

# The Roman peasantry between town and countryside<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Ever since Adam Smith's assertion that 'the great commerce of every civilised society is that between the inhabitants of the town and those of the country' and his accompanying claim that 'the division of labour in this is advantageous to all different parties concerned',<sup>2</sup> questions concerning the division of labour between town and country have not failed to play a considerable role in historical research. Perhaps present-day students of ancient history are best acquainted with *negative* assertions relating to this subject matter. In the wake of Moses I. Finley, the 'typical' ancient city is generally assumed to have been a 'consumer city', essentially living off surpluses extracted on the basis of 'legal claims' (*i.e.* as taxes or as rents). The obvious corollary is that, in Antiquity, the relationship between town and country was *not* characterized by a balanced and mutually advantageous exchange of urban against rural products.

Whilst this paper accepts the fundamentally exploitative nature of the ancient town-country relationship as given, its approach is unorthodox in that it presents an attempt to take a 'bottom-up' rather than a 'top-down' view of urban-rural relationships. What this means, is that the focus is less on the functions and economic underpinning of towns, than on peasant communities and their exchange relationships with the outside world. Originally part of a much longer thesis on rural demand, supply and distribution, the following discussion of urban-rural distribution gains its full significance only when placed against the background of companion pieces on rural manufacturing and exchange relationships within and between villages. If, despite this, I have decided to present this paper in isolation, it is because of a dearth of previous discussions of the subject of urban-rural distribution. As an expert on Roman pottery remarked a few years ago, 'of all aspects of Roman commerce there is perhaps none so neglected as the arrangements for marketing within a short radius'.<sup>3</sup> This was in 1982, but it is still very true today. It will be obvious that I cannot hope to remedy this state of affairs in such a short paper as this. Nonetheless, I should like to give some impression of how mechanisms for the distribution from town to country complemented the contribution of rural manufacturing in catering for rural demand for specialist goods and services.

But before turning to a discussion of these mechanisms I must warn the reader

that what follows is a very static picture. I do try to pay some attention to interregional differences, but despite the fact that the evidence on which I draw covers more than four centuries, I do not give any account of changes over time. This is not to say that there were no chronological developments. Nor do I think that such developments as were there can never be uncovered. In fact, there are some recent indications to the contrary, such as Pollard's demonstration that, in second-century A.D. Kent, rural settlements start to display the same variety in ceramic assemblages as the nearest large towns.<sup>4</sup> In the second half of the fifth-century A.D. the reverse process is to be observed, with rural sites in Lowland Britain losing access to wheel-made pottery and raw iron.<sup>5</sup> Indications of this kind are tantalizing, but unfortunately also conspicuous for their rarity.

Consequently, I have chosen to give a highly abstract account of the economic geography of marketing on the one hand, and a short survey of some relevant ancient literary and epigraphical sources on the other hand. Both of these approaches are inherently unsatisfactory, for neither allows an assessment of the quantitative dimensions of urban-rural distribution. What economic geography does, is to highlight some of the variables involved and to suggest what kind of marketing mechanisms we might look for in a pre-industrial society like the Roman Empire. It also has some classificatory concepts to offer. But it does not show what proportion of peasant needs was covered by urban-supplied goods instead of by home-production or village-based craftsmen. As regards the literary and epigraphical sources, it will be clear that these can hardly be expected to provide an answer to this question either. What evidence of this kind does, is to illustrate the existence, in some regions, of some or all of the mechanisms predicted by theory. It shows that 'urban' products *did* reach rural inhabitants and through what channels. Sometimes, it is suggestive of the level of intensity at which contacts between town and country stood. Admittedly, this is not much. But for the time being it is about as far as we can go.

## Some theoretical observations

I start by approaching the problem of urban-rural distribution from a theoretical angle. In doing so, my main focus will be on Walter Christaller's Central Place Theory (CPT) and its relevance for our understanding of the economic geography of marketing.<sup>6</sup> In view of the fact that CPT receives ample treatment by another contributor to this issue of *Leidschrift*, there is no need to waste ink and paper on a definition and discussion of basic CPT concepts (such as 'central place', 'order', 'range', 'threshold' etc.).<sup>7</sup> Instead, I concentrate on those aspects of CPT that are immediately relevant to the subject of this paper.

One of the things CPT tells us is that the need, on the part of suppliers of goods/services, for a minimum sales level, combined with the unwillingness on the part of consumers to travel beyond a certain distance to obtain particular goods/services, implies the non-viability of permanent establishments for certain goods and services in 'lower order' centres. For our understanding of marketing in rural areas, it is important to realize that this does not always lead to *buyer mobility* towards 'higher order' centres where the desired goods and services are in continuous supply. While it is implicit in the concept of 'range' that this may be the case for consumers who live in close proximity to a relevant higher order centre, for more outlying areas one often observes the contrary phenomenon of *trader mobility*. By becoming mobile, traders can attain their 'threshold' for survival in business by supplying their goods to a *number* of lower order centres in none of which a permanent residence would be viable. Though from a theoretical point of view this does not necessarily lead to the emergence of a pattern of periodic marketing, in practice this often is the case, partly because periodic marketing is preferred by selling peasants, while these markets are often combined with cultural and religious festivities. Rural periodic markets can, therefore, be regarded as 'periodic central places', enabling rural inhabitants to supply themselves with goods not permanently available in lower order rural settlements.<sup>8</sup>

Among ancient historians, Finley has rejected Christaller's model of central place systems on the grounds that such systems presuppose the presence of an 'enormous conglomeration of interdependent markets', associated with an 'extreme division of labour and the absence of household self-sufficiency in necessities'.<sup>9</sup> While this seems an impeccable description of what Christaller had in mind, recent applications of Central Place Theory to pre-industrial societies have demonstrated that, somewhat paradoxically, the non-existence of some of its original premises does not undermine the applicability of the theory! The reason for this is that, though CPT does presuppose that rural inhabitants are market-involved to *some* degree, its utility for analyzing the resulting marketing pattern does not depend on the *intensity* of this market-involvement. To put it differently, though the use of CPT presupposes the existence of *markets*, its applicability does not depend on the dominance, in the economy under discussion, of an all-pervasive *market principle*. Carol Smith is absolutely right in maintaining that the utility of Christaller's models is actually *greatest* in the case of relatively simple agrarian societies. The same lesson is brought home by Skinner's successful application of Central Place Theory to traditional peasant marketing in China.<sup>10</sup> In view of this, it seems perfectly legitimate to try to apply CPT to market-systems of the ancient world, especially to those linking rural dwellers and urban-based suppliers of goods and services.

Before undertaking such an attempt it seems useful, however, to point out that,

in recent years, the applicability of CPT to pre-modern economies has been greatly enhanced. The past two decades or so have seen the adding to CPT of several concepts that are particularly suited to an analysis of 'bounded systems', that is of market systems that are characterized by imperfect integration with other systems and/or among various centres within the systems themselves. The concept of the 'solar system' is a case in point. Whereas the Christallerian notion of a 'central place system' refers to an unbounded and highly integrated system of market exchange, we speak of a 'solar system' in the case of marketing networks which have a major market as their centre, but where contacts with 'higher order' central places simply become ever less intense as one moves towards the system's periphery. The system is 'bounded' in the sense that there are no alternative higher order central places to which rural inhabitants can turn.<sup>11</sup>

The role played by itinerant traders in the distribution of 'urban' products to rural consumers can be summed up in one word. They are 'gap-fillers'. As Braudel writes with reference to the itinerant traders of early-modern Europe, 'They filled in the gaps in the regular channels of distribution, even in towns, though mostly in villages and hamlets. Since the gaps were plentiful, so were the pedlars, and this too was a sign of the times'.<sup>12</sup> Was this also true of the Roman Empire? There is no easy answer to this question, for the existence of gaps is predicated upon numerous factors about which Roman historians are notoriously ill-informed. For the purpose of this paper, let us take the existence of a modest level of effective peasant demand for both 'lower' and 'higher order' goods and services as given. If this is accepted, the next question to be asked, concerns the extent to which peasant demand for specialist goods and services was catered for by rural, rather than urban-based, suppliers.

The viability of rural manufacturing establishments, working for a clientèle of peasant cultivators, is determined largely by two factors. The level of consumer demand must be sufficiently high to enable craftsmen to survive in business and they must have access to raw materials. If both of these preconditions are met, we must expect to find village-based artisans. In contrast, non-availability of natural resources and the absence of sufficient consumer demand to sustain permanent establishments in a rural context make for dependency on urban-based producers, whether this is direct or indirect.<sup>13</sup> The impact of these two variables is clear from comparative historical material. In medieval Picardy, for instance, increasing availability of iron to rural communities was a key-factor behind the progressive spread of village smithies. Contrast twelfth-century Metz, where there is evidence for a powerful craft guild of *urban-based* ploughshare-makers (*soccarii*).<sup>14</sup> The case of the early-modern Dutch Republic is also instructive. In the central districts of early sixteenth-century Friesland, 'village craftsmen had not yet made their



appearance, nor had rural industry and trade. The peasants performed all manner of economic activity and relied upon *the small cities* for extraordinary needs' (my italics).<sup>15</sup> However, as specialized agriculture produced rising peasant prosperity, peasant demand for specialist goods and services showed a dramatic increase. Part of this demand was catered for by suppliers who were based in near-by *towns*, but at the same time there was also a remarkable proliferation in the number of *village-based* craftsmen and other specialists, such as potters, leather workers, carpenters, smiths, tailors, innkeepers and merchants. The interesting aspect of these two historical examples is that they demonstrate that a low level of demand does not exclude dependency on town-based suppliers, while a high level of demand in no way entails decreasing reliance on ruraly based producers.

Jones's *The Greek city* has a fine passage that alerts us to some other factors influencing the shape of mechanisms for urban-rural marketing. Jones observes that:

'the area which each city served was small, since a peasant would normally prefer to walk in with his donkey, do his business, and walk back within a day. Where cities were closely set, they were no doubt the sole markets of the country. But in many districts territories were large, and here the cities served only their immediate neighbourhood, and in outlying areas the peasants frequented small market towns or seasonal fairs'.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, whether or not there were 'gaps' to be filled by itinerant traders was dependent not only on the existence of effective peasant demand for externally supplied goods, but also on the willingness of peasants to travel and on the density of the urban network.

As regards the first of these two factors, it is not easy to specify the distance beyond which peasants are not, normally, prepared to travel to obtain certain goods and services. In fact, we just saw that theory precludes any simple answer to this question, for we have to allow for different goods and services having different 'ranges'. None the less, various figures have been put forward. Since ancient evidence is almost totally lacking<sup>17</sup>, these estimates are usually based on comparative data. This is the basis of, for instance, Finley's estimate of 4 or 5 miles being the 'standard maximum distance preferred wherever means of transport are primitive'. Yet other comparative evidence suggests much higher figures, so that a figure of 15 kms is also quite commonly advanced.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that we should allow for a fair degree of interregional and intercultural variation. Even within a given region, exceptions can be found to any rule. That does not make it totally meaningless to establish some rough idea of the order of magnitude involved. For peasants making

frequent trips to neighbouring markets, 10 kms are a common maximum, 15 kms are not exceptional, while estimates in excess of 20 kms appear to be over-generous.

Whatever the precise numbers, it is certainly very likely that, roughly speaking, the willingness of peasants to travel to town was inversely proportional to the distance separating their farms from the urban centre. Peasants living in close proximity to a city will have visited the urban market quite often, sometimes even on a daily basis, as appears to have been the case with a *hortulanus* (market-gardener) in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>19</sup> But moving away from the city, the intensity of direct contact with the urban market will have decreased, with visits being gradually restricted to less frequent occasions, such as 'weekly' markets and, finally, annual urban fairs. It is tempting to hypothesize that such a pattern of concentric zones, characterized by an ever-decreasing level of direct contacts with the urban centre, should be reflected in the material evidence. One might, for instance, expect the share of urban, as opposed to locally produced, pottery to fall steadily with increasing distance from town.<sup>20</sup> Yet, such a pattern will perhaps emerge only when the distances involved are very substantial, for there is plenty of comparative evidence to illustrate how amazingly efficient itinerant pedlars often are in supplying the needs of those not serviced by what Braudel calls 'the regular channels of communication'.<sup>21</sup> In fact, it is clear even from the ancient literary evidence that the distances travelled by itinerant traders could be quite considerable. One of Cicero's speeches, for instance, contains a reference to L. Clodius, an itinerant quack from Ancona, who travelled all the way to Larinum, which lies some 200 kms to the south.<sup>22</sup>

It seems hardly necessary to point out that the shape of the marketing mechanisms linking town and country was crucially affected by the density of the urban network. In regions of high urban density, distance does not constitute an obstacle for peasants wanting to make use of urban 'central place' facilities. Large sections of the rural population find themselves within walking distance of a nearby town. If rural settlement is scattered rather than nucleated, this may also work in favour of reliance on this urban centre. In other words, in regions of high urban density the marketing pattern will approach a 'central place system' rather than a 'solar system'. A marketing pattern of the latter type is more characteristic of lightly urbanised areas. Here, a large part of the rural population finds itself beyond walking distance from a neighbouring town. Below it will be suggested that this distinction corresponds to actual differences between the market network of Central Italy and market systems found in other parts of the Roman Empire.

### Three case-studies

What, if anything, does all this tell us about urban-rural relations in the ancient world? I think that it does tell us something. Let me try to substantiate this claim by turning to two passages from the speeches of Libanius, a fourth-century A.D. writer from Syrian Antioch. The interesting aspect of these two passages is that, whilst each of them offers a rare glimpse of ancient urban-rural relations, the information provided by the first source seems to be flatly contradicted by the second. On the one hand, according to Libanius' *Antiochicus* (*Or.* 11.230) in the territory of Antioch there were 'large and well-populated villages' (*kômai megalai kai polyanthrôpoi*) which 'had little need of the city' (*mikra tês poleôs chrêzousai*). On the other hand, there is the oration *De Angariis* (*Or.* 50) in which we see Libanius protesting against the fact that the pack-animals of peasants who visit the city of Antioch are requisitioned for the purpose of carrying off rubble from public building-sites. Libanius informs us that these peasants had to come to the city 'because they needed the city' (*Or.* 50.29: *chrêzousi tês poleôs!*)

The idea of zones with differential levels of urban-rural interaction suggests that, behind this seeming contradiction, may lie a distinction between large villages at a certain distance from the city and other villages situated in the close proximity of Antioch. For in *Or.* 50 it is implied that, under normal circumstances, the peasants who visited Antioch could have made their trip to the city *plus* the return trip to their farms in one day (*Or.* 50.25-26). This surely indicates that we are dealing with rural inhabitants who did not live further from the city than, say, ten or fifteen kilometres. While this provides us with a clue as to the dwelling-places of the peasants of *Or.* 50, no light is thrown on the location of the 'large villages' of *Or.* 11.230.

However, by a remarkable coincidence there is another piece of evidence that sheds more light on the pattern of marketing in Antioch's territory. This piece of evidence is a passage from the Christian writer Theodoret of Cyrus. In his *Historia Religiosa* (7.1 and following) this author refers to a fair (*panêgyris*) which was held in Imma, 'a very large and populous village' (*kômê megistê kai polyanthrôpos*). This is a remarkable echo of the *kômai megalai kai polyanthrôpoi* of *Or.* 11.230 and it may well be the case that the reference is actually to the same group of villages. The *panêgyris* of Imma is said to have attracted 'traders from everywhere and a numberless crowd'. If we combine this latter piece of information with the fact that the fair in question had a duration of more than one day, it seems a reasonable inference that we are dealing with a low frequency periodic market (an annual fair rather than a 'weekly' market). Theodoret goes on to relate how one of the travelling traders who had come to sell his wares at the *panêgyris* was murdered

and robbed of his money. The interesting thing is that we know exactly where the village of Imma was situated. It is in Antiochene territory, lying some forty kilometres to the east of the city. The considerable distance that separated Imma from Antioch makes it unlikely that the villagers were in the habit of visiting the city very frequently. At the same time, we perceive that this did not mean that they were living in isolation from the outside world. Travelling traders were instrumental in providing contacts with other places, also, as seems likely, with the city of Antioch.

The scanty literary evidence we have on the pattern of marketing in Antioch's territory would seem to be compatible with the hypothesis that the marketing network of which Antioch was the centre should be characterized as a 'solar system'. Peasants who lived in the close vicinity of Antioch seem to have regularly used the city as their 'central place', while peasants living at a greater distance visited rural periodic markets instead. 'Lower order centres' that were sufficiently large (and, presumably, also situated at a certain distance from the urban centre) had manufacturing establishments of their own. Where consumer demand for particular commodities was too small to sustain permanent establishments, itinerant traders filled in the gap. Their mobility implies that they were tapping demand which was scattered over the countryside and that for them this was the way in which their 'threshold' for survival in business was attained.

Notions derived from Central Place Theory thus appear to be a helpful tool when it comes to elucidating the marketing pattern observed in the Antiochene countryside. On the other hand, they do not provide a sufficient explanation. A glance at the map shows that Imma was situated exactly on the edge of the Antiochene plain and at the foot of the *Massif Calcaire*. While the main crop of the plain must have consisted of cereals, Tchalenko showed that the cultivation of the olive must have loomed large in the economy of the *Massif*.<sup>23</sup> This suggests that Imma was also a centre of exchange between more or less complementary zones of agricultural production. Indeed, until quite recently the inhabitants of the *Massif* were in the habit of using the villages on the edge of the plain for selling their products and making purchases. This points to the more general conclusion that patterns of marketing should not be understood exclusively in terms of the relation between 'higher' and 'lower order' central places, but are influenced also by the presence of *ecological boundaries*.

The relevance of ecological boundaries is a complicating factor, but does little to undermine my interpretation of the Antioch-centred market network as a 'solar system'. The picture is one of concentric zones in which the intensity of interaction with the central market shows a marked decrease as one moves towards the periphery of the system. Beyond a certain distance from the centre, urban-rural

contacts are confined to the occasion of low-frequency periodic markets instead of taking the form of frequent trips to town. For a large section of the rural population contact with the urban centre, whether direct or indirect, was rare. It is tempting to connect this interpretation of the market system linking Antioch and its *chôra* with the image of Roman Syria found in Jones's *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*. Jones stressed the superficial character of the changes brought about by the partitioning of Syria into city-states. 'The political life of the inhabitants of the agricultural belt remained unaffected; their unit remained the village, and they took no part in the life of the city to which they were attached... Culturally, the countryside remained utterly unaffected by the Hellenism of the cities; the peasants continued to speak Syriac down to the Arab conquest.'<sup>24</sup>

The evidence we have on the market system in certain parts of Roman Africa is open to a roughly similar interpretation. Just as in the case of Antioch's territory, ecological boundaries affected the location of rural periodic markets in a major way, as has been clearly shown by Shaw. The rural fair of Vanisnesus (a small locality at the site of present-day Hassawana, in north-east Algeria) is plausibly interpreted by him as involving a 'combination of annual trade that combines plain and mountain exchange'. The sites of periodic markets that were held much more frequently (twice a month) were on or in strategic passes connecting the *tell* (an area relatively well-watered by rainfall) with other, more arid, zones.<sup>25</sup> As regards the intensity of contacts between town and country, it may be useful to point out that the distances between these markets and the nearest urban centre invariably exceed twenty kilometres. Under these circumstances urban-rural contacts can hardly have been intense. In fact, there is little evidence for any contacts with 'higher order' centres at all and the main function of these markets may well have been to provide occasions for 'horizontal' exchange between rural inhabitants on the fringes of a 'solar system'. Only in one case (*CIL* 8.270 = 8.11451) do we hear of *advenae* (visitors) attending the *nundinae* (in Africa twice-monthly markets) of an estate. This may refer to travelling traders, but an alternative interpretation is that the reference is to transhumant pastoralists, coming to exchange their products for those of the estate's sedentary farming population. In any case, it is surely tempting to follow Shaw's conclusion that the most remarkable aspect of these African rural markets is their lack of integration with the urban market centres.

However, as we approach the African cities we do come across some pieces of evidence that hint at a higher level of intensity of urban-rural contact. The *nundinae* on record in Castellum Mastarense, some fifteen kilometres from the city of Cirta, are a case in point. The remarkable thing about these *nundinae* is their timing: the market-days of Castellum Mastarense fall exactly one day before those of Castellum

Tidditanorum which lies some twelve kilometres further along the same road. It is tempting to interpret these two markets as parts of a market network centred on near-by Cirta, the existence of a neatly arranged market cycle suggesting the activity of travelling traders. If this interpretation is correct, Castellum Mastarense and Castellum Tidditanorum represent a zone where urban-rural contact is indirect, but not infrequent.

Two zones are also found in the territory of Magnesia on the Maeander. In 1982 Nollé published an inscription which deals with the institution, in 209 A.D., of a periodic market (*panēgyris*), to be held three times a month in the village of Mandragoreis. The inscription allows a partial reconstruction of the market system linking town and countryside:

*periodic markets in Magnesian territory*

village	distance from city	market-days (days of month)
Attukleis	c. 17 kms	8 - 18 - 29
Mandragoreis	c. 10 kms	9 - 19 - 30
Kadyie	c. 5 kms	no market
Magnesia	-	10 - 20 - 31 or 1

Nollé must be right in commenting that 'it is unlikely that Kadyie qualified for the conferment of the right of holding a market at all: it is so close to Magnesia that its inhabitants were able to visit, and will have visited, the market in Magnesia'.<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that the inscription makes mention of pedlars who sell their products at the periodic village markets in the city's territory. In the case of Magnesia on the Maeander the evidence is therefore not only consistent with a model which posits the existence of zones in each of which economic interaction with the urban centre took a different form, but also points to the sale of 'urban' products to the rural population, even on a rather frequent basis.

Finally, we turn to Italy. What is striking is that, for this area, there exists a persistent tradition according to which peasants were in the habit of visiting high frequency periodic markets that were held in *towns*. Writers of the annalist tradition maintained that the *nundinae* (markets held every eighth day) had been established in order to give rural inhabitants the opportunity of 'arranging matters concerning both town and countryside'. The peasants were supposed to have come to the city in order to 'visit the market and take cognizance of new legislation'. It may be added that the sanitary standards of the illustrious *maiores* (forefathers) are put in a rather unfavourable light by Seneca, who informs his readers that, in former

times, it had been customary to wash the whole body on *nundinae* only.<sup>27</sup> Annalistic evidence is surely not the best one can wish for. Yet, this time it is confirmed by other sources and I shall argue that the picture it presents is essentially correct, at least for the late Republic and the early Empire. What is more, the prominent role of urban *nundinae* in establishing links between town and countryside is but one aspect of a more general phenomenon: the important part played by small towns in the lives of the peasantry of Central Italy. Of course, Roman Italy had its villages and rural markets no doubt existed. Yet it is my contention that in Central-Italy, unlike in Syria, large sections of the peasantry were in close contact with towns.

The relatively high intensity of urban-rural contacts is, I think, borne out by the Campanian *indices nundinarii* (calendars recording market-days).<sup>28</sup> Only one of the 'weekly' periodic markets on record on these lists seems to have been held in a village (*in vico*). The remaining twenty-five or so are all held *in towns*. It is against this background that we should read Cicero's claim (*De lege agraria* 2. 88-89) that, in 211 B.C., the Roman senate decided to punish the town of Capua for its collaboration with Hannibal by degrading it to 'a retreat for the ploughmen' (*receptaculum aratorum*) and 'a market for the peasantry' (*nundinae rusticorum*). According to Cicero, the senate thought it useful that Capua would continue to exist as a centre supplying 'the means for the cultivation of the *ager Campanus*'. A few other bits of literary evidence would also seem to be consistent with the hypothesis that contacts with town were a common and important feature of Italian peasant life. The peasant Simylus, the hero of the pseudo-Virgilian *Moretum*, goes to market the produce of his *hortus* (garden) in town, at the time of the urban *nundinae* (*Moretum* 79-83). Though his sales bring in a handsome amount of cash, Simylus seldom spends this on 'urban' products. In this, he differs from the peasant of Virgil's *Georgics* (1. 273-275) who uses the opportunity offered by the urban *nundinae* not only to sell the produce of his olive and fruit trees, but also to buy a millstone or some pitch.

The Italian evidence, in particular that for Campania, would seem to point to the conclusion that, in Central Italy, urban-rural contacts were intense. I think this conclusion can be corroborated by looking at the density of the urban network in this part of the Roman Empire. In the central regions of Italy, the average distance between towns was very small: 11 kilometres in Latium and Campania, between 13 and 13.5 kilometres in Southern Etruria and Umbria. By contrast, the averages for northern Italy are generally in excess of 25 kilometres and in some parts as high as 35 kilometres. It is evident that, in Central Italy, towns were within easy walking distance of virtually hundred percent of the rural population. Under these circumstances, the rate of peasant participation in a well-integrated and urban-centred market system was very high. The resulting marketing pattern is more



appropriately described as a 'central place system' than as a 'solar system'. What needs to be stressed is that this in no way implies that the peasants involved in this system turned into entrepreneurial and commercializing farmers. What it does imply, is that the farming population was in closer contact with urban centres and made more frequent use of urban facilities. In densely urbanized areas subsistence remained the main objective of peasant production. But peasants tended to satisfy their limited needs more often from urban-based suppliers.

The case of Magnesia on the Maeander presents a variant on this theme. The distance between Magnesia and its nearest neighbours considerably exceeds the averages for Central Italy. Still, urban-rural contacts appear to have been rather intense. This is not only true of inhabitants of villages in the near vicinity of the city, but also of those of somewhat more remote villages, which were visited by itinerant pedlars as often as three times a month. Given the well-known inverse correlation between the frequency with which markets are held and the 'order' of the goods that can be obtained in them, this surely points to the conclusion that, in Magnesia's territory, sections of the peasantry had access to a regular supply of externally produced 'lower order' goods. Yet again there are no grounds for supposing that the peasants in question were anything else than market-involved subsistence producers. They were *not* market-orientated entrepreneurial and commercializing farmers.

### Some final remarks

An analysis of channels for urban-rural distribution leaves one with the impression that mobility between town and country was considerable. Peasants visiting urban markets represent one direction, itinerant pedlars travelling countryside markets the other. A variety of market institutions helped to connect town and country: urban *nundinae* and frequently held village markets are found alongside annual fairs, both urban and rural.

It is also clear that, throughout Antiquity, peasants bought their goods from urban producers. Examples range from fourth-century B.C. Greece, where ploughs were made by carpenters in small towns, to the North Mesopotamian city of Amida where, in the sixth-century A.D., peasants sold victuals to the Persian army and were paid either in cash or with 'things from the city'.<sup>29</sup> Peasant purchases of 'urban' goods mainly come under three headings. First, goods that were produced by village artisans in some regions, but not in others. Items like pottery, cheap clothing, as well as iron or wooden farm implements fall into this class. From Cato's *De agricultura* (caput 135), it appears that town-based artisans supplied villa's with clothing, shoes, farm implements, copper vessels, earthenware, ropes,

nails and other items. It seems unlikely that urban-based suppliers of such goods should not have been able also to attract rural customers of a more humble status. More than five centuries later, Palladius (*Opus agriculturae* 1.6.2) still had to urge landowners not to let their *rustici* (persons living on their estates) go to town in order to make purchases from urban potters, smiths and carpenters.

A second class of goods is formed by goods that could not be produced in most villages, simply because the natural resources needed for production were available at a limited number of locations only. Items like querns, salt and pitch are a case in point. Such goods had to be brought from a certain distance and towns are likely to have fulfilled a mediating role here. The peasant of Virgil's *Georgics*, returning from the urban *nundinae* with some pitch or with a millstone, provides an illustration. Towns surely also fulfilled a mediating role in supplying peasants with salt. In less urbanized areas, a similar function might be performed by non-urban centres, such as the *fora* and *conciliabula* (market centres and gathering places) of Republican Italy.

The third category comprises 'luxuries', that is: items like fancy clothing for weddings or funerals, a golden ring or a silver bracelet (the latter two also as a form of saving). In most villages, there existed a stratum, no doubt of limited size, of reasonably well-to-do peasants. These peasants may well have spent a sizeable part of their resources on better housing, better food, more land, more cattle etc. Despite this, some connection between peasant 'wealth' and expenditure on 'urban luxuries' is likely to have existed. The ancient evidence relating to such purchases is scant. Perhaps significantly, the few scraps that might be relevant all refer to urban or rural fairs.<sup>30</sup> In any case, it seems clear that demand for such 'luxuries' was generally too low to warrant the setting-up of establishments in rural settlements. If peasants wanted to buy such 'high order' goods, they also had to rely on 'high order' central places, in other words: on towns. Itinerant traders might bring such goods to annual rural fairs. Alternatively, peasants could make such purchases when visiting urban fairs and festivals. There is no doubt that the combined appeal of the religious, theatrical, economic and sometimes political aspects of these festivals was effective in attracting large numbers of people, including peasants coming from considerable distances. Special rows of seats in theatres, reserved for the inhabitants of specific *kômai* (villages) or *pagi* (country districts), provide eloquent testimony.

Again, no one would wish to claim that the peasants who bought a few luxuries and other goods at such occasions made a significant contribution to a city's 'economic base'. The economic underpinning of nearly all cities in the ancient world was provided by elite income from landed property, extracted from rural producers on the basis of 'legal claims'. Yet urban-rural contacts were not entirely

of a negative nature. I have focused on the positive role of cities as focal points in the marketing system. Towns provided peasants with an outlet for selling produce. They fulfilled a mediating role in the distribution of such items as salt or querns. They were the sources of the 'luxuries' that some peasants could afford. Besides, town-based artisans could supply the same goods as village craftsmen: pottery, a wooden plough, iron implements, a piece of rough clothing. Other positive aspects of urban-rural interaction can be added: peasants receiving help from town doctors, visiting urban temples, or going to watch a show in the theatre.<sup>31</sup> Conversely, townsmen travelled considerable distances to rural shrines and festivals, as did itinerant traders to rural periodic markets. Mobility between town and country was considerable, for religious and cultural, but also for economic reasons.

## Notes

1. This article is based on a chapter of my thesis for the Cambridge Diploma of Historical Studies (June 1990).
2. Quoted by M.I. Finley, 'The ancient city; from Fustel de Coulanges to Max Weber and beyond', in: Idem, *Economy and society in Ancient Greece* (ed. B.D. Shaw and R.P. Saller) (Harmondsworth 1983) 7.
3. D.P.S. Peacock, *Pottery in the Roman world* (London and New York 1982) 156.
4. R.J. Pollard, *The Roman pottery of Kent* (Maidstone 1988) 58-80.
5. J. Evans, 'From the end of Roman Britain to the Celtic west', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 9 (1990) 93-94.
6. The seminal work is W. Christaller, *Die zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland* (Jena 1933).
7. See the paper by Peter Doom in this volume of *Leidschrift*.
8. For example C.A. Smith, 'Economics of marketing systems: models from economic geography', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3 (1974) especially 181 and following.
9. M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (2nd ed.; London 1985) 34.
10. Smith, 'Economics', 169 and 171; G.W. Skinner, 'Marketing and social structure in rural China', *Journal of Asian Studies* 24 (1964-1965) 3-43.
11. For example Smith, 'Economics' 176 and following.
12. F. Braudel, *Civilization and capitalism, 15th-18th century*. Volume II: *The wheels of commerce* (London 1982) 75.
13. In reality, things are somewhat more complicated than this, for sometimes specialist goods not made locally can be obtained through exchange with other rural communities.
14. R. Fossier, *La terre et les hommes en Picardie jusqu'à la fin du XIIIe siècle* (Paris and Louvain 1968) 370 and following; G. Duby, *The early growth of the European economy* (London 1974) 195.
15. J. de Vries, *The Dutch rural economy in the Golden Age, 1500-1700* (New Haven and London 1974) 57.
16. A.H.M. Jones, *The Greek city from Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford 1940) 260.
17. One of the very few relevant data known to me is a set of funeral regulations from an African

- town, referring to the obligation of members living within a 6-mile distance to attend funerals: *CIL VIII 14683c*.
18. Finley, *Ancient Economy*, 127; R. MacMullen, 'Market days in the Roman Empire', *Phoenix* 24(1970), 337. M.H. Hansen, *Die athenische Volksversammlung im Zeitalter des Demosthenes* (Konstanz 1984) 19, considers 15 kms the maximum distance which peasants were prepared to travel in order to attend assembly meetings.
  19. Apul., *Met.*, 9.32.
  20. Cf. Renfrew's 'distance-decay models', for which see: C. Renfrew, 'Trade as Action at a Distance: Questions of Integration and Communication', in: J.A. Sabloff and C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky ed., *Ancient Civilization and Trade* (Albuquerque 1975) 3-59, esp. 46-51; idem, 'Alternative Models for Exchange and Spatial Distribution', in: T.K. Earle and J.E. Ericson ed., *Exchange Systems in Prehistory* (New York etc. 1977) 71-90.
  21. Cf. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, 77, on the success of travelling merchants in distributing craft goods and printed books throughout 'the great expanses of [17th and 18th century] Sweden ... half-empty of population'. K. Greene, *The Archaeology of the Roman Economy* (London 1986) 165 (referring to S. Dyson, 'The villas of Buccino and the consumer model of Roman rural development', in: C. Malone and S. Stoddart ed., *Papers in Italian Archaeology IV*, BAR IS 246 (Oxford 1985)) comments on the extent of the pottery trade 'even in remote rural areas of Italy well away from towns'.
  22. Cic., *Pro Cluentio* 40. On the other hand, it seems clear that Clodius's customers could not hope to avail themselves of his dubious services on anything but an infrequent basis.
  23. G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord*, 3 volumes (Paris 1953-1958).
  24. G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The class struggle in the ancient Greek world* (London 1981) 19, quoting A.H.M. Jones, *The cities of the Eastern Roman provinces* (2nd ed.; Oxford 1971), 293f. For a much less bleak view of Antioch's impact on its countryside, see now: J.-P. Sodini, 'Villes et campagnes en Syrie du Nord: Echanges et diffusion des produits d'après les témoignages archéologiques', in: E. Aerts, J. Andreau and P. Orsted ed., *Models of regional economies in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Proceedings Tenth International Economic History Congress* (Leuven 1990); G. Tate, 'Les relations économiques entre ville et campagne autour d'Antioche et en Syrie du Nord (début du IIe siècle-début du VIIe siècle)', in: Aerts, Andreau and Orsted, *Regional economies*, esp. 87.
  25. B.D. Shaw, 'Rural markets in North Africa and the political economy of the Roman empire', *Antiquités Africaines* 17 (1981) 37-83, 51, 54 and following, 59 and 61.
  26. J. Nollé, *Nundinas instituere et habere* (Hildesheim 1982) 27.
  27. Cassius and Rutilius, both in Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1. 16.33-34; Seneca, *Ep.* 86.12.
  28. For the *indices nundinarii*, see A. Degrassi, *Inscriptiones Italiae*, volume 13.2 (Roma 1963) numbers 49-54. Cf. MacMullen, 'Market days', 338 and following.
  29. For Greece: Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.2.5. For Amida: K. Ahrens and G. Krüger, *Die sogenannte Kirchengeschichte des Zacharias Rhetor* (Leipzig 1899) caput 7.3.
  30. Cf. L. de Ligt and P.W. de Neeve, 'Ancient periodic markets: festivals and fairs', *Athenaeum* 66 (1988) 414.
  31. For medical care reaching rural inhabitants from the city, for example Galen, *De locis affectis* 3.11 (volume 8, 197 Kühn) and Idem, *De compositione medicamentorum per genera* 1.7 (volume 13, 402-403 Kühn). Mobility for religious reasons: R. Lane-Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London 1986) 41-46.