

# The Economic and Productive Processes in the Hellenistic ‘Globalization’: From the Archaeological Documentation to the Historical Reconstruction



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## Introduction

During his detention, Antonio Gramsci addressed a series of letters to his family, that greatly help to understand his personality.<sup>1</sup> Among the recommendations intended for his wife and his son Delio, there is a tale, known as ‘the mouse and the mountain’, marked by a strong symbolic value. The tale was written for his son, whom he would not be able to meet anymore, and refers to different aspects of reality, particularly stressing the relevance of two of them: that society is an economic system based on reciprocal relations and that there is an ‘active element’, consisting in the self-awareness of the society itself, on which its organization relies. Both these aspects pose an interpretative question concerning the historical understanding of social systems. In reference to pre-Medieval cultures, the issue has been considered only sporadically, partially and sometimes on the basis of prejudicial assumptions.

The belief that pre-Medieval communities and their economies should be regarded as primitivistic and marked by an extremely limited or even absent conception of the economic complexity is still under debate.<sup>2</sup> The lack of written sources hampers a comprehensive reconstruction of this research’s questions, and the use of other types of sources, such as the archaeological evidence, does still not provide sufficient information for an adequate historical narration. The archaeologists themselves tend to avoid the concrete reconstruction of the economic dimension of ancient societies, as shared methods and models for the data analysis have still not been developed.

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<sup>1</sup> Gramsci (1947).

<sup>2</sup> Descat (2008).

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The two interpretative positions, i.e., the primitivistic and the modernistic one,<sup>3</sup> are actually prejudicial with regard to the systematic examination of the available data and do not constitute reliable alternative interpretative tools, as they cannot be assessed on the basis of precise and comparable parameters. In both cases, in fact, the hypotheses have been built upon some specific factors, often without relating them to the wider general framework, while comparing them with literary sources, that are evidence with marginal value.

Therefore, the topic, which could be developed under different chronological and thematic perspectives, should be analysed starting from an organized and overall analysis of the acquired knowledge. In this respect, the late Classical age and subsequently the Hellenistic period could be a relevant field of research, given the consistency of the available documentation and the advanced level of collection and examination of the archaeological, philological and epigraphic materials. Of course, the following observations are focused on the interpretation of the contexts and findings pertaining to the archaeological sector, pointing out some considerations that will be further addressed later on, in an overall volume still under preparation.

## Hellenism

Between the work of M. Rostovzeff<sup>4</sup> and the recent studies on Hellenistic economies, edited by J. K. Davies and Z. Archibald,<sup>5</sup> the European culture underwent social and cultural transformations that greatly influenced the research. The latter clearly demonstrated that, between the fourth and the first century B.C., a radical change occurred in the Mediterranean cultures. The political development of the Macedonian States and of the Roman Federation, extensively documented by literary sources, resulted into a novel institutional scheme and expanded the horizons of economic action and rationality; furthermore, the archaeological evidence documents an even wider and deeper process, stressing the increased importance of the economy and the spread of new behavioural models.

During this period, in fact, the Mediterranean cultures expanded in different directions: among the most noticeable novelties were the increase of the urbanization level, the re-organization and the spread of the inhabited rural areas, the growth of artisanal production and of trade, the rise of interrelated consumption schemes, the development of a private economy introducing novel models of wealth management. For the first time, homogenous behavioural and social models, in the framework of a shared material culture, marked the Mediterranean basin.

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<sup>3</sup> For an overall overview of the debate, see Mazza (2002), pp. VII–LXXX), with reference bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> Rostovzeff (1926), Rostovzeff (1941); *Contra*: Bowersock (1974): 15–23; Momigliano (1994): 32–43; Reinhold (2002): 82–100; Andraeu, Berelowitch (2008), partic., Descat (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Archibald, Davies, Gabrielsen, and Oliver (2006) and Archibald, Davies, and Gabrielsen (2011).

Such models derived from previous contacts and traditions, but widened and spread in different ways, together with a progressive integration of production processes. The Mediterranean regions experienced a real cultural 'globalization', which preceded and accompanied the dissemination of universalistic political systems—the Roman Empire being its final and most complete expression.

Moreover, the period between the fourth and the first century B.C. is marked by archaeological phases characterized by differentiated archaeological evidence that is often interpreted prejudicially as a sign of involution, while the overall trend of social and economic growth is not always visible. To properly address the issue it is necessary to consider the long-term processes in their overall diachronic development, in order to systematize preconditions and final results, that are part of a historical process and must be considered in the context of an interpretative system able to define the diverse periods composing it and their reciprocal interrelations.

In this framework, the studies on the material culture are the main source of knowledge, although such studies started later than those concerning architecture, urbanization and artistic production as well as their function to deliver collective messages. Some of the pioneering studies on the transportation of amphorae were already published at the beginning of the twentieth century, but only around the 1950s systematic research on the material culture of the period was pursued. The latter was then constantly developed up to the 1990s, becoming completely integrated in the respective scientific fields, although, later on, it slightly decreased in importance, according to the number of dedicated studies.

During this evolution of research, some productions have been examined in-depth with a high level of interest and of detail, while others have been lesser analysed, so that the general knowledge of the topic is still quite heterogeneous. Moreover, a taxonomic analysis, with the purpose of establishing useful means to critically examine the material documentation, remains necessary, and a more advanced level of elaboration is still lacking or quite discontinuous. Notwithstanding the rare attempts of integrating the different components in a general scenario, linking together production, trade and consumption in a systemic analysis of Hellenistic economies is still incomplete at best, due to the difficulties deriving from the research methods, but also to the existing dissociation between archaeological analysis and historical interpretation.

A specific attention was reserved to the containers used for freight transport and so they acquired a special relevance as a first effort to investigate the economic system as a whole. Among other productions, similar attention was paid only to tableware and, partially, to lamps, although there are still several problems concerning the identification of production sites and specific technologies. These products pertain to a productive cycle that started in the Archaic age and experienced a diversification of products and an increase in the volume of the sales between 330 and 270 B.C. This happened in consequence of the Greek-Macedonian expansion in the Mediterranean and in the eastern world, which contributed to establish extended political systems, fostering exchanges and local economic development.

## The Management of the Production Systems

The stamping over vessels always attracted the attention of the scholars for the capacity to deliver information. Nevertheless, its partial usage, identifying only certain butches of the products, also caused uncertainty concerning its nature and scope.

The significance of the stamp over the vases has been variously interpreted. The stamp, either single or double, is usually located in the most visible spot, over the vase's handles,<sup>6</sup> neck or lip.

Regardless of the different conceivable interpretative proposals, it is possible to assume that, at least for some productive categories, the stamps indicate the control of some agency over the quality, the compliance and the origin of the product. The involvement of the state can be elicited, *inter alia*, by the shapes chosen, in use by the magistrates or by eponymous priests. A public commitment, in the control over the production or over its marketing, applies to at least part of the total volume of the commercialized products. Under this perspective, the study of the stamps of Thasos, Rhodes and Knidos, provides relevant information.<sup>7</sup> The matching of stamp and container's shape is a clear identifying tool, with regard to the origin of the product. The changes in the shapes and in the external appearance of the exported amphorae help to recognize their origin through their distinguishing features. The homogeneity of these features, in turn, testifies for a convergence that is neither spontaneous nor occasional. The little data provided by the sources, as exemplified by the polis of Mende's commissioning the sculptor Lysippos to design a special amphora to commercialize the local renowned wine, confirm this conclusion.<sup>8</sup> In this case, the public involvement is undeniable, as coherently testified by the archaeological evidence.

The public involvement in the quality control of similar products, for instance daily usage pots or tableware, is less evident. Even in this case, though, some archaeological data and epigraphic texts can be of help. The case of the figurative pottery of the fourth century B.C.,<sup>9</sup> in fact, seems to follow two main directions, through the usual commercialization of the products and the mobility of artisans connected to the main workshops.<sup>10</sup> These artisans seem to gain an increased fame by manufacturing huge productions of figurative pottery, found in a limited series of places. The possibility that this is due to the mobility of the artisans, rather than to the mobility of the products, is suggested by the recognizability of the individual producers, who acquire visibility by being constantly engaged in the production commissioned by local authorities.

Although such development can be only indirectly inferred for the productions of Southern Italy, conversely, for the mainland Greece, the process is particularly

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<sup>6</sup> Lund (2007), Lawall (2005), Porro (1916).

<sup>7</sup> Garlan (2000), Jörens (1999), Brugnone (1986), Gentili (1958).

<sup>8</sup> Athenaeus 11 784c.

<sup>9</sup> Lund (2011), Eiring, Lund (2004), Whitbread (1995).

<sup>10</sup> Capdetrey and Zurbach (2012).

evident, especially as far as the Attic tradition is concerned. A correspondence between the archaeological evidence and the epigraphic documentation, for example, can be found in a decree of the polis Ephesus that testifies the mobility of two Athenian artisans, Kittos and Battos, who owned a workshop in Athens and dedicated several offers in the city and whose family's funerary enclosure has been identified.

It is possible to reconstruct the history of the two artisans, who were expressly invited by the Ephesians to produce ritual vases for the celebration of the local poliadic cult of Artemis and who also ran a workshop there, producing black-figure vases. The decree testifies the will of the Ephesians to keep the two Athenian artisans in the city, by granting them the citizenship.

Some other fragments of Panathenaic amphorae made for ritual competitions taking place during the local festival at Ephesus and at Rhodes for the Halios festivities,<sup>11</sup> indicate that engaging Athenian artisans to produce prestigious vases, used as representative gifts for the winners of the local competitions, was a common practice. That these vases were specifically commissioned and made in loco is also documented, for example, by the epigraph inscribed on a fragment found in Rhodes specifically mentioning the *Halieia*.<sup>12</sup> The attribution of these materials to the workshop of the so-called Marsyas Painter,<sup>13</sup> hypothetically identified as an artisan working in the workshop of Kittos and Battos, further confirms our thesis.

The Athenian artisans, so, commonly emigrated, spreading technologies and skills, at least from the second half of the fifth century B.C. The emergence of red-figure vases in Southern Italy,<sup>14</sup> around 440 B.C., is, for example, connected to the establishment of a workshop where an artisan who had worked in Athens was active, i.e., an Athenian expat or an Italic individual who had worked in Athens acquiring local know-how. This artist, known as Pisticci Painter,<sup>15</sup> clearly trained within the group of Attic artisans belonging to the so-called Group of Polygnotos<sup>16</sup> and was, furthermore, close to the Christie Painter, denoting a strong continuity with the Attic experiences.

The discovery of Metapontum's Kerameikos in the 1970s,<sup>17</sup> with remnants of vases decorated by vase-painters belonging to the generation subsequent to this first ceramographist, documents the introduction of new tools and novel productive techniques, undoubtedly deriving from Attic models. In this case also, a transfer of skills can be proved, starting from the fifth century B.C., when the most attested trend was the export of products and not the mobility of artisans. The latter only gradually increased in time and, a century later, was widespread, as documented by the above-mentioned evidence from Ephesus and Rhodes. Moreover, the artisans' mobility

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<sup>11</sup> Lippolis (2016).

<sup>12</sup> Angeli Bernardini (1977).

<sup>13</sup> Jaeggi, Petrakova (2007).

<sup>14</sup> Todisco (2012), Denoyelle (2008, 2009), De Juliis (2004), Schmidt (2002), Bonacasa et al. (2002), Trendall (1967, 1974, 1966).

<sup>15</sup> Denoyelle (1997), Denoyelle (1992).

<sup>16</sup> Matheson (1995).

<sup>17</sup> D'Andria (1975,1980).

presupposed commissioning entities that were stable over time, a constant presence of craftsmen in the local production system and the accessibility of resources. Such conditions could not be easily achieved without a continuous demand in the local communities. Artisans' mobility, so, increased during the third century B.C.,<sup>18</sup> in contrast to the sixth and fifth century B.C., when production centres were few and the trade traffic intense.<sup>19</sup>

The situation changed once again in the second century B.C., when new conditions made trading more convenient than the proliferation of productive centres. In this case, it should be pointed out how the reduction of the prestige of fine pottery was partially due to a new taste for metal and glass products, regarded as more prestigious. Hence, the value of fine pottery decreased, giving way to a mass production characterized by a serial character. This is especially true for some classes of products, such as the Campana A, from Naples. The change in the organization of the work, with a strong exploitation of slave labour, obviously influenced the productive process, too.

This briefly defined framework indicates the relevance of the commissioning entities—i.e., demand—and of the spreading of technological know-how through artisanal migrations as factors that changed the production processes, in different directions over time. In some cases, studying demand patterns is necessary to understand the reasons for the commercial success of some products. For example, the exportation of Rhode wine in the Mediterranean,<sup>20</sup> especially in the central area, seems to register a large-scale growth and a widening geographical range, even in those regions that traditionally produced wine, during the first half of the second century B.C.

Was this a consequence of the novel role of the Roman federation in the Mediterranean system after the second Punic war? Was the marketing of the wine of Rhodes<sup>21</sup> connected also to specific requests, for instance from the military bodies? The decrease in the volume of exportation after the year 146 is a sign that Rhodians took advantage of a favourable political juncture to foster exports?<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, the close connexion between the amphorae of Rhodes and Knidos is not random. The presence of the same producers in both centres reveals that the production system and the economic activities—depending on how the figures reproduced in the stamps are interpreted—were in the hands of a homogeneous group that worked in several fields but applied the same commercial methods.

The temple is another public sector connected to the spread of productive activities and of consumption patterns. Notwithstanding the loss of their primary collective role in the economic and social history of the polis during the Hellenistic phase, cult places still maintained some important functions. The sanctuary or the polis is

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<sup>18</sup> Lippolis (2015).

<sup>19</sup> Morley (2007).

<sup>20</sup> Lund (2011); Lund (1999).

<sup>21</sup> Rauh (1999).

<sup>22</sup> Lund (under press).

often the commissioning entity of the products and creates relations that, through the interaction of supply and demand, increase the integration of the Mediterranean commercial network. In this respect, Ephesus is an emblematic example but also in other sites, the archaeological remains indicate how several productions, from pottery to figurines, related to sanctuaries that still attracted workshops and promoted manufacturing. This is particularly noticeable in Italy, where it can be elicited by several documents testifying a close relation between diffusion of cult practices and productive activities. The recurrent presence of dies inside votive deposits, for instance, shows that their usage was closely connected to the management of the cult and was restricted to the sanctuary, allowing for their distinguishing features.

## The Mediterranean Network

As seen, magistrates, institutions and cult places acted as commissioning authorities and producers in a multi-level productive and commercial system, which became more and more integrated over time.<sup>23</sup> The geographical spread of manufacturing centres, from the end of the fourth century B.C. and particularly during the third century B.C., corresponds to the most dynamic phase of the demographic growth and of the urbanization process. The latter is indeed a crucial factor, in a context where dominant elites emerge, in some cases lasting for several generations, and where new social urbanized groups promote medium-level consumption, based on the proliferation of workshops and on the search for local specificity in the framework of an over-increasing productive homologation.

The rivalry among the urban centres and the ruling classes' eagerness for political, cultural and economic accomplishments marked this period of general growth. Once again, the third century B.C. appears as one of the most relevant transition phases, during which new social languages are established. Production and consumption suited the new expressive models, thus definitively deleting the Archaic and Classical scheme of management of the society and of the collective life. From this standpoint, the birth of federal organizations and of extended States are maybe independent from the ongoing economic growth.

In this way, the foundations that foster the circulation and the stability of the exchange system are laid down, although under certain circumstances, marked by political disorders, some recessive (but anyway transitory) situations can be detected.

The topic deserves to be furtherly investigated starting from the birth of a complex commercial system in the Archaic Age in the Mediterranean basin and should be addressed together with the Greek colonization process in the East and in the West, which is currently the subject of an intense debate.<sup>24</sup> The tendency to belittle the

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<sup>23</sup> Malkin, Constakopoulou, Panagopoulou (2011).

<sup>24</sup> Greco, Lombardo (2012), Tsetskhladze, Hargrave (2011), Yntema (2000), Lepore (1969).

‘awareness’ of the Greek settlers, in order to reassess the role of the ‘native’ inhabitants, led to a historical reconstruction with a ‘happy end’, characterized by an emphasis on coexistences and the disparage of models imposed by the external groups, that ultimately hampers a proper understanding of the process, rather than enriching it with new perspectives.

In the meantime, the present study mainly focuses on a more recent chronological phase, ranging from the fourth until the first century B.C., when the establishment of a network of relations in the Mediterranean area was completed and, during the first two centuries, seems to have been mainly managed by the Greeks.

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