Production, Accumulation, Trade, and Value:
Political Economy in the Ancient Mediterranean (ISAW-GA 3013-001)

Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University,
Fall 2015, Mondays, 2:00-5:00pm
Seminar Room, 2nd Floor, ISAW, 15 East 84th St., New York, NY 10028

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Abstract

During the last decades, renewed attention has been devoted to the importance of market and private enterprise in the economies of the ancient Mediterranean, as exemplified by such works as A history of market performance: from ancient Babylonia to the modern world (van der Spek et al., eds., 2015), Commerce and colonization in the ancient Near East (Aubet, 2013), and The Roman market economy (Temin, 2013). On the one hand, interest in market and private enterprise enables us to traverse artificial distinctions between pre-classical and classical ancient Mediterranean civilizations and to pose cross-culturally comparative questions about ancient state economies. On the other hand, this new trend in some respects pays less attention to institutional and political impacts on ancient economies. This impact has perhaps received too much attention in the historiography of ancient western Asia, but the meaning of political intervention in the economic process acquires a different meaning when embedded in a context of private enterprises. For the Roman world, the interests of imperial institutions (e.g., military supply chains, annona redistributions, imperial monopolies) as influencing the scale and organization of economic activities has been long recognized, but recent approaches have turned to the more subtle and indirect ways that institutions affected regional economic development. In response to these academic trends, this course aims to examine the role of political economy in the ancient Mediterranean from multiple vantages.

General Course Organization

The first six classes will focus on recent theoretical works on political economy such as Piketty’s Capital, and North’s Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance, as well as some of the ‘classic’ works on ancient economies, such as those by Polanyi, Finley, and Rostovtzeff. In the following classes, ideas developed through the theory classes will then be confronted with specific case studies from the protohistory of ancient western Asia and the Greco-Roman world. These thematic classes will consider issues of primary production, storage and hoarding (accumulation of surpluses and wealth), trade, and the definition of value.
Pre-requisites

This is a graduate-level course. In exceptional cases, undergraduates in their final year may be allowed to enroll in this class upon approval by the instructors.

Assignments and Assessment

1) In-class Presentations 25%
2) Final Paper 50%
3) Participation and Attendance 25%

Final grades will be issued in 10% increments (100-90 is an A; 89-80 is a B; 79-70 is a C; 69-60 is a D; 59 and below is a Failure).

1) In-class Presentations (25%)

Periodically students will be assigned readings on a topic related to the day’s discussion that they will present to the rest of the class. The presentations should offer a summary of the main points of the readings. The student should highlight how the readings relates to the general argument of the course, as well as critique the work within the framework of the broader themes of the course. Use of visual aides (e.g., power point, overhead projectors, posters, handouts) is strongly encouraged.

2.) Final paper (50%)

A final research paper is expected at the end of the semester. This paper should incorporate some of the conceptual themes discussed in the seminar section of the course, and should be argument-driven. It may expand the class presentation, but this is not mandatory. The content should center on some aspect of ancient economies, and approaches different than the archaeological and the historical ones represented by the two instructors are encouraged. The paper is expected to be between 20-25 pages in length with a full bibliography.

3) Participation and Attendance (25%)

A major component of this class is organized around informed discussion. That means that the student is expected to have prepared the assigned readings prior to class and that the student comes to class ready to discuss. Any absence from class not cleared before with the professor or for a non-medical or non-emergency reason will result in an automatic 5% reduction in your final grade.

Academic Support

Students are encouraged to visit the instructors during office hours, to attend problem sessions, and to access other departmental resources for learning, whether or not they are experiencing academic difficulty. Students, who by nature of a documented disability, require academic accommodations, should contact the instructors during office hours. Students may also speak with the Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (726 Broadway, 2nd Floor) or at 212-998-4980 to discuss the process for requesting accommodations.
Class Schedule

** Class readings may be subject to change at the discretion of the instructors. **

Week 1: September 14
Presentation of the course: The many meanings of ‘political economy’

Week 2: September 21
Macroeconomical theory in the modern and contemporary world
T. Piketty, Capital in the 21st century, Cambridge MA 2014

Week 3: September 28
Embedded economies in the ancient world
K. Polanyi et al. (eds), Trade and Market in the Early Empires. Economies in History and Theory, Glencoe, Ill. 1957.
F. Carlà, Gift giving and the ‘embedded’ economy in the ancient world, Heidelberg 2014.

Week 4: October 5
Institutions and economic performance

**Week 5: October 13 (**Monday class scheduled for Tuesday**)**

**Markets and market economies**


**Week 6: October 19**

**Taxation and tribute**


**Week 7: October 26**

**Political economy, long distance trade and warfare**

Military supply and Long distance trade in Assyria:


Week 8: November 2
Public vs. private accounting
Uruk IV accounting system (bibliography t.b.d.)


Week 9: November 9
Food production and its organization
Food production the Middle Assyrian Empire

Roman regional landscape exploitation: Greece, Italy, North Africa, Spain

Week 10: November 16
Religious institutions and economy
Temple economy in the Neo- and Late Babylonian Period
Hellenistic temple estates


**Week 11: November 23**
**Population and Demographics**
**Additional Readings TBD**


**Week 12: November 30**
**In-depth case study: Storage, production, value: Political economy in the Hittite empire**


**Week 13: December 7**

**In-depth case study: Roman imperial monopolies**

*Annona* and the Grain Trade


**Imperial Mines and Quarries**


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**Week 14: December 14**

**Conclusions**