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PEOPLE AND THEIR SOIL IN ITALY UNDER THEODERIC THE GREAT

The aim of the paper is to discuss some of the questions regarding the basic economic sources and nationwide wealth within the environment of the late ancient Italy during the rule of the Ostrogothic monarchs. In the process of a full and organic continuity of its social-economic networks to the later imperial developments and trends, the Ostrogothic state embarked largely on a broad range of activities centred primarily at ensuring an overall security, protection and inviolability of both public and private landed property. Both on the propagandistic and technical side of its actions and being fully aware of the pivotal import that the convenient stimuli and effective motivations could generate for a further assistance and development of the key agents influencing the nationwide material base, the governmental circles paid a considerable attention to the maintaining of the still existing agricultural structures and to expanding of new agrarian sources together with their labour force, factors, which represented the most important and overwhelming fount of the contemporaneous corporate wealth.

The land distribution phase

As one of the most important questions regarding the social development in the Italic territory after the gradual breakdown of the political-administrative structure of the western Roman empire and following the establishing of the new territorial units under barbarian rule, the crucial issue arose, relating to the preservation of the basic features of the traditional ancient economic continuity and encouraging congruous development in the area of agrarian production, which represented the key factor and entirely prevailing sphere of the contemporary economic life.¹

In spite of the pressing need to deal with the above mentioned concerns, which led to the first attempts to handle the most imminent challenges inherited from the late imperial times, and despite a subsequent relative stabilization of agricultural output that were brought about as early as the Odovacer's reign, only with the formation of the Ostrogothic kingdom did the agrarian policy of its monarchs adopt

¹ BEDNAŘIKOVÁ, JARMILA. 2007. *Stěhování národů*. Praha: Vyšehrad, 315–318.

active policy and some constructive measures in striving to bring on more progressive and positive changes in this economic field of the post Roman Italy.²

It was just the vision of being settled on the rich soil of Italy, – the country still seen by the new invaders as the traditional homeland of the eternal Roman Empire, which represented the chief motive power that drove tens of thousands of Goths under Theoderic's leadership in A.D. 489 across the Frigidus river and the Alpes Carnicae range still forwards into the vast northern Italian plains of the Venetian and Ligurian provinces. Following a series of bloody victories over Odovacer's troops the Gothic dream of fertile Appeninic corn fields, wine-bearing hills and better, civilized future came true and accented the practical necessity to handle the crucial question of property distribution, requested by the traditional long aged barbaric custom, to the Gothic population within the newly constituted Theoderic's dominion.³

In the light of recent experience and a precedent that were brought about by the settlement of the Odovacer's federates,⁴ an alleged amount of one third of all the Italic lands was made liable to the distribution of the Germanic newcomers. Immediately afterwards, a real process of land allotment had begun, within which the so called "sortes Herulorum" – the "thirds", which once represented the landed propriety of Odovacer's Sciric confederacy, were utilized in the course of events as well. The nature of the process itself, however, required it to be carried out in a very sensitive and prudent way. Since the reason seemed to be to try to create and to preserve a friendly and acceptable social relationship between the Gothic and Roman population, which was regarded as a necessary base for establishing a state where law and justice in the traditional Roman view should have been respected.⁵

But even greater objective should have been attained. It was of crucial exigency for the new governmental ideology of both the Ostrogothic rulers and the high echelons of the native Italic-Roman aristocracy that exercised its part of power in the palatine circles and central administrative bureaucratic organs, to try to neutralize the long-aged, traditional hatred which the native Italic-Roman population harboured toward the barbarians. Moreover, it became necessary to amalgamate those two altogether ethnically and culturally different peoples into a tolerable form of existence and into a sort of positive co-operation.⁶

This quite complicated task was taken up by a special board comprising highly qualified and experienced Roman aristocrats, headed by a high civil servant, the praefectus praetorio, patrician Liberius, once the great financial minister un-

2 LAMMA, PAOLO. 1950. *Teoderico*. Brescia: La Scuola Editrice, 116–117.

3 HEATHER, PETER. 2002. *Gótové*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 221–226.

4 Procopius, *De bello Gothico* I. 1.

5 BEDNAŘÍKOVÁ, JARMILA. 1996. „Půda nebo daně?“ In *Querite primum regnum Dei*. Brno: Matice moravská, 191.

6 MOORHEAD, JOHN. 1992. *Theoderic in Italy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 66–83.

der the Odoacer's rule.⁷ The great senatorial figure was able, under the terms of "hospitalitas", to adopt a land settlement method used elsewhere in the imperial West to accommodate barbarians, and to initiate and probably to complete the requested allocation of land to the Theoderic's Gothic tribesmen. The prestigious nobleman was evidently furthermore able to perform his assignment, as the evidence suggests, without any significant inconvenience or distress caused to either the Italics or the Goths.⁸

In connection with the coordination of the distribution activities, accomplished by the competent officials with the responsibility to carry out in person the local allocation of landed property and on the base of special receipts, which were issued to the new beneficiaries, the whole process of land apportionment was attained fully according to legal principles. In the course of its obviously quiet and expeditious accomplishment, the land distribution constituted one of the indispensable pre-conditions for a pragmatic future coaction between the both nations then present in the Italic territory.⁹

The successful accomplishment of such a delicate procedure as the apportionment of the Italic lands to the barbarian population elicited positive reactions of some of the high representatives of the Roman power circles. The most prestigious members of the senatorial, Roman-Italic nobility within the political-ecclesiastical official structures regarded the Liberius' achievement with great respect and approval. The main reason was that the praetorian prefect was apparently able to achieve in a very prudent way such a result, which, according to one of the most prominent scions and an exquisite literary figure of this age, the bishop Ennodius of Pavia, had entailed rather negligible economic loss for the Roman population: Thanks to the vast expanses of abandoned land in Italy, being at disposal for the distribution to the Germanic newcomers, the native Italic – Roman population stayed in a large extent intact by the new political change in their fatherland.¹⁰

Even respected members of the Roman senate could be eyewitnesses to a Theoderic's optimistic attitude as the monarch declared that the distribution of the "thirds" to his kinsmen not only united the Roman and Gothic holdings but also contributed substantially to reconciling their reciprocal interests.¹¹

The evident uniqueness of those events was also clearly demonstrated by the responses of some of the learned contemporaneous political personages. They used to compare the Liberius' land allotments to the human relations in the ordinary life, where, "albeit men are frequently inclined to come into collision on

⁷ Cassiodorus, *Variae*. 1894. THEODOR MOMMSEN [ED.]. (MGH AA) Berlin: Weidmann, II. 16. 2.

⁸ MACPHERSON, ROBIN. 1989. *Rome in Involution*. Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 92.

⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* I. 18. 2.

¹⁰ Ennodius, *Epistulae* IX. 23. In Ennodius. *Opera omnia*. 1882. WILHELM VON HARTEL [ED.]. Vindobonae: Gerold 1882.

¹¹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* II. 16. 1–6.

account of their being neighbours, yet the sharing of common estates proved in practice a reason for concord. For both nations attained a state of harmony by living together, which seems to be unique and altogether imposing outcome.”¹²

In the viewpoint of the governmental circles the land division brought about the longed for condition as “the souls of the farmers having been united and the amity between the nations progressed and it grew together with their accepting of one another’s reciprocal losses.” In this way “the accomplished distribution of the land possessions was out-balanced by acquiring a new defender and security of the property and population was completely preserved.”¹³

Nevertheless, the evidently successful division of the Italic soil and its allotment to the Germanic population did not by far involve the peninsular territories as a whole. For it was carried out in the geographic terms implying the Padan lowlands in the first place, including the traditional historical regions of the Transpadana and Cispadana, with only a minority number having been scattered across several central and southern provinces. The Samnium¹⁴ and Picenum together with Campania and the insular Sicilia represented those of the central-southern agricultural regions, where sporadic and occasional Gothic settlements were dispersed.¹⁵

In spite of the fact that by far not all the lands, that comprised the basic Italic agricultural resources, were made subject to the actual division about the initial period of the Theoderic’s reign, yet their entire surface area, either cultivated or unused, was regarded as an integral amount of wealth, liable to a supposable future division. The proprietors of the undivided estates became in a long term outlook possible purveyors of an adequate part of their landed property and simultaneously they also became prospectively bound to accept the function of so called “hosts” towards the new land receivers from the ranks of the Gothic populace, who would be settled on it.¹⁶

Until the eventual division of their estates, it was moreover necessary for the mentioned social-economic category of the native Roman-Italic agrarian proprietors to pay, except paying their regular, land-related taxation, a tribute on their hitherto practically undivided holdings, which still incorporated the “thirds”.¹⁷ Support can be found for this conclusion in one of the Cassiodorus’ letters, which describes a situation in a northern Italic town called Tridentum. The aforesaid municipium and its broader urban area represented an important crossroad of the traditional commercial corridors that intersected the southern Alpine foothills, with long-distance mercantile routes running from the mountainous passes

12 Cassiodorus, *Variae* II. 16. 5.

13 Cassiodorus, *Variae* II. 16. ibidem.

14 Procopius, *De bello Gothico* I. 15.

15 P. HEATHER (2002: 241–246).

16 JONES, ARNOLD HUGH MARTIN. 1964. *The Later Roman Empire I*. Oxford: Norman, 250–251.

17 DAHN, FELIX. 1866. *Die Könige der Germanen III*. Würzburg: Stuber, 143.

toward the Adriatic ports. As one of the remarkable events there occurred in Tridentum an episode when a local Gothic ecclesiastical personage lived to see, to his great joy, that his longed for a tract of land was finally apportioned to him, to which he was obviously legally entitled. Soon afterwards it happened that the sovereign exempted the city inhabitants to whom the land, from which the Gothic share was detached, pertained, from their legal liability to pay an adequate fiscal proportion for the “thirds”, to which they were subjected before the land division in their city area took place.¹⁸

The sovereign took similarly compliant attitude toward a situation that developed in a city district called Cathalia, whose inhabitants apparently strove to secure their agricultural property and to avoid the impending land division. A plea sent to the monarch from the city asked courteously for their “thirds” to be merged with their regular land taxation. If fully accomplished their intention, the newly formed jural local state of affairs would have probably implied that the inhabitants, who had held landed property as a source of economic profit in the Cathalia’s municipal area, would not have in time outlook been subjected to another land division anymore.¹⁹

It was a distinctive social feature of these times that the possibility for the Italic-Roman landowners to effectively avoid the presumable land division resulting in a loss of the thirds to the Germanic peoples, was furthermore increased by certain specific economic aspects that progressively developed in the later Roman economic environment:²⁰ In the last centuries of the Western Roman Empire an important social-economic feature made itself still more evident, comprising a trend in which typically vast expanses of fertile and actively utilized rural agricultural soil became gradually abandoned. In forming a lasting condition those phenomena were to a great extent the consequence caused by piecemeal demographic decrease and equally they proliferated due to the fiscal policy of the government.²¹ As this tendency resulted from serious, deeply rooted causes and was of long-run traits, which were furthermore aggravated by the consequences of the long power struggle between Odoacer and Theoderic, the progressively increased extents of abandoned land were capable of being placed at disposal of the common land funds, wherefrom relevant economic units comprising soil, buildings and labour force could be ascribed for distribution to each of the awaiting recipients.²²

In this sense, the sufficient amount of abandoned lands, which was absorbed by the Germanic request, did not damage the present agrarian background and could even positively influence the social condition in the newly constituted Ostrogothic Italic dominion as it did not actively affected the social and economic

18 Cassiodorus, *Variae* II. 17.

19 Cassiodorus, *Variae* I. 14. 2.

20 BURY, JOHN BAGNELL. 1889. *A History of the Later Roman Empire I*. London: Macmillan, 25–36.

21 J. BEDNAŘÍKOVÁ (2007: 11–32).

22 J. BEDNAŘÍKOVÁ (1996: 99–105).

balance of the actual Italic-Roman landed proprietorship. And for not only the Romans, but the Goths too, were obliged to the appointed land tax liability²³ and to look after those newly acquired estates and farmsteads, thus the consequences of the land distribution modestly inclined towards a positive development in the general economic condition of the state and they also generally worked in favour of the individual proprietors. Thanks to this, “the treasury enjoyed regular profit and the private owners did not suffer any serious loss.”²⁴

In spite of the invasion brought about by a new and a relatively more numerous ethnic group than the Odoacer’s federates were, facts, which the establishment of the Ostrogothic dominion in Italy and the ensuing apportionment of land to the barbaric population entailed, the aggregate picture of the landed ownership did not experience, considering the late imperial economic circumstances, any substantial change.²⁵

A broad and varied range of productive agrarian units and their labour force, with the great landlords’ vast latifundia at one end of the scale and the petty farmers’ crofts on the other, cultivated incessantly their soil and cherished a very intimate attitude to it, as their fields and the work in them were the indispensable source of their livelihood. For those who handed their age-long traditional occupation from father to son, the cultivation of land represented an elementary means of production, by far the most important existential back-up and moreover the profession that was extolled by eminent poets as early as the Augustan age.²⁶

Besides, the wide-ranging latifundia precincts, being ideally convenient to the division owing to their configurational structure of component villa units,²⁷ remained still to be largely the property of moneyed Roman senatorial and patrician nobility. But the great landholdings increasingly became also the property of the Gothic aristocratic circles, whose wealthy members entered likewise into the process of land amassing.²⁸

The far – flung tracts of the royal landed property, the Theoderic’s patrimonium, stood out then as the largest among the possessions of the wealthiest estate proprietors in the Ostrogothic dominions. The accumulation of the patrimonium’s lands was greatly contributed and increased by confiscations of the political enemies’ wealth and by acquiring steadily an ever growing amount of land, attained chiefly as a result of the important Theoderic’s warfare campaigns that were primarily aimed at territorial gains. The monarch’s large land holdings, dispersed conveniently across entire Italic territory and located frequently in the most fer-

23 Cassiodorus, *Variae* IV. 14. 1–2.

24 Cassiodorus, *Variae* II. 16. 4.

25 DE ROBERTIS, FRANCESCO. 1948. „Produzione agricola in Italia dalla crisi del III. secolo all’età dei Carolingi.“ In *AFEC della Università di Bari VIII*. Roma: Bretschneider, 127.

26 Vergilius. *Georgica*. 1930. REMIGIO SABBADINI [ED.]. Firenze, I. 120–235.

27 SALVIOLI, GIUSEPPE. 1901. *Città e campagne prima e dopo il mille*. Palermo: Kessinger Pub Co., 16–17.

28 Cassiodorus, *Variae* IV. 39. 1–5.

tile and profitable regions or provinces within the Ostrogothic dependencies,²⁹ brought enormous profits into the royal treasury thanks to the flourishing agrarian, industrial and business life that was under way there. On the other hand the favourable economic background of the sovereign's demesnes could be and used to be utilized, together with his tirelessly exercised spirit for justice, as a reliable material base and a necessary pre-condition for helping those who needed assistance. In the spirit of his evident, broad solidarity concerning the economic matters, the Amal king thus regarded especially those, who as the leaseholders of the royal estates, appertained to the jurisdiction of the central bureau administering the Theoderic's possessions, the *comitiva patrimonii*, and happened to fall into a kind of pressing circumstances. In this case the Theoderic's help typically included the possibility of taxation relief for the tenants, who as otherwise punctual tax-payers, were not capable of paying the appointed land tribute at the moment as a consequence of a short-run economic inconvenience.³⁰

One of the examples representing the above mentioned governmental procedure occurred in the southern Italic provinces of Apulia et Calabria, regions which since the ancient Roman times featured one of the most important granaries of the Peninsula. In 508 AD, after the territory was seriously affected by the eastern Roman warfare operations, which gravely impaired the whole regional economy and agrarian production including the profits of the royal farmsteads,³¹ a tax alleviation was conferred on the tenants, who cultivated the king's properties located in these fertile regions. Moreover, the monarch's favour and his understanding for the difficult circumstances of those farmers, who would have otherwise contracted large debts, thus produced a remarkable impetus to incite a further economic development within the area in question.³²

Vast royal *latifundia* typically comprising fertile and active agricultural soil and productive plantations concentrated primarily on the most important items of foodstuff output, growing especially corn, olives and wine, yet they did not exclude, for instance, an economic utilization offered by numerous and large forest expanses that were in the peninsular territories proper made up predominantly of cypress³³ and pine growth.³⁴ This sort of arboreal vegetation could be found particularly in those of the Italic territories that enjoyed distinctive Mediterranean climatic features, being a valuable and irreplaceable source for a broad range of economic purposes. It conformed ideally to be utilized as building material, but also for heating and general manufacture use. However, the crucial significance, implied by the import of the great timber reserves for a maritime country, inhered in their indispensable function and the possibility of mass utilization in ship-

²⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* V. 6. 1–2; V. 7. 1–3.

³⁰ Cassiodorus, *Variae* XII. 7. 1–2.

³¹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* I. 16. 2.

³² Cassiodorus, *Variae* I. 16. 3.

³³ *Enciclopedia Italiana* X. 1936–1939. TRECCANI, GIOVANNI [ED]. Roma, 388–389.

³⁴ *Enciclopedia Italiana* XXVII. 1935–1943. TRECCANI, GIOVANNI [ED]. Roma, 303–306.

building industry, particularly in the manufacture of battle crafts and commercial vessels.³⁵

On the other hand, the landed property of the royal patrimonium, where primary mineral sources and most notably the wealth of iron ore deposits were found, represented a kind of possessions of strategic relevance, as well. With regard to the iron ore³⁶, the cardinal economic import, mediated by this raw substance, resided in its utilization in the field of common artisanal and broad general manufacturing activities that produced necessary artefacts of everyday use, but its industrial role was crucially essential in its mission within the strategic area of military use and in weapon production, as well.³⁷ The deposits containing precious metals as the gold or silver were also of no less importance because they represented the mineral substances that purveyed indispensable source of royal wealth and a means for coin production.³⁸

The royal landed property was administered and managed by specific officials referred to as *actores*³⁹ or *conductores*,⁴⁰ who played their integral part in the bureaucratic structure of the *committiva patrimonii* that the royal institution, especially in its economic administration, had at its disposal.⁴¹

An analogical, but entirely independent form of administrative structure to that, which was employed for managing the economic functions of the royal domain, was also utilized in operation of the ecclesiastical property. Respective church territorial domains were subjected to the local city bishopric offices. The process, through which the ecclesiastical landed funds expanded their dimensions and in which they gradually grew in number, was progressively accentuated by acquiring large properties, usually donated by the state treasury, and by the wealthy private individuals, who were interested in taking advantage of the ecclesiastical patronage.⁴²

Security and inviolability of the landed property as a basic principle of the governmental economic policy

Together with the issues regarding landed property there was also evidently arising, given the broad social-economic circumstances, a pressing exigency to ensure an adequate degree of its general security. The matter in question was ac-

³⁵ Cassiodorus, *Variae* V. 16. 1–3; V. 18. 3.

³⁶ Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 25. 2; III. 26.

³⁷ P. HEATHER (2002: 55–56; 76).

³⁸ Cassiodorus, *Variae* IX. 3. 1–2.

³⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 29. 2; IV. 40. 1–3.

⁴⁰ Cassiodorus, *Variae* V. 39. 6.

⁴¹ A. H. M. JONES (1964: 413–419).

⁴² MOCHI ONORY, SERGIO. 1932. *Vescovi e città (IV. – VI. sec.)*. Bologna: Zanichelli, 113, 294.

centuated by the social-economic traditions inherited from the times of the later Roman empire: As a consequence of various perils that often lurked in open undefended countryside, large tracts of land became gradually completely abandoned or greatly depreciated in their effective value due to the lack of agricultural work, which disappeared together with peasants seeking frequently to find their refuge behind the city walls or in inaccessible distant areas.⁴³ So the pressing need to urgently deal with the question of the general security in the post-Roman Italy was further augmented, as the mentioned long-run social-economic trends negatively affected not only the positive stimulants and general endeavour, intentioned at reclaiming unused tracts of land, but since they even exerted a strong inauspicious impact on the actual creative condition and general working initiative within still active and cultivated landed property.⁴⁴

Therefore, only by immediately attaining the condition of a sufficient degree of general public security and of the landed property in particular – the value which constituted an essential agent for an adequate economic growth, it was conceivable to successfully achieve several crucial preconditions, needed for creating the social stability and for preserving the internal social – political balance. The state of affairs regarding material possession and its safety influenced directly the supposable extent and quality of the food production for all those numerous groups of inhabitants that resided in populous cities and vast rural regions.⁴⁵

Overall extent and quality of agrarian production, immediately conditioned by a sufficient security level of the public and the private agrarian property and also by general public and economic stability, was moreover the decisive factor for the commonweal, the public utility, but above all, for the fiscal system, based mainly on the levy in kind these days, to be able to supply food rations to the army corps, which consisted largely of the Gothic element.⁴⁶

But the fiscal foodstuffs played a prominent role also in making up a prevailing form of remuneration for the members of the bureaucratic administrative system. It was the Ostrogothic population whose members constituted predominant component part of the military organization, which guaranteed the condition of internal safety and of external peace of the Ostrogothic dependencies, being on their permanent military duty.⁴⁷ It was therefore absolutely necessary for these indispensable forces to be materially sustained in their crucial commission by agrarian, industrial and service production, delivered by all the affordable economic resources, both private and public, and by nation-wide manpower.⁴⁸

43 JONES, ARNOLD HUGH MARTIN. 1964. *The Later Roman Empire II*. Oxford: Norman, 812–823.

44 Ennodius, *Epistulae* IX. 23.

45 P. HEATHER (2002: 248–250).

46 BOWERSOCK, GLEN – BROWN, PETER. 1999. *Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World*. Cambridge Mass. – London: Harvard University Press, 279–282.

47 Cassiodorus, *Variae* VII. 3. 3; IX. 14. 8.

48 G. BOWERSOCK – P. BROWN (1999: 122).

The fact, that as one of the key contemporaneous social elements, there arose the question involving the preservation of the general security of the landed property, was legitimately destined to find its reflection in the governmental politics. The essential relevance of this issue became increasingly accentuated by several facts: Since not only did the consequences implied by it directly impact the working conditions in the agricultural lands, which were under systematic, active cultivation but they moreover negatively influenced the effective rent value and the prospective conceivable utility of those tracts of abandoned soil that were already qualified by the government to be reclaimed or distributed to the Gothic populace.⁴⁹

Landed property, as it was done during the final centuries of the later Roman rule, was frequently jeopardized by illegally seizing the real estates and indebted farmsteads with facilities and plantations particularly. Another widespread social form with great detrimental impact on the general condition of stability and safety of the landed property was represented by some illicit activities, centred on organized robbery, especially on thefts of the labour force and working stock. Even if these manifestations proved merely some of the side effects attesting to the decline of the former economic vigour of the peak imperial periods, yet they represented a constant challenge for the new political reality of post Roman Italy as a consequence of the clear evidence to the decrease of the public authority that was one of the most serious epiphenomena in the gradual disintegrative process of the unified Roman rule in the West.⁵⁰

Following the foundation of the Ostrogothic dominion, which by its rigorous performance in the social sphere brought about a considerable increase in the respect toward the general authority of the new political system and in the regard to the basic principles of justice and law,⁵¹ it was necessary, as it was done under the Dominate, to undertake decisive actions that would be focused on an effective struggle against those specific dissociative trends, which lingered on from the past.⁵²

It was thus inevitable to pursue those intended strategic aims for instance in the northern borderline province of Raetia where a hitherto wild and uncivilized barbaric tribe, referred to as Breonnes, sedulously committed depredatory incursions against local Raetian farmsteads and its manpower. This tribe, whose unmanageability was still augmented by its permanently dwelling in the unapproachable mountainous passes of the Alpine range, made it gradually wholly impossible for the farmers to practice their everyday peaceful work in the fields. The farmers' lives were evidently disturbed by permanent abduction of labour force⁵³ and

⁴⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variarum* V. 11.

⁵⁰ BURIAN, JAN. 1997. *Římské impérium. Vrchol a proměny antické civilizace*. Praha: Svoboda, 197–213.

⁵¹ J. BEDNAŘÍKOVÁ (2007: 120–122).

⁵² Cassiodorus, *Variarum* I. 11. 1.

⁵³ Cassiodorus, *Variarum* I. 1. 2.

destruction of their harvest. The circumstances in Raetia deteriorated that far, that it became inevitable for the local administrator with the title of the “dux Raetiae”, Servatus, together with the coalition of the palatine circles to adopt all the necessary measures aimed at complete suppressing of the obdurate peoples and re-establishing of the civilized social order and peace.⁵⁴

Only by preserving the broad social security and stability it became possible to better successfully the general economic productivity of both fecund agrarian regions, but above all, in the entire territory of the Theoderic’s Ostrogothic dependency, which, after a considerably protracted period of deep economic uncertainty, seemed to begin experiencing a gradual change resulting in the desired condition of relative peace and tranquility.⁵⁵

However, it were not only these cross-border barbarian peoples who inclined to resist the state authority and to scorn the law that committed illegal and inadmissible actions against landed property and human lives. For those serious aspects of lawless behaviour concerned frequently, similarly as it occurred during the later Roman period,⁵⁶ even the high standing members of the Italic and increasingly also the Gothic nobility, who was employed in the services of the Ostrogothic government. Thus it happened that certain estate holder, called Castorius, was illegally disposed of his property by the praefect praetorio Faustus himself.⁵⁷ But even in this case, on the afflicted person’s supplication, the sovereign’s prompt intervention had done justice to the matter: the supreme civil servant was thus not only legally obliged to restore the purloined landed possession but he also had to provide additional compensation to Castorius by furnishing him with a fortune, which in its actual value equated the cost of the stolen property itself.⁵⁸

Not only was the guilty praefectus praetorio disciplined by the right of recovery and the penalty of his was extended to providing for a supplementary considerable financial amount to the affected person. But he also risked being severely penalized in case of any future transgression together with his accomplices who did not evade the monarch’s justice and his law court where they were brought with the praefect Faustus.⁵⁹ Protecting private property, at least according to the governmental propaganda and official documents, enjoyed such a degree of respect in the Theoderic’s Italy, that the abuse of the authority and committing illegal deeds by highest echelons of the power ladder including the most important members of the bureaucratic system were not tolerated. Their civil and profes-

⁵⁴ Cassiodorus, *Variae* I. 11. 2–3.

⁵⁵ A. H. M. JONES (I. 1964: 247).

⁵⁶ *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum consilio et auctoritate Accademiae litterarum Borussicae editum*. Berlin 1862–, (CIL) III. 123336.

⁵⁷ J. MOORHEAD (1992: 73).

⁵⁸ Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 20. 2.

⁵⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 20. 3.

sional conduct was under strict legal control also in the affairs regarding illegal enriching and suppressing the principles of justice.⁶⁰

A very serious question that regarded the problem of safety of the landed property was also frequently presented by the conduct and behaviour of the armed forces, which were almost exclusively staffed by the Gothic population. Numerous military units, whose primary task included paying permanent attention to the maintaining of the internal order and external peace, lapsed in fulfilling their crucial mission.⁶¹ Frequently the monarch exerted an intensive effort to bring their demeanour in the civil environment into conforming with the requirement to protect the property, peace and civilized co-existence of all the social groups of the state. But it often happened that despite the common need to try to harmonize the society where two altogether different nations lived at the time and the urgent exigency to attempt to cultivate full respect towards the law, the Gothic forces inclined frequently to commit violent actions against general public order.⁶²

The rapacious and aggressive gist of these deeds frequently caused damage not only to the property and harvest but to the broad range of basic economic values at all. It used to cause a havoc that was but onerously amendable and it moreover brought a considerable lesion into an otherwise positive process by which each social and productive group systematically took part in creating a necessary initiative centred on effective development within various spheres of the social-economic environment.⁶³

In this sense the mentioned behaviour of the Gothic soldiers was in strict contradiction to the effort, exerted by the Theoderic's governmental policy, which endeavoured every positive rigorous constitutional action on the base of permanent exercise of general legal principles and lawfulness.⁶⁴

The aforesaid governmental attitudes seemed to be equitably exercised across all the territory of the Theoderic's dominion. They were enforced in such circumstances that implied, for example, the necessity aimed at protection against frequent cases of ruinous plunder, which was committed by Gothic military garrisons stationed at numerous strategic defensive outposts of the Italic territory.⁶⁵

One of the occurrences that exemplified the troublesome social behaviour of the Germanic population turned up within the municipal area of Syracusae, an important eastern Sicilian city. Syracusae were also an international port and economic center amidst a vast agrarian region that had made up one of the most significant granaries of Italy since the most ancient times. The local Gothic garrison, evidently lured by the temptation of an easy booty, plundered the produce harvested in the rich Syracusan fields and stored in the granaries of the farmers

⁶⁰ Cassiodorus, *Variarum* III. 20. 4.

⁶¹ Cassiodorus, *Variarum* XII. 5. 3.

⁶² Cassiodorus, *Variarum* III. 38. 2.

⁶³ Cassiodorus, *Variarum* IX. 14. 1–4.

⁶⁴ Cassiodorus, *Variarum* IX. 14. 5–10.

⁶⁵ Cassiodorus, *Variarum* VI. 22. 1.

in this side of Sicily. As the rampaging Gothic units induced a serious and huge damage, affecting gravely the economic welfare and prosperity of the region and in doing so they concurrently committed severe offence against general legality, the remedy and disciplining measures against the culprits could once again be implemented only by the intervention of the central authority.⁶⁶

The bleak experience regarding the often troublesome and uncivilized behaviour of the Gothic population was also an incentive for the government to adopt necessary pre-emptive measures to face and preclude this highly injurious social trend effectively. In this sense the central bureaucratic organs had to intervene when the Gothic military reserves, located in the provinces of Picenum and Samnium, were invited by the sovereign to travel to Ravenna to take part in a ceremony, which included receiving the donativum from the king. The monarch felt an urgent necessity to warn the Gothic soldiers to eschew any illegal acts against public order and people's property on their way to the capital, especially the frequent ruinous plundering of the crop that was under cultivation in the local farmers' fields. Across the territory which they traversed, the Samnian and Picenian Gothic soldiers should have also avoided causing severe damage to the mountain meadows that were important grasslands giving pasture to the peasants' cattle. Even in this case the endeavour, presented by the governmental circles and the judicial system to remedy these harmful phenomena by implementing sufficient pre-emptory measures, bore out an extraordinary motivation in the official authority's attitudes to cherish the idea of the protection of the landed property as a source of basic economic values and of the broad public welfare.⁶⁷

In another case when the monarch was urgently pressed to call on an allied German tribe of the Gepids to help an impending Ostrogothic military campaign in southern Gaul, his pre-occupation resulting from a high likelihood of the devastating of the Venetian and Ligurian territories brought about a pre-cautionary measure to distribute a sum of three solidi per week to each Gepid warrior. The import of this arrangement was furthermore emphasized by the fact that the north Italic regions of Venetia⁶⁸ et Histria⁶⁹ and Liguria, which, as the transit line of the Gepidae and formerly flourishing agrarian provinces, were actually recovering from the pernicious consequences of the previous Sciric-Ostrogothic power struggle. This fact prompted the sovereign to an immediate response consisting not only of the above mentioned gold money payment to the Gepid soldiers, but also in ordering to furnish them, if such an exigency would arise, with new wains, carts and utility stock so that the local agrarian community would not be confiscated and robbed of its living outfit of absolute basic necessity.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Cassiodorus, *Variae* VI. 22. 3.

⁶⁷ Casiodorus, *Variae* V. 26. 1–2.

⁶⁸ Cassiodorus, *Variae* XII. 4. 2–3.

⁶⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* XII. 22. 1–3.

⁷⁰ Cassiodorus, *Variae* V. 11.

Thanks to the preventive governmental intervention the potentially precarious passage of the Gepidae across the northern Italy did not result in any more serious damage being made to the local farms and to peasants' crop and property. In spite of this fact the main body of the Ostrogothic army under the command of the general Ibbas, on its haul through the same territory to the southern Gaul in 509 AD, caused evidently a great damage to the local economic life anyway. Especially, the peasants in the fertile valleys of the Alpes Cottiae range were struck, and it had to be again resorted to a provision, taken by the sovereign himself, which could restore the principles of law and provide for an adequate recompense of the damage that was caused by the large-scale devastation of the Cottian private landed possession. The monarch did so by exempting the cultivators from paying their entire tribute amount for one years' period.⁷¹

It was necessary again to undertake a similar action in 535 AD, which on local terms relieved the agrarian population of their otherwise regularly paid tax.⁷² It occurred then, that a large Gothic military corps committed grave foray and despoil in the provinces of Lucania et Bruttium on their way to the southern Italy and towards Sicily, where an eastern Roman military campaign commenced, including the landing operation under the command of Belisarius, the dreaded Justinian's general.⁷³

But the assiduous plunder and pillage, inflicted to the agrarian life as a serious side effect of the war operations, did not constitute, from the sheer economic viewpoint, the only expression of critical import that seriously affected the hard working peasants, who would often take pains to raise a sufficient amount of crop both for their own subsistence and as a means of fiscal obligation toward the state demands. And it sometimes happened that equally serious matters were under question. Those comprised enforced seizures and assumptions of the landed property in particular, which were imposed on their lawful owners by way of violent methods.⁷⁴

The struggle against aforesaid alarming expressions of contempt toward the inviolability of the private landed property was not easy for the government at all. For the central administration it was still more complicated with regards to many perpetrators of the illegal deeds because they frequently came both from the environment of high state officials and even from the power circles of the royal lineage including the monarch's house.⁷⁵ One of the prominent members of the sovereign's family, the son of the Theoderic's sister Amalafriada, the prince Theodahad,⁷⁶ who possessed great estates in the northern Italic region of Etruria, was evidently literally obsessed by a self-indulgent, rampant amassment of every

71 Cassiodorus, *Variae* IV. 36. 1–2.

72 Cassiodorus, *Variae* XII. 5. 3–4.

73 Cassiodorus, *Variae* XII. 5. 3.

74 Cassiodorus, *Variae* IV. 39. 1–5.

75 Procopius, *De bello Gothico* I. 3.

76 J. MOORHEAD (1992: 103).

kind of property, using illegal means in the process.⁷⁷ In that way Theodahad also purloined a far-flung tract of land belonging to an aristocratic person with the rank of *vir spectabilis* and a great landlord Domitius. This situation became apparently so desperate for the affected aristocrat that it was not possible for him to achieve the application of justice in any other way than to seek recourse with the royal court itself.⁷⁸

By the intervention of the royal palace and to a great satisfaction of the injured party, the consequences of the injustice were then redressed. For one thing Theoderic ordered his greedy relative to restore without delay the entire property, which he illegally seized. But above all, the sovereign reproved and instructed Theodahad that a man of noble birth is under every circumstance bound to behave in accordance with the governmental ideology and with the principles of justice and legality. For, as the monarch stated, by omitting them the person of royal origin is exposed to the scorn and hatred in a degree that is equal to the extent of the oppression committed by the said man on the people of lower social status.⁷⁹

Together with its initial phase that was represented by the Theoderic's reign, the period, which spans the Ostrogothic rule over the Italic diocese inherited, together with all the positive and negative aspects of the late antiquity, also somewhat unstable social-economic background, whose main decadent features developed mostly during the final period of the western Roman empire.⁸⁰

This tradition produced a pre-condition and a breeding ground for the emergence of specific manifestations that reflected the general state of affairs in the field of the landed property. In this area there were various issues including the degree of reliability with respect to the mensuration and delineation of agricultural and other kinds of grounds under question, affairs that dated as far back as the early imperial times. But it also took the points regarding the extent to which the historical and old Roman geodetic documentary material, comprising measurement entries and official papers with cadastral information or other various agricultural, topographic and geodetic data, was preserved.⁸¹

The crucial importance of these questions was further accented by the fact that they directly influenced the rate of credibility and reliability in those geodetic procedures that were employed under the Ostrogothic rule to assess and survey large numbers of land tracts and to redefine their new boundary lines.⁸² Therefore, it happened that the joint forces of the partial loss of historical awareness and the oblivion into which the one-time cognizance gradually fell, together with uncertainty or loss in the official documentation, profoundly influenced many aspects of the contemporary social-economic life: Largely insufficient or completely lost

⁷⁷ J. BEDNAŘÍKOVÁ (2007: 131).

⁷⁸ Cassiodorus, *Variae* IV. 39. 3–4.

⁷⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* IV. 39. 5.

⁸⁰ G. BOWERSOCK – P. BROWN (1999: 134–136).

⁸¹ HODGKIN, THOMAS. 1886. *The Letters of Cassiodorus*. London: H. Frowde, 147.

⁸² T. HODGKIN (1886: 148).

information and readings, which during the greatest imperial florescence punctually registered all the necessary borderline courses within individual cadastral units, typically resulted in troublesome and conflicting relationships between the neighbouring proprietors.⁸³

Their bitter disputes were usually induced by the difficulties that arose in the survey attempts by which the proprietors tried to delimit and work out the course of the new, supposable boundaries. Resulting dissensions frequently used to gain as high level of risk that could be solved only by the governmental intervention: One example of the above mentioned occurrences took place during an abrupt and sharply fanned dispute between two persons of prestigious social standing, the owners of vast landed possessions and noble Romans, who ranked as *virī spectabiles*, Leontius and Paschalis.⁸⁴

These men were not able to determine the exact borderlines of their grounds nor was it attainable for them to reach a reciprocally acceptable settlement on the issue with the help of regular peaceful measures. As a consequence of these circumstances their messy business brought closer to the use of illegal, violent steps. And as mentioned, it was, as in many other cases regarding the application of legal principles in the economic matters, a direct measure of the royal authority, which, by commissioning a senator ranked as *vir illustris*, had to enter the issue to resolve it lawfully, obtaining a peaceful agreement of the litigants.⁸⁵ Technically, the operation was carried out by authorizing a specialist who dealt with the business of land surveying. The geodetic expert, chosen and entrusted by the senator, accomplished his work by thoroughly and exactly assessing the formerly questionable borderlines and he also similarly provided for traditional typical landmarks used in Italy since the ancient times, to be set in the defined boundary lines. So that by the governmental intervention a wholly legal, peaceful and ordered solution of a seemingly banal quarrel of two wealthy possessors was reached and it happened, that the formerly dis-united neighbours could henceforth live and pursue their profession in peace and quiet together with their colons and slaves.⁸⁶

Already in the later imperial times and within its juristic environments the legal patterns and principles that championed the idea of inalienability of the private landed property by violent means and its inviolability were exerted and cultivated.⁸⁷ These legal standards were continually handed down being under constant reflection and certain developments both in the imperial times and also during the post Roman periods. So after the final collapse of the western Roman political-administrative structure they were, together with the entire late imperial

83 Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 52. 1.

84 Cassiodorus, *Variae* ibidem.

85 Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 52. 5.

86 Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 52. 8–9.

87 Novellae Valentiniani III, XIX. In *Codex Theodosianus*. 1905. THEODOR MOMMSEN [ED.], Berlin, XI. 28. 2.

legislation, received, fully respected and exercised not only by the founder of the Ostrogothic dominion in Italy,⁸⁸ the king Theoderic, but also by his grandson and descendant on the Italic throne, the king Athalaric.⁸⁹

Athalaric visibly emphasized the question centred on the protection of the landed property by placing the clause regarding the matter at the first position within the numerical order of his legal ordinance. And it was also he who admiringly confirmed and pointed out to the “insurmountable validity of the Valentinianus Divus’ laws.” By this the Theoderic’s offspring paid overt homage to the later Roman juristic traditions and to the heritage of the imperial civilization in general. In his eyes the Roman culture of ancient times represented a permanently revered value to which the Ostrogothic government professed and that should have become an immutable inspirational model of the Ostrogothic rule and a founding stone of his government.⁹⁰

Valorizing the national – wide agrarian potential

Simultaneously with its activities aimed at the renewal of internal peace, including integrity, security and stability of the landed property, the official Ostrogothic governmental policy formulated another strategic intention that was focused on the key issue regarding the abandoned and unused agrarian land resources. This crucial question comprised chiefly the attempts to reclaim the vacated land tracts and to bring them into cultivation again.⁹¹ Generally, a policy aimed at extending the overall acreage, both private and public, of this basic economic nationwide wealth was pursued. These enterprises made up an integral part of the comprehensive Theoderic’s attempts that were chiefly intended at the preservation and congruous development of the general ancient cultural legacy.⁹² In this sense the king’s governmental actions were of crucial importance for a prolific development of the political reality in the newly founded Ostrogothic dependency.⁹³

The overall level of quantity in the foodstuff output and the general ability to keep up the entire broad sphere of the former traditional agrarian production were seriously affected during the later imperial period by a gradual process that encompassed a considerable shrinkage in the total amount of the actively cultivated land and in the aggregate acreage suitable for this kind of business in general.⁹⁴ This phenomenon was also in direct and evident connection and worked in full

88 Cassiodorus, *Variae* I. 1. 1–3.

89 J. BEDNAŘÍKOVÁ (2007: 131).

90 Cassiodorus, *Variae* IX. 18. 1.

91 P. LAMMA (1950: 122–123).

92 Cassiodorus, *Variae* I. 1. 1–5.

93 GIUNTA, FRANCESCO. 1984. „Gli Ostrogoti in Italia.“ In *Magistra barbaritas*. Milano: Scheiwiller, 75–76.

94 *Codex Theodosianus*. 1905. THEODOR MOMMSEN [ED.]. Berlin, XI. 28. 2.

interaction with a planispheric demographic drop that in its turn gravely affected the economic potential, which influenced negatively the capability for an effective increase in the agrarian production.⁹⁵

The above mentioned facts that inhered in progressive, substantial lack of agricultural labour force were in the first place influenced by a markedly decreased degree of internal security and the inhabitants' fears resulting from an augmented danger of barbaric incursions into the deep inland agrarian territories. But also the exorbitant fiscal policy of the central Roman government played a significant part in these issues since it represented a major motive for the farmers to try to evade their traditional vocation and simultaneously to eschew their frequently unbearable fiscal obligation towards the state, which resulted in huge deficiency in manpower – the colons and slaves in particular.⁹⁶

The coaction of these social-economic elements shaped the general demographic aspects of the Italic society as early as the later Roman times and it also induced a noticeable and unmistakable qualitative change to the rural agrarian landscape and its traits, which enjoyed a considerable prosperity in the peak imperial period: In the oral traditions and written memories, a vivid consciousness of the ancient authors was preserved about the astonishingly high technical level that commanded the multilateral economic utilization of the rural landscape and about various cultivation methods, exerted during the flourishing periods of the Roman principate.⁹⁷

On the pages of the chronicles that the learned men of the sixth century used to read and in the narrations which they would listen to, gracious conventional images appeared to them depicting the golden, old-time romantic rural scenery, densely studded with ripening field stretches and green gardens giving fruits and fragrant orchards. But as these Theoderic's contemporaries experienced the actual appearance of the Italic urban and rural panorama on their numerous journeys through the age-long Aeneas' country, comparing it to the fore-past imperial economic efflorescence, sometimes a strikingly contrasting reality comprising visible signs of overall material decline appeared before their eyes.⁹⁸

It was evident that certain symptoms of overall seediness and neglect worked as early as the first decades of the fourth century. And as far as the traffic infrastructure was concerned, it was evident that at least two of the most important ancient roads, the Via Cassia and Via Aurelia presented by this time impaired transport possibilities due to their damaged carriageway, resulting in their very rare usage. So the travellers, who intended to set out on their way from Rome

⁹⁵ ROSTOVITZEFF, MICHAEL. 1957. *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire I.*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 476, 524.

⁹⁶ A. H. M. JONES (I. 1964: 812–814).

⁹⁷ Tacitus. *Annales*. 1960. ERICH KOESTERMANN [ED.]. Lipsiae: B. G. Teubner, I. 79.

⁹⁸ Cassiodorus, *Variae* XII. 18. 2; IV. 24. 1–2; II. 21. 2.

northwards, had to use the other principal ways, particularly the Via Aemilia and Via Flaminia.⁹⁹

The general planispheric population decrease induced, for example, that some depopulated coastal stretches of the Tyrrhenian sea, the section of the Latium and Etruria in particular and the evident shabbiness in settlements and agrarian landscape evoked frequently in the contemporaries' views a sense of great desolation at the beginning of the fifth century.¹⁰⁰ Though this circumstance was still lingering on to a considerable extent in the Theoderic's time,¹⁰¹ it seemed that the certain progress in the field of social stabilization and comparably enhanced internal security in the Ostrogothic dominion were soberly manifested¹⁰² and adequately encouraged a proportionate improvement and increase in the maintenance given to the landed property. The Theoderic's government adopted, as the documentary sources indicate,¹⁰³ active steps to undertake measures, aimed at a necessary renewal in the extent and quality of the agrarian production, which constituted an integral part in the general governmental program that attempted at stabilizing all the negative aspects of the traditional economic trends inherited from the past centuries. In the first place, it was of crucial importance to take up the effective steps to try to revive cultivation in the fields and agrarian areas that, although they were not actually used for production, were well disposed for economic purposes. In a similar way the governmental action vigorously attempted to protect the quality in lands that were under active agrarian utilization.¹⁰⁴

In this area, activities focusing on reclaiming and ameliorating the unused lands were concerned at large, comprising in the first place the reconstruction and maintenance work that was chiefly organised, as in other economic fields, in the form of the extraordinary fiscal requirements¹⁰⁵ and aimed at respective technical interventions including effective regulation of a functional network of irrigation systems and draining channels in particular.

This kind of work was required especially with frequent occurrences of large areas with previously intensive degree of cultivation, which had become swampy terrains or permanently inundated territories as a result of mainly natural, both climatic and other processes. But in some specific areas the inundation could have been to a certain extent also a consequence brought about by the gradual reduction of advanced drainage techniques and methods, which were exercised

⁹⁹ *Itinerarium Burdigalense*. 1929. OTTO CUNTZ, [ED.]. Lipsiae: B. G. Teubner, 86–102.

¹⁰⁰ Rutilius Namatianus. *De reditu suo*. 1933. JULES VESSEREAU – FRANCOIS PRÉCHAC [EDS.]. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, I. X. 37–42.

¹⁰¹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* II. 21. 1–5.

¹⁰² Procopius, *De bello Gothico* I. 1.

¹⁰³ T. HODGKIN (1886: 120; 123–124)

¹⁰⁴ MOSCA, ANNAPAOLA. 1993. „Gli interventi di bonifica sotto Teoderico.“ In *Teoderico il Grande e i Goti d'Italia*. Spoleto, 756.

¹⁰⁵ Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 48. 1. – 5; V. 38. 1–2.

on a large scale within the most fertile agricultural regions during the flourishing periods of the Roman empire.¹⁰⁶

The Ostrogothic government seemed to have been ever conscious of the opportunity implying great potential for the public interest, that could have been exploited by the activities aimed at the valorisation of abandoned soil through the implementation of land reclaiming enterprises. This was also the reason why the governmental attitudes proved an adequate effort, aimed at assistance and motivation and intended for the private sector. One of the forms, that helped the private enterprise in this kind of business, appeared to be to offer the yield and prospective benefit, brought by the renewed works, to the individuals who were ready to take up the respective land valorisation.¹⁰⁷

The governmental echelons regarded the readiness to take up the charge of land amelioration as a welcome sign of a good civil consciousness. They considered it an expression of responsibility for the affairs of general public interest and a necessity to pass the outcome of the present endeavour on to the generations, which were to come. It seems that this attitude frequently invoked positive responses with private investors. They would have demonstrated their willingness to invest their financial or material resources and administrative spirit to employ these values to undertake various projects of strategic public importance that played a significant role in materially restoring the agrarian sector.¹⁰⁸

Manifold signs of decline with relation to the economic networks were manifest for instance in the Umbrian region and in the municipal area of Spoletium in particular, where frequent deluges, caused by the Clitumnus river and other streams, made it impossible to agriculturally utilize vast tracts of land.¹⁰⁹ This fact became an incentive for two prestigious and probably local figures, the men ranked as *viri spectabiles*, Spes and Domitius, who made a proposal to the state to undertake land reclamation consisting mainly of drainage work within that area. The government responded affirmatively to the aristocrats' welcome initiative and it gave, with the view of possible future ownership for them, the entire flooded area to the said entrepreneurs because it evidently highly appreciated any initiative that would try to enlarge the total cultivable area in the central regions and which could create a more suitable condition for the agriculture as a whole.¹¹⁰

Overall responsibilities and the difficult tasks in such large projects as the Spoleitian case certainly was, often reflected the technical and administrative extent of the works, which the involved persons, even if being wealthy land magnates

¹⁰⁶ Plinius. *Naturalis historia*. 1875–1909. LUDWIG VON JAN – CARL MAYHOFF [EDS.]. Lipsiae: B. G. Teubner, III. 120.

¹⁰⁷ P. LAMMA (1950: 121–122).

¹⁰⁸ Cassiodorus, *Variae* VII. 44.

¹⁰⁹ SENSI, LUIGI. 1993. „Spoleto e il suo territorio all'età di Teoderico.“ In *Teoderico il Grande e i Goti d'Italia*. Spoleto, 799–800.

¹¹⁰ Cassiodorus, *Variae* II. 21. 2.

as Domitius and Spes did, had to face. Thus it occurred that while the business was fully under way, Domitius was abruptly forced to postpone or to temporarily cease in discharging his part in the respective administrative tasks properly, which could have been a consequence resulting from broader circumstances, probably in relation to a very costly character and size of the work under discussion or there could have been causes relating to his deliberate intention to quit as well. Regardless of the true reason and in the first place because the whole arranged enterprise had to be completed and put into operation punctually and as previously planned, it was not possible for the government that the mentioned lapse in keeping the Domitius' duties reduce or delay the drainage work as a whole.¹¹¹

In the response to the state of affairs in the Spoletian case, the government admonished Domitius and exhorted him to reinstate his tasks in the commenced reclamation activities. Subsequently, at the instruction of the government, an official deputy, named Johannes, was sent out to the region in question and entrusted with the task to ensure the troubled business to be redressed, the sovereign's instructions to be enforced and the whole process to be supervised. But the governmental official was also commissioned to guarantee that the entire work would be speeded up and successfully accomplished as soon as possible.¹¹² Besides, his mission included the instruction to convey the monarch's decision to the culprit, reading, that if the whole business would not be carried out according to the agreed intention, then the entire benefit and privilege resulting from the accomplishment will be transferred to Spes himself.¹¹³

There were naturally many other possibilities in the Italic economic environment, where procedures similar to those above mentioned could be adopted and utilised for the increase in quantity and quality of the means of production in agriculture. One of the most prominent cases of this kind occurred when an exponent of the traditional Roman – Italic aristocratic circles, the patrician Decius, brought forward his offer to carry out a reclamation work in the region of the Decennovium,¹¹⁴ a fertile area located to the southeast of Rome, where large swamps were formed in the course of time. Decennovian territory made up a vast district through which the ancient Via Appia road ran, spanning approximately the nineteen miles of the Pontine lowlands, namely the geographic section stretching from Tripontium as far as Tarracina.¹¹⁵

An overwhelming part of this economically promising territory became marshy and therefore abandoned land during the preceding epoch and as a consequence of permanent overflows. These were caused by several streams and rivers intersecting these regions, resulting in a subsequent permanent inundation across vast

¹¹¹ Cassiodorus, *Variae* II. 21. 3.

¹¹² Cassiodorus, *Variae* II. 21. 4.

¹¹³ RUGGINI CRACCO, LELLIA. 1995. *Economia e società nell'Italia annonaria*. Bari, 263.

¹¹⁴ Cassiodorus, *Variae* II. 32. 2.

¹¹⁵ *Encyklopedie antiky*. 1973. SVOBODA, LUDVÍK [ED]. Praha: Academia: the table of ancient Italy.

stretches of the Pontine lowlands. Also in the Decennovian case which represented an enterprise of huge dimension with all the necessary measures for its successful accomplishment the prospective economic importance for its future owner and especially fiscal import for the state brought about very positive reaction of the government circles and even their moral support for the patrician. In the course of the works, the monarch summoned two prominent senators, dispatching them to the area in question, to survey the lands and to carry out the assessment and measurement with respect to the prospective borderlines in the reclaimed areas so that the data regarding the project could be registered in the local land register and that the Decius could become its legal owner.¹¹⁶

By implementing the drainage works that aimed at reclaiming the Pontine countryside which was inundated for a long time, there must have been activated and positively influenced various additional ventures, which were initiated in the region. Thanks to the courageous dewatering that was accomplished in this section of the Latium it became possible to embark on a highly useful reconstruction implying a strategic traffic benefit of both local and long-distance import: Thus it became luckily possible to reconstruct the olden important transport artery, the Via Appia road, whose course was flanked by a majestic navigable water canal in this area. The rebuilding activities on the Appian road are supported by epigraphic information including an inscription that originated during the Ostrogothic period. The latter archaeological discovery commemorates the king and his spectacular building initiative that instilled a new life to the ancient arterial road that crossed the region of the Pontine marshland in the northwest – southeast direction.¹¹⁷

The primary concern aimed at improving the material background in the agrarian sector both in quality and size initiated also a noteworthy reclamation project in the lowlands that bordered the late ancient imperial capital of Ravenna in which the Ostrogothic monarchs resided at the time.¹¹⁸ It was a matter of necessity from the governmental viewpoint and from the standpoint of the public interest too to maintain primary nutrient resources, which constituted a necessary cornerstone for a successful fiscal policy of the state. This reason was at least partially the basic incentive for embarking on implementation of intentions, which comprised plans, aimed at drainage and reclamation of the swampy terrain in the locality of the former Ravenna's port.¹¹⁹ Though already unused in the Ostrogothic period, the history wished the local centre of the transcontinental marine travel to be, together with the Campanian naval base located in Misenum, one of the most important centers of the Roman imperial fleet.¹²⁰

116 Cassiodorus, *Variae* II. 32. 4.

117 A. MOSCA (1993: 759).

118 *CIL* XI. 1. 10.

119 A. MOSCA (1993: 762).

120 M. ROSTOVITZEFF (1957: 239).

The accomplished enterprise, which was materially and financially subsidized by the government, concentrated chiefly on the economically unusable fens, which the gradually receding sea level, resulting from long centuries of various topographic variations, left behind in the locality of the former Ravenna's docklands.¹²¹ Therein, literally before the eyesight of local inhabitants, who witnessed the building venture, the former basins and docks, clogged with mud, were transformed into productive and ornamental orchards. The work performed in Ravenna was, at least according to a coeval observer, unforgettably impressive, as he recalled that in places, where the sails had used to hang on the masts in the former times, fruits in the treetops did so following the drainage and reclamation activities.¹²²

In comparison with those numerous areas, which were devalued by permanent inundation and therefore requested the implementation of massive drainage works so that they could be reclaimed and brought back to a new effective agrarian use, in other Italic territories, frequently suffering from inadequate rainfall, decisive steps had to be taken to face this unfavourable circumstance. Thus for their economic potential to be proportionately exploited it was necessary to embark on implementing such measures that would have ensured a sufficient level of irrigation. But this exigency frequently constituted a difficult question to resolve both in the regions with lack of water sources and areas that proved an augmented degree of water consumption. It was therefore of vital necessity, if such a circumstance arose, to adopt an adequate measure that would ensure an urgent exploration aimed at detecting sufficient water reserves.¹²³

The troubles resulting from insufficient water supply seemed to have burdened for instance the urban inhabitants of several Roman city quarters of the Ostrogothic period for a long time. Especially the residents dwelling in outskirt areas were evidently greatly vexed by the lack of usable water sources. These were of absolute necessity, given the prevalent climatic particularities of the Apenninic peninsula in the summer period, especially in the suburbs, where large gardens and orchards were located, and similarly an adequate need of water pressed on those estate proprietors who pursued intensive agrarian activities in the areas and fields behind the city walls. It seemed however, that the relatively high regular demand of drinking water but chiefly usable water in the suburban areas contrasted with the circumstances of water supply that were found within the inner city circle. The everyday water consumption of the downtown inhabitants including such a demanding facilities as baths and industrial usage was fed with drinking water of excellent quality, piped into the city predominantly from the distant Alban hills situated to the south-east from the capital.¹²⁴

¹²¹ LUSUARDI SIENA, SILVIA. 1984. „Sulle tracce della presenza gota in Italia.“ In ARCAMONE, MARIA GIOVANNA [ED]. *Magistra barbaritas*. Milano: Scheiwiller, 535 – 536.

¹²² Iordannes. *Getica*. 1882. THEODOR MOMMSEN [ED.]. (MGH AA) Berlin, XXIX. 151.

¹²³ G. BOWERSOCK – P. BROWN (1999: 745–746).

¹²⁴ ASHBY, THOMAS. 1935. *The Aqueducts of Ancient Rome*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 10–11.

But the water, conducted through the aqueducts intersecting the parched suburbs, meant a great temptation for local cultivators who frequently managed to partially divert it illegally from the main course and for their own use.¹²⁵ The still considerable degree of Roman water consumption being made up by the public water supply system and urban water pipe demands, by numerous baths, both public and private, and countless fountains allowed rather for only low margin that could be effectively utilized for service purposes in the outskirts without seriously affecting the requirements of the central districts.¹²⁶ Having struggled with these obstacles presumably for a long time, the city administration fully appreciated the issue of water insufficiency for the entire territory of the capital at length and in coordination with the government it decided to undertake responsibility in using public resources to embark on an acceptable solution of this onerous question.¹²⁷

Thus the monarch together with the Roman Senate decided to take the initiative that augmented the independence of the outskirt city areas from the water supplies furnished by the principal aqueducts.¹²⁸ For the benefit of the public interest both the governmental circles and the Roman senators then took active steps to develop a concept aimed at the search and exploration of new water sources. Moreover, the strategy intended all the prospective water wealth to be capitalized in broad regional economic utilization and in the agrarian sector of both private and public enterprises in particular.¹²⁹

The Ostrogothic government seemed to fully understand that to reduce or to completely eliminate illegal water wastage it was not ever thinkable to recur to repressive measures only. For, in the first place, it was necessary to accede to complementary and constructive solutions, that would promise a vision of a stable and permanent results and positive expectations. It appeared to be essential that the characteristic of the newly intended project should be proportional to the demands and requirements of that large section of Roman inhabitants who utilized water not only for their broader social demands and for the sake of direct consumption, but also to those who were in an exigent need of this most precious

125 Cassiodorus, *Variarum* III. 31. 2.

126 Procopius, *De bello Gothico* I. 19. It is probable that at least until the beginning of the Byzantine – Ostrogothic wars, significant number of the urban 14 aqueduct were still in operation, not to mention the technically challenging maintenance of the aqueducts and sanitary networks during the Theoderic's and Athalaric's time: *Variarum* VII. 6. 5–6; VIII. 29. 1–2. See also Cassiodorus, *Variarum* III. 30. 1–2: The level of attention given to the upkeep and repair of the Roman sewage system can indicate that this enormous facility was, in direct relation to the operation of the public water supply and thus vicariously to the population quantity, still largely functioning.

127 Cassiodorus, *Variarum* III. 53. 1.

128 Cassiodorus, *Variarum* III. 31. 5.

129 Cassiodorus, *Variarum* III. 53. 6.

liquid with respect to their everyday economic activities, which both fed them and made up the base for the tax assessment.¹³⁰

In this sense the governmental provision decreed that adequately qualified personnel must be employed and paid out of public funds, which would take permanent care of the proposed additional water supply in the Roman conurbation. The appointed body of specialists with regard to the water exploration should have come preferably from the African regions and the choice as to its geographical origin was not accidental since it actually reflected the governmental attempt to recruit reliable, efficient and devoted labour forces for all its plans and projects. For as a coeval observer's testimony echoed, Africa was a country offering very instructive examples as to the possibilities to cope with the necessity to effectively use precious and scarce water sources. The broadly known admiring appreciation of the complicated and effective reclaiming and irrigating works undertaken there, through which it could have been possible to bring the dry and formerly barren areas in Africa into productive condition and to find new economic sources, was a clear sign for the competent authority that the local inhabitants, adapting themselves to their burdensome life in centering their aptitudes on survival and becoming famed experts in irrigation works, represented the best possible source of manpower for the cited governmental program.¹³¹

The chief task of the water finders was to try to look up suitable locations in which to build up artificial water reserves and cisterns. The water specialists should have been also able to predict water quality in a particular spot¹³² and moreover they should have been always accompanied by another service staff being insofar technically and mechanically competent so as to make the discovered water source available for consumption. The irrigation specialists' services were in the first place needed for the suburban agriculture because the inner city proper was fed sufficiently with the water conducted by the aqueducts. So by means of the quite generous enterprise, which was in this case carried out by coordinated action both of the government and the Roman senate, the overall material base of the Eternal City was given a welcome impetus that could help to sustain or to improve the quality of its current and future social – economic life.¹³³

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¹³⁰ Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 31. 1, 5.

¹³¹ Procopius, *De bello Vandalico* II. 19.

¹³² Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 53. 3.

¹³³ Cassiodorus, *Variae* III. 53. 6.

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RESUMÉ

Text se zabývá některými otázkami péče věnované základním hospodářským zdrojům v prostředí pozdně antické Itálie za vlády ostrogótských panovníků. V organické návaznosti hospodářského života Theoderichova státu na pozdně imperiální sociálně-ekonomický vývoj šlo ve zmíněné oblasti zejména o aktivity zaměřené na zajištění celkové bezpečnosti, ochrany a nedotknutelnosti jak veřejného, tak soukromého pozemkového vlastnictví. V oficiální vládní politické linii, která zahrnovala jak složku reálného působení na společensko – hospodářské úrovni, tak i prvky čistě propagandistické, však byla v adekvátních přístupech řídicích státních složek vzhledem k určujícímu významu vhodných stimulů a motivací pro další podporu a růst klíčových prvků materiální základny společnosti rovnocenná pozornost zaměřena také na udržení stávajících a rozvoj nových půdních zdrojů a k nim vázaných výrobních sil jako pramenů, které představovaly naprosto nejvýznamnější a převažující formu soudobého společenského bohatství.

Klíčová slova: Itálie za Teodericha Velikého, hospodářské zdroje, lidé, půda

Keywords: Italy under Theoderic the Great, People, Soil, Economy

