

# Introduction

Peter F. Bang – Mark L. Lawall – John Lund

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, archaeologists developed ways of applying quantitative data to traditional questions of scale of production, fluctuating levels of imports etc. But historians on both sides of the old primitivist-modernist divide often relegated archaeology to a largely illustrative role vis-à-vis text-based history.<sup>1</sup> Now, however, the different approaches seem to be converging,<sup>2</sup> although the evidence of archaeology is still at times relegated to an inferior position in text-oriented treatments of the ancient economy.<sup>3</sup>

Interest in New Institutional Economics (NIE) has opened up significant new pathways for a productive collaboration between archaeology and history investigating the ancient economy. Within this paradigm, an important task for an institutional history of ancient economies is the identification and evaluation of those factors adding to the cost or effort of transactions.<sup>4</sup> Already by 1908, Charles Conant highlighted the need to consider factors that impeded economic processes:

It should not be forgotten that economic science differs in essential respects from the physical sciences. In those sciences we find forces which work according to fixed laws. Even in them we find the effect of those, laws mitigated or offset by friction and opposing forces.<sup>5</sup>

Historians have begun to explore the impact of institutions such as systems of measurement, political alliances, long-distance communication, taxes, tolls, and informal brigandage, among other factors, in increasing or decreasing the ‘distance’ between transactors.<sup>6</sup> Network theories have enhanced our understanding of connectivity,<sup>7</sup> and sophisticated ways of modelling ancient travel are increasingly being compared with patterns in the archaeological record. Other factors, not least information asymmetry, also slow or impede transactions. Texts, especially papyri but also stone inscriptions, shed some light on the changing transactional friction caused by such uncertainties.

The papers in this panel session brought archaeological evidence together with written sources to explore the impact of social, economic, political, and geographic friction in ancient economies. Mark Lawall’s paper (published here) led off with the archaeological evidence for late Archaic and Classical shipping through the Hellespont. The socio-political friction created both by ‘external’ forces, especially Athenian imperial policies, and ‘internal’ forces, especially the changing interests of non-Greek elites in the Pontic region. Kristian Göransson (also published here) focused on evidence for trade involving Cyrenaica – the western periphery of Egypt, the eastern fringe of the Punic world and the southern neighbour of the Peloponnese. Jennifer Gates-Foster’s paper examined the commercial and social impact of at least two layers of controlled or limited access, first to Egypt itself and from there into the Eastern Desert. Sitta von Reden’s paper took

the examination of this general region one step further and examined how, in specific terms, the Roman imperial system managed and facilitated commerce over the Eastern Desert.<sup>8</sup> The final paper, by Roberta Tomber, (published here) extended the study out beyond the commonly perceived limits of the Classical World, to the Indian Ocean and India. Quantitative data from within the Mediterranean are compared with this more far-flung region to pinpoint the effects of friction on especially long-distance movement of goods.<sup>9</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a more general discussion of the relationship between the two disciplines, see Hall 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Davies 2018.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Manning 2018.

<sup>4</sup> North 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Conant 1908, 104.

<sup>6</sup> Scheidel et al. 2007; Bang 2009a and b; Verboven 2015; Dross-Krüpe et al. 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Leidwanger – Knappett 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. also Seland 2016.

<sup>9</sup> See now also Cobb 2017.

### References

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