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"IRRATIONAL" ELEMENTS IN THE AMARNA TRADE*

Scholars of the Amarna trade did not need (if one will allow the irony) to be acquainted with the *Essai sur le don* by Marcel Mauss¹ to understand that commercial exchange in an archaic society assumes at times the form of an exchange of gifts. The terminology and the mechanisms are so clear that one needs rather the opposite "discovery", namely, that those transactions presented formally as exchange of gifts were in reality trade. Having realized this (and easily at that), the utilization of Amarna data has become fossilized, in the research, in a purely commercial key,² by following, in practice, the shipment of single products, taken out of their general context, as indication of "imports" and "exports", of areas of production and of commercial directions.³ Economic history is thus produced in a very empirical - extrinsic way; no attempt is made at producing global history, in which elements of sociology and psychology, customs and ideology, might be considered together with those of economic interest, so that, specifically, the exchange of gifts of the Amarna Age might be viewed as a manifestation of the activity of man in all of his complex personality, and not only the activity of man as a merchant.

The lesson to be derived from Mauss consists, in effect, not only and not so much in the clarification of what forms economic exchange activity assumed in archaic society, but also and even more, in the indication that the exchange activity, like any other activity, was a "total social phenomenon"—⁴

* "Elementi 'irrazionali' nel commercio amarniano." *OA* 11 (1972) 297-317.

¹ The classic study of M. Mauss, *Essai sur le don*, published in *Année Sociologique*, II série, I (1923-24) pp. 30-186, has subsequently been republished in M. Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, Paris 1950, pp. 143-279 (the following citations refer to this edition), and it is also available in Italian (M. Mauss, *Teoria generale della magia e altri saggi*, Turin 1965, pp. 153-292). My thanks to Prof. V. Grottanelli and to Dr. N. F. Parise for having kindly agreed to read my article before publication.

² The volume of A. Moret - G. Davy, *Des Clans aux Empires*, Paris 1923 (analysis of international relations in the Amarna letters on pp. 324-341), missed a good chance in this respect, all the more so considering the intent, the approach to the methodology, the background and the training of the authors (G. Davy was close to M. Mauss). Perhaps if the volume had been written a few years later, the authors would have been more likely to use the *Argonauts* of Malinowski, 1922, and the *Essai sur le don*. The diplomatic aspects of the Amarna system of the exchange of goods are underlined in V. Korošec's *International Relations according to Cuneiform Reports from Tell el Amarna and Hittite State Archives*, Ljubljana 1950, pp. 346-361 (in Slovene; English summary on pp. 394-395) which, however, contains various misunderstandings both of the general situation and of details.

³ It will be sufficient to re-read chapter 27 ("Handelsprodukte") in W. Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien*, Wiesbaden 1962, pp. 391-460 or the article by D.O. Edzard, "Die Beziehungen Babyloniens und Ägyptens in der mittelbabylonischen Zeit und das Gold," *JESHO*, 3 (1960) pp. 38-55, in order to ascertain how even in the best articles on the subject the data about individual wares have been pulled out of their wider context. To my knowledge, the only observation concerning the non-commercial character of the exchange of presents among kings is the one by A.L. Oppenheim, *Trade in the Ancient Near East, Fifth International Congress of Economic History*, Moscow 1970, p. 14 (offprint); but the position of Oppenheim (that the gifts represent "the pride of the king in the quality of the products of his country, in the techniques of the craftsmen of his palace or in the range of his personal international contacts") seems to me to be excessively unbalanced in a direction opposed to the common one. In a recent fascicle of the new *Cambridge Ancient History*, M.S. Drower, *Syria c. 1550-1400 B. C.*, Part 2, Cambridge 1969, the diplomatic aspects of the exchange of gifts (pp. 6-12) are analyzed on their own apart from trade (pp. 25-39), but without a coherent individuation of their characteristics. [Cf. now C. Zaccagnini, *Lo scambio dei doni nel Vicino Oriente durante i secoli XV-XIII*, Rome 1973.]

⁴ As is well known, the well chosen formula "phénomènes sociaux totaux," is used just at the beginning of *Essai sur le don* (p. 147; p. 274, "faits sociaux totaux"). The importance of this concept is stressed by all the commentaries on Mauss, cf. among others V. Valeri, "Marcel Mauss e la nuova antropologia," *Critica Storica* 5 (1966) pp. 677-709 (pp. 695-699 on the gift); C. Levi-Strauss, "Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss," in *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, cit. pp. XXIII-XXX; J. Cazeneuve, *La*

analyzable to be sure, into its various components, but in such a way that each is always understood as functionally related to the others. The lesson is still useful, still applicable, and quite instructive, for it is clear that a purely commercial reading of the exchange of gifts of the Amarna Age is by no means satisfactory. Obviously, it is unsatisfactory from any point of view other than historico-economic, but it is also unsatisfactory from the historico-economic point of view, which, if considered in a vacuum and apart from its "global" social context, assumes an often disconcerting characterization. The judgement about the "rationality" of the Amarna trade can not be but negative in most cases, if "rationality" comes to be understood in a purely economic sense: in fact, situations are not lacking in which the pursuit of the maximum economic gain with the least effort (thus one can approximately synthesize economic "rationality") seems completely out of the question.⁵ /

This economic "irrationality" cannot as such be understood in purely economic terms, but can in fact be understood by means of an analysis which takes into account the configuration of the Amarna trade as a global social phenomenon, in which the criterion of action is dictated concurrently by economic and non-economic factors (political, religious, psychological, etc.), and is conditioned by custom-bound ideological schemes which overshadow the economic aspect. What is "irrationality" from a narrow point of view and to a superficial level of analysis becomes thus "rationality" through a more profound analysis and a "global" consideration.⁶ We shall analyze in this study some examples which certainly do not exhaust the thematic potential, but which should offer a sufficient perspective for the understanding of Amarna trade as a phenomenon clarifying the complex and existential relationships among social groups.

1. The Exchange of Identical Products.

In a letter⁷ to the *rābišu* of Egypt, the *rābišu* of Alašia (Cyprus) recalls having already sent certain products, including two elephant tusks, and announces the shipment (as a gift for the addressee of the letter) of other objects amongst which was yet another elephant tusk. In soliciting the habitual counter-gift, the *rābišu* of Alašia explicitly asks for a shipment of ivory. One has, therefore, ivory travelling from Cyprus to Egypt in exchange for ivory travelling from Egypt to Cyprus. From a purely economic point of view, this exchange is irrational to the limit: / transportation costs, involving as they do a trip by sea of a messenger-merchant entrusted with delivering the gifts and receiving the counter-gifts, are considerable when viewed in the context of the technology of the period and lead simply to a financial loss in the case of the exchange of ivory against ivory. One more aspect of irrationality, secondary and ancillary, has also often been brought to light—namely, the anti-economical nature of exporting ivory

Sociologia di Mauss, Milan 1971, pp. 165-178 and passim. For a recent application of the concept of "total social facts" (and of Maussian sociology in general) in the environment of the Ancient Near East, cf. J. Bottéro, "Antiquités assyro-babyloniennes," in *École Pratique des Hautes Études, Annuaire 1970-1971*, Paris 1971, pp. 87-116 (especially p. 89).

⁵ "Rationality" and "irrationality" are here employed in the critical (and one can say ironic) sense of M. Godelier, *Rationalité et irrationalité en économie*, II, Paris 1969, pp. 113, 192-209. For the traditional definition of economic rationality see for example P. Diesing, "The Nature and Limitations of Economic Rationality," *Ethics* 61 (1950), p. 12: "Economic rationality, or economizing, consists of the deliberate allocation of scarce means to alternative ends in such a way that the ends are maximized".

⁶ In historicizing economic rationality, namely, in recognizing that every society has its own economic rationality corresponding to the general structure of society in all its various aspects, Godelier clearly depends on the concept of Mauss of "total social fact" (cf. *Rationalité et irrationalité*, cit., p. 205: "nous retrouvons l'idée d'une rationalité plus large, d'une correspondance entre toutes les structures d'un système social, parenté, religion, politique, culture, économie. Il n'existerait donc pas de rationalité proprement économique mais une rationalité globale, totalisante, une rationalité sociale, historique"), even if he does not deem it necessary to have explicit references. Moreover, the weight of extra-economic factors in the commercial transactions and the changing scale of values in the individual societies have been generally acknowledged after Mauss (and not always in direct dependence from him), constituting the basis of a polycentric and realistic economic anthropology, as opposed to a monocentric and normative political economy. Cf. among others R. Firth, *Primitive Polynesian Economy*, London 1939, pp. 2-5; M.J. Herskovits, *Economic Anthropology*, New York 1952, pp. 7-8 and 19-24; etc. See also, from a different point of view, P. Diesing, cit., *Ethics* 61 (1950) pp. 12-26 and the bibliographic indications in M. Godelier, *Rationalité et irrationalité*, cit., I, p. 14.

⁷ EA 40.

from Cyprus, which does not produce it, to Egypt, which by virtue of having access to the vast African reserves is the privileged exporter of this material in the whole area of the Near East.⁸

In point of fact, the exchange does have its own global rationality, if it is recalled that the commercial interpretation is our arbitrary distortion (or at least simplification), and that in reality we have here an exchange of gifts which has as its principal motivation that of stabilizing personal relationships. In this sense, even if the exchange turns out to be useless in terms of mercantile exchange, the intended result will be the establishment of friendly relationships between the two *rābiṣu*'s, "colleagues" in function and partners in the pursuit of commercial exchanges. The amicable relationships established thereby will eventually blossom from a commercial point of view as well: and already in this letter the *rābiṣu* of Cyprus asks for two favors from his Egyptian colleague—to quickly return the ship and the merchant, and to exempt him from customs dues.⁹

One notes, besides, that requesting ivory as a counter-gift serves the Cypriot *rābiṣu* as a counter-balance for the other "irrationality", namely, the exportation of ivory in a direction which is economically inconvenient. In effect, he foregoes for the moment detaining three elephant tusks, but he does it in the expectation (actually, the certainty, within the framework of exchange mechanism) of receiving them in return in greater quantity. It is certainly not a case that the two shipments from Cyprus to Egypt include, besides the ivory, also copper (9 talents in the first shipment, 8 in the second) and timber, two typical Cypriot products of which Egypt is short;¹⁰ on the other hand the request of a counter-gift mentions only ivory which is precisely merchandise more easily available in Egypt but not Cyprus. The exchange is therefore perceived thus: from Cyprus to Egypt copper, timber and (a little) ivory; from Egypt to Cyprus only ivory (but in a measure to compensate for all the Cypriot shipments). The ivory sent / from Cyprus comes to be algebraically eliminated so to speak from the same ivory which travels in the opposite direction, and what remains is an exchange of copper and timber for ivory, an exchange which is faultless in mercantile terms, "rational," considering the resources of the two countries.

It is clear therefore, that the three tusks of ivory sent "counter-current" did not have an economic significance (economically they are cancelled by the restitution of as many tusks), but functioned as catalysts in the establishment of good relations between the two *rābiṣu*.¹¹ At this point it becomes clear why this "error," this "irrationality" was in the explicit intentions of the Cypriot *rābiṣu*: clearly, he had sent ivory not in spite of it being a disadvantageous shipment, but precisely because the shipment was disadvantageous, not in spite of his needing these goods, but precisely because he had need of this merchandise. It is prestigious to be able to send a particularly rare and precious commodity, and a sort of stimulus, of provocation to obtain the same commodity in exchange¹²: if the *rābiṣu* of Alashiya has

⁸ To demonstrate how far can lead a mistaken analysis of these relationships it is enough to see how the notion of the "exportation" of ivory from Alashiya to Egypt (not only in EA 40 but also in the annals of Thutmose III) has long been considered a proof against the identification of Alashiya with Cyprus, beginning with G. A. Wainwright, "Alashia=Alasa; and Asy," *Klio*, 14 (1915) pp. 2-3 and 17, and all the way up to fairly recent authors. For a balanced re-examination of the problem see now I. Vincentelli, "Alashiya, per una storia di Cipro nell'età del bronzo," forthcoming in *Biblioteca di Antichità Cypriote* [3 (1976) pp. 10 and 15].

⁹ EA 40, 16-20 and 24-28.

¹⁰ See I. Vincentelli, *Alashiya*, cit. [pp. 20-22, 26 and 27].

¹¹ The exchanges of identical products in primitive societies (cf. R. Firth, *Primitive Polynesian Economy*, cit., p. 316) generally has not an economic but rather a social motivation, i.e., they take place on particular occasions (for example marriage). Cf. also M. Sahlins, "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange," *The Relevance of the Models for Social Anthropology*, London 1965, p. 148: "Perfectly balanced reciprocity, the simultaneous exchange of the same type of goods to the same amounts, is not only conceivable but ethnographically attested in certain material transactions, friendship compacts, and peace agreements". See also the sociological formulation of A.W. Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement": *American Sociological Review* 25 (1960) p. 172.

¹² Cf. (in a more complete and institutionalized manner) the "solicitory gifts" of the *kaributu* type in the Melanesian *kula*: B. Malinowski, "Kula: The Circulating Exchange of Valuables in the Archipelagoes of Eastern New Guinea," *Man* 51 (1920) pp. 97-105, republished in G. Dalton (ed.), *Primitive and Peasant Economies*, Garden City, New York 1967, p. 174 (the later citations refer to this edition); id., *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, London 1922, pp. 99, 354-55; resumed by M. Mauss, cit., p. 186. The

foregone, in favor of / his "colleague," his "brother," the possibility of detaining the ivory which for him is so precious, his colleague will not hold back from sending in exchange still more ivory (as it is explicitly requested) and even in a larger measure, corresponding to the lessor scarcity of the product in Egypt.¹³ The behavior of the Cypriot *rābišu* at this point seems clear and "rational" to me: he exchanges copper and timber for ivory, thereby stimulating the mechanism of the exchange by means of the shipment of the very material of which he has greater need, and at the same time firming up the friendly relations which are necessary for a correct follow-up of the exchange (actual shipment of the counter-gift which begins to be late; a faster rhythm of the trip; customs exemptions).

The case now analyzed is the most explicit and the most articulate, but certainly is not unique. If in most cases the material which made up the gifts was selected amongst those most rare (and therefore most precious) in the country of destination and not in that of origin, we also have opposite cases in which the materials travel "counter-current" (in the sense seen above for the Cypriot ivory) and therefore they do not represent an economically rational act in the complex balance of the Amarna commerce.¹⁴

Thus, EA 13, a list of gifts sent from Babylon to Egypt, frequently includes gold and one time ebony,¹⁵ two products which characterize the flow in the opposite direction. ¹⁶ Also the materials sent from Mitanni to Egypt frequently include gold and sometimes also ebony; one has notice of it both from letters of Tušratta¹⁷ and from two long lists of gifts.¹⁸ In quite a similar / way, even if in the opposite direction, the list of gifts sent from Egypt to Babylonia includes objects of silver and copper, metals certainly more rare in Egypt, obtained prevalently as imports from Asia, and even an object of lapis lazuli¹⁹ material which travels typically from Mesopotamia (Babylonia, Mitanni) to Egypt.²⁰ Just as anomalous are the requests for lapis lazuli made by Šuppiluliuma and by Tušratta to Egypt.²¹

character of challenge of the gift, and the consequent obligation for a major restitution, was studied by M. Mauss, "Une forme ancienne de contrat chez les Thraces," *Revue des Études Grecques*, 34 (1921) p. 391 (on the episode of Glaucos and Diomedes). About "solicitory gifts" see now M. Sahlins, "Exchange-Value and the Diplomacy of Primitive Trade," in *Essays in Economic Anthropology*, Seattle 1965 (= *Proceedings of the 1965 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society*), pp. 110-11. Equally "challenging," but in an opposite sense, is the shipment of a small quantity of a commodity that the partner has requested but has not yet earned by means of adequate counter-gifts, like the sword of KBo I 14 (studied in this sense by C. Zaccagnini, "KBo I 14 e il "monopolio" hittita del ferro," *RSO* 45 (1970), pp. 14-16) or the 500 shekels of copper of EA 35. The partner must understand in this case, beyond the official excuses (the unfavorable season of KBo I 14, the pestilence of EA 35), that the material requested is effectively available, but will be shipped in a quantity proportional to the amount of the counter-gifts. This mechanism recalls under several aspects (especially the delaying function) the "intermediary gifts" of the *basi* type in the Melanesian *kula* (B. Malinowski, *Argonauts*, cit., pp. 98, 355-356; taken up by M. Mauss, cit., p. 184), which, however, derives from the momentary non-availability of an adequate counter-gift, and not (as in our case) from considering inadequate the gift received in comparison with the counter-gift requested.

¹³ A.W. Gouldner, *The Norm of Reciprocity*, cit., p. 171 notes: "The value of the benefit and hence the debt is in proportion to and varies with - among other things - ... the resources of the donor ("he gave although he could ill afford it") . . .".

¹⁴ Considered statistically in its complex, the Amarna trade is all in all fairly rational from a mercantile point of view, so that it corresponds to what was maintained for example by J. N. Keynes. *The Scope and Theory of Political Economy*, 1904, pp. 119-24 (quoted after P. Diesing, cit., *Ethics* 61 (1950) p. 14), that in long term expectations based on a large number of cases the economist may neglect the extra-economic elements. This does not, naturally, take away from the fact that in the analysis of single commercial acts and in their examination from a global, social point of view, not programmatically restricted to the economic aspect, the irrational "dross" has a pre-eminent interest.

¹⁵ EA 13, 27.

¹⁶ For the gold see D.O. Edzard, cit., *JESHO* 3 (1960) pp. 38-55; for ebony see B. Landsberger, "Assyriologische Notizen, III," *WO* 1/5 (1950) p. 369 (on the provenience from Egypt); A. Salonen, *Die Möbel des Alten Mesopotamien*, Helsinki 1963, p. 226 (for the meaning "ebony" of *ḫṣ*).

¹⁷ EA 17, 42-43; EA 19, 80-83; EA 20, 81-82; EA 81, 37 (always gold).

¹⁸ EA 22 (gold: *passim*; ebony: I 34, II 49, III 6, III 22); EA 23 (gold: *passim*; ebony: III 46). In EA 22 it is symptomatic with what accuracy Tušratta specifies the weight of every part in gold (vs. the ease with which in EA 14, II 33-34, of Egyptian origin, only the total of gold sent is given).

¹⁹ EA 14, II 9.

²⁰ Cf. D.O. Edzard, cit., *JESHO* 3 (1960) pp. 52-54.

²¹ EA 41, 27; EA 26, 39; EA 27, 22.

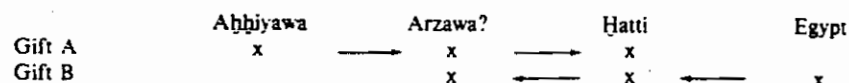
In some of the letters of Tušratta (EA 19 and EA 20) the function of these "counter-current" gifts does not seem dissimilar from that characterized in the Alashian letter analyzed at the beginning: indeed, the letters contain urgent requests for Egyptian gold, that gold which in Egypt is as abundant "as dust" (this is the recurring expression) and which in Mitanni, on the other hand, is lacking. The fact that these requests were accompanied by "stimulating" gifts including also some quantity of gold, is "irrational" on an economically abstract plain, but agrees well with the aim of provoking the reaction of the prestige mechanism outlined above.

But the most general case of objects of gold and ebony which come from Mesopotamia to Egypt or of objects of silver and of lapis lazuli which come from Egypt to Mesopotamia, included in long lists of bridal gifts, do not evidently belong in this particular mechanism of stimulation, showing only an aspect of economic irrationality (very modest, perhaps) which consists in "counter-current" shift. It is to be imagined, in practice, that this ebony which Tušratta gives as a present to Amenophis IV was of Egyptian origin (namely, part of previous shipments of Amenophis III or IV to Tušratta, or maybe of older gifts), and thus also that this lapis lazuli which Amenophis IV gave as a present to Burnaburiaš was of Asiatic origin, and had perhaps already passed through the hands of the Babylonian king. Therefore these precious objects were not "commercial items under the form of gifts," but really and simply gifts. The gift in these instances is not a mechanism for carrying out the exportation of an object from the country in which it is produced and is abundant toward the country which lacks it; the gift is an end in itself.²² The object acquires worth inasmuch as it is given, not inasmuch as it is acquired; one can perhaps say that it had the function of being given and not that of being acquired, if it is the same object passing from one court to the other, returning sometimes to its point / of departure.²³ One thinks of the letter of a Hittite king (probably Hattušili III) to a king perhaps of Arzawa, where one speaks of a *bibrū* of silver and one of gold sent as a gift from the king of Egypt to the Hittite king and from this last sent to the addressee of the letter, perhaps (but the text is not clear on this point) in exchange for a gift which the king to whom the letter is addressed had in turn received from the king of Ahhiyawa.²⁴ We are not very far—basically—from those Melanesian mechanisms in which necklaces of red shell discs circulate in a clockwise direction, "exchanged" for bracelets of white shell which travel in the opposite direction:²⁵ objects which are kept by someone only as a stopping station, in the expectation of being

²² Cf. in M.J. Herkovits, *Economic Anthropology*, cit., p. 180 the definition of trade ("... when objects are exchanged with the primary aim of obtaining commodities, rather than to sustain or increase the prestige of the giver") contrasted with the exchange of gifts of ceremonial type. The contrast is also accepted by M. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, London 1956, p. 71 for the Homeric world.

²³ B. Malinowski, *Kula*, cit., p. 175; id., *Argonauts*, cit., p. 94; cf. in general M.J. Herkovits, *Economic Anthropology*, cit., p. 162 on the types of exchanges in which "objects pass from one partner to another in many different local groups and may be retained only temporarily" (cf. also Mauss, cit., p. 180). For the Greek world cf. L. Gernet, "La notion mythique de la valeur en Grèce" (1948), *Anthropologie de la Grèce antique*, Paris 1968, pp. 100-104 ("le trépied des Sept Sages," which at the end of the circulation is returned to the point of departure).

²⁴ KBo II 11, Rs. 11-17; transcribed and translated by A. Sommer, *Die Ahhiyawa-Urkunden*, München 1932, pp. 242-243; recently studied by C. Zaccagninni, cit., RSO 45 (1970) p. 15; on *bibrū* as "Rhyton in Vogelgestalt" cf. AHw p. 125 and CAD B, pp. 222-223. If my interpretation of the text is exact (I regard lines 11-12 as an allusion to a promise on the part of the king—the addressee, to send to Hattušili a gift received from the king of Ahhiyawa, to which Hattušili answers by sending in fact a gift received from the king of Egypt) one would have the following scheme:



It should also be recalled that in EA 14, 39-41 two *bibrū* of silver go as gifts from Hatti to Egypt (on the Amarna passage, and on the Anatolian documentation relative to *bibrū* cf. H. Ehelolf, "Zu Amarna Knudtzon Nr. 29, 184 und 41, 39ff," ZA 45 (1939) pp. 71-73).

²⁵ B. Malinowski, *Argonauts*, cit., 81-83, 93 and passim; id., *Kula*, cit., p. 172 (and the map on p. 177); M. Mauss, cit., pp. 178-179. On the mechanism of the *kula*, see especially subsequent to the fundamental studies of Malinowski, J.P. Singh Uberoi, *Politics of the Kula Ring*, Manchester 1962 (bibliography *ibid.*, pp. 2-4).

ultimately forwarded as part of the cycle of exchanges; exchanges which have the sole function of taking place, i.e., have the function of keeping alive the social relations.²⁶ /

2. The Differentiation of Levels

In a situation, wholly hypothetical and abstract, in which exchange be based on an exclusively economic rationality, it would be presumed that any object or merchandise might be exchanged for any other object or merchandise, obviously on the basis of a computation of the respective value of the merchandise in such a way that the quantities be considered equivalent. A purely economical assessment means in substance that one loses the notion of what a given object or material really is (that is, what is its meaning in the comprehensive symbolical-cultural system of the society in which it is found), maintaining only the notion of how much it is worth; one renounces to any qualitative appraisal that is not reducible to a quantitative assessment (of "price," when there is a monetary or paramonetary mechanism of some type). In point of fact this situation is purely abstract, and does not seem apt to take place; in the reality of things any system of exchange is subject to non-economic assessments—of a religious, emotional, political, or cultural character—which inhibit the exchange of certain objects for others considered to be of a diverse character, when they do not totally prevent the introduction of certain objects into the commercial process. In particular, the feeling is diffuse that certain things (by reason of symbolic implications) cannot be "sold" and can only be "given," and that on the contrary other things can only be sold and not given: people who would consider it absurd (socially undesirable, or morally reproachable) to reciprocally sell objects which are customarily given reciprocally, consider it at the same time totally obvious to sell reciprocally other types of goods which are not part of the system of gifts.

Thus, two (or more) separate levels of exchange are established, differentiated according to the prestige (namely to symbolic implications) of the objects exchanged and of consequence differentiated also in the procedure of exchange. The phenomenon is particularly institutionalized (and has been particularly studied) in some Melanesian, Polynesian, and African societies, where the differentiated levels are numerous, and the impermeability from one level to another seems to be rather rigid.²⁷ But the phenomenon of the differentiation / of levels, in their general lines and in its simpler form of separation of a "ceremonial level" from one "of subsistence," is certainly fairly diffuse, and in fact totally normal. The differentiated characterization of levels (which produces a hindrance to the "free" commercial circulation, according to the canons of an economy alienated from the social context) takes place not only according to the type of objects exchanged, but also according to the status of the

²⁶ The stereotyped and "irrational" relations of the *kula* are really also occasions of real and proper trade relations, economically "rational" and based on barter (*gimwali*), cf. B. Malinowski, *Kula*, cit., p. 183; id., *Argonauts*, cit., pp. 83, 189-190, 361-364; M. Mauss, cit., pp. 177 and 185; R.F. Fortune, *Sorcerers of Dobu*, London 1932, pp. 206-207; J.P. Singh Uberoi, *Politics*, cit., pp. 148-157. Cf. also M.J. Herkovits, *Economic Anthropology*, cit., p. 194 on the participation in the commercial expeditions of persons who had nothing to exchange; and P. Bohannan-G. Dalton, Introduction, in *Markets in Africa*, Evanston, Illinois 1962, pp. 15-19 ("Non-economic aspects of market places").

²⁷ The differentiation of levels, already noted and utilized in part by B. Malinowski and by M. Mauss (cf. for example pp. 176-177 on the difference between ceremonial *kula* and commercial *gimwali*; pp. 214-215 on the difference between "les objets de consommation et de vulgaire partage" and "les choses précieuses de la famille"), subsequently became a common acquisition; cf. for example R. Firth, *Primitive Polynesian Economy*, cit., pp. 340-341; M.J. Herkovits, *Economic Anthropology*, cit., chapter VIII and IX; for a critical discussion cf. M. Sahlins, "Political Power and the Economy in Primitive Society," in G. Dole - R. Carneiro (eds.), *Essays in the Science of Culture in Honor of Leslie A. White*, New York 1960, pp. 390-415. Considerable expansion to this concept is found in the more recent works of, on the one hand, R.F. Salisbury, *From Stone to Steel, Economic Consequences of a Technical Change in New Guinea*, Melbourne-London-New York 1962, pp. 39-111 and 198-204 (taken up and commented upon by M. Godelier, "Economie politique et anthropologie économique," *L'Homme* 3 (1964) pp. 118-132); and on the other hand by P. Bohannan, "Some Principles of Exchange and Investment among the Tiv," *American Anthropologist* 57 (1955) pp. 60-69; id., "The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy," *Journal of Economic History* 19 (1959) pp. 491-503, republished in G. Dalton, *Tribal and Peasant Economies*, cit., pp. 123-135 (on the differentiation in levels ["spheres"] cf. pp. 124-127); id., *Tiv Economy*, London 1968, pp. 227-233; id., G. Dalton, *Markets in Africa*, cit., pp. 4-5, 10-11.

persons who carry out the exchange,²⁸ and according to the mode in which the exchange can happen. In essence, there is a whole series of extra-economic factors, ascribable to the "total social" character of the exchange, which influences the very economic substance of the exchange.

It is particularly worth noting that in the systems of differentiated levels the computation of the price (and eventually the presence of a non-ceremonial monetary system, for example, the one introduced from the western world) characterizes the lower level, reserved for goods of subsistence, while at the ceremonial level, reserved for objects of ancient and symbolic consolidated prestige, one can only speak of "equivalence" and the tone of the negotiation excludes an explicit merchandising.²⁹ Also, the exchange of women, in the limits in which this is part of the general exchange of gifts, is part of a specific level, being accompanied by an exchange (or in general by a long series of exchanges) of gifts of a well-defined typology:³⁰ and normally the specific level of the exchange of women is that of maximum prestige.³¹

A similar set of problems may be usefully applied to the Amarna trade to avoid giving a flat assessment in that sense of abstractness which was mentioned at the beginning—as if everything could be exchanged for everything, putting aside the symbolical or emotional evaluations, with a simple computation of value; in short, as if the exchange of gifts was the international commerce of the age, or as if all international commerce of the age took place with the ceremony of the exchange of gifts.³² On the contrary, it appears rather clearly that there is a subdivision in two levels which are kept substantially separate (even if probably without a precise institutionalization or awareness on the part of the participants). There is a level of prestige, characterized by the status of the partners, by the type of objects exchanged, by the form of the exchange; and there is a level which is more properly commercial which has different protagonists, different objects and different modalities.³³

a) The Use of Silver

The most effective way to analyze the differentiation of the levels seems to be that of identifying the position of silver, whose function as "money," i.e., as a standard of value and as an intermediary

²⁸ The influence of the rank of the partners on the modality of the exchange had already been noted by B. Malinowski and by M. Mauss (see for example p. 176 on the fact that the *kula* is reserved to chiefs); but it has been put into major prominence more recently, see above all M. Sahlins, *On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange*, cit., pp. 144ff.; R. Firth, "Economics of the Gift," in R. Firth (ed.), *Themes in Economic Anthropology*, London 1967, pp. 12-13.

²⁹ For the distinction between "price" and "equivalency" see K. Polanyi in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, Glencoe, Ill., 1957, p. 262; for the respective application to levels of sustenance and of prestige, see P. Bohannon, *Tiv Economy*, cit., p. 228-230; see also the assessment by L. Gernet, "Droit et prédroit" (1951), in *Anthropologie de la Grèce antique*, cit., pp. 182-183 of passages such as Her. I 69-70 and III 139-140 in which one gives as a gift objects which one refuses to sell.

³⁰ Cf. for example R. Firth, *Primitive Polynesian Economy*, cit., p. 323. The study of mechanisms of exchange of gifts as part of a general exchange of services among social groups has been particularly developed by C. Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, Paris 1967, *passim*. For the Homeric world cf. M. Finley, "Marriage, Sale and Gift in Homeric Greece," *RIDA* 2 (1955) pp. 167-194. Cf. also G. Dalton, "'Bridewealth' versus 'Brideprice'," *American Anthropologist* 68 (1966) pp. 732-738.

³¹ On the connections between women and goods of prestige cf. for example P. Bohannon, *Tiv Economy*, cit., p. 231; R.F. Salisbury, *From Stone to Steel*, cit., p. 189; G. Dupré and P. Ph. Rey, "Réflexions sur la pertinence d'une théorie de l'histoire des échanges," *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, 16 (1969) pp. 149-150.

³² This seems to me to be the current opinion; the analysis of Amarna commerce is nevertheless at such a low level that one never finds an explicit statement of the approach chosen (i.e. the problem has not been pointed out up till now). In any case, the notion of differentiated levels appears to me to have been completely disregarded even in more recent studies.

³³ In this article the typology of objects exchanged at the two levels will not be analytically examined, for on this point (and in general on the whole mechanism of exchange of gifts in the Amarna Age) there is in preparation a fuller monograph by C. Zaccagnini, where all the documentation will be organically systematized and discussed. It will be sufficient to note—as an obvious observation as soon as the problem is posed—that the ceremonial level, working with the mechanism of gifts, is reserved for objects not strictly utilitarian, fitting to storage of wealth, which are not consumed (or are consumed slowly); the lower commercial level is reserved for materials destined for consumption or for transformation. This is the classic distinction in situations of this type. For a typology of goods according to differentiated levels see among others R.F. Salisbury, *From Stone to Steel*, cit., pp. 196-198. For the archaic Greek world cf. M. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, cit., p. 65; the gifts of prestige are usually things that are not used (and are therefore not consumed), they are only kept (to subsequently give them as gifts on a later occasion); and see also L. Gernet, *La notion mythique de la valeur*, cit., pp. 95-99.

(provisional, neutral) means of exchange is notoriously diffuse in the Amarna Age.³⁴ / This entails, naturally weighed silver,³⁵ not objects of wrought silver (these enter into the category of precious objects, not into that of "money").³⁶ Now it is evident that the silver-"money" does not ever intervene in the exchange of prestige objects among kings of equal rank. Not only no shipment of payment in silver for gifts of prestige is concretely affected but valuations in silver of goods exchanged are not even made. One renounces thus in an "irrational" way, to a convenient means of adjustment in the complex rates of value between objects exchanged, however heterogenous they may be one with respect to the other. If we keep in mind the difficult negotiations carried on to balance to the satisfaction of both partners the gifts sent in one direction with the gifts sent in the opposite direction, one cannot avoid the impression that the recourse to paying in silver for squaring the account would have greatly facilitated the mechanism. If in this type of exchange one did not resort to this solution (an obvious solution common at a properly commercial level) that means that reasons of style, of prestige, namely extra-economic reasons, did not permit it. The reticence to mix in silver in this type of exchange reached the point that the value of the things sent as gifts is never explicitly given (a valuation which was usually computed at the administrative and mercantile level); nevertheless, one is very careful to provide all the / elements (type and weight of various materials employed in single objects) which permit the consignee to arrive *by himself* and *tacitly* at the necessary computation of the value;³⁷ it is not a rare instance where a disputation arises (also of a resentful tone) over the valuation of the weight (and therefore the value) of the objects sent. The exchange is therefore accurately balanced as to the economic value (translatable in value in silver), but is not considered "elegant" that this balance should become the matter of overt calculations. To compare lapis lazuli to gold and horses to ivory, each party had to make the reckoning in silver, without letting it be seen explicitly.

However, silver plays a part several times in the letters of Alalakh. In one of these the king of Alalakh, in bringing up the issue of copper provisions for Pharaoh, explicitly asks for "silver in large quantities," i.e., he asks to be paid;³⁸ and in another letter there is an analogous request even though the merchandise is not explicitly named (but it must be copper in this case too, since we are dealing with Alalakh).³⁹ In another passage the same king of Alalakh asks Pharaoh to be paid for some timber sent previously.⁴⁰ Finally, in a letter (unfortunately broken) found at Ugarit it seems that the king of Alalakh pays in silver for a shipment of Ugaritic olive oil.⁴¹ It is immediately apparent that the use of silver in

³⁴ It is necessary to give a brief clarification on the use of the term "money" in this context. It has been indicated by K. Polanyi ("The Semantics of Money Uses" [1957], in G. Dalton (ed.), *Primitive Archaic and Modern Economies, Essays of Karl Polanyi*, Garden City, N. Y., 1968, pp. 175-203; id. in *Trade and Market*, cit., pp. 264-266; cf. the evaluation of S.C. Humphreys, "History, Economics and Anthropology: the Work of Karl Polanyi," *History and Theory*, 8 [1969], pp. 182-184) and subsequently / developed also by P. Bohannon (*The Impact of Money*, cit., pp. 123-124) and by G. Dalton ("Primitive Money," *American Anthropologist*, 67 [1965], pp. 44-65 [= *Tribal and Peasant Economies*, cit., pp. 254-281]; P. Bohannon and G. Dalton, *Markets in Africa*, cit., pp. 11-12), that only the "general-purpose money" of the western world covers a whole series of functions (means of exchange; mode of payment; standard of values; storage of wealth, etc.) which the "limited-purpose monies" of the primitive or archaic societies fulfill only partially. In this perspective, in the Amarna environment to which this article is limited, the ceremonial uses of exchange and storage of wealth are fulfilled with objects of prestige such as lapis lazuli, bronze cauldrons, etc., (and it is legitimate to compare these objects of prestige to certain primitive "money" of the type of the conch shells of the *kula*); on the contrary weighed silver fulfills a practical and non-ceremonial use (computation of values) and is therefore rather comparable to the computation of "prices" (cf. note 29) which in primitive societies characterizes the level of sustenance. There is, therefore, no contradiction but only a diverse terminological usage between the prestige of primitive pseudo-coinage and the lack of prestige of Near Eastern silver.

³⁵ In the Near Eastern societies of the Late Bronze Age, besides a concrete (but limited) circulation of weighed silver, one has (and more frequently) simply a system of credit registration, based on the computation in silver of the value of merchandise.

³⁶ Objects of wrought silver inserted into the system of exchange of gifts: EA 13, rev. 3, 6, 9-13; EA 14 I 39, 48-49, 52, 57, 59, 67, II 12, 35-55, 57-59, 60-63, 65, 71, 73, III 4; EA 22, I 8-9, 11, 45, 47, II 55, III 4, 11-12, 14-15, 18, 21-23, 42-43, 58, IV 9; EA 25, II 53, 55-56, 58, 65-73, III 12-15, 64-65, 68-70, IV 1-2, 4-5, 9, 22-23, 25, 30-32, 36; EA 41, 40-42.

³⁷ Cf. M. Sahlins, *Exchange-value*, cit., p. 102 and passim.

³⁸ EA 35, 19-22 and 43-44. A free translation is found in A. L. Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia*, London-Chicago 1967, pp. 120-22.

³⁹ EA 37, 18.

⁴⁰ EA 35, 27-29.

⁴¹ *Ugaritica V*, pp. 80-83 (n. 21).

such cases can only confirm the distinction between the commercial level and the level of prestige. For the king of Alašia, who still has relations with Pharaoh at the level of exchange of gifts, uses the payment procedure only in the case of raw material, that is of utilitarian material of a non-prestigious nature, raw and not fabricated. Moreover, in the case of timber the king of Alašia maintains that his own people urge him to obtain the payment:⁴² the true commercial character (not of exchange of gifts among kings), and the common, non-ceremonial level in which the transaction is set is made clearer yet by the above.

In the exchange among kings of equal status, the use of silver is thus excluded from the ceremonial level reserved for gifts of prestige, and occurs only when the negotiations are of a commercial character and regard consumer goods. Analogously (and so much more) the silver is used when a king deals with an / interlocutor of unequal rank⁴³ (or inferior: in general a palace functionary) and always in regard to merchandise of utilitarian character. A good example of it is a letter from the prefect (*šaknu*) of Qadeš to the king of Ugarit,⁴⁴ from which is reconstructed the following sequence of commercial relations: bronze (or copper) and tin come from Ugarit to Qadeš in exchange for donkeys which go in the opposite direction (and there is considerable controversy about the weight of the metal); then too sheep and various commodities go from Qadeš to Ugarit, and money is requested in exchange. This, as one can see, is by no means a context of elegant court dealings—raw metals and beasts are not gifts endowed with a symbolic prestige but rather goods of a utilitarian value, the correspondents are of an unequal rank, the deal is presented without circumlocutions, the comparative calculations are awkwardly explicit, silver is used. Another case in which the king of Ugarit handles silver⁴⁵ is to be understood in quite a similar framework: his interlocutor is of a different rank (the *ḫuburtanuri* of Karkemiš), and therefore the horse (even though a horse of great value) can simply be paid for in silver (200 shekels of silver, a considerable sum),⁴⁶ without having to resort to the ceremonial of equivalent gifts.

Silver comes much more into play when both interlocutors are of non-royal status: between two functionaries of different palaces the exchanges take place with great ease, the merchandise can be paid for fully or in part (with the addition of gifts). It may be possible to identify two slightly different situations, according to whether the two functionaries are of comparable rank (by position or age or at any rate authority) and are considered "brothers," or whether they are of uneven rank and are considered "father" and "son." There are two examples of the first alternative. There is the exchange between Zulannu and the prefect (*šaknu*) of Ugarit, who are "brothers":⁴⁷ Zulannu sends merchandise which is utilitarian but of a certain value (an iron sword, a robe, a mare with a rider, and promises a mule and a suit of clothes) and requests in exchange much gold (that is a true payment) and also counter-gifts (lapis lazuli and a bronze cauldron). There is, in quite analogous a fashion, the exchange between Piḫa-Tešub and the prefect of Ugarit:⁴⁸ in exchange for a mare 30 shekels of silver and a / bronze cauldron are requested. Indicative of the second alternative is the exchange of a certain Yabin-

⁴² EA 35, 27-28: "the people of my land murmur against me." By declaring himself compelled by third parties (or by public opinion) and therefore not in a position to compromise, the king of Alašia conducts the negotiations from a psychologically strong position, cf. T. C. Schelling, "An Essay on Bargaining," *American Economic Review*, 46 (1956) pp. 282-287 (Bargaining power: the power to bind oneself).

⁴³ On the unevenness of the reciprocity relationship resulting from the respective rank of the partners (as also of other elements) see the studies of M. Sahlins and R. Firth cited in note 28, and also A.W. Gouldner, *The Norm of Reciprocity*, cit., pp. 164-65 and *passim*.

⁴⁴ *Ugaritica* V, pp. 117-120 (No. 38). On this text cf. C. Zaccagnini "Note sulla terminologia metallurgica di Ugarit," *OA* 9 (1970) pp. 322-24.

⁴⁵ *PRU* III, p. 41 (RS 16.180).

⁴⁶ On the usual price of a horse at Ugarit, Nuzi, Ḫattuša (about 20-35 shekels of silver) see M. Heltzer, "The Goods and Prices in the Ugarit Trade" (in Russian), *Palestinski Sbornik* 19 (1969), pp. 12 and 27.

⁴⁷ *PRU* VI n. 6; on this text see C. Zaccagnini, cit., *RSO* 45 (1970) p. 20 (addendum). Zulannu must be a Hittite functionary (from Ḫattuša or from Karkemiš), to judge from his name and from the merchandise sent.

⁴⁸ *PRU* VI n.7B. In this case too the name is fitting to a Hittite functionary, as is the merchandise sent. The gifts requested are also indicative of trade going in the direction from Ugarit to Ḫatti (for the lapis lazuli see *PRU* IV, pp. 221-25, for bronze see *PRU* IV, pp. 231-232).