

## *Coloni adscripti*

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*Coloni adscripti* were a particular type of tenant or estate laborer that emerged in the period following the tax reforms of Diocletian and his colleagues in the Tetrarchy at the end of the third century CE. While dating and exact chronology are unclear, *coloni adscripti* are first solidly attested in the late fourth century. A *colonus (censibus) adscriptus* was an individual whose name was added to the tax return (*professio* or *iugatio*) of his landlord and entered into the census rolls, as the cultivator of a particular estate or field.

In contemporary scholarship, opinion is divided over the implications of this act for the *coloni* in question. On the one hand, some scholars suggest that by the addition of their name to the census rolls, these individuals came to be subjected to a collection of obligations and limitations upon their behavior, and reduced to a condition of economic and social dependence that has been labeled the “adscripticiate.” By contrast, other scholars deny an explicit link between adscription and socio-economic dependence in the period before Justinian, noting that the term *adscripticius* and its apparent Greek cognate, *enapographos*, are not attested in legislation or papyri before the middle of the fifth century (see COLONATE).

It is difficult to reconcile these two positions, and the nature of the evidence

compounds the problem. Indeed, it is only under the emperor Justinian that the picture becomes clearer, and a recent contribution has sought to redraw the terms of the debate, and develop a methodology for explicating the condition of *coloni adscripti* in that period. It would appear that Justinian attempted to clarify the limitations upon *coloni adscripti* and consolidate the differences between these individuals and other *coloni* who are labeled in the sources and modern scholarship “free” *coloni*. By a law of 530, for example, *adscripticii* are accorded a position that differs only marginally from that of slaves: both should be regarded as under the *potestas* of their *domini* (CJ 11.48.21). While debate continues to rage, this refocusing of attention upon the legal matrix in which laws on *coloni adscripti* were collected together in the middle of the sixth century has much to recommend it.

### REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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