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RESEARCH CENTRE FOR GREEK AND ROMAN ANTIQUITY
NATIONAL HELLENIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION

ΜΕΛΕΤΗΜΑΤΑ

42



**WEIGHT AND VALUE
IN PRE-COINAGE SOCIETIES**

AN INTRODUCTION

Anna Michailidou

ATHENS 2005

DIFFUSION DE BOCARD - 11, RUE DE MEDICIS, 75006 PARIS

The present publication was funded by the 'Aristeia' programme of the Greek Ministry of Development, General Secretariat for Research and Technology, within the European Union's 3rd Community Support Framework

Cover illustration: A weighing scene from the Sixth Dynasty tomb of Mereruka at Saqqara

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ISBN 960-7905-23-7

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Βασιλέως Κωνσταντίνου 48 - 11635 Ἀθήνα

Εκτύπωση: Γραφικὲς Τέχνες «Γ. ΑΡΓΥΡΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ ΕΠΕ»

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ΕΘΝΙΚΟΝ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ

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photo by P. Atzaka

To the people of Egypt

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PROLOGUE

The project on *Weight and Value* deals mainly with metrology and trade in the Bronze Age in relation to societies in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East whose economies were at that time in a pre-coinage stage. Although the main thrust of the project was and is the metrology and economy in the Aegean era, it employs documentation from Egypt and the Near East, necessary to the understanding of the main theme.

The project started some years ago, while I was studying in the rich library of the Griffith Institute of Oxford, and continues today in the libraries of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Rome and Berlin, the university libraries of Heidelberg and last but not least the university library of Crete in Rethymnon. It has been partially but repeatedly supported by the Institute for Aegean Prehistory in Philadelphia and owes a lot to the hospitality provided by these institutions; it will soon result to a volume that greatly relies on material and textual evidence from the Orient.

This introductory volume was prepared under the aegis of the programme *Aristeia* assigned to the Centre for Greek and Roman Antiquity by the Greek Ministry of Development. The aim of the book is to provide a first approach to the subject, by presenting three aspects of the field and offering the tools to be used; it is addressed to scholars specializing in the Archaeology of the Aegean with a particular interest in Bronze Age economics and metrology.

With regard to the state of studies in Near Eastern metrology, first, the on-going work by Italian scholars such as Nicola Parise, Carlo Zaccagnini, Mario Liverani, Alfonso Archi, and their followers should be mentioned. As for studies on the ancient economy in general, one may point, for example, to the immense work by Oppenheim, Leemans, Powell, Waetzoldt, Moorey, Postgate, Janssen, Veenhof, Renger, Diakonoff, Vargyas, Joannès, Michel, Limet, Muhly, van de Mierroop and Silver Morris. This list, of course, does not include many other important names, which, however, will generally be found in the bibliography of this volume. I will only add here the name of Don Evely, the Aegean archaeologist whose book on Minoan crafts and techniques gave me my own starting point.

In fact, the present work maybe regarded as an attempt to respond to the plea as addressed – and documented – by Cynthia Shelmerdine in one of the Conferences on Aegean Archaeology. She said: “I simply close with a plea to colleagues who work in all these areas to be as aware of each other as were the people they study. Further advances in knowledge are sure to result if we continue to study trade from both ends, and if we broaden our view of these various ancient cultures to include the larger world in which they surely lived”. Of course, moving east to understand the other end of trade networks, certainly involves risks for the Aegean archaeologist, inexperienced as he or she is in such matters; but if occasional misinterpretations are unavoidable, the voyage is certainly worth the effort.

The book starts with three chapters that give three aspects of the research project.

First, the overall picture of the subject is presented. The introductory chapter takes the reader from the point of departure, the study of the simple stone and metal balance weights, to the ultimate destination, that is a system of exchange involving metals that, in the words of Pare 2000, “make the world go round”.

Second comes the line of enquiry that we will follow. We select three commodities whose modes of exchange present particular interest: a pair of shoes, a craft item in demand, cloth, a trade good par excellence, and the cleaning of garments, a humble everyday requirement.

In the third chapter, we offer a case study designed to illustrate the difficulties that arise when more complex levels of production and exchange are involved. The case study consists of people possibly working as servants or slaves, in the Aegean, Egypt and the Near East. After dealing with the problems of terminology and of status definition, we present a selection of evidence on the exchange value of humans and address some questions regarding the Mycenaean evidence on ‘slave contracts’.

The second part of the book, with the data bank of selected bibliography, consists of:

a) The Alphabetical Catalogue by author and with an ID number for every entry. The bibliography represents the actual selection made during the progress of my work in the libraries mentioned. It is constantly being updated, and only those articles or books that I have personally consulted are included.

b) The Thematic Catalogue rests on the Greek key-words of the data base inserted in two fields (one field for the title, in whatever language, and one for the content of the article or book, if it has been thoroughly studied). Under each word, the relevant bibliographical titles are represented by their ID numbers. The Greek key-words were specifically chosen to correspond in meaning to a variety of foreign words, attested in the titles of whatever language. Each key-word is linked to other key-words closely or more distantly related, thereby creating a functional rather than theoretical network; thus the reader may go from one theme to the next and so on, and even in cases where titles have not yet been inserted, the range of topics of interest is obvious (e.g. in the network around the word for grain). For this reason words with no titles under them will be found as part of the network; such words await the insertion of titles from material not yet consulted.

c) The Guide to the Bibliography gathers the existing titles (by ID numbers) under key-words in English; each word represents a choice drawn from the existing bibliographical titles, which we consider to be the word most appropriate and functional. Next to it the corresponding Greek key-word is written in italics.

The second part of the book is offered here as a tool to aid for further reading; one may start from the key-words of one’s interest, or learn about an author who deals with certain topics, and then continue by searching in other resources for the rest of the author’s work.

The contributors to this book are mentioned in the appropriate place, but I must thank them here warmly for their speed and efficiency. I am also indebted to Aris Gerontas for following me with his camera inside the Tomb of the Two Brothers in Saqqara and to the

Deir el-Medina village on the West Bank of Thebes. This volume is dedicated to the people of Egypt for their hospitality and friendship. The picture depicts our first visit to Saqqara, with an Egyptian guide, who is proudly narrating the content of the wall decorations. I remember another guide who carefully accompanied me down to the catacomb at Alexandria, telling me all the time “Watch your step, madam” and was so delighted when I told him that, in my view, the Egyptian element in the tomb reliefs was dominant over any Greek or Roman trends. And from among my memories, I should also include a little boy with clever black eyes in the valley of the Kings; he sold me the card with the sites of the tombs, which we publish here, together with others: “Five Egyptian pounds, madam” he asked for them and he accepted no less for his merchandise.

ANNA MICHAILIDOU
February 2005

EXCHANGING COMMODITIES: GIVING SANDALS, SENDING CLOTH, RENDERING SERVICES

In the entry ‘Prices and quantities’ of the *New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*,¹ we read: “These are the most directly and readily observable attributes of commodities (goods and services produced for and exchanged in the market). Both price and quantity relate to a unit (piece, bushel, barrel, pound etc), established usually by commercial practice as the *customary unit of reckoning*” (mine emphasis). Thus, the main interest of these units lies in their role of reckoning, as established in Aegean, Egyptian and Near-Eastern societies, identified by the researchers through textual references to weighed commodities and through material evidence from excavated sites.

But weighing as an everyday activity is not depicted in the Bronze Age Aegean art.² Scholars do not yet agree on references to ‘values’ in the Linear B tablets: the case of a provision of a quantity of wheat as ‘payment’ (*o-no*) to a net-maker, the probable value of a linen chiton stated (?) in units of weight of bronze (a chiton of fine linen: 1 kg of bronze), the exchange value of imported alum, etc.³ The debate whether *o-no* means ‘ass-load’ or ‘benefit’ / ‘payment’⁴ is particularly interesting for a researcher with a Near-Eastern experience.⁵

The researcher of Aegean proto-history is finally led to the necessity of consulting the far richer textual and material evidence from Egypt and the Near East. The work of Petruso⁶ on the existence of a uniform main unit of wool measuring, both in Knossos and in Nuzi, is one of the first attempts in this direction in the field of metrology, as is the work by Melena, which expresses a similar view.⁷ One should also definitely consult works by Parise and Zaccagnini.⁸ Contributions to conferences and publications referring to the status of relations between the Aegean world and the Orient (e.g. in the relevant volume in the *Aegaeum* series⁹) encourage one to pursue the line of enquiry that we attempt to follow here.

Hence, in the light of this approach, we need to be selective in our choice of data on economic history from the Orient. Documentation from the ancient Mesopotamia, in particu-

1. EATWELL et al. 1996, 957.

2. For weighing in a ‘religious’ context there is the well-known crater from Enkomi cf. EVANS 1935, fig. 646.

3. The evidence conveniently summarized in MICHAILIDOU 1999, 99 with the relevant references; A. Sacconi presented a paper more recently at the *Emporia* Conference (to appear in the vol. 25 of the *Aegaeum* series), with the title: La ‘monnaie’ dans l’économie mycénienne. Le témoignage des texts (in press).

4. MICHAILIDOU 1999, 105 for references.

5. Having studied, for instance, the Old-Assyrian trade in caravans of loaded donkeys (VEENHOF 1972).

6. PETRUSO 1986.

7. MELENA 1987.

8. E.g. PARISE 1986, ZACCAGNINI 1999-2001.

9. The volume CLINE & HARRIS-CLINE 1998, where in particular SHELMEARDINE 1998.

lar, provides us with a wealth of information on agriculture, animal husbandry, craftsmanship and especially barter, trade and various forms of exchange; we also learn about economic phenomena, such as fluctuating and fixed ‘prices’ or equivalences, as well as the use of certain goods, e.g. grain, and in particular of silver and other metals as indicators of value and as a means of exchange; further more “we have before us a testing ground for an economic history of the *longue durée*”.¹⁰

Of course, when studying Aegean and oriental societies, we are dealing with different social and political entities: Egypt, for instance, most certainly had a different political and social structure as compared to its neighbors in the east. As Amélie Kuhrt points out,¹¹ the term ‘ancient Near East’ is used by scholars to embrace an immense territory inhabited by many different peoples and socio-political groups. But it is perhaps not unwarranted to use properly selected information drawn from any of these cultures if it can contribute to establishing a framework for our main interest. This is the question of what kinds of commercial activities *were possible* in the Eastern Mediterranean and what levels of complexity and sophistication could exist in such early pre-coinage societies.

Part of the information deriving from economic and administrative texts may conveniently be illustrated by the rich repertoire of the Egyptian iconographic material, especially when it is related to everyday occupations. Egyptian iconography and texts tend to reveal the social environment of weighing, recording and exchanging.

Giving sandals

We turn once again to Aristotle who gives us a very clear definition of an object’s value, starting from its use value and extending to its exchange value (*Politics* I, iii, 11): «ἐκάστου γὰρ κτήματος διττὴ ἡ χρῆσις ἐστίν, ἀμφοτέραι δὲ καθ’ αὐτὸ μὲν ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὁμοίως καθ’ αὐτό, ἀλλ’ ἢ μὲν οἰκεία ἢ δ’ οὐκ οἰκεία τοῦ πράγματος, οἷον ὑποδήματος ἢ τε ὑπόδησις καὶ ἡ μεταβλητική. ἀμφοτέραι γὰρ ὑποδήματος χρήσεις ...». ¹² It is very significant that a pair of sandals is indeed one of the few craft items depicted among the subsistence produce offered in the so-called ‘market scenes’ in the Old Kingdom tomb paintings. The excavator Lauer thus describes the scene from the mastaba of *Ti* (Fig. 1): “two men move towards a sandal merchant; one of them, with a load on one shoulder and a bag hanging on the other, proffers a vase in his left hand; but the man in front of him seems to have met with better success, exchanging a mysterious triangular package for the desired pair of sandals”.¹³ On one occasion, the

10. RENGER 1994, 157-158.

11. KUHRT 1998, 16-30.

12. Translation into English by Rackham (previous chapter, n. 31): “With every article of property there is a double way of using it; both uses are related to the article itself, but not related to it in the same manner – one is peculiar to the thing and the other is not peculiar to it. Take for example a shoe – there is its wear as a shoe and there is its use as an article of exchange; for both are ways of using a shoe... ”.

13. LAUER 1976, 50. Of course, there may be reasonable objections to the term ‘merchant’, but one cannot discuss these here.

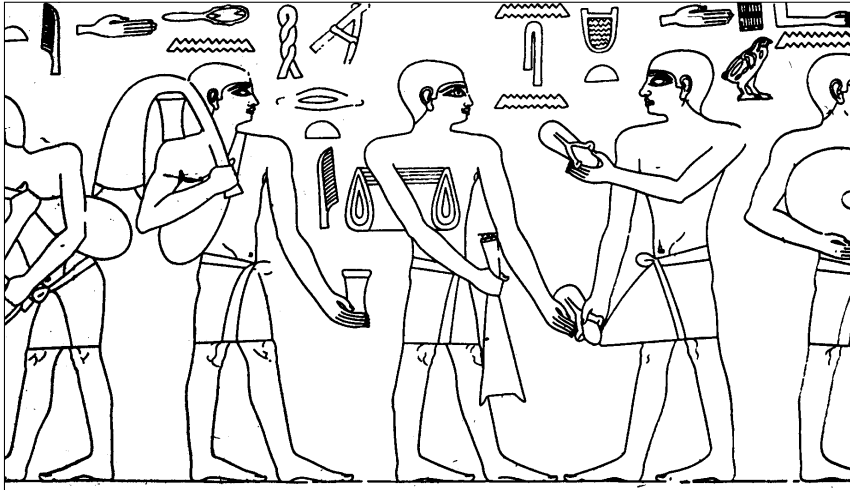


Fig. 1. Detail of the 'Market Scene' from the Old Kingdom tomb of Ti, Saqqara (after WILD 1966, pl. 174). In another register, not visible here, manufacture and sale seem to run together in the depiction of a man engraving a seal for a waiting client.

equivalence of the pair of sandals to one measure of barley is specified.¹⁴ The two-levels in value (as given by Aristotle) are in fact emphasized by Warburton, when he states that the sandals that appear in these 'scenes of the markets' were not merely a surplus, like the herbs or fishes offered there for exchange; these craft items were "produced for the market, as a full-time job".¹⁵ James also comments: "We may suppose that an ancient Egyptian sandal-maker had a fairly precise notion of what he might expect to receive in exchange for a pair of his sandals. He could think of this value in terms of many specific commodities – grain, oil, cloth, etc. – but he would not know precisely what he might be offered when he came to 'sell' it. At the point of negotiating a trade for his sandals he would have to set them in one pan of a kind of mental balance, and the offer in the other pan."¹⁶

More details on the subject of equivalences of the sandals to other goods, are found in the famous 'ostraca', mostly of the 19th and 20th Dynasties, recording daily transactions within the community of the tomb-builders of the Pharaohs at Deir el-Medina. Several types of sandals made of various material such as leather, papyrus or dom palm, noted in sixty six records, indicate the frequency of this commodity; its value is given in copper (usually one to two *deben* of copper for each pair, occasionally three), in silver units (*sniw* or *shaty*)¹⁷, as well as in emmer or in oil, both being calculated in capacity measures.¹⁸ That 'prices' for a pair of sandals remained within a range of 1 to 2 *deben* of copper over 150 years is considered

14. HODJASH & BERLEV 1980, 49.

15. WARBURTON 2000, 79.

16. JAMES 1984, 259.

17. For the words defining this silver unit of a value around 7.6 grams, see for example, JANSSEN 1975, 102 ff.; CASTLE 1992, 263-265.

18. JANSSEN 1975, 292-298, Table L.



Fig. 2. Depiction of sandal makers in tomb-paintings is usually part of a scene on leather working activity (Courtesy of the Ägyptologisches Institut, Heidelberg)

by Janssen to show a stability resulted by tradition, while Kemp explains it by noting that in this case, “tradition represented a supply and demand equilibrium”.¹⁹ Regarding the providers of sandals, the case of the ostrakon O. Dem. 240 is revealing, where in line 4 we read “given by the Pharaoh, 5 pairs”, in lines 6-7 sandals are mentioned as “given by” private persons, and in lines 8-9, sandals are “made by” sandal makers.²⁰ Sandal makers, often depicted in tomb-paintings (Fig. 2), appear in the ‘Town Register’ of the verso of the Papyrus BM 10068,²¹ listed among the inhabitants of various professions on the west bank of Thebes, none of them belonging to the Deir el-Medina community, which lay not too far away; according to Peet, eight of the recorded houses are each named as “house of the sandal maker x” .

Sending cloth

A simple transaction that indicates that cloth was a commodity in demand is mentioned in the so-called ‘Divorce Ostrakon’, at the Petrie Museum: ‘*She gave me a shawl saying, take it to the riverbank and sell it for a measure of wheat. And I took it, but they refused it saying: Bad*’. Wheat, given in exchange, was measured by capacity standards. Here we have a transaction quite close to the ‘giving’ of sandals in the Egyptian ‘market scenes’ (or in some of the Deir el-Medina ostraca). The situation of the market on the bank of the watercourse is a common element in Egyptian scenery; as Eyre points out, in general the term ‘riverbank’ is used for the market reflecting the watercourse as highway and natural crossroads.²²

In another Egyptian text, on the ‘judicial stele of Karnak’,²³ the following text: ‘*What N gave: 60 deben of gold, being gold, copper, barley and clothes*’ indicates the first item (gold) as the index of value (in this case of a transferred governorship), while the rest of the phrase specifies the actual goods given in return, among them clothes.²⁴

19. KEMP 1989, 251-252.

20. JANSSEN 1975, 296.

21. PEET 1930, 84-85.

22. EYRE 1998, 177.

23. JAMES 1962, 45, see also LACAU 1949, 25.

24. For the possibility that it is not a real act of sale, but possibly consists “de la cession de fonctions sous forme d’une vente (imaginaire)” cf. ALLAM 1998, 139.

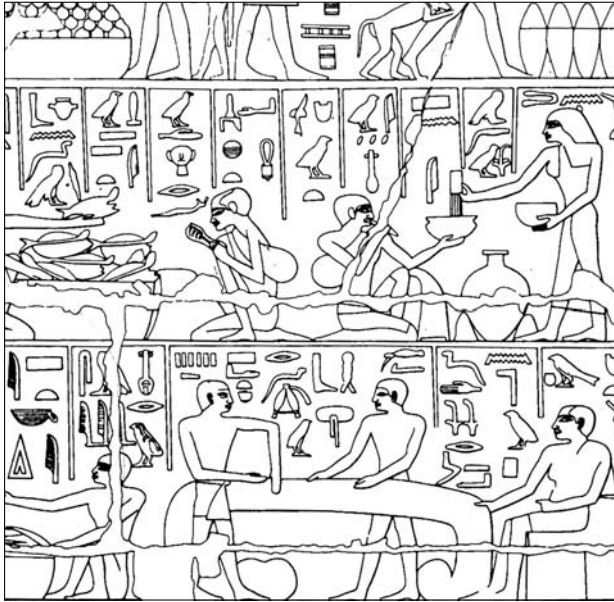


Fig. 3. Detail of the 'Market Scene' from the Old Kingdom 'Tomb of the Two Brothers' at Saqqara (after Moussa & Altenmüller 1977, Abb. 10)



Fig. 4. The present condition of the wall painting of fig. 3 (in situ photograph by Aris Gerontas)

A rare depiction of cloth being offered in the market is preserved on one of the walls of the so-called 'Tomb of the Two Brothers' at Saqqara (Fig. 3);²⁵ it is part of a 'market scene' where other usual items are being traded: foodstuffs, vegetables, fruit, fish (both fresh and dried) and some craft goods. Eyre describes what he calls a depiction of a 'private' business in cloth in a scenario reminiscent of the *souk* (Fig. 4), in the following terms: "One man is measuring out cloth by the cubit from a bale held by a second man, with the caption: '[A (?)] cubit of cloth for (r-db3) 6 1/2 š 't'. Behind sits a fat – that is old and senior – man, commenting favorably on the price and quality".²⁶ The important element in this depiction is that in a scene of barter exchange, an index of value is given for one item, the cloth. As James emphasizes, "the purchaser is not shown with any reciprocal object which he can trade against the cloth. He is, in effect, being given a 'price' for the cloth, not in terms of any of the common commodities used in exchanges, but against an apparently abstract unit of value, the *shat*."²⁷

25. MOUSSA & ALTENMÜLLER 1977, 79-85.

26. EYRE 1998, 179. The price is considered extravagant: cf. MOUSSA-ALTENMÜLLER 1977, 85, where also the caption with the words by the older man is given in German translation: 'Ich sage dieses gemäss der Wahrheit: es ist ein *ntrw*-Tuch von sorgfältiger handwerklicher Arbeit'.

27. JAMES 1984, 258, where he reasonably guesses that the bargain could be completed by handing over in exchange a commodity of the value of six š 't (= *shat*, a word related to the –later– terms *shaty* or *seniu*).

Most revealing regarding the role played by cloth as an important form of capital is the text from the New Kingdom Papyrus Cairo 65739²⁸ with the statement of a woman called Iry-nefer: ‘I am the wife of the Overseer of the District (?) Samut, and I came to live in his house, and I worked on spin[ning(?)] and I wove (nwj) my cloth (d3jw).’²⁹ She further declares that after seven years she acquired a young Syrian slave by giving the merchant various items in exchange: firstly, seven pieces of cloth of high quality and, secondly, copper/ bronze vessels, along with a quantity of honey and ten shirts. Thus Eyre concludes that her weaving activity was also intended to create a surplus in cloth in order to increase her capital³⁰.

Textiles were trade goods *par excellence* in pre-coinage societies. We gain an overall picture of their circulation in long distance trade from the tablets found in Kültepe at Asia Minor, where the site of the *emporion* *Kanesh* (*kārum Kaneš*³¹) of the Assyrian merchants

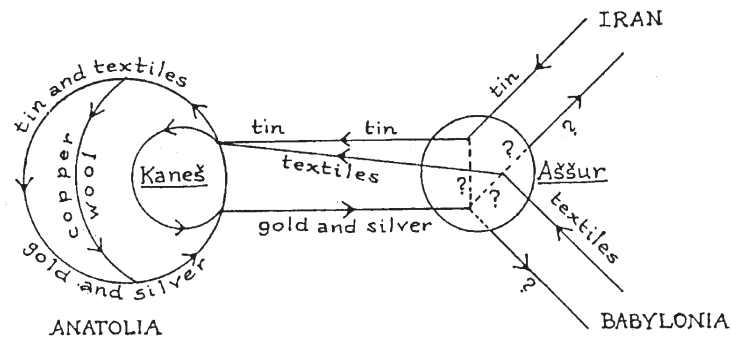


Fig. 5. The pattern of Old Assyrian trade (after Veenhof 1988, 244)

was discovered; for the patterns of this particular trade in Old-Assyrian period, the model (Fig. 5) published by Veenhof is very illuminating³²: tin, presumably originating in Afghanistan, is the transit good, part of the textiles exported to Asia Minor were produced in Aššur, other textiles came from Babylonia, gold and silver were brought from Asia Minor to Aššur in return for the tin and the textiles and further more the Assyrians were involved in an intra-Anatolia commerce in wool and copper.³³ Two points are most important here. Firstly, the fact that apart of the existence of local industry at Aššur, producing textiles for

28. GARDINER 1935, 140-146.

29. The English translation of the text by EYRE 1998, 178, also n. 27, 28; GARDINER, the publisher of this papyrus under the title ‘A Lawsuit arising from the purchase of two slaves’, translates: “and I worked and [...] and provided my dress” (1935, 141, 143).

30. EYRE 1998, 178-179; see also below, next chapter, pp. 39-40.

31. Literary meaning the ‘Kanesh harbour’ (LARSEN 1976, 51), it represents a residential area at the foot of the mound of Kültepe (where the local Anatolian palace) with houses (and equipment) of a local Anatolian tradition yet occupied by the Assyrian merchants as indicated by more than 10,000 tablets found there, written in Old Assyrian dialect.

32. VEENHOF 1988, 244, adapted from LARSEN 1967, 172.

33. VEENHOF 1988, 244-245.

export and located in the very houses of the Assyrian merchants, other textiles named 'Akkadian' were imported to Aššur from Babylon, to be sent to Anatolia in the same caravans. Secondly, the explanation given by Veenhof³⁴ that, though involved in an intra-Anatolia commerce in copper, the Assyrian traders did not import copper from Anatolia to Aššur, because it was not considered profitable.

This pattern of commerce gives a clear picture of a profit-oriented trade, what Aristotle named *καπηλική*. According to Aristotle,³⁵ first came the art of exchange, which extends to all goods and which he terms *μεταβλητική (τέχνη)*. This arises from what is natural, that is from the circumstance whereby some have too little, others too much. *Καπηλική (τέχνη)* develops later. Thus Aristotle distinguishes exchange provoked by human necessity from –unnatural – profit-oriented trade. If we are looking for commodities functioning exclusively as trade goods, the extreme example is surely the opium imported to Egypt from Cyprus, as mentioned by Warburton, who defines it as “an article produced exclusively for the ‘market’, as consumption is its sole *raison d'être*”.³⁶

Rendering services

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, in the entry 'commodities' in modern dictionaries, both *goods* and *services* are included as being 'produced for the market'.³⁷ Services are less tangible than goods in the study of societies of the past; finished products imply the existence of their manufacturers, but there is always the problem of the definition of the artisans as either dependent or semi-dependent or non-dependent personnel, provided either with substitute rations or with 'payment' in kind.

For instance, the builders of the royal tombs of the 19th and 20th Dynasties, established as a community in their village in Deir el-Medina in Egypt (Fig. 6) and defined as 'Servants in the Place of Truth' or the 'Crew of the Tomb', were a workforce of comparatively high status, consisting of stone masons, carpenters, sculptors and draughtsman, all well provided for by the Pharaoh with wheat, for making flour, and barley, for making beer, and generally

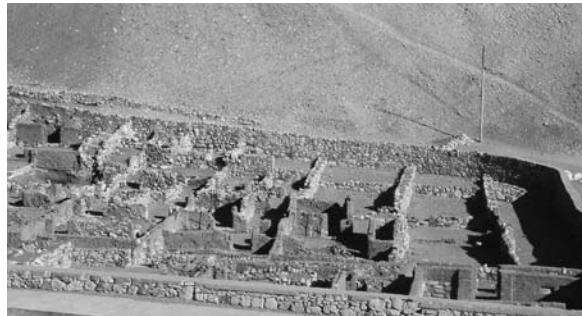


Fig. 6. View of the Deir el-Medina village where the Tomb-Builders of the Pharaohs lived (photograph by Aris Gerontas)

34. VEENHOF 1988, 258.

35. Aristotle *Politics* I, iii, 15-«ἔστι γὰρ ἡ μεταβλητικὴ πάντων, ἀρξαμένη τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν, τῷ τὰ μὲν πλείω τὰ δὲ ἐλλάτω τῶν ἰκανῶν ἔχειν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. ἢ καὶ δῆλον ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι φύσει τῆς χρηματιστικῆς ἢ καπηλικῆς ...».

36. WARBURTON 2000, 78.

37. EATWELL et al. 1996, 957. The debate on Marketless economy in the pre-coinage stage will not be discussed here; See more recently WARBURTON 2003, 136 ff.; 147 ff.

regarded as well paid.³⁸ The ‘payments’ were essentially copper, cloth, oils and foodstuffs, received somewhat irregularly by the workmen.³⁹ The local habit of writing, with ink, on ostraca (broken pottery sherds or limestone flakes) helped in the preservation of texts that range from pieces of literature to legal or small-scale economic transactions. From the famous Turin Strike Papyrus, we even learn of the earliest recorded ‘strike’ in ancient history (during the reign of Ramesses III, 29th year), its reason stated as follows: “*It was because of hunger and thirst that we came here. There is no clothing, no fat, no fish, no vegetables*”.⁴⁰ In fact, it was more in the nature of a hunger march, than a strike.⁴¹

Leaving aside the domain of craftsmanship – also related to the domain of cost of labour – one wonders how other minor services were rendered

apart from when they were proffered by those who may or may not have been slaves.⁴² As an example, we will focus on a particular service need, the cleaning of clothes. From the well known ‘Laundry Lists’ on ostraca from Deir el-Medina (Fig. 7) and some references in the surviving literature⁴³, plus the depictions – and captions – in tomb-paintings⁴⁴ (Fig. 8), we get a composite picture of the whole process, where natron was used as ‘soap’ for bleaching linen, and even ‘laundry marks’ were made in indelible ink.⁴⁵ Except for women doing their domestic washing at the riverbank, laundering was a male profession: semi-dependent washermen served the households of the elites or the king or the temples. The superintendent of the washermen was an important member of rich

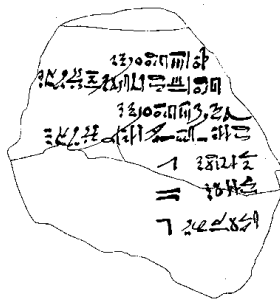


Fig. 7. Laundry list of clothes delivered to the riverbank: ostrakon ODeM 30 (after Hall 1986 fig. 42, based on Černý's facsimile)



Fig. 8. Laundry scene from a Twelfth Dynasty tomb at Beni Hasan (after Newberry 1893, pl. XXIX)

38. EYRE 1987, 170.

39. EYRE 1987, 170 and JANSSEN 1975, 488-493.

40. ROMER 1984, 120.

41. EYRE 1987, 180.

42. To be discussed in the next chapter on the exchange value of humans.

43. E.g. the description of the washerman working in the river near to the crocodile, in the New Kingdom copy of The Satire on the Trades or the metaphoric concept in a love song of the same period (JANSSEN & JANSSEN 2002, 2).

44. Six laundry scenes from the Middle Kingdom and two – as yet – from the New Kingdom (HALL 1986, 48; JANSSEN & JANSSEN 2002, 2).

45. The information given in this paragraph is derived from the chapter on the Egyptian laundry in HALL 1986 and from the article on Laundrymen of Deir el-Medina by JANSSEN & JANSSEN 2002.

households, of a slightly lower rank than the sandal bearer of the master of the house.⁴⁶ At Deir el-Medina, washermen formed their own guild; they belonged to the so-called personnel (*smdt*) ‘of outside’⁴⁷ consisting also of water-carriers, woodcutters, gardeners, fishermen, potters and gypsum-makers, all of them rendering services to the tomb-builders, who were of higher rank, living in the Deir el-Medina village. The *smdt* (*semedet*) worked for a lower remuneration by the government: the rate (at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty) seems to have been one sack of wheat a month for the *smdt* as opposed to three sacks at least for the tomb-builders, and for the washerman in particular it was three quarters of a sack.⁴⁸

The laundry lists on the ostraca (Fig. 7) are considered to be either deliveries by the washermen, in cases of high totals of garments, normally recorded by kind in a fixed order, or amounts of dirty washing from individual households, when low numbers are given, perhaps to be delivered by the owners to the riverbank, to the washerman responsible⁴⁹. Listed in the ‘Town Register’ of the Papyrus BM 10068, are six owners of houses of the profession of washerman,⁵⁰ among the inhabitants of other professions (e.g. the previously mentioned eight sandal makers).

With this evidence of semi-dependent laundrymen,⁵¹ we may contrast the picture derived from a unique Mesopotamian textual description.⁵² It refers to a dialogue taking place “At the Cleaners”.⁵³ The dialogue in this literary text from Ur, of Old Babylonian period,⁵⁴ is between a clothier (*LÚ-TÚG*), probably a cleaner and re-furbisher of clothes⁵⁵ and a customer. The customer gives many instructions on the way he wants the job done, to the great annoyance of the cleaner who finally tells him to go (to the canal) and do the cleaning himself! The main

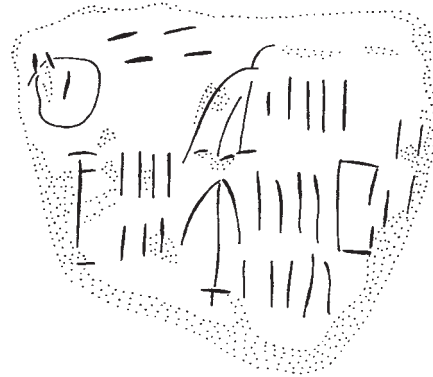


Fig. 9. A rare instance of an ‘ostracum’ listing commodities in Linear A script from Akrotiri, Thera (Michailidou 2000-2001)

46. As depicted in a Twelfth Dynasty tomb (HALL 1986, 50, fig. 37).

47. For more information on the workforce in Deir el-Medina, see VALBELLE 1985 and of course ČERNÝ 1973.

48. JANSSEN & JANSSEN 2002, 3.

49. Who sometimes complains that he had undertaken too many households (Hall 1986, 55; JANSSEN & JANSSEN 2002, 8). We even know the names of 18 laundrymen of the Theban necropolis (JANSSEN & JANSSEN 2002, Appendix on page 12).

50. JANSSEN & JANSSEN 2002, 6.

51. Also in the Near East there are references to the fuller or washerman working in an institutional context: RENGER 1984, 88.

52. RENGER 1984, 88.

53. This is the title given to the relevant chapter in GADD 1963.

54. The tablet U. 7793, presented by GADD 1963, 181-188.

55. For the interpretation of the term see GADD 1963, 181 and n. 11.

part of the payment the customer has offered, apart from a full meal, is a measure of grain, with which he promises to fill the cleaner's lap when the latter himself delivers the work completed to the customer's house. So this 'sketch of life at Ur'⁵⁶ has an economic interest, because, according to Gadd, it displays the presence in the Old Babylonian cities of a class of free workers, able to choose among the commissions offered them by private customers, and it also gives an example of means of payment for small everyday requirements of services. In the "Laws of Eshnunna", 20% of the value of the garment to be laundered is defined as the fee for a washerman's work, while Renger also cites as an exceptional case of reward the formal work contract from Nippur where a fuller received half a shekel of silver.⁵⁷

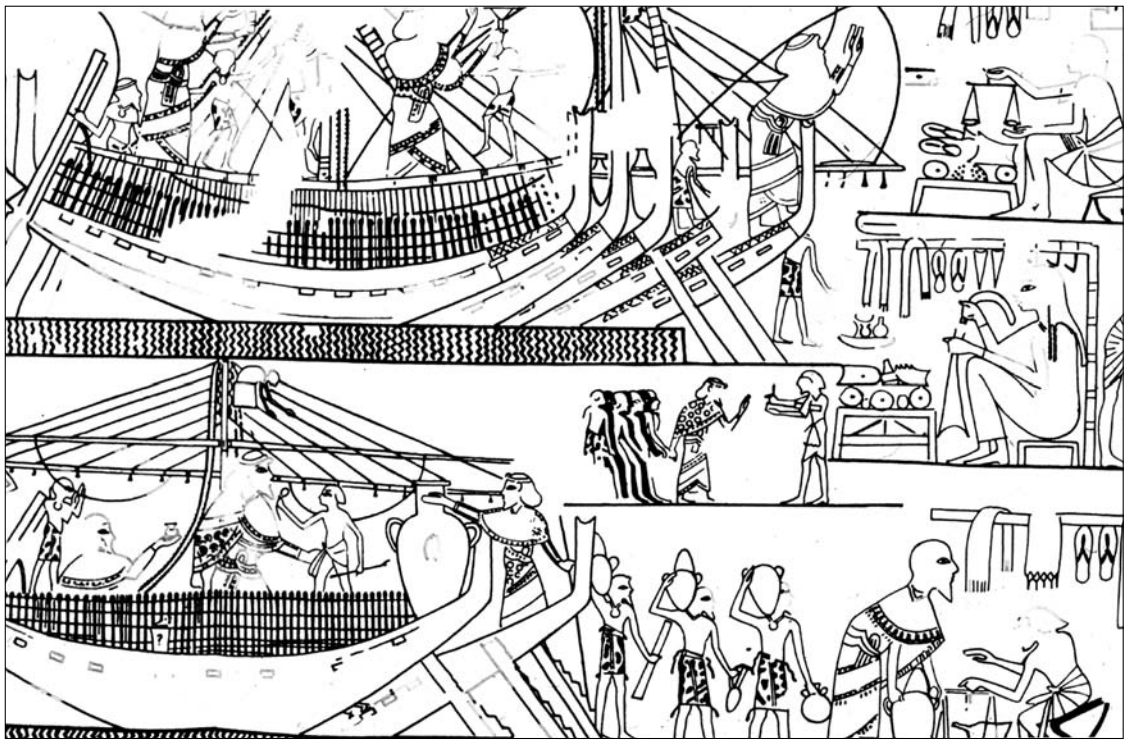


Fig. 10. Detail of the scene of unloading cargoes in the river bank, from the Tomb of Kenamun, a 18th Dynasty mayor of Thebes: traders sitting beneath shelters, offering a range of goods, among them sandals and lengths of cloth. They are holding little scale balances, perhaps to weigh metal, and are making deals with 'Syrians' from the ships (After Kemp 1989, 253-4 and Fig. 86). In the central register the mobility of the work force is perhaps depicted.

56. Cf. the general title of the article by GADD 1963.

57. RENGER 1984, 88.