

# ***The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel***

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***The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel***

**ROLAND BOER**

**WESTMINSTER**

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For Norman Gottwald

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## ***Foreword***

## ***Preface***

This is a work of self-clarification. For more than a decade I have pondered various aspects of what I call the sacred economy, so when Doug Knight suggested I write a volume on ancient economies for the Library of Ancient Israel series, I seized the opportunity. Although this study constitutes a return to one of my occasional pursuits, biblical criticism, it is also very much part of my main research focus on Marxism and religion. On the way, I have come to know rather well that strange beast *Homo archaeologicus* (with a passion for multiple references); with pleasure I have delved into accounts and tables and diagrams of ancient bones and plants, seeking to rethink and clarify some key texts. Occasionally I have paused, filled with trepidation before the task at hand, wondering whether such an effort at thinking the big picture was best left to those more capable than me. But I also feel strongly that if we fail to criticize and reshape the frameworks within which we think, then we may as well find some other pursuit, such as growing onions.

Before I say a word of thanks, I should point out that for those seeking theoretical and theological engagements with economics of our own day, you will not find those discussions explicitly here. I deal with such matters in a recent book written with Christina Petterson, *Idols of Nations: Biblical Myth at the Origins of Capitalism*. Further, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel* was written with the support of Australian Research Council Discovery Project Grant (DP130103659). To those who have encouraged, challenged, and brought me to rethink much, I would like to say thanks:

Dick Horsley, Gale Yee, Neil Elliott, Norm Gottwald, David Jobling, Roger Nam, Sam Adams, Matthew Coomber, Kitty Murphy, as well as Dick Boer, Peter Thomas, Sebastian Budgen, Mika Ojakangas, and Zhang Shuangli. Sean Durbin cast his careful and judicious eye over the manuscript in its final stages, formatting, rearranging and correcting. Doug Knight has been a wonderful sponsor of this work in the LAI series, and so has Dan Braden, a fellow lover of cycling and hiking (albeit in different continents). To Christina, however, I owe the most thanks, for in our common political project, the economic looms large.

June 2013

Somewhere on the City Night Line train (in a sleeper),

between Amsterdam and Berlin

## ***Abbreviations***

<i>AAAG</i>	<i>Annals of the Association of American Geographers</i>
<i>ABS</i>	<i>American Behavioral Scientist</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AmAn</i>	<i>American Anthropologist</i>
<i>Ant</i>	<i>Antiquity: A Quarterly Review of World Archaeology</i>
<i>AoF</i>	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
<i>AT</i>	<i>Author Translation</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BCSMS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies</i>
<i>BSA</i>	<i>Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Current Anthropology</i>
<i>CoA</i>	<i>Critique of Anthropology</i>
<i>CTH</i>	<i>E. Laroche. Catalogue des textes hittites. Paris: Klincksieck, 1971.</i>
<i>DPA</i>	<i>Henri Limet. Étude de documents de la période d'Agade appartenant à l'Université de Liège. Paris: Société d'éditions Les Belles lettres, 1973.</i>
<i>EA</i>	<i>Tell el-Amarna, with numbers for Amarna letters</i>
<i>EaPD</i>	<i>Environment and Planning D: Society and Space</i>

<i>Eir</i>	<i>Eirene</i>
<i>EJHET</i>	<i>European Journal for the History of Economic Thought</i>
<i>ErIsr</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
<i>FF</i>	<i>Food and Foodways</i>
<i>HM</i>	<i>Historical Materialism</i>
<i>HPE</i>	<i>History of Political Economy</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>HuEc</i>	<i>Human Ecology</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>IJPE</i>	<i>International Journal of Political Economy</i>
<i>IO</i>	<i>International Organization</i>
<i>IRSH</i>	<i>International Review of Social History</i>
<i>ITT</i>	François Thureau-Dangin et al. <i>Inventaire des tablettes de Tello conservées au Musée Imperial Ottoman</i> . Vol. 1. Paris: E. Leroux, 1910.
<i>JAA</i>	<i>Journal of Anthropological Archaeology</i>
<i>JAMT</i>	<i>Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JE</i>	<i>Journal of Ethnobiology</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Economic History</i>
<i>JEL</i>	<i>Journal of Economic Literature</i>
<i>JEP</i>	<i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JHET</i>	<i>Journal of the History of Economic Thought</i>

<i>JHI</i>	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JE</i>	<i>Journal of Ethnobiology</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>KTU</i>	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976. 2nd ed., Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995; 3rd ed., 2013.
<i>LAI</i>	Library of Ancient Israel
<i>MIOF</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung</i>
<i>NICOT</i>	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NLR</i>	<i>New Left Review</i>
<i>OJA</i>	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library
<i>PCASQ</i>	<i>Pacific Coast Archaeological Society Quarterly</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>PEFQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly</i>
<i>PRU, IV</i>	<i>Le Palais royal d'Ugarit, IV, Textes accadiens des archives sud</i> . Edited by J. Nougayrol. 2 vols. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1956.
<i>PSB</i>	<i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>



<i>REH</i>	<i>Research in Economic History</i>
<i>RM</i>	<i>Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture &amp; Society</i>
<i>RS</i>	Ras Shamra, with field numbers of objects excavated
<i>RTC</i>	F. Thureau-Dangin. <i>Recueil des tablettes chaldéennes</i> . Paris: E. Leroux, 1903.
<i>SAA</i>	<i>Soviet Anthropology and Archeology</i>
<i>Saec</i>	<i>Saeculum: Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte</i>
<i>SaS</i>	<i>Science and Society</i>
<i>SBL</i>	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>SBLWAW</i>	SBL Writings from the Ancient World
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semeia</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SovSoc</i>	<i>Soviet Sociology</i>
<i>TA</i>	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
<i>TGJ</i>	<i>The Geographical Journal</i>
<i>TSR</i>	<i>The Soviet Review</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>WA</i>	<i>World Archaeology</i>
<i>ZAA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie</i>
<i>ZVR</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für vergleichende Rechtswissenschaft</i>

## Introduction

### *On Economics and the Ancient World*

But only he who never does anything never makes mistakes.

—Vladimir I. Lenin<sup>1</sup>

The time is overdue, perhaps well overdue, for a new proposal concerning the economy of ancient Israel<sup>2</sup> within ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>3</sup> I undertake such a study here. Let me offer a succinct outline before dealing with other introductory matters. Taking to heart the slogan “It’s agriculture, stupid,” I distinguish between three levels of economic activity: (1) the basic institutional forms, (2) their varying constellations as economic regimes, and then (3) the overarching mode of production that is constituted by the regimes. Into this threefold structure I introduce a further distinction, between allocative and extractive economic patterns. As the terms indicate, allocative patterns depend on the allocation and reallocation of labor and the produce of labor, while extraction means the appropriation of the produce of labor by those who do not work (the willing unemployed, namely, the ruling class and its hangers-on). Extraction takes place by means of either exploitation or expropriation: the former designates the extraction of surplus from what one possesses—

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, “On the Significance of Militant Materialism,” in *Collected Works* (1922; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), 33:233.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this study I use “southern Levant” and “ancient Israel” interchangeably, although the former predominates since it covers a much longer period than the brief time of the “little kingdom” of Israel in the earlier part of the first millennium, or indeed the time as an imperial province. Although it may be possible to distinguish between Israel and Judah as separate states, this distinction is not important for my analysis. On the term “little kingdom,” see Chapter 4, note 1.

<sup>3</sup> More than a decade ago, Charles Carter observed that a new study of economic patterns “is still to be written and will require new data or new methods of interpreting the existing data.” Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study*, JSOTSup 294 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 285. See also Marc Van de Mieroop, “Economic Theories and the Ancient Near East,” in *Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World: Means of Transmission and Cultural Interaction*, ed. Robert Rollinger and Christoph Ulf (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004), 54–64, esp. 54.

land, machinery, labor—while the latter concerns the extraction of surplus from what one does not possess but is possessed by another. Of the building blocks known as institutional forms, there are several: subsistence survival, kinship-household, patronage, (e)states, and tribute-exchange. The first three are largely allocative, while the remaining two are extractive, although there are overlaps between them. At different economic periods, the institutional forms are arranged in different ways, in patterns of dominance and subservience. These arrangements or constellations are the regimes: the subsistence regime, the palatine regime, and the regime of plunder. Here only the first is allocative, characteristic of the bulk of the population engaged in agriculture, while the other two are extractive, the approaches of the little and big kingdoms and their brutish potentates. These regimes indicate the internal workings of the mode of production I call *the sacred economy*.

In my analysis, the treatment of institutional forms is mostly synchronic, seeking to describe the way they function. By contrast, the analysis of regimes is more diachronic, tracing their conflicts and changing patterns over time. Thus, while the aspiring despots preferred the palatine regime until the end of the second millennium BCE, always seeking to counter and undermine the resilient subsistence regime, they switched tactics by the first millennium, developing variations on the regime of plunder. In the periods, longer and shorter, of the waning of these little and big kingdoms, the subsistence regime once again reasserted itself, so much so that it can be seen as the economic staple of ancient Southwest Asia, and especially the southern Levant. Of

course, the distinction between synchronic and diachronic aspects is for the sake of clarity, since they perpetually fold into one another.<sup>4</sup>

The rest of the book involves unpacking that admittedly dense statement. But it is worth emphasizing that my focus is not on temple and palace as the prime locations of economic activity (as so much analysis to date has assumed), but rather on the agriculture of rural areas and village communities outside the intermittent sway of those rulers and their functionaries, or even under their very noses. In these rural areas and villages, the bulk of the small populations carried out their daily economic activity. The southern Levant, in which the little kingdom of Israel flashed briefly before becoming an imperial province, is paradoxically central in my analysis precisely because it was so economically marginal, if not also politically and culturally so.<sup>5</sup> Being a “poor and

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<sup>4</sup> Wallerstein provides a useful comment on this relation between synchronic and diachronic readings: “The whole book is simultaneously historical/diachronic and structural/analytic/theoretical. This is in accord with my epistemological premise that the much-vaunted distinction between idiographic and nomothetic epistemologies is outdated, spurious, and harmful to sound analysis. Social reality is always and necessarily both historical (in the sense that reality inevitably changes every nanosecond) and structural (in the sense that social action is governed by constraints deriving from the historical social system within which the described activity occurs).” Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), xi.

<sup>5</sup> Igor M. Diakonoff, “Main Features of the Economy in the Monarchies of Ancient Western Asia,” in *Troisième conférence internationale d’histoire économique: The Ancient Empires and the Economy*, ed. Moses Finley (Paris: Mouton, 1969), 13–32, esp. 29; John David Hawkins, “The Neo-Hittite States in Syria and Anatolia,” in *Cambridge Ancient History*, ed. John Boardman et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 3.1:372–441, esp. 425; Niels Peter Lemche, *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Israel* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 8; Mario Liverani, *Israel’s History and the History of Israel*, trans. Chiara Peri and Philip Davies (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 6, 9–10; Albert Kirk Grayson, “Assyrian Rule of Conquered Territory in Ancient Western Asia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 959–68, esp. 967; Ianir Milevski, *Early Bronze Age Goods Exchange in the Southern Levant: A Marxist Perspective* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2011), 27. This has not prevented some from undertaking inordinate efforts to claim some form of centrality: crisscrossing caravan routes, point of intersection of the great powers, emergence of history and monotheism, and so on. Mostly recently, Herrmann has attempted to challenge the sheer marginality of the southern Levant, with little success. Virginia Rimmer Herrmann, “The Empire in the House, the House in the Empire: Toward a Household Archaeology Perspective on the Assyrian Empire in the Levant,” in *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond*, ed. Assaf Yasur-Landau, Jennie R. Ebeling, and Laura B. Mazow (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011), 303–20.

menacing land,”<sup>6</sup> it had a relative but blessed relief, due to the tyranny of distance, from the machinations of the centers of power. This reality ensured that the subsistence regime was the major economic reality for most of its history. From time to time it may have been subject to extractive patterns, whether by neighboring powers that sought to bring it under their temporary sway, or during the short period of being a little kingdom, or during its provincial status later in the first millennium; yet it kept reverting to the tried and resilient regime of subsistence, with its core institutional form of subsistence survival.

At the same time, the evidence from ancient Israel and the southern Levant more generally is patchy, even patchier than other parts of ancient Southwest Asia. In part, this situation is due to the practice of using parchment for records rather than clay, but it is also the result of being in a marginal zone. Here the tendency to keep records was less consistent. Above all, the fact that the dominant regime was subsistence survival meant that records were simply not kept at all. Ruling powers are not interested in the areas outside their sway. Built structures too were made of more ephemeral materials, thereby not surviving as archaeological traces. For these reasons I often draw on evidence from elsewhere in ancient Southwest Asia where that is relevant. At the same time, I am careful to make use of what is available for ancient Israel, particularly in the chapter on subsistence survival, for that is the key to its economic structures. Fortunately newer

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<sup>6</sup> Liverani, *Israel's History*, 6. Liverani goes on to write: “Seen within a regional dimension, then, the marginality of the land appears with stark clarity: it lies to the extreme south of the ‘Fertile Crescent,’ the semicircle of cultivated lands between the Syro-Arabian desert, the Iranian and Anatolian mountains and the Mediterranean Sea. The role that geography dictates for this land, if any, is to serve as a connection (more for transit than for settlement) between Egypt and Western Asia: but this location seems to have brought the inhabitants of Palestine more misfortune than benefit.”

techniques of zooarchaeology and archaeobotany provide other levels of data when the older and conventional sources fail.

Is this not a brave and foolhardy enterprise, daring to tread where few dare to go? Is not the time frame too large, in terms of millennia, is not the landscape and social organization bewilderingly varied, and are not the data complex, lumpy, full of gaps, and resistant to the econometric analysis that passes for “economics”? In reply I take Liverani’s observation to heart, that those who object so fail in terms of “the ideological point of reference, the courage to make choices, and the model whose elegance lies in simplicity.”<sup>7</sup> In seeking such a model, I draw primarily upon the theoretical contributions of *Régulation* theory, Soviet-era Russian scholarship, and the insights of Liverani. That these are Marxist-inspired approaches makes them all the more attractive, and I will have more to say concerning them in the first chapter on economic theory. Their genius is to be able to discern, amid the chatter of data, deeper economic patterns rather than imposing alien theoretical constructs into which one makes the material fit. The dialectical point to be made here is that such an approach is enabled precisely by the theoretical (heuristic) framework with which they operate. It hardly needs to be said that we all operate with some such framework, so it is better to be as explicit about it as one can be. That is better than throwing up one’s hands in resignation and leaving those

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<sup>7</sup> Mario Liverani, *Uruk: The First City*, trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van de Mieroop (London: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 11. See also idem, “The Near East: The Bronze Age,” in *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models*, ed. Joseph Gilbert Manning and Ian Morris (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 47–57, esp. 47. Or, as Wallerstein puts it, one’s “ability to participate intelligently in the evolution of his own system is dependent on his ability to perceive the whole. The more difficult we acknowledge this task to be, the more urgent it is that we start sooner rather than later.” Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 10.

assumptions unexamined. Nonetheless, I should say that although my declarative statements and the rhetorical flow of my narrative may give the impression of deft confidence, my specific arguments should always be understood in terms of “possibly” and “maybe.” Yet to do so in the text itself would burden the analysis with unnecessary weight, so I undertake the necessary fiction of firm statements, not least because this is a feature of scholarly work, the better to persuade readers of the viability of one’s argument.

One further question: is this proposal not too abstract and theoretical? As far as abstraction is concerned, I do not take the obvious line that one’s model should seek to draw near to the actual data on the ground, seeking as close a fit as possible.<sup>8</sup> This is always a forlorn enterprise, no matter how common it is in “scientific” research, especially in the relation between written words and lived reality. Instead, it is only through the process of abstraction that concrete reality emerges, a dialectical process that enables discernment. As for theory, the reader will soon find careful engagement with a plethora of data.

My final task in this introduction is to offer, as is my practice, an outline of the argument of the book so that the reader may gain an overview of the whole argument. The first chapter concerns economic theory. After surveying the existing contributions to the study of ancient Southwest Asian economies from world-systems theory and the frame-setting approach of Polanyi, I focus on two traditions of Marxist economics: Soviet-era Russian scholarship and especially *Régulation* theory. As mentioned earlier,

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<sup>8</sup> Iurii Ivanovich Semenov, “The Theory of Socioeconomic Systems and the Process of World History,” *SAA* 16, no. 1 (1977): 3–26, esp. 11–12.

any economic system (mode of production) is made up of key building blocks (institutional forms) that come together in unique formations (regimes) to provide very limited continuity for a time within the larger scale of a mode of production. Due to internal contradictions, these regimes easily fall apart, giving way to the economic norm of “crisis.” In those efforts at continuity, a whole series of compromises have to be made, which are enabled and sustained by cultural assumptions, social forces, beliefs, and practices (mode of *régulation*). Since religion was woven into every facet of ancient economics and society, I speak of the *sacred economy*. The chapter also indicates why neoclassical economics—arguably the dominant (but often critically unassessed) theoretical framework—falls short, as well as dealing with the matter of anachronism and the way ancient texts may be read.

In chapters 2 to 5 I deal with the economic building blocks, the institutional forms of subsistence survival, kinship-household, patronage, (e)states, and tribute-exchange. Scholars occasionally mistake an institutional form as the foundation of the whole economy, indeed as a mode of production in its own right. As the core economic driver, examples include the household (or domestic or communitarian mode of production), patronage (or patrimonialism), a tribute-based mode of production, and exchange. My reconstruction enables one to resist the temptation of such false universals.

Given the widespread importance of subsistence survival agriculture, I give it considerable attention in chapter 2. The centrality of agriculture is occasionally asserted but rarely analyzed in terms of its economic structures, which is precisely what I set out



to do here.<sup>9</sup> Drawing on zooarchaeological and archaeobotanical research, along with field surveys and theoretical reflections, I outline the patterns of crop growing and animal husbandry in both village communities and among pastoral nomads. They were focused on optimal usage, diversity, and security against risk; were concerned primarily with labor and usufruct (and not land); and developed small surpluses for tough times.

Two further allocative institutional forms are the concern of chapter 3. Kinship-household is the first and more important. It provided the social determination of subsistence survival: through religion and cultural assumptions, customary law, division of labor, and social sanction, it determined who does what where and who receives what from whom. I draw upon and critique recent interests in “household” archaeology, emphasizing the flexible and fluid rhythms of clans and households (Henri Lefebvre’s *rhythmanalyse*). Although less important, patronage bridges allocation and extraction, moving in either direction, depending on the prevailing tenor of the times.

In chapter 4 I turn to the first of the extractive institutional forms, (e)states, which concerns the intersections of temple and palace estates, along with the development of the state. I understand the state as the result of intractable class conflict, the machinery of which is then seized by one class and turned into an instrument of its own agenda. This ruling class also develops agricultural estates: as nonproducers they must find some way to live in the way to which they have become accustomed. The estates were administered

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<sup>9</sup> Despite that fact that about 90 percent of the population was engaged in agriculture, mostly of a subsistence-survival form, agriculture is often bracketed out when “the economy” is under consideration. Why? Left unto its own devices, that “economy” concerns exchange, trade, wheeling and dealing for the sake of gain—or so it is assumed. The way agriculture then appears is through the production of cash crops or in animal husbandry for trade and profit. Needless to say, I find this approach wayward at best and thoroughly misleading at worst.

either directly or by tenure, and laborers were indentured permanently or temporarily (corvée, debt, and so on). Given the perpetual labor shortage, the estates constantly sought to draw more laborers from the village communities, with little concern for their viability.

The final institutional form is the topic of chapter 5. Here the many faces of plunder appear, whether crude, polite external, polite internal, or elite plunder. These are usually known as plunder per se, tribute, taxation, and exchange. However, they are all forms of booty, since the underlying purpose is acquisition through some form of extortion. Apart from dealing with the patterns of taxation and tribute, this is the place for treatments of exchange, markets, and coinage. I conclude that long-distance exchange was in preciosities (high-value, luxury items) since it was near impossible to shift bulk goods over such distances. At a local level, usually between villages within eyesight of one another, some exchange took place for items not obtainable locally. An important shift did take place in the first millennium, when the need to provision ever larger armies, the invention of coinage, and the search for new mechanisms of taxation saw the expansion of local markets. Yet their primary function was logistical (provisioning empires) rather than for profit, for they were by-products of the state's concerns.<sup>10</sup>

With these institutional forms in place, chapter 6 offers a fully diachronic analysis, albeit one that already emerges in the preceding chapters. Here I explore how those forms were constantly rearranged into the regimes that responded to different economic situations, with one or another institutional form dominant and determinative.

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<sup>10</sup> It should be clear that this chapter entails some redefining of terms, such as market, surplus, and trade. Thus they had markets, but not primarily for profit; they had trade, but for preciosities; they had surpluses, but for subsistence.

As I mentioned earlier, the three regimes are the subsistence regime, the palatine regime, and the regime of booty. The subsistence regime was characteristic of what are usually called times of economic crisis or chaos—ever present yet notable in the third millennium, the middle of the second millennium, and in the closing centuries of the second millennium BCE. It was the dominant regime found in the southern Levant and thereby of ancient Israel. I argue that it was in fact the most stable of all regimes, and usually the most creative of times: usable inventions happen during such periods. The palatine regime (an extractive one) characterized the efforts of various potentates and despots to seize control of states and support themselves and their dependents by means of agricultural estates. Inherently unstable, the palatine regime rose and collapsed time and again, only to run completely out of steam by the thirteenth century. In its place, the regime of booty characterized the first millennium and its large empires. It varied between crude plunder (Neo-Assyrian Empire) and the more refined forms of taxation and tribute, enabled by the use of coinage and development of markets as by-products of the state's overriding concerns with provisioning its military and bureaucracy (Persian or Achaemenid Empire).<sup>11</sup> The regime of booty was also deeply unstable and readily fell apart.

Given the interest that this project has generated for those who seek—often but not always with inspiration from biblical patterns—alternative economic models today, in the conclusion I reflect on the role of normative economic models. In particular, I am interested in whether a subsistence regime, which was the constitutive economic presence

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout the text, when I refer to the Persian Empire, I mean the Achaemenid, or first Persian Empire (550–330 BCE).

through most of the history of the southern Levant, may or may not have some insights. To do so, it would need to find somewhat different ways of being together, of social structures that are not brutally hierarchical (in terms of gender, age, sexual orientation, class, and so on) like those of kinship-household and patronage. Instead, subsistence survival would need to find alternative types of social interaction, ones that are mutually affirming and thereby conducive to human and natural flourishing.

The reason why I have called this the “sacred” economy should become clear as the argument of the book unfolds. Yet a word here will set the scene. At the most basic level, the determining ideological framework—what I call the mode of *régulation*—of this ancient economy was the sacred. As in so many respects, ancient Israel was no different from any other part of ancient Southwest Asia. The language used, the thought forms, the framework in which human beings inhabited the world—all were understood in terms of the sacred. However, the problem with using such terminology is that in our very different ideological frames, it invokes an opposition with the secular. Given the limits of our terminology, I prefer to speak of what was more or less sacred. Yet even this distinction belies the fluidity of the situation. I think not of temples and sacred hills and trees and graves, but of the ubiquitous cult corners in dwellings. The production of this space meant that it would be used for the observance of household religion, yet that it was also used for many other purposes that initially may appear less sacred: placing some bread there to cool, storing of beer, placing a child there, or perhaps an animal for a while. In other words, the very distinction begins to break down in light of this flexibility. Another way of making my point is that the sacred saturated daily life,

especially agricultural life. What may appear to us as “secular” was imbued with all manner of assumptions that were also sacred. So also with economic life.

# Chapter 1

## *The Question of Theory*

As is always the case, practice marched ahead of theory.

—Vladimir I. Lenin<sup>1</sup>

*Régulation* theory and Soviet-era Marxist scholarship—these two form the primary and perhaps unexpected theoretical groundwork of this study. Both are parts of a large and rich Marxist tradition of economic analysis that has a pedigree of well over a century and a half. I am up front about this basis, since I feel it is better to be transparent—at least as far as one is able—concerning one’s heuristic framework, rather than leaving it unexamined. All manner of tactics are used to avoid such examination: a claim to get on with the task at hand rather than bother with theoretical matters; a suggestion that the data are too thin for any larger models; the assumption that “economics” is a universal and neutral discipline that may be applied in all places and time; a dismissal of “ideological” elements in the name of “science.”<sup>2</sup> Obviously our frameworks are all the stronger for us the more we leave them untouched. No doubt the reflex of some to my preferred framework will be negative, for a range of articulated and unarticulated reasons. Those who live under the long shadow of the anticommunist witch hunts of the US senator Joseph McCarthy (1908–57) may, on purely partisan political grounds, resist the deep engagement of my reconstruction with Marxist, Soviet, and indeed communist theories and terms. So too may those who see (mistakenly) that the “fall” of the Berlin Wall symbolizes the collapse of the

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, “Lessons of the Moscow Uprising,” in *Collected Works* (1906; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 11:172–73.

<sup>2</sup> This last move is particularly prevalent in Germany, where *ideologisch* carries with it overtones of the DDR, the Stasi, and the ideological battle that rages still between East and West.

socialist project. That is the topic of another debate, one that I have undertaken elsewhere and see no need to reprise here. In this work, I take a minimal position, holding that the analytical power of Marxist approaches remains at least unabated, if they have not been developed with greater sophistication in the last couple of decades (for instance, see Wickham).<sup>3</sup> The proof is, of course, in the execution, but I also suggest that the framework I deploy in this work raises new questions and opens up new vistas. The value of a new proposal is not that it says the final word—impossible for the limited creatures that we are—but that it may generate new questions and areas of investigation that have not been considered earlier.

In light of all this, a question needs to be asked: what is the dominant framework or economic model in recent work on ancient Israel within the context of ancient Southwest Asia? As I will show in the next section, since the last decade of the twentieth century, it has been largely a neoclassical model, as that particular tradition of economic study has been appropriated by what is sometimes called neoliberalism. The theoretical analysis that follows should therefore be seen as a challenge to the obvious inadequacies of a neoclassical approach, an intervention in the best sense of the word. As will gradually become clear over the course of this book as a whole, it seems to me that the theoretical framework I develop here is best able to make sense of the available data, as well as the scattered insights from other approaches.<sup>4</sup>

I begin the following analysis by examining the inadequacies of neoclassical approaches. These will be familiar to the majority of scholars who have worked on

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<sup>3</sup> Chris Wickham, ed. *Marxist History Writing for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> See Excursus 1. As the book grew in the writing, the notes also grew. Some became detailed enough to find their way into a series of excursuses, collected at the back of the volume.

economic matters relating to ancient Southwest Asia and ancient Israel. For that reason, I begin with such approaches, but I also do so to provide a springboard to the more fruitful approaches provided by Marxist methods. Thus, following the treatment of neoclassical economics, I discuss the key schools of Marxist economics that have provided or may provide viable resources for a study of ancient Southwest Asia: world-systems theory, the work of Karl Polanyi, Soviet-era Russian scholarship, and *Régulation* theory. I close with two further methodological issues: the need to deal squarely with the inescapable anachronism of any study of the past, and the vexed issue of how textual materials relate to their historical context.

### ***NEOCLASSICAL ECONOMICS***

[There] is . . . a certain propensity in human nature, . . . the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.

—Adam Smith<sup>5</sup>

I do not deploy the theoretical framework of neoclassical economics, despite the fact that it provides the resource for most of those who work on ancient economies, let alone for biblical societies.<sup>6</sup> Yet deeply flawed is the neoclassical approach. Why? The reason may be found in what is called economics imperialism, in which neoclassical economics, through a process of chronic reductionism, attains the status of a false universal applicable to all human activity.<sup>7</sup> The telltale sign of this economics imperialism is the tendency to describe it as “mainstream” economics, if

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<sup>5</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776; repr. of 1994 ed., London: Modern Library, 2000), 1.2.1.

<sup>6</sup> While many assume such a framework, some are explicit about its use. Laetitia Graslin, “Les théories économiques du commerce internationale et leur usage pour l’étude des échanges à longue distance à l’époque néo-babylonienne,” in *Approaching the Babylonian Economy: Proceedings of the START Project Symposium Held in Vienna, 1–3 July 2004*, ed. Heather D. Baker and Michael Jursa (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2005), 121–36; Guillermo Algaze, *Ancient Mesopotamia at the Dawn of Civilization: The Evolution of an Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> The points that follow are distilled from a much longer study on these matters: Roland Boer and Christina Petterson, *Idols of Nations: Biblical Myth at the Origins of Capitalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).



not, by mutual consent, to drop the epithet and quietly universalize it as simply “economics.” In their landmark study,<sup>8</sup> Fine and Milonakis speak of a triple reductionism crucial to economics imperialism: to the individual as the basic unit of analysis, an individual that is rational, self-interested, and focused on utility; to the “market” without any social basis; and to a “market” that is devoid of history. That is, the establishment of neoclassical economics is a process of individualizing, desocializing, and dehistoricizing economic analysis. I add that this process also involved detheologizing or even debiblicizing economics. Such reductionism provided the dialectical basis for economics imperialism: having excised social concerns, class, institutions, history, and religion, this redefined neoclassical economics then engaged, and continues to do so vigorously today, in colonizing these and every other area of the social sciences and humanities. Particularly from the 1980s onward, with the “fall” of communism, the extraordinarily narrow principles of rationality and equilibrium became a “universal grammar” for analyzing human behavior, institutions, history, geography, neural networks (neuroeconomics), and even religion.<sup>9</sup> The imperializing pretensions are breathtaking. Here theology is at its most pernicious, for the assumption of theological absolutism is transmuted into a discipline that has overtly dispensed with its theological concerns— now without the traditional checks of theology.

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<sup>8</sup> Ben Fine and Dimitris Milonakis, *From Economics Imperialism to Freakonomics: The Shifting Boundaries between Economics and Other Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2009); Dimitris Milonakis and Ben Fine, *From Political Economy to Economics: Method, the Social and the Historical in the Evolution of Economic Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Gary S. Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Rachel McCleary, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Larry Witham, *Marketplace of the Gods: How Economics Explains Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (1932; 2nd ed., London: Macmillan, 1935). Polanyi’s curt reply is to the point: “No human motive is per se economic.” Karl Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1968; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 63.

In light of this development, it is not difficult to see how neoclassical economics might be applied to the ancient Levant, ancient Southwest Asia, or indeed any ancient society. But let me outline a couple of the key moments in a much larger account, for they reveal that the relation between reductionism and imperialism is dialectical, already embodied in the work of one Adam Smith.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith offers the following well-known myth:

In a tribe of hunters or shepherds a particular person makes bows and arrows, for example, with more readiness and dexterity than any other. He frequently exchanges them for cattle or for venison with his companions; and he finds at last that he can in this manner get more cattle and venison, than if he himself went to the field to catch them. From a regard to his own interest, therefore, the making of bows and arrows grows to be his chief business, and he becomes a sort of armourer. Another excels in making the frames and covers of their little huts or moveable houses. He is accustomed to be of use in this way to his neighbours, who reward him in the same manner with cattle and with venison, till at last he finds it his interest to dedicate himself entirely to this employment, and to become a sort of house-carpenter. In the same manner a third becomes a smith or a brazier; a fourth, a tanner or dresser of hides or skins, the principal part of the clothing of savages. And thus the certainty of being able to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labour as he may have occasion for, encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation, and to cultivate and bring to perfection whatever talent of genius he may possess for that particular species of business.<sup>10</sup>

For Smith, this perfectly “natural” process is both the origin of the division of labor and reveals the natural propensity for human beings to “truck, barter and exchange one thing for another.”<sup>11</sup> This distinguishes us from the animals, for who ever saw a dog offer a bone as a fair and deliberate exchange with another dog? A little later, Smith goes on:

When the division of labour has been once thoroughly established, it is but a very small part of a man's wants which the produce of his own labour can supply. He

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<sup>10</sup> Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 1.2.3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.2.1.

supplies the far greater part of them by exchanging that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labour as he has occasion for. Every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant, and the society itself grows to be what is properly a commercial society.<sup>12</sup>

We are all capitalists at heart, it seems, for we are natural merchants, constantly exchanging things with one another. Smith can be somewhat long-winded, so let me summarize the remainder of this myth. Once our primitives have all busied themselves with their natural propensity to produce and “truck,” they soon find that others have enough of whatever is on offer. I may have made plenty of toe ticklers, but now that the tribe or village is full of toe ticklers, I have nowhere to hawk my wares and get what I want. The solution: stockpile items that I am sure everyone will want: salt, sugar, dried cod, dressed leather, sex toys. . . . So when I want something, I can simply use these items in exchange. At last one of us happens upon the idea of using precious metals, weighed, then standardized, minted, and so on. Eventually, in our wisdom, we come up with credit, or virtual money.

In various forms, this myth has been repeated countless times in economics textbooks, in online forums, and in classes on economics. For economists, it is “the most important story ever told.”<sup>13</sup> Its narrative from a natural division of labor, to barter, to money, and then in our sophisticated modern era, to banking and credit—this account has become so pervasive that it is regarded as common sense. The problem is that it is pure fantasyland. Where is this mythical village? Among North American Indians? Asian pastoral nomads? African tribes, Pacific Islanders, Australian Aborigines? A small Scottish town of shopkeepers? Or among Homo

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1.4.1.

<sup>13</sup> David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2011), 24. The myth is not original to Adam Smith: it may be traced back at least to Hugo Grotius. But Smith, as the consummate storyteller and mythmaker, ensured its subsequent popularity. See further, Boer and Petterson, *Idols of Nations*.

erectus, Homo heidelbergensis, Neanderthals, or Homo sapiens? Often in the same myth it moves from one place to the other, or indeed one species to the other. But the simple fact is that this village never existed. No such village has ever been found, nor will it be. Although it is necessary to point out the mythical status of this story and counter it with empirical evidence, that is insufficient to overcome the myth. No amount of “facts” will dent the power of the myth, as Sorel showed so well many years ago.<sup>14</sup> Instead, it is more worthwhile to ask what truth the myth expresses, given that a myth is always split between fiction and a deeper and not always pleasant truth (part of the mixed heritage of the very sense of myth).<sup>15</sup>

That truth is that Smith, in resuscitating and refining the myth, had a distinct agenda: he needed to create a new being, “the economy.” The definite article is crucial, for “the” economy was to be a distinct entity, with its own rules, its own dynamic, which is distinct from politics, the state, and above all religion. What better way to do so than to concoct a myth in which “the” economy arose as a natural expression of human nature? But why did Smith and those who followed him wish to create such a being? A new field of study was emerging from the swamp, the discipline of economics. And in order to ensure that this discipline was not bereft of an object of study, “the economy” was created. For my purposes, it is important to state precisely what this “economy” designates: for Smith and those who follow, it is already reduced to the domain of huckstering and trading, of profit gained from a daring and innovative transaction (albeit not without the occasional bending of the rules). The ideal of this constructed realm is free from any “interference” by the state,

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<sup>14</sup> Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T. Hulme and J. Roth (New York: Collier, 1961).

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Roland Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

let alone social relations and forces. Many continue to fall into this trap, including those who write on biblical economics and ancient Southwest Asia, assuming the “economy” is an autonomous realm of self-regulating patterns, of private individual “entrepreneurs” who operate in terms of self-interest and comparative advantage, quite apart from socially determining forces.<sup>16</sup> It should come as no surprise, in light of the founding myth, that research on the economy must mean that one explores the permutations of trade and commerce, even invoking Smith and Ricardo.<sup>17</sup>

The second point concerning the history of classical economics is its tense engagement with the Bible. The eventual outcome of this engagement was a process of concealing the Bible and theology from its narrative of origins, thereby obscuring the specificity of those origins.<sup>18</sup> If we go back to one of the earliest theorists of capitalism, Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), we find the first effort to create a new myth of the origins of human society and economic activity.<sup>19</sup> Grotius traces out a grand narrative of the origins of private property, law, commerce, the state, and then those zones (such as the sea) that fall outside the claims of such property. He also articulates the first argument that the free individual has rights (plural) as private property, rights that can then be alienated. Yet what is significant about Grotius’s myth is that it

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<sup>16</sup> Heather D. Baker and Michael Jursa, “Introduction,” in *Babylonian Economy*, 2. The assumed autonomy of “economics” washes over into other uses of “economy.” For instance, when one stumbles across the terminology of “sexual economy,” it trails in the dust of its neoclassical deployment.

<sup>17</sup> Algaze, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 15. Ricardo (*On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, vol. 1 of *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo* [London: J. Murray, 1817; repr., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004]) has been deployed to argue for the system-reinforcing nature of debt easement in Persian-era Yehud, although this is done in conjunction with the work of Amartya Sen. See Zipporah Glass, “Land, Labor and Law: Viewing Persian Yehud’s Economy through Socio-Economic Modeling,” PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> See Excursus 2.

<sup>19</sup> Hugo Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, ed. Martine Julia van Ittersum, trans. John Clarke (Latin original transcribed, 1868; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006), 315–21. Grotius’s Arminian theology played a significant role in the construction of his myth. See Hugo Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Clarke (Latin original, 1627; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012).

involves a wrestle with the biblical narrative of the fall in Genesis 3. To show that private property, law, human society, and so forth are the outcomes of the divine will and plan, Grotius resorts to texts (such as Gen 1:29 and 9:3, with their indications of what human beings may use for food) that bypass the curse of Gen 3:17–19. Labor, use, and private property are no longer the result of a curse, but of the goodness of God’s plan for human life. This struggle with the early chapters of Genesis appears also in the effort by John Locke (1632–1704) to develop the new myth further. His engagement with Genesis is sustained and troubled, for he systematically tries to restrict the effect of the fall to mortality (which Christ then overcomes) and to argue that labor is the key to private property. In other words, it is God’s will that human beings are “free,” that they make into private property what once was common property, and that the institutions of early capitalism may be seen as part of the divine plan. The catch is that Locke cannot escape the curse of Gen 3:17–19 entirely, for it constantly trips up his alternative myth. That myth is full of contradictions ensuring that the free laboring subject, with his treasured private property, becomes elusive indeed.

By the time we arrive at that great storyteller, Adam Smith, the myth of capitalism’s emergence had already undergone significant development. At first sight, Smith’s version of the myth (see earlier) may seem to have dispensed with the biblical text. Yet its subterranean presence rises to the surface one last time with Thomas Malthus (1766–1834). For Malthus, the fall is once again important, now through a distinctly strong doctrine of evil. One may locate that doctrine in his sermons and in the essay on population, especially the first edition, with its stark observations

concerning the goodness of God that turns into evil.<sup>20</sup> The divine gifts of procreation and the impulse to work for our subsistence inevitably end up in conflict, with insufficient food to feed a rampantly libidinous population, thereby leading to misery and vice through overpopulation and inadequate food. The fact that Malthus was troubled by the implications of his appropriation of the doctrine of the fall—that God was responsible for evil—shows up in attempts to backpedal in later editions of the essay on population (with their assertions of the role of moral sanction in restricting the drive for sex), but above all in his half dozen efforts to retell the myth of capitalism. In each case the story cannot keep from turning to a dire outcome.

Malthus may have been one of the last to make his economic arguments explicitly theological, acting as a decompression chamber from the intense engagements of earlier theorists. Nonetheless, his moral emphasis carried much weight. In this way, the Bible was to be subsumed under the umbrella of morality, which had the effect of both banishing the specific story of the emergence of the discipline of economics and enabling its claim to universality. But this is true only for the classical economists such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and John Stuart Mill; soon enough the moral, social, and political dimensions too would be dumped. The debiblicizing and detheologizing of classical economics,<sup>21</sup> part of its reductionism, would be taken much further on the path to universalizing imperialism by the Marginalists: William Stanley Jevons, Carl Menger, and especially Léon Walras at the University of Lausanne. They argued that what is now called “neoclassical

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *The Unpublished Papers in the Collection of the Kanto Gakuen University*, ed. John Pullen and Trevor Hughes Parry, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); idem, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London: J. Johnston in St. Paul’s Church-Yard, 1798).

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798–1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); idem, *Political Economy and Christian Theology since the Enlightenment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

economics” should be a problem-solving discipline, braced by mathematical formulations and focused on exchange, credit, money, and price information. This drastically reduced discipline was to find a home no longer among the arts, nor among the moral philosophers, but among mathematics, physics, and the applied sciences. Through intensive mathematicizing, the definition of an economist became one of deploying certain techniques.<sup>22</sup> Economics, now without any epithets, became a “professional” and “scientific” discipline. Politics was not so much banished as redirected. The potentially threatening interests in “political economy,” “social economy,” or “national economy” were now reshaped to provide policy directions for the status quo under liberal democracies. As Wallerstein drily reports, economics—along with the other nomothetic disciplines of sociology and political science—took the form of a university discipline in which “the Western world studied itself, explained its own functioning, the better to control what was happening.”<sup>23</sup> All of this set the scene for the chronic imperialism of neoclassical economics from the 1980s onward.

So also with ancient Southwest Asia, for it too was a conquest of economics imperialism. One cannot help noticing that in recent years an increasing number of intelligent and reputable scholars—historians, archaeologists, and biblical scholars—have seen fit to argue for a busy “market” economy in ancient Southwest Asia, driven by the universal desire of human beings to truck, barter, and exchange for the sake of profit.<sup>24</sup> This assumption may be stated explicitly, or it may appear in the uncritical

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Blaug, “The Formalist Revolution of the 1950s,” *JHET* 25, no. 2 (2003): 145–56. See also E. Roy Weintraub, *How Economics Became a Mathematical Science* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Wallerstein, *World-System IV*, 264. See also Ben Fine and Dimitris Milonakis, “From Freakonomics to Political Economy,” *HM* 20, no. 3 (2012): 81–96.

<sup>24</sup> See Excursus 3.



and lazy usage of a whole battery of terms from neoclassical economics, such as “private entrepreneurs” in “business houses” with their “property portfolios” and “business strategies,” which fostered the production of “commodities” for trade by “investing in industrial and commercial enterprises.”<sup>25</sup> The vast bulk of these recent works were published during the phase of rampant economics imperialism, after 1989, after the “fall” of the Berlin Wall and the “collapse” of communism in Eastern Europe and Russia. At the time, China too seemed to be embarking on the “capitalist path.” With the “victory” of capitalism and the infamous proclamation of the “end of history” by Francis Fukuyama,<sup>26</sup> capitalism was seen as the natural status of human beings. The supposedly fundamental principles of capitalism, rationality of the individual, and equilibrium were not only “universal” but now applied back to a history that had not so long ago been excised from the discipline. Capitalism became a universal narrative, one that begins with the dawn of civilization and works its way, with numerous bumps on the way, to what we now have. Those brave early human beings may have been a little rough and primitive in their exercise of capitalism, but their hearts were in the right place.

I have taken some time with these developments, since they render somewhat suspect the ability of neoclassical economics to provide useful resources for studying biblical economics, let alone the modern world. It is not merely that they are

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Jursa, “Das Archiv von Bēl-eṭ ̄eri-Šamaš,” in Baker and Jursa, *Babylonian Economy*, 197–268; Heather D. Baker, “The Property Portfolio of a Family of Builders from Hellenistic Uruk,” in *ibid.*, 7–44; Paola Corò Capitanio, “Business Profiles of Multi-Prebend Holders in Seleucid Uruk: Reconsidering the Dossier of Lâbâši/Anu-zēru-iddin/Ekur-zākīr,” in *ibid.*, 75–88; Karlheinz Kessler, “Zu den ökonomischen Verhältnissen von Uruk in neu- und spätbabylonischer Zeit,” in *ibid.*, 269–88; Cornelia Wunsch, “The Šangû-Ninurta Archive,” in *ibid.*, 365–80; Muhammad A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia: From Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626–331 BC)*, trans. Victoria A. Powell (Russian original, 1974; DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 61, 63. See the useful warning against such lazy terminology in Lester Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 190.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

anachronistic (for all theories and methods we use are so), nor that some elements may fruitfully be deployed within a different framework. The problem lies in the universalizing and imperialist move that is enabled by the chronic reductionism of neoclassical theory, in which it became individualized, desocialized, dehistoricized, and above all detheologized. In the process, the very specific circumstances in which classical and then neoclassical economic theory arose are locked away and forgotten. Once we operate with universalizing and imperialist categories as the basis of human economic activity, once we assume that all human beings are part of the grand unfolding of market economies, then it becomes difficult indeed to make fruitful use of such an approach. It is a classic case of a false universal.

### ***SCHOOLS OF MARXIST ECONOMIC THEORY***

A bad doctrine is splendidly rectified by a good revolution.

—Vladimir I. Lenin<sup>27</sup>

By contrast, Marxist economics resists such imperialism in its methods. Four significant and at times overlapping approaches or schools of a Marxist bent (however vaguely) have been applied to ancient Southwest Asia: (1) Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems, (2) Polanyi's substantivist proposals, (3) Soviet Marxism (Marxist-Leninist), and (4) the *Régulation* school of economic theory. Or rather, the first three have been deployed in relation to ancient Southwest Asia; the past tense will apply to the fourth only by the close of this work.<sup>28</sup> I outline each in turn, indicating why I find the first two less promising than the Russian material and *Régulation* theory.

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<sup>27</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, "The Black Hundreds and the Organisation of an Uprising," in *Collected Works* (1905; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 9:202.

<sup>28</sup> These approaches or schools, as part of a much wider range, indicate the health and vibrancy of a rich and multifaceted tradition of Marxist economic analysis. For useful general works on Marxist approaches to archaeology, see Matthew Spriggs, ed. *Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Randall H. McGuire, *A Marxist Archaeology* (Clinton Corners, NY: Percheron Press, 2002). V. Gordon Childe was the first historian of ancient Southwest Asia to deploy Marxist approaches: see Childe, *The Bronze Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930); idem, *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,

## WORLD-SYSTEMS THEORY AND POLANYI'S FRAME SETTING

The study of world-systems is particularly tricky because of the impossibility of finding comparable instances.<sup>29</sup>

The most influential Marxist-derived approaches to the economies of ancient Southwest Asia have been the world-systems theory of Immanuel Wallerstein and the ingenious and often successful effort by Karl Polanyi to frame the terms of debate. Before discussing each approach further, I should point out that in the process of chopping up and applying Wallerstein's approach to ancient Southwest Asia, the explicit Marxism has been systematically dumped. In Polanyi's case, the relation to Marx was always ambivalent and somewhat distant, with Weber providing the more immediate inspiration.

Developed from dependency theory and the Annales school, with its foci on longer historical perspectives and wider spatial horizons,<sup>30</sup> Wallerstein's world-systems theory<sup>31</sup> is both a breathtaking effort at global thinking and a relatively simple hypothesis: it is an elaborate and dynamic version of the center-periphery relation for understanding the rise, expansion, and cycles of capitalism from the sixteenth century CE. The core areas constitute centers of industry, finance, trade, wealth, and military power, while peripheral areas provide the raw materials, cheap labor, and markets, mediated by those in the semiperiphery. Wallerstein challenges

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1935); idem, *Man Makes Himself* (London: Watts & Co., 1936); idem, *What Happened in History* (London: Penguin Books, 1942; repr., 1946). See the useful summary of the main points of Childe's reconstruction in Milevski, *Goods Exchange*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Wallerstein, *World-System I*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th–18th Century*, vol. 1, *The Structures of Everyday Life*, trans. Siân Reynolds (London: Collins, 1981); idem, vol. 2, *The Wheels of Commerce* (1982); idem, vol. 3, *The Perspective of the World* (1984).

<sup>31</sup> Although Immanuel Wallerstein has written many articles and spin-off books, the core of his argument is in his world-system series: *The Modern World-System I*; idem, *II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750* (New York: Academic Press, 1980; new ed., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); idem, *III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730s–1840s* (New York: Academic Press, 1989; new ed., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); idem, *IV: World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

the persistent tendency to think of economies in terms of national boundaries, arguing that already at the origins of capitalism in the “long sixteenth century,” class has been divided globally, with cheap labor provided by the periphery. The proposal has many elaborations, such as these: the refutation of the modernization hypothesis in which “undeveloped” individual states must follow the path of modernization or development characteristic of more “advanced” states; the assumption that states themselves must be seen as part of a larger worldsystem; the dialectic of hegemony, in which the very attainment of hegemonic status is the basis for systematic undermining and decline of that core—initially the Netherlands, then England, then the USA, although not without contest from France and Germany; and the crucial role of Kondratiev waves (or K-waves),<sup>32</sup> the systemic cycles (rather than crises) of overaccumulation and underconsumption. Perhaps the most significant challenge was to think of a “world-system” at all, well before “global” histories became common in the first decade of the new millennium (from 2000). That idea encompasses not merely economics, but also politics, social relations, culture, belief, and ideology. In this respect it is deeply Marxist, which characteristically expands the discrete fields not only of intellectual inquiry but also of social formations as a whole. It is also deeply Marxist in the sense that the dominant ideology of liberalism comes lately, in the eighteenth century and following on the gradual construction of capitalism, rather than setting the scene, as the Weberian position would have it (Wallerstein’s initial volume was published in 1974, when Weber’s position ruled).

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<sup>32</sup> Named after the Russian economist Nikolai Kondratiev, these are long waves, averaging 50 years in length, characterized by alternating global patterns of high and low economic growth (during periods of long economic start-ups); Jacob J. van Duijn, *The Long Wave in Economic Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983); Alfred Kleinknecht, Ernest Mandel, and Immanuel Wallerstein, eds., *New Findings in Long-Wave Research* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992).

Despite the comprehensiveness of world-systems analysis, the most significant shortcomings in its analysis of capitalism involve (1) the subordination of states to the world system and (2) the emphasis on objective forms of contradiction and conflict. The first point has been well rehearsed: Wallerstein's model is too rigid, not allowing space for all manner of regional variations. This is a criticism that will be leveled at any synthesis, any effort to think in terms of the total picture. Yet, in Wallerstein's case, the issue turns on the state. In the world system of capitalism (the first world system, he is keen to stress), with its internationalized class struggles, how much room is there for the individual state, for its laws and permutations of capital, for its specific history of class and struggle, if not revolution? The breathing space for such variations has been somewhat restricted.<sup>33</sup>

As for the second point concerning the objective side of contradictions, the examples are multiple. For instance, the contradiction of underconsumption through reducing wages involves the tension between the short-term result of increasing profits and the long-term reduction in the ability of people to buy and consume commodities. Or the mantra of competition is deeply contradictory: on the one hand, full competition would destroy profits and thereby the system; on the other hand, the response of economic monopolies undermines the markets upon which they rely to operate in the first place. That is, Wallerstein stresses one side of Marx's approach to social conflict: the objective economic and social conditions that produce conflict. In doing so, world-systems theory neglects the subjective, agential dimension of such conflict and change.<sup>34</sup> The most consistent response has come from Ernest Mandel,

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<sup>33</sup> Alain Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles: The Crises of Global Fordism*, trans. David Macey (French original, 1985; London: Verso Books, 1987), 2–3.

<sup>34</sup> Ellen Kay Trimberger, "World Systems Analysis: The Problem of Unequal Development," *SaS* 8, no. 1 (1978–79): 127–37; Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 297; Marcel van der Linden, "Global Labor History and 'the Modern World

who stresses the subjective dimension.<sup>35</sup> Comparable to Wallerstein, Mandel proposes that the capitalist world economy is “an articulated system of capitalist, semi-capitalist and precapitalist relations of production.”<sup>36</sup> Its growth, he holds, has been due to the combination of both ongoing capital accumulation in the domain of existing capitalist processes of production and ongoing primitive accumulation of capital outside that domain. However, Mandel differs from Wallerstein by arguing for a crucial third feature of the dialectic: the struggle and conflict between these two zones. The first, Wallerstein’s core, tries to determine, limit, and appropriate its wealth from the second, but the latter resists in all manner of fashions that lead to conflict and revolution. This insight is due not merely to Mandel’s Marxist theory, but also to his lifelong revolutionary socialist commitment (of a Trotskyite flavor).

I have given some scope to the world-systems approach since it has been reasonably popular among some ancient Southwest Asian scholars. Although Wallerstein is careful to warn that his approach was developed for the analysis of capitalism (the only “world system” to date) and is inapplicable to precapitalist formations,<sup>37</sup> the possibility that it may be amenable to noncapitalist systems is not hard to see. It is at heart a center-periphery model, which may well be applied in a simplified fashion that strips away the specificities and complexities of Wallerstein’s

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System’: Thoughts at the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Fernand Braudel Center,” *IRSH* 46 (2001): 423–59.

<sup>35</sup> Ernest Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, trans. Brian Pearce, 2 vols. (London: Merlin Press, 1968); idem, *Late Capitalism*, trans. Joris de Bres, rev. ed. (London: NLB, 1975).

<sup>36</sup> Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, 48–49.

<sup>37</sup> On this matter, Wallerstein distinguishes between world-empire and world system, pointing out that before capitalism no world system existed. The difference is that in a world system, no one political system controls the space, while in a world-empire, a single political system operates over most of the area, however attenuated that control may be. Further, a world-empire is both highly unstable and is responsible for managing and defending a huge population and landmass, which diverts attention from economics. Wallerstein, *World-System I*, 15–17, 60–62, 170–71, 348. See also Immanuel Wallerstein, “World System versus World Systems: A Critique,” *CoA* 11 (1991): 189–94; and Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine-Etherton, 1972).

analysis (with its semiperipheries and dialectical analysis). All one needs is a center that exploits peripheries for its own needs. Now the candidates may line up, whether the “revolution” marked by Uruk in the fourth millennium BCE or any of the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, or Persian Empires in the last millennium BCE, or indeed the whole of the ancient world.<sup>38</sup> If one follows this model, then the Levant becomes a peripheral zone, exploited by a core area elsewhere that draws away raw materials and labor. It is, of course, much sexier to call this “world-systems” analysis than a “center-periphery” model. As should be clear by now, this application suffers from a number of problems, such as no evidence of substantial control over the supposed “peripheries,” an equal absence of asymmetry between the various zones, and the lack of substantial long-distance trade in raw materials from the periphery and finished goods from the core, a feature that is crucial for a world system.<sup>39</sup> That is, the model

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<sup>38</sup> To cite a sample: Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, “Observations and Queries about Sociological Aspects of Imperialism in the Ancient World,” in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 21–33; Kajsa Ekholm and Jonathan Friedman, “‘Capital’ Imperialism and Exploitation in Ancient World Systems,” in *ibid.*, 41–58; Philip L. Kohl, “The Ancient Economy, Transferable Technologies and the Bronze Age World-System: A View from the Northeastern Frontier of the Ancient Near East,” in *Centre and Periphery in the Ancient World*, ed. Michael J. Rowlands, Mogens Trolle Larsen, and Kristian Kristiansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13–24; Guillermo Algaze, *The Uruk World System: The Dynamics of Expansion of Early Mesopotamian Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); André Gunder Frank, “Bronze Age World System Cycles,” *CA* 34 (1993): 383–429; Seymour Gitin, “The Neo-Assyrian Empire and Its Western Periphery: The Levant, with a Focus on Philistine Ekron,” in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995*, ed. Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 77–103; Mitchell S. Rothman, ed., *Uruk Mesopotamia and Its Neighbors: Cross-Cultural Interactions in the Era of State Formation* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2001); Christopher M. Monroe, “Money and Trade,” in *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*, ed. Daniel C. Snell (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 155–68; Algaze, *Ancient Mesopotamia*.

<sup>39</sup> Gil J. Stein, “World System Theory and Alternative Modes of Interaction in the Archaeology of Culture Contact,” in *Studies in Culture Contact: Interaction, Culture Change, and Archaeology*, ed. James G. Cusick (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1998), 220–55; *idem*, *Rethinking World-Systems: Diasporas, Colonies, and Interaction in Uruk Mesopotamia* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999); J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 85–89. As I point out later, to assume such control is to be seduced by the documents from the ruling class, especially from monarchs, who claimed far greater control than was really the case. The fallback position, that exchange of preciousities provides a world system, misreads the function of preciousities, as I argue later.

is stripped of its explanatory power, thereby becoming both universal and meaningless. However, the most significant problem with these applications is a curious anachronism: the specificity of Wallerstein's analysis of capitalism is both ignored and yet universalized. How so? On the one hand, the brushing aside of the specificity of his approach enables its application to very different economic systems. On the other hand, since it remains at heart an analysis of capitalism, ancient Southwest Asian scholars import that framework into their engagement with the ancient world, making it seem very much like "capitalism light." Now the final twist occurs, for Wallerstein's Marxism is replaced by a neoliberal framework. In more detail, Wallerstein's own work comes from a Marxist perspective, seeking to provide a new model to enliven debates that were at the time mired in Weberian assumptions. However, most ancient Southwest Asian scholars use Wallerstein for a very different purpose: to assert that capitalist-like economic relations also existed in the ancient world. Terms such as "market economy," "economic rationalization," "extraction of revenues," "business houses," "commercial networks," "profit motive," and "comparative advantage" regularly appear in such studies. Or, as Algaze puts it, ancient Southwest Asia was "partly capitalist."<sup>40</sup>

Even more influential in biblical and ancient Southwest Asian studies have been the proposals of Karl Polanyi.<sup>41</sup> As I noted earlier, the assumption that this is a

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<sup>40</sup> Algaze, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 42. Similarly, Ekholm and Friedman ("Imperialism and Exploitation," 41) propose that "there exists a form of 'capitalism' in the ancient world."

<sup>41</sup> Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry W. Pearson, eds., *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory* (New York: Free Press, 1957); Karl Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic*; idem, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). For a thorough survey of the background and nature of Polanyi's proposals, as well as some of the key responses, see Roger Nam, *Portrayals of Economic Exchange in the Book of Kings* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2012), 46–69. For the most comprehensive and judicious assessment to date of Polanyi's complete work, see Gareth Dale, *Karl Polanyi: The Limits of the Market* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010). Many are those who have assumed, at some time or other, some form of Polanyi's framework. As a sample: Mario Liverani, *Prestige and Interest: International Relations in the Near East ca. 1600–1100 B.C.* (Padua: Sargon, 1990); Douglas



Marxist model is mistaken. More important are his Weberian roots and his reliance on the early anthropological work of Malinowski and others of his ilk.<sup>42</sup> The latter shows up particularly in the distinction between reciprocity and redistribution, which, along with the market, have become staples of economic and indeed social analysis of ancient Israel and ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>43</sup> A further distinction, at least in appropriations of Polanyi, is that between “embedded” and “disembedded” trade, with the bed being social relations and cultural expectations. As is well known, embedded trade takes place within the frameworks of gift exchange (reciprocity) and redistribution, while disembedded trade operates according to “market” relations, assuming those to be profit and self-interest. The problems are already significant, but for his proposals Polanyi was astute enough to propose a general framework entailing that most of those who engage with these issues are forced to take sides: one is either a formalist or a substantivist, that is, a maximalist or a minimalist. Either the ancients operated with largely the same economic forms as we do (since all human beings are the same), or they were qualitatively different, so that the connections between us are minimal. The genius here was to select unfamiliar terms for an opposition that derived

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L. Esse, *Subsistence, Trade, and Social Change in Early Bronze Age Palestine* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1991), 99; David C. Hopkins, “Bare Bones: Putting Flesh on the Economics of Ancient Israel,” in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States*, ed. Volkmar Fritz and Philip Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 121–39, esp. 123; Paula M. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, LAI (London: SPCK; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 72–73, 119–20, 139–41, 156–58; Ferdinand E. Deist, *The Material Culture of the Bible: An Introduction* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 164–82; Schloen, *House*, 79–82. Liverani (*Prestige and Interest*, 20) notes drily: “Polanyi’s influence on economic and political anthropology has now become so pervasive as to make use of many indirect channels—so that an essay could easily be written about ‘The impact of Polanyi’s theory upon scholars who did never read it.’”

<sup>42</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge, 1932).

<sup>43</sup> Karl Polanyi, “The Economy as Instituted Process,” in Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson, *Trade and Market*, 242–70, esp. 245–56; idem, *Primitive, Archaic*, 207–37; idem, *Great Transformation*, 49–58; George Dalton, “Introduction,” in Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic*, ix–liv, esp. xxxi–xxxvi. Often forgotten in appropriations of Polanyi’s work is a fourth category, householding, which he connects with Aristotle’s reflections on *oekonomia*, but this remains undeveloped (idem, 55–57). Polanyi also sought to distinguish between the differing institutionalizations of trade, markets, and money, which in capitalism have merged into an interlocking system. See Dale, *Limits of the Market*, 142–48.

more immediately out of the “*oikos* debate,”<sup>44</sup> thereby giving the feel of a new idea. Yet it is a minor variation on the philosophical opposition between identity and difference, as well as between quantity and quality. Thus identity assumes a fundamental continuity between the ancients and us, with perhaps variations in terms of quantity; and difference assumes a vast qualitative gap between two or more worlds. In this light, one can see how Polanyi might be mistaken for a Marxist, for in some respects his preferred substantivism aligns him with the Marxist tool of mode of production, which marks qualitative difference from one mode of production to another.<sup>45</sup> Or rather, in terms I use later, Marxism includes a narrative of difference in its very method, a narrative that is necessary due to the inescapable anachronism of all work relating to the past. To his credit, Polanyi also uses a narrative of difference, and in this respect his work is useful.

Nonetheless, there are some distinct problems with Polanyi’s framework.<sup>46</sup> Apart from a notable lack of interest in agriculture (which bedevils those who depend on Polanyi), the first is the subterfuge involved in the category of redistribution. This is the process by which a centralized authority, temple or palace or bourgeois government, extracts a surplus from the population only to “redistribute” it among those same people. While this is presented as a category from the precapitalist world,

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<sup>44</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, classicists were divided over whether the ancient economy (initially Greek but expanded to the ancient world in general) was based largely on *oikoi* (households or estates), or whether it operated according to neoclassical principles. The key names include Karl Johann Rodbertus, Karl Bücher, Eduard Meyer, Max Weber, spilling down to Moses Finley. See Dale, *Limits of the Market*, 137–40.

<sup>45</sup> Dale’s careful treatment (*ibid.*, 19–44, 128–32, 240–47) of Polanyi shows how he was closely involved with socialist movements (esp. Christian socialism), but that he lacked the rigor of Marxist analysis, too often falling back to a moral argument.

<sup>46</sup> For useful critical assessments of Polanyi, see Maurice Godelier, *The Mental and the Material: Thought, Economy and Society*, trans. Martin Thom (French original, 1984; London: Verso Books, 1986), 179–207; Dale, *Limits of the Market*. Here I am interested in the theoretical shortcomings of Polanyi’s approach, rather than futile efforts to disprove his specific proposals concerning ancient Southwest Asia. Note that Baker and Jursa find his categories too simplistic: “Introduction,” in *Babylonian Economy*, 1–6, esp. 4.

often counterbalanced by the tribal forms of reciprocity, it is nothing of the sort. It comes from the playbook of welfare states that became popular after the Second World War as a reaction to the appeals of communism. High-taxing states provided care for their citizens from the cradle to the grave. This statist model was then retrofitted into the ancient world, romanticized ever so slightly for use among “primitives,” and then was seen unique to those times and places. Why does it not work in ancient Southwest Asia? Apart from the point that it was never clear what the boundaries of a state were or who belonged to it, the pattern was not so much redistribution by the governing despots and their hangers-on, but acquisition.<sup>47</sup> Centripetal was the direction, prestige was the desire, giving it away to the populace was certainly not on the agenda. All that we find are building projects of dubious common good and of notable benefit to the ruling class, and the allocation of rations to those who worked on palatine estates and projects. This is hardly redistribution.

The second problem is the baleful argument that a market economy, capitalism, did not arise until the nineteenth century, generated initially out of long-distance trade. This means for Polanyi that all social formations up until that time operated according to varying combinations of reciprocity, redistribution, and householding. It reduces the sheer variety of precapitalist formations into a vast economic porridge. Further, like many, he mistakes the changes of the nineteenth century, the “great transformation,” as the emergence of capitalism, whereas it is now quite clear that, while the tendrils of what would become capitalism may be traced

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<sup>47</sup> This problem shows up sharply, albeit unwittingly, in the work of anyone who makes extensive use of the category of redistribution across ancient Southwest Asia. The attempt to give redistribution more Marxist credentials via the category of primitive accumulation does not avoid the basic problem. Liverani, *Prestige and Interest*; idem, *Uruk*, 19–24.

back into the feudal era, the moment when capitalism definitively showed its face was in the sixteenth century, with the Dutch economic empire.

The third problem is his underlying assumption that the prime business and motivation of markets is profit. As I will show later, most markets throughout history have not been primarily profit-making ventures, for they arose as secondary phenomena with very different purposes. To be sure, Polanyi shows glimpses of awareness that markets have indeed had other purposes, such as those that arose in the Hellenistic era, but he makes little of such purposes.

A fourth problem is his equivocation over the autonomy of the market. His underlying position is that there is no such thing as a market unto itself, that the self-regulating economy is a pipe dream of the classical economists and their heirs.<sup>48</sup> At other times, he suggests that such a market is possible, or at least that social relations are now determined by the economy: “Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system.”<sup>49</sup> This equivocation had led many who have deployed Polanyi’s framework to assume a clear distinction: reciprocity and redistribution are economic approaches embedded in social relations; market economies are not so embedded. This distinction comes to its sharpest expression in debates over trade, where many assert that we can distinguish between embedded and disembedded trade. In the end, this is a profound misreading, despite Polanyi’s hand in enticing many so to read. Instead, he argues that the classical economists desperately sought to disembed the economy, that they encouraged governments to think it was possible, but that it was an impossible quest. Quite

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<sup>48</sup> “Our thesis is that the idea of a self-adjusting market implied a stark utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness.” Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 3; see also idem, *Primitive, Archaic*, 72–74.

<sup>49</sup> Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 60. See also idem, “Economy as Instituted Process,” 266–70.

simply, economic activities are always embedded. Why? A fully autonomous market economy would destroy itself in short order, by destroying its social and natural environment.<sup>50</sup>

The fifth problem concerns what is excluded from Polanyi's proposal—the old question of what is not said but is crucial. For Polanyi, the excluded is class and thereby the complex dynamics of economic exploitation, which are embodied in unequal and hierarchical patterns of economic exchange. At this point, David Graeber's effort to recast Polanyi's distinctions comes into play.<sup>51</sup> Instead of redistribution, reciprocity, and market exchange, Graeber proposes these categories: (1) baseline communism, premised on the basic and necessary principle of “from each according to his abilities and to each according to his needs”—necessary since human society would cease to function without this everyday and low-level form of mutual cooperation; (2) exchange, which is reciprocal and assumes both equality and the absence of continuing social relations between those engaging in exchange, indeed that the equality in question is one based on nonsocial bonds; (3) hierarchy, where reciprocal exchange does not occur, but rather uneven patterns of qualitatively different items of exchange, in which the hierarchies of power come to the fore. The shifts from Polanyi are both obvious and lateral: redistribution has become baseline communism, reciprocity and market relations have in a curious fashion merged under “exchange,” and hierarchy has usefully been added. Indeed, the value of Graeber's proposal is that he highlights the hierarchical dimension of exchange and that he emphasizes the leakage from one form to the other.<sup>52</sup> One would expect such leakage,

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<sup>50</sup> On the impossibility of disembedded economies, see Fred Block, “Introduction,” in Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, xviii–xxxviii, esp. xxiii–xxxviii.

<sup>51</sup> Graeber, *Debt*, 89–126.

<sup>52</sup> Graeber (*ibid.*, 113) is keen to emphasize the slippage between baseline communism and hierarchy, but here he reveals both his Western prejudice against the successful communist revolutions,

since any socioeconomic system operates with different combinations of this triad; what distinguishes them is how one form dominates the others. Yet problems remain. Like Polanyi, Graeber's analysis contains no explicit account of class. One may develop such an account at the intersections between hierarchy and exchange, but that remains secondary rather than foundational work. Further, the restriction of "exchange" to a reciprocal, largely equal process both retreats from exchange as a ubiquitous and multifaceted process and curiously strips from such a process its inherent inequality and hierarchy.

Finally, Graeber reveals a problem inherent to Polanyi's proposal: the assumption of some fundamental features of human nature that cut across time and space. This seems to be a fault to which anthropologists and their various dependents are particularly prone. Graeber is, of course, an anthropologist, while Polanyi leaned heavily on the work of Malinowski. Such anthropology may take the form of great narratives that challenge our basic assumptions, but it usually ends up in a primitivist argument: the true insight into human nature and interactions is to be found in these anthropological investigations into tribal peoples from Africa, Greenland, Asia, the Americas, Australia, or wherever. The upshot is an assumption that both share, curiously, with Adam Smith and his hangers-on: human nature is the same wherever we look. The trick is to identify how we tick. All of this leads to a transhistorical assumption, embodied in the inadequate suggestion that all human societies operate on the basis of interwoven patterns of reciprocity, redistribution, and markets (Polanyi)—or baseline communism, reciprocity, and hierarchy (Graeber). As will become clear as my argument unfolds, I find the tensions between allocation and

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which happened almost exclusively in the East (from eastern Europe to China), and his anarchist leanings, which are suspicious of strong states.

extraction, woven through institutional forms and regimes by means of modes of *régulation*, less prone to such traps and more able to deal with issues of class and economic exploitation.

### SOVIET SCHOLARSHIP

The Soviet school of historians of the ancient Orient have by now amassed considerable material for drawing a coherent and comparatively accurate picture of the socio-economic structure of the Near Eastern society.

—Igor M. Diakonoff<sup>53</sup>

Unlike world-systems theory and Polanyi's proposals, I have much greater room for the contributions of Soviet-era Russian scholarship. At various points I draw upon the work of Igor Diakonoff, Ninel Jankowska, Ludmila Danilova, Nelly Kozyreva, Georgii Aleksandrovich Melikishvili, and others.<sup>54</sup> This is not due merely to some perverse delight in the USSR,<sup>55</sup> not even to the influence of this work on the insightful studies of Mario Liverani, but also to the underlying theoretical assumptions of such work. These assumptions include the search for deeper patterns, the discernment among the plethora of data showing the characteristic features of an age, with a view to outlining its socioeconomic formation rather than eschewing such a task.<sup>56</sup> That this attention arises from critical engagement with the Marxist heritage still needs to be pointed out in light of the overweening avoidance of attention to matters of

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<sup>53</sup> Igor M. Diakonoff, "The Structure of Near Eastern Society before the Middle of the Second Millennium B.C.," *Oikumene* 3 (1982): 7–8.

<sup>54</sup> I have written on this material elsewhere but have thus far been restricted to summarizing the main achievements. Roland Boer, "The Sacred Economy of Ancient 'Israel'," *SJOT* 21, no. 1 (2007): 29–48; idem, *Political Myth*. For key collections and surveys, see Jan Pečírka, "Von der asiatischen Produktionsweise zu einer marxistischen Analyse der frühen Klassengesellschaften: Randbemerkungen zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion in der UdSSR," *Eir* 6 (1967): 141–74; Igor M. Diakonoff, ed., *Ancient Mesopotamia: Socio-Economic History; A Collection of Studies by Soviet Scholars* (Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1969); Igor M. Diakonoff and Philip L. Kohl, eds., *Early Antiquity*, trans. Alexander Kirjanov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Stephen P. Dunn, *The Fall and Rise of the Asiatic Mode of Production* (London: Routledge, 1982; repr., 2011). Further references to this tradition of Soviet scholarship are found throughout the book.

<sup>55</sup> Roland Boer, *Lenin, Religion, and Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Igor M. Diakonoff, "Slaves, Helots and Serfs in Early Antiquity," in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im alten Vorderasien*, ed. János Harmatta and Geörgy Komoróczy (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976), 45–78, esp. 56; idem, "Structure of Near Eastern Society," 34. See also Liverani, *Uruk*, 11.

theoretical frameworks and sophisticated economic modeling characteristic of work that is done under the oft-unexamined umbrella of capitalism.<sup>57</sup>

Closely related is the long-standing assumption that any serious work on ancient Southwest Asia, including the Levant, requires the deployment of sophisticated economic modeling and debates concerning such models. This debate was focused on the category of mode of production, which may be defined as a unique combination of economic and social factors that distinguishes one mode of production from others. To be sure, the early debates often turned on interpretations over the observations of Marx and Engels on the ancient world<sup>58</sup>—with debates over feudalism, the slave mode of production, and the Asiatic mode of production—but in light of the available evidence, these discussions soon turned to increasing complexity and reformulations of modes of production. Given the increase in data since that work (up to the 1990s), I remain struck by the insights enabled by the theoretical basis of those studies.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> For useful surveys of the key issues, one may consult Philip Kohl's introduction to Diakonoff and Kohl, *Early Antiquity*; and Dunn, *Fall and Rise*.

<sup>58</sup> For a useful collection of the texts of Marx and Engels concerning the Asiatic mode of production, see Lawrence Krader, *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Sources, Development and Critique in the Writings of Karl Marx* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975).

<sup>59</sup> Konstantin K. Zel'in, "Principles of Morphological Classification of Forms of Dependence," *SovSoc* 6, no. 4 (1968): 3–24; Ludmila V. Danilova, "Controversial Problems of the Theory of Precapitalist Societies," *SAA* 9, no. 4 (1971): 269–328, esp. 283–89; Georgii A. Melikishvili, "On the Character of the Most Ancient Class Societies," in *Introduction to Soviet Ethnography*, ed. Stephen P. Dunn and Ethel Dunn (Berkeley, CA: Highgate Road Social Science Research Station, 1974), 2:549–73; idem, "The Character of the Socioeconomic Structure in the Ancient East (A Preliminary Classification of Class Societies by Stage and Type)," *SAA* 15, nos. 2–3 (1976–77): 29–49; idem, "Some Aspects of the Socioeconomic Structure of Ancient Near Eastern Societies," *SAA* 17, no. 1 (1978): 25–72; Iurii Ivanovich Semenov, "The Problem of the Socioeconomic Order of the Ancient East," in *Introduction to Soviet Ethnography*, ed. Stephen P. Dunn and Ethel Dunn (Berkeley, CA: Highgate Road Social Science Research Station, 1974), 2:575–621; idem, "Socioeconomic Systems"; Stephen P. Dunn, "The Position of the Primitive-Communal Social Order in the Soviet-Marxist Theory of History," in *Towards a Marxist Anthropology: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. Stanley Diamond (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 173–84. See also the references in note 28 above and to Diakonoff in chap. 4, below. For instance, while Western scholarship in the 1970s was still toying with versions of feudalism and laying to rest the Asiatic mode of production, this Russian scholarship had comprehensively rejected feudalism and was recovering (already from the 1960s) a streamlined and reconditioned version of the Asiatic mode of production. J. Suret-Canale, Maurice Godelier, and Vasilii Vasil'evich Struve, "An Exchange of Views on the Asian Mode of Production," *SAA* 4, no. 2 (1965):



A corollary of the attention to deeper patterns and economic modeling is the inclusiveness of the understanding of economics. It does not, as the disciples of Adam Smith would have it, restrict economic activity to truck, barter, and trade, to tax-tribute and the activities of centers of power, but is concerned with the whole picture. In that light, patterns of land use and labor, the social and economic structure of the village-commune, and the inclusive category of mode of production—drawing together economic, political, social, and ideological dimensions—are crucial items of analysis. These scholars are not afraid to consider the big picture, both in terms of the heuristic framework with which we inevitably approach matters such as economics and in terms of the longer patterns that may last centuries and millennia.<sup>60</sup> On this matter, such work draws to itself the Marxist-inspired proposals of the Annales school (Braudel) and world-systems theory (Wallerstein), albeit in a fashion that is often more insightful and satisfying.

Although the careful reader may espy the influence of the Soviet-era research at many points, as in my analysis of subsistence survival and kinship-household, it is most obvious in my proposals concerning state and estate. This is predicated on the way any mode of production is both enabled and hobbled by a basic contradiction. The success of a mode of production in usurping the one that has gone before (which now leaves its traces in subordinate roles) relies on the ability to overcome irresolvable contradictions in that earlier mode. However, the new mode of production also produces its own tensions, which enables it to rise to dominance but

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38–46; Petr Skalnik and Timoteus Pokera, “Beginning of the Discussion About the Asiatic Mode of Production in the USSR and the People’s Republic of China,” *Eir* 5 (1966): 179–87; Leonid S. Vasil’ev and Iosif A. Stuchevskii, “Three Models for the Origin and Evolution of Precapitalist Societies,” *TSR* 8, no. 3 (1967): 26–39; Schloen, *House*, 187, 201–19; Kevin M. McGeough, *Exchange Relationships at Ugarit* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 42–49.

<sup>60</sup> Igor M. Diakonoff’s final work, *The Paths of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), is a case in point.

also keeps it in a perpetual state of crisis, eventually being the crucial factor that leads to its disintegration. This basic feature of Marxist analysis was adapted by Soviet scholarship for application to ancient Southwest Asia in terms of ruling-class estates and rural agriculture, or the palatine system of estates and the subsistence survival of the countryside, characteristic up to the end of the second millennium BCE. In order to feed the nonproducers, first the temple estates and then the palatine estates were established. They were managed either directly by the palace or by tenure. Those who worked on the estates did so either as permanently indentured laborers or as periodic laborers for specific tasks, such as sowing, harvest, or building projects. Outside that system but in tension with it were the rural communities, which operated according to a well-trying subsistence-survival pattern. The tensions between the two took the form, in the context of perpetual labor shortages, of efforts by the ruling class to increase the indentured laborers on the estates, while village communities resisted such efforts by various means. Eventually the tensions and limitations (for the ruling class) became too much, and the long period of economic “crisis” of the late second millennium BCE gave way to the imperial patterns of blunt and sophisticated plunder, extractive systems of imperial expansion, taxation, and tribute, enabled by the discovery of coinage and the use of markets to provision the ruling class and its armies.<sup>61</sup>

### ***RÉGULATION THEORY***

The regulationist movement originates in a rigorous and radical critique of neoclassical theory.

—Robert Boyer<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Greater detail concerning this pattern appears in chap. 4, below.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Boyer, “The Origins of *Régulation Theory*,” in *Régulation Theory: The State of the Art*, ed. Robert Boyer and Yves Saillard, trans. Carolyn Shread (French original, 1995; updated ed., London: Routledge, 2002), 13.

The most explicit theoretical framework for my analysis relies on a creative adaptation of *Régulation* theory. A one-sentence definition: given the normal state of economic instability and crisis, a *régulation* approach is interested in how specific economic systems stabilize crises in order to gain some continuity for certain periods. In other words, stability is not the norm, with crisis an anomaly that must be explained, but crisis is the norm; so the crucial question is how periods of stability are achieved through compromises or complex patterns of *régulation*.<sup>63</sup> I deliberately use “*régulation*,” following the practice in Boyer and Saillard’s crucial work.<sup>64</sup> Why not “regulation,” as earlier translations tended to render the French word? The semantic fields of both terms do not overlap very much. Rather than suggesting juridicopolitical regulation at a microeconomic level (for which the better French word would be *réglementation*), *régulation* designates the social, institutional, and ideological factors that determine the stabilities and transformations of a system as a whole. Or as Jessop and Sum put it, *régulation* theorists “typically refer to a wide range of economic and extraeconomic mechanisms in seeking to explain the ‘regularities’ of economic behaviour. They aim to show how these mechanisms interact to normalize the capital relation and guide (govern) the conflictual and crisis-mediated course of accumulation.”<sup>65</sup>

Before I outline the key points in more detail, let me supply a little background. *Régulation* theory has a particular theoretical heritage, developing out of a clear Marxist base, with debts to Louis Althusser (as rebel sons and daughters),

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<sup>63</sup> Excellent surveys may be found in Boyer and Saillard (*Régulation Theory*), who also have a very useful glossary of key terms; and in Bob Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum, *Beyond the Regulation Approach: Putting Capitalist Economies in Their Place* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006), 13–57.

<sup>64</sup> Boyer, “Introduction,” in Boyer and Saillard, *Régulation Theory*, 1.

<sup>65</sup> Jessop and Sum, *Beyond the Regulation*, 15; see also Robert Boyer, *The Regulation School: A Critical Introduction*, trans. Craig Charney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 20–21, 47–48, 117–23.

Kaleckian economics, and the Annales school.<sup>66</sup> Like any economic theory, it emerged in response to a dual crisis, one economic and the other theoretical. The economic crisis was that of the 1970s, after what appeared to be a long period of relatively stable post-war economic growth, a period characterized by a series of compromises now known as Fordism.<sup>67</sup> The theoretical crisis was the bankruptcy of neoclassical economic theory in its attempts to understand and respond to the economic crisis. In reply, the *régulation* theorists sought to challenge the three neoclassical axioms: (1) the rationality of the fictional individual, Homo economicus, who by sleight of hand is assumed to express human nature; (2) the equilibrium of the interactions between these rational individuals, in which crises are therefore anomalies due to outside irrational factors (state, law, unions, collective conventions); and (3) the context in which these interactions take place, as a completely independent network of markets.<sup>68</sup> For the *régulation* theorists, these assumptions by neoclassical economists of an abstract, perfect “market” are totalizing and totalitarian, having little relation to the real world—precisely the world in all its contradictory mess they set out to examine.<sup>69</sup> In short, any Homo economicus that might be released into real life would not last one day.

Needless to say, the *régulation* approach has its own debates, differences, and explorations of new directions. While identifiable as a distinct emphasis, if not a school in economic theory, it is by no means a uniform and tight-knit program. It does, however, have excellent Marxist credentials, for the initial theorist who laid the

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<sup>66</sup> Boyer, “Origins of *Régulation* Theory,” 16.

<sup>67</sup> Fordism is the name given for the approach to manufacturing and industrial production that breaks down the work of assembly-line construction into small unskilled tasks that are interlocked within a whole.

<sup>68</sup> Boyer, “Introduction,” 3–4; Jessop and Sum, *Beyond the Regulation*, 214–15; Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (London: Verso Books, 1976; new ed., 2000), 13.

<sup>69</sup> Boyer, “Origins of *Régulation* Theory,” 14; Aglietta, *Capitalist Regulation*, 10.

groundwork in the 1960s was Paul Boccara, key economic theorist of the French Communist Party (PCF). Boccara based his work on a nondogmatic reading of all three volumes of Marx's *Capital*, seeking long-term patterns of overaccumulation-devalorization and their modes of spontaneous *régulation* in capitalist economies. The purpose was to identify a more decentralized mode of management, with a focus on human values.<sup>70</sup> He gave his name to one of three branches, the *boccarien*; another branch developed in Grenoble (*grenoblois*), and the increasingly dominant one was in Paris (*parisien*). The *grenoblois*—in the *Groupe de recherche sur la régulation de l'économie capitaliste* (GRREC)—attacked general equilibrium theory in the name of specific, real-life analysis of the different phases of regulation within capitalism.<sup>71</sup> The *parisien* developed from a focus on extensive and intensive forms of accumulation (their early focus on Fordism was one of the latter), to studying the specific structures and institutions involved in securing and regularizing capital accumulation in different contexts around the globe, all of which was kick-started by Aglietta's *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*.<sup>72</sup> The intricacies of these debates, the many works that have been produced, the new directions of subsequent scholars—these are beyond my mandate here, for I am interested in the key methodological principles as they may be relevant for biblical economies. Given

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<sup>70</sup> Paul Boccara, *Études sur le capitalisme monopoliste d'état, sa crise et son issue*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1977); idem, *Sur la mise en mouvement du "Capital": Premiers essais*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1978); idem, "Théories de la régulation et suraccumulation-dévalorisation du capital (I<sup>re</sup> partie)," *Issues* 32 (1988): 65–126; idem, "(suite)," *Issues* 33 (1989): 63–143; idem, "(suite et fin)," *Issues* 34 (1989): 33–108; Michel Bellet, "La régulation: Éléments sur le statut de deux programmes de recherche," *Issues* 32 (1988): 3–33.

<sup>71</sup> Groupe de recherche sur la régulation de l'économie capitaliste [GRREC], ed., *Crise et régulation: Recueil de textes, 1979–1983* (Grenoble: Université des sciences sociales de Grenoble, 1983); idem, *Recueil de textes, 1983–1990* (1990).

<sup>72</sup> See Excursus 4.

the importance of the Parisian school and its achievements, I draw those principles primarily from their work.<sup>73</sup>

One of the best formulations of those theoretical underpinnings comes from Alain Lipietz:

First, we consider society and, within society, economic activities, to be a network of social relations. That is, we do not say that there are individuals who from time to time connect with each other and engage in exchanges, but we consider that exchange is itself a social relation, of a very particular sort.

A second major thesis is that each of these social relations is *contradictory*, and therefore it is not easy to live within this network of social relations. . . . If social relations are contradictory in this way, the usual situation should be a crisis. In other words, crisis is the normal, natural state and non-crisis is a rather chance event.

This proposition leads to a third idea—that there are long periods of time when things work. I mean, there are times when the configuration of social relations that defines capitalism, for instance, reproduces itself in a stabilized way. We call such a continuing system a *regime of accumulation*. This refers, of course, to economics but I think this methodology can be extended to politics, diplomacy, and so on.

Fourth, we have to think about the ways this regime of accumulation is achieved. The problem is that individual expectations and behavior must take shape so that they are in line with the needs of each particular regime of accumulation. There are two aspects of the process. The first operates as *habitus*, as Bourdieu would say, in the minds of individuals with a particular culture and willingness to play by the rules of the game. The other operates through a set of institutions and may vary widely, even within the same basic pattern of social relations. Wage relations, market relations, and gender relations have, for example, changed a lot since they first developed. We call a set of such behavioral patterns and institutions a *mode of régulation*.

With these four notions or theses we can speak of different models of development through history.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Of course, the catch here is that these principles have been attained after intense studies devoted to the particular historical and social conjunctures of the crises in capitalism. Boyer, “Introduction,” 5–6. Here we face the old praxis-theory dialectic, in which one seeks to develop categories of analysis specific to the items being analyzed, knowing full well that one begins with certain theoretical assumptions that will be changed in the process. But note Boyer’s observation concerning the “unjustifiable domination that the two extremes of abstraction and empiricism have enjoyed in economic discussions. The problem is therefore to construct different sorts of concepts, which allow us to move from the highest level of abstraction to propositions that can be tested against research material or social actors’ immediate life experiences.” Boyer, *Regulation School*, 31.

<sup>74</sup> Alain Lipietz, “Rebel Sons: The Regulation School,” an interview with Alain Lipietz, conducted by Jane Jenson, in *French Politics and Society* 5, no. 4 (September 1987): 17–26, <http://lipietz.net/spip.php?article750>; see also Jessop and Sum, *Beyond the Regulation*, 14–15.

Lipietz's final observation is worth noting, for in terms of this general framework, one may develop a *régulation* approach for very different historical periods and thereby economic systems. Let me take each point and see how it might be deployed for ancient economies. To begin with, social relations are primary, or rather, determinative. One cannot speak of exchange, for instance, without describing it in terms of social relations. The polemical edge of this argument, recovering Polanyi,<sup>75</sup> is that even in capitalism, pure market-oriented relations do not exist, let alone in precapitalist economies: "All social relations frame the world in which economic activities are carried on."<sup>76</sup> Or as Boyer and Saillard observe, an individual reduced to pure economic rationality would simply be unable to function at the simplest level; instead, our economic arrangements "arise from the construction and maintenance of a social bond."<sup>77</sup> That is, structural forms and economic practices are inescapably "embedded" in specific institutions and cultural assumptions that change over time and place, and even these institutions and assumptions have their own social dynamics.<sup>78</sup> Thus, in capitalism there is no such thing as an autonomous market, somehow carrying on a life of its own and into which the state "intervenes" from time

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<sup>75</sup> Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson, "The Place of Economies in Societies," in *Trade and Market*, 239–42; Polanyi, *Great Transformation*.

<sup>76</sup> Lipietz, "Regulation School"; see also Jessop and Sum, *Beyond the Regulation*, 6–8; Aglietta, *Capitalist Regulation*, 15, 24. For a study of biblical economics that makes a similar point, see Ronald A. Simkins, "Patronage and the Political Economy of Ancient Israel," *Sem* 87 (1999): 123–44, esp. 123–24. And for ancient Southwest Asia, see Michael Jursa, "Debts and Indebtedness in the Neo-Babylonian Period: Evidence from Institutional Archives," in *Debt and Economic Renewal in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael Hudson and Marc Van de Mierop (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2002), 197–220, esp. 203.

<sup>77</sup> Boyer and Saillard, "A Summary of *Régulation* Theory," in *Régulation Theory*, 36–44, esp. 37; see also Boyer, *Regulation School*, 44.

<sup>78</sup> The connections with institutional economics are worth noting here. Maurice Baslé, "Acknowledged and Unacknowledged Institutional Antecedents of *Régulation* Theory," in Boyer and Saillard, *Régulation Theory*, 21–27; Marie-Claire Villeval, "*Régulation* Theory among Theories of Institutions," in *ibid.*, 291–98.

to time.<sup>79</sup> Even more, in the ancient world we do not have some forms of exchange that are market oriented and some that are “embedded,” as the Polanyi-and-Malinowski-derived debates would have it, for pure market relations do not exist.

The second point is more intriguing. Are all economies concerned with the management of crisis, or does that apply only to capitalism? As far as that mode of production is concerned, the global events since the 2008 crash remind us of capitalism’s constant instability. But what about other economies? With those of ancient Southwest Asia, the periodic collapse and rise of empires is usually considered in political terms, or is perhaps attributed to external forces (marauding hill tribes, salinization of the soil, and so forth). Or the long periods of any clear centralized economic activity are described as “crises.” As I outline later, such crisis was the norm, so much so that it becomes the desired situation for subsistence practices and moments of greatest creativity.

However, we should note that *régulation* theorists distinguish between four different types of crisis: (1) exogenous, (2) endogenous, (3) structural, and (4) ultimate.<sup>80</sup> Exogenous crisis is due to external shocks and forces. Those who see economic equilibrium as the norm regard all crises as exogenous, disrupting the calm stability of the system. By contrast, for *régulation* theorists, exogenous crises, no matter how dire, do not in and of themselves threaten the dominant economic form.<sup>81</sup> Only in the case of a deep structural crisis (type 3) do exogenous threats contribute to

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<sup>79</sup> As I argued earlier, the demarcation of classical economy as a distinct discipline, carving out a zone for itself apart from philosophy and theology, required the production of a distinct field of inquiry called “the economy.”

<sup>80</sup> Boyer and Saillard, “Summary of *Régulation* Theory,” 41–42; Frédéric Lordon, “Formalising Regulationist Dynamics and Crises,” in Boyer and Saillard, *Régulation Theory*; Boyer, *Regulation School*, 48–60.

<sup>81</sup> In his earlier synoptic work, Boyer (*Regulation School*, 52) does entertain the possibility that an intense exogenous shock may indeed lead to a deeper crisis.



the problems. Changes in the climate (rainfall and temperature patterns), foreign invasions, especially by “nomadic” and “tribal” groups, or indeed by the ever-popular Habiru in the Levant and elsewhere—any of these are real perils when a system itself is in deep crisis.

Endogenous or internal crises (type 2) appear in a cyclical form. These are not in themselves threatening, since they are endemic and perform a useful function in managing the extremes of the economic system. For example, in the slave economies of Greece and Rome, periodic shortages of slaves from conquest led to spikes in the cost of slaves, thereby generating the search for other sources, whether through ramping up debt slavery or converting free laborers into slave conditions. Here the ancient Southwest Asian practice of the amelioration of some debts, usually at the beginning of a new potentate’s reign, may be seen as response to a cyclical crisis that needed to be managed in order to sustain the system in question.

The third type is a structural crisis in the regime and mode of *régulation* (and is thereby another form of endogenous crisis). The internal, socially determined tensions that enabled the system to rise to dominance now threaten to tear it apart. No longer can the system recover due to its internal dynamics, so a thorough reconfiguration is required. At this point one may speak of a shift in the regime of *régulation*, most notably at the turn of the first millennium BCE, when a new regime arose to deal with the impossible tensions of what had gone before. Here the focus in analyzing crises is not the search for causes (in modern debates it boils down to uninteresting oppositions between state “interference” or “cronyism” and the dangerous volatility of markets that need to be regulated) but the identification of

shifts that such crises mark.<sup>82</sup> Modern examples include the Great Depression in 1929, the end of Fordism in the early 1970s, and the extended financial and economic crisis that began in 2008. Given the emphases of the *régulation* approach, these crises have been a major concern, whether in terms of the overall nature of economies, the self-undermining nature of specific regimes and modes, or the major ruptures and structural changes of a system.<sup>83</sup> Ancient examples include the transition from the regime dominated by estates to those in which tribute-exchange was the main means of extraction at the beginning of the first millennium, or that of the shift from slaves to *coloni* (indentured farmers) in the Roman Empire.

Ultimately this type of crisis is merely the warm-up for the crisis of modes of production, when the whole economic structure can no longer be sustained, when no new forms can be constructed within the existing confines. Usually drawn out, deeply disruptive, and violent, the crisis of mode of production comprises the most fundamental reconfiguration. Witness the transitions from the sacred economy to the slave-based mode of the Greeks and Romans, thence to feudalism, and then from feudalism to capitalism in Europe and Japan.

In light of these multilayered crises, how is relative stability attained? Given the absence of an “inherent regulatory principle,”<sup>84</sup> how can a system reproduce itself if it is unstable, if the social relations at its core are inherently contradictory and crisis-ridden? How can stability be achieved at all, however fleeting? The two remaining features, regimes and modes, deal with the mechanisms by which relative stability is achieved for a time, especially in response to the underlying norm of crisis.

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<sup>82</sup> Jessop and Sum, *Beyond the Regulation*, 209.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>84</sup> Aglietta, *Capitalist Regulation*, 412.

A regime is simply the term given for this stability, during which the system manages to reproduce itself and crises are managed in a more or less successful manner. The building blocks of a regime are known as institutional forms, which may be defined as codifications of the fundamental social relations that underpin economics (the first point noted above). The specific genius of *régulation* theory may be located in these institutional forms. Not only do many of its practitioners focus precisely on these forms, but the well-known specificity and attention to local variations of *régulation* analysis is found here. The way this works is to give close attention to both the particular shapes and unique combinations (one is usually dominant) of these institutional forms in specific times and places. Within capitalism, the main institutional forms are the wage-labor nexus, money, forms of competition, the state, and relations to the international regimes; each of these take different shapes and operate in different hierarchical structures for any given regime.<sup>85</sup> In the very different situation of the sacred economy, I distinguish a number of institutional forms, such as subsistence survival, kinship-household, patron-client, (e)state, and tribute-exchange. These are the components, the building blocks of the sacred economy, and their relations to one another change under various regimes.

Among those who do work on ancient economies is a tendency to elevate one institutional form into the determining feature of the whole system. It may be kinship-household, which now becomes patrimonialism, or the domestic or household or familial mode of production.<sup>86</sup> It may be subsistence survival, now described as the

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<sup>85</sup> Boyer, *Regulation School*, 38–42; Boyer and Saillard, “Summary of *Régulation* Theory,” 38–40.

<sup>86</sup> Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); idem, “Material Remains and Social Relations: Women’s Culture in Agrarian Household of the Iron Age,” in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina*, ed. William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 425–44; David Jobling, “Feminism and ‘Mode of Production’ in Ancient Israel: Search for a Method,” in *The Bible and the Politics of*

communitarian mode of production.<sup>87</sup> It may be tribute-exchange, which is turned into a tributary mode of production.<sup>88</sup> It may be patronage, which becomes a patron-client mode of production, or simply Weber's patrimonialism.<sup>89</sup> Or it may be state and estate, which is seen as a palatine mode of production.<sup>90</sup> While I draw on the work of those who have made these proposals, since they provide insights into the institutional forms, I also critique them for a false universalism: they take a particular feature, which properly operates in relation to the others, and turn it into a universal explanation of the whole social, political, and economic system.

The means by which a regime's stability is achieved is through the mode of *régulation*, which is a dynamic and "active process of adjusting disequilibriums on a day-to-day basis."<sup>91</sup> In more detail, a mode of *régulation* is "the totality of institutional forms, networks, and norms (explicit or implicit), which together secure the compatibility of typical modes of conduct in the context of an accumulation regime, corresponding as much to the changing balance of social relations as to their more general conflictual properties."<sup>92</sup> The institutional forms that comprise the

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*Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. David Jobling, Peggy L. Day, and Gerald T. Sheppard (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 239–51; Gale A. Yee, "Gender, Class, and the Social-Scientific Study of Genesis 2–3," *Sem* 87 (1999): 177–92; idem, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

<sup>87</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 BCE* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979; repr., Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); idem, *The Politics of Ancient Israel*, LAI (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

<sup>88</sup> Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*; Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation*, Historical Materialism Book Series (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2010), 1–44.

<sup>89</sup> Simkins, "Patronage"; Ronald A. Simkins, "Family in the Political Economy of Monarchic Israel," *Bible and Critical Theory* 1, no. 1 (2004): 1–17; Niels Peter Lemche, "Kings and Clients: On Loyalty between the Ruler and the Ruled in Ancient 'Israel,'" *Sem* 66 (1994): 119–32; idem, "From Patronage Society to Patronage Society," in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States*, ed. Volkmar Fritz and Philip Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 106–20; Schloen, *House*.

<sup>90</sup> Mario Liverani, "Land Tenure and Inheritance in the Ancient Near East: The Interaction between 'Palace' and 'Family' Sectors," in *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. Tarif Khalidi (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1984), 33–44.

<sup>91</sup> Boyer and Saillard, "Summary of *Régulation* Theory," 41.

<sup>92</sup> Alain Lipietz, "Accumulation, Crises, and Ways Out: Some Methodological Reflections on the Concept of 'Regulation,'" *IJPE* 18, no. 2 (1988): 10–43, esp. 30. Or as Jessop and Sum define it, "A mode of regulation is an emergent ensemble of norms, institutions, organizational forms, social networks and patterns of conduct that can temporarily stabilize an accumulation regime despite the

building blocks of a regime now become, in distinct combinations, mediators between regime and mode. Thus the specific investigations into institutional norms (see above) combine with and provide the context for the more intangible cultural dimension.<sup>93</sup> All of this takes place in three domains: those of (1) constraint (laws and rules) and compromises;<sup>94</sup> (2) patterns of behavior and assumptions; and (3) the methods by which these are socially reinforced and challenged.<sup>95</sup> At each level, religious and cultural beliefs and practices play crucial roles. Or, in more conventional Marxist terminology, this is the zone of culture and ideology.<sup>96</sup>

Five final points. First, all of the above is an effort to describe the structures of a particular mode of production, which is simultaneously the most basic and abstract category. The various combinations of regimes and modes of *régulation* take place within this larger framework, as do the spirals of crises, which at some point reach the ultimate crisis of the mode of production itself. Second, the combination of regime

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conflictual and antagonistic character.” Jessop and Sum, *Beyond the Regulation*, 42; see also Boyer, *Regulation School*, 42–45; Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles*, 14–15, 32–34.

<sup>93</sup> Here Althusser’s influence is strongest on *régulation* theory, especially the “ideological state apparatuses,” sites of simultaneous efforts at ideological control and struggle. They include religion, education, family, law, politics, trade unions, communications, and culture. Alongside but distinct are the “repressive state apparatuses,” such as the army, police, courts, prisons, and government. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127–86; idem, *Sur la Reproduction* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 269–314.

<sup>94</sup> Christine André defines such “institutionalised compromise” as resulting “from situations of tension and conflict between socioeconomic groups over a long period, at the conclusion of which a form of organisation is established, creating rules, rights and obligations for those involved. Institutionalised compromises act as frameworks in relation to which the population and groups involved adapt their behaviour and strategies; their founding principles remain unchanged over the long term.” Christine André, “The Welfare State and Institutional Compromises: From Origins to Contemporary Crisis,” in Boyer and Saillard, *Régulation Theory*, 95.

<sup>95</sup> Boyer, *Regulation School*, 44–45.

<sup>96</sup> To take a current example: a thoroughly internalized and constantly reinforced assumption within capitalism is that greater skills attract a higher wage. Indeed, the best firm or institution attempts to offer a higher pay packet than its competitors in order to attract the best talent. Conversely, a lower-paid employee is not in the same league, although it does not stop such a person from hoping, dreaming, working for at least a pay raise, if not a job with a higher wage. This assumption is necessary, among many others, for the current regime to maintain itself for a time. In response, a simple question may be asked: since when is greed the criterion for the best candidate? Thus a fundamental assumption, part of the wider mode of *régulation*, begins to show its true colors as a somewhat desperate measure to shore up a crisis-ridden regime.

and mode of *régulation* is a chance occurrence. Lipietz in particular emphasizes that there is no necessary relation between one regime and one mode, that the possibility that they do work together to achieve provisional stability is by chance rather than some outworking of a greater, mechanical logic.<sup>97</sup> Third, this combination is crucial for the elusive stability in question. As Jessop and Sum describe this double act, it may be seen, in terms of a gloss on Gramsci's *lo stato integrale*, as *l'economia integrale* (the integral economy, or economy in its inclusive sense), for which the formula "regime + mode of *régulation*" applies.<sup>98</sup> Fourth, the catch with such regimes and modes of *régulation* is that they do not seek merely to provide some stability to constant disequilibria, which haunt the system in place and threaten to tear it apart. Here *régulation* theory is deeply dialectical, for it turns out that the modes and regimes deployed actually generate their own instability, that economic fluctuations, as Boyer puts it, "depend upon the reigning mode of regulation in each historical era."<sup>99</sup> The cure is also a cause of further ailment. Fifth, this approach has little time for the simplistic opposition of materialist or idealist approaches that one encounters from time to time.<sup>100</sup> It is not a case of reductionism to either material causes or idealist causes, for a Marxist-inspired approach like that of *régulation* theory expands analysis to include both elements in complex dialectical interaction.

This, in brief, is the main theory that informs the analysis that follows. It provides not so much a crude template into which one then fit the bits and pieces, whether they wish so to be fitted or not, but rather a flexible theoretical framework

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<sup>97</sup> Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles*, 14–15.

<sup>98</sup> Jessop and Sum, *Beyond the Regulation*, 43.

<sup>99</sup> Boyer, *Regulation School*, 69.

<sup>100</sup> Robert McCormick Adams, "Common Concerns but Different Standpoints: A Commentary," in Larsen, *Power and Propaganda*, 393–404; Herrmann, "Empire in the House," 313–18.

within which I work.<sup>101</sup> In that light, I draw upon insights from world-systems theory, especially its focus on agriculture and the crucial distinction between exchange in preciosities and bulk; on Polanyi's work, in terms of the inescapably embedded nature of any economic relations;<sup>102</sup> and of course on Soviet-era Russian scholarship, especially concerning the nature of estates in relation to the village communes of subsistence survival. Within such a total picture, unexpected conjunctions and insights emerge.

### **CONCERNING ANACHRONISM**

It is gross ethnocentrism to assume that the monk, the feudal lord, the Inca priest-king, the commissar, and the Trobriand islander are directed in their material lives to abide by the same market rules that drive the London stockbroker and the Iowa wheat farmer.

—George Dalton<sup>103</sup>

One of the blind spots of the popular neoclassical economic theory concerns the matter of anachronism, a problem particularly germane as well to biblical critics. To be sure, one finds this objection leveled more often at Marxist economic theory, which is charged with imposing foreign models on the Bible and its economic context. This objection takes two forms. One is to suggest that the data are simply insufficient for any sustained economic model or reconstruction. The answer is simple: we all operate with certain models, whether examined or unexamined, with which we order and arrange the available evidence. More often than not, such a heuristic framework remains unsaid, the untranscendable horizon that we cannot

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<sup>101</sup> Indeed, *régulation* theory's flexibility is what has drawn others to the same approach. Jessop and Sum, *Beyond the Regulation*, 106.

<sup>102</sup> Despite the persistence, in some quarters, of Polanyi's distinctions between reciprocity, redistribution, and market in studies of ancient Southwest Asia, I am thankful that I am not engaged in Greco-Roman economics, since there the ghost of Finley lies heavily on the minds of the living. Moses Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973; updated ed., 1999); Joseph Gilbert Manning and Ian Morris, eds., *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>103</sup> Dalton, "Introduction," xxviii. See also Danilova, "Precapitalist Societies," 274.

challenge without bringing the whole house down. I prefer to question that framework, to render said what is unsaid, and to be explicit about the framework that I use, indeed to undermine the house.

The second form of the objection is that the method I or any other scholar deploys is anachronistic. One frequently encounters this objection in the struggles between historical-critical approaches to the Bible and what are variously called “newer literary” approaches or even (with a profound misunderstanding of the term) “postmodern” approaches, which include a disparate collection running all the way from Marxist methods to postcolonial or queer analysis. The objection from traditional scholars is that “newer” methods (although they now date from the 1970s) impose modern categories on an ancient text and are therefore invalid. The assumption is that historical-critical or archaeological or even social-scientific methods are not anachronistic, that they are approaches appropriate to the biblical texts, their histories, and their contexts.

This assumption relies on a curious blind spot, for the supposedly historically sensitive methods championed by those who make the charge of anachronism are equally anachronistic. In short, all the methods we use have an inbuilt or structural anachronism that is produced by our very different social, economic, and ideological condition. This structural anachronism occurs in the very act of studying the past in the various ways we study, for that act and our assumptions about a “past” that must be studied in certain ways assume notions about the past that are produced by our own condition. However, we may take this a step further and argue that precisely those approaches assumed to be historically sensitive to these ancient texts or economic conditions are the most anachronistic of all, since their practitioners do not see the structural anachronism at work in the methods they champion.



Despite significant overlaps, the study of ancient economics has a different set of contours. On the one hand, we find more extensive uses of categories from neoclassical economics, yet with little if any sense of strangeness of such acts. It is not difficult to encounter terms such as “profit centers,” “business corporations,” “privatization,” “trade balance,” “free market,” and “international market economy.”<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, we find debates focused around certain key categories constructed specifically for studying ancient economies, although not without some leakage from the neoclassical terminology with which we are so familiar. I think here of Polanyi’s distinctions (mentioned earlier) between formal and substantivist approaches, or between reciprocal, redistributionist, and market forms of exchange. Here we find both an extraordinary blind spot as to the anachronism of applying economic terms of analysis from capitalism to the ancient world, plus an unarticulated sense that such anachronism should be avoided by developing different sets of categories for studying economies that are vastly different from ours. Thus the same point may be made here concerning anachronism, for all approaches are caught in the net of anachronism.

How do we escape the net? The best way to do so is to build an awareness of that anachronism into the theory one is using. The theory proposed should, in a scale of increasing intensity, at all times be *aware* that it is engaged in an anachronistic task, that such anachronism is a *necessary* feature of any analysis of ancient societies, and that one *structures* the theory in order to include such anachronism in its very workings. The first two items (awareness and necessity) may be achieved easily enough, but the question of structure is a little more challenging.

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<sup>104</sup> See Excursus 3.

I propose that we approach it in the following manner: the theory in question should include a *narrative of difference*. Both terms are vital. By *narrative* I mean an account of the vast distance traveled in time between the economy we are investigating and the one from which we undertake such investigation. That ever-present narrative, which is always contested, rewritten, and contested again, means we have perpetually before us the distance from those ancient economies and societies. By *difference* I mean precisely that: the effect of the narrative is that it produces a profound sense of the difference between our own social formation and that of the economies (or societies, cultures, texts, and so on) we seek to study. Through that persistent difference the issue of anachronism is inescapably foregrounded. Yet that narrative of difference is more dialectically complex than it at first seems, for we may, hypothetically, find elements that seem exceedingly familiar—money, agricultural production, exchange, banking, and taxation—but they are structured in unfamiliar ways: their relationships to one another, the patterns of dominance and subordination, and their determining forms of social relations. At this point, the narrative of difference has its most difficult task.

The approaches that embody such narratives of difference within their workings are mostly Marxist-inspired. A good example is a work in a closely related area, Geoffrey E. M. de Ste. Croix's *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*,<sup>105</sup> which is significant for the wholesale deployment of Marxist class theory in order to make sense of the social and economic tensions in the period of the “Greek world,” from c. 700 BCE to 750 CE.. Ste. Croix's value is that the theory upon which he bases his work includes precisely the structural presence of distance, difference,

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<sup>105</sup> Geoffrey E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquest* (London: Duckworth, 1981).

and anachronism that I seek. How so? Marxist theory makes use of a continually contested and reformulated narrative of modes of production, a narrative that emphasizes the vast distances and continuities between the different economic structures throughout history. By that means, a theoretical approach that was first developed in order to analyze the workings of capitalism is able to be aware of its own anachronisms as it is applied to ancient and very noncapitalist social formations. The secret is that through its account of the beginnings and then dominance of capitalism, it shows the way that capitalism differs from all that has gone before it.

As for *régulation* theory, it too is a Marxist-inspired approach that includes within its structure a narrative of difference. For the *régulation* theorists, each mode of production, if not each regime of *régulation*, is qualitatively different from the others, whether those that have existed before or that exist side by side. Thus the distinct culture and set of institutions and relations established within a mode of production attempt to deal with a set of problems in a way that marks it off from others. Now it becomes interesting and thoroughly dialectical, for it is precisely through such qualitative changes that the system is reproduced. Thus, for Aglietta, the study of *régulation* “is the study of the transformation of social relations as it creates new forms that are both economic and non-economic, that are organized in structures and themselves reproduce a determinant structure, the mode of production.”<sup>106</sup> In terms of ancient Southwest Asia, this is to my mind an extremely useful principle for studying the sheer variety of economic materials in the context of their extraordinary continuity.

## ***RESPONSIVE METAPHORIZATION***

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<sup>106</sup> Aglietta, *Capitalist Regulation*, 16.

Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.

—Louis Althusser<sup>107</sup>

A final theoretical contribution comes from critical theory. Beginning first with the Frankfurt school, “critical theory” operated at the intersections between Marxism, philosophy, empirical social sciences, psychoanalysis, and what would much later be called ecocriticism. Since then, critical theory has come to embrace a range of approaches, moving all the way from narrative theory to queer studies. It is within this context that the richness of *régulation* theory may be located, drawing as it does upon the work of Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, the Annales school, psychoanalysis, and engaging with a host of disciplinary crosscurrents. Indeed, it is more common for European and even Asian economic theorists to form teams comprising specialists in, for example, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and religion—rather than restrict analysis to professional economists. I do not mean to espouse the oft-repeated mantra of “interdisciplinary” approaches, for this is to put the cart before the horse, assuming that disciplines are entities unto themselves that then seek partners through mating agencies. Instead, I mean that each discipline is actually a complex intersection of a multitude of disciplinary paths, so much that it becomes impossible to demarcate one discipline entirely from another (although that does not prevent intellectuals from doing so in the interminable and often petty turf wars). At a deeper level, this is a reflection of the fact that we cannot simply quarantine certain areas—economics, society, religion, and so on—and then declare them discrete objects of study.<sup>108</sup> They have always been part of a larger, intermingled whole.

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<sup>107</sup> Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 162.

<sup>108</sup> Here too we need to resist the mythic narrative whereby once upon a time everything was an inchoate mash, but that through a long and slow process the various disciplines defined themselves and stood on their own, usually by distinguishing themselves from theology. The metaphors vary—maturity from the womb, a formless and void creation that the gods then defined and distinguished—

The most significant presence of critical theory in my study relates to how texts are read in relation to socioeconomic life. As with many scholars, I take the position that the texts are as vital as the variegated archaeological data, indeed that the texts themselves may be seen as “archaeological,” although more in a Foucauldian sense. But how are the texts relevant? Within biblical criticism, two insufficient positions contest the field: texts reflect their context in a relatively unproblematic fashion, or they express the political and religious agenda of their unknown authors. As for the first approach in its fetching naivety, little has changed for over a century: since biblical texts reflect their contexts, they provide more or less reliable evidence of that context so that one may read evidence directly from them.<sup>109</sup> Proof-texting is pervasive with such an approach, now for historical and economic reasons rather than theological ones. The second and increasingly common approach argues that biblical texts are politico-religious tracts produced to assert different political positions—in short, pious propaganda. Produced much later than the events they purport to describe, the texts tend to be historically unreliable since they are primarily ideological, although they may give indirect insights into the later contexts in which they were written.

By contrast, my approach is to draw upon a wealth of literary criticism and read texts as complex, contradictory, and unexpected responses to their contexts. This approach relies upon the Marxist notion of the “relatively autonomous” character of

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but the situation is less according to this myth and more that the complex and overlapping web has always been with us.

<sup>109</sup> This curse is particularly prevalent among archaeologists, of whom only a sample can be given. For instance, William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001); John Day, ed., *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Susan Ackerman, “Household Religion, Family Religion, and Women’s Religion in Ancient Israel,” in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity: Contextual and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 127–58; Lawrence E. Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1–35.

the cultural-ideological instance with respect to the economic.<sup>110</sup> As Althusser famously put it in his discussion of overdetermination, the economy may be the determinant of all others, as some elements of Marxism would have it, but only “*in the last instance.*” That is, the various domains of life—means of production, relations of production, culture, ideology, religion, and so on—are sufficiently autonomous so that they are not dependent upon the economic in every instance, that they are not predetermined by the economic. One should not rush in too quickly with an economic explanation. But then Althusser goes on:

In History, these instances, the superstructures, etc.—are never seen to step respectfully aside when their work is done or, when the Time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the “last instance” never comes.<sup>111</sup>

This text has generated almost endless debate; yet the point Althusser is making here is not that the various domains are eternally autonomous, or indeed that one may offer a pure causal economic analysis of any item. Instead, the “lonely hour” never comes. That is, one can never completely separate all of the complex elements of a mode of production from one another. To some extent they may be autonomous, but never entirely autonomous, for they are part of a much larger whole, and hence semiautonomous.

In order to lay out what this means for literary interpretation, let me move through another crucial element: metaphorization. By this I mean the production of metaphorical relations, often contradictory, to the social and economic situation in which texts are produced. The basis of metaphorization is straightforward: speaking,

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<sup>110</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 260–78; idem, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991); Roland Boer, *Jameson and Jeroboam* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1996).

<sup>111</sup> Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1977), 113.

thinking, and writing are saturated with metaphors of the dominant socioeconomic systems. Indeed, metaphORIZATION is a crucial signal of such dominance. Under capitalism, for example, human relations are often cast in terms of economic relations and the market, such as competition, survival of the fittest, individual entrepreneurship—in short, a metaphORIZATION of the market. In the sacred economy of the Bible, by contrast, we find a different set of metaphors. Functioning as complex metaphors of the sacred economy are images of ideal gardens, fertility, merchant kings, bands of a patron's thugs, Sabbaths, and kinship.

How is this different from texts “reflecting” their contexts, albeit with a little more sophistication? It seems like perfect common sense. The possible range of our imagination is limited by the socioeconomic context in which we live, along with the inherited metaphors that have found their place in this new context. Here another dimension of my approach comes into play, for one always operates with a healthy dose of ideological suspicion (deployed with devastating brilliance by the Frankfurt school).<sup>112</sup> That suspicion leads one to suspect that this process of metaphORIZATION is never direct, so that it becomes difficult indeed to read, directly from texts, images of the socioeconomic situation. And it ensures that one is always suspicious of arguments that texts express the conscious politico-religious agenda of their authors. Here subconscious and unnoticed features play a far larger role, as do structural and linguistic elements in the very way written language is constructed. Most of the time, they know not what they do.

All of that brings me to the final aspect of this approach to texts. Textual responses to their contexts are often unexpected, precisely because they are

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<sup>112</sup> See also Douglas A. Knight, *Law, Power, and Justice in Ancient Israel*, LAI (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 2.

semiautonomous. They may metaphorize their context, but they do so in unanticipated and indirect ways. For instance, a story of kinship or tribal conflict does not necessarily mean a text comes from a tribal situation. The text's tribal world may be an imaginary creation in a different context, perhaps to provide an alternate model of human relations or distribution of resources. Similarly, the detailed images of idyllic gardens, from Genesis to the Song of Songs, may seem to provide an alternative picture from life as it might be, a world in which exploitation, debt, and violence are absent. But they may, as I will argue, express the idealized image of palatine estates, in which food is apparently produced without labor, thereby effacing the actual role of labor in those estates. More significantly, contradictions embodied in narratives of disobedience and rebellion, or in structural breaks, as in the story of Cain and Abel, may voice not so much arguments over different social formations as impossible contradictions at a socioeconomic level. This is particularly the case with myth and folktale, as Ernst Bloch shows so well.<sup>113</sup> Here the reactionary narratives of disobedience and "sin" actually preserve the possibilities of popular rebellion.

That last point is a central feature of my analysis, which may be described as an imaginary resolution of a real contradiction. The idea derives from Lévi-Strauss, although he formulated it through the inspiration of Marx.<sup>114</sup> It was subsequently framed in Althusserian language and mediated by Fredric Jameson.<sup>115</sup> Alongside Marx, this mode of textual interpretation draws upon the psychoanalytic insight that subconscious dimensions of human existence are far more powerful than the

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<sup>113</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); idem, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, trans. J. T. Swann (London: Verso Books, 2009).

<sup>114</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (London: Pan Books, 1989), 229–56.

<sup>115</sup> Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 127–86; idem, *Sur la reproduction*, 269–314; Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 77–80; Boer, *Jameson and Jeroboam*.



conscious; these subconscious dimensions are as much if not more political and economic than restricted to the individual psyche. The key to the theory is that problematic and irresolvable socioeconomic tensions show up in the cultural products of a society, whether art, literature, festivals, and in our day, film, television, internet, and so on. These cultural products set out to resolve the tensions in many possible fashions. Some may offer an alternative reality (as we find in utopian works, or indeed in any artistic creation that presents such a world); others may present a story that violently breaks through the tensions (as in many works that solve the story's problems through a violent conflagration at the end); others may do so through the production of myth, where the tensions and conflicts may be aired and a resolution sought (myths characteristically tell stories of rebellion and its overcoming); and others may do so through formal innovation (new genres in the mixture of old ones, new styles of painting, and so on).

The famous example of such a process comes from Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques*, where he offers an innovative reading of facial art by some indigenous tribes in South America. In particular, he was intrigued by the facial decorations of the Caduveo tribe. Inexplicably these decorations were determined by an axis at an oblique angle to the face. Rather than use the natural lines of nose, mouth, and eyes, as so many of the tribes did, the Caduveo patterns followed another axis at an angle to these natural lines. The result was a design that seemed skewed, for the two axes competed with one another. The reason: Lévi-Strauss suggested that unlike the neighboring Guana and Bororo, who had the social checks and balances of moieties to mitigate their caste system, the Caduveo had no such social solution. In this fraught social situation, where a social contradiction remained in delicate tension, the Caduveo unwittingly used their facial decorations in an effort to ameliorate and

repress the social tensions between social groups within the tribe. In other words, their art was an effort at resolving these tensions at the level of culture, through the imaginary work of art. The problem is that in the very effort to deal with such a tension, the art shows up the tension at a formal level. That is, the attempted resolution at an ideological and cultural level ultimately does not work, for what it does formally is reproduce those contradictions.

By now this is a common example, but it may give the false impression that a singular socioeconomic tension draws a singular imaginary response. Obviously such tensions are multiple, generating complex and overlapping solutions. Another example shows how multifarious and unexpected such solutions may be. It comes from the Tiv people in Africa, during the profound transitions of the last couple of centuries.<sup>116</sup> The Tiv were a deeply egalitarian society, or at least they were highly suspicious of anyone becoming too powerful and had various mechanisms designed to prevent it. Patriarchs may lord it over a large compound, with its cattle, wives, sons and daughters, dependents, and sundry hangers-on, but this was restricted to their own compound. No one was to extend that power, to become a chieftain and thereby destroy the pattern of households across the landscape, beyond which was no formal political organization. How exactly did they control such tendencies? Anyone who became a patriarch, with cattle, wives, masculine prestige goods, and children, was already suspected of having a “strong heart,” the charisma and enterprise that could “turn chickens into cows.” But a strong heart was also produced by a physical substance known as *tsav*, and the only way to acquire that substance was to eat human

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<sup>116</sup> Paul Bohannan, “Some Principles of Exchange and Investment among the Tiv,” *AmAn* 57, no. 1 (1955): 60–67; idem, “The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy,” *JEH* 19, no. 4 (1959): 491–503; idem, *Justice and Judgment among the Tiv* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957); Paul Bohannan and Laura Bohannan, *Tiv Economy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968); Graeber, *Debt*, 146–55.

flesh. It was not so much that people did eat each other (it disgusted them), but that the suspicion was rife. A prominent man had probably eaten someone, grown *tsav*, and thereby gained extraordinary powers, such as being able to fly, impervious to weapons, able to send out their souls at night to kill further victims. It was more than likely that they had been introduced to human flesh by a society of witches, *mbatsav*, which was always seeking to trick new members into joining the society by slipping some human flesh into everyday food (a bowl of stew, for instance).

So here is an initial contradiction: the egalitarian drive (at least among men) fosters constant suspicion of those who become powerful, imagining a secret society that makes them so. The contradiction in this elaborate suspicion is that the very structure of the imagined world creates the danger that it seeks to ameliorate. But now the situation gains another level of contradiction, for the Tiv also defended themselves fiercely against the slave traders,<sup>117</sup> who operated according to the elaborate societies imagined among the Tiv for their strong men. Made up of merchants, the secret societies, such as the Aro Confederacy (calling themselves “Children of God”) and the Ekpe, brought a brutal regime of “order” to a disrupted world, and simultaneously were prime mechanisms for the slave trade. Operating with multiple levels of initiation, elaborate ceremonies, and ever higher costs, they easily created tribal bankruptcies, which would result in whole clans being shipped off to slavery as a result. Yet the only way to become influential, to gain prestige among one’s peers, was to join such a society. At an economic level, the contradiction is that the very mechanism of slavery within this part of Africa relied upon the notion of honor and distinction that membership of such a society brought. That is, one could become a

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<sup>117</sup> The Tiv had migrated into an extraordinarily inaccessible piece of country in the Benue River valley in 1750, just as Nigeria was being destroyed by the rampant slave trade. The Tiv ferociously defended themselves against the neighboring peoples, but above all against the slave traders.

big man only through an organization that ripped up the fabric of social and economic life. As for the Tiv, we can see that the imagined world of witches and flesh-eating patriarchs was not only a mechanism for keeping a lid on the ambitions of the powerful, but also an imaginary resolution of the very real contradictions of the slave trade in African societies. The contradictions within that imagined world, which creates the very thing it attempts to block, are formal manifestations of the real social and economic contradictions of slavery, the system of honor that was actually destroying African society.

I hope these examples have shown to some extent the delicate and unexpected nature of what I call responsive metaphorization and thereby revealed the mechanisms of the imaginary resolution of real contradictions. It would, of course, be appropriate at this point to give a biblical example, such as David the patron, the palatine estate of Gen 1–3, the desire to overcome marginality in the books of Samuel and Kings, or the bestiality laws as indicators of the extent of the clan. Since I discuss these and others at various points in the rest of the book, I leave them until their more natural setting.<sup>118</sup>

## ***CONCLUSION***

The abstraction of *matter*, of a *law* of nature, the abstraction of *value*, etc., in short *all* scientific (correct, serious, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly and *completely*. From living perception to abstract thought, *and from this to practice*—such is the dialectical path of cognition of *truth*, of cognition of objective reality.

—Vladimir I. Lenin<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Although I provide instances of such readings throughout, it is not possible to enter into detailed and extended exegetical work in this study since it sets out to provide an overall framework. Indeed, I have had to cut some longer sections of biblical interpretation that rendered the book imponderably long. These are the subject of later studies that will in more detail indicate the workings of such an approach to texts.

<sup>119</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, “Philosophical Notebooks,” in *Collected Works* (1914–16; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), 38:171.

By now the key items of my theoretical framework should be clear: the institutional forms, the regime and modes of *régulation*, the unique combinations that arise from attempts to achieve some stability in the face of constant crisis—all these are part of the rich idea of mode of production as that has been reformulated by *régulation* theory. Add to this the contributions and deeper methodological assumptions of Soviet scholarship on ancient Southwest Asia, as well as the need to include a narrative of difference and be aware of the unexpected patterns of responsive metaphorization in the cultural products of an era, and we have what I hope is a relatively sophisticated and theoretically aware approach to the sacred economy.

A final word on the limits of what I undertake here. I do not fool myself by imagining that this framework approximates reality more or less, or indeed that the task of language is to describe reality, for in that respect we always fail. The task of reconstruction is thereby not to seek some humdrum correspondence between theoretical model and empirical facts.<sup>120</sup> If we follow that tired agenda, then we fall into the trap of assuming that the greater the amount of data, the closer we are able to creep toward a reality that exists out there.<sup>121</sup> Reconstructions with a wealth of data are notorious for the wide variety of contested interpretations: the role of Stalin, for instance, in the victory of World War II is a case in point. Rather, in a more Hegelian-Leninist fashion, the task of reconstruction is to undergo the full process of abstraction, drawing away from a postulated world “out there.” Indeed, the very terms

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<sup>120</sup> Liverani, *Prestige and Interest*, 22.

<sup>121</sup> Conversely, the less and more scattered the data are, the less able are we to approach that postulated reality. David C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan: Agricultural Life in the Early Highlands* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), 21–22; Cornelia Wunsch, “Debt, Interest, Pledge and Forfeiture in the Neo-Babylonian and Early Achaemenid Period: The Evidence from Private Archives,” in Hudson and Van de Mieroop, *Debt and Economic Renewal*, 221–56, esp. 223; Peter Bedford, “The Persian Near East,” in *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Walter Scheidel, Ian Morris, and Richard Saller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 302–29.

used in order to make such a move are inescapably abstract: labor, agriculture, administration, subsistence survival, estates, tribute, class, economy, and so on. To complete the dialectical move, it is precisely the most abstract—as Georg Lukács pointed out—that is able to become concrete at a deeper level. Only then can the proper task of reconstruction begin. Of course, the devil is in the details, to which the rest of my study is devoted.

## Chapter 2

### ***Of Bread, Beer, and Four-Legged Friends***

Le premier point est que la communauté de village existe encore comme élément essentiel d'une structure économique (et politique).

—Mario Liverani<sup>1</sup>

Agriculture and allocation: these are inseparable for understanding the sacred economy. Or at least they comprise one major side of that economy, the other being extraction, which I analyze in later chapters. Arguably, the allocatory dimension is the greater of the two, especially in the economically marginal zone of the southern Levant. As I have emphasized earlier, that status has profound implications for the nature of local economic practices. It meant that the ever-present threat of economic crisis was more obvious, that human beings engaged in more basic efforts to deal with that situation, and that they had to negotiate and seek to avoid the disruptive incursions of great powers from all points of the compass. Given the prevalence of these factors in the southern Levant, this and the following chapter focus specifically on that region. When I come to the extractive institutional forms, the analysis necessarily moves out into the wider context of ancient Southwest Asia.

The outcome of this situation in the southern Levant was a consistent pattern of specific strategies for ensuring survival. Those strategies take the shape of institutional forms of allocation. I distinguish between three such forms: subsistence survival, kinship-household, and patron-client. Of these, subsistence survival is the basis, and for that reason I deal with it extensively in this chapter. However, such an institutional form cannot operate without the other forms, and so I analyze them in the

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Liverani, "Communautés de village et palais royal dans la Syrie du II<sup>e</sup> millénaire," *JESHO*, no. 18 (1975): 146–64, esp. 163–64.

following chapter. Together, they may be seen as some of the building blocks of the regimes and modes of *régulation* of the sacred economy.

The core of economic activity in the ancient Levant, and indeed ancient Southwest Asia, was agriculture, both the growing of crops and animal husbandry. Economics is not only socially determined but also environmentally embedded. Here we recall Marx's point that economic activity involves a profound interaction with nature. But what was the primary form of that agriculture? On the answer to this question much turns. Did those farmers grow more of one type of crop, nurture more of one type of animal, for its meat, milk, or wool, for the sake of stockpiling, exchange, and profit? Or did they operate in terms of subsistence survival? Did they ensure herd and crop security and survival over the long term, insofar as they were able, carefully creating small surpluses for lean years, famine, disease, or invasion? Subsistence survival is closer to the truth.<sup>2</sup> By subsistence survival, I mean not merely the day-to-day activities needed to ensure a minimal level of subsistence, but also carefully honed, risk-reducing, and creative forward-looking strategies that sought to ensure long-term survival.<sup>3</sup> As Sahlins succinctly observes, "There are after all two

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<sup>2</sup> Igor M. Diakonoff, "The Commune in the Ancient East as Treated in the Works of Soviet Researchers," in *Introduction to Soviet Ethnography*, ed. Stephen P. Dunn and Ethel Dunn (Berkeley, CA: Highgate Road Social Science Research Station, 1974), 2:519–48, esp. 523; Carlo Zaccagnini, "Asiatic Mode of Production and Ancient Near East: Notes Toward a Discussion," in *Production and Consumption in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Carlo Zaccagnini (Budapest: University of Budapest, 1989), 1–126, esp. 50–51.

<sup>3</sup> Clifton R. Wharton Jr., "Risk, Uncertainty, and the Subsistence Farmer: Technological Innovation and the Resistance to Change in the Context of Survival," in *Studies in Economic Anthropology*, ed. George Dalton (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1971), 7:152–80; Carl G. Widstrand, "The Rationale of Nomad Economy," *Ambio* 4 (1975): 146–53, esp. 149; Hopkins, "Bare Bones," 133; Grabbe, *Jews and Judaism*, 206; Aharon Sasson, *Animal Husbandry in Ancient Israel: A Zooarchaeological Perspective on Livestock Exploitation, Herd Management and Economic Strategies* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2010), 10; Knight, *Law, Power*, 120–21, 124–25.



roads to satisfaction, to reducing the gap between means and ends: producing much or desiring little.”<sup>4</sup> Subsistence designed for survival opts to desire little.

However, before I engage in some detailed description of the mechanisms of subsistence survival, I offer a few observations on the role of religion or the sacred in that ubiquitous institutional form. Immediately we face a problem, for the terminology of the “sacred” or “religion” assumes an opposite, whether “profane” or “secular.” It goes without saying that this is a perpetual problem of the terminology we use, for it brings with it a host of assumptions that are foreign to the ancient world. Similar difficulties face the use of “official” and “popular” religion, for that distinction falls under the spell of the dominant perspective of the biblical texts. On behalf of the aspiring potentate and his ruling-class henchmen, “official” means their religion, one that everyone is supposed to follow. It bears with it the sense of orthodox, while “popular” religion invokes the wayward superstitions of the ignorant rural population. If we need to keep using such terminology for religion, the sacred, or even the popular, then I suggest that it should be understood as the ever-present practice of everyday life, carried out by about 90 percent of the population. What that means is the burden of the following.<sup>5</sup>

How is one to locate such a practice, especially when the evidence that remains pertains largely to ruling-class ideas and practices? As mentioned in the

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<sup>4</sup> Marshall Sahlins, “Tribal Economics,” in *Economic Development and Social Change: The Modernization of Village Communities*, ed. George Dalton (New York: Natural History Press, 1971), 43–61, esp. 49.

<sup>5</sup> I do not pretend to offer a full picture of this practice of everyday life, for at least two reasons. First, others have extensively and exhaustively offered studies of ancient Israelite religions. Second, my interest pertains specifically to the institutional form of subsistence survival. For recent and comprehensive studies, see, among others, Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, trans. John Bowden, 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994); Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, LAI (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000); Beth Alpert Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001).

previous chapter, I take my cue from Ernst Bloch's dialectical interpretation of myth and ideology, in which the practices and beliefs condemned in official, often reactionary literature may signal the presence of traditions of resistance, popular unrest, and expressions of alternative approaches characteristic of common people.<sup>6</sup> Those acts may be condemned, characterized as rebellion against God and the powers that be, but in that very condemnation those expressions are preserved. Douglas Knight also undertakes a Bloch-like analysis, pointing out that the denunciations of various types of religious observance in the Hebrew Bible may contain some traces of the religious practice of everyday life. I mean not a deep and orthodox piety among the rural population, but the veneration of a multitude of gods apart from Yahweh (for instance, the queen of heaven, Baal, and many other local deities) and the keeping of figurines (depicted as "idols"); partaking and even enacting rituals and sacrifices in places different from the Jerusalem temple (at clan centers, "high places," and so on); sheer disregard of "purity" laws; fertility gods and their rites (for soil, animals, and women: Judg 2:11–13; 6:25–28; Jer 7:18; 44:15–19, 25); the use of amulets and charms; the ubiquity of taboos; constant efforts to ward off the effects of evil spirits; attention to omens, everyday divination, the inescapable role of mediums, and "witchcraft."<sup>7</sup>

Archaeological and textual references from other cultures in ancient Southwest Asia suggest that these practices were prevalent among the rural population of the Levant as well. To give a couple of examples, among the Mesopotamians and Hittites omens and their divination formed a crucial component,

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<sup>6</sup> Bloch, *Principle of Hope*; idem, *Atheism in Christianity*.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, *Religion of Ancient Israel*, 57–76; Knight, *Law, Power*; Grabbe, *Jews and Judaism*, 254–56. It may be possible to trace some elements of these "superstitious" practices also in Lev 11–15, 19, 21–22; Num 19; Deut 21–25, 28, as well as in the miraculous stories of the never-ending oil and the widow's son raised to life (1 Kgs 17:8–24), and the floating axhead (2 Kgs 6:1–7).

traces of which may be found in the texts that have been preserved. All the phenomena of nature, including animals and insects (esp. pests), would be read for omens: specific behavior, forms of (unusual) motion, sounds made, reactions to human beings—these and more were seen as omens to be interpreted. So we find the behavior of lizards, mongoose, mice, ants, moths, grasshoppers, caterpillars, crickets, and wood-eating insects. Larger wild animals, such as the lion, wolf, gazelle, and fox also appear, as do domesticated animals. The difference between the wild and the domestic was that the former may have constituted an omen on sighting, but the latter were subject to myriad observations concerning appearance and behavior.<sup>8</sup> As a second example, all manner of approaches were used for protection from negative forces, such as demons and sorcery that would affect crops or animal health, thereby threatening the fine line between survival and hardship. The most common form was the amulet, deeply influenced by Egyptian styles and practices: scarabs, seals, anthropomorphic figures, objects like the Horus-eye, moon, or Djed pillar, and animal figurines. The Hebrew terms were *ḥōtām* (seal), *lēḥāšîm* (conjuring amulets, from Isa 3:20), *śahārōnîm* and *šēbîsîm* (little moons and little suns; see Isa 3:18). Those with special powers, notably women, made amulets and charms (Ezek 13:17–23) or formulated simple incantations against enemies or evil forces.<sup>9</sup> These women are in no uncertain terms denounced by the “official” literature, as mediums engaged in sorcery, but in that condemnation their vague presence may be ascertained (Deut 18:10–11; Lev 19:26, 31; 20:6–7, 27; see also 1 Sam 28:7–24).

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<sup>8</sup> Benjamin R. Foster, “Animals in Mesopotamian Literature,” in *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Billie Jean Collins (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002), 271–88, esp. 274; JoAnn Scurlock, “Animals in Ancient Mesopotamian Religion,” in *ibid.*, 364–67.

<sup>9</sup> Rainer Albertz, “Family Religion in Ancient Israel and Its Surroundings,” in Bodel and Olyan, *Household and Family Religion*, 89–112, esp. 101.

We may read this religious practice of everyday life in a functionalist manner, as the expected response to the insecurity of crops, helplessness against disease and natural disasters, the simplicity of dwellings and tools, and the absence of any sense of hygiene. At one level, this may indeed be the case, but it removes the creative agency of people involved in subsistence agricultural life, a creativity that is evident across peasant cultures.<sup>10</sup> As with agricultural methods, combining the tested approaches of centuries with creative responses to immediate challenges, so also the everyday concern with the capricious gods, demons, and spirits indicates less an effort to make sense of a senseless world and more a creative engagement with it. These observations should constantly be kept in mind in the following analysis, for it frames the very nature of subsistence survival.

### ***FORERUNNERS OF DOMESTICATION***

Abel was a keeper of sheep,  
and Cain a tiller of the ground.

—Genesis 4:2

In a part of the world that is largely semiarid,<sup>11</sup> the two crucial features of subsistence survival were crops and animals, especially the four-legged ones with whom human beings became inextricably connected. Both more sedentary and pastoral-nomadic groups practiced cereal and livestock cultivation, albeit with different emphases. Although I am interested in the fully fledged forms of these interactions between human beings, plants, and animals, they were a legacy of a long process of domestication. Across ancient Southwest Asia and much earlier than had initially

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<sup>10</sup> Eric R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 100–106.

<sup>11</sup> The minimum rainfall for dry farming is 200–350 millimeters (8–14 inches) per annum, although this varied according to region, from wetland niches and well-watered floodplains, to areas with an annual rainfall as low as 150 millimeters (6 inches). For a full survey of rainfall and climate matters for the Levant, along with a judicious assessment of water conservation techniques, see Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 79–108, 171–87.

been suggested—as far back as 9,500 BCE, if not earlier (originally the period was proposed as 8,000 to 7,500 BCE)—human beings, animals, and crops experienced a fundamental shift in their relationships.<sup>12</sup> The reasons are unclear, although the most persuasive analyses focus on a mix of social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors in which mutual agency brought about a decisive change in the mode of production and the sense of how life itself should be lived. As for animals, sporadic efforts at herding the animals hunted became a sustained concern with husbandry, especially with those relatively good-tempered and social ruminants, goats and then sheep. A handful of cattle, descended from aurochs,<sup>13</sup> were used for traction, and later the pig became a source of meat. Eventually and after a long period of domestication, the animals themselves mutated, although originally wild versions were domesticated: through restriction of movement, controlled breeding, and regulation of feeding, lactation became sustained beyond the needs of young animals, wool became longer and more amenable to human use (by selective breeding through which plucking during annual molting gave way to nonmolting wool that could be shorn),<sup>14</sup> and the

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<sup>12</sup> In an influential article, Bar-Yosef and Meadow suggested the lower dates and focused on the Levant. Ofer Bar-Yosef and Richard H. Meadow, “The Origins of Agriculture in the Near East,” in *Last Hunters, First Farmers: New Perspectives on the Prehistoric Transition to Agriculture*, ed. T. Douglas Price and Anne-Birgitte Gebauer (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1995), 39–94. However, in a significant update by Zeder, the dates and developments have been pushed back more than a millennium. The sequence that Zeder proposes, with all its detail in carbon dating, accords rather well with the Marxist proposals from Soviet-era Russian scholarship. Melinda A. Zeder, “The Origins of Agriculture in the Ancient Near East,” *CA* 52 (2011): 221–35; Danilova, “Precapitalist Societies,” 295–96. One should consult the following references with this in mind. Peter M. M. G. Akkermans and Glenn M. Schwartz, *The Archaeology of Syria: From Complex Hunter-Gatherers to Early Urban Societies (ca. 16,000–300 BC)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 68–79; Brian Hesse and Paula Wapnish, “An Archaeozoological Perspective on the Cultural Use of Mammals in the Levant,” in Collins, *Animal World*, 457–91, esp. 465–67; Benjamin S. Arbuckle, “Caprine Exploitation at Erbaba Höyük: A Pottery Neolithic Village in Central Anatolia,” in *Archaeozoology of the Near East VIII: Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium on the Archaeozoology of Southwestern Asia and Adjacent Areas*, ed. Emmanuelle Vila et al. (Lyon: Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée, 2008), 345–66.

<sup>13</sup> The last captive aurochs died in a Polish game park in 1627; in the early twentieth century, the Berlin and Munich zoos tried to breed back known characteristics of the aurochs into bovines.

<sup>14</sup> Plucking was still characteristic of the cycle of wool in Uruk, with shearing (or “shaving,” Akkadian *gazāzu*) becoming the norm in the second millennium. Domestic sheep are descendants of the mouflon (*Ovis gmelini*), with whom they share the same chromosome number (in contrast to the

animals became smaller than their wild relatives. Of course, hunting of the gazelle, onager, aurochs, hare, fox, and wild sheep and goats continued for a long time alongside the herding of domesticated animals, but the shift had been made.

Cultivation of plants, originally thought to have preceded the mutual domestication of animals and human beings, took place at about the same time. As a result, there was a slow shift in genetic structure and morphology that rendered plants dependent on human beings for reproductive success, just as human beings became thoroughly dependent on these plants for their own survival. The brittle stalks of wild grains became thicker and stronger, so that the seeds did not fall to the ground easily and were able to germinate better, ripen longer, and produce larger yields. “Naked” seeds developed, the easier to thresh, and two-row barleys developed into six-row barleys. Initially, emmer wheat provided a small supplement to hunter-gatherer diets, but later other crops are in evidence, such as the staples barley, lentils, and field peas, although also to be found are chickpeas, flax, horsebean, and vetch.

For a long period, up to four thousand years, wild and domesticated animals and plants were in an in-between zone. The norm was neither one nor the other, as the situation also applied to foraging and farming, hunting and herding. But eventually human beings focused more on farming and husbandry. Such a vast change in modes of production was not necessarily all beneficial, for the transition from the ease of hunter-gatherer existence to the hard work of agriculture introduced higher levels of

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urial, *Ovis vignei*). Wild sheep typically have an outer coat of long stiff hair, beneath which the thinner layer of fine wool is found; through shearing and genetic changes, domestic sheep produced thicker coats of wool that required shearing for regrowth. Andrew B. Sherratt, “Plough and Pastoralism: Aspects of the Secondary Products Revolution,” in *Pattern of the Past: Studies in Honour of David Clarke*, ed. Ian Hodder, Glynn Isaac, and Norman Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 261–306, esp. 282; Allan S. Gilbert, “The Native Fauna of the Ancient Near East,” in Collins, *Animal World*, 3–75.

labor, required for the new technologies such as the plow,<sup>15</sup> and new diseases in which the organisms relied on human beings and animals for their life cycles (worms and tuberculosis). Droughts and famines had more catastrophic consequences, while the increasingly temperate climate encouraged the wetlands to produce malaria, hookworm, tetanus, and schistosomiasis (snail fever). More permanent settlements with their refuse encouraged flies, fleas, mosquitoes, wild dogs, and wild cats—all potential disease carriers. Also found in skeletal remains are signs of malnutrition from a more limited diet; deformities in the vertebrae, lower back, knees, toes, and wrists, developed from carrying heavy loads, incessant seeding, nurturing, harvesting, and threshing of grains; as well as loss of teeth, ground down from the coarse diet (which was relieved only with the introduction of cooking in pottery vessels, late in the Neolithic period). Life expectancy was between twenty-five and thirty, with only 50–60 percent of children attaining maturity. Alongside these ever-present threats, disease cycles also influenced the economic forms I discuss in this book. Plagues regularly cut swathes through the small populations, thereby contributing to the perpetual problem of labor shortage. However, we should hesitate to assign primary economic causality to disease, or indeed to climate. These factors play a role when economic forms are inherently weak, assisting their collapse. But they have less effect when economies are stronger, for a regime like subsistence survival was geared to manage and survive precisely such events. However, the challenges faced by this economic shift to herding and farming may be summed up by the fact that virtually no toilets have been found in archaeological sites.

### ***FOUR-LEGGED FRIENDS***

Know well the condition of your flocks,

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<sup>15</sup> Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 38–41.

and give attention to your herds;  
 When the grass is gone, and new growth appears,  
 and the herbage of the mountains is gathered,  
 the lambs will provide your clothing,  
 and the goats the price of a field.

—Proverbs 27:23, 25–27

These far-reaching changes set the scene for the key institutional form of subsistence survival that persisted throughout the history of ancient Southwest Asia, particularly in ancient Israel. I focus first on our four-legged friends before turning to the matter of grains and pulses.<sup>16</sup> What was the composition of the herds kept by the vast majority of a small population? Goats comprised one-third and sheep two-thirds. This ratio is remarkably consistent, across villages and even in towns. But why have two species and not one instead of the other? After all, both species breed quickly and easily, and they move readily. They both produce meat, milk, and fiber (wool or hair). The key to the presence of two species is one of diversity for the sake of survival. Sheep have the advantage of producing richer levels of proteins and fats in their meat and milk, and their wool is higher in volume and versatility than goat's hair (and easier to produce than flax).<sup>17</sup> Yet goats have other advantages. Although sheep can deal with a range of temperatures, as well as variations in water and fodder, they are less able to deal with extremes like goats. In many respects, goats are the wonder of evolutionary survival mechanisms. They manage both cold and heat equally well. In more detail: they have low thermoregulation and moisture loss through sweating, urine, and feces; can modulate their metabolism rapidly to deal with food shortage; when pressed, are able to survive with up to 30 percent loss of body weight (for other animals 15 percent is

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<sup>16</sup> See Excursus 5 for resources used in this analysis of animal husbandry.

<sup>17</sup> It is simply mistaken to assume that the presence of sheep indicates a market-oriented approach in relation to wool. Paula Wapnish and Brian Hesse, "Faunal Remains from Tel Dan: Perspectives on Animal Production at a Village, Urban and Ritual Center," *Archaeozoologia* 4 (1991): 9–86; David Ilan, "Household Gleanings from Iron I Tel Dan," in Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow, *Household Archaeology*, 133–54, esp. 148.



lethal); and recover quickly after water shortage, being able to drink 20–40 percent of their body weight in one session. The complementary roles of sheep and goats go further. They eat different types of pasture: while sheep are more selective, preferring grass that regenerates easily, goats are well known as versatile eaters indeed: thorny bushes and shrubs are fine, but they will try out anything that can be masticated and swallowed, at least once. Further, with the ever-present risk of disease, one type of animal would leave the herd prone to decimation. However, with two species, disease may afflict one part of the herd, but the other part would survive, thereby ensuring the survival of the human beings dependent on them. Given the breeding capacities of both sheep and goats, the affected part of the herd could soon be replenished, usually within two or three breeding cycles.

The evidence for the nature of these herds comes from zooarchaeological research, especially sophisticated and highly technical analysis of bone remains in a large number of sites.<sup>18</sup> By far the largest amount of bones found are those of animals eaten by human beings, for their remains were dumped close to the point of consumption: tossed on the floor for a dog to gnaw, or into open spaces after a meal for scavengers. As ever, much is to be learned from human waste, given that the unwanted is economically and socially determined.<sup>19</sup> In the case of animal bones, the

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<sup>18</sup> As Sasson (*Animal Husbandry*, 2) points out, zooarchaeological analysis of usually significant animal bone remains (as food waste) provides “a substantial means for assessing human diet, social complexity and economic dynamics.” As the basis for his conclusions, Sasson provides a comprehensive survey of 70 sites, both rural and urban, across all the major geographic areas of the southern Levant (Israel). After stone tools or pottery shards, animal bones form the largest group of finds; the bones collected thus far in ancient Southwest Asia number in the hundreds of thousands, and even then they comprise about 2 percent of the fauna originally present. The one limitation of this approach is that the data from settled sites does not provide an adequate archaeological record of pastoral-nomads.

<sup>19</sup> In a fascinating fecopoetical study of excrement, Susan Morrison has called for a new discipline of “waste studies.” Susan Signe Morrison, *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer’s Fecopoetics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Other studies with similar sensitivities to our much-neglected nether regions, including my own modest effort, should also be mentioned here. Peter J. Smith, *Between Two Stools: Scatology and Its Representations in English Literature, Chaucer to Swift* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Valerie Allen, *On Farting: Language and*

evidence indicates a prevalence of sheep and goats, with bovine bones a distant third.<sup>20</sup> Zooarchaeological analysis factors in arrangements and distribution of bones and bone types throughout a site (using GIS: Geographic Information Systems software), cut marks as a reflection of butchery practices, age of animals killed, evidence of usage of body parts, and sagittal analysis, meaning a taphonomic approach that accounts for the passage of time and effect on bones through various phases: their original discarding as food waste; predepositional influences through dispersal (dogs, other scavengers, water, and wind) and postdepositional processes (bone attrition and fragmentation); discovery as archaeological artifacts; and arrival at the laboratory. It also enables comprehensive comparative surveys across archaeological sites, since bones have been collected since the earliest archaeological activity.

In light of this work, it is clear that the herd was culled at various ages, not only for the sake of meat, hides, and bones (for tool handles), but also to keep the herd at an optimal size, foster its health, and free up valuable pasture and water for the remainder of the herd. Culling of preadult animals took place when they attained optimal size at three years of age.<sup>21</sup> It was not a favorable environment for males, at least if one was a male sheep or goat looking forward to one's dotage. Most faced the ax at an early age, with only a few mature males kept for breeding purposes. By contrast, females enjoyed a longer and more productive life (up to five or six years), for they produced young and milk and needed pasturage and water to do so. Culling

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*Laughter in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Roland Boer, *The Earthy Nature of the Bible: Fleshly Readings of Sex, Masculinity, and Carnality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Other finds—such as camel, donkey, dog, fish, bird, and rodent bones, as well as those of game like gazelle—are relatively rare.

<sup>21</sup> Approximately 15 percent of young animals died of natural causes.

had other benefits: continued milk productivity, higher quality meat, and in the case of sheep, better wool.

Where were such practices common? One would expect that they were prevalent in the countryside, especially in villages. Yet they are also found in the larger towns. Indeed, these culling patterns are consistent across all areas in the late Bronze and Iron Ages in the southern Levant, with a marked absence of diverse culling patterns (which would indicate specialization in different animal products, such as wool, meat, or hides). Further, rather than choosing particular parts of the slain animal for consumption, such as high meat-yield sections or hides (characteristic of animals bred for sale), all parts of the body were utilized. This is the case in village communes and in larger centers such as Beersheba. While in a place like this one would expect evidence of typical upper-class practices, such as selecting choice and tender portions from young animal carcasses, preferring luxury foods as a sign of prestige,<sup>22</sup> the evidence points to virtually the whole population using meat-rich and meat-poor parts of animals of all ages.<sup>23</sup> Utility and sufficiency override refinement and stature, which means that the ruling class was decidedly small and rather undeveloped. Notably, evidence across smaller and larger sites indicates that the

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<sup>22</sup> Marijke van der Veen, “When Is Food a Luxury?,” *WA* 43, no. 3 (2003): 405–27. A luxury food is here defined as the refinement of a basic food widely desired, which thereby becomes a sign of distinction. For subsistence agriculture, the only time luxury foods are eaten is during feasts; for societies marked by sharp class distinctions, luxury becomes an everyday item for the ruling class.

<sup>23</sup> Aharon Sasson, “Reassessing the Bronze and Iron Age Economy: Sheep and Goat Husbandry in the Southern Levant as a Model Case Study,” in *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel in the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of Israel Finkelstein*, ed. Alexander Fantalkin and Assaf Yasur-Landau (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008), 113–34; idem, *Animal Husbandry*, 82–86, 94–98; contra Lily Singer-Avitz, “Beersheba—A Gateway Community in Southern Arabian Long-Distance Trade in the Eighth Century B.C.E.,” *TA* 26 (1999): 3–74, esp. 54–60; Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 139; Paula Wapnish and Brian Hesse, “Urbanization and the Organization of Animal Production at Tell Jemmeh in the Middle Bronze Age Levant,” *JNES* 47 (1988): 81–94, esp. 83–85; idem, “Faunal Remains.” Sasson (*Animal Husbandry*, 82–86) points out that such a lack of evidence of significant stratification is in contrast to Mesopotamia and Egypt, all of which indicates the economically marginal status of the Levant.

animals were slain and their bodies used locally. They were not brought from a distance, even to larger towns, sold, and then slain. In other words, even in the rather small towns, most people were primarily involved in agriculture. All of this reinforces the marginal economic (and indeed political) status of the southern Levant: this common approach to animal husbandry—in herd management, culling, and use of animal carcasses—indicates the persistence and ubiquity of subsistence survival in this area of ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>24</sup>

What about the cow? Would it not have been wiser and more productive to focus on these heavier ruminants, for they provide far more meat and milk? There is one catch, for a bovine requires far greater amounts of pasturage and water than the smaller sheep or goat. A comparison quickly reveals the problem: although the species of cow used in ancient Southwest Asia had 5 times the body mass of a sheep or a goat, it required up to 25 times the amount of water. That is, a cow needs approximately 50 liters (13 US gallons) of water per day, more in hot weather, while a sheep or a goat needs 2 to 3 liters (4.2–6.3 US pints). For this reason, a cow can range no more than 16 kilometers (10 miles) from a water source, while sheep and goats can operate up to 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) away. Herds of bovines would have put stress on precisely these resources and thereby threatened the survival of all.<sup>25</sup> In other

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<sup>24</sup> Schloen, *House*, 138.

<sup>25</sup> What do we do with areas that yield higher percentages of bovine bones? These are typically in areas with higher carrying capacity and less threat to subsistence survival, such as the Levantine lowlands, that is, the Northern Valleys, the Coastal plain, and the Shephelah. Here the percentage of bones ranges from 12 percent to 56 percent, with an average of 33 percent. If these cattle were bred for consumption, then one would expect widespread usage, given the utility of cattle for meat and milk. Yet the proportion remains relatively small, which leads Sasson to argue for an optimal approach to resources even here. I also suggest that these higher yields represent palatine estates, as we find in Ugarit. On such estates, each laborer was typically allocated one team of oxen. The purpose: to produce food for the nonproducers. Thus they were still traction animals. Mario Liverani, “Economy of Ugaritic Royal Farms,” in *Production and Consumption in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Carlo Zaccagnini (Budapest: University of Budapest, 1989), 127–68, esp. 134; Sasson, *Animal Husbandry*, 57–59. By contrast, in Egypt there is evidence for the eating of soft meats heavy with fat from overfatted bovines. However, such consumption is a distinct mark of ruling-class identity, in which the heavy use

words, herd security and thereby human survival was more important than maximal production.<sup>26</sup> Once again, the zooarchaeological evidence supports this conclusion. Bovine numbers were quite small in relation to sheep and goats, with no more than 15 percent of animal numbers, when they are included in the total number of animals.<sup>27</sup> Further, they were not culled across all age groups, managing to live to a point when their usefulness was past. Only then were they slaughtered, providing tough, old beef for a festival or two. So what was their prime function? It was traction, especially for the vital plowing of fields,<sup>28</sup> but also for hauling heavy loads, at times over slightly longer distances. Even here, their virtually endless need for fodder and water meant that they were not good prospects for serious long-distance haulage.<sup>29</sup> It also meant

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of water, fodder, and labor plays an important role. Douglas Brewer, "Hunting, Animal Husbandry and Diet in Ancient Egypt," in Collins, *Animal World*, 434–38.

<sup>26</sup> Richard W. Redding, "Theoretical Determinations of a Herder's Decisions: Modeling Variation in the Sheep/Goat Ratio," in *Animals in Archaeology*, vol. 3, *Early Herders and Their Flocks*, ed. J. Clutton-Brock and C. Grigson (Oxford: British Archaeology Reports, 1984), 223–41.

<sup>27</sup> Baruch Rosen, "Subsistence Economy of Stratum II," in *Izbet Sartah, an Early Iron Age Site Near Rosh Ha'ayin, Israel*, ed. Israel Finkelstein (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1986), 156–85, esp. 160–65; Hijlke Buitenhuis, "Archaeozoological Aspects of Late Holocene Economy and Environment in the Near East," in *Man's Role in the Shaping of the Eastern Mediterranean Environment*, ed. S. Bottema, G. Entjes-Nieborg, and W. Van Zeit (Rotterdam: Balkema, 1990), 195–206, esp. 199. Sasson (*Animal Husbandry*, 56) estimates that for a village of 100 people, it would need 300 sheep and goats, and only 12 bovines. For persuasive assessments of the apparent anomalies of higher bovine bone assemblages at a few sites, see idem; Hesse and Wapnish, "Archaeozoological Perspective," 464.

<sup>28</sup> This is so in wider ancient Southwest Asia as well, from the earliest days of agriculture. Johannes M. Renger, "Report on the Implications of Using Draft Animals," in *Irrigation and Cultivation in Mesopotamia, Part 2*, ed. J. Nicholas Postgate and Marvin A. Powell, *BSA 4–5* (Cambridge: Sumerian Agriculture Group, 1990), 267–79; Peter R. S. Moorey, *Ancient Mesopotamian Materials and Industries: The Archaeological Evidence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 3; Anne Goddeeris, *Economy and Society in Northern Babylonia in the Early Old Babylonian Period (ca. 2000–1800 BC)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 363.

<sup>29</sup> Usage of the far more versatile camel happened relatively late, in the first millennium. Gilbert, "Native Fauna," 19; Patrick F. Houlihan, "Animals in Egyptian Art and Hieroglyphics," in Collins, *Animal World*, 97–143, esp. 107. Very few camel bones have emerged from Late Bronze and Iron Age sites, while their numbers gradually increase, at times up to 25 percent, from sites of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian eras (and into the Islamic period). It is beyond my remit here to explore why and how this transition—obviously needed due to long-range travel in semiarid and arid regions—took place so late. Paula Wapnish, "The Dromedary and Bactrian Camel in Levantine Historical Settings: The Evidence from Tell Jemmeh," in Grigson and Clutton-Brock, *Early Herders*, 171–87. A major reason is the limited utility of the camel for subsistence survival, since they are not used under normal conditions for meat, milk, or fiber.

that they were highly prized for what they did, as the laws indicate concerning treatment, injury, and damage caused by a bovine (Exod 21:28–36).<sup>30</sup>

In light of this situation, it should come as no surprise that sheep and goats provide a prime focus for metaphorization in the Hebrew Bible, with bovines occupying a more prized place. Yahweh is thereby the ideal shepherd, leading his herd to green pastures while protecting against ever-present dangers (Pss 23; 78:52; 95:7; 100:3; Isa 40:11; Ezek 34:11–16; Mic 2:12), or perhaps punishing the people like sheep of the pasture, or slaughtering them like sheep and goats (Ps 74:1; Isa 34:6). The king, too, is imagined in such a manner (1 Sam 16:11, 19; 17:34; 2 Sam 7:8; see also 2 Sam 5:2; Ps 78:70–72). Of course, without such a herdsman or perhaps with a bad herdsman, the sheep go astray (Num 27:17; Ps 44:11, 22; Isa 13:14; 53:6; Jer 23:1; 50:6; Ezek 34:2–10). On a different register, the Suffering Servant is led to his slaughter like a young sheep (to be culled), struck dumb like a sheep before shearers (Isa 53:7; see also Jer 12:3). A contrary note, a trace of resistance, is also to be found, as when the absence of a royal shepherd actually means peace rather than exploitation (1 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chr 18:16). These and myriad other metaphors bend toward religious expression,<sup>31</sup> not so much as a Feuerbachian projection from the experience of everyday life, but rather as yet another signal of religion being pervasive in such life.

I have focused on goats, sheep, and bovines, since they form the faunal backbone of a subsistence economy. But what about the much-debated pig, with its

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<sup>30</sup> Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed., SBLWAW (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997), 40–41, 127–28, 227.

<sup>31</sup> In the “official” pattern of sacrifice, sheep, goats, and oxen predominate, although the goat tends to be the one who suffers in the more negative sacrifices, for sin offerings and especially on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). See also the reference to “goat-demons” (*šē’ irīm*) in Lev 17:7; 2 Chr 11:15; Isa 13:21; 34:14, as well as the evil imperial goat that ousts the ram in Dan 8:1–14. Here too a note of resistance appears from time to time (Isa 1:11).

lovers and haters? The patterns of pig bones fluctuate over time, with abundant distribution during the Chalcolithic (Aenolithic) period, declining to a low in the Late Bronze Age, rebounding for a while in the Early Iron Age in a few places, until full resurgence in the Hellenistic era.<sup>32</sup> Rather than laying the cause of such a patchy pattern on an emerging ideological aversion to porcine products (and investing wasted energy on using such data to determine ethnic awareness), it is more realistic to focus on the limited possibilities of pigs within a subsistence-survival institutional form. Although pigs provide good quality meat, they fare ill under temperature extremes, require relatively high levels of water,<sup>33</sup> and do not provide fiber or milk for human consumption. With these limitations, our porcine cousins are not always the best option within such an institutional form.<sup>34</sup>

With versatile herds of goats and sheep, as well as lumbering bovines for traction, animal husbandry in ancient Israel was clearly a matter of subsistence survival. To abstract from all the data, I suggest that three key features of the motivation for survival can be discerned: diversity, security, and optimal use. Diversity appears in terms of animal species (and as we will soon see, crop growing) and usage of all animal parts. In turn, diversity ensures security by reducing risk: one does not suffer catastrophically when disaster hits, for another part of the herd will be

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<sup>32</sup> Brian Hesse, "Pig Lovers and Pig Haters: Patterns of Palestinian Pork Production," *JE* 10 (1990): 195–225; Hesse and Wapnish, "Archaeozoological Perspective," 468–70; Brian Hesse and Paula Wapnish, "Can Pig Remains Be Used for Ethnic Diagnosis in the Ancient Near East?," in *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*, ed. Neil Asher Silberman and David Small (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 238–70.

<sup>33</sup> Pigs are limited to the 250-millimeter (10-inch) isohyet, much higher than that required by sheep and especially goats. Caroline Grigson, "Shiqmim: Pastoralism and Other Aspects of Animal Management in the Chalcolithic of the Northern Negev," in *Shiqmim I*, ed. Thomas E. Levy (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1987), 219–41.

<sup>34</sup> Where the conditions were favorable, class issues may play a role, for pigs were used by common farmers and shunned by the ruling class. A similar situation applies to Egypt, where the riverine environment is more favorable to pigs. Here the abundant remains of pigs are limited to the rural population, while they were denigrated and avoided by the ruling class. Brewer, "Hunting, Animal Husbandry," 441–43.

there.<sup>35</sup> Optimal usage, in contrast to maximal usage for the sake of profit, ensures longer-term survival; something is always left over for an emergency if one systematically underutilizes pasturage and water.<sup>36</sup> Thus the mythological images of the patriarchs, kings, and landlords with vast herds, including sheep, goats, oxen, donkeys, and occasionally camels, become simultaneously metaphorical signals of power and wealth, and images of unbelievable excess that may contain an undercurrent of disapproval (for instance, Gen 12:16; 13:2–6; 20:14; 24:35; 30:25–43; Job 1:3; 42:12). Optimal too is the population size: the number of people is kept below carrying capacity, for an excess population threatens survival. That is, the means of production determine the size of the population.

All of this has a direct bearing on the question of surpluses. If one follows the myth of Adam Smith, then the production of surplus for the purpose of trucking, bartering, and exchanging is supposed to be a basic, inescapable feature of human existence. But is this true for subsistence survival? Not at all, for the production of small surpluses was a necessary feature of survival, a reserve to carry the group over a bad harvest, drought, burned crops, animal disease, or any other untoward but all too common event that threatened survival. Planning for surplus is therefore a response to ever-present uncertainty rather than a strategy for profit.<sup>37</sup> And if one should not have

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<sup>35</sup> Lewis R. Binford, *Constructing Frames of Reference: An Analytical Method for Archaeological Theory Building Using Hunter-Gatherer and Environmental Data Sets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 193; Wharton, “Risk, Uncertainty”; Jennifer J. Piro, “Pastoral Economies in Early Transcaucasian Communities from the Mid-4th to 3rd Millennium BC,” in Vila et al., *Archaeozoology of the Near East VIII*, 451–64; idem, “Pastoralism in the Early Transcaucasian Culture: The Faunal Remains from Sos Höyük,” PhD diss., New York University, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Hayden, “On Territoriality and Sedentism,” *CA* 41, no. 1 (2000): 109–12; Richard W. Redding, “A General Explanation of Subsistence Change: From Hunting and Gathering to Food Production,” *JAA* 7 (1988): 56–97; idem, “Subsistence Security as a Selective Pressure Favoring Increasing Cultural Complexity,” *BSA* 7 (1993): 77–98.

<sup>37</sup> Sahlins, “Tribal Economics,” 30; Widstrand, “Nomad Economy”; Tim Ingold, *Hunters, Pastoralists and Ranchers: Reindeer Economies and Their Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 134–40; Michael Jochim, *Strategies for Survival: Cultural Behavior in an Ecological Context* (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 210; Mario Liverani, “Ville et campagne dans le royaume d’Ugarit: Essai d’analyse économique,” in *Societies and Languages of the Ancient Near*



a particular item needed for subsistence survival, such as flint or bitumen, then one sought those items locally, at the nearest place possible. The friction of distance and assumptions of subsistence survival prevented anything more extensive.<sup>38</sup> Not surprisingly, the same features appear with the cultivation of edible flora.

### ***BETWEEN BEER AND BREAD***

Thus says Enniglula: four jugs of black beer (and) 20 breads.

—A letter from early Mesopotamia<sup>39</sup>

Sociable quadrupeds may have graciously provided milk and fibers, meat and hides, bones and membranes, and whatever else may be gleaned from an animal body, but they could not provide a complete diet for human beings. High-value proteins and complex fats are still not enough for human survival. For that one needs edible flora, the domesticated plants that comprise the other crucial dimension of the institutional form of subsistence survival. Archaeobotanical research indicates that the dominant crops were glume wheats (emmer and einkorn), barley, and lentils. Minor crops include various types of pea, chickpeas, grapes, figs, dates, olives, and nuts such as pistachio and almond.<sup>40</sup> With a general shortage of timber, straw and dung were the main sources of fuel. Apart from eating food freshly picked, food was also processed, preserved, and baked as well as cooked when ceramic pots began to be used for such a purpose. With these, the pervasive stew rendered edible the legumes and tougher

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*East: Studies in Honour of I. M. Diakonoff*, ed. Muhammad A. Dandamaev, J. Nicholas Postgate, and Mogens T. Larsen (Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 1982), 250–58, esp. 253; Peter Rowley-Conwy and Marek Zvelebil, “Saving It for Later: Storage by Prehistoric Hunter-Gatherers in Europe,” in *Bad Year Economics: Cultural Responses to Risk and Uncertainty*, ed. Paul Halstead and John O’Shea (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 40–56; Sasson, *Animal Husbandry*, 7–10. I will have occasion to return to the question of surplus, especially in my discussion of tribute-exchange.

<sup>38</sup> Milevski, *Goods Exchange*.

<sup>39</sup> *ITT* 1, no. 1216; in Piotr Michalowski, *Letters from Early Mesopotamia*, ed. Erica Reiner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 21. See also *DPA* 49; in Michalowski, *Letters*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Mette Marie Hald, *A Thousand Years of Farming: Late Chalcolithic Agricultural Practices at Tell Brak in Northern Mesopotamia* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008), 44–121; Frank Hole, “Middle Khabur Settlement and Agriculture in the Ninevite 5 Period,” *BCSMS* 21 (1991): 17–29.

parts of an animal. Not to be missed was the staple of bread and . . . alcoholic beverages.

Indeed, before I discuss the way edible flora was produced, I make a few observations concerning alcohol, not least because critical accounts of ancient food production tend to neglect the role of alcoholic drinks, despite their importance. We may call the products “beer” and “wine,” but only if we use such terms loosely for the intoxicating liquids actually produced. The difference between wine and the amber liquid is geographic, subject to the vagaries in soil and rainfall patterns. Egypt and Mesopotamia might be good for grain crops, crucial for beer, but in the rocky and dry areas of Palestine or Greece, grapes grow more easily.<sup>41</sup> Even so, wine was produced along the Nile and in Mesopotamia, while grains were grown in Palestine, and from them beer was brewed, *šēkār* in Hebrew (Lev 10:9; Deut 29:6; Prov 20:1).<sup>42</sup> Some have argued persuasively that the first human communities gathered not purely for the production of grain for bread, but also for alcoholic beverages. Early archaeological material from Mesopotamia and Egypt points to the possibility that it was the production of beer from barley and wheat that enticed human beings to come together in more settled social forms.<sup>43</sup> In ancient Mesopotamia approximately 60 percent of the total cereal crop was barley, and up to 40 percent of the whole cereal crop was used for brewing.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 228–30.

<sup>42</sup> Michael M. Homan, “Beer, Barley, and *šēkār* in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Le-David Maskil: A Birthday Tribute for David Noel Freedman*, ed. R. E. Friedman and W. H. C. Propp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 25–38; idem, “Did the Ancient Israelites Drink Beer?,” *BAR* 36, no. 5 (2010): 48–56, 78. The argument over whether *šēkār* means beer, brandy, or simply a fermented drink misses the point that it was an alcoholic beverage. Lawrence E. Stager, “Ashkelon on the Eve of Destruction in 604 B.C.,” in *Ashkelon 3: The Seventh Century B.C.*, ed. Lawrence E. Stager, Daniel M. Master, and J. David Schloen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 3–11, esp. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Jeremy Geller, “Bread and Beer in Fourth-Millennium Egypt,” *FF* 5, no. 3 (1993): 255–67; Robert J. Braidwood, “Did Man Once Live by Beer Alone?,” *AmAn* 55 (1953): 515–26.

<sup>44</sup> Henry S. Corran, *A History of Brewing* (London: David & Charles, 1975), 15.

Beer and wine were vitally important, as suggested by extensive evidence from the third millennium to the Persian era. Here especially we find excellent instances of the interweaving of the sacred and everyday life. For instance, for over two millennia in the Levant we find the *marziḥ u*, a socioreligious group, with its leader and meeting place, for which the main purpose was drinking as a religious activity, under the auspices of a patron deity.<sup>45</sup> Further, the extensive archives from Garšana, in the period of the third dynasty of Ur (third millennium), show how central beer was to the daily diet of estate and construction workers,<sup>46</sup> as it was for Old Babylonia, Neo-Babylonia, and in the Persian era.<sup>47</sup> Alongside flour as “rations,” each hired laborer, male and female, received an allocation of beer or wine per day, although slaves received less. At Garšana the ration was 2 liters (4.2 US pints) a day for laborers, 1 liter (2.1 pints) for slaves, although by the time of the Persian Empire, wine became more common, yet more parsimonious, for a mere 2 cups a day is given for a traveling party.<sup>48</sup> So crucial was the supply that the brewers are themselves named, the beers and wines were distinguished between ordinary and good quality, and the high volumes of these blessed liquids were recorded. The greater one’s status, perhaps as an overseer or supervisor, the greater one’s allocation. On special occasions, the amounts were higher still. A woman giving birth, the completion of a building stage and especially the whole building, a religious festival—the reasons or

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<sup>45</sup> This type of group seems to have been ubiquitous across the ruling class, town groups, and subsistence village groups. Theodore J. Lewis, “Family, Household, and Local Religion at Late Bronze Age Ugarit,” in Bodel and Olyan, *Household and Family*, 60–88, esp. 74–76.

<sup>46</sup> Wolfgang Heimpel, *Workers and Construction Work at Garšana* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2009), 105–14.

<sup>47</sup> Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 432; Goddeeris, *Economy and Society*, 362; Kristin Kleber, “Von Bierproduzenten und Gefängnisaufsehern: Dezentrale Güterverteilung und Buchhaltung in Eanna,” in Baker and Jursa, *Babylonian Economy*, 289–322; Jane M. Renfrew, “Vegetables in the Ancient Near Eastern Diet,” in Sasson, *Civilizations*, 1:191–202, esp. 197.

<sup>48</sup> James M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, ed. Kent Harold Richards (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 91.

perhaps excuses for a few extra drinks were many indeed. Thus, in the later Persian era, a woman received a baby bonus of 10 liters (2.6 US gallons) of beer or wine for a boy, 5 liters (1.3 US gallons) for a girl, although at times 15 liters (4 US gallons) were given.<sup>49</sup> Even better was the celebration if it concerned the completion of a stage in building the typical triple complex of flour mill, kitchen (bakery), and brewery. Why typical? In early Mesopotamia and Egypt, bakeries and breweries or wineries were not separate affairs, but parts of the same building, which itself was the central installation in a town.<sup>50</sup> The reason was that yeast (crucial for beer, wine, and bread) appears naturally in some areas in higher concentrations. People soon found that some containers attracted this strange substance that made beer or wine ferment and bread rise, so they kept using those same containers. And since yeast is a living organism, it stays and multiplies. In Egypt and Old Babylonia, lumps of baked bread were thrown into the liquid in order to start fermentation. For beer and wine, the final product may have been a little lumpy, full of barley hulls, furry balls, and other growths from the brewing process, but all one needed was a strainer, or reed straw, as depictions and instructions make clear. In short, the production of alcoholic beverages is inseparable from the production of bread. This makes profound sense, for why else would humans exchange the relatively light and efficient work of hunting and gathering for the much more labor-intensive cultivation of crops?<sup>51</sup> It is not for nothing that the way of referring to food and drink, even from the early days of Sumer and Akkad(e), was “beer and bread.”<sup>52</sup> Beer first, of course.

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<sup>49</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 435.

<sup>50</sup> Corran, *History of Brewing*, 19–22; Roger Protz, *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Beer*, Carlton Book (London: Prion, 1995), 201–3; Geller, “Bread and Beer,” 258–59; Stager, Master, and Schloen, *Ashkelon 3*, 13–29.

<sup>51</sup> This is a good example of how the “law of least effort” struggles to make sense of human existence. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 45.

<sup>52</sup> RA 23:25; in Michalowski, *Letters*, 27.

With the important matter of beer and wine under our belts, it is time to consider how the edible flora was itself produced. The risk in considering such production is that we impose assumptions from our own era, in which land is scarce and the population heavy. Thus land becomes the primary focus. By contrast, in contexts in which land was plentiful and labor in short supply, the prime concerns were labor and usufruct. The evidence is telling: infant mortality at a rate of 50–60 percent; life expectancy of approximately 30 years; disease cycles; constant mechanisms for securing labor, such as the primary function of debt in order to indenture labor, or standard punishments stipulating periods of indentured labor on royal land or for landlords; laws concerning the treatment of human beings pledged for labor; laws concerning injury to able-bodied human beings, thereby rendering them unfit for labor, as well as protection of fetuses; the absence of evidence for contraception and abortion;<sup>53</sup> the focus on usufruct in legislation; deportations, especially by the larger empires in the first millennium such as Assyria; treaties, edicts, and correspondence that often include clauses concerning fugitives; evidence of rural laborers abandoning estates and fields and joining Habiru groups; documents of estate administration, such as those from Ugarit, which provide lists of estates, laborers, yields, and tools, but simply ignore the extent of the estates themselves; the high cost of labor where landlords had to pay for it, outside the palatine sector; the routinely low cost of land where it was transferred and despite evident fluctuations; and the constant desire for more people, as expressed in the covenants and blessings

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<sup>53</sup> For a useful discussion of contraception and abortion in Egypt and Middle Assyria, see Knight, *Law, Power*, 133–35, 184–86. Knight also discusses child sacrifice, which may seem to counter the emphasis on human labor. It may also be understood as a signal of giving to the gods what is most valuable: a human life.

of Gen 12, 15, 17, 22, and 35, plus Num 22–24.<sup>54</sup> The land, as Marx put it, provides the fundamental means of labor.<sup>55</sup>

How does one organize labor in order to ensure subsistence survival, characterized by diversity, food security, risk-spreading, and optimal use of resources?<sup>56</sup> For crop growing, this took place in terms of what the Soviet-era scholars called the extended-family household commune, or village commune, the *mir* or *obshchina*.<sup>57</sup> Its population was typically 75–150 people, although often smaller settlements had less than 75.<sup>58</sup> The template for their analysis was the practice in Russia even into the twentieth century. Studies from the 1980s onward, usually without acknowledging the Russian work in this area, focused on the practice of *musha*<sup>59</sup> farming in nineteenth-century and then pre-Ottoman periods in the Levant.<sup>59</sup> Such farming turned out to be largely similar to the Russian village commune. Since then, further work has shown that these practices were far more widespread, found in

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<sup>54</sup> Note also the refracted depiction of plentiful land in Gen 13. See Excursus 6 for references to the shortage of labor.

<sup>55</sup> Danilova, “Precapitalist Societies,” 298.

<sup>56</sup> Debate continues over the question of “efficiency,” with some arguing that this method of agriculture reduces the efficiency of production compared to individual competition, while others argue that there is either no difference or that it is the most efficient in prevailing conditions. Comparable arguments may be found in relation to technology, which in some cases actually increased labor and reduced efficiency. The plow is an excellent example, for it is by no means clear that the plow reduced labor. The problem with such a question is that it is the wrong one: efficiency was not an issue, but optimal use for survival was. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 38–41, 191–210; Haim Gerber, *The Social Origins of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1987); Deidre N. McCloskey, “The Prudent Peasant: New Findings on the Open Fields,” *JEH* 51 (1991): 343–55; Gary Richardson, “What Protected Peasants Best? Markets, Risk, Efficiency, and Medieval English Agriculture,” *REH* 21 (2003): 299–356; Philippe Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis: Agrarian Finance in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2012), 34–35.

<sup>57</sup> I understand “village commune” and “village community” here as covering a complex range, from farmstead through hamlet to village. For an insightful discussion of the variability of terminology, see Brian Roberts, *Landscapes of Settlement: Prehistory to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1996), 15–19. See further Excursus 7.

<sup>58</sup> Knight, *Law, Power*, 122–23. Schloen (*House*, 155–64) differs slightly, suggesting 100–150 persons.

<sup>59</sup> The ubiquity of this practice raises the question about its function within very different modes of production. At the close of this chapter I will discuss this question in more detail; here it suffices to point out that Marx’s observation is valid: specific components that are found in more than one mode of production have quite different functions in relation to the specific whole one is analyzing. On *musha*<sup>59</sup>, see further Excursus 7.

places such as medieval Europe, seventeenth-century North America, pre-1873 Japan, Russia, the Maghreb, pre-Ottoman and Ottoman periods, Iraq until the revolution of 1958, and twentieth-century Greater Syria and Greece.<sup>60</sup>

How did the village commune work? To optimize labor, ensure soil preservation and consistent crops, and spread risk (natural and human), members of village communes would allocate to each other strips of usually noncontiguous land. These were social units of measurements rather than clear demarcations of land for the purpose of ownership. They would usually be of considerable length (up to one kilometer [0.6 miles], or along the twisting path of a terrace in areas such as the Judean highlands), but with a width of a few furrows, as wide as the spread of seed thrown from the hand. The key is that they were constantly reallocated.<sup>61</sup> At different intervals (seasonally, usually annually or biannually) all of the farmers would gather and agree to a realignment of these land shares, in light of the various needs of the village commune. The allocation may depend on the capabilities of each household (human and animal power), considering the land within reasonable walking distance. However, the most common method of allocating these land shares was by lot, in

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<sup>60</sup> Abraham Granott, *The Land System of Palestine in History and Structure* (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1952); Jerome Blum, *The End of the Old Order in Rural Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Robert McCormick Adams, "Property Rights and Functional Tenure in Mesopotamian and Rural Communities," in Dandamaev, Postgate, and Larsen, *Societies and Languages*, 1–14; Mario Liverani, "Communautés rurales dans la Syrie du IIe millénaire A.C.," in *Les communautés rurales*, pt. 2, *Antiquité* [20e Congrès, Warsaw, 1976], Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin 41 (Paris: Dessain & Tolra, 1983), 147–85; idem, "Communautés de village"; Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 257–58; Roberts, *Landscapes of Settlement*, 15–37; McNutt, *Society of Ancient Israel*, 67–72, 174; Warren O. Ault, *Open-Field Farming in Medieval England: A Study of Village By-Laws* (London: Routledge, 1972; repr., 2006); Tony Wilkinson, *Archaeological Landscapes of the Near East* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003); idem, "The Tell: Social Archaeology and Territorial Space," in *Development of Pre-State Communities in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Dianne Bolger and Louise C. Maguire (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), 55–62; Guillaume, *Land, Credit*, 28–42.

<sup>61</sup> Liverani's useful discussion of the "long field" misses the crucial element that they were field shares. Mario Liverani, "The Shape of Neo-Sumerian Fields," in Postgate and Powell, *Irrigation and Cultivation in Mesopotamia, Part 2*, 147–86; idem, *Uruk*, 15–16. As Knight (*Law, Power*, 149) points out, the biblical laws on fallowing (Exod 23:10–11; Lev 25:1–7) have a didactic and religious intent. If villagers had seen, from generations of practice, that fallowing was beneficial, then they would hardly need a town-dwelling cleric to mandate it.

order to ensure that all had to work the better and worse land at some time or other.<sup>62</sup>

Other methods included argument (often lengthy) and agreement by the whole village commune, or by males, by elders, heads of households or clans, or a patron.

The relevant term from the Hebrew Bible is *ḥ elqat haśśādeh*, more often functioning as a metaphor (Gen 33:19–20; Ruth 4:3; 2 Sam 14:30–31; 2 Kgs 9:21, 25; Jer 12:10; Amos 4:7; cf. the verb *ḥ lq*, “apportion,” in Jer 37:12). This is not, as it is so often rendered, a field or plot of land, but a movable and reallocated land share.<sup>63</sup> Or rather, it is a reallocation of usufruct and labor rather than land; for this reason, it is better to speak of an allotment of land usage. In this light, it is possible to understand the various references to “boundary” or “landmark” (Deut 19:14; 27:17; Prov 22:28; 23:10; Job 24:2; Hos 5:10),<sup>64</sup> to “the lot (*gōra*) of their *naḥ ālā*” (Josh 14:2 AT; see also 18:2–10),<sup>65</sup> as well as to the “measuring rope” (*ḥ ebel*), the

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<sup>62</sup> Ninel B. Jankowska, “Communal Self-Government and the King of the State of Arrapha,” *JESHO* 12 (1969): 248–49. It is possible that the ubiquitous astragali (knucklebones, from the anklebone of animals) were used for such lots. Astragali appear in human settlements across five continents and throughout 10,000 years of human history. Garth Gilmour, “The Nature and Function of Astragalus Bones from Archaeological Contexts in the Levant and Eastern Mediterranean,” *OJA* 16 (1997): 167–75; Henry C. Koerper and Nancy A. Whitney-Desautels, “Astragalus Bones: Artifacts or Ecofacts?,” *PCASQ* 35, nos. 2–3 (1999): 69–80; Jeremiah R. Dandoy, “Astragali through Time,” in *Integrating Zooarchaeology*, ed. Mark Maltby (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2006), 131–37. The usual theories concerning their use include games, divination, and record keeping for animals and stores of grain and legumes. However, given that many of them are marked, and given that multiple use for any object was preferred for subsistence survival, I suggest they may also have been used for casting lots, as with the reallocation of field shares.

<sup>63</sup> See Excursus 7 for biblical scholars who have shown an intermittent awareness of these agricultural practices.

<sup>64</sup> Among others, Wright and Matthews mistakenly assume that they refer to markers of personal property in land. Christopher J. H. Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 70; Victor H. Matthews, “Physical Space, Imagined Space, and “Lived Space” in Ancient Israel,” *BTB* 33, no. 1 (2003): 1–13, esp. 5. Knight (*Law, Power*, 205–6) suggests that such a boundary pertains more to a large landholder, for within the context of a village, it would not be so easy to move a boundary. However, he fails to recognize the function of land shares in the village communes.

<sup>65</sup> The common argument that this was a once and for all allotment of land (as far as the narrative is concerned) that was subsequently inalienable misses the function of the terminology. Marvin Sweeney, *I and II Kings: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 249; Deist, *Material Culture*, 145. By contrast, Kitz explores the implications of the allocation by lot. Anne M. Kitz, “Undivided Inheritance and Lot Casting in the Book of Joshua,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 601–18.



semantic field of which actually includes an “allotted portion” of land (Deut 3:4, 13–14; 32:9; Amos 7:17; Mic 2:5; Zeph 2:6–7; Zech 2:5 [2:1 ET]; Pss 16:6; 78:55; 105:11).<sup>66</sup> These are the means for measuring and demarcating strips of reallocated land usage in relation to one another.

Recent evidence of such practices comes from the spatial arrangement of small tells and the radial pathways—as hollow tracks or droveways for animals—leading up to 3–5 kilometers (2–3 miles) from a tell.<sup>67</sup> These pathways indicate the spatial rhythms of farmers who lived in the villages and walked to their allotments to work on them. Beyond the pathways were areas of grazing land for the village herds. Thus the spatial production is of tightly nucleated villages, with the dwellings either jumbled together or in a circular arrangement, surrounded by a highly fragmented landscape of small land shares, without clear field boundaries or structures for habitation or for other purposes—thus a landscape empty of archaeological sites or

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<sup>66</sup> The measuring-rope (*ḥ ebel*) is occasionally connected with both *ḥ elqat hasśādeh* and *naḥ ālā* (designating the process of transition or handing over, rather than meaning inalienable property, as suggested by many: Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 687; David J. A. Clines, ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 5:659; Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 22; idem, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 26.). Thus in Ps 16:6 *ḥ ebel* and *naḥ ālā* appear in parallelism, or rather, the outcome of casting the measuring rope is a *naḥ ālā*. Further, Pss 78:55 and 105:11 both speak of a *ḥ ebel naḥ ālā*, a “rope of a portion.” The connection may be outlined as follows: if *naḥ ālā* designates the process of transition, and if *ḥ elqat hasśādeh* is the land-usage share, then the rope indicates the extent of the share allocated, often by lot (Josh 14:2). See also the Middle Assyrian Laws, B8 and B9, which deal with the penalties for encroaching on the “great boundary” between villages and the “small boundary” between allocated lots. Roth, *Law Collections*, 178–79; Guillaume, *Land, Credit*, 41.

<sup>67</sup> Tony Wilkinson, “The Tell,” 56–57; idem, “The Structure and Dynamics of Dry Farming States in Upper Mesopotamia,” *CA* 35, no. 1 (1994): 483–520; idem, *Archaeological Landscapes*; Jesse J. Casana, “Structural Transformations in Settlement Systems of the Northern Levant,” *AJA* 112 (2007): 195–222. Ample evidence also comes from the legal documents from Arrapkha, in the middle of the second millennium, where cases involve the inevitable struggles within and between village communes. See Jankowska, “Communal Self-Government,” 246–66. Spatial analysis is a crucial indicator of economic and social frameworks, as Henri Lefebvre first argued persuasively, thereby generating a whole subdiscipline of economic and geographical analysis. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. David Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Georges Benko and Alain Lipietz, “From the *Régulation* of Space to the Space of *Régulation*,” in Boyer and Saillard, *Régulation Theory*, 190–96; Roland Boer, *Marxist Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (London: Continuum, 2014), 117–38.

features. The reason: no one person could claim any land as a permanent possession and build on it, for the parcels were reallocated regularly. Wilkinson sums this up: “Such fields were sufficient to supply the inhabitants of the central communities with staple foods, and the entire assemblage—tell, outlying fields, and pasture—went together as a single, and perhaps indivisible, unit of the landscape.”<sup>68</sup>

Indivisible from this unit also were the social and cultural forces that determined the economic practices of subsistence survival. Collective activity was inescapable, within the village and between villages that were 2–4 kilometers (1.4–2.8 miles) apart, for the individual was helpless in the face of natural and social disaster, needing cooperation and reciprocal aid in order to survive.<sup>69</sup> Thus kinship, both highly flexible and embodied in the patriarchal household, was crucial.<sup>70</sup> A further factor was the advantage of combined labor, whether with plow teams, sowing, or harvesting. Finally, the close-knit village commune, with its headman and council of elders, was also advantageous for protection and defense against raiders. Roberts terms these three factors the communality of assent, of economizing, and of enforcement.<sup>71</sup> However, this social determination of the economy also had a number of other ramifications. Since the land was held in common as a collective good,<sup>72</sup> the only way foreigners—such as remnants from a neighboring village after being decimated by disease or a war party—could acquire a land share or become part of a village’s apparently closed social network was through incorporation into a creatively reshaped

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<sup>68</sup> Wilkinson, “The Tell,” 57.

<sup>69</sup> Diakonoff, “Commune in the Ancient East,” 523; idem, “Slaves, Helots,” 66; Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 256.

<sup>70</sup> See also Michael R. Fischbach, *State, Society and Land in Jordan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000); Gerber, *Social Origins*.

<sup>71</sup> Roberts, *Landscapes of Settlement*, 35–37.

<sup>72</sup> On private property, see Excursus 8.

genealogy.<sup>73</sup> It also meant that any tax burden, primarily in terms of labor but also as a tithe of produce, fell on the whole village commune, for it was assessed for such purposes as a unit.<sup>74</sup> So also in legal cases: a theft, a murder, any “crime” committed by people of and within the area of a village commune was regarded as the collective responsibility of the village commune.<sup>75</sup> And if a village was to change hands—perhaps at the desire of the occasional ruler or despot who wished to give some territory to another for the sake of acquiring a desirable, exotic item for his own aggrandizement, or perhaps as a gift—then the whole village network had to agree for such a transfer to take place.<sup>76</sup> Hence Liverani sums up: “Even if they were small, the villages were real systems, which the palace saw as administrative units and local cells of judicial responsibility, but which were in fact seen by those who lived there as large family groups owning and organizing the exploitation of an agro-pastoral domain.”<sup>77</sup>

### ***THE DESERT AND THE SOWN?***

Landscapes are richly interwoven with history and memory, and movement develops a group’s conception of place.

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<sup>73</sup> Birgit Schäbler, “Practicing *Musha*: Common Lands and the Common Good in Southern Syria under the Ottomans and the French (1812–1942),” in *Rights to Access, Rights to Surplus: New Approaches to Land in the Middle East*, ed. Roger Owen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 241–309, esp. 289; Gerber, *Social Origins*, 144.

<sup>74</sup> Magnus Widell, “Some Observations on the Administration, Agriculture and Land Management of Tell Beydar,” *UF* 35 (2004): 717–33, esp. 721–23; Jason Ur and Tony Wilkinson, “Settlement and Economic Landscapes of Tell Beydar and Its Hinterland,” *Subartu* 21 (2008): 305–27, esp. 313–14.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Heltzer, *The Rural Community in Ancient Ugarit* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1976), 63–65.

<sup>76</sup> See esp. Zaccagnini (“Asiatic Mode,” 56–98), who discusses the transfer of whole villages in detail, with evidence from Nuzi, Hittite Anatolia, Alalakh, and Ugarit. See also Igor M. Diakonoff, “Early Despotisms in Mesopotamia,” in Diakonoff and Kohl, *Early Antiquity*, 88; idem, “Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine in the Third and Second Millennia B.C.,” in Diakonoff and Kohl, *Early Antiquity*, 286–308, esp. 290; Bonnie Magness-Gardiner, “Urban-Rural Relations in Bronze Age Syria: Evidence from Alalakh Level VII Palace Archives,” in *Archaeological Views from the Countryside: Village Communities in Early Complex Societies*, ed. Glenn M. Schwartz and Steven E. Falconer (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 37–47, esp. 40; Schloen, *House*, 306–9. Another agricultural dimension of the economy was comprised by the estates run by the temple-palace to supply those who did no labor with provisions. Since this is a feature of the extractive estate-state institutional form, I deal with it in my discussion of that form.

<sup>77</sup> Liverani, *Israel’s History*, 22.

—Jennifer E. Jones<sup>78</sup>

Herds and crops, the two major components of subsistence survival, may easily be classified in terms of the distinction between nomadic and settled, between the desert and sown. Thus nomads prefer the herds of sheep and goats, while sedentarists are crop specialists. This distinction remains a staple of studies of ancient Southwest Asia and Palestine.<sup>79</sup> Two assumptions are reiterated as though obvious: nomads and settlers simply switch when times are bad or good, and the two exchange with one another, providing necessary items the others lack. On the first count, the assumption—especially from the overwhelmingly settled context of contemporary capitalism—is that being in one place, with a fixed abode, is by far the desirable state for human beings. Hence, when times are good, human beings prefer to settle. Only in times of troubles, such as weak states, constant warfare, and economic crisis, do people resort to nomadic life.<sup>80</sup> On the second count, settlers and nomads trade with one another, exchanging grains and legumes for meat and hides, finished products for raw materials.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Jennifer E. Jones, “Movement across the Landscape and Residential Stability: Agency and Place in the Southern Levantine Early Bronze Age,” in *Agency and Identity in the Ancient Near East: New Paths Forward*, ed. Sharon R. Steadman and Jennifer C. Ross (London: Equinox Publishing, 2010), 13–26, esp. 17.

<sup>79</sup> McNutt, *Society of Ancient Israel*, 82–83; Guillaume, *Land, Credit*, 37.

<sup>80</sup> This problem is exacerbated by the irresistible temptation to extrapolate from anthropological studies of peasants and nomads in the context of capitalism—within which they are inescapably enmeshed—in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the context of ancient Southwest Asia, let alone to any other precapitalist mode of production. The factors inducing sedentarization of nomads—such as modernization, transportation, industrialization, wage-labor in industrial centers, capitalist economic relations, and strong governments with control over defined territories—are simply missing in ancient contexts. Especially pertinent regarding the dangers of such assumptions is George Dalton, *Economic Anthropology and Development: Essays on Tribal and Peasant Economies* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

<sup>81</sup> J. Nicholas Postgate, “The Economic Structure of the Assyrian Empire,” in Larsen, *Power and Propaganda*, 193–221, esp. 198; Israel Finkelstein, *Living on the Fringe* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 155; Glenn M. Schwartz, “Pastoral Nomadism in Ancient Western Asia,” in Sasson, *Civilizations*, 1:249–59, esp. 250; William G. Dever, “Pastoralism and the End of Urban Early Bronze Age in Palestine,” in *Pastoralism in the Levant*, ed. Ofer Bar-Iosef and Anatoly M. Khazanov (Madison, WI: Prehistory Press, 1992), 83–92, esp. 88–89; Steven A. Rosen, “Early Multi-Source Nomadism: Excavations at the Camel Site in the Central Negev,” *Ant* 77 (2003): 749–60, esp. 757–58; Patricia L. Fall, Steven E. Falconer, and Lee Lines, “Seeds of Civilization: Bronze Age Rural Economy and Ecology in the Southern Levant,” *AAAG* 88, no. 1 (1998): 107–25, esp. 117.

These assumptions fly in the face of weighty evidence that both forms of existence were largely self-sufficient, and that sedentary populations were periodically nomadic, while nomads were not averse to pausing for a while. Self-sufficiency is of course a survival strategy, in which one produces all that is needed, and in which need is minimal. This means there was little need for the extensive exchange of goods with one another. Further, nomadism and sedentary life are too often seen as ideal types, with a person being born as one or the other. By contrast, so-called settled people were highly mobile, at times more so than nomads, and nomads themselves spent periods in one place for the sake of crop cultivation, rituals, and breeding.<sup>82</sup> Those in villages and farms also had herds, as the bone deposits clearly show, grazing the animals on fallow land or on pastures outside the cultivated zones. The herds required periodic movement, especially on a seasonal basis, in order not to exhaust fodder and to make the most use of other pastures—whether vertically (highland summer and lowland winter pastures) or horizontally (steppe and cultivated valley). Even more, villagers were quite ready—apart from assaulting tax collectors, hiding harvests, and operating hidden plots—to abandon their homes in the face of drought or famine or disease, excessive disruption from marauding bands, conscription, and oppressive taxes.<sup>83</sup> This was even more the case with the estates run by monarchs and temples: farmers would sow fields and then depart, leaving the crops unharvested. They were always ready to expand the numbers of the ever-present

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<sup>82</sup> On this matter, see the extensive literature discussed by Sasson, *Animal Husbandry*, 16–17, 22–23.

<sup>83</sup> Heltzer, *Rural Community*, 58–62; Esse, *Subsistence*, 28; Guillaume, *Land, Credit*, 59–65. Greenberg’s careful study of village patterns in early to mid-Bronze Age Palestine illustrates this point very well. The flexibility of their inhabitants, the ability to move on when needed, may be seen in patterns of village establishment and abandonment between early Bronze II and III (although Greenberg tries to use his evidence for the hoary rural-urban argument). Raphael Greenberg, “Discontinuities in Rural Settlement in Early Bronze Age–Middle Bronze Age I Palestine,” in *The Rural Landscape of Ancient Israel*, ed. Aren M. Maeir, Shimon Dar, and Ze’ev Safrai (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2003), 27–42.

Habiru, whose appeals to “justice” (abolishing debt, return of bonded hostages, and driving out of landlords and mayors) struck deep chords of resistance.

Nomads were not averse to settling for a period, plowing, sowing, and reaping a crop when needed in a pocket of good soil, and then moving on to do so in another well-known place.<sup>84</sup> And they would make use of whatever shelter was available, whether ruins, makeshift dwellings, seasonal encampments, or tents.<sup>85</sup> In other words, pastoral nomads and sedentary populations preferred to be self-sufficient and were not necessarily related in a symbiotic fashion, trading “necessary” goods with one another. Interactions took place at deeper, socially determined, levels, whether in terms of kinship, military skirmishes (against one another or joint against a common foe), or in agreements over optimal usage of scarce resources—all of which blurred the distinctions between the two types.<sup>86</sup> In this light, both pastoral nomadism and sedentary agriculture were variations, with many overlaps, on the resilient institutional form of subsistence survival.

## **CONCLUSION**

Living in villages was the survival strategy most practiced by Israelites throughout the people’s entire history.

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<sup>84</sup> This is particularly the case in the smaller deserts of the southern Levant, which one may walk through in a couple of days. Despite the expected limitations of his liberal (“personal choice”) framework, Dever’s effort to provide a cognitive map of such a life is worth a read. William G. Dever, “The Rural Landscape of Palestine in the Early Bronze IV Period,” in Maeir, Dar, and Safrai, *Rural Landscape*, 43–60.

<sup>85</sup> Note Deut 6:11: “houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.” These occasionally show up in the archaeological record as foundations of a few scattered structures, which may be mistaken for “houses.” Schloen, *House*, 155.

<sup>86</sup> Roberts, *Landscapes of Settlement*, 19–23; Øystein S. LaBianca, “Salient Features of Iron Age Tribal Kingdoms,” in *Ancient Ammon*, ed. Burton MacDonald and Randall W. Younker (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 19–29, esp. 22. These days, one walks a fine line between a radical distinction between nomadic and sedentary groups (characteristic of older work), and an absence of distinction at all. Liverani (*Israel’s History*, 23) offers a useful angle that maintains the distinction while seeing the many overlaps: “This agro-pastoral unity exists if we consider the village as a whole; but within it, the Alalakh lists show that the ‘houses’ of shepherds were clearly distinguished from those (more numerous) of the ordinary farmers—and indeed each kind of activity (transhumant or permanent) required specialization.”

—Douglas A. Knight<sup>87</sup>

I have outlined in some detail the institutional form of subsistence survival, since it was one of the mainstays of economic life in the southern Levant within the context of ancient Southwest Asia, so much so that it formed the persistent underlay of economic life.<sup>88</sup> Its basic features were geared toward survival and self-sufficiency, in the context of the perpetual reality and threat of economic crisis. So pervasive was this form that its two constituent features, animal husbandry and crops, were in mythology the dual metaphor for agricultural existence (witness Abel the “keeper of sheep” and Cain the “tiller of the soil” in Gen 4:2; see also Exod 12:5; Lev 1:10; 5:6). The animals, mainly sheep and goats, reproduce quickly, ensure that one always has a fallback should disease strike one part of the herd, and produce vital items such as meat, milk, fiber, and bones. Crop production followed a pattern of reallocated strips of land in a village commune, focusing on a range of staples. Diversity, risk aversion, optimal usage—these were the keys of the institutional form.<sup>89</sup> A range of animal species and crops were grown rather than specializing with certain types; all parts of the animals were used across all ages rather than selecting specific parts more characteristic of luxury consumption; pasture, water, and soil were used in an optimal rather than a maximal fashion, thereby ensuring sustainable long-term use; human and animal populations were kept below carrying capacity; surpluses were kept for difficult times ahead. It was a basic and successful response to the normal state of economic crisis. Adaptable and reconfigured in many ways, its resilience is evidenced not merely in its longevity but also in its widespread presence in difficult contexts.

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<sup>87</sup> Knight, *Law, Power*, 120.

<sup>88</sup> Igor M. Diakonoff, “The Rural Community in the Ancient Near East,” *JESHO* 18, no. 2 (1975): 123.

<sup>89</sup> Thus Isa 5:8–10 and Mic 2:1–2 critique maximal usage, with the dire result that “a homer of seed shall yield a mere ephah.”

In closing, I focus on a few pertinent issues. To begin with, it is misdirected to focus on the land itself, and especially in terms of private property. Without people to work the land and without the production of items needed for human survival, not to speak of the survival of flora and fauna, land by itself was useless. That is, usufruct and labor were the keys. Time and again, an invader would find a village and its lands empty of people, which rendered the land worthless. And the people knew full well that to vacate the territory would render it so. This is the case also with the royal and ruling-class estates I will discuss later, for the issue here was not the land of the estate but the labor desperately needed for it and the produce it would provide to feed those who did not labor so.

All this has a bearing on the question of surpluses, which I discussed earlier. Within this institutional form, surpluses were produced with an eye on the lean time before harvest, on a possible dry year, on a partial loss of a crop or the herd through pest, disease, or war.<sup>90</sup> Here Wallerstein's distinction between direct and indirect agricultural production and consumption is useful. "Direct" means that the bulk of the population produces food for its own consumption while some is transferred to the nonagricultural population; "indirect" refers to a situation in which most food is produced for those not engaged in agricultural production. The latter is the system we know under capitalism, while the former characterizes the ancient world, and even Europe before 1150 CE.<sup>91</sup> However, even under direct production and consumption,

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<sup>90</sup> Throughout his eminently useful book (*Animal Husbandry*), time and again Sasson insists that survival subsistence, as he calls it, is incompatible with the now-dominant neoliberal model used in much study of the Levant, a "market economy" (understanding "market" as geared for profit). Since the evidence points overwhelmingly to the presence of survival subsistence in all the settlements he surveys, he is unequivocal: "We may assume that if households or sites maintained a market oriented strategy, they would specialize in particular products for trade, they would strive to gain wealth and their surplus would be directed to exchange. No evidence was found to support the market economy model" (120).

<sup>91</sup> Wallerstein, *World-System I*, 18. See also Melinda A. Zeder, *Feeding Cities: Specialized Animal Economy in the Ancient Near East* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 31–44.



Wallerstein does not exclude the transferal of some—that is, a smaller portion of—food to those who do not engage in agricultural production. This is of course the role of the palatine and temple estates, of plunder and its refined forms as tribute and tax, which I discuss in later chapters. Yet the point remains that these activities constitute the lesser part of the economic system rather than its main focus, for the bulk was still consumed directly by its producers.

Further, it should be clear by now that it is a mistake to assume that the institutional form of subsistence survival constituted a mode of production in its own right, what has been called a “domestic mode of production”<sup>92</sup> or a “closed economy” that was entirely self-sufficient and conservative.<sup>93</sup> Instead, it was but one institutional form within a larger mode of production that I have designated the sacred economy. Its prime approach was allocative rather than extractive, and in this respect it forms part of a larger constellation of institutional forms, both allocative and extractive, that together make up regimes and then the mode of production. The specific ways in which these forms relate to one another may change over time, especially after prolonged periods of economic “chaos,” but they remain part of that larger and quite dynamic mode of production. Nonetheless, this does raise the question of the ubiquity of subsistence survival across many different places and times, and within rather

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Wallerstein emphasizes that the beginnings of capitalism in the sixteenth century took place in the transformations of agriculture, moving gradually from direct to indirect production, and toward small margins of profits from trade in bulk goods, over against the exchange of preciosities to benefit the ruling class. Thus, at the dawn of capitalism, the scene was one of tiny economic nodules, with slowly increasing production, yet with a legal mechanism ensuring that the bulk of the surplus went to the nobles who controlled that legal system. All of this changes to favor indirect production and trade in bulk products—precisely the achievement of the first capitalist power, the Netherlands and its economic empire.

<sup>92</sup> The “domestic mode of production” has also been called “communitarian,” “household,” or “familial.” Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*; Meyers, *Discovering Eve*; Yee, “Gender, Class”; Simkins, “Patronage.” It draws less on the archaeological material I have discussed in this chapter and more on the sociological work of Marshall Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968); idem, “Tribal Economics.”

<sup>93</sup> Ze’ ev Safrai, *The Economy of Roman Palestine* (London: Routledge, 1994), 415.

different modes of production. As an institutional form geared for survival in the context of economic crisis, it has proved resilient. Yet its function, within the larger whole, changes in light of that whole.<sup>94</sup> In the context of the sacred economy, its concerns were ensuring life when land was plentiful, labor was scarce, and usufruct the key. Taxes or tribute imposed by an external authority—often spasmodically if the village in question was far from a center of power—would be met by the whole village. By contrast, in the context of capitalism, with the availability of commodities, the control of strong states with jurisdiction over definable borders, the opportunities for wage-labor in cities nearby, and the use of machinery—all these fundamentally change the way a subsistence-survival approach operates, for it must negotiate the reality of this context.

In terms of ancient Southwest Asia, the penultimate question concerns where this institutional form is found. Given that it was geared for economic crisis and functioned best the further it was from extractive forms, it was more prevalent in marginal zones such as the Levant.<sup>95</sup> Despite the attention lavished on the Levant by scholarship, it is worth stressing that it was indeed peripheral, a minor concern of the centers of political and economic power in Egypt, between the two rivers (Mesopotamia), and occasionally to the north. This is not to say that subsistence survival was not present closer to those centers, with their preference for extractive forms so that they could function. Even here, with the vast bulk of the population

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<sup>94</sup> Even within the same mode of production, the role of subsistence survival may shift within the different regimes that I treat later. In Egypt the dominance of a riverine environment and a longer history of class difference produced a slightly different institutional form. Here, fish were more important, either seasonally or year-round, and pigs played a larger role, as the faunal remains indicate. Even so, sheep and goats remained the basis of herds for the vast majority of common people. Class difference was marked by the preference of the ruling class for overly fattened bovines, which required significant drains on water and fodder. Brewer, "Hunting, Animal Husbandry."

<sup>95</sup> LaBianca, "Tribal Kingdoms," 21.

engaged in agriculture and only a portion involved in the royal and ruling-class estates, subsistence agriculture comprised the main occupation of the populace.

Finally, subsistence survival is an ambivalent institutional form, especially in terms of environment, gender, and class. Here I think of the many who draw upon ancient (often biblical) practices as the inspiration for their own social and economic life, usually as an alternative to the production and consumption of so much trash under capitalism. They seek a form of living that treads lightly upon the earth, that is genuine about mutual gender equality, and that seeks the abolition of hierarchical class distinction. Does subsistence survival provide such a model? Here we need to be wary of becoming too romantic about this form, postulating relative egalitarianism and dreaming of bucolic bliss wherever it occurs. All too often subsistence survival is no festival of equality, for it can be a brutal and unforgiving process. In ancient Southwest Asia, the social structure was usually deeply patriarchal, with kinship, judicial, and military activities directed and controlled by the male elders. Survival may mean the need to offer labor to others for farmwork or as mercenaries, to leave the very old and very young to starve in lean times, to launch raids on neighboring villages, and to leave land when the tax burden became too onerous. Yet it may also offer the possibility for acephalous societies, with an awareness that one needs to produce very little to live, with more democratic than hierarchical practices of social organization. In short, it is an ambivalent economic form that requires a careful touch and much wise discernment if one is to opt for it in our own context.

## Chapter 3

### *Clans, Households, and Patrons*

If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed.

—Genesis 31:42

Kinship-household and patronage are the two remaining institutional forms that are largely allocative, and thereby my focus remains on the marginal zone of the southern Levant. In outlining their major features, I follow the analytical fiction that they may be clearly demarcated from one another. Of course, the reality was quite different, for they run into, overlap, and conflict in myriad ways. My interest is in their economic functions, especially in the way they highlight the inescapably social dimension, or rather the social determination of economic matters. The emphasis may be seen as an elaboration on usufruct and labor, which were the basic concerns of subsistence survival in a situation in which land was plentiful and the population small. This social dimension of the economic also highlights a persistent theme of my reconstruction: the sacred was an inescapable part of economic life.

Let me say a little more on both features of these institutional forms, on the social dimension and on the sacred. The former concerns the economic life of agriculture, in terms of both production and consumption. Although it should be obvious, agriculture is not merely concerned with animal species, water and fodder, soil types, techniques of sowing and harvesting, and so forth. Agriculture simply would not have happened without human acts and relations, without overlapping modes of determining who tills where, who tends animals and how, who receives what from harvest and herd. In other words, allocation is as much a feature of the processes of tillage and husbandry as it is of distributing the produce of such labor.

As for the sacred, both kinship-household and patronage were not bare economic forms, operating purely in terms of economic needs and abilities. They were rich in ideological features, mostly at an everyday level. Yet the web of ideology should not be seen in an idealist fashion, as “subjectively meaningful motivations that give rise to patterns of social action,”<sup>1</sup> but in a dialectically materialist sense, in which praxis and ideology interact with one another in complex patterns. The starting point for understanding the role of the sacred is the material presence in the archaeological record of the ambivalent cult corner. A cult corner may be defined as a “small area or part of an area in a larger building or courtyard, with or without a bench, and containing ritual objects that could accommodate two to three people.”<sup>2</sup> They may take the form of a partition or niche in a wall, a platform, bench, or plastered surface, usually in a corner of a room or in a courtyard.

But why is it “ambivalent”? Often the identification of these corners is made intuitively by archaeologists, assuming clear distinctions between the sacred and the profane. The problem is that, as I argue below, space was multifunctional, or rather, it

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<sup>1</sup> Schloen, *House*, 44.

<sup>2</sup> Louise A. Hitchcock, “Cult Corners in the Aegean and the Levant,” in Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow, *Household Archaeology*, 321–45, esp. 321. See also Garth H. Gilmour, “The Archaeology of Cult in the Southern Levant in the Early Iron Age: An Analytical and Comparative Approach” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1995); Miller, *Religion of Ancient Israel*, 64; Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 248–54; Karel van der Toorn, “Family Religion in Second Millennium West Asia (Mesopotamia, Emar, Nuzi),” in Bodel and Olyan, *Household and Family Religion*, 20–36, esp. 26; Beth Alpert Nakhai, “Varieties of Religious Expression in the Domestic Setting,” in Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow, *Household Archaeology*, 347–60. Objects found include stands for vessels and offerings, small altars, standing stones, drinking and libation vessels, arrowheads and knives, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, model furniture and vehicles, amulets, beads, pendants, animal bones, tools for food preparation, and remains of food offerings. Hitchcock observes that the origin of the term “cult corner” is obscure, but it comes from Eastern Orthodoxy, with its devotional corner. Typically it is modest, with at least an icon and a candle or two, situated on a small corner table. After the Russian Revolution, they were willingly replaced in many homes with “Lenin corners.” The easy move between what is conventionally regarded as sacred and profane is actually typical of such corners, also in ancient Southwest Asia. Such ambivalent spaces should be contrasted to the rooms characteristic of elite practices, such as the room (#65) found at Ai (el-Tel), which may loosely be connected with the folktale of Micah and his personal Levite in Judg 17–18. Ackerman, “Household Religion,” 133–37.

was constantly reproduced through its usage.<sup>3</sup> The fact that some cult corners appear in transitional areas, such as passageways and gates, enhances this reality. This means that what may be used for cultic purposes may also be used for everyday activities, except that to describe it in such a fashion assumes a sharp separation between the two.<sup>4</sup> Instead, while the corner was the location for a sheaf of grain, worked animal bone, amulet, figurine, incense, jug of beer, or a representation of food left for the sake of a god of harvest, or perhaps for animal well-being, safe birth of a child, or for the rains at the right time—it was also the place to put a cooling cooking pot, a loaf of bread before a meal, or some clothes needing repair. Or if at times a space was used for threshing, oil pressing, wine production, or weaving, then the processes may have required regular libations at different stages, or the notching of bone scapulae in a way that was integral to the processes themselves.<sup>5</sup> In Ashdod, for example, potters worked with terra-cotta figurines and kernos rings at their side, to which libations were given. In Tell el-Hammah in the Jordan Valley, spinning and weaving took place in one building, while across the courtyard are found objects such as a kernos, a zoomorphic vessel, astragali, and a female plaque figurine. In the many domestic oil presses and weaving sites in Ekron, a large number of four-horned incense altars have been found.<sup>6</sup> An idealized trace of such activities may have found its way into the

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<sup>3</sup> I use the terminology of Henri Lefebvre's landmark work, *The Production of Space*. For Lefebvre, space is not a given but is produced in the context of modes of production. Thus space is produced in terms of that mode of production, and also the specific acts of production of space determine the nature of that mode.

<sup>4</sup> This point is missed by Press's long argument for specificity in defining "domestic religion," for he seeks clear demarcations. Michael D. Press, "A Problem of Definition: 'Cultic' and 'Domestic' Contexts in Philistia," in Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow, *Household Archaeology*, 361–89.

<sup>5</sup> As Hitchcock ("Cult Corners," 342–43) suggests for a room at Tell es-Şafī/Gath, deploying the term "sacred economy" for such practices. Yet my argument is that "the sacred economy" is an appropriate term for the whole economic system.

<sup>6</sup> See Rüdiger Schmitt, "Ashdod and the Material Remains of Domestic Cults in the Philistine Coastal Plain," in Bodel and Olyan, *Household and Family Religion*, 159–70; Nakhai, "Religious Expression," 351; Schloen, *House*, 143.

legendary story of Gideon encountering a deity at the threshing floor (Judg 6:11–32). More telling is the condemnation in Jeremiah of the daily rituals associated with what is called the “queen of heaven,” for in the process of caricaturing and decrying this “sin,” the text may well leave the spoor of popular practice (Jer 7:18; 44:15–23).<sup>7</sup> The flexible use of these spaces, by both men and women,<sup>8</sup> indicates the way the sacred was interwoven with everyday life. The same applies to the local cultic leaders, who may have other roles—herdsman, farmer, artisan—alongside officiating at local, village-level festivals.<sup>9</sup> The capricious spirits and gods were part of the very structure of the world, for to them was attributed the stillborn lamb and the welcome survival of disease, both the blight on the corn and the full harvest, both the many aches of pre-pain-killer life and the birth of a child. These cult corners were one with the everyday (what we would call) chance occurrences that counted as manifestations of the sacred, whether the appearance of a wild animal, the behavior of one’s flock, the path of an ant or scorpion, the strange color of the sky, the entrails of a sheep upon slaughter. The fluidity I seek to emphasize is embodied not merely in the rhythms surrounding the built structure, but also the religious expression in the very act of building,<sup>10</sup> a

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<sup>7</sup> See the introduction (above), where I outline this fruitful mode of oppositional reading, drawn from Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, 24–46.

<sup>8</sup> Nakhai (“Religious Expression,” 356–59) argues for a greater role for women in such cult corners, especially in relation to reproduction, given that they faced greater risks associated with childbirth, high infant morbidity and mortality, and died on average ten years younger than men. She finds traces, perhaps a little too confidently, in texts such as Gen 12:1–3; 16:7–14; 17:1–22; 24:48; 31:30–36; 35:6–15; Num 30:3–15; Judg 4–5; 11:39–40; 13:2–25; 1 Sam 1–2; 19:11–19.

<sup>9</sup> Knight, *Law, Power*, 81. The rather Lutheran-sounding distinction between “personal piety” and “official religion” proposed by Albertz is therefore both somewhat unhelpful and abstractly disembodied. Rainer Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion: Religionsinterner Pluralismus in Israel und Babylon* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1978). Later Albertz (*Israelite Religion*, 1:19) refined this distinction in terms of (1) “family religion,” or “the personal piety related to the family”; (2) the cults of the local village and region; and (3) “official” religion. For a critical reassessment of such terminology, see Knight, *Law, Power*, 233–35.

<sup>10</sup> Sharon R. Steadman, “Agency, Architecture, and Archaeology: Prehistoric Settlements in Central Anatolia,” in Steadman and Ross, *Agency and Identity*, 27–46, esp. 34–36.

fluidity that found expression in the multiple and fluid bodies of the gods.<sup>11</sup> This creative malleability is a constituent feature of the kinship-household.

### ***KINSHIP-HOUSEHOLD***

So the Israelites departed from there at that time by clans and households.

—Judges 21:24 AT

The role of kinship-household in the allocation of both the means of agricultural production and of usable items from the cultivated flora and fauna is inescapable. The hyphenated title of this institutional form reflects two approaches I seek to connect. Kinship primarily concerns beings, of the living and pulsing type, and of those who used to enjoy that state; household refers to the produced space of habitation. The starting point of kinship is biological; the household begins with the architecturally physical. The former relies more on extrapolating from ethnographic and textual work, while the more recent interest in household research attempts to base itself on archaeology, although here too a good deal of inference and extrapolation takes place. My interest is in the omnipresent economic function of this institutional form.<sup>12</sup> Its main features concern its collective orientation, the malleability of its genealogical reconstructions (extending beyond human beings), flexibility in its productions of space and rhythms of life, and customary law.

### **COLLECTIVES**

In the morning therefore you shall come forward tribe by tribe. The tribe that YHWH takes shall come near by clans, the clan that YHWH takes shall come near by households, and the household that YHWH takes shall come near one by one.

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<sup>11</sup> Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Most of the current work takes its theoretical and methodological cue from Richard R. Wilk and William L. Rathje, "Household Archaeology," *ABS* 25 (1982): 617–39. For useful surveys of the research on households in relation to the Levant, see Assaf Yasur-Landau, Jennie R. Ebeling, and Laura B. Mazow, "Introduction: The Past and Present of Household Archaeology in Israel," in *ibid.*, 1–8; James W. Hardin, "Understanding Houses, Households, and the Levantine Archaeological Record," in *ibid.*, 9–25.



—Joshua 7:14

It is an obvious point that still requires restatement: kinship-household is an eminently collective form. It may be defined as a particular form of collective life with ideological, social, and economic dimensions. In its ideological dimension, the kinship-household functions as an extraeconomic form of economic compulsion, part of the mode of *régulation* crucial for any economic system to function (see the discussion in chap. 1 above). It ensures that most of the small population sees itself as part of the social whole and partakes of the necessary functions to ensure survival. And it does so by offering justifying narratives, such as genealogies and mythical stories of the ancestors, along with fostering customary assumptions such as loyalty, behavior, association, and labor.

Socially, kinship provides certain structures for collective organization. The best way to see such organization in operation is to focus on the village communes I explored in the previous chapter, for these villages were typically organized in terms of kinship.<sup>13</sup> The mean village area during the Bronze and Iron Ages in the southern Levant was 0.5 hectares (1.2 acres), yet many of them occupied less than that area. This provides a mean human population of 75–150 people for each village. Significantly, this is roughly the same size as the clan, or, to use a slippery biblical

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<sup>13</sup> Here I am indebted to the detailed calculations of Liverani (*Israel's History*, 21–22) and Schloen (*House*, 155–65), as well as the careful analysis of Jankowska (“Communal Self-Government,” 239–53) concerning Arrapkha, where the clan and the village overlapped to a significant degree. See also the summary in Knight (*Law, Power*, 122), who distinguishes between very small villages of 0.1–0.3 hectares (0.25–0.74 acres), and small villages of 0.4–1.0 hectares (1–2.5 acres). The mean size of each was 0.2 and 0.7 hectares (0.5 and 1.7 acres). For a different view, in which the clan and village commune, a subsequent development not based on kinship, were distinct but mutually interacting entities, see Danilova, “Precapitalist Societies,” 278; Dunn, “Primitive-Communal Social Order,” 170–71. Yet even Danilova goes against the common assumption that a clan covered wider stretches of territory and included numerous settlements (biblical scholars rely on the unreliable lists in Num 26 and Josh 17). See the interesting suggestion that professions and clans were also coterminous, by Marc Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 108.

term, *mišpāḥ ā*.<sup>14</sup> The overlap is reinforced by the way the Samaria ostraca (8th century) use the same name to designate a place that the Hebrew Bible uses for a clan.<sup>15</sup> Of course, that name was drawn from the mythical founder of the clan village in question. In short, the village (also called ‘*îr*’<sup>16</sup>) and the clan were overlapping realities, as the parallelism of Jer 3:14 (AT) suggests: “I will take you, one from each village [‘*îr*], two from each clan [*mišpāḥ ā*].”<sup>17</sup> So we find that the crucial village commune, with its herds of sheep and goats and patterns of allocated land shares, was largely coterminous with the clan, which provided the social determination of the economic activities of the village.<sup>18</sup> As for the clan itself, it was endogamous, provided protective association (including the basis of the militia), was the primary social horizon within which people understood their place in the world, and, like the subsistence survival with which it was integrated, was remarkably resilient.<sup>19</sup>

But it was also the prime social determination of the economics of subsistence survival. The allocations of field shares, of herding animals, of the transfer of land

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<sup>14</sup> I write “roughly” since we need to be careful not to fix such a correspondence too tightly, especially in light of my emphasis on fluidity and flexibility. In this light, Schloen’s analysis (*House*, 147-55) is too neat; for instance, he would like to see each patrilineal joint-family (*bēt-’ āb*) occupying one dwelling, all of whom then comprise a clan (*mišpāḥ ā*). Despite his effort to take into account life cycles and mortality rates, he misses the flexibility of kinship. Also useful here is Igor M. Diakonoff, “Socio-Economic Classes in Babylonia and the Babylonian Concept of Social Stratification,” in *Gesellschaftsklassen im alten Zweistromland und in den angrenzenden Gebieten*, ed. Dietz Otto Edzard (Munich: Beck, 1972), 41–52, esp. 44.

<sup>15</sup> Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 357–68; Cornelis. H. J. de Geus, *The Tribes of Israel* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1979), 138–40; Schloen, *House*, 156–59.

<sup>16</sup> I simply reiterate the common point that ‘*îr*’ means a settlement of any type. Note here Michael O’Connor’s eloquent warning: “The usage of English ‘city’ in the Bible is not an ordinary part of English usage. Biblical English ‘city’ is a calque, a term that transfers into another language the range of meanings and associations not found in the source language.” Michael Patrick O’Connor, “The Biblical Notion of the City,” in *Constructions of Space II: The Biblical City and Other Imagined Spaces*, ed. Jon L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 18–39, esp. 34.

<sup>17</sup> See also Judg 6:24; 8:32; 2 Sam 14:7.

<sup>18</sup> On the matter of the clan, or gens, as the prime social determinant, I agree with van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*.

where it happened,<sup>20</sup> and of myriad other tasks—these were determined in large part according to patterns of the kinship-household. Production was only half of the story, for kinship comes into its own in the allocation of the much-needed produce of herd and crop.<sup>21</sup> A slaughtered sheep or goat is consumed, from choice portions to apparently useless parts, in terms of kinship lines. So also, the milks, fibers, and bones are distributed according to such patterns. In other words, production and consumption appear as one beneath the umbrella of kinship; it was not a question of individuals sharing (post-Rousseau), but the simple assumption that any labor and usufruct belonged to the collective.

### MALLEABLE GENEALOGIES

There are many ways in which we cannot help behaving just as animals do—or mammals, anyway—and sex is one of the most obvious ones. We copulate, as they do. They have penises and vaginas, as we do.

—Peter Singer<sup>22</sup>

Kinship, however, is not a feature merely of the sacred economy, for it appears in different shapes across quite distinct modes of production. As with subsistence survival, the point here is that kinship's role and place change significantly within

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<sup>20</sup> The prime instances of the determination, by the kinship-household, of such transfers are the “adoptions” in Arrapkha of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries. In this case, an indebted member of a clan “adopted” the creditor and gave him access to his share in exchange for a “gift.” More generally, adoption was used to include “strangers” within the kinship structure, for a variety of reasons that tended to turn on the need to ensure greater numbers of laborers. Here it is clear that “adopting” someone was not a method of engaging in commerce by avoiding state controls, but rather indicates a very different system of value: “Inside the communal-clan structures, and groups of coevals, what counted was not market value but a duty of mutual help. This is a social relation that is at once voluntary and obligatory. Mutual help does not mean delivery of equivalents but only readiness to help whenever needed and in whatever way is needed at the moment.” Ninel B. Jankowska, “Asshur, Mitanni, and Arrapkhe,” in Diakonoff and Kohl, *Early Antiquity*, 228–60, esp. 246. See further, Ninel B. Jankowska, “Communal Self-Government”; idem, “Extended Family Commune and Civil Self-Government in the Fifteenth-Fourteenth Century B.C.,” trans. G. M. Sergheyev, in Diakonoff, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 235–52; Diakonoff, “Structure of Near Eastern Society,” 45.

<sup>21</sup> “Kinship relations served as the social relations of production and distribution, regulating access to the means of production and determining the distribution of the products of labor.” Simkins, “Patronage,” 132.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Singer, “Heavy Petting,” *Nerve*, March 12, 2001, <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/2001-03-12.htm>.

different modes of production. Where it is less prominent, other forces shape the narrative of meaning and nature of economic relations; where it is more prominent (as here), it becomes one of the determining features. A distinct sign of its prominence is the omnipresence of genealogies, most notably in biblical texts such as the Pentateuch (and Chronicles).

Here I am not interested in the futile question as to whether those texts represent “real” genealogies, but rather in the structural role they play. They appear as significant narrative items, structuring and linking the various episodes of the stories in between. The key here (see chap. 1, on theory) is that social and economic conditions leave their traces not so much in the content of a text, but in its structural and formal features. In this light, the framing role of the genealogies acts as a trace of the enveloping function of kinship in everyday life. Or rather, they point to an ideal in which kinship is the dominant form of collective life, a response to precisely the forces that seek to undermine such a life (esp. extractive institutional forms).

Two items need to be emphasized in relation to kinship. The first is that kinship structures were as much practically collective as ideologically constructed. Not only were the flexible genealogies given mythical ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for instance—but they also had their gods, who were fiercely clan-loyal. It is a short step from the mythical narratives of specific clans to the people as a whole clan, a singular gens, all with one patriarchal deity, the God of Israel. That this was a necessary fable, a political myth, is immediately clear from the fact that what counts as Israel was a cobbled-together collection of Canaanites.<sup>23</sup> So common was that

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<sup>23</sup> See further Boer, *Political Myth*.

Canaanite connection that some ideological framework was needed to assert difference—hence kinship.<sup>24</sup>

Second, there is the well-documented artificiality and malleability of genealogies. Such flexibility, usually attributed to political and ideological tensions, is better seen as an indicator of the shifting contours of what counts as the socioeconomic unit of the kinship group. Should a famine or plague decimate some tribal groups, then their leftovers need to be included within other formations. Should captives from war arrive, or should some tribes find themselves splintered due to war, then other groups expand their own sense of identity to include those needing a collective home.<sup>25</sup> Here emerges an apparent tension between conservative assumptions and the realities of life, with its shortage of able-bodied laborers. The genealogies, and indeed customary law concerning endogamous marriage and kinship associations, seem to make it difficult for outsiders to join the group, yet the group in question was highly flexible. How to solve this tension? Assert, as part of the mode of *régulation*, the deep continuity of the genealogies and the restrictions to outsiders,

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<sup>24</sup> Contemporary debates over ethnicity thus function as a spillover of this necessary fable, yet trailing all manner of connections with current struggles over distinction. Here may be found the curious and unabated debates as to whether one can read ethnicity from the archaeological record, especially in efforts to distinguish Israelites from Philistines. A sample may be found in Avraham Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2006); Yuval Gadot, "Houses and Households in Settlements along the Yarkon River, Israel, during the Iron Age I: Society, Economy, and Identity," in Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow, *Household Archaeology*, 155–81; David Ben-Shlomo, "Early Iron Age Domestic Material Culture in Philistia and an Eastern Mediterranean *Koiné*," in *ibid.*, 183–206. That this is heavily determined by struggles between some Israelis and Palestinians in our own day is obvious. For a useful caution on this debate, see P. M. Michèle Daviau, "Domestic Architecture in Iron Age Ammon: Buildings Materials, Construction Techniques, and Room Arrangement," in *Ancient Ammon*, ed. Burton MacDonald and Randall W. Younker (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 113–36, esp. 113.

<sup>25</sup> Danilova, "Precapitalist Societies," 276; Guillaume, *Land, Credit*, 51–52. Schloen's (*House*, 71) Weberian approach is somewhat different, but makes the same point: "As many ethnographers have noted, actual blood relationship, in the Middle East and elsewhere, is less important than the substantive relationships of friendship or dependence that exist among persons who construe their closeness in terms of kinship. On the broader levels of corporate social action (the 'clan' or 'tribe'), in particular, the facts of genealogy are beside the point—common descent is assumed to exist among those who cooperate."

while at the same time constantly remold that “unchangeable” tradition. “We have done so since time immemorial” bears with it the assumption that “time immemorial” is no longer than a few years, if not months. Even more, the creative malleability of genealogies indicates a rather different sense of what constitutes a kinship group or “family.” Rather than assuming that such a group is constituted by blood relations, it moves well outside such connections.

But the question is, how far it did extend? Given the ubiquity of sacrifices to and veneration for the ancestors, the dead were obviously included, not least because they often dwelt in a chamber beneath the floor or were represented by the teraphim, or anthropomorphic statues.<sup>26</sup> While Nancy Jay’s point is well taken—“Ultimately the dead are only important as they integrate and differentiate relations among their living descendants”<sup>27</sup>—I stress that the dead are not merely tools of the living, but are also very much part of the clan, one that is constructed beyond the boundaries of the living. Schloen’s observation is more to the point: “The ‘living’ household was also, in a sense, the household of the dead, because deceased ancestors continued to participate in the social life of their descendants.”<sup>28</sup> Of course, the dead do not engage materially in agricultural production, but even here they are recipients of reallocated produce, particularly in the daily pattern of invoking their names (a task for the eldest son), breaking some bread for them as part of the meal of the living, and in the presence of the “chair for the ghost.” Every month in Mesopotamia, more lavish items were set aside, culminating in the vigil for the dead at the end of the fifth month

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<sup>26</sup> Evidence for such chambers is found across ancient Southwest Asia, whether Syria (Ugarit), the Levant (Bronze Age), or Mesopotamia (Ur). Schloen, *House*, 342–46. On teraphim, see Gen 31:19–54; Judg 17–18; 1 Sam 19:11–17; likely near the door, Exod 21:6. See van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 218–25; Miller, *Religion of Ancient Israel*, 72.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 46.

<sup>28</sup> Schloen, *House*, 346.

(summer). However, their prime function was ideological, an extraeconomic dimension that was very much part of the kinship-household. Given the inescapable interlacing of the sacred with everyday agricultural life, the dead were very much present, for not only did daily life have its specific rituals for the dead, but they were invoked in all those myriad moments I mentioned earlier.<sup>29</sup>

However, the kinship group extended even further. An insight may be gained from an unexpected quarter, namely, the so-called bestiality laws in the Hebrew Bible. The prohibitions against bestiality read as follows (all AT):

Whoever has sex with [*šōkēb*]<sup>30</sup> a beast shall be put to death. (Exod 22:18 [19 ET])

And you shall not ejaculate [*tittēn šēkōbtēkā*]<sup>31</sup> into any beast and defile yourself with it, neither shall any woman bend over before [*ta'āmōd lipnē*]<sup>32</sup> a beast to copulate [*rb'*] with it: it is a perversion. (Lev 18:23)

If a man ejaculates [*yittēn šēkōbtō*]<sup>33</sup> into a beast, he shall be put to death; and you shall kill the beast. If a woman approaches any beast to copulate [*rb'*] with it, you shall kill the woman and the beast; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them. (Lev 20:15–16)

“Cursed be he who has sex [*šōkēb*] with any beast.” And all the people shall say, “Amen.” (Deut 27:21)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> On ancestor cults and veneration for the dead, see Miller, *Religion of Ancient Israel*, 54–55, 71–72; Naomi Steinberg, “Exodus 12 in Light of Ancestral Cult Practices,” in *The Family in Life and Death: The Family in Ancient Israel; Social and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Patricia Dutcher-Walls (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 89–105; E. Bloch-Smith, “From Womb to Tomb: The Israelite Family in Death as in Life,” in *ibid.*, 122–31; van der Toorn, *Family Religion*; *idem*, “Family Religion.”

<sup>30</sup> The basic sense of *škb* is “to lie (down),” but it includes within its semantic cluster sex and dying.

<sup>31</sup> Very euphemistically translated as “lie with” in many translations (although NRSV reads “have sexual relations with”), *tittēn šēkōbtēkā* means, literally, to give a load of semen, to “ejaculate.”

<sup>32</sup> As is so often the case, the translations try to “civilize” the explicit earthiness of the Hebrew text. The NRSV has “give herself to,” while the Hebrew reads stand or “take a position before”; and what position does a woman take before an animal? She turns her behind toward it and bends over.

<sup>33</sup> See note 31, above.

<sup>34</sup> Imagine for a moment the liturgical scene in this text: the Levites say with a loud voice on Mount Gerizim (after the people have crossed the Jordan) that anyone who has sex with an animal shall be put to death. The congregation reverently intones “Amen.” How strange that it has not entered into any Christian books of common prayer. On the intriguing history of such laws in the Middle Ages, in which animals were seen as agents and tried accordingly in courts of law, and into the modern era (with the Code Napoléon, 1804), when it was no longer the role of the state to appease God and enforce his law, see Midas Dekkers, *Dearest Pet: On Bestiality*, trans. Paul Vincent (London: Verso Books, 2000), 116–25; *idem*, *Lief Dier: Over bestialiteit* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Contact, 1992), 130–40; Edward

Apart from the consistent pattern of translations attempting to soften the earthy directness of the Hebrew, we notice, first, that these texts ban sex with any animal;<sup>35</sup> and second, that the command explicitly (and graphically, in the case of Lev 18:23) addresses women as well as men on two occasions. Yet all attempts to interpret these texts isolate them from their literary contexts, which may well be understood as mediated traces of customary village laws.<sup>36</sup> Three of the four occurrences of the ban on bestiality occur in the context of the “incest” taboo.<sup>37</sup> In Lev 18:23, bestiality comes at the conclusion of a long passage on the incest taboo (18:6–18), where we find bans on sex with one’s (assuming a man’s) mother; father’s wife (obviously different from one’s mother); sister or even stepsisters (daughters of one’s mother or father); granddaughters; half sisters; paternal and maternal aunts; a paternal uncle’s wife; daughter-in-law; brother’s wife; sisters; a woman, her daughter, and her granddaughter. At the close of this collection of incest taboos, we also find laws against sex with a woman during her period, sex with a man’s neighbor’s wife, devoting one’s children in the fire to Molech, a ban on male-on-male sex, and finally on bestiality. Rather similar lists of incest taboos, albeit with a few less examples, appear in Lev 20:10–21 (in which vv. 15–16 are found) and in Deut 27:20–23 (the context for v. 21).<sup>38</sup> In other words, the ban on bestiality is one instance of a much

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Payson Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1906; repr., Clark, NJ: Lawbook Exchange, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> It seems that relatively large, domestic animals are in mind here, and that practices such as formicophilia are simply off the radar. Formicophilia is, strictly speaking, sex with ants, but includes any small creatures, such as snails, slugs, and frogs. It is said that to have them crawling—enticed perhaps by some honey or other tidbit—over one’s genitals produces the most exquisite orgasm.

<sup>36</sup> Knight, *Law, Power*, 135–40.

<sup>37</sup> In the fourth ban, Exod 22:19, the prohibition of bestiality is preceded by the commandment to kill sorceresses and followed by a ban on sacrificing to other gods. The immediate context concerns religious practice, which touches on the central role of animal and theriomorphic images and sculptures in all areas of ancient Southwest Asia. On this material, see the extensive collection by Billie Jean Collins, ed., *Animal World*.

<sup>38</sup> The text in Deut 27:15–26, the liturgical recitation on Mount Gerizim, becomes even more intriguing, since the four incest laws appear amid 12 laws that can only be called a variation on the Ten Commandments.



more flexible and extended incest taboo, a taboo that includes not merely relations by blood, but also wider clan relations, menstrual sex, male-on-male sex, and bestiality.<sup>39</sup>

I suggest that we read the obverse side of these texts, for then they become quite revealing. First, they operate with massively different assumptions concerning sex,<sup>40</sup> in which there is no sliding scale of sexually forbidden acts: bestiality is on the same level as having sex with one's aunt by marriage or a menstruating woman. That is, sex with animals, the same sex, and extended relatives are all on par. Second, the biblical laws assume that animals are on the same level, sexually, as a man's extended clan and his fellow men. The clan does not stop with human beings. Hence the laws on bestiality are located within a much expanded range of incest taboos. In this respect, these laws have a deep continuity with the Hittite laws on bestiality, which I have studied elsewhere.<sup>41</sup> Despite apparent differences—the Hittites permitted sex with horses, the dead, and being penetrated by an ox, for instance—they indicate common and shared assumptions concerning sex and kinship. Similar assumptions appear in material scattered across ancient Southwest Asia: lists from the late Uruk period in which the distinction between animals and laborers is nonexistent; the more limited incest laws from Hammurabi; Hittite laws, where we find a list of prices for an ox, horse, ass, mule, and human being—all as part of the one list; a Mesopotamian

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<sup>39</sup> At this point the studies of incest by Brenner, Rashkow, and Carmichael simply fail to see that incest applies beyond human beings. Athalya Brenner, "On Incest," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner, Feminist Companion to the Bible 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 113–38; Ilona Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000); Calum Carmichael, *Sex and Religion in the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 125–36. Schloen (*House*, 148–49) suggests that those mentioned in the collection would have cohabited in one dwelling. If so, then for some strange reason he leaves out bestiality and male-on-male sex.

<sup>40</sup> So different, in fact, that Frymer-Kensky's careful study concludes that she cannot discern any coherent system for dealing with sex in the Bible. Tivka Frymer-Kensky, "Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible," in *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality*, ed. Jonathan Magonet (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995), 3–14.

<sup>41</sup> Boer, *Earthy Nature of the Bible*, 133–47. Note also the list of prices for an ox, horse, ass, mule, and human being, all as part of one list, in the [Hittite laws 147–59](#); Roth, *Law Collections*, 232–33.

ritual for dealing with a twinge of regret for having had sex with a goat; and from a (positive) Mesopotamian omen concerning sex with a horse and kissing it afterward—the timing of the kiss seems to be the crucial item.<sup>42</sup>

To sum up: the clan went well beyond blood relations, yet even living human bodies were not the only bodies that counted. The dead were counted as well, as were domesticated animals of various descriptions. Thus far I have emphasized fluidity and continuity over against clear boundaries. Yet boundaries there were, only at different points. I suggest that there was sharper distinction between ruling-class bodies and those of the estate and rural laborers (the laws especially make this clear). Another was between domesticated and wild animals, as much of the representations in art suggest. In between, however, is our group of animals and human beings (dead and alive), whose bodies were part of the same continuum.

The economic implications should be obvious: patterns of allocation and reallocation, largely concerning foodstuffs, involve these clan members as well. The animal's own contribution was in terms of milk, wool, or hair, and on death its body parts. They were also recipients, of water, food, and care; and the household space, in both village communes and towns, is inconceivable without the omnipresent domesticates.<sup>43</sup> Even more, they were understood as agents in their own right, acting

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<sup>42</sup> In a little more detail: in the late Uruk period, early lists use the same terminology and method of record keeping for both laborers and domestic animals, with the same signs for male and female, age (e.g., an infant is “womb-suckling”), and groups or “herds.” Robert Englund, “Proto-Cuneiform Account-Books and Journals,” in *Creating Economic Order: Record-Keeping, Standardization, and the Development of Accounting in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael Hudson and Cornelia Wunsch (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2004), 23–46, esp. 41–44. The incest laws in the Code of Hammurabi (154–58) concern a man and his daughter, daughter-in-law, mother, and father's principal wife. Roth, *Law Collections*, 110–11. The intriguing horse-kissing omen, as well as the ritual for dealing with one's dalliance with a goat, may be found in JoAnn Scurlock, “Animals,” 379, 937; idem, “Bestiality I: Ancient Near East,” in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 3, *Athena–Birkat ha-Minim* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 935–38.

<sup>43</sup> Singer-Avitz suggests that between four and twenty animals may have been housed in any one dwelling, being parts of the larger herd of the village, with whom they pastured during the day. Lily Singer-Avitz, “Household Activities at Tel Beersheba,” in Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow,

in ways that manifested the capriciousness of the gods, to be watched and studied closely, to be divined through myriad means. In other words, through the creative expansion of one's sexual and kinship horizons, animals were included within the workings of the sacred economy.

### **FLEXIBLE HOUSEHOLDS**

“A room of your own” is a comparatively modern concept, which has, through many centuries, been filtered down from the great houses of the wealthy. Shared rooms, shared attics, shared beds, shared lives have been and are the common lot of most people, involving a close, noisy, often smelly intimacy between people and livestock.

—Brian Roberts<sup>44</sup>

All of this brings me to the concern with households, which has become a major focus of archaeological work since to some extent it, laudably, provides access to the lives of ordinary people rather than those of the ruling class.<sup>45</sup> I assume a definition of household that provides a slight twist to the usual: a household comprises the rhythms of life and flexible constructions of space within and without a distinct structure or collection of structures that may be more or less permanent, which is made possible by the social and economic context in which it is found. Let me say a little more about each of these terms. “Household” is far preferable to “family,” with its modern assumptions of (constructed) blood ties between individuals. Thus it is comprised of people, animals, the smells, sounds, tastes, and items of everyday life: tools, cooking pots, jugs, storage containers, clothes, pestles, lamps, and so forth. However, these are not static: they involve constant rhythms, of movement within, of the flow of items,

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*Household Archaeology*, 275–301, esp. 287. See also Stager, “Archaeology of the Family,” 12; Schloen, *House*, 137–38.

<sup>44</sup> Roberts, *Landscapes of Settlement*, 84.

<sup>45</sup> “Household commune” was a common term in Soviet scholarship well before its recent fashion. Igor M. Diakonoff, “Commune in the Ancient East,” 529; idem, “Structure of Near Eastern Society,” 37; idem, “General Outline of the First Period of the History of the Ancient World and the Problem of the Ways of Development,” in Diakonoff and Kohl, *Early Antiquity*, 27–66, esp. 34–35; idem, “Despotisms in Mesopotamia,” 88.

both animate and inanimate, into and out of the place, of the way space itself is produced through such rhythms.<sup>46</sup> That is, households are eminently flexible, constantly reusing items for different purposes, and reconfiguring internal and external space in multiple ways, depending upon the needs of the moment. While “household” emphasizes structures for dwelling, such dwellings may be more or less permanent. They may be anything from tents or ruins used for a season, or they may be longer-term structures made out of brick, timber, mud, and plaster—whether the “courtyard” cluster or ubiquitous “pillared” dwelling in the southern Levant, with its three or four rooms. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the household is contained within such spaces, for it comprises what is both external and internal to the various structures. Finally, households are not discrete units, but constituted by the social and economic context in which they function—the clan village with which I began this section.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Here I am indebted to the insights of Henri Lefebvre, both his proposals concerning the production of space (see note 3 above) and “rhythmanalysis.” Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London: Continuum, 2004); idem, *Éléments de rythmanalyse* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 1992). Nakhai (“Religious Expression,” 347) offers a useful description that comes close to my emphasis: “In Israel, domestic space was used in different ways depending upon seasonal factors, food preparation requirements, craft production activities, storage needs, issues with livestock, and more.” For a comparable focus on motion, using “time-geography” theory, albeit bedeviled by a focus on the individual, see Scott Branting, “Agents in Motion,” in Steadman and Ross, *Agency and Identity*, 47–59. This reality is enhanced if we keep in mind that households were more often clusters or compounds rather than singular structures. Ackerman, “Household Religion,” 128. More sedately, one may speak of the “multifunctional use of defined spaces,” although this does not quite capture the dynamic process of constructing and reconstructing space through use. See Itzhaq Shai et al., “Differentiating between Public and Residential Buildings: A Case Study from Late Bronze Age II Tell eṣ-ṣafi/Gath,” in Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow, *Household Archaeology*, 107–31, esp. 112; Aaron J. Brody, “The Archaeology of the Extended Family: A Household Compound from Iron II Tell en-Naṣbeh,” in *ibid.*, 252.

<sup>47</sup> My thanks to Christina Petterson (personal communication) for this definition, which is drawn from her current work on the Moravian household in eighteenth-century Europe. See also Diakonoff, “Commune in the Ancient East,” 530. Too often definitions of “household” restrict it to human beings and veer toward the static. This is a legacy of the oft-cited definition of Wilk and Rathje, who specify: (1) the social unit constituting the household; (2) the material reality of the dwelling and its contents; (3) human behavior. Wilk and Rathje, “Household Archaeology,” 618; Hardin, “Understanding Houses,” 14; David Ben-Shlomo, “Domestic Material Culture,” 186.

This definition is an effort both to deal with some of problems associated with research on households and to focus specifically on economic matters.<sup>48</sup> Too often is it assumed that a household is a dwelling in which a family lives, either nuclear or extended.<sup>49</sup> Although scholarly weight is firmly on the side of extended families, it is usually postulated in terms of different combinations of nuclear and extended families, with the latter spread over a number of households.<sup>50</sup> Alternatively and very much within the family fold, a simplistic and unmediated correlate is at times made between size of dwelling and size of family: smaller structures (esp. in towns) are assumed to be the dwellings of nuclear families, while larger structures (sometimes in

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<sup>48</sup> Many studies promise economic analysis, but it remains largely undeveloped. For example, see Shai et al., “Public and Residential Buildings,” 107–31; Ilan, “Household Gleanings,” 133–54; Gadot, “Houses and Households.” A significant disappointment is William G. Dever, *The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel: Where Archaeology and the Bible Intersect* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012). An exception is Faust, who proposes a loose tripartite model: private family, lineage, and royal. The private family is characteristic of urban locales and is directly subject to the royal in terms of taxes, although private enterprise keeps a zone for itself. Lineage systems characterize rural sectors and mediate between households and royal demands. The royal economy seems largely to levy taxes and tribute. The proposal is notable for its conservative assumptions, the looseness of its terminology, and the absence of any rigorous theoretical discussion. Avraham Faust, “Household Economies in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah,” in Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow, *Household Archaeology*, 255–73.

<sup>49</sup> Stager’s oft-cited but problematic article (“Archaeology of the Family”) on the “family” in ancient Israel (which he assumes was based in the highlands from 1200 BCE onward) assured that this unfortunate term would persist in studies of households in the Levant. As a sample, see Nava Panitz-Cohen, “A Tale of Two Houses: The Role of Pottery in Reconstructing Household Wealth and Composition,” in Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow, *Household Archaeology*, 85–105, esp. 100–103; Brody, “Extended Family”; Faust, “Household Economies”; Saul M. Olyan, “Family Religion in Israel and the Wider Levant of the First Millennium BCE,” in Bodel and Olyan, *Household and Family Religion*, 113–26.

<sup>50</sup> As a sample, see Panitz-Cohen, “Tale of Two Houses,” 100–103; Brody, “Extended Family”; Faust, “Household Economies”; van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 225. Alternatively, the conflict between nuclear and extended families is read as locus of political and economic tension between kinship structures and the monarchy. Simkins, “Patronage,” 136–38; idem, “Family.” Schloen (*House*, 135–36, 149–54) has a slightly more nuanced proposal, in which the *mišpāḥ ā* is the clan, *bēt-’ āb* is the patrilineal joint family (conjugal couple, unmarried children, married sons and their wives and children, dependent paternal kin, and slaves), which then goes through cycles of the full joint family and nuclear units—both of which are called *bēt-’ āb*. If we must use the terminology of extended families, then Diakonoff has to my knowledge the simplest and best solution: an extended family is the norm, but occasionally breakaway groups may for a time function as what we now call nuclear families, until they have built themselves up to the status of an extended family. Igor M. Diakonoff, “Extended Families in Old Babylonian Ur,” *ZAA* 75 (1985): 47–65, esp. 48–49.

towns but more often in villages) housed extended families.<sup>51</sup> The initial problem here is the looseness of the terminology, for “nuclear” and “extended” operate as a catchall opposition that gathers all manner of different arrangements without specification. The two key terms, *bêṭ-’ āb* and *mīšpāḥ ā*, are often used loosely, with the former doing double service as a nuclear family and as a patrilineal joint (extended) family, while the latter is taken either as an extended family or as a broader clan or patronymic association of related households. Does “extended” include all blood relations, or only some of them, or perhaps those also fused by means of legal arrangement? Does it include the dead, animals, recent additions that have been creatively added to the genealogy?<sup>52</sup> Only in this light does it make sense to speak of an “extended” family, although I prefer “clan.” As for the “nuclear” family, it is best to put that term to rest and refer to a “mating couples,” in the immediate sense of what is physically and biologically necessary for the production of children. In pondering these questions, the oft-unexamined assumptions associated with the term “family” begin to reveal themselves. It comprises the fundamental building block of society and economy, some argue as they echo slogans of the religious and political right. It includes one’s immediate or more distant blood and legal relatives, is natural, and is universal. And a family lives in a house, or at least an identifiable and discrete

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<sup>51</sup> These calculations operate on the rather fixed assumption that one human being requires 10 square meters (12 square yards) of roofed area in which to live. Avraham Faust, “Differences in Family Structure between Cities and Villages in the Iron Age II,” *TA* 26 (1999): 233–52; idem, “The Farmstead in the Highlands of Iron Age II Israel,” in *The Rural Landscape of Ancient Israel*, ed. Aren M. Maeir, Shimon Dar, and Ze’ ev Safrai (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2003), 91–104; idem, “Household Economies,” 257, 262–63; Ilan, “Household Gleanings,” 133–54, esp. 144. Morris offers a comparably crude example from the study of Greek history, in which house size is taken to be an indication of growth in wealth. Ian Morris, “Archaeology, Standards of Living, and Greek Economic History,” in Manning and Morris, *Ancient Economy*, 91–126.

<sup>52</sup> Thereby expanding what Laslett calls a “houseful.” Peter Laslett, “Introduction: The History of the Family,” in *Household and Family in Past Time*, ed. Peter Laslett and Richard Wall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 1–89, esp. 36.

dwelling, separated from other families who live in similar dwellings.<sup>53</sup> The anachronism is becoming obvious; yet I add that the anthropological evidence of the way human beings connect with one another is so varied that it becomes difficult to know what “family” means. In some cases husbands and wives never live together; in others the biological paternity of children is never known and is ignored in raising children; in yet others slaves mediate all social relations; and so on.<sup>54</sup> Further, it is salutary to remind ourselves that this focus on the family is a relatively recent affair, with its own history. Arising with the comprehensive realignments of social and economic life associated with the long process of capitalism’s emergence, the family became a discrete unit and thereby an object worthy of attention. Not until the seventeenth century in Europe does the family become such a concern, for before that time it was very much the household.

A second problem is a carryover from the focus on the family: the household, it is asserted ad nauseam, is the basic socioeconomic unit, upon which larger economic structures are built.<sup>55</sup> The trap now, however, is a fragmented and Taylorized approach to the economy. One begins with the smallest identifiable unit and then sees the whole as made up of those units—a distinctive approach characteristic of capitalism and its liberal ideology. The truth is somewhat different, for those units would not exist at all without the wider framework. A household exists

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<sup>53</sup> See also the criticisms of the terminology of “family” by Ackerman, “Household Religion,” 127.

<sup>54</sup> See the extensive number of examples in Bonnie J. Fox, ed., *Family Patterns, Gender Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Susan McKinnon, *Neo-Liberal Genetics: The Limits and Moral Tales of Evolutionary Psychology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> Many studies begin by simply reiterating the claim, by Wilk and Rathje in their programmatic study, that the household is the “most common social component of subsistence, the smallest and most abundant activity group.” Wilk and Rathje, “Household Archaeology,” 618. As a sample of this repeated assertion, see Meyers, “Material Remains,” 427; Hardin, “Understanding Houses,” 10; Brody, “Extended Family,” 239; Faust, “Household Economies,” 255; Singer-Avitz, “Household Activities,” 275.

not in sheer isolation, as though on another planet, but in the context of the socioeconomic institutional form, and thereby within a mode of production.

Third, researchers are tempted to regard the household as a static entity. The physical reality of traces of foundations, walls, roofs, and rooms often make this temptation irresistible, as do the archaeological items that have lain in situ for millennia.<sup>56</sup> They count the household not only as static, but also as contained and constrained by the outer walls of a single dwelling or of a cluster of structures (tents typically do not leave much of a trace). My earlier definition explicitly seeks to counter such a static approach, focusing as it does on rhythms and the flexibility of constantly reconstructed space. Precisely how such space was reproduced may actually be beyond our imaginative ability. I think not only of the constant rhythms and flows inside and outside a built structure or collection of structures, not only of the fact that a household is clearly not constrained by walls (that are often difficult to identify), but also of a couple of curious features that emerge from documents of transfer (although there are no central state registers of possessors or title deeds<sup>57</sup>). Throughout Mesopotamia, a reasonably large collection of such documents—all from urban contexts, but here we may extrapolate to rural situations on the question of space—specify the built space that is to be transferred in terms of its internal dimensions (not including the courtyard), not the external dimensions, as so much

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<sup>56</sup> Schloen's (*House*, 165–83) quaint but obsessive effort to calculate numbers of persons on the basis of dwelling size is perhaps the most extreme example. See also Panitz-Cohen, "Tale of Two Houses."

<sup>57</sup> Instead, documents of transfer were kept in the household that had been transferred, along with earlier such documents. As the sole record of the legitimacy of possession, they were carefully guarded, which explains the relatively large number of records that were preserved. See Marc Van de Mieroop, "Thoughts on Urban Real Estate in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Urbanization and Land Ownership in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael Hudson and Baruch A. Levine (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1999), 253–87, esp. 254–55.



analysis assumes.<sup>58</sup> The difference is often considerable.<sup>59</sup> At this point, we may suggest that such a focus reveals a concern with living space and not with external house size as a determinant of value. But now it becomes even more intriguing: virtually all of the titles that have survived never specify a complete structure, but only part of it, usually a room or part of a room, which was measured out by covering the floor with grain, such as barley or emmer wheat. A number of town or village officials with various titles (such as “master house surveyor,” “street herald,” and “great one of the peg”) were present to ensure that the measurements and payments were accurate. The part of the room so transferred then had an object (peg or cone) hammered into the wall. I have been unable to find anyone who can provide coherent reasons for these practices, particularly the parts of rooms transferred, which suggests that the perceptions and constructions of space are even further from our own than we may expect.<sup>60</sup> Further, the layout of the remains of built structures and their relationships to one another indicates a very different sense of spatial production. Each is at oblique angles, jutting out here, and bending to the curving streets and lanes there. Often a building has a bend or two on one side, with a rather different bend on the other. Why these varying angles? Why these bent streets? Why the jumbles of houses and buildings? It speaks of a production of space, a notion of lived reality that is far from our own under capitalism. It is not as though they did not have the wherewithal to construct neat right angles, but rather—and this is only a guess—the

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<sup>58</sup> Gadot, “Houses and Households,” 160; Bruce Routledge, “Average Families? House Size Variability in the Southerly Levantine Iron Age,” in Dutcher-Walls, *Family in Life and Death*, 42–60; Faust, “Family Structure.”

<sup>59</sup> For example, Van de Mierop discusses (“Urban Real Estate,” 266) a tablet from Tello in the Old Akkadian period, in which the entire building measures 164.5 m<sup>2</sup>, but the inside space is 89 m<sup>2</sup>, which is 54 percent of the external dimensions.

<sup>60</sup> For further discussion, see *ibid.*, 356; Goddeeris, *Economy and Society*.

sense that human existence was a much more complex affair, in contrast to the supposedly clear calculations of life in our own time.

Flexible, dynamically rhythmic, perpetually reproduced space—these are the features of the household I seek to emphasize. But what are the implications for kinship? Apart from my earlier point concerning the malleability of genealogies, the clan-group underwent patterns of expansion and contraction. Due to life cycles of children and adults, the needs of households varied, at times being less and at others more. But so also did the capabilities fluctuate according to life cycles.<sup>61</sup> Further, while the households in question were patriarchal and patrilineal, physically embodied in the importance of the patriarch's testicles,<sup>62</sup> they were not fixed entities, but malleable in terms of who or what was part of that patriarchal household. It had both ideological functions, vital for the mode of *régulation*, and economic roles. The rhythms of who went out when to what field shares; what animals would be taken out to the herds and back again; what equipment was used and to whom it should be given next; who would work the olive presses or cultivate the orchards; what foods, fibers, fuels, liquids, and other products were gathered, brought in, and processed; where food was to be cooked and eaten and where it was to be taken;<sup>63</sup> which animals would return; how waste was dealt with—these constant flows were determined by the social

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<sup>61</sup> See Schloen's effort to account for such cycles (*House*, 135–36, 149–54), although he tries to tie it down too closely in line with “nuclear” and “extended” families. My thanks to Kitty Murphy (personal communication) for the need to mention this point concerning life cycles.

<sup>62</sup> On the patriarch's testicles, see Boer, *Earthy Nature of the Bible*, 49–58. One indication of the overwhelmingly patriarchal nature of such clans was the fine line that was usually unable to distinguish a priestess from a prostitute, a woman who was supposedly “not under patriarchal authority.” Igor M. Diakonoff, “Women in Old Babylonia Not under Patriarchal Authority,” *JESHO* 29 (1986): 225–38.

<sup>63</sup> These rhythms and flows of food are implicit in the concept of “foodways,” although the full potential of such foodways is not often realized. Nimrod Marom and Sharon Zuckerman, “Applying On-Site Analysis of Faunal Assemblages from Domestic Contexts: A Case Study from the Lower City of Hazor,” in Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow, *Household Archaeology*, 37–54. Typically food was prepared and cooked outside in the hotter months and inside during cooler seasons. Brody, “Extended Family,” 249.

reality of the patriarchal kinship-household. So too were activities that required collective activity, such as harvesting, oil pressing, baking, beer and wine brewing, and storage of surpluses for tough times.<sup>64</sup>

What are the implications for gender? Here two points are pertinent. First, women found themselves in either a patrilocal or virilocal household.<sup>65</sup> By patrilocal I mean the woman lives in the house of her father (or grandfather, in the unlikely chance that he is still alive) while her partner comes to live in the same household. It follows that a virilocal household entailed the woman living in the household of her husband, who would then be subject to his own father. These distinctions are an obvious and deliberate shift from the traditional categories of matrilineal and patrilocal, which obscure the nature of gender arrangements. In either case, the women in question were formally and socially subject to the economic and social directions of the male head of the household. All of this leads to the second point concerning the division of labor. Here we face a curious twist.<sup>66</sup> Many have assumed that women typically engaged in “domestic activities,” such as the processing and preparation of food, spinning and weaving, bearing and raising of young, along with labor-intensive tasks involved in the gathering, threshing, and storage of crops. The problem is that it is actually quite difficult to specify such activities from

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<sup>64</sup> A sufficient number of installations in village communes may well have been oil presses, bakeries, breweries, and storage facilities—thus indicating collective activity on these matters. They are clearly not facilities of a central, monarchic government, for they are far smaller than those of the ruling powers, and it makes little sense to have such facilities unguarded, especially among those who have produced the goods in question and who were regularly plundered and taxed by the same ruling powers. Schloen (*House*, 138–40) points out that the locations of the oil presses indicate that they were part of the subsistence economy, with approximately 20 percent of dwellings having such presses.

<sup>65</sup> Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Jobling, “Feminism and ‘Mode of Production.’”

<sup>66</sup> It is not for nothing that Marx and Engels, in the first rough outline of historical materialism in *The German Ideology*, equivocate over the first moment of the division of labor. They state that gender comprises that first moment, only to hesitate. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy according to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism according to Its Various Prophets* (written, 1845–46; first published, 1932), in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 5:19–539.

archaeological data. Some skeletal remains of women indicate deformities from bending, kneeling, and threshing, and it may be the case that cooking and weaving were primarily the tasks of women; but as Singer-Avitz points out, it is impossible to determine what household spaces were used by which sex.<sup>67</sup> By now the reason should be obvious, for the multifunctional flexibility of space, which was constantly reproduced, also means that men and women overlapped in many areas of the actual work needed for subsistence survival in the framework of the kinship-household. While the whole structure may have been normally under the tutelage of a kinship-household head, the reality of shortage of labor meant less specialization and the utilization of all hands.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, we should not forget how these rhythms and flows impressed the senses. Sounds come and go: humans talking and shouting, calling to animals, whistling to a dog; animals bleating, snorting, lowing, barking, hissing, pissing, and defecating. Smells move almost as fast as light, swirling about and constantly on the move: urine, feces, refuse piles, raw meat, blood, threshed grain, baked bread, brewing beer, cooking stews, unwashed human bodies, wet animal fur, lanolin, the smells of sex, birth, and death. . . . For where it smells, it is not only warm, it is also busy. Without the myriad agents to remove bacteria and their effect, taste too was strong, on the air, in the food, in the beer and wine, in the intimacy of ripely smelling bodies. And touch: of fur, wool, and hide; of thistle, fruit, and grain; of wood, stone, and metal; of slime, roughness, and moisture.

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<sup>67</sup> Singer-Avitz, "Household Activities," 294. Hardin ("Understanding Houses," 21) stresses the dynamic and adaptive nature of gender and labor, over against static and absolute distinctions.

<sup>68</sup> Meyers (*Discovering Eve*, 169–70), following Phyllis Sanday, suggests that the optimal ratio for female-male involvement in tasks in such a situation is optimally 40:60. The discrepancy is due to women's energies engaged in reproduction. If women go beyond this ratio, the effect is detrimental to economic production. I add the caveat that the components of labor with the ratio were flexible.

## CUSTOMARY LAW

They called together all the elders of the town,  
and all their young men and women ran to the assembly.

—Judith 6:16

Kinship-household was also the locus of customary law, laced inextricably to the sacred.<sup>69</sup> This was the realm of village and clan elders, headmen (sometimes called “mayors”), councils, but above all the community as a whole. Never codified, customary law comprised the collection of commonly agreed practices and assumptions ensuring that a community functioned for the sake of subsistence survival.<sup>70</sup> They were local rules for social interaction, except that they were internalized in such a way that they were rarely, if ever, seen as external, but rather as common sense, as the way the world should be and the way it has always been.

Inherently conservative, they were passed on and maintained from generation to generation, since they had proved themselves as the basis of survival. After all, they were sanctioned by the capricious gods. So why change them in any drastic fashion?

Or so it was believed. This conservative assumption was part of the mode of *régulation*, needed to maintain a sense of continuity. Yet the assumed unchangeableness of customary law was predicated on, and indeed justified, constant adaptation. For example, marriage may be endogamous, but that was the framework for constant and creative adaptation that both admitted outsiders and kept endogamous patterns intact (Gen 38:2; Exod 2:21; and Ezra 9–10 may be read as a

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<sup>69</sup> For a comprehensive study of customary law, with many insights, see Knight, *Law, Power*, 115–56. Note esp. twelve principles of customary law of ancient villages (128–29).

<sup>70</sup> Adams, “Property Rights,” 2. Like many, Schloen (*House*, 77) suggests that such law was ad hoc, with no “logic” or “organizing ideas.” For grand surveys that are of limited use in relation to customary law and even the more delectable features of codified law, such as sex and bestiality, see Raymond Westbrook, ed., *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003); Claus Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern Law: A History of Its Beginnings; The Early Dynastic and Sargonic Periods*, rev. ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007).

response to such patterns). Or, inheritance may be described as needing to remain within the kinship-household, but that was enabled by finding all manner of ingenious ways to ensure the continuity of that ideological fiction (Lev 25, 27; Num 27; Ruth 4; 1 Kgs 21).<sup>71</sup> In other words, customary law did change in the face of new situations, within and without the community. When the ever-present threat of economic crisis became real (as in the long period toward the close of the second millennium), the collection of assumed patterns of social interaction would be reconstituted to ensure survival. When imperial powers flexed their muscles and imposed new tributes, the law would shift to deal with the new situation. Yet this way of framing the process of adaptation to greater, external forces posits the community and its law as weak, as a minor factor in the grand movements of economics and empires. I suggest that the situation operated in reverse: the sheer resilience of kinship-household and subsistence survival, along with its creative adaptation to ever-changing conditions, was itself the constitutive force. The various imperial powers found themselves forced to adapt, seeking ever-new ways to exploit the communities in question. That is, customary law was part of what may be called the constitutive resistance of kinship-household and subsistence survival.<sup>72</sup>

Despite its tantalizing vagueness, evidence from Mesopotamia indicates that limited citizen councils (of adult males) and mayors existed in many places, even in

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<sup>71</sup> Here it is worth noting that *naḥālā* designates not so much inviolable inheritance as the process of transition or passing over. The root *nh l* means to take possession (*qaI*), allocate (*piel*), and give (*hiphiI*), all with the association of inheritance. That is, it designates the acquisition (*qaI*) of something that is allocated or given (*piel* and *hiphiI*).

<sup>72</sup> Here I disagree with Knight (*Law, Power*, 117–18), who sees the villages as dominated by central powers. I draw this proposal from the work of Antonio Negri, whose *operaismo* (workerism), developed from his collective reflections while engaged with Italian workers, argues that the ruling powers do not constitute the center against which resistance throws itself. Instead, those powers are forced to adapt consistently to the constitutive resistance, which is itself the core reality. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 64–91.

the neighborhoods that made up larger conglomerations of towns and the rare city. In the southern Levant (based on material from Ugarit and Alalakh), the reality was more often a council of elders (or “fathers”), along with a village headman that some like to call quaintly a “mayor.”<sup>73</sup> Their jurisdiction was local, restricted to the village or perhaps across several villages related through kinship. That is, no national body of such customary legislators existed. Why were they needed when the laws in question were part of oral tradition and imbibed by everyone from youth onward? The individual who broke from customary law needed to be dealt with; the arguments over field shares often demanded mediation (whether the sections cultivated by my neighbor are responsible for all the weeds in my share); the conflicts between village communes required some form of arbitration; the decimation of a clan might require some creative thinking to deal with the few survivors; inheritance may have become messy for a much-broken and rebuilt clan; the demands of a marauding warlord may need concerted action; the presence of a disruptive village idiot may require an effort to explain his actions or bring him or her into line. In each case, the local councils and their leaders were called upon to adjudicate.<sup>74</sup>

Ultimately, customary law grew out of and was constantly reapplied to the social and economic realities of kinship-household and thereby subsistence survival. Laced in with the sacred, it provided the strongest form of ideological glue to those

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<sup>73</sup> Jankowska, “Communal Self-Government,” 274–76; Diakonoff, “Commune in the Ancient East,” 532, 540. See the detailed terminology in idem, “Structure of Near Eastern Society.” Traces may be found in the *zēqēnīm* and *zīqnē hā’īr*, “elders” and “elders of a town” (Deut 19:12; 21:3; Josh 20:4; Ruth 4:2; 1 Sam 16:4). On councils of elders, mayors, and even assemblies, in Bronze Age Emar, Ugarit, Alalakh, and Israel, see Heltzer, *Rural Community*, 75–83; McNutt, *Society of Ancient Israel*, 100–101, 176; Liverani, *Israel’s History*, 22; Daniel E. Fleming, “The Integration of Household and Community Religion in Ancient Syria,” in Bodel and Olyan, *Household and Family Religion*, 37–59, esp. 39; Knight, *Law, Power*, 72–73. See, however, the useful warnings by Van de Mieroop (*Ancient Mesopotamian*, 121–39) concerning the tantalizing vagueness of the material concerning assemblies, elders, and mayors, and his intriguing proposal that they did not disappear with stronger monarchs, but were actually a product of that process.

<sup>74</sup> Jankowska, “Communal Self-Government,” 246–66; Knight, *Law, Power*, 74.

institutional forms. It therefore functioned as a vital component of the mode of *régulation*. In other words, it was part of the collection of assumptions and compromises needed for the allocatory institutional forms.

Customary law was not, however, the only form of law to be found in the Levant, let alone in ancient Southwest Asia. Far better known and discussed are the codified forms that have been preserved on tablet and text: Hammurabi's Code, that of the Hittites, the Torah, and so on. Although in part they contain some of the customary laws that became ossified, they were primarily the products of ruling powers.<sup>75</sup> For this reason, I discuss them in the context of extractive institutional forms.

## **PATRONAGE**

Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him [David]; and he became captain over them.

—1 Samuel 22:2

The step from the head of the kinship-household to the patron is small.<sup>76</sup> At times the powerful man would find himself surrounded by flunkies, sycophants, perpetual

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<sup>75</sup> They shared the basic assumption of all judiciaries: the duty to structure, sanction, and facilitate the dominant socioeconomic system. One may briefly compare feudalism's legal bonding of serfs to the lord (premised on the strength of the lord and the weakness of any state forms), or capitalism's labyrinthine judicial protections of competition and private property, including the human person.

<sup>76</sup> At times they are confused as one and the same, or rather, kinship-household is swallowed up by the whale of patronage, most notably in the Weberian category of patrimonialism deployed by Schloen, *House*. See the useful criticisms by McGeough, *Exchange Relationships*, 81–85. Among those who have outlined patronage in the Levant, see Niels Peter Lemche, "Kings and Clients"; idem, "Patronage Society"; idem, "The Relevance of Working with the Concept of Class in the Study of Israelite Society in the Iron Age," in *Concepts of Class in Ancient Israel*, ed. Mark Sneed (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 89–98; idem, *Prelude to Israel's Past: Background and Beginnings of Israelite History and Identity*, trans. E. F. Maniscalco (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 102; idem, *The Old Testament between Theology and History*, trans. E. F. Maniscalco (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 420–21; Simkins, "Patronage,"; idem, "Family"; T. Raymond Hobbs, "Reflections on Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations," *JBL* 116 (1997): 501–3; Liverani, *Prestige and Interest*. Although Lemche argues that patronage is a central feature (and that class is irrelevant), Simkins and Schloen go further. Simkins elevates this particular institutional form and makes it the determinative feature of the mode of production and its political system, which he calls a patron-client or clientalistic mode. Operating with an idealist approach (derived from Max Weber and Paul Ricoeur), Schloen makes patronage, or "patrimonialism," the all-explanatory term. Unfortunately, he inherits Weber's orientalist tendency to see patrimonialism as characteristic of a largely unchanging East and ancient world (which becomes for Schloen the Mediterranean-style joint-family patrilocal household). Indeed,



dinner guests, and anyone else who had determined that this was an easier way to make a living or that their own special gifts did not ensure food, shelter, and clothing. In the latter group one finds writers (of religious texts), poets, musicians, philosophers, religious specialists, and occasional performers for festivals: jugglers, comics, and even, in some contexts, troupes of farters.<sup>77</sup> Of course, patronage is not peculiar to biblical societies, for it appears in ancient Rome, ancient China, and today among politicians, academics, and gangsters at a more informal level.

The structure of patronage is quite simple: the patron has something I want and need, such as security, shelter, and food. But I have something he wants, my support, whether my ability with animals or crops, or perhaps with my fist and sword. The relationship is personalized and customary: I give allegiance and loyalty to my patron, while the patron protects me and ensures that I survive.<sup>78</sup> This may sound reciprocal, an informal contract of sorts between equals, each bringing to the deal something the other needs. Indeed, the ideology of patronage seeks to give that impression, presenting the relationship as reciprocal.<sup>79</sup> Nothing could be further from the truth, for patronage reminds us that allocatory economic systems are rarely festivals of equality. Patronage highlights the fact that allocation is all too often

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he goes beyond Weber, finding patrimonialism in Roman Egypt, Renaissance Tuscany, Ottoman Syria, feudal Europe, classical Greece, the Roman Empire, and Islamic-majority areas up to the modern era.

<sup>77</sup> For a reference to farting as music, see Isa 16:11 KJV. In other societies, such farters appear as well. One is “Roland the farter,” who performed at the English court of Henry III (1216–72); others appear in early Irish records that mention troupes of farters among the musicians of the clan head man or patron. Allen, *On Farting*, 64–81.

<sup>78</sup> Lemche identifies what I have called customary law as part of patronage. Lemche, “Patronage Society,” 111–12. As I noted earlier, Lemche makes patronage his overarching explanatory model and thereby locates such law primarily here. More realistically, customary law was characteristic of both kinship-household and patronage.

<sup>79</sup> Simkins, “Patronage,” 134.

hierarchical, in which qualitatively different items pass between patron and client, in which the material balance heavily favors the patron.<sup>80</sup>

Above all, patronage is a very ambivalent institutional form: it describes one element of the patriarchal clan head's *modus operandi* but goes well beyond him; it may work in collusion with the institutional form of kinship-household, but it may also present a fundamental challenge to that form; it may operate in an allocatory fashion, but it can also easily slip into patterns of extraction, with all manner of thuggery, extortion, class differences, and modes of government. Let me take each item in turn. To begin with, the similarities, if not overlaps, between patron and clan head should be obvious. Both are powerful men, commanding the allegiance of what is often a considerable body of people, dispensing a form of justice, and with not unreasonable firepower available should their respective groups face trouble. Their power, of course, relies on the extent and strength of their respective kinship-households or client bases, not to mention the labor that keeps everyone fed, clothed, and sheltered. At an ideological level, they also seem to be very similar, for they represent their various relationships as relatively equal, with mutual obligations. Even more, patronage deploys the language of kinship, with the patron acting as a loyal "father" to his faithful "sons" and "servants."

An example of such overlaps between the clan headman and the patron appears in the mythical story of Abram and the 318 men who rescue Lot and his worldly goods (Gen 14). Here Abram is the idealized clan leader, whose very wealth in livestock, silver, and gold is a stark contrast to the subsistence survival of real life. In response to Lot's capture by the minor coalition of local warlords, Abram leads out

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<sup>80</sup> "Patronage is a system of social relations rooted in an unequal distribution of power and goods and expressed socially through a generalized exchange of different types of resources" (*ibid.*, 127).

his 318 “consecrated” and “trained” men (*hǎnîkāyw*), pursues and routs the warlords, and recovers Lot, his women and people and other necessary appurtenances of excessive clan life. The story might just as easily have been told of a patron with his band of loyal retainers, ready to unsheathe a knife or sword at the patron’s bidding.

Yet a major factor distinguishes our brothers in arms: the realm of the clan head is restricted to the kinship-household (no matter how flexible its boundaries may be), while the patron can and often does cut across kinship lines, no matter how much he may use the terminology of kinship. To be sure, the clan head may attempt to influence other clans and their leaders, bringing them under his control in situations where no safeguards are in place. He may attempt to crush other clans and absorb their members, but the kinship-household remains his social habitat. The patron is not so encumbered, for his clientele may be drawn from whatever resource—across kinship lines, from external groups, the disaffected, banished, and so on.

At this point, the conflict with the kinship-household becomes clear. If the patron seeks to extend his influence, drawing people from different clans to his clientele, then he challenges the power of the kinship-household head. Here we find systems of honor and shame, an opposition that has become common parlance in social-scientific analyses of biblical texts.<sup>81</sup> But it is worth remembering that honor and shame are really characteristic of the world of gangsters, thugs, and the obscenely wealthy. Further, the patron may more easily adopt patterns of extractive economics: patronage may move from customary systems of allocation based on subsistence survival and kinship-household to a pattern of “gifts,” extortion, tribute, and a rough-and-ready form of taxation. Materially, patronage is able to sit rather easily within

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<sup>81</sup> Hobbs, “On Honor, Shame.”

extractive relations; ideologically, patronage may become one element of the mode of *régulation* that justifies extraction.

Here too we find at least one path to monarchy. Of course, the kinship-household head may also become a monarch, but the trap is that while he may rely on fierce clan loyalty, other clans will be less than impressed. A patron has more potential to undercut such patterns of kinship. An excellent literary example appears in the fable of David's rise to power. After the patron-client relationship between Saul and David breaks down,<sup>82</sup> the latter gathers around him "everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented [*mar-nepeš*]" (1 Sam 22:2). That is, "young men" (1 Sam 21:3 [2 ET]) who were down-and-out, who had fallen afoul of the customary law of the kinship-household, join David. While they become his "servants," he becomes their patron, or chief (*sar*) (1 Sam 22:2; 2 Sam 2:13, 17, 30–31). The gang of bandits has no fixed address, moving from Philistine town to cave to forest to hills to wilderness: "They wandered wherever they could go" (1 Sam 23:13). But David ensures that in return for their loyalty they have food, booty, women, and eventually a town in which to live, procured by violence and protection rackets if necessary (1 Sam 21:1–6; 23:1–5; 25:18, 39–44; 27:5–7). Should David fail to provide, then his clients have due cause to stone him, unless he immediately ensures that the misfortune is overcome (1 Sam 30). Of course, the account is a wonderful literary creation, so its immediate connection to real economic conditions is tangential. What is noticeable here is that the language of kinship-household is used to describe the patron-client relationship and its codes of honor: the down-and-out "young men" become "servants" and then,

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<sup>82</sup> In their exchange after David cuts off a corner of Saul's cloak while the latter was relieving himself in a cave, they still call each other "father" and "son" (1 Sam 24:11, 16; see also 26:17–18, 21).

as David gains the upper hand, the “house of David” (2 Sam 3:1, 6). This is not so much an effort to provide legitimacy to a band of thugs as to show the ideological dominance of allocatory ways of thinking. Allocation provides the ultimate framework within which the world is understood, so much so that the allocatory language of kinship-household is used to speak of what does not belong to that institutional form.

So it turns out that a distinct pattern of ambivalence is discernible in the institutional form of patronage. The patron may well operate according to the patterns of an allocatory economics, no matter how hierarchical they may be. Yet also he may all too easily slip into extractive practices, albeit under the ideological and practical umbrella of allocation. A small adjustment here, some creative accounting there, and he has bent the customary to his own purposes.

### ***CONCLUSION***

This concludes the outline of predominantly allocatory institutional forms of the sacred economy. My major concern has been on subsistence survival, with its focus on what the majority of the small populations spent their short lives doing: animal husbandry and agriculture. Crucial to the functioning of subsistence survival were kinship-household and patronage, which provided the social and ideological determinations, without which subsistence survival would not function. In closing, I make a few points. To begin with, these forms were not seamlessly integrated, for significant tensions operated between them, especially between kinship-household and patronage. These tensions were not merely due to differing social formations, but also to the possibility of extractive economic relations creeping into allocatory patterns (esp. with patronage). Second, as I have mentioned in my discussion of theory, there is a perpetual trap of elevating these particular institutional forms into

universals, into the explanation of the whole economy. These may be the domestic or household or familial mode of production, or patronage, or indeed subsistence. As should be clear by now, this is to make a false universal of a particular form, to miss the proverbial forest for the trees. Instead, they form some of the shifting components of the sacred economy.

Finally, and despite continued claims to this effect,<sup>83</sup> none of these institutional forms was particularly egalitarian in the specific historical formations in which they operated. Hierarchies, social status, customary law, accidental fortune or misfortune, and appropriations of power—all these left room for economic and gender exploitation.<sup>84</sup> Clan leaders, elders, and patrons were particularly prone to such behavior. This is not because human beings are inherently evil, but because these institutional forms manifest their own internal contradictions: they do seek to mitigate economic differentiation, both materially and ideologically; yet in their very structures they perpetuate the very inequalities they seek to overcome. How do these observations relate to my suggestion in the preceding chapter that subsistence survival may offer alternative possibilities that are fairer, more collective, and generate less environmental impact? I suggest that such an institutional form, if it is to be viable in our own day, would need rather different social bonds than kinship-household and patronage.

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<sup>83</sup> Gadot, “Houses and Households,” 179; Nakhai, “Religious Expression,” 347–60, esp. 358.

<sup>84</sup> Diakonoff, “General Outline,” 36; Simkins, “Patronage,” 133.

## Chapter 4

### ***Feeding the Nonproducers, or, (E)states***

Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

—2 Thessalonians 3:10

Still we explore the building blocks, or institutional forms, of the sacred economy.

Subsistence survival, kinship-household, and patronage I have already discussed in terms of the largely allocatory institutional forms. These were characteristic of the marginal economic zone in which ancient Israel found itself (see chaps. 2–3).

However, now I turn to forms that are primarily extractive. In doing so, my focus noticeably shifts to the wider context of ancient Southwest Asia, for here the extractive forms showed their face more clearly, setting the agenda from time to time even in the southern Levant. Put simply, their main function is to enable a nonproducer to extract something from a producer. But that is where the simplicity stops, for the need to ensure that producers acquiesce to such a form requires many types of compulsion, ranging all the way from brute force to subtle ideological justification. Two of these extractive institutional forms appear: the (e)state and tribute-exchange. I deal with the first one in this chapter.

### ***ESTATE***

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east.

—Genesis 2:8

During our period the bulk of the small population may have been engaged in subsistence agriculture, socially determined by kinship-household and patronage, but this was not the whole picture. Rubbing up against them was the extractive institutional form of what may be called the state-estate. I focus initially on the estates, reserving my discussion of the state until a little later. The reason for doing so is that the estates were first a feature of temples (as in Sumer with its *en*, or supreme

priest), which formed the focus of activities in more powerful towns or “little kingdoms,”<sup>1</sup> and which were eventually subsumed under the power of the palace. Given the needs of the nonlaboring ruling class, some means were needed to ensure a supply of the necessary items of life (exotic, luxury items were acquired by plunder and “trade”). And since the surpluses of subsistence survival were not sufficient for such needs, agricultural estates were also established. Their basic purpose was the supply of “goods for a minority,”<sup>2</sup> that is, to supply those who were not gainfully employed—priests, monarchs, and hangers-on—with food, alcohol, and textiles.<sup>3</sup> This was a system of exploitation, by which is meant the extraction of surplus produce from the land and labor that one possesses. The administration of such estates may have varied, ranging from directly appointed overseers to tenants and landlords, but the estates were a necessary item if the temple and then the ruling class were to live in the manner to which they had quickly become accustomed.

The reality of the estates means that agriculture was divided in terms of two basically different economic structures, between (1) the subsistence survival of the village communes and (2) the estates, initially of the temple, and then of the palace when it drew the temple under its control. In this respect, I adapt the rich work of Soviet-era Russian scholarship, especially that of Igor Diakonoff and its development

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<sup>1</sup> A “little kingdom” is a small region that is a single territorial community or collection of close-knit communities, with security depending on natural features such as mountains, the sea, or the surrounding desert. It is preferable to the much-abused term “city-state.” Apart from problems with the term “city” (they were really towns), the term “city-state” carries too much weight from its Greek (esp. Athens) usage, which provides the model in analysis (although not in reality). Here the “city” becomes the focus, and the land surrounding it is worked by the city’s inhabitants for the sake of supplying the “city.” Far better, then, to employ the term used by those in ancient Southwest Asia: little kingdom. Most little kingdoms had populations of little more than 3,000–4,000, with very few places achieving truly city-like proportions. Diakonoff, “General Outline,” 37; Liverani, “Ville et campagne,” 250; idem, *Israel’s History*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Diakonoff, *Paths of History*, 36.

<sup>3</sup> As I have mentioned on several occasions, these towns were not exclusively for the ruling class, since the majority of town dwellers were still engaged in agriculture, whether in estates or in the communal land of local villages.



in some respects by Mario Liverani.<sup>4</sup> Before discussing some of the detail, let me mention three preliminary items. To begin with, the records are written, cuneiform on clay tablets, and thereby give the initial impression of volume and substantial data, which is to some extent the case. Yet, as I will point out a little later, they contain traps and can be misleading. The records of these estates come from a range of archives, from Sumer (Uruk at the Eanna temple precinct, Shuruppak, Lagash, Ur [Umma and Garšana archives]), Old Babylonia, the Middle Assyrian kingdom, Alalakh, Arrapkha (and Nuzi), Hittite Anatolia, and Bronze Age Syria and Palestine (esp. Ugarit).<sup>5</sup> To some extent the legal codes are also helpful in revealing economic patterns, especially that of Hammurabi.<sup>6</sup> A further question concerns where and when the system of estates operated. They were earlier and stronger in riverine environments, where water courses require flood management—for protection during crucial periods, for fertilizing, and for irrigation—and thereby a higher degree of central management. The areas where this applied were Egypt;<sup>7</sup> the plains of Lower Mesopotamia, where the Tigris and Euphrates flow; and the valleys of the Karun and Karkheh Rivers.<sup>8</sup> Without that environment, other areas that rely on rainfall—Upper Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Syria, and Palestine—took somewhat longer to establish

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<sup>4</sup> On Diakonoff, see Excursus 9.

<sup>5</sup> In areas where perishable parchment or papyrus was used, the records are much thinner: in Egypt, Palestine, and the Seleucid period are obvious examples. Diakonoff also identifies Phrygia and Lydia, the Armenian highlands (Urartu), the whole Nile Valley (Egypt and Nubia), as well as isolated states in Iran and Middle Asia. As a reminder that ancient Southwest Asia was not unique in these developments, in *The Paths of History* (published in Russian in 1994) Diakonoff relates comparable situations in China, Japan, the Indian subcontinent, and in parts of Europe. This effort at global history precedes by almost a decade the fashion in such works that began after the turn of the millennium (2000 CE).

<sup>6</sup> Laws 36–41 speak of three types of land use. The first two are part of the palatine estate system, being allocated to royal workers and warriors, as also to others for various types of service; the third is for all other purposes and is thereby acquirable by the king—which is precisely how the ruling class views that of the village communes. Igor M. Diakonoff, “On the Structure of Old Babylonian Society,” in *Beiträge zur sozialen Struktur des alten Vorderasien*, ed. Horst Klengel (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1971), 15–31, esp. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Early Egyptian economic and legal texts are very rare, so information is difficult to locate.

<sup>8</sup> Diakonoff, “General Outline,” 31–33, 45–46.

estate networks, which at times were as complex and extensive as the riverine ones. Temporally, the estate system constituted the main extractive institutional form from the third millennium until the sustained economic crisis at the end of the second millennium, although it continued in subordinate and diminished shape thereafter. The estate system was also adopted in Israel, although belatedly and to a limited extent, when much of the rest of ancient Southwest Asia had already moved to a dominant practice of tribute-exchange (see chap. 5 below).

Finally, it is deeply misleading to use the terminology of “private” and “public” to speak of the differences between royal estates and subsistence-survival agriculture, if not of the perceived difference between the state and the “private” sector.<sup>9</sup> The problem is the slippage implicit in a term like “private,” especially when used in a capitalist context informed by the ideologies of liberalism. The slippage actually has a distinct history in scholarship on ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>10</sup> It begins with none other than Diakonoff and his Soviet colleagues, who already in the 1950s began to challenge the all-pervasive temple-city complex in terms of the two sectors (which I adapted above). The problem is that Diakonoff, writing in the context of a socialist country, used the term “private-communal” to speak of what was not owned, planned, and run by the state. In that context, it was a purely technical term. While Western critics were keen to exploit Diakonoff’s insight, they were quick to dismiss the village commune as the figment of a Bolshie’s imagination and fill the space with

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<sup>9</sup> As a sample among many, see Steven J. Garfinkle, “Public versus Private in the Ancient Near East,” in Snell, *Companion to the Ancient Near East*, 384–96; Claus Wilcke, “Markt und Arbeit im alten Orient am Ende des 3. Jahrtausends v. Chr.,” in *Menschen und Märkte: Studien zur historischen Wirtschaftsanthropologie*, ed. Wolfgang Reinhard and Justin Stagl (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), 71–132; Yasur-Landau, “‘The Kingdom Is His Brick Mould and the Dynasty Is His Wall’: The Impact of Urbanization on Middle Bronze Age Households in the Southern Levant,” in Yasur-Landau, Ebeling, and Mazow, *Household Archaeology*, 55–84; Yuval Gadot, “Houses and Households,” 170–71. For a welcome caution against using the distinction between state and private in archaeological work, see Shai et al., “Public and Residential Buildings,” 131.

<sup>10</sup> Liverani, “The Near East,” 48–50; idem, *Uruk*, 59–62.

the activity of that beloved fiction of liberalism, the “private individual.” This process gained immense acceleration after the “defeat” of communism in 1989, with universal (spatially and historically) manifestations of private enterprise, private and personal property, private management, if not processes of privatization.<sup>11</sup>

### **BENEFICIARIES**

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

—Genesis 1:28

In describing the estates and their functions, we need to distinguish between beneficiaries, administration, and the question of labor. As for the beneficiaries, they were temple, palace, and landlord. Estates appeared at the earliest moments of town living, when some human beings became disengaged from direct production and needed others to produce food and clothing. In riverine environments, these were first the priests of the temples, then the personnel of palaces (who usually subsumed the temples under their control), and then the landlords closely connected with the palace. The earliest material indicates the enormous role that temples, ritual, and priestcraft played in the early millennia. Thus, when agricultural estates first begin to appear in the written records, they are part of the temple complexes. In fourth millennium Sumer, most notably at the large Eanna complex in Uruk, the temples emerged as the crux of the extractive estates.<sup>12</sup> The estates supplied the temple and its personnel with the foodstuffs and fibers needed for a coterie of priests, who did little direct agricultural work. Largely the same may be said for the palace when it became the

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Hudson and Baruch A. Levine, eds., *Privatization in the Ancient Near East and Classical World*, Peabody Museum Bulletin 5 (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Liverani (*Uruk*, 30) writes of the impersonal relations and bureaucracy fostered by the Eanna temple, but here the voice of an Italian living under the long shadow of the Roman Catholic Church speaks loudly.

center of political control, for now the aspiring despot and the obligatory retainers and functionaries who swarm to such operations became the recipients. In the riverine environments, where the temples were clearly first, the palace was able to take over existing patterns of estates, along with control of the temples. In nonriverine contexts, such as the southern Levant, the temples were not as central, and political power seems to have arisen without such an obvious appropriation of a prior system. Here the estate system was constructed by the palace itself; in Israel this seems to have taken place during the brief period of the first millennium when it aspired to the status of a “little kingdom.” As for the landlords, they may have begun as simple tenants of the palace, but then gradually built up control over land and labor so that they became important features of the ruling class. They were not “private business houses,” as is so often and mistakenly suggested, assuming thereby a distinction between state and private economies. Here, among many others, were the houses of Ur-Utu, Ur-Dumuzida, and Ur-DUN from Ur III, of Imdi-Ilum from Old Babylonia, of Tehib-Tilla and Prince Shilwi-Teshub from Arrapkha, of Iddin-Marduk from Neo-Babylonia, as well as the gangland clans of Egibi and Murašû.<sup>13</sup> These landlords, passing on at times through many generations and also undertaking the despised tasks

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<sup>13</sup> Mogens Trolle Larsen, “Your Money or Your Life: A Portrait of an Assyrian Businessman,” in Dandamaev, Postgate, and Larsen, *Societies and Languages*, 214–45; Jankowska, “Asshur, Mitanni, and Arrapkhe,” 245–48; Cornelia Wunsch, *Die Urkunden des babylonischen Geschäftsmannes Iddin-Marduk: Zum Handel mit Naturalien im 6. Jahrhundert v. Chr* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993); Van de Mierop, “Urban Real Estate,” 257–61; Hans Neumann, “Ur-Dumuzida and Ur-DUN. Reflections on the Relationship between State-Initiated Foreign Trade and Private Economic Activity in Mesopotamia towards the End of the Third Millennium BC,” in *Trade and Finance in Ancient Mesopotamia*, ed. Jan Gerrit Dercksen (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1999), 43–53; Wilfred Hugo van Soldt, “Private Archives at Ugarit,” in *Interdependency of Institutions and Private Entrepreneurs*, ed. Arminius C. V. M. [= Herman] Bongenaar (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 2000), 229–45; Piotr Steinkeller, “The Money-Lending Practices in Ur III Babylonia: The Issue of Economic Motivation,” in Hudson and Van de Mierop, *Debt and Economic Renewal*, 109–38, esp. 117–18; Piotr Steinkeller, “Toward a Definition of Private Economic Activity in Third Millennium Babylonia,” in *Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World: Means of Transmission and Cultural Interaction*, ed. Robert Rollinger and Christoph Ulf (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004), 91–111; Wunsch, “Šangû-Ninurta”; Bedford, “Persian Near East,” 319–20.

of usurer, tax collector, messenger of the potentate, as well as *tamkar*, were in many places a necessary feature of ruling-class estates.

### **ADMINISTRATION**

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.”

—Genesis 41:39

On the matter of administration, we need to distinguish between agricultural estates that supplied temple, palace, and landlord, and specific projects that usually concerned construction work and maintenance, which was ongoing. Information on both types of administration comes from the archives I mentioned earlier, with their indications of the networks of estates, details on personnel, tasks, rations (in grain and beer), tools, and livestock.

Management of the estates took place either through direct supervision by the temple and palace, or through tenure in which a percentage of the crops and herds had to be turned over for ruling-class requirements. In different circumstances, one or the other would dominate. For instance, under Ur III or the Sargonids in Lower Mesopotamia, estates tended to be directly managed by the palace and temple, with officials responsible to the king and workers allocated rations. By contrast, in Upper Mesopotamia, as well as the Old Babylonian period after Hammurabi, tenure was preferred over direct management of estates. Let me take each in turn. Of the directly administered estates, I restrict myself to only three among many examples. To begin with, the archive of the temple of the goddess Baba (or Bau) in Lagash of the third millennium indicates that the estates were managed by the temple to maintain its

personnel, provide materials for sacrifice, and hold reserves for difficult times (the old habits of subsistence survival die hard).<sup>14</sup>

Another instance is found in the relatively rich archives from the third dynasty of Ur, where efforts were undertaken to organize and document all aspects of the estate system. Apart from the details of herds, crops, teams, workshops, and rations, we also find a complex method of accounting, even down to the smallest detail (such as a pigeon or two for a kitchen, or who plowed what strip). Seals had to be affixed to each document by both the one who undertook the work and the supervisor, and the accounts were all summed up in annual reports. Details also appear of the amounts handed over for the sake of the palace, army, temples, and their many sacrifices.<sup>15</sup>

A third example is found in the relatively extensive archives from Ugarit, where the network of directly managed estates are named in lists.<sup>16</sup> In two of the key lists, the names of the individual estates are found, with the annual yield of grain, part of which is set aside as rations for the laborers, for draft-animal fodder, and as seed grain for the next season. The lists also include the pieces of equipment on each estate, but tellingly do not mention the extent of the estates (land was obviously plentiful). Liverani proposes that the lists indicate a process of a priori calculation of

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<sup>14</sup> Igor M. Diakonoff, *Structure of Society and State in Early Dynastic Sumer* (Los Angeles: Undena Publications, 1974), 7; idem, "The City-States of Sumer," in Diakonoff and Kohl, *Early Antiquity*, 67–83, esp. 79.

<sup>15</sup> Diakonoff, "Despotisms in Mesopotamia," 92–93; Marek Stępień, *Animal Husbandry in the Ancient Near East: A Prosopographic Study of Third-Millennium Umma* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1996). The archives also speak of organization for the ruling class's building projects, of which the Garšana archives from the third dynasty of Ur (third millennium BCE) are the most extensive. See esp. the study by Heimpel, which provides fascinating details on the roles of women (weaving, spinning, milling flour, carrying bricks), who outnumbered the men (builders), as well as techniques and tools for building, repair, demolition, brickmaking, waterproofing, and provisions. Heimpel, *Work at Garšana*.

<sup>16</sup> See esp. Liverani, "Ugaritic Royal Farms." They are designated as *gittu*-estates and are usually associated with either the name of a village or person. *Gittu* seems originally to have meant a press (oil and wine) but was extended to cover horticultural estates. It is paralleled by Akkadian *dimtu* (or masculine *dunnu*), which means a tower, a watchtower over a field or garden, or a fortified country area. Schloen, *House*, 232; McGeough, *Exchange Relationships*, 130, 376–77.

(expected) yields, which thereby enables one to determine how much grain would realistically be available for palace and temple. The original yields range between threefold and fivefold (which one would expect in unirrigated zones in the Late Bronze Age), supplying enough for 3.5 people (including the laborer). If one deducts rations, fodder, seed, the grain used in transport (for animal feed), and spoilage from storage, then the average amount supplied to the ruling class was about 50 percent.<sup>17</sup> Given that the usual amount demanded, from both directly managed and tenured estates, was between one-third and one-half of the crop, then this makes some sense.<sup>18</sup> In other words, rent rather than profit was the prime means by which surplus labor was manifested.<sup>19</sup>

When the estate was held under tenure, the tenant was expected to supply a significant portion to palace and temple and also to be able to survive on what was left over.<sup>20</sup> In this case, further levels of tenure operated, for such a tenant would have his own laborers to work the herds and fields. If the palace did not demand too much, and if the pests were subdued, the laborers diligent, the rains appropriate, and the harvest

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<sup>17</sup> Some of the grain had to be set aside as rations for those working on pastoral estates, with herds of sheep and goats. The two texts concerning grain production studied in detail by Liverani are RS 16.395 (*KTU* 4.243) and RS 19.97 (*KTU* 4.636), where we find the formulae: (1) in *gt GN*: X (measures) are seed-grain and Y (measures) are *drt* and Z *dd*-measures are the servicemen's rations; (2) total food in *gt GN* is N (measures). X (measures) are the servants' rations; Y (measures) are seed-grain; Z (measures) are *drt* for the oxen. In both cases, *drt* means fodder and *dd* are amounts measured for rations. While the exact meaning of *dd* is not known, Liverani proposes that 1 *dd* is equivalent to 60 *sila* (ca. 50 liters [13 US gallons]), the usual monthly ration of barley for a laborer in Mesopotamia. Liverani carefully uses these and other documents to calculate yields (average 3.5), rations (1 *dd* a month), the number of personnel on the estates (between 1 and 16), the number of ox teams (on average one per person), ox fodder (to supplement grazing), and tools (one or two specialized tools, but on average one sickle per laborer). Liverani, "Ville et campagne," 252–53; idem, "Ugaritic Royal Farms"; Schloen, *House*, 233–35.

<sup>18</sup> The amounts were rounded to the nearest ratio: one-third, one-fourth, or one-fifth. From the time of Uruk and throughout the millennia that followed, the amounts due were calculated, at flat rates, before the harvest and on the basis of the previous year's harvest. Why? After the harvest was a more difficult affair, for tenants and laborers would often appropriate portions for themselves. Liverani, *Uruk*, 34.

<sup>19</sup> Danilova, "Precapitalist Societies," 300.

<sup>20</sup> Diakonoff ("General Outline," 36) suggests that in third-millennium Sumer, the primary form of estates involved such a process of tenure, in which tracts of land and its labor were tenured out to temples and to leading state functionaries.

full, then the substantial holdings of such estates—land, livestock, buildings, but above all labor—meant there was enough to live on. For example, under the temple of Baba (Bau) in third millennium Lagash, some of the estates were allotted to temple administrators, craftspeople, agricultural administrators, and soldiers who formed the temple's armed force; yet the tenure was often given to groups rather than individuals. Other land was tenured out to anyone who was willing to return to the temple a significant portion of the crops and herds.<sup>21</sup> A little later, in the Old Babylonia of Hammurabi, landlords made use of laborers provided by the palace, or they tenured out land in smaller lots. And later still, in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, most land was tenured out in such a fashion by the palace itself.<sup>22</sup> The laws indicate that tenants had to supply between one-third and one-half of the produce in return for the tenure; that tenure could be prolonged due to natural disaster; and that the tenant was obliged to farm carefully and maintain equipment (mainly for irrigation). The task of gathering the produce for the palace, as well as organizing corvée labor and disbursing any excess the palace might have gathered, fell to specific agents or middlemen.<sup>23</sup>

However, what is intriguing here is that both the tenured land and the portion of the produce due to landlord or state were called *biltu*.<sup>24</sup> Why is this intriguing? It suggests

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<sup>21</sup> Diakonoff, "Structure of Near Eastern Society," 61–62; idem, "City-States of Sumer," 79–80.

<sup>22</sup> Melikishvili, "Some Aspects," 58.

<sup>23</sup> The complex and overlapping roles of the despised merchants begin to appear here; in the next chapter I discuss them in detail. This system has been called *Palastgeschäfte*, although the treatment by Renger is far too loose in its terminology, drawing upon terms characteristic of neoclassical economic theory. See Johannes M. Renger, "Das Palastgeschäft in der altbabylonischen Zeit," in Bongenaar, *Interdependency of Institutions*, 153–83; idem, "Royal Edicts of the Old Babylonian Period—Structural Background," in Hudson and Van de Mieroop, *Debt and Economic Renewal*, 139–62, esp. 203–5; Goddeeris, *Economy and Society*, 338–39, 343–46; Marc Van de Mieroop, "Credit as a Facilitator of Exchange in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia," in Hudson and Van de Mieroop, *Debt and Economic Renewal*, 163–74, esp. 165–67.

<sup>24</sup> By the Middle Babylonian period the term *šibšu* is also used and came to dominate. Maria deJong Ellis, *Agriculture and the State in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: Babylonian Fund, University Museum, 1976); Nelly V. Kozyreva, "The Old Babylonian Period of Mesopotamian History," in Diakonoff and Kohl, *Early Antiquity*, 98–123.



that the land itself was not the main issue, but rather its usufruct. The *biltu*-land was land that could or had the potential to produce *biltu*, especially for the one who did not work it. So perhaps the best term for such arrangements is a *biltu*-tenancy, a usufruct tenancy.

The other dimension of administration concerned the ruling class's building projects. This was one of the main drivers for acquiring preciosities (rare timber, copper, silver, gold, and the like) and for organizing skilled laborers. Among the richest resources for information on these projects are the Garšana archives from the third dynasty of Ur. Here we find fascinating details on the roles of women (weaving, spinning, milling flour, carrying bricks), who outnumbered the men (builders), as well as techniques and tools for building, repair, and demolition, of brickmaking, waterproofing, and provisions.<sup>25</sup>

## LABOR

By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread  
until you return to the ground.

—Genesis 3:19 NJPS

On the question of labor, we need to consider—for reasons that will become obvious in a moment—estate labor and subsistence labor, both of which were in short supply and thereby unfree. As with the vast bulk of human history, no labor in ancient Southwest Asia was particularly free when we understand “free” labor as the ability for a person to decide when, where, and how to work.<sup>26</sup> Estate labor is more obviously

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<sup>25</sup> Heimpel, *Work at Garšana*.

<sup>26</sup> It is in this sense that we should understand the early Soviet debate over slavery (see further below). Diakonoff's terminology is potentially misleading. He uses “free” and “unfree” in a technical sense: it all depends on whether or not one is tied, legally, to another. In this light, the royal service is “unfree” while the labor of the rural communities is “free.” The problem is not merely that the term “free” is potentially misleading and ideologically overloaded, for it also may easily slide into liberal ideological notions of “freedom,” but that subsistence labor was not particularly free, even in the technical sense used by Diakonoff. So also Melikishvili, “Ancient Class Societies,” 557–58; idem, “Some Aspects,” 59–61; Liverani, “Communautés de village,” 146–47.

tied down, for the conjunction of economic necessity and the cultural and legal framework—part of the mode of *régulation*—ensured that such a laborer remained tied to the estate and its overseer. What of the subsistence laborer? To eyes viewing the situation from a great temporal distance and from a qualitatively different mode of production, subsistence laborers may appear to be their own bosses. But this is far from reality, for it was simply unfeasible to be so, due to risk (natural and human) and vulnerability. I suspect that it would hardly have been thought through in such a fashion, for the collective context was the primary determinant of working lives. As I argued earlier, in my treatments of subsistence survival and kinship-household, these institutional forms played a determining role in the designation of tasks to be performed, produce to be allocated, life to be lived. Thus the ties may have been somewhat different, but estate and subsistence laborers were both bound.

At this point the question of class arises; however, before I outline the key issues relating to class, let me make a few observations concerning the nature of labor on estates. Those who worked on the estates—as indentured laborers, slaves (a small amount), or tenant farmers<sup>27</sup>—had no control over the means of agricultural production, for this was in the hands of the ruling class and their administrators. This lack of control was characteristic of both the permanent and the temporary laborers on the estates, and even of the tenant farmers, who tended parts of the estates in return for the expected amount of produce. The laborers became so by various means, whether as captives from war (typically boys and girls), as deportees, or as refugees from the sanctions of customary law, from catastrophic drought or flood, from the need to pay off debt, and so on. The most detailed and impressive examples are

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<sup>27</sup> On slavery, see Excursus 10.

provided by the archives from Ur III, where laborers were organized into teams (farmers, porters, fishermen, and so on) and craft workshops, and given rations of barley (1.5 liters [3.2 US pints] for men and half for women, with none provided for children), along with some oil and wool.<sup>28</sup> Teams were sometimes assigned to tasks for which they were not necessarily specialized, such as shepherds sent to haul barges or coppersmiths to unload ships.

How did estate and subsistence laborers relate to one another? It is clear that these are not ideal types, as though two sectors that have nothing to do with one another. Instead, there was considerable internal variation and movement between them. Some labored (as indentured, as slaves, and as tenant farmers) full-time on the network of estates, especially those skilled in agricultural work, and were housed and fed by rations on those estates.<sup>29</sup> Others, either with specific skills or with general skills in horticulture and animal husbandry, were conscripted for periodic *corvée* labor, during which time they too were fed rations and housed.<sup>30</sup> This may have been during peak seasons, such as plowing, sowing, reaping, and shearing, but it was a

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<sup>28</sup> Against the common tut-tutting concerning the extraordinary level of organization evidenced at Ur III, this pattern may be the secret of its significant success. These amounts remain remarkably consistent over long periods and under different political constellations in Mesopotamia. Thus, in the Old Babylonian period, males were still rationed 1.5 liters (3.2 US pints) of barley, along with 2.5–3 liters (5.3–6.3 US pints) per annum of oil (mainly for anointing), and 1.5 kilograms (3.3 pounds) of wool, sufficient for one garment. A woman had the same oil and wool, but half the barley. Kozyreva, “Old Babylonian Period,” 111.

<sup>29</sup> Liverani, “Ugaritic Royal Farms”; Michael Heltzer, *The Internal Organization of the Kingdom of Ugarit* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1982), 49–79. Although some of the documents mention periods of time, most do not, so one cannot assume either full-time or part-time work. A median position is far more realistic.

<sup>30</sup> This was known as *ilku* (the going) in Akkadian, *unusshe* in Hurrian, *luzzi* among the Hittites, and so on. Grigoriĭ G. Giorgadze, “The Hittite Kingdom,” in Diakonoff and Kohl, *Early Antiquity*, 266–85, esp. 280; Diakonoff, “Syria, Phoenicia,” 297. See further examples in idem, “Old Babylonian Society,” 26; idem, “Socio-Economic Classes,” 49–50; idem, “City-States of Sumer,” 68; idem, “Despotisms in Mesopotamia,” 94; idem, *Paths of History*, 25; Liverani, “Ugaritic Royal Farms”; idem, “Communautés de village,” 150; Piotr Steinkeller, “The Foresters of Umma: Toward a Definition of Ur III Labor,” in *Labor in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marvin A. Powell (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1987), 73–115; Horst Klengel, “Non-Slave Labour in the Babylonian Period: The Basic Outlines,” in *ibid.*, 159–68. In light of this material, Schloen’s effort to “disprove” the differences between estates and villages by showing how they interacted is strangely misdirected. Schloen, *House*, 221–51.

more common pattern with the perpetual building projects, repairs of fortifications, military and naval service (where one finds a few ships, as at Ugarit), as well as the tasks of building, cleaning, and maintaining the canals where irrigation was used. For such periodic labor, the village commune as a whole was responsible and would need to select those who fulfilled it, along with their traction animals. The crucial point here is that the primary form of taxing the village communes and the rural sector was not in terms of agricultural goods (these were produced by the estates), but in terms of labor—another manifestation of its perpetual shortage.<sup>31</sup>

Periodic labor service (tax in the form of labor) depended on the strength of the state machinery, which had to enforce such service. However, it was ultimately in the interest of the ruling class to drag subsistence laborers into the estate system, to lengthen the periods of service, to make permanent the indenture of as many as possible, and to expand the land tilled in the estates.<sup>32</sup> In the name of subsistence survival, the texts of Isa 5:8–10 and Mic 2:1–2 may be seen as critiques of this

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<sup>31</sup> Liverani, “The Near East,” 50; Heltzer, *Rural Community*, 24–30. This is not to say that villages did not pay taxes, in grain tithes and in animal products, before the shift to the dominance of tribute-exchange in the first millennium (what I will call a “regime of booty”). This was certainly present but was subordinate to labor.

<sup>32</sup> Diakonoff, “Rural Community,” 127; idem, “Structure of Near Eastern Society,” 60; Mario Liverani, “Ras Shamra. II. Histoire,” in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. Henri Cazelles and André Feuillet (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1979), 1295–1348, esp. 1321; idem, “Ugaritic Royal Farms,” 142–43, 152–53. This situation makes some sense of the critiques found in Isa 5:8–10 and Mic 2:1–2, rather than elaborate arguments concerning cultural evolutionary theory and assumptions concerning the function of trade in a changed economy. Devadasan N. Premnath, “Latifundialization in Isaiah 5:8–10,” in *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism*, ed. David Chalcraft (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 301–12; Marvin L. Chaney, “Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets,” in *Reformed Faith and Economics*, ed. Robert L. Stivers (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 15–30; idem, “Whose Sour Grapes? The Addressees of Isaiah 5:1–7 in the Light of Political Economy,” in *The Social World of the Hebrew Bible: Twenty-Five Years of the Social Sciences in the Academy*, ed. Ronald Simkins and Stephen L. Cook, Semeia 87 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 105–22; idem, “Micah—Models Matter: Political Economy and Micah 6:9–15,” in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context*, ed. Philip Esler (London: SCM, 2005), 145–60; Matthew J. M. Coomber, *Re-reading the Prophets through Corporate Globalization: A Cultural-Evolutionary Approach to Economic Injustice in the Hebrew Bible* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010); idem, “Prophets to Profits: Ancient Judah and Corporate Globalization,” in *Bible and Justice: Ancient Texts, Modern Challenges*, ed. Matthew J. M. Coomber (London: Equinox Publishing, 2011), 213–37.

process; for expansion of the estates, whether directly managed by the palace or temple, or managed indirectly by landlords, was an endemic feature of the estate system. It mattered little to the ruling class whether the rural communities and their agriculture flourished or not, for the estates were their prime concern. The reasons are obvious: labor was always in short supply, so better to have people working on the estates; taxes imposed on village communities were no more than 10 percent and were always unreliable, since the farmers were fickle and resistant; the yields from estates were around 50 percent.

### CLASS

The wealth of the rich is their fortress;  
the poverty of the poor is their ruin.

—Proverbs 10:15

To return to class: I have thus far used the terminology of ruling class and types of labor (indentured and subsistence). So let me define these terms in the context of ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>33</sup> Class has both objective and subjective dimensions. Objectively, class is determined by access to and control over the means of production, as well as location in the division of labor.<sup>34</sup> Typically, this control

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<sup>33</sup> This is not the place for an extended discussion of class, save to point out that the two paradigms most influential in biblical criticism and ancient Southwest Asian studies are those that derive from Weber and Marx. For Weber, class initially refers to the layer or group that occupies a common economic situation. It also includes status, which thereby introduces a potential for multiple stratification. This approach is gradualist: given the complex overlaps, classes phase into one another and are defined by variables such as income and status. As their circumstances change, people move more freely between such classes. A prime instance is the work of Gerhard Lenski, which has been applied in biblical criticism. See Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff et al. from the 4th German ed., 3 vols. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 1:302–5; Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966); Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); Robert B. Coote and Keith W. Whitelam, *The Emergence of Early Israel in Historical Perspective* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1987); Anthony Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees: A Sociological Approach* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988); Schloen, *House*. As should be clear by now, I prefer a Marxist approach, due to its richness and complexity.

<sup>34</sup> This is a standard and accepted Marxist definition of class. For a specific statement, among many, see Diakonoff, “Socio-Economic Classes,” 42. The once common, but rather crude, effort to determine class by means of house size (measuring external walls) and “possessions” in archaeological remains has by now been discarded. The key is rather what one does and how one relates to others re

appears in the form of gatekeeping: those who control the means of production determine who can and who cannot engage in productive activity. The paradox is that it is precisely the controllers who are no longer engaged in productive labor, preferring to exploit others who are so engaged. The subjective dimension involves a consciousness of belonging to a particular class. That consciousness includes a complex web of cultural assumptions, modes of speech, social codes, world outlook, and religion. Most significantly, class consciousness is determined by a class opponent, the differences with which are marked by opposing assumptions of one's role and importance within production, and by the cultural assumptions that each holds. For instance, peasants regard the class that extracts their produce, whether through taxes or direct appropriation (plunder), as exploitative and cruel, while those who exploit regard peasants as ignorant, lazy, earthy, uncultured, and surly. In many cases for ancient Southwest Asia, a sharp distinction was made between people partaking in the community and those under perpetual patriarchal authority, with the latter characterized as subservient and not full members of the community.

Lest we think that this is a benign, smooth, and linear process, Diakonoff reminds us of the violence and brutal complexity of class society:

The formation of a class society . . . does not mean that a society releases the best organizers, the most profound thinkers, and the most outstanding artists from production work. It is not those who are best capable of utilizing the surplus of produce in the most rational way who acquire it. It is, rather, those who are in a position to do so: individuals who possess resources of sheer physical strength or who have the daring or the armed or the ideological power; it is they who appropriate the organizational power. Most of these individuals exploit the labor of others without thereby benefiting society as a whole.<sup>35</sup>

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the means of production. See Panitz-Cohen, "Tale of Two Houses"; Itzhaq Shai et al., "Public and Residential Buildings," 111.

<sup>35</sup> Diakonoff, "General Outline," 35.

In the context of the estates under consideration, who controlled the means of production? They were the landlords and monarchs, as well as their perpetual dinner guests: priests, bureaucrats, scribes, and so on. This much is obvious: no matter how small they might have been in number (less than 2 percent of the population),<sup>36</sup> objectively they were the ruling class. Conversely, the estate laborers, whether permanently or periodically indentured, had no access to the means of production. Their role was to provide the nonproducers with the goods the latter felt they needed. The question left begging concerns the subsistence laborers of the village communities. Here the means of production was not under direct control of the court, temple, and landlords, but under the direction of the village community. In effect, this was the council of elders, assembly of clan heads, or perhaps of able-bodied men. While there was always a push for these bodies, as a type of local ruling class, to be subsumed under the rule of court and temple, there is a difference between them as well. Despite their apparent common ground, the fact that the palace sought to subdue the village communities indicates such a difference. The basic reason is that here we find yet another manifestation of the tension between allocative and extractive tendencies, which I have been tracing.

How does this affect the estate and subsistence laborers? While there is an objective difference in terms of allocative and extractive patterns, the many overlaps between them (see earlier) also indicate some common ground. However, when we turn to the subjective factors of class consciousness, they are clearly lumped together, at least by their class opponents, the ruling class. As with most expressions of class consciousness, the exhibits left to us come from the ruling class (texts, artwork,

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<sup>36</sup> For some obscure reason, Lemche argues that class did not exist since the number of the ruling class was too small. Lemche, "Concept of Class."

monuments, and so forth). If we wish to locate some traces of the voices of those who have otherwise been obliterated by the economic structures of the time, then we need to be sensitive to the characterization of class opponents in these ruling-class documents. As is the case with most ruling-class consciousness, those we find in ancient Southwest Asian documents are contradictory. On the one hand, they seek to appropriate for themselves the language of the village commune, especially the terms describing elders and active members of local councils or assemblies. The most well-known example comes from the Old Babylonian situation (see the Code of Hammurabi),<sup>37</sup> where a member of the ruling class is described as *awīlum* and *mār ālim*. That is, he is one “partaking of communal rights,” for whom the penalties for various “crimes” are notably light. By contrast, the *muškēnum*, the one “perpetually prostrating himself,” has much harsher penalties, especially if the “crime” in question is enacted upon an *awīlum*. Initially it may seem as though we have a description of class in these documents, and that is the way they are often read, whether in terms of “gentlemen” and “commoners” or some other bland opposition. This sense is enhanced by the appearance of slaves, *wardum* and *amtum* for male and female.

However, this approach is a potential trap, for the legal terms promulgated in an urban context by a ruling class do not necessarily overlap with the actual economic dimensions of class. Two initial factors make this obvious. First, the ruling class appropriated for itself the terminology of the village commune. This may be due to a situation where old forms and old terms had to do service for new realities, especially in light of a desire to maintain at least the semblance of continuity, as typical of the

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<sup>37</sup> Diakonoff, “Socio-Economic Classes,” 46–47; idem, “Structure of Near Eastern Society,” 28–29. Similar distinctions were used in Hittite, Assyrian, Arrapkhan, and Ugaritic societies.



long history of ancient Southwest Asia (seen in official languages, the gods, the rates of interest, and so on). Nonetheless, I suggest that it also reveals an effort to appropriate and obliterate the village communes themselves, by taking over the titles of their elders, council members, and fully active males.<sup>38</sup> The metaphorical arm thrown around the shoulders of the village elder—“We are just like you”—was soon followed by the second arm, with its concealed knife aimed for the ribs.

Second, the term *muškeenum* lumps together estate and subsistence laborers, along with tenant farmers and other variations. Here the economic difference between these groups is effaced, a process that, at a legal and ideological level, voices the desire by the ruling class to draw more subsistence laborers into the estate system. From their perspective, subsistence laborers either are or should be estate laborers. The ruling class, with its petty despots, slightly more talented brutes who tried to construct empires, priests and their temples, as well as landlords—the whole lot may have been at one another’s throats much of the time. But they were as thick as thieves when it came to identifying whom they sought to exploit: the estate and subsistence laborers, whom they saw as one.

The legal terms are only the beginning, for this group of class opponents also appears in political myths of creation as afterthoughts of the gods, as beings made merely to serve the gods in a version of indentured labor, as virtual pieces of shit from the gods’ anuses. To be such a person meant that one was ugly, lowborn, cowardly, poor, stupid, unfortunate, cursed, evil, dishonest, and worthless. A Sumerian text from the early second millennium eloquently disparages such a person:

He is dressed in sheepskins;

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<sup>38</sup> Needless to say, I do not see a “natural” continuity from village elder to a member of the ruling class in the town.

He lives in tents in wind and rain;  
 He doesn't offer sacrifices.  
 Armed [vagabond] in the steppe,  
 He digs up truffles and is restless.  
 He eats raw meat,  
 lives his life without a home,  
 and, when he dies, he is not buried according to proper rituals.<sup>39</sup>

The ruling class embodies the opposite: beautiful, highborn, brave, wealthy, intelligent, fortunate, blessed, good, honest, and pillars of society.<sup>40</sup> This determinative opposition of class consciousness appears at its sharpest in the Proverbs, where a pattern of contrasts emerges between wise and foolish, prudent and simple, humble and proud, righteous and wicked, industrious and lazy, sound and rotten, truth and lies, and, of course, rich and poor.<sup>41</sup> In this light, the origin of ethics is very much a justification of ruling-class mores.<sup>42</sup> The despicable rural laborers also appear as dangerous and barbaric “nomads,” always marauding, always threatening the power of the monarch in question, given archaic names (like “Gutian”) that indicated time stood still among them. Given that village-based peasants were seminomadic, and that the nomads themselves often settled for a while (for lambing season, or to harvest a crop sown), here again is a ruling-class characterization of the

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<sup>39</sup> Van de Mieroop, *Mesopotamian City*, 43.

<sup>40</sup> Geoffrey E. M. de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, ed. Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 338–39. Ste. Croix writes of the Greek world from 600 BCE, but these characterizations have a long pedigree, especially among the Greeks, who borrowed heavily from ancient Southwest Asia. Ste. Croix provides a host of related terms: *hoi tas ousias echontes, plousioi, pacheis, eudaimones, gnōrimoi, eugeneis, dynatoi, dynatōtatoi, kaloi kagathoi, chrēstōi, esthloi, aristoī, beltistoi, dexiōtatoi, charientes, epieikeis*—all for the “good” ruling class; their class opponents are *hoi penētes, aporoī, ptōchoi, polloi; to plēthos; ho ochlos, dēmos; hoi dēmotikoi, mochthēroi, ponēroi, deiloi; to kakiston*. See also idem, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 371–76.

<sup>41</sup> Occasionally Proverbs attempts mildly to subvert these contrasts, most notably with the occasional sayings warning against riches (11:4, 28; 15:16–17; 16:8; 17:1, 5; 18:23). These may be seen either as relics of village wisdom, or (more likely) as instructions as to how one should manage wealth—always keeping in mind a higher calling of righteousness, which is the path to true wealth.

<sup>42</sup> See further Roland Boer, “Towards Ethical Insurgency,” *RM* 25, no. 1 (2012): 38–51.

rural workers. These characterizations applied just as much to the outlying nomads with economic grudges as to the taciturn farmers who were forced to work on the hinterland estates or pay taxes from the nearby villages.

At times, those who engaged in productive labor were designated in ethnic terms, as we find with Joseph the estate manager over Egyptian laborers in Gen 41, or the characterizations in the book of Ruth.<sup>43</sup> Or the laborers may be removed from narratives almost completely. The most telling example is the combined myth of Gen 1–3 (see also Deut 8:7–20 and the Song of Songs), although here is the characteristic ambiguity of myth. I do not mean the effort to close down opposition via the narrative of eating from the tree, but the way the myth mediates tensions between allocative and extractive forms. That is, it may appear as a myth of idealized existence for those involved in subsistence survival, with the earth producing in and of itself, or at least at divine directive (Gen 1:20–25). Yet its stronger message is one of an idealized estate, which simply produces goods for a ruling class in and of itself. To be sure, there may be some token pottering about the garden (Gen 2:15), but the absence of real labor indicates a palatine or temple perspective: the estates produce goods aplenty, all for the sake of the despot, priests, and their operators. Now another tension appears, for what is repressed in myth must reappear elsewhere in altered form (and myths are by no means logically consistent, for they seek to ameliorate, at an ideological level, real social contradictions). Agricultural labor, now outside the bucolic estate and in the realm of subsistence survival, is really a punishment, a hard life of sweat and toil that soon leads to death (Gen 3:17–19). Now the ruling-class man and women mutate into

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<sup>43</sup> For a full discussion of the class dimensions in Ruth, see Boer, *Marxist Criticism*, 97–116.

laborers, to battle the thistles and thorns of a cursed ground and to endure the pain of childbirth. Far better, then, to put aside that life and come to the palatine estate.

### **SEDUCTIONS OF WRITTEN SOURCES**

Solomon was sovereign over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines, even to the border of Egypt.

—1 Kings 5:1 [4:21 ET]

I have left until now the question as to whether there were palatine and temple estates in the brief little kingdom of ancient Israel. On this matter, the archaeological material is ambivalent at best. It may be possible to extrapolate from the situation in nearby Ugarit, except that this is slightly earlier, before the crucial collapse of 1200. Faust tries his best to read problematic Iron Age archaeological remnants as palatine storehouses for grain and wine, olive presses for palace consumption, centers for wine production, and estates themselves on the periphery of the Judean highlands, which are usually regarded as fortified towns.<sup>44</sup> Not unexpectedly, he seeks a powerful state with many palatine estates scattered throughout Judah, but this requires considerable imagination. All we can say is this: likely there were some estates, since the little kingdom existed in this part of the southern Levant for a while in the first millennium. Some limited archaeological evidence indicates such a possibility, especially the *lmlk* (“to/for the king”) seals of the eighth or seventh centuries. However, the homogenous nature of the seals and their very restricted time-frame indicates the brevity and marginality of such an exercise (the Samaria ostraca from roughly the same period are even more ambiguous).<sup>45</sup> The usual practice of using parchment in this part of the world means that many of the records that might have been made have been lost.

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<sup>44</sup> Faust, “Household Economies,” 267–69.

<sup>45</sup> The most judicious assessment of the *lmlk* seals may be found in Lester Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 168, 180-82.

Nonetheless, even if we had such records, they would have produced many traps. This is the case with other areas of ancient Southwest Asia, where serendipity has determined what records have survived and have been recovered. These cover all manner of administrative matters, such as the percentage of crops and herd animals required from estates, or the range of specialists engaged on a building project, or the lists of rations provided for the laborers. The risk is that one may be deceived into thinking that estates, their produce, and their labor were the prime forms of agricultural production and thereby of economic activity. The reason is twofold. First, despite the relative (in comparison to similar periods of ancient time) wealth of written sources over three millennia, their preservation is by chance and their discovery is spotty. Small oases of intense documentation survive in a desert of time.<sup>46</sup> The trap here is that the uneven record may generate a skewed generalization. Second, the piecemeal sources are overwhelmingly concerned with the estates. Why? They come from the state archives and from those who worked closely with the state, such as high officials, cult personnel, and landlords. The concern of these personnel was to ensure that palace and temple were supplied with foodstuffs and other products deemed necessary for their own day-to-day existence. In Ur III, for instance, 90 percent of the documents concern the management of temple and palace estates. In Ugarit, the palace archives reveal a preponderance of economic documents.<sup>47</sup> All of these provide a warped picture of the economics of agriculture, as seen from the perspective of the ruling class.<sup>48</sup> What these texts largely neglect is outside the zones

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<sup>46</sup> As a sample of the noncontiguous and uneven nature of the written sources, see the tables in Postgate ("Economic Structure," 194–95) and Mogens Trolle Larsen, "Commercial Networks in the Ancient Near East," in Rowlands, Larsen, and Kristiansen, *Centre and Periphery*, 47–56, esp. 48.

<sup>47</sup> Alongside these texts are those from ruling-class officials and personnel, nine in all, with 10 to 30 percent of the material economic in nature (90 percent in one case). See van Soldt, "Archives at Ugarit"; Schloen, *House*, 207.

<sup>48</sup> See Excursus 11.

of political power and economic interest: rural agriculture with its villages, allotments, herds, and nomads.<sup>49</sup>

At this point one may object and say that other records do exist, in the biblical accounts of Solomon. Here we find mention of periodic indentured labor and permanently indentured labor (1 Kgs 4:6; 5:27–30 [13–16 ET]; 9:15–21); royal administrators in twelve districts, each responsible for supplying the palace for a month (4:7–19); tens of thousands of horses and their stalls (5:6 [4:26 ET]); the vast amounts of foodstuffs supplied to the palace on each day, especially the resource-draining bovines (5:2–3 [4:22–23 ET]); and of course of the magnificent temple itself, with its thousands of animal sacrifices (1 Kgs 6–8). It may be possible to interpret such material in terms of a command economy, with direct taxation of the villages, but it is also quite possible, given the dominant system in ancient Southwest Asia of supplying palace and temple, that the picture is one of a large pattern of estates, especially with periodic and permanently indentured labor. And if it was good enough for Solomon, it was good enough for subsequent despots in the little kingdom.

The problem here is that this written material is not of the same type as the clay documents from estate management that I discussed above. Instead, they belong to the same category as the typical propaganda fostered by various potentates, in which they claim immeasurable power over vast swaths of territory, and sincerely promise to deliver justice, peace, and well-being (see also 1 Kgs 4:20, 5:9–14 [4:29–34 ET]).<sup>50</sup> In reality, the claim that all land was of the gods (cf. Lev 25:23), that the

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<sup>49</sup> It does not do simply to resign oneself to the situation, forget about rural agriculture, and focus on the concerns of the power centers, as Schloen (*House*, 208) does in the case of Ugarit.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see the prologue and epilogue to the Laws of Ur-Nammu, Lipit-Ishtar, and Hammurabi, as well as throughout the various royal chronicles. Roth, *Law Collections*, 15–17, 24–26, 33–35, 76–81, 133–36; Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, ed. Benjamin R. Foster (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).

monarch was the divine regent, that all the people of the earth (or at least those to the ends of the known world) were under his sway, and that all his subjects were his happy servants or at least his happy tenants—that whole claim was a grandiose legal and political fiction.<sup>51</sup> It is one matter to claim jurisdiction over a certain piece of territory if that territory is clearly demarcated, with agreed borders, if it is characterized by complex systems of administration (immigration, customs, police, judiciary, citizenship, and infrastructure in terms of water and transport), and if one has mutually strong neighboring states that manage and enforce these systems. But if the borders are unclear; if power is exercised haphazardly by roving bands of soldiers, tax collectors, and so on; and if states simply do not have the mechanisms for managing the territory—then the claim to possess all the land is more wishful thinking than reality, and the obsession with boundaries between order and chaos is a reflection of the uncertainty of those boundaries.<sup>52</sup> A similar point may be made by the “fiction of control” generated for the interregional network or “club of powers” characteristic of the mid to late second millennium, for we rely on the surviving correspondence, such as the Amarna letters, of precisely those interested in

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<sup>51</sup> Piotr Steinkeller, “On Rulers, Priests, and Sacred Marriage: Tracing the Evolution of Early Sumerian Kingship,” in *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the Second Colloquium on the Ancient Near East—The City and Its Life, Held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo), March 22–24, 1996*, ed. Kasuko Watanabe (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1999), 103–37; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 177–78.

<sup>52</sup> On the actual limits of power, see Govert van Driel, *Elusive Silver: In Search of a Role for a Market in an Agrarian Environment* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2002), 161, 187. On obsessions over borders, see the treaties and diplomatic correspondence that constantly reiterate border claims (*RTC* 83; *CTH* 46, 51, 69, 106, 64). Michalowski, *Letters*, 20–21; Gary Beckman, ed., *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 2nd ed., SBLWAW (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 35, 45–46, 84, 109–10, 114–17, 174–75. See also Mario Liverani, “The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire,” in Larsen, *Power and Propaganda*, 279–317, esp. 306–7; idem, *Prestige and Interest*, 50–58. This is also the way I read Diakonoff’s repeated point that the monarch’s claims were actually quite limited, especially in relation to the village communes and their clans. Diakonoff, “Commune in the Ancient East,” 540; idem, “Slaves, Helots,” 46–48; idem, “Despotisms in Mesopotamia,” 88; idem, “Structure of Near Eastern Society,” 17.

maintaining this impression.<sup>53</sup> How does the account of Solomon fare by comparison? Here the distance between rhetoric and reality is greater than elsewhere in ancient Southwest Asia. In telling the much-embellished story of the effort to establish a short-lived state in the southern Levant, the scribes borrowed the hyperbolic language of the great powers. Solomon is supposed to have reigned over all the territory from the kingdoms on the Euphrates to edge of Egypt. But the reality of the “little kingdom,” if it even can be called that, was far indeed from the rhetoric. The extensive archaeological work in Jerusalem for the early Iron Age has found only a small settlement above the Gihon spring.<sup>54</sup>

In each case we have a clear process of responsive metaphorization: the reality of intermittent control, which became more sporadic the further one went from the seat of power, means that claims to possess all the land and (more importantly) its people express a desire, a wish that in an ideal extractive world the despot did indeed have such power. And that desire is embodied above all in the religious claims that the gods are the ultimate landlords and that all human beings are their tenants. Here are the seeds of the political myths that frame the worlds of the little and big kingdoms: the universe of created order needs both to expand its influence and is constantly threatened by chaos, by barbaric hordes that are simultaneously barely human and yet multitudinous. All of this is ensured by the gods, who provide the

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<sup>53</sup> Liverani, “Ras Shamra,” 1323–33; Mario Liverani, “The Collapse of the Near Eastern Regional System at the End of the Bronze Age: The Case of Syria,” in Rowlands, Larsen, and Kristiansen, *Centre and Periphery*,” 66–73, esp. 67; idem, *Prestige and Interest*, 14–15; Marc Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 BC*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 131–42.

<sup>54</sup> Not until sometime in the eighth or seventh centuries BCE was a walled town built. David Ussishkin, “Solomon’s Jerusalem: The Texts and Facts on the Ground,” in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, ed. Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann E. Killebrew (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 103–15.



meaning, motivation, and justification for the world as it is.<sup>55</sup> The monarch is merely their most significant tenant. Yet that is but the first step in this responsive metaphorization, for the monarch's very claim to tenancy unwittingly gives voice to an uncertainty, precisely at the moment of claiming the most. In speaking of himself as the divine regent, a royal tenant of the gods, the monarch registers the hollowness of the claim. Why? Tenure entails a limited set of expectations and "rights" and claims to inheritance; it does not entail absolute ownership and the right to alienate property at will. Of course, this assumes that there was a state at all, run by an intelligent thug who aspired to greater heights.

The paradox with these types of documents, estate records of varying types and royal propaganda, is that their initial audiences were stunningly small. The records were for the few administrators keeping an eye over affairs, while the grand claims by potentates were circulated among a group in which the writers and recipients were much the same.<sup>56</sup> At most, 5 percent of the population may have been literate, but 1 percent is more likely.<sup>57</sup> The catch here is that material of such limited initial scope has been read and analyzed by many more than their putative and unknown authors may have imagined, and it has thereby become the basis for so much scholarly work.

In contrast to the aggrandizing claims by the ruling class, the self-sufficient subsistence of the village communes, which comprised the bulk of all socioeconomic life, operated in ways that often ignored the claims of a very small ruling class. The ruling class may have been stronger in riverine environments, such as Lower

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<sup>55</sup> For an effort to map out some of the contours of this mythic framework, see Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire"; idem, *Prestige and Interest*.

<sup>56</sup> Liverani, *Prestige and Interest*, 28.

<sup>57</sup> Knight, *Law, Power*, 95–96.

Mesopotamia and Egypt, thereby ensuring a stronger system of estates.<sup>58</sup> But elsewhere that power was much weaker, as in the case of the Levant, which was always a marginal economic zone. In the north and before the prolonged economic crisis of the late second millennium, Ugarit operated with an estate system. Estates also appeared around the smaller centers, such as the Philistine towns in the first millennium, but these were limited affairs, supplying the “needs” of small ruling elites. As for Israel, it is likely that here also a low level of estates operated. However, now a feature of that system indicates clearly the marginal economic nature of the southern Levant. Precisely when the more important areas of ancient Southwest Asia were slowly establishing various permutations of a rather different regime (one of plunder, based on the institutional form of tribute-exchange), the aspiring potentates and their hangers-on in Israel were trying to implement the out-of-date and limited estate system. The little kingdom, along with the increase in population of the towns, also required an increase in agricultural production for the sake of those centers. The known approach was to develop some estates to supply the palace and the towns, supplemented by some taxation on villages. Yet that approach was belated and out of touch, for soon enough the imperial muscle of the Neo-Assyrians would sweep it away under a regime of booty.<sup>59</sup>

I close this treatment of estates with the most telling example showing the limits of the estate system across ancient Southwest Asia: the perpetual appeal of the Habiru for disaffected peasants and estate workers. Of course, “Habiru” is a specific name drawn from the Amarna letters, but it designates anyone who has simply slipped

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<sup>58</sup> A generous estimate that is somewhat seduced by the archives from Old Babylonia suggests that at most royal estates comprised no more than one-third of cultivated land. This is in a riverine environment where estates were the most extensive. Kozyreva, “Old Babylonian Period,” 108.

<sup>59</sup> For a brief description of this development, see Hopkins, “Bare Bones.” Largely to be avoided is Faust, “Household Economies.”

away from the burdens of estate life, or any group or village that has felt the hot breath of an uncomfortably close power center (with its demands for taxation in labor and in produce).<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the seminomadic nature of village life meant that this was not an onerous transition, even to the point of being a Habiru by night and a villager by day. The deeper and more sustained the economic crisis, the more the ranks of the Habiru swelled. They would establish self-governing communities and occasionally enter military service of local monarchs if it served their interest; at one point, in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries BCE, they formed a polity in the mountains between Phoenicia and Syria (Amurru). Yet their underlying motivation remained opposition to royal rule, estates, and tribute. In the late second millennium, they become a significant signal of the breakdown of the estate system.

## ***STATE***

An imperial set-up thus requires the systematization of unbalance, and in this respect it is the apex of all forms of exploitation.

—Mario Liverani<sup>61</sup>

Without a state, there would not have been agricultural estates, let alone the ongoing building and maintenance projects. For this reason, state and estate comprise one institutional form. The state and its development is a vast topic unto itself, raising all manner of complex questions, so I restrict myself to dealing with those that are germane to economic matters: the role of class conflict in the emergence of state and the seizure of the state machinery.

Most analyses of the ancient state, let alone in ancient Israel, assume that the rise of the state is concomitant with the rise of a ruling class, or “elite,” as the less

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<sup>60</sup> Liverani outlines the various stresses of the term’s semantic field: the denotative exile, outlaw, and refugee, to the connotative hostile, enemy, and rascal. Mario Liverani, *Myth and Politics in Ancient Near Eastern Historiography* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2004), 102–3.

<sup>61</sup> Liverani, “Ideology of the Assyrian Empire,” 297.

robust literature would have it. As a ruling class forms, so does the state. Is this not logical and obvious? The way this commonly assumed conjunction of state and ruling class emerges is through a narrative of differentiation. That narrative goes as follows: under certain conditions (soil fertility, rainfall, trade, or booty) a small differentiation of wealth and power begins. It may be a few extra goats, a larger crop, a bountiful raid; yet from small beginnings, large differences grow. Eventually power is concentrated in the hands of certain individuals, whether priests in temples, heads of households, village elders, or patrons who have been able to establish a power base (and the crucial band of armed thugs) outside traditional structures. With less need to engage directly in production and a greater ability to extract what is needed for daily life, let alone an increasing amount of luxuries, these individuals form an unemployed ruling class. Disconnected from the process of production, this nonproductive class makes its living on the backs of the productive class, made up variously of peasants, slaves, artisans, and so on. The extraction of goods is ensured through a mix of force and persuasion (technically known as exploitation). With further concentration of wealth and power, chieftains and towns appear. Then, when the extraction of essential items becomes sufficiently complex and requires defense of such wealth, the state and its (usually despotic) ruler emerge. This state is identical with the ruling class. Such a narrative is widespread within and without biblical criticism.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Verso Books, 1974); Krader, *Asiatic Mode*, 292; Niels Peter Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society*, trans. Fred Cryer (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 22–23; idem, *Prelude to Israel's Past*, 98–100; Philip Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 59–73; Simkins, “Patronage”; Gottwald, *Politics of Ancient Israel*; Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?*; Yee, *Banished Children*, 60–63; Liverani, *Israel's History*, 75–76; Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35–37; Karl Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity*, trans. H. F. Mins (German, 1908; London: Socialist Resistance, 2007). A slightly more benign version is found in “cultural evolutionary” theory, in which there is a shift—to manage new trade opportunities perhaps—from the clan subsistence unit to an administrative class that enables the organization of cultivation, storage, and redistribution of agricultural produce. Allen W. Johnson and

The problems with this popular narrative are more subtle than they at first appear to be. When one first considers the end product, it does indeed seem as though the state is coterminous with the ruling class.<sup>63</sup> In ancient Southwest Asia, one local potentate after another runs estates, or tenures them out, extracts tax/tribute/plunder from his own and conquered lands, engages in expensive acquisition of preciosities in order to impress his rivals, offers gifts to those rivals to place them in obligation to himself, and so forth. Around him gather the flunkies and apparatchiks one would expect at what is euphemistically called a “court,” all of whom comprise the unemployed ruling class.

Appearances can, however, be deceptive. Contrary to the dominant narrative I traced earlier, this ruling class did not arise in some organic relation with the state, thereby constituting its very fabric. Instead, it seized the state as a means of forwarding its own agenda. This requires two steps: (1) the state is the result of irreconcilable class antagonism; (2) one class seizes the machinery of state, seeks to make itself identical with the state, and turns it into a weapon to exploit another class.<sup>64</sup> Let me take each in turn.

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Timothy Earle, *The Evolution of Human Societies: From Foraging Group to Agrarian State*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 24–27; Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 220–22; Coomber, *Re-reading the Prophets*, 33–75. For a selective survey of theories of state formation that have influenced biblical criticism (although Marxism is conspicuous by its absence), see Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger, “Sociological and Biblical Views of the Early State,” in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States*, ed. Volkmar Fritz and Philip Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 78–105, esp. 82–94. Far less useful, due to the deployment of a universal of exclusion, is Walter Scheidel, “Studying the State,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5–57.

<sup>63</sup> This relation is very close in ancient Southwest Asia, where “the state controls *both the means of production and the ruling class*” and has complete disposal over the sum of surplus labor of the population. Banaji, *Theory as History*, 23. This observation directly counters Hindess and Hirst, who argued on theoretical grounds that the identification of the state with the exploiting class is nonsensical in terms of development of the state. Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Precapitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 192–93.

<sup>64</sup> These are the first two of four points concerning the state in Vladimir I. Lenin’s insightful and unjustly neglected work, *The State and Revolution*, in *Collected Works* (1917; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 25:385–497. I leave aside the intriguing third and fourth points of Lenin’s argument,

## CLASS CONFLICT

The state is a product and a manifestation of the *irreconcilability* of class antagonisms.

—Vladimir I. Lenin<sup>65</sup>

The first point is uncontroversial but often forgotten: the state is the product of class conflict and not, as is so often assumed, an imposition upon people from outside. Instead, the state is both the result of and the clear indication of the way class conflict is irreconcilable. Note carefully: the state is therefore not a reconciliation of such antagonism, a means of mediating and ameliorating conflict within acceptable limits. It is a signal that “antagonism objectively *cannot* be reconciled.”<sup>66</sup> The converse is also true, for the very fact that a state exists indicates that class conflict is irreconcilable. Of course, this assumes that division of labor and thereby different classes have already formed—a process that involves both objective factors relating to the means of production and subjective factors (see the earlier section on “Class”). It also means that the development into classes does not initially entail control over the forces of production as the separation of organizing functions—over labor, disbursement of usufruct, the military, religion, and so forth—from that of productive labor.<sup>67</sup>

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that the only way to overthrow the state is to seize control of the state and then use its machinery to crush one’s class enemy: “If the state is the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, if it is a power standing above society and ‘alienating itself *more and more* from it,’ it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, *but also without the destruction* of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this ‘alienation’” (ibid., 388). The profound mistake is to assume that the state is neutral and that all one need do is gain control of that apparatus and turn it to one’s own ends. For a useful deployment of Lenin’s argument, see Diakonoff, “Commune in the Ancient East,” 536; Zel’in, “Morphological Classification,” 16. For a recent and insightful Marxist approach to the state, see Vicente Lull and Rafael Micó, *Archaeology of the Origin of the State: The Theories*, trans. Peter Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. 227–71. Boyer’s (*Regulation School*, 93) hasty suggestion that Lenin views the state as the “concentrated expression of the power of monopolies” is wide of the mark.

<sup>65</sup> Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 387.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 387.

<sup>67</sup> Danilova, “Precapitalist Societies,” 294.

Now we need to be careful, for this conventional Marxist position on the state is often misappropriated. Some theorists now argue that the state must involve a reconciliation of class conflict. As Aglietta puts it, the state is “a mode of social cohesion required by relations of production that divide society into conflicting groups with heterogeneous objectives and unequal possibilities of action.”<sup>68</sup> Or as Boyer suggests, “The state appears as the (often contradictory) totality of a set of *institutionalized compromises*.”<sup>69</sup> That is, the state mediates class conflict via compromises in order to provide social glue.<sup>70</sup> Extremes are tapered off, the middle ground is asserted, and conflict is managed in terms of what is acceptable and what is not.<sup>71</sup> Yet the implicit assumption of all those who play the game is that the system itself is not to be questioned, that the basic economic structures and ruling-class culture must be sustained. The catch is that the compromises, cohesion, and mediation are in terms of the ruling class: you must accept these terms or you will be punished!

### **SEIZING THE STATE**

The state is an organ of class *rule*, an organ for the *oppression* of one class by another.

—Vladimir I. Lenin<sup>72</sup>

How does this situation emerge? Given that the state is the outcome of irresolvable class antagonism, the next step is that the state becomes a tool, an organ for the rule by one class and for its oppression of another. Notice the fine distinction: it may seem, post-factum, that the state is synonymous with the ruling class and that the two

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<sup>68</sup> Aglietta, *Capitalist Regulation*, 26.

<sup>69</sup> Boyer, *Regulation School*, 41.

<sup>70</sup> On this matter, Wallerstein is closer to Lenin’s position. In his treatment of the sixteenth century, he argues that a crucial feature was the development of strong states that weakened the power of nobles, enforced taxation, secured trade, and manipulated finance. In other words, the new ruling class was gradually asserting itself. Wallerstein, *World-System I*, 30–31.

<sup>71</sup> In our own context, the range of political options is carefully limited, running from a mild “left” to a mild “right,” with each seeking to win the “middle ground.” One need only witness the process of parliamentary bourgeois “democracy” for evidence of precisely such a phenomenon.

<sup>72</sup> Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 387.

have arisen together through graduated stages of centralization, chieftainship, and prestate forms (inchoate, typical, transitional);<sup>73</sup> yet this state of affairs is due to a quite different process, in which the ruling class seizes control of an institution that arose out of intractable class conflict.

In ancient Southwest Asia, this is a deceptively simple process, although its simplicity is complicated by the obscuring mists of time. As far as can be ascertained, within the context of the early communities (already in Sumer), the machinery of government involved councils of elders, or perhaps limited popular assemblies. At certain points, a patron or strongman,<sup>74</sup> who could rely on his own gang of ruffians, seized the machinery of state. For instance, in Sumer, the *lugal* would use his own hired thugs (under a system of patronage) to circumvent the early councils, gain power in the town, and thereby subsume the temple and its priesthood (under the *en*, or supreme priest).<sup>75</sup> An early moment of such an assumption of power appears with Enentarzi of Lagash. Astutely assuming the role of chief priest of Ningursu, he drew as much as he could under his control, dismissed priests, and ensured that all the temple estates fell under his sway. A little later, Sargon the Ancient established his rule by similar means in Akkad(e), although he seems to have done so by circumventing and challenging the traditional bases of power in the towns. Once he had Lower Mesopotamia more or less under his sway, he and his successors subjected

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<sup>73</sup> McNutt, *Society of Ancient Israel*, 112–52.

<sup>74</sup> While a patron and clients may provide one of the avenues for the seizure of power (see the discussion in **chap. 3** above), it does not follow, as Schloen (*House*, 51) suggests, that the state is one determined by patronage, or patrimonialism.

<sup>75</sup> Diakonoff, “City-States of Sumer,” 76–77, 82. The relation between *lugal*, *ensi*, and *en* is rather flexible, and its details are lost to us. As a rough guide, an *en* soon became a purely priestly function, while an *ensi* was dependent on a *lugal*—although *lugals* appear who are dependent on others, and independent *ensis* also appear. Diakonoff, *Structure of Society*, 9–10.



the temples to the power of the palace, posing (in surviving artwork) as larger-than-life figures, indeed as deified kings.<sup>76</sup>

Of course, this situation assumes that some government machinery existed and that a strongman seized that machinery. I suggest that at a basic level the assemblies or councils of elders constituted such organs of government. These seem to have been of the same ilk as the elders of the village communes, or perhaps the able-bodied males (see chap. 3 above), responsible for allocating agricultural labor and produce. They were also charged with administering customary law and with maintaining the mode of *régulation*, ensuring that the adaptable system kept running the way it always had done. With the larger towns, the councils' responsibilities and functions expanded into what can really be called an early state. In some cases the councils continued even after the strongman had seized power. These were the Old Babylonian assemblies of elders (*puḫ ru*), with mayors (*rabiānu*) of neighborhoods and towns.<sup>77</sup> Later, under the Hittites, the monarch had to deal with an assembly, or *pankus*. Initially this was comprised of all men bearing arms, but later it embodied the key elements of the ruling class. The *pankus* seems to have reserved to itself the final decision concerning the monarch's successor.<sup>78</sup> At this point, it becomes clear that the councils, assemblies, and mayors were not so much popular or "democratic" (in the sense of the allowing some space for the exploited classes) as already manifestations of the ruling class. The thuggish patron who seizes power thereby wrests it away from

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<sup>76</sup> Veronika K. Afanasieva, "Sumerian Culture," in Diakonoff and Kohl, *Early Antiquity*, 124–36, esp. 130; Mogens Trolle Larsen, "The Tradition of Empire in Mesopotamia," in Larsen, *Power and Propaganda*, 75–103, esp. 90–91.

<sup>77</sup> Schloen, *House*, 287.

<sup>78</sup> Giorganadze, "Hittite Kingdom," 273.

the existing power structures, or—as often seemed to be the case—realized the common ground with the councils and worked together with them.

All of this leaves unanswered a key question: Why is it necessary to seize control of the state? With the emergence of a ruling class, those exploited do not willingly or “naturally” give their labor to someone else, or at least hand over part of what they have produced. As Diakonoff observes, “A coercive mechanism was therefore necessary to force the exploited class, as well as the entire society, to submit to the socioeconomic order.”<sup>79</sup> That mechanism was the state. In other words, for the nonproducers to ensure that they were actually fed, housed, clothed, and able to live the lives to which they had become accustomed, they needed some mechanism to ensure that others did the work. The whole estate system, the imposition of tax and tribute, relied on the subtle combinations of persuasion and force that the state provided.

The use of force is the more obvious of the two, even when it becomes covert and institutionalized. But I want to make a couple of observations on the use of persuasion, since this is central to the workings of a mode of *régulation*. To begin with, to a greater and lesser degree those who control the state apparatus wish to maintain the fiction that they do so for the benefit of all, that they represent the aspirations of everyone, and that the state itself is neutral or at least God-given.<sup>80</sup> Thus

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<sup>79</sup> Diakonoff, “General Outline,” 36. See also idem, *Paths of History*, 21: “Since the exploited class is clearly shaped in contrast to the class of freemen (as yet undifferentiated), the system of governing the society becomes institutionalised, it receives a constant, generally recognised structure and an apparatus for coercion; in other words, it becomes a *state*.”

<sup>80</sup> Here Lenin draws from Marx’s *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law*, in which Marx argues that Hegel’s approach to the state is inverted. Hegel begins with categories such as the state, sovereignty and law and then attempts to fit the lives of flesh-and-blood people within these abstract categories. Instead, argues Marx, we must stand Hegel on his feet and begin with the everyday lives of human beings. In this light, the Hegelian categories become abstractions, alienated from human life, and appearing to be entities greater than and determinative of our daily lives. So also with the state. Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law*, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (1843; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 3:3–129. Engels summarizes: the state is

one monarch after another in ancient Southwest Asia claims to introduce justice and abolish debt burdens. The law collections, from the Laws of Shulgi onward, state that the laws of the king are to protect the widow and the orphan, the weak against the powerful, the poor against the rich. In the Hebrew Bible such assertions are commonplace, producing both theological justifications of the state as the expression of divine will, and the assertion that the king's responsibility is to care for widow, orphan, and foreigner.

Further, the law is a rather subtle beast. We have already encountered customary law, in the context of the kinship-household. There I suggested that it was administered on a quotidian, subconscious pattern by all who were part of the community, but that when an aspect had to be enforced, it fell to the community elders or perhaps headman. But what happens when the law is written down in the name of the ruler of a state? On the one hand, it still makes much use of allocatory language and terminology, largely because those royal collections seem to have emerged from customary practices in centers of power. This is true of the conservative tradition that begins with the Laws of Shulgi (son of Ur-Nammu), and runs through the Laws of Lipit-Ishtar of Issin, and the Laws of the Kingdom of Eshnunna in the valley of the Diyala River—until we arrive at the relative detail of the laws of Hammurabi's Code.<sup>81</sup> Of course, this allocatory language begins to be deployed increasingly to justify extractive practices. So we find different penalties for the ruling class, estate laborers, and slaves; the setting of "prices" (in silver and barley especially); as well as "interest" rates, payments for hire, and so on.

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"a power which arose from society but places itself above and alienates itself more and more from it." Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State in Light of the Researches by Lewis H. Morgan*, in *ibid.* (1884; 1990), 26:128–276). Quoted in Lenin, *State and Revolution*, 389.

<sup>81</sup> Kozyreva, "Old Babylonian Period," 114–21.

On the other hand, the law becomes another tool in the persuasion needed to justify the existence and indeed value of the ruling class. If we accept Knight's persuasive proposal for biblical law (the written law), the initial impulse came from Darius I (522–486 BCE).<sup>82</sup> That is, with Darius's desire to record the laws of all the Persian provinces, the impetus for the writing of biblical laws began, especially in the hands of a rather disempowered ruling elite keen to reassert some power, upon their return from exile to what was now the province of Yehud. Of course, the final codification took much, much longer, but the initial step of codifying the parochial concerns of scribes and their bosses in the provincial capital had begun. As with the laws across ancient Southwest Asia, their concerns were narrow and colonizing: while the laws purport to be for all, they concern primarily the ideology of the ruling class and what they claim to be under their jurisdiction.

### ***TRANSITION: THE SACRED IN BETWEEN***

The interpreting priests . . . continually recharge the signified in the temple, transforming it into signifier.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari<sup>83</sup>

I close this discussion by returning to the role of the sacred, especially since it provides a useful means of charting the transition from the institutional form of state-estate to that of tribute-exchange. Nonetheless, before I do, I emphasize a number of points that have arisen from the preceding analysis. First, it is quite clear that the estate system and the powerful states, which both established the estates and were fed by them, were characteristic of the major areas of political and economic power: Mesopotamia (Lower and Upper), occasionally the northern reaches around Anatolia,

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<sup>82</sup> Knight, *Law, Power*, 101–9.

<sup>83</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 116.

and along the Nile. In a marginal zone such as the southern Levant, estates were small affairs, the business of modest temples and aspiring strongmen. Ravaged by marauding armies, from both south and north, it was more likely that bands of Habiru were the norm.

Second, the development of this institutional form, first manifested in Uruk of the fourth millennium, fostered a number of technological shifts that then led to its consolidation and further development.<sup>84</sup> These include the technology of bronze production, the construction of irrigation canals (along the rivers), the invention of devices to raise water, and the introduction of plow, potter's wheel, and weaver's loom. As is characteristic of such innovation and modification, it leads to a modest burst in productivity, but then it soon settles into its own groove, out of which it cannot seem to jump. That is, once these technological shifts have been enabled, the same social form that enabled them now hobbles further development. For example, the technology of extracting iron from ore was known before its eponymous age, especially in the northeastern parts of Asia Minor. The Hittites are only the most well-known smelters, but the technology was used across different parts of ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>85</sup> Yet the iron objects found tend to be ornamental, and the

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<sup>84</sup> Here we need to avoid the common mistake of assuming that technology drives economic changes; such a technologism occasionally afflicts Liverani's work. I think here of his argument that the long fields, which required traction animals and irrigation, led to the Uruk "revolution." Liverani, *Uruk*, 17–19. By contrast, technology is both enabled and limited by the dominant social form. An excellent study that argues for a dialectic between socioeconomic formation and technology is that of Golden on the Chalcolithic (Aenolithic) Age (4700–3500 BCE). He writes, "a unique set of circumstances helped create a socially driven need for complex metal technology." Jonathan M. Golden, *Dawn of the Metal Age: Technology and Society during the Levantine Chalcolithic* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2010), 5. The only flaw with this work is that it does not investigate the nature of this new formation apart from complexity, chieftainship, and social stratification. For an earlier observation on the limits of technologist arguments in relation to first millennium developments in the Judean highlands, see Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 23.

<sup>85</sup> James D. Muhly, "The Bronze Age Setting," in *The Coming of the Age of Iron*, ed. James D. Muhly and Theodore A. Wertime (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 25–67; Paula M. McNutt, *The Forging of Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

correspondence indicates that it was not so plentiful.<sup>86</sup> It is not merely that iron is more difficult to smelt than copper, that its molding possibilities are lower, and that it easily rusts. Primarily, the social and economic conditions were not conducive to the production of iron on a wide scale.<sup>87</sup> After the long economic crisis of the late second millennium, only with the shift to the institutional form of tribute-exchange do the conditions foster the wider production of iron and the use of carbon additions to produce a carbonaceous iron that is often called “steel” (although it was quite different from what we think of as steel).<sup>88</sup> These new technologies also had unexpected and potentially disastrous consequences. More obviously, iron and then steel weapons are far more devastating than bronze. In place of the daggers, short swords, and light spears of bronze, large swords and body armor become possible, as also more deadly bows and arrows. With these handy items, a marauding army can inflict far higher casualties. Needless to say, the control of such technologies was central in the consolidation and expansion of new forms of political power.<sup>89</sup> Less obviously, while irrigation may be a boon for supplying the food and fiber for the walled towns and their temples and palaces, it also leads to impoverishment and salinization of the soil, with the resultant downgrading of crop quality. Not only does the danger of maximal use of the land show here, but also the perpetual threat of crisis that is a feature of the sacred economy. These built-in limitations of the institutional

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<sup>86</sup> For instance, in the Late Bronze Age letter from Hattusili of Hatti to Adad-nirari I of Assyria, the former stalls the latter’s request for a few iron blades by making the excuse that the making of the good iron is not yet finished. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 148–49.

<sup>87</sup> Surprisingly, this perspective in relation to metal technology is missing from Liverani’s (“Collapse,” 71) otherwise rather orthodox Marxist approach.

<sup>88</sup> Without such a process, iron implements and weapons were little better than bronze, a fact that retarded the rapid spread of iron. Hopkins, *Highlands of Canaan*, 217–23.

<sup>89</sup> Golden, *Dawn of the Metal Age*, 195.

form of estates would lead to the ruling classes seeking other sources for their own “needs,” namely, the institutional form of tribute-exchange.

Finally, the distinct advantage of Diakonoff’s proposal is that it provides one element of the socioeconomic tensions that kept economic crisis an ever-present reality. Indeed, in Liverani’s detailed expansion, the need for estates to gain ever-new laborers put increasing strain on the agriculture of village communes, for which the ruling class cared little (far higher yields came from the estates than taxes on the villages). Or in my own appropriation, given the perpetual shortage of labor, the effective response by those on the estates and farms was simply to abandon the fields, preferably when the harvest was ripe and sheep needed to be shorn. That is, when extractive institutional forms begin to dominate over the allocative, the system faces imminent collapse.<sup>90</sup> This periodic pattern is the focus as I discuss the spiral of crises in the final chapter (chap. 6).

Now I can return to the question of the sacred, specifically in terms of its relation to extraction. As I discussed in the chapter on theory (chap. 1), in order to function any system or regime needs a mode of *régulation*: the specific collection of institutions, cultural assumptions and compromises, shared beliefs in what is required to maintain at least a semblance of stability and continuity. The sacred or religious domain is arguably the prime component in the mode of *régulation* under consideration, saturating the whole so that the institutions were religious in all manner of ways. As with the allocative institutional forms, so also was religious expression inextricably woven in with the extractive forms. In particular, the religious was

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<sup>90</sup> Liverani’s focus is the collapse of a weakened Ugarit, which was overrun by the Sea Peoples in the twelfth century. He is mistaken, however, in arguing that it constituted a shift to a slave-based mode of production. Liverani, “**Communautés de village,**” 163; idem, “Ras Shamra,” 1312–14, 1346–47; idem, “Collapse,” 72.

central to the compulsion needed to ensure that extractive forms could function. If we allow for a moment the artificial distinction between economic and extraeconomic modes of compulsion, then religion is at the heart of the extraeconomic type. But why is compulsion necessary? Given that extraction is usually resisted (in word and deed) by those from whom produce is extracted, the process of extraction requires some level of enforcement. As we saw earlier in relation to the state, this may be external enforcement in terms of covert and overt patterns of violence, but far more effective are the internalized ideological justifications for extraction. The ruling ideas may be the ideas of the ruling class, but they gain traction only when the ruled internalize them.<sup>91</sup> Or at least such is the desire of the ruling class, although reality is often somewhat different, with all manner of modes of resistance to that internalization.

Three moments in the role of the sacred in relation to extractive forms may be identified: priestcraft; political myth; and the violence of the “axial” shift of the first millennium. Earlier I mentioned the large temple estates in Sumer, especially the Eanna precinct in Uruk and the network required to sustain a relatively large operation. Its recipients—the various priests and their offsidiers—do no productive work of their own, so they need others to do so. Yet the recipients of that produce justify such extraction through increasingly elaborate theological systems that assert the supreme importance of their activities for the welfare of the whole community.<sup>92</sup> The viability of agricultural produce, of the river’s rising or the rain’s falling, of the avoidance of pests and invasions, of the staying of disease—all such rely upon the goodwill of capricious gods. They must be appeased to keep the system running, with

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<sup>91</sup> This situation is often twisted by nonproducers, who have extracted goods from the producers, into an assumption that their own gain has been “honestly” acquired and that efforts at redistribution are thereby violent requisitions of what is “rightfully” theirs.

<sup>92</sup> Liverani, *Uruk*, 34, 63.



sacrifices offered to the gods instituted as a primary task. The ingenuity of such an ideology is that it is couched in allocative terms: the tithe is therefore a reallocation of produce to the most important locus: the temple and its workers. The priests do the most vital work of all, so they are exempt from usual labor so they can devote their lives to a higher calling. Everyone else is to pitch in and provide produce. The complex system of festivals, seasons, and cycles attempts to include more and more within the orbit of priestcraft. The priests themselves develop what Deleuze and Guattari call the interpretation of interpretation: not only must the will of the gods be interpreted by whatever means are available, whether divining the flight of birds, peering into entrails, drawing lots, prayer and dreams; but also the priests develop traditions of religious thought and practice that then become the subject of subsequent interpretation. When written, interpretation builds ever further upon itself, ever seeking the will of the gods.

The second moment is that of political myth: the often-complex narrative of the founding of a state and especially its ruling family. The spatial moment of political myth appears when the temple is absorbed by the palace, when both are in the same precinct and dominated by the palace (no matter how sullen the priests may be over such a move). As we saw earlier, this happened quite early. For example, in Sumer it came via the hands of the *lugal*, Enentarzi of Lagash, who circumvented the early councils, took on the title of chief priest, and under his power merged the estates of Ningursu's temple and those of Baba (or Bau, Ningursu's wife). In Akkad(e), Sargon the Ancient circumvented the traditional power of the towns, gained control of the temples, and then sought the favor of the priesthood with largesse. He went so far as to make his daughter an *en*-priestess (*entu* in Akkadian) of the moon-god Nanna of Ur. Nonetheless, the relations between the Sargonids and the priests remained cool.

With this subsuming of the temple under the control of the palace, and with the sporadic claims by kings to divine status, or at least derivation from the gods, political myths begin to appear.<sup>93</sup> They may take the form of claims that the monarchs in question are then descended from the gods, usually in the form of putative genealogies with timescales in the tens of thousands of years.<sup>94</sup> Or they may involve complex narratives that include theogonic, cosmogonic, and anthropogonic elements, such as *Enuma Elish* or the narrative from Genesis to Joshua in the Hebrew Bible. Ultimately the purpose in these stories may be called “poligonic,” constructing myths concerning the political origins of the current order.<sup>95</sup> I suggest that the creation myths of ancient Southwest Asia are actually by-products of these poligonic myths: the gods, cosmos, and human beings must be created for the political order to be established. The attraction of political myths may be seen in their persistence into the Persian era and beyond, as also their late development in the Hebrew Bible.

The third moment is the extreme violence of the “axial” age. While the “discovery” of abstraction and the beginning of henotheisms and monotheisms in the first millennium have been much celebrated and discussed, less attention has been given to the socioeconomic conditions of such changes. As Graeber persuasively argues, this was an era of even more extensive violence than usual. Marauding bands

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<sup>93</sup> Examples of palace controlling temple multiply: in Nuzi the palace entrance faces the temple of Ishtar; in early Asshur, the ruler is priest, administrator, and military chief; and so on. An intriguing later and converse example is Ez 45, with a defanged local ruling class and the priests taking the opportunity to rebuke the princes, assign them land separate from temple and city, tell them not to oppress, and take over control of the temple. Yet this example reinforces my point concerning the development of political myth.

<sup>94</sup> This is already the case with the “Chronicle of the Single Monarchy,” the earliest text of which dates from the twenty-first century. Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 119–36.

<sup>95</sup> Elsewhere I have argued that a political myth is characterized by the construction of a labyrinthine world split by patterns of reaction and insurrection, repression, and great cunning. Despite the most excessive efforts within these mythical narratives to close down the opposition that keeps appearing, an opposition that is constructed by the myth in the first place, these stories have a cunning knack of twisting out of such a stranglehold. See Boer, *Political Myth*.

and armies crisscrossed the land, rulers sought to extract plunder and tribute as ways of feeding larger state machines (when estates were no longer sufficient), and the logistics of providing for perpetual armies became a nightmare. In this context, coinage provides an ingenious solution to the logistics of supply (see the next chapter), and with coinage a new type of abstraction becomes possible and tangibly real.

At this point we need to be careful, for the usual argument is that here lie the origins of the ability of human beings to think abstractly in a sustained manner. That argument goes as follows: coinage can happen and is fostered by a huge step in human abilities, specifically the ability to ponder the world in abstract terms. The reason is that coinage embodies an abstract value, both instituted by the state and agreed upon by those who use it. Arguments run back and forth in idealist and materialist directions: either the “discovery” of abstraction precedes and enables coinage, or coinage produces the conditions for thinking abstractly. However, the problem lies elsewhere, in the assumption that abstraction itself was a new step in human development. It follows that before then, human beings operated in concrete, immediate terms, not being aware of mutually contradictory beliefs: for instance, the god can be a bull, a storm, or physically present in the temple or cult corner. I find this argument exceedingly strange and somewhat patronizing, a projection backward in time of assertions still made today that indigenous people cannot think abstractly since they are “primitive” and “backward.”<sup>96</sup> It may be refuted simply: does not the use of language entail a process of abstraction, as also the ability to plan crops or raise herds, or to distinguish between different types of animals or groups of people?

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<sup>96</sup> For instance, I have encountered this observation made repeatedly by Danes who work in Greenland, or indeed by some immigrant Australians in regard to Indigenous Australians.

What are the implications for the changes of the first millennium, embodied physically in coinage? I suggest that this shift entails a new type of abstraction, not the invention of abstraction itself. A coin has an objective value, instituted by the monarch who punches, stamps, or presses it (invented simultaneously in China, India, and Lydia). It has the same objective value for the peasant who sells his produce as it does for the hungry mercenary who purchases that produce and will never be seen again. In this blood-soaked era and with new forms of abstraction embodied in coinage, new forms of religious expression take root: comprehensive theological systems emerge, headed by singular gods that rule not the tribe or town or palace-temple complex, but that lay claim to ruling the whole cosmos. The imaginative possibility of these new systems is of course enabled by the great empires of the Neo-Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, Persians, and even the client systems of the Greeks and then Romans.

I suggest that the shift from the era of the creation of political myths to that of totalizing theological systems is marked by the change in extractive institutional forms. Or rather, it is a shift in dominance: until the end of the second millennium, the predominant extractive institutional form was state-estate; after the sustained period of economic crisis at the close of the second millennium and with the subsequent rise of empires, tribute-exchange takes over that role. However, while the broad patterns are clear, such shifts are characterized by lags and overlaps, as is well known in socioeconomic analysis. It is no surprise, then, that the earlier Assyrian efforts at empire in the second millennium already preferred plunder and tribute-exchange. Yet the Assyrians were unable to hold together their efforts at expansion, having to wait until after the long economic crisis to realize their brutal system in the first millennium. In other words, the institutional form of tribute-exchange was already in

existence; yet its time had not yet come, so it played second fiddle to the estate system. On the other side, the pattern of estates did continue into the later era, as did the ideological assumptions concerning the sacred, especially in the Neo-Babylonian Empire. These still supplied the temple-palace complex with its goods, but they did so in a position subservient to a wider pattern of tribute-exchange. Finally, the monotheisms characteristic of the first millennium had their precursors, most notably with Akhenaton's attempt at henotheism in the fourteenth century BCE. That it failed to grip the masses is more a sign that its time was not yet, much like the many technological inventions that have no use within a particular social form, only to become crucial in a later one.

## Chapter 5

### *The Many Faces of Plunder, or, Tribute-Exchange*

Have you come to seize spoil? Have you assembled your horde to carry off plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to seize a great amount of booty?

—Ezekiel 38:13

I closed the previous chapter by arguing that there was a decisive shift, in terms of extractive institutional forms, from (e)state to tribute-exchange. This took place on either side of the centuries-long economic crisis of the late second millennium. Or rather, I argued the shift in terms of the sacred, in the way a transition may be traced from the political myths generated by the state and its estate system to the imperial monotheisms of tribute-exchange. In this section I open out the analysis of the final institutional form, tribute-exchange, to include material beyond the religious.

It may surprise some readers to find tribute and exchange linked by means of a hyphen as one institutional form. The reasons will become clear soon enough as to why they are two sides of the same extractive coin (the metaphor is not accidental). Simply put, they are variations on plunder, which involves the expropriation of goods from the labor and resources one does not possess or control. Tribute (for “them”) and taxation (for “us”) are really the politer and slightly more regulated faces of plunder. But how is exchange also a form of looting? The basic purpose of exchange in ancient Southwest Asia was the acquisition of preciosities. People in pursuit of the unnecessary items of life used whatever means were available to get hold of them. If such trophy seekers had to give something in exchange, then so be it, for that was a necessary evil. Needless to say, of all the matters I have discussed thus far, the components of this institutional form have generated the most attention in recent scholarship, in light of the mistaken assumption that the core of economic activity is

to truck, barter, and exchange. The result is that there have been a goodly number of proposals that claim to have found the key to the whole economic system in either tribute or in exchange (or “trade”). I discuss some of those proposals in what follows. Here it suffices to point out that they make the mistake of the false universal that I have already identified with households and patronage: a specific feature is elevated to be the key of the whole mode of production.

### ***INSTITUTIONAL TRANSITIONS***

They will despoil those who despoiled them,  
and plunder those who plundered them.

—Ezek 39:10

To set the scene for my analysis below, let me say a little more concerning the crucial shift in extractive institutional forms at the turn of the first millennium. The limitations and contradictions of the estate system finally became sufficiently apparent that virtually no one within the ruling classes, with the exception of marginal states like the little kingdom of Israel, was keen to reestablish that system as a dominant form after the centuries of economic crisis. In the short term, the estate system provided food, fibers, and other materials for the few. Shortage of labor, however, meant that estates always sought to transfer subsistence laborers to the estates, moving them from zero involvement to periodic estate labor, then to more permanent forms of labor. From the perspective of palace and temple, with higher yields from the estates than the intermittent taxation of village communities in the countryside, there was little interest in ensuring that the latter remained viable. Ultimately, this is unsustainable on two levels. First, the estates themselves operated with an internal limit. They served their function for centers of power and moderately sized states, providing direct sources of food and fibers for those who did not labor. From Asshur to Babylon, a distinct natural limit emerged with the institutional form

of the (e)state. Any further expansion would require another mode of extraction above and beyond the estate system. Second, it is chronically shortsighted to undermine the labor base of the estate system. The countryside can supply only a certain amount of labor before people begin to abandon villages, join the “brigands” or Habiru in the hills, or simply relocate out of harm’s way. This would not be the first or last time that human beings constructed an economic pattern that was to their detriment. Indeed, in a telling counter to the neoclassical myth that human beings seek their own best interest, more often than not human beings seem to opt for what is destructive rather than beneficial. This second point is another way of saying that when the extractive patterns dominate and thereby undermine allocative patterns, the social formation as a whole begins to fall apart. So it was that the ever-present threat of crisis became all too real in the last centuries of the second millennium. The old patterns of estate-based extraction had come to the limits of their possibilities, self-destructing through internal contradictions, while a new constellation of institutional forms that might achieve an as yet unexplored type of limited stability had not yet risen to dominance.

Eventually an existing institutional form, transformed and streamlined, would provide some solutions to the limits of the estate system. This was the form of tribute-exchange, which we find already existing alongside and subordinate to the estates up to the end of the Bronze Age. While the estates were reasonably sufficient for relatively local forms of power, tribute-exchange provided greater and more systematic patterns of providing for the “needs” of a ruling class intent on imperial expansion.<sup>1</sup> Its extractive reach was wider and was thereby able to provide the basis for the empires of the first millennium BCE: the Neo-Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, and

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<sup>1</sup> Diakonoff, *Paths of History* 26.



then the Persians. Each would explore and refine the many faces of plunder, upon which their empires were founded. That it was ultimately unstable, producing spectacular florescence and equally spectacular collapse, indicates the limits of this institutional form. Before I outline in more detail the nature of tribute-exchange, a couple points should be kept in mind. To begin with, tribute-exchange constitutes one institutional form among the others, part of a constellation of forms that underwent constant reconfiguration in face of the continuous effort to deal with and counter economic crisis and the resilience of subsistence survival. Thus, before the first millennium, the estate system attempted to become dominant in the constellation, only to come up against its own limits. When the first millennium opens out, tribute-exchange takes its place as the dominant form. Yet this is not a qualitative change, as some have argued, whether in terms of a new mode of production (Liverani),<sup>2</sup> or a supposed seismic shift in human consciousness (Schloen). It was a reconfiguration of the constellation of institutional forms within the same mode of production.

Further, the reason why this situation is not always noticed, and thereby why critics are apt to give priority to extractive forms, is due to the nature of the material available. As I stated in my treatment of the estates, this evidence is largely from the ruling class, in the form of archives from palace, temple, and landlord. Their interest was primarily in what can be extracted from producers. It is also due to the nature of the economic theories (acknowledged or not) that are brought to bear. Here the patterns of trade and surpluses, of the exercise of self-interest and comparative advantage, are to the forefront of analysis as the proper subjects of economic analysis. Here too the interest is in periods of relative stability (the assumptions of economic

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<sup>2</sup> Liverani, "Land Tenure."

equilibrium), for which crisis then becomes an anomaly that must be explained.

However, when the focus shifts to crisis as the norm for ancient Southwest Asian economies, then allocative institutional forms come to the fore. They were more able to deal with such crisis, although I will soon question what “crisis” means in this context.

### ***PLUNDER, TRIBUTE, AND TAX***

All the spoil of these towns, and the livestock, the Israelites took for their booty; but all the people they struck down with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, and they did not leave any who breathed.

—Joshua 11:14

The mechanism of plunder is simple: the work of one’s hands is appropriated by another through force. Closer examination of this basic and effective formula reveals a number of useful distinctions, specifically in terms of the use of force, and whether those plundered are outside or inside the political entity in question. As far as force is concerned, it may be overt or covert: the hovering sword ensures plunder is handed over promptly and with minimal complaint, while a system of institutions conceals such violence and ensures a more consistent pattern of extraction. We tend to call it plunder or loot when boots crash through doors, heads are separated from shoulders, women and children are carried off, and the produce of the land is appropriated. We prefer to speak of tribute or tax when tax gatherers replace soldiers, heads remain on shoulders, and fewer women and men are raped. Within the domain of systematized plunder, where violence is woven into the fabric of institutions, a further distinction operates between outside and inside. Those outside one’s own political entity usually pay “tribute,” while those inside pay “tax.” Rulers of other petty regimes pay tribute to the dominant ruler in an area. Of course, if the power relations shift, tribute gatherers easily become givers, and vice versa. At a narrative level, this shift appears in the contrast between Solomon, who receives tribute, and the bulk of the successor

despots after 1 Kgs 11, who give tribute.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, those inside one's polity pay tax. As subjects, they hand over such taxes directly to the ruler, or rather, through the hands of tax collectors. That the tax collectors often belonged to the same landlord clans that ran estates and engaged in exchange and diplomacy with foreign courts only added to their despicable nature, at least in the eyes of the common people. To sum up, we have three departments responsible for looting: the Department for Rude Plunder; the Department for Polite Foreign Plunder; and the Department for Polite Internal Plunder.<sup>4</sup>

The distinct advantage of this approach for the economies in question is that it relies, ideally, on the continued viability of both the tribute-giving polities and of the agricultural structures of one's own realm. Both domains (external and internal) boil down to the same reality, for the way a ruler raises tribute to give a foreign potentate is through taxing his own subjects or handing over treasures (usually stored in temples) gathered through earlier taxes. In this light, it is crucial for the institutional form of tribute-exchange that the patterns of subsistence survival continue to function. Why? The village communes of rural areas need to flourish so they can pay taxes, so that in turn a ruler can pay tribute to some other bully who happens to be stronger. The typical pattern was for whole villages to be taxed as distinct units. The initial yield of such a system may be lower than the estate system, for the surpluses from subsistence survival were much smaller and designed for seeing the village through

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<sup>3</sup> For other traces, see the account of the tribute seized by Jehoash from the temple and palace treasuries to keep the Aramean king Hazael from attacking Jerusalem (2 Kgs 12); Menahem's taxation of fifty shekels of silver on the wealthy to hold at bay Tiglath-pileser III (2 Kgs 15:19–20); Hezekiah's stripping of the temple and royal treasuries for tribute to Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:13–16). Thanks to Gale Yee for these references (private communication).

<sup>4</sup> At this point, it should be clear that I disagree with Liverani's insightful but anthropologically influenced account of tribute's origin in the realm of gift, claiming that tribute becomes fixed gift, which then needs further "voluntary" gift to maintain the fiction of gift in the first place. Instead, "gift" is itself a form of plunder. Liverani, *Prestige and Interest*, 267–73.

lean times. In principle, nonetheless, taxes and tribute could be spread indefinitely across ever larger stretches of territory, thereby enabling empires.

I wrote “ideally” above, for the pattern of taxation and tribute within the context of the sacred economy is a fragile affair.<sup>5</sup> Temples were certainly of no assistance in this situation, for they acted as a further net drain on scarce resources. The very need to dress a tax as a sacred duty speaks volumes (as in Lev 27:30–33; Num 18:25–26), as do the warnings against not living up to that duty.<sup>6</sup> To achieve anything resembling stability, it requires a fine balance between allocation and extraction, with the former providing the basis of the latter. It was in the self-interest of a ruling class to ensure that the extraction from agricultural village communes and towns (which were still largely agricultural) was enough for their own purposes and yet did not threaten the viability of the communities in question. The margin for extracting from village communities may have been small, but multiplied across large realms, the total was substantial.

The only regime that seems to have come close to achieving such a fine balance was the Persian Empire, which I call a strong extractive regime in the next chapter. Or rather, it lasted a little longer (some two centuries) than the previous two imperial regimes—the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires—that based their extractive practices primarily on variations of plunder. The reasons for the relative “success” of the Persians come down to three: expanse, refinement, and

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<sup>5</sup> This fragility is enhanced by the rough-and-ready modes of calculation, blending customary practice, a love of round figures (in tens and sixes), an absence of any sense of “hidden” factors, and despotic demands.

<sup>6</sup> As Grabbe points out, the need for a pledge in Neh 10:36–40 (35–39 ET) indicates resistance to this imposition (if it were an assumed religious duty, why make an extra pledge?). So also Mal 3:8–11 states that not paying a tithe is the same as defrauding God. Grabbe, *Jews and Judaism*, 208.

administration.<sup>7</sup> The sheer expanse of the Persian Empire, from the Indus to the Mediterranean, meant that any excesses of extraction could be mitigated by other parts of the empire. The Persians also refined the practices of violence they inherited from the Neo-Assyrians and Neo-Babylonians. To be sure, brute and devastating force was always required in expanding and maintaining such a vast empire, but the Persians also developed more sophisticated forms of covert violence. These appeared above all in the extensive administration of the empire, with its provinces (including that of Yehud), satraps, well-guarded royal roads, record keeping, and myriad dimensions of imperial management, which was simultaneously highly centralized and recognized linguistic and cultural diversity. That is, the Persians were no less violent than the infamous Neo-Assyrians, but they were far more systematic, sophisticated, and covert in the way they deployed that violence.

Nonetheless, the strong extractive regime of the Persian Empire lasted barely two centuries. This is hardly an endorsement for its economic credentials, even if one allows a slightly longer time frame by including, within the same pattern, the early period after Alexander's conquest. The Neo-Assyrians and Neo-Babylonians were even less able to establish a convincing level of stability through systematic plunder. I suggest three main reasons for this spectacular lack of success: (1) administrative limits, (2) the nature of surpluses, and (3) the brutality of plunder. The first reason is found with the contingency of power and its administration. As I have mentioned earlier, we too readily tend to assume strong administrative states in ancient Southwest Asia. Ensuring regular taxation requires comprehensive and efficient administration, a feature that even escapes many modern and supposedly advanced

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<sup>7</sup> See esp. the detail in Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 388–421; Grabbe, *Jews and Judaism*, 189–208.

states under capitalism. Registers of all citizens (constantly updated), records of incomes and taxes paid or unpaid, systemic enforcement, complex modeling of the needs of a state bureaucracy, and the efficient use of funds—these and myriad other features are needed to make taxation work. Despite their impressive achievements, it is clear that ancient states simply did not have the computational apparatus or even the terminology for efficient taxation.<sup>8</sup> Add to this the facts that the borders of these states were never clearly demarcated, that citizenship was fluid at best, and that the grandiose claims by rulers concerning the reach of their power inevitably exceeded mundane reality—all these facts undermine the viability of tax and tribute. So what we find are customary assumptions concerning tax, relatively basic methods of calculation, and intermittent enforcement.<sup>9</sup> The tithe is the basic form of tax, regardless of circumstances; it inevitably required religious sanction to justify its imposition; and actual enforcement depended on the nearness of the power center and the brawn available to tax collectors.

The second reason relates to the core issue of surplus. As I discussed at length in my treatment of subsistence survival, the farmers who carefully produced marginal surpluses did so for the sake of risk aversion. The small stockpiles of grain and

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<sup>8</sup> Van Driel, *Elusive Silver*, 315. On the marked looseness and variation in systems of record keeping in early Mesopotamia, generated by the limits of clay, post factum recording (often much later), the absence of strict notions of accounting, a focus on quality rather than quantity, the primary use of memory and parawriting methods of accounting, and the alternative reality of administration rather than real life, see Marc Van de Mieroop, “Accounting in Early Mesopotamia: Some Remarks,” in *Creating Economic Order: Record-Keeping, Standardization, and the Development of Accounting in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael Hudson and Cornelia Wunsch (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2004), 47–64; Piotr Steinkeller, “The Function of Written Documentation in the Administrative Praxis of Early Babylonia,” in *ibid.*, 65–88.

<sup>9</sup> As examples, see the simple table of taxes from first-millennium Babylon and the small but consistent amounts listed in the Samaria ostraca. In the latter case, it matters little for my purposes whether the items, mostly a jar of old wine or a jar of fine oil, are given to (prefaced by *l-*) landlords or taken from them and given to the government apparatus. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*, 54–56; Schloen, *House*, 156–64. This is not to say that the Neo-Assyrians or Neo-Babylonians did not use forms of taxation, as van Driel’s study (*Elusive Silver*, 153–322) of Neo-Babylonian taxation makes clear, but that it was not yet as refined and thereby productive (for the ruling class) as the Persian.

legumes, the extra wool, and so on, acted as buffers for lean times, which were always lurking around the year's corner. Those surpluses were crucial for ensuring the survival of the clan and village commune. Thus, to speak of a surplus that was taxed gives the impression that it was in some way beyond and above the needs of everyday life, luxuries without which one could easily live. Thus, if a ruler begins exacting taxes, either for his own purposes or for the payment of tribute to a bigger bully in the neighboring state, then he immediately threatens the viability of subsistence survival. All may go well for a time if the rains are good, the pests stay away, resistance to disease is high, and the crops and herds are robust. Then the removal of the small surpluses through taxation and tribute may not be noticed as much. Yet it takes little to tip the balance: a bad year comes, crops wilt, a significant part of the herd dies off, and then there is no surplus upon which to rely.

The fine balance required for a modicum of stability under this arrangement assumes that human beings make reasonably rational choices for their own self-interest (as neoclassical economics would have it). The ruling class exacts only enough taxation and tribute for its needs but does not threaten the viability of its tax base, while the farmers of the rural sector work enough to maintain their subsistence level and pay the taxes demanded. This is patently absurd, for human beings rarely make decisions that are in their own self-interest; more often than not, we opt for what is in our worst interest. So also with the institutional form of tribute-exchange: rulers demand taxes higher than the people can pay, and would-be emperors exact tribute beyond the capabilities of conquered despots and their subjects. Forget taxing surpluses; mostly, taxes cut deeply into the necessary stuff of life. That is, the ruling class acts in ways that threaten the viability of the system upon which their own well-being relies. For these reasons, the truth of the whole institutional form is embodied in

plunder: hence my choice of this term as the key. And those who express that truth most clearly are the Neo-Assyrians.

The Neo-Assyrians provide the third reason (brutality of plunder) for the failure of tribute-exchange to achieve any viable stability. They constitute an interesting example of the impossibility of separating apparently material, economic causes from the religious (ideological). At an economic level it could be argued that the Neo-Assyrian Empire of the first millennium required yearly plunder for its own survival. The vastness of the army, the splendor of the capital, the pomp and glory of the court, the hocus-pocus of the temple and its obsessive cult—all these could not rely simply on a number of estates or even taxation of those within the putative domain of the Neo-Assyrian emperor. The annual expedition for conquest and plunder thereby became a necessary feature of the economic life of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. (I suggest that the various biblical narratives of plunder, such as Josh 6:19, 24; 11:10–14, were inspired by the gory Neo-Assyrians.) Nonetheless, the economic motivation took second place to the religious (except that this is a rather anachronistic way of putting it). On their coronation, Neo-Assyrian kings pledged to “expand the frontiers” (cf. Exod 34:24). In the words of the officiating priest: “Expand the land by your just scepter! May Asshur grant that your orders are heard and obeyed, and grant justice and peace!”<sup>10</sup> Significantly, this invocation originated not in the first millennium, but from two millennia earlier. Assyrians apparently were religiously hardwired for plunder. This religious predilection for looting may have been old indeed, but it needed to wait until the first millennium to come to its full flourishing. Only then could the first real empire emerge.

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<sup>10</sup> Larsen, “Tradition of Empire,” 90–91.



Yet only then could it collapse as spectacularly as it emerged. The reason is the long-term futility of plunder. The gains from plunder are largely immediate: the wine is drunk; the human beings are molested, mutilated, and killed; the herds are driven off or slaughtered; the accumulated treasures in temple and palace are carted away. The Neo-Assyrians in particular preferred to engage in scorched-earth policies, slashing, slaughtering, and burning on their way through. Needless to say, this is neither the best approach to long-term sustainability, nor to winning friends and influencing people. It is not as though they were lacking in previous examples of the harm wrought by this type of approach. For instance, in the second-millennium conflicts between Egypt and Mitanni (Indo-Iranian Empire), the lands of Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine were systematically stripped of labor and goods. It is not for nothing that the Habiru found their ranks swollen from fugitives of these depredations.<sup>11</sup> As for the Neo-Assyrians, some evidence suggests that they began to learn a few lessons later in their career and stumbled across alternative approaches, such as seeing the value of allowing the Phoenician cities to do their thing, of leaving some people alive in conquered zones. But what of those accumulated treasures that suddenly fell into their hands? Unless their former possessors had acquired them by plunder, their acquisition would normally have taken quite some time. These included the slow process of exchange in preciosities, gift exchange between the courts of various despots, the happenstance of mines in one's domain, levies on the occasional donkey caravans passing through one's territory, and the painstaking process of building up reserves by means of taxation and tribute. None of this happens overnight. Plunder, of course, does happen overnight. The catch is that once these accumulated

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<sup>11</sup> Diakonoff, "Syria, Phoenicia," 293.

treasures had disappeared with the invading army, they did not miraculously reappear for the next raid. It is not for nothing that the Neo-Assyrians soon reached the limits of plunder and collapsed with impressive alacrity.

I suggest that the biblical *hērem*, or ban,<sup>12</sup> in which all animate and inanimate items are to be destroyed (see Deut 13:12–18; 20:16–18; 1 Sam 15), was both deeply influenced by and reveals the internal contradiction of the Neo-Assyrian approach. At a more immediate level, it would function as propaganda to strike fear into one's enemies, even though it was rarely, if ever, enacted since it would be counterproductive in terms of plunder (1 Sam 15 offers a narrative in which such an option becomes disobedience to the divine command). The Neo-Assyrians strove to strike fear into enemies and hapless victims of their plundering expeditions, so much fear that, they hoped, defenders would capitulate before a blow was struck (see 2 Kgs 18:13–37). Exaggeration, with a few choice examples, was the leitmotiv of such propaganda. At a deeper level, in its formulation the ban expresses the internal contradiction of plunder: the system is ultimately unsustainable, destroying itself in the process of destroying others. (The desperate effort by Deut 20:10–18 to distinguish between plunder and complete destruction only reveals this contradiction more strongly.)

Even so, the vagaries of plunder, tribute, and taxation have not prevented proposals that the whole economic system relied on tribute as the means of extracting surplus. This may be the tributary mode of production first proposed by Norman Gottwald many decades ago, in which the Canaanite city-states of the late second millennium functioned primarily in terms of tribute mechanisms, against which the

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<sup>12</sup> The semantic field of the term also includes censure, or excommunication, and a gift devoted to God.

Israelites rebelled, choosing an alternative, communitarian mode of production.<sup>13</sup> It may be the very same tributary mode that Banaji (without acknowledging Gottwald) proposes as the basis of all imperial systems in ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>14</sup> Or it may involve the claim, which now becomes banal through its very universalization, that all empires throughout human history rely on tribute.<sup>15</sup> To proposals of this ilk, Marx once observed drily that there has to be something to plunder. That is, someone has to produce the goods that are then plundered, for they do not appear *ex nihilo*. Another way of stating this is to reiterate my point concerning false universals. To take an institutional form such as tribute-exchange and to make it the determining feature of the whole economic system is to elevate the particular to the universal when there is no clear reason to do so. Indeed, that move obscures the reality of the other institutional forms that make up the sacred economy.

### ***DEBT AND CREDIT***

If you lend [*talweh*] my people silver, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor [*nōšeh*]; you shall not set interest [*nešek*] on them.

—Exodus 22:24 [25 ET] AT

Before moving on to discuss exchange, I offer a few comments on debt and credit, especially since debt, the perpetual bane of human existence, provides the necessary lubricant for the mechanisms of extraction. For instance, the woman who is indentured to work on a palatine estate or for a landlord does so through a system of debt: she may be a daughter of a father who has to pay a debt to the state or to a landlord; her systemic debt involves paying between one-third and one-half of the produce of her hands to landlord or palace. Or the village that has to pay a tax to the

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<sup>13</sup> Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*. See also Susan Pollock, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 79–92.

<sup>14</sup> Banaji, *Theory as History*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Scheidel, “Studying the State.”

temple's treasury does so because the tithe is framed in terms of a debt to the deity. If it is not paid, that debt becomes outstanding. So too the tribute exacted from a neighboring warlord or potentate is a debt to a conqueror and framed in terms of reparation for losses incurred by the conqueror in his enlightened "liberation" of his neighbor. Finally, the despised busybodies known as merchants (*tamkāru*) rolled into one bundle the tasks of acquiring preciosities for the ruler, management of estates as landlords, tax collecting, and loan-sharking. If one wanted a loan, the conniving merchant-cum-landlord-cum-shark was the first and often only person who could provide it. That is, both extractive forms, of (e)states and tribute-exchange, cannot be understood without debt.

Yet in dealing with such matters, it is important to distinguish debt from credit. Too often credit and debt are seen to be variations on the same economic feature.<sup>16</sup> However, although they may overlap, they are distinct. Credit relies primarily on "trust,"<sup>17</sup> whereas debt is a mechanism for securing limited labor power, for ensuring the flow of relative wealth to the lender, and for reinforcing economic hierarchies. By "trust" I mean not a moral value, but the existence of a complex pattern of reciprocal relationships within a known community. Credit is an indispensable element for the functioning of such communities. If I need a hoe for a few hours, I may borrow it from the common pool or from someone within the village commune. The unspoken assumption is that I will return it as soon as I have finished using it, since everyone knows that I have borrowed the hoe and that someone else needs it for working their allocated strips of land. Or the village may have three or

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<sup>16</sup> Guillaume, *Land, Credit*, 111–224; Hudson and Van de Mieroop, eds., *Debt and Economic Renewal*.

<sup>17</sup> Here I adapt Graeber's proposal (*Debt*, 89–126) concerning "baseline communism."

four draft oxen, available for plowing. In this case, the oxen are used across all the allocations of land, with groups assisting in order to ensure that the plowing is done. It is in everyone's interest for the land to be plowed, so it is out of the question for any person to claim an ox for oneself. A borrowed tool, assistance with reroofing a dwelling, the allocation of grain and meat during lean seasons, the need for a good cloak in order to visit a neighboring village, the sharing of the tax burden imposed by an external and distant ruler with his armies—these and more are part of the necessary system of credit by which such communities operate. In other words, credit is a feature of allocation, of the allocative institutional forms I discussed earlier. Credit ensures the mutual allocation and reallocation of all goods within the community. It is the assumption of a surprising number of biblical texts that advise giving credit without extracting interest (Deut 15:7–8; Ezek 18:16),<sup>18</sup> ban interest (Exod 22:24 [25 ET]; Deut 23:20–21 [19–20 ET]; Lev 25:35–37), or see interest as a sign of depravity (Ezek 22:12) or as a punishment (Isa 24:2; 50:1; Job 24:9; Ps 112:5–6).<sup>19</sup> These texts may be seen as part of basic tension in the biblical texts between subsistence survival (credit) and an estate system (debt with interest). In this respect, it is not for nothing that the root meaning of the verb *nš̄k* is “bite.”

That credit functioned as a system of mutual assistance based on “trust” may be illustrated by the state's appropriation of it in certain circumstances. The “barley

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<sup>18</sup> Although see Glass's argument (“Land, Labor and Law.”) that Deut 15 functions to ensure that existing economic and social structures remain in place.

<sup>19</sup> Deut 24:10–13 makes no mention of interest and thus seems to assume a credit relationship. The text of Neh 5:3–12 is another case, for despite the apparent cancellation of debt, a rate of interest still applies. This may be seen as the limited cancellation of debts I discuss below. See further Glass, “Land, Labor and Law,” 36–57. Texts concerning pledges include Exod 22:24 (25); Deut 24:6, 11, 12, 13, 17; Job 24:3; Ps 109:11–12; Prov 20:16; 22:26–27; 27:13; Ezek 18:7, 12; 33:15; Amos 2:8. And the warnings against offering oneself up, even for another, as surety, indicate resistance to the most common form of loan in ancient Southwest Asia: Lev 25:17; 2 Kgs 4:1–7; Job 24:9; Prov 6:1–3; 11:5; 17:18; 22:26–27; Isa 50:1. See further Tivka Frymer-Kensky, “Israel,” in *Security for Debt in Ancient Near Eastern Law*, ed. Raymond Westbrook and Richard Jasnow (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 251–62.

loan” (*še-ur<sub>5</sub>-ra*), widely used by Ur III, is one example.<sup>20</sup> It functioned as a (usually) interest-free advance of barley to tide palace dependents over until the harvest, when it would then be repaid. More generally, in the Old Babylonian period, well before markets appear as a by-product of state activity, any exchange of goods was expressed in terms of credit. That is, if someone agreed to provide something at a future date—a supply of beer, some wool, a certain amount of grain, or indeed less regular items—then the intended recipient extended credit, by means of a specific document. The credit was then remitted when the items were provided. However, identifying this as a process between two individuals misses its prime function in relations between the palace and its various estates and tenants. The requirement to provide between one-third and one-half of the produce of estates was expressed exactly in terms of credit. Such and such an estate or tenant had a certain amount of barley on credit from the state, which was then fulfilled at harvesttime. And then, by extension, the various middlemen who were engaged with the tasks of acquiring such goods, as well as collecting taxes, would in their own turn enter into credit arrangements with the workers and estate managers.<sup>21</sup>

It is easy to see how the situation I have just described may slip into the different approach of debt, especially when the contracts issued in such a credit system were called “loans.” Yet debt is different, for it operates mainly as an extractive economic device. That is, it extracts something—goods, labor, money—from the debtor with the result that the lender’s own wealth increases. Debt does so in at least three ways.<sup>22</sup> The primary role of debt in ancient Southwest Asia was as

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<sup>20</sup> Steinkeller, “Money-Lending Practices,” 116.

<sup>21</sup> On this institutionalized extension of credit, see esp. Van de Mierop, “Credit as a Facilitator.”

<sup>22</sup> What follows is a schematic outline. The particular practices over time indicate many variations on these three types. For a useful survey of debt (once one disentangles the author’s confusion between debt and credit) in ancient Southwest Asia, see Marc Van de Mierop, “A History of Near Eastern

compulsion for labor. In terms of economic and extraeconomic compulsion, the economic dimension of debt is the loan itself, which functions to secure labor—commonly called “debt slavery” or “indentured labor”<sup>23</sup>—in a situation in which labor is scarce and land plentiful. This pattern applies as much to the state as it does to a wealthy usurer. But why would the state or a usurer loan anything to an impoverished peasant who had little hope of repaying even the high interest? Given that inability to repay, the debtor in question would need to pay off the debt by means of labor, preferably on the same land (and thereby yielding its usufruct) he worked before.<sup>24</sup> That is, the prime purpose was to get hold of what we might call the “collateral” or “security” itself, but here the terminology fails, for it was hardly a way to provide security for the one making the loan.<sup>25</sup> In this way, a landlord or the state seeks to ensure that the land under its control is worked, and to ensure that those with skills

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Debt?,” in Hudson and Van de Mierop, *Debt and Economic Renewal*, 59–94. He points out that a significant collection of loan documents, covering 2,000 years, have been uncovered in Mesopotamia, but not in the southern Levant, due to usage of perishable parchment. Notably, these all come from urban contexts.

<sup>23</sup> For a useful study of the relation between debt and labor in the Hebrew Bible, see Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993). Knight (*Law, Power*, 150) suggests that biblical laws on debt slaves (including indentured laborers) may be seen as an idealized response to forms of debt slavery, a desire that the conditions not be too harsh (Exod 21:2; Lev 25:39–55).

<sup>24</sup> Piotr Steinkeller (“Money-Lending Practices,” 113) tellingly observes: “Assuming that most loans were made with other objectives than the interest-generated profit in mind, it follows that, in such circumstances at least, interest was a tool and not an economic end in itself, being therefore devoid of real economic value. Its rate was largely irrelevant vis-à-vis the amount of the loan, except that it had to be sufficiently high to make it impossible for the borrower to repay the capital.” His only error is to describe these as “fictional” loans characteristic of “primitive” economies. See also idem, “The Ur III Period,” in Westbrook and Jasnow, *Security for Debt*, 47–61, esp. 48. The point was originally made by Finley, with reference to Mesopotamia. Moses Finley, “Debt-Bondage and the Problem of Slavery,” in *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*, ed. Brent Shaw and Richard Saller (London: Chatto and Windus, 1981), 150–66, esp. 153–56. See further Van de Mierop, “Near Eastern Debt?,” 66, 77–79, 82, 83–84. The common practice of using loan frameworks for what seem to us as other purposes—advance payment for an item, a means for gaining control over an estate, and so forth—actually illustrates this point in another way. The very structure of the loan is to ensure some type of obligation, whether for labor, delivery, or other task. Goddeeris, *Economy and Society*, 388; Van de Mierop, “Near Eastern Debt?”

<sup>25</sup> Zaccagnini warns that “antichretic” is also entirely inadequate for dealing with such loans; indeed, Roman Civil Law and English Common Law (and their derived forms today) are alien to ancient Southwest Asia. Carlo Zaccagnini, “Nuzi,” in Westbrook and Jasnow, *Security for Debt*, 223–36, esp. 223–24, 228–29.

and muscle power to do so are bound by means of debt. Thus the landlord would have little incentive to see the debt repaid promptly, for it was in his interest for the laborer to work longer on his estates.<sup>26</sup>

In this light, the practice of pledging a human being for a debt begins to make sense. It may be a clan member, a dependent laborer, or even oneself (in third-millennium Babylon this person was unambiguously called the “hostage” or “captive”).<sup>27</sup> But it indicates that human labor was held to be of the highest value and thereby had the greatest security. By contrast, land or a built structure had relatively little worth. A lender had the right to apprehendforcibly the person so pledged and then hold that person until the debt was worked out, as many law codes and letters indicate.<sup>28</sup>

Further, this pattern of debt-labor reveals the basic features of the spasmodic *mīšarum* (also *andurārum*), or jubilee, often at the beginning of a new despot’s reign.<sup>29</sup> Misleadingly called “clean-slates” or “abolitions of debts,” they were far from it. Rarely, if ever, were they complete abolitions; rather, they were partial and selective: “debt easement,” as Chaney calls them.<sup>30</sup> A key element of the *mīšarum* was to shift labor from one type of dependency and back to another. As the decree of Lipit-Ishtar (1934–1924 BCE) makes clear, the *mīšarum* had the purpose of putting

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<sup>26</sup> Given the practice of destroying the loan document when the loan was repaid, the vast number of such documents that have survived—the highest number of economic documents as such—indicates that most of the loans in question were never repaid. Steinkeller, “Money-Lending Practices,” 113–14; Carlo Zaccagnini, “Debt and Debt Remission at Nuzi,” in Hudson and Van de Mieroop, *Debt and Economic Renewal*, 175–96, esp. 176.

<sup>27</sup> The term is šu-du<sub>8</sub>/dū-a. Steinkeller, “The Ur III Period,” 49.

<sup>28</sup> As one example among many, laws 114–16 of Hammurabi’s Code stipulate precisely this. Roth, *Law Collections*, 102–3; Kozyreva, “Old Babylonian Period,” 117.

<sup>29</sup> The first ruler on record to have done so was Enmetena of Lagash, shortly before 2400 BCE. See further Van de Mieroop, “Near Eastern Debt?,” 71.

<sup>30</sup> Marvin L. Chaney, “Debt Easement in Israelite History and Tradition,” in Jobling, Day, and Sheppard, *Politics of Exegesis*, 127–39. Beyond the terminology, my reading does not follow Chaney.



“them into their previous status.”<sup>31</sup> If people had become too indebted to landlord-usurers, then they were moved back to palatine dependence; if they were too heavily tied to palace officials, their dependence was returned to the temple. So we find that the decree was often restricted to certain types of debt, especially those concerning labor; or they focused on a specific target, such as landlord-usurers, or even rapacious palace officials. The reason was that the patterns of debt slavery tended to lock laborers into certain types of indentured labor and thereby render them unavailable for other types, especially the *corvée* that the state needed for its building projects or for peak periods such as sowing and harvest.

A further feature is that they would often offer amelioration, at least in theory: the *corvée* might be reduced to ten days a month or even to four, but this merely reflects the depth of economic crisis. In short, the jubilees were barometers of economic instability. Or, to shift the metaphor, they functioned as short-circuits to ensure that the crisis-ridden system continued to survive. And they provided extraordinary occasions for political spin.<sup>32</sup> Mesopotamian kings were consummate propagandists, who not only engaged in hyperbole, which may be read in an inverse ratio to their limited measures, but also cloaked their conquests “in the rhetoric of justice and equity.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, as far as the state was concerned, debt-labor was

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<sup>31</sup> The translation here follows Renger (“Royal Edicts,” 145), although he is too keen to misread the text as referring to a return to “free” status. Roth (*Law Collections*, 25) offers “restored order.” In a similar fashion we may read Exod 22:20–26 (21–27); Lev 25:8–17; Deut 15:12–18; Neh 5:1–13; Jer 34:13–17. See also Glass, “Land, Labor and Law.”

<sup>32</sup> Knight (*Law, Power*, 218–22) argues that they were all spin, to curry favor with those oppressed by debt, for the ruling elite would hardly enact something so economically disadvantageous. He has in mind the rather mechanical stipulations of Exod 21:2–6; Lev 25:8–17, 25–34, 40, 47–55; Deut 15:1–3, 12–18. He also suggests that when releases were made, they tended to be annulled soon afterward.

<sup>33</sup> Yoffee, *Archaic State*, 160. The decrees of the Isin dynasty (2017–1794), especially those of Ishme-Dagan, Lipit-Ishtar, Ur-Ninurta, and Enlil-bani, are among the best examples. They loudly proclaim that they have returned justice, joy, and even food to their subjects. Renger, “Royal Edicts,” 145–51; Roth, *Law Collections*, 15–17, 25–26, 33–35.

a good thing, but only in limited doses.<sup>34</sup> Yet, given the inadequacy of the *mīšarum* and the ease with which this exploitative pattern expanded, debtors and even entire villages had myriad other means of absconding from debt requirements: leaving the fields once the crops were harvested, taking the produce with them, not harvesting at all and disappearing out of range of the landlord's or state's control, abandoning villages and relocating, sowing and reaping in different places.

The second major feature of debt is to ensure that the flow of wealth runs from debtor to lender, which initially was the state and temple, but soon included landlords. This may be in the shape of labor secured by the lender, a percentage of products from the field (between a third and a half), or directly in terms of money. In this context and contrary to our assumptions concerning debt, interest on debts was clearly a secondary development, an outgrowth of the primary function of debt as a means of securing labor.<sup>35</sup> Although the origins of the “unnatural” idea of interest are disputed,<sup>36</sup> we notice that the rates had a close connection with the amount of produce demanded by the palace from its estates.<sup>37</sup> In particular, the rate was a third for produce (and a fifth for silver),<sup>38</sup> indicating both the fundamentally extractive nature

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<sup>34</sup> So law 117 in Hammurabi's Code stipulates a period of debt bondage for no more than three years. Roth, *Law Collections*, 103.

<sup>35</sup> Once again Enmetena seems to be the first, as far as the records go, to have used a concept of interest, although here too it is a secondary aspect. The context is state focused, involving disputed territory between Lagash and Umma. Lagash claimed Umma had used the land to its own benefit, that is, for crops. Enmetena indicates that the produce was rightfully Lagash's and, since Umma had not handed it over to Lagash, it was therefore a loan. Further, since the loan had not been repaid, it had accrued interest, of astronomical proportions. Yet even here the purpose seems to have been elsewhere, for it was an excuse to go to war over disputed territory. Van de Mieroop, “Near Eastern Debt?,” 62–63.

<sup>36</sup> Among many references, the Hebrew Bible has its well-known collection against charging interest: Exod 22:24 (25); Lev 25:36–37; Deut 23:20–21 (19–20); Ps 15:5; Ezek 18:17.

<sup>37</sup> In the ideal extractive world of the palace, all usufruct belonged to it, and therefore all produce was owed to it.

<sup>38</sup> Roth, *Law Collections*, 97. The amount of one-third has obvious connections with the amount of produce expected from estates and tenants. However, the 20 percent for silver is most likely due not to what we would call economic forces but to the sexagesimal system in force in Mesopotamia for millennia: the Akkadian formula was “every month one shekel of silver will be added to one mina.” Given that a mina has sixty shekels, with the conversion to decimals one easily arrives at 20 percent per

of interest and its role as an extension of the agricultural practices of the estates.<sup>39</sup> Further, the rates themselves, like prices,<sup>40</sup> were set by royal decree throughout the history of Mesopotamia, although in practice they varied due to negotiation between the parties, but clearly not due to “market forces.”<sup>41</sup> Why would a debtor contract such a loan if it was structurally disadvantageous? In most cases, the debtor needed the loan in order to survive: seeking a loan of seed after a bad harvest, a loan to pay taxes, a loan for a wedding, and so on.<sup>42</sup> The flow of wealth to the lender allowed some space for the debtor to survive.

Third, debt functions to ensure economic hierarchy. Both of the elements I have just discussed—the primary purpose of securing labor, the flow of goods and wealth—operate on the basis of and reinforce the hierarchy between landlord and peasant, between palatine or temple estate and laborer. In other words, debt is a feature of class difference and often class conflict. In light of all this, it is no surprise

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annum. Van de Mierop, “Near Eastern Debt?,” 84; Jursa, “Debts and Indebtedness,” 198. By contrast, at Nuzi the rate for interest was a staggering 50 percent. The variation here is that some loans did not attract interest unless they were not repaid on time, while others included interest from the beginning. Most were to be paid in a few months, “after the harvest,” indicating significant and widespread shortage among the rural population. Zaccagnini, “Debt Remission,” 179–80. For some further detail on the possible origins and early nature of sexagesimal systems in Uruk, see Englund, “Proto-Cuneiform Account-Books,” 32–37.

<sup>39</sup> Although Steinkeller’s proposal is attractive, it misses the close connection with estates and their functions. He suggests that the initial idea of interest was in terms of rent: a farmer uses the state’s fields or a flock for a period of time and thereby pays a fee at the time of harvest, shearing, or culling. Piotr Steinkeller, “The Renting of Fields in Early Mesopotamia and the Development of the Concept of ‘Interest’ in Sumerian,” *JESHO* 24 (1981): 113–45. While productive loans may be seen as an extension of this initial impulse, they were scarce indeed. Steinkeller, “Money-Lending Practices,” 113. Loans were not undertaken to generate capital or interest in and of themselves; the gain would immediately be converted into personnel and land. For instance, in the Old Assyrian colony of Kanesh, the gain from its exchange in preciosities was turned to other purposes, such as dowries, acquisition of buildings, and so forth. They were usually produced with the assistance of the state and groups of landlords-merchants-usurers, each of whom then was paid (or not, if the shipment was lost) when the venture was over. The same can be said of the Hellenistic world. Finley, *Ancient Economy*.

<sup>40</sup> For example, Roth, *Law Collections*, 59–60, 235–36.

<sup>41</sup> It may be 20 percent for the life of the loan, or there may be additional rates, usually with the factors not stipulated. Kozyreva, “Old Babylonian Period,” 104; Van de Mierop, “Near Eastern Debt?,” 84–85; Jursa, “Debts and Indebtedness,” 198–200.

<sup>42</sup> Marty E. Stevens, *Temples, Tithes, and Taxes: The Temple and the Economic Life of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 144, 152.

that the first demands of popular uprisings throughout history have been and remain: cancel the debts, destroy the records, reallocate the land.<sup>43</sup>

To conclude this discussion of credit and debt, I suggest that both are dimensions of compulsion, which I have distinguished for now as economic and extraeconomic compulsion (although the two cannot so easily be separated). In its different constellations, credit and debt form part of the mode of *régulation* of the sacred economy. Thus far I have argued that credit is a feature of allocative institutional forms, while debt belongs to those that are extractive. However, the two systems I have outlined were not mutually exclusive, for the ability of indentured laborers to work the royal or landlord estates relied upon the methods of credit that operated in the village commune: mutual use of equipment, the reallocation of produce that was left over after the bulk was handed over to the landlord or the monarch, and movement between the estates and the village communes from which such laborers came and to which they periodically returned. Often the monarch or landlord deployed the same ideology of communal credit to justify their practices. So also, the village commune was not immune to the patterns of debt, for monarchs would—when they had the means to do so—enforce taxation that was “owed” to the state. In this case, the small surpluses produced and kept for lean years would have to be handed over, although even here the burden was shared by the community in yet another form of spreading the risk. As I mentioned earlier, such extraction often veered beyond the razor-thin surpluses and cut into the basics required for subsistence survival.

### ***EXCHANGE: THE DEPARTMENT OF ELITE PLUNDER***

If anyone kills a merchant, he shall pay 4,000 shekels of silver.

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<sup>43</sup> Graeber, *Debt*, 8; Finley, *Ancient Economy*, 80.

—Hittite Law 5<sup>44</sup>

A little earlier I distinguished between various departments of plunder within the state's bureaucracy. On that occasion, I neglected to mention a fourth: the Department of Elite Plunder. This is the domain of exchange, or "trade," as it is at times misleadingly called.<sup>45</sup> I have quite deliberately listed this as a government department, for reasons that will become clear soon enough. After dealing with some important preliminary matters, the following analysis begins by outlining what is arguably the majority position in regard to exchange in ancient Southwest Asia and the southern Levant. Next I juxtapose this position with some rather intriguing biblical texts, where we find that the metaphorization of exchange is rather different. After meeting acquisitive kings and those groveling busybodies known as merchants, I reconsider the key terms of surplus, trade, and market and then ask why tall tales are told concerning "international market economies" in ancient Southwest Asia.

However, before proceeding I want to ward off a couple of curses and introduce some key terms. Studies of exchange in ancient Southwest Asia tend to labor under two curses: one of Adam Smith and the other of Karl Polanyi. The curse of Adam Smith is actually a variation on his infamous founding myth, that human beings have a natural propensity to truck, barter, and exchange. But how is this a curse? It means that many of those interested in economic matters assume exchange as the core economic activity: investigate exchange, and you have the key to the economy. Those who manage to repel this curse run the danger of falling under the curse of Karl Polanyi. There is no need to repeat my criticisms of Polanyi here (see chap. 1, on theory) except to point out that this spell commits one to either formalist

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<sup>44</sup> Hittite Law 5; in Roth, *Law Collections*, 217.

<sup>45</sup> I follow Milevski (*Goods Exchange*, 7–8) here in preferring the terminology of exchange to trade.

or substantivist positions, or to desperate efforts to overcome this unhelpful opposition. Yet with close analysis, these curses lose their sting, as will become clear in what follows.

Further, my treatment relies on some crucial distinctions and terms. The first is between exchange in bulk and preciosities: trade in bulk has small profit margins and requires cheap transport and complex logistics; by contrast, the exchange of a small amount of nonessential preciosities with high value (tangible and intangible) takes place where they are difficult to acquire due to high risks, prohibitively expensive transport, and limited logistics. While bulk trade is for the whole population, preciosities are for those who can afford it, the small ruling class. It follows, then, that in precapitalist societies, bulk exchange is marginal, decentered, and local, undertaken between nearby settlements (usually in sight of one another) and in light of subsistence needs. Meanwhile, exchange in preciosities may take place over greater distances, for it requires minimal and sporadic interaction.<sup>46</sup> The only form of bulk acquisition was for feeding palace and estate, a command economy that operated by means of estates and taxation. Occasionally, in a preciosity-poor region, some bulk goods may be sent to a neighboring little kingdom for the sake of acquiring preciosities. The second set of terms concerns state and market: according to the assumptions of neoclassical economics and its many dead-ends, the clumsy hands of the state and the bright entrepreneurs of the market are always at loggerheads.

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<sup>46</sup> The initial distinction comes from Wallerstein, but see also the useful discussion in Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall, *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 52–54, 204, 248. They distinguish among networks: BGN, bulk-goods networks; PGN, prestige-goods networks; PMN, political/military networks; IN, information networks. In premodern periods, BGNs are the smallest, restricted to seas and rivers and contained within states. PGNs and INs, by contrast, expanded much further since they rely on minimal interaction and on intermediation. All of these networks grow and contract, depending on state power. Due to the virtual absence of BGNs in ancient Southwest Asia, PMN is the crucial element in the nature of state power.

Nothing could be further from the truth. I think not of a Keynesian position in which the state is meant to soften the extremes of the market, but the simple point that time and again markets are by-products of certain concerns of the state.

### TRADING VENTURES

You increased your busybodies  
 more than the stars of the heavens.  
 The locust sheds its skin and flies away.

—Nahum 3:16 alt.

It has become a commonplace among many scholars of ancient Southwest Asia and the southern Levant that the prime economic motor was trade for profit. This position may initially have been restricted to changes that took place in the first millennium (which I discuss below), but one now finds it advocated across the millennia, from Uruk to Persia. In a swath of literature, a triad of terms appears to characterize this ancient economy: trade, markets, and surplus. Given the primacy of agricultural production, the farmers in question specialized in certain areas: sheep for wool and meat, cattle for milk and meat, grains, olive oil, wine, and so forth. Having built up surpluses from such specialization, and having been good students of Adam Smith, they naturally sought to sell their surpluses for profit; hence trade, both locally and over longer or even “international” distances. These two practices, production for surpluses and trade, thereby give us a market economy.<sup>47</sup> It may have been a little more primitive, smaller in scale, and “partly capitalist”;<sup>48</sup> or it may indeed have been

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<sup>47</sup> An intriguing alternative is proposed by Robartus Johannes van der Spek, Jan Luiten van Zanden, and Bas van Leeuwen (ed.), *A History of Market Performance: From Ancient Babylonia to the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2014). They use an economics imperialism approach (see chap. 1), defining “market” as an exchange between two people. At the same time, they unwittingly reinforce my later argument, since they begin their analysis with the first millennium BCE, when markets did become relatively widespread.

<sup>48</sup> Algaze, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 42.

as complex and as sophisticated as our own, capitalist system.<sup>49</sup> In short, it was largely the same as our own. These farmers and merchants were driven by the same motives that drive us to improve our lot in life: self-interest (Adam Smith) and comparative advantage (David Ricardo). At heart, human beings are largely the same: somewhat selfish.

With this framework, all manner of dimensions of this ancient market economy have been identified, especially in the southern Levant. Thus pastoral nomads would specialize in hides, meat, and dairy products, trading them for the products typical of settled farmers, such as grains, vegetables, legumes, and dates.<sup>50</sup> The farmers from the hill country would produce olive oil and wine, selling them to pastoral nomads, the cities, or even the Neo-Assyrians, leading to economic boom; indeed, in some cases “industrial” production enabled trade for precious metals across the Mediterranean.<sup>51</sup> From the valleys would come barley and other grains that were then traded with the Phoenician cities, which in return would sell the wares they had acquired from many quarters.<sup>52</sup> Other farmers would specialize in sheep, selling wool,

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<sup>49</sup> Eric H. Cline, *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: International Trade and the Late Bronze Age Aegean* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), 107. Arguing that the “primitives” were not primitive at all, but that they were as sophisticated as us, is a trap since it assumes we, under capitalism, set the benchmark for sophistication and complexity.

<sup>50</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman, *Bible Unearthed*, 117; Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007); Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 136.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas E. Levy, “Transhumance, Subsistence, and Social Evolution in the Northern Negev Desert,” in *Pastoralism in the Levant: Archaeological Materials in Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Ofer Bar-Iosef and Anatoly M. Khazanov (Madison, WI: Prehistory Press, 1992), 65–82, esp. 75; Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 118; Gitin, “Neo-Assyrian Empire”; Finkelstein and Mazar, *Quest for the Historical Israel*, 16; Coomber, “Prophets to Profits,” 220–22.

<sup>52</sup> C. Leonard Woolley, “Syria as the Gateway Between East and West,” *TGJ* 107, nos. 5–6 (1946): 179–90, esp. 180; Finkelstein and Mazar, *Quest for the Historical Israel*, 96, 137; Lawrence E. Stager and Daniel M. Master, “Conclusion,” in Stager, Master, and Schloen, *Ashkelon 3*, 737–40.



wool products, and meat on the market, especially to the cities.<sup>53</sup> One part of the flock would be kept for the farmer's own use, but the surplus was designed for export, marketed for its exchange value.<sup>54</sup> In more entrepreneurial villages, flocks would be kept so that they could become the currency of exchange after a bumper crop.<sup>55</sup> Despite the telling absence of evidence for, and indeed strong evidence against, long-distance trade in bulk goods such as wine, beer, grain, and meat, this has not prevented scholars from suggesting that these items were "undoubtedly" traded, but since they are perishable, they have disappeared from the record.<sup>56</sup>

The picture as a whole can lead to but one conclusion: the nature of this ancient economy was an open system of trade in surpluses from specialized production of bulk, necessary goods for the sake of profit. This was especially so after the supposed economic "boom" of eighth-century Palestine and ancient Southwest Asia more generally. Individual entrepreneurs, outside the clumsy restrictions of states and their red tape, found very new ways to turn a profit. Country traded with city, sedentary farmers with pastoral nomads, and vice versa. Ships crisscrossed the seas and sailed up and down the rivers; donkey and then camel caravans traversed coastal routes, mountains, deserts, laden with wares in an increasingly integrated pattern of trade. Trade, it seems, formed the backbone of the economy.<sup>57</sup> The reason:

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<sup>53</sup> Fall, Falconer, and Lines, "Seeds of Civilization"; Patricia L. Fall, Steven E. Falconer, and Lee Lines, "Agricultural Intensification and the Secondary Products Revolution along the Jordan Rift," *Human Ecology* 30, no. 4 (2002): 445–82; Zeder, *Feeding Cities*.

<sup>54</sup> Brian Hesse, "Animal Bone Analysis," in *An Early Iron Age Village at Khirbet Raddana: The Excavation of Joseph A. Callaway*, ed. Z. Lederman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 103–18, esp. 107.

<sup>55</sup> John S. Holladay, "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: Political and Economic Centralization in the Iron II a-B (ca. 1000–750 BCE)," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, ed. Thomas E. Levy (New York: Facts on File, 1995), 368–98, esp. 386.

<sup>56</sup> Cline, *International Trade*, 95.

<sup>57</sup> Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*; Esse, *Subsistence, Trade*, 103–4; Caroline Grigson, "Plough and Pasture in the Early Economy of the Southern Levant," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, ed. Thomas E. Levy (New York: Facts on File, 1995), 245–68; Arlene Rosen, "The Social Responses to Environmental Change in Early Bronze Age Canaan," *JAA* 14 (1995): 26–44;

as with all of us, farmers sought to raise their standard of living, with better housing, clothes, tools, and even some prestige items that would impress the neighbors.<sup>58</sup>

### OF ACQUISITION, PRECIOSITIES, AND BUSYBODIES

The weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred sixty-six talents of gold, besides that which came from the men of the road and the to-and-fro of the busybodies.

—1 Kings 10:14–15 AT

Given this situation, one would expect a comprehensive metaphorization of such entrepreneurial farmers and their activities in the Hebrew Bible. Unfortunately for such tall tales, the only appearance of anything that resembles an entrepreneur is a king and a city, Solomon and Tyre, found respectively in 1 Kgs 10 and the prophecy of destruction in Ezek 27–28. While Tyre is an intriguing and important addition, Solomon has already made an appearance in my treatment of estates in the previous chapter. I am particularly interested in the fabulous and hyperbolic narrative of Solomon, since it presents an excellent example of a literary and thereby ideological contradiction. How so? The narrative was produced at some point in the first

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Muhammad A. Dandamaev, “An Age of Privatization in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in Hudson and Levine, *Privatization in the Ancient Near East*, 197–222; idem, *Slavery in Babylonia*, 60–63; Carl C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, “The Archaeological Evidence for International Commerce: Public and/or Private Enterprise in Mesopotamia,” in Hudson and Levine, *Privatization in the Ancient Near East*, 73–108; Thompson, *Mythic Past*, 118–19, 124–29; Finkelstein and Silberman, *Bible Unearthed*; Finkelstein and Mazar, *Quest for the Historical Israel*; Brian Hesse and Paula Wapnish, “Commodities and Cuisine: Animals in the Early Bronze Age of Northern Palestine,” in *Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and Neighboring Lands in Memory of Douglas L. Esse*, ed. Samuel R. Wolff (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2001), 251–82; idem, “Archaeozoological Perspective”; Goddeeris, *Economy and Society*, 368–69; Raphael Greenberg, *Early Urbanizations in the Levant: A Regional Narrative* (London: Leicester University Press, 2002), 13; Borowski, *Daily Life*; Graslin, “Les théories économiques”; Monroe, “Money and Trade”; John S. Holladay, “Hezekiah’s Tribute, Long-Distance Trade and the Wealth of Nations ca. 1000–600 BC,” in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. Seymour Gitin, J. Edward Wright, and J. P. Dessel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 309–32; Hayah Katz, “*A Land of Grain and Wine, . . . a Land of Olive Oil and Honey*”: *The Economy of the Kingdom of Judah* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2008); Christopher M. Monroe, *Scales of Fate: Trade, Tradition, and Transformation in the Eastern Mediterranean ca. 1350–1175 BCE* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2009); Coomber, *Re-reading the Prophets*, 77–133.

<sup>58</sup> Ze’ ev Herzog, *Archaeology of the City: Urban Planning in Ancient Israel and Its Social Implications* (Jerusalem: Emery & Claire Yass Archaeology Press, 1997), 7.

millennium, later rather than earlier,<sup>59</sup> at a time when tribute-exchange became dominant as an institutional form in other parts of ancient Southwest Asia. However, in the southern Levant, the little kingdom of Israel belatedly introduced an estate system, a system that was still used elsewhere but had been relegated to secondary status. In light of this situation, the creative imagination of the scribe(s) faced a dilemma: how does one represent a mythical great king, if not an emperor in his own right? The answer was to borrow the various images, narrative devices, and descriptions that one finds elsewhere in relation to the seriously powerful states: the Neo-Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, but above all the Persians. In this way the text becomes a window, with refracted and partial light, into the wider situation of ancient Southwest Asia. Or rather, it provides an insight into the way exchange was perceived and represented.

### **Ivory, Apes, and Peacocks**

For the king had a fleet of ships of Tarshish at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.

—1 Kings 10:22,

This text captures a microcosm of Solomon's image. Solomon appears as the quintessential merchant king, one who brings prosperity to the united kingdom by engaging in trade, among many other ventures. Two items in this text are notable. First, these ships "used to come" (*bw'*) every three years. The text speaks not of ships coming and going, engaged in the business of export and import. Instead, the ships come, bringing items to Solomon and his court. Their function is to acquire items. But those items are intriguing: valuable metals (gold and silver; see the verses

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<sup>59</sup> It is of little use for economic analysis to date texts any more precisely than this, for their role within an economic phase does not depend on endless efforts at precise dating.

preceding this one for the vast amounts of such metals in Jerusalem), expensive ornamental material (ivory), and exotic animals (apes and peacocks, or perhaps rare fowl).<sup>60</sup> No mention is made of bulk goods, such as grains, meats, dairy products, or vegetables. Instead, acquisition and preciosities are the key elements of an ideal image, projecting a picture of how an Israelite empire might have appeared. It is clearly drawn from the realities of actual empires, whether Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, or Persian, each of them providing an ideal to which the “little kingdoms” might aspire, about which they dreamed, but which they rarely if ever attained.<sup>61</sup>

Within the wider context of 1 Kgs 10:22, the focus remains consistent: a concern purely with preciosities and the acquisition thereof. In one year, it states, the gold that “came to” Solomon was 666 (a mythical number) talents, all of which were made into shields, cups, and all the other vessels. It was used to overlay a throne made of nothing less than ivory. Indeed, so much gold was available that silver was counted as nothing (10:14–21). Not short on hyperbole, our anonymous author(s) state of Solomon’s throne, “Nothing like it was ever made in any kingdom” (10:20). He is greater than even those emperors! And if we push back a little earlier in 1 Kgs 10, the Queen of Sheba arrives, riding camels laden with spices, gold, and precious stones.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For a comparable and much longer lists, see EA 14, 22, 25; in William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 27–37, 51–61, 72–84. See also Nam, *Economic Exchange*, 70–73.

<sup>61</sup> Briant (*From Cyrus to Alexander*, 172, 201–2) notes that many minor potentates tried to emulate the Great (Persian) King. For instance, the extended statements by Darius concerning what he brought to Susa for the palace and for his dinner table make those concerning Solomon (1 Kgs 5:2–3 [4:22–23 ET]; 10) pale by comparison. Of course, the unknown author(s) of 1 Kings went a step further, creating an ideal image well beyond any factual basis. On Neo-Assyrian parallels, see Burke O. Long, *1 Kings, with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 75–76.

<sup>62</sup> For Finkelstein and Mazar, the Queen of Sheba mutates into Solomon’s “trading partner,” “undoubtedly” reflecting the presence of the “lucrative Arabian trade” under Neo-Assyrian domination. Finkelstein and Mazar, *Quest for the Historical Israel*, 116; see also John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM, 1980), 215.

As she unloads these exotic items, she is overwhelmed by Solomon's wealth and wisdom, which surpass any report she has heard. To add to the influx, an appended couple of verses (10:11–12) include Hiram of Tyre, who from Ophir brings yet more precious stones and the rare almug wood, which is used for temple and palace building, for lyres and harps for the singers.

The important feature of these stories is what may be called the idea of exchange. They may belong to the genre of legend,<sup>63</sup> full of dreams of grandeur, but the assumed function of exchange is to acquire goods. All of these preciosities travel in one direction: to Solomon (see also 1 Kgs 4:20–5:6 [4:20–26 ET]).<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the archaeological evidence from the southern Levant later in the first millennium indicates that luxury goods for the elite were the prime items that were exchanged even in this marginal zone.<sup>65</sup> As was the case with the Persian Empire, which is supposed by some to be the most “commercial” of all,<sup>66</sup> the emphasis is thoroughly centripetal, in which tribute and trade merge into one.<sup>67</sup> There is little sense of exporting goods, let alone two-way exchange, a favorable balance of trade, the weighing of risks, outlays, losses, returns, and investment. Nor is there any presence of the brisk trade in bulk agricultural goods that appeared in the proposals I surveyed above. This applies just as much to the “men of the road and the to-and-fro of the

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<sup>63</sup> Long, *1 Kings*, 119–20.

<sup>64</sup> Nam (*Economic Exchange*, 76–86, 155–74) argues for a basic Polanyian perspective in the accounts of Solomon, with reciprocity the key, yet not without “formalist” motives. Generally, Nam seeks a middle ground between substantivist and formalist approaches, thus assuming Polanyi's framework. He also discusses 2 Kgs 20:12–15 (Hezekiah and Merodoch-baladan); 1 Kgs 13:1–32; 14:1–3; 2 Kgs 5:8–27; 8:7–11 (cases of “failed reciprocity”); 1 Kgs 17:8–15 (empowering the disenfranchised); 1 Kgs 17:1–6 (nonelite reciprocity). As for “asymmetrical redistribution,” he analyzes a swath of texts in 1 and 2 Kings: 1 Kgs 3–10 as a whole, but esp. 4:7–19; 5:27–32 (13–18 ET); 8:62–63; 9:15–22; 2 Kgs 12:5–17; 22:5–8. Yet a pattern of acquisition rather than redistribution is closer to the text.

<sup>65</sup> David W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archeological Approach*, JSOTSup 109 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991), 107–35.

<sup>66</sup> Liverani, “Collapse.”

<sup>67</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 201.

busybodies” ( *ʿ anšê hattārîm ûmish ar hārōkēlîm*) of 1 Kgs 10:15. Even in the Greek world and its phase of colonization, the prime function of trade was the acquisition of goods one did not have, to be paid for by whatever means were available: mines, plunder, or the necessary evil of merchants.<sup>68</sup> Wallerstein’s observation on a very different situation may well read as commentary on this text concerning Solomon: the acquisition of preciosities “depended on the political indulgence and economic possibilities of the truly wealthy.”<sup>69</sup> I cannot help wondering whether the entrepreneurial farmers we met a little earlier were also hankering after the odd ingot of gold, or perhaps an ape or a peacock, some almu building materials, or some of those affordable spices that Solomon had acquired.

### Groveling Middlemen

And horses went out [ *ʿ yš ʿ* ] for Solomon that were from Egypt and Kue [or linen; *miqwēh*]; the king’s busybodies [ *sh ʿ r* ] acquired [ *lqh* ] them from Kue at a price. And a chariot came up [ *ʿ lh* ] and went out [ *ʿ yš ʿ* ] from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for one hundred and fifty; so for all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram, they brought them out [ *ʿ yš ʿ* ] by their hand.

—1 Kings 10:28–29 AT<sup>70</sup>

Some may object that 1 Kgs 10:28–29 reveals a vigorous market economy. Surely here is the legendary merchant king, trading for profit, even if the items in question

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<sup>68</sup> Geoffrey E. M. de Ste. Croix, *Athenian Democratic Origins and Other Essays*, ed. David Harvey, Robert Parker, and Peter Thonemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 349–70. De Ste. Croix gives the example of the Piraeus, the port of Athens, which charged the same tax for ships entering and leaving the port. The point: if one was concerned to ensure a balance of trade in favor of exports, one would hardly tax ships *leaving* port. Exactly the same practice is found in Egypt during the Persian Empire, where not only did every ship entering and leaving an Egyptian port have to pay a levy, but also each ship on departure paid a flat tax called the “silver of the men.” Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 385.

<sup>69</sup> Wallerstein, *World-System I*, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. the NRSV, which finds here a fully fledged market economy, driven by profit: “Solomon’s import of horses was from Egypt and Kue, and the king’s traders received them from Kue at a price. A chariot could be imported from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for one hundred fifty; so through the king’s traders they were exported to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram.” Other recent versions offer similar renderings.

are the rather expensive horses and chariots.<sup>71</sup> Of course, the effect is mitigated significantly if the crucial terms are given their proper sense: what is in many recent interpretations seen to be “export” is simply “go out” (*yš* 𐤓), and the subject is either horse or chariot and not an entrepreneurial Solomon; “import” is actually “acquire” or “get” (*lqh* 𐤋).<sup>72</sup>

As for *sōh ar*, its root (*sh r*) means to go around and about, to scurry, bearing largely the same sense as *rōkēl*, the participle of *rkl*. The semantic fields are revealing, for *sōh ar* also means an enchanter or sorcerer, while *rōkēl* bears the sense of slanderer. The basic meaning is then one who bustles about, a traveler, a middleman who acquires the exotic goods desired by the politically powerful and wealthy. However, given the marginal status of such operators, indeed the disdain for them in the prophetic literature, I suggest that “busybody” or even “hustler” captures best the nuances of *sōh ar* and *rōkēl*.<sup>73</sup> If we add another term translated as

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<sup>71</sup> Brueggemann certainly thinks so, designating this and the whole of 1 Kgs 10 as “what we of late have come to call ‘the global economy.’” Walter Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 138; see also Bright, *History of Israel*, 216–17. In the same vein but based now at Megiddo in the eighth century, Cantrell and Finkelstein argue that Megiddo was a major international center for raising, training, and selling horses, especially war horses—that is, a thriving economy in the North. Deborah Cantrell and Israel Finkelstein, “A Kingdom for a Horse: The Megiddo Stables and Eighth Century Israel,” in *Megiddo IV: The 1998–2002 Seasons*, ed. Israel Finkelstein, David Ussishkin, and Baruch Halpern (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Institute of Archaeology, 2006), 643–65. Many thanks also to Christina Petterson’s SBL paper “King Solomon and the Global Economy” (November 19–22, 2011) for insights into this passage.

<sup>72</sup> The crucial term *qnh* is often taken to mean “buy” (Gen 33:19; 47:20–22; Lev 25:14, 28–50; 2 Sam 24:21, 24; 1 Kgs 16:24; Jer 32:7–9) and its derivatives such as *miqnâ* as “purchase” or “property” (Gen 23:17–18; Jer 32:11–12, 14, 16). The basic sense of *qnh* is to acquire; it matters not how something is acquired. Thus in Jer 32:11–12, 14, 16, *sēper hammiqnâ* is simply “the written record of acquisition.” I suggest that the stronger sense of *qnh* may be found with *yrš* (1 Kgs 21:15, 16, 18, 19; see also Jer 32:8), which signals a much more forceful “taking of possession,” precisely what Ahab does to Naboth’s vineyard. Here is its more negative side, as in the senses of acquire by conquest, dispossess, and drive out; also, in the *hiphil* it can mean “to make poor.”

<sup>73</sup> See also Gen 23:16; 2 Chr 9:14; Neh 3:31–32; 13:20; Prov 31:14; Song 3:6; Isa 23:2–3; Ezek 17:4; 27:3, 22–23, 36; 38:13; Nah 3:16. Liverani takes a very different tack and suggests that the terms indicate the shift from a stationary, state-sponsored trade to an independent merchant class. Mario Liverani, “The Trade Network of Tyre according to Ezek. 27,” in *Ah, Assyria . . . : Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), 65–79, esp. 75–76. To postulate such a class at all

“merchant” or “trader”—*Kēna’ an* or *Kēna’ ānî*, Canaan or Canaanite—then the full disdain becomes apparent. The semantic field of this word has the basic sense of becoming low, or lowly (*kn’*), then folding out to include both Canaanite and “merchant.”<sup>74</sup> Given these overlapping meanings, “groveler” captures the sense best. Comparable terms in our time might be used-car salesman, real-estate agent, or perhaps “cockroach.”<sup>75</sup> Here indeed is the clearest expression of the marginal status of such a busybody, for he is a groveling foreigner as well.<sup>76</sup> These despised merchants

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is more wishful thinking than reality. Odell, who follows Block, simply misses the biblical tenor of the words with his suggestion of “broker” and “agent” respectively. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997–98), 2:68; Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel* (Macon: Smith & Helwys, 2005), 348.

<sup>74</sup> Isa 23:8; Ezek 16:29; 17:4; Hos 12:8 (7 ET); Zeph 1:11; Zech 14:21; Prov 31:24. In these texts, *sōh ar* appears as a parallel with *Kēna’ an*. Indeed in Ezek 17:4, *’ ereš Kēna’ an* bears the double sense of “land of Canaan” and “land of trade.” So also Zeph 1:11 with its *’ am Kēna’ an*. This foreign sense is doubled by the connection with the bustling woman of Prov 31, who not only acts like a *sōh ar* (v. 14, *sōh ēr*), but also deals with *Kēna’ ānî* (v. 24). The picture is less flattering than is often assumed.

<sup>75</sup> I suggest that the Akkadian term for such a person—*tamkāru* (*dam-gār*), to which Hebrew *mkr* is related—has comparable derogatory connotations. To begin with, the root meaning of “sell” has sinister connections with debt slavery: one “sells” and thereby “betrays” children, family members, even oneself. Further, a number of texts indicate attitudes toward such *tamkāru*. An excellent example is a response from the thirteenth-century king of Hatti, Hatusili III, to complaints concerning the activities of such middlemen (from Ura) in the town of Ugarit (CTH 93). “The men of the city of Ura, the merchants, are a heavy burden upon the land of your subject,” writes the king of Ugarit to Hattusili III. Why? They acquire houses and fields, force local people into debt bondage, and generally disrupt life by their prolonged presence. Hattusili responds by demanding that they return home for the winter and forbids them from acquiring houses and fields by whatever means. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 177. A further example may be found in the Amarna letters, where merchants are killed (EA 8). Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 12–13. Or in the fifth law from the Hittite Code, which simply begins “If anyone kills a merchant.” Roth, *Law Collections*, 217. Or in a text from Ugarit (PRU, IV, 17.229), which reveals the ill-feeling toward these busybodies. The text indicates that a village, Apsuna, bears responsibility for killing a foreign *tamkāru*, who came from a neighboring state ruled by a certain Talimmu. Why? Talimmu had “raised a legal case with the sons of Apsuna,” and the outcome had been that the village had to pay one talent of silver to Talimmu. He sent his groveling busybody to collect the silver; in response, the villagers made their own position perfectly clear. Heltzer, *Rural Community*, 63. For further references, see Bendt Alster, “He Who Pays with Valid Money: On the Status of Merchants in Early Mesopotamia,” in *Tablettes et images aux pays de Sumer et d’Akkad: Mélanges offerts à Monsieur H. Limet*, ed. Öhnan Tunca and Danielle Deheselle (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 1–6; Jursa, “Debts and Indebtedness,” 204–5.

<sup>76</sup> Gen 37:27–28 also expresses this sense of busybodies as foreign and not “ours,” for here they are Midianite (or Ishmaelite). That they engaged in exchange in preciousities and a little human trafficking only adds to their despicable status. None of that prevents Finkelstein from spying energetic traders wherever. Even though he argues that archaeology is the only source for historical reconstruction, this text provides him with evidence of the “lucrative Arabian trade that flourished under Assyrian domination in the eighth to seventh centuries B.C.E.” Finkelstein and Mazar, *Quest for the Historical Israel*, 46.



never formed a subclass, a “middle class” with its own identity. Instead, we find that if merchants did gather in one place, they were excluded from the usual categories of political life. Thus the Cappadocian tablets (from ancient Kanesh in the Hittite Kingdom) indicate that foreign merchants were segregated, in a type of economic apartheid, in a *karum* (a “harbor” or “quay”) or in a *warbartum* (trading factory).<sup>77</sup>

Once we read the story closely, it turns out to be less a commercial enterprise for profit and more a rather lucrative task of despised middlemen, acquiring horses for Solomon, along with the kings of the Hittites and of Aram. In this legendary tale, they needed horses and chariots and someone who was prepared to get them. Those middlemen would have been rewarded handsomely for acquiring the precious metals, stones, apes, peacocks, and horses.

### The Curse of Tyre

Tarshish scurried [*sh r*] about with you due to your massive piles of riches; silver, iron, tin, and lead they gave [*ntn*] for your forsaken wares [*‘ zb*]. Javan, Tubal, and Meshech trafficked [*rkI*] with you; they gave human beings and vessels of bronze for your barren cargo [*‘ rb*].<sup>78</sup> Beth-togarmah gave for your forsaken wares horses, warhorses, and mules. The Rhodians swarmed [*rkI*] about you; many coastlands became your own busybodies [*sh r*]; they brought you in payment ivory tusks and ebony. Aram scurried [*sh r*] about with you because of your many shady dealings (*‘ sh*); they gave for your forsaken wares turquoise, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral, and rubies. Judah and the land of Israel swarmed [*rkI*] over you; they gave for your barren cargo wheat from Minnith, millet, honey, oil, and balm. Damascus scurried [*sh r*] about with you due to your many shady dealings—because of your piles of riches of every kind—wine of Helbon, and white wool. Vedan and Javan from Uzal gave for your forsaken wares wrought iron; cassia and sweet cane were for your barren cargo. Dedan swarmed [*rkI*] about you for saddlecloths for riding. Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your favored

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<sup>77</sup> Giorganze, “Hittite Kingdom,” 268–69.

<sup>78</sup> The rich semantic field of *‘ rb* includes exchange, become dark, and arid, barren, or sterile. It is also the name for Arabia. In its substantive form “barren cargo” expresses these associations.

busybodies [*sh r*] in lambs, rams, and goats; in these they scurried [*sh r*] about with you. The busybodies [*rkI*] of Sheba and Raamah swarmed [*rkI*] over you; they gave for your forsaken wares the best of all kinds of spices, and all precious stones, and gold. Haran, Canneh, Eden, the busybodies [*rkI*] of Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad swarmed [*rkI*] over you. These swarmed [*rkI*] over you for choice garments, for clothes of blue and embroidered work, and for carpets of colored material, bound with cords and made secure; in these they swarmed [*rkI*] about you. The ships of Tarshish sailed for you with your barren cargo.

—Ezekiel 27:12–25 AT

The epigraph is from Ezek 27–28, the other main text cited to indicate a market economy. Immediately noticeable, among the swath of preciosities, are the agricultural staples absent from 1 Kgs 10. Judah and Israel supply wheat, millet, and honey, while Arabia and the princes of Kedar bring lambs, rams, and goats. The two main areas of agriculture, the basic crops and animal products from the herds of sheep and goats, are part of the goods acquired by Tyre. At last some biblical evidence appears for the proposed production of specialized surpluses by the enterprising Israelite farmers, who produce such surpluses for the lucrative trade with Tyre.<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately for this imagined market economy, the text does not mention farmers or peasants at all, for they would in no way have been the beneficiaries of such exchange. Indeed, given the nature of exchange between the “little kingdoms” of the ancient world, these transactions take place between the courts of those minor potentates. That is, the payment of grains and animals was not for the sake of profit, but the necessary evil of handing over something—acquired through taxation—for the aggrandizing desires of the preciosity-poor despots of the southern Levant. On this matter, we notice that despite all his supposed wealth, Solomon gives Hiram of Tyre

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<sup>79</sup> Odell, *Ezekiel*, 349–50.

both wheat and twenty towns in Galilee (1 Kgs 5:25 [11 ET]; 9:11–13).<sup>80</sup> The catch here is that when Hiram came to view the towns, he found them entirely useless.<sup>81</sup>

More telling, however, is the emphasis of the passage and its genre. As for emphasis: items flow into Tyre in centripetal fashion;<sup>82</sup> the lists are swamped by preciosities; the city's status is exceptional or anomalous; it even traffics in human beings (Ezek 27:13). Tyre is a little kingdom that embodies the status of the middleman or busybody described earlier. As for genre, not only is it a literary word picture, full of the obligatory literary license,<sup>83</sup> but it is above all a prophetic condemnation of Tyre.<sup>84</sup> The town is thoroughly denigrated for precisely what it does: accumulating wealth through the dirty business of exchange. This text is part of the wider image of the glittering ship of Tyre, decked out in all the finery acquired from here and there. That ship is about to come to grief: "By your great wisdom in trade you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth" (Ezek 28:5).

This disdain of middlemen or busybodies appears throughout the prophetic literature, where they become a byword for all that is unsavory, taking all that is best

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<sup>80</sup> Nam, *Economic Exchange*, 126.

<sup>81</sup> In relation to this and my earlier discussion of 1 Kgs 10, Seibert argues that the material functions as a subtle critique, especially in light of Deut 17:14–20. Eric A. Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative: A Rereading of 1 Kings 1–11* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 174–80.

<sup>82</sup> Dale F. Launderville, *Spirit and Reason: The Embodied Character of Ezekiel's Symbolic Thinking* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 162–63, 170–71.

<sup>83</sup> Liverani (*Israel's History*, 170) is, among others, seduced by the word picture, suggesting that this poem of condemnation "describes the trade network of Tyre in its whole extent, both in the Mediterranean and, especially, on land." It spreads between Egypt and Babylon, from Anatolia to Arabia, so much so that "Tyre also pursued, during the Assyrian eclipse, a strategy of disengagement and expansion that, given its own circumstances, could only be commercial." Elsewhere, Liverani suggests in a footnote that the section may be based on a hypothetical Phoenician document from the sixth century BCE, a suggestion Launderville promptly takes as a fact; idem, "Trade Network of Tyre," 66n5; Launderville, *Spirit and Reason*, 162–63. Diakonoff's study is—in a rare case for him—rather unhelpful, assuming many of the positions later adopted by Liverani. Igor M. Diakonoff, "The Naval Power and Trade of Tyre," *IEJ* 42 (1992): 168–93.

<sup>84</sup> Launderville, *Spirit and Reason*, 150; Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 95–96.

and hoarding it (Isa 23:2–3, 8, 17; Ezek 17:3–4; 38:13; Hos 12:8–9 [7–8 ET]; Nah 3:16; Zeph 1:11; Zech 14:21; see also Neh 13:20). The mark of the busybody, the false balances, is also condemned (Hos 12:8 [7 ET]; Zeph 1:11; see also Lev 19:36; Deut 25:13; Amos 8:5–6; Mic 6:11; Prov 16:11; 20:10, 23).<sup>85</sup> Above all, these texts critique the activity of the cockroaches, who also happen to be tax collectors, usurers, and landlords: like Tyre, they “prostitute” themselves “with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth” (Isa 23:17; compare Rev 18).

To sum up, in these biblical texts the complex picture provides metaphors of acquiring preciousities rather than bulk trade for profit, as well as thoroughly denigrating merchants and their activities. I have suggested that a better term for such “merchants” is “middlemen,” or indeed “grovelers,” those outsiders responsible for acquiring preciousities for the political indulgence of a small ruling class.

### **TALL TALES**

All her people groan as they search for bread;

they exchange their treasures for food to revive their strength.

—Lamentations 1:11 alt.

Obviously a discrepancy appears between the proposals of a spate of recent suggestions concerning economics and the biblical texts. In the former, a world emerges of bustling trade in bulk surpluses of everyday staples, within an ancient market economy; in the latter, the metaphorized idea of exchange is focused on the acquisition of preciousities by the wealthy and powerful through despised busybodies. However, it is in these times acceptable to dismiss the biblical material as misleading and irrelevant, claiming that archaeology gives us the real data. As should be clear by now, this assumption is based on embarrassingly crude referential assumptions

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<sup>85</sup> Law 94 in Hammurabi’s Code also condemns false weights in lending or receiving money.

concerning the relation of biblical texts to their contexts, assumptions that are far from my concerns in this study. However, let me return to the three key terms of the “partly capitalist” world of ancient Southwest Asia: surplus, trade, and market. Far be it from me to argue that there were no surpluses, exchanges, or markets. But much turns on what we mean by those terms.

### **Surplus**

To begin with, did farmers specialize in, say, the production of sheep, cattle, or grains, building up surpluses to trade with the cities, between villagers and nomads, and over long distances? Little needs to be added here to my earlier discussion of subsistence survival, save to reiterate that this picture—usually liberally sprinkled with “probably,” “undoubtedly,” and “likely”—is far from the reality of agricultural life. Small surpluses in good years were for the purpose of seeing people through a bad year or two, through disease, pests, famine, and marauding bands. The last thing on the minds of such farmers was specialization for the sake of producing surplus for long-distance exchange.<sup>86</sup>

### **Elite Plunder**

What of the actual situation regarding exchange? In the reconstructions I outlined earlier, trade in bulk staples is central. Yet here we face a rather inconvenient truth: missing is the evidence for large-scale and long-distance exchange in the bulk staples

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<sup>86</sup> As Liverani (*Israel's History*, 7) notes, “Long distance terrestrial trade may provide raw materials (especially metals) and luxury products that are economically transportable, but it cannot bring cereals.” See also Milevski, *Goods Exchange*, 32; Jochim, *Strategies for Survival*, 210; Widstrand, “Nomad Economy”; Sahlins, “Tribal Economics,” 30; Ingold, *Hunters, Pastoralists*, 134–40; Rowley-Conwy and Zvelebil, “Saving it for Later.” It has been argued that the storage jars found on the lower floors of dwellings in the Levant were for the storage of surplus goods for export trade. Instead, it is clear they were used for subsistence storage. Schloen (*House*, 144) estimates that a household of 5 persons would need 1,500–2,500 kilograms (3,300–5,500 pounds) of grain for a year. This would require a minimum of 3,150 liters (832 US gallons) of storage capacity (at 1.3 liters per kilogram of wheat and 1.6 liters per kilogram of barley [2.75 US pints per 2.2 pounds of wheat and 3.38 US pints per 2.2 pounds of barley]), not to mention storage for oil, wine, and legumes, or seed for sowing. This estimate is at the lower end of what is normally proposed.

of grains and meats, textiles and everyday building materials, raw materials and manufactured goods. For an economy in which surplus is produced through trade, bulk is the key. As I mentioned earlier, the reasons they are shipped in bulk is that profit margins are small on each shipment, and the place to which they are transported either needs them for its own consumption since it does not produce sufficient bulk materials for its own needs, or processes them (raw material into finished goods) for sale elsewhere. Further, bulk trade requires technology for cheap transport, complex logistics, formally established financial mechanisms, the complex legal and political framework needed to ensure trade in bulk goods, let alone the agreement among states to enforce such mechanisms: strong states are needed for market economies. Above all, bulk trade requires the combination of use value and exchange value, the latter of which produces the surplus value (absolute and relative) by which the whole system runs.<sup>87</sup> The first time such a network functioned was in the Netherlands in the sixteenth century, providing the basis for the first commercial, capitalist empire. Not only did the Dutch acquire the foodstuffs for their own consumption, taking over the Hanseatic trade routes in the Baltic, but they also turned raw materials into manufactured goods, which were then sold throughout Europe at a price that was lower than local manufacture. For instance, Dutch textiles and ships were produced more cheaply and of better quality than elsewhere.<sup>88</sup> This situation is clearly not the case with ancient Southwest Asia.

However, other forms of exchange existed. Again, what is meant by exchange is crucial. Three points are relevant here. First, the matter of scale is often forgotten as scholars rush to see highways and byways clogged with donkey and later camel

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<sup>87</sup> Duncan Foley, "Use Value," in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1983), 504.

<sup>88</sup> Wallerstein, *World-System I*.

caravans, to espy shipping lanes bustling with merchant vessels, passing one another with the latest cargo. With populations so sparse that it is difficult for us to imagine them so, and with no more than 10 percent of that population comprising the ruling class and its various dependents (priests, retainers, functionaries, and so on), very few would have actually been the middlemen. In our world—with a population over seven billion, with seaborne trade now over 35,000 billion tonnes (US 38,500 billion tons) per annum, with a capitalist system that saturates even our imagination and processes of metaphorization—we struggle to understand a landscape of thin and scattered population, of paltry states whose claims to be “empires” are empty chest beating, of small towns of 3,000–4,000 people (including Jerusalem) euphemistically called “cities,” all amid wide sweeps of forest, plain, and mountains. In this context, the cargo was miniscule indeed.<sup>89</sup>

Further, the logistics of transporting goods made the cost prohibitive for long-distance exchange. Here the “friction of distance” is crucial, especially in terms of labor, for there is an exponential relationship between distance and the amount of labor involved: the further one travels, the greater is the friction.<sup>90</sup> In regard to land transport, even in the much later period of the Roman Emperor Diocletian (284–305

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<sup>89</sup> As Wilson observed already many decades ago, “It is the smallness of scale, so hard for modern Europeans to grasp imaginatively, which is the fundamental characteristic of primitive life.” Godfrey Wilson, *An Essay on the Economics of Detribalization in Northern Rhodesia* (Livingstone, Northern Rhodesia: The Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1941), 10. As examples, the “little kingdom” of Ugarit had a total population of ca. 32,000–33,000, with perhaps 8,000 in the town itself and the rest scattered over 150 villages. In the Persian era Jerusalem had no more than 3,000 inhabitants, out of approximately 30,000 in the province, although earlier it may have had a little over 10,000 inhabitants, again at perhaps 10 percent of the population. Even the largest Mesopotamian imperial centers could rarely muster more than 100,000. Liverani, “Ville et campagne,” 250; Yoffee, *Archaic State*, 43; Grabbe, *Jews and Judaism*, 199. The archaeological record is equally sparse, although this has not prevented scholars from constructing vast edifices on the basis of miniscule evidence. For example, Cline (*International Trade*) analyzes 942 pieces of pottery from around the Aegean, Egypt, and the Near East from the hundreds of years of the Late Bronze Age. He uses them to construct a complex and primarily commercial network of trade in bulk goods, even though none of them actually concern such goods.

<sup>90</sup> Milevski, *Goods Exchange*, 32.

CE), when one would have expected at least some improvement in the nature and means of transport, it was cheaper to move the same quantity by ship from one end of the Mediterranean to another, from Syria to Spain, than it was to transport it 120 kilometers (75 miles) overland.<sup>91</sup> In a much earlier period, second-millennium Mesopotamia, it has been estimated that when traveling downstream on a raft, it would take 20 days to cover 1,000 kilometers (620 miles). By contrast a donkey caravan (domesticated and used in the Early Bronze Age)<sup>92</sup> took 6 weeks to cover the 1,200 kilometers (745 miles) from Kanesh in Anatolia to Asshur in mid-Mesopotamia.<sup>93</sup> The cost: it has been estimated that the cost of transporting items doubled every 200 kilometers (125 miles). If the cargo was grain, then the animals used would have eaten the whole supply well before the end of the journey.<sup>94</sup> And the staple pack animal, the donkey, needs to stay close to water sources, so it cannot traverse arid regions.<sup>95</sup> Was transport by ship then more feasible? The cost per unit transported would suggest so, but this neglects the considerable resources needed to build even a decent riverboat, let alone a seagoing ship, which was far higher than gathering a donkey caravan or team of oxen. Add to this a general thalassophobia on

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<sup>91</sup> Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 11–12.

<sup>92</sup> For discussions of the technical, cultural, and ritual (and thereby metaphorical) role of donkeys in the Early Bronze Age, see Milevski, *Goods Exchange*, 177–97; Kenneth M. Way, *Donkeys in the Biblical World: Ceremony and Symbol* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

<sup>93</sup> Michael Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* (London: Equinox Publishing, 1990), 18. Liverani (*Uruk*, 44) points out that in the Old Babylonian period, a donkey could carry 90 kilograms (200 pounds) of metal or about 70 kilograms (155 pounds) of cloth, and that caravans traveled about 25 kilometers (15 miles) a day. In relation to the Assyrians, although this may apply to any ancient Southwestern Asian situation, Adams (“Common Concerns,” 396) observes: “A crucial factor in determining flows of either trade or tribute must have been the ancient calculus of costs for long distance land transport. To commit personnel, draft animals and other resources to movements of subsistence supplies and other high-bulk goods as tribute would have been a heavy burden on the Assyrian military economy, and more especially on the mobile and organizational factors that were vital to it.” See also Hopkins, “Bare Bones,” 125.

<sup>94</sup> Van de Mieroop, *Mesopotamian City*, 169.

<sup>95</sup> Moorey, *Mesopotamian Materials*, 12–13.



the part of larger Mesopotamian states,<sup>96</sup> and the fact that most of the few river ports and seaports were controlled by rulers, and we have a situation where the cost of waterborne exchange was not inconsiderable.<sup>97</sup> It formed part of a network of interpalatial exchange.

Most important, the purpose of such exchange was quite different. If one belonged to the small and relatively wealthy ruling class, then one sought to acquire the appropriate appurtenances and tools of power, surrounding the process with what may be called the propaganda of acquisition.<sup>98</sup> Instead of the combination of use value and exchange value characteristic of capitalist trade, I suggest that the prime form of value may be called “prestige value.” Due to a particular conjunction of social, economic, and ideological features, a certain object provided prestige for the one acquiring it, and hence prestige value.<sup>99</sup> Palaces and temples required building materials from elsewhere, especially in Lower Mesopotamia, where timber and stone for large buildings was rare. Soldiers required metals for weapons, as well as horses and chariots for mobility in battle. Above all, one would not spare any expense to acquire hard metal, hard enough for sharp and devastating weapons, but rare in Mesopotamia. Tin was by far the most valuable metal in the Bronze Age, and then iron in its eponymous age, for the production of daggers, swords, helmets, and coats

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<sup>96</sup> The fact that the Phoenician cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos were left to their own devices, instead of being easily appropriated, paradoxically reinforces such a thalassophobia. Robert B. Revere, “‘No Man’s Coast’: Ports of Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean,” in Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson, *Trade and Market*, 38–63, esp. 40. Contra Lawrence E. Stager, “Port Power in the Early and Middle Bronze Age: The Organization of Maritime Trade and Hinterland Production,” in Wolff, *Studies in the Archaeology of Israel*, 625–38.

<sup>97</sup> For an outline of the major Mesopotamian river and sea routes, see Moorey, *Mesopotamian Materials*, 7–10. However, he overstates the ease and ubiquity of such activity.

<sup>98</sup> Liverani, *Uruk*, 41; Schloen, *House*, 199: “It was not a matter of exchanging food for manufactured goods and specialized services, but of exchanging luxuries for luxuries or to meet intangible social obligations and thereby to maintain or increase one’s status.”

<sup>99</sup> Harry W. Pearson, “The Economy Has No Surplus: Critique of a Theory of Development,” in Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson, *Trade and Market*, 320–41, esp. 337–38.

of mail.<sup>100</sup> Added to these were the precious stones (such as gold from India, lapis lazuli from Badakhshan),<sup>101</sup> fine alcohol, expensive clothes (well beyond the single cloak of a peasant household), and strange animals such as elephants, monkeys, or indeed peacocks, bulls' heads, and hippopotamus parts.<sup>102</sup> These needed to be acquired if one aspired to be recognized as a ruler. Obviously, they are the preciosities I mentioned earlier: the rulers' aim was to get hold of such goods.<sup>103</sup> It was very much like a "vacuum cleaner, a huge military and administrative apparatus designed to secure a constant flow of goods from periphery to center."<sup>104</sup>

This situation poses a distinct problem for those who wish to argue for an international market economy in ancient Southwest Asia, or even a pattern of

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<sup>100</sup> With bronze appearing toward the end of the second millennium BCE in Western Asia, the source of tin has remained somewhat of a puzzle. Did it come from distant mines (Spain, Malaysia, or even southern China) to be transported over great distance? Or did it come from closer sources, albeit with low level traces of tin, in what are now Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan? In regard to these suggested sources, debate continues as to whether the higher yield layers have been exhausted or whether the sites were too minor to yield the amount of tin required. See Lloyd Weeks, "Metallurgy," in *A Companion to the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Daniel T. Potts (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 304-305; John E. Dayton, "The Problem of Tin in the Ancient World (Part 2)," in *Le problème de l'étain à l'origine de la métallurgie / The Problem of Early Tin*, ed. Alessandra Giunilia-Mair and Fulvia Lo Schiavo (Oxford: Archaeopress, BARIS 1199, 2003), 165-170; Larsen, "Commercial Networks," 50-51; Liverani, "Collapse," 68. For an excellent treatment of the precious role of copper in the earlier Chalcolithic Age, see Golden, *Dawn of the Metal Age*.

<sup>101</sup> The Sumerian example comes from the grave of Puabi (from the First Dynasty of Ur), with its lapis lazuli, carnelian, gold, and silver, all worked into exquisite forms. These seem to have been acquired from India and Badakhshan in northern Afghanistan. Diakonoff, "City-States of Sumer," 77-79. On the predominance of preciosities in fourth-millennium Egypt, see Jane Roy, *The Politics of Trade: Egypt and Lower Nubia in the 4th Millennium BC* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011), 245-86.

<sup>102</sup> Milevski, *Goods Exchange*, 146-63.

<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, the Old Assyrian donkey caravan exchange with Cappadocia in the second millennium fits into this context. Tin and woolen textiles from Mesopotamia were exchanged for Anatolian silver and gold, and the merchants were closely connected with the royal courts of Asshur and Anatolia, even if they enhanced their takings with some deals on the side. Johannes M. Renger, "Patterns of Non-Institutional Trade and Non-Commercial Exchange in Ancient Mesopotamia at the Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.," in *Circulation of Goods in Non-Palatial Context in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Alfonso Archi (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1984), 31-123, esp. 38; Schloen, *House*, 80, 83; Van de Mierop, "Near Eastern Debt?," 75-77; Klaas Veenhof, "Kanesh: An Assyrian Colony in Anatolia," in Sasson, *Civilizations*, 859-71.

<sup>104</sup> Larsen, "Tradition of Empire," 100; Adams, "Common Concerns." My approach here is different in emphasis from that of Liverani's *Uruk*. He falls into the trap of regarding a materialist approach as one that begins with specific technological and logistic issues, which then lead to all manner of changes. Thus the reality of long fields plus the need for draft animals and irrigation led to a centralized government, the process of primitive accumulation, and thereby the "revolution" that was Uruk. In contrast to this technologism, I prefer a historical-materialist analysis, in which technological shifts only gain traction when a different sociocultural context requires them.

redistribution. Haunted by the preciosities in ample evidence, they follow one or both of two strategies. Either the preciosities are vital for the whole economy, in the sense that archaeological evidence of such items indicate widespread wealth,<sup>105</sup> or scholars clutch at elusive straws that supposedly indicate extensive exchange in bulk staples. Let me give three examples of the latter, which may be called (1) the shipwreck, (2) the pottery shards, and (3) a couple of grains. The shipwreck is none other than the much-discussed Ulu Baran (Kas) shipwreck from the second millennium. The hull was loaded with both preciosities and empty amphorae, which have encouraged more than one scholar to attempt to fill the amphorae with oils, wines, and grains. Yet they are tantalizingly empty and may just as easily have functioned as ballast. The identifiable cargo includes a considerable amount of the highly precious copper and tin ingots, pottery, blue-glass ingots, jewelry, scarabs, cylinder seals, bronze weapons and tools, jars with aromatic resin and beads, amber, ostrich eggshells, ivory (elephant and hippopotamus), logs of ebony, and some unworked raw materials. Even in relation to the copper and tin, one must ask who had the resources to process such material. Only a palatine estate system with its workshops would have been able to convert the copper and tin into bronze, for weapons and tools.

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<sup>105</sup> For instance, in an extreme effort to account for Uruk's move to urbanization in the fourth millennium in terms of capitalist-style trade, Algaze (*Ancient Mesopotamia*) is faced with the reality that the only evidence is for trade in preciosities. His recourse is to argue that such preciosities were vital to the whole "economy." For a comparable argument for pre-Uruk activities, see Moorey, *Mesopotamian Materials*, 3. See also Frangipane's focus on preciosities at Uruk. Marcella Frangipane, "Centralization Processes in Greater Mesopotamia: Uruk Expansion as the Climax of Systemic Interactions among Areas of the Greater Mesopotamian Region," in *Uruk Mesopotamia and Its Neighbors*, ed. Mitchell S. Rothman (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2001), 307–48. A comparable and much later example than that of Algaze is the hypothesis that the presence of expensive cedar timber shards in Beersheba indicates widespread commerce and wealth. Nili Liphshitz and Gideon Biger, "Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) in Israel during Antiquity," *IEJ* 41 (1991): 167–75. Auld and Steiner attempt a similar line for Jerusalem but are forced to conclude that the evidence in Jerusalem in the first millennium points almost exclusively to preciosities. A. Graeme Auld and Margarete L. Steiner, *Jerusalem 1, from the Bronze Age to the Maccabees* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1996), 123–25. In the slightly wider zone of the Aegean, Cline (*International Trade*) presents comprehensive evidence of Late Bronze Age exchange in preciosities and yet tries to argue that this provides "evidence" of trade in bulk goods.

Closely related is a second instance of the search for exchange in bulk goods: the focus on pottery shards. Notably, analysis of pottery typically concerns qualitative rather than quantitative matters. Thus petrographic analysis identifies the geographical sources of clays, stylistic analysis identifies particular types, and detailed classifications distinguish between different forms and functions. So, while we find pieces of pottery from, say, Mycenaean, Greek, Egyptian, or Phoenician sources, quantitative analysis is significantly lacking. The reasons are not difficult to find. As we saw with the Ulu Baran shipwreck, some scholars are eager to fill the empty pots with all manner of goods, such as distant wines, olive oil, and of course grains. Why? The actual evidence is simply missing, presumably perishing with the passage of time. Further, when the amount of pottery is analyzed, even from places around the Aegean when dealing with a coastal town, it becomes rather small. For example, all of the Eastern Greek and Early Corinthian pottery found in the southern Levant in the seventh century BCE would have formed only part of the cargo of one ship passing along the coast.<sup>106</sup> Instead, the vast bulk of pottery that was exchanged was decidedly local, given the friction of distance.<sup>107</sup> Of course, if one assumes a complex market economy, they become glimpses of an as yet unseen whole.<sup>108</sup> But if the evidence

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<sup>106</sup> Jane C. Waldbaum, "Greek Pottery," in Stager, Master, and Schloen, *Ashkelon 3*, 127–338, esp. 141.

<sup>107</sup> Milevski, *Goods Exchange*, 39–88.

<sup>108</sup> One may cite some excellently perverse examples of the argument that the presence of pottery pieces, relatively unimportant economically, are visible indicators of "invisible" trade in bulk goods, albeit without the crucial analytic elements required to make such claims. Andrew B. Sherratt and Susan E. Sherratt, "From Luxuries to Commodities: The Nature of Mediterranean Bronze Age Trading Systems," in *Bronze Age Trade in the Mediterranean*, ed. Noël H. Gale (Jonsered, Sweden: Paul Åström, 1991), 351–86; Susan E. Sherratt and Andrew B. Sherratt, "The Growth of Mediterranean Economy in the First Millennium BC," *WA* 24, no. 3 (1993): 361–78; Carol Zerner, Peter Zerner, and John Winder, eds., *Wace and Blegen: Pottery as Evidence for Trade in the Aegean Bronze Age, 1939–1989: Proceedings of the International Conference Held at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, December 2–3, 1989* (Amsterdam: American Schools of Classical Studies at Athens, 1993); Daniel M. Master, "Trade and Politics: Ashkelon's Balancing Act in the Seventh Century B.C.E.," *BASOR* 330 (2003): 47–64; Ephraim Stern, "Tel Dor—An East-West Trading Centre in the Bronze and Iron Ages," *ErIsr* 25 (1996): 268–73; Amihai Mazar, "The 1997–1998 Excavations at Tel Rehov: Preliminary Report," *IEJ* 49 (1999): 1–42; Frances W. James, *The Iron Age at Beth-Shan*

indicates otherwise, then the spread of such discovered pottery indicates nothing more than a desire to acquire pots.

Third, there are a few grains in which one may espy an “integrated market economy.”<sup>109</sup> The example here is drawn from the recent reports of archaeological work at Ashkelon, which was destroyed by the Babylonians in 604 BCE. The leaders of the project are keen to paint a picture of a bustling marketplace, with skinned sheep carcasses, fish stalls, and grains from Judean highlands. The problem is the scarcity of the evidence: a few types of grain that may have grown in the hills very close by, a slightly higher number of sheep bones, and remains of fish bones and shells from nearby sources (no more than 100 kilometers [62 miles] away in the Nile). Needless to say, this is pushing the evidence beyond where it clearly wishes to go, especially when the overwhelming majority is of preciosities in such archaeological sites.<sup>110</sup> Moving beyond Ashkelon, perhaps we may rely on textual references, where grain and even bread are occasionally requested for shipping. The catch is that, while amounts are sometimes stipulated, distances are not. Those distances were obviously not great, since concern is expressed over spoiling. Given the provenance of the texts

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(Philadelphia: University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1996); Cline, *International Trade*; David W. J. Gill, “Pots and Trade: Spacefillers or Objets d’Art?” *JHS* 111 (1991): 29–47; Robin Osborne, “Pots, Trade and the Archaic Greek Economy,” *Ant* 70 (1996): 31–44. By contrast, in a curiously apologetic work, Faust (*Israel’s Ethnogenesis*, 49–64) offers an ingenious twist on the absence of “foreign” pottery remains in the highlands of Judea: it is due to an ethnic resistance to foreign trade, which thereby becomes evidence of Israel’s consciousness of its unique identity.

<sup>109</sup> Stager and Master, “Conclusion,” 737.

<sup>110</sup> Brian Hesse, Deirdre N. Fulton, and Paula Wapnish, “Animal Remains,” in Stager, Master, and Schloen, *Ashkelon* 3, 615–43; Ehud Weiss, Mordechai E. Kislev, and Yael Mahler-Slasky, “Plant Remains,” in *ibid.*, 591–613; Omri Lerna, “Fish Remains,” in *ibid.*, 645–57; Stager, “Ashkelon”; Stager and Master, “Conclusion.” Comparable approaches to the presence of fish bones and shells have been undertaken in relation to other sites in ancient Palestine. Oded Borowski, *Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel* (London: AltaMira Press, 1998), 172–76; Henk K. Mienis, “Molluscs,” in *Excavations at the City of David, 1978–1985*, ed. Alon De Groot and Donald T. Ariel (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1992), 3:122–30; Roaf, *Cultural Atlas*, 34.

(where that can be ascertained), these are inevitably for the needs of central authorities and over shorter distances.<sup>111</sup>

We are left with the intermittent networks of luxury items as the primary form of longer-distance exchange. To acquire the desirable preciosities, middlemen would undertake the dangerous and expensive task of doing so. They were men (and never women) who were royal servants and were rewarded for their tasks. Against the curiously intractable and very modern assumption that state and “commerce” are forever opposed to one another,<sup>112</sup> the vast majority of these middlemen were also tax collectors and diplomats. Rather than freewheeling entrepreneurs, they were indentured agents in the service of the king, engaged in gathering taxes internally and in interpalace gift exchanges externally.<sup>113</sup> Thus it becomes deeply anachronistic to distinguish between these roles. It is not for nothing that kings would call them “my merchants.”<sup>114</sup>

Yet they were also treated with distaste, as a necessary evil, as we saw earlier. The very same person (or rather, clan) acquired preciosities for the court, collected taxes for the state, and—to add to the achievements of this multitasking wizard—

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<sup>111</sup> Lindenberger, *Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 33, 39, 53, 123, 130, 140.

<sup>112</sup> We may track Hudson’s slow realization of this reality. Michael Hudson, “The Role of Accounting in Civilization’s Economic Takeoff,” in *Creating Economic Order: Record-Keeping, Standardization, and the Development of Accounting in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael Hudson and Cornelia Wunsch (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2004), 1–22.

<sup>113</sup> Michael Heltzer, *Rural Community*, 33–34; idem, *Goods, Prices and the Organization of Trade in Ugarit* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1978), 123; Melikishvili, “Some Aspects,” 41; Carlo Zaccagnini, “Aspects of Ceremonial Exchange in the Near East During the Late Second Millennium BC,” in Rowlands, Larsen, and Kristiansen, *Centre and Periphery*, 57–65, esp. 58; Kozyreva, “Old Babylonian Period,” 104–5; Schloen, *House*, 83–84; Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*, 63; Cline, *International Trade*, 85.

<sup>114</sup> EA 8, 39, 40; in Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 16, 112–13. The Late Bronze Age Amarna letters make it clear that the goods exchanged between courts were understood as the exchange of gifts, and that the prices were the result not of “market mechanisms” but of case-by-case negotiation, with personal requests to adhere to customary expectation of generosity and price. Zaccagnini, “Ceremonial Exchange.” Schloen, *House*, 84.

engaged in usury and functioned as a landlord.<sup>115</sup> On all four counts, he could become very wealthy. On all four counts, he definitely became despised and hated. These “skills” also enabled him to make the transition through the long “crisis” of the late second millennium and emerge on the other side with new opportunities for multiple extraction.<sup>116</sup> In wider ancient Southwest Asia, rulers too were quite suspicious of the busybodies in their employ. The reasons are not difficult to find: the costs of acquiring preciosities were always high, and the agents of the king would often do a few deals on the side and make a killing. These suspicions were manifested not only in the habit of rulers taxing donkey caravans that passed through territory they considered their own, but also of plundering them at border points, as the Assyrian kings used to do on a regular basis.<sup>117</sup> The feeling among princes was that the amount confiscated was insufficient, so they would not hesitate to plunder caravans bringing items to their own own courts. While this may seem chronically shortsighted, it indicates a mind-set: someone else shouldn’t get the preciosities I want; or, these busybodies are working for me anyway, so let’s make sure they don’t keep too much for themselves.

But how was one to pay for such items, apart from those directly requisitioned by the government from its estates or as taxes? A nearby mine was helpful, perhaps of silver or another precious metal; so were plunder from raids, textiles, exotic timber

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<sup>115</sup> Diakonoff, “Structure of Near Eastern Society,” 54; Van de Mierop, “Urban Real Estate,” 255–56; idem, “Near Eastern Debt?,” 71–72. Already in the Old Babylonia of Hammurabi, *dam-gârs* acted on behalf of the palace, gathering the agricultural products from tenants on palatine estates, organizing corvée labor, and disbursing excess produce via patterns of debt and credit. Renger, “Das Palastgeschäft”; Goddeeris, *Economy and Society*, 338–46.

<sup>116</sup> Liverani (“Collapse,” 69–70) stresses too much the “private” nature of the work of such merchants in the transition, but he does show that their ability to be all men to all people enabled their survival. For Liverani (*Uruk*, 41–43), the middlemen provide a solution of sorts to the ongoing debate between the substantivist and formalist camps: it was not a matter of either/or but both/and: the middleman was in “service” while in the palace and on appointed tasks, but once out of range of the despot’s spies, his profit-making side came to the fore.

<sup>117</sup> Diakonoff, *Paths of History* 38.

from a forest in one's domain, whole villages, the minimal acquisition from taxation. If one did actually have to exchange one item for another in order to acquire the desired goods, then that was seen as a necessary evil for the sake of securing the desired preciosities. Prices were largely customary, varying mostly due to social, environmental, and political factors, although scarcity and difficulty of acquisition also played a role.<sup>118</sup> The availability of items to exchange was less a result of careful and rational economic planning than serendipity.<sup>119</sup>

### On the Nature of Markets

Thus far I have emphasized the acquisition of preciosities, managed by groveling busybodies, as the core of exchange. This idea is metaphorized in some biblical texts, even though the specific workings in the reality of economic life were somewhat different. But this is to be expected in the complex relations between text and context, for the relation is often contrary and responsive. However, this basic nature of exchange raises a question concerning the relationship between exchange, on the one hand, and tribute and taxation, on the other hand. Clearly they are variations on plunder, on the centripetal drive to acquire goods. Thus far I have argued that this was

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<sup>118</sup> On this matter it is telling to note that, according to Hammurabi's Code, if one charged a higher amount for a product, it was seen as a devaluing of what you wished to exchange. In law 108, a woman innkeeper who refuses to accept grain for her beer but accepts only silver of a greater amount ("by the large weight") thereby devalues the beer. Roth, *Law Collections*, 101. See also Howard Farber, "A Price and Wage Study for Northern Babylonia during the Old Babylonian Period," *JESHO* 21, no. 1 (1978): 1–51; Daniel C. Snell, "The Activities of Some Merchants of Umma," *Iraq* 29 (1977): 45–50. Thus, Hebrew *mēhîr* (1 Kgs 21:2; etc.), cognate with *tamkārūm*, means customary price, with little sense of the "economic" value of an item. Without a system of commodities that relate to one another, without assessments of the costs involved in production and circulation, and without efforts to raise or lower prices depending on demand, "price" takes on a very different, traditional, and customary sense. For a table of the scarce material available concerning the values of different items, see Milevski, *Goods Exchange*, 29.

<sup>119</sup> An excellent example is the relatively large number of olive oil presses (plus an equally significant number of weaving looms) found in seventh-century Ekron. Schloen (*House*, 140–46; contra Gitin, "Neo-Assyrian Empire") persuasively shows that, rather than rational economic planning, this was due to displacement of the rural population (which in a hostile environment established oil presses for far smaller circles than customary in villages), an anomaly that later was exploited by the Assyrian overlords.



characteristic of tribute-exchange through the vast history of ancient Southwest Asia. However, there was a shift in the first millennium to what seem to be “commercial” operations, to a greater use of markets. However, this was due to the new dominance of the institutional form of tribute-exchange, which gave rise to a new regime. Central to that process was the discovery of the usefulness of markets.

Here we need to be exceedingly careful, for these early markets were by-products of the state’s logistical concerns, they were not driven primarily by profit, and they exchanged everyday staples at a very local level, for the costs and risks of long-distance transport remained prohibitive.<sup>120</sup> At this point the terminology of a global or international “market economy” is especially misleading since it assumes that that the type of market we experience under capitalism, driven by the self-interest (greed) of the profit motive, is the common definition of market for all times and places. It also assumes a whole system of supply and demand, social networks, judicial frameworks, political structures, economic relations, and ideological patterns in which the market is itself metaphorized.<sup>121</sup> I do not speak of Polanyi’s misleading proposal of a nonmarket (marketless) economy, for that assumes that markets operate as profit-generating mechanisms.<sup>122</sup> Instead, I mean that markets have mostly operated without profit as their prime function, for profit and the accumulation of

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<sup>120</sup> For an alternative and more orthodox Marxist approach that arrives at a similar conclusion, that exchange in ancient Southwest Asia does not operate in terms of capitalist patterns, see Milevski, *Goods Exchange*, 27. See also Neale’s initial effort to show that the ancient “marketplace” was a very different beast. Walter C. Neale, “The Market in Theory and History,” in Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson, *Trade and Market*, 357–72.

<sup>121</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 260–78; Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* (London: Verso Books, 1983). See also McGeough’s observations (in *Exchange Relationships*, 380) concerning the haphazard nature of the palace’s economic activities in Ugarit; as also Van de Mieroop’s point (“Economic Theories,” 61) that price fluctuation had little to do with supply and demand.

<sup>122</sup> Polanyi, “Marketless Trading in Hammurabi’s Time,” in Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson, *Trade and Market*, 12–26; idem, *Primitive, Archaic*, 249–60; Dalton, *Economic Anthropology*, 131–34. For a signal example of the misreading of the sense of market, see Goddeeris, *Economy and Society*, 383–84.

capital for the sake of capital itself (which is singularly lacking in the ancient world)<sup>123</sup> is but a secondary and later development of markets and is by no means universal.<sup>124</sup> As may be expected by now, I would go further and argue that even in profit-based markets, such profit is a phenomenon secondary to social patterns and determinations.

In fact, markets first spread for an entirely different reason: rulers had to find ways to provision armies. As Stalin knew so well, and for which he worked so hard in order to ensure his victory in World War II, supply lines are the key to any army. In the case of an ancient ruler, he had the option of engaging as many people and animals—for the sake of locating, acquiring, and transporting the needed provisions—as his army of, say, 10,000 men. However, an alternative eventually presented itself: a monarch could pay the soldiers in coins stamped with an image of his own head on them. He could then demand that taxes be paid in coin. Obviously, the farmers in question would then seek to get hold of those coins by exchanging provisions for the soldiers' coins. The earlier intermittent practices of exchange—local and decentralized, usually between villages within view (2–4 kilometers [1.4–2.8 miles] apart), for items such as flint and pottery, and across phytogeographic regions<sup>125</sup>—now gained a whole new life. Fostered by the new conditions, local markets began to spring up, meats and vegetables and legumes and whatnot were exchanged, coins

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<sup>123</sup> Diakonoff, “Commune in the Ancient East,” 523. Renger (“Non-Institutional Trade,” 41) gropes most closely toward this awareness: “Pre-modern economies functioned according to mechanisms totally different from what we call ‘market economies.’” Yet even here he is trapped within his Polanyian framework.

<sup>124</sup> Given the near universal assumption that “market” is defined by the generation of profit, I need to insist on the point that early markets did not have profit as their primary motive. Apart from the expected references that assume such a framework, even Polanyi, Dalton, and the otherwise very useful work of Sasson fall into this trap. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*; Dalton, *Economic Anthropology*, 202; Sasson, *Animal Husbandry*, 7–8.

<sup>125</sup> Milevski, *Goods Exchange*, 132–45.

changed hands.<sup>126</sup> Then the farmers and village communities could pay their taxes. Once this became a pattern, we see again and again that the spread of coinage followed the path of an army receiving pay in coins. An excellent example is the later Roman army (second century BCE onward), as it expanded, in campaign after campaign, what would become the empire.<sup>127</sup> With the Roman authorities demanding taxes in coinage, soon enough every farmer and hunter was exchanging goods with the soldiers for coins in order to pay those taxes. Provisions were supplied, prostitutes found, not a little petty theft undertaken, and so on. When this method was seen to work, it was applied to requisitioning just about everything, instead of engaging labor to work on palatine estates. Obviously, it fostered the growth of larger towns and even cities, since to some extent the markets overcame the logistical limits of palatine estates. Fewer people in the towns and cities needed to be engaged in agriculture, although this was still the norm for town dwellers, so they could be deployed in the increasing bureaucracies of the larger empires. From China, through India, to ancient Southwest Asia, this is the way the first markets arose. And this process has been replicated time and again in colonial contexts, in which the local people had to be forced into paying taxes (often poll taxes) by means of money. In other words, the most efficient and practical way for markets to spread is through the activity of the government. Markets are thereby a by-product of government needs, rather than government stifling the enterprise of markets.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Even in this context, and due to the immediate need to acquire the necessary coinage for taxes, the pattern of supply-demand-price can hardly be said to function. Customary price was the norm, although farmers would also accept any amount for their goods, since their survival was not dependent upon the markets. Dale, *Limits of the Market*, 145–46.

<sup>127</sup> Rui M. S. Centano, “De República ao Império: Reflexões sobre a monetização no Ocidente da Hispânia,” in *Barter, Money and Coinage in the Ancient Mediterranean (10th–1st Centuries BC)*, ed. María Paz García-Bellido, Laurent Callegarin, and Alicia Jiménez Díaz (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2011), 355–67; Maria Isabel Vila Franco, “El proceso de monetización del noroeste de la Península Ibérica: Las calzadas romanas,” in *ibid.*, 369–76.

<sup>128</sup> Graeber, *Debt*, 49–50.

This assumes the prior invention of coins, which happened at about the same time, from 600–500 BCE, in the three parts of the world just mentioned.<sup>129</sup> Intriguingly, the technologies were distinct and do not seem to have been borrowed: casting coinage in the Great Plain of China, punching coinage in the Ganges River valley of northern India, and stamping coinage in the lands surrounding Aegean Sea, beginning in Lydia. For some reason, local rulers decided that the long-standing credit systems were no longer adequate and began issuing coins out of precious metals, metals that had been used in exchange and usually stored in temples.<sup>130</sup> For more than a millennium, the practice became widespread, until about 600 CE, when coins became scarce and the prior systems of credit returned. But the reason for the initial move to coinage was economic and social unrest, with armies on the move, marauding bands, and gangs. With the breakdown of large states (Warring States China, Iron Age Greece, and pre-Mauryan India) and the efforts at new levels of imperial expansion in ancient Southwest Asia, soldiers and brigands were constantly on the move. Itinerant armed men became a credit risk. So if one needed to engage in

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<sup>129</sup> Alongside the various older positions on the origins and nature of money, a number of newer studies have appeared. Among the older ones, I cite Adam Smith's theory that money results from the logjam of stockpiling; the intriguing proposal by Aglietta and his colleagues that money is based on the ancient idea of sacrifice as debt to gods (drawn from the Rig Veda); money as the unpayable debt of human life; and the chartalist position that money is an unpaid IOU to the state. More recently, Graeber has sought to extend the chartalist position, while von Braun and Goodchild have emphasized the religious and theological dimensions of money, in a way that may be seen as attempts to develop the insights of Aglietta et al. Michel Aglietta and André Orléan, *La violence de la monnaie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992); idem, *Souveraineté, légitimité de la monnaie* (Paris: Association d'Économie Financière, 1995); idem, *La monnaie souveraine* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998); Philippe Rospabé, *La dette de vie: Aux origines de la monnaie sauvage* (Paris: Éditions la Découverte/MAUSS, 1995); Georg Friedrich Knapp, *Staatliche Theorie des Geldes* (Leipzig: Dunker & Humblot, 1905); Geoffrey Ingham, *The Nature of Money* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004); Graeber, *Debt*; Philip Goodchild, *Theology of Money* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Christina von Braun, *Das Preis des Geldes: Eine Kulturgeschichte* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2012).

<sup>130</sup> A. J. Domínguez Monedero, "Circulación de dinero y moneda en la Grecia arcaica: El ejemplo de los santuarios," in García-Bellido, Callegarin, and Díaz, *Barter, Money*, 43–61. In the time between the invention of coinage and its widespread use, it was in some cases used for elite exchange and the storage of wealth, in this respect being little different from the hoarding of precious metals in temples. David Wigg-Wolf, "The Function of Celtic Coinages in Northern Gaul," in *ibid.*, 301–14.

a transaction, it was far better to have something that can be weighed and handed over than to rely on credit (which can operate only when you know your neighbors).

Soldiers might loot such stuff, but they can also be paid and can pay without having to worry about credit. “For much of human history, then, an ingot of gold or silver, stamped or not, has served the same role as the contemporary drug dealer’s suitcase full of unmarked bills: an object without a history, valuable because one knows it will be accepted in exchange for other goods just about everywhere, no questions asked.”<sup>131</sup>

Where does all this leave those who argue for a partly capitalist international market economy? I suggest that they are caught in what may be called Polanyi’s trap, a double trap. They know that the overwhelming nature of the evidence shows exchange in preciosities; they know that the overwhelming feature of economic life was agriculture; they know that in order to postulate an international market economy, they need to find evidence of trade in bulk staples. And so they clutch at straws, speculate, build firm conclusions from “possibly” and “maybe.” A few extra sheep bones, a small bug, some fish bones, a collection of pottery shards—all these soon become solid evidence of such a market in bulk goods. Thus Polanyi is proved wrong, for markets did indeed operate. Yet they are trapped, for they uncritically work within Polanyi’s framework of reciprocal, redistributive, and market forms of exchange. All they have done is move from one term to another. But now the trap doubles, for they neglect Polanyi’s point that no market operates outside social relations, and they also fail to notice that Polanyi himself was mistaken about the idea of the “market.” He assumed that “market” has the sense given to it by Adam Smith and other classical

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<sup>131</sup> Graeber, *Debt*, 213. See also Finley, *Ancient Economy*, 115–16, 141, 166, 174, 196.

economics, that human beings truck, barter, and exchange for the sake of profit.<sup>132</sup> Now the trap closes: the vast majority of markets throughout history have not primarily been profit-making ventures, since they were by-products of state-driven activities for requisitioning goods. Many continue to fall into this trap, including those who write on biblical economics and ancient Southwest Asia.

## **CONCLUSION**

The men of the city of Ura, the merchants, are a heavy burden upon the land of your subject.

—Niqmepa, king of Ugarit, to his overlord, Hattushili III, king of Hatti<sup>133</sup>

Now I may answer a final question: why did the extractive dimensions of the economies of ancient Southwest Asia make the transition from (e)states to tribute-exchange? The answer is contained in my treatment of the nature of markets: the mechanisms of a local market solved a significant number of logistical problems related to provisioning armies. Instead of a monarch and his apparatchiks dealing with the myriad needs of this provisioning directly, with its drain on the vital labor that was always in short supply, a market of the sort I have outlined above did the job in a far better fashion. Such a market's prime purpose was far from any notion of profit, for it was a by-product of the state's needs; it was usually local, within the purview of the

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<sup>132</sup> Those who embrace even a modified form of Polanyi's basic position perpetuate this assumption. Johannes M. Renger, "Different Economic Spheres in the Urban Economy of Ancient Mesopotamia: Traditional Solidarity, Redistribution and Market Elements as the Means of Access to the Necessities of Life," in *The Town as Regional Economic Centre in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Erik Aerts and Horst Klengel (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 20–28; idem, "Formen des Zugangs zu den lebensnotwendigen Gütern: Die Austauschverhältnisse in der altbabylonischen Zeit," *AoF* 20 (1993): 87–114; idem, "Probleme und Perspektive einer Wirtschaftsgeschichte Mesopotamiens," *Saec* 40 (1989): 166–78; idem, "On Economic Structures in Ancient Mesopotamia," review of *Economic Structures of the Ancient Near East*, by Morris Silver, *Or* 63 (1994): 157–208; Schloen, *House*, 79–80; Nam, *Economic Exchange*. So also do those who seek to "prove" wrong Polanyi and his followers. For examples, see Marvin A. Powell, "Wir müssen unsere Nische nutzen: Monies, Motives, and Methods in Babylonian Economics," in *Trade and Finance in Ancient Mesopotamia*, ed. Jan Gerrit Dercksen (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1999), 5–24; Goddeeris, *Economy and Society*; Algaze, *Ancient Mesopotamia*. For a useful survey of such responses, see Nam, *Economic Exchange*, 59–67.

<sup>133</sup> Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 177.

potentate and his policing. However, although these types of markets may have solved some military logistical issues, they also revealed possibilities well beyond those concerns. These included two vital components: (1) the possibilities of provisioning temple and palace in a way that went beyond the limits of the estate system; (2) a mode of taxation that had an internal component of compulsion, which could thereby be used more extensively and effectively. With these two elements combined as refined forms of plunder, taxation and tribute became the staple of the dominant institutional form.

A crucial enabling factor in this process of realignment was the spread of local markets, fostered by the state's logistical concerns. All of this makes sense of the oft-remarked increase in "commercial" activity in the first millennium.<sup>134</sup> This was due neither to some discovery of the value of self-interested exchange for the sake of profit, nor even to the crassly commercial breakdown of social ties, nor even to the belated discovery of a "market economy," but rather to the shift in institutional forms I have traced in some detail.

It also makes sense of the so-called "Axial Age" of the first millennium. It is often depicted as some genteel process in which abstract, rational thought was discovered, in which the early philosophers and great teachers of some of the world religions plied their trades, in which human beings made a great leap forward;<sup>135</sup> but it actually was an excessively brutal period. State-sponsored markets and coinage, and the abstractions they both enabled and represent, arose as part of wider patterns of

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<sup>134</sup> In the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods, the evidence points to increases in the use of markets, silver, coinage, and local exchange in salt, wine, beer, pottery, and other goods. Yet the nature and context of such exchange is often misread. A. Leo Oppenheim, "Trade in the Ancient Near East," in *V. International Congress of Economic History, Leningrad, 10–14 August, 1970* (Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1970), 1–37; Liverani, "Collapse"; Francis Joannès, "Private Commerce and Banking in Achaemenid Babylon," in Sasson, *Civilizations*, 1475–85.

<sup>135</sup> Schloen, *House*, 95–99.

systemic violence, slavery, and the subjugation of women.<sup>136</sup> Finally, it makes sense of the inseparable connection between tribute, taxation, and exchange. This connection operates at two overlapping levels. First, they are all concerned with acquisition, as the refinement of plunder. Tribute is for the despot under the thumb of a more powerful neighbor, taxation is for the people ostensibly within a despot's domain, and exchange involves the acquisition of preciousities, often over long distances and at great cost. Second, exchange provides the mechanisms for a new level of taxation, especially by means of coinage. The difference is that now exchange is local, operating through local markets that solve logistical problems for rulers. Most important, the underlying purpose remains the same, for exchange at this level is primarily for the ruler's own acquisitions—without neglecting the fact that such markets provide the means for more effective armies, which may then engage in further plunder.

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<sup>136</sup> As I mentioned earlier, Hebrew *mkr* (cognate with Akkadian *tamkāru*), “sell,” has quite sinister connotations. It is closely associated with debt slavery: one “sells” and thereby “betrays” children, family members, oneself as security for debt (Gen 31:15; 37:27–36; 45:4; 47:20–22; Exod 21:7–8; **Lev 25:35–36**, 39; Deut 21:14; 24:7; Isa 24:2; Amos 2:6; Neh 5:8).



## Chapter 6

### *Spiral of Crises*

The disappearance and rise of social organisms, the formation and breakdown of great political entities, the incursions by peoples of the historical periphery into areas where historical progress was centered, cannot be regarded as deviations from the norm or anomalies. For the societies of the Ancient East, all this was the norm, the rule.

—Iurii Ivanovich Semenov<sup>1</sup>

Regimes are the concern of this chapter. In its technical, economic sense, “regime” means a distinct arrangement or constellation of the institutional forms. These constellations change over the economic history of ancient Southwest Asia, usually in response to internal contradictions and crisis, when it becomes clear that the existing constellation can no longer function.<sup>2</sup> This means that we need a degree of periodization of regimes and their constitutive institutional forms, but this is quite standard for any reputable historical analysis, let alone those with a Marxist bent.<sup>3</sup> Under ideal circumstances, which really mean an abundance of data, such analysis involves both qualitative and quantitative components. Yet, as is well known with ancient Southwest Asia and Israel, the data is spotty at best and often simply nonexistent, especially in terms of quantitative data. So my focus here is a treatment of the changing regimes, of their internal combinations of institutional forms, of identifying which forms are dominant and which not (or rather, which are embryonic,

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<sup>1</sup> Semenov, “Socioeconomic Systems,” 21.

<sup>2</sup> In other words, here I shift from the more synchronic concerns of the preceding chapters to ones that tend to be more diachronic. The qualifiers are quite deliberate, for the analytic fiction of distinguishing between synchronic and diachronic may be convenient for the linear argument of written texts, but even in that situation the two categories reveal their inseparability. It is not for nothing, then, that the preceding two chapters (4–5) in particular swerved toward diachronic concerns. The primacy of internal tensions for both fluorescence and crisis is a staple of Marxist analysis, as I outlined in the chapter (1) on theory. To those references, I add Liverani, “Collapse,” 69; idem, “Ras Shamra.”

<sup>3</sup> Boyer, *Regulation School*, 60–61.

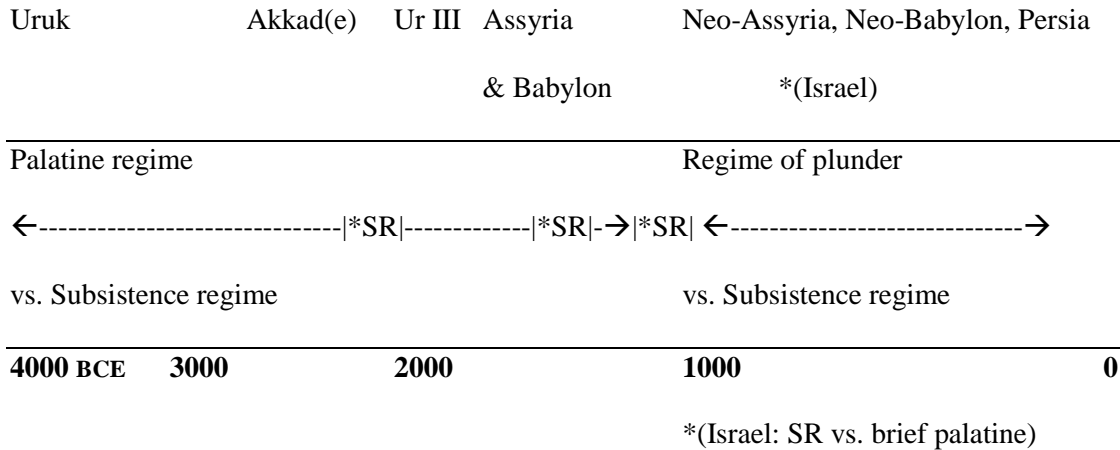
limited but growing rapidly, or dominant and declining), and of ascertaining the reasons why one regime becomes inadequate and why another takes its place.

I have organized the following in three phases. The first concerns the nature of crisis and collapse, particularly the perspective from which they are so designated and the way a subsistence regime reorients that perspective. The second deals with the palatine regime, while the third covers the permutations of the regime of plunder or booty. Finally, I explore a number of implications of these regimes and the mode of production of which they form a part. Before proceeding, I want to address two points. First, I should reiterate a point made earlier concerning mode of production: I understand the different regimes as forming part of an overarching mode of production called the sacred economy. Too often critics confuse one regime or another as a mode of production, or more grievously, one institutional form or another as a mode of production. As I have mentioned on several occasions, this is to be guilty of a false universal (extrapolating from a particular situation to posit a universal). Second, the earlier chapters have moved between the southern Levant, within which Israel belatedly appeared, and the wider context of ancient Southwest Asia. Obviously the two cannot be separated from one another, yet it is possible to identify different emphases within the larger picture. Thus the discussion of allocative institutional forms—those of subsistence survival, kinship-household, and patronage—was directly concerned with ancient Israel since it was a marginal economic zone. By contrast, the extractive forms of (e)state and tribute-exchange of necessity dealt with the wider context first, before locating Israel within that context. In what follows, a similar pattern operates.

In order to situate the remainder of this chapter, I offer a timeline with the major economic regimes as the focus. Although two sustained periods of the

subsistence regime appear, it was always present and in tension with the palatine and plunder regimes. Often it would establish itself in a region while eyes are turned (mostly of historians) to yet another power elsewhere.

### Economic timeline



\*SR: prolonged dominance of subsistence regime

## ***THE SUBSISTENCE NORM: RECONSIDERING "CRISIS" AND "COLLAPSE"***

Village life thrived on its relative isolation from the wider universe of the nation-state, and indeed from urban life in general.

—Douglas A. Knight<sup>4</sup>

I have argued initially and then assumed throughout this study that crisis was the norm of economic life in ancient Southwest Asia. By doing so, I was able to engage with the reality that crisis is not the anomaly that requires explanation. That privilege belongs to stability: periods of economic stability become anomalies or exceptions, so we need to find out why. This has proved to be a very fruitful approach to such an ancient economy. The regimes I analyze later in this chapter all attempt some form of continuity and stability in the teeth of ever-present crisis.

<sup>4</sup> Knight, *Law, Power*, 117.

All the same, a question remains: crisis for whom? Let me approach an answer in terms of the related category of “collapse.” It is common speak of imperial and cultural collapses. Thus the Sumerian expansion, running through from the revolution of Uruk to the elaborate and rather extraordinary organizational achievements of “The Kingdom of Sumer and Akkad(e)” (Ur III), eventually collapses around 2000 BCE, due to a variety of causes. To continue our sample from a large collection, in the sixteenth century a “dark age” descends upon ancient Southwest Asia; then later another such age comes at the close of the second millennium, when the Hittites’ modest achievements also collapse, as does the Creto-Mycenaean sphere at about the same time in the thirteenth century. By the first millennium it is the turn of Assyria, the Neo-Babylonians, and then the Persians. In various forms this narrative is one of the staples of ancient Southwest Asian history (going back to Herodotus), with a consistent pattern of fluorescence and collapse, or expansion and contraction, as one despot after another attempts a phallic-like extension of his powers, penetrating his neighbors and holding them under his seminal sway, only to find that the rush of blood does not last forever.

To reiterate: collapse for whom? From the perspective of the ruling class, it is indeed collapse, and the ensuing period is a prolonged time of crisis.<sup>5</sup> The sources of wealth have been removed, the palaces and temples destroyed, the estate system or patterns of tribute and exchange have been dismantled, and power has been lost. In these contexts, the archaeological record begins to show signs of “crisis architecture,” “termination rituals,” and “calamity feasts,” in which the desperate rulers use up their

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<sup>5</sup> For an outline of the “collapse” after 1200 BCE, albeit from the perspective of the ruling classes and their states, see Van de Mieroop, *Ancient Near East*, 191–206. Even Yoffee (*Archaic State*, 131–60), who sets out in neo-evolutionary terms to describe the emergence and collapse of states from the perspective of ordinary people, cannot avoid this statist assumption of “collapse.”

last reserves to appease furious gods.<sup>6</sup> At times dispossessed elites do indeed produce remarkable works: the collection of texts in the Hebrew Bible is an excellent example. Yet from the perspective of the village communes, of the subsistence and estate laborers, of socially determining clan households, a “collapse” actually means a blessed relief from various means of extraction.<sup>7</sup> We can hardly expect the peasants, laborers, and common people to sit back and wait for such much-desired collapses to happen. From the Habiru through to archaeological signals of urban destruction by the town’s own exploited class, they were more than keen to hasten the demise.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in the Amarna letters the Habiru become ever stronger and threaten town after town, making for heartwarming reading.<sup>9</sup> As Rib-Hadda put it when facing revolt, “I am afraid the peasantry will strike me down.”<sup>10</sup> Seminomadic pastoralists too were ready to join in, for throughout Mesopotamian history their annual and usually “peaceful” migration “could be transformed into aggressive campaigns if the power of the centralized state was weak.”<sup>11</sup> The outcome was highly desirable: no longer do the young men and women have to work periodically or permanently on the palatine

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see the study of Late Bronze Age Hazor, where such features appear just before the abandonment and final destruction of the site. Marom and Zuckerman, “On-Site Analysis,” 51–53.

<sup>7</sup> See further Gale A. Yee, “Recovering Marginalized Groups in Ancient Israel: Methodological Considerations,” in *To Break Every Yoke: Essays in Honor of Marvin L. Chaney*, ed. Robert B. Coote and Norman K. Gottwald (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 10–27, esp. 13–15. On peasant movements more generally, see Wolf, *Peasants*, 106–9; James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> For examples of such archaeological materials at Late Bronze Age Hazor, especially in the burning of monumental structures in the lower city and on the “acropolis,” aimed at the symbols and reality of ruling-class power, see Marom and Zuckerman, “On-Site Analysis,” 51–53.

<sup>9</sup> See EA 67–138, 144, 148, 179, 185–86, 189, 195, 197, 207, 215, 243, 246, 254, 271–74, 286–90, 298–99, 305, 307, 313, 318, 366; in Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 137–223, 230–31, 235, 262, 265–68, 269–70, 273–75, 280, 283–84, 297–98, 300, 307–8, 317–19, 326–34, 340–41, 343, 345–47, 349, 364.

<sup>10</sup> EA 77; in Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 148.

<sup>11</sup> Kozyreva, “Old Babylonian Period,” 99. This is complicated by an internal tension when these seminomadic pastoralists settle down in an area where they have assisted in the demise of a local potentate. At times they establish their own states and become somewhat oppressive as a result, replicating in part the system of the vanquished. So it was after the collapse of Ur III in the early second millennium, with the Haneans based in Terqa, the Yamutbala tribe in Larsa, and the Amnanu tribe in Babylon. Earlier, in the late third millennium, the Qutians did much the same after they dispatched the Sargonids of Akkad(e).

estates; no longer does the despised usurer-merchant-tax-collector call with his thugs to collect a debt slave or take a portion of the herd or some of the girls for his sexual usage; no longer do the temple and palace suck away the foodstuffs needed for subsistence survival. I suggest that the mythical accounts of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11) and Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18–19) embody such a perspective in their own way, as do the warnings of 1 Sam 8, the parable of the bramble in Judg 9:8–15, the long account of the failings of the kings of Israel and Judah and the eventual punishment in 1–2 Kings, and the account of the resistance by the “people of the land” and myriad other groups in Ezra–Nehemiah to the imposition of an imperial regime of plunder with the return of the exiles.<sup>12</sup> It is telling that during such times certain things disappear: records of loans, debts, and the obligatory labor tied in with loans.<sup>13</sup> This is not due to some “dark age,” lacking civilization, but rather another signal of the dominance of the subsistence regime: one of the first acts of those eager to see the demise of their overlords is to tear up or, in this case, smash the loan documents. These periods were not only ones of ruralization and the spread of villages, such as the eightfold increase in villages in the southern Levant between 1200 and 1000 BCE, or whenever cities and their political power declined,<sup>14</sup> but also ones of innovation: horse and chariot in the sixteenth century “dark age,” for instance, or the spread of iron technology at the end of the second millennium.

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<sup>12</sup> On the class dimensions of the resistance in Ezra–Nehemiah, see Roland Boer, “No Road: On the Absence of Feminist Criticism of Ezra–Nehemiah,” in *Her Master’s Tools: Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 233–52.

<sup>13</sup> Van de Mierop, “Near Eastern Debt?,” 81.

<sup>14</sup> Israel Finkelstein, “The Emergence of Israel: A Phase in the Cyclic History of Canaan in the Third and Second Millennia BCE,” in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeology and Historical Aspects of Early Israel*, ed. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na‘aman (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1994), 150–78; Knight, *Law, Power*, 118–19, 159–60.

These differing class perspectives may be illustrated by two examples. The first comes from the lament in the Erra Epic, written from a Babylonian context and concerned with the events from 1200 BCE onward. I suggest that we read this not as a lament of general chaos and collapse, but specifically a lament of a ruling class with nowhere to hide, much like the biblical book of Lamentations:

He who did not die in battle, will die in the epidemic.  
 He who did not die in the epidemic, the enemy will rob him.  
 He whom the enemy has not robbed, the thief will thrash him.  
 He whom the thief did not thrash, the king's weapon will overcome him.  
 He whom the king's weapon did not overcome, the prince will kill him.  
 He whom the prince did not kill, the storm-god will wash away.  
 He whom the storm-god did not wash away, the sun-god will carry him away.  
 He who has left for the countryside, the wind will sweep him away.  
 He who has entered his own house, a demon will strike him.  
 He who climbed up a high place, will die of thirst.  
 He who went down to a low place, will die in the waters.  
 You have destroyed high and low place alike!<sup>15</sup>

A second example of the different perspectives on “crisis” may be found in interpretations of the slogan in Judg 17:6: “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.” The textual setting suggests that the overarching editorial framework is negative: a man called Micah requests a silversmith to construct an “idol” (*peseḏ*) from a portion of the silver he had recovered for his mother. He puts the resultant image in a shrine he has made, adds an ephod and teraphim, and makes one of his sons a priest. Later a passing Levite is invited to become priest, only to join a larger crowd of marauders from the tribe of Dan who also take the image and associated shrineware. If we assume the ban on images in the second commandment, as well as the various instances of supposed

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<sup>15</sup> From the Erra Epic; Van de Mieroop, *Ancient Near East*, 199; cf. Amos 5:19.

“lawlessness” that follow, this story seems to be negative, giving voice to ruling-class concerns of chaos and crisis, expressed through the pens of the scribal subclass.

By contrast, it may also be read as a slogan of freedom. As David Jobling pointed out some time ago, the statement that there was no king (see also Judg 18:1; 19:1; 21:25; 1 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chr 18:16) and that “all the people did what was right in their own eyes” is an almost utopian image, a claim and a desire for a society without oppression from some petty potentate seeking to squeeze the peasants once again. I suggest that this slogan applies very well to the perspective of those who were all too pleased to see the crisis and collapse of the sundry overlords and their seedy hangers-on. Indeed, the text from Judges echoes a rallying call from one of the Habiru leaders,

‘ Abdi-Aširta:

Let us drive out the mayors from the country that the entire country be joined to the  
‘ Apiru, . . . to the entire country. Then will (our) sons and daughters be at peace  
forever. Should even so the king come out, the entire country will be against him, and  
what will he do to us?<sup>16</sup>

In this light, when I write that crisis was the norm and that economic “stability” was the exception, I am still using the terminology of the ruling class, of those who left most of the records and who felt that world would collapse without them. To be sure, I am at least one remove from the assumption that stability is the norm and crisis the exception, but I have not yet gone far enough. That final step would require a more substantial reversal, in which crisis actually becomes stability, imbalance becomes balance, and vice versa.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> EA 74; in Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 143. See also Diakonoff, “Syria, Phoenicia,” 295; Liverani, *Israel’s History*, 27–28.

<sup>17</sup> This ambivalence of class perspective also shows up in the way archaeologists interpret the material remains in crucial periods. For instance, in the period of Late Bronze Age “decline,” some see evidence of increasing “poverty,” in both measures of wealth and in artistic skill; by contrast, others find signs of great wealth and artistic skill. Yet the questions left begging here are many. Of which classes do they speak? Whose perspective do they voice? Is not the tension between extreme wealth and extreme poverty the sign of excessive exploitation? See Panitz-Cohen, “Tale of Two Houses,” 99.



Thus the centuries-long periods of “crisis”—whether late in the third millennium BCE, in the “dark age” of sixteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and then at the turn of the first millennium—are actually the most stable of all, for now the allocatory institutional forms become dominant, now their preferred modes of the sacred come to the fore, now subsistence survival is less threatened, now the kinship-household may concentrate on what it does best rather than having to deal with continuous external threats.<sup>18</sup> It is truly a revolution, but not in the way it is usually understood, as a revolution from the palatine system to the imperial regimes of plunder that followed.<sup>19</sup> Instead, the revolution is in terms of the subsistence regime, a proper *re*-volution. With the marginal surpluses and often the basic needs of subsistence survival no longer appropriated by temple, palace, or marauding army, they can be used for what they were primarily intended: to see a community through a lean year or two. Customary law and the myriad expectations of the kinship-household no longer find it necessary to compete with the codified laws of an aspiring emperor. Above all, the intimate practice of the sacred, with cult corners and the inescapable presence of imps and spirits and demons, dominates again, while the temple on the hill lies in ruins. To use a term I have deployed earlier, rural life in village communes was the form of central constitutive resistance, to which the powers had constantly to respond, especially so when imperial armies invaded.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This revalorization is implicit in Diamond’s description of the greater potential for “collapse” of economic systems dominated by an extractive ruling class: “A series of good years, with adequate rainfall or with sufficiently shallow groundwater, may result in population growth, resulting in turn in society becoming increasingly complex and interdependent and no longer locally self-sufficient. Such a society then can no longer cope with, and rebuild itself after, a series of bad years that a less populous, less interdependent, more self-sufficient society had previously been able to cope with.” Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking Press, 2005), 143.

<sup>19</sup> Liverani, “Land Tenure,” 34.

<sup>20</sup> Diakonoff, “Rural Community,” 123; Knight, *Law, Power*, 120. The “murmuring” stories in the wilderness wanderings may give expression to such constitutive resistance (Num 11–12, 16, 20, etc.).

Nonetheless, before this proposal is misread as some proto-anarchist advocacy of local communal life, let me point out that it entails a distinct constellation of the institutional forms I have analyzed in the preceding chapters. As my point of reference, here I take the most relevant period for the southern Levant: the long and quiet centuries following the collapse of the palatial system in the twelfth century BCE. Another reason for turning once again to the southern Levant is that its marginal economic status meant that it was more often in “crisis” than other areas. Thus, not that much earlier, the area found itself plundered empty by Egyptian and Mitannian armies, with large bands of Habiru offering a far more attractive life to most farmers and town dwellers. As for the twelfth century and onward, the much-studied settlements in the Judean hills begin to appear, but even later, under the Persians, village life proliferated while larger towns declined. In this context, allocatory institutional forms dominate: subsistence survival is the key, with the kinship-household ensuring complex patterns of social determination. Credit is the common form of social and economic interaction, and patronage tends toward its more allocatory side. With the absence of strong states, the palatine estates and patterns of tribute and exchange become minimal and distant. To be sure, these never disappear, for some chieftain, patron, or even Habiru warlord will always try to establish patterns of extractive deference. Yet they remain on the fringes.

This may be called the subsistence regime, with its necessary mode of *régulation*. In order to make it work, well-tried compromises are deployed, held together by religious assumptions and modes of enforcement (customary law and militia). Such compromises apply between patron and clan head, so that the two do not undermine one another. But they also apply with the ameliorating patterns of reallocating field shares, the allocations of tasks and produce, and the provision of

appropriate channels for grievance and conflict. All of this is enabled by the complex mode of *régulation*, which ensures that communities actually adhere to the compromise.

As a way of making the transition to the two extractive regimes, I raise the question of the military, for it functions as a remarkable litmus test. Militia or standing army? The answer to this question provides a reliable guide to the type of regime that is dominant. A militia, drawn from all able male members of a social group, tends to be found where a stable subsistence regime holds sway; a standing and often mercenary army is the norm in the extractive regimes of the palatine and booty varieties. I take as the premise here Engels's insight that the structure of the military is an excellent insight into the nature of social and economic relations among a people.<sup>21</sup>

In a little more detail: a standing army, characteristic of dominantly extractive regimes, is in the employ of despots and aspiring dictators. The soldiers themselves are withdrawn from regular labor; they are paid out of coffers filled by taxation, plunder, and extortion; and their function is to ensure precisely the extractive institutional forms that brought them into being in the first place. By contrast, a militia is the shape fostered by a more allocative system. In the same way that everyone partakes of the labor process and is part of the complex web of allocation, so also do they form the militia. Times of threat, of external invasion, of the need for new land during drought or famine—the reasons why the militia is called out are many, but

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<sup>21</sup> Conversely, the shape of the military becomes a crucial question if one wishes to reshape a social formation from the bottom up. Engels discovered an extraordinary skill in war correspondence and military assessment during the European Revolutions of 1848–49, the Crimean War (1853–56), the Franco-German War (1870–71), the Indian uprising against the British (1857), and so forth. He penned numerous well-written and thoroughly enjoyable articles on battles, campaigns, the nature of armies across Europe, strategies, tactics, equipment, uniforms, and so on. I will not list them since there are scores, beginning with vol. 11 of the *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (55 vols. [1975–2004]), and then clustering together to fill up most of vol. 18.

they all turn on ensuring the survival of the group in question.<sup>22</sup> They manifest the central feature of the subsistence norm, which is the basic “mechanism of self-defence and co-operation.”<sup>23</sup> On this matter, in the Hebrew Bible the interchangeability of *mišpāḥ â* and *ʿelep*, of clan and military unit (Num 1 and 26), bends toward a common perception of the militia, no matter how legendary it may be.<sup>24</sup> In short, the key is that a militia calls on all to participate, while a standing army leaves the task to professionals and mercenaries. Of course, these are ideal types, and one sees efforts to use the ideological cover of the militia for justifying extractive regimes: periods of the draft (conscription) during extended wartime are a prime example. The patron’s bodyguard is also a distinctly transitional type, for the distance between the armed militia of the clan boss (Abram in Gen 14) and the bodyguard that morphs into a standing army (David in 1 Sam 21–30) is not so large. However, the fundamental point remains that the two types of armed forces are in their primary structure signals of and products of different socioeconomic systems.

### ***THE PALATINE REGIME***

Ahishar was in charge of the palace; and Adoniram son of Abda was in charge of the forced labor.

—1 Kings 4:6

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<sup>22</sup> Deleuze and Guattari add an intriguing feature regarding the militia: numbering, which is intrinsic and not generated by an external need. The war bands are numbered not for administration, taxes, and control; instead, numbering is intrinsic to mobility, relations, and arrangements. Thus the numbering is not geared for an extractive system but for an allocatory one, for the allocation and reallocation of tasks, supplies, equipment—what we call logistics. Hence the texts of Exod 18, Num 1–3 and 26 may be seen in a different light. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 351–423. Roland Boer, *Criticism of Theology: On Marxism and Theology III* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2010), 245–53.

<sup>23</sup> Diakonoff, “Rural Community,” 130. In smaller states, a mix of a basic standing army and then additions via a militia were possibly deployed, as in Arrapkha. See Jankowska, “Communal Self-Government.”

<sup>24</sup> Here I take as a given the position that *ʿelep* designates a military unit of varying size, drawn up as a militia from the clan, or *mišpāḥ â*. For full discussions, see Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, 270–76; Schloen, *House*, 153–54; George E. Mendenhall, “The Census Lists of Numbers 1 and 26,” *JBL* 77 (1958): 52–66.

Two other major regimes appear in the sacred economy: the palatine regime and the regime of booty. In light of my effort earlier to invert some terminology, I suggest that they may be called “regimes of crisis,” in contrast to the subsistence regime of stability. That is, as dominantly extractive regimes, they characterize periods of instability, when the system is constantly teetering on the point of collapse (from a ruling-class perspective). Since I have discussed these at some length in the preceding two chapters, here I summarize their salient features and emphasize what is relevant for more diachronic concerns.

The palatine regime signals the dominance of the institutional form of estates. This means that extraction begins—or at least attempts—to dominate the constellation of institutional forms. As I described earlier, the (e)state system appears first around temples in the riverine areas of Lower Mesopotamia and Egypt. Soon enough, the temple and its estates are subsumed by the palace, as with Enentarzi in Lagash and then, a little later, Sargon the Ancient in Akkad(e). In the nonriverine environments, the palace emerges in control of the temple. The system of estates sought to deal with a very practical matter: how does one feed and clothe the nonproducers? Or rather, how does one enable the nonproducing ruling class to maintain the life to which its members had quickly become accustomed? Directly or indirectly (via tenure), managed estates were the answer. Some laborers on these estates were permanent, ending up in that role through misadventure, natural disaster, or simply due to their need for shelter and food, no matter how basic. Many, however, were temporary, fulfilling debt obligations perhaps, *corvée* requirements imposed on local villages, for building projects, and so forth.

How dominant was the institutional form of estates? If we are to believe the written documents from archives of palace, temple, and landlord, it was utterly

dominant. I have voiced my skepticism concerning the skewed picture that a reliance on such documents creates, for they typically claim more than was actually the case. The extent of that dominance depended much on the power of the state and the ruling class, which has seized the machinery of the state for its own ends. In the smaller states, where a patron may have seized power with his band of thugs, the extractive reach of the estate system remained rather limited. This was particularly the case with the marginal economic zone of the southern Levant, where we also find pompous claims to the contrary on behalf of these martinets. Such claims were usually expressed in political myths, as in the Hebrew Bible, which also produced as by-products the well-known creation stories (for one has to begin the account of one's own glorious rule with the creation of the gods, the world, and human beings). Subsistence survival and the kinship-household were able to maintain their own patterns in the face of these developments. What is notable, however, is that in such situations the institutional form of patronage bends toward extraction rather than allocation, for it is precisely the gang of clients, cutting across clan lines, that provides both the power base of the new ruler and the means of opposing the more allocative regimes.

In the larger systems, the institutional form of (e)states is properly dominant, and we have a stronger palatine regime. We see this in the impressive organizational achievements in Ur III,<sup>25</sup> in Old Mesopotamia among the Hittites, and so on. Yet in these situations the tensions of this regime begin to show. The basis of these tensions was a relatively direct conflict between allocation and extraction, between the institutional forms of subsistence survival and kinship-household on the one hand, and

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<sup>25</sup> I write "impressive" advisedly since the resources for such organization and record keeping were decidedly limited. For the anti-Stalinist Diakonoff, the Third Dynasty of Ur was "one of the worst totalitarian régimes known to history." Diakonoff, "Old Babylonian Society," 20.

(e)states on the other hand (while tribute-exchange was present, it played a secondary role). Since labor shortage was always a problem and since the yield from estates was higher than intermittent taxes on the villages, it was in the interest of rulers to draw more and more people from the village communes to the estates. Such labor may have begun in a periodic fashion, through demands that subsistence laborers spend some time each year on the estates, especially during peak periods of sowing and harvesting, or on special projects that stroked the despot's own insatiable ego. Typically these "demands" required both brawn and persuasion, in what I have been calling a mode of *régulation*. The local potentate needed his armed enforcers to insist that demands be met, that debts be worked off. Yet it also required a certain level of compromise, in which people agree—persuaded through religion, propaganda, and practical assessment—to undertake these tasks. But the pressure was always directed toward both replacing spent labor (particularly in light of the short period of active life) and increasing the number of laborers on the estates. As both Diakonoff and Liverani point out, the ruling classes of the various little and big kingdoms had minimal interest in ensuring the viability of the village communities, since the needs of the nonproducers were met through the estate system.<sup>26</sup> From our perspective, this is obviously a rather shortsighted approach, for when subsistence survival and kinship-household cease to be viable, when people walk away from village communes

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<sup>26</sup> Diakonoff, "Rural Community," 127; idem, "Structure of Near Eastern Society," 60; Liverani, "Ras Shamra," 1321; Liverani, "Ugaritic Royal Farms," 142–43, 152–53. With regard to Nuzi and Arrapkha, see also Carlo Zaccagnini, *The Rural Landscape of the Land of Arraph e* (Rome: Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, Università di Roma, 1979); Carlo Zaccagnini, "Land Tenure and Transfer of Land at Nuzi (XV–XIV Century B.C.)," in Khalidi, *Land Tenure and Social Transformation*, 79–94. Liverani makes the mistake of assuming that the collapse of the Hittites (and what I am calling the palatine regime) in the thirteenth century was part of a shift in modes of production. The new mode of the first millennium—with its autonomous merchants, commercial exchange, desire for profit, and associated alienations of human relations—sounds remarkably like a nascent capitalism. Liverani, "Communautés de village," 163; Liverani, "Ras Shamra," 1346–47; Liverani, "Collapse," 72. Obviously I disagree: it was really a shift in regimes, from palatine to booty.

in the zones where the power of the palace holds sway, when laborers abscond from estates with the animals, when the invaluable source of labor dries up, when the gods have become furious and refuse their blessings—then the palatine regime has reached its limit.

Given these problems, how did the palatine regime retain its appeal for so long? It seems to have lasted for a stunning two millennia or more, an extraordinary period for a regime when we are accustomed to whole modes of production lasting barely five hundred years. The trap here is twofold. First, to assume that it remained dominant for the whole period is a mistake, for it periodically collapsed under its own contradictions, to be followed by a subsistence regime for a time, and then an effort to reestablish yet another palatine regime. Uruk, Ur, Akkad(e), Alalakh, Arrapkha, Nuzi, Mitanni, Ugarit, Hattusa, Israel, and others—the list is long indeed. Some were more diligent in imposing a palatine regime; some failed, tried again, and failed again; others aspired to do so but fell short. It was really a spasmodic affair, arising in spurts, only to fade away yet again.

Second, human beings are not often the wisest concerning their own well-being. Rather than opting for what is in their best interest, they seem to choose the worst (the disastrous effects of capitalism are but the latest example). Such stupidity manifests itself with the repeated efforts to found yet another palatine regime. It does not help matters when inanity is enhanced by theological arguments and assumptions, especially the political myths that are characteristic of this regime.

### ***THE REGIME OF BOOTY***

The subordinate peoples . . . were treated simply as milk cows, as producers of wealth for the ruling power.



—Lester Grabbe<sup>27</sup>

Apart from its inherent instability, or crisis mode of operation, the palatine regime also had clear limits as to what it could support. Despite directives from the gods to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28) and “expand the frontiers” (Assyrian and Egyptian monarchs),<sup>28</sup> despite the obsessive propaganda of priestcraft concerning angry and aggressive gods (“I . . . am a jealous God,” as Exod 20:5; 34:14; and many other verses state), and despite the testosterone-charged aspirations of petty potentates, the palatine regime was unable to deliver at a practical, economic level. No matter how hard such a despot may have tried, this regime soon reached its limit in both space and time. Territorially, the reach of the various centers in ancient Sumer, even the Ur III phase, was quite modest. The same may be said of the states in Lower and Upper Mesopotamia that followed. Temporally, their period of florescence was remarkably short-lived, crumbling all too readily due to internal tensions and then overrun by disgruntled peasants and ever-watchful marauders keen to exploit weaknesses. As an insight into the smallness of scale, it is worth recalling the numbers of laborers on the palatine estates. The problem with a term such as “estate” is that it conjures up vast realms, with thousands of laborers busily engaged in the myriad tasks of production for the palace. The reality was far more modest. In the Hittite records that have survived, the largest estates have no more than thirty laborers, and it is not uncommon for estates with two or three laborers to appear.<sup>29</sup> This sounds more like a backyard vegetable plot than an “estate.”

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<sup>27</sup> Grabbe, *Jews and Judaism*, 191.

<sup>28</sup> Larsen, “Tradition of Empire,” 90; Liverani, *Prestige and Interest*, 56–57.

<sup>29</sup> Liverani, “Ugaritic Royal Farms.” To be sure, some were relatively large, such as the estates connected with the Eanna temple in Uruk, but these are exceptions.

What was to be done? As Diakonoff puts it, in order to expand beyond these limits, other sources of extortion were needed.<sup>30</sup> The turning point seems to have been the two or three centuries when the subsistence regime dominated at the end of the second millennium, or as the ruling classes would have it, the extended time of economic “chaos.” The end of the palatine regime was well overdue because of its economic limits and contradictions. In this context, the drying of the area’s climate contributed to (but did not cause) the end of that regime’s dominance.<sup>31</sup> We also see widespread and, for the peasants, welcome destructions of centers of power across the regions. In the Levant, this period witnesses a higher number of flattened towns, palaces, temples, and so on. These seem to have been as much the result of peasants and estate laborers—many of them part of Habiru war bands, finally venting their built-up class hatred of the ruling class—as it was of external invasion, whether by Sea Peoples or other displaced and itinerant groups.

When the remnants of the ruling classes finally got their act together after a few centuries, a rather different regime emerges, what may be called a regime of plunder or booty. In the constellation that makes up this regime, the dominant institutional form is that of tribute-exchange. I have dubbed this form “the many faces of plunder” (chap. 5), which dominates this regime; it is indeed a ransacking regime, a regime of loot and plunder. The mechanisms for extracting plunder may be blunter (Neo-Assyrians) or more sophisticated (Persians), but it remains at heart a regime of booty. The distinctive shift of this extractive regime is as follows: the institutional form of tribute-exchange, which was in a position subordinate to the system of

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<sup>30</sup> Diakonoff, *Paths of History*, 36.

<sup>31</sup> Dafna Langgut, Israel Finkelstein, and Thomas Litt, “Climate and the Late Bronze Collapse: New Evidence from the Southern Levant.” *Tel-Aviv* 40 (2013): 149–75. However, they make the common mistake of attributing the *primus casus* of such an economic shift to changes in rainfall and temperature patterns.

estates, now becomes dominant.<sup>32</sup> The form of estates is by no means abolished, but the estates become subsidiary.<sup>33</sup> The allocative forms of subsistence survival and kinship-household remain in a subordinate position, while patronage bends once again toward its extractive side. Yet this is not merely a shuffling of the extractive deck, finding yet more efficient ways to exploit the peasants. The relations with the allocative institutional forms shift as well. With the palatine regime, the relation was largely and crudely oppositional: the increase in estates was predicated on the decrease of subsistence survival and of kinship-household. In the case of the regime of booty, the relation is a little more subtle: the well-being of the interrelated allocative forms of subsistence survival and kinship-household is crucial for the success of the regime of booty. I mean not the banal point that the whole regime comes crashing down when village communes, kinship systems, and households are hollowed out, but that the mode of extraction relies on precisely these sectors continuing to provide the necessary forms of legalized plunder, usually designated as “taxes,” or “tribute” if one is speaking of client states.

I have presented this change in relation to the other extractive regime, the palatine one, since it marks a shift in the nature of extraction. An astute reader may have noticed that there is a substantial temporal gap between the two regimes, a gap that was by no means a void or perhaps a period of “chaos” and “anarchy.” Since it was actually a relatively stable time, when the subsistence regime once again came into its own, it is better to see the regime of booty as an answer to that of subsistence.

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<sup>32</sup> Diakonoff points out that no evidence exists, in third- and second-millennium Mesopotamia, for broad and systematic taxation outside the estate system—apart from labor, military service, and sacrifices. Diakonoff, “Socio-Economic Classes,” 43–44. There is evidence for elite tribute between vassal states and dominant states, as shown (e.g.) in an inventory of Ugaritic tribute to Hatti in the second millennium (*CTH* 48 and 65). Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 168, 176.

<sup>33</sup> The continuance of debt patterns and defaults on those debts, owed to a state by tenants, indicates the continued role of estates. Van de Mierop, “Near Eastern Debt?,” 74.

That is, since the palatine regime was economically, socially, and ideologically bankrupt, and since the subsistence regime had clearly established itself as a preferred option, a new regime was needed to overcome those pesky peasants and their way of life: hence the regime of booty.

The paradox of this regime is that it was more efficient than the palatine regime and yet as much prone to crisis as that regime. As I argued in the preceding chapter, that efficiency was predicated initially on the ability to spread the patterns of extraction more widely. Taxation for subjects within one's own ill-defined realm, tribute (raised via taxation) from subservient if grumpy monarchs in neighboring states—although the initial yield was not as high as the estates, the potential for extending this system was higher. Yet the gate to crisis swings open all too easily. The temptation to extract a little more than the system can bear is always there, for the armies need to be fed and armed, the new palace needs to be built, the rebellious southerners need to be quelled. . . . As we will see in a moment, the Neo-Assyrians simply looted their way to oblivion, while the Persians took a more “refined” approach to extracting booty.

A new regime does not emerge overnight. Apart from the usual period of trial and error, its sources are multiple. A reconfiguration of the sacred needs to take place, closing down ideas that are moribund and seeing the gods in a new way—or rather, letting the gods see this earth in a new way. Earlier I suggested that this shift is from the political myths common across ancient Southwest Asia to the imperial henotheisms and possibly also monotheisms of the first millennium, in which new levels of abstraction play a crucial role. I also argued that this change should not be seen, in some gloriously vulgar Marxist fashion, as the result of socioeconomic change, but that it was also a crucial factor in that change. One needs to see, or rather

be in, the world differently in order to bring about change. We should not rule out the role of an original idea or two. Coinage is one of these, as is the use of markets to feed armies and secure taxes more efficiently. Of course, original ideas—“inventions,” as they are sometimes called—do not of themselves bring about change. Each mode of production is littered with inventions for which the socioeconomic conditions had no use. Finally, practical and material concerns are important as well. Larger territories mean that a despot and his apparatchiks have access to vital materials, especially metals such as iron, gold, and silver, rather than relying on the “goodwill” of others. Further, a resurgent ruling class seeks a new way of subverting the subsistence regime and expanding the frontiers. So, in the context of the rising dominance of the institutional form of tribute-exchange, whatever will assist that process finds a use.

That all this took some time is indicated by the nature of the situation in the earlier years of the first millennium. Now we encounter an entirely new network of states from that of the second millennium, at least until the thirteenth century: Assyria, Babylonia, Urartu, Elam, Phoenician harbor cities, Neo-Hittites, Medes, Phrygia, Lydia, Aramaeans, the small state in northern Israel,<sup>34</sup> and many other small states. Of course, some are recoveries of older states, but many are quite new, and their modes of extraction are also new. With a minimal ruling class feeling its way forward, testing possibilities, operating by trial and error, the contours of the new regime of booty begin to emerge. It remains relatively weak during these early years, for the subsistence regime is a tough one and will not give in easily.

### **LOOTING ONE’S WAY TO OBLIVION**

Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger—  
the club in their hands is my fury!

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<sup>34</sup> If one accepts Carter’s proposal in *Emergence of Yehud*.

Against a godless nation I send him,  
 and against the people of my wrath I command him,  
 to take spoil and seize plunder,  
 and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.

(Isaiah 10:5–6).

Within the regime of booty, there were two emphases. One prefers the blunt instrument of outright plunder; the other prefers the refined implements of taxation and tribute. The former characterized the shooting star of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, with its overt use of force and terror, delight in maiming, disfiguring, and hacking up anyone or anything with a pulse that stood in the way (and many who did not). The latter was the business of the Persian Empire, ably assisted by the bright idea of demanding taxes in coinage in order to provision the ever-present armies, which generated the rather useful by-product of markets, which in turn enabled a new level of provisioning the ruling class itself, the temples and their clergy, the armies, and any other perpetual dinner guests.

While the refined extraction of the Persians provided a modicum of stability, the same cannot be said of the Neo-Assyrians, who simply ransacked their way into early extinction. The Neo-Assyrian Empire shows both the deeper truth of this regime (one of various forms of booty) and its inherent instability. While the Neo-Assyrians may have entertained the possibility of some minimal balance, some slightly longer-term vision, they soon dispensed with any such niceties.<sup>35</sup> With the gods and their

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<sup>35</sup> This is not to say that the Neo-Assyrians were uninterested in some sort of stability, but that their methods were somewhat counterproductive. Other evidence suggests an acute awareness of the perpetual problem of labor shortage and the immense problems of moving bulk goods over great distances. Thus, in the Neo-Assyrian core (Jezirah of northern Syria and Iraq and the Upper Tigris River Valley in southeastern Turkey), surveys indicate a rise in the number and spread of small agricultural sites during the Late Iron Age. The suggestion is that these are the result of deportees being resettled in villages, to supply the Neo-Assyrian cities and thus deal with a chronic problem: shortage of hinterland for food production. Large estates were not pursued, indicating the imposition of an internal taxation system. Tony Wilkinson, "Late Assyrian Settlement Geography in Upper Mesopotamia," in *Neo-Assyrian Geography*, ed. Mario Liverani (Rome: Università di Roma, 1995), 139–60; Tony Wilkinson and Eleanor Barbanes, "Settlement Patterns in the Syrian Jazira during the Iron Age," in *Essays on Syria in the Iron Age*, ed. Guy Bunnens (Louvain: Peeters, 2000), 397–422;

ventriloquists demanding expansion of the empire, ideological constructions in which they were surrounded by hostile and deceitful enemies (who were paradoxically vastly inferior cowards),<sup>36</sup> large armies to keep on the road, lavish rebuilding programs for temples and palaces in the capital and regional centers, the shortage of a viable hinterland for the production of food for those large centers, all those administrators, the constant demand for labor—with all that, the need for direct plunder was difficult to avoid.<sup>37</sup> Here the inseparable role of the sacred emerges once again, for looting warfare was inescapably religious. Indeed, such war was obligatory, not optional. The gods declare war: the Assyrian king was their messenger and the “staff of their anger.” As Oded puts it:

There was no point at which the Assyrian expansion could stop as long as any country remained independent. In an orderly world the Assyrian king stood at the summit of the universal-political hierarchy. To reject this model of centralized universal empire would have meant violation of the world order; introduction of chaos; offence against the gods and rebellion against the “great king.”<sup>38</sup>

The catch is at least twofold. First, and somewhat counterintuitively, the very use of military force indicates a deeper weakness. In a situation of assured power, with unchallengeable hegemony, an empire does not need to use military force. Everyone knows it is there and that it is overwhelming; the slightest hint is enough. By contrast, in a situation of weakness, the exercise of military force becomes necessary. Yet the more it is used, even if it wins, the weaker it becomes. Why? The

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Tony Wilkinson et al., “Landscape and Settlement in the Neo-Assyrian Empire,” *BASOR* 340 (2005): 23–56; Bradley J. Parker, *The Mechanics of Empire: The Northern Frontier of Assyria as a Case Study in Imperial Dynamics* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2001). Yet these villages may also show persisting subsistence patterns even in the heart of Assyria.

<sup>36</sup> Liverani, *Prestige and Interest*, 115–25. The common themes of being surrounded by foes panting for one’s blood and of few fighting the vast hordes of the enemy are also found in the stories of Gideon (Judg 6–8) and in the psalms of complaint and lament.

<sup>37</sup> Yoffee, *Archaic State*, 151–53.

<sup>38</sup> Bustenay Oded, *War, Peace and Empire: Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reicher, 1991), 185; see also idem, “‘The Command of God’ as a Reason for Going to War in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,” in Cogan and Eph‘al, *Ah, Assyria*, 223–30.

fact that it needs to be used at all indicates that someone else is strong enough and bold enough to challenge that power; “And one dare leads to another.”<sup>39</sup> Second, it is difficult indeed to veer from that road without bringing the ideological edifice crashing down. Each year the armies wage campaigns in search of ever-new plunder, and a monarch who does not lead such an army would be shirking his responsibilities. Such a regime teeters on the perpetual edge of collapse: the need for ever more plunder requires perpetual expansion, for the plunder gathered is itself the result of long years of gathering riches in the states conquered. The problem is that such plunder is a nonrenewable resource. As long as ferocious expansion continues, this regime can be maintained. But as soon as it reaches its limits, it collapses spectacularly. Soon after Assyria achieved complete dominance in the seventh century BCE, it was gone.

Yet these specialists in hacking, burning, and raping their way into history did mark a profound shift: the regime of booty had shown what it could achieve, even though that achievement was deeply contradictory. Steel weapons and the new military tactics that followed enabled levels of cruelty not seen before, and that is saying something for ancient Southwest Asia. Etched into the metaphorical imagination (see 2 Kgs 19:17–18; Isa 10:5–7; 36–37) is the synonymous relation between “Assyrian” and “brutality.” Yet not everyone suffers as a new order makes its presence felt. The effect is haphazard, with some parts of the conquered territory destroyed and never to recover, while other parts flourish, unexpectedly and without a grand plan.<sup>40</sup> Then there is the sheer extent of the empire, impressive for its time, and

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<sup>39</sup> Wallerstein, *World-System II*, xxiv.

<sup>40</sup> For instance, the southern Levant shows that in the wake of Neo-Assyrian conquest, some areas underwent demographic recovery and flourished, while others remained relatively depopulated. Herrmann, “Empire in the House,” 307.



its ideology of expanding their own world of order,<sup>41</sup> which enabled new levels of access to resources (human and otherwise) and of interimperial exchange. It is not for nothing that the deep-seated notion, that plunder is the *raison d'être* of any state worthy of the name, is found throughout ancient Southwest Asia.<sup>42</sup> Although not all were willing to take it to the crude extremes of the Neo-Assyrians, all dreamed of empires like them.

### REFINING EXTRACTION

The best foreigner is a dead one, next comes a submitted one.

—Mario Liverani<sup>43</sup>

The difference between the Neo-Assyrians and the Persians may be characterized by the number of hypothetical “departments” they saw fit to exploit. The Neo-Assyrians favored one, the Department for Rude Plunder. The Persians made use of three: the Departments of Polite External Plunder, of Polite Internal Plunder, and of Elite Plunder. These spheres are tribute, taxation, and exchange. This is not to say that the Neo-Assyrians, or the Neo-Babylonians, for that matter, did not make use of the other three. Yet their roles were relatively minor. To their credit, the Persians managed a regime of booty that was a little more stable than that of the Neo-Assyrians.<sup>44</sup> I suggest three reasons why this was so, relating to the sacred, to the systematization of taxation, and to the role of coinage and markets in provisioning the empire and its armies.

In contrast to the Neo-Assyrians, who sought to impose a known world of “order” over the chaotic and barbarian neighbors—at least to the boundaries of that

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<sup>41</sup> Liverani, “Ideology of the Assyrian Empire”; idem, *Prestige and Interest*, 50–58.

<sup>42</sup> Liverani, *Prestige and Interest*, 135–43.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>44</sup> For a useful survey of Persian practices, in terms of continuing Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian practices and also innovations, see Grabbe, *Jews and Judaism*, 194–97.

world, marked by impassable mountains and seas—the Persians developed a religious framework more amenable to a diverse empire. The genius of what appears to be the curious choice of Zoroastrianism is that it held together both a universal henotheism and the diversity of lesser beings. So also, the empire was highly centralized and recognized linguistic and cultural diversity.<sup>45</sup> The inhabitants of the province of Yehud were clear beneficiaries of this policy and religious framework. Zoroastrianism also had a robust doctrine of evil, embodied in Angra Mainyu, the evil opponent of Ahura Mazda. I suggest that this evil and hostile spirit enabled and justified a pattern of covert violence that ran through the Persian system. That is, in order to protect against such evil, one needed modes of doing so: it may be through blunt force, but protection is more successful when embedded in the judiciary, in patterns of governance, surveillance, and economics. In these matters, the Persians were masters. As I have mentioned earlier, they were no less cruel than the Neo-Assyrians, but they were more refined about it. That all these religious developments were enabled both by the Realpolitik and economics of empire itself goes without saying; it is also clear that the new levels of abstraction were enabled by the widespread use of coinage (from ca. 500 BCE) in taxation and by the local markets that sprung up as by-products of the state's own interests (see my earlier discussion of these matters, in chap. 5). Here I add, in a dialectical approach I have used throughout, that these religious ideas were also causative in political and economic matters, without losing any of the materialist causation that was in play. In the end, Zoroastrianism was a creature of the Persian Empire, peculiarly suited to its size, diversity, and pomp.<sup>46</sup> This was not

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<sup>45</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 76–78.

<sup>46</sup> The eminent suitability of Zoroastrianism for such an empire also appealed to the Sassanids (224 CE to 651), who transformed and reshaped this religious form for their own purposes.

before it had influenced and impressed the scribes from that peripheral province who were penning the various scrolls that came to be the Hebrew Bible.

Further, alongside plunder and devastation, the Persians realized the need for systematic taxation, turning the whole empire into a regulated system of provinces (including that of Yehud). To overcome the inherent limitations of taxation, especially its relatively low and intermittent yields, the Persians constructed an empire of greater scale than all those that had gone before (from India to northern Greece, from central Asia to southern Egypt). Plunder was part of the expansion, but the size of the empire and systemic organization and enforcement of taxation enabled a slightly more stable form.

A breakthrough in this respect was the widespread use of coinage and thereby an increase in markets. As I argued in the preceding chapter, it is easy to be deceived by these developments. For those whose very ways of thinking are shaped within a capitalist neoclassical framework, they may seem to be signs of commercialization, individualization, and the pursuit of profit, for these are “natural” to human beings.<sup>47</sup> Instead, coinage solved the intractable problems of provisioning (initially armies), and markets were local by-products of this need. Once instigated, this system was extended to all levels of feeding the nonproducers: the emperor required taxes in coins; state officials and workers were paid in coin; farmers and craftspeople and village communes sold goods to those officials and workers, thereby obtaining the coins needed for taxation. The system could be expanded far beyond what had gone before, especially in a world without rapid and cheap transport, without the levels of accountancy and bureaucracy to which we have become accustomed. To be sure,

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<sup>47</sup> On the history of the scholarly search for Homo economicus and his propensity to trade in ancient Southwest Asia, see Excursus 3.

other modes of provisioning remained, with palatine estates and direct administrators, but these played second fiddle to the system of tribute-exchange.

Despite the breakthroughs of the Persians in terms of religion, imperial provisioning of the nonproducers, and expansion of the empire, the whole regime of booty was still deeply unstable. The Great King in all his extravagant pomp may have had a much wider base upon which to sustain a lavish court, he may have had a more efficient mode of provisioning and taxation, and he may have deployed a relatively sophisticated henotheism; yet the regime itself was prone to crisis. The limits of plunder were no longer to be found at the point where imperial expansion ceased, but with the tensions of taxation and exchange. At its simplest level, it is almost impossible to resist the temptation to expand taxation beyond what subsistence agriculture can manage, especially in a system without the universal presence of the wage relation.<sup>48</sup> Further, it may seem well to encourage people to sell local agricultural goods to state officials and workers, but every item they sell means less for their own subsistence survival. If farmers in village communes resort to maximal rather than optimal use of soil and animals, then they lose the crucial reserve for lean years. It goes without saying that selling off the thin surpluses kept for such years had a similar effect. One should not be surprised that the Persian Empire, for all its glory and geographical extent, lasted but two centuries: it fell with alarming abruptness at the hands of a small army of Greeks.<sup>49</sup>

## ***CONCLUSION***

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<sup>48</sup> The wage relation entails the near universal separation of producers from the means of production and thereby the need to sell their labor power to the owners of production in return for wages. Typical of capitalist production, it entails that wage labor does not constitute a full return for the labor sold, with the margin held by the owners of production. In the ancient world, some labor was remunerated with wages, but this was by no means universal and the pay was customary.

<sup>49</sup> At the same time, the Greeks and then the Romans tended to absorb many aspects of the sacred economy into their structures, albeit now as subordinate colonial zones.

And as for the villages, with their fields . . .

—Nehemiah 11:25

Where does ancient Israel fit into this picture of extractive regimes? I have already indicated that it was not a major player by any means in such regimes. For most of the time it was an object of conquest, a source of labor via deportations, a province that had to pay its taxes like any other—in short, a pawn in the larger machinations of regimes of plunder. Where it does come into its own is with the subsistence regime, whenever it gains the upper hand, as well as the regime of estates. As I pointed out in the chapter on estates (chap. 4), Israel did institute a fledgling estate system during its brief period of being a relatively independent little kingdom. The catch is that this effort was a sign of its peripheral economic status. In the earlier centuries of the first millennium (esp. Iron Age II), archaeological evidence suggests some moderate changes in economic activity, some population increase, enlargement of town size, construction of buildings consonant with state power, water systems, storage facilities, and the direction of goods toward those towns.<sup>50</sup> The dominant subsistence regime finds itself under threat from an extractive regime. It was not, however, a regime of booty—at least not yet, for soon enough the Neo-Assyrians would impose one. Rather, it was a state-directed, albeit limited, system of estates (and some village taxation) that sought to replace the subsistence regime.<sup>51</sup> The catch is that all this was chronically out of date. At a time when a regime of plunder was being established in wider ancient Southwest Asia, the petty despots in Israel were busy with trying to

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<sup>50</sup> For a recent survey of the archaeological material, with an argument that the Neo-Assyrian threat and invasion spurred on such activity, see Nam, *Economic Exchange*, 104–31. Yet his arguments for rational economic motives in Neo-Assyrian fortification and resettlement patterns are dubious. For a contrasting view, that punishment and pacification were the key reasons, see Bedford, “Persian Near East,” 308.

<sup>51</sup> The paradoxical marginality of Israel appears in texts such as Isa 5:8–10 and Mic 2:1–2, which, despite their vagueness, appear to critique the expansion of estates at the expense of subsistence survival in the village communes. That is, they critique an institutional form and thus a palatine regime that were marginal by the first millennium.

institute a palatine regime. It may have been appropriate to such a little kingdom, it may even have fostered dreams of imperial expansion (as we saw with the creative stories of Solomon), but it was also obsolete as a dominant regime.<sup>52</sup> In this light, at an imaginary level the repeated images of royal plenty and exorbitant demands for temple building and sacrifice—especially with Solomon’s vast amounts of flour, fattened oxen, grain-fed cattle, sheep, deer, roebucks, gazelles, and fatted fowl (1 Kgs 5:2–3 [ 4:22–23 ET]; see also 8:5, 63), as well as the extensive requirements for the temple (1 Kgs 6–8; see also Exod 25–31, 35–40; Lev 1–7; Num 3–10, 28–29)—try to imitate the excess of the estate systems of a bygone era. As I argued earlier, the Solomon narratives also offer a literary signal of the contradictory position in which Israel found itself (a palatine regime amid those of plunder), for they also attempt to depict an imperial expanse that dares to outdo those around them.

Of more interest is the dominant subsistence regime. As I indicated earlier, the most pertinent period is the last couple of centuries in the second millennium and the early years of the first. The subsistence regime brought stability over a long period, enabled the settlements in the Judean highlands, and resisted the first efforts to impose a regime of booty during the period of myriad weak states. And in peripheral zones such as the southern Levant, the subsistence regime had a much longer life. True, it was subordinate to the regime of booty in the first millennium, but even then resistance to that regime was strong, as the narrative depiction of the “people of the land” shows so well in Ezra–Nehemiah.<sup>53</sup> For the simple reason that survival was uppermost, the institutional forms of subsistence survival and kinship-household had

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<sup>52</sup> For a useful yet brief outline of this system, see Hopkins, “Bare Bones.” By contrast, a warning needs to be placed over the conservative proposal of Faust, “Household Economies.”

<sup>53</sup> I suggest that the account of Exod 1–15 may also be read as an antipalatine estate narrative, directly opposed to that of Joseph in Gen 41.

greater traction in those areas outside the spotlight of empires. At this level we may find some unexpected insights for economic possibilities today, but that is my concern in the book's conclusion.

## Conclusion

### ***A Subsistence Regime for Today?***

Come, my beloved,  
let us go forth into the fields,  
and lodge in the villages.

—Song of Songs 7:11

I have unashamedly set out to provide an overarching framework for understanding the economies of ancient Israel within the context of ancient Southwest Asia. The proposal has identified five institutional forms: subsistence survival, kinship-household, patronage, (e)states, and tribute-exchange. With some stronger and others weaker at different times, these institutional forms become distinct constellations or regimes, as I have called them in my adaptation of the Marxist school of economic thought called *Régulation* theory. Three operated across the time frames of ancient Southwest Asian history: the subsistence regime, the palatine regime, and variations on the regime of plunder. While the former was an allocative regime, the other two were extractive in terms of economic patterns. In all this the religious practice of everyday life made its presence felt through the modes of *régulation*, the cultural and social assumptions, the beliefs and compromises, the structures and norms, all ensuring that a particular regime functioned as well as it could. In this light, I have spoken of the “sacred economy,” although I would not object if one were to discern a thoroughly revised version of the Asiatic Mode of Production.<sup>1</sup>

I wrote “unashamedly” above since some would caution against such proposals, citing the paucity and lumpiness of the data available, along with the inability to provide much quantitative analysis. Others may point to the vast timescale

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<sup>1</sup> Even the thorough and cautious Lester Grabbe (*Jews and Judaism*, 191–92) is happy to use this term for the first millennium, especially for the Persian era.



in question, of millennia rather than centuries or even decades, thereby being wary of any framework at all. As I have already made clear, this stance would abdicate responsibility for the heuristic frameworks with which we all operate. Better to be clear about those deeper patterns and assumptions, as far as possible, than to bury one's head in the proverbial sand. It is not for nothing that I have drawn upon Soviet-era Russian scholarship, for here we do find a concern with discerning patterns amid the data, patterns that speak of the nature of longer economic cycles.

There is little need to reiterate my main points, since they are found in the overview of chapters provided in the introduction. In conclusion, however, I do wish to reemphasize one feature and address a slightly different question. Throughout the book I have sought to focus economic analysis on agriculture, especially the areas outside the control of imperial courts. Most economic analysis thus far has emphasized the centers of power, trying to find the core economic features in this area. I cannot stress enough that my emphasis is different, for the real core appeared in the agriculture of village communes, beyond the intermittent sway of petty despots and their hangers-on, and often even under their noses. Therefore temple and palace are not in the center of my analysis.

Now for the final question: what, if any, normative patterns emerge for considering economic life today? In various ways, many have asked this question of me during the long process of research and of thinking through the argument of the book. For example, one person from a secular commune, which seeks to live in ways different from capitalism, asked me what models are available for them and others. Another mentioned that she has been considering deeply a way of living that is economically, socially, and environmentally more responsible. Another, from nothing less than a Christian communist community, offered the wisdom of long experience in

living in such a fashion. A younger person from an urban environment gave me an insight into the way young people are eschewing the pursuit of a “successful” career, with its empty appurtenances of expensive cars, a big house, and 1.8 children. Instead, they seek new ideas for modes of engaging communally in a way that is informed by an agenda of widespread and fundamental social transformation. But these are intentional communities, trying to move away from the overtly capitalist patterns of everyday life. Yet many elsewhere are still engaged in subsistence economic forms close to what I have outlined earlier in this book, whether in the Pacific Islands, in Africa, or in other parts of the globe regarded as peripheral within the dominant economic mode of capitalism. They may do so in a way that envelops them within wider capitalist relations (selling “authentic” artifacts for occasional tourists, for instance), but they maintain a subsistence form. Or they may find that they revert to older practices of agriculture due to economic circumstances. I have found this to be the case in many visits to the re-agriculturalized parts of Eastern Europe, where the enforced “shock therapy” of Western European colonization since 1989 has de-industrialized the east and forced many to return to well-tried agricultural practices. In a very different situation, I have also encountered comparable approaches in the socialist environment of rural China, where no private property in land exists and agricultural land around villages is regularly reallocated according to ability and need.

So the question is well worth asking, but before I do so, let me be clear that I find the rather crude dismissals of supposedly theological concerns—on the basis of “ideological” bias (from European scholars) or the perverse argument that theology is a pseudodiscipline (from North American religion scholars fighting petty turf wars)—worthy of little serious consideration. I am also wary of those who like to make the move of connecting the economic conditions of (e.g.) eighth-century Palestine, with

life under modern capitalism. This is simultaneously a hermeneutic and homiletical move, whereby prophetic texts such as Mic 2:1–2 and Isa 5:8–10 are able to speak to us today. In both cases a structural economic shift (first millennium BCE or late capitalist globalization) has deleterious effects on farmers and small producers. This effort to connect biblical contexts with those of various phases of capitalist imperialism may be found in studies of the Hebrew prophets, the Roman Empire in early Christianity, or theologians and biblical scholars in the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> Economic depredations then and now become linked, imperial patterns show up similarities, so the biblical critiques of such exploitation speak once again today. Why am I wary? Although class conflict seems to repeat itself,<sup>3</sup> although powerful rulers and bosses seem to exploit the common people with dreary regularity, and although those exploited always struggle and resist, I would like to insist on the qualitative difference between modes of production, between the sacred economy (in this instance) and capitalism. Their structures and patterns are quite distinct, and only awareness of those differences can make any economic critique effective. At a deeper level, however, it is always easier to take a stance of opposition and bemoan the status quo, to criticize the acts of greedy tyrants and the oppressively wealthy, or for that matter, of sexists, racists, homophobes, and all those without whom the world would be a better place. Much more difficult is the task of proposing a viable alternative.

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<sup>2</sup> Premnath, “Latifundialization”; Chaney, “Bitter Bounty”; idem, “Whose Sour Grapes?”; idem, “Models Matter”; Matthew J. M. Coomber, *Re-reading the Prophets*; idem, ed., *Bible and Justice: Ancient Texts, Modern Challenges* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> As Marx and Engels eloquently observe: “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (1848; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 6:477–519, esp. 479.

From the sacred economy, there is obviously little to be gained from the regimes of (e)states or of tribute-exchange, for these are predominantly extractive regimes, predicated on palatine and imperial exploitation, on marked division of labor and class conflict. Above all, they are inherently unstable, desperately trying to manage one crisis after another. That leaves us with the subsistence regime, with its institutional forms of subsistence survival, kinship-household, and patronage (in its more benign form). Is this a preferred economic regime? Earlier I tentatively suggested that it might prove to be so. The reasons are not difficult to find.

First, the subsistence regime operates according to optimal rather than maximal engagement with nature, preferring modes of animal husbandry, crop management, and human population at well below the carrying capacity. As one example, this regime prefers animals that have minimal impact on their environment, rather than the bovines, which suck up water and fodder as though they were nothing. Compare the daily provision of “ten fat oxen” to Solomon’s mythical court (1 Kgs 5:3 [ 4:23 ET]), oxen that may well be illustrated by the Egyptian practice of fattening cows so much that they could no longer walk and had to be transported in carts. By contrast, an optimal approach does not operate for the sake of prestige, power, profit, or greed, but to ensure survival in the lean time that is always just around the corner.

Second, the subsistence regime seeks not choice portions characteristic of ruling-class practices, not the luxury foods that seek to mark that class and those who aspire to it from the common herd. Rather, it is all-inclusive, making use of everything, whether all parts of animals or every possible part of a plant. Nothing is wasted: if it can be used, it will be used, and then again. Third, diversity is crucial, for this provides security in the long term: diversity in terms of food, shelter, and minimizing the risks of disease. When I mentioned security in my earlier discussion, I

had in mind security of human life in an environment that could at any time threaten that security. But that is to separate human beings from their natural environment in all its unpredictability. What I mean here is that security is for the natural environment as a whole, a security ensured also by optimal and all-inclusive strategies.

Finally, the subsistence regime is stable, through well-tried strategies. As I argued in the last chapter, a subsistence regime is really the stable basis of ancient Southwest Asia. In my effort to overturn the assumption that crisis and collapse are what happens when an empire falls, when a palatine or plunder regime breaks apart, and when a supposed “dark age” ensues, I argued that crisis is the reality of those regimes and the little and big kingdoms that fostered them. Instead, the long periods of the subsistence regime were much preferred by the majority, the system to which people reverted whenever they could. Even more, the subsistence regime provides the constitutive resistance (a term I borrow from Antonio Negri) of ancient Israel and ancient Southwest Asia. That is, it was the regime against which the extractive regimes constantly directed their energies, seeking ever new ways to undermine the resilience and persistence of that regime.

Optimal, all-inclusive, diverse, secure, and stable—to these I add the assumption that human beings need not much, but little. No wonder this regime has been so resilient through human history. In our own day, terms such as environmentally sustainable and economically equal might be used for such an approach. I find it intriguing that in the marginal area of the southern Levant, or ancient Israel, this was the dominant regime, being eclipsed from time to time (the brief period of the little kingdom and then under imperial control as a province), yet reasserting itself once again.

Nevertheless, there is a problem. The way this regime manifests itself in ancient Israel is not particularly favorable in terms of gender and age, and in relation to outsiders. On the last point, it often played a double game, putting on a show of resisting outsiders ideologically and even judicially, yet using those very patterns to include outsiders where needed (by making them one of “us”). I suggest that these drawbacks are due to the fact that within this regime the institutional form of subsistence survival was laced up with kinship-household and patronage. I have yet to hear an argument in favor of kinship as a model of human organization. Kinship may provide some level of security and social cohesion in particular circumstances, but it is geared toward abuse of the young, of women, and of the elderly. Patriarchal and hierarchical, it is hardly a model for human flourishing. In our own day, “family values” mean sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. Growing up means that an individual has to come to terms with the damage to oneself inflicted by one’s parents, siblings, and other relatives. And patronage, with its patterns of honor and shame, of loyalty and solidarity with the patron, is characteristic of criminals, politicians, and the wealthy (not to mention many academic systems).

In that light, I suggest that the institutional form of subsistence survival may be viable only if it dispenses with other forms that are hierarchical and abusive, that seek security at the cost of women, outsiders, and the vulnerable. It requires not a return to some idealized and mythical earlier practice, when the world was a simpler and happier place, as the conservatives would have us believe.<sup>4</sup> Rather, it may form part of a reshaped regime, with the institutional form of subsistence survival at its

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<sup>4</sup> “When Marx and Engels spoke of primitive communism, they *never* entertained such a simplistic thesis, for they always used to protest against what they called the idea of a primitive ‘El Dorado’ and tirelessly insisted upon the fact that even in the most primitive societies, there would seem to exist at least three forms of inequality: between men and women; between senior and junior generations; and between autochthons and foreigners.” Godelier, *The Mental and the Material*, 78.

core, but with very different types of social organization and modes of *régulation* (these often tend to be religious). This regime may well provide a model for those seeking a different path. It would be one that is environmentally and economically sustainable, communal, optimal, all-inclusive, diverse, secure, and stable, but also one that has gender, ethnic, and sexual equality. A pipe dream in our day and age? Not at all: around the world many communities, both local and national, provide ample examples, continuing earlier practices or seeking new ways to make such an approach work.

# ***Excursuses***

## **EXCURSUS 1: ECONOMIC MODELS**

Detailed theoretical treatments of economic models in relation to ancient Southwest Asia are relatively few, let alone the systematic deployment of critical theory as such. Liverani (*Myth and Politics*) is the notable exception in terms of critical theory, while Milevski's Marxist study (*Goods Exchange*) is a refreshing recent addition, to be added to the Soviet-era Russian scholars I discuss below. Further, Liverani's efforts to provide some quantitative economic analysis of the basis of scarce materials may be seen as an attempt to overcome David C. Hopkins's observation ("Bare Bones," 123): "There are few numbers, and fewer still are reliable; there are no statistics and no broad cliometric data. Quantification, the great desideratum of every economic historian, is beyond our reach for most aspects of the economy." Some others have discussed theoretical matters with less success. Both Schloen (*House*) and McGeough (*Exchange Relationships*) discuss socioeconomic models at some length. Unfortunately, Schloen is misled by his devotion to Ricoeur and Weber (his idiosyncratic and often ill-informed discussions of Marxism should be avoided), while McGeough's strength is his survey of other approaches (to Ugarit); his deployment of a "Network" model is the weakest part of his study. Glass's overview ("Land, Labor and Law," 11–35) of some models used for the economics of Persian-era Yehud are also useful although somewhat restricted, as she acknowledges. The survey of scholarship and theoretical models of the economies of the Mediterranean by Ian Morris and Joseph Gilbert Manning ("Introduction," in *Ancient Economy*, 1–44) has occasional snippets of useful information, but it is largely misdirected and unhelpful. I hoped Jeremiah W. Cataldo's idiosyncratic study (*Breaking Monotheism: Yehud and the Material Formation of Monotheistic Identity* [New York: Bloomsbury, 2012]) would be more useful, given its engagement with Marx, Deleuze, and other sundry theorists, but its economic discussions are in the end rather thin. Finally, I



had high hopes for Marc Van de Mieroop's study ("Economic Theories") but was disappointed by its lack of depth.

## EXCURSUS 2: CLASSICAL ECONOMIC THEORY AND RELIGION

In relation to the growth of classical economic theory, the key is clearly the Bible, due to its central role in the formation of classical economics, let alone other disciplines in eighteenth- and even nineteenth-century European societies. Thus I am less interested in the rather loose and at times sloppy studies that invoke some vague notion of religion or theology, and the connections with economics. Their efforts are predicated on the assumption that one can engage in economics imperialism with religion as well. Albino Barrera, *Market Complicity and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Bradley Bateman, "Presidential Address: Reflections on the Secularization of American Economics," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 30, no. 1 (2008): 1–20; idem, "In a Space of Questions: A Reflection on Religion and Economics at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century," *History of Political Economy* 43, no. 2 (2011): 389–411; H. Geoffrey Brennan and Anthony Waterman, eds., *Economics and Religion: Are They Distinct?* (Boston: Kluwer, 1994); Duncan Foley, *Adam's Fallacy: A Guide to Economic Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006); Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Introduction to the Economics of Religion," *JEL* 36, no. 3 (1998): 1165–95; Rachel McCleary and Robert Barro, "Religion and Economy," *JEP* 20, no. 2 (2006): 49–72; Deidre N. McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Robert H. Nelson, *Economics as Religion: From Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); idem, "What Is Economic Theology?," *PSB* 25, no. 1 (2004): 58–79; Paul Oslington, ed., *Economics and Religion* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2003); idem, ed., *Adam Smith as Theologian* (London: Routledge, 2011); Tomas Sedlacek, *Economics of Good and Evil: The Quest for Economic Meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Max L.

Stackhouse, *Globalization and Grace*, vol. 1 of *God and Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2007); Waterman, *Revolution, Economics*; idem, *Political Economy*. Some of these may be seen to take up the unfinished project of Viner, who problematically and rather loosely sought to trace the theological influences on economics from the first century BCE until today—problematic since he assumed the history of economics was a narrative of increasing complexity of the same “core” element of the market. Jacob Viner, *The Role of Providence in the Social Order: An Essay in Intellectual History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); idem, *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

### **EXCURSUS 3: NEOCLASSICAL APPROACHES TO ANCIENT SOUTHWEST ASIA**

A number of research projects from the 1990s onward have in all seriousness searched for our dreadfully incompetent and incapable Homo economicus at the earliest moments of human economic activity. The guilty parties have been an odd coterie from Stanford University, the project directed by Michael Hudson, the Vienna START project, and the Dutch “Economy of Ancient Mesopotamia” group. The last in particular strikes me as a curious throwback to sixteenth-century Netherlands’ role as the first capitalist empire. With the perceived new order after 1989, our Dutch friends seem keen to show that the entrepreneurial spirit that prevailed in their Lowlands in the sixteenth century was the same spirit that was at work in the fourth millennium BCE. Michael Hudson and Baruch A. Levine, *Privatization in the Ancient Near East*; idem, eds., *Urbanization and Land Ownership in the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1999); Hudson and Van de Mierop, eds., *Debt and Economic Renewal*; Hudson and Wunsch, eds., *Creating Economic Order*; Jan Gerrit Dercksen, ed., *Trade and Finance in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1999); Manning and Morris, *Ancient Economy*; van Driel, *Elusive Silver*; Wolfgang Reinhard and Justin Stagl,

eds., *Menschen und Märkte: Studien zur historischen Wirtschaftsanthropologie*, rev. ed. (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2007); Baker and Jursa, eds., *Babylonian Economy*.

In addition to these groupings, for the most extreme examples of efforts to deploy a neoclassical approach to what mysteriously becomes a fully fledged capitalist market economy, see Morris Silver, *Prophets and Markets: The Political Economy of Ancient Israel* (Boston: Kluwer Nijhoff, 1983); idem, *Economic Structures of the Ancient Near East* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1986); idem, *Economic Structures of Antiquity* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995); idem, “Modern Ancients,” in *Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World: Means of Transmission and Cultural Interaction*, ed. Robert Rollinger and Christoph Ulf (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004), 65–86. See also Algaze, *Uruk World System*; idem, *Ancient Mesopotamia*; André Gunder Frank, “Bronze Age World System Cycles”; Michael Hudson and Baruch A. Levine, “Privatization: A Survey of Unresolved Controversies,” in Hudson and Levine, *Privatization in the Ancient Near East*, 1–32; Michael Hudson, “The Dynamics of Privatization, from the Bronze Age to the Present,” in *ibid.*, 33–72; idem, “Introduction: The New Economic Archaeology of Urbanization,” in Hudson and Levine, *Urbanization and Land Ownership*, 9–15; idem, “Summary Review: From Open Lands to Private Ownership,” in *ibid.*, 481–89; idem, “Reconstructing the Origins of Interest-Bearing Debt and the Logic of Clean Slates,” in Hudson and Van de Mierop, *Debt and Economic Renewal*, 7–58; Muhammad A. Dandamaev, “Age of Privatization”; idem, “Land Use in the Sippar Region during the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods,” in Hudson and Levine, *Urbanization and Land Ownership*, 363–89, esp. 379; McNutt, *Society of Ancient Israel*, 195; Thompson, *Mythic Past*; Goddeeris, *Economy and Society*, 370, 372; Wunsch, “Debt, Interest”; David A. Warburton, *Macroeconomics from the Beginning: The General Theory, Ancient Markets, and the Rate of Interest* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003); Alfredo Mederos and Carl C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, “Weight Systems and Trade Networks in the Old World (2500–1000 BC),” in Hudson and Wunsch, *Creating Economic Order*, 199–214; Monroe, *Scales of Fate*.

We can trace a rough development of these assumptions as we survey scholarship on ancient Southwest Asia concerning markets and the growing reach of *Homo economicus*. Initially and at a minimal level, the existence of exchange and markets in the first millennium BCE was permitted, so much so that commercialization and profit generated a fundamental change in economic and psychosocial sensibilities. But then some scholars began to push back into the second millennium, arguing for similar patterns during the Bronze Age, so much so that there was little that changed by the time of the first millennium. Emboldened—also by the “victory” over communism in 1989—some drove the analysis back to the ultimate point, the Uruk phenomenon. This deep-seated economic change at the first urban center and its later expansion into northern Mesopotamia was, it is suggested, due to the entrepreneurial spirit at the heart of human nature—*Homo economicus*—in which trade and its consequent wealth was the prime cause. See Govert van Driel, “Capital Formation and Investment in an Institutional Context in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in Dercksen, *Trade and Finance*, 25–42; Jan Gerrit Dercksen, *Old Assyrian Institutions* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2004); Algaze, *Ancient Mesopotamia*; Hald, *Years of Farming*, 15–19, 30. This extreme proposal has suffered a series of telling critiques, indicating that long-distance trade was by no means the reason for such changes. Akkermans and Schwartz, *Archaeology of Syria*, 204–5; Geoff Emberling and Helen McDonald, “Excavations at Tell Brak 2001–2002: Preliminary Report,” *Iraq* 65 (2003): 1–75; Glenn M. Schwartz, “Syria and the Uruk Expansion,” in *Uruk Mesopotamia and Its Neighbors: Cross-Cultural Interactions in the Era of State Formation*, ed. Mitchell S. Rothman (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2001), 233–64. For a far more insightful and comprehensive proposal regarding the Uruk revolution, see Liverani, *Uruk*.

#### **EXCURSUS 4: BRANCHES OF *RÉGULATION* THEORY**

Jessop and Sum (*Beyond the Regulation*, 13–57) provide an excellent survey of the various branches, emphases, and key theorists of the *régulation* approach, distinguishing no less than seven groups. Beyond the three French groups, they include the Amsterdam school, the West

German theorists, the “Nordic models” group, and the American radicals. As representative works, see especially Michel Aglietta, “Phases of US Capital Expansion,” *NLR* 110 (1978): 17–28; idem, *Capitalist Regulation*; Joachim Becker, *Akkumulation, Regulation, Territorium: Zur kritischen Rekonstruktion der französischen Regulationstheorie* (Marburg: Metropolis Verlag, 2002); Bellet, “La régulation”; Bertrand Billaudot, *L’ordre économique de la société moderne: Un réexamen de la théorie de la régulation* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996); Robert Boyer, *La théorie de la régulation: Une analyse critique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1986); idem, *Regulation School*; idem, *Une théorie du capitalisme: Est-elle possible?* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004); Boyer and Saillard, *Régulation Theory*; Benjamin Coriat, “La théorie de la régulation: Origines, spécificités et perspectives,” in *École de la Régulation et critique de la raison économique*, ed. Farida Sebaï and Carlo Vercellone (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994), 101–52; Michael Dunford, “Theories of Regulation,” *EaPD* 8, no. 3 (1990): 297–321; Kurt Hübner, *Theorie der Regulation: Eine kritische Rekonstruktion eines neuen Ansatzes der Politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin: Edition Sigma, 1989); Alain Lipietz, *Le capital et son espace* (Paris: Maspéro, 1977); idem, *Crise et inflation, pourquoi? L’accumulation intensive* (Paris: Maspéro, 1979); idem, *Mirages and Miracles*; idem, “Accumulation, Crises”; idem, “From Althusserianism to ‘Regulation Theory,’” in *The Althusserian Legacy*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso Books, 1993), 99–138; Alain Noël, “Accumulation, Regulation, and Social Change: An Essay on French Political Economy,” *IO* 41, no. 2 (1987): 303–33; Bruno Théret, *Régimes économiques de l’ordre politique: Esquisse d’une théorie régulationniste des limites de l’état* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992); Jean-François Vidal, “Birth and Growth of the French Regulation School in the French Intellectual Context,” in *Institutional Economics in France and Germany: German Ordoliberalism versus the French Regulation School*, ed. Agnes Labrousse and Jean-Daniel Weisz (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2001), 13–48.

## EXCURSUS 5: SOURCES FOR ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

The analysis of animal husbandry in chap. 2 draws upon a range of sources, some of more use than others: Gudrun Dahl and Anders Hjort, *Having Herds: Pastoral Herd Growth and Household Economy* (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1976); Hesse, “Pig Lovers”; idem, “Animal Bone Analysis”; Brian Hesse and Paula Wapnish, *Animal Bone Archaeology from Objectives to Analysis* (Washington DC: Taraxacum, 1985); idem, “Commodities and Cuisine”; idem, “Archaeozoological Perspective”; Hesse, Fulton, and Wapnish, “Animal Remains”; Amiran Shkolnik, “Physiological Adaptations to the Environment: The Israeli Experience,” in *The Zoogeography of Israel*, ed. Yoram Yom-Tov and Eitan Tchernov, *Monographiae biologicae* 62 (Dordrecht: W. Junk, 1988), 487–96; J. Nicholas Postgate and Marvin A. Powell, eds., *Domestic Animals of Mesopotamia*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Sumerian Agriculture Group, 1993–95); Michael L. Ryder, “Sheep and Goat Husbandry with Particular Reference to Textile Fiber and Milk Production,” *BSA* 7 (1993): 9–32; Terry P. O’Connor, *The Archaeology of Animal Bones* (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2000); Paula Wapnish and Brian Hesse, “Archaeozoology,” in *Near Eastern Archaeology: A Reader*, ed. Suzanne Richard (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 17–26; Hitomi Hongo et al., “Sheep and Goat Remains from Çayönü Tepesi, Southeastern Anatolia,” in *Archaeozoology of the Near East VI: Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium on the Archaeozoology of Southwestern Asia and Adjacent Areas*, ed. Hijlke Buitenhuis et al. (Groningen: Centre for Archeological Research and Consultancy, Rijksuniversiteit, 2005), 112–23; David B. Landon, “Zooarchaeology and Historical Archaeology: Progress and Prospects,” *JAMT* 12 (2005): 1–36; Aharon Sasson, “The Role of Cattle and Economic Strategies in the Bronze and Iron Age at Tell Beer-Sheba, Israel,” in Hijlke Buitenhuis, et al., *Archaeozoology of the Near East VI*, 208–21; idem, “Sheep and Goat Husbandry”; idem, *Animal Husbandry*; Arbuckle, “Caprine Exploitation”; Piro, “Pastoral Economies”; idem, “Pastoralism”; Marom and Zuckerman, “On-Site Analysis,” 42–46. Although the data provided by Hesse and Wapnish is useful, they work within a theoretical framework that may be called a narrative of specialization: human societies move on a path from simplicity to specialization, based on rational economic

activity. In the later stages of that path, surpluses, markets, and exchange are the natural outcome. Obviously this framework is indebted to the pervasive myth of Adam Smith.

For a thorough sense of the development of zooarchaeology, see the conference volumes of the International Council for Archaeozoology, such as Hjlke Buitenhuis and Anneke T. Clason, eds., *Archaeozoology of the Near East: Proceedings of the First International Symposium on the Archaeozoology of Southwestern Asia and Adjacent Areas* (Leiden: Universal Book Services, 1993); Hjlke Buitenhuis and Hans-Peter Uerpman, eds., *Archaeozoology of the Near East II: Proceedings of the Second International Symposium on the Archaeozoology of Southwestern Asia and Adjacent Areas* (Leiden: Backhuys, 1995); Hjlke Buitenhuis, László Bartosiewicz, and Alice M. Choyke, eds., *Archaeozoology of the Near East III: Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on the Archaeozoology of Southwestern Asia and Adjacent Areas* (Groningen: Center for Archaeological Research, Rijksuniversiteit, 1998); Marjan Mashkour et al., eds., *Archaeozoology of the Near East IV: Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium on the Archaeozoology of Southwestern Asia and Adjacent Areas* (Groningen: Centre for Archeological Research and Consultancy, Rijksuniversiteit, 2000); Hjlke Buitenhuis et al., eds., *Archaeozoology of the Near East V: Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium on the Archaeozoology of Southwestern Asia and Adjacent Areas* (Groningen: Centre for Archeological Research and Consultancy, Rijksuniversiteit, 2002); Hjlke Buitenhuis et al., eds., *Archaeozoology of the Near East VI: Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium on the Archaeozoology of Southwestern Asia and Adjacent Areas* (Groningen: Centre for Archeological Research and Consultancy, Rijksuniversiteit, 2005); Emmanuelle Vila et al., eds., *Archaeozoology of the Near East VIII: Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium on the Archaeozoology of Southwestern Asia and Adjacent Areas* (Lyon: Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée, 2008). In Egypt too subsistence survival was important, but its shape and function were affected both by the dominant riverine environment and the long history of class difference. See Brewer, “Hunting, Animal Husbandry.”

## **EXCURSUS 6: SHORTAGE OF LABOR**

The references for the shortage of labor in ancient Southwest Asia are extensive. See Igor M. Diakonoff, “Structure of Near Eastern Society,” 57–58; idem, “Cities of the Medes,” in Cogan and Eph‘al, *Ah, Assyria*, 13–20, esp. 19; Liverani, “Ville et campagne,” 251; idem, “Ugaritic Royal Farms,” 131–32; Michalowski, *Letters*, 29, 50, 75; Roth, *Law Collections*, 19, 65, 84, 88–91, 121–23, 170, 173–74, 178–83, 218, 220, 222–25, 234; Govert van Driel, “Land in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Landless and Hungry? Access to Land in Early and Traditional Societies*, ed. Ben Haring and Remco de Maaijer (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1998), 19–49; Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 12, 15, 25–26, 35, 39–40, 45, 56–57, 62, 66–67, 71, 83, 91, 98–99, 165, 178; Carlo Zaccagnini, “Economic Aspects of Land Ownership and Land Use in Northern Mesopotamia and Syria from the Late Third Millennium to the Neo-Assyrian Period,” in Hudson and Levine, *Urbanization and Land Ownership*, 342–43; Van de Mieroop, “Near Eastern Debt?,” 66, 77–79, 82, 83–84; Steinkeller, “Money-Lending Practices,” 113, 119; Matthew W. Stolper, “Farming with the Marašûs and Others: Costs and Returns of Cereal Agriculture in Fifth-Century Babylonian Texts,” in Baker and Jursa, *Babylonian Economy*, 327; Bojana Janković, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: An Aspect of the Manpower Problem in the Agricultural Sector of Eanna,” in *ibid.*, 167–82; Gershon Galil, *The Lower Stratum Families in the Neo-Assyrian Period* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), 348–50; Knight, *Law, Power*, 140–41; Guillaume, *Land, Credit*, 227–29; Steven J. Garfinkle, “Ancient Near Eastern City-States,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 94–119, esp. 113.

In the Hebrew Bible, tort laws concerning injury may be found in Exod 21:18, 22–25; Deut 25:11–12; 27:24; Lev 24:19–20. In light of this situation, some of the earlier landmark studies of agriculture such as that by Eric Wolf, especially in their efforts to provide typologies, err by focusing too heavily on land and land use, in terms of fallowing, crop rotation, and so on. One wonders what such a global typology in terms of labor would look like (Wolf, *Peasants*). Amid his characteristic comprehensiveness, Renger misses this crucial



distinction: Johannes M. Renger, “Institutional, Communal, and Individual Ownership or Possession of Arable Land in Ancient Mesopotamia from the End of the Fourth to the End of the First Millennium BC,” in *Symposium on Ancient Law, Economics, and Society, Part II*, ed. James Lindgren, Robert Mayali, and Geoffrey P. Miller (Chicago: Chicago-Kent College of Law and Illinois Institute of Technology, 1995), 269–319.

### **EXCURSUS 7: VILLAGE COMMUNE AND *MUSHA*<sup>ʿ</sup>**

The following excursus relates to both the village commune analyzed by Soviet-era Russian scholars and *musha*<sup>ʿ</sup> farming studied by other scholars.

On the village commune, see Diakonoff, “Commune in the Ancient East”; idem, “The Rural Community”; idem, “Structure of Near Eastern Society,” 35; idem, “General Outline,” 34–35; idem, “Despotisms in Mesopotamia,” 88; Jankowska, “Communal Self-Government”; idem, “Asshur, Mitanni, and Arrapkhe,” 253; Vasil’ev and Stuchevskii, “Precapitalist Societies,” 28–32; Roger P. Bartlett, ed., *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia: Communal Forms in Imperial and Early Soviet Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990).

The term *musha*<sup>ʿ</sup> was first used by Bergheim in the late nineteenth century. Samuel Bergheim, “Land Tenure in Palestine,” *PEFQ* 26, no. 3 (1894): 191–99. See further: Adams, “Property Rights”; Helga Seeden and Muhamed Kaddour, “Space, Structures and Land in Shams ed Dīn Tannīra on the Euphrates: An Ethnoarchaeological Perspective,” in Khalidi, *Land Tenure and Social Transformation*, 495–526; Granott, *Land System of Palestine*; Jacques Weulersse, *Paysans de Syrie et du Proche Orient* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946); Amos Nadan, “Colonial Misunderstanding of an Efficient Peasant Institution,” *JESHO* 46 (2003): 320–54; idem, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy under the Mandate: A Story of Colonial Bungling* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Ya’akov Firestone, “The Land-equalizing *Mushā*<sup>ʿ</sup> Village,” in *Ottoman Palestine*, ed. Gad G. Gilbar (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 91–130; Schäbler, “Practicing *Musha*<sup>ʿ</sup> .” To the advantage of those who have studied these practices closely, for the Ottoman period maps of *musha*<sup>ʿ</sup> field systems, or at

least post-*musha'* landscapes that retain the patterns of earlier practices, have been published. See Wilkinson, "The Tell," 58; Weulersse, *Paysans de Syrie*, fig. 37.

A consistent thread showing some awareness of this approach to agriculture appears among biblical commentators, albeit with more or less specificity. Albrecht Alt, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, vol. 3 (Munich: Beck, 1959), 348–72; Katherine Helen Henrey, "Land Tenure in the Old Testament," *PEQ* 86 (1954): 5–15; Josef Kohler, "Gemeinderschaft und Familiengut im israelitischen Recht," *ZVR* 17 (1959): 217–22; Edward Neufeld, "The Emergence of a Royal-Urban Society in Ancient Israel," *HUCA* 31 (1960): 31–53, esp. 32; Karl Elliger, "Allotment," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:85–86; Marvin L. Chaney, "Ancient Palestinian Peasant Movements and the Formation of Premonarchic Israel," in *Palestine in Transition: The Emergence of Ancient Israel*, ed. David Noel Freedman and David Frank Graf (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 39–90, esp. 64–65; Stephen A. Kaufman, "A Reconstruction of the Social Welfare System of Ancient Israel," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honour of G. W. Ahlstrom*, ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 277–86, esp. 280; Niels Peter Lemche, *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy*, trans. Frederick H. Cryor (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 196–98; Wright, *God's People*, 70; Shunya Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel: The Institution of the Family (Beit 'ab) from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy* (Jerusalem: Simor, 1996), 141–60.

### **EXCURSUS 8: PRIVATE PROPERTY**

The question of private property, or rather its absence in ancient Southwest Asia, is beyond my remit here, save to note Steinkeller's observation: the category of absolute private property in land in ancient economies is "useless, confusing and harmful." Or more fully, "That an individual, separate from a social group, could be sole and exclusive owner of

immovable property is a very recent notion; . . . it is impossible to speak of private or individual property . . . when referring to the situations existing in ancient times.” Piotr Steinkeller, “Private Economic Activity,” 93; idem, “Land-Tenure Conditions in Third-Millennium Babylonia: The Problem of Regional Variation,” in *Urbanization and Land Ownership in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael Hudson and Baruch A. Levine (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1999), 289–329, esp. 296. See further Schloen, *House*, 231; Carl Brinkman, “Land Tenure,” in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. Edwin R. A. Seligman (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 9:73–76, esp. 74; Diakonoff, “Slaves, Helots,” 51; Godelier, *The Mental and the Material*, 85; Deist, *Material Culture*, 143–44; Guillaume, *Land, Credit*, 10–12.

Relevant biblical texts include Abraham’s acquisition of the field of Machpelah in Gen 23; Jacob and the issue of land for an altar in Gen 33:19–20; stipulations regarding inheritance, redemption, and jubilees in Lev 25 and 27; Boaz’s acquisition from Naomi of both land and woman in Ruth 4; David and the threshing floor of Araunah in 2 Sam 24:18–25 (1 Chr 21:18–22:1); Ahab and Naboth’s vineyard in 1 Kgs 21; Jeremiah and the field of his cousin Hanamel in Jer 32:6–15; various texts in the Psalms and the Prophets that concern *naḥ ʾālā*. For a study of these texts and of the invention of private property by the Romans, see Roland Boer, “A Dead Spouse, a Vegetable Garden, and a Destitute Woman: On Private Property and the Hebrew Bible” (forthcoming).

### EXCURSUS 9: IGOR M. DIAKONOFF

Deploying Igor Mikhailovich Diakonoff requires a degree of distillation, for his insightful Marxist framework is mingled with some very traditional assumptions concerning scholarship and the nature of texts. In particular I think of his use of the technical terminology of “private” and “free” with respect to sectors of the economy and the nature of labor, and his tendency to focus on land rather than labor and usufruct. I indicated my reservations on these matters in the body of my argument. Diakonoff first outlined his basic proposal in 1952, but

the English texts typically lagged behind the Russian material; they were usually presented as overviews of his whole position, without detailed referencing. Eventually he was able to publish an extensive text in English in 1982: Diakonoff, “Structure of Near Eastern Society.” Detailed terminology designating the palatine estates and subsistence laborers, ranging over Sumerian, Old Babylonian, Hittite, Assyrian, Syrian, and Phoenician situations, may be found on pages 27–29 of that study. For other works that make many of the same points, yet with noticeable developments until the consummate statement of *The Paths of History*, see Igor M. Diakonoff, “Commune in the Ancient Near East”; idem, “Die hethitische Gesellschaft,” *MIOF* 13 (1967): 313–66; idem, “Agrarian Conditions in Middle Assyria,” trans. G. M. Sergheyev, in Diakonoff, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 204–34; idem, “Economy in the Monarchies”; idem, “Old Babylonian Society”; idem, “Socio-Economic Classes”; idem, “Rural Community”; idem, “Slaves, Helots”; idem, “Extended Families”; idem, “Slave-Labour vs. Non-Slave Labour: The Problem of Definition,” in *Labor in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marvin A. Powell (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1987), 1–3; idem, “General Outline”; idem, *Paths of History*, 21–55; cf. Melikishvili, “Some Aspects,” 36–49.

Liverani too requires distillation, for he mingles some very mechanistic Marxist categories (e.g., ideology is false consciousness; religion involves a hypostatic process) with some wayward ideas concerning modes of production, a curious theological tone deafness, and some strangely modern assumptions concerning the clear demarcation of the boundaries of states. With these qualifications in mind, I still find his work rather valuable: Mario Liverani, “Communautés de village”; idem, “Ideology of the Assyrian Empire”; idem, “Ras Shamra”; idem, “Ville et campagne”; idem, “Communautés rurales”; idem, “Land Tenure”; idem, “Collapse”; idem, “Ugaritic Royal Farms”; idem, *Israel’s History*, 17–24; idem, *Uruk*.

Michael Heltzer has provided a significant body of detailed technical analysis, albeit primarily of the documents. Generally this provides good background material, although he loses himself a little too often among the trees and thereby can be somewhat loose concerning the forest. His variation on Diakonoff is to describe the system (mainly at Ugarit) as a “Royal Service System,” in which both communal land and estates were under royal control. See

Michael Heltzer, *Rural Community*; idem, “Mortgage of Land Property and Freeing from It in Ugarit,” *JESHO* 19, no. 1 (1976): 89–95; idem, “The Metal Trade of Ugarit and the Problem of Transportation of Commercial Goods,” *Iraq* 39 (1977): 203–11; idem, *Goods, Prices*; idem, *Kingdom of Ugarit*; idem, “Labour in Ugarit,” in *Labor in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marvin A. Powell (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1987), 237–50.

### EXCURSUS 10: SLAVERY

Slavery has received more attention than it deserves in the study of ancient Southwest Asia. In Soviet-era Russian scholarship, the influence of the category of slavery was due initially to a four-hour (!) lecture in 1933 by Vasilii Vasil’evich Struve, at the Academy of the History of Material Culture in Leningrad. His target was feudalism, which had been entertained briefly in the USSR but had an afterlife in Western scholarship into the 1970s. In a broad sweep that covered all of the key documents then available in the histories of Mesopotamia and Egypt, Struve went on to persuade most scholars that the evidence pointed toward a slave mode of production. Even though slaves were numerically inferior to various other classes, such as “free” laborers or landholders, these slaves were owned collectively by the state and temple complexes, worked the year-round, and were therefore the dominant means for the extraction of surplus value. Although his proposal swept the field in Soviet scholarship, it underwent variations and modifications until it died the death of a thousand qualifications some three decades later (by the 1960s Struve himself accepted a revised version of the “Asiatic Mode of Production,” albeit with a significant component of slavery). The problems are that the means of physical coercion, in terms of personnel and weapons technology, were not sufficient for a predominant slave economy, nor was there an ideological framework or mode of *régulation* that made slavery a primary feature. Occasionally captives from war (typically young boys and girls) may have become slaves, in the sense that someone or some group had lifelong possession and control over another’s life. However, I suggest that we may read the whole debate over slavery as a way of expressing the fact that nearly all labor in ancient Southwest

Asia, indeed in the world as such, was indentured and thereby unfree. In his later works, Diakonoff calls them “serfs.” This reality meant that the actual living conditions of the different laborers differed little.

See Suret-Canale, Godelier, and Struve, “Asian Mode”; Vasilii Vasil’evich Struve, “The Problem of the Genesis, Development and Disintegration of the Slave Societies in the Ancient Orient,” trans. Inna Levit, in Diakonoff, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 17–69; idem, “Some New Data on the Organization of Labour and on Social Structure in Sumer During the Reign of the IIIrd Dynasty of Ur,” trans. Inna Levit, in Diakonoff, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 127–72; Aleksandr I. Tyumenev, “The State Economy of Ancient Sumer,” trans. G. M. Sergheyev, in *ibid.*, 70–87; idem, “The Working Personnel on the Estate of the Temple of dBa-Ú in Lagas during the Period of Lugalanda and Urukagina (25th–24th cent. B.C.),” trans. Inna Levit, in *ibid.*, 88–126; Melikishvili, “Ancient Class Societies”; idem, “Socioeconomic Structure”; idem, “Some Aspects,” 49–54, 59–61; Semenov, “Socioeconomic Order”; Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East: A Comparative Study of Slavery in Babylonia, Assyria, Syria, and Palestine from the Middle of the Third Millennium to the End of the First Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949; repr., 1978); Diakonoff, *Paths of History* 24–26; Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*; Dunn, *Fall and Rise*, 42–63.

### **EXCURSUS 11: ESTATE AGRICULTURE**

Since most of the records that have survived concerning agriculture come from ruling-class circles, many scholars have succumbed to the temptation to see this type of agriculture as the dominant form. This skewed perspective may be seen in many works. Melikishvili, “Some Aspects,” 35–36; Johannes M. Renger, “Non-Institutional Trade”; idem, “Economic Spheres”; idem, “Formen des Zugangs”; idem, “On Economic Structures”; idem, “Royal Edicts”; Kozyreva, “Old Babylonian Period,” 103–4; Giorgio Buccellati, “Urkesh and the Question of Early Hurrian Urbanism,” in Hudson and Levine, *Urbanization and Land Ownership*, 236–37; Steinkeller, “Money-Lending Practices,” 115; Baker and Jursa,

*Babylonian Economy*; Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*; Cataldo, *Breaking Monotheism*, 64–65; Garfinkle, “Ancient Near Eastern City-States,” 112–13. Even Diakonoff is occasionally tempted, assuming that the estates loomed larger in ancient Southwest Asian economies, at least until the imperial period. He is quite explicit about the lack of textual sources relating to subsistence agriculture. See Diakonoff, “Rural Community,” 131; idem, “Slaves, Helots,” 48; idem, “Structure of Near Eastern Society,” 20; idem, *Paths of History*, 26; Adams, “Property Rights,” 11.

Liverani’s varied efforts to bring theoretical and literary concerns to the written sources are still snared from time to time in the universalizing trap of the written texts themselves, assuming that they speak of the world as it was for everyone. See Mario Liverani, *Prestige and Interest*; idem, *Myth and Politics*. The disciplinary subdivision of “historians” who work with texts and “archaeologists” who work with material remains exacerbates this problem. See idem, “History and Archaeology in the Ancient Near East: 150 Years of a Difficult Relationship,” in *Fluchtpunkt Uruk: Archäologische Einheit aus methodischer Vielfalt; Schriften für Hans Jörg Nissen*, ed. Hartmut Kühne, Reinhard Bernbeck, and Karin Bartl (Rahden in Westfalen: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 1999), 1–11; Anne Porter, “Akkad and Agency, Archaeology and Annals: Considering Power and Intent in Third-Millennium BCE Mesopotamia,” in Steadman and Ross, *Agency and Identity*, 166–80, esp. 167. Contemporary political events also influence such work. Thus, the postinvasion instability in Iraq and the confrontations with Iran have made archaeological work impossible since soon after 2000, forcing scholars interested in these areas to restrict their work to texts and data already gathered. A similar situation now applies to Syria since the outbreak of civil war in 2011.

## ***Glossary***

**allocatory systems.** A primarily collective system that functions by the allocation and reallocation of labor and the products of labor.

**bulk trade.** The movement of large volumes of staple goods with minimal profit margins, first undertaken as a major economic activity by the Dutch commercial empire in the sixteenth century CE.

**classical economics.** Economic theorists of capitalism from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries CE, including Adam Smith, David Ricardo, James Mill, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Malthus. They postulated a “free market” that regulates itself without external interference and should be permitted to operate by means of laissez faire. Prices of goods and wages, supply and demand, and saving and investment will adjust according to the “dynamics” of the market. They typically included political, social, and ethical concerns in their theories.

**economics imperialism.** The claim that neoclassical economics provides the means for analyzing every aspect of human life and history. It is based on a process of individualizing, dehistoricizing, and desocializing economic analysis, thereby producing assumed universal principles: equilibrium of the market, rational actors, and self-interest.

**exploitation.** A technical Marxist term concerning the extraction of surplus from what one possesses: land, machinery, labor.

**expropriation.** The extraction of surplus from what one does not possess, but is possessed by another.

**extractive system.** The extraction of produce by those who do not labor from those who do labor. Usually a combination of exploitation and expropriation.

**formalism.** A term proposed by Karl Polanyi, which assumes formal equivalence between ancient and modern economies (based on the underlying similarity of human nature). It is the opposite of substantivism.



**Habiru.** Generic term designating groups of farmers, nomads, and marauders who provided relief from taxation, tribute, and plunder. They often attacked and assisted in the destruction of palatine and plunder regimes.

**Homo economicus.** A fictional creation by neoclassical economists. This person is projected as a rational actor in the free market, functioning in terms of self-interest.

**institutional form.** The building blocks of an economic system (or regimes); may be defined as a codification of the fundamental social relations that underpin economics.

**(e)states.** The extractive system of palatine and temple estates, using indentured labor (temporary and permanent, including slaves) in order to supply the small ruling class. Managed directly by palace functionaries or indirectly by landlords.

**kinship-household.** The socially determining feature of subsistence survival. It combines flexible kinship structures with equally flexible productions of lived space.

**patronage.** A personalized, customary, and hierarchical relationship, in which the patron provides protection and the basic necessities to the client in return for allegiance, loyalty, and muscle from the client.

**subsistence survival.** The crucial allocative institutional form of ancient Southwest Asia, focused on agriculture, both animal husbandry and crop growing. Its approach was well tried and geared for survival by means of diversity, food security, risk-spreading, and optimal rather than maximal use of resources.

**tribute-exchange.** An extractive form that used tribute, taxation, and exchange—all forms of plunder—as mechanisms for appropriating goods that one did not produce.

**land shares.** Strips of communally owned land, regularly reallocated to members of the village community for farming. Reallocation usually took place every year or two, depending on ability and need. Also called *musha* farming.

**market.** In ancient Southwest Asia, the function of markets was logistical: they provisioned the armies of local potentates.

**merchant-landlord-usurer-tax-collector-diplomat.** A widely despised multitasking figure in ancient Southwest Asia, although immensely useful for rulers.

**mode of production.** The overarching economic category, constituted by institutional forms and regimes.

**mode of *régulation*.** The behavioral patterns and institutions that ensure periods of relative stability (during a regime). It includes cultural norms, ideologies, compromises, and above all, religion.

***musha'* farming.** *See* land shares.

**neoclassical economics.** The successor to classical economic theory. It is characterized by the removal of social, political, and ethical concerns from economic analysis, and the aim of providing a “scientific” (and heavily mathematicized) description of the capitalist system as it is. It began in the late nineteenth century and carries on today, claiming to be “mainstream” economic theory. As the basis of economics imperialism, it remains the approach most widely used by scholars of ancient Southwest Asia.

**preciosities.** Luxury goods for the ruling class, which were the objects of long-distance exchange in ancient Southwest Asia.

**reciprocity.** A term proposed by Karl Polanyi (drawing from anthropological studies), in which systems of exchange operate according to mutual obligation.

**redistribution.** Another term from Karl Polanyi, in which goods are appropriated (usually by a centralized authority) for redistribution to the people. Commonly used in relation to ancient Southwest Asia. Allocation is a preferable term, since it focuses on agricultural life in village communes.

**regime.** A combination of institutional forms that provides relative stability over a period of time. In each regime, one institutional form dominates over the others.

**palatine regime.** Palatine estates dominate the other institutional forms in this extractive regime, which was the main extractive regime until the last centuries of the second millennium BCE. Always in tension with the subsistence regime.

**regime of plunder.** The extractive regime in which tribute-exchange is dominant. It provided the basis for the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian Empires of the first millennium BCE. Again, in tension with the subsistence regime.

**subsistence regime.** Subsistence survival and kinship-household are the two institutional forms dominant in this regime, which persisted throughout the history of ancient Southwest Asia. Always in tension with the palatine and plunder regimes, it came into its own during periods of the “collapse” and “crisis” of those regimes.

**Régulation theory.** A Marxist school of economic theory that provides one of the methodological bases for reconstructing the sacred economy. The key components of economic analysis are institutional forms, regimes, and modes of *régulation*, which form into new constellations within a mode of production.

**substantivism.** A term proposed by Karl Polanyi, designating the profound difference between modern and ancient economies.

**usufruct.** The focus on the produce of the soil rather than the land itself.

**village commune.** Equivalent to village community and a basic social and economic unit of agricultural life in ancient Southwest Asia. Typically each village commune has a population of 75–150 and is often coterminous with the clan. The village community is inseparable from the institutional forms of subsistence survival and kinship-household.

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