

DEFINING A MARKET IN ANTIQUITY: BEYOND THE CERAMIC AND COMMODITY

EXCHANGE

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1. Introduction

Talk about "Market", when referring to some ancient economic dynamics, brings back particularly complex issues. Indeed, there are few themes more divisive among the historical sciences than the ones involving a market economy; between the stormy debates opposing neo-modernists and primitivists¹, the reprimands from "true" economists and the epistemological weaknesses of some of the recent studies, the reasons of this turmoil are numerous (Maucourant 2008, 16-19; Roman 2008, 8-12; Tchernia 2011, 101-104). It is therefore understandable that the notion should be engaged with infinite precaution or vehemently castigated, or even simply neglected. Yet it is an essential term in modern economic analysis and it is difficult not to approach its derivatives if one wishes to examine the diachronic conditions of οἰκονομία (Clerc 2008). The exercise is all the more complex as contemporary neo-liberal currents brought the idea, which I believe to be fallacious, that they represent the most accomplished form of *household management* (Fontaine 2014). Even so, macroeconomic thinking is considered to have lost its purpose

¹ A debate that still opposes the advocates of a closeness between modern and ancient economic mechanisms, a so-called neo-modernist vision, and those who rather considered the organization of exchanges during antiquity to be fundamentally different from that of contemporary times, designated as primitivists. These two currents of thought had a profound influence on the historical sciences, but today it is preferable to overcome this antagonism.

nowadays, in front of the well-oiled machinery of a large market, which now requires only the working maintenance of a few microeconomic specialists (Bürgenmeier 2019, 20-35)². This intellectual climate has had some deep consequences in the historical sciences. As a matter of fact, we often witness a form of self-censorship in the studies of antiquity, illustrated by the first assumed words of this introduction. Although consistent, this state of affairs has the disadvantage of giving the impression that the debate would be settled. The caution that surrounds the use of the concept of market among many archaeologists and historians could indeed lead us to believe that there were no markets before the modern era, as some so-called orthodox economists still claim (Clerc 2008). However, the debate is far from over, and these questions are even more under pressure after the discoveries made in recent years on price trends during the Roman era (Andreau et al. 2019, 212-214; Temin 2004; 2013, 97-142).

Before continuing, I must point out that my contribution does not pretend to solve a problem as old as modern archaeology. Instead, this study aims to revive the discussion regarding market conditions throughout history, an exercise that leads to commit oneself in the difficult interpretation of what underlies the economy. I intend to propose new avenues of reflection in this field, based on the examination of certain ancient ceramic *assemblages*. However, my thinking is bound to a multidisciplinary framework that goes far beyond the historical sciences alone, an approach that would lead it to be classified among the so-called heterodox perspectives³. Nevertheless, such a debate is necessary if

² The apology of the "economist-plumbers" made by the Nobel Prize winner in economics, Esther Duflo, is symptomatic of the preference currently given to microeconomics, to the detriment of all theoretical and macroeconomic reflection, which are nonetheless fundamental.

³ This could bring much discredit from orthodox economists.

one wishes to question some of the observations made by post-modernism and neo-liberalism.

2. Between Market and Economy: some fundamental elements

Current economic theories present the market as a metaphorical space where economic agents – both individuals and groups – are free to sell and buy goods and services. In this virtual space, each agent acts according to his or her interests; profit, viewed positively, is perceived as a reward for the necessary risks in the pursuit of personal interests. These market considerations are based on the liberal doctrine explained by Adam Smith at the end of the 18th century (Smith 1776). The market was then presented as an "invisible hand" (Smith 1776, IV.i.1.10), a mechanism still considered as a natural law that should ensure the achievement of a global economic equilibrium, through the rule of the supply and the demand. Léon Walras (Walras 1926) explored the prospects of this market law in greater depth, with the idea that forming prices was a mechanism that contributed to the stability of the relation between supply and demand. Even if this concept of market was later extended to other areas, such as housing and labor force, it was not always easy to define it properly (Schumpeter 1951). In fact, the Market par excellence in the minds of Adam Smith's heirs remained as of consuming goods and commodities.

Nowadays, these conceptions on the market economy lead us to consider it as a general and well-integrated system, based on the coordination of supply and demand through a price system. Such system, associated with the quantitative adjustment of all economic variables, would be dependent on the circulation of information displayed by an amount, as well as on the institutions that ensure its validity. Finally, despite the profound connection between the market and the socio-cultural environment, some economists consider the market as the basis of social relations (Williamson 1975, 20), although it can

only exist in the presence of an extended and integrated monetary system, defined on the basis of the mechanisms of the modern age. Such a reading has unfortunate consequences for the historical sciences, as there could be no real markets, and by extension no real economic phenomena, in the absence of a generalization of monetary transactions and of a well-integrated price system. This definition therefore leads to the exclusion from economic analysis of most of the activities related to ancient trade. This is the case for premonetary trade from the Bronze Age, but also for periods where money existed, such as the Hellenistic period and the Early Empire era, when other forms of transactions were available. During a certain time, a solution appeared thanks to contributions of economic anthropology (Roman 2008, 9-11). The work of Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi, for example, has had a lasting influence on our disciplines (Mauss 2012; Polanyi 1963; Polanyi - Arensberg 1975). But anthropology has also been a source of uncertainty, since it has come to consider the notions of economic rationality and the pursuit of profit as principles that only make sense in a modern market economy (Géraud et al. 1998, 252). Faced with these considerations and the refusal of the economic field to assess commercial exchanges prior to medieval times, archaeologists and historians have for long found themselves condemned to consider the trade of the Ancients as a non-rational and primitive practice.

However, some recent works have led us to question the naturalness of the invisible hand advocated by Smith's followers (Maucourant 2008, 18-25), reminding us that "the monetary economy is not capitalism", as Max Weber pointed out. Moreover, most economists today agree that the Great Market cannot by itself produce the conditions for its construction and maintenance. A whole set of principles and institutions are indeed at the basis of production and exchange of activities (Searle 1995, 42-45). The neo-institutionalist intellectual strands has thus enabled historical sciences to break out of the

opposition between ancient economic theory and analysis of trade, since market exchanges are above all based on institutional mechanisms and an economy that can exist without a monetary system (North 2005). In fact, the currency, like the Great Market hold dear by the neo-liberals, would be only an institution among others (Menu 1982, 99; Coriat and Weinstein 2004, 45-47; Polanyi 1977). The economy should then be seen as a social activity, comprised around an exchange of values and/or resources, be it material, cultural or symbolic. Whether the terms of this exchange are monetized or not is not an essential characteristic; from a semantic and ontological point of view, it is indeed the management of resources, and especially their distribution among the different members of a social group, that defines economy⁴. As an institution, markets have to be seen as complex phenomenon with a continuous existence (Searle 1995, 47-55), which structure the availability of the multiple resources produced by a social group, and in particular that of status indicators⁵. The conditions of access to these resources could be seen as an expression of the principles and values promoted by the group. If we consider the market as an institution dedicated to the distribution of resources, it will effectively be a diachronic mechanism whose action would be connected to the level of hierarchy of

⁴ The extreme commodification of social exchanges carried by neo-liberalism is then only economic form among others, just as imperfect as the others. Its only advantage may lie in its ability to display in a simplified manner the values of multiple resources, whether cultural or material; but this display should be in line with the scales of application of these values for this model to be truly efficient.

⁵ A status indicator is a practice or an artifact that serves to represent institutional facts, which exist only through the agreement and recognition of the individuals who are subject to them. By extension, the legitimacy granted to agents who serve these institutions is demonstrated through the possession and display of certain artifacts.

social groups. However, this does not mean that modern capitalism and its *homo economicus* would also be a diachronic reality, on the contrary.⁶.

In any case, the search for gain or profit should not be taken into account when we try to define the organization of economic activities; the coexistence of several individualities in a world of limited resources implies in essence that the search for gain is a natural behavior. Nevertheless, the modalities and principles to obtain this gain, what we call economic rationality, are culturally and socially constructed (Maucourant 2004, 214-218; Rathbone 1991, 400-410). Indeed, the type of gain sought is necessarily different according to cultures and eras, since it depends on the state of resources available in different fields (material, cultural, psychological or emotional). This gain does not need to be indexed to a monetary system comparable to ours in order to be rational, especially since many other material elements fulfilled the roles of our contemporary currency throughout human history. Economists thus tend to forget that what they call money is in fact an institution that concentrates economic (standard of value, means of payment, terms of exchange and reserve of value), social (manifestation of political authority) and symbolical (representations of identity) functions (Maucourant 2005; Menu 1982, 80-99; Polanyi 1968, 184-186). Starting from the classical definition of money, it turns out that other material elements have also concentrated several of these functions throughout history. For example, with silver in the Near East at the beginning of the Iron Age (Pálfi 2014, 218-224).

Despite the interest of my comments, most economists still consider that a market economy implies necessarily an adaptation between supply and demand through a strictly capitalist monetary system, as well as the presence of complex insurance and financial

⁶ To use Max Weber's formula, the market economy - i.e. the provision of resources on a group scale – is also not capitalism.

mechanisms, which are by nature considered exclusively modern (Roman 2008, 12). But the modernity of these conditions is contradicted by historical and archaeological data. On the one hand, there is a variation in the price of housing in Rome, the structuring of which manifests the existence of a market economy (Temin 2013, 139-145). On the other hand, we know that the Ancients sought to make profits (Michel 2015, 49-54), some ancient authors having made the apology of speculation in order to raise the selling price of certain products, especially wine (Cato, *De Agri Cultura*, 2.7). This desire for profit did not only concern currencies, but rather different standards and reserves of value, such as metal, livestock or certain manufactured objects (Földi 2014, 83-88). Finally, opposite to what some economists argue, ancient sources attest of the existence of loans and forms of usury, some of them akin to marine reinsurance, sometimes long before our modern era (Plut., *Cato the Old*, XXI.6-7; Chankowski 211, 149-157; Cseke 2014, 563-572).

In truth, many documents invite us to consider the existence of a market economy in antiquity, a definition that in no way implies a connection with contemporary capitalist and neo-liberal models. Nevertheless, the majority of economic researchers reject these sources of information outright, a situation that is rooted in the evolutionary and ethnocentric biases of the discipline: the Western neo-liberal model being presented as the most successful form of economic organization, there can be no such efficient models in the past or elsewhere in the world. Although the functioning of market is regularly considered as an institutional mechanism, it is still presented as a derivative of the modern monetary system (Coriat and Weinstein 2004, 46). Despite these shortcomings⁷,

⁷ These shortcomings are accentuated today by the reluctance of economists to engage in the epistemological and ontological work necessary for any social science, with theoretical reflection being denigrated in favor of an engineering of economic action. However, the objectification of human social

Historical sciences cannot do without the conceptual tools of economic reasoning to analyze the phenomena of the past. As such, it is up to history and archaeology to specify the conditions of application of these principles and notions, and to adapt them to their fields of study. If there is one field that particularly concerns the historical sciences, it is the one concerning exchanges of consumer goods and commodities. The circulation of manufactured goods represents in fact an object of study that is as fundamental to the economy as it is to archaeology. The limits of classical economic theories in relation to the commercialization of artefacts, however, make it necessary to return to the perspectives provided by other disciplines, notably sociology and anthropology.

3. From market to artifacts, a connection and meaning to be clarified?

The action of artifacts on the course of social dynamics has long remained unnoticed. The "material turn" of the 1980s represented a turning point in this field, as illustrated in Arjun Appadurai's work (Appadurai 1986). Since then, many researchers have shown interest in the role of artefacts in human life, especially in the contexts of the past (Boissinot 2015; Hodder 2012). Reflections on the social role of objects are rooted in the thoughts of several authors, including Max Weber: "Any artificial object, a machine for example, could be interpreted and understood on the basis of the meaning that human activity has given to its production and use" (Weber 1971, 23). Other scholars have insisted on the mediating role played by objects in the course of social dynamics. More recently, Bruno Latour's work has contributed to give artefacts an active function in these phenomena, as mediators of social dynamics (Latour 2005, 37-55). However, it should be remembered

reality, the one we are all part of, requires a much more complex methodology than that of natural phenomena, as the philosophy of science has taught us well.

that objects are the product of an intrinsic subjectivity, and therefore they must be active in order to correctly fulfil their social role.

Indeed, it is the attribution of a function that distinguishes the artifact from the simple material element, and not only the activity of production (Luaces 2018, 16-19)⁸. The function attributed to an object depends, however, on a socially and culturally constructed set of behaviours (Bourdieu 2015, 232-235). Work in sociology has thus made it possible to highlight the structural effect of certain artefacts on social perception; active objects participate in the way we see our relationships with the world and with others (Huguet 2017). An artefact is thus above all the product of a semiotic creation, properly cultural if we define culture as a system of meaning (Bruner 2015, 35-55), and the commodification of an object - i.e. its placing on the market - is to be seen as the result of a social process (Kopytoff 1986, 72-80). François Sigaut's quote clearly summarizes this idea: “a knife is not used to cut, but by cutting” (Sigaut 1991).

This culturally constructed feature of artefacts implies that their value would be attributed according to their socio-cultural usage environment (Maucourant 2019). For example, a so-called luxury object will manifest our position in accordance with other individuals, and will therefore influence the modalities of social interactions, but according to the principles specific to each social group⁹. In fact, that is why luxury objects have such a value, literally and figuratively: they display a specific position within a highly

⁸ By selecting a shell on the beach as a souvenir, the individual assigns it a function - emotional and memorial here - that transforms it into an artifact.

⁹ What is considered luxurious obviously changes from one period to another and from one culture to another. Western interest in the most powerful computers will seem incomprehensible to a recluse Amazonian tribe, just as the Romans' attraction to certain foods, then defined as luxurious, leaves us doubtful.

hierarchical social organization. Accordingly, artifacts should not be considered as purely "passive" elements, nor as fully active agents, but as the materialization of know-how and soft-skills whose attributes and modalities depend on their social environment of manufacture and use, in connection with what Arjun Appadurai called the "social existence" of artifacts (Appadurai 1986, 3-4). Conversely, it is necessary to know the primary function of an artifact in order to properly analyze it.

Once this observation has been made, we can take a new look to the link between market, consumer goods and society. Indeed, thanks to George Simmel, we know that: "the economy, as a particular form of behavior and communication consists not only in exchanging values but in the exchange of values" (Simmel 2004, 77). It turns out that artefacts, defined as consumer goods, do not have an absolute value in relation to a demand, but rather that it is the demand that gives them value (Appadurai 1986, 5-9). More concretely, it is the social environment that sets the value of an object, contrary to what economic theories envisage, an evidence of the pre-eminence of the social over the economic. If the latter is sometimes presented as an autonomous sphere, it actually represents an extension and a materialization of social phenomena¹⁰.

These clarifications have several consequences in the case of historical analysis. First of all, they imply that it is necessary to have previously identified the function of an object in order to be able to carry out its analysis in economic terms, a constraint that is difficult to meet in the absence of the agents who have manipulated this object, as it is the case here. Moreover, it is impossible to know exactly the value given to each artefact by ancient populations, and we are reduced to infer it indirectly. Despite these constraints, the functions of certain ceramics are relatively well known. For example, it is known that

¹⁰ Even a field as "pragmatic" as technical development actually turns out to be based on the socio-cultural transformations of human societies (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999, 19-22).

the primary function of an amphorae was to serve as a single-use commercial package. Several forms of tableware also have well-identified functions in relation to meal service. These artifacts were also used to fill other designs, as illustrated by the use of amphorae in funerary contexts. However, these were reuses that had no connection with the original function of these objects.

4. Some case studies: what the trade of ancient ceramic artifacts could indicate

The principles outlined above regarding the link between market – or even a possible Grand Market associating different ancient spaces and populations – and artifacts invite us to take a new look at the trade of certain consumer goods during Antiquity. We will focus here on a few examples of artefacts whose function is well known, namely amphorae and tableware ceramics, in order to examine the clues that could illustrate their involvement in transactions connected with a market economy, in the sense of an institution engaged in the distribution of resources. From this point of view, one should not only consider these exchanges in economic terms, but also take into account the trade of cultural and symbolic values inscribed in the artifacts.

4.1. The phenomena of amphora imitation, an example of adaptation to the market?

Although the amphora was not a consumer good per se, but rather a package, it was an artifact that contributed to the commercial success of its contents. In addition to the function of the product display associated with the shape of these commercial containers, the amphora served as a carrier for various brands (stamps and *tituli picti*) that ensured the volume and quality of the products transported (Finkielsztejn 2006). From this perspective, traditional approaches to the study of amphorae have tended to associate a container shape with a single production base and a very specific chronology. However,

recent studies in this field have highlighted the existence of an "imitation" phenomena during ancient history. Thus, we know today that several models of amphora have been imitated by populations other than the original ones, for commercial use.

A first example is the manufacture by Egyptian workshops of imitations of the Levantine amphorae (Marchand 2019), associated with the Bettle A type but also referred to as "torpedo" amphorae (Bettles 2003, 105-121) (figure 1, A). These Levantine containers, originally intended for the trade of wine products, were very successful during the classical period, before being quickly imitated by certain Egyptian workshops. One could also cite the case of the Carthaginian T-7.4.3.1 type, a form of container intended for the trade of cured meats that was copied, after the fall of Carthage, by other cities of Phoenician origin in the West. For example, the T-7.4.3.3 type, produced only in the Strait of Gibraltar region, is clearly inspired by this Carthaginian model for the export of fisheries products from the Gibraltar area (García Vargas 1998, 155-162). The similarities between these series of amphorae make us believe that the Phoenician settlements in the Strait sought to take advantage of the commercial reputation of Carthaginian products (Figure 1, B and C). Finally, we can mention the case of the imitation by Punic workshops of Greek and Italic containers for the transport of wine, among which the Dressel 1 type. Although the Punic workshops had their own containers for the wine trade, they decided to integrate a foreign model to transport this product (Sáez Romero et al. 2016; Sáez Romero - Luaces 2019). In fact, there are many examples of this kind of imitation in packaging during the antiquity. We can also mention the case of the Dressel 7/11 type, originally from southern Hispania but also manufactured in Gaul and Tarraconaise (Fernández Izquierdo 2006, 280-282). It turns out that the imitation of a foreign maritime container, when the package was associated with a successful product or from a famous region, was more a rule than an exception. Different hypotheses could explain this

phenomenon. First of all, it could be seen as the result of a change in the ship construction, or as an adaptation to the institutional rules imposed by some trading partners. But it could also be seen as a response to the commercial situation of the moment, or rather to the market. Indeed, if the shape of an amphora was associated to a kind of product and to its origin and quality, it is understandable that some producers sought to use a recognized shape in order to transport a new product, or that they wanted to rely on the reputation of reputable regions (Rauh et al. 2018, 152-155). Such a practice is in part reminiscent of some contemporary marketing principles used in packaging design.

4.2. Adapting to the market in the case of tableware: examples of ancient "marketing"?

As far as table ceramics are concerned, there are many other examples of modifications in shapes produced in relation to the demand, i.e. a form of adaptation to the market. One of the oldest case is illustrated by the Aegean ceramics from the Tell Abu Hawam site, located on the present Syrian-Palestinian coast (Balensi 2004). Examination of some ceramic furniture dated to the 14th/13rd c. B.C. has indeed brought to light a significant quantity of imported Mycenaean's ceramics. This site was initially interpreted as a possible commercial enclave for Mycenaean in the Levant. The *faciés* of these Aegean imports nevertheless present clear divergences from those generally observed among the Helladic region itself or in Cyprus (Balensi 2004, 153-155). Therefore it seems that the Mycenaean adapted their offer of ceramic products according to the region for which they were intended (Figure 2, A), a practice interpreted as proto-marketing (Balensi 2004, 162-163). Such a process implied the existence of a form of product follow-up, as well as the action of intermediaries who were able to carry out similar market studies (Balensi 2004, 156-157).

Another example of adaptation to the market during antiquity is illustrated by the trade of Campanian ceramics A. It is known that the manufacture of these Roman ceramics with black glaze was linked to a slave production method whose aim was to reduce production costs as much as possible (Morel 2008, 166-167). The Campania A represents a clear example of a mass produced commodity, in connection with the standardization of shapes and the simplification of manufacturing processes. The Roman elites did not hesitate to move their workshops – rather to relocate their production – to get closer to certain markets, notably those of the Roman army in Gaul, in an attempt to increase the competitiveness of their products (Morel 2008, 175-177). In addition, there is a real conquest of markets by the Roman elite. In fact, Campanian ceramics were from the outset destined for massive export. The wide distribution of these ceramics throughout the Mediterranean testifies of their commercial success (Morel 1998, 487-488). It even seems that certain ceramic forms were intended for specific spaces (Morel 1990, 58), as illustrated by the clear divergences observed between the Campanian A *faciés* of Carthage and Gades and those of southern Gaul (Figure 2, B).

Despite the chronological gap that separates the case of Mycenaean ceramics from that of the Campania A, the material data that have been evoked testify of a desire, among the ancient elites to make a profit from mercantile exchanges, all through practices of adaptation to the market, rationalization of production and the implementation of complex commercial strategies, practices that are far astray from a "primitive" exercise of mercantile exchange.

5. Conclusions

Numerous examples, between the Bronze Age and the Republican era, show an adaptation of artifact's production to meet a demand. There are also various cases of

modification in the production methods in order to increase profitability, as the Roman elites did not hesitate to relocate their workshops in order to make their products more competitive for sale. Even if it is not easy to explain, different logics seem to have intervened in their development. In the case of Roman amphorae and Campanian ceramics, the political expansion of Republican Rome seems to have motivated the spread of Greco-Roman values and Italian products, in accordance to social dominance effects. In the case of the imitations of T-7.4.3.1 and the diffusion of Mycenaean ceramics, the circulation of distant/exotic or reputable products could have responded to a need for differentiation and social distinction. Regardless of the motives, these material clues do testify of an adaptation to the market, responding on a production to a predictable and localized demand, as well as a will of the ancient elites to sell more.

There is indeed evidence of the existence of markets for commodities, and the use of economic mechanisms to take advantage of them. If we could assess an adaptation to a demand and price system in Antiquity, nothing prevents us from considering the presence of a market economy at this period. The question then would be to analyze the level of embedment and integration of these markets on a Mediterranean scale (Tchernia 2011, 129-131). In this instance, the main difference with our modern economies lies more in the small proportion of the population that was involved in this market economy and in the complexity of the technical, institutional and legal arrangements that contributed to their functioning. It is obvious that the markets mentioned in this contribution have not developed uniformly, just as the old Mediterranean was not a homogeneous area. Moreover, there were strong economic and socio-cultural divergences from one region to another, linked to levels of connectivity and particularities in production methods. Those fundamental differences between ancient and modern economies explain the reluctance of several authors to envisage a market economy during ancient times. Nonetheless, the

existence of large-scale markets during the High Empire cannot be denied (Tchernia 2011, 101-131). Despite his precautions, André Tchernia does not hesitate to talk about the oil market and the existence of consumer goods markets, the main question being to know what their extension within Roman and Hellenistic society was. But this debate does not solve the problem modern economists have with the existence of integrated markets during antiquity. It seems to me futile to try to make precise comparisons of economic organizations from one period to the next, and from one culture to another, since the differences between demographic and social situations make them both similar and different at the same time. But this does not preclude the discussion regarding the presence of a market economy. In my opinion, the problem here lies rather in the definition attributed to this concept, and by extension in the epistemological deficiency of the economic science related to its objects of study.

One possible path lies in the redefinition of this notion of market by archaeologist and historians. If the Market is indeed an institution, as some author consider it, it should be more accurately seen as a specific socio-cultural device, intended for the distribution of resources produced by a collective. It would then no longer be a question of thinking about the market as a natural mechanism, an invisible hand that prefigures social relations, but rather as an extension of the social, political and cultural framework elaborated by a society. In this perspective, the market economy would not be based on capitalism. Just as it has been proven that the monetary system did not come from this same model. The organization of exchanges and transactions – which is also the basis of all social functioning – can respond to different types of organization, whether it is a bazaar economy, a capitalist economy or a communist one¹¹. These models do not

¹¹ Moreover, even the territories under the communist regime of the former USSR were marked by the existence of market-like exchange networks; the USSR had a monetary system and market transactions

necessarily preclude the prior existence of markets. Rather, the latter should be considered as a resource management device, developed specifically – and in different ways according to time and space – depending of the level of prioritization of a society, the structuring of its population and the degree of specialization of its production. Such a proposal is worth discussing, but it does raise the problem of knowing when a market economy could have started to emerge. For example, if the involvement of a multifunctional monetary system is a prerequisite, it would already be necessary to know which function of the currency would be predominant in order to examine its anteriority. My point could lead to think that there have always been markets in the course of human history, which I doubt, regardless of the economic terms used. But as it stands, archaeological data tends to indicate the appearance of the first markets as early as the beginning of the Bronze Age. However, if one wishes to better define the mechanisms associated with the market economy, it becomes necessary to take into account the contributions of this historical documentation. Such exercise implies revising some of the premises underlying current economic paradigms and moving away from the “refusal of modern scholarship” – as says Jean-Paul Morel (2008, 171-172) – to recognize the antiquity of market mechanisms. The problem is thus far from being solved. One can hope, however, that the lines of thought proposed here will help revitalizing a debate that deserves the interest of the historical sciences, as well as of other social sciences.

took place there, even if the structuring of these exchanges limited the obtaining of a high profit while guaranteeing a minimum price. It was the manifested absence of a capitalist economic organization, not the absence of a market economy, which distinguished the USSR from the United States.

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