

MONEY, LABOUR AND LAND

Approaches to the economies
of ancient Greece

*Edited by Paul Cartledge,
Edward E. Cohen and Lin Foxhall*



London and New York

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PREFACE

Geoffrey Lloyd

When the term ‘economics’ was eventually coined – in the early twentieth century – was that an invention or a discovery? In one sense it was clearly an invention, in that a new learned discipline came into being, to take its place among other university departments, staffed with its professors and lecturers in designated areas of the subject. But what about the phenomena that were studied by that discipline? Were they called into being or had they been there all along?

Let me elaborate those two alternatives with some analogies. On the option that the phenomena were invented, the analogy would be with, say, the jet engine. That certainly did not exist in any sense before it was invented. Similarly some historians of science (such as Latour) have argued that microbes did not exist before Pasteur, and they have pointed to the feedback or loop effect of the creation of a concept such as that of child abuse. Once that concept was made explicit, so Hacking has argued, it called into being the very phenomena that it was used to describe.

On the other option, that of discovery, the analogy would be that of Columbus discovering America. The lands that now go by that name were certainly there before Columbus arrived and mistook them for countries bordering on China. However for the indigenous peoples of America whom Columbus discovered, what *they* discovered – or had thrust to their attention – was the realisation that there were foreigners eager to convert them to Christianity and to appropriate their land.

Every social anthropologist is taught to be careful to distinguish between actors’ and observers’ categories, the former the concepts that the peoples they study use to describe their experience, the latter those brought into play by the anthropologists themselves. Where economics is concerned, neither the Greeks nor the Romans had a word for it. Rather, the Greeks had a word, οἰκονομία – from which our own term is derived of course – but that meant something very different, the orderly management of the household or estate (see Cartledge, Chapter 10).

Ancient authors obviously paid far less attention than modern ones to such topics as exchange value, price inflation, supply and demand, banking and credit, coinage, work, and they arguably pay none at all to such phenomena as

labour, in our sense of the term. Moreover their methods of dealing with the issues that they do discuss differ from those of modern studies. One of the most striking differences is the absence of any sustained quantitative analyses, let alone the demand for statistically significant results. But whole areas of what we would call economic phenomena receive no explicit attention, or if they are attended to, are not treated as matters of purely economic concern. Ancient thinking on slavery focuses on the political, social and moral distinctions between slave and free, rather than on the appropriation of surplus value (Cartledge, Chapter 10 and Jameson, Chapter 11). Loans, as Andreau points out in Chapter 7, are not just a matter of a financial transaction, in that the terms agreed may well reflect the desire to cement or create social relations. Prestige and honour may be the leading motives more than a concern for financial gain.

So the question of the framework within which we can or should discuss the ancient economy or economies is much contested. On the one hand, there are those who insist on the realities of the economic phenomena – hard though they are for modern scholars to reconstruct. Even though ancient interests do not tally with those of modern economics, ancient economic life is nevertheless a legitimate area of study.

On the other, there are those who resist any such move on the grounds that it implies the inappropriate application of observers' categories that are bound to distort the lived experiences as the ancient actors themselves saw them – hard though that too is for us to reconstruct with any confidence. Against the realists, the representationalists insist on the priority of those actors' categories.

To these conceptual disputes we must add formidable difficulties associated with the quality and the quantity of the data available – either for the study of ancient representations or for that of the economic realities that on the realist view are a proper subject of analysis. Quantitative analysis was not in the ancients' field of vision, as I have already noted, and in most cases it is beyond our reach too. We do not even have firm data for ancient populations, let alone for the gross national products of communities of different sizes. Worse still, most of our literary texts reflect the assumptions and prejudices of elites of one type or another – their interests both in the sense of what they were curious about and in the sense of the values they chose to defend or indeed considered unquestionable. If we are concerned with representations, we have access only to a tiny subset of the concepts entertained and the attitudes adopted. If we hope to get to economic hard facts behind the representations, we are still desperately impoverished for data to throw light on questions relating to the vast mass of the population in every state at every period of antiquity. Wherever we turn, the evidence is lacunose and loaded with bias.

On the basis of these observations the outlook for anyone with the ambition to study what passes as ancient economic life may seem irremediably bleak. The way ahead must depend on two types of development – and the positive results contained in the chapters of this book provide eloquent testimony to that possibility of progress.

First in the matter of evidence. New data have been coming to light, and new models and methods of analysis can be and have been brought to bear. Thus in Chapter 3 Kim focuses on the importance of the existence of coins in small denominations – neglected or totally ignored in many previous studies. Before the analysis of the new hoards, indeed their discovery, it was commonly assumed that early silver and gold coinage existed only in large denominations that were quite impracticable for ordinary commercial transactions. Now we can see how mistaken that was. The transformation in our understanding of the early history of coinage, its uses and its impact, has only just begun.

Then Alcock's report in Chapter 13 on the study of settlement patterns in Messenia – and Foxhall's use of similar evidence in her study of resources in Chapter 15 – provide further instances of an expansion in our data base. Thanks to new fieldwork, we can get beyond the literary texts and are now in a better position to arrive at judgements as to where, and consequently also concerning how, the helots lived.

Scheidel's study of slavery in the American South (Chapter 12) exemplifies the usefulness of a comparative approach, at least when both sides of the comparison are subject to critical and sceptical evaluation. To be sure, the question of what constraints need to be imposed on the transfer of conclusions from better known modern studies to the Graeco-Roman situation is yet another hotly debated topic. Yet abstract model-building drawing on comparative materials can be a potent tool of analysis helping in particular to determine the outer limits within which the ancient experience can be assumed to fall.

Finally Harris' study in Chapter 6 of the semantics of the professions is a telling reminder that the most familiar type of evidence of all, namely our extant literary texts, has still to yield up all its potentially relevant information.

So the first hope for the future lies in new evidence and methods of analysis. But that still leaves the fundamental question with which I began. Are the two attitudes to ancient economies that we can call the representational and the realist irreconcilable? The principals in the debate have often written as if they were. Yet one reflection that may be prompted by the diversity of materials in this book is this. What we encompass under the rubric of economic phenomena is far more disparate than some who demand a crisp answer to the question of the validity of different modes of investigation seem to allow. At one end of the spectrum, the irrelevance of much of the economics of industrialization to the ancient world is agreed on all sides. At the other, we can study ancient attitudes to pay and rewards for goods and services and go some way to reconstruct not just ancient concepts but the social practices they were embedded in. There is much that falls in between, where debate is bound to continue.

Yet that ongoing controversy can itself be taken as a point of departure for future progress in understanding, provided at least that the pluralism of economic phenomena is granted, and provided that the competition between the representationalists and realists is not construed as itself a zero-sum game. Some expectations of the possibility of economic analysis based on our,

observers', categories, are easily defeated. But in other cases the ancient categories themselves are more promising. There may be room after all both for the intense study of the actors' perspectives and for the judicious application of observers' concepts.

The conference that these studies emerged from was originally entitled *kerdos* ('gain, profit'). The organisers thereby moved directly to the ancient category itself. This was to be a workshop not on profit, but on the spectrum of approaches to gain, a concept both within the mental horizon of ancient authors and part of their lived experience. The aim was not to diagnose the shortfall in the ancients' reflections (though that is a conclusion that some of the authors come to). Rather the target for our discussions was both those ancients' representations and what they were representations of – what was there to be represented.

Paul Cartledge was the prime mover, inviting a group of scholars from many different countries representing many different approaches to discuss the aspects of the problems that they felt best able to illuminate. The book that results is not the record of the conference's proceedings. All the chapters that originate in papers given at the workshop have been revised, and several have been completely rewritten (Cartledge, Jameson, von Reden, Cohen). The divergence in viewpoint will be obvious to any reader, though I would like to remark that the appearance of disagreement is greater in the written, than it was in the spoken, communications.

It was appropriate that the workshop was held at Darwin College, Cambridge, where Moses Finley had been Master from 1976 to 1982. By that I do not mean that Darwin should be seen as devoted to the perpetuation of Finley's or anyone else's approach. If his *Ancient Economy* (Finley 1999a) contributed hugely to opening up debate (however much its theses have been misunderstood), Finley himself never imagined that it closed it. It was in the spirit of continuation that we conducted our discussions, and I believe that the outcome will, in due time, be seen to mark a new beginning.

INTRODUCTION

Edward E. Cohen

Discussion of ancient economic history is often accompanied by admonitions seemingly more appropriate to the packaging of tobacco products: 'Ancient economics has become a treacherous field' (Schaps 1998b: 1) that 'can sometimes leave you with a sleepless night' (Isager and Skydsgaard 1992: 121), or with 'the virtual impossibility of drawing up a reasoned and equilibrated balance-sheet' (Andreau et al. 1994:10).¹ 'Danger . . . familiarity with the debate leads to boredom' (Whittaker 1995: 22). For active participants in the debate over the nature of 'the ancient economy,' however, the threat seems far more toxic than mere ennui: 'some recent works express amazement that the other side has not yet fallen down dead' (Schaps 1998b: 1), and others gape at 'modernism's miraculous powers of recuperation from repeated and apparently fatal blows' (Meikle 1995b: 148). As with 'passive smoking,' the victims include even scholars who consciously seek to avoid involvement.²

This academic scourge has a long history. Even today, comparative histories of financial systems tend to treat Graeco/Roman economies exclusively from a 'modern' or 'primitivist' perspective (cf. Goldsmith 1987: 16, 254, n.1; Lowry 1987: 2–10; Love 1991: 211–45). But polarized analysis of the ancient economy was already into its second century when Bücher published in 1893 his seminal 'primitivist' exposition of the ancient economy ('geschlossene Hauswirtschaft'), to which Meyer in 1895 and Beloch in 1902 issued 'modernizing' responses.³ Decades of dichotomized struggle followed in which – lamented one late twentieth-century observer – 'no new weapon is lethal, and none of the battles is finally decisive' (Hopkins 1983: ix). Still the virtually simultaneous appearance in the early 1990s of voluminous but seemingly contradictory interpretations of Athenian credit ('lending and borrowing')⁴ impelled a Greek-born authority on modern finance, Anthony Courakis of Oxford University, to convene an 'International Conference' on 'Economic Thought and Economic Reality in Ancient Greece' which was held at the European Cultural Centre in Delphi in late September 1994. There, for four days, under the sponsorship of British and Greek foundations, and with the cooperation of the Greek government, scholars of ancient Greek history and philosophy, and of modern economics and finance, from Europe, North America and Africa (and an

audience of economists and ancient historians from various parts of Greece) presented and heard papers, and enjoyed fine food, pleasant accommodation and stimulating discussion. But this was, after all, a conference on aspects of the ancient economy – and occasional emotional confrontations and verbal jousting were only preliminary to a demand by one group of participants to exercise a veto over the publication of papers deemed by them or their representative not to be of appropriate quality. In the event, the proceedings of the conference were never published, and the convenor abandoned efforts to hold future similar meetings. ‘The ancient economy is an academic battleground’ (Hopkins 1983: ix).

But the editors of the present volume (participants in the Delphi conference) were convinced that the deleterious effects of Greek economic discourse were outweighed by its therapeutic benefits, and that a proliferating variety of sophisticated methodologies and a broadening of academic interests and approaches were working to ameliorate the polarized paralysis of past struggles over the ancient economy. A profusion of studies was now emanating from ‘Marxists,’ ‘structuralists,’ ‘substantivists’ and ‘formalists,’ from practitioners of cultural poetics (who tend to interpret economic phenomena as agent-centred categories of representation, rather than as narrowly functional occurrences)⁵ and from traditional archaeologists, papyrologists, numismatists, epigraphers, legal scholars, agricultural historians and many others who have been busily building models, researching specialized topics, undertaking surveys and studying material remains,⁶ largely oblivious of the ‘endless battles about “the ancient economy”’ that – as the millennium was coming to its end – seemed ‘to have run their course’ (Cartledge 1998; cf. Davies 1998: 230; Kuhrt 1998: 29). We therefore felt it auspicious to convene a gathering intended to foster dialogue (or at least mutual awareness) among scholars using a multitude of modalities and approaches to Greek economic subjects. And so towards the end of May 1997 about 30 participants from Europe and North America gathered at Darwin College at Cambridge University for three days of presentation and discussion.

Similar considerations had led French scholars in 1994 to institute a series of conferences on ‘the ancient economy’, which have been held periodically at Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges in the French Pyrenees. The organizers of these meetings (Messrs. J. Andreau, P. Briant and R. Descat) had noted that in reality the primitive/modern debate had never (‘heureusement’) monopolized the efforts of scholars and that numerous studies had been devoted, with increasing frequency in recent decades, to other aspects of the material situation of the inhabitants of the ancient world. Concluding that, for such conferences, a primitive/modern focus was purposeless,⁷ the convenors determined to encourage quantitative approaches and to focus at each gathering on a selected topic (an overall theme or a single delineated issue) to be considered in the perspective of the entire period of antiquity and over the totality of the area around (‘or in contact with’) the ancient Mediterranean.⁸ And to protect against

the excessive parochiality of *Altertumswissenschaft*, at each conference a final response is offered by an individual not otherwise involved in ancient studies: for example, an anthropologist who has focused on the pre-colonial history of West Africa and has written on an aspect of modern European history relevant to the year's theme (Emmanuel Terray in 1999), an economic historian specializing in the modern period (Jean-Yves Grenier in 1997).⁹

Our approach has been quite different. We have determined to focus on the ancient Greek world (including its Hellenistic and Roman manifestations), to avoid valorizing any individual approach or tendency (such as quantitative analysis), and to avoid a single topic or theme (hence the chameleonic rubric of the conference: *Kerdos: the economics of gain in the ancient Greek world*). But our narrow commitment to the 'ancient' and to the 'Greek' goes beyond nomenclature and reflects a fundamental orientation.

The ancient Greek world

Influential scholars have often insisted on the unity of the 'ancient world,' and hence of the 'ancient economy,' both as a theoretical construct and as a spiritual fusion.¹⁰ In practice, however, 'the ancient world' is traditionally equated with 'classical' antiquity, i.e., Greek and Roman life and sources.¹¹ This is, of course, a patently false identification (Cartledge, Chapter 10), and even classicists have come to expand their horizons to encompass those neighbouring civilizations of the 'Near East' that interacted with and (at the least) strongly influenced Greek and Roman life.¹² Yet an expansive inclusiveness seemed to us to mandate a choice between the Scylla of superficiality and the Charybdis of hermeneutical incoherence. Academic interaction is necessarily inhibited by the vast scope, both geographic and temporal, of territories 'in contact with' the Mediterranean, and by the resultant complementary ignorance of scholars who are often exclusively immersed in the study of a single aspect of an individual academic field.

Moreover – although Near Eastern documents of the first millennium BCE are often dated and preserved in serial order, with a profusion of figures and administrative content, thus offering some clear advantages over comparable Greek and Roman materials – Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian studies are afflicted by a frequent absence of narrative context, a lacuna exacerbated by the relatively limited academic resources that have been devoted to elucidation of even long-known documents. Yet this material generally presents even greater uncertainties of interpretation (and is often yet more fragmentary) than evidence from classical sources.¹³ Accordingly, a specialist in the 'ancient Near East' decried as an 'almost impossible task' a request to add 'some consideration of commercial practices in the ancient Near East' to a recent symposium oriented to Graeco-Roman trade in antiquity (Kuhrt 1998: 6).

Less dramatic cleavages mandate care in the conflation of evidence from different eras or aspects of the classical world, and even in the intermixture of Greek and Roman materials. For the Roman Empire, for example, financial

practices in the Latin-speaking provinces were quite distinct from those prevalent within the Eastern territories (and even among the Greek-speaking provinces there was frequently a lack of uniformity).¹⁴ Because of such discontinuities, we have admitted Roman considerations only gingerly, and then only in contexts intertwined with the 'ancient Greek world'. Thus Andreau's chapter in this volume – although it takes its context and examples largely from Roman Italy – references Magna Graecia, pan-Hellenic sanctuaries and Greek religious festivals, and engages methodological issues that have largely arisen in Hellenic context.¹⁵

Within this commitment to the ancient Greek world, our chapters exemplify 'how wide the spectrum of approaches' to ancient economic history has become (Davies 1998: 225): archaeological (Alcock), philosophical (Kyrtatas), political economic (Foxhall), comparative (Scheidel, Cartledge), numismatic (Kim), juridical (Vélissaropoulos), social/prosopographical (Davies), constructionist (Cohen), philological (Harris), methodological (Andreau), sociological (Morris) and cultural poetic/historical (von Reden).¹⁶ Yet the full diversity of contemporary scholarship can only be suggested in a volume of modest bulk. Thus we offer nothing explicitly Marxist (although several of our chapters approach 'exploitation' in terms unlikely to be congenial to devotees of market economics). But the most striking omission, perhaps, is that of cliometric studies – absent except for Foxhall's contribution which draws in part on earlier quantitative analysis (Osborne 1991a; Foxhall 1992; cf. Morris 1994a: 362) and Morris' application of mathematical models derived from modern economics to the ancient literary traditions about Solonian Athens. This lacuna, however, is largely a consequence of our focus on Hellenic studies. Although quantitative research is highly valorized in all areas of historical studies – 'nothing is intelligible until it has been put into statistics' (Braudel 1981: 23, disapprovingly) – 'the ignominious truth is that there are no ancient statistics' (Jones 1948; cf. Momigliano 1952; Andreau, Briant and Descat 1997: 5–6; Cartledge, Chapter 10). Even for the Roman Empire, an area where scale of phenomena and profusion of remains would seem to offer reasonable opportunity for quantitative analyses, relatively little numerically based work has even been attempted: the better efforts – such as those of Duncan-Jones (1974; 1982; 1990; 1994) – have invariably required an extreme ingenuity, an originality sometimes itself decried as inherently unreliable.¹⁷ For Greek economic history – despite the survival of a few pockets of evidence amenable to cliometric analysis¹⁸ – quantitative studies are virtually non-existent, frustrated by the notorious unreliability of numbers transmitted over thousands of years through confused and sometimes contradictory manuscripts, by the patent impossibility of assuming that material which has often survived by chance constitutes a scientifically appropriate sampling, and by the total absence for many issues of any data at all. For the classical and archaic Greek world, the most fruitful source of quantitative data is likely to be archaeological research (Morris 1994a: 363–5; cf. Alcock, Chapter 13 and Foxhall, Chapter 15).

The modern world

Many observers have noted ‘an increasing tendency . . . to address modern political issues through the study of the Greek city’ (Foxhall, Chapter 15). The contention, for example, that Athenian sexual protocols were based not on genitalia, but on politicized dominance and submission ‘has generated great controversy, both as a historical topic of investigation and as an important issue of contemporary sexual politics’ (Larmour, Miller and Platter 1998: 28). David Halperin – who offers Greek evidence as support for sexual ‘constructionism’ in modern societies – has found in ‘the course of lecturing to different audiences around the United States’ an enormous emotional ‘resistance’ and ‘skepticism’ among the large portion of gay and lesbian society committed to sexual ‘essentialism’ (cf. Halperin 1990: 10, 44, 47; Butler 1990: 8–9, 147; Calame 1996: chapter 5; Thornton 1997: 247). In a similar fashion, the primitive/modern polarization in Greek economic history has long generated an emotional reaction not unconnected with contemporary issues. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, increasing and unprecedented technical sophistication seemed likely to challenge (and even threaten the survival of) systems of education based on the study of classical languages, literature and art (Jenkyns 1980: 60–7). Advocates of classical studies accordingly welcomed modernizing interpretations of classical economic phenomena, characterizations which then often insidiously affected scholarly interpretations of ancient economic institutions.¹⁹ At the same time, critics of capitalism welcomed assertions that the vaunted excellence of classical civilization reflected an approach to economic organization inherently different from that of the modern world. An historically attested selfless communal ‘primitivism’ arguably demonstrated that socialism was not contrary to human nature, and that exploitative ‘instincts’ – unknown in ‘the ancient economy’ – were perforce a relatively recent product of capitalism (Polanyi 1922; 1932; cf. Silver 1995: 172–5). In its updated garb of ‘substantivism’ and ‘formalism’,²⁰ this primitive/modern dichotomy now separates ‘those for whom the modern science of economics is the key to understanding ancient economics and those for whom the key is anthropology’ (cf. Marchionatti 1985; Morris 1994a; 1999; Schaps 1998b: 1).

Yet ours was envisaged as a conference on the ancient Greek world, not on that world’s impact on modern life. And so in both the Cambridge conference and in this publication – but in contrast with the conferences at Delphi and Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges – we have eschewed the participation of modern economists, governmental officials, and/or experts in disciplines not requiring an intimate direct knowledge of the ancient Greek world and an ability to access that world free of the filter of language translation. In part, we were seeking to eliminate that ‘irremediable ignorance about the classical world’ (albeit, generally, by one’s opponents!) that has been frequently cited as among the principal reasons why ‘the ancient economy is an academic battleground’

(Hopkins 1983: ix). But in greater part we were seeking to centre within ancient studies the study of the ancient economy. Sceptics might assert that the result has been exposition of modern American history by British classicists (see Scheidel, Chapter 12 and Cartledge, Chapter 10). But we aimed not to avoid comparative studies, but to eliminate grand conceptualizations flawed by inadequate familiarity with the underlying evidence – whatever their superficial political attractiveness in modern contexts. For some (to paraphrase Thucydides 1.22.4), the absence of such grandiose elements may make our volume less appealing, but not, we hope, for serious students of Hellenic history.

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NOTES

- 1 'La quasi-impossibilité de dresser un bilan raisonné et équilibré'.
- 2 For example, R. Bogaert 1995: 604: 'Nous avons tâché . . . de ne pas nous laisser influencer par ces théories . . . ce qui nous a valu d'être considéré comme un primitiviste par C. et comme un moderniste par M.'
- 3 For the eighteenth-century origins of this dispute, see Andreau, Briant and Descat 1994: 7; for the antecedents of Bücher's position, von Below 1901; Gras 1930.
- 4 Millett 1991 and Cohen 1992 in fact represented 'contrasting approaches' that shared 'some common ground' (Millett 1994: 2).
- 5 For the contribution of cultural poetics to the study of Greek history, see Dougherty and Kurke 1993a: 1–12. For its place in Greek economic history, see Morris 1999: xxix–xxxi; von Reden 1997: 154–5 (money as 'both a reality and an ideology'), 1995: 79–89; Kurke 1999: 2–6; Davidson 1997; Kim (this volume).
- 6 For a (partial) survey of these varied approaches and practitioners, see Morris 1994a. Cf. Tandy 1997: 84–87; Silver 1995: xxii–xxiii, 97–177.
- 7 The organizers rejected 'la vieille controverse modernistes–primitivistes, non parce qu'elle serait considérée par tous comme close, mais parce qu'elle a peu de chances de déboucher sur une issue scientifique satisfaisante' (Andreau, Briant and Descat 1994: 7). Similarly: Mattingly 1997; Parkins 1998: 2; Lo Cascio and Rathbone 2000; Mattingly and Salmon 2001.
- 8 Andreau, Briant and Descat 1994: 7–8, 1997: 5, 2000: 5–6. *Rencontres* have been held in 1994, 1996 and 1999, with the proceedings (largely but not entirely in French) published as *Entretiens d'archéologie et d'histoire* 1, 3, and 5 (Musée archéologique départemental de Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges) (1994, 1997, 2000). Subjects (in chronological order): 'The Role of the State in Trade in Antiquity,' 'Price and the Determination of Price in the Ancient Economies,' and 'War and the Ancient Economies'.
- 9 In the organizers' opinion, these outsider participants have demonstrated that 'le comparatisme permet de mieux comprendre les faits historiques' (Andreau, Briant and Descat 2000: 9).
- 10 E.g., Weber 1921: 756. Finley 1999a: 34 emphasizes the 'common cultural-psychological framework' of ancient Mediterranean civilization in defining an 'ancient economy'.

- 11 Finley's ancient economy, for example, excluded 'the great river-valley civilizations along the Nile, the Tigris and Euphrates, the Indus and Yellow rivers' (1999a: 31).
- 12 Even the meetings of the (North American) Association of Ancient Historians – generally devoted exclusively to Greek and Roman antiquity – increasingly have included presentations on Near Eastern antiquities, such as Matt Water's paper at the 2000 meeting on 'Neo-Elamite and Achaemenid Periodization'.
- 13 For exemplification and elucidation of these difficulties, see, for example, Bagg 1998; Liverani 1998; Córdoba 1997 with Fales 2000: 54, n.8.
- 14 For these reasons, Andreau (1987: 20), for example, limited his massive study of Roman financiers to those functioning in the Latinophone part of the empire (cf. Andreau 1999, which does include several references to Greece).
- 15 Similar gatherings under other auspices offer inconsistent precedent. The sessions at Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges (with the exception of the initial meeting in 1994) have been well-balanced between Graeco-Roman and Near Eastern presentations. But the periodic meetings of the Italian 'Incontri capresi di storia dell'economia antica' – despite the inclusive nomenclature – tend to be confined to Roman subjects. The theme of the Colloquio in 2000, for example, was 'Credito e moneta nel mondo romano,' and only a single paper was anticipated on a non-Roman subject.
- 16 Leslie Kurke presented a paper in the original conference based on material which was part of her then unpublished, recent book (Kurke 1999).
- 17 See Andreau, Briant and Descat 2000: 5. In many areas, the paucity of data renders even skilful analysis 'extrêmement aléatoire (ou même impossible)' (Andreau 1997: 105). Cf. Andreau 1995, 1999: 127–38. Indirection has often been critical to successful Roman quantitative studies, whether 'inductive' (e.g. Giardina 1986; Tchernia 1986) or 'deductive' (e.g. Hopkins 1980; von Freyberg 1989).
- 18 See, for example, recent considerations of Delian prices in the Hellenistic period (Reger 1994; Chankowski-Sablé 1997).
- 19 See, for example, Andreau's demonstration, this volume, of the relationship between Rostovtzeff's modernizing view of the Roman imperial economy and his relegation of Roman fairs to remote times and marginal regions.
- 20 Though the substantivist/formalist and the primitivist/modernist debates are considered different by some (Cartledge 1998 and this volume).

HARD SURFACES

Ian Morris

I Introduction

‘Κέρδος, *gain, profit, advantage: desire of gain*’. Thus Liddell and Scott. In this essay, I ask how we should study gain in ancient Greece. In the main part of the chapter (sections II–V) I set out four different ways of thinking about *kerdos*. From some of these perspectives, *kerdos* is all-important; from others, it hardly matters at all. In section VI, I focus on the significance of the pursuit of gain in a particular episode, the crisis leading to Solon’s reforms in Athens in 594 BCE. I choose this example because Greek historians interested in *kerdos* and economics more generally have regularly treated it as a decisive moment. I suggest that the ideas developed across the last twenty years by the ‘neo-institutional’ school of economic historians allow us to combine the strengths of these different approaches without having to acquiesce to their limitations. In the questions and methods that they raise, I see both a way forward from the long-running formalist-substantivist debates, and the possibility of combining cultural and economic history.

Research into gain spans the whole range of the humanities and social sciences, and is astonishingly varied. Academics are fond of spatial metaphors, and in Figure 2.1 I formalize this by representing these approaches as four overlapping sets. I begin by identifying just two broad categories of thought, which, for simplicity’s sake, I call ‘humanistic’ and ‘social-scientific’, and then subdivide each into two further sets. The basic distinction I draw between humanistic and social-scientific thought is that the former are tools for *understanding* the world, while the latter are tools for *explaining* the world. This is, of course, a sweeping generalization; but to get the analysis started, I argue that the humanities are about drawing out the meanings of the complexity of lived experience. God is in the details, and good work in the humanities explicates the richness of culture. The social sciences, on the other hand, aim to cut through the messy details that make up real life to find underlying general structures and principles. Social scientists seek to explain complexity through generalization. At the risk of caricaturing complex issues, we might say that in the humanist’s eyes, reducing the world to a handful of principles tells us little,

because it ignores precisely those things that we most need to understand. In the social scientist's eyes, humanists systematically select on dependent variables, superficially wallowing in particulars rather than seeking explanation.

I sub-divide humanistic approaches into 'liberal' and 'new'. Both focus on culture, seeking to understand meaning, but they do so in very different ways. Liberal humanism, whether historicist or formalist, generally aims at the enrichment of the individual's sensibilities. An artist's or a novelist's representations of the desire for gain, or the philology of the language of gain in a particular culture, are perfectly respectable scholarly topics. But on the whole, gain is most important because it is one of the very forces of materialism that liberal humanism tries to transcend. The new humanities, on the other hand, make the desire for gain a central analytical issue, arguing that economic motivations are culturally constructed. Showing how, in any specific case, knowledgeable actors construct and contest the category of gain in linguistic and other texts is a major goal.

I sub-divide social-scientific approaches into 'economic' and 'sociological'. The former takes the fact of *kerdos* for granted; it is hard-wired into humans. This is the starting-point for analysis, which is about how best to organize society to satisfy the desire for gain. The latter makes gain more problematic, seeing it as a fundamental human motive, but as only one of several such motives, enmeshed in a network. But both aim at generalization and explanation, using gain as the, or a, core principle to which other categories of behaviour can be reduced.

I suspect that few, if any, scholars will feel that their own work fits neatly into any of the four boxes in Figure 2.1. Reducing centuries of scholarly thought to such a simple framework is, of course, a gross oversimplification. The sets are what an economist would call stylized facts (i.e., broad generalizations, true in essence, though perhaps not in detail). My decision to start with this kind of reductionism opens me up to the charge of setting up the entire discussion in social-scientific terms. Another historian might prefer to dissolve the terrain into a mosaic of shifting discourses, each constituted by and at the same time helping to constitute the others, overlapping and forming temporary alliances, only to spring apart again. This might make some things clearer, like the ways that Marxism, feminism, phenomenology, and a host of other methods crosscut the distinctions I am drawing. Ideologically, it might make more sense to group the new humanities with (parts of) the sociological approaches, in opposition to (parts of) liberal humanism and neoclassical economics, rather than splitting these political alliances apart into humanities and social sciences. I make no claim that the way I divide the scholarly map is definitive; only that the spectrum running from generalization, abstraction, and explanation at one end and towards particularism, empiricism, and understanding at the other provides a useful wedge for opening a discussion about methods and goals. We build models to do particular jobs: mine highlights the division between the social sciences and the humanities, and I concentrate in section VI on questions and

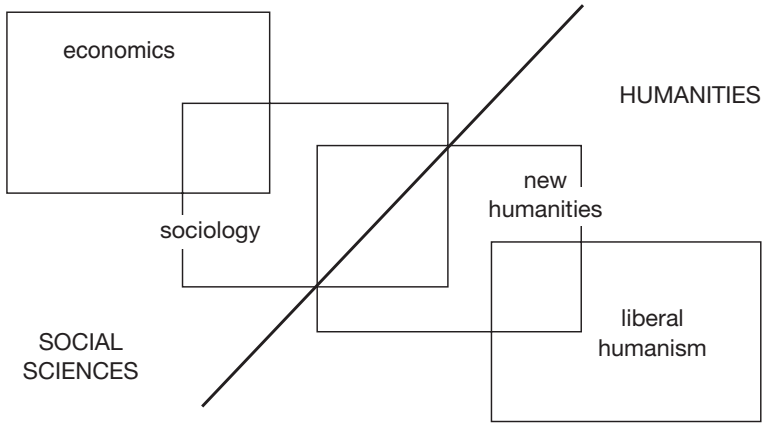


Figure 2.1 Approaches to gain.

methods that can bridge this gap. But any division of the intellectual terrain creates its own problems, and the most obvious of these is my need to keep returning to Marxism.

Deciding how we should analyse *kerdos* depends largely on what we want the study of ancient Greece to do for us, here and now. Classicists generally shy away from explicit discussion of such questions, perhaps through fears that they taint our claims to disinterested scholarship. This is naïve. Whether the field in question is physics or literary criticism, only when we know why we are doing it can we assess how well we are meeting our goals. The world has changed dramatically in the last thirty years, and neither the agendas established by nineteenth-century philologists nor those formulated by Moses Finley in the 1940s and 1950s are very helpful any more. I conclude by suggesting that thinking about *kerdos* in the terms of the New Institutional Economics not only lets us combine the most fruitful elements of the various approaches to gain, but also raises questions about ancient Greece that address widespread concerns in modern scholarship.

II Gain and liberal humanism

By ‘liberal humanism’ I mean the mainstream of humanistic thought that took shape in nineteenth-century western Europe and North America. Its heyday was the first half of the twentieth century, but it remains important in the early