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# Palmyrene Temples: Economic Institutions<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Palmyra constantly delivers new topics and issues for research in various domains, such as historical economy in a framework of exchange and exploitation of goods and services, which forms the main theme of the present volume. The issue was often examined in the context of long-distance trade, mainly from the perspective of the famous Tariff of Palmyra, a huge bilingual (Greek–Aramaic) inscription containing a list of non-luxury goods and services taxed in Palmyra and toll regulations by the imperial government.<sup>2</sup>

However, the economic organization of the Palmyrene urban sanctuaries has never been the main focus of researchers. The aspects often analysed within studies on the local temples have been restricted to rituals, deities, decoration, and architecture, without getting into the economic resources and instruments that permit the functioning of the cult and ‘earthly’ support. In the definition brought by Douglas C. North, Nobel Memorial Prize winner in Economic Sciences, institutions form a very important part of the economy. They ‘regulate everyday life by defining and limiting the set of choices of individuals and they guide human interactions’. Institutions are the framework within which human interactions take place.<sup>3</sup> The institutions have influence on the economies and processes related to exchange and circulation of goods. Institutions concern formal rules (laws, regulations) and informal limitations (conventions, practices, norms).<sup>4</sup> Such a formulated definition, no matter that it refers to modern times, renders well the situation illustrated by the Palmyrene temples. The temples managed an exchange in two different spheres: human and divine. The first, the human sphere, consisted of exchanging and reusing material goods. The second, divine exchange, is related to the interactions between humans and deities marked in the ceremonies, rituals, and in the numerous dedications.

In this paper I want to draw attention to the character of the urban sanctuaries of the Palmyrenes as economic institutions regulating the circulation of goods, contracts with personnel, and investments in trade, but which also circulated ideas and traditions, as well as the management

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<sup>2</sup> For the Tariff, see Matthews 1984; Shifman 2014.

<sup>3</sup> North 1990, 5.

<sup>4</sup> North 1990, 9.

of cultic places and their relation to cult. Developing the idea of the prebendary system and looking at the Tariff through the perspective of the temple economy, I will explore how the sanctuaries of the Palmyrenes fulfilled economic functions. I will not focus particularly on the divine economy, but in the conclusion, I provide support for the point that both aspects, human and divine, are strongly bound together.

## Human Economy

Even though D. C. North did not base his observations on ancient societies, some similar mechanisms can be noticed in Antiquity and in the ancient religions. The economic institutions are human creations; they need support, and they regulate exchange in different fields. Such a point of view can be linked to the ancient temples, here particularly the Palmyrene temples. The cultic places, despite being divine dwellings ('house of the gods' in Aramaic),<sup>5</sup> do not exist without human support and need proper organization. To perform cult and rituals, and so to be a place of religious activities, a temple needs human maintenance. Gods, like humans, need clothes, food, and leisure. Thus, elements such as materials for sacrifices (animals, plants, etc.), tools (knives, towels, pottery, and metal or glass vessels or objects), money for the personnel and preparation of festivals, goods for the deities (clothes, food, ex-votos of different sorts), various services, distribution of the 'leftovers' from cultic meals, and so on are components of daily life in a place of worship. They are the elements of 'household management': *oikonomia*. The income of a temple was measured by goods, not only by money, as understood in monetary terms. An honorific inscription, dated to AD 137 and coming from the Temple of Allat, attests to a donation of objects in gold and silver, valued at 6000 denars, to Allat, as well as to Bel, Yarhibol, Aglibol, Ashtarte, Baalshamin, Durahlun, and Beltia:

[šlm<sup>2</sup> dnh dy ...] | [...] | <sup>2</sup>ky dy <sup>2</sup>qmt lh <sup>2</sup>lt wbn<sup>2</sup>y | nwrbl bdy<sup>2</sup> dy špr lhwn lyqrh | byrh <sup>2</sup>dr šnt 448 | w<sup>2</sup>bd bšnt 438 | mn dytq<sup>2</sup> dylh l<sup>2</sup>lt <sup>2</sup>štr<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup>lhth | mhr dy dhb<sup>2</sup> wksp<sup>2</sup> w<sup>2</sup>p <sup>2</sup>bd | lbl wyrh<sup>2</sup>bwl wl<sup>2</sup>glbwl wl<sup>2</sup>štr<sup>2</sup> | <sup>2</sup>lhy<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup>tby<sup>2</sup> wškr<sup>2</sup>y<sup>2</sup> mhr<sup>2</sup> dy klh dhb | w<sup>2</sup>p qrb lb<sup>2</sup>šmn wdrh[lwn] | wlbly <sup>2</sup>štr<sup>2</sup> mhr<sup>2</sup> [dy] ksp<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup>lhlq lywm šr<sup>2</sup> wtrn bsywn [dnryn] | <sup>2</sup>lpyn št<sup>2</sup> wyhb lbny plyn[...] | l<sup>2</sup>lm<sup>2</sup> dy msqyn lbilt<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup>lt ywm tš<sup>2</sup>t<sup>2</sup> dbh<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup>lwl | wym 7 b<sup>2</sup>lwl lgd[...] | w<sup>2</sup>p yhb lbny <sup>2</sup>ky bny bt[h] | dy <sup>2</sup>bhthwn bzb<n>z<b>n kl št<sup>2</sup> | [<sup>2</sup>l hywhy whyy] | bnwhy wbn<sup>2</sup>y bnwhy l<sup>2</sup>[lm<sup>2</sup>].

(This image of [...] Aakai, which set for him Allat and the Bene Nurbel, because he pleased them, for his honour in the month Adar, in the year AD 137. And he made in the year 127 from his deposit for Allat, the goddess, his goddess, an offering\* of gold and silver. Even he made to Bel and to Yarhibol, and to Aglibol, and to Ashtarte, the good and rewarding gods, an offering\* entirely in gold; and he dedicated to Baalshamin and Durahlun and to Beltia, the goddess, an offering\* in silver for the share for the day 12 in Siwan, 6000 denars and paid obligation for Bene Palyn [...] forever, the burnt offerings for the Virgin Allat day 9 sacrifice Elul and the day 7 in Elul for the Gadde (Protector) of [...] and also paid obligation for Bene Aakai, the 'sons of the house of his ancestors', now and then every year, for his life and life of his children and children of his children for eternity.)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Byt <sup>2</sup>lh<sup>2</sup>*, attested in the inscriptions from the Temple of Bel; see PAT 0269 and 1353. See also Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 206.

<sup>6</sup> Gawlikowski 2017, 263, inscr. 35; Drijvers 1995. Transcription after Gawlikowski 2017, trans. A. Kubiak-Schneider. The meaning differs from the one proposed in Gawlikowski 2017, 263. For the title 'good and rewarding gods' see Kubiak 2013.

The items offered to the gods, which in Aramaic are called *mhd*<sup>7</sup> or *mhr*<sup>2</sup>, were purchased with a gigantic sum of money, or the objects' price was evaluated at 6000 denars. Drijvers and Gawlikowski assume that the items were vessels, basins which served for drawing lots, but we cannot exclude a different interpretation, especially if the reading of the doubtful Aramaic term was *mhr*<sup>2</sup>, as postulated in the modified transcription above.<sup>7</sup> Looking at other Semitic languages, like Akkadian, three terms are attested to justify the above reading. The first one, *mehru*, means a kind of offering, a reproduction, or something attractive to the deities.<sup>8</sup> The second one, *muhru*, means a cultic building. The third one, *maharu*, means 'received' (or 'a delivery'), and it is a legal term appearing in the Akkadian economic texts.<sup>9</sup> All of these interpretations seem plausible. The expense was enormously high, and so we are dealing with luxurious objects offered to the gods for 'their use' — either a silver model of a shrine, an offering pleasing to the deities, or even a delivery. As opposed to being a spontaneous act of making such an expensive offering of ritual objects in precious metals, in my opinion, the offering should be seen as a fulfilment of a certain duty towards the primary city deities, especially since the text clarifies that it was for the official share of the honorand on day 12 of the month Sywan. The inscription mentions further the payment from his own deposit. This can be understood in different ways. First, we may be dealing here with a very rich person who had spontaneously invested a large sum of money for his gods, but it is less likely. Secondly, it could have been a sort of a lease from the temple and cultic associations like Bene Nurbel, Bene Palyn, and Bene Aakai for such an investment, especially in the light of the new translation proposed above. The new interpretation of the text insists on listing the fulfilled obligations towards the associations and deities. The honorand must have been contracted by the temple with (possibly) a cultic function, as the inscription speaks about offerings during certain days. I imagine a situation in which the temple had chosen the honorand, maybe a craftsman, and granted him an amount of money to provide the gods precious offerings, making an order for a particular item. This text is a confirmation of transactions between temples and cultic associations and an individual. It could be that this inscription is a monumentalized and officialized approval of fulfilment of the agreement. It is, however, curious that it mentions acts that were a decade apart. It could be that other information was added later, following up the rest of the deeds of the mentioned person.

Texts that mention offering precious objects, constructing parts of the temples, and supporting religious life in other ways are very popular in Palmyra.<sup>10</sup> Since Hellenistic times or even since the Achaemenids, the preservation and care of temples lay in the hands of rich individuals, members of the local elites, and not of the kings or emperors.<sup>11</sup> The former needed to provide everything required for the good functioning of a cultic place, and their deeds were considered pious. We also need to include caravans as an investment for the wealth of a sanctuary, and this is the reason why we find caravan inscriptions also in the precincts of the Palmyrene urban

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<sup>7</sup> The double reading is possible through the same way of writing *daleth* and *resh* in Palmyrene Aramaic. Sometimes, to differentiate between the two, the stonemasons marked *resh* with a small dot written over the letter, but in the case of this text there is no such a differentiation. Both Gawlikowski and Dijkstra signal that this term is not yet attested in the epigraphic records of Palmyra and can be read as well *mhr*<sup>2</sup>. See Gawlikowski 2017, 263 and Drijvers 1995, 110.

<sup>8</sup> Black, George, and Postgate 2000, s.v. *mehru*.

<sup>9</sup> Kleber 2005, 290–91. The polysemy of the Aramaic root compared to the Akkadian is the reason why the small asterisk marks the translation. It is only one of three (or more?) possibilities to understand this problematic word. In Qumran Aramaic and Epigraphic Jewish Palestinian Aramaic appears the term *mhyr*, which means 'price, fair share'; see the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project <<https://cal.huc.edu>> [accessed 4 May 2022].

<sup>10</sup> *PAT* 0263, *PAT* 0270 (AD 19, the honours of Palmyrenes from Seleucia), *PAT* 1352 (AD 23, financial support of the rebuilding the Temple of Bel in Babylon), *PAT* 1524 (the earliest text from Palmyra, dated to 44 BC, mentions setting up a statue for a benefactor of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra). See also Sander 2020, 97–99.

<sup>11</sup> Boyi 2004; Baker 2013, 20; 2014, 187–89.

sanctuaries, like the Temple of Bel and Temple of Allat. Besides the donors and funders of the temples, whose statues stood on the brackets located in the temples' porticoes, we find also the statues of merchants who provided the sanctuaries with the necessary goods: spices, aromas, perfumes, but also cultic objects made of precious metals, stones, and garments. It would explain why the *collegia* of priests were involved in the sponsoring of the caravans.<sup>12</sup> The priests had interests in long-distance trade and contacts with Babylon, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Charax, and Volagesias to also exchange knowledge about cultic issues (including astronomy and divination), which is marked in the organization of the cult of Bel and Nabu corresponding to its Mesopotamian heritage in art and in politics.<sup>13</sup> The material evidence, mainly pottery, from Hellenistic Palmyra confirms a vibrant economic exchange between Babylonia and Palmyra, but we can be sure that there was also a religious exchange and exchange of ideas which were then adopted and reused in ways that were certainly modified for local purposes.<sup>14</sup> The worship of Mesopotamian deities in Palmyra and the care of the sanctuaries of these deities in Babylon and Seleucia indicate how close and influential the contacts between Palmyra and the land between the Tigris and Euphrates were. Some of the caravan inscriptions from Palmyra attest the involvement of Palmyrenes in the maintenance and/or rebuilding of the sacred places in these cities.<sup>15</sup> It is likely that among the traders, high officials of the Palmyrene temples travelled as members of caravans, especially those from the Temple of Bel, the main Palmyrene sanctuary. The relations between temples and long-distance traders are known from earlier than Roman times, from the contracts dated to the first millennium BC in Babylonia.<sup>16</sup> The Babylonian temples provided middlemen with capital (in silver or in goods), who, in exchange, had to deliver some goods to the temple.<sup>17</sup> As for Palmyra in the second and third centuries AD, it is not clear who initiated these campaigns: temples or private people, but definitely the sanctuaries had their capital located in them.<sup>18</sup> The temples could invest money for their proper interests as well as offer the offices for the economic well-being and maintenance of cultic life.

## Prebendary System in Palmyra

Since temples were a framework for interhuman relations, and not just human–divine ones, one basis for the good functioning of the religious engine was the prebendary system. The inscription from the Temple of Allat quoted above mentions shares received during some exact days by the honorand, whose name is unfortunately unknown because of damage to the stone. In a recent paper on the role of tesserae in the administration of cultic places in Palmyra, I pointed out that temple administration was based on a prebendary system similar to the one which still functioned in Uruk during the Seleucid period (312–141 BC).<sup>19</sup> In the case of the Palmyrene sanctuaries, we do not have at our disposal temple archives which would cast light on the economic organization of cultic places, as they do in the case of Hellenistic Uruk. However, we can theorize that a prebendary

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<sup>12</sup> For temples and traders, see Gregoratti 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Sommer 2020, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Sommer 2020, 41–44.

<sup>15</sup> Hauser 2007, 228–30; *PAT* 0307 and 1352.

<sup>16</sup> Graslin-Thomé 2016, 169.

<sup>17</sup> Graslin-Thomé 2016, 169.

<sup>18</sup> Gregoratti 2020, 470–75. He signals that Palmyra had strong religious and cultural connections to Mesopotamia, which includes continuity and temple activities. What is more, he points out the banking activities of the temples of the Graeco-Roman Near East.

<sup>19</sup> Kubiak-Schneider 2022. There is vast literature on prebends in ancient Mesopotamia, see e.g. van Driel 2005, 518–24; Jursa 2010; Corò Capitanio 2004; Pirngruber and Waerzeggers 2011.

system was a key part of the economy of Palmyrene temples, thanks to the numerous tesserae and some inscriptions. Prebends were a system based on an agreement between a person and the temple, so that a person was appointed for a certain service to the temple and, after fulfilment of his or her duties, was remunerated with money or commodities. The allocations could also be counted in shares of meat, drink, and other foodstuffs.<sup>20</sup> Three badly preserved texts from the end of the first century BC or the mid-first century AD,<sup>21</sup> which were found in the Temple of Baalshamin, the Diocletian Camp, and in the Hellenistic foundations of the Temple of Bel, point to how the economic systems of Palmyrene temples involved the lawful regulation of a process of exchanging offices and distributing goods.<sup>22</sup> In spite of general comprehensive difficulties in reading these inscriptions, words like ‘pledge’ (*mšknʔ*) and ‘office-holder’ (*ʔhydyʔ*)<sup>23</sup> are significant keys to understanding these texts not as ‘sacred laws’, as was suggested in prior studies, but as monumentalized prebend contracts.<sup>24</sup> These texts display many comparable elements to the Seleucid contracts from Uruk: names of contractors and deities, regulations in bringing goods (wine, oil, meat, etc.), a period of service, financial consequences in case of abandonment of the prebendary office, and even witnesses (mentioned in the combined text from the Hellenistic foundations of the Temple of Bel).<sup>25</sup>

The Palmyrene Aramaic formula *mkl wplg bsmk*, which often accompanies the tesserae and is usually translated ‘a measure and a half during the banquet’, has been recently interpreted as a particular share of deposited goods.<sup>26</sup> The Urukian contracts attest that temple personnel were allocated portions of offerings according to their respective rank and position within the priestly offices.<sup>27</sup> The meat cut for cultic purposes together with other goods was an offering and/or a part of the cultic meal for the gods, but then it was used as material compensation for the prebendary function, being thus an object of economic exchange.<sup>28</sup> This same meat had been provided as a duty by the prebendary suppliers or simply as an offering, ritually butchered, and then processed or left unprocessed (raw meat was also an exchange product), with some parts offered to the deity and the rest shared with other prebendary holders. Perhaps some of the goods such as the meat of ritually slaughtered animals (Aramaic *maqluta*, Akkadian *maqlutu*), dyed fleece, perfumed oil, animal fat, and maybe even bronze statues, mentioned in the Palmyrene Tariff from AD 137, were considered first as a temple income and second as a prebendary share for some cultic functions.<sup>29</sup> On closer inspection, one discerns that these are temple essentials. Perfumed oil served for anointment of the cultic statues and/or of the ritual specialists, ritually slaughtered animals were a sacrifice to the gods and essential goods for the festival meals, and bronze statues were set in honour of the temple

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<sup>20</sup> Kubiak-Schneider 2022; Pirngruber and Waerzeggers 2011, 112.

<sup>21</sup> There is some doubt about the chronology, because the dates are unluckily in the lacunae. See Kaizer 2002, 175.

<sup>22</sup> *PAT* 0991, which speaks about the collection of the votes and election of cultic specialists. Cf. *PAT* 1981, *PAT* 2774, 2775, 1521.

<sup>23</sup> The translation of the Aramaic term is after Kaizer 2002, 171. However, further study is needed to verify this interpretation. It is possible to understand it as ‘prebend-holders’, see Kubiak-Schneider forthcoming.

<sup>24</sup> They are interpreted as ‘sacred laws’ by Milik 1972, 300–04; Gawlikowski 1973, 56–58; Kaizer 2002, 167–77. This term was coined by the monumental work of Sokolowski (1955; 1969) to describe the Greek texts which regulated the conduct of cult. See also Parker 2016. The Palmyrene texts focus more on the organization of the temple economy and administration by referring to the selection of priests, the conferral of goods, and punishments for the evasion of duties. An examination of the texts in the light of the economy and the testimony of Palmyrene tesserae needs further study, which is already being undertaken by the author of this paper.

<sup>25</sup> *PAT* 2774–75 and 1521. As a comparative reference, I looked at the text dated to the reign of Antiochus II (222–187 BC) published in Joannès 2004, 255–56.

<sup>26</sup> For a proposed new translation, see Kubiak-Schneider 2022, 83.

<sup>27</sup> Corò Capitanio 2004, 259.

<sup>28</sup> Corò Capitanio 2004, 264.

<sup>29</sup> Matthews 1984.

benefactors or eminent prebendary holders. What is more, the location of the document specified in the text as ‘in front of the Temple of Rabbasire’ (in Aramaic *lqbl hykl? dy rb?syrr?*),<sup>30</sup> confirmed by archaeological finds by the Polish archaeological mission led by M. Gawlikowski,<sup>31</sup> and not on the Agora or other public places related to the municipal administration, point to the importance of the temple in the economic sphere and to the goods and services mentioned in the Tariff as intended for cultic purposes.

A prebend owner automatically entered the clergy of a temple by fulfilling the cultic duties; this is suggested by the texts from first-millennium BC Babylonia and is well documented in the archives of Seleucid Uruk. In this way, among prebendary positions we count priests of different disciplines of priesthood: exorcists, diviners, sacrificers, and the like, as well as brewers, bakers, butchers, and weavers.<sup>32</sup> At Palmyra, some of the tesserae are personalized, mentioning names of the cultic functionaries and particular offices, but many of these small objects simply feature an image of a priest.<sup>33</sup> In this case they could have been reusable and passed from one agent to another in the moment of change in the office or sold or taken in lease by someone else. Inscriptions from Palmyra attest a few butchers and bakers in the votive and funeral texts.<sup>34</sup> The fact that their profession is very rarely mentioned in the texts can be connected with cultic service to the temple and not just to a simple craft.<sup>35</sup>

A few small clay tokens contain references to dates. These take the form of either a day or a name of the month and year or just the name of the month or number referring to the year as it is presented in the Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1. Tesserae with date references.

No. in the Corpus	Date	Gods or persons and their function	Special features
RTP 32	AD 132/133, 444 SE	Bageshu Hamma, the chief of <i>marzeah</i> ( <i>rb mrzħ?</i> )	—
RTP 63	Bel Nisan	No people mentioned	Image of a ladle and a jug on the obverse
RTP 158	day 12	Aglibol and Malakbel	Image of grapes
RTP 645	420 SE	No people mentioned	Image of two eagles flanking a stamp on the obverse and image of a priest on the reverse
RTP 691	AD 118/119, 430 SE	Malakel (label for the image of the priest)	On the obverse inscription m1 = m(kl) 1 — probably measure 1

<sup>30</sup> Tariff, Decree, l. 10 (transcription by A. Kubiak-Schneider from the squeeze).

<sup>31</sup> Gawlikowski 2014, 424; 2021, 96.

<sup>32</sup> Corò Capitanio 2004, 257. The archives from Uruk dated to the Seleucid period include contracts of sales and lease of the offices. See Jursa 2010, 155.

<sup>33</sup> See the plates at RTP; more than half of the objects are accompanied with the priestly image.

<sup>34</sup> Cussini 2017; Kubiak-Schneider 2021.

<sup>35</sup> The terms for butcher and baker show a connection to Akkadian heritage and origins. The rarity of mentioning these professions at all in the epigraphic material also supports their cultic character.

<i>RTP 720</i>	Satam <sup>36</sup> Mita day 8	Bolai, Zebeida, Malku, Nasrallat	—
<i>RTP 721</i>	on day 7	No people or gods mentioned	Image of a cup
<i>RTP 737</i>	Adar or Ayar AD 108 (419 SE)	No people or gods mentioned	Image of three priests lying on a couch in the building with two columns
<i>RTP 785</i>	AD 140/141 (452 SE)	Qasprinus	Image of a priest lying on a couch
<i>RTP 997</i>	Satam, day 10	Zebeida, Ashtor	Image of a palm tree

The dates presented in Table 4.1 could refer to the particular services provided by the persons mentioned or depicted on the other side of the tokens or to particular events, like Bel Nisan — the month dedicated to the god Bel — or the services for particular deities. In addition to this, there are tesserae with less evident references to the month than the above examples. There is a group of objects bearing images related to the Zodiac such as Scorpio, Pisces, and Gemini. These representations could be an allusion to a particular month. Following the contracts of sale or lease of prebends, these dates could refer to the assignment of the office (*RTP 32, 997*) or other duty, like bringing wine, meat, etc. for the deities in a particular month or day (*RTP 63, 158*). In the light of the information brought by the prebend contracts from Uruk, some of the offices could have been yearly or only appointed for a day or a month, which also finds its reflection in the tesserae.<sup>37</sup>

In this context, the tesserae could mark the appointment period or a prebend's obtaining a share for the office. Altogether, it seems that the tesserae and the honorific texts testify more about the temple economy in Palmyra in the times of the High Empire (first to third centuries AD) than we have expected.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

Without all the goods like aromatics, meat, wine, oils, precious materials, or even architecture (as the rituals can take place within special constructions and buildings) there would not be a substantial base for the rituals and interactions between deities and humans. The religious exchange with deities is always based on the rituals, and for this, material substance is required. The human economy supported the divine economy. The sanctuaries with their cultic specialists established a set of ritual rules, such as a prohibition against blood offerings in the precinct of the Temple of Allat,<sup>39</sup> or a mandate for offering non-fermented drinks for the god Shai 'al-Qaum,<sup>40</sup> and these were important for proper communication between humans and gods.

<sup>36</sup> This word is left untranslated by the authors of the *Recueil des tessères de Palmyre*. This Aramaic term appears on seven tesserae. The *DNWSI*, however, provides a translation through the Greek parallel (>stemma): assembly or coronation; see *DNWSI*, sv. *štm*'<sub>1</sub>. The Greek stemma refers also to the priestly crown, which could influence the interpretation of the Aramaic *štm*' as a designation of the priestly office. The tessera could have marked a moment of appointment for the office of a priest. However, the Babylonian Talmud gives a word *šwmh* in the meaning of a seal derived from *h̄tm*. The interpretation of the Palmyrene term towards a seal would mean that it would be a technical term for what is called a tessera in scholarship. This interpretation is very likely in the context of all tesserae bearing this word.

<sup>37</sup> For the dates and tessera see recently Yon 2022, 76–77.

<sup>38</sup> For new studies on tesserae, see Raja 2022.

<sup>39</sup> *PAT* 1122; Kaizer 2002, 169–70; Gawlikowski 2017, 248, inscr. 19.



What is more, the votive dedications are material testimonies of the exchange between the gods and humans. The vow is a particular contract between the deity and a devotee, and a dedication is somehow a material result of fulfilling this contract.<sup>41</sup> A devotee could have promised to make an object when a deity showed his or her mercy: an altar, an image, a part of a sanctuary, but also a non-material gift, such as a eulogy or hymn.<sup>42</sup> The choice of words in the Palmyrene votive inscriptions seems also not to be spontaneous. It was instead schematic and repetitive, based on a model in the form of a prayer or a hymn that is not preserved today.<sup>43</sup> Altogether, the votive dedications are texts and dedicated objects that represent the divine economy.<sup>44</sup> We have here an exchange between a deity and a devotee who, before dedicating, established a relationship in a difficult moment of life and prayed for the immediate improvement of the situation. The *ex-votos*, especially with the praising formula ‘blessed his name forever’, present such a chain: calling upon the god, being answered by the deity, praising the mighty deeds of the god through the hymnic formula ‘blessed be his name forever’, and laudatory epithets such as good, rewarding, merciful, compassionate.<sup>45</sup>

Ancient temples, including those from Palmyra, were economic institutions according to modern definitions and concepts. In the economy, institutions comprise norms, regulations, and laws that establish the rules of interaction. The temples are thus places which secure exchanges on different levels: by securing the material ‘income’ (food, clothes, luxurious objects, constructions, and works), they maintain cultic life, the well-being of gods, and, indirectly, the prosperity of the city. We can regard the Palmyrene temples as economic institutions according to North’s conceptualization because they ‘structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social or economic’.<sup>46</sup> The sanctuaries contributed to the evolution of Palmyra in cultural and social dimensions over the course of time. It is possible to see the impact of the cultic places in the development of Palmyra through their contribution to trade and their close links to the important cultic places in the East: Seleucia, Babylon, and Vologesias.

Does an approach to the Palmyrene temples as economic institutions militate against the ‘sacred’ and ritual function of the cultic places? In my opinion, study of the cult and the economic issues of the temples is strongly coherent and harmonizes with the worship of the gods. The system outlined in this article was based on people contributing capital and goods to sanctuaries, for such actions kept these places alive. Furthermore, goods like wool, oils, perfumes, animals, and meat were the means of ritual communication with the gods. The wool used for clothes and furniture and oils for anointment were earmarked for the highest in the hierarchy: the deities. The aromas and animals used for sacrifices were pleasing to the gods. Meat was their food. In conclusion, when humans took care of the divine dwellings on earth, the deities became engaged in interaction with them — listening to prayers, banqueting during the festivals, being recalled during celebrations. The matter of how the ancient temples of Palmyra operated beyond their cultic functions is still quite puzzling because of the lack of archives which could deliver more information. However, the sources presented above, when read through a different lens, can offer a glimpse into the administrative and economic organization of the sanctuaries.

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<sup>40</sup> *PAT* 0319; Kaizer 2002, 189–90.

<sup>41</sup> Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 55.

<sup>42</sup> On the case of the dedications with the formula ‘Blessed his name forever’, see Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 145–47.

<sup>43</sup> See Kaizer 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Hemmer de Gudme 2013, 21–30. She points out the connection between votive offerings and the theory of gifts by M. Mauss.

<sup>45</sup> Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 162–76.

<sup>46</sup> North 1990, 3.

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