

Urban elites and business in the Greek part of the Roman Empire

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In the lively debate provoked by Moses Finley's *The Ancient Economy* no consensus has been reached on the nature of economic life in antiquity. In particular, while none deny the primacy of agriculture, the place of manufacture and commerce – or 'business' – is vigorously disputed.

One characteristic of the debate has been the regular recourse to historical comparison. Finley's polemic is directed in the first place at Rostovtzeff's assumption that the difference between ancient and modern economies was quantitative rather than qualitative.¹ In addition, his assertion of 'the low status of the professional traders and manufacturers throughout Roman history'² is built at least in part on a contrast between the imperial and urban elites of antiquity and the commercial bourgeoisie of the Italian and Flemish city-Republics of the late middle ages and early modern period – who 'nestled into town government'.³

John d'Arms' critique (1977) (1981) of Finley leans on a comparison of the mentalities of the Roman imperial nobility and the French nobility of the eighteenth century. His observation that in the French case a contempt for 'business' coexisted with a commercial bourgeoisie encouraged him to believe that in the Roman Empire similar negative views were compatible with the existence of a commercial bourgeoisie in the localities and at least indirect involvement in trade at the highest level of Roman society.

Paul Veyne, for whom the great break lies in the nineteenth century, which experienced 'a phenomenon of growth of quite unprecedented dimensions',⁴ attacks the assumption that the absence of a commercial bourgeoisie is necessarily a sign that business was of marginal significance in Rome in comparison with other pre-industrial societies. In his view – and I accept his argument – it points to a difference in the organization of society, to a lack of correspondence between social classes and economic activities, more precisely to the permanent availability of slaves and free dependents (freedmen in particular) for the

execution of commercial enterprises (Veyne (1979) espec. 277–8), rather than to a fundamental difference in the dimensions of the non-agrarian sector. Both Veyne and d'Arms seem to imply that the reductionists/'primitivists' may have made pre-modern Western Europe too modern and antiquity too primitive.

The attempt to make a meaningful comparison of the size of the 'non-agricultural sector' in ancient and later pre-industrial societies is vitiated by the lack of quantitative data for (at least) the former. It is true that Jones considered that late imperial data are adequate to establish a precise ratio (95 per cent: 5 per cent) between the contribution of agricultural and non-agricultural enterprise to the state revenues and the wealth of the Empire. But the argument is weak, resting as it does on extremely scanty evidence, returns for the 'trade tax' (*collatio lustralis*, chrysargyron) from Edessa and for the land tax from two Egyptian cities (Jones (1964) 465). One of the many objections that could be raised is that the tax was bypassed by small men through the operation of *patrocinium*,⁵ and by the landed elite through what I think was the common practice of investing in business through the intermediary of slaves, freedmen and perhaps other free dependents. Urban aristocrats did not themselves act as *negotiatores* (cf. *C. Th.* XIII 1.4 A D 362), but if they did business through dependents, and moreover presented this as trade in the products of their own estates, they could easily escape the chrysargyron.⁶

Meanwhile the impropriety of arguing back from Late Empire to Principate on the basis of such evidence needs no stress. One consideration that must be borne in mind is that the chrysargyron operated precisely in a period in which the number and prosperity of urban craftsmen and traders was seriously reduced.

Finally, even if we were attracted by Jones' argument, we would still need comparable material from other societies to produce a case for the relatively small size of the business sector in the Roman Empire.

The most interesting method currently used to assess the level of trade and commerce in the Roman Empire is that of the model, as employed by Keith Hopkins. Particularly noteworthy is his argument that, in order to be able to continue paying taxes in money, the tax-exporting provinces (especially Asia Minor and Greece) must have exported goods and products to the tax-receiving areas (Italy and frontier provinces).⁷ In this way he establishes a link between taxation and the growth of long-distance trade.

Though Hopkins perhaps underestimated the amount of tax levied in kind under the Principate, I agree that some coinage must have been

earned back, for example, by the sale of requisitioned grain to the army and the export of textiles, marble⁸ and similar luxuries. Hopkins also posits an important interregional trade in staple foods like corn (to which may be added wine and oil) in addition to the transport of tax-corn, a huge redistributive operation. In the end, however, he sticks to the overall picture painted by Sombart, Weber and Finley:⁹ the monetary commercial economy is merely a thin veneer spread over a large subsistence economy; the ancient city was not a Hanse-city, a city which produced wealth by exporting its articles, but remained a consumer city, one which served its own elite who paid for whatever goods they required with the surplus taken from the peasants in the form of rents. Hopkins apparently does not believe that we can even begin to close the gap between Roman cities and medieval and post-medieval European cities. On that matter I have three points:

1. It is perhaps not correct that the (post-) medieval cities in general were characterized by the regular opposition of 'commercial burghers' and 'rural aristocracy';¹⁰ this may be valid for the period of the *rise* of the medieval cities but not necessarily for the period of full-grown urbanism; and it is that which should be compared with the situation in the Roman Empire.

2. It is not correct to assume that all medieval and post-medieval cities were invariably 'producer-cities' on the Hanseatic model.

3. There may be room for a fruitful comparison between (a-typical) Hanse-cities and (a-typical) large harbour-cities in the Roman Empire.

Useful as the comparative approach may be, in the end the relative unimportance of trade is supposed to be shown by the absence of a prestigious class of urban merchants, a bourgeoisie. In this respect Hopkins joins Finley and the Weberian ranks are closed again. As I said above, the absence of an urban bourgeoisie does not necessarily reflect the backwardness of trade and manufacture, but rather a different organization of society, a different social structure. In other words, with Paul Veyne I believe it to be not improbable that the level of business did not differ decisively as between Roman and later societies, and that the contribution to this branch of the economy by the Roman urban aristocracy, largely indirectly through the intermediary of middlemen (slaves, freedmen and other dependent figures), was equivalent to that of the bourgeoisie of later periods.¹¹

I believe that one cannot emphasize enough the fundamental *social* (rather than economic) difference between, on the one hand, a bourgeoisie directly engaged in business, and on the other, an urban and

agricultural elite investing in business and entrusting their interests to agents.¹² In the Greek East it is by no means easy to find examples of *direct* involvement of members of the urban elite in business; by 'direct' I mean that they are referred to as businessmen by themselves or by others. Veyne was not the first to misread the Erastus inscription (*Syll.*³ 838) as attesting 'a self-confessed professional trader turned local notable'.¹³ Lucius Erastus often sailed the seas, was useful to his city and specialized in transporting Roman dignitaries – Hadrian included. As a result of all this 'he wants to become a member of the council'. Hadrian intervenes for him and writes that he is willing to pay the entry fee. The correct interpretation is exactly the opposite of Veyne's. The Ephesian council members were not prepared to accept a *naukleros* (shipper) in the council, not even among the *inferiores* (as opposed to *primores*) who presumably existed in the council of that city as in the council of nearby Clazomenae in Hadrian's day.¹⁴

I know of only one example from Asia Minor in which a person calls himself a *naukleros* and *bouleutes*: a shipper and councillor. It is a certain Telesphorus, son of Telesphorus, whose sarcophagus was found in Nicomedia.¹⁵ Since he mentions no offices he presumably belonged to the *inferiores* (or *pedarii*); L. Robert has recently collected and discussed the impressive epigraphic evidence concerning Nicomedian shippers, which shows that they transported their goods all over the oikoumene.¹⁶ But Robert largely ignores the question of their social status or the broader problem of the importance of trade in the Roman Empire. There is no parallel in these texts to Telesphorus' council membership. One Nicomedian trader (*emporos*), Asklepiades, was also honorary citizen of the Phrygian city of Aezani, and did business in Tomis where he buried his brother and business partner. This was, as Robert says, a big businessman, whose interests extended from S. Phrygia to the Euxine. Yet he did not belong to the urban bouleutic class, not even to the lower echelon within that class. Nicomedia is known to have had a junior and senior association of *naukleroi* which, like all ancient professional organizations, was in the habit of electing top local politicians as patron. But since such patrons do not seem to have been active in the trade in question, and not to have been office-holders within the association, they do not help us to determine the social status of members.¹⁷

In the same article, Robert has also drawn attention to a passage in the 38th speech of Dio of Prusa (§ 32). Dio emphasizes the vital importance of Nicomedian sea-trade for neighbouring Nicaea; Nicomedia lets Nicaea share in the goods transported by sea. The passage unfortunately is

corrupt. The argument seems to be that Nicaea owes its share in imported goods partly to Nicomedian favour. Dio adds in parenthesis that 'it is the city of Nicomedia which should grant favours officially and not certain people privately'. Robert seems to mistranslate; 'one should be grateful to the city for all this, and not to some private individuals', and suggests that the latter were a pressure-group of Nicomedian shippers who claimed the gratitude of the Nicaeans. Whatever the truth of the matter is, Dio obviously defends the views of the city, or, more realistically, those of the elite to which he himself belongs, according to whom the criticisms of a number of shippers were not to be tolerated. The latter apparently claimed a voice of some importance in urban life but were rebuffed. In other words, Telesphorus was no match for the urban elite.

Ruggini¹⁸ recently suggested that a Chian inscription offered an example of an important politician, a *nauarchos* ('admiral'), who was simultaneously president of the association of 'merchants in the agora' (*archonta ton kata ten agoran*) and consequently himself involved in their business. The man was honoured by the '*naukleroi* and *ergastai* (shopkeepers, petty-traders) in the harbour-area'. But L. Robert saw that this man was president not of the agora-merchants but of the urban magistrates in charge of the agora.¹⁹ No big businessman, then, but another top politician, admiral and chief of the market-officials, honoured as patron precisely because of his politico-military functions; as *nauarchos* he was the man to protect the *naukleroi* against pirates.

On Nicomedia, we may echo the judgment of Liebeschuetz ((1972) 73–83) in connection with fourth century Antioch, that it lacked a politically and socially important merchant class. But we should elaborate the comparison. In Antioch it was not unusual for *councillors* to own ships (Liebeschuetz (1972) 46, 75, 165). They were among the landed and shipowning elite on whom the transport of tribute-corn to Constantinople was imposed. If imperial pressure for the fulfilment of this liturgy was continuous, this does not reflect any shortage of ships but rather a reluctance to contribute ships. Investment in ships by the elite was common all over the Greek world. Dio of Prusa writes that the urban rich supported themselves by investment in usury, leasing of tenements, slaves and ships (cf. Brunt (1972), 10). The astrologist Ptolemaios lists among profit-making activities building, agriculture and shipowning plus trading (*naukleria*).²⁰ Lucian describes the situation of a man owning five ships, and Rougé, who admittedly too easily turns *pragmateutai/oikonomoi* into commercial agents, this time correctly writes

that the passage would have been incomprehensible 'if in the period in which he was writing the East had not known enterprises of maritime transport where individuals had several ships'.²¹ In all these passages there is no special pleading; on the contrary, owning ships is represented as normal for the rich. I do not understand why Liebeschuetz ((1972), 83), after pointing out that shipowning among councillors was not unusual, goes on to write that 'it is an indication of the low development of trade under the later Empire that the provisioning of the capital cities could not be imposed on a professional merchant class'. In my view the absence of such a class is significant for the *organization* of trade, not its dimensions. For the economic historian it is unimportant whether, let us say, 500 Antiochean ships were the property of a landowning aristocracy of between 100 and 500 men, or of a small professional merchant bourgeoisie. For the social historian, on the other hand, it is highly relevant. Investing in trade was normal for an aristocrat; to be a trader, humiliating. In this connexion Veyne's 'Gelegenheitshandel' (cf. above note 12) perhaps does not convey the right message. The term is acceptable in so far as it suggests that landowning was the economic basis which guaranteed stability, whereas trade was derivative; it is unacceptable to the extent that it implies that landowners dabbled in trade only occasionally, as a sideline. A sideline it was, but one with structural significance, as it were – and there were other sidelines too.

Lucian's little dialogue *The Ship* provides another interesting detail. Adeimantus, who dreams about possessing a large freighter, believes he would gain a handsome profit from investing in a merchant-vessel. There is no reason to take his 'twelve Attic talents' literally, but the basic assumption is that a large freighter is a wealth-generating possession: 'what a happy life I should have had if of a sudden some god had made the ship mine: I would have helped my friends, and sailed in her myself sometimes, and sometimes sent my slaves' (*Navigium* 13). He proceeds, not unexpectedly, to describe the conspicuous consumption he dreams of: a house near the Stoa Poikile, slaves, clothes, carriages and horses.

Adeimantus has 'Peiraeus-fever' and loves the idea of sailing his own ship. There is something of a parallel from the world of agriculture in the attitude of Antoninus Pius, who took a hand in the work of the farm for recreation (Fronto, *ad M. Caes.* IV 6.1).²² Neither would have appreciated the label of *naukleros* or *georgos* respectively. Adeimantus prayed to Hermes 'Kerdōos' (*Navigium* 18), but there is a vast social distance between him and the *naukleros* who in a Thasian text is called *archikerdemporos* the chief profit-making merchant, worshipping Hermes

'Kerdemporos'.²³ The shipowning urban elite surely did business, but equally surely was not 'in business'. Adeimantus had slaves 'in business'; and he was not alone.

In Antioch Libanius' friend Lollianus used slave agents to operate his ship (Liebeschuetz (1972) 46 n.3). Plutarch (*de liberis educandis* VII) in an important but neglected passage unmarked by special pleading states in a 'matter-of-fact' way that people turn their first-rate slaves into farmers, *naukleroi*, *emporoi*, estate-managers and bankers.²⁴ Of course not all recorded *naukleroi* in fact were slaves. The Nicomedian *naukleroi* were free. However, we should not ignore the possibility of links with the landowning aristocracy. Veyne²⁵ drew attention to a passage in the *Philogelos*, a book full of jokes about the 'ideal-type' of the pedantic scholar, the professor. In § 50 the joke lies in the professor's having a *naukleros* as a debtor.²⁶ It was presumably common for landowning intellectuals (and scholars were generally members of the landowning upper-class) and landowners in general to have *naukleroi* among their debtors. In the Pergamene magnate L. Cuspius Pactumeius Rufinus, consul in A.D. 142, who is said to have asked the oracle in Didyma how to exact an oath 'from his own *naukleros*', we have a wealthy landowner using either a slave or a debtor as *naukleros*. L. Robert was right to conclude that he had 'an enterprise of maritime commerce'.²⁷ One professor who was also an extremely wealthy estate-owner was the sophist Damianus, said by Philostratus to have had a private harbour built near his coastal estate for the use of merchant-vessels.²⁸ If there is an implication that in Asia Minor the private harbour was exceptional, the situation may have been different elsewhere. In Tripolitania archaeology has shown that large coastal villages seem to have had their own harbours.²⁹ At any rate Philostratus does not imply that it was unusual for a landowner to have been involved in the shipping of the products of his own estates. He records that the wealthy father of a sophist from Byzantium owned *thalattourgoi oiketai*, ('slaves earning their livelihood from the sea') (*V.S.* p. 103 (Loeb)). Did they function as agents of their well-to-do owner, or were they involved in fishing? My conclusion is that behind the many *naukleroi* who are on record in inscriptions may have lain wealthy members of the urban elite who leased ships to *naukleroi*,³⁰ put slaves (or freedmen) in charge of ships, or provided capital to small independent *naukleroi*.³¹

In the Roman world an influential shipowning and trading urban bourgeoisie is unlikely. Though we did come across one shipper councillor, the shippers as a group turned out to be of lower status, not

involved in local politics. However, in my view the estate-owning urban elite in harbour cities of some size and importance were involved indirectly in trade as shipowners. In as much as they availed themselves of the services of agents, free or unfree, and lent money to small, independent shippers, they in fact functioned as bourgeois shipowners such as those who in later European history in cities like Amsterdam came to belong to the urban elite. The latter did not sail themselves, but either used other people as ship captains (in Dutch: 'zetschippers') on their own ships or chartered tonnage on other people's ships.

A recent study by W. Brulez³² on the profitability of shipowning in early modern European history shows clearly that both in the Mediterranean area and in N.W. Europe shipowning gave 'trivial or nonexistent net returns'. Though we cannot do the sums for antiquity, I have no doubt that the same is true for Graeco-Roman society. It is striking that, both in the Roman Empire and in 15th–16th century AD Genoa and Venice, the government had to support private shipbuilding by attractive subsidies, which never proved to be attractive enough. From Brulez' survey one is entitled to infer that in this period in general the social status of the shippers, whether independent or agents, was not high. This is perfectly in line with what we know about our Greek shippers. As to Hanseatic cities where some shippers did possess 'high social rank', Brulez suggests that it is not always clear whether shipping was in fact their main profession. They may well have combined shipping with commercial activities. Shippers consistently tried to become merchants; the reverse did not occur. In other words, cases like that of our Nicomedian shipper Telesphorus who managed to penetrate into the bouletic class (probably the lower echelon) may have been as exceptional for Nicomedia as for later European harbour-cities. Telesphorus, as so many shippers, probably combined shipowning with commerce. In this respect he is again a perfect parallel for those rare later shippers who managed to acquire high social status. It is a comparison of this kind which inclines me to the view that pre-industrial European history has been modernized and Roman imperial history 'primitivized' too much.

Brulez's article emphasizes the importance of the merchant as against the shipper. The merchants of pre-industrial Europe were on the whole little interested in shipowning, and the profits derived from the latter were marginal when compared with those from commercial operations. This brings us to the problem of the merchant in the Greek part of the Roman Empire.

Plutarch (*de liberis educandis* VII) wrote of slaves functioning as merchants (*emporoi*) for their masters. Two centuries later Basilios mentioned five sources of wealth: corn, wine, wool, trade (*emporio*) and, of course, banking.³³ The rôle of shipper (*naukleros*) and merchant (*emporos*) might be and often was filled by one man, but there are examples of merchants who booked space on somebody else's ship for their cargoes.³⁴ A third category of merchant traded overland and had little or nothing to do with ships. Except for traders in luxury-items which could bear the heavy costs of land-transport, these will have been engaged in local trade (in wool, wine, grain and oil). They are to be distinguished from the local retail dealers (*kapeloi*) who often, though not always, were identical with the small craftsmen who produced the articles concerned.

Our sources present basically the same picture with respect to *emporoi* and *naukleroi*. The number of self-styled *emporoi* who also enjoy high social status in their cities, that is, hold magistracies and are members of the town-council, is exceedingly small. Most epigraphically attested *emporoi* are undistinguished. An interesting exception is offered by an honorary inscription from Thyatira (Asia Minor).³⁵ The slave-trader (*somatemporos*) Alexandrus has been market official (*agoranomos*) of the city and thus belonged to at least the lower echelon of the urban elite.³⁶ Characteristically he did not himself buy and sell in his city. That was the business of the dealers on the slavemarket (*hoi tou statariou ergastai*) and of the slavebrokers (*proxenetai somaton*), who both honoured the big merchant publicly. Artemidorus from nearby Daldis, the author of a dream-book, held it to be perfectly conceivable that slave-traders could make large profits from their trade (*Oneirocritica* III 17 (T p. 211)). He was right: Alexandrus is praised for having paid lavishly for entertainment during a feast in honour of the imperial family. The only other Greek slave-trader known to me is a freedman Aulus Caprilus Timotheus whose relief was found in Amphipolis. He was presumably an agent working for a patron who invested money in the trade, without being a trader himself (S.E.G. XXVIII 537 (ca. 100 AD)). Timotheus explicitly mentions his patron, thereby, as it were, expressing his dependence. In the recent catalogue of slave-traders of W. V. Harris ((1980), 129–32), the predominance of freedmen is striking. Non-freedmen in the list do not seem to have had much social prestige. Harris pointed out that those who enjoyed high social status did not shrink from advertising their interest in and connexion with the slave trade, but this does not alter the fact that apart from Alexandrus no upper-class slave-trader is as yet

known to us. The same seems true of merchants as a whole, though perhaps less so than for shippers. They must have been either small independent merchants or slave or freedmen agents. The latter operated with upper class money. The former, like the shipper, may have been indebted to members of the urban elite, though inscriptions, of course, do not mention such details. An interesting example which may point to the dependence of a trader on a member of the urban elite comes from Smyrna and concerns a certain Attalus, son of Gaius, nicknamed Gaius (C.I.G. 3288). Boeckh gave him the cognomen 'Helemporos'. Attalus had bought and repaired a vaulted tomb (*kamara*) for himself and his family, and in the usual manner proclaims that none of his heirs will have the right to sell that tomb; this prohibition is explained by the unusual addition 'because it is the possession of a president (*prytaneus*) and councillor'. G. Petzl, who republishes this epitaph in the first volume of his forthcoming corpus of inscriptions from Smyrna, suggests reading *elemporos*, 'oil-merchant'. I assume that Attalus wanted to deter future evil-doers by explicitly adding that the entire tomb, of which his *kamara* was only part, belonged to one of the top citizens of Smyrna. It is (on onomastic grounds) less likely that he was referring to himself than to someone on whom he depended and for whom he worked, perhaps by selling products of his estate on the market, local or otherwise.

C. P. Jones has recently listed a number of inscriptions, mostly epitaphs, in honour of merchants. Most are undistinguished, but there are a few exceptions. A Greek inscription from Lyon records a certain Thaimus Iulianus, a merchant who operated a large general store in that city and styled himself councillor of the Syrian city of Canotha in the Hauran. Another Syrian merchant, also called Iulianus and similarly buried in Lyon, was called 'honourable on his father's side'. Against those who hesitate to consider this Syrian from Laodicea a merchant, Jones observes 'it is clearly no difficulty that he was of high social rank'.³⁷ In Moesia another Syrian is on record, Aur. Sabinus, who is both priest and wine-merchant, (*oinemporos*) and together with a *town-councillor* of Porollissus dedicates a temple of Dolichenus (I.G. Bulg. III 1590=1678). This is not to deny that most merchants belonged to the common people, especially those who personally bought and sold their goods; they enjoyed little prestige in their cities. When the Roman jurist Callistratus writes that such people should not be scorned as low persons, and in support of that admonition points out that it is not forbidden for them to seek the decurionate or some magistracy in their city, the obvious

inference is that in general these merchants enjoyed low social prestige, and were only enlisted as town-councillors when more appropriate candidates were lacking.³⁸

This being said, it is reasonable to emphasize that merchants, at least some of them, had a better chance than shippers of rising in the social scale. Jones ((1964), 866-71) registered several examples of reasonably well-to-do merchants in the Greek East in the later imperial period. We hear of merchants engaged in trade in luxury items on both sides of the frontiers of the empire. Others are said to have owned one or more ships which were operated by agents or relatives. The less emphasis there is on actual selling, the better the chances are that we are dealing with someone of respectable social status. Jones stresses the fact that some of these merchants aspired to posts in the office of the provincial administration (*officium*) and that the attested size of fortunes of merchants was modest beside the fortunes of great senatorial landowners. That is true, but it does not prove that far from Rome, on the level of the innumerable cities in the empire, such merchants also made a modest showing. P. Veyne ((1981a) 343) has recently shown that in the third and fourth centuries AD *curiales*, veterans and *officiales* were considered to be on the same social level. One wonders where the difference lay between the wealthy Alexandrian merchants who in one case had 'a great fortune in ships and in gold' and in another left 500 solidi in cash (300 lbs gold) plus slaves and clothes (and, I presume, houses), and the well-to-do merchants from later pre-industrial harbour-cities.³⁹

The nature of the ancient historian's sources is often such that detailed data about the size of trading operations are not to be expected. Consistent indirect involvement through slaves, freedmen and indebted free persons enabled many members of the urban elite to gloss over their commercial activities in their honorary inscriptions and epitaphs. Who knows how our theories might be affected by the discovery of a business archive comparable in size to the Murecine-archive from Pompeii, which shows that sizeable sums of money were handled by freedmen of well-to-do families in the grain-trade?⁴⁰ With so little known about non-agrarian activities, it is the more significant that we have evidence for a number of merchants having respectable fortunes and corresponding social status, men like M. Aurelius Alexander Moschianus from Phrygian Hierapolis, who on his sarcophagus is called 'purple-seller' and 'town-councillor'. He was presumably a merchant not only in purple dye but also in purple wool and cloth.⁴¹ Hierapolis - Laodicea was

famous for its luxury wool and linen and it seems reasonable to suppose that this merchant ('Grosshändler und Exporteur')⁴² derived considerable wealth and corresponding social status from this business. That purple-dyers were an important association in Hierapolis is suggested by the regulation that tomb-violators had to pay fines to their board.⁴³ This is not to deny that in most small communities, towns or villages, vendors are mostly undistinguished people. A quick glance at E. Patlagean's analysis ((1977) 156–81) of the numerous professions on record in the epitaphs from the Cilician city of Corycus underlines this point. One may wonder whether it was otherwise in *comparable* communities in later pre-industrial Europe.

In the epigraphic evidence (leaving Corycus aside) no wool-seller or linen-seller of a social status comparable to that of Moschianus from Hierapolis comes to light. The explanation is that wool and linen were primarily the concern of the owners of estates and flocks. They were the people who derived profit from the wool trade by selling to small traders either directly or through their own agents.⁴⁴ Purple, however, is a very expensive 'industrial' product (cf. *ed. Diocl.* 24) requiring considerable capital outlay and bringing in attractive profits in view of the high prices paid for finished garments. Small wonder that it was precisely purple-merchants who managed to penetrate into the town councils.⁴⁵ This is corroborated by what we know about trade in another luxury item, silk. According to Jones, the late Roman silk-merchants from Berytus and Tyre, Constantinople and other cities 'handled the whole business from the purchase of the raw material to the sale of the finished product' and 'were men of substance' who were 'in the habit of buying court sinecures for themselves and their sons'.⁴⁶ They provide a nice parallel to late medieval textile merchants who similarly pulled the strings in the wool business.⁴⁷ Just as silk had to be procured from beyond the frontier, that is, from the Persians, and transported to the production-centre, similarly there was a flourishing transport of wool in late medieval times from England to Flanders.⁴⁸ This gave the merchant the opportunity to occupy the position of the spider in his web. As far as I know, there is no evidence for a comparable position of wool and linen merchants in the Greek East. Wool and linen were fed into the textile production process in the area in which the wool was produced. It was the flock-owners who dominated the scene and, as said above, made the crucial profits. From Diocletian's price edict it seems clear that the raw material is the most expensive item. The value added in the various stages of production is comparatively small. Even so, at least some

dealers in expensive items – purple – managed to acquire a respectable social status.⁴⁹

Reasons of space prevent us from discussing some further problems concerning the production and sale of textiles. Instead we conclude with a brief comment on possible interregional trade in bulk goods like grain, oil and wine. My impression is that in normal situations and with normal harvests the grain trade was a local affair, dominated by the grain-producing estate-owners of the cities, who either sold the surplus of their harvests to local traders, somewhat in the way the younger Pliny (*Ep.* VIII 2) in Italy is known to have sold his wine-surplus to independent *negotiatores*, or used their slaves and freedmen for that purpose.⁵⁰ Interregional trade would only be feasible by sea or river, since the cost of land-transport of relatively inexpensive bulk goods would have frustrated the entire business. Hopkins (1978) recently suggested that the regularity of famines must have necessitated transport of corn in quantity.⁵¹ This may be true, but the little evidence we have does not point to the existence of an institutionalized class of professional corn-merchants, wealthy enough to handle large-scale imports. I have in mind a number of inscriptions from Ephesus and Tralles showing, first, that export of grain from Egypt to cities in Asia Minor was a privilege to be awarded explicitly by the emperor, and second, that if permission was granted in case of severe local shortage, it was not Ephesian or Trallian *merchants* who took up the business, but well-to-do and prestigious local citizens who could afford to advance (or give) money to the city for the buying and transporting of the grain from Egypt.⁵² It is surely significant that even in Ephesus, a flourishing harbour-city, local merchants were not available for such transactions. Such merchants as there were obviously serviced the local market in normal conditions, but were not financially capable of handling the import of, for example, the 60,000 modii of grain which a Tralleian benefactor is said to have had imported into his city from Egypt. I do not know whether the transport of fiscal grain to Constantinople had the same spin-off for the free market as was the case in Rome.⁵³ But I know no parallel in the Greek East to well-to-do Western grain-merchants like the Aufidii, who owned estates in Africa, occupied curial positions both in Ostia and African cities, and were corn-merchants in Ostia.⁵⁴ Nor did the important Western traders in oil and wine have Eastern counter-parts.⁵⁵

One thing is certain: the sources for ancient economic history will always remain grossly deficient. We do not have the archives of the wealthy. But when we find tablets in Pompeii we see slaves and

freedmen, with family names that recur among the urban magistrates, lending sizeable sums of money to grain-merchants who themselves have a fair chance of being freedmen (or their descendants). The crucial difference between the Roman Empire and the Ancien Regime lies in slaves and freedmen, and in the vast possibilities opened up by their existence to landlords to control manufacture, commerce and banking, while despising it.

It is not irrelevant that in the late Middle Ages successful merchants and entrepreneurs began to invest in real estate. This gave security to their acquired riches and assured a regular income. The Fuggers owned in Swabia alone about a hundred villages with an area of 230-50 sq km.⁵⁷ How are they different from Roman senators, who owned comparable estates⁵⁸ and are known to have invested in brick and tile-production,⁵⁹ used slaves and freedmen as bankers, profited from the marketing of grain and oil on urban markets, and with other urban landlords of comparable (though not identical) wealth, controlled non-rural industry? The difference between members of the urban elites of large cities in antiquity (shipping-centres or possibly even large weaving cities like Tarsus, with which I hope to deal elsewhere) and the great merchants of Flanders and Italy perhaps lies in the availability of middle-men. That is, it lies in the social structure of their respective societies, rather than in the dimensions of their trade.

11 - H. W. PLEKET: Urban elites and business in the Greek part of the Roman Empire

1 - H. W. Pleket, 'Afscheid van Rostovtzeff', *Lampas* 8 (1975) 267-84; d'Arms (1977).

2 - Finley (1973) 60. The low status of 'businessmen' leads to the conclusion that business was insignificant and the economic structure primitive. Naturally, other institutional weaknesses in the Greco-Roman world are adduced as well, as proof of the primitiveness of the economy, e.g. the underdevelopment and small scale of the operations of banking, the absence of anything like joint ownership in shipping, etc. In this essay we do not discuss these aspects. For banking see Veyne (1979) 279-80; for shipping etc. Rougé (1980) 296-300 (similarities between Roman maritime *societates* and commercial associations of the Middle Ages); for commercial banking operations of some size, see the Murecine tablets in L. Casson (1980) 33 and 26-9 (bankers and debtors are linked to Pompeian and Puteolean upper class families as freedmen).

3 - See the discussion of Lis/Soly (1979) 11ff., from which the quotation is taken. As to 'commercial bourgeoisie', Lis/Soly note a predominance of merchants rather than entrepreneurs/mastercraftsmen. Finley is influenced by the Weberian Ideal-Types of consumer (ancient) city and producer (medieval) city. Cf. Finley (1977).

4 - Veyne (1976) 135. That is the period in which de Tocqueville's famous dictum 'il faut faire des affaires mais non être dans les affaires' no longer reflect the generally accepted value-system. Incidentally, on the basis of A. J. Mayer's *The Persistence of the Old Regime* (New York, 1981), one is tempted to conclude that pre-industrial structures and mentalities lingered on even longer than the 19th century. Cf. Pleket, *Mnemosyne* 29 (1976) 211; G. Chaussinand-Nogaret 'Aux origines de la révolution: noblesse et bourgeoisie', *Annales E.S.C.* 30 (1975) 265ff.; C. Lucas, 'Nobles, bourgeois and the French revolution', *Past and Present* 60 (1973) 84ff.

5 - C.Th. XIII 1.5; cf. Ruggini (1961) 134, nn.366-7.

6 - C.Th. XIII 1.8; 1. 10-13; Cf. Ruggini (1961) 127-8 n.344; also P. A. Brunt, *J.R.S.* 71 (1981) 166.

7 - Hopkins (1978) (1980).

8 - Ward Perkins (1980). Hopkins' position on taxes in kind: cf. in the same sense P. A. Brunt, *J.R.S.* 71 (1981) 161-2.

9 - For Sombart, cf. Veyne (1976) 119, 129-30.

10 - Certainly for the later period in pre-industrial Europe there is plenty of evidence for investment in landed estate by the urban bourgeoisie and indirect involvement of noble landed proprietors in urban economies. For the latter, cf. e.g. D. Cannadine, *Lords and landlords, the aristocracy and the towns 1774-1907* (Leicester, 1980). Cf. d'Arms (1981) 94 n.96 quoting Braudel ('the social takeover of the countryside by the money of the towns').

11 – Cf. d'Arms (1981) 128 n.23 for a Roman parallel: well-to-do freedmen (Augustales) conceptualized as 'les bourgeois urbaines'. Naturally the problem remains how far successful freedmen became independent of their masters; cf. d'Arms (1981) 103 n.30, 142–6, with n.110.

12 – For the conception of 'Gelegenheitshandel', see Veyne (1976) 121, 124, and Veyne (1979): one is not a full-time professional merchant; nor is commercial profit-making the only object; the latter is typical of a professional.

13 – Veyne (1976) 125 n.157. Cf. *Die Inschriften von Ephesos* V no. 1487 (Hadrian and the shipper Philokyrios).

14 – Dig. L.7.5.5; with P. Garnsey, 'Aspects of the decline of the urban aristocracy in the Empire', *A.N.R.W.* II 1 (1974) 229–52, at 232.

15 – S.E.G. XXVII 828 (Roman Empire).

16 – L. Robert, *B.C.H.* 102 (1978) 422–6. As we shall see below, it is by no means certain that all these *naukleroi* were independent shipowners who traded with their own goods. *Naukleroi* could be agents, working for landed aristocrats.

17 – Cf. Pleket in *Mnemosyne* 29 (1976) 217 n.4. See d'Arms (1981) esp. 168 n.91 for the suggestion that patrons may have played the rôle of economic 'masterminds' behind the fragmentation of small producers (and, I would add, of small traders).

18 – L. C. Ruggini, 'La vita associativa nelle città dell' Oriente greco: tradizioni locali e influenze romane', in *Assimilation et Résistance à la culture gréco-romaine dans le monde ancien. Travaux du VIe Congrès Intern. d'Etudes Classiques*. (Paris, 1976) 481 n.67.

19 – L. Robert, *Opera Minora Selecta* I 542–8.

20 – Veyne (1979) 275n. 46, on *Tetrabiblos* IV 2; cf. also Ruggini (1961) 202, 631.

21 – Rougé (1966) 254–5; cf. Finley (1973) 58. Lucian in Loeb, vol. VI, p. 444 (§ 14).

22 – Brunt (1973) 12.

23 – I.G. XII 8. 581, with L. Robert, *Études Anatoliennes* (1937) 245 n.2. Robert speaks about a 'société d'armateurs et négociants' but that seems a rather audacious inference from the fact that the Heracles on record in this inscription was owned by two or three *emporoi*. Admittedly, the latter were not slaves, but the possibility cannot be ignored that they were indebted to powerful members of the elite; cf. below, n.26.

24 – For the involvement of the upper class in banking (and for that matter in overseas commerce) via slaves and freedmen, see Veyne (1979) 279–80; also Veyne (1981) 258–9; cf. nn.2, 26, 33.

25 – Veyne (1979) 277 n.51; cf. also Veyne (1976) 124 n.154.

26 – For the difference between a professional banker (which the professor was not) and a wealthy elite-member who lends money to friends for political purposes and to business people via middlemen (slaves, freedmen) cf. the discussion between Finley (1973) and Frederiksen (1975) 167–8; cf. also nn. 2, 24, 33.

27 – See d'Arms (1977) 177 n.67; d'Arms (1981) 158 n.38; cf. Frederiksen (1975) 166 ('... owning and financing of ships was often undertaken without the person acting as *naukleros* or *magister* ...').

28 – Philostratus, *V.S.* p. 266 (Loeb). The ships are *holkades* ('... les navires de gros transport par excellence', Vélissaropoulos (1980) 59). Cf. d'Arms (1981) 159, 164–5.

29 – Cf. J. Rougé, 'Ports et escales dans l'empire tardif', *Settimane Spoleto* 25 (1978) I 67–128, at 124. Cf. also d'Arms (1981) 85.

30 – Cf. Vélissaropoulos (1980) 52; services of *naukleroi* hired in Hellenistic Egypt. Rougé (1966) 230–55, tries to show that in the course of the Roman imperial period *naukleros* came to mean *magister navis*, i.e. the agent-representative of the shipowner; since I am not certain that he proved his point, I do not use his support. Vélissaropoulos (55) is doubtful whether an inference to the Greek world is justified: I am more confident than she.

31 – Cf. also Jones (1964) 866–7 (shipowners not navigating their own ships; great landowners owning ships).

32 – For the points that follow see W. Brulez, 'De scheepvaartwinst in de nieuwe tijden', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 72 (1979) 1–19, at 11, 8, 6.

33 – Quoted by Ruggini (1961) 202 n.631.

34 – Jones (1964) 866–7; for 4th century BC Athens, L. Casson, 'The Athenian Upper-class and New Comedy', *T.A.P.A.* 106 (1976) 29–59, esp. 43–5.

35 – O.G.I.S. 524; cf. Harris (1980) 127, 131.

36 – The precise hierarchy, if any, of Greek urban magistracies is unclear. For the aedileship-*agoronomia* as an office of some status, see Apul., *Met.* I 24; cf. F. Millar, *J.R.S.* 71 (1981) 69.

37 – C. P. Jones (1978) 345–6 n.40; for the list, see 351 n.60.

38 – Dig. L.2. 12; cf. R. Macmullen, *Roman social relations 50 BC to AD 284* (New Haven, 1974), 99.

39 – See Jones (1964) 870.

40 – Cf. Casson in d'Arms/Kopff (1980) 26–9. Pace Casson, C. Sulpicius Cinna was C. Sulpicius Faustus' freedman. See J. G. Wolf 'Aus dem neuen pompejanischen Urkundenfund: Der Seefrachtvertrag des Menelaos', *Freiburger Universitätsblätter* 65 (1979) 23–36, esp. 27–8. The freedman C. Novius Eunus, a large-scale dealer in foodstuffs, is undoubtedly related to the family of the Novii. Another grain-dealer is P. Annius Seleucus, connected with the Pompeian and/or Puteolean Annii; cf. P. Castren, *Ordo Populusque Pompeianus. Polity and Society in Roman Pompeii* (Rome, 1975) 135 (and 226–7, 496–7 on the Sulpicii and Novii); d'Arms (1974) 107–8, 122.

41 – Judeich, *Altortümer von Hierapolis* (1898), *Die Inschriften*, no.156; cf. Cichorius' commentary on p. 54–5; or is he a second choice? cf. n.38.

42 – Cichorius (n.41). Note that in Italian Aquinum the upper class family of the Barronii possessed dye-works; cf. d'Arms (1977) 177 n.62.

43 – J. and L. Roberts, *B.E.* (1971) no. 647; cf., later, Aurelius Psates from Panopolis, Egypt, owning four houses and sons employing assistants. See Jones (1964) 865.

44 – Cf. M. M. Postan in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe* II 168ff: most merchants were 'small fry'; even in the later Middle Ages English landlords dabbled in the wool trade.

45 – See d'Arms (1974) 110 on the Cnaei Hail of Puteoli; cf. d'Arms (1981) 49ff. on Vestorius, who introduced the production of special colouring dyes. H. v. Petrikovits, *Z.P.E.* 43 (1981) 286, pointed out that purple-dyeing was about the only craft for which 'Fachbücher' have been written; most other craftsmen were illiterate. For a possible relation between urban elite and purple-dyeing cf. note 42, above.

46 - Jones (1974) 362; Jones (1964) 861-2.

47 - Lis/Soly (1979) 11-14 (1000-1300 AD), 36-7 (1350-1450 AD: merchants dominating the increasing rural production of textiles), 63-6 (1450-1630 AD: predominance of merchants, who used the putting-out system, and of small production-units), 105-6 (1630-1750: merchants controlling putting-out system; small percentage of the merchants really important).

48 - Lis/Soly (1979) 11; cf. also *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, II 369-77.

49 - As to the Western part of the Empire, I refer to Drinkwater (1977-8), who suggests that the Secundinii from Trier were wealthy and socially important cloth-merchants, forerunners of their later medieval colleagues. See also J. F. Drinkwater, 'Money rents and food-renders in Gallic funerary reliefs' in A. King, M. Henig, *The Roman West in the third century*, B.A.R. 109 (1981) 215-33. (It is fair to add that Drinkwater follows Jones in admitting that the decurional elite was a landowning elite and that the wealthiest merchants do not seem to have formed part of the ruling group: in his view what prevented merchants 'from transforming comfortable fortunes into great ones' was the absence of significant state borrowing). Trier and the area of the Treviri and Nervii was renowned for its wool; cf. Diocletian's Edict 19, 44 and 66; 22, 21; so there is reason to suppose that the Secundinii specialized in luxury textiles. One is tempted to see a parallel in C.I.L. III 5800 from Augsburg, recording the erection of a temple by the textile merchants for themselves and for a father (?) and son; one of them was *equus Romanus* and member of the town-council. Schlippschuh (1974) 40 assumes that this urban dignitary was himself a member of the guild of *negotiatores*. Cf. also C.I.L. XIII 2010 mentioning a textile merchant, buried in Lyon and called *III vir*. Cf., for N. Italian businessmen in public office, Garnsey (1976). The presence of wealthy freedmen among the *negotiatores* shows that being a cloth merchant could be rewarding and create the wealth on the basis of which descendants could rise to urban elite status. It is important to distinguish between the great textile centres and the average town which produced for its own consumption. Pompeii, despite W. D. Moeller (*The Wool Trade of Ancient Pompeii*, Leiden (1976)), is not known to have been a major, exporting textile centre. If structures comparable to those of the later pre-industrial European textile-cities existed at all in the Roman Empire, they are likely to have occurred in the great weaving towns.

50 - For slaves as *negotiatores* cf. Pavis d'Escurac (1977) 345-7; Veyne (1981) 257-8, n.62. Schlippschuh (1974) 164 incorrectly maintains that slaves did not act as independent *negotiatores*; cf. also Ruggini (1961) *passim* for the use of 'straw-men' in the grain-trade in Italy.

51 - Cf. J. K. Evans, 'Wheat production and its social consequences in the Roman world', C.Q. 31 (1981) 428-42, at 429 n.6, who stresses the inadequacy even of maritime transport during famines.

52 - Wörrle (1971) 333-7; Casson in d'Arms/Kopff (1980) 23-5.

53 - Casson in d'Arms/Kopff (1980) 21, 24, 29; Rickman (1980) 72.

54 - C.I.L. XIV 4142 (I.L.S. 6140) and 4620; cf. Rickman (1980) 142.

55 - For the latter cf. e.g. Ruggini (1978), the table at the end (after p. 92) nos. 1, 4, 5 and 8 (the latter being a *nauta* who also was *duovir bis* of Vienna: a parallel to a *naukleros* being a member of the town-council of Nicomedia). Cf. text to n.15.

56 - Cf. nn.2 and 40. concerning the Murecine archive.

57 - Lis/Soly (1979) 61.

58 - The late Roman lady Melania is an obvious parallel (one domain had 60 hamlets, with a total of 24,000 slaves). Cf. Finley (1980) 122.

59 - Cf. the review by N. Purcell of two recent monographs in J.R.S. 71 (1981) 214-15. The Roman upper-class landowners made money from the *figlinae* in their estates by letting contracts for the making of bricks to another individual who did the job through his own dependents. Previously it was thought that the *figlinae*-owners used slaves and freedmen for that purpose. Purcell argues that the latter system reflected 'great capitalist interests' whereas the *locatio-conductio* scheme 'drives out the spectre of capitalist industrialism'. In my view in both cases the term 'industrialism' is out of place, since the production-units were invariably small. But I fail to see why the contract system is less capitalistic than the slave-system; the former coupled a regular flow of income with the smallest possible trouble about management. The leasing of a pottery in Egyptian Oxyrhynchus (cf. J.R.S. 71 (1981) 87-98) provides a nice parallel. It is not certain that the slave and freedman system would have produced larger profits. For a recent attempt to show that in agriculture to run an estate by slave labour alone was far from profitable see D. W. Rathbone, 'The development of agriculture in the "Ager Cosanus" during the Roman Republic: Problems of evidence and interpretation', J.R.S. 71 (1981) 10-23.

60 - Cf. nn. 2, 24, 26, 33.