

SUB-PEASANT STRATA IN RURAL SOCIETIES
OF LATE MEDIEVAL EAST CENTRAL EUROPE*Markus Cerman*

Scholarly publications dealing with non-peasant landless strata or those having small, insufficient plots at their disposal still convey, in a rather generalizing fashion, a picture of the rural scene in late medieval East Central Europe largely dominated by middle and large farms. To what extent this scene was socially differentiated is often overlooked, and the role played by sub-peasant strata in certain regions frequently neglected. The present contribution examines landless non-peasant strata and those with insufficient plots in three ways: First, their true share of the population is discussed. In the second place, the variety of sub-peasant social strata with regard to their legal status, economic situation, and the size of what plots they had is revealed. Finally, the author devotes his attention to the problem of distinguishing between peasant and sub-peasant households, which has frequently been discussed, and to the economic and social links between both groups. Summing up, one may conclude that the general assumption of a far-reaching dominance of households with plots big enough as to be referred to as peasant can no longer be maintained and that one has to differentiate along regional or even local lines even when referring to late medieval East Central Europe.