

# Introduction

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New approaches and fresh finds in archaeology and anthropology have gradually mitigating the traditional understanding of craftsmanship in the ancient world as belonging exclusively to the realms of ‘production’ and ‘trade’ – two concepts derived from modern economic thought of economy.

Today, our critical awareness of the irreducible and complex nature of ancient thought and beliefs, paired with in-depth investigations of the historical, political and ideological contexts of artisanal activities, allow us to open new paths for a fuller comprehension of the latter – and of the ritual concerns of the social groups who controlled these activities, which certainly played a role in shaping them.

Within this framework, I would now like to mention some key concepts, around which today’s talks and the following discussion will revolve, concepts that link our different perspectives on distinct periods and regions of the Mediterranean.

- The meaning of the word *economy* in antiquity, and its different forms across space and time;
- The meaning of the word *craftsmanship* in antiquity, and its different forms across space and time;
- The *status* of craftsmen in antiquity, and how it changes across space and time.
- The *status* of the “élite” in antiquity, and how it changes across space and time.
- The *multi-functionality* of the structures we bring to light in our excavations (Alexander Mazarakis Ainian, Alexis Gorgues).

In this perspective, I would like to mention the important work of Aldo Schiavone<sup>1</sup>. Here, the author reminds us that the economy as we conceive of it does not exist in ancient literary sources.<sup>2</sup> Every perception of economy *as a distinct sector of human activities and of social life* is absent: “*economy* of the ancient word is only a modern lexical convention”<sup>3</sup>.

Rather, an in-depth study of the relationships between craft activities and elite “domestic” contexts in antiquity shows us that technical skills can enhance *status* through control of raw materials and the highly sophisticated know-how required to transform the latter into finished products. Within a non-“economic” perspective (in the modern sense), but a political and cultural perspective, production strategies aim to provide resources for: (1) support of interpersonal relationships; (2) redistribution and intangible compensation (for example, by the creation of *clientelae*); (3) the creation of international relationships; and (4) the construction of cosmological and ritual patterns to consolidate local community identity (Alexis Gorgues, Sandra Blakely).

Within this framework, it is essential to keep in mind ancient notions of gifts as objects that increase their conceptual and ideological value by travelling (Mary Helms): a trajectory that should be understood as internal (inside the community), external

(outside the community), and intra-community (between different communities living together).

In conclusion, approaching artisanal productions in the ancient world requires us to think in terms of interpersonal, gentilital relationships instead of in terms of “market economy”.<sup>4</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A. Schiavone, *La storia spezzata. Roma antica e Occidente moderno* (Rome 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Schiavone 1996, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Schiavone 1996, 47.

<sup>4</sup> For a last discussion of this problems, see now M. Denti, *Apprendre à reconnaître les gestes des potiers. Une introduction au colloque*, in: M. Denti – M. Villette (eds.), *Archéologie des espaces artisanaux. Fouiller et comprendre les gestes des potiers. Actes du Colloque International de Rennes (27–28 novembre 2014)* (Montpellier 2019) 11–19.