3 Mediterranean, Near East, and Iran

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3.A Economic Actors in the Hellenistic and Roman Empires: The Mediterranean and Southwest Asia

I Introduction

The economy of the ancient Mediterranean and Southwest Asia was driven by a wide variety of actors whose behavior was shaped by social, cultural, and physical structures.¹ This chapter examines a variety of types of actors who played important roles, both positive and negative, in this development in order to shed light on the ways in which their economic behavior impacted the behavior of others and the structures within which they operated. We start with urban systems, before moving on to consider sovereign rulers, armies, temples, local elites, households, producers, and networking agents like bankers and merchants. The structures within which these actors operated are the focus in part II, which treats economic ‘tools.’

In the ancient Mediterranean and Southwest Asia, state power was distributed across several constituencies. For our present purposes, the most important are cities, which interacted directly with the bulk of the population; imperial and regional rulers, who exercised power at a higher level; courts, who intermediated between rulers and locals; armies, who exercised military power but also consumed a large portion of the resources extracted by the state; and temples, which served as another space of state-population interface. In addition to (or in consequence of) their state functions, these units were both economic actors in their own right (producing, distributing, and consuming goods), and also shaped the structures within which the behavior of others took place. In addition to the coordinating behaviors mentioned above, war-making/conquest and the cultivation of urbanism (both the spread of urbanism and the patronage of capitals that became megacities) were two of the most consequential actions taken by ancient states.

¹ We have decided to unite our consideration of both the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, so the analysis that follows treats these actors across a broad swath of time and space. There was considerable continuity in underlying systems of social organization, although institutional developments – and particularly those in domains close to the state like monetary policy and law – brought significant changes over time. It was, however, a slow and uneven process with significant geographical diversity, and one in which the palimpsests of prior institutional structures had lasting consequences. For an example of considering the continuity in these spaces, see, e.g., Chaniotis 2018.

Nonstate actors, with less political and almost no military power, had somewhat different capacities. The broad, diverse, and fuzzy group of people who were prominent within their local societies ('local elites') were fundamentally important as landholders. But beyond this, they interfaced with and participated in the various state components outlined above, while also maintaining private peer networks among themselves and hierarchical networks with their less prominent neighbors. They thus occupied a pivotal position, mediating between different levels of society. Inter-elite competition at the local and imperial scales drove increased consumption, but also increased production. Commercially oriented agriculture that funded elite consumption has been seen, especially in the Roman context, as a fundamental driver of increased production and urbanism. Cultural values privileging not only agricultural investment but also large-scale money-lending as honorable means of wealth acquisition increased the money supply. Prosocial, city-state-based ideology helped stabilize urban markets and increased the supply of public goods, partly through direct donations but in large part through the support of urban political institutions.

Below and intersecting with local elites are all those actors who produced goods and facilitated the economic activities of others. Greater specialization in production, both primary and secondary, and changes in the distribution of labor between agricultural and nonagricultural sectors increased efficiency. The structures through which agricultural labor was applied to the land (freehold owner/operators, tenancy, slave labor, and wage labor) impacted not only agricultural productivity but also the distribution of the resulting wealth. An increase in the number of urban craftsmen and shopkeepers, which have been labeled a "middle class,"² has been seen as the most likely mechanism by which average living standards might have improved in the Roman period.³

Those who facilitated economic activity, including bankers, merchants, and transporters (e.g., shippers, beast of burden drivers) amplified the impact and reach of all other economic activity. Those involved in financial mediation in particular have been seen as an important locus for institutional innovation. All of the above individuals operated within an organizational context. The two most influential were the household and the private association. Households, in addition to their production and consumption activities, coordinated labor and acted as key hubs in knowledge production and transmission. Associations perform key networking functions in a range of domains: financial, knowledge, and quasi-political.

² Mayer 2005, but cf. Weaverdyck, ch. 12.C, II, n. 4, this volume for controversy surrounding this term.

³ Erdkamp 2016; Weaverdyck, ch 12.C, II.3, this volume.

II Urban Systems as Actors

By the time of Alexander, the Mediterranean and Southwest Asia was a world dominated by cities. While urbanism has a tremendously long history in Southwest Asia, it was a relatively unfamiliar phenomenon in the Mediterranean before the early first millennium BCE, when first Phoenician and eventually Greek and Etruscan communities developed within an increasingly networked and explicitly urban framework, with concentrated populations and built-up urban cores governing wider hinterlands.⁴ The Hellenistic kings and the Roman Empire accelerated the expansion of urbanism through both direct foundations and the encouragement of locally initiated city-formation.⁵

On an economic level, cities first and foremost necessitate surplus production, which shapes larger agricultural patterns. But the concentration of people and social functions in a confined space also has important economic consequences.⁶ With greater population, the demand for certain goods and services increases to such an extent that specialization is both possible and indeed incentivized.⁷ Such density also makes coordination easier, allowing organizations consisting of more people to form without the friction of distance that impedes communication. Urban networks act as bridges that facilitate this communication. In a broader sense then, cities came to serve as economic centers, and hubs of connectivity.

II.1 Urban Forms

Cities in the ancient Mediterranean were organized and conceptualized in a number of different ways. In modern economic scholarship, a sharp boundary has been drawn between Near Eastern cities dominated by palaces and temples, and Graeco-Roman cities dominated by private landowners, but this distinction is currently being challenged.⁸ In fact, we should distinguish between a far wider number of urban forms, with the Classical Greek *polis* standing as only one – and one rather exceptional – example.

The *polis* was a distinctive form of city-state that became dominant across the Mediterranean in large part because of the patronage of the Hellenistic and Roman Empires. It consisted of both a community of people and a territory with, normatively,

⁴ On this trajectory generally, see Woolf 2020.

⁵ For Hellenistic colonization, see von Reden, vol. 1, 33–39; for the role of cities in the Roman Empire, see Weaverdyck, vol. 1, ch. 7, III.2.4.

⁶ Morley 2013.

⁷ This is one of the fundamental insights of Central Place Theory (Christaller 1966).

⁸ Finley at one point excludes Near Eastern cities from his analysis (1977), and elsewhere distinguishes Graeco-Roman from Near Eastern civilization on the basis of private property (1999, 28–29); see Bedford 2005.

a built-up urban core with spaces like the *agora*, which was at once a market space and the site of intense political maneuvering. The institutional structures of the city not only bound citizens to each other, they bound them to a certain territory and created special relationships with certain gods and heroes. The ideology of urbanity also prompted significant public investment in building and infrastructure and demographic concentration in cities. Even when empires dominated cities politically, the *polis* was normatively the focus of patriotic affection.⁹ Each *polis* was a corporate entity with a unitary identity expressed through distinctive symbols, patron deities, genealogy, and history that simultaneously made it unique and situated it within a dense peer-polity network consisting primarily of other homologous *poleis* but also more powerful kings and leagues.¹⁰ *Polis* ideology, and corresponding ideas of civic beneficence that were adopted in the Roman *civitas*, therefore played a role in shaping the economic behavior of residents.¹¹

Out of the world of *poleis*, the Hellenistic period saw the emergence of megacities, in which the political status of the city played an increasingly minor role in its economic might.¹² The renown of Alexandria that echoed in Hellenistic poetry, for example, focused not on political ideology, but on the city's wealth, the conspicuous consumption of its court, and its vast scale.¹³ Ptolemaic Alexandria had many of the institutional structures of a *polis*, but was in fact controlled by the dynastic family. It served at once as a court center, and a bustling commercial hub; its *agora*, now bereft of actual political functions, was instead the transit point for tremendous wealth, grain, and increasingly for luxury goods brought by the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade networks. By the time of Strabo, Alexandria was acknowledged as "the largest emporium in the inhabited world," and was described as a central point in the transshipping of exotic cargos.¹⁴ Although none matched Alexandria's scale or richness, other Hellenistic capital cities like the Seleucid's Antiocheia-Orontes and Seleukeia-Tigris were built along similar lines in a formal sense, with Hippodamian plans and large monumental quarters, and also played similar roles as "gateway cities" that articulated transit between disparate regions.¹⁵ Not all gateway cities were megalopoleis. On a local scale, regional cities served a similar function as gateways – the so-called caravan cities of the Syrian desert, for example.

⁹ This caused some tension when Roman citizenship was extended far beyond the borders of the city and its territory, prompting Cicero to develop his theory of dual fatherlands (*De legibus* 2. 5).

¹⁰ Ma 2003; Malkin 2011.

¹¹ The debates about whether Republican Rome was itself a *polis* is a question that has occupied historians ever since, as Woolf (2020, 325) points out concerning the first century BCE, without clear resolution.

¹² Compare this pattern of urbanism and its centrality to identity-formation to that in South Asia and China, Dwivedi, ch. 5, VI.1 and Leese-Messing, ch. 6, III.1, this volume.

¹³ Green 1986, 141–142.

¹⁴ Strabo 17. 1. 13.

¹⁵ Woolf 2020, 379–403.

Rome of the Principate, the megacity par excellence of the ancient world, developed into a super-aggregator and hub on an unimaginably large scale. Growing from humble roots as one of a number of settlements in central Italy, Rome came to eclipse all earlier Mediterranean urban centers in terms of scale and monumentality, complexity, and sheer network dominance. Indeed, the political power of the Roman Empire can be seen as a network of relationships between Rome and subject polities, the majority of which were cities organized along *polis* lines. The precise relationship between Rome and these cities was expressed in terms of juridical statuses and privileges that evolved into a hierarchy of prestige.¹⁶ This hierarchy maps very imperfectly onto the economic roles that cities played. The most basic distinction was between a legally autonomous city and a dependent community. Roman administration depended on self-governing communities with a local elite possessing the financial and social means of ensuring compliance. In sparsely populated areas with little history of urbanization, a city overseeing a large territory might be tiny and contain no monumental architecture,¹⁷ while in densely populated regions, dependent villages could reach great size and elaboration.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Roman cities were generally the largest central places in their immediate neighborhood. Within a province, certain cities would be singled out as preeminent, and this could have economic impacts. Cities designated as *conventus* capitals, hosts of the governor's court, profited from the crowds of litigants, for example.¹⁹ But the status distinctions between *municipia*, *colonia*, and *civitas/polis* were more important for their citizens' sense of prestige than for any practical impacts.

II.2 Urban Consumption and Production

Cities of all types were centers of consumption, first and most fundamentally, of foodstuffs. In some cases, most notably in Greece in the Classical period, many of the inhabitants of cities were agriculturalists. This is evident from the dearth of settlements in the cities' hinterlands.²⁰ For the most part, however, especially in the Roman period, the hinterlands around cities were densely inhabited, suggesting that urban inhabitants produced very little of their own food.²¹ Thus, the very existence of urban populations necessitates surplus production in the countryside.²²

¹⁶ Boatwright 2000, 36–56.

¹⁷ Donev 2020.

¹⁸ Sartre 2005, 228–233.

¹⁹ Galsterer 2000, 347.

²⁰ Cf. Hansen 2000, 159–160, who argues that an urban agricultural population is not incompatible with production for the market.

²¹ Garnsey 1979.

²² Lo Cascio 2009; Zuiderhoek 2017.

The economic impact of Graeco-Roman urbanism has traditionally been understood to be directly dependent on the means by which surplus was extracted from the producers. Medieval cities generally bought the food they required with goods manufactured in the city, a pattern that has been seen as crucial to the development of modern capitalism. For the ancient world, socially dominated by a landowning elite, it is usually thought that most of the surplus was extracted from the countryside in the form of rents. This, it used to be thought, explained the relative stagnation of the ancient economy relative to the medieval and early modern European economy.²³ More recently, however, the link between the model of the “consumer city” and economic stagnation has been challenged.²⁴ Even if the producers themselves do not profit much from the surplus, the elites, who sell the grain in the city, could consume enough to support a group of craftspeople and traders who themselves spend the money they receive on other goods and services.²⁵ Even if the consumer-city model is consistent with vibrant urban economies, however, the consequences for the food-producing sector of the economy remain. Small-scale producers could not compete effectively in a grain market dominated by produce extracted as rents, though they might have been able to compete in other sectors, like market gardening.²⁶ An urban system sustained by rents from the countryside therefore concentrates spending power in the hands of the rentiers, then in the hands of those from whom they buy goods and services.

As cities grew in scale, procurement of foodstuffs was handled through both local and long-distance networks, and buffered against calamity through risk-management strategies like granaries and grain funds. In the case of Rome, whose size created particular procurement challenges, supplying the city with grain led to the development of a vast, multi-actor supply-system that spanned the Mediterranean.²⁷ Cities had other consumption needs beyond foodstuffs, and again, the larger the city, the more difficult their fulfillment became. Augustus’s interest in aqueduct management and the supply of municipal water early in the Principate provides an example of how cities’ consumption needs created pressures for infrastructural development.²⁸

Beyond the consumption of basic products, cities – and especially capital cities – were also the most important stage for *conspicuous* consumption, and therefore for the public performance of state power. Thus, Callixeinos’ description of Ptolemy II’s grand procession in Alexandria presents a picture of unimaginable wealth, dripping with gold and exotica.²⁹ Beyond the products consumed in the

²³ Finley 1977.

²⁴ E.g., Morley 2013.

²⁵ Erdkamp 2001.

²⁶ Erdkamp 2005, 134–138.

²⁷ See Kessler and Temin 2007, also Weaverdyck, ch. 12.C, this volume.

²⁸ Wilson 2000.

²⁹ Athenaios 5, 196A, 197C.

course of these events, the capital cities came to set the consumptive tastes of imperial populations. Finally, cities, and their concentration of wealth and population, fostered specialization in productive spheres. Inscriptions that record occupations show a significant level of horizontal specialization in ancient cities (that is, people specializing in the production of a certain product), but vertical specialization (specializing in a certain part of a production process) can be observed in some industries.³⁰

II.3 Centers of Coordination and Rule Enforcement

Beyond their role in the consumption and production of products, cities also served as centers of coordination and rule enforcement. We see this particularly in the context of the monetary economy. In the Classical period, cities played an outsized role in both the minting and circulation of coinage, the collection of tax revenue, and the establishment of norms and institutions surrounding transactions. Although part of its power in some of these spheres waned as the Hellenistic kingdoms rose, they never disappeared entirely.

To understand the connection between cities and the monetary economy, one has to start with the story of the independent Classical *poleis*, which constructed its identity by issuing coinage. In the ancient Mediterranean, issuing coinage was a statement of political power. Although the precise origin of the Greek coinage tradition is controversial, it coincides with a period of intra-*polis* political struggle in which the reform of weight standards was a way to exert authority.³¹ While the first coins were minted for local use, they quickly became a medium of intercommunity exchange.³² The stamp of the *polis* ensured they would be accepted in local transactions, particularly with local authorities, and the constant handling of local symbols must have fostered communal solidarity. At the same time, these local coinages circulated beyond the political boundaries of the city, advertising the city's existence farther afield.³³ Some coins, like the Athenian *tetradrachm*, were so widespread that they inspired many imitations and effectively established weight standards over a large area. Issuing coins with the symbols of the *polis* was a tangible, widely circulating declaration of corporate identity that simultaneously facilitated market-based exchange at multiple scales.

In the early Hellenistic period, a generally valid posthumous Alexander coinage became current, although individual kings minted special coinages that were gener-

³⁰ Zuiderhoek 2017, 134–140.

³¹ Von Reden 2010, 19–25.

³² Osborne 2009, 237–246.

³³ Von Reden 2010, ch. 3 on monetary networks.

ally related to the same (Attic) weight standard, with the major exception of Egypt.³⁴ Over time, as the Hellenistic world fractured, minting practices became more fragmented and varied.³⁵ Then, under the Roman Empire, where coinage production was more centralized, some cities continued to mint their own base-metal coinage that circulated locally while provincial authorities minted silver coinage that circulated more broadly.³⁶

A realm in which we see the power of cities as economic actors is in rule-setting and enforcement, particularly relating to transactions. Urban institutions served to lower transaction costs and ease the distribution of goods. These included the setting of standard weights and measures for use within the particular urban context, as well as the *agoranomoi* magistrates who regulated the marketplace and legal mechanisms to adjudicate disputes. The lack of uniform standards for weights and measures between cities, a phenomenon that persisted throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods, ensured that local standards held sway.³⁷ Cities often also served to guarantee property rights. For example, in the *polis*, and keeping with the principle that the *polis* was a community of citizens living in a certain territory, the right to own land in that territory was restricted to citizens, with occasional grants of the right to own land given (or sold) to certain outsiders. While protecting citizens' access to land against powerful outsiders, this would have made it very difficult to use land as collateral in transactions with noncitizens.³⁸ Legal negotiations between Romans, locals, and governors eroded the principle of exclusivity in the Late Republican period, easing intercity transactions but also allowing wealthy Romans to acquire land at the expense of provincials.³⁹

Beyond restrictions on ownership, cities also often participated in the transfer of land and other property. These transactions were effected through legal procedures involving written documents, which were stored in the city archives, increasing public confidence. Dio Chrysostom, a first-century CE orator from Prusa in Asia Minor, describes this explicitly:

Then consider, further, that all men regard those agreements as having greater validity which are made with the sanction of the state and are entered in the *polis*'s records; and it is impossible for anything thus administered to be annulled, either in case one buys a piece of land from another, a boat or a slave, or if a man makes a loan to another, or frees a slave, or makes gift to anyone. How in the world, then, has it come to pass that these transactions carry a greater security than any other? It is because the man who has handled an affair of his in this way has made the *polis* a witness to the transaction.⁴⁰

³⁴ On *drachm*-based systems, see Weaverdyck and Fabian, ch. 8A, III.1.2, this volume. On the particular situation in the Ptolemaic Empire, see Lorber 2012.

³⁵ Von Reden 2010, 85.

³⁶ Weaverdyck, vol. 1, ch. 7, III.3.2.

³⁷ On standards, see Weaverdyck and Fabian, ch. 8A, VI, this volume.

³⁸ Finley 1977.

³⁹ Eberle 2016.

⁴⁰ Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 31. 51, trans. slightly modified from Cohoon.

The city archives are the arbiter of who owns what. They function thus not because of the inherent reliability of the written word, but because the *polis* acts as a witness, a role usually played by an individual, who vouches for the truth of something.

II.4 Cities as Network Hubs

Finally, beyond their serving as nodes of consumption and distribution, and beyond their role in rule-setting for economic transactions, cities also served as network hubs or multipliers: as concentrators of political power, centers of peer-polity interaction, and engines of innovation. Cities developed and maintained infrastructures such as harbors, roads, and marketplaces that facilitated economic transactions and maintained funds that were used to buy grain in times of food shortage, which were not infrequent (see below). Some of the money spent in the city context, from a modern perspective, appears wasteful, like the construction of monumental buildings, buying supplies (particularly olive oil) for *gymnasia*, and hosting festivals and athletic competitions. However, these activities shaped consumption patterns that supported certain economic sectors, and shaped community relationships.

The formal institution that most distinctively shaped this economic activity emerged out of the Classical *polis*, and was, in fact, a political one, the assembly: the body that acted on behalf of the people. This formal political organization consisted of large assemblies of citizens, smaller councils of a subset of citizens, usually elites, and magistrates, citizens selected to exercise certain functions. While councils and magistrates retained most power, the assemblies usually retained certain important functions, like ratifying the decisions of the councils. The assembly was the formal political expression of the principle that the *polis* was a community of citizens that transcended divisions of kinship and wealth. The actual power of the assembly relative to other organs of government varied, and there was a trend toward oligarchization that was given formal sanction in the Roman period, but the idea that a city was a community remained.⁴¹

This ideal had economic implications. Elites in Greek cities were expected to directly shoulder a portion of the *polis*'s expenses by paying fees to take on magistracies or enter the council, and by performing 'liturgies,' specific obligatory, often expensive duties. The same idea underlies the institution of *euergetism*, in which elites provide benefactions to the community in return for honors (see below).⁴² Eventually, in the Roman Empire, the system of *munera* developed, which struc-

⁴¹ Zuiderhoek 2009, 54–70.

⁴² For the development of *euergetism* and its dynamic relationship with liturgies, see Domingo Gygas 2016.

tured such contributions. Elites were also expected to undertake embassies at their own expense, which not only established and maintained the position of the *polis* within the larger peer-polity network, but could also convince imperial powers to bestow lucrative privileges or favorable rulings in disputes.

All of these factors contributed to a peer-polity network rooted in urban spaces: a vast set of relationships between communities that ensured mutual intelligibility. Beyond knowledge of others, these urban systems and their structures helped spread standards of behavior that allowed people from distant communities to interact and understand one another. The network of urban nodes was the fundamental context within which the economic life of antiquity unfolded.

III Rulers and their Inner Circles

One of the decisive transformations from the world of the *poleis* of Classical Greece to that of warring Hellenistic kingdoms and eventually the Roman Empire was the expansion of the role of sovereign rulers, who, on the model of Alexander the Great, rose to prominence as the most visible and powerful individuals in antiquity. More than simply standing as figureheads of ancient states, these sovereigns along with their inner circles of elites assumed a number of economic roles that had earlier been conducted by *polis* assemblies, and that, in more modern contexts, are performed by the state.

Impersonal, independent state bureaucracy was limited in the ancient world.⁴³ Instead, political sovereigns relied on an institution rooted in the private sphere to delegate much of their power: that of their (often fictive) household. In the Hellenistic world, we can discuss the *philoi* ('court elite') in this light;⁴⁴ in the Roman world, imperial freedmen played a central role. The status of the participants, the degree to which these relationships were formal rather than informal, and the contemporaneous existence of other parallel institutional channels, like office-holding aristocracy, add considerable variability. Nevertheless, in both the Hellenistic and Roman cases, relationships rooted within the context of the imperial household played a role in coordinating, and regulating, behavior across imperial territories.

Sovereigns themselves were consumers, at enormous scale, and they set the tone for elite consumption more generally. They were the center of extractive systems that collected rents and levied taxes. They distributed the revenues they collected through imperial gifts and donations, as well as through their patronage of critical infrastructural projects, and finally through their spending on war. They exercised both regulatory and coordinating authority that stretched into political,

⁴³ Garnsey and Saller 2015, ch. 2 on the limited bureaucracy in the Roman Empire.

⁴⁴ On whom, see von Reden, vol. 1, ch. 1, 29–30.

social, and economic spheres, and that structured the development of regional connectivity, particularly in frontier zones.

III.1 Models of Sovereignty

One factor that complicates our appreciation for the economic role of sovereign rulers in the Hellenistic and Roman world as a whole is the changing nature of sovereignty; a divide which is especially stark between the Hellenistic and Roman Empires. Different understandings of the power of the sovereign ruler, his source of legitimacy, and his relationships with other powerful constituents in his society shaped which economic levers were available to him, as well as how he expended his resources in the pursuit of power.

Even within the Hellenistic world, there was never a single, uniform version of royal power. In principle, the supraregional monarchical systems that grew in the wake of Alexander the Great's conquests and the battles among his successors each had at its center a king after a Graeco-Macedonian fashion, whose role combined military, political, and economic power. In theory, this centralization of functions gave Hellenistic kings tremendous control over economic systems. Such centralized power was, in fact, often only illusionary. The reality of these systems was more variegated, with preexisting models of sovereignty in different regions shaping the practice of Hellenistic kings, who tended toward pragmatic flexibility. In practice, this could have consequences for fundamental issues such as imperial landownership.

In Egypt, for example, Ptolemaic kings claimed royal legitimacy not only on the basis of Graeco-Macedonian models, but also in accordance with preexisting pharaonic norms.⁴⁵ This was not simply titular – beyond the rhetorical fashioning of kingship, the “basic patterns of governance” in terms of imperial interaction with institutions of Ptolemaic Egypt continued many practices that were in force in the Pharaonic, Saite, and Persian periods, and chiefly the relationship between the monarch and temple authorities. And yet, the Ptolemies introduced changes, perhaps the clearest of which concerned the widespread use of coinage. Despite Greek administrative innovations, however, the strength and continuity of low-to-the-ground bureaucratic structures in Ptolemaic Egypt, along with the numerous indigenous institutional structures, shaped the nature of Ptolemaic rule. One example lies in the sphere of water management. Although the ‘despotic’ control of water resources was long a mainstay in studies of royal authority in Egypt, papyrological research has demonstrated that the regular running of irrigation systems was in fact a local issue that fell under the purview of a large bureaucratic establishment, with

⁴⁵ Bingen 2007, 28–30.

kings acting rather as coordinators.⁴⁶ Since successful irrigation is essential to the fertility of Egypt, and therefore to the taxes and rents collected by the Ptolemaic kings, the fact that this domain remained in local hands speaks for the negotiated nature of Ptolemaic rule.⁴⁷

Similarly, recent research on Seleukid authority has stressed the debt that the Seleukids owe to previous Achaemenid models of sovereignty both in the presentation of their rule to local populations, and also in the formal characteristics of their administration, including at least some of their interactions with the massive temple complexes that anchored many Near Eastern cities.⁴⁸ The case for this is not entirely straightforward: the titular formulae used to refer to Seleukid kings in the cuneiform evidence from Babylon, for example, suggest that the Babylonian scribes seem to have been mirroring the Greek vocabulary to describe kings, rather than drawing on older Achaemenid models.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it is likely that, as in Egypt, Seleukid kingship was neither a wholesale importation of a foreign monarchical system nor a complete continuation of what had come before, but instead the development of the intersection of these spheres.⁵⁰

Beyond the massive Seleukid and Ptolemaic kingdoms, Southwest Asia and Anatolia in the Hellenistic and Roman periods also saw the persistence of kings who operated on what might best be described as a regional level. In concrete terms, some of these 'regional' dynasts controlled a single city and its hinterland, while others ruled territories that themselves might be considered empires.⁵¹ The most persistent regional rulers clustered along the fringes of the great empires, often in territories that were either difficult to control or ecologically marginal. Owing to generally insufficient evidence, it is difficult to analyze the internal nature of sovereignty in these spaces. The rulers, however, were linked to each other as well as to pan-regional empires through bonds of obligation, which took many forms from full independence to vassalhood and subjugation, and shifted over time. The hyperconnected nature of this world of minor rulers can be seen in an economic light, as one of the building blocks for a durable network of connectivity across the region, which would continue to shape both local affairs and the expansion of imperial power through the Roman period.

⁴⁶ On Hellenistic kingdoms as complex coordinating actors, see, e.g., Manning 2010.

⁴⁷ For exceptions, see for example the Fayum reclamation project, on which Weaverdyck and Fabian ch. 8.A, IV.1.2, this volume.

⁴⁸ E.g., Capdetrey 2007; but see also Monson 2015, 174 on this question from the perspective of fiscal policy.

⁴⁹ I.e., there was not a continuation of Achaemenid titles such as 'King of all the Lands' (Sum. lugal.kur.kur). Instead, and quite to the contrary, there was a tendency to simply title the ruler a 'king' (Gr. *basileus*; Sum. lugal).

⁵⁰ See also Kosmin 2014 on a similar question in a religious context.

⁵¹ See, e.g., the territory of Hatra in comparison to that of Armenia.

Unlike the variety of Hellenistic kings, the Roman emperor emerged explicitly from a Republican system. While viewed as a semidivine ruler figure throughout the empire, the emperor remained embedded in a Rome-based aristocracy.⁵² In addition to the army, he required the support of the upper levels of the Roman elite and the urban populace of Rome. This accounts not only for the vast amount of resources channeled from the empire to Rome and Italy, but also for certain ambiguities in the role of the emperor. Although he was able to make new laws at will, the good emperor, as ‘first citizen,’ respected the law and the opinions of jurists, allowing Roman law to develop more or less autonomously.⁵³ The emperor, just like a Republican magistrate, was simultaneously a private landowner and an administrator of public business. But the role of the emperor was so bound up with that of the state that the difference between his private property (the *patrimonium* and the *fisci*) and the state treasury (the *aerarium*) was, in practice, meaningless.⁵⁴ The emperor modeled good aristocratic behavior by making benefactions, but these could have much greater structural impact than normal *euergetism*, as in the case of Rome’s water supply (see below). The emperor managed his land like any other aristocrat, through agents from within and outside his household, slaves and freedmen on the one hand, and equestrians on the other. However, these managers could also collect taxes in provinces that the emperor governed directly and had jurisdictional power.⁵⁵ Soon an entire equestrian office-holding career structure emerged alongside the imperial household structure.⁵⁶ The emergence of the role of emperor from a Republican system, therefore, created a public/private ambiguity that pervaded the imperial administration. As a result, the economic role of the emperor is ambiguous. On the one hand, it cannot be meaningfully distinguished from that of the Roman state, but on the other, it was similar in many ways to the role of any Roman aristocrat.

Kings and emperors, in both the Hellenistic and Roman context, were surrounded by a coterie of elites. These inner circles mediated the interaction of the monarch with the wider world. Although the ruling monarch stood at the center of these power systems, twentieth-century thought on the political relevance of medieval and early modern courts has emphasized that courts served as a balancing and moderating power vis-à-vis the monarch.⁵⁷

52 Wallace-Hadrill 1982 stresses the ambiguity of Roman imperial ideology as compared to Hellenistic kings. For the development of Hellenistic and Roman monarchic ideology, see Noreña 2011, 37–100, 314–316. For a model of the emperor’s political power, see Flaig 1992; 2015. For the role of the emperor in the provinces, see Ando 2000; Edmondson 2015.

53 Weaverdyck and Fabian, ch. 8.A, V.1.2, this volume.

54 Rathbone 1996.

55 Taxes: Davenport 2019, 179–183. Jurisdiction: Brunt 1990, 163–187.

56 Davenport 2019, 299–369 for equestrian administrative careers. Kłodziński 2019 for the relationship between equestrian and freedmen administrators.

57 Especially influential was Elias’s work on the French court (1969), although the absolute monarchical manipulation of a weak court that it posits has been widely reconsidered in more recent works. See Duindam 2011, 5–9 for a discussion of the evolution of court studies concerning antiquity.

In the Hellenistic world, this elite sphere is generally conceived of explicitly as court, and discussed as such. The Hellenistic courts brought a monarch and his dynastic family into regular, structured contact with social elites from across the Greek world, providing a stage on which dynastic and civic power were enacted through diverse performative practices ranging from commensality to *euergetism*. Specifically, *philoi* retained relationships with their cities and families of origin after joining fictive brotherhood of a Hellenistic royal family, thus becoming fulcrums through which cities and kings were connected, and could be entrusted to care for the emperor's affairs in far-flung corners of the empire.⁵⁸

The degree of hierarchy of the Hellenistic courts and the configuration of players inside these hierarchies were variable. A restructuring and formalization of the Ptolemaic court in the second century BCE, for example, has been hypothesized to have increased the participation of local Egyptian elites, expanding the reach of royal power deeper into the Egyptian hinterland.⁵⁹ In general, it appears that the class of *philoi*, who began as the at-will courtiers of a given Hellenistic king, tended to develop over time into first a veritable institution, and then eventually a type of hereditary aristocracy, whereby the sons of the *philoi* were raised at other courts as pages of a type, thus extending the in-group bonds and strengthening their collective power.⁶⁰ At the same time, the courts were not closed systems, and individuals with the status of 'outsiders,' whether by virtue of their family background (i.e., as non-Greeks), or their political history (i.e., as exiles from other realms) could – and often did – rise to prominence within Hellenistic courts.⁶¹ Members of the court came to play important roles at the top of every branch of Hellenistic administration.

In scholarship on the Roman world, the language of an 'imperial court' is far rarer.⁶² Nevertheless, the existence of a class of extreme imperial elites surrounding the emperor is clear, who served broadly similar functions as courts did in the Hellenistic period. There were, on the one hand, the equestrians and particularly the senators, ultrawealthy citizens who occupied administrative offices. There were also, however, a different group of imperial dependents who assumed central roles: imperial freedmen.

Imperial freedmen were trained administrators, so they would have known how to manage their own property as well as the emperor's. Because they were able to

⁵⁸ For the *philoi* and court organization, von Reden, vol. 1, ch. 1, V.

⁵⁹ Moyer 2011a.

⁶⁰ Strootman 2014, 183–184.

⁶¹ Strootman 2013, 51–52.

⁶² Bang 2011; A.-C. Michel 2015; Pani 2003; Wallace-Hadrill 1996; 2011; Winterling 1999. Because the Roman monarchy emerged from a Republican form of government, scholarship on the power of the emperor has tended to focus on its legal basis, its bureaucracy, or on the personal relations and charisma of the emperor. See, e.g., Millar 1977 on the bureaucracy of empire; Lendon 1997 and Ando 2000 on the emperor's personal relationships and charisma, respectively.

serve in one location for a long period of time, unlike administrators drawn from the social elite, they were able to build up a store of local knowledge and local relationships that were impossible for higher-ranking officials to achieve, and therefore might have served as more enduring nodes in networks that linked the highest imperial elite to local communities across the empire. Although details elude us, the results are occasionally visible when freedmen are honored by cities for their benefactions.⁶³ In addition to collecting money for the emperor and the state, imperial freedmen and even slaves could get quite wealthy in their own right. They earned a salary for their work, and there were opportunities for illicit profit.⁶⁴ More importantly, they surely also invested in legitimate business interests and land. Thus, participation in the imperial household system allowed personnel at all levels to concentrate wealth for themselves and forge connections between imperial and local social networks.

III.2 Consumption

Kings, emperors, their courts, and their dependents were, in a literal sense, prolific consumers. There are two ways to evaluate this consumptive power: the first comes from textual and archaeological evidence pertaining to consumption habits; the second concerns the accumulation of wealth in royal or imperial hands, which indicate the potential to consume more generally. In the latter case, however, it becomes quite difficult to disentangle the wealth of the sovereign from that of his kingdom: Even in the Roman period, the emperor's personal property (the *fiscus*) is scarcely distinguishable from the treasury of the Roman state (the *aerarium*).⁶⁵ It is possible, however, to discuss, and in some cases to quantify, the concentration of wealth in the sovereign's inner circle – a social elite to which access was controlled by the sovereign. In this way, we can get a glimpse at the consumptive power that surrounded, and in some cases was explicitly nurtured by, sovereigns.

In the Hellenistic period, most evidence we have for royal consumption itself comes from the context of court life. Monarchs conceived of their kingdom as their house (*oikos*), using domestic vocabulary to articulate its structures, and often relying on private law to adjudicate imperial issues.⁶⁶ Palaces were themselves the center of court consumption. They were lavish spaces, which, if ancient accounts are to be trusted, occupied vast tracts of urban space – Strabo estimates that the late

⁶³ Dalla Rosa 2016, 323–328 on Phrygia.

⁶⁴ Haensch 2006.

⁶⁵ Cassius Dio (Cass. Dio) 53. 22. 2–4.

⁶⁶ Two terms used in Greek to denote the Hellenistic courts emphasize the spatial character of the court: *to basileion* ('palace') or more commonly *aule* ('hall'). The more common term was *hoi periten aulen* ('those around the hall'), which stressed the physical presence of the core group of courtiers in the palace.

Ptolemaic palaces and court spaces occupied one-quarter to one-third of the territory of Alexandria.⁶⁷ In some cases, dynasties had multiple palaces spread across their territory, creating a network of consumption centers. The Seleukids, for example, held a main seat at Antiocheia, but other residences at Sardis, Seleukeia-Tigris, Susa, and elsewhere, but unfortunately, the limited archaeological remains preclude deep analysis.⁶⁸ Similar models of multifocal court dynamics have also been proposed for some periods of Arsakid history.⁶⁹

The most direct outlay of the court, and a central driver of consumption, was the monarch's spending on the upkeep of his retinue. Alexander the Great set the tone in this as in much concerning court culture, with lavish feasts becoming an important component of court life, in a pattern adopted at least partially from the Achaemenid courts which he conquered.⁷⁰ In one description of Alexander's dining culture, Plutarch writes: "His suppers, however, were always magnificent, and the outlay upon them increased with his successes until it reached the sum of ten thousand *drachmas*."⁷¹ Beyond the significant expense of these meals,⁷² they also drove a market for rare and exotic foodstuffs as well as the attendant luxury tableware.⁷³ The courts also became the center for other types of non-alimentary consumption. This was exemplified in the collecting practices of the court, which included collections of art and exotica, as well as in the centers of learning and science that grew around Hellenistic courts.⁷⁴ The overwhelming scale of Herod the Great's building program in Judaea demonstrates how the fashioning of the largest Hellenistic courts filtered into the courts of the so-called minor kings.

In the Roman period, it becomes easier to quantify the wealth that was held by the elites surrounding the emperor – wealth which helps us to appreciate the consumptive potential of the imperial inner circle. Although held in private hands, this wealth was entwined with the sovereign. Beginning already in the reign of Augustus, the Roman emperor controlled access to the senatorial and equestrian orders, the highest statuses in the Roman imperial social hierarchy. He also largely controlled the acquisition of the formal ranks and distinctions that defined the hierarchies within those orders.⁷⁵ The promise of admission and advancement thus bound the wealthiest portion of the imperial population to the imperial system.

⁶⁷ Strabo 17. 1. 8.

⁶⁸ For an overview of Hellenistic palace architecture, Nielsen 1995.

⁶⁹ Fabian vol. 1, ch. 6, III.

⁷⁰ On the court of Alexander, Weber 2009. On feasting specifically – and its ties to pre-Hellenistic Achaemenid practices – see Spawforth 2007, 99–101.

⁷¹ Plutarch *Alexander* 23. 10, trans. Perrin.

⁷² On which quantitatively, Aperghis 2004, 207.

⁷³ See Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* (Joseph. *AJ*) 12. 2. 15 for an example of the gifting of tableware along with other luxury goods by Ptolemy II to his guests.

⁷⁴ On court collecting practices, Kuttner 2014; on science, Berrey 2017.

⁷⁵ Millar 1977, 275–361.

These imperial elites were fabulously wealthy. Each order had a minimum property requirement (400,000 sesterces for the equestrian, 1,000,000 for the senate) ensuring that only the wealthy could enter, and many had much more than the minimum. Pliny the Younger was probably worth around 20 million sesterces, and he was not the richest senator in Rome.⁷⁶ Scheidel and Friesen have estimated average senatorial and equestrian fortunes at 5 million and 600,000 sesterces respectively, though these figures obscure significant variations among these classes.⁷⁷ For comparison, local elites are worth, on average, only 150,000 sesterces. If one assumes a 6 percent return on property, it is possible to compare elite annual income with those of soldiers and other laborers. Legionary soldiers earned 1,200 sesterces per year in the second century. The average equestrian in Scheidel and Friesen's model earned more than 33 times a soldier's salary, and Pliny the Younger earned a thousand times as much. This concentration of wealth allowed elites to invest their money in a variety of capital-intensive ventures, like shipping, mining, or moneylending, either on their own or in partnership.

Although quantification is difficult, then, it is possible to draw the rough outline of the tremendous consumptive power of sovereigns. The conspicuous consumption and the habits of luxury that developed at the imperial centers, furthermore, spread, as elite emulation and habits of imperial largesse disseminated goods and ideas outward.⁷⁸

III.3 Extraction

The next domain in which we see the economic activity of kings, emperors, and their inner circles is in extraction of rents and taxes, as well as through their control of other types of revenue streams, for example, state monopolies, and finally through the irregular extraction of wealth in the form of booty collected in the course of military activities. Regular forms of extraction are predicated fundamentally on the imbalance of power between the sovereign and those from whom he is extracting resources, making this one sphere in which the sovereign himself fully assumes the economic power of the state. Beyond the sovereign, this process also requires the cooperation of a range of middlemen like tax collectors. Along the line, these extractive processes brought income not only to the state, but to many of the intermediary officials, where it became a major source of personal enrichment. Leaving the technical details of the extraction regimes for chapter 8.A, we focus

⁷⁶ Duncan-Jones 1982, 17–32.

⁷⁷ Scheidel and Friesen 2009 tab. 6. It should also be remembered that membership in the senate was capped at 600, so there must have been equestrians rich enough to enter the senate but excluded from that order.

⁷⁸ Rotroff 2019; von Reden 2007, 48–56.

here on the extractive capacities of sovereigns, and on the relationships between the sovereign and his various dependents which facilitated this extraction.

Our clearest evidence for the specific workings of a Hellenistic extractive system comes from Egypt, where papyrological records preserve considerable, if not comprehensive, details about taxation and revenue collection.⁷⁹ We know relatively much about the system, which was organized around the fundamental unit of administration in Egypt, the *nome*, and in which local *nome* officials played a considerable role.⁸⁰ As has been the case with respect to the person of Ptolemaic kings, questions of the degree of centralization of Ptolemaic state and its extractive administrative mechanisms have been the subject of long discussion. Current thought highlights the fact that the power of the Ptolemaic kings was articulated through a network of agents who were drawn from the Egyptian elite holding hereditary claims on the control of affairs at the local level.⁸¹ Although the Ptolemies did seek to exercise control over the appointment of some of local officials, they were not uniformly successful, and the local elite continued to hold considerable power.⁸² Although the tax regimes varied from region to region, the bulk of extraction levied on agricultural products (whether taxes or rents) were paid in kind, and were collected in local granaries under the supervision of an official explicitly responsible for the granaries (the *sitologos*). Monetary taxes, on the other hand, were collected by tax farmers (*telonai*) who bid on contracts – a largely new innovation in the Egyptian landscape.⁸³ Although the idea of tax farming was fundamentally imported from Greek practice, the Ptolemaic variant had been adapted to suit the unique characteristics of Egypt as well as the priorities of the Ptolemies. Chiefly, the accurate land registers made the expected tax volumes predictable, and the process of their collection involved a higher degree of oversight and interaction between the tax farmers and state authorities than attested elsewhere.⁸⁴

In the Seleukid case, the details of extractive power are far fuzzier, although of course revenue from land comprised the most significant income source. There are several terms used for land in the texts – some of which familiar also from Ptolemaic Egypt – that point to the variable exploitative systems that were used by the kings, although both the meaning and the functions of these categories remain subject to debate. Chiefly, there were lands deemed *basilike chora* ('royal land') which were worked by *basilikoi laoi* ('royal cultivators'), who paid rents (presumably in kind?), and also lands called *phorologoumene chora* ('taxed land') or simply *chora*, which were subject to taxation of some type.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Derow and Bagnall 2004, especially appendix 1; also von Reden vol. 1, ch.1.

⁸⁰ For an overview of organization, see von Reden, vol. 1, ch. 1, V.2, with bibliography.

⁸¹ E.g., Manning 2019.

⁸² Manning 2019, 105–106.

⁸³ Manning 2010.

⁸⁴ A state official, the *logeutes*, supported in their collection.

⁸⁵ Aperghis 2004, ch. 6 on land categories.

The identity of the tax officials who collected these incomes is also opaque. The presence of a formal system of financial administration within the Seleukid *satrapies* is not attested at the start of Seleukid rule, but rather seems to have developed by the time of Antiochos II.⁸⁶ Discussion has focused on the roles of two individuals: that of the *dioiketes* and the *oikonomos*, the former of which is often understood as a financial administrator operating at the satrapal level and in secular contexts, while the latter may have been a subordinate.⁸⁷ Several other titles are attested for financial administrators responsible for affairs in temples.⁸⁸ For the present purpose, it is enough to say that the nature and range of the financial officials documented in the texts demonstrate a multilayered and likely spatially and temporally flexible system for extracting income from land and tribute territories.

Similarly, the emperor remained the largest landowner in the Roman world.⁸⁹ He acquired these lands through a mix of mechanisms, many of which were only available to him. The emperor was entitled to claim ownerless land, the goods of people who died intestate or whose will was invalid, and the property of the condemned.⁹⁰ Much of this was immediately sold, but some was retained.⁹¹ Septimius Severus, at the end of the second century CE, broke with this tradition by seizing and keeping the land of those who had opposed him in the civil war that brought him to power, thus enlarging the imperial patrimony very quickly.⁹² Prior to this, much of the emperor's land came through inheritance. It was customary for Roman elites to leave legacies for their friends and patrons in their will as a demonstration of esteem and to discharge the debts of reciprocity they owed.⁹³ As the most esteemed and beneficent individual in the empire, the emperor would have been in a position to benefit handsomely from the wills of powerful Roman elites.⁹⁴

The mechanisms by which the emperor exploited the land were not qualitatively different from the way any absentee landowner might manage their estates, except that their size perhaps required an extra level of management. The emperor appointed a *procurator*, either an equestrian or an imperial freedman, to oversee some portion of his patrimony. The *procurator* then rented the right to exploit the

⁸⁶ Aperghis 2004, 280.

⁸⁷ Opinions differ widely. See Aperghis 2004, 280–281 for one interpretation and an overview of the debates.

⁸⁸ E.g., *padqu* in the Babylonian context, and the *prostates tou hierou* ('the official in charge of the sanctuary') attested at Jerusalem. On these, see Aperghis 2004, 287–288.

⁸⁹ Maiuro 2012; Lo Cascio 2015; Millar 1977, 153–189.

⁹⁰ Millar 1977, 158–163; Maiuro 2012, 55–67, 81–88.

⁹¹ Maiuro 2012, 88–117.

⁹² Lo Cascio 2015, 66–67.

⁹³ Verboven 2002, 183–223.

⁹⁴ However, Maiuro (2012, 70–80) has recently argued that this source of land was less important than had previously been thought, and that the wills of the emperor's freedmen, who were obligated to leave half of their estates to their patrons if they died childless, were much more significant.

land to *conductores*, who did not farm it themselves, but rather collected the rent owed by the tenants, the *coloni*. Tenants of the Roman emperor may have been in an especially good position, as they had an avenue of redress against the abuse of the managers and contractors who administered the estates and the land they worked was unlikely to be sold out from under them. The emperor also enacted policies that encouraged the exploitation of marginal land by remitting rent on newly cultivated plots. Thus, imperial ownership of land might have actually increased access to land for small-scale cultivators.⁹⁵ Freedmen and slaves were primarily responsible for managing the emperor's property, though freedmen can also be found overseeing taxation.

Beyond land that he owned directly, the Roman emperor also collected taxes on land as well as a range of other sectors. Tax farmers, or *publicani*, who were not imperial officials, played a central role in this system, which is discussed at more length in chapter 8.A. For now, it suffices to say that, in the Republican period, the equestrian order was associated with tax farming. While the association was less explicit in the Principate, equestrians and even some senators must have been involved.⁹⁶

More importantly, equestrian and senatorial status made one eligible to hold certain offices within the imperial system. While many of these positions were salaried, the performance of them also provided opportunities for licit and illicit gain. In the provinces, the most prominent imperial official was the governor, who commanded armies and adjudicated legal disputes.⁹⁷ Although a provincial governor and his staff spent only a limited amount of time in any one province, they had ample opportunities to enrich themselves.⁹⁸ The judicial duties of the governor and his legates would have allowed them to take bribes on a regular basis, and the sums involved could be substantial, four million sesterces in one case.⁹⁹ Governors and their staff also had legal means of extracting money from the provincials. They were allowed, for example, to requisition whatever supplies they deemed necessary as they traveled through the province with very little practical oversight. True, the governor might have provided provincials access to imperial elite networks, and his judicial functions might have lowered transaction costs, but for most in the provinces, the most immediate economic role played by the governor and his staff would have been that of a parasite.

⁹⁵ Kehoe 2013; 2015.

⁹⁶ Brunt 1990, 354–432; Duncan-Jones 2016, 118–122. For tax farming in the Republican period, Badian 1972.

⁹⁷ For the duties of the governor in provincial administration, see Weaverdyck, vol. 1, 261–267.

⁹⁸ Tan 2017, 68–90 provides a detailed account of Republican period profiteering. Brunt 1990, 53–95 argues for continued corruption in the Principate. For judicial corruption in the Late Antiquity, see Slootjes 2006, 61–68, and 61–62 for the appropriateness of the term ‘corruption.’

⁹⁹ Pliny *Epistulae* (Plin. *Ep.*) 3. 9. 13.

We also see extractive power in other domains. The emperor or the Roman state (it is not quite clear and functionally irrelevant) owned, for example, many decorative stone quarries throughout the empire.¹⁰⁰ In places where transportation costs were low enough that a private contractor might make a profit, the right to exploit these quarries was leased for a portion of the product.¹⁰¹ In more remote areas, like the Eastern Desert in Egypt, the emperor managed the quarry directly through a *procurator* overseeing a hierarchically organized staff and many free-born laborers, along with, possibly, slaves and convicts.¹⁰² Beyond this, the emperor also owned a variety of other productive resources, including mines, sources of luxury products like the balsam groves around Jericho, and certain trees in the forests of Lebanon and elsewhere, which were used to build ships and military infrastructure.¹⁰³ Imperial dominion over extractive resources, therefore, was a way of mobilizing heavy goods over long distances, and sometimes in great quantities.

III.4 Distribution

Another direct role of sovereigns in supply systems came through their role as redistributors of resources *par excellence*. Spending on the army was a significant part of this, which will be treated in the following section. Beyond spending on the army, other exchanges between sovereigns and those they ruled (donations, gifts, land grants etc.) were, by definition, not reciprocal. As a result, the largesse of sovereigns was a distinct form of nonmarket exchange that, because of the tremendous wealth of sovereigns, had outsized economic consequences.

Gift-giving was a mainstay of the Hellenistic court system.¹⁰⁴ In this system, the monarch distributed intrinsically valuable gifts like land and precious metals as well as royal titles or rights that conferred privileged status to members of his court, in exchange for their support.¹⁰⁵ The grants could be bestowed upon social elites, as well as to local organizations like cities and temples, or at a smaller scale to individuals like military veterans. Land grants to cities and temples, which are the best-attested example of imperial largesse, demonstrate how such an arrangement enabled a monarch to transform an available resource into both social and economic value. In principle, Seleukid monarchs appear to have used land grants as a way of stimulating economic behavior, by spurring the development of extractive regimes in territories with untapped agricultural potential.¹⁰⁶

100 Hirt 2010, 10–32; Russell 2013, 37–94 for the question of imperial ownership.

101 Russell 2013, 45–49.

102 Russell 2013, 39–45.

103 Hirt 2010, 32–46 (mines); Sartre 2005, 208 (timber in Lebanon), 210 (balsam); Harris 2018, 224–225 (imperial timber in general).

104 On this, Ma 2013, 344–345.

105 Strootman 2013, 47–48 provides a succinct description.

106 On which, Aperghis 2004, ch. 6. On the Hellenistic situation in Asia Minor, see Mileta 2008.

But the effect expanded beyond increased production. In one episode recounted by Seneca the Younger, Alexander the Great gifted a favored companion an entire city. When the companion balked at accepting the gift, saying that it was too great for him to receive, Alexander responded: “I am concerned, not in what is becoming for you to receive, but in what is becoming for me to give.”¹⁰⁷ Beyond distributing resources, grandiose imperial largesse of this type created bonds of obligation between the monarchs and their court. The habit of gift-giving therefore reinforced the unequal power relationships that bound a monarch with his courtiers, as well as with other actors like the temples that benefited from these land transfers.

The Roman emperor, similarly, was expected to be generous, and his generosity reflected his greatness. However, the terms in which this beneficence was expressed shifted, with land grants assuming a less important role, replaced in a certain sense by the funding of massive infrastructural projects. Indeed, while any wealthy citizen was expected to perform acts of benefaction for his community, generosity (*liberalitas*) was one of the defining virtues of a monarch.¹⁰⁸ For the Roman emperor, this took various forms, including regular cash handouts to the citizens of Rome and soldiers on important occasions. Perhaps more impactful, though, was the emperor’s benefactions for the city of Rome, which included ensuring a steady supply of grain and public building on a spectacular scale. The emperor’s patronage of the capital city helped make it the largest center of consumption in the Graeco-Roman world.

Distributions of grain to the urban citizenry at Rome began in the Late Republican period, but the emperors reformed the practice and claimed the distribution as a personal benefaction that reinforced their position as patron of the city of Rome.¹⁰⁹ Although the grain distribution only supported a subset of the urban population, the emperor also took pains to stabilize the grain market. Further, by subsidizing this subsistence food, the emperor also, indirectly, supported markets for other foodstuffs.¹¹⁰

The emperors also patronized Rome through building projects. The construction and maintenance of aqueducts was particularly important and explicitly associated with the emperor. Agrippa, Augustus’s lieutenant, built two aqueducts in the late first century BCE and formed a body of slaves for their upkeep, which he left to Augustus when he died. Augustus turned this gang over to the *res publica* and it was supported by the *aerarium*. Emperor Claudius, in the mid-first century CE, formed a second larger gang of slaves when he constructed his own aqueduct and

¹⁰⁷ Seneca the Younger *De beneficiis* 2. 16. 1, trans. Basore.

¹⁰⁸ Noreña 2011, 82–92.

¹⁰⁹ Bernard 2016, 65–70 discusses the ideology of grain distribution. The economic impacts of efforts to ensure the food supply of Rome have already been discussed in volume 1 in terms of their impact on shipping.

¹¹⁰ Tchernia 2016, 103.

this gang was supported from the *fiscus*, which also paid for the material required for maintenance.¹¹¹ No less than the grain supply, the aqueducts allowed the population of Rome to reach massive proportions.

The emperors' other building projects were less regular and, from a purely biological perspective, less fundamental, but they had important economic consequences nevertheless. While all elites and cities built monumental buildings, imperial projects were characterized by their size and by the liberal use of exotic decorative stones from the far corners of the empire.¹¹² The use of these stones demonstrated the wealth and power of the emperor and displayed, through their distant origins, the geographic extent of the empire to the inhabitants of Rome, who lived at its center.¹¹³ This not only supported the construction industry in the city, it also fueled widespread demand for decorative stone across the empire. Even if non-imperial projects could not afford to deploy this stone on the scale of imperial projects, there emerged a market for veneers that produced a similar effect.

III.5 Coordination and Networks

In addition to economic behaviors to which sovereigns or their agents contributed directly, their economic importance can be traced in two related domains: coordination and regulation related to economic processes, and the expansion of the networks that knit the region together in a sociopolitical sense, creating the massive supraregional empires that we associate with Southwest Asia and the Mediterranean in antiquity.

One example of the role that sovereigns in the Hellenistic period played in increasing coordination and regulation comes from an explicitly economic domain: coinage systems. In contrast to earlier periods, when the seat of coinage production rested in the *polis*, starting in the Hellenistic period, royal currencies minted in the name of dynasts and bearing the portrait of the sovereign himself came to dominate many of the western Asian and Mediterranean markets.

These currencies were explicitly linked to the personhood of the sovereign, bearing his name and portrait.¹¹⁴ They were, then, personalized in a conceptually different way from older Greek currencies, with their legitimacy linked to the charisma of a specific ruler. As the Hellenistic Empires expanded, the coins came to circulate in increasingly geographically extensive regions. This ensured, over time, that the image of the sovereign would be linked to monetary practice across broad terri-

¹¹¹ Frontinus, *De aquaeductu urbis Romae* 119.

¹¹² Hirt 2010; 2015; Russell 2013; 2018.

¹¹³ There is a debate as to whether the emperor monopolized the use of certain stones. For contrasting summaries, see Hirt 2015, 290–296 arguing in favor of monopolization, and Russell 2013, 193–197.

¹¹⁴ Thonemann 2015, ch. 8 especially.

tories. More concretely, it also gave sovereigns extensive power in influencing coin-based transactions within these territories, in contrast to the preexisting patchwork of civic coinages, which were regulated at a more local level. Egypt, with its controlled monetary zone, is the clearest example of this.¹¹⁵

Finally, the story of smaller, regional rulers in Southwest Asia offers an opportunity to consider how the minor monarchs and their social networks shaped patterns of regional connectivity. Although regional rulers are principally analyzed as political rather than economic actors, the pressures of negotiating their sovereignty within regional and ‘global’ contexts had important ramifications on the development of frontier economies. As regional rulers engaged in these negotiations, they faced choices regarding their degree of integration into global networks, on the one hand, and independence from outside powers, on the other. The tensions between greater connectivity and greater division, and the variety of strategies that regional rulers employed in balancing these tensions, had variable economic consequences on the local level, which in turn could shape imperial systems.

In the Hellenistic period, these rulers were in charge of what have often been called the ‘minor kingdoms’ including for example Armenia, Pontos, and Bithynia, which were only incompletely integrated into the structures of the Seleukid state. More than formal political arrangements, it was actually kinship relationships that connected Graeco-Macedonian families and other local dynasties across this region, such as that of the marriage between Seleukid Antiochos III and Laodike, a Pontic princess.¹¹⁶ Marriages between different regional dynastic families and the Arsakid dynasts, such as that between a Kommagenian princess and Orodes II,¹¹⁷ highlight the multipolarity of these ties.

The spread of Roman power affected the status and organization of these older minor kingdoms and city-states. It also brought players from the major dynastic empires – the final Ptolemies, for example – into the Roman system. Some territories merged into the provincial structure of the Roman Empire, as with Kappadokia in 17 CE, while others like Armenia remained at least somewhat independent longer. The growth of Rome also spurred the emergence of new regional powers like the Nabataeans and Palmyrenes, who were minor players in preceding periods. As in the Hellenistic period, regional rulers in the Roman period continued to maintain political relationships with multiple external powers, as with Armenia and both its Roman and Arsakid ties.

In the diplomatic language of the Roman world, these relationships were couched in the vocabulary of friendship, with the monarchs frequently described as *amici* (friends) and *socii* (allies). And indeed, even in the world of fairly centralized Roman imperial power, these “friendly kings” served an important function in regu-

¹¹⁵ Von Reden 2007, 31–58. See also Weaverdyck and Fabian, ch. 8.A, III.1.2, this volume.

¹¹⁶ Polybius (Polyb.) 5. 43. 3–4.

¹¹⁷ Cass. Dio 49. 23. 4.

lating Roman foreign policy, supporting the empire's political and military interests.¹¹⁸ Behind the veneer of politesse, however, was the threat of coercive power that carried an existential threat for regional leaders. As Plutarch's Marius said to the restless Mithridates, "either strive to be stronger than Rome, or do what is ordered in silence."¹¹⁹

The suppression of the independent tendencies of the allies did, however, sometimes necessitate Roman military investment, defense against which created particularly acute pressures on the budget of local authorities. At the same time, the desire for local sovereignty, or at least the illusion of it, also affected the development of currency systems across western Asia, as the right to mint coinage was typically the prerogative of a sovereign. One significant cause for the diversity of coinages that circulated in western Asia even into the Roman and Arsakid periods was the continued prominence of regional dynasties.

The tendency toward greater integration, on the other hand, created an incentive for regional rulers to establish and maintain relationships with neighbors, and particularly with the most powerful states. These relationships often entailed the exchange of financial resources in return for various types of allegiance or protection. Regional rulers spent money – sometimes tremendous sums – currying favor with important intermediaries in the Roman Empire, with provincial governors and senators being the most important targets.¹²⁰ The question of whether formal payments of tribute flowed from allied kings to Rome has been the subject of disagreement, but the practice is only sporadically and tenuously apparent in the transmitted texts, and likely was not a central characteristic of such relationships.¹²¹

The Roman Empire in turn showered allies with gifts and sometimes subsidies. Many of the standard gifts were laden with symbolic value, evoking the pomp of kingship.¹²² The Roman state also did occasionally pay straightforward subsidies to some of its allies.¹²³ Moreover, the Roman Empire also invested in technological and infrastructural development of allied territories, a fact attested even at the far reaches of Roman influence in the South Caucasus.¹²⁴ This type of infrastructural aid was likely intended to keep regional friends happy and in power, but at the same time, it served as a technology transfer system that spread Roman construction methods far and wide.

118 Braund 1984.

119 Plutarch *Marius* 31. 3. This was not an idle threat, as the Roman annexation of much of Mithridates' kingdom demonstrates.

120 See Cicero *Pro Rabirio Postumo* 4 for the case of Ptolemy XII Auletes, who ran up massive debts in his efforts to secure his position vis-à-vis the Romans, Siani-Davies 1997.

121 See the discussion in Braund 1984, 63–67 and notes.

122 Braund 1984, 27–29.

123 Braund 1984, 62.

124 E.g., Braund 1991.

Beyond the financial ties binding the regional rulers to the Roman state, the practices of intermarriage between Hellenistic dynastic families continued in the Roman period, with Roman emperors taking an interest in the affairs.¹²⁵ Proximity to the city of Rome also grew in importance. The practice of fostering the youth of regional rulers at Rome – as well as more explicit cases of hostage-taking – ensured that the upper echelon of the client states, along with neighboring empires, was deeply familiar with personal politics of the Roman capital.¹²⁶

IV Armies

Next, we treat an organization that was the key to royal and imperial power within states of all sizes: the army. From the time of the Hellenistic monarchies until the height of the Roman Empire, armies facilitated the expansion and maintenance of imperial territory and thus the acquisition of tributary and tax-paying lands – lands that, as discussed above, were the central component of state wealth. That said, the professional standing army of the Roman Empire, which eventually spread broadly and more or less permanently across imperial space, can be contrasted sharply with the shifting constellations of armed forces (both professional forces and mercenaries) that characterized the early Hellenistic world, or even the more stable military configurations of the late Hellenistic period.

Armies were not producers in a classical sense. However, they were capable of ‘producing’ both destruction and peace, and as such played an important role in setting the parameters for the production of others. They brought ruinous destruction in the wake of their campaigns, damaging cities and local populations, and hindering their productive capabilities; at other times, however, they acted as stabilizing forces, creating stable conditions that allowed local populations to flourish.

IV.1 Consumption

IV.1.1 Provisioning

When considered as economic agents, armies were first and foremost a consumptive power on a massive scale. From wartime military encampments to permanent bases, armies were comprised of soldiers who were at least at the moment not working as agriculturalists. The basic supplies of food, clothing, and equipment required to support these soldiers – whether paid directly by the state or by soldiers themselves,

¹²⁵ Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 4.

¹²⁶ Nabel 2017.

perhaps out of their salaries – would have increased and/or redirected surplus production throughout the wider economic system.

The scale and complexity of the consumptive demands depended both on the nature of the forces to be supplied, and on their patterns of deployment. Operational strengths for the Hellenistic armies of Southwest Asia, generally multiethnic and including both levied territorial ('national') and allied troops as well as mercenaries, have been long-debated, but the scale was, by any estimate, vast.¹²⁷ Beyond the land forces, the major Hellenistic armies also fielded navies, which served a primary function in protecting port access, but also extended the reach of the empires across seas.¹²⁸ Given the variety of Hellenistic military configurations, it is difficult to generalize about their consumptive demands. Speaking of equipment, for example, consider the very different needs of the various specialized force types that comprised Hellenistic armies: light- and heavy infantry, elite troops, cavalry, and sailors.¹²⁹ The armies also included nonhuman actors – horses but also, according to one account of Seleukos I's campaign to Ipsos, 480 elephants.¹³⁰

The citizen-soldiers of the Greek world were expected to supply their own weapons. Large donations of armor by Hellenistic kings – such as Ptolemy V, who according to an account in Polybius provided armor for 6,000 foot-soldiers to the Achaian League¹³¹ – demonstrate, however, that mass-scale provisioning was also a possibility. Liturgies could also be used to raise money for equipment and war supplies.

In the Roman period, with the standardization and formalization of army provisioning, it becomes possible to track the different ways that centralized provisioning at the level of the unit differed from that of individual soldiers. In the interest of organization efficiency, units probably bought supplies from large-scale suppliers or simply drew on goods controlled by the state, while individual soldiers are more

127 Recent overviews estimate an overall force sizes in the third century BCE of about 50,000 for the Seleukid army, and 30,000–40,000 for the Ptolemaic, with perhaps up to twice that number of troops raised for specific campaigns in each case. Some ancient sources furnish troop numbers far beyond these, Appian for example suggests an army of 240,000. On the numerical strength of the Seleukid army, see Aperghis 2004, 197, who further specifies that roughly 15,000 of these troops were mercenaries. On the figures for the Ptolemaic army, see Fischer-Bovet 2014, 54.

128 Figures for the naval forces of the Hellenistic monarchies are even more speculative than those concerning the land armies (De Souza 2007, 434). On the idea of a Hellenistic army as maritime power, see Strootman 2019. On the thin line between the actions of the 'official' navies and of piratic opportunists, see Chaniotis 2008, 134.

129 These troops were commanded by a hierarchy of officers, including three named in sources, the *strategos*, *hegemon*, and *hipparchos*, although their precise functions are unclear. For an overview of organizational debates, see Fischer-Bovet 2014, 116–118; and Bar-Kochva 1976, 85–93 on the organizational structure of the Seleukid army.

130 Diodorus Siculus (Diod. Sic.) 20. 113. 4. This ratio of infantry to cavalry was quite high, with the Hellenistic norm being closer to 10:1 or even lower, see Aperghis 2004, 194. On elephants elsewhere, see Diod. Sic. 18. 71. 2–6; Plutarch *Demetrius* 29. 4–5.

131 Polybius 22. 9. 3.

likely to have bought goods locally, possibly from smaller-scale producers, or acquired them through their personal networks. Two accounts of soldiers' pay that include amounts withheld to pay for basic necessities hint at a shift in the method by which goods were acquired.¹³² The first, from 81 CE, shows that roughly three-quarters of the total salary was withheld for things like clothing and food.¹³³ The second, from 192 CE, shows that, at this point, automatic deductions were much lower, suggesting that either the state no longer charged soldiers for necessary supplies or the soldiers were expected to acquire more of their supplies themselves.¹³⁴ In the early second century CE, private letters preserved on papyri record soldiers requesting goods like shoes and even a sword from their family, so the latter explanation is more likely.¹³⁵ The precise timing of the shift in supply practice is unclear, but it might be related to Hadrian's reforms, elliptically referred to in the *Historia Augusta*.¹³⁶ Prior to this, the army would have either consumed more goods extracted through rents or taxes or goods bought from large-scale producers, which would have concentrated wealth in the hands of the wealthy. After this shift, consumption by individual soldiers would have dispersed more wealth into the local economies.

IV.1.2 Salaries and Land Grants

Beyond the consumption of soldiers themselves and the costs of war supplies, there is also the question of payment for soldiers. Hellenistic troops could be remunerated in different ways depending on their agreements with a given monarch, but the methods included payment in coin, the provision of rations, and grants of land, although not all strategies were used by all monarchs. It has long been accepted that the costs of armed conflict were a central driver in the expansion of coinage in the Hellenistic period.¹³⁷ More detailed research has suggested that it was a very specific type of soldier who drove the minting of coinage: mercenaries.¹³⁸ We also do, however, have some evidence that garrison soldiers were also paid in silver, at least some of the time.¹³⁹ This practice of payment in coin, even if limited to some sectors of the army or some periods, spread the use of imperial coinage into remote outposts, and thus created an expanded monetized zone that reduced the friction of payment in these spaces.

¹³² For soldiers' pay and deductions, see Speidel 2009, 349–380.

¹³³ Fink 1971 no. 68.

¹³⁴ Fink 1971 no. 70.

¹³⁵ Wierschowski 1984, 121.

¹³⁶ Scriptores Historia Augusta, *Hadrian* 10. 3; Speidel 2009, 366.

¹³⁷ See, e.g., Bresson 2005, 50. Compare to the situation in China, Leese-Messing, ch. 6, IX.2, this volume.

¹³⁸ De Callataj 2000.

¹³⁹ SEG 32–1400, Sherwin-White 1982.

Not all soldiers were paid in coin, with land grants representing another common form of remuneration, although these took different forms in the Seleukid and Ptolemaic spaces. Land grants and the long-term military settlement that followed in their wake restructured local landownership and created closer relationships between landowners and monarchical authorities. They also placed military settlers in close proximity to local residents (both Greek and non-Greek) across the space, and they extended the area of agricultural cultivation. The massive agricultural reclamation project undertaken in the Fayum in Egypt stands as the clearest example of this.¹⁴⁰

The Roman army's pay scale was more regularized, based on multiples of a basic wage. This wage was very static over time, with rare, but dramatic raises. Domitian increased it by a third in 84 CE, then it was static until Septimius Severus doubled it in 197 CE. This was partly to account for inflation in the previous decades.¹⁴¹ Compared to other laborers, Roman soldiers were comfortable but not particularly wealthy.¹⁴² Most soldiers received a similar wage: infantry in auxiliary units were paid five-sixths as much as those in the legions, and cavalrymen in both the *auxilia* and legions were paid seven-sixths as much as legionary infantry. Each unit had a few low-level officers that were paid one-and-a-half times and two times as much as an infantryman, but above this level, wages rise much more dramatically. Most legionary centurions were paid 15 times as much as an infantryman, but some were paid 30 times as much and one received 60 times as much. The salary of auxiliary commanders was actually lower than that of legionary centurions, but of the same order of magnitude. In addition to their salaries, soldiers also received special gifts of cash on important occasions (*'donativa'*), and legionary soldiers received a substantial discharge bonus.

Legionary centurions, then, could be as wealthy as some local elites – which in turn increased the consumption power of soldiers. Indeed, a Talmudic source illustrating the social hierarchy places the centurion above the town councilor,¹⁴³ and centurions are found lending money to local notables in the Babatha archive.¹⁴⁴ The army, then, injected a new type of elite personage into local society who enjoyed unique legal privileges and social authority stemming from his role in the imperial apparatus.

IV.2 Production

The Hellenistic world was born out of armed conflict, and there is a consensus among modern scholars that frequent – nearly uninterrupted – interstate conflict is

140 On which, see Weaverdyck and Fabian, ch. 8.A, IV.1.2, this volume.

141 Rathbone 2009, 312. In the third century, as the political order became strained, emperors increased military pay more frequently to secure their support, but this was also a period of monetary collapse, so the meaning of the salary is difficult to understand.

142 Alston 1995, 105–108; Rathbone 2009, 310–312.

143 Isaac 1990, 137.

144 P. Yadin 11.

a defining characteristic of the period.¹⁴⁵ The prevalence of war in this period can be understood as the result of overlapping political and economic factors. On the one hand and in terms of politics, given the polycentricity of Hellenistic power, there were a great number of sovereigns, each of whom could exercise state-sanctioned violence in the pursuit of his own goals. Such violence was glorified because ideological power in the Hellenistic monarchies was based on the military prowess of the king as evidenced by his ability to win victories, in a model that has its roots in Greek thought about kingship, but which was anathematic to political organization in democratic *poleis*.¹⁴⁶ At the same time, Hellenistic conflicts – beginning with Alexander’s own conquests – were frequent battles over land, territorial control, and booty, and in this sense, they can be seen as economic as well as political conflicts.¹⁴⁷ Eckstein has summarized the key features of Hellenistic state relationships that lead to hypermilitarization as “anarchy; militarization; multipolarity; the offensive as ideology, strategy, and technique; the primitive character of interstate diplomacy.”¹⁴⁸ The frequency and massive cost of wars in the Hellenistic world in fact functioned as a check on the concentration of wealth in imperial coffers, given the great expense required to recruit and maintain a competitive Hellenistic army.

Although this type of interstate warfare could be ‘productive’ from the perspective of a state looking to expand its territory and tax base and indeed military power, it caused enormous damage along the way. Furthermore, if a monarch was unsuccessful, a loss could have long-term economic consequences in terms of lost territory, beyond the costs incurred in war. In the course of warfare, forces turned their destructive power most often against rival cities.¹⁴⁹ Technological developments in the field of siege machinery increased the effectiveness of these tools in attacking fortified sites. Massive state investment in fortifications at urban sites and hinterland systems was therefore necessary.¹⁵⁰ In this way, the money spent on war was not all directed outward from imperial centers to mercenaries and provisions, but was also in some cases inwardly directed. In the case of Greek *poleis* in the Hellenistic period, the funding for the construction and maintenance of these fortifications was sourced at least in part from the low-interest loans and donations of wealthy citizens (as well as foreign metics), whose benefaction was announced through public contribution lists (*epidoseis*) bestowing honor on those who donated. In this way,

145 Chaniotis 2008, ch. 1; Eckstein 2006, ch. 4. This model pushes against an earlier understanding of the Hellenistic period that stressed the development of a balance of power after ca. 280 BCE, on which, Austin 1986.

146 The Byzantine *Suda* defines kingship as follows: “Neither has nature produced the institution of kingship (*basileiai*) among men, but it is the creation of those who can command armies and administer affairs with expertise,” trans. Sage 1996, n. 271.

147 Chaniotis 2008, 14–16.

148 Eckstein 2006, 99.

149 E.g., Lysimacheia: Livy 33. 38. 10–12.

150 On the city-hinterland fortification systems and their administration, Baker 2000.

funding the military defense of a city was one avenue for transforming money into social and political power.¹⁵¹

It was not just the world of cities that was affected, however, with literary and inscriptional evidence speaking repeatedly about damage to agricultural territories in the course of war.¹⁵² One evocative, if ultimately impressionistic, account comes from an inscription from the city of Sestos, which describes how after many years of war, “... everything in the fields had been carried off, most of the land not sown, and the dearth of crops which recurred continuously reduced the people publicly and every individual citizen privately to penury.”¹⁵³

In reality, the true extent of this damage is difficult to estimate, and it has been argued that agricultural damage sustained in the course of war was rarely severe enough to imperil cities,¹⁵⁴ nevertheless, it likely depressed agricultural yields and caused considerable local pain and hardship. That the damage to agricultural lands presented a problem is, furthermore, evidenced by guidance concerning the burning fields and destroying crops that appeared in normative texts. Philo of Byzantium’s guide to siege warfare, for example, advocates for destroying agricultural lands only after a failed siege attempt, thus ensuring that in the case of a successful campaign, the territory will be productive for the victors.¹⁵⁵

Beyond intentional and collateral damage to crops, the armies also exacted a heavy economic toll on an occupied rural landscape simply through their subsistence requirements. Alongside the destruction of city infrastructure and the spoiling of rural land, the sacking for booty and particularly enslavement of vanquished populations are two other consequences that should be mentioned here, although in this case, one community’s loss was very much another’s gain.¹⁵⁶

The rise of Roman power, while initially a catalyst for even more wars, eventually ushered in a fundamental change: a single hegemony. Polybius deemed this change, which had its roots in the late third century BCE, to be the stitching-together of the Eastern and Western Mediterranean into a *somatoeide*, an organic whole.¹⁵⁷ The Roman period saw very little interstate violence. Even before the creation of provinces in the Near East, the Romans suppressed large-scale violence by preventing the kings under their sway from going to war with each other. The famous ‘Day of Eleusis’ in 169 BCE, when a Roman ambassador prevented the Seleukid king, Antiochos IV, from invading Ptolemaic Egypt, was an early demonstration of the

¹⁵¹ Chaniotis 2013.

¹⁵² E.g., Chandezon 1999; Chaniotis 2008, 122.

¹⁵³ *OGIS* 339, *I.Sestos* 1. Trans. and discussion, Chaniotis 2011, 122.

¹⁵⁴ Foxhall 1993.

¹⁵⁵ D 87 and 90–1, ed. Garlan 1974, 325; Chaniotis 2008, 123.

¹⁵⁶ For the position that the spoils of war did not constitute an important source of revenue, see Aperghis 2004, 175, but cf. Chaniotis 2008, 129–137. On plunder as a motivator of troop loyalty, see Austin 1986, 464–465.

¹⁵⁷ Polyb. 1. 3. 4.

Romans' ability to prevent large-scale, state-led violence, and represented a decisive shift in the system of interstate relations that had developed in the later Hellenistic world. Although the Roman army was not directly involved, the ultimatum that checked Antiochos's advance was only effective because Roman armies had defeated the Seleukid king Antiochos III over 20 years earlier and had just crushed the Antigonid king Perseus at the battle of Pydna.¹⁵⁸ Interstate warfare would not really abate for over a century, but now the contenders had to consider Roman interests. After Pompey's defeat of Mithridates and the establishment of the province of Syria in 63 BCE, every ruler west of the Euphrates had some form of friendly relationship with Rome, so interstate warfare was very difficult. When the Judaeen king Herodes attacked the Nabataeans, he took pains to publicly justify his actions, but a Nabataean official was in Rome at the time and appealed to Augustus personally. A strongly worded letter from Augustus was enough to end the war.¹⁵⁹

As 'client kingdoms' became provinces, warfare between states became impossible, with the exception of the Parthians. Warfare did not cease altogether. There were Roman-Parthian wars, Roman civil wars, and two great Jewish rebellions, but these conflicts were separated by decades of peace such as were unknown in the Hellenistic period. Even in the face of reduced interstate warfare, medium- and small-scale violence persisted. However, the Roman army took at various moments aggressive measures to intervene and settle even these smaller threats.

One way the army accomplished this, indirectly, was by employing young men from areas known for banditry.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the third-century historian Cassius Dio, in a fictionalized exchange between Augustus's advisors states that one of the advantages of a standing army is that "the most active and vigorous element of the population, which is generally obliged to gain its livelihood by brigandage, will support itself without molesting others."¹⁶¹ That such a policy was actually followed, at least in part, is evident from the names of auxiliary units that attest to the place in which they were initially recruited. A larger portion of those recruited in the Near East come from mountainous areas or regions near the desert – zones known for supporting banditry.¹⁶²

IV.3 (Re)distribution and Connectivity

Armies, in part by virtue of their wide geographic spread, played an important role in a variety of distribution systems, both literal and metaphorical. They were, on

¹⁵⁸ Polyb. 29. 27; Livy 45. 12.

¹⁵⁹ Joseph. *AJ* 16. 9.

¹⁶⁰ Haynes 2013, 106–109.

¹⁶¹ Cass. Dio 52. 27. 5, trans. Cary.

¹⁶² Kennedy 1989.

the one hand, a central vector through which both inter- and intrastate resources were redistributed – in addition to land seizure and plunder, the salaries of soldiers themselves, just mentioned above as an indicator of army consumption, can also be seen as a component in intrastate redistribution of wealth. On a more physical level, army installations also came to serve as nodal points in networks of imperial expansion and control. The installations served both as physical instantiations of imperial power over space, but also as outposts of imperial economic regimes. Armies were finally also often active in the creation and protection of infrastructure that facilitated connectivity. Although much of this activity advanced military aims, it had consequences for the freedom of movement across space, which impacted distribution mechanisms.

In the Hellenistic period, we see the start of long-term military outposts, with some proportion of troops – perhaps tens of thousands of men in the Seleukid world – stationed in the military garrisons (*phourai*) and guard posts (*stathmoi*, *phulakai*) that dotted the landscape of western Asia.¹⁶³ These garrisons, which were staffed with forces of various sizes who remained at the garrison for variable periods, were placed often in dependent cities, and marked a certain loss of autonomy of a city.¹⁶⁴ They tended to sit at nodal points within the territory of the respective empire, existing in order to extend rule far from imperial centers. Like the broader composition of Hellenistic armies, the garrisons could be manned by troops from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including by nonlocal mercenaries, which facilitated the movement of individuals far and wide across imperial space. The multiethnic character of the army and the geographic movement of these people served to integrate distant areas of the empire.

The Roman army similarly moved people across regions. Soldiers stationed in Southwest Asia and Egypt generally came from the eastern provinces of the Empire.¹⁶⁵ While some soldiers served close to home, many were stationed either far from their city of origin in the same province or in a different province altogether. Soldiers serving in Syria came from the Levant as well as from Egypt, Asia Minor, and even Thrace. The army in the Near East, then, served to integrate the wider region more closely. But soldiers from Syria served even farther afield.¹⁶⁶ A well-excavated auxiliary fort on the Middle Danube was manned by the *cohors I Hemesenorum*, which formed the core of a community that maintained close ties to its Syrian homeland.¹⁶⁷ The practical impact of military service on social networks is illustrated in a second-century letter of recommendation found in Karanis. The letter writer instructs his brother to help the bearer, a veteran named Terentianus, to set-

¹⁶³ Aperghis (2004, 200) rates the strength of peacetime garrisons at perhaps 30,000.

¹⁶⁴ Chaniotis 2002, 101–103.

¹⁶⁵ Pollard 2000, 111–134; Stoll 2015, 137–167.

¹⁶⁶ Grainger 2018, 77–145 collects the evidence, but cf. Olshanetsky 2019 for a sharp critique.

¹⁶⁷ Fitz 1972.

tle in Karanis by renting him a house and a field, connecting him with a linen merchant from whom he can buy furnishings, and by informing him about “what sort of villagers we have, lest he get into trouble.”¹⁶⁸ Soldiers were nodes that linked their home communities not only to the areas in which they served, but to the soldiers that they served with, facilitating the mobility of goods, people, habits, and ideas across the empire.

Furthermore, we see in the Roman period a clear example of how spending on the military could amount to a large-scale redistribution of wealth between regions. While it is generally thought that the provinces of Syria and Egypt paid more in taxes than they received in the form of salaries, Judaea was probably a net importer of taxes.¹⁶⁹ The army also redistributed capital through imperial investments in infrastructure. The construction of roads, bridges, canals, and ports needed to move soldiers and supplies quickly facilitated the movement of all kinds of goods. In addition, soldiers trained to build military infrastructure were often sent to advise and manage purely civilian projects, so the army created human capital that was invested throughout the empire.¹⁷⁰

This redistribution of wealth had significant implications for the population of the Roman Near East. The construction of roads seems to have stimulated the growth of permanent settlement in areas where they had previously been sparse.¹⁷¹ Veterans, with their discharge bonuses, savings, skills, and social connections, were well-placed to become modestly wealthy farmers and traders upon retirement, and they are well-represented among upper echelons of urban and village societies in the Near East.¹⁷² In a few places, like Berytus, Heliopolis, Ptolemais, and Jerusalem after the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–136 CE), the Roman emperor founded formal colonies populated by veterans, dispossessing the previous inhabitants of their land and creating communities of people who identified with the empire.¹⁷³ The Latin culture of some of these places, most famously Berytus, which became a major center for the study of Roman law in the Late Roman Empire, helped plug them into larger imperial networks. However, the epigraphic record shows that veterans settled in many places beyond these formal colonies. The areas around legionary bases, like Bostra, had significant veteran populations.¹⁷⁴ These people brought money and their own labor into local economies, increasing production and consumption, and, by virtue of the personal relationships and identities forged during their service in the army, spread social networks.

¹⁶⁸ SB 6. 9636 = <http://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;6;9636> (accessed Jan 3rd, 2021); trans. Lewis 1959.

¹⁶⁹ Roth 2002, 382–383.

¹⁷⁰ Weaverdyck vol. 1, 273; Pollard 2000, 242–247; Roth 2002, 388–391.

¹⁷¹ Liebeschuetz 2007, 435.

¹⁷² Stoll 2015.

¹⁷³ Isaac 1990, 318–325; for Berytus and Heliopolis, see now Paturel 2019.

¹⁷⁴ Stoll 2015.

Roman armies also built infrastructure, including roads and fortifications, to solidify their hold on power and prevent the emergence even of small-scale violence. This would have been particularly important in protecting trade routes. In the first half of the first century BCE, widespread warfare drove many in the Mediterranean to piracy, increasing the risks of shipping to such a degree that the grain supply of Rome and other imports were seriously threatened. In response, Pompey was given an extraordinary command with a huge fleet and authority over the entire Mediterranean, allowing him to coordinate attacks on pirate strongholds, leaving them no escape. He also allowed many to surrender and settled them in sparsely populated areas.¹⁷⁵ Although piracy persisted, the scale of the problem was greatly reduced.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, the Roman outpost on the Farasan Islands and the fleet in the Red Sea probably suppressed piracy by attacking pirates and their strongholds rather than defending individual merchant ships.¹⁷⁷ Since Roman warships were not suited for the journey across the Indian Ocean,¹⁷⁸ merchant ships carried guards for their own defense.¹⁷⁹

On land, Roman forces sometimes attacked bandits, but securing transportation routes from banditry in the long-term required heavy investments in infrastructure. Strabo notes that Arabian merchants were robbed less often after Roman soldiers from Syria broke up the band of robbers under the leadership of Zenodorus.¹⁸⁰ These robbers had been living in Trachonitis, a rocky region with many caves, providing refuge and hindering the advance of armies. Despite the fall of Zenodorus, Trachonitis remained a haven for bandits, a problem that King Herodes tried to solve by settling people from elsewhere in and around the region, but this was only partially successful.¹⁸¹ In the second century CE, the Romans built a road with watchtowers through Trachonitis linking Damascus to Bostra, the capital of Arabia and headquarters of a legion, which must have facilitated the safe passage of traffic.¹⁸² Recent work in the Eastern Desert of Egypt has provided new evidence for the role of military infrastructure in securing the routes from the Red Sea ports to the Nile.¹⁸³ These older routes were equipped with wells and guard posts by Ptolemy II to facilitate the import of war elephants from eastern Africa, but they were further developed and maintained after the Roman conquest of Egypt.

175 Cass. Dio 36. 20–37.

176 De Souza 1999, 149–178.

177 The fleet might also have prevented smuggling and maintained Roman military supremacy over Arabian and East African polities (Cobb 2018, 119–120).

178 Cobb 2018, 119–120.

179 Cobb 2018, 117–118.

180 Strabo 16. 2. 20; Joseph. *AJ* 16. 9.

181 Isaac 1990, 62–66.

182 Isaac 1990, 134–137. Stoll has recently argued that the settlement of veterans might have increased security as well (2015, 122–136).

183 Cobb 2018, 92–126 with further literature.

Armies, then, played the following roles: They were significant centers of consumption. They consumed vast amounts of foodstuffs, while their pay requirements consumed a tremendous portion of state wealth. Finally, functioning across broad geographies, armies unsurprisingly also had broad consequences in the sphere of (re)distribution. From the capture of booty to the payment of wages, armies were a key mechanism in the redistribution of resources between communities, and also into nonelite spaces. On a physical level, army communities became hubs at the frontiers of imperial space – often monetized hubs at that; while infrastructural projects of armies contributed to increased stability of both land and in some cases maritime trade routes, reducing risk and instability for merchants and other travelers. But at the same time, when evaluating the economic role of the army, its overwhelming potential to produce violence can never fall out of consideration.

V Temples

From Rome to Alexandria to Babylon, temples or sanctuaries, composed of assemblages of individuals including priests, worshippers, or dedicants, were the sites of ritual practices, regulated by the norms and ideologies of the relevant region, ranging from that of the Summero-Akkadian temples, to *polis*-based practices (including structures often termed ‘state cults’), through to Judaism. The affairs of the temples – and therefore much of their economic activity – were conducted within concrete physical spaces, often monumental in scale. Temple life often involved specific material practices, such as the collection and storage of particular types of objects; the production, consumption, or redistribution of foodstuffs; and precise recordkeeping. The material demands of cult practice meant that the temples were major hubs of consumption, while widespread practices of *euergetism* on the part of both private citizens and political authorities ensured that temples amassed considerable stores of wealth that, although not fully liquid, enabled the temples to develop a range of banking and credit-related functions.¹⁸⁴ On a more abstract level, temple involvement in landownership in some regions positioned this institution as a driving force behind the creation of agricultural surplus, at least some of which they then redistributed to other temple employees: non-agriculturalists who relied on the temple-held surplus. Finally, temples and the associated religious norms may have in some cases played a role in rule-setting and compliance, particularly in the realm of trust networks.¹⁸⁵

The degree to which temples have been considered as economic actors varies by region. In contrast to the Mediterranean world, where the *polis* has been under-

¹⁸⁴ Dignas 2002, 21–25.

¹⁸⁵ Padilla Peralta 2020.

stood as a central feature of political organization, traditional approaches to the Near Eastern have focused attention on these temple- or palace-complexes, whose vast powers led to the appellation “temple-states.”¹⁸⁶ The economic ramifications of this organizational difference found full expression in Moses Finley’s *Ancient Economy*, which describes the Near Eastern system as follows:

The Near Eastern economies were dominated by large palace- or temple-complexes, who owned the greater part of the arable, virtually monopolized anything that can be called “industrial production” as well as foreign trade ... and organized the economic, military, political and religious life of the society through a single complicated, bureaucratic, record-keeping operation ...¹⁸⁷

Even after Alexander the Great’s conquests and the rise of the Hellenistic monarchies that restructured political systems, it is indeed clear that temples owned and even directly administered vast tracts of arable land in the Near East and Egypt.¹⁸⁸ However, a more complicated picture of the position of temples has emerged in recent years, inspired by an increasing body of late cuneiform evidence that has expanded our understanding of economic activity in the Near East,¹⁸⁹ as well as by reconsiderations of sanctuaries’ interaction with states.¹⁹⁰ Pushback against Finley’s sharp distinction between Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman models, furthermore, has animated attempts to integrate Seleucid western Asia more fully into models of the ancient economic system.¹⁹¹ Thus, even as the nearly exclusive importance of the temple-complex has waned in economic thought about Near Eastern economies, the diverse instantiations of ‘sacred economies’ that developed in the Near East and the Mediterranean have received renewed attention, positioning temples not just as centers of agricultural production, but also as concentrators of a specific type of sacred wealth and as hubs of diverse consumption and distribution.

V.1 Organizational Variety

There have been long debates about the degree to which the various economic actions of temples constituted independent economic behavior – about whether, for

186 The phenomenon is traced back to much earlier periods in the Near East, but has been used in reference to the Hellenistic period, see classically Rostovtzeff 1: 1941, 502–517 and passim.

187 Finley 1999, 28.

188 On the Near East, van der Spek 2004. On Egypt (and including the nominal temple hold on some of this land), Manning 1999, 32, 50.

189 Chiefly the *Astronomical Diaries*, on which, see, e.g., Pirngruber 2017; van der Spek and Leeuwen 2014; see also Taasob, ch. 3.B, this volume

190 E.g., Dignas 2002. See also Aperghis 2004, 107–108 on temple-state relations in the Seleukid context.

191 Davies 2001, 7–9.

example, income raised by temples can be understood to be separate from civic revenue – and also about the scale of this activity and therefore its consequences for wider economic systems.¹⁹² In the context of the variegated landscape of post-Achaemenid Southwest Asia and the evidentiary disparities therein, there is no single answer to these questions.

Owing to the rich body of cuneiform evidence, Hellenistic Babylon provides a singular window into economic activities connected with temples, and particularly with the Esagila complex at Babylon.¹⁹³ The evidence documents the explicit economic activity of the temple as it relates to (1) temple staff and wages; (2) land-tenure regimes; and (3) incomes and expenditures.¹⁹⁴ They, and particularly the records of wages and rations paid to craftspeople and agriculturalists, demonstrate the wide involvement of the temple in local life.¹⁹⁵ The core individuals administering Mesopotamian temple systems like that at Babylon were members of an urban elite with deep roots in the region's cities – a sort of urban nobility.¹⁹⁶ The interaction between temple elites and both civic and imperial administrative systems changed over time, but at least in the case of the largest cities, there was a nominal separation of religious and secular administration, even if many of the same individuals were involved in both.¹⁹⁷

A different version of temples as core economic engines comes from Jerusalem. In contrast to the previous example, however, the activities of the temple of Jerusalem are reported not in temple records, but rather in the body of Hebrew and Aramaic religious texts and rabbinic commentaries, and also in Graeco-Roman transmitted texts. The scope of what we might consider direct economic data is, therefore, more restricted. There is, for example, more uncertainty about the nature of landholdings of the temple of Jerusalem, with debates about whether there were temple estates at all.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the tremendous scale of Herod's temple construction project as well as the rich records surrounding temple income from donation and particularly the fees paid by pilgrims highlight the temple's functions as both a center of consumption and a concentrator of wealth.¹⁹⁹

Both of the examples discussed thus far concern temples or religious identities that were, in at least some senses, non-Greek both socially and politically – perhaps seeming to bolster Finley's argument. But this line is not always easy to draw, as the development of ambiguous and syncretized religious practice across the ancient

¹⁹² On this, see Dignas 2002, 13–16.

¹⁹³ Boiy 2004, 265–275; Oelsner 1986; see further Taasob ch. 3.B, III.

¹⁹⁴ The *Astronomical Diaries* also provide extensive data on commodities' prices, see van der Spek and Leeuwen 2014.

¹⁹⁵ Boiy 2004, 241–262.

¹⁹⁶ Clancier 2007, 28–30; see also von Reden, ch. 12.A, VI, this volume for discussion

¹⁹⁷ Clancier and Gorre 2021, cf. Aperghis 2004, 109.

¹⁹⁸ Safrai 2003.

¹⁹⁹ Broshi 1987.

world demonstrates.²⁰⁰ There were sanctuaries that were anchored in the Greek religious system, which seem to have engaged in a similar range of economic activities to those discussed above, including the ownership of land.²⁰¹ In Asia Minor, the temples and other sanctuaries played an important political role as intermediaries between the populations of the Greek *poleis* and their Hellenistic monarchs.²⁰² Lavish donations are attested at some such sites as a result of attempts to curry favor, translating their political power into concrete economic wealth. As the Roman Empire expanded into these spaces, there was a general approach to tolerate the pre-existing sacred infrastructure and even to grant sacred properties special rights.²⁰³ At the same time, the expansion brought the Roman state religion into the east, implanting the Roman emperor as the subject of veneration himself, and situating the Roman governors as important arbiters in affairs of local cult practice.²⁰⁴

V.2 Consumption, Production, and Distribution

Landownership, particularly in areas where irrigation agriculture dominated like southern Mesopotamia and Egypt, but also elsewhere, positioned the temples as central figures within agricultural production systems.²⁰⁵ Beyond landholdings, there is also evidence for the existence of herdsmen and pastoral activities in association with both Egyptian and Babylonian temples.²⁰⁶ The legal structures surrounding both the ownership of temple lands and the labor systems by which they were cultivated were variable and often poorly understood. Temple estates in Seleukid Babylon and Ptolemaic Egypt provide a useful point of comparison, as in each case the temple institutions predated the monarchical structures of the Hellenistic period, and their priesthoods remained as bastions of preexisting elite structures. In Seleukid Babylonia, however, we know that at least some temple estates were not actually owned by the temples, but rather granted to them in usufruct by the new monarchs.²⁰⁷ Additionally, the practice of leasing temple lands to others who cultivated them is well attested, which offered a channel to collect rents.²⁰⁸ In Ptolemaic

200 See, e.g., Aliquot 2008 on rural sanctuaries in the Levant in the Roman period.

201 See the classic discussion of Kent 1948 and more recently Reger 1992.

202 Dignas 2002, 108–109.

203 Dignas 2002, 119 ff.

204 Beard, North, and Price 1998, 320–321.

205 See, e.g., Philo *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.76 on the profits of the temple in Jerusalem from landownership.

206 E.g., the herdsmen in Edfu, Manning 1999, 98–99. On the long Babylonian tradition of associating pastoral activities with temples, see Kozuh 2010. See also van der Spek 2004, 307.

207 In the Seleukid context, Aperghis 2004, 108. For Egypt, see the similar point in Manning 1999, 101.

208 In the case of leases from the Ptolemaic period, the taxes on such land were paid to the Ptolemaic state rather than to the temple institutions, Manning 2003, 198–201.

Egypt, lands that were designated as temple lands were able to be inherited, sold, or given as gifts, implying that the categories of temple land and privately owned land were not binary.²⁰⁹

Although this engagement in agricultural production has received the most attention from economic historians, temple organizations also engaged in a wide range of consumptive economic activities, and served as the stage for dedicatory activities. Between temple offerings and income from agropastoral activities among other things, a tremendous quantity of wealth came to be concentrated in temples.

Temples were also physical structures: usually monumental complexes that were expensive and labor-intensive to construct, and required ongoing investment in the form of maintenance.²¹⁰ The cult practices that occurred in the framework of the temples were also resource-intensive, driving consumption, but also distribution within the local community. Epigraphic evidence from second-century BCE Delos, for example, testifies to the considerable expense of buying sacrificial animals slaughtered as part of temple festivals, and even mentions the cost of importing animals not available locally.²¹¹ Temple festivals also acted as economic attractors, evidenced by the frequent association of periodic markets with temple gatherings.²¹² This association between temples and markets is a subject of discussion of a number of classical sources, with Strabo noting that Apollo's festival at Delos "serves the purposes of commerce."²¹³ The regular activities of temple festivals, ranging from the fairly local to the Pan-Hellenic, created one important framework for the expression of peer-polity networks, and provided an alternative to the networks rooted in urban centers themselves.

These wealthy temple organizations came, in some cases, to assume banking functions like the safe storage of wealth, and the extension of credit, including making resources available in times of crisis.²¹⁴ Even in Rome, where the economic behavior of temple organizations is generally considered to be far more attenuated than in earlier periods or in more eastern territories, temples continued to serve as safe deposits for wealth.²¹⁵

209 Manning 2003, ch. 6.

210 On construction costs, see, e.g., Barresi 2015.

211 Linders 1994.

212 De Ligt and de Neeve 1988. It should, however, be noted that these periodic markets were not limited to the sphere of what we might today group strictly under temple organizations, but also occurred alongside festivals held in conjunction with athletic events. Although these other types of performances were certainly 'religious' in a certain sense, the direct link to temple organizations is more attenuated in some cases than in others.

213 Strabo 10. 5. 4.

214 Dignas 2002, 21–25. There have been considerable debates about the scale of temple banking activity, particularly since much of the temple holdings comprised sacred wealth that was not freely available for secular use.

215 Herodianos 1. 14. 2–3 describes a fire in the late second century CE in the Forum of Peace that destroyed the wealth of many elite individuals. See Duncan-Jones 1994, 8–10 for other examples from the Roman world.

VI Local Elites

We turn now from actors whose economic behaviors can be understood as elements of state power, to those with a more tenuous connection to political authority. We consider first local elites, who in the Graeco-Roman world were characterized by the confluence of superiority of wealth and honor – played out in urban contexts.²¹⁶ In addition to their urban contexts, these elites were landowners on a vast scale, and had a hand in controlling agricultural prosperity. A central motivating factor for these elites, and a factor that therefore shaped their economic decision-making, was the markers of esteem that were bestowed upon them for their civic-minded behavior, including election to political office (for males), public declarations, and statues, all honors that enhanced one's total honor.²¹⁷ The system of honor in which they competed depended on the estimation of others, so the local elites were particularly well networked, as they interfaced with their own peers, as well as the larger community, including social inferiors.²¹⁸

VI.1 Production, Consumption, and Distribution

The social elites held land on vast scales. The most honorable way to acquire wealth according to Graeco-Roman moral thought was through agriculture, so those with money who aspired to honor invested heavily in land.²¹⁹ To make one's living through manual labor was similar to slavery, and trade on anything but a very large scale sordid.²²⁰ Of course, aristocrats did not always conform to this norm and they

216 For Mediterranean honor, see Horden and Purcell 2000, 487–523. For Roman honor, see Lendon 1997, 30–106; 2011; Verboven 2002, 45–48.

217 The esteem of the emperor and imperial elites is of less immediate import for the moment, and in any case, these could be thought of as particularly privileged members of the aristocrats' peer group. The emperor's ability to distribute political office in Rome made him uniquely similar to a public collective.

218 For alternative systems, see Lendon 1997, 89–105. In our period, the most important differences were in the value attached to different forms of making money: see Verboven 2007 on business classes; Mayer 2012 on middle classes with review Mouritsen 2012; Mouritsen 2011 on freedmen; also Wilson and Flohr 2016. For the confluence of the systems of Greek civic honor and Roman honor, see Heller and van Nijf 2017.

219 The *locus classicus* for the moral evaluation of various means of acquiring wealth is Cicero, *De officiis* 1, 150–151. Disreputable occupations include those that incur the ill will of others, require unskilled manual labor, rely on dishonesty (this includes all short-term retail), and those that cater to sensual pleasures. Honorable occupations include those requiring intelligence and those that are beneficial to society, including importing large quantities of goods from distant places. Cicero takes it as self-evident that agriculture is the most honorable occupation. For a defense of the general applicability of this passage in antiquity, see Finley 1999, 41–61.

220 Verboven 2012a, 601.

could mask their commercial interests through intermediaries, but even so, the ideal that aristocratic wealth was based on property, and more particularly on agriculture, meant that most wealthy people invested heavily in land. Whether they cultivated this land themselves through servile agents (*vilici*) or leased it to tenants, the aristocracy controlled large agricultural surpluses.²²¹ While their ideological ties to local cities, along with the friction of transportation costs, ensured that much of this surplus was used to support urban populations in the area in which it was produced,²²² the concentration of agricultural surpluses in a few hands would also have facilitated long-distance trade through efficiencies of scale. On the other hand, investments in real estate also froze assets, which could lead to a shortage of cash.²²³

The Roman period, partly as a result of the agricultural handbooks of Cato (second century BCE), Varro (first century BCE), and Columella (first century CE), offers evidence for the significant intellectual investment and development of farming techniques intended to maximize productivity while minimizing risk.²²⁴ For example, the treatment and application of manure and particularly the cultivation of plants specifically to replenish the soil was quite sophisticated.²²⁵ Faunal evidence from Italy and the western provinces shows that Roman livestock was generally larger than what had come before, suggesting improvements in breeding and care.²²⁶ The Roman agronomists recognize their debt to older Carthaginian and Hellenistic agricultural writings, most of which are now lost, so it is difficult to tell how uniquely ‘Roman’ these techniques were. Despite the marginality of the Mediterranean climate, it was possible to achieve yields comparable to those achieved in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe.²²⁷ The degree to which these results actually were achieved is a different question, and one that surely varied between regions and even estates.

Turning to elite consumption patterns, we find that they served simultaneously to demonstrate the wealth and cultural knowledge of the consumer. Conspicuous consumption, particularly in the context of feasts, set off an emulative cycle that has been characterized as a “consumer revolution.”²²⁸ The spread of tableware associated with elite commensality practices, which can be connected also to develop-

²²¹ Erdkamp 2005; Erdkamp, Verboven, and Zuiderhoek 2015.

²²² This fact has led historians to classify ancient cities as Weberian “consumer cities,” but the heuristic utility of this label has been exhausted (Erdkamp 2001).

²²³ The example of Pliny relying on a loan from his mother-in-law to buy a farm has already been mentioned (*Ep.* 3. 19).

²²⁴ Kron 2008b, 2012 emphasizes the productivity of Roman agriculture. For innovations within the Roman agricultural writers, see Diederich 2007; Marcone 2006.

²²⁵ Kron 2008b, 76; White 1970, 125–145.

²²⁶ Kron 2008a.

²²⁷ Kron 2008b, 76–77.

²²⁸ Wallace-Hadrill 2008.

ments at Hellenistic courts, reflect developments in not just style, but actually in the dietary practices in elite centers across the ancient world.²²⁹

Local elites did not distribute their wealth without a purpose. In order to achieve honor within the city, an aristocrat was expected to use part of their wealth for the benefit of the citizenry, the practice known as *euergetism*.²³⁰ The construction of monumental public buildings, or parts thereof, sponsoring games and festivals, and distributions of oil, money, grain, or wine were common forms.²³¹ There is some debate about the economic significance of *euergetism*. Zuiderhoek has argued that elites spent only a small part of their wealth on this and that the city's resources covered most of the costs,²³² but Verboven has argued that this *euergetism* contributed to the construction and maintenance of physical infrastructure,²³³ and Hoyer has argued that it stimulated market development and monetization in Roman North Africa.²³⁴

Regardless of the effects of formal acts of *euergetism*, a sense of obligation to the city directed the distribution of elite resources, particularly grain. This was particularly important in times of food crisis. An anecdote from Philostratos's *Life of Apollonios of Tyana* is illustrative.²³⁵ The philosopher Apollonios was visiting the town of Aspendos in Pamphylia (modern Turkey) when he observed a food riot in progress. The only thing available for sale was bitter vetch, because 'the powerful' (*hoi dunatoi*) were keeping grain locked away to be exported. A mob, holding the leading magistrate responsible, was about to burn him alive when Apollonios interceded on his behalf. The magistrate, in turn, passed the blame to certain named people who were responsible because "taking away the grain, they were hoarding it" in various places in the countryside. These people were apparently landowners, for the mob intended to go to their estates (*agros*). But Apollonios, when he had convinced the mob to summon them instead, calls them 'corn dealers' (*sitokapeloï*), using a term that generally referred to small-scale retailers and therefore should be understood as derogatory in this context.²³⁶ In his accusation of these men, Apollonios says "the earth is mother of all ... but you have pretended that she is your own

229 The contributions in van den Eijnde, Blok, and Strootman 2018 explore Greek feasting habits from the archaic through the Hellenistic period. For a wide-ranging introduction to food in the Graeco-Roman world, see Wilkins and Nadeau 2015.

230 *Euergetism* has enjoyed a long history of scholarship, for which Veyne 1976 is foundational. More recently, see Domingo Gygax 2016, for *euergetism* in the Greek city from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period and Zuiderhoek 2009 for *euergetism* in the Greek cities of the Roman province of Asia.

231 Zuiderhoek 2009, 76–109.

232 Zuiderhoek 2009, esp. 23–52 for the economic argument.

233 Verboven 2012a.

234 Hoyer 2013.

235 Philostratos *Life of Apollonios of Tyana* 1. 15.

236 Yon 2007, 54–55.

mother alone,” expressing an ethos that entitles the entire community to share in the produce of its land, despite the private ownership of it. Local elites were firmly rooted within their community and had an obligation to assist it in times of scarcity.²³⁷ This restricted the scope of their profit-seeking behavior, checked the extent to which they could accumulate wealth, helped to ensure the survival of the less-wealthy urban population, and could be seen as restricting interregional economic integration.

Grain was not the only resource expended for the good of the city. The rich body of epigraphic evidence from the desert city and trading center of Palmyra (discussed at length in chapter two) offers insights into elite support for trade activity.²³⁸ Here, the so-called ‘caravan inscriptions’ offer praise for elites from the community who facilitated caravan expeditions.²³⁹ The variety of individuals and official structures named as dedicators suggest that there were numerous configurations of caravan activity, which can be differentiated at least in part by the level of direct civic/state participation.²⁴⁰ The inscriptions suggest that, in this particular civic context, financing trade caravans counted as a type of civic *euergetism*, demonstrating the flexibility of the idea and its contextual deployment.

Beyond their own productive and consumptive behavior, local elites in the Roman world, and likely before it as well, had access to a lively system of credit, in which elites were both borrowers and lenders. This positioned local elites as financiers, and enhanced the productive behavior of others. As with other elements of the elite system, beliefs about honor set key terms for this activity. Elites were supposed to be generous with their friends, and this generosity could take the form of monetary gifts or interest-free loans to help them in times of crisis or invest in activities that would enhance their social status.²⁴¹ In addition, a person’s *fides*, their reputation for both trustworthiness and financial solvency, was an important component of their honor. To default on a loan was dishonorable, and bailing out a friend in need was an honorable and significant favor to bestow upon them.²⁴²

237 Erdkamp 2002.

238 Rostovtzeff 1932; Will 1957. See recently particularly Yon 2002. The Palmyrene epigraphic evidence is particularly noteworthy because it is generally bilingual (Greek or occasionally Latin and Palmyrene), and comes from a variety of contexts around the city.

239 See the list assembled in Gawlikowski 1994, 32–33. There is a wealth of epigraphic material beyond this, especially associated with funerary monuments, which provides detailed information about families and social organization within the city. Most follow Will 1957 on this point.

240 In addition to the names of the honorees, the inscriptions list a range of dedicators, from the ‘council’ (Gr. *boule*; Aram. *bwl*) the inscriptions to collectives of individuals (e.g., “the merchants back from Charax”), as well as several offices associated with caravan activity, chiefly the ‘caravan leader’ (Gr. *synodiarch*; Aram. *rb syrt*). Understanding these relationships is made more difficult by the fact that the Greek and Palmyrene terms used on a single inscription do not always correspond perfectly, see, e.g., *CIS* II 3916.

241 Verboven 2002, 71–125.

242 Verboven 2012a.

Lending at interest also seems to have been fairly common at least from the Late Republican period, despite frequent denunciations of the practice.²⁴³ Elites would seek loans within their social network, and lenders would often give better rates as a favor to their friends and family.²⁴⁴ Standing as surety for the loans of others was an important social obligation that marked one as beneficent and faithful, not only to the debtor but to the creditor as well.²⁴⁵ Honor might not have effectively prevented lending money at interest, but it was far from inconsequential in the system of credit. Indeed, the strictures of honor encouraged some forms of loans and facilitated others. In every case, however, elite reputations and networks made it easier for elites to access credit than for nonelites.

VI.2 Connectivity

Finally, local elites served a crucial role as nodes that linked local and imperial networks. The concept that local elites were central mediators in the waves of socio-cultural change that were spurred by the expansion of the ancient Mediterranean world has been a mainstay of scholarship on the Roman Empire. ‘Indigenous’ local elites, studied largely in the context of the western Roman world, have been understood as a primary vector for assimilation for wider non-Roman populations within the Roman Empire.²⁴⁶ As the thinking goes, elite emulation and adaptation of cultural practices introduced through imperial contact created a new set of behavioral norms, which overlapped with norms in the imperial heartland as well as other frontiers. Over time, as these norms converged, they facilitated increased integration, leading to the creation of sprawling networks of local elites within the Roman Empire. As with local elites in other imperial contexts, they were internally diverse and yet with enough shared practices to act as a flexible infrastructure across which goods and ideas flowed.²⁴⁷

In contrast to non-Roman local elites from the western Roman Empire, for whom the Roman Empire was the only universal power, those who dwelt in the post-Achaemenid Southwest Asia inhabited a space of intersecting Greek, Iranian, and eventually Roman spheres. Their cultural patterns developed through interaction with norms within these multiple spheres. The resultant elite networks transcended imperial boundaries, and served as a particularly important connective framework across the region. Primary evidence for how these networks were understood by their elite participants is, unfortunately, relatively scarce. Material evi-

²⁴³ Andreau 1999, 9–29.

²⁴⁴ Verboven 2002, 125–132.

²⁴⁵ Verboven 2002, 140–148.

²⁴⁶ On these issues in the Hellenistic world, see particularly Chrubasik and King 2017. See also older debates about Romanization, e.g., Brunt 1974; Millett 1992.

²⁴⁷ Lavan, Payne, and Weisweiler 2016.

dence can contribute little on this count, and textual sources are rare. One important exception lies in the writings of the satirist of the Second Sophistic, Lucian of Samosata (125–after 180 CE), a Syrian who wrote in Greek.

Lucian's birthplace was the important crossing-points of the Euphrates River – a city that had been the capital of Hellenistic Kommagene until it fell to Rome – while his professional oeuvre led him to develop mastery of Attic Greek literary style.²⁴⁸ Our interest in Lucian is what his work suggests about how local elites from non-Roman communities in the Roman East understood their place within global systems. First, it bears note that the polarizing dichotomy that emerges from Lucian's works is between Syrians and Greeks, rather than between Greeks and Romans.²⁴⁹ This, despite the fact that Lucian was writing in the second century CE, hundreds of years after the rise of the Hellenistic *oikoumene* of which Kommagene was a participant. Second, the concept of 'barbarian-ness' (in opposition to 'Greek-ness') is a central trope of Lucian's work. Framing this idea in personal terms, Facella has commented that, "Lucian's lifelong attempt to wholly belong to the world of the Greek intellectuals never takes him to the point of disowning that he was *barbaros* by birth."²⁵⁰ Thus, despite the vast reach of both the Hellenistic and Roman waves of elite integration, it was entirely possible that many communities within this space maintained a strong sense of otherness over the centuries.

The need to maintain honor in the eyes of one's peers affected the ways that local elites generated wealth for themselves, consumed that wealth, and transferred it to each other. Their own consumption patterns, generally patterned on that of the hyperelite ruling class, acted as a multiplier, spreading consumption norms more widely. They fostered distribution systems both through their own benefactions, and also through their financial backing of other, rather more private, financial activities. Beyond their own productive activities, they also supported those of others through their financial investments. Finally, they were particularly dynamic agents, with wide-ranging contacts up and down prevailing social hierarchies, which gave them unusual power in spurring innovation and knowledge production, particularly at the interface of different imperial systems.

VII Producers

Primary production was rooted in the rural landscape. Access to land, the means of cultivating it, as well as the means of processing its products, were decisive factors

²⁴⁸ Owing to the prominent place of Syrianness in Lucian's works, discussions about his personal 'identity' and how it filtered into his work have a long history in attempts to interpret his works, although we know nothing about his life other than what he tells us himself, always couched in layers of satire. For an overview of approaches to Lucian, see Richter 2005.

²⁴⁹ Richter 2017, 328.

²⁵⁰ Facella 2012, 86.

in the success of rural residents. The agricultural economy was furthermore integrated with animal husbandry, and the differential strategies that people adopted to manage these two sectors had profound effects on economic development across various regions. Secondary production, meanwhile, happened both at a household and workshop level, and in both rural and urban contexts. Decisive factors in the success of these endeavors rested on the knowledge of skilled labor as well as access to resources, capital or otherwise.

VII.1 Primary Producers

VII.1.1 Agriculturalists

Agriculture in the Mediterranean is limited by the Mediterranean climate, characterized by hot, dry summers, wet winters, and significant interannual variations in precipitation. Average yearly precipitation levels in most places are not far above the minimum needed for rain-fed agriculture. In the Levant, the coastal region west of the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains receives enough rain, but precipitation levels drop quickly as one moves east from the coast, especially in the southern part of the region.²⁵¹ The risk of crop failure was omnipresent. The most commonly cultivated grains were barley and wheat, grown over the winter with millet serving as an emergency summer crop. It is generally assumed that cultivators alternated grain and fallow, legumes, or fodder in alternate years, but alternate systems have been proposed that may have increased not only grain yields, but also the health and productivity of animals.²⁵² Southern Mesopotamia and Egypt are the only two regions where agriculture was based on large-scale irrigation. Egypt was also exceptional because the Nile floods deposited fertile silt, obviating the need for fallow. Alongside grain, olives and grape vines were also cultivated in a system of polyculture. Dates were cultivated as well in the Levant. Although certain crops might be emphasized on different estates and some were produced specifically for the market, monoculture in the modern sense was not practiced. That would have exposed the farmer to unacceptable risks from the weather, pests, and market conditions. Polyculture also spread labor requirements more evenly throughout the year. Animals were also raised on most farms, including some combination of cattle, horses, donkeys, sheep, goats, pigs, and poultry. These provided manure and traction along with meat, leather, wool, eggs, and other secondary products. The agriculturalist who worked these lands could be operating in one of a range of labor regimes: they could be tenant farmers, slaves, or small-scale landowners, so-called peasants.

²⁵¹ Sallares 2007; Wilkinson 2003, 15–32.

²⁵² Kron 2000; cf. Kehoe 2007, 551 citing Spurr 1986, 23–40. However, Spurr (1986, 117–122) emphasizes the variety of crop rotation techniques attested in Roman literature.

As discussed in conjunction with the local elite, we have considerable information about the large-scale landowners that evolved in the Roman period, who exploited their holdings in one of two ways: they either managed them closely using slave labor or they leased them to tenants. The former method seems to have been common in parts of Italy from the Late Republic through the first century CE.²⁵³ Estates were of moderate size, perhaps several hundred hectares, and worked by slaves under the supervision of a slave overseer. This form of estate management is prominent in Latin literary sources because most of the sources were produced in the same geographic, temporal, and social context. It should be noted, however, that a similar form of management is attested in Egypt in the third century CE in the Heroninos archive, but under a different labor regime,²⁵⁴ and that Rabbinic sources attest to estates sold along with slaves.²⁵⁵ It should be noted that this system of land management appears to have evolved in the Roman context, and to have been unfamiliar in the Hellenistic one.²⁵⁶

Taken as a whole across both time and space, however, literary and documentary sources show that tenancy was the more common method of exploiting the land. It should be noted, though, that tenancy and slave labor were not mutually exclusive. Many people also cultivated their own land directly, but outside of a few glimpses from tax registers in Egypt, the balance between land cultivated by owners, tenants, and slaves is impossible to determine. Furthermore, in the course of the lifecycle of a household, the availability of labor fluctuates. Therefore, a small-scale landowning household that cultivates its own land might rent an extra field when their children are old enough to work it or they might rent out their own land to another if their children have left home. Tenancy allows a household to adjust its land to match its labor. Rabbinic sources describe several types of tenants, some of which are permanent,²⁵⁷ but others of which rent land for one to two years at a time. Similarly, a mid-third century contract from the middle Euphrates also attests to a single year term of rental.²⁵⁸ Payment could be either a share of the crop (usually half in Rabbinic sources) or a fixed amount of produce or cash.²⁵⁹ While permanent tenants are unlikely to be landowners, short-term leases would seem to be well suited to households looking to make use of temporary labor surpluses. Although tenants are sometimes seen as disadvantaged relative to freeholders, this could be a very profitable relationship that combined the capital of the landowner with the labor of the tenant.²⁶⁰

253 Kehoe 2007, 553–557; Launaro 2015.

254 Kehoe 2007, 556–557; 1992; Rathbone 1991.

255 Safrai 1994, 86; Sartre 2005, 216–217.

256 Descat 2011, 211.

257 Safrai 1994, 335–337.

258 Sartre 2005, 217.

259 Alon 1980, 157–160.

260 Erdkamp 2005, 23–33.

Small-scale landowners, ‘peasants,’ also played an important part in the agricultural economy. We should not distinguish peasants and tenants too sharply, since small holders could rent fields, and the behavior of long-term tenants was similar in many ways.²⁶¹ Nevertheless, there were important differences. Landowners got to keep a larger share of their produce, increasing their consumption capacity, but they also bore the costs of capital investment on their properties. The wealthiest small holders had or could borrow enough capital to invest in things like presses, but others would have had to pool resources.²⁶² Ancient peasants are difficult to detect, making their contribution to the economy hard to gauge. It was long thought that the peasantry of Republican Italy was replaced by slave-run estates, but de Ligt has shown that the free rural population, though impoverished, continued to grow.²⁶³ Conditions improved at the end of the Republican period, when colonization, emigration, and a change of recruitment patterns led to both an increase in small holdings and in tenancy in first-century CE Italy.

Archaeological survey evidence and the size of the plots distributed in colonization schemes indicate that most Italian smallholders’ plots were sufficient for subsistence, and many, especially those of the later colonists, were larger.²⁶⁴ Papyrological evidence from Roman Egypt and Rabbinic literature from Roman Palestine similarly suggest the existence of cultivators operating comfortably above subsistence.²⁶⁵ These peasants must have been engaged in market exchange.²⁶⁶ The impact of peasant demand depends on the scale at which it can be effectively aggregated.²⁶⁷ This impact was felt mostly on a local and regional scale, but the empire-wide demand of moderately wealthy peasants for pepper and other eastern imports might have contributed significantly to Roman trade in the Indian Ocean.²⁶⁸ The main contribution of peasants, however, was as surplus producers.

261 Erdkamp 2005, 55–105; Garnsey 1998, 91–106. Rathbone 2008, 321 points out that Latin vocabulary lumps landless and poor landed agriculturalists together.

262 *Institutes* 3. 24. 2 for shared draft animals. Vaccaro et al. 2013 for an isolated pressing facility excavated in Italy. The excavators are confident that the facility was used by multiple cultivators, but suggest it might have been paid for by a single household. They summarize comparable evidence for communal facilities at 171–172.

263 De Ligt 2012. See also Launaro 2011.

264 Rathbone 2008; de Ligt 2012, 274–275.

265 Erdkamp 2005, 18–22 summarizes the Italian and Egyptian evidence. Rosenfeld and Perlmutter 2020, 116–140 for Palestine. Based on the dearth of architecturally elaborate rural residences (‘villas’) in the Near East and the prevalence of villages (Sartre 2005, 224–232), it is tempting to conclude that there were fewer large-scale landowners and more comfortable peasants in the East than in the West, but this could also simply reflect differences in the geographic location of status displays.

266 De Ligt 1990; Erdkamp 2005, 95–104; Hollander 2019. Plot size and market engagement are not directly correlated, since market gardening, which favors free over servile labor, in the vicinity of cities could take place on very small plots (Morley 1996, 101–102).

267 De Ligt 1990, 54–55.

268 *Contra* de Ligt 1990, 54. The bottleneck of the Indian Ocean crossing means pepper importers were in a position to tap the demand of the entire Empire.

Ancient cultivation practices could yield significant surpluses, but the economic context of this production varied. With the exception of the *annona*, grain was sold primarily in local or close-regional markets.²⁶⁹ Large-scale landowners, who could afford to store grain after harvest until prices rose, could make money on the grain market, but small-scale producers consumed most of the grain they grew or transferred it to a landlord as rent.²⁷⁰ Olive oil and wine, on the other hand, were cash crops for large and small producers alike. Presses are ubiquitous in many regions, and are found both singly in small settlements and in larger complexes.²⁷¹ The Western Mediterranean, North Africa and southern Spain exported olive oil in large quantities to Rome and the northern frontiers, but in the Eastern Mediterranean, the oil trade was more regional. Wine varies in quality more than oil, and some wines were traded over very long distances. Laodicean wine was even exported to India. Presses are difficult to date, but settlement dynamics hint at increasing agricultural production throughout the region beginning in the Hellenistic period but accelerating in the Roman period.²⁷² Some of this settlement can be attributed to Graeco-Macedonian colonization, but increased sedentarization of previously more mobile groups also played a role.²⁷³

We must mention here one other type of surplus production: wood, both as construction material and as fuel.²⁷⁴ Little is known about wood production. We hear of peasants selling firewood,²⁷⁵ but elites took an interest too. The agronomists include planted trees that produce vine props and other useful goods among their ideal estates. Cato recommends that suburban farms include a plantation from which firewood can be sold in the nearby city, and management techniques like short-cycle coppicing were used to sustainably supply the demand for fuel.²⁷⁶ Charcoal, necessary for metal production, also required specialized production techniques.²⁷⁷ When used for building, the particular qualities of the wood matter more, and merchants traded timber at a regional scale.²⁷⁸ We hear of state-owned forests at the imperial and local level, so there must have been contractors who bought the

269 Rabbinic sources describe regional grain trade primarily within Palestine (Safrai 1994, 110–116; Sartre 2005, 220–221).

270 Erdkamp 2005, 147–174.

271 Syria/Palestine: Safrai 1994, 118–136; Sartre 2005, 221–223; Waliszewski 2014, 298–300. Multi-press facilities throughout the Empire: Marzano 2013a.

272 Zerbini 2013 synthesizes settlement dynamics in the Limestone Massif, the Golan Heights, and the Hauran. See also Frankel et al. 2001 for Galilee; De Giorgi 2007 for the Amuq river valley; Al-Fuqaha 2018 for the Nabataeans in Jordan. For a large-scale, longue durée examination of population in the Levant, see Palmisano et al. 2019.

273 E.g., Al-Fuqaha 2018, 37–71.

274 Harris 2018; Veal 2017.

275 E.g., *Life of Aesop*, 57.

276 Cato *De agricultura*, 7; Harris 2018.

277 Veal 2017.

278 Harris 2018, 229–231.

right to exploit them.²⁷⁹ Thus, wood production occurred both on public and private lands and involved actors ranging from individuals gathering firewood to specialist managers and loggers.

VII.1.2 Pastoralists and Animal Economies

Despite agricultural changes, lifeways based on mobility never fully disappeared. Pastoralism, in the broadest sense of the word, refers to the raising of livestock as a central economic activity. In some cases, these patterns of animal husbandry include significant mobility – nomadic pastoralism, mobile pastoralism, or transhumance. Many of the landscapes of Southwest Asia facilitate pastoralist strategies – from the Anatolian highlands, the Syrian steppe, the Arabian Desert, and the Egyptian deserts, and so it is not surprising that ancient ethnographies of these lands note many nomadic groups. One thinks, for example, of the Blemmyes in the Egyptian Eastern Desert,²⁸⁰ or of the Skenitai of Arabia.²⁸¹ The productive activities of pastoralism created products (wool, leather, meat) that often went on to participate in market exchange.

The management of animal economies across Southwest Asia and the Mediterranean varied tremendously. Species commonly raised as livestock included large animals ranging from cattle to horses to camels, smaller ones like sheep, goats, and pigs, and various types of fowl. These animals could be raised by a single family on small holdings for subsistence, or they could be kept as parts of large, specialized herds managed by fulltime shepherds. In some cases, the animals were kept as transport or traction, while in other circumstances they were valued predominantly for their secondary products (chiefly milk and wool), or for their meat. Organizational factors like the size and composition of the herds, their private or collective ownership, and the primary use of the animals mean that it is scarcely possible to generalize about animal husbandry as a single economic sector.²⁸²

There were, on the one hand, systems of mixed-farming that places the role of animal husbandry within the sphere of agriculture production, forming an agricultural-pastoralist symbiosis.²⁸³ The economic behaviors of this type of animal management are best understood through the wider lens of agricultural activity already discussed. On the other hand, more specialized animal management strategies, divorced from agricultural affairs to a greater degree, create different dependencies.

²⁷⁹ Veal 2017, 347–348.

²⁸⁰ Strabo 17. 1. 53–54, see Barnard 2005.

²⁸¹ Strabo 16. 1. 26, see Cameron 2019, 203–214.

²⁸² For these particular factors as of particular importance to understanding economic consequences, see Chaniotis 1999, 41.

²⁸³ On the idea of this symbiosis, see in general contributions in Whittaker 1988.

These typically involved some type of transhumance, which is to say the regular and often cyclical movement of animals (and people) across medium- to long distances, usually in order to take advantage of seasonal availability of fodder in different locations.

A widely practiced pattern of transhumance in the mountainous flanks of the Mediterranean basin, for example is ‘alpine’ or ‘vertical’ transhumance, where shepherds move flocks from lowland winter pastures up to highland summer grazing territories, before returning to permanent winter homes in the lowlands.²⁸⁴ In other regions, the seasonal movements are ‘horizontal’: moving between pastureland in the same elevation, and often moving longer distances.²⁸⁵ Related to transhumance is the practice of fully mobile pastoralism, also known as nomadism, where an entire community moves along with its animals, without any fixed permanent homes. Studies of *longue durée* movement patterns in the ancient world have shown that the balance of different types of mobility was extremely varied across time.²⁸⁶

The spectrum of mobile herding practices created economic relationships and opportunities that differed from those of more sedentary agriculture. Principally, transhumance allowed for a more flexible and widescale exploitation of the landscape than sedentary farming, creating a “complex mosaic of habitats” that expanded the amount of productive territory available to a population.²⁸⁷ Although often understood to have emerged as a risk-buffering strategy that responded to the instability of the Mediterranean climate, herding strategies based on mobility could themselves serve as a central source of wealth and profit. At the same time, the mobilities themselves created opportunities for social and economic interaction that are not naturally present in sedentary contexts.²⁸⁸ By virtue of their mobility, these transhumant or mobile pastoralist actors were important in the periodic markets that served as key economic nodes in antiquity,²⁸⁹ as well as in the trade routes that came to stretch across Southwest Asia’s deserts.²⁹⁰

In seeking to understand the economic consequences of this sector of primary production, however, we face a stark evidentiary problem. In contrast to farming, which often leaves at least some traces in the archaeological record,²⁹¹ transhumance and mobile pastoralism leaves many fewer marks. The attitudes of Greek and Roman authors toward ‘nomadism’ (broadly construed) add to our difficulties.

284 Alpine and vertical transhumance refer to slightly different practices, see Carrer 2015 for a discussion.

285 Ocak 2016, 440.

286 Hammer and Arbuckle 2017.

287 Oteros-Rozas et al. 2012, 14.

288 Frachetti et al. 2017; Hammer and Arbuckle 2017.

289 E.g., discussions of North African markets, Fentress 2007; Shaw 1981; Vanacker 2014.

290 E.g., in Palmyra, Seland 2014.

291 E.g., farmhouses, barns, and other built infrastructure as well as farming equipment, but also traces reflecting landownership arrangements, like cadastration.

There was a profound skepticism and antagonism that was directed at mobile pastoralist communities in the corpus of Graeco-Latin literature.²⁹² Although mobile herding practices were clearly practiced by cultural insiders,²⁹³ the role of nomad was intrinsically that of an outsider, who by virtue of their mobile lifeways was less-than-civilized. Nomads are often presented as a prevalent threat to regional stability, and particularly to trade routes.²⁹⁴

The stark dichotomy between sedentary and mobile animal management strategies has obscured, on the one hand, the degree of specialized mobility that was a regular part of 'normal' sedentary agricultural regimes in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.²⁹⁵ And on the other hand, it has downplayed the complex systems of animal management that were practiced at the fringes of imperial space, by the so-called nomads. Beyond their productive activities, there is also evidence that at least some of these mobile groups were in fact collaborative facilitators of trade activity, allowing merchants to traverse their territory in exchange for payment.²⁹⁶

VII.2 Manufacturers

Secondary production activities were conducted both at the household and workshop level, although both the wealth and scale of these operations were dwarfed by agricultural pursuits.²⁹⁷ Nevertheless, from the small-scale workshops that dotted Classical Athens to the vertically integrated industries involved in some Roman industries, like fish-salting, craft production from textiles to ceramics was an undeniable factor of life, and was particularly visible in urban contexts. Quantifying the scale of economic activity in the craft industries has proven elusive, with many discussions of the economic role of secondary producers becoming enmeshed in long-standing debates about consumer vs. producer cities.

Textile production is one of the most widespread craft traditions of the Mediterranean. Because of the variety of archaeological, papyrological, and literary evidence related to different stages and types of textile production, it offers an exemplary window into the diversity of production strategies within a single manufacturing sphere. In particular, evidence from Egypt highlights the complex networks and pressures that shaped the choices of textile producers, which emanated from state agents, consumers, and community networks, with social relationships appearing to have been an important factor in coordinating steps of the process be-

²⁹² See classically Shaw 1982–1983.

²⁹³ E.g., the variety of relationships between shepherds and settled agriculturalists described by Thompson 2011a, 392–396.

²⁹⁴ E.g., debates between the position of Parker 1987 and Graf 1989.

²⁹⁵ E.g., Keenan 1989.

²⁹⁶ Strabo 16. 1. 27, see Millar 1998, 126–127; Seland 2014.

²⁹⁷ On this sector in general, Mattingly and Salmon 2002.

tween different production units. Despite the specialization of the production, however, there is little evidence for strong vertical integration.

Textile production at the household level – often carried out by women – served the needs of household members, and was a mainstay of the first-millennium Greek world. Small-scale domestic weaving activities known from Crete demonstrate that this scale of production remained widespread into the Hellenistic period.²⁹⁸ At the same time, there is evidence from household contexts at the Greek city of Olynthus that at least some households already in the fifth and fourth centuries were producing more textiles than they could have been consuming themselves, suggesting that fabric was commoditized.²⁹⁹ This should come as no surprise: specialized production of textiles for marketing is attested already in Middle Bronze Age Anatolia, in the Kültepe-Kanesh texts.³⁰⁰

As Bresson has discussed, textile production was an industry that, because of the range of raw materials that were required (ranging from fibers, to dyes and setting agents like natron), made the development of complex supply chains a necessary precondition for fine textile production.³⁰¹ Shifts in the forms of loom-weights – a critical component of weaving technology – suggest that, although weaving might have often been carried out in domestic contexts, innovations in the Hellenistic period spread widely, as regional networks became increasingly connected.³⁰² In Ptolemaic Egypt, where fine textiles were items of significant value among the Ptolemies, the presence of specialized textile production is attested in papyrological sources. Dozens of job titles listed describe stages of production, from fullers and dyers of specific colors, to weavers, menders, and finally merchants of different fabrics, indicating that it was a complex and segmented system.³⁰³ Wage records reflect the involvement of paid labor in the process, although some textile manufactures may have also been slaves.³⁰⁴ Furthermore, it was production in which the state took an interest: inspection of weaving facilities was listed among the duties ascribed to local administrators.³⁰⁵ More than just inspection, as documented in the papyri of the Zenon archive, Ptolemaic elites played an active role in promoting production by managing estates directly involved in production coordination. Temples, however, remained key sites of coordination as well.³⁰⁶ There has been speculation that the royal family and imperial elites themselves comprised the most important market for these textiles.

298 Chaniotis 1999.

299 Cahill 2002, 250 ff.

300 C. Michel 2014.

301 Bresson 2000, ch. 7.

302 Lawall 2014.

303 For a detailed discussion, see Droß-Krüpe 2011.

304 Papadopoulou 2016, 197.

305 *P.Teub.* III 703.

306 Papadopoulou 2016, 201.

Roman Egypt continued to be a center of textile production, even after the decline of the Ptolemaic monarchy, as demonstrated for example in papyrological evidence from the *nome* of Oxyrhynchus.³⁰⁷ There is also occasional evidence from Roman Egypt of larger-scale production in the context of true workshops (*ergasteria*).³⁰⁸ But, in general, producers working on the various stages of production were connected not by formally integrated production structures. Neither were they, in the rule, participants in ‘putting-out’ systems, whereby piecework was assigned by a central coordinator to low-skilled workers.³⁰⁹ Instead, the relationships between producers and their clients were interpersonal, and only minimally intermediated.

The prominence of textile production was not limited to Egypt: Archaeological evidence from elsewhere in North Africa attests the presence of significant facilities for fiber processing in urban contexts such as those at Timgad, which by the fourth century CE, boasted two markets specializing in the sale of textiles.³¹⁰ Natron, a salt used in fiber processing and dye-setting, was sourced from Egypt.³¹¹ Another element of textile production – the manufacture of dye agents and subsequent dyeing of fibers and fabrics – is also attested in the region. This is particularly true in the case of the prestigious and in-demand purple *murex*, harvested from sea snails and produced at scale in coastal North African sites like Jerba.³¹² Thus, North Africa and Egypt appear to have been a center for the production of both animal (wool) and plant (linen and flax) fibers, as well as processing (e.g., natron) and dyeing agents. Although the production units appear to have remained quite small in general,³¹³ the regional concentration of these complementary branches of textile production likely contributed to the growth of an export-driven textile production industry.

VIII Households

We turn now to the household, perhaps the most fundamental economic organization in any society.³¹⁴ Households implicate, in one way or another, every individual in a series of relationships with other individuals and with society more broadly.³¹⁵ The concept of the household, as well as household management, also sits at the

³⁰⁷ Van Minnen 1986.

³⁰⁸ Van Minnen 1987, 47.

³⁰⁹ On theories of ‘putting-out’ or *Verlagssystem* production, see recently Droß-Krüpe 2020.

³¹⁰ Wilson 2002.

³¹¹ Bresson 2016, 354–355.

³¹² Marzano 2013b, on Jerba specifically, Wilson 2004.

³¹³ Kehoe 2007, 566.

³¹⁴ Hirth 2020, 13, 17–42.

³¹⁵ Although closely related, the family and the household are distinct organizations. The household is defined by co-residence while the family is defined by conjugal and kinship relations.

center of ancient thought on economic questions – *oikos*, Greek for ‘house’ itself being the root of the word ‘economy’ (*oikonomia*). Ideas about the household and economic management can be seen already in the Homeric tradition, with the trope remaining central in Classical and Hellenistic thought.³¹⁶ We have already discussed the specialized role of the imperial household. Now, however, we turn to a focused discussion of the household itself.

From an economic perspective, the household is an administrative production and consumption unit that coordinates and organizes the labor of its members.³¹⁷ The biological and social sustenance of the household and its members is the primary aim of the household, though actively improving the conditions of existence was also a common goal. To achieve this goal, the members of the household coordinated their productive and consumptive activities and manipulated the membership of the household itself through family planning, sending members of the family out of the household, or incorporating external individuals. Each household is in a constant state of evolution as members marry, are born, grow, leave home, divorce, and die. Certain implications of household formation are biological and physical, but the sociocultural institutions, both formal and informal, that shape household dynamics also have significant implications for the entire economy: A shift away from autarchic households feeds in to demand cycles, and expands the role of marketed goods in daily life. Here, we examine the ways in which ancient Mediterranean household institutions shaped labor organization, consumption, the transfer of property, and the development of human capital.

VIII.1 Consumption and Distribution

The household was a node of consumption. On a subsistence level, households consumed their own agricultural products. However, despite the ancient ideal of a self-sufficient autarchic household, Mediterranean households in the late first millennium BCE tended to produce at least some surplus, which was used to acquire other goods, either through market or other forms of exchange. Beyond subsistence means, the household consumed various goods to create and communicate its social position in both the world of daily life, but also in religious spheres through acts like sacrifice and mortuary ritual.

The formal institutions that governed the ownership and transfer of household property in the ancient Mediterranean and beyond had significant impacts on the organization of economic activity. Most of our evidence comes from Roman legal sources, but Rabbinic sources and some evidence for Classical Athens are also useful in this regard, as are a small number of cuneiform records from Babylonia. In

³¹⁶ See sources in Audring and Brodersen 2008.

³¹⁷ Lowry 1987, ch. 3.

the Roman family, property ownership was governed by the institution of *potestas* ('power').³¹⁸ A free man (called a *pater familias*) held his children and slaves *in potestate*, meaning he had complete legal authority over them. Only the death of the *pater familias* or the explicit emancipation or manumission of a dependent ended the father's *potestas*. A person *in potestate* had no legal property rights; all of the property of the *familia* technically belonged to the *pater familias*. The family depicted in Rabbinic writing is similar in many ways to the one in Roman sources, but there is greater recognition of the independence of adult children.³¹⁹

A Roman woman remained *in potestate* of her own father even when married, and when her father died, she became independent, so husbands and wives held property separately.³²⁰ Indeed, Roman law went so far as to prohibit substantial gifts between husband and wife. Rabbinic writings display ambiguity about this point, but the late first and early second-century archive of a Jewish woman named Babatha contain records of her independent financial action. She even lends money to her husband in the same way one would lend money to a stranger, including demanding security.³²¹ This separation of property meant that each spouse had less capital to invest, but at the same time, it protected each from possible bad investments on the part of the other. Further, the ability to lend money within the family allowed resources to be temporarily and strategically pooled. Indeed, Pliny the Younger, when contemplating buying an estate for three million sesterces, felt confident he could borrow from his mother-in-law, "whose purse I use as freely as my own."³²²

Although marriage did not involve a merger of the husband's and wife's property, it did entail a transfer of wealth from the bride's family to the husband's household in the form of a dowry. The payment of a dowry, meant to cover the costs of supporting the wife, seems to have been traditional throughout the Mediterranean. In Rome, the dowry was supposed to be about five to ten percent of the value of the bride's father's estate,³²³ but in other contexts it might have been larger, representing the woman's entire inheritance.³²⁴ In the Roman context, if the marriage was dissolved, the dowry returned to the woman. Divorce was common and relatively easy, requiring only that either party withdraw their consent to be married.³²⁵

³¹⁸ Riggsby 2010, 106–108, 173–185 provides an accessible introduction to the legal side of the Roman *familia*. For a thorough discussion of Roman conceptions of family, see Saller 1994, 74–101.

³¹⁹ Sivertsev 2010, 238–239.

³²⁰ An archaic form of marriage called *manus* marriage transferred a woman into the *potestas* of her husband, but this was obsolete by our period.

³²¹ Sivertsev 2010, 239–244.

³²² Plin. *Ep.* 3. 19.

³²³ Saller 2007, 96.

³²⁴ Sivertsev 2010, 242–243.

³²⁵ Riggsby 2010, 174–180.

Inheritance transferred property between generations. Writing a will was fairly common practice, and Roman judges recognized both formal *testamenta*, which had to be drawn up in a very specific format, and written declarations of the decedent's intentions, which could be more informal.³²⁶ This provided a great deal of flexibility. However, it was also possible to challenge a will on the grounds that it was unjust. These grounds, along with rules regarding the disposition of property in the absence of a valid will, reveal the ideological assumptions that shaped inheritance patterns. Most notable is the idea that all children, regardless of gender or birth order, had a right to share in the inheritance. The assumption of partible inheritance, along with the common practice among elite Romans of leaving legacies to each other as a sign of respect, would have served to break up estates over time. However, the prevalence of wills gave people the flexibility to adjust inheritance arrangements to suit their particular situation. The strategies they adopted, as evident from the wills preserved as examples in legal sources, suggest that the primary goal was to ensure the short-term comfort of the decedent's family, rather than the perpetual cohesion of a single estate.³²⁷

The household also served as a risk buffering mechanism, which could distribute goods between its living members, a fact that is simultaneously obvious and significant in several ways. First, it has implications for the production of goods and services. The fact that the household provided food to its members allows its members to engage in other forms of labor that would not themselves be enough to support them. If sustenance derives from an activity that requires variable amounts of labor, as in Mediterranean agriculture, there will be periods of slack and there will be people whose labor is not as heavily and consistently invested in producing that food. This labor time can then be invested in producing other goods and services that could be sold for less than the price charged by a specialist, who depends on those goods and services for sustenance. This low-cost production not only brings in extra money to the producing household, but it also makes these products affordable to other households with little extra money. This would facilitate small-scale market exchange, but it would also make wage labor and transportation cheaper.³²⁸

Goods could also be distributed over very long distances within a household, or rather, a family. Wealthy families with scattered holdings would move large quantities of goods from one holding to another. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing how much was distributed over what distance in this way, but it could have been significant.³²⁹ Familial ties could also be used to acquire property and

³²⁶ Saller 1994, 161–180.

³²⁷ Saller 1994, 178–180.

³²⁸ Erdkamp 2005.

³²⁹ Erdkamp 2005, 114–118.

do business over long distances. Slaves were seen as extensions of their master, which put them in a uniquely good position to act as agents under Roman law.³³⁰

VIII.2 Production and Labor

The primary economic power of the household lay in its ability to coordinate. This was an idea that seems to have been recognized already in the Classical period: the word *oikonomia*, while used in a literal way to describe household management, was also used in a variety of nonhousehold contexts to describe “any environment in which the capacity to manage a complex structure (big or small) well can be applied with success,” including for example the organization of military equipment and army installations.³³¹ Above all, the household was the most common institution for mobilizing labor, in which (ideally) each member is motivated by a commitment to the whole. As noted above, the household has the ability to coordinate labor surplus across the year, such that nonagricultural work can supplement the agricultural labor that provides the household subsistence minimum.³³²

The form of a household, especially whether it was primarily that of a nuclear or extended family, had implications for its access to labor.³³³ Extended households provide more labor, which is especially important when children are young and unable to work. In agricultural societies, grain harvesting requires the deployment of a significant amount of labor in a relatively short time, which an extended household can provide. Nuclear households contain less labor, but they also require less space and food. Therefore, one might expect that nuclear households would be common in urban settings while extended households would be more typical of the countryside. Things are not so simple, though. In villages, as opposed to isolated farmsteads, co-residence is less important for the coordination of labor.³³⁴ Furthermore, labor can be acquired through community obligations or hiring temporary workers. Finally, detailed examinations of modern family structures indicate a great deal of diversity between and within regions and between socioeconomic statuses.³³⁵ The actual makeup of ancient Mediterranean households is difficult to discern because of a lack of evidence, but we do have nearly 400 census declarations from Roman Egypt preserved on papyri, although there are many particularities to

³³⁰ See Weaverdyck and Fabian, ch. 8.A, V.3.3, this volume.

³³¹ Natali 1995, 98.

³³² Erdkamp 2015.

³³³ The terms ‘extended’ and ‘nuclear’ are simplifications of more formal classification systems, for which, see Huebner 2017, 5. Here, ‘nuclear’ indicates a household consisting of a conjugal pair and their children, and ‘extended’ refers to households that include additional family members. We should also remember that many households in antiquity also included slaves.

³³⁴ Erdkamp 2005, 69.

³³⁵ Huebner 2017, 3–9.

Egyptian property rights and inheritance structures that mean we must be careful with this material.³³⁶ These indicate that villagers were more likely to live in extended households than urban-dwellers, but even in the villages, almost half the population lived in nuclear households.³³⁷ Although the Egyptian household needs to be approached carefully, comparison of these data with ethnographically documented populations nevertheless shows that this pattern applies even in societies where extended households are the ideal because high mortality rates either prevent the formation of extended households or convert them to nuclear households with the death of grandparents.³³⁸

Within the household, labor was divided along the lines of age, gender, and status.³³⁹ Many households, especially wealthier ones, contained slaves, and these performed a wide range of duties, ranging from menial labor to the management of significant assets. Children and the elderly could do light work including managing shops, and children in particular could herd animals effectively. Given the high mortality rate of the ancient Mediterranean, women would have had to give birth to between six and nine children on average.³⁴⁰ In a nuclear household, the burden of caring for these children would have fallen primarily on their mother, but in extended households, grandmothers and other relatives would have helped. Other forms of labor that were typically gendered female included grinding grain, weaving cloth, and especially spinning yarn. In some cultures, particularly in Classical Greece, women's labor was ideally secluded and private, but this is not necessarily true everywhere. Indeed, Rabbinic sources describe a man whose wife sells goods because he is ashamed to.³⁴¹ Columella, echoing Xenophon, the most influential writer on household economics in the fourth century BCE, provides a philosophical justification for the gendered division of labor in which men acquire the means of subsistence outside while women manage it inside. Interestingly, he cites differential endurance as the reason for this division, not mental capacity: "But seeing that, after they had acquired substance, memory and attention were equally necessary to both sexes, god granted no smaller a share of these qualities to women than to men."³⁴² Men and women both were expected to manage household resources. Finally, elite households could include hundreds or even thousands of slaves,³⁴³ which made them the institution nexus for large networks of production and distri-

336 Bagnall and Frier 1994; Huebner 2013. Attempts to reconstruct family structure based on the relationships that appear in tombstones have been influential, but Huebner (2011) has shown this evidence to be unreliable by comparing it with the evidence of census returns.

337 Bagnall and Frier 1994, 67 tab. 3.2.

338 Huebner 2011, 78–80.

339 Saller 2007.

340 Scheidel 2007, 41.

341 Sivertsev 2010, 236.

342 Columella *De re rustica* 12. Pr. 6. Trans. Forster and Heffner.

343 Scheidel 2012, 91.

bution, but for the most part, this was highly segmented, with multiple, medium-sized concerns operating simultaneously.

The institution of slavery was fundamental to ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern households, but its prevalence and intensity varied.³⁴⁴ For example, judging from the Egyptian evidence, chattel slavery expanded in Ptolemaic Egypt with the arrival of Greek settlers, but – and in contrast to other Hellenistic contexts – there is no evidence for the use of slaves in large-scale workshop contexts with dozens of slaves. Instead, in a set of records reflecting salt-tax payment, slaves appear in the context of smaller households – with female slaves more common than male, suggesting a mostly domestic role.³⁴⁵ The role of slavery in the Roman economy is somewhat contentious. Scheidel characterizes the Roman economy as a “slave economy” because dominant social groups primarily in the imperial core relied on slave labor to maintain their economic and social dominance.³⁴⁶ However, in recent decades, scholarship on the Roman economy has tended to de-emphasize slavery, arguing instead that free labor was quantitatively much more prevalent, even in agriculture and mineral extraction long thought to have been dominated by slaves.³⁴⁷ Rather than focusing on numbers of slaves or the kind of labor they performed, we ask here what role the institution of slavery itself had in the organization of labor.

Two aspects are fundamental: first, chattel slavery allowed a master complete control over the labor of the slave over a long span of time, at least theoretically; second, slaves, although human, were not juridical persons, and in the Roman context, were treated as an extension of their master. The first aspect, that of control, allowed slave owners to deploy labor strategically. The massive influx of enslaved captives into Rome from the wars of conquest during the late third and second centuries BCE allowed Italian elites to establish highly productive, market-oriented farms in west-central Italy. Because they had a long time horizon, landowners could invest in and even experiment with vines and olives, which would not produce an immediate harvest. And because the owners felt no commitment to the slaves, they could ruthlessly reduce their endeavors’ reproductive costs to a minimum.³⁴⁸

The second aspect of slavery, their nonpersonhood, made them uniquely qualified under Roman law to act as agents on behalf of their masters.³⁴⁹ An underlying

344 Bradley and Cartledge 2011 provides fairly comprehensive overviews of slavery in a variety of ancient Mediterranean contexts, though Greek and Roman slavery are the focus of most contributions. Bradley 2015 for a brief overview of slavery within Graeco-Roman society.

345 Thompson 2011b, 208–211. See also Clarysse and Thompson 2006, 262–267.

346 Scheidel 2012, 89.

347 Verboven and Laes 2017, 7–9.

348 Cato advises his readers to “sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle, blemished sheep, wool, hides, an old wagon, old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave, and whatever else is superfluous” (*De Agricultura* 2. 4).

349 Non-slave agents also operated in the Roman Empire (see Weaverdyck and Fabian, ch. 8.A, V.3.3, this volume), but Schumacher 2010 argues that the legal status of slaves made them uniquely

principle of Roman legal thought is the independence of free, male citizens, in accordance with which, a person could not bind another in a contract without their explicit consent, nor could they acquire property on behalf of another. Slaves, as extensions of their master, could acquire property and, with their consent, enter into binding contracts on their behalf. Nor did masters have to consent to every contract, but could express consent by giving a slave control over a pool of capital (a *peculium*) to manage or by giving a slave access to unlimited capital for defined uses, such as running a particular business. In both cases, the liability of the master was limited.³⁵⁰ The slaves themselves often benefited personally from their labor, since they had *de facto* control of much of the profits from these endeavors.

The household, finally, provided the primary context in which human capital was developed, despite some attested apprenticeships.³⁵¹ Aside from the children of elite households, education was most characteristic of slaves.³⁵² Slaves were often trained in numeracy and literacy for administrative purposes, but also a variety of other specialized tasks. As a result, slaves and former slaves probably made up a large portion of those conducting business in Mediterranean cities. Most education must have been simply that acquired through watching one's parents, limiting the employment options of children.

IX Networking Agents and Traders

Finally, we come to the individuals and collectives who facilitated the movement of goods and capital across that network: traders who distributed products like the textiles just discussed, and financiers, who lubricated the system by supplying and directing capital. The nature of the cargos that merchants were carrying, and of the credit systems that were financing their activities (among other things), will be treated in more detail in chapter 8.A.³⁵³ Our interest here lies in the ways in which these actors became a connective force that amplified the density of networks. Beyond these individuals themselves, we also consider the phenomenon of voluntary associations, institutions that created trust-based networks that strengthened and expanded these networks.

qualified. The literature on slave agency in Roman law and business is vast. Classics in English include Aubert 1994; Kirschenbaum 1987. For more recent overviews and analysis, see Abatino and Dari-Mattiacci 2020; Schiavone 2020; Gamauf 2016.

³⁵⁰ In the first case to the amount of the *peculium*, in the second case to claims arising from the conduct of the delimited activities.

³⁵¹ Saller 2007, 109. There is evidence for apprenticeships that were also arranged in the context of the household, see van Minnen 1998.

³⁵² Verboven 2012b.

³⁵³ Weaverdyck and Fabian, ch. 8.A, III.1.1, this volume; Weaverdyck, ch. 12.C, V, this volume.

IX.1 Financiers

Varieties of credit in the Hellenistic and Roman world range from retail credit extended by shopkeepers, to loans exchanged within family or social networks, which undoubtedly account for the bulk of transactions, to productive commercial loans aimed at financing things like maritime commerce.³⁵⁴ Two broad categories of financiers have generally been discussed in conjunction with the extension of credit, who can be coarsely divided into elite ('nonprofessional') lenders and the so-called professional moneylenders.³⁵⁵

In the first category of elite moneylenders, we find men like Atticus, an equestrian and childhood friend of Cicero who gifted him the whopping sum of 250,000 sesterces in an hour of need.³⁵⁶ These nonprofessional lenders were often portfolio investors – “aristocratic financiers” to use Andreau’s term – who used their surplus wealth from land in pursuit of both returns on capital and social and political power.³⁵⁷ They and their socially embedded lending networks have already been mentioned above, in conjunction with intra-elite social negotiations. This system was lubricated by personal connections within the context of elite social networks, but it is a mistake to think of it as informal – it was in fact the venue in which large-scale, long-term movement of capital was conducted.

In the second category of ‘professional lenders,’ we have the *trapezitai* of the Greek world and the *argentarii* of the Roman, who presided over deposit banks that offered money-handling and payment functions to their customers, but who also in some instances used the deposits they held to extend loans.³⁵⁸ Although deposit banking is attested in the Greek world beginning in the fifth century BCE, and in the Roman by the third century BCE, there were both temporal and geographical differences in its execution and reach. Kay has recently hypothesized for example that widespread social and economic pressures in the early first-century BCE account for the limited Roman evidence for deposit banking in the Late Republic.³⁵⁹ There were also regional differences in the role and behavior of deposit bankers. Most starkly, in Ptolemaic Egypt, they were in fact royal bankers, running banks that served as the state treasuries and facilitated state financial transactions. But, as vividly demonstrated in accounts from Zenon’s archive detailing interactions

³⁵⁴ For overviews of credit markets, see Verboven 2020 with further literature. Debates about the scale in breadth of these credit systems, and their impact on economic development are treated in chapter 8.A.

³⁵⁵ See Bogaert 1968; Andreau 1999 for Greek and Roman contexts, respectively. Kay 2018, 133–135 for an overview.

³⁵⁶ Rauh 1986.

³⁵⁷ Andreau 1999, 13–15.

³⁵⁸ The scale of this lending activity is impossible to identify, but see Verboven 2020, 407–409 for a discussion of the Roman credit market capacity and reach.

³⁵⁹ Kay 2014, 235–265.

with the banker Ammonios, they mixed this ‘official’ state financing with private banking activities, although the lines between these spheres can be difficult to draw.³⁶⁰ The smaller-scale loans that were advanced by the professional money-lenders were important not simply for their pure economic impact: they also created new, and often dense, networks of interaction. This stands in contrast to elite moneylending, which explicitly relied on preexisting social networks.

As Verboven has recently pointed out, it is a mistake to draw unduly narrow boundaries around the idea of financiers.³⁶¹ Those wishing to participate in the credit system as lenders could avail themselves of a flexible set of institutional and legal frameworks, and structure their relationships with other financiers as well as borrowers in a number of ways. As an example of one of these configurations in practice, the third-century CE jurist Ulpian reports a legal distinction between ‘simple’ bank clients who deposited money in a bank interest-free, and those who deposited sums intended for interest-bearing moneylending.³⁶² In the latter configuration, a wealthy individual would entrust a (presumably large) sum of money with a deposit banker in the expectation that the banker would be able to mobilize his investment for profit. Beyond depositing money with bankers, such an individual would have several other options. He could form a co-credit arrangement directly with a banker. Or he could work through intermediaries, like the *negotiores* of the Roman world. Finally, he could loan his own money directly or through dependent agents, such as the specialized Roman freedmen known as *faenatores*, trained in moneylending.

Although the loans extended by deposit bankers were generally fairly small, the bankers were nevertheless valuable systemic agents. Their success rested on detailed local information about the financial status of clients depositing money, as well as a network of contacts within a given community about where money could be safely and productively invested. Since there were no financial concerns in either the Hellenistic or Roman world that operated across wide geographical regions, these locally embedded individuals, whose livelihood depended on their reputation, became important informational hubs.³⁶³

One exceptional record of the intersection between finance and trade from the Roman world comes from the Italian site of Puteoli, where wax tablets record business transactions conducted by three generations of the Sulpicii family, financial service providers, either deposit bankers or *faenatores*, who were active in financing trading activity in the Bay of Naples. The tablets, many of which concern legal matters of the family, are an invaluable source of the actual functioning of Roman

³⁶⁰ Von Reden 2007, 280–290.

³⁶¹ Verboven 2020.

³⁶² In the case of bankruptcy, the former clients were made whole before the latter, Verboven 2020, 390–391.

³⁶³ Verboven 2020, 391–392.

law in the first century CE. Following recent analyses of Terpstra and Broekaert, the tablets demonstrate the role that tight, local community networks played in contract enforcement and conflict resolution.³⁶⁴ Formal Roman law could be brought to bear in cases of disagreements detailed in the archives – and sometimes was. However, the Sulpicii family preferred to turn to nonofficial strategies like private arbitration. These community-based solutions shifted the incentives for compliance with settlements from the weak (or nonexistent) official enforcement mechanisms to enforcement through reputational mechanisms, which drew their power from social pressure and community ties.

IX.2 Merchants, Merchant Communities, and Associations

In contrast to deposit bankers and other financial intermediaries who often operated at a local level, the intrinsic characteristic of merchants was that they functioned across vast spaces. In a climate with low state enforcement of contracts, exchange at distance came with high risks of being treated unfairly by trading partners. One strategy for limiting risk was engaging in trade with members of your own community, where, as in the case of the Sulpicii, social capital could act as an enforcement mechanism. There was also a mechanism for opening up these trust networks to individuals not born into the same families or communities: the phenomenon of voluntary associations.³⁶⁵ These associations brought together members bound by a shared religious practice, profession, place of residence or ethnicity – or another axis of identity that existed outside of other civic organizations. These groups acted fundamentally in an economic sense as “institutionalized trust networks” that structured relationships between individuals.³⁶⁶

The voluntary associations had roots in the world of the Classical *polis*.³⁶⁷ However, they expanded and developed new functions, particularly in Hellenistic and then Roman urban centers, where they became an important force mediatory and network force.³⁶⁸ In the Hellenistic and Roman world, one finds associations operating in the name of various gods, i.e., the *Sarapiastai*, the *Dionysiastai*, and the *synodos* of Herakles; but also associations with ethnic affiliations, i.e., the *Bakhcheion* of the *Asianoï*, and also explicitly professional character, i.e., the *synetheia* of the donkey drivers, or the *synetheia* of the purple-dyers.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁴ Terpstra 2013; Broekaert 2013. See Verboven 2020, 405–407 for a somewhat dissenting option.

³⁶⁵ On the critical role of both financiers and associations in trade, Terpstra 2013.

³⁶⁶ For this term, and a recent overview of associations in the Roman world, Liu 2017, 203.

³⁶⁷ See for example the discussion of the role of private associations in extending credit in Classical Athens, Thomsen 2015.

³⁶⁸ Although the voluntary associations were predominantly an urban phenomenon, this was not exclusively so. There was, for example, an association of donkey drivers in the Arsinoite *nome* (BGU I 15).

³⁶⁹ E.g., *IRhamnous* II 59; *IG*² 1326; *SEG* 36:228; *IPerinthos* 56; *Iberoia* 372; *IG* X/2.1 291.

Part of their power in the Hellenistic context came from their broad social reach. Whereas participation in civic ('public') associations of *poleis* was open only to citizens,³⁷⁰ membership in many of the voluntary associations was open to a range of noncitizens, including women, foreigners, and sometimes slaves. Drawing their structural vocabulary from the civic structures of the *polis*, these groups were governed by their own constitutions (*nomoi*), with their administrative bureaucracy filled out by officials also mirroring those found in public spheres.³⁷¹ Although membership in these groups remained out of reach for the urban poor, they were important means for incorporating a wider sector of the *plebs media*, the lower and middleclass urbanites, into formal institutional structures, and expanding the access and influence of these individuals into the world of the *poleis* that surrounded them.³⁷² Furthermore, as Gabrielsen has demonstrated in his analysis of associations on the important trade hub of Rhodes, the benefit did not only accrue for the membership of associations, but also for the civic elite who financed and supported many of them.³⁷³

Nevertheless, despite their prevalence, there is no single term in either Greek or Latin that corresponds directly to the modern "voluntary associations." Instead, these associations were known by a range of terms, among the most common of which were the Greek *thiasos* and *eranistos* and Latin *collegium* – a fact that highlights the diversity of the organizational type. Much of our evidence for voluntary associations comes from funerary inscriptions. The commemoration of the dead was both an expensive proposition, and one laden with symbolic meaning, and the associations seem to have provided craftsmen and other sub-elite groups with both the financial means to support appropriate burials, and with a social order within which the deceased could receive appropriate honors. Beyond their involvement in funerary rites, we also find voluntary associations as dedicants in honorific contexts in temples or elsewhere, demonstrating their participation in systems of civic *euergetism* and expressing their relationships to local elite who acted as their patrons.³⁷⁴ Additional evidence for the associations comes from papyrological sources, which include tax rolls generated by the state which mention the associations, as well as associations' administrative documents, including petitions from members to association leadership. The relative dearth of references in transmitted texts to associations deserves note, as it reflects the elite bias of the transmitted corpus.

Although these voluntary associations were once commonly called "guilds," more recent scholarship has emphasized the fact that their fundamental purpose

370 The central associations in this sense were connected to membership in specific *deme* and *phyle* groups.

371 Gabrielsen 2007, 186.

372 For the *plebs media* as the core constituents of associations, see van Nijf 1997.

373 Gabrielsen 2001.

374 Van Nijf 1997, 73–130.

was social rather than economic.³⁷⁵ At the same time, there are two important counterpoints to consider here. Firstly, although thin, there is explicit evidence of economic protectionism of at least some voluntary associations in some periods, for instance, the salt-dealers in the Egyptian city of Tebtunis, whose price-setting behavior makes it clear that the group was “attempting to act as a cartel.”³⁷⁶ And secondly, as noted above, these associations could act as networks of trust, which gave their members the ability to benefit from nonstate enforcement structures.

We see the tendency to organize along these lines in the case of shippers and shipowners in the Roman world, who from the first century CE, began to form associations called *collegia* and then *corpora navicularum*, associated with cities or areas of operation. Recently, Rohde has traced a process of deepening involvement of the state in the *corpora* over the course of the second century.³⁷⁷ At some point in the second century, these and other *collegia* involved in useful trades were granted immunity from civic liturgies, leaving them in a privileged position economically. These organizations would have provided a convenient avenue through which people operating as government officials could arrange public contracts, and in the interest of maintaining a regular food supply. The government granted them a form of legal personhood distinct from that of its members, which was unusual in Roman law, and in the third century, membership itself became a liturgy.³⁷⁸ Nevertheless, they remained nongovernmental associations.³⁷⁹ Legal evidence from the fourth century shows that even then, they were willing to drive a hard bargain when negotiating public contracts with the state.³⁸⁰ While they were public contractors, it is not at all obvious that this was their only business. Indeed, if it were, one would expect them to be described as *societates publicanorum*. Rather, the *navicularii* were merchants who took public contracts in addition to their private operations.

Finally, we also find explicit examples of trade diasporas, where members stemming from a single place or sharing an ethnic identity operate within ingroup networks that span long distances. Their shared identity “ensures a large measure of conformity with common values and principles,” in the words of Cohen, whose study of trade established the idea.³⁸¹ The solidarity that comes from this shared identity enables the diasporic community to broker relationships among members more effectively than weak public institutions. Such diasporic communities are well

³⁷⁵ See especially MacMullen 1974, 19.

³⁷⁶ Van Nijf 1997, 14.

³⁷⁷ Rohde 2018, 152–153.

³⁷⁸ Broekaert 2008; Rohde 2018; Sirks 1991.

³⁷⁹ Sirks argues for particularly deep state involvement in these otherwise private associations, but most see the relationship as slightly more distant (1991, 81–107). Broekaert (2008) argues *contra* Sirks that the *corpora* were not established by the emperor, and Arnaud (2016, 139–142) argues that the *curatores navium* were not government officials.

³⁸⁰ Arnaud 2016, 149.

³⁸¹ Cohen 1971, 267.

attested in the ancient Mediterranean and Southwest Asia. In his study of diasporic communities in the Near East, for example, Seland has identified networks structured around both ethnic and religious identity.³⁸² Despite the inherently private nature of the binding identities, Terpstra has highlighted the interplay between private and public rule-setting in diaspora settings. He points to evidence from the island trade emporion of Delos, where Phoenician traders in the late Hellenistic period curried favor with the rising Roman power in their private association house, through which they asserted their loyalty to the Romans, thus reenforcing their own position amid rapidly changing political context.³⁸³ The language that the Phoenicians on Delos used to express their community identity included the term *synodos*, which furthermore connects this diasporic community to the phenomenon of the so-called 'private' or 'voluntary associations.'

There were, then, a number of different ways that merchants could organize, drawing on claims of shared heritage, and eventually on shared community membership. The line between 'private' and 'public' in these communities and their dealings with political authority was flexible. Similar to the situation with respect to financiers, part of the innovation that occurred over the course of the Hellenistic and Roman periods involved the evolution of multiple, interlocking networks that created mutually reinforcing enforcement and knowledge systems, reducing transaction costs at scale and across great distances. These networks bridged the gaps between the regional economies that continued to live on, even in the face of growing political hegemony, allowing for the more ready movement of goods and capital through the system.

X Conclusion

This chapter has provided a survey of actor-types who played an outsized role in determining the course of economic processes in the ancient Mediterranean and Southwest Asia. The discussion began with the most concrete – urban systems – and moved through a series of institutions and individuals that varied in scale and type. One through line in the organization of the chapter concerned the relationship of these actors to state power, which was fragmented and disbursed among a range of individuals and institutions. In principle, we moved from actor categories whose source of power was most entwined with the state, to those whose authority stemmed from other types of social order. And yet, even at the end of the chapter in our discussion of associations, we found that some aspect of state authority, in the form of aristocratic financiers, nevertheless coursed under the surface.

382 Seland 2013.

383 Terpstra 2019, 67–71.

Cities act as the meta-organizers of economic behavior, providing a foundation of both concrete institutional and social frameworks that long predate the Hellenistic and Roman periods, although the details of their functioning changed dramatically over time, and varied considerably across space. Cities, and particularly the trend toward increasing urbanism, drove surplus agricultural production. But cities also served as aggregators, physical hubs with similar institutional and social frameworks that were dense with opportunities for innovation and connectivity, which eased communication across the wider network of urban sites, and reduced the transaction costs for individuals operating within the system.

The Hellenistic period saw expansion of the power of the next actor category, sovereign rulers and their inner circles. Kingship was, of course, nothing new in either the Near East or Mediterranean, but the scale of the Hellenistic sovereigns and the breadth of their kingdoms, and eventually empires, made them uniquely powerful. Their economic power came at once from their raw holdings in land and property and their own immense consumption, but also more abstractly from their ability to coordinate behavior across their territories. Armies were, on the one hand, the enforcement mechanism for these sovereigns. Beyond this, they were also a critical consumptive force, while also becoming an important site for redistributive systems, as demonstrated for example in discussions of the role of armies in the spread of monetization.

The final major institutional actor, temples, serve many of the same roles as cities, although with a considerably more varied range of organizational structures. Temples also often represented an older stratum of social and political organization, and therefore controlled networks that were quite different from those of the expansionist Hellenistic and Roman sovereigns. Figuring out how to either coexist with or coopt these networks was therefore important for political authorities.

In the second half of the chapter, we treated a series of actors and institutions who were less intrinsically wrapped up with state or political power, but who were by no means divorced from these systems. This close relationship is best exemplified by the case of local elites, an amorphous and difficult-to-define category whose fundamental economic role was as landowners and secondarily as taste-setters for general consumption patterns, but who also inhabited their own social networks, which were critical in (among other things) the movement of large amounts of capital in the form of elite lending – an alternative to commercial banking that facilitated other types of commercial activity.

The behavior of both local elites, and of the producers and traders treated at the end of the chapter, were all structured within the fundamental organization of the household. Our discussion highlights the household as the most basic unit of both consumption, and the organization and coordination of labor. Interacting with the state through issues like property rights and inheritance rules, it was these household systems that most often structured the deployment of human capital in fundamental agricultural and secondary production contexts.

The chapter ends with a discussion of a category of actors whom we call ‘networking agents,’ which includes financiers, voluntary associations, and merchant communities. Crosscutting other actor categories, these actors are analyzed primarily for their ability to create durable links that facilitated long-distance and occasionally large-scale economic behavior.

Throughout the chapter, we treated the economic behavior of these actors on two levels. We considered first their role in productive, consumptive, and distributive processes, highlighting the ways that they supported the fundamental economic behavior of the ancient world. To cite one example: we traced the central importance of landholding as the source of productive power that supported state superstructures, but also tracked the mechanisms that transformed land into social and political power, through mechanisms like land grants and the involvement of temple infrastructures in landholding. We also followed the conversation about land down the social ladder, considering the arrangements by which land was actually worked, and considering how these systems interacted with the most basic economic unit of the ancient world: the household. We also considered instances where the fundamental economic activity could be considered in some cases destructive, rather than productive, as in the case of the military.

Alongside the discussion of productive, consumptive, and distributive processes, we also tracked the ways in which each of these actor categories facilitated coordination and integration, whether through the top-down rule-setting power of sovereigns, or the bottom-up network creation of voluntary associations. We view these integrative behaviors as the preconditions for the pronounced increase in connectivity witnessed over the course of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. And, although this process often occurred within the context of violent imperial expansion, we emphasize that integration cannot be looked at as merely a function of that expansion, but rather as the product of interlocking patterns of community interaction that undergirded the system.

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