

## Understanding the Ancient Egyptian Economy

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I am grateful for the opportunity to present my view of the ancient Egyptian economy to you this afternoon. As you will see, there is still a lack of agreement on the best way to analyze Egypt's economy. This disagreement stems from a debate over which model of the economy has the most explanatory power for the data remaining to us from the Egyptians. I have argued in a series of articles and in one book that Karl Polanyi's redistributive model is a good starting point for understanding the Egyptian economy because it helps us make sense of many of the actual transactions we can observe in the data. Moreover, Polanyi's model allows us to respect the cultural context in which the economy operated. This afternoon I would like to review my current thinking on this subject. Much of what I argue here has been suggested in an article I wrote for *The Egyptian World* edited by Toby Wilkinson. (Bleiberg 2007)

Much of the disagreement over the Egyptian economy begins with the question of whether large institutions such as the temple should be the focus of economic analysis or whether the main unit of analysis should be the individual household. While recognizing that there is both a temple/state economy and a private economy, scholars still debate the nature of and connections between state and private enterprise in ancient Egypt. While many researchers have regarded the state and its associated temples as the major focus of economic activity in Egypt, increasingly others have come to treat the individual household as the more significant unit of analysis. Perhaps the future of Egyptian economic history lies in understanding how, or even whether, state and private enterprise connected to each other in different historical periods.

### SOURCES

Much of the difficulty in creating a modern understanding of Egyptian economic history starts with the Egyptians' own records of economic activity. The sources are

usefully divided into two categories, the ceremonial and the administrative (Bleiberg 1996: 115-25; Haring 1997; 2004: 24). The ceremonial sources include royal and private inscriptions on the walls of temples and tombs as well as some texts written on papyrus. These sources are useful for determining the ideology behind Egyptian statements about economic issues. Administrative texts could be recorded on papyrus or on ostraca. These texts comprise actual bureaucratic documents that include records of the reception and disbursement of commodities at institutions such as the royal palace or at a temple. They also include accounts of privately conducted exchanges. Some scholars in addition have made use of images of economic activities in tombs. These sources are just as difficult to interpret as written sources because they are imprecise, lending themselves to more than one possible interpretation. Yet they are also valuable for revealing activities not documented in texts. Scholars have, for example, examined representations of fruit markets which have left no documentation in the written record. Finally archaeological evidence can also be useful in providing further context for economic activities, especially long distance trade.

### **The Use of Ceremonial sources**

Ceremonial sources include scenes in tombs and temples depicting the delivery of taxes, gifts, or other groups of commodities. They, moreover, comprise texts that describe feasts, offerings from kings to gods, and private endowments in temples. All of these sources are useful in establishing the official ideology behind the Egyptian economy. Some scenes in Old Kingdom tombs depict the delivery of goods to private tomb owners from royal estates. They underline the Egyptian belief that everything belonged to and derived from the king. Festival calendars were also ceremonial. Kings commissioned their carving on the walls of temples during the New Kingdom and later. These texts record goods received in the temple and then redistributed to the people on festival days. Yet these documents appear to be successive copies of each other rather than reports of objective

fact. For example, the festival calendar found in the Mortuary Temple of Ramesses II, was reproduced with minor alterations in the festival calendar found at Mortuary Temple of Ramesses III. This fact has suggested to scholars that the details of the inscriptions cannot be understood literally. For the modern observer, such calendars only provide evidence for the framework of temple administration, not the day-to-day details of administering a festival.

### **The Use of Administrative sources**

Administrative sources are among the oldest documents known from ancient Egypt. They include seals or ink inscriptions on jars, and ivory tags attached to goods. Such records are preserved as early as the 1st dynasty (Kaplony 1963; 1968; 1973). A fifth dynasty papyrus from the funerary temple of King Neferirkara-Kakai is the oldest known administrative document on papyrus (Posener-Kriéger 1976).

The Middle Kingdom is better documented. A group of twelfth dynasty papyri excavated at Lahun in the late nineteenth century reveals economic data both in a pyramid town and at the funerary temple of Senusret II during the subsequent reigns of Senusret III and Amenemhat III (Collier and Quirke 2002; 2004). Papyrus Boulaq 18, dating to a few weeks into the reign of the thirteenth dynasty king Sobekhotep II, records administrative practices at the royal palace (Scharff 1922).

While the documents from the earlier period are examples of bookkeeping, some documents preserved from the New Kingdom provide a variety of economic data including bookkeeping, but also criminal trials, civil litigation over property, and exchanges of goods between private individuals (McDowell 1999). Other administrative documents provide information on the actual administration of agricultural property (Gardiner 1941-52). Each of these documents provides evidence from a specific and particular time and place. It is often unclear whether the situation described in the document is typical for ancient Egypt

and thus a good example to use in forming broader generalizations about the economy. For this reason, scholars have turned to a variety of economic models to explain the economy.

#### ANALYSING THE SOURCES ACCORDING TO MODERN ECONOMIC THEORIES

Scholars have taken at least two approaches to analyzing the ancient Egyptian economy with modern economic theories. The substantive approach, derived from the work of Karl Polanyi, focuses on the way the economy operates within the culture as a whole. The rationalist or formalist approach, based on modern concepts of the market economy, relies on universal laws that would be true throughout history and across cultures. Neither approach has successfully answered all of scholar's questions about the state and private economy in ancient Egypt.

#### **Redistribution**

Karl Polanyi and his followers (Polanyi 1977; Janssen 1975; Müller-Wollermann 1985; Bleiberg 1996; Eichler 1992) assert that economic processes are not independent of the culture and universal, but rather are embedded in the social and political context in which the economy exists. Polanyi described such traditional economies with three patterns for pre-market economies. He called these patterns redistribution, reciprocity, and exchange. Many scholars of ancient Egypt, like those who study other ancient Near Eastern cultures, have used redistribution as a model for interpreting the ceremonial inscriptions found in Egypt. In sum, they find evidence from the ceremonial inscriptions that Egyptian ideology posited that the king owned everything in Egypt. All goods were thus gathered at central collecting points in the temples and were redistributed to the Egyptian population on the basis of rank. This description fits well with Polanyi's redistribution model.

New Kingdom documents such as Hatshepsut's Punt reliefs, Thutmose III's annals, and the Great Papyrus Harris, are excellent examples of relief, inscriptions and papyri that

support the idea that Egyptian ideology fits well with Polanyi's pattern of redistribution and the way the economy is embedded in Egyptian culture. Hatshepsut, for example, sent an expedition to the land of Punt to obtain incense for the cult of the god Amun (Bleiberg 1995: 1378). She sent the expedition, according to the inscriptions, in response to Amun's direct command. She never cites purely economic motivations for her actions. There is no sense in the texts or relief of the economic realities of the import/export trade. In fact, she never fully explains how she was able to pay the people of Punt for the products they gave to Amun. Rather Amun and the king's prestige in the greater world at large is the point of the narrative. Yet, here the state acts for the good of the temples. It is a perfect example of the way the Egyptians described the royal monopoly on foreign trade.

Thutmose III's Annals prove a similar point. In the narrative portion of the text, the king repeatedly explains that he has gone to war at the command of the god Amun and that the king's success is highly dependent on Amun's support. The inscription is also filled with long lists of goods that foreigners conveyed to the king and to Amun as a result of these wars (Bleiberg 1981). Egypt's defeated enemies transfer goods to the king under several rubrics including words that mean tax and gifts (Bleiberg 1981). Here again, the narrative emphasizes the king's and the god's prestige in the world rather than, for example, the economics of capital formation in the temples based on the large quantities of goods now brought to their storerooms. It also illustrates the centralized storage of these goods which are brought from foreign countries and deposited in the temples or in the palace.

The Great Harris Papyrus records gifts that Ramesses III gave to the temples of Ra of Heliopolis, Ptah of Memphis, and Amun of Karnak (Grandet 1994-9). It illustrates both the centralized collection of goods and the distribution from royal to divine institutions. The text confirms the ideology that kings act for the gods and return both goods and services for the god's use in recognition of royal success in the world. Although the text expresses

economic ideas, it does not consider the realities of land tenure for the large tracts of land that the gods now own or the means of production for the goods promised to the gods.

Finally, the festival calendars found in both the Ramesseum and Medinet Habu describe distribution of large amounts of food and drink to the general population during festivals (Haring 1997). Here, the large quantities of goods collected for the god by the state are redistributed on a regular basis to the people. Yet even the elaborate lists of the goods redistributed are not generally considered to contain concrete information about Egyptian practices as they are intended to reflect Egyptian ideas about the proper use of the god's treasure.

It is thus clear that the texts considered through the lens of Polanyi's theories lead to a good description of Egyptian ideology rather than analysis of economic reality. Ceremonial documents omit concepts such as the actual status of temple fields and cultivators and land lessors, trading the surplus production of the temples, the exact motives behind hoarding precious metals, and many other economic questions. They, however, do emphasize the importance of prestige issues, religious ideology, and even a sort of sociology for understanding economic actions in ancient Egypt. They are an excellent illustration of the meaning of embeddedness of the economy in a specific culture.

### **Private economic activity**

In contrast to those scholars who have attempted to understand the Egyptian economy through the lens of Polanyi's models, others have interpreted the data using the general principles of economic rationalism, derived from the modern market economy (Römer 1989; Warburton 1997; Eyre 1998; Wilke 2000). These scholars view Egyptian economic activity as business, operating on the principles of the modern market economy. For example, Eyre (1998: 174) regards the market stalls depicted in both Old Kingdom and New Kingdom tombs as businesses with capital investment and accumulation of capital rather than opportunistic trade in excess consumables, the explanation preferred by those

who see the Egyptian economy as basically a redistribution system. Furthermore, those who wove cloth are understood as real capitalists who both accumulated capital and could reinvest it.

The Old Kingdom tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep at Saqqara (Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: fig. 10 pl. 240), the tomb of Fetekta at Abusir (Verner 1994: 89-92), the tomb of Ankhmahor at Saqqara (Badawy 1978: pls 32-4), and the reliefs decorating the Unas causeway in Saqqara depict both men and women at 'market stands' offering vegetables, fruits, fish, cloth, and other commodities in small pottery vessels. In addition, men offer services such as hair-cutting, seal making and sandal making. From these scenes, some scholars have drawn the conclusion that Egyptian towns had stable markets for fish, fruit, and vegetables, located near craftsmen who, at least in the tomb of Ty at Saqqara, appear to be itinerant because they carry everything in bags (Eyre 1998: 176).

New Kingdom tomb paintings depict similar scenes. Paintings in the Ramesside tombs of Ipuy (Davies 1927: pls 30, 34), Kenamun (Davies and Faulkner: 1947) and Khaemhet (Wreszinski 1923: 199-200) portray men unloading barges of grain into baskets tended by women at the riverbank. Women offer fish, loaves, fruit, beer and wine. Some scholars understand these exchanges as the sailor's means of getting food. They could perhaps be spending their rations of grain which constitutes their salaries.

All these scenes share their location on the riverbank, the source of the idea that the quay was the market place (Janssen 1980). This role derived from the Nile's function as the major transportation artery for Egypt. Notably, nearly all temples had direct access to the quay and it is impossible to prove either that these market stalls were or were not somehow associated with the temples. Furthermore, these scenes provide no information on how customers would have paid for their purchases in a moneyless economy. The only information that is preserved for Egypt concerning barter does not seem to be related to these scenes. As Eyre has observed (1998: 178), there are too many gaps in our

knowledge to understand what relationship this material might have with the demonstrably private barter transactions found in the Deir el-Medina texts. Moreover, not enough information remains from antiquity to allow scholars to discuss the existence of private craftsmen totally independent of the temple or royal economies. Whether they sometimes worked part-time and privately for themselves we simply do not know.

Eyre has also drawn a distinction between those who operate market stalls and the principal individuals involved in the transactions recorded in numerous contemporaneous documents from Deir el-Medina. The most famous of these documents, often used to illustrate the nature of private Egyptian barter transactions, is Papyrus Cairo 65,739. The document records court proceedings brought by a woman named Bakmut against a woman named Irynefer arising from a sale of female slaves (Eyre 1998: 178; Gardiner 1935: 140-6; Bleiberg 1995: 1377). Essentially, Bakmut makes the claim that some of her goods were used in the barter to obtain the slave and thus Irynefer should not have sold the slave without Bakmut's participation. Irynefer wants to demonstrate in court that she used only her own goods to obtain the slave and thus she was the sole owner.

In the introduction to this document, Irynefer states that she had woven cloth for seven years before she bought the slave. Cloth, indeed, is one of the main commodities Irynefer lists in this document which she claims to have used to barter for the slave, in addition to metal vessels, beaten metal, and honey. For Eyre (1998: 179), the document demonstrates that Irynefer had used cloth weaving as a means of building her savings to obtain a slave. Cloth production became a means of increasing her personal wealth.

Eyre also adduces other examples of cloth as a source of private wealth. In the letters of Hekanakht, dating to the early twelfth dynasty, the author uses the profits of a cloth sale to rent land. Part of this land is then used to grow flax. Another Hekanakht letter deals with giving flax to a woman so she can spin it into thread for him. The letters seem to document small-scale manufacture of cloth from obtaining land for growing flax, spinning

the flax into thread, perhaps weaving the cloth, and finally selling it so that the process can be repeated with land rental. Hekanakht seems to be in the cloth business as well as being a subsistence farmer (Eyre 1998: 180). Thus, for Eyre, the widespread evidence of centralized weaving does not negate the possibility of privately manufactured cloth in ancient Egypt. Yet there is no way to be certain that Hekanakht's activities do not represent outsourcing by the large, centralized weaving establishment. The relationship cannot be established either way.

The same criticism could be brought to the evidence from Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1453A,B (Eyre 1998: 181). This document contains a ship's log. The papyrus records lists of men both collecting and distributing materials that relate both to yarn spinning, and honey. Again, institutional connections in this text can neither be demonstrated nor disallowed. The women do however give their production back to the ship using the Egyptian term *b3k*. Although the root meaning of the word is 'work', in ceremonial texts this term is clearly a technical term referring to goods sent to a temple (Bleiberg 1988). It is not clear if the women are selling retail or if they are somehow outsourcing for a central establishment that is associated with a temple. The ship's logs might represent the distribution that local manufacturers depended on for widespread use of their goods; yet, it is difficult to imagine, without any evidence, that local manufacturers had national distribution networks unrelated to royal or divine institutions. These transactions might well be part of the temple economy. There is no way to determine with certainty whether this document describes commerce or taxes.

Thus for Eyre (1998: 185), the redistributive economy has little effect on anyone except the elite who are directly a part of it. Ordinary people, in this view, are taxed, but they do not benefit in a regular way from redistribution. The household, in this view, becomes the most important unit of production rather than the temple or the royal government.

## ECONOMY WITHOUT MODELS

Even though scholars have mostly derived the ideology of the ancient Egyptian economy from the ceremonial texts, others have still used these documents to examine specifically the administration of the institutions called the Temples of Millions of Years. The ceremonial texts still allow analysis of important administrative terms. One case is the meaning of the phrase 'Temple (*hwt*) of Millions of Years in the domain (*pr*) of Amun'.

Haring (1997) has used the ceremonial and administrative texts from the Ramesseum and Medinet Habu to study the economic basis for these institutions. In Egyptian, these temples were classified as 'Temples of Millions of Years in the domain of Amun'. Both of these temples were located on the western bank of the Nile opposite modern Luxor and Karnak. Haring argues that these temples operated independently and were not integrated into the larger administrative structure called the domain of Amun. He argues on the basis of the texts that there is no overall pattern of economic relations among these temples of millions of years, the temple of Amun in Karnak, and the royal palace. He finds that each of these institutions operates independently. Haring thinks the connection is religious but not administrative because there would be no advantage in making it administrative for any of the parties involved. The expression 'in the domain of Amun' is thus only ceremonial and not really administrative. This again is a question of ideology versus administration and this is a good example of where this concept helps scholars disentangle the two categories.

## TAX AND TRADE BEFORE COINAGE

Among the most important differences between ancient and modern economies is the use of coinage as money. The Egyptians were unaware of coinage until late in their history. The earliest Egyptian document to calculate a tax in money, Papyrus Berlin 3048, dates to the Third Intermediate Period (Muhs 2005: 3). Before importing this Greek invention, the Egyptians had developed several methods of calculating taxes in the state

sphere, salaries for state workers and conscripts and prices in private exchanges.

From earliest times the royal government conducted an inventory of Egypt's wealth, presumably to set taxation goals. Wealth was counted primarily in terms of the number of cattle, but there is evidence for counts of land, other objects of value, and people (Wilkinson 1999: 220-1). The Palermo Stone refers to biannual cattle counts as early as the second dynasty, and also a count of 'gold and the fields'. The sixth dynasty tomb biography of Weni refers to a count of 'everything which can be counted', probably including people for conscription (Lichtheim 1975: 21).

The nomarchs, were responsible for delivering taxes to the central government. The nomarch Ameny of the Gazelle Nome (Beni Hasan) who lived in the late eleventh or early twelfth dynasty succinctly described the process in his tomb biography:

I spent the years as Lord of the Oryx nome with all dues for the king's house being in my charge. I gave gang-overseers to the domains of the herdsmen of the Oryx nome and 3000 oxen as their yoke-oxen. I was praised for it in the king's house in every year of the cattle tax. I delivered all their dues to the king's house and there was no shortage against me in any bureau of his...

(Lichtheim 1988: 138-9)

Residents of Old Kingdom pyramid towns - where workers who administered the work of the pyramid complexes lived - were exempted from many taxes as well as conscription. A series of royal decrees found at Dahshur, Giza and Coptos all exempt various classes of priests and other workers at the royal funeral monuments from paying specific kinds of taxes and from conscription for other kinds of work (Goedicke 1967). These exemptions must have been an incentive to remain at work in the pyramid towns, though why such an incentive was needed is not clear. Perhaps kings wanted to insure against removal of those charged with maintaining the funeral cult which was to keep them

alive forever in the next world. Exemption from the cattle levy is notably absent from those exemption decrees, however. This absence may point to the importance of this particular type of levy for maintaining the central government during the Old Kingdom.

In addition to cattle, the other largest tax was paid by farmers in grain. During the New Kingdom, Papyrus Wilbour shows that grain was taxed at the rate of one and a half *khar* (76.88 l = 20.31 gallons (US) = 16.91 gallons (British)) of grain per *aroura* (two-thirds of an acre = 2.67 km<sup>2</sup>) (Katary 1999: 65). Tomb paintings show tax assessors measuring both the standing grain in the field and collecting and recording large baskets of grain for shipment to centralized storehouses (James 1985: 126).

All taxes before the first millennium BC, it is clear, were collected in kind. Private sales were also conducted by barter for goods, with the use of a unit of exchange rather than actual coinage. In the New Kingdom this unit was one *deben* (approximately 91 g) of copper which could be divided into ten *kitě*. A *kitě*, or one-tenth of a *deben*, was a common measurement for more valuable metals such as silver and gold. In Papyrus Cairo 65,739, the document described above, Irynefer lists twenty-four separate items that she used to trade for a slave girl. The agreed value of the slave girl was first determined in *deben* and *kitě*. Then each of the items which Irynefer offered in exchange was appraised at a value in *deben* and *kitě*. The total value of the twenty-four items in Irynefer's list were determined then to be equal to the value of the slave girl in *deben* and *kitě*. No actual *deben* and *kitě* were traded in this transaction. These measurements represent only the agreed value of each of the items which were part of the exchange.

The Egyptians computed salaries in units of bread and beer, the two staples of an ancient Egyptian diet. They never use *deben* and *kitě* in calculations of salary. It seems likely that the lower salaries which were close to subsistence level were paid by giving bread and beer to employees or conscripts. To ensure uniformity, each loaf of bread was baked from a standard recipe, using equal amounts of ingredients. Thus, each loaf had a

standard nutritional value.

Standardization was assured through a system called *pefsu* in ancient Egyptian, which can be translated as 'baking value'. *Pefsu* could also be used to ensure that a predictable number of loaves would be baked from a known amount of grain. The baking value was based on the number of loaves produced from a measure of grain. The higher the value, that is, the more loaves from one measure, then the smaller the loaves, or the weaker the beer, or the smaller the jars. Most wage lists seem to assume that a standard *pefsu* value has been used in baking and brewing (Bleiberg 1995: 1379).

Standardization could also be assured through the use of tokens or tallies. From the Middle Kingdom fortress of Uronarti in Nubia, tallies have been discovered in the shape of a standard loaf of bread. Presumably this tally could be used to check that a worker's wages in bread loaves were all the same size. Beer jars were also presumably a roughly standard size (Bleiberg 1995: 1380).

The standard basic wage was ten loaves of bread plus one-third to two full jugs of beer per day. This was the amount paid to the lowest paid staff members. Other workers were paid in multiples of this standard wage varying from twice as much to fifty times the standard wage for top earners (Bleiberg 1995: 1380).

Various methods could be used for calculating wages. One ship's crew received half the ration of the captain. In another case the highest paid official received  $38\frac{1}{3}$  loaves while the lowest paid worker received  $1\frac{1}{3}$  loaves.

In another example from the Middle Kingdom, it appears that the staff the temple of Wepwawet in Asyut received a commission on all the goods which came to the temple. The staff was paid by the 'temple day'. This unit was defined thus: 'As for a temple day, it is  $\frac{1}{360}$  part of a year. Now, you shall divide everything which enters this temple -- bread, beer, and meat -- by way of the daily rate. That is, it is going to be  $\frac{1}{360}$  of the bread, the beer, and of everything which enters this temple for (any) one of these temple days which I

have given you' (quoted in Kemp 1989: 126). In this temple the regular staff received  $\frac{2}{360}$  of the total revenue of the temple, while the chief priest received  $\frac{4}{360}$ .

In another case from the Middle Kingdom, describing the wages of an expedition leader, the chief of the expedition received 500 loaves per day. Clearly, large sums like this were not paid out in actual loaves of bread or jars of beer. It seems highly unlikely that an expedition leader could actually take his ever increasing number of loaves of bread, growing from 500 to 1,000 to 1,500 in three days, to 15,000 loaves of bread after a month, with him on an extended trip into the desert. It also seems impossible that he could eat this much, even with a large family and servants. Therefore it seems possible that 500 loaves of bread is actually a unit for measuring out commodities, approximating our idea of a unit of money. It must have been possible to save also and draw against an account of bread and beer owed (Bleiberg 1995: 1380).

During the Late Period, coinage imported from Greece began to play a role in the Egyptian economy. At first, the state began to collect some taxes in silver during the Third Intermediate Period. Customs duties on goods from outside Egypt might also have been paid in coinage (Muhs 2005: 4). Increasing trade with Greece in the Saite Period was a possible stimulus for the use of coinage in exchanges. But even at this point, use of coins was most likely limited to elites. During the Saite through to the Persian periods, coins are found only in hoards (Muhs 2005: 5). Isolated coins, suggesting more widespread circulation, occur only in the fourth century BC. Before the arrival of the Ptolemies, the hoards of silver coins suggest that they were valued as bullion rather than money. Although the Persians minted coins in Egypt in imitation of Greek coinage, it was only after the arrival of the Ptolemies that small denomination coins seem to have been used in actual transactions.

The absence of money except as a unit of exchange in classical pharaonic society is an excellent example of the basic differences between ancient and modern economies.

This absence suggests one of the many reasons that many Egyptologists have reservations about applying modern economic principles to analyzing ancient practices.

## ORGANIZATION OF LABOR

Labor was provided to the government through a system of conscription which may have originated in prehistory. Conscription was the chief source of labor for construction projects, maintenance of the irrigation system, agricultural work on crown administered lands, and expeditions outside Egypt for raw materials. To some extent, this labor was organized by the *phyle* system. During the Old Kingdom, this system divided at least some Egyptians into five groups of workers. Each group had a name: The Great Phyle, The Eastern Phyle, The Green Phyle, The Little Phyle and The Perfection Phyle. Each *phyle* name probably made reference to its protective deity. In the Middle Kingdom there were only four *phyles*, each known by number. The numbers might refer to the season of the year when the *phyle* served (Roth 1991). The evidence for *phyles* in the New Kingdom is much less specific. A different system of gangs as seen at Deir el-Medina may indicate a reorganization of the labor force at this time.

Workers were initiated into a *phyle*, possibly at puberty. Each *phyle* did government service for a specific amount of time each year. The amount of time seems to have varied with the kind of labor performed. Many of the *phyle* rotations seem to have been monthly. During this period, workers received rations and lodgings, possibly generous enough to help support their families for part of the year.

## CONCLUSION

The data currently available for analyzing the state and private economy of ancient Egypt leaves many gaps in our knowledge. Although ceremonial texts inform scholars about the ideology behind the Egyptian economy, administrative texts reveal details of specific times and places, and private sales contracts, legal proceedings, private letters and wills offer details of private economic life, it is nearly impossible to tie these elements

together into a coherent pattern.

A major obstacle in constructing a coherent picture of the relationship between the state and private economy is the fact that the relationship was probably ubiquitous. Because the relationship was widespread, with many points of contact, the texts do not mention connections that would have been obvious to the ancients. Thus any connection between the activities described in the ship's log in Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1453A,B and the state remain unacknowledged, perhaps because they would have been obvious to an Egyptian. Such ancient assumptions would be true also of market place scenes in tombs. Since the ancients knew what these scenes represented, it was unnecessary to explain them. Thus, modern observers can make automatic assumptions about the nature of these market stalls' connections with the state, or independence from central control, based on modern prejudices. Only additional information, as yet undiscovered or unanalyzed, will allow scholars to construct a firmer foundation for our knowledge of the state and private economies.

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