**Trade and the Ancient Middle East**

**古代中东与贸易**

Trade was the mainstay of the urban economy in the Middle East, as caravans negotiated the surrounding desert, restricted only by access to water and by mountain ranges. This has been so since ancient times, partly due to the geology of the area, which is mostly limestone and sandstone, with few deposits of metallic ore and other useful materials. Ancient demands for obsidian (a black volcanic rock useful for making mirrors and tools) led to trade with Armenia to the north, while jade for cutting tools was brought from Turkistan, and the precious stone lapis lazuli was imported from Afghanistan. One can trace such expeditions back to ancient Sumeria, the earliest known Middle Eastern civilization. Records show merchant caravans and trading posts set up by the Sumerians in the surrounding mountains and deserts of Persia and Arabia, where they traded grain for raw materials, such as timber and stones, as well as for metals and gems.

自从中东地区的商旅们成功跨越周围的戈壁，只有水路和山峦还是障碍时，贸易就成为了中东地区城市经济的主要支柱。这种情况(贸易是主要支柱)从古至今都是如此，一部分原因是中东地区的地质环境——多为沙石和石灰岩，金属矿藏和其它有用材料很少。古代对黑曜石(一种火山岩，可以用来制作镜子和工具)的需求引发了(中东地区)与北方的亚美尼亚之间的贸易;用作切削工具的玉石从土耳其斯坦购买;而稀有贵重的琉璃青金石是从阿富汗地区进口。探险活动最早可以追溯至古苏美尔——已知最早的中东文明。记录显示商队和贸易站由古苏美尔人在周围山区及古波斯和阿拉伯的沙漠地区建立。

Reliance on trade had several important consequences. Production was generally in the hands of skilled individual artisans doing piecework under the tutelage of a master who was also the shop owner. In these shops differences of rank were blurred as artisans and masters labored side by side in the same modest establishment, were usually members of the same guild and religious sect, lived in the same neighborhoods, and often had assumed (or real) kinship relationships. The worker was bound to the master by a mutual contract that either one could repudiate, and the relationship was conceptualized as one of partnership.

过于依赖贸易造成了一些重大影响。生产工作一般在师傅也是店主的监视下，由熟练的工匠计件完成。在这些店铺中，阶级差异并不明显，因为工匠和店主同在一个相对舒适的环境中共事，通常有着相同的宗教信仰，而且又是街坊邻里，彼此之间还很有可能(没准真的)是亲戚关系。工人和店主双方具有劳务关系，任一方都有权终止，这是合作关系中的一种。

This mode of craft production favored the growth of self-governing and ideologically egalitarian craft guilds everywhere in the Middle Eastern city. These were essentially professional associations that provided for the mutual aid and protection of their members, and allowed for the maintenance of professional standards. The growth of independent guilds was furthered by the fact that surplus was not a result of domestic craft production but resulted primarily from international trading; the government left working people to govern themselves, much as shepherds of tribal confederacies were left alone by their leaders. In the multiplicity of small-scale local egalitarian or quasi-egalitarian organizations for fellowship, worship, and production that flourished in this laissez-faire environment, individuals could interact with one another within a community of harmony and ideological equality, following their own popularly elected leaders and governing themselves by shared consensus while minimizing distinctions of wealth and power.

这种生产模式有助于自主管理制度的发展，在中东城市里意识形态上秉持人人平等的手工行会比比皆是。他们实质上是专门提供互助且保护组织成员的协会组织，同时注重维持行业标准。独立行会不断增加，是因为剩余价值的产生并非由于国内生产，而是主要来自于国际间的贸易活动。政府允许劳动人民自主管理，这和部落首领让牧羊者们离群索居一样。在当地，团体、信仰以及生产方面的小型平等主义团体或类似平等主义的组织在这种自由放任的环境里遍地开花，和谐平等的团体中，成员之间相互影响，追随着他们自己选举的领导人，在缩小财富和权力差距的同时通过分享意见进行自我管理。

The mercantile economy was also characterized by a peculiar moral stance that is typical of people who live by trade—an attitude that is individualistic, calculating, risk taking, and adaptive to circumstances. As among tribespeople, personal relationships and a careful weighing of character have always been crucial in a mercantile economy with little regulation, where one's word is one's bond and where informal ties of trust cement together an international trade network. Nor have merchants and artisans ever had much tolerance for aristocratic professions of moral superiority, favoring instead an egalitarian ethic of the open market, where steady hard work, the loyalty of one's fellows, and entrepreneurial skill make all the difference. And, like the pastoralists, Middle Eastern merchants and artisans unhappy with their environment could simply pack up and leave for greener pastures—an act of self-assertion wholly impossible in most other civilizations throughout history.

商品经济也通过靠贸易为生的商人所秉持的特定道德立场表现出来。他们具有独立自主、精于计算、敢于冒险和随遇而安的优秀品质。在部落成员之间，人际关系和对人格的仔细衡量在监管不严的商品经济中至关重要，商品经济里人们出口成契，诚信基础上的非正式联系形成了一个国际贸易网络。从没有商人和工匠对贵族职业的道德优越感如此宽容，这很好地促进了开放市场中的平等主义，人们辛勤工作，忠诚跟随，具备企业家精神非常重要。而且，这和畜牧文明类似，中东的商人和工匠们若对自己所处的环境不满意，简单收拾一下就可迁移到一个更加丰茂的牧场——纵观历史，如此随性而为的行为在其他多数文明中是无法想象的。

Dependence on long-distance trade also meant that the great empires of the Middle East were built both literally and figuratively on shifting sand. The central state, though often very rich and very populous, was intrinsically fragile, since the development of new international trade routes could undermine the monetary base and erode state power, as occurred when European seafarers circumvented Middle Eastern merchants after Vasco da Gama's voyage around Africa in the late fifteenth-century opened up a southern route. The ecology of the region also permitted armed predators to prowl the surrounding barrens, which were almost impossible for a state to control. Peripheral peoples therefore had a great advantage in their dealings with the center, making government authority insecure and anxious.

对远距离贸易的依赖也意味着伟大的中东帝国得以建立在这片飘忽不定却又无比真实的沙土之中。帝国中部尽管非常富足繁盛，但本质上脆弱不堪，因为新的国际贸易线路的出现会动摇经济基础并腐蚀国家权力。就在15世纪晚期达伽马绕过非洲开辟南部航线以后，欧洲的水手们便绕过中东商人改走南部航线了。该地区的生态环境也允许武装“捕食者”在周围的荒漠潜行，几乎很难被帝国控制。外围的人借此得到一个应对中央帝国的绝好机会，这让政府惴惴不安。