

ESF Exploratory Workshop on

**Dynamics of Production and Economic  
Interaction in the Near East in the First Half  
of the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BCE**

Villeneuve d'Ascq (France), 28-30 June 2011

Convened by:  
**Juan Carlos MORENO GARCIA**

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**SCIENTIFIC REPORT**

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When considering the organization of the exploratory workshop, I felt that the first meeting of a group of researchers, coming from disciplines not used to have a fluid dialogue between them, could turn to be too formal, even rigid, unless a pleasant work environment was provided by the organization. That is why the workshop was held at the “Maison de la Recherche” of the University Charles-de-Gaulle, Lille 3, a quiet building at the periphery of the campus but including all the necessary facilities in order to provide a calm and nice environment for the participants, not only for the scientific discussions but also for informal meetings. The experience gained from the organization of other congresses in the past was also taken into account when considering an easy access for the guests, thus avoiding stairs and similar obstacles for people with reduced mobility. As the “Maison de la Recherche” also includes facilities such as a dining room as well as a personnel specialized in office computerization, I cannot but thank the University for providing a very pleasant setting highly valued by the participants.

The three-day workshop began the 28<sup>th</sup> June with 19 researchers from seven countries. The atmosphere was surprisingly warm, natural and relaxed when considering that many of us have never met before. The presence of the representative of the ESF, Dr. Barry Dixon, greatly contributed to the general relaxed mood as he integrated himself perfectly well within the group and avoided any kind of “authority attitude”, thus helping to improve a very stimulating atmosphere. This was doubtless especially appreciated during the discussion time. As scientific meetings usually pass in an almost “ritualized” way, with conferences following one another and being only interrupted by one or two courtesy questions, one of my goals was to stimulate true discussions in order to meet the main goal of the workshop: to open new and innovative paths of research thanks to the contribution of sources, approaches and experiences from disciplines that work on similar topics but in isolation. I am proud to say that the time devoted to the discussions was doubtless the most productive and exciting aspect of the workshop, with quite vivid exchanges of ideas and information and with the excitement of discovering how sources and theoretical perspectives from neighbour disciplines could cast an unexpected light on one’s own work. In some occasions cutting short the discussions prove to be a quite difficult task (for instance, in order to leave the building or to have lunch), when brain storming was at its peak.

Such a favourable personal and scientific environment proved to be very stimulating when turning to the scientific objective of the workshop, the study of the transition of the productive structures of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean and Near East between the Late Bronze and Early Iron ages, and more precisely:

1. the basic characteristics of Late Bronze economy and trade;
2. which sectors of economic activity were dismissed, why and how others survived and how they adapted themselves to a new economic environment of increasing trade and private non-institutional activity;
3. measuring the impact of private trade in the economic relations and in the organization of power within the states;
4. which social sectors benefited the most from the new conditions, how they transformed their wealth into social and political power, and how they mixed with the traditional elite that have dominated the Late Bronze Age states;

5. why micro-territorial powers linked to trade and new commercial routes emerged everywhere, and which were the reasons of their competitive advantages and political weakness in the long term against the state organization; in some cases similar conditions can be detected around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, but the results were quite different when compared with those of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium;
6. how power was exploited by competing factions of the elite, which were their respective economic and social basis of power, and why in the end former Late Bronze Age states escaped from political fragmentation to become imperial “super-powers”;
7. which were the solutions adopted by former institutional powers in order to adapt themselves to the new economic environment. In this respect a comparative perspective could be very productive, revealing parallels and divergences within a broad geographical area encompassing the Red Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia;
8. finally, which (new) conceptual framework could prove to be the most efficient in order to characterise and define the economic developments which took place in this area during the first half of the first millennium BCE.

Grouping the conferences into five main thematic areas help avoiding the dispersal of the data presented while encouraging discussions and the discovery of parallels. Such thematic areas, each of them including several conferences according to their (broadly) common contents, were also intended to exactly coincide with the five sessions of the workshop (three in the morning, two in the afternoon). The idea was thus to avoid the inconvenience of any cut that would make difficult the discussions, especially about the contents of the earlier conferences. The thematic areas were as follows:

- Declining institutions *versus* raising private sector? Economies in transition in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE”;
- Economies in transition. The role of temples;
- The dynamics of change from the perspective of temples;
- Trade, markets and investment in a new economic environment;
- The archaeology of trade.

Thanks to the high quality of the conferences and of the subsequent discussions, it became apparent that the analysis of the economic transition from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age societies, both in the Eastern Mediterranean and in Egypt and the Near East, should be improved by refining the concepts currently used in our disciplines. Such a measure should certainly contribute to a better comprehension of Near Eastern economic structures by historians of the ancient world, by specialists in economic anthropology, even by economists interested in learning from the societies of the past, especially on the following topics:

- the use of the term “institution”, as it is usually employed by Egyptologists and Assyriologists, is somewhat misleading. The growing importance of New Institutional Economics in the field of economic history has led to a specific use of the term “institution” which encompasses a broader set of meanings than those used in ancient Near Eastern studies, where it is usually applied to temples and royal palaces;
- “pre-monetary” is also a controversial term. Monetary practices are broadly attested in ancient Near Eastern sources, even in the absence of true struck coins, so the use of the term “pre-monetary” suggest economic practices more primitive than it was the case;

- as for trade, it is an activity usually linked with the state and public spheres, especially in Egyptology, thus neglecting the role and initiatives played by the autonomous initiatives of private traders.

Another conclusion of the meeting is that archaeology becomes indispensable for the study not only of economic aspects insufficiently documented by the texts, but also for many sectors that were never recorded in the official record as they were carried out by private agents. The Iron Age is a particular problematic period because of the scarcity of written sources as many states collapsed and private activities, hardly controlled by the states and their bureaucracies, flourished. A connected problem arises when confronting the analysis of the “unknown knowns”, that is to say, goods that we positively know that were produced and traded but which have not left any archaeological trace because of their organic and perishable nature (cloth, metals reworked, salt, precious vegetal produce like frankincense or spices; even slaves could be included under this heading).

In general, the need was felt that interdisciplinary discussion is indispensable because the economic realities usually studied in isolation by our disciplines proved to be better understood in a broader context. Agricultural change, the rise of “agricultural entrepreneurs” at the service of palaces and temples, the development of new trade routes, the colonization of marginal areas, the variety of “currencies” and the extent of monetary practices were considered the more promising avenues for future collaborative research, to evoke only some of them. The fact that all the participants were enthusiastic about the idea of continuing the collaboration originated by the workshop, and to participate in any future programme proves the success of the workshop.

## 2. SCIENTIFIC CONTENT OF THE EVENT

The workshop was organized into five thematic areas, each one devoted to a specific economic topic.

1. The first one was entitled “*Declining institutions versus raising private sector? Economies in transition in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE*” and was introduced by a conference by Susan Sherratt. The author stressed the shift from palatial control over international trade towards more autonomous, private centred exchanges, involving the opening of new routes and contacts with distant areas, from the Atlantic to India. Afterwards, Peter Bang insisted on the more productive analytical tools to be employed when dealing with pre-industrial trade, especially those derived from Neo-Institutional Economics, well-rooted in the ideas developed by Polanyi in the 1950s but introducing considerable nuances; finally, the characteristics of the bazaar economy, with its informal gathering of traders for specific ventures (instead of durable enterprises), involving different productive sectors, could prove to be useful when dealing with non-palatial trade activities. My own conference dealt with the changes apparent in pharaonic agriculture, when the direct exploitation of the fields by the institutions thanks to the abundant manpower provided by imperial conquest (slaves, serfs sent as tribute into Egypt, etc.) gave way to a different model, where the participation of “agricultural entrepreneurs” was essential in order to cultivate the domains of the temples and of the crown. In the same vein, Johannes Hackl presented similar results from Babylon, when private entrepreneurs cultivated vast tracts of land and when temples paid wages in silver instead of employing forced workers on a large scale.

2. The second thematic area *“Economies in transition. The role of temples”*, was introduced by a conference centred on archaeological research, as the expansion of agricultural settlements in the Northern Jazirah region was related to the obligations imposed by the temples and the palatial sector. Julian Zurbach presented a different perspective, from the Greek experience, as Mycenaean temples are being considered one of the main actors of economic activity in Late Bronze Age, only to disappear with the crisis of the states. Renate Müller-Wollermann presented another different case, this time from Egypt, when temples appear more and more involved in putting silver into circulation and acting as “transformation centres” during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, as hoards of silver prove thanks to archaeological discoveries. Finally, the conference by Damien Agut-Labordère connected the foundation and agricultural expansion of a temple in the oasis of Kharga (Egypt) with the production and export of oil to the Nile Valley during the Achaemenid Period.
3. In parallel with the precedent paragraph, the thematic area *“The dynamics of change from the perspective of temples”* began with the conference by Kristin Kleber, which stressed the change from corvée-work to wages in first millennium Babylon as a strategy best suited in an economic environment where silver circulated broadly. Caroline Waerzeggers offered another view of this problematic by highlighting the importance of the economic strategies of powerful local families, able to control, exploit and commercialize the produce from the fields of the temples and to accumulate enough wealth as to preserve their dominant social position. As for Gaëlle Tallet, she studied how a temple succeeded to exploit some fields in a harsh environment in the Kharga oasis.
4. *“Trade, markets and investment in a new economic environment”* gave Jean-Baptiste Yon the opportunity to evoke the role of long-distance traders from Palmyra and other localities thanks to the epigraphical record. Later on, Laetitia Graslin-Thomé stressed the changes in trade and in the role played by markets after the collapse of the Late Bronze palace economy, when private ventures and an expanded use of silver fuelled international exchanges. Robert Morkot provided an exciting picture of such changes from the perspective of North-Eastern Africa and the area of the Red Sea, when Nubia played the role of intermediary between the Mediterranean and the Sudanic area, providing not only gold and exotica, but also horses, indispensable for the new warfare techniques appeared during the Iron Age. As for Karen Radner, she discussed the geopolitical environment in which Assyria raised from the condition of an Upper Tigris middle power into a huge empire controlling much of the caravan trade and supply centres of strategic metals in the Near East; the evidence she provided helped understand why the Neo-assyrian empire expanded towards areas traditionally outside direct Mesopotamian rule, and why the massive deportations of conquered populations and their settlement in the countryside sought to obtain the resources necessary to sustain an aggressive military expansion. Finally, Heather Baker studied the confluence of private and “public” interests in the policy followed by some elite families in order to preserve their prominent social position, especially in the light of the management of their landed resources.
5. Finally, the thematic area *“The archaeology of trade”* included three conferences. Mario Fales stressed the inaccuracy of the rather artificial dichotomy between “monetary systems”, based on coins, and “pre-monetary systems”, where silver was nevertheless extensively used as a means of payment, value reference and wealth reserve. Carol Bell analyzed the reasons of the overseas expansion of the Phoenicians in the light of the more recent archaeological evidence, thus showing how it was rooted in the previous “world-system” economy of the Late Bronze Age and how it began earlier than

supposed. As for Astrid Moeller, her conference dealt on the origins and growth of Naucratis as a trade port in ancient Egypt, and how its allegedly unique and exceptional position is in fact incomprehensible without considering that similar ports have existed in previous centuries.

The flow of ideas and written and archaeological sources stimulated many vivid debates. The most important centred about the extent and use of “money” in Iron Age Near Eastern economies; about the informal mechanisms which made it possible the circulation of goods and precious items outside the palatial sphere; about a more precise use of terms like “institutional” in order to be better understood by historians working in ancient economy; about the better way to integrate both written and archaeological material when dealing with specific historical problems; about the development of trade routes, the role played by private and palatial actors and the interplay between them, etc. It also became apparent that the interpretation of Pharaonic economy has been hampered by naive interpretations rooted in 19<sup>th</sup> century scholarship, when Egypt appears as an odd isolated exception within Near Eastern societies. As a result, the analytical tools, historical approaches and theoretical debates currently in use in Egyptology are completely inappropriate to understand the economic changes occurred at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, thus making it urgent to analyse such changes in a comparative perspective, principally within the broader geopolitical environment of Near Eastern societies during the Iron Age. No real disagreements were noticed, with the only exception of the discussion on the extent of slave work and the very existence of slave markets in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Finally, I would like to highlight the mass of evidence and the exciting fresh insights provided by Karen Radner, Susan Sherratt and Mario Fales, especially about long distance trade, about the importance of “money” in economies traditionally considered to be mainly based on agriculture, and about the importance of the private sector, undervalued in the “public” temple and palace archives but which emerges from recent scholarship as a potent vector of economic activity and adaptability to changing historical environments.

### **3. ASSESSMENT OF THE RESULTS, CONTRIBUTION TO THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE FIELD, OUTCOME**

The workshop showed how much is to be gained from a truly interdisciplinary collaboration between Egyptologists, Assyriologists, archaeologist and historians of the ancient world, especially when focussing on economic and social history. The fact that scholars from such different disciplines suddenly realise that they are working on similar topics, and that their own research could be greatly improved thanks to the sources, theoretical approaches and contributions from neighbouring disciplines, was the most exciting outcome of the meeting. It also became evident that no scientific discipline in the domain of ancient oriental studies can continue to conceive itself as a secluded self-sufficient domain of knowledge, and that an urgent task actually consists in overtaking the limits imposed by 19<sup>th</sup> century scholarship. The contribution by Peter Bang revealed the necessity of clarifying many of the concepts currently (but mistakenly) used by Egyptologists and Assyriologists in order to be understood and see our work incorporated into current debates in ancient history. Expanding our perspectives of research, building collaborative models on specific topics (“currency”, “temple”, “dependent labour”, “institution”, and so on), and refining our concepts and theoretical approaches are the basis for the renewal of our disciplines and for their incorporation into the mainstream of ancient (economic) studies.

Having in mind these considerations, all the participants agreed to pursue our collaboration and to fix new topics of collaborative research. The use and extent of “money”, a careful analysis of the categories encompassed by terms like “institution” and “institutional” in ancient Near Eastern social and economic studies, the archaeology of economic activities outside the palatial sphere, and the development and characteristics of new trade routes (actors, commodities, itineraries, geopolitics, smuggling) were agreed as the main foci of future research. As for the best way to continue and deepen our co-operation, the advice of the ESF representative, Dr. Barry Dixon, proved to be invaluable. That is why I think that the first step should consist in launching a series of congresses, each dealing with one of the priority themes of research just evoked. Once the general results from these meetings expounded and discussed in a final plenary congress, a European research project should follow (European Commission, ESF, ANR programme financed by the French government).

Therefore I intend to submit a proposal for an ESF COST programme (ISCH) in the spring 2012. It should allow me to expand the number of colleagues and of disciplines involved, to organise the intended conferences, to consolidate an European network of scholars and to constitute an international leader team of research constituted around the participants at the exploratory workshop hold at Lille. Furthermore, I have contacted Oxbow Books (a world leader publishing house on archaeology and ancient history) in order to publish the proceedings of the workshop, a proposal that has been accepted and the book planned to appear about 2013-2014.

## 4. FINAL PROGRAMME

Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2011

- 09.30-09.40 **Welcome by Convenor**  
**Juan Carlos Moreno García** (HALMA-IPEL, Université Charles-de-Gaulle Lille 3, Villeneuve d'Ascq, France)
- 09.40-10.00 **Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)**  
**Barry Dixon** (ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH))
- 10.00-13.00** **Morning Session: "Declining institutions versus raising private sector? Economies in transition in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE"**
- 10.00-10.30 **"From institutional to private: Traders, routes and commerce from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age"**  
**Susan Sherratt** (University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom)
- 10.30-11.00 **"Conceptualizing ancient trade: the bazaar economy"**  
**Peter F. Bang** (SAXO Institute, Copenhagen, Denmark)
- 11.00-11.15 *Coffee / Tea Break*
- 11.15-11.45 **"Temples and agriculture in Egypt, from the Late New Kingdom to the Saite Period"**  
**Juan Carlos Moreno García** (HALMA-IPEL, Université Charles-de-Gaulle Lille 3, Villeneuve d'Ascq, France)
- 11.45-12.15 **"The Neo-Babylonian empire and its economic foundations: the impact of state institutions on the transformation of the Babylonian economy in the sixth century"**  
**Johannes Hackl** (Universität Wien, Vienna, Austria)
- 12.15-13.00 **Discussion**
- 13.00-14.30 *Lunch*
- 14.30-18.30** **Afternoon Session: "Economies in transition. The role of temples"**
- 14.30-15.00 **"Northern Jazirah and Upper Tigris valley in the Iron Age. The contribution of pottery production and settlement organization in reconstructing local economic trends"**  
**Anacleto d'Agostino** (Università di Siena, Siena, Italy)
- 15.00-15.30 **"From Mycenaean to Classical Greece"**  
**Julien Zurbach** (Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris, France)
- 15.30-16.00 **"Temples, money and trade in Egypt in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium"**  
**Renate Müller-Wollermann** (Universität Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany)
- 16.00-16.15 *Coffee / Tea break*
- 16.15-16.45 **"Temples and private business in Late Period Egypt"**  
**Damien Agut-Labordère** (Collège de France, Paris, France)
- 16.45-18.30 **Discussion**
- 19.30 *Dinner*



Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2011

**09.30-12.30** **Morning Session: "The dynamics of change from the perspective of temples"**

09.30-10.00 "Cash crop production and the use of money in Babylonia from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age"

**Kristin Kleber** (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands)

10.00-10.30 "In search of the origins of the *hanshû* land schemes in the early Neo-Babylonian period: interactions between temple, palace, and local elites"

**Caroline Waerzeggers** (University College London, London, United Kingdom)

10.30-11.00 "Settlement and irrigation at Kharga Oasis"

**Gaëlle Tallet** (Université de Limoges, Limoges, France)

11.00-11.15 *Coffee / Tea Break*

11.15-12.30 **Discussion**

12.30-14.00 *Lunch*

**14.00-18.30** **Afternoon Session: "Trade, markets and investment in a new economic environment"**

14.00-14.30 "Organization and financement of trade and caravans in the Near East"

**Jean-Baptiste Yon** (Université Lyon 2, Lyon, France)

14.30-15.00 "Institutional and private trade in 1<sup>st</sup> millenium Mesopotamia"

**Laetitia Graslin-Thome** (Université Nancy 2, Nancy, France)

15.00-15.30 "North-east Africa and trade at the crossroads of the Nile Valley, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea"

**Robert Morkot** (University of Exeter, Exeter, United Kingdom)

15.30-15.45 *Coffee / Tea Break*

15.45-16.15 "The Assyrian economy in transition, from the Early Iron Age to the Neo-Assyrian empire"

**Karen Radner** (University College London, London, United Kingdom)

16.15-16.45 "Family, private property and the state in first millennium BC Mesopotamia"

**Heather D. Baker** (Universität Wien, Vienna, Austria)

16.45-18.30 **Discussion**

19.30 *Dinner*

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011

**09.30-12.30** **Morning Session: "The archaeology of trade"**

09.30-10.00 "Money and premonetary systems in Mesopotamia"

**Frederick M. Fales** (Università degli Studi di Udine, Udine, Italy)

10.00-10.30 "Phoenician trade—the first three hundred years"

**Carol Bell** (University College London, London, United Kingdom)

10.30-11.00	<b>“Naucratis and archaic Greek trade”</b> <b>Astrid Möller</b> (Universität Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany)
11.00-11.15	<i>Coffee / Tea Break</i>
11.15-12.30	<b>Discussion</b>
12.30-14.00	<i>Lunch</i>
<b>14.00-16.00</b>	<b>Afternoon Session: general discussion and discussion on follow-up activities/networking/collaboration</b>
17.00	<i>End of Workshop and departure</i>

## 5. FINAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Damien AGUT-LABORDERE (Collège de France, France)  
 Heather D. BAKER (University of Vienna, Austria)  
 Peter Fibiger BANG (University of Copenhagen, Denmark)  
 Carol BELL (British School at Athens, United Kingdom)  
 Anacleto D’AGOSTINO (Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italy)  
 Frederick Mario FALES (Università degli Studi di Udine, Italy)  
 Laetitia GRASLIN-THOMAS (University of Nancy 2, France)  
 Johannes HACKL (University of Vienna, Austria)  
 Kristin KLEBER (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands)  
 Astrid MOELLER (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Germany)  
 Juan Carlos MORENO GARCIA (CNRS, France)  
 Robert MORKOT (University of Exeter, United Kingdom)  
 Renate MÜLLER-WOLLERMANN (Universität Tübingen, Germany)  
 Karen RADNER (University College London, United Kingdom)  
 Susan SHERRATT (University of Sheffield, United Kingdom)  
 Gaëlle TALLET (Université de Limoges, France)  
 Caroline WAERZEGGERS (University College London, United Kingdom)  
 Jean-Baptiste YON (CNRS, France)  
 Julien ZURBACH (Ecole Normale Supérieure de Paris, France)

## 6. STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON PARTICIPANTS

### Age bracket (%)

<b>-30</b>	10,6
<b>30-40</b>	36,8
<b>40-50</b>	26,3
<b>50+</b>	26,3

### Gender (%)

<b>Male</b>	47,3
<b>Female</b>	52,7

### **Countries of origin (%)\***

<b>Austria</b>	10,5
<b>Denmark</b>	5,3
<b>France</b>	31,5
<b>Germany</b>	10,5
<b>Italy</b>	10,5
<b>The Netherlands</b>	5,3
<b>United Kingdom</b>	26,4

\* Four expected participants, invited when the proposal was first submitted in 2010, could not finally attend the workshop, a circumstance which has unfortunately distorted the final statistics. They came from Austria, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom respectively.

### **Scientific speciality (%)**

<b>Ancient history</b>	15,8
<b>Assyriology</b>	36,8
<b>Classical archaeology</b>	21,0
<b>Egyptology</b>	26,4