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**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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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

