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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

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ΚΕΝΤΡΟΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΡΩΜΑΪΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΤΗΤΟΣ
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

THE VALUE OF HUMANS AS A COMMODITY: SOME EVIDENCE FROM EGYPT AND THE NEAR EAST

When faced with the subject of dependent or non-dependent personnel, the archaeologist who is dealing with the textual and material evidence from the Aegean era usually relies on Mycenaean texts written in the Linear B script.¹ Among the women recorded in the tablets as receiving rations from the palace,² there are female groups which have 'ethnic' designations associated with islands and ports along the coast of Asia Minor or which are even referred to as 'Asian' women;³ this has given rise to the hypothesis that these women were 'slaves', traded in return for Aegean luxuries.⁴ These women, coming from the outside of the borders of the Mycenaean kingdoms, are not designated as *do-e-ra*, though other are, and this word, *do-e-ro/-a*, is connected etymologically with the Greek word for slave, but not necessarily related to it semantically.⁵ In the view of Nosch, this term was used in the Mycenaean period as "a designation of dependency towards the slave owner, and not as a general social condition", and there seems to be a difference between women generally dependent on the palace and privately owned slaves; she concludes that the term slave seems to be used only for slaves owned privately.⁶ Regarding female owners of slaves, Nosch stresses that priestesses and the key-bearer, had male and female slaves, in a cult context, while, by way of comparison, smiths could have slaves (Jn series), and in Crete the shepherds had slaves as well (C[4] set).⁷

In the attempt to understand similar situations in other pre-coinage societies outside the Aegean, it is natural to turn to the rich documentary sources from Egypt and the Near East. Uchitell, among the first to do this⁸, informs us that in Ur-III tablets, on which great numbers

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1. E.g. HILLER 1988.
 2. Cf. recently NOSCH 2003, 15, for more than 750 dependent women in the Pylian kingdom, some recorded as performing domestic duties but most of them working in the textile production.
 3. The subject of ethnicity is in itself an enormous topic. Cf. Muhly: "I deal with ethnic groups only in the sense that those groups appear as recognizable entities in historical sources" (MUHLY 1999, 517); see also A. & S. SHERRATT 1998, 335 for the point that ethnicity is not so much a constant quality attached to a particular group of people but a voluntary identification with a group dependent upon situation.
 4. The Linear B evidence on this particular subject (with the relative references) has been recently summarized by Voutsas in a paper jointly given by K. VOUTSA and A. MICHAILEDOU in the *EMPORIA* conference (vol. 25 of *Aegaeum* series) with the title: Merchants and Merchandise. Humans as a Commodity in Aegean and Oriental Societies (in press).
 5. UCHITEL 1984, 260; for the word *do-e-ro*: "it is more likely to be a loan-word of Asiatic origin" (CHADWICK & BAUMBACH 1963, 187).
 6. NOSCH 2003, 18-19, 22.
 7. NOSCH 2003, 14.
 8. A. UCHITEL, *Mycenaean and Near Eastern Economic Activities* (1985), 173-186.

of female laborers and children are listed mainly as millers and weavers,⁹ the designation ‘woman from foreign country’ refers to a captive slave-girl.¹⁰ Records of ‘Asiatics’ (*Aamu*) in Egyptian texts, in particular women weavers, may imply that the Asiatic (*Aswial*) women of the Pylian archive played the same role as Asiatics who entered Egypt, for both lands were rich in flax production and required a skilled labor force for their linen industry. Of course, it is not certain that the determinant ‘Asiatics’, whether verbally specified or presumably defined, refers to the same people in both cases; but the important common element is that the designation is usually applied to persons of superior skills, as compared to local servants.¹¹ Textual evidence of gift exchange of master artisans between courts of Egypt and the Near East¹² occasionally yields information on cases where artisans were sent under the supervision of guards and presumably trained workers had a considerable exchange value. Merchants in the Near East are occasionally mentioned as being involved in trading foreigners, whether these people were in debt to merchants or were immigrants, had been captives of war or kidnapped by nomads and pirates.¹³ In this chapter some cases of the exchange value of humans will be mentioned in connection with various levels of dependent personnel, who may perhaps have had the social status of slaves or serfs, but who are not easily defined as such, whilst any attempt at definition remains dubious.

Gelb’s article deals with the problems involved in defining a slave,¹⁴ as does a whole volume of *Altorientalische Forschungen* (and many other studies that followed).¹⁵ Consideration of the question of what consists slave-labour as opposed to non-slave labour occurs constantly in the literature on organization of work in Eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern societies.¹⁶

To start with the Aegean era: two Linear B tablets from Knossos have been interpreted as ‘contracts’ for the sales of slaves:¹⁷ they include the name of the buyer, who might be acting on behalf of the palace, the name of the ‘slave’ (*do-e-ro*) who is exchanged, the name of the former owner, and the verb *πρίατο* (meaning in ancient Greek ‘he has bought’), but no exchange value is given.

Turning to Egypt, we find that the terminology used to define humans in some sort of service (or *corvée* labor¹⁸) is varied. For the First Intermediate Period, for instance, Moreno

9. For example, in two households in Girsu, there are 1019 women and 666 children under seven superiors and 1045 women and 625 children under eight supervisors respectively, all of these female weavers (UCHITEL 1984, 269).

10. UCHITEL 1984, 261-265.

11. See the whole discussion on this subject – and on the debatable meaning of Asia – in the paper presented in the *EMPORIA* by MICHAÏLIDOU & VOUTSA (supra n. 4).

12. ZACCAGNINI 1983.

13. MICHAÏLIDOU & VOUTSA (supra n. 4).

14. The article begins with the phrase “The term ‘slave’ can be discussed, but not defined” (GELB 1979, 283).

15. *AoF* 1977; more recently: B. MENU, La question de l’esclavage dans l’Égypte pharaonique, *Droit et Cultures* 39, 2000/1, 59-79.

16. E.g. DIAKONOFF 1987 and other chapters in POWELL 1987.

17. OLIVIER 1987; MICHAÏLIDOU & VOUTSA (supra n. 4); SACCONI (previous chapter n. 3).

18. EYRE 1987, 18 ff; MENU 1998, 202, 206; also DONADONI 1990 (the chapter by A. Loprieno).



Fig. 1. Asiatic from the caravan from the Eastern Desert; detail of a scene depicted on the walls of the Tomb of Chnumhotep at Beni Hasan (NEWBERRY 1893, Pl. XXXI)

Garcia gives the following (with a translation in French): *rmt* (*les gens*),¹⁹ as the most frequent, *tp* (*tête*) and *b3k* (*serf*).²⁰ The determinant Asiatic (*ʿ3m*) is usually treated by Egyptologists as equivalent to the other terms for ‘servant’, though in this case for a Semite from Syria or Palestine (Fig. 1).²¹ For the Egyptian servant, the usual terms in Gardiner’s Grammar (Fig. 2) are *hm*²² and *b3k*, the latter related to the verb ‘work’,²³ while the collective *rmt*, meaning ‘people’, and the *tp*, meaning ‘head’, are also referred to.²⁴ As the variation in Egyptian terminology shows,²⁵ social conditions are not clear;²⁶ what is more, any official could refer to himself as the king’s or God’s servant.²⁷ In two of the designations for a serf (*meret*²⁸ and

19. The t of the transcribed form of this word should be underlined. The word refers also to the Egyptians as opposed to the foreigners (MORENO GARCIA 2000, 129 n. 40).

20. MORENO GARCIA 2000, 129.

21. HAYES 1955, 94-99; ALBRIGHT 1954; SCHNEIDER 1987; MICHAILIDOU & VOUTSA (supra n. 4).

22. With a dot under ‘h’, producing a sound of an emphatic ‘h’ (GARDINER 1927 [1957³], 27).

23. According to BAKIR (1952, 16) *b3k*, when transitive, means ‘to force to work’ while when used intransitively it means ‘to work for’ (=to serve) and this service may even be ordinary employment; thus the noun may refer to a person working of his own will or to one forced to work for others, and that it does not by itself mean slave is evident from a case where a *b3k* married the king’s daughter (BAKIR 1952, 17).

24. For all these terms see GARDINER 1927 (1957³) *passim*, HAYES 1955, MENU 1998, MORENO GARCIA 2000.

25. Cf. also BAKIR 1952, 68 for other terms used for domestic and rural workers.

26. It is interesting to note here that in New Kingdom period, there are cases of the introduction of a slave into a household when there was no direct heir, with the intention of ensuring succession in the family (EYRE 1987, 210); cf. MENU 2000/1 (supra n. 15), *passim*.

27. “Un ‘vizir’ se dira, par exemple, le *b3k* de Pharaon. Pharaon est lui-même *hm.f* ‘son serviteur’ c’est-à-dire qu’il ne dépend de personne” (MENU 1998, 194).

28. EYRE 1987, 35 considers that the *mrt* who worked the lands and the estates of the Old Kingdom officials, though of undefined legal position or terms of service, are also to be regarded as serfs.

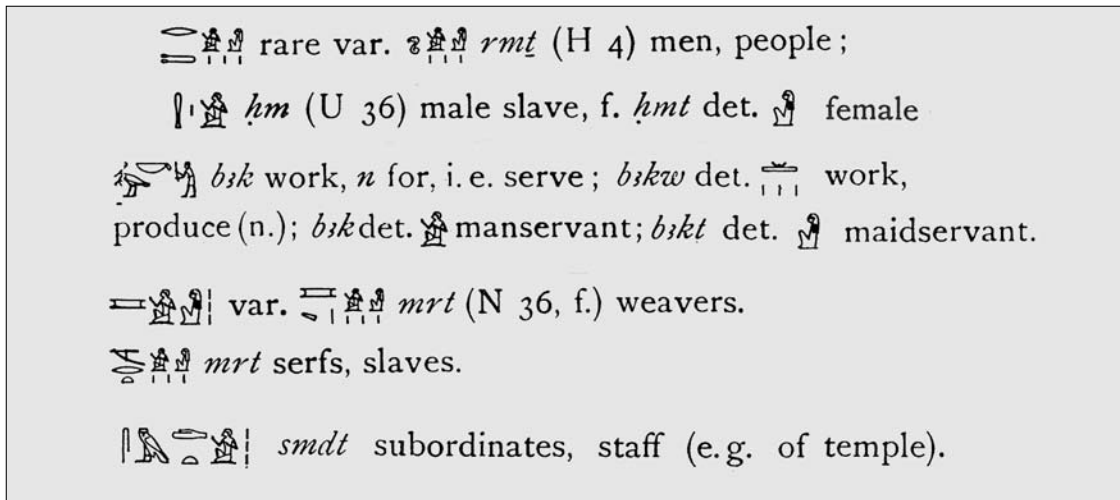


Fig. 2. Terms used for workers or servants in Egyptian Hieroglyphic Script (after GARDINER 1957³, *passim*)

*semedet*²⁹) the British Museum Dictionary states that they were allowed to own property and their limited freedom was tied more by tradition or economic circumstances and much less by law.³⁰ In sum, there were different forms of dependent work or serfdom³¹ in Pharaonic Egypt; according to Bakir, “the decisive criterion for slavery as opposed to simple serfdom should be *the possibility or impossibility of being sold.*”³²

Humans as part of the goods of an individual’s property are attested in Egypt at least as early as the First Intermediate Period (2181-2040 B.C.): autobiographical texts of the period express the acquisition of valuable items (flocks, ships, fields, and people) by members of local elite; e.g. the general *Nwj* refers to the acquisition of 40 serfs, 54 bovines, 36 donkeys and 260 goats.³³ Humans are also mentioned among inherited goods, e.g:

“*j’ai acquis trois serfs et sept servantes en supplement de ce que mon père m’avait donné*”³⁴
 or

“*les gens de mon père Mentouhotep étaient nés dans la maison en tant que biens de son père et de sa mère. Mes gens proviennent également des biens de mon père et de ma mère, ainsi que de mes propres biens que j’ai acquis par mes propres moyens*”³⁵

29. Cf. *smdt* in previous chapter in the paragraph for the semi-dependent washer men and others ‘outside’ of the Deir el-Medina village.

30. SHAW & NICHOLSON 1995, 272.

31. Serfdom is another ambiguous word often used by scholars as distinct from freedom and slavery (see GELB 1979, 285 ff. for various aspects and views on the word serfdom).

32. BAKIR 1952, 8.

33. Stele Cairo JE 45600: MORENO GARCIA 2000, 129 no. 15.

34. MORENO GARCIA 2000, 129 no. 1. The terms used are *b3k* and *b3k.t* (fem.). I retain the translation of Egyptian texts in the language of each article in order to avoid faults in transfer of meanings.

35. MORENO GARCIA 2000, 129 no. 13. The term used is *rmt*.

And they may also circulate along with other goods:

*“j’ai donné dix pièces de tissu à de ritualiste, ainsi qu’un serf et une servante”*³⁶

These cases of wealth acquisition do not represent royal compensations, as was the rule during the previous – Old Kingdom – period (when also any private possession of land was absent from the autobiographies³⁷); they are to be considered as acquisitions made semi-officially.³⁸ Moreno Garcia suggests that perhaps “the impoverishment of peasants, the abuses committed by powerful local men and the failure to repay the debts contracted in hard times could lead people to become serfs, specially in domestic contexts. It also seems that women were particularly affected by this situation”.³⁹

The famous correspondence of the farmer and landowner Hekanakhte, of the period of the Eleventh Dynasty, also reveals that he had people working his land. The letters are tentatively dated in about 2005 and 2002 B.C.⁴⁰ In one of his letters Hekanakhte urges those who work on his fields, including members of his family, to work hard so that they may earn their keep.⁴¹

The term used for slaves, as well as their status, may vary from one historical society to another, and from age to age within the same culture. We know a certain amount about the “women slaves” in Deir el-Medina, of the 19th and 20th Dynasties (1295-1069 B.C.), who, as Černý emphasizes,⁴² were always the last in the lists dealing with ‘salaries’⁴³ which consisted of grain. The rations of grain they received were smaller than those of the ordinary workmen, for example $\frac{1}{2}$ *khar* of barley⁴⁴ is given to each of two slave women (while the workman gets 2 *khar*); or when the slave receives as much as $\frac{1}{2}$ *khar* of emmer, a workman has $4\frac{1}{2}$ *khar* etc.⁴⁵ Nothing is stated regarding the work they are involved in, but Černý presumes that the king supplied both barley and emmer to his workmen and slave women to grind the grain into flour (Fig. 3), work performed at the back of the house, in the kitchen where grinding stones have been actually found in the workmen’s village.⁴⁶ The extremely interesting point about their status is that, in Černý’s view, the women slaves did not belong to any workman or family, the community owned them collectively and they remained the property of the

36. MORENO GARCIA 2000, 129 no. 11. The terms used are *b3k* and *b3k.t* (fem.).

37. MORENO GARCIA 2000, 126.

38. MORENO GARCIA 2000, 131-133 ; he notes ‘la fréquence des références à l’achat de personnes...faites en marge de l’État’.

39. MORENO GARCIA 2000, 139 and n. 87 with references to similar phenomena in the Near East.

40. JAMES 1962, 3.

41. JAMES 1984, 119.

42. ČERNÝ 1973, 175-181.

43. Inverted commas are used here in order to remind the reader that there is a basic difference, of course, between wages or salary and upkeep rations, the first being given as a recompense for labour and the second for the necessary upkeep of dependent personnel. (cf. ZACCAGNINI 1988, 45. citing I.J. Gelb’s important remark)

44. A measure of volume, 1 *khar* is 76.88 lit. ČERNÝ assumes that $\frac{1}{4}$ of *khar* was meant as the upkeep for the woman slave.

45. ČERNÝ 1973, 176.

46. ČERNÝ 1973, 177.

king, under the control of the administration of the Tomb.⁴⁷ Černý considers it possible that a slave woman worked one or more days for one family, and then moved on to the next, for the term “servant’s day”, is met with now and then in documents, usually given in *payment*, e.g.:

“Year 3, 3rd month of the summer season, day 21, the day when mistress... gave her day of servant to the workman Any, 10 days per month, making 120 days per year, [for 4 years], making 480 days. The list of silver which Any gave her”⁴⁸

In Černý’s view, although the names of the items given in return for the servant’s days are not all preserved, it is clear that they were valued in š ‘ty’,⁴⁹ with a total of 18 ½ š ‘ty, that is more than 1 ½ *deben* of silver or – converted to copper – around 150 *deben* of copper, leading to a sum of only 1/3 *deben* for one working day. In another case, a workman sells “his day of servant” against only a sieve and the basket belonging to it; of course these low sums might easily be explained by the fact that what is sold is only *the working time* of a servant *not owned* by the seller; but Černý still considers the sums too low, when compared to the cost of 2 š ‘ty of silver of one working day of a woman in the 18th dynasty (that is over 16 *deben* of copper).⁵⁰

Indeed turning back to the 18th Dynasty (1550-1295 B.C.), one finds various cases of people obtaining “servant’s days” in return for cows, bulls, goats, clothes, evaluated in š ‘ty of silver; for instance a case (in the 33rd year of Amenophis III) of someone buying from a certain woman six days of her female servant in exchange for 8 goats and some textiles, amounting to the value of 10 š ‘ty.⁵¹ This seems a complex system indeed, with one person serving more than one ‘master’ and any ‘owner’ being in position to transfer to others, ‘fractions’ of an individual’s working time.⁵²

Bakir has referred to hire contracts of the 18th Dynasty, as opposed to the scarcity of real sale contracts.⁵³ As examples of sale prices for the following Ramesside period (19th-20th



Fig. 3. A wooden tomb model of a woman grinding grain (after Robins 1993)

47. ČERNÝ 1973, 178.

48. ČERNÝ 1973, 179. ALLAM (1998, 141, n. 31) considers that the ‘four’, if correct, refers to slave number instead of years.

49. Cf. the discussion on *shat/shaty/seniu* (*sniw*), supra, previous chapter n. 27.

50. ČERNÝ 1973, 179-180; Cf. MENU 1998, 204, for the average tariff of 2 *shaty* per working day and the relevant papyri of the 18th Dynasty with the transactions that she prefers to define as “Le louage de services”.

51. For more on these ‘hire contracts’ of the 18th Dynasty, see ALLAM 1998, 140-148.

52. “Le principe de l’achat partiel d’un esclave permet de mieux définir la notion de propriété, et d’expliquer les textes où une ‘fraction d’individu’ prête ses services à un maître donné; il s’agit d’un personnage qui doit au maître une fraction annuelle de son travail, quantifiée en jours.” (ALLAM 1998, 145).

53. BAKIR 1952, 73

Dyn.), he mentions the price of 4 deben and 1 kite of silver for a young Syrian girl in Pap. Cairo 65739 (*cf.* below) and the price of 2 *deben* of silver for a man slave, in Pap. BM 10052.⁵⁴ In the latter papyrus, the wife of a tomb robber, while denying under interrogation any knowledge of the silver stolen by her husband,⁵⁵ when asked specifically about how she got the slaves, replies

*“in exchange for crops from my garden”*⁵⁶

Kemp comments that it is a most important point in itself that she can base her case on being able to grow cash crops on a significant scale, and refers to the response by another wife who has been asked to explain her property in silver. She bases her argument on a relationship of supply and demand:⁵⁷

“I got it in exchange for barley in the year of the hyenas, when there was a famine”

Bernadette Menu, who has thoroughly studied the subject of hiring the working time of dependent personnel,⁵⁸ mentions only two texts that may refer to the transfer of the whole working time of a person, for an undefined period. In the Twelfth Dynasty (1985-1795 B.C.) Pap. Kahun 1.2, there is a transaction between two brothers of high status, regarding four female Asiatics, two women and two little girls.⁵⁹ Though the term used in the text to define the specific act implies some compensation given in return,⁶⁰ such a compensation itself is not preserved in the text, so Menu decides that it may consist of an official transfer of personnel who were previously undertaken for training.⁶¹

The second case is the one implied by the text Pap. Cairo 65739, which we have already mentioned;⁶² the value of a Syrian girl bought from *the merchant*⁶³ is stated at 4 *deben* and 1 *kite* of silver, but is paid in copper vessels and cloth, with their value stated in silver.⁶⁴ In particular:⁶⁵

*“1 wrap of thin cloth: value 5 kite of silver”*⁶⁶

1 sheet (?) of thin cloth: value 3 1/3 kite of silver

1 cloak of thin cloth: value 4 kite of silver

54. BAKIR 1952, 101.

55. For the papyri containing the confessions of the Theban thieves in the Late New Kingdom period: PETRIE 1930

56. BAKIR 1952, 70 (Pap. BM 10052, 10. 14-15).

57. KEMP 1989, 243 (Pap. BM 10052, 11. 5-8).

58. MENU 1998: Les échanges portant sur le travail d'autrui.

59. MENU 1998, 197. More on the Asiatic servants, summarized with relevant references, in MICHAÏLIDOU & VOUTSA (*supra* n. 4).

60. ‘La vente est pour la première fois définie par le mot *sounet*. . . impliquant la remise d’ une contrepartie’ (MENU 1998, 197).

61. MENU 1998, 198.

62. *Supra* p. 39 and previous chapter, p. 28.

63. The term *šwty* is used, *cf.* also KEMP 1989, 257 ff.; ALLAM 1998, 148-156.

64. GARDINER 1935; also *supra* previous chapter n. 28-30.

65. The text here is taken from JAMES 1984, 262.

66. The *kite* is the one tenth of *deben* (of 91 grams).

3 loin-cloths of fine thin cloth: value 5 kite of silver
1 skirt of fine thin cloth: value 5 kite of silver
Bought from the citizeness Kafy, 1 bronze gay-vessel: value 14 deben (of copper)⁶⁷, value 1 2/3 kite of silver
Bought from the chief of the store-house, Piay, 1 bronze gay-vessel: value 14 deben (of copper), value 1 1/2 kite of silver
Bought from the priest, Huy-panehsy, 10 deben of waste copper: value 1 kite of silver⁶⁸
Bought from the priest, Iny, 1 gay-vessel of bronze: value 16 deben (of copper), value 1 1/2 kite of silver; 1 menet-vessel of honey: value 1 hekat⁶⁹ of barley, value 5 kite of silver
Bought from the citizeness, Tjuiay, 1 bronze kehen-vessel: value 20 deben (of copper), value 2 kite of silver
Bought from the steward of the Temple of Amun, Tutui, 1 bronze kebet-vessel: value 20 deben (of copper), value 2 kite of silver; 10 tunics of fine thin cloth: value 4 kite of silver
Total for everything: 4 deben and 1 kite of silver
And I gave them to the merchant Reia, with nothing among them belonging to the citizeness Bakmut.⁷⁰ And he gave me the girl whom I named Gem-ny-her-Imentet⁷¹.

The young girl is alternatively defined by the terms *ḥmt.t* or *b3k.t* (in versions for the feminine) and, in Menu's view, her youth indicates that she was meant to be trained by her mistress in weaving, afterwith seven other persons, in fact the neighbors mentioned as having contributed to the means of payment, are to profit of her working time.⁷¹

In view of the great variety in the social status of dependent personnel and in the terminology used, one may safely conclude two points only: that there was not one specific word to define a person of our current view on the social status of a slave, and that there was great mobility in human capital, with silver, cloth, metal vessels or animals being given in exchange for hiring the working time of servants.⁷²

To turn to the Mesopotamian evidence: "there are sufficient indications to suggest that craftsmen worked both independently and in institutional workshops throughout the history of Mesopotamia".⁷³ In regard to the dependent personnel, the number of people who received rations from the institution, be it state or temple, was enormous.⁷⁴ But if one also considers Bakir's definition of slavery, then we should look for existing evidence on contracts of sale. Steinkeller discusses Ur- III (2150-2000 B.C.) sale documents, where out of a total of 137

67. The first value represents the actual weight of the artifact; see also MICHAILIDOU 2001b.

68. Thus a ratio 100:1 for copper: silver is given (GARDINER 1935, 145-146), and the role that waste copper could play in payments is evident; Cf. MICHAILIDOU 2001b.

69. A measure of volume.

70. She is the woman who, according to her relative, the soldier Nkhi, who is the accuser of Iry-nefer, had contributed to the building of a tomb in exchange for a male slave, also mentioned in this Lawsuit.

71. MENU 1998, 199-200, where she equalises 'enfant', in the text, with 'apprenti'.

72. Cf. MENU 1998, 194: "Juridiquement, les *ḥm.w* et les *b3k.w* sont traités comme des homes libres; sur le plan économique, ils sont considérés comme un capital mobile."; also MENU 2000/1 (supra n. 15), 78 where she defines these two categories as "... des sujets libres, titulaires de droits et redevables d'obligations (impôt, corvée)".

73. VAN DE MIEROOP 1997, 179.

74. WAETZOLDT 1987, 118.

SLAVE SALE (3.133B)	
<i>Piotr Steinkeller</i>	
This text comes from Nippur and dates to the Ur III period (5th year of Ibbi-Sin, the 10th month, ca 2024 BCE).	
<p>(lines 1-7) One woman — her name being Geme-Ezida; her price being 4 shekels of silver — Ur-Nuska, the NU-ĒŠ(<i>nešakku</i>) priest, bought from Zanka, her mother.</p> <p>(line 8) Ur-G¹ula¹, the merchant, was the one who weighed out the silver.</p> <p>(lines 9-10) Lugal-namtare is the guarantor.</p>	<p>(lines 11-12) They swore by the name of the king not to contest one against the other.</p> <p>(lines 13-17) Ur-sukal, Lu-balašaga, Lugal-nesage, (and) Ur-nigingar — these are the witnesses.</p> <p>(lines 18-20) Month Ab-è, year that the king's daughter was married to the ruler of Zabšali.</p> <p>Seal: Zanka, daughter of Ur-dun.</p>

Fig. 4. Slave Sale document of Ur-III period (after Hallo & Younger 2002). We notice here the expression for paying: “weighing out the silver”. We also notice the transfer of a girl from her mother to the temple (?)

sale documents, the majority, that is 85, concern sales of persons (Fig. 4), four of them involving self-sale; Steinkeller notes that, the term *sag*, whose basic meaning is ‘head’, in a transferred sense means ‘human being’ and when it is combined with the qualifications *nita* and *SAL*, its respective meanings are ‘(grown) man’ and ‘(grown) woman’, while in contrast, the terms *árad* and *géme* are social terms. He therefore states that in his study he takes *sag* as ‘head’, *sag-nita* as ‘man’, *sag-SAL* as ‘woman’ and he will reserve the translations ‘slave’ and ‘slave woman’ for *árad*⁷⁵ and *géme* respectively;⁷⁶ in Old Babylonian times, though, *SAG.ÁRAD* and *SAG.GÉME*, standard descriptions of sold humans in the sale documents of the period, mean slave and slave woman, and these hybrid logograms are considered Old Babylonian creations.⁷⁷

The existence of domestic slaves in Old Babylonian Ur (2000-1600 B.C.) is evidenced by various documents (in inheritance divisions up to 19 female slaves are listed among the property of the family, in dowry lists even five slaves are given); they were traded as a commodity, there is one at least case of self-selling for debts and they could even be used as guarantee for loans.⁷⁸ These domestic slaves had a monetary value and they could be used as means of payment (even by a shepherd to pay his arrears).⁷⁹ The ‘price’ for a female slave varied from 52 grams to 192 grams of silver⁸⁰ as compared to the ‘price’ of 2.66 grams to 16 grams of silver for a sheep.

75. The Sumerian term *árad* is also used in cases of free persons, referred to as servants of high-ranking officials, or in the case of the king when referred to as servant of a god (GELB 1979, 284), just like the Egyptians.

76. The Sumerian term *géme* originally referring to ‘woman of the mountains’, that is a captive, covers two of the terms used for men: the *árad* (slave) and the *guruš* (serf): VAN DE MIEROOP 1989, 64-65.

77. According to STEINKELLER 1989, 130-131.

78. As VAN DE MIEROOP 1992, 213-214.

79. VAN DE MIEROOP 1992, 225.

80. VAN DE MIEROOP 1992, 200 (*UET* 5: no 184, 188).

In any attempt to estimate the exchange value of a human being, the definition as “*people who are delivered for silver*”, given in the following text from Ugarit, which is coincidentally revealing as regards the social stratification, is of some help. The Akkadian text in question (RS 17.238) is a letter from the Hittite king, Hattušiliš III (13th cent. B.C.), to Niqmepa, king of Ugarit, his vassal, in which the Hittite king declares that he will not accept in his territory fugitives from Ugarit of any of the following categories:

“*sons of Ugarit*”

“*servants of the king of Ugarit*”

“*servants of the servants of the king of Ugarit*”

“*people who are delivered for silver*”⁸¹

The latter status is described in the text RS 17.130, also a letter of Hattušiliš III sent to Niqmepa, where it is stated that traders from Ura, a seaport of the Hittite kingdom, when trading in Ugarit may take Ugaritian debtors and their families into ‘slavery’, though their land and property may remain in the hands of the King of Ugarit:⁸²

“*And if silver of the sons of Ura is with the sons of Ugarit, and they are not able to repay it, so the king of Ugarit these people together with his wife, together with his sons, into the hands of the merchant shall deliver.*”⁸³

So merchants were involved in human-labour traffic. In Nuzi documents humans may even appear as capital for purchases in the Levant, as Zaccagnini cites:

“*PN, the merchant, took one woman belonging to the palace for (a value of) 5 talents of copper and, upon arrival of his caravan, he will convert the 5 talents of copper into (essence of) cedar, juniper, cypress, myrtle, . . . , in blue and red purple-wool and in dye (extracted) from worms and will deliver it in the palace to PN2*”⁸⁴

The Nuzi evidence for slavery and/or serfdom presents similar problems to those presented by contemporary Late Bronze Age Syrian archives. The label *ardu* applied to ‘slaves’ who are dependent on both palace officials and dependents (of various professional capacities and bureaucratic ranks) and on family households, in Zaccagnini’s view, does not necessarily imply “an identical personal situation both from a juridical and a social view-point”; instead, “to all appearances, specialized handicraft (textile industry in the first place) was carried out by slaves”.⁸⁵ The average purchase price for a male slave was 30 shekels of silver, whilst for a slave maid it was 40 shekels.⁸⁶

81. Cf. HELTZER 1976, 4-5; cf. HELTZER 1987, 247 for an average price of 30 shekels per slave.

82. HELTZER 1988, 9.

83. HELTZER 1976, 57.

84. ZACCAGNINI 1984, 148 (AASOR XVI 77).

85. ZACCAGNINI 1999, 96-97.

86. ZACCAGNINI 1988, 49, where also see in comparison the price of the bride, again 40 shekels, or the price of an ox, 10 shekels of silver; 1 mina of copper is the compensation for each day of absence of work of a pledged person (idem 46); the price of a male slave 30 shekels of silver = 20 imērū of barley, corresponds to 6 months and 20 days of hired work (idem 51).

It has been suggested that in some cases transported humans represent a workforce that moved from place to place of its own free will, that is, that they themselves offered provisional work to caravans of desert tribes with the aim of following them in safety to areas where conditions were better.⁸⁷ As for the involvement of nomads in human labour traffic, the nomadic Sutians⁸⁸ play a role similar to that of the Bedouins of Egypt.⁸⁹ In some cases the Sutians captured people by force, which is the reason why a royal command of king Samsu-iluna of Babylon (1749 B.C.), forbids the sale of any slaves deriving from Babylonian districts under the code of Hammurabi:

*“Nobody shall buy a man or a woman who is a citizen of Idamaras or of Arrapha from the hands of the Sutians. (Anyone) who buys a citizen of Idamaras or of Arrapha from the hands of the Sutians shall forfeit his silver”*⁹⁰

In a letter from the king of Karkemish to Ammištamru II of Ugarit, a slave is liberated from the hands of the Sutians in exchange for 50 shekels of silver.⁹¹

That in the case of Mari the slaves were included in merchandise that could be exported only under state control is shown by Finet who refers to the case of two persons wanting to export four women but who are stopped by the governor of the district, named Sagarātum, because they do not have the tablet containing permission from his master; the governor states:

“sans la permission de mon seigneur, aucun envoi ne peut passer vers un pays étranger” and the governor also asks:

“pourquoi n’es tu porteur d’ une tablette de mon seigneur?” ⁹²

Another document from the archives of Sagarātum informs us that a Canaanite has managed to export a woman slave but on his return he is stopped by the soldiers and he is obliged to surrender the 2 asses and 3 sheep he has earned from this transaction.⁹³

Powell, in his study on continuity and discontinuity in price structure in Mesopotamia, remarks that “in contrast to the up-down-up movement of barley prices, the cost of adult slaves seems to rise gradually from about 10-20 shekels in the third millennium (Presargonic-Ur III) to 20-30 shekels in Old Babylonian period, moving above 30 shekels in Middle Babylonian to around 1 mina (60 shekels) in Neo-Babylonian” though he notes that the range is in fact even greater (from $\frac{2}{3}$ shekels in Ur III to 3 minas or more in Neo-Babylonian).⁹⁴

If we turn to the Hittite laws for data on prices of slaves we find a particular paragraph (176b) that offers specialized information:

87. KLENGEL 1977, 168.

88. KLENGEL 1977, 168-169.

89. The Bedouins as in regard to the movement of Asiatics (MICHALIDOU & VOUTSA supra n. 4).

90. POSTAGATE 1992, 219, Text 11.10.

91. KLENGEL 1977, 169 and n. 40.

92. FINET 1974/77, 130 (ARM XIV, 52).

93. FINET 1974/77, 131 (ARM XIV, 79).

94. POWELL 1990, 94 and n. 80 with relevant references to these periods.

“if anyone buys a trained artisan – either a potter, a smith, a carpenter, a leather-worker, a fuller, a weaver, or a maker of leggings, he shall pay 10 shekels of silver”

Hoffner⁹⁵ suggests that this paragraph refers to the purchase of a slave trained in either of the above skills and, although he is aware of the possibility that ‘prices’ in the law codes are not necessarily valid,⁹⁶ he believes that in this case the figure should be mended to 30 shekels of silver. To the opinion that this paragraph shows the buying price of a trained and unfree person an opposite view has recently been expressed. Floreano believes that the scribe meant the ‘purchase’ of the specialized work of an artisan in free condition.⁹⁷ As in other codes also,⁹⁸ there is a section dedicated to sanctions against physical injuries, where the fine in the case of a slave is, as usual, half of the silver paid for free persons, and it is not clear if the compensation was destined to the injured slave or to the owner.⁹⁹

In this chapter, the selection of evidence about a category of dependent labour usually considered as slavery or serfdom, is intended to give a picture of the activity in Egypt and the Near East. The ‘suplesse’ in the legal or economic situation of slaves, as a modern scholar understands it for Egypt,¹⁰⁰ might, or might not, also be the case in the Aegean era. It would seem as if slave sale contracts were more of a habit in Mesopotamia than in Egypt, for instance, but what this means in terms of society or economy, has yet to be discussed. Here we may only offer some thoughts regarding the Linear B contracts, some of them already expressed by Olivier.¹⁰¹ Firstly, in comparison with the Egyptian evidence as referred to by Menu,¹⁰² the two preserved Mycenaean contracts constitute a not inconsiderable piece of evidence, since they come from the same find spot, near the North Entrance of the palace at Knossos, and are written by different scribes. The absence of the exchange value might, of course, indicate that the scribe was interested only in recording the purchase on behalf of the palace. If not, however, the palace might have functioned as the official witness keeping the record of the transfer of a *do-e-ro* between two individuals: this recalls the already mentioned case of the Pap. Kahun 1,2 where the act of transfer is taking place in front of the official

95. HOFFNER 1997, 140-141, 220. In paragraph 177: 20 shekels of silver is the price for an unskilled man.

96. The ‘Laws of Eshnunna’ as well as those of Hammurabi, list wages and fees for craftsmen etc. but the various tariffs listed in terms of the value of a silver shekel are more as a political propaganda than an accurate reflection of economic circumstances; still, these lists of equivalencies, in addition to contribution to the king’s image as a good ruler, also served as a standard of comparison for commodities bartered in exchange for barley, which was mostly obtained through rations, and silver was the most convenient and common denominator for this purpose (RENGER 1984, 91-94).

97. FLOREANO 2001, 224.

98. In Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian laws a large amount of space is dedicated to slavery, and the great interest in slavery reflected in legal documents indicates a preoccupation with this subject (GELB 1979, 283).

99. FLOREANO 2001, 225.

100. The French word ‘suplesse’ used by MENU 1998, 194.

101. OLIVIER 1987, 496-497.

102. Who declares that “rien ne permet de déceler, dans l’Égypte pharaonique, la moindre trace d’un esclavage privé. Quant à l’esclavage public... le rôle présumé de l’esclavage... est rempli par un système de travail obligatoire (ou “corvée”) requis périodiquement de toutes les couches laborieuses de la population” (MENU 2001, supra n. 14, 78).

authority¹⁰³ and, although the term (*sounet*) used in the text to define the act implies recompense in some form, this is not recorded (?), exactly as in the case of the Knossian tablets, where the term *npíaro* is used without specification of the means of payment. The same term *sounet* is used in contracts of the 18th Dynasty to define a transfer of the working days of a servant between two persons, in one case among a shepherd and a herdsman¹⁰⁴ (the recompense specified). If, as in the Deir el Medina parallel, the palace of Knossos was normally the provider of *do-e-ro* to his dependents, and they could further divide his working time among them, then this act was recorded by the palace with no interest on the recompense given. In any case, Olivier is absolutely right in defining these tablets as “texts juridiques”.¹⁰⁵ Such questions may be asked by an Aegean archaeologist but are, of course, for philologists to investigate. For the Aegean archaeologist, other issues arise, in particular how one can infer this variety in social ranking from the material evidence available, such as visual representations or households equipment? For example, is ‘otherness’ as expressed in the depiction of the so-called Priestess in the West House of Akrotiri (Thera), used to emphasize a ritual or a *rite de passage* activity or to define a social or ‘ethnic’ identity?¹⁰⁶ This is a rather modest house where over 400 loom-weights were found in one room; who worked on the presumed four to five looms of the upper floor central room?¹⁰⁷ Was it for the inhabitants of the house only, or was there also hired labour for the textile industries housed in certain of the buildings of the settlement? And, given the Therans’ role of middlemen in trade,¹⁰⁸ how distant is this textile production¹⁰⁹ from the model of the export-oriented production of the Old-Assyrian traders?¹¹⁰ In this case, we might ask if other ‘foreign’ textiles were also imported as a transit good. And the discussion is to be continued.

103. “Il a été fait dans le bureau de ‘Vizir’, en présence du chef de la Ville, le ‘vizir’ Khéty, par le Scribe port-sceau du bureau de la Main-d’oeuvre Amény fils d’ Amenemhat, un échange à titre onéreux (*sounet*)...” (MENU 1998, 197).

104. It is the act in the 33 year of Amenophis III (MENU 1998, 204); cf. supra n. 7 (NOSCH 2003); shepherds in royal service in Ugarit had ‘youngsters’ or ‘apprentices’ who were their subordinates (HELTZER 1987, 241).

105. OLIVIER 1987, 479.

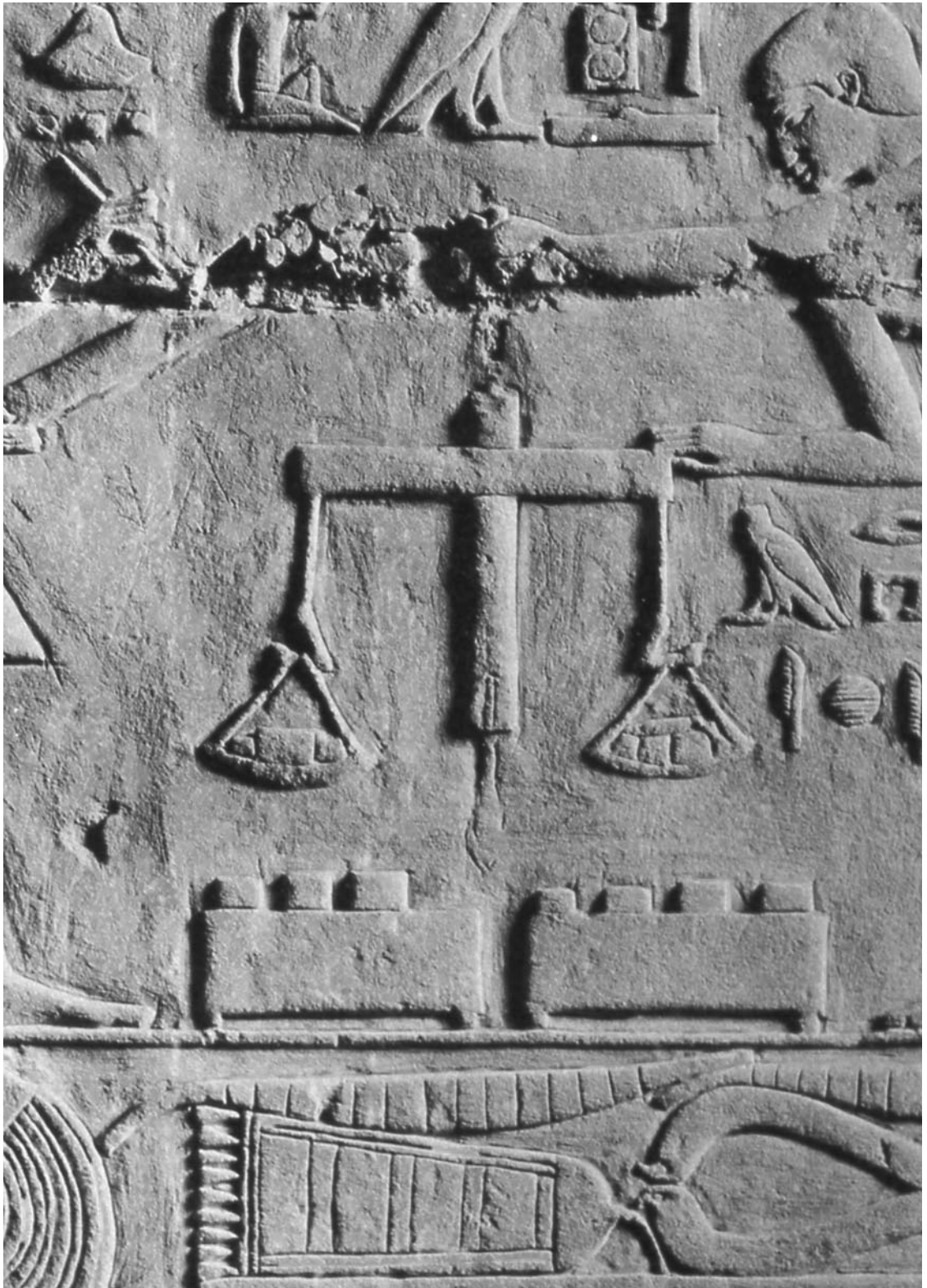
106. MICHAILIDOU & VOUTSA supra n. 4; Cf. I. PAPAGEORGIOU, On the rites de passage in LC Akrotiri, Thera: A Reconsideration of the Frescoes of the ‘Priestess’ and the ‘Fishermen’ of the West House, S. SHERRATT (ed), *The Wall Paintings of Thera*, Athens 2000, 961-963.

107. TZACHILI 1997, 192.

108. DOUMAS 1982.

109. Also in the light of the great number of textiles recorded in a single Linear A tablet from Akrotiri (Thera), one of the very few tablets preserved at site (BOULOTIS 1998).

110. Supra, previous chapter, fig. 5.



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