

# The Archaeology of Trading Systems, Part 1: Towards a New Trade Synthesis

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**Abstract** After almost three centuries of investigations into the question of what it means to be human and the historical processes of becoming human, archaeologists have amassed a huge volume of data on prehistoric human interactions. One of the largest data sets available is on the global distribution and exchange of materials and commodities. What still remains insufficiently understood is the precise nature of these interactions and their role in shaping the diverse cultures that make up the human family as we know it. A plethora of theoretical models combined with a multitude of methodological approaches exist to explain one important aspect of human interaction—trade—and its role and place in shaping humanity. We argue that trade parallels political, religious, and social processes as one of the most significant factors to have affected our evolution. Here we review published literature on archaeological approaches to trade, including the primitivist-modernist and substantivist-formalist-Marxist debates. We also discuss economic, historical, and ethnographic research that directly addresses the role of traders and trade in both past and contemporary societies. In keeping with the complexities of interaction between trade and other aspects of human behavior, we suggest moving away from the either/or perspective or strong identification with any particular paradigm and suggest a return to the middle through a combinational approach to the study of trade in past societies.

**Keywords** Trade · Trading systems · Traders · Archaeology · Exchange · Interaction · Economic history · Economic anthropology

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## Introduction

Two popular news magazines, *National Geographic* and *The Economist*, published articles in 2005 that stressed the significance of trade for humans as a species. The *National Geographic* article (Achenbach 2005), citing Ambrose (1998) on possible genetic bottlenecking caused by the volcanic winter after the eruption of Toba in the Indonesian Archipelago, c. 76,000 B.P., suggested that during those crisis periods groups that exchanged and traded materials with each other survived better than groups that were more isolated. *The Economist* piece (Economist 2005) reported on the work of economists Horan et al. (2005), who proposed that biological fitness or subsistence behavior alone does not explain Neanderthal extinction and success of *Homo sapiens* in Eurasia. But when trading behavior (and the ability to mobilize a larger variety of resources) is factored, then the adaptation and fitness distances between *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals become increasingly significant over short periods of time (Economist 2005, pp. 67–68; Horan et al. 2005).

Although both articles promoted exchange/trade as an important and deep-rooted part of human behavior, they took completely different slants on the nature of exchange. The more culturally minded *National Geographic* suggested that “gifts saved humanity” (Achenbach 2005, p. 2). The “advocate of free trade,” *The Economist* (Economist 2005, p. 67), stated, “[free trade and division of labour] might be responsible for the very existence of humanity.” Both views propose the ubiquity of trade and exchange behavior as significant in human evolution (Adams 1992; Gamble 1998; Isaac 1993). However, their different interpretations of the same set of behaviors also mirror ongoing debates within anthropological, archaeological, and cliometric disciplines about the nature of exchange and trade in the past and the differences between contemporary and past economic behaviors (Adams 2001; Earle 1994; Polanyi et al. 1957; Sahlins 1972). Debates about trading behavior in archaeology have privileged some schools of thought over others, especially in the subordination of trade and exchange to *necessity*, *social process*, and *political economy* (Isaac 1993; Plog 1993). Before delving into this debate, we first define, compare, and contrast the terms “trade” and “exchange” as we use them in this article.

## Trade and exchange

Exchange is a particular interactional process that is part of most biotic and abiotic systems (Befu 1977; Webb 1974). Confining ourselves to exchange as an interaction between humans, we define trade itself as the material-economic component of exchange and hence a necessary part of any social exchange (Blench 1982; Bloch and Parry 1989). We define trade as the material and ever-present aspect of exchange and analyze trading behavior with respect to exchange infrastructures, materials exchanged, and social relationships formed and renegotiated before, during, and after exchange. Our definition is modeled after Hutterer (1977b, p. xiii), who suggested that notwithstanding the social context of exchange, overstating the social at the expense of the economic defeated the purpose and methodology of

archaeology, as “economic exchanges [lent] concrete manifestations to social relations which themselves may transcend the economic realm.” The overall picture of the political-economic landscape hence is an emergent property of relations between trade and its larger social milieu and between different trading systems (Adams 2001; Padgett 2001). We realize that this definition, as general as it is, presents a different approach, as trade in archaeology has hitherto been studied primarily as the exchange of “things,” as a dependent result of political and relational processes, the result of sociopolitical complexity, and as an afterthought of embedded exchange arising from social and political desires and motives. Some scholars still regard prehistoric trade as the socially mandated exchange of goods and favors between elites in a stratified society and limited to luxury items (Earle 1994). Hence, the common theme in studies on interregional interactions was that all or most societies participated in exchange, but only socially complex societies had trade that was elite-driven and controlled (Polanyi et al. 1957). Trade was a handmaiden of preindustrial complexity and hence given a subordinate role in human evolutionary models (Allen 1985; Kipp and Schortman 1989).

Shorn of any commercial underpinning, an essay on the archaeology of premodern trade should be a relatively easier undertaking. However, after reevaluating published literature from history, ethnography, and economics, we have become convinced that trade is a necessity, that is, it is ever present in any system of exchange and is the material basis of the relational network of exchange (Leemans 1977). Trade is an inseparable element of human behavior and evolution, in which the act of giving is inalienable from exchange, expressed in material and social forms (Mauss 1990; Weiner 1992). “Sociopolitical complexity” is not a precondition for trade; in fact, the opposite is often true (Adams 1992, 2001).

From this perspective, trade accompanied and abetted humanity through the Upper Paleolithic, the emergence of agriculture/social complexity, and the rise and decline of chiefdoms, states, and nations (Bar-Yosef 2002; Gamble 1980). We are aware of the extreme position in which we place ourselves with this proposition and the difficult task at hand, since exchange/trade, seen as a basis for the development of human societies at all times, raises the central question of what it means to be human. Would humanity, as we know it, have been possible without trade? If not, trade is then surely a shaping factor in human social evolution. In keeping with this approach, we first discuss the intellectual history of trade within archaeological thought and the development of trade research as an offspring of economic anthropology, history, and the archaeometric sciences. We “de-subordinate” exchange/trade behavior from larger concerns of social process and/or political economy as a mere epiphenomenal process and view it in its own light as an important structuring mechanism on par with political, environmental, or other social processes (Brumfiel 1994; Curtin 1984). In this we follow the arguments first laid out by Adams (1992) and stress that prehistoric trade/exchange by itself is not a simple commercial relationship, nor is it just a noneconomic social process (Braun and Plog 1982; Gledhill and Larsen 1982). We address the fact that all forms of exchange have economic, social, political, and environmental elements and motivations important for participants. Based on the time period, area, or one’s ideological place in this debate, some of these factors may perceptibly dominate

analysis and lead us to ignore or downplay others. In the following sections we discuss the contentious position of trade in archaeological research and review major approaches to trade from the early 20th century onward, from power and political economy approaches to strategies approaches.

## Trade and archaeology

Trade has had an uneasy history within archaeological thought. Though early work in Europe, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas revealed the evidence of trading behavior in the past (Fewkes 1896; Rivi re 1904), archaeological explanations for perceived similarities in styles and function of material culture or ideas was attributed to diffusion (Kidder 1962). Culture history, diffusion, and its related concepts of culture areas and migrations helped define archaeological approaches to interactions for most of the 1920s and 1930s (Adams et al. 1978; Schortman and Urban 1992). Studies that specifically focused on trade were for the most part ignored (Colton 1939, 1941; Shepard 1936). Diffusion/migration was used to explain the growth of urbanism, domestication, metal technology, and stylistic influences as well as religious, political, and economic ideas in Asia, Africa, and Europe from primary cores in the Near East and Egypt (Ekholm and Willey 1966; Ollsson 1965; Willey 1953). Reacting to growing evidence of active interactions between prehistoric and historic societies and the critiques of diffusion as a passive process, some diffusionists tried to modify and create a methodology by which diffusion could be seen in the archaeological record and also the underlying mechanisms driving diffusion (Davis 1983; Schortman and Urban 1987; Sharer 1984). Such ideas included the concept of propinquity in which intensity and rate of diffusion depended on cultural differences between societies, and that different rates of development created cultural diversity (Schortman and Urban 1992). In the 1950s, specific focus on the nature of flow of ideas and goods between societies led to series of seminars on prehistoric interactions and the development of concepts such as “interaction spheres” (Caldwell 1964; Seaman 1979; Struiever and Houart 1972; Willey 1953; Willey and Lathrap 1956).

We will revisit interaction spheres in a subsequent article, but suffice it here to say that interaction studies in archaeology suffered in the 1960s with the increasing influence and resurgence of evolutionary theory under Steward (1955, 1958), White (1959), Service (1962), Sahlins (1963, 1965), and Harris (1968). These scholars developed new ways for studying the temporal-spatial development of culture. These approaches, including unilineal and multilineal evolution, cultural materialism, cultural ecology, and neo-evolutionism, privileged basic sociopolitical and technological-economic aspects of society and subordinated noncore or nonbasic aspects of societies such as ideology, religion, aesthetics, and exchange as the result of cultural reactions of humans to their specific environments (Harris 1968; Steward 1958). Much of this emphasis on materialism was due to Marxist influence in which development of social complexity was narrowly confined to circumscribed areas and depended on control of production through the control of labor and resources (Meillasoux 1971, 1972; Service 1962, 1972). Barring a few urban areas, prehistoric

societies were largely seen as closed corporate communities, largely rural, and basically self-sufficient (Wolf 1957). Exchange of material goods between these closed corporate villages took place as gift exchange to cement social, marital, and political alliances; under duress as tribute, tax, or plunder; and for mobilizing resources and minimizing risk during marginal/critical conditions (Befu 1977; Blundell and Layton 1978; Bohannan and Dalton 1962; Braun and Plog 1982; Damon 1980; Flannery 1968; Godelier 1969; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Rubin 1975). Following their Marxist influence, these anthropological approaches also saw intersocietal interactions and exchange of material goods as superstructural phenomena arising as emergent elites strove to control the distribution of exotic, symbolic, and labor-intensive crafts, resources, and material goods through a combination of coercion and ideological legitimacy (Earle and Ericson 1977a; Ericson and Earle 1982).

This particular set of perspectives that considers trade and exchange as arising out of necessity, as having a social rather than economic context, and/or as an elite legitimation strategy is based on a combination of cultural materialism, economic anthropology, and ethnographic studies of tribal and band societies in Oceania, the Americas, and Africa, as well as developments in economic anthropology and history (Bohannan and Bohannan 1968; Bohannan and Dalton 1962; Hodder and Ukwu 1969; Malinowski 1922; Meillassoux 1971; Polanyi et al. 1957). Since these ideas dominated and guided archaeological thought, method, and analysis from the 1960s onward, and continue to do so, we need to understand how exchange/trade as a topic of significance in archaeology was transformed from its previous insignificant stature to being a major focus for understanding social complexity and the distribution of power, resources, and wealth within and across societies (Roseberry 1989). In the next section we briefly discuss the reasons behind the increasing relevance of trade and exchange in archaeology based on work done in economic anthropology and history, especially by Mauss, Malinowski, and Polanyi.

### **The social embedding of trade/exchange**

In the 1920s, two seminal works on non-Western economies, *The Gift: Forms and Means of Archaic Exchange* (Mauss 1990) and *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Malinowski 1992) changed the way that anthropologists viewed economic interactions between humans forever. Following Durkheim's (1964) work on solidarity and structure, Mauss suggested that gifts were exchanged to strengthen social relationships between people. The act of giving created obligatory reciprocity that was socially reinforceable, and these relationships formed the basis for other types of exchange and social organization (Malinowski 1922; Mauss 1990). Malinowski identified seven systems of exchange, ranging from pure gift (Kula) to pure trade (Gimwali) coexisting among the Kiriwana. These exchanges functioned in structuring eight forms of social relations between individuals. He argued that these systems have varying levels of profit and personal gain motives, and that there were frequent complaints that some conducted the Kula exchange as if they were transacting the Gimwali (Malinowski 1922, pp. 189–191). Subsequent studies in

economic anthropology stressed the social bases for exchange between humans: to cement social relationships. Profit, commerce, and other such motivations were absent or, at best, negligible in early and non-Western societies (Bohannon and Dalton 1962; Wilmsen 1972b). These ideas were welcomed by “primitivist” economic historians, especially for classical period Greco-Roman economists who held that past humans used significantly different and less-developed economic practices than contemporary humans; these include primary dependence on agriculture and the marginality of trade (Finley 1985). The primitivists used these ideas drawn from Malinowski and Mauss to counter the “modernists,” who suggested that there was no difference between contemporary and past human economic strategies and that developments in modern economic theory based on economic rationalism also could be used to analyze prehistoric and historic economic infrastructures (Rostovzeff 1998).

In the 1940s and 1950s the “primitivist/modernist” debate became subsumed within a larger debate between “substantivists” and “formalists,” roughly but not exactly corresponding with the former divisions (LeClair and Schneider 1968; Polanyi 1947). This debate engaged both economic historians and anthropologists, mainly due to Polanyi’s influence. In *The Great Transformation* (Polanyi 2001) and subsequently in a series of essays and edited volumes, Polanyi and his students argued that the market mentality and the assumption of pan-human economic rationalism that guided most neo-classical, modernist, and formalist thought was an aberration, a recent phenomenon that would become obsolete with the social transformation of capitalism in the 20th century (Dalton 1975; Polanyi 1963, 1966; Polanyi et al. 1957). They argued that social norms and requirements determine the distribution of goods in archaic and primitive economies and these economies are “embedded” in social process (Bohannon and Dalton 1962; Brunton 1971; Dalton 1969; Rotstein 1972). They distinguished between contemporary markets economies (in which economic decision-making guides most sociopolitical process) and archaic economies, including reciprocity, redistribution, and administered trade, in which the economy is subordinated to top-down sociopolitical decision-making and motivations (Carrasco 1978; Dalton 1969, 1977; La Lone 1982; Ratnagar 1981).

The influence of Marx, Mauss, and Malinowski is apparent in the Polanyi paradigm: premodern systems of production, distribution, and consumption were assigned, administered, and controlled by political centers/elites and used to fund craft specialization and luxury goods (Halperin 1984). These in turn were used to cement alliances within and between different elite sections of society (Polanyi 1966). Ideas of demand and supply “may” have guided elite production decisions but not those of independent, nonelite, or craft specialists (Bohannon and Bohannon 1968). In these archaic economies, currency and money might have existed as a means of exchange, but it was socially controlled and cannot be compared to contemporary ideas of money and currency as commodity (Aglietta and Orlean 1982; Codere 1968; Mancourant 2002; Polanyi 1966). Political elite fixed prices of goods and services, and marketplaces were regulated forums of distribution where appointed administrators facilitated redistributive and fixed systems of exchange. In *Markets in Africa* (Bohannon and Dalton 1962), a collection of ethnographic work on African economic systems c. 1950, Polanyi’s students Dalton and Bohannon



argued that market mentalities in Africa became prominent only after contact with European colonial economies in the past three centuries. Prior to European interactions, African economies, whether in marketless societies or early states, were socially embedded in reciprocity, redistribution, and administered exchange (Bohannon and Dalton 1962; A. Cohen 1966; R. Cohen 1965).

Notwithstanding the decommercialization of ancient economies, Polanyi's greatest influence on archaeology lay in bringing "trade" firmly into archaeological thought within a theoretical and methodological framework. Cultural materialism and ecology and Marxist anthropology had assigned trade a minor role in the development of societies, arguing that control of production has always been the core strategy by which elite gain and reproduce their power (Marcus 1983; Price 1977). Contra Marxist and cultural materialist approaches, Polanyi and the substantivists asserted that long-distance trade was a significant factor behind the development of archaic states (Bisson 1982; Polanyi et al. 1957; Rowlands 1979; Rowlands et al. 1987). "Appointed" or "royal" elite traders/trade specialists who engaged in diplomatic missions to other polities or settlements on behalf of the political rulers facilitated gift exchanges and secured military, marital, and other trade alliances (Berdan 1977; Carrasco 1978; Polanyi et al. 1957). This trade was administered through controlled neutral zones called "ports of trade" that helped political elite meet in safety and monitor the flow of imports and exports, control prices, and redistribute imports within their own polities (Polanyi 1963). Hirth (1978) extended Polanyi's port-of-trade model to Mesoamerican economies by suggesting the presence of "gateway communities" that functioned as zones where trade could be facilitated and where elites could control and regulate long-distance exchange by centralizing and regularizing infrastructures.

The rulers of these "archaic states" used their control of production and redistributive systems to allocate produced goods to further reproduce their ideologically power, including control of rare material resources and their transformation into elite symbolic items by craft specialists (Earle 2002). These latter goods ended up as gifts for elites and their long-distance trading partners: elites in other areas. Control of the imported exotica further legitimated and strengthened elite power (Helms 1979).

Within the substantivist-primitivist paradigm, all forms of trade exist to structure social relationships (Hoopes 1993). This position is best summed up by Creamer (1983, p. 60): "[b]efore the arrival of Europeans, exchange may have been more important as a 'social cement' to integrate the petty leaders within the regions than it was to distribute goods." The movement of bulk goods took place through redistribution and tribute (social processes) rather than independent exchange (Damon 1980; Earle 1977; Elmberg 1965). There was no place for profit, decision-making based on demand and supply, and long-distance exchange of bulk goods or raw materials such as grain, minerals, and stone beyond what was mandated by political elite and entrusted to subordinate trade appointees (Polanyi 1975). Polanyi's ideas were used to describe the Bronze Age cultures of South and Southwest Asia (Ratnagar 1981), classical Greco-Roman economies (Finley 1985), Aztec trade (Chapman 1957), and precolonial West African states (Dalton 1975; Polanyi 1966).



In the late 1960s increased evidence for interregional interactions made it difficult for archaeologists to dismiss or explain these using diffusion-migration ideas and/or in situ evolutionary development (Schaefer 1969). Regionally focused studies also started to reevaluate the “closed” and “corporate” nature of prehistoric societies (Plog 1980). Studies on exchange in the Mediterranean using geochemical analyses of obsidian from the island of Melos, pioneered by Renfrew and his colleagues (Renfrew et al. 1965, 1966), placed exchange systems back in the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods of Southeast European and West Asian prehistory. Renfrew’s work allowed the differentiation of interaction areas into supply zones (where materials were directly procured) and contact zones (items indirectly procured through exchange), suggesting the complexity of early trade (Renfrew 1967). The substantivist focus on the importance of long-distance exchange in luxury goods was ideal for archaeological research. These luxury or sumptuary goods are usually composed of rare materials (metals, precious stones, shell), are carried in specific receptacles such as amphorae, glazed or painted wares, and porcelains, and/or are endowed with symbolic or ideological meaning that demonstrates their exoticness and uniqueness (Davies and Schofield 1995; Earle 2002; Helms 1979). Each of these characteristics also deems these prestige goods ideal for provenience analysis (Knapp and Cherry 1994).

In the Americas, Caldwell’s “interaction sphere” (Caldwell 1964) had begun to be used for analyzing the movement of Gulf shell, obsidian from the Rockies, and copper from the Great Lakes across the upper and lower Mississippi Valley as part of a larger sphere that linked various cultural regions (Struever and Houart 1972). A similar case for interregional interaction was made by Flannery (1968) to explain the distribution of prestige items and the development of culture in Mesoamerica. He rejected the dominant opinion that the Olmec were the mother source for the diffusion of Mesoamerican culture, arguing instead that different regions interacted with each other through trade and exchange. Characteristics of interregional exchange include the relationship between consumers and suppliers of raw materials and how the upper echelon of each society provides the entrepreneurs to facilitate the exchange. Flannery (1968, p. 105) further suggested that this exchange behavior was not “trade” in the sense of commercial exchange but was set up through social mechanisms (ritual visits, exchange of women, and fictive kinships). Flannery’s work in Mesoamerica, and the work by Renfrew and colleagues in the Mediterranean helped establish a methodological framework for understanding trade/exchange in the absence of historical or epigraphic records (Fry and Cox 1974; Hankey 1970–1971, Renfrew 1967, 1969; Renfrew et al. 1965, 1966; Shalkleton and Renfrew 1970). These advances were discussed in a series of edited volumes, conferences, and papers that deal directly with the question of interregional exchange and trade. We review some of these seminal works below.

### **Trade, exchange, and interregional interaction**

Many works emerging in the 1970s and early 1980s dealt exclusively with exchange and trade in prehistoric and historic societies, and some works became influential

beyond their regional focus (Curtin 1984; Earle and Ericson 1977a; Ericson and Earle 1982; Hirth 1984; Hutterer 1977a; Sabloff and Lamberg-Karlovsky 1975; see Webb 1974 for a good review of early work on exchange networks). Other volumes include more regionally focused works on trade and exchange (Fry 1980a; Hårdh et al. 1988; Hirth 1984; Lee and Navarrete 1978; MacReady and Thompson 1984; Specht 1972; Wilmsen 1972a). As summarized by Plog (1977), these studies developed theoretical and methodological foci on content/types, quantities, and diversity of commodities, and the size, duration, directionality, symmetry, centralization, and complexity of the exchange system.

Interregional interaction was used to explain exchange of ideas and goods between Mesoamerica and the Chacoan and Anasazi culture areas of the American Southwest (Hegmon 1999; Plog 1977). Various studies eschewed the former focus on diffusion of Mesoamerican cultural practices or migration and the development of southwestern polities as mercantile colonies of Mesoamerican states (Cordell and Plog 1979; Wilcox 1979). While alliances with Mesoamerican states that were structured through long-distance exchange might have aided Chacoan elites, these alliances were not the reasons behind the development of civilization in the Southwest (Baugh and Ericson 1993). The distinct nature of southwestern political and socioeconomic infrastructure, along with evidence of Mesoamerican imported goods, suggested in situ development with exchange between different regions (Cordell and Plog 1979; Ericson and Baugh 1993). Similarly, studies in other parts of the world also suggested in situ development of social complexity and interregional interaction (Earle and Ericson 1977a; Wilmsen 1972a).

One of the first works in the 1970s to focus on exchange was the edited volume *Social Exchange and Interaction* (Wilmsen 1972a). The aim of the volume was to understand how exchange as a social interaction was a structuring mechanism for maintenance of social systems, extending the works of Durkheim and Mauss (see Rubel and Rosman 1975, 1976; Shapiro 1968). In the introduction, Wilmsen (1972b) acknowledged that most of the authors show a substantivist bias, even though the volume itself should be placed outside the substantivist-formalist debate. Though most papers in this volume stressed the ritual or structure-functional aspects of exchange, a few dealt directly with or mention trade (as we define it) as significant in the social process (see Benedict 1972; Flannery 1972; Ford 1972; Kottak 1972).

Various papers mentioned the role played by exchange and cooperative sharing of food in structuring both within and between group interactions (Ford 1972; Frison 1972; Yengoyan 1972) and the rise/presence of specialists to mediate these exchanges, especially between groups with different social, economic, and political organizations (Benedict 1972; Ford 1972; Frison 1972). Two papers drew attention to the development of trade towns in early Mesopotamian urbanism (Wright 1972) and the growth of trading centers on the northwest Madagascar coast (Kottak 1972) as central places or mediatory zones; both linked the fortunes of these loci to the political geography that generated the production of commodities that were exchanged. In the summary chapter, Flannery (1972) drew a correlation between the emergence of exchange/trade specialists for “information processing” and mediation and the different stage/phases of social complexity: the emergence of

sodalities, trade partners, middle men, central places, and professional merchants roughly corresponds to the transition from bands to states, egalitarian to ranked to stratified societies.

Contrasting with Wilmsen's social embedding of exchange, the issue of *World Archaeology* edited by Bray was devoted entirely to the archaeology of trade; articles covered various regions and/or time periods, including West Africa (Posnansky 1973), Amazonia (Lathrap 1973), Southeast Asia (Macknight 1973), the Iranian Plateau/Mesopotamia (Beale 1973; Crawford 1973), and postcontact trade between Native Americans and Europeans (Heldman 1973). None of the articles shied from considerations of commerce in the trading activities, regardless of time period or group. Beale (1973) pointed out many different yet trading-additive infrastructures organized at local, regional, and transregional levels by either independent or state-sponsored traders: trickle trade, local redistributive trade, and regional and long-distance organized trade. Macknight (1973) used historical, ethnographic, and archaeological evidence to discuss trade within the Indonesian archipelago and with the northern Australian mainland and how this trade predated and later subsumed European traders. Posnansky (1973) and Lathrap (1973) stressed the importance of regional and long-distance trade in West Africa and Amazonia that predated the so-called civilizing aspects of the Arab polities of North Africa or the Formative polities of Peru or Ecuador, respectively. Rathje and Sabloff (1973) applied a modified version of Polanyi's port-of-trade model to the Maya port of Cozumel and outlined a general hypothesis for understanding the relationship between regulating polities and trade activities (see also Rathje and Sabloff 1972).

Another volume centered on trade is *Ancient Civilizations and Trade* (Sabloff and Lamberg-Karlovsky 1975). In his contribution, Renfrew (1975) suggested that increasing complexity demanded increasing efficiency of distribution, and in most societies this was seen in the tendency toward centralization of distribution, whether for primary or secondary production. Various papers centered on trade, and specifically individual trading activities, as significant for the development of social complexity (Adams 1975), for third millennium B.C. Mesopotamia (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1975), Classic period Maya (Rathje 1975; Sabloff and Friedel 1975), and the effect of trade on political decisions (Webb 1975). Foreshadowing our own stance, Wheatley (1975) suggested that epigraphic sources and monumental architecture have biased the archaeohistorical record against independent trade due to elite views on traders. However, departing from the aforementioned slants, Chang (1975) suggested that trade should be seen as part of a larger ecosystemic perspective, ideas later taken up by Hodder (1980) and other structuralist anthropologists.

Two more volumes focusing on trade and exchange are *Exchange Systems in Prehistory* (Earle and Ericson 1977a) and *Economic Exchange and Social Interaction in Southeast Asia* (Hutterer 1977a). In their introduction, Earle and Ericson (1977b) outlined a strongly substantivist methodology for looking at the sociopolitical contexts of prehistoric exchange. Following Dalton (1969, 1977), who suggests that contact with Europeans forcibly moved non-Western societies into market systems as we know them, they argue that traditional systems of exchange "are almost extinct" and economies studied at present are radically different from the

past due to reduced transportation cost, cash economies, and imposed peace (Earle and Ericson 1977b, p. 9). Paralleling Renfrew's collaborative work (1979; Renfrew et al. 1982) with mathematicians and economists to model cultural evolution, this volume included attempts by archaeologists to use various developments in mathematical modeling for looking at exchange systems, including graphic analysis (Ericson 1977; Renfrew 1977; Sidrys 1977), spatial analysis (Ericson 1977), network analysis (Irwin-Williams 1977; Plog 1977), and nodal analysis (DeGarmo 1977; Singer and Ericson 1977). In a significant contribution, Earle (1977) combined substantivist-primitivist models with limited formalism (elites as self-interested rational actors) to formulate the concept of a primitive "command" economy and argued that in hierarchical societies, mobilization of resources under the banner of redistribution was a largely unidirectional flow of resources from the commoners to the elite centers. This tribute was then used to further legitimate their status through public rituals, monumental architecture, and other self-aggrandizing displays of wealth and power (Earle 1977, 1982, 1997, 2002).

The Earle and Ericson volume (1977a) concentrated mainly on nonliterate or preliterate societies and favored social as opposed to economic contexts for exchange for reasons mentioned above. Perhaps because of numerous epigraphic references to markets, traders, and commerce in Southeast Asian economies predating European arrival, there was no effort to negate economic underpinnings for exchange in Hutterer's volume (1977a). As a volume bringing together historians, ethnographers, and archaeologists of Southeast Asia, it is an excellent resource for early multidisciplinary research on exchange mechanisms. Paralleling later Marxist notions on trade and inequities, Foster (1977) argued that trade was not a mechanism for maintaining social structure as proposed by Durkheim or Mauss; rather, after Benedict (1972) and Amin (1976), he argued that trade emerged from actions of self-motivated actors and was essentially a destabilizing and conflict-creating process that needed regulation by social and political regulation. These emerging Marxist critiques suggested that rather than the naïve substantivist notions on the benign managerial underpinnings of exchange, the ritual, political, and social-relational components of trade served to mediate the conflict that resulted from exchange and were not the underlying basis for exchange (see also Mitra 1977). Following Posnansky (1973) and Lathrap (1973), Whitmore (1977), Kennedy (1977), Hutterer (1977b), Wisseman (1977), and Hall (1977) gave a temporal-spatial overview of local, regional, and transoceanic exchange and trade within Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, that predated, adapted to, and subsumed the so-called Indic-Sinitic trading ventures c. 100 B.C. Bronson (1977) outlined the process by which this multiscalar interaction could have transpired: his proposed dendritic model suggests that by virtue of their positions, coastal (or other nodal) centers would be able to control access by hinterland or dispersed groups to overseas traders and vice versa (p. 42). Hence, the elites of these trade centers could commandeer exotic and prestige material for themselves and send regulated quantities of these as well as locally made rather than imported products into the hinterlands. In the next two decades similar arguments were made for other areas marginalized from cultural or political cores: East Africa (Abungu 1990; Horton 1996; Kusimba 1993), the Philippines and other areas in Southeast Asia (Glover 1989; Hall 1981; Junker 1990;

Nishimura 1986, 1988), Central America (Drennan 1991; Hoopes 1993), Oceania (Kirch 1991; Terrell 1986; Terrell and Welsch 1990), California (Arnold et al. 2004), and the Caribbean (Keegan 1994; Siegel 1992). Other papers in Hutterer's volume include ethnographic work on the contemporary trade and trading groups such as the Malay in Thailand (Gosling 1977), the Chinese in the Philippines (Omohundro 1977), farmer-forager exchange in Luzon (Peterson 1977), and ethnohistoric work on European contact (Forman 1977) and colonial trade (Wilson 1977; Woodward 1977).

*Mesoamerican Communication Routes and Contacts* (Lee and Navarette 1978) focused on combining archaeological and ethnohistoric research on communication, contact, and trade in Mesoamerica prior to the conquest. Trade was frequently mentioned in all its social, political, and commercial glory, as were numerous references to and analyses of commercial exchange infrastructure and trade specialists in prehispanic Mesoamerica. Papers include studies of infrastructures of trade and markets (Ball and Brockington 1978; Feldman 1978a, b, c; Köhler 1978; McVicker 1978; Piña Chan 1978; Rathje et al. 1978) and trade routes and settlements (Hammond 1978; Lee 1978; Navarette 1978). Though she identified herself as a substantivist, Berdan's (1977, 1978) reappraisal of Mesoamerican trade centers/ports and trade specialists (the Aztec Pochteca and the Maya Ppolom) suggests that merchant groups enjoyed a differential status in Mesoamerica from commoners and elite nobility with the ability to move across ethnic or political boundaries (but see Berdan et al. 1996).

Like better-known trading communities of the Old World (Abraham 1988; Chaudhuri 1985; Gurevich 1972; Middleton 1992; Spencer 1988; Wade 1968; Wilding 1989), Mesoamerican merchants could be differentiated into wholesale, petty, and retail specialists and were organized in both powerful guild structures (Pochteca) or loose confederacies of individual traders (Ppolom) to counter political influence. They used both economic alliances and martial prowess to guard their trade routes and secrets and had the ability to trade and interact within local and foreign markets (Berdan 1978; Bittman and Sullivan 1978; Feldman 1978c; cf. A. Chapman 1957; Polanyi et al. 1957). New merchant wealth and networks provided investment in times of crises, helped regulate trade, and also worked as information/spy resources in ways observed in many other areas of the world (Bittman and Sullivan 1978; King 1978; Oka n.d.; Rathje et al. 1978). These networks allowed commodities and tribute to flow between Mesoamerica, Central America, and the Southwest long before the conquest (Edwards 1978). And like the Old World merchants, the Pochteca and Ppolom also were distrusted by political elites. Price's summary paper (1978) predated our own arguments and decries the overly noneconomic bias of the substantivists that goes to great lengths to differentiate between modern commercial economies and archaic economies (Earle and Ericson 1977b); she suggests an *etic* approach that if "it" looks like trade and works like trade, then it is trade, regardless of epiphenomenal interpretations and nuances.

We view the period between 1978 and 1987 as the turning point for the domination of structural perspectives for studying exchange in premodern societies. One reason was the emergence of dependency and world systems ideas in the late 1960s and early 1970s and their gradual application in archaeology. We discuss this

later. We completely agree with Thomas (1975), who stated that this was part of a larger trend within the social sciences and humanities toward structural explanations for all socially and culturally manifested phenomena, past and present. Subsequently, studies focusing on structural embedding of exchange in the 1980s examined New World or non/preliterate societies (Clark 1979; Ericson and Earle 1982). Most of the papers in *Models and Methods in Regional Exchange* (Fry 1980a) approached exchange infrastructure of ceramics in the Southwest and Mesoamerican culture areas with the underlying goals of outlining procurement and production sources (Bishop 1980; Rands and Bishop 1980; Rice 1980) and modeling the intraregional distribution of goods within the social and political context of those societies (Allen 1980; Arnold 1980; Deutchman 1980; Fry 1980b; Hodder 1980; Plog 1980; Rands and Bishop 1980; Toll et al. 1980). In a departure from the general trend, Rands and Bishop (1980) and Plog (1980) referred to commercial aspects of exchange in the Southwest, including merchant middlemen and profits. Significantly, Plog (1980) summarized the data and analysis of production and distribution of ceramics in the Southwest, suggesting that exchange of materials (trade) was not a product of crisis or need but could be traced back to the earliest occupations, and laid to rest the idea of “autonomous village communities” in the prehistoric Southwest. Hodder (1980, p. 151), however, clearly states that the lack of commercial aspects in premodern exchange minimizes the role played by “importation, marketing, merchants, middlemen and profits” and that primitive exchange was necessarily socially and politically integrated and hence structurally embedded.

Most of the aforementioned works took great effort to contextualize their approaches *vis à vis* the debate on social versus commercial/economic aspects of trade. Interestingly, between the 1970s and 1980s there was a split between Old and New World perspectives on trade exchange, with most New World and some Old World researchers favoring strong political integration of all economic activity and the structural subordination of commerce as a significant activity in the development of sociopolitical complexity (Baugh and Ericson 1993; Brumfiel and Earle 1987; Clark 1979; Ericson 1981; Ericson and Earle 1982; Garber 1985; Hirth 1978; Kohl 1975, 1978; McDowell 1976; Ratnagar 1981; Santley 1985). Other studies on Old World trade and some New World approaches favored a dynamic state of flux between trade/commerce and political attempts to regulate, control, and dominate the economy (Alden 1982a; Coblenz 1978; Cordell 1977; Crawford 1978; Davidson and McKerrel 1976; Fulford 1989; Gledhill and Larsen 1982; Guderjan et al. 1989; Gurevich 1982; Hårdh 1977–1978; Hårdh et al. 1988; Hassig 1985; Irwin 1978; Leciejewicz 1978; MacReady and Thompson 1984; McKillop 2005; Offner 1981b; Smith 1987; Tosi and Piperno 1973; Wells 1984; Whitehouse 1983; Whitehouse and Williamson 1973). Our assessment of this split also suggests that there was a strong correlation between the presence of literacy/epigraphic records of the society/culture under study and the socioeconomic paradigm. Those with extensive epigraphic records had trade, traders, and commerce. Those without these attributes did not have commercial trade or considerable attempts were made to negate these aspects of exchange (Dalton 1977; La Lone 1982; Murra 1956). The latter approach essentially made premodern trade into a behavioral privilege for the elite and a



mechanism for elites to gain and maintain power over nonelites. We explore the emergence of elite-centered ideas on trade below.

### Archaeology of trade: power and the elite

As mentioned earlier, the tendency toward structural-systemic approaches in the social sciences and humanities during the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the premise that trade is an important but subordinate *part* of the political economy (Hodder 1980; Paynter 1989). Apart from interregional interaction models, the search for systemic models to explain trade in the political economy led to the borrowing of extradisiplinary structural mechanisms—particularly Wallerstein’s world systems theory. Drawing from Marxist economics and dependency theories of the 1960s, Wallerstein (1974) sought to explain the emergence of modern capitalism and the disparity of wealth across cultures by placing the emergence of capitalism in Western Europe c. A.D. 1500. The colonial takeover of the Americas, Asia, and Africa allowed Europeans to develop corporate and industrial economic systems in which Europe became a rapidly industrializing core, extracting raw material from the peripheral colonies. This disparity in flow of labor, goods, and services led to underdevelopment of the periphery and development of the core. The attraction of world systems theory was that it seemed to present a nonlocal or nonregional analysis of large-scale economic systems, and it also brought trade firmly into grand historical analysis (Peregrine 1996a). Wallerstein, however, defined his world system only to explain post-A.D. 1500 Western European interactions with the Americas, Africa, and Asia, and how these have shaped the modern world (Wallerstein 1979). He also suggested that the processes outlined in the system would work only when bulk transfers of agricultural materials dominated exchange. He asserted that patterns of exchange prior to A.D. 1500 that resembled a world system could be characterized more aptly as world empires in which tribute mobilization and political processes were far more significant than long-distance trade that was dominated by luxury, prestige, or sumptuary goods.

Subsequent historical and sociological research on classical, medieval, and premodern trade in Eurasia asserted that there “was/were” world system/s prior to A.D. 1500 centered in the Near East, South Asia, or East Asia (Abu-Lughod 1989; Chaudhuri 1985; Glover 1989). Archaeological responses to Wallerstein’s narrow definition and utility of his model asserted that in spite of minimal exchange in bulk product, luxury goods trade could be used to analyze ancient economies using the systemic perspectives provided by world systems theory (Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978; Schneider 1991). The late 1970s’ and early 1980s’ nascent interest in the archaeological applications of world systems theory was regenerated by Kohl’s (1987) influential and cautionary article on the possible applications of Wallerstein’s world system theory to archaeological economies (see also Blanton and Feinman 1984). In the early to mid-1990s, world system theorists split into two camps—hard world *system* theorists and world *systems* perspectivists—with differing emphasis on one versus many systems (Amin 1991).



World system theorists eschewed any deviation from Wallerstein's original model and insisted on the core-periphery dichotomy and relationships in prehistoric economies (Frank 1993). Frank argued that such relations did exist in the past and outlined a supraregional system of rise and decline of civilizations based on intercultural trade and contact between large dominant cores and subordinate peripheries. He further argued that there has been only one world system since the fourth millennium B.C., with a shifting core first in Southwest Asia (Bronze Age), subsequently in the Far East (Iron Age until the modern era), briefly in Europe, and now shifting back to East Asia (Frank 1993, see also Frank and Gills 1993). Most archaeologists have argued that there is little support for Frank and colleagues' single world system before the premodern era (Stein 1999), but some advocate the cautious use of regionally focused core-periphery ideas to understand prehistoric political economies of Uruk Mesopotamia and Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Spain (Algaze 1989; Rowlands et al. 1987).

Archaeologists interested in the application of world system approaches find world systems perspectives far more suitable to explain data on trade and polity (Kardulias 1999). Following Kohl's critique (1987) of the inapplicability of world system theory as presented by Wallerstein, Hall and Chase-Dunn (1992) and Peregrine (1992) developed the world systems perspective in the early 1990s. This approach problematized and addressed the concepts of core-periphery differentiation, underdevelopment, and the necessity for bulk goods exchange to cause systemic change, some or all of which were not seen as part of prehistoric exchange, even though the exchange itself was multiregional and changes in one system affected other regions (Chase-Dunn 1992; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1991; Hall and Chase-Dunn 1996; Peregrine 1991a, 1992). In subsequent publications, world systems perspectivist outlined various types of world systems that existed prior to the modern world system based on how labor is mobilized and surplus accumulation is managed within the system (Kardulias 1999; see papers in Peregrine and Feinman 1996).

Polanyi's ideas on long-distance exchange of prestige goods were combined with Wallerstein's core-periphery ideas to understand exchange and its role in shaping social development (Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978; Schneider 1991). The prestige goods model postulates that a large interregional exchange system based on sumptuary and luxury goods develops when elites "obtain and maintain their position by controlling access to sumptuary goods trade" (Baugh and Ericson 1993, p. 10). These goods have value because of scarcity and/or because they require specialized manufacturing skills and are associated with the external, exotic, and/or more powerful. The commoners or producers of staples are given temporary access to these networks and goods by the elite who then mobilize the surplus production for furthering their control and access to prestige goods networks and distribution (Baugh and Ericson 1993; Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978).

Peregrine (1996b) used prestige goods exchange in Mississippian societies to argue for a Mississippian world system and related processes that affected relations between Mississippian polities and their surroundings. To shift between levels of analysis, Hall and Chase-Dunn (1996) developed four categories of heuristically bounded world systems and the corresponding trading/exchange strategy

dominating each system: (1) kin-based (reciprocity), (2) tribute-based (redistribution), (3) capitalist (market), and (4) socialist (democracy). Far from freeing trade/exchange from the political economy, even the more flexible approaches of the world systems perspectivists subordinated premodern trade to larger political and social process. Despite the presence of “markets, capitalist production and commodity exchange [...] within tributary empires, capitalist activities were always embedded in a larger tributary structure and subordinate to it” (Hall and Chase-Dunn 1996, p. 17).

The structural approach is central to world systemic approaches, especially as an explanatory mechanism to demonstrate how cores would eventually dominate peripheries. However, as we outlined before, the structural-material approach to the development of trade studies in archaeology became especially significant in the archaeology of urbanism and complex societies, even outside the world systems paradigm. Though Polanyi’s elites controlled trade, this was seen as a benign process and not exploitative, with the commoners receiving good returns. Emerging Marxist critiques of substantivism and of prestige goods exchange stressed the problems with giving distribution and exchange mechanisms a greater role in the development of complexity as opposed to production (Halperin 1984). McAnany (1992) pointed out that exchange of prestige goods reflects extant power mechanisms but cannot in itself generate wealth and power. Hence, emerging elites can use their primary sources of power (warfare, control of basic resources, bulk production) to control or sponsor craft specialists, thereby gaining access to existing prestige goods systems to legitimate their arrival into elite circles or, if already in power, use prestige goods to build further alliances (D’Altroy and Earle 1985). But the main argument remains that prestige goods networks cannot be both the source of power and the legitimation thereof. Furthermore, many Marxist scholars argued that trade was an inherently unequal and destabilizing mechanism in which labor and resources were transferred to another as traders and more powerful communities benefitted at the expense of the weaker and less developed groups (Amin 1976; Emmanuel 1972; Godelier 1969; Hornborg 2003; Mitra 1977; Patnaik 1996–1997).

Amin (1976) suggested that in the past, traders’ profits were based on the lack of knowledge of demand by producers and lack of information on production cost by consumers. As distant societies were brought into trader-mediated contact, surpluses from one society were transferred to another without either producers or consumers benefiting. Godelier (1969) argued that economic systems seen as reciprocal or ideal redistributive are actually asymmetrical and exploitative. In the Andes, most substantivists saw or see the Inka as ideal and benevolent redistributive monarchs who enriched the state and quelled notions of personal aggrandizement and independent commercial enterprise (Murra 1956; Stanish 1992). Research on emerging social complexity points to a parasitic group of elites motivated by individual needs, who mobilized resources and controlled production for their own profit and gain (Brumfiel and Earle 1987; Earle 2002; Gilman 1991; see Sabol 1978). Pursuing wealth, status, and power, individuals variously called accumulators, aggrandizers, strivers, and entrepreneurial elites are usually driven by self-interest. The desire for wealth, status, and political power are the foundations of

societal inequality and its institutionalization; they also are the engines for behaviors such as trade and exchange that are then used to cement political and social alliances (Clark and Blake 1994; Earle 1997, pp. 5–10; Haas 1982, Mann 1986).

To resolve this disparity, D'Altroy and Earle (1985; Earle 2002; Earle and D'Altroy 1982) combined the formalist ideas of rational maximizing elites, the substantivist prestige goods model, and the primitivist ideas of agricultural control in their discussion of Inka imperial economies. They differentiated between twin mechanisms of wealth and staple finance operating concurrently in Andean political economies. Wealth finance was the subsystem in which sumptuary goods produced by attached or controlled crafts specialists were exchanged between elite groups (intra- and interregional) to negotiate and maintain alliances (Earle 1994). Staple finance was the appropriation and mobilization of bulk agricultural resources by elites who then used the surplus for self-aggrandizing public displays of power and ideological legitimacy (Earle 2002). Here we see the growing divergence between Polanyi's benevolent elites running ideal redistributive archaic states and Gilman's parasitic chiefs who ran exploitative and self-aggrandizing systems of governance by controlling all aspects of production and distribution for their own political benefit (Gilman 1983, 1991).

The study of trade moved in the direction first suggested by Chang (1975), Friedman and Rowlands (1978), and then Hodder (1980), that trade/exchange behavior should be seen as an epiphenomenal result of structural processes and subject to the larger political economy. Specifically, premodern trade and trading processes were seen as ways and means for elite members of society to mobilize resources and negotiate power (Brumfiel and Earle 1987; Earle 1997; Haas 1982). This development continued the structural-functional approach to trade and exchange first suggested by Durkheim and elaborated by Mauss, that exchange serves to mediate conflict and maintain social structure, but it also removed trade from exchange (reciprocal or redistributive) as being strictly an elite activity and strategy to gain power through control of rare and/or exotic materials and long-distance trade routes (Marcus 1983).

Hence, trading behavior was viewed as a subset of a larger political process. This approach, however, begs too many questions. If evidence for full/part-time trade specialists now suggests their presence in the Levantine Neolithic and the pre-Ubaid Uruk era (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1989; Stein 1999), can (should) we conflate political, ritual, military, and trade elites as one category? What was the role of covert nonpolitical interest groups in decision-making (Ehrenreich et al. 1995; Yoffee 1979)? What is the nature of relations between various groups in a larger political economy (Blanton et al. 1996; Crumley 2001; Feinman 1995; Knapp and Cherry 1994)? How complex was the nature of prehistoric exchange? And just because Wallerstein argued that world systems depended on both bulk trade of staples and luxuries, does this mean that trade in bulk goods did not transpire prior to the early modern era (see Fisher 1986; Haldane 1993; Malville 2001 for examples of prehistoric bulk goods exchange)? Why do markets, traders, and commerce that appear in historical documents disappear when anthropologists decide that either the peoples exhibiting the behavior or the observers do not know what they are doing/

observing or deem them incapable of such behavior (Berdan 1978; Bohannon and Dalton 1962; Dercksen 1997; Knapp 1993; La Lone 1982; Stark 1978)? Finally, how realistic is it to assume vast politically integrated economies functioning without resistance over large areas and time periods (Alden 1982a, b; Clark 1988; Clastres 1977, 1987)?

We suggest, after Isaac (1993) and Austin (2004), that the many efforts to embed all premodern economic interactions in social relations served to smother or to negate any commercial motivations that nonmodern peoples may have had (Adams 1992; Yusuf 1975). Evidence suggests that both commercial motivations and social relations mattered as much in the past as they do now (Vanderwal 1978). We postulate that the drive to negate the commercial aspects of exchange emerged from two main paradigms. The first paradigm was the distancing of anthropology from the perceived universalist and hyper-reductionist theories of neoclassical economists and to prove that cultural differences mattered (Polanyi 2001). The second was a broader antipathy toward middlemen, traders, and trading activities expressed by intellectual and political elites in many societies, including our own, in which businessmen have to legitimate their existence and their activities through philanthropy, social investment and gifts/services, and favors to their political patrons (Alexander and Alexander 1991; Duyvedak 1928; Rotstein 1972; Sabol 1978). We suggest that the reality is much more complex: it is not all about the bottom line nor is it just about “ritual” either (Plog 1993).

The aforementioned power-strategy approaches rely on assuming top-down control of political economy (production, distribution, and consumption) (Earle 1997; Haas 1982; Mann 1986; cf. Yoffee 1979, 1993); recent studies are showing how this “control” is usually fleeting, superficial, and usually unsustainable for any appreciable length of time, and how trade continues in spite of elite attempts at control or in the absence of stable political infrastructure (Braund 1991; Igue 1976; Nwambughuogu 1981). Increasing evidence suggests that part-time specialization in trade and exchange might have accompanied sedentism and the rise of institutionalized inequality in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Levant (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1989). Trading communities such as Hacinebi might have been active in the early Uruk polities in Anatolia (Stein 1999). Various reanalyses of ancient economies in Africa, Asia, and Europe have suggested that the growth of trade and commerce, far from being a sudden development in the Classic period/early modern era (Casson 1979, 1984, 1989), can be found in the Levant, Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East/South Asia as far back as the fourth millennium B.C. (Caspers 1972; Casson 1994; Davies and Schofield 1995; Dercksen 1997; Hankey 1970–1971; Heltzer 1977; Klengel 1978; Lahiri 1992; Leemans 1977; Loewe 1971; Stech and Piggott 1986; Van Loon 1977; Veenhof 1977; Zagarell 1986).

Likewise, ethnohistorical and archaeological work in the Americas, Mesoamerica in particular, also suggest that, contra Chapman (1957) and Carrasco (1978), non-state-based commerce carried out by trading specialists definitely formed a major part of Postclassic interactions (Blanton et al. 1993; Gledhill and Larson 1982; Offner 1981b). Recent work tying household studies to regional systems (Berdan et al. 1996; Blanton et al. 1997; Feinman and Nicholas 2004; Robin 2003; Moholy-Nagy 1999; Nichols et al. 2002) have opened the path for looking at decentralized

distribution of commodities and the possible presence of traders and markets/market activity in Epiclassic, Classic, and even Formative Mesoamerican societies. In this view, the growth of independent commerce and trade specialists was not a sudden development of the Postclassic in Mesoamerica but the result of millennia-long interactions between Mesoamerica and its neighbors (Blanton 1996, 1997; Blanton and Peregrine 1997). Much of this research emerged from work on behavioral process and held that development of social structure was a result of human decision-making. In the next and final section we outline the archaeological research on trade focused on behavior, including individual/group motivation, multiple-level decision-making, and strategies for cross-cultural exchange. We focus on the main agents of economic exchange—trading communities.

### Archaeology of trade: traders as agents

The idea of agent-based trade is not new in archaeological or economic thought because agency or the ability to act is at the root of economic rationalism, neoclassical and neoliberal economics, and the *Homo economicus (politicus)* of the modernist-formalist schools of economic history (Gudeman 2001). However, given the sparse nature of the archaeological record, one of the greatest difficulties is to understand the nature of group activity, let alone individual agency. Formalist approaches in economic anthropology began in earnest in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g., LeClair and Schneider 1968; Schneider 1968, 1974). Firth (1965) suggested that Malinowski had overemphasized the ritual aspects of exchange and supported further work on exchange in Melanesia that included profit, demand, and supply (Carrier and Carrier 1989; Colson 1973; Finney 1969, 1973; Greenfield and Strickton 1986; Hughes 1977; Leroy 1979; Rehfisch 1962; Strathern 1969, 1978). Applying formalist ideas in his ethnographic research, Pospisil (1963, p. 395) asserted that Melanesian peoples “were as individually motivated, profit oriented as anybody in the West or in the capitalist world.”

As we have mentioned before, most strictly formalist methodologies and studies declined by the mid-1970s, as the aforementioned marriage of primitivism-substantivism-formalism became one of the basic tools for explaining the development of social complexity and how political elites gained and maintained power (Earle 2002). The case for trade/exchange as a parallel process affecting social change and cultural development came about through two separate avenues: reanalysis of historical data on ancient trade and the strategies approach. The first approach began as a combination of economic history/anthropology and classical/historical archaeology that focused on trade and trading communities in the ancient world (Austin 2002; Knapp and Cherry 1994). The second approach emerged out of archaeological studies on “interaction spheres” and the strategies used by agents to manage and maintain these interactions. Here we discuss the work on trading communities and its impact on the research on ancient and premodern trade. The second approach will be addressed in a forthcoming article prepared for this journal.

## Trading communities, trade, and the past

Polanyi's paradigm for administered trade in the ancient world minimized any role for independent traders or merchants, at least where historical documents were nonexistent (Bohannon and Dalton 1962; Ratnagar 1981). Prices were fixed and central market places acted as efficient redistribution zones (Polanyi et al. 1957). After Polanyi, Finley (1985, p. 22) stressed that the classical Greek and Roman economies depended on agricultural production and not "an enormous conglomeration of interdependent markets." He also stressed the administered nature of exchange and the relative insignificance of trade in the Greek and Roman classical worlds. Finley's marriage of primitivism-substantivism and the subordination of all economic activity to agricultural production and administered redistributive markets guided much research on ancient states and empires, from Babylon to the Andes (Browman 1975; La Lone 1982; Murra 1956).

Reanalysis of the Kultepe documents from the *karum* (merchant quarter) of Kanesh in Anatolia, c. 1800 B.C., reveals a very different system of trade, one that fully incorporated merchants, and it also showed the relationships between merchants and political elite (Casson 1994; Gledhill and Larsen 1982; Larsen 1977). The documents show that money as a commodity was collected from a number of investors by one individual to invest further in other ventures (Kramer 1977; Larsen 1977). Other sets of documents such as the Kaskal show complicated trading procedures in Mesopotamian states involving sponsored traders and private traders, with both independent and politically motivated trading ventures (Casson 1994). There are detailed accounts of how profits from these ventures were to be divided. The documents also mention that the political elite may invest funds based on state revenue but limited these to 50% of total investment, presumably to prevent undue influence. Casson (1984, 1994) mentions numerous examples of how merchants in second millennium B.C. Mesopotamia exchanged information, transferred goods, and arranged credit. There is a striking similarity between the rules of business seen in the early second millennium B.C., those seen among Roman and Greek business practices, South Asian Hindu-Buddhist-Jain *sreshitis* of 500–200 B.C., the documents of Jewish and Islamic medieval traders, the Italian, Asian, and African business elites of the 14th–16th centuries, and modern-day investment practices such as building and managing private equity funds (Agarwal 1982; Garg 1984; Larsen 1977; Ray 1986; Tampoe 1989). Furthermore, there are remarkable similarities between trading cultures all over the world, a fact that has led some to describe a "trading network culture" that transcends cultural, ethnic, and even temporal bounds (Bellina 2003; Dhar 1985; Grofman and Landa 1983). As Pospisil (1963, p. 356) argues and ethnographic and ethnohistoric studies confirm, "the political boundaries of the confederacy of lineages [pose] no limit whatsoever to business relationships."

Ethnohistoric and ethnographic work on trading communities suggests that traders share many trading behaviors because of the similarities in which they conduct their business (Brett 1969; Cohen 1971; Damon 1980; Dannhaeuser 1983; Fagan 1969; Gerlach 1963; Goody and Mustapha 1967; Harding 1965, 1994; Hill 1969; Hunt 1965; Martin 1969; Mitchell 1962; Ortiz and Lees 1992; Pendergast 1972;



Ukwu 1967; Vansina 1962). Traders are regarded as necessary evils in most parts of the world (Curtin 1984); they are disliked by the intelligentsia and political elites alike; they are often marginalized, even in areas they might call home (Duyvendak 1928); trading diasporas are ubiquitous (Isaac 1974; Merani and Van Der Laan 1979; Orser 1984); traders usually live in bounded zones within or near cities, differentiated from political centers (Cohen 1971; Curtin 1971; Isaac 1974; Khuri 1965; Larsen 1977). This differentiation along both professional and ethnic lines makes them easy targets in cases of popular or political unrest and hence they find strength in their networks (Kiem 1993). In addition, trade networks go beyond cultural, national, and geographic boundaries and are usually long-lived (Cohen 1971; Dhar 1985; Isaac 1974; Lewicki 1964; Lisle-Williams 1984; Martin 1969); traders take risks and trade in areas that others will not (Meneses 1987; Northrup 1972); trading communities keep their distance from politics and react to rather than anticipate political or social change (Clark 1992; Meneses 1987); long-term sustainability is usually desired (Steenstgard 1987), but in untenable situations short-term profits are not overlooked, including hoarding and price gouging (Allouche and Al Maqrîsî 1994).

In politically favorable periods, traders might be able to visibly amass wealth and wield greater political power by becoming kingmakers, but in times of distress or political change, traders might become the scapegoats for local or regional conditions and be punished likewise (Alexander and Alexander 1991; Nwabughuogu 1981; Oka 2002). Hence, traders usually invest much time and effort in building networks that cross ethnic and political boundaries, that can be inherited by succeeding generations, and that will keep a continuous flow of commodities, credit, and resources (Chaudhuri 1985; Chauveau 1976; Dhar 1985; Shoji 1966). It is clear that trade, traders, and trading systems can be seen as distinct from political processes (Adams 1992, Donlan 1994; Pearson 1976, 1999).

The hatred or distrust of traders can clearly be seen in ancient Greek, Chinese, or Hindu thought. Xenophon and then Aristotle, writing in the second and third centuries B.C., suggested that trading activities were immoral and should be relegated to slaves and foreigners (Morris 1994). In a characteristic intellectual and political elite description of ideal trade policy, Shang Yang, a nobleman in c. 500 B.C. China suggested: “trade should be hampered as much as possible by heavy tolls, merchants should be made to serve and to live simply, heavy prices and taxes should be fixed for such luxuries as wine and meat and trade in grain should not be allowed” (cited in Duyvendak 1928, p. 49). Statesman Chao Tso (cited in Duyvendak 1928, p. 55) stated in the face of an unfair tax increase by the state that:

those [peasants] who have grain sell at half value while those who have not borrow at exorbitant usury. Then paternal acres change hands; sons and grandsons are sold to pay debts, merchants make profits and even petty tradesmen set up businesses and realize unheard of gains. Every day, they loiter on the market places of the capital, and, taking advantage of the oppression of the superiors, have double profit on what they sell.

The more encouraging view toward trade in the Sanskrit text, the *Sukraniti*, c. A.D. 700, suggests that states should not overtax or overburden agriculture, merchants, or temples; the state must maintain 20 times the cost of a potential crisis



in the treasury, but the crisis itself must be paid for by a loan from a merchant consortia or a few large merchants and paid back in a timely manner with interest (Sarkar 1914). The best king enriches by tribute (conquest and control of agriculture), the middle king enriches by trade, and the worst king enriches himself by overtaxing temples. In a manner reminiscent of the Kultepe documents (c. 1800 B.C.) (Dercksen 1997; Larsen 1977), as well as the Geniza texts (c. A.D. 1000) (Udovitch 1970), the author suggests that kings should invest their wealth with merchants who trade with their capital and not with their interest, who sell when prices are high and store when prices are low. The text suggests that prices be regulated (but not fixed by rulers) based on time and space and an understanding of three price levels: high, middling, and low (Sarkar 1914).

Although both of the aforementioned works talk about the relationship of the political elite toward trade and traders, they also mention many aspects of trade and commerce common from the first millennium B.C.: prices were based on demand and supply and were subject to regulation as opposed to control (Geva 1982; Osborne 1996); trade was regulated, not controlled or administered regardless of political elite desires (Mattingly et al. 2001; Yoffee 1979); state or public debt could be absolved (a practice regarded as a development of the early modern era) by loans from a merchant consortia (contra Mancourant 2002); state investment in private entrepreneurship was common and merchants were both liked and disliked for their ability to generate wealth without any effort. The author of the *Sukraniti* also placed an upper limit on the territorial growth of states that depended on trade returns as a primary source of revenue. This pattern is also seen in the archaeological and historical record on trade-based polities in Mesoamerica, Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, and even South America (Alpers 1969; Bandy 2004; Bisson 1982; Boone et al. 1990; Kusimba 1999a, b; Mudenge 1974; Plotkin 1973; Ray 1986).

The past 20 years have seen an increasing interest in research on the evolution of trading communities and their relations with political elite, with a consensus of opinion emerging from studies on traders in the Uruk polities (Hacinebi) (Stein 1999), Bronze Age Babylonia (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1975; Larsen 1977), the classical Greco-Roman world and its periphery (Mattingly and Salmon 2001; Woolf 1992), recent periods in Afroeurasia (Brett 1983; Chenciner and Magomedkhanov 1992; Doherty 1980; Masters 1992; Pitiphat 1992; Wells 1984), and recently in Epiclassic (Hirth 1984, 1998) and Classic and Formative Mesoamerican societies (Feinman and Nicholas 2004; Guderjan, et al. 1989; McKillop 1989, 2005; also see comments by Feinman and Winter in Hirth 1998). Looking at the sheer volume of distribution of products in the Valley of Oaxaca, Feinman and Nicholas (2004) argue that redistribution and reciprocity cannot explain nor account for the complexities of pre-Aztec exchange. They see a combination of economic specialization, with exchange taking place primarily through market and reciprocal exchange and some redistribution mechanisms. In the Late Formative and Classic period Valley of Oaxaca, the intensity and scale of household production was too large to have been handled by face-to-face reciprocity or even elite redistribution in form of feasting. The specialized nature and intensity of domestic production suggests the presence of markets along with reciprocal or redistributive systems

(Feinman and Nicholas 2004). Hirth (1998) has outlined an archaeological methodology—the distributional approach—to locate marketplaces and market systems in the Mesoamerican past; he finds both at Xochicalco in the Epiclassic Valley of Mexico. However, most of the ideas regarding the subordination of trading behavior have impinged on the control over production by political elites (Earle 1997). Below we explore how independence in trading behaviors and the tension between political elites and economic specialists could have paralleled similar complexities arising from attempts to control craft production.

### Trade, craft production, and control

The theoretical basis for the nexus between trade, production, and political economy rests on the assumption of control of both craft specialists and their products by political elite (Costin 2001; Peregrine 1991b; Schortman and Urban 2004; Underhill 2002). But recent work on craft production in Asia, Africa, and the Americas reveals that neither mass production nor highly specialized production was necessarily controlled by elite, nor was it organized in top-down controlled guilds (Charlton et al. 1991; Schortman and Urban 2004). As Feinman and Nicholas (2004) and Sinopoli (2003) both indicate, commodities could be produced for local, regional, and macroregional consumption by craft specialists working at the household level. The organization of labor and production ranged from being spatially centralized to being distributed across the landscape (Junker 1999; Sinopoli 1988). But these groups were all loosely organized by lineage, lateral relationships with other producers and distributors, and were sponsored and/or encouraged by local elite (Aoyama 1999; Bates and Lees 1977; Feinman and Nicholas 2004). Underhill (2002) suggests using “sponsored production” rather than “controlled production” to underscore political elite/craft specialists relationships, although she argues that Shang elite controlled the final products and circulation of bronze crafts in second millennium B.C. China, if not the specialists themselves.

We suggest that the link between craft specialists, trade, and social complexity might be due to the centralization and aggregation of specialists in urban areas where they were liable to find more patrons, distributors, and clients for their products (Kusimba 2005). Recent studies point out that the centralization of craft production should be seen as a locational phenomenon and not a political control mechanism. The political integration of craft production and distribution is a parallel regulating process, not the prime cause of craft production (Alden 1982a; Junker 1993, 1999; Peregrine 1991b; Schortman and Urban 2004; Sinopoli 1988, 2003; Stark 1991, 2003). Centralization of craft production or import substitution is seen by economists as a natural aggregational process that enhances efficiency of production *and* distribution. The centralization is encouraged by political elite who offer protection and the use of territory, and provide benefits such as land, water, access to raw materials, and middlemen trading groups (Goody 1982). The political integration hence serves as a regulated forum in which political elites, entrepreneurs, producers, and distributors can interact (Kusimba 2005; Sinopoli 2003; Trigger 2003).

The benefit to the political elite was revenue in the form of tax, tribute, and first access to finished products or special projects and commissioned artifacts from the sponsored specialists. Sinopoli's work (1988, 1994, 2003) on the Vijayanagara empire, South Asia, c. A.D. 1350–1550, shows how production of cloth, pottery, and other crafts that were mass-produced and marketed to targeted populations in other parts of Asia, Europe, and Africa could remain at the household level, under minimal control of political elite. Similar arguments are made by Blanton et al. (1997) and Feinman and Nicholas (2004) to explain mass production at domestic household levels in Classic period Oaxaca. In times of unfair taxation or treatment, craftspeople could and did vote with their feet to move to other areas where elites were eager to sponsor their skills and production (Mattingly and Salmon 2001; Rathbone 2003). Expanding states and political elites also gave incentives to agrarian workers to develop nonagricultural areas to increase total staple finance or agricultural revenue (Manning and Morris 2005; Rathbone 2003; Stephen 1995, 1997).

Apart from the economic historical and archaeological work on trade and traders in the past, other studies focusing on the nature of political control have contended that it is and was neither efficient nor desirable for states or political elite to control every aspect of production, distribution, and consumption or even long-distance trade (Offner 1981a, b; Parkins and Smith 1998; Rathbone 2003; Yoffee 1979, 2004); producers, distributors, and specialized trading groups will resist such attempts (Curtin 1984; Garg 1984). Aubert (2001, p. 90) argues that:

the organization of production, production, agricultural or not, depends at all times on the need and/or the willingness of “entrepreneurs” to reach a level of productivity that would make their effort worthwhile; only an economic system like those established by some Communist régimes in the twentieth century would be able to subordinate economic rationalism to social priorities, an endeavour that met limited success and saw the development of parallel economies (black market) ruled by profit.

In all areas where economic process was forcibly embedded in sociopolitical ideology, informal economies soon arose in which favors and services were commodified, gift exchanges sealed informal alliances, and lateral or illegal flow of goods and services eroded increasing state attempts to centralize economies (Clark 1988; Ferman et al. 1987; Gregoire 1991; Igue 1976). According to Lomnitz (1988, 2002), informal economies profit from and add to state inefficiencies and ultimately, through covert complicity with political elite, might be the primary means by which the “redistributive” state economy “functions” visibly.

In fact, many examples of public architecture, state-sponsored ideology, and other symbols of state power accepted as actual evidence of control were created to suggest the state's power, even though the state maintained visible power only through complicity with “subsystemic groups” and regional power brokers and with tacit acceptance of the informal or shadow economy (Barfield 2001; Ferman et al. 1987; Leirissa 1993; Lovell et al. 2000; Pitiphat 1992; Yoffee 1979). As mentioned before, Wheatley (1975) suggests that epigraphic sources and monumental architecture remain primary sources for top-down modeling on political economy.

These are commissioned by political elite to promote their deeds and “control” over social and economic process and to downplay independence and deeds of private traders and entrepreneurs and resistance movements. After Wheatley (1975), we also assert that, historically, elites who attempted to overcontrol specialists or the distribution of products experienced steady attrition of revenue and craft production as specialists sought greener pastures. Apropos Wheatley, many folkloric narratives among craft specialists abound in themes in which “crafty” specialists outwitted or thwarted predatory, greedy, or overly controlling elites (Chattopadhyaya 1994; Upadhyaya 1966). Though many of these stories might indeed be apocryphal myths, they suggest an underlying subtext of tension between political and economic spheres over control of knowledge, products, and distribution, a tension that is not often considered in archaeological approaches (Gmelch 1986; Oka 2006).

Uncritical acceptance of elite narratives and monuments as evidence of actual elite authority (e.g., Ogburn 2004a, b) might lead to nonrealistic assumptions of power and control in ancient times (but see Stanish 2001). Reevaluation of Spanish chronicles of the Aztec and Inca empires in line with archaeological evidence has revealed that economic systems in these vast empires, their tributary states, and surrounding polities were much more distributed among subsystemic groups and regional/local power structures than previously assumed (Bauer 1992; Berdan 1978; Berdan et al. 1996; Blanton 1996; Cowgill 1997; Rostworowski de Diez Canseco 1970, 1977; Stanish 2001).

### An argument for trader autonomy in premodern economies

Systems of decentralized control relying on complicity between political, economic, and religious elites at multiple levels are now being seen in most ancient states and other groups in their systems of production, distribution, and consumption (Cowgill 1997). This is also true for relationships between people in different social organizations (Barfield 2001; Khazanov and Wink 2001; Morrison and Junker 2002). Similar distinctions and relations between political and economic elite are suggested for societies in the Americas—Mexica and Maya traders in Panama and Central America (Hoopes 1993)—and West Africa, such as the Hausa, the Diakhank, and the Nri (Alagoa 1970; Anikpo 1991; Curtin 1984; Lovejoy 1973). Even state-appointed market masters/traders in the Old World, Central America, and Mesoamerica tended to be influential/senior members of trading communities/guilds as opposed to nonspecialized members of the nobility; they had the power to intercede or deal on the behalf of traders and adjudicate commercial disputes without involving political elites (Alpers 1969; Arhin 1990; Curtin 1984; Kathirithamby-Wells and Villiers 1990). For West Africa, Anikpo (1991) argues that definite separation existed between the political Nri (known as the Eze) and the trader Nri. The trader Nri organized the commercial aspects, but the Eze Nri did “not acquire a monopoly of trade, they acquired a monopoly of the ritual base that sustained the trade and other productive sources inside and outside the Nri” (Anikpo 1991, p. 52).

This work on trading communities and their role in political and economic process is guiding research in many other parts of the world, including the

Americas, Asia, Africa, and Europe (Arhin 1990; Arkush 1993; Attolini-Lecon 1994; Austin 2002; Bayman 1995; Fernandez-Tejedo 1998; Kusimba 1993, 1999a; Stein 1999). In a critique of the world systems theory and perspectives, Stein (2002) argues that the top-down modeling in both approaches results in structural hegemony and that systems emerge as a black box that explains everything through external change. Even accounting for variations in world systems by classifying interactions into heuristically discrete but empirically fluid world system types obfuscates the real nature of balance of political and economic power in ancient economies (Stein 1999, 2005). Although world systems thought itself has reacted to these and other critiques by including more bottom-up and interdisciplinary approaches, as seen in works by Chase-Dunn and Anderson (2005) and Wallerstein (2004), we would argue that the complexity of ancient economies needs to step beyond the structural paradigm that still forms the core of the world systemic approach (Feinman 1996; Stein 1999).

First, the distance between polities was a major factor for undertaking any kind of punitive or disciplinary mission; hence, distance created parity between polities, supporting the distance-parity model to view interpolity relations (Stein 1999). The relations between interacting groups were mediated and long-distance trade was facilitated by trading diasporas who arranged both prestige and bulk goods exchange for independent and group gain, “acted” as ambassadors, and negotiated diplomatic missions and alliances between elites (Ambrose 1978; Cohen 1971). It is no coincidence that traders, ambassadors (as agents for political elite), and thieves (traders as thieves, trader’s nexus with informal economies according to political elite and intelligentsia) all shared the same gods in many different cultures: classical Greece (Hermes), West African Yoruba traders, Aztec Pochteca, and Maya Ppolom traders (Agiri 1975; Berdan 1978; Bittman and Sullivan 1978; Curtin 1984; Falola 1991; Krapf-Askari 1969). To Stein’s distance-parity model we would add the social distance between members and groups caused by increasing complexity. This distance also forces parity between members of different groups of elite and commoners (Blanton 1998). Following our earlier argument, it is far easier for elites to regulate production and distribution through conciliatory strategies backed by occasional show of strength and gain tribute/tax through covert or overt alliances than to constantly maintain centralized control (Trigger 2003). The relative independence or interdependence of traders, producers, and craftspeople from elites allowed the concentration of secondary production, competition, innovation, and development that characterized agglomerated urban areas (Apatá 1990; Kusimba 2005; Osborne 1996).

We have suggested that traders, and indeed craft specialists, have been far more independent from political elites than archaeological analysis allows; we also have argued that trade activities (including commercial aspects) have played both deep and broad roles in the human past (Osborne 1996). Reanalysis of most economic systems from Bronze Age Mesopotamia to 19th century West Africa has shown that the strong substantivist differentiation between contemporary and premodern economies is misplaced and gives unfounded importance to social-political integration or control over economies (Chaudhuri 1985; Latham 1978; Launay 1978; Law 1977, 1992; Lynn 1992). This view, however, does not mean that traders

and market mentalities have always dominated in past societies or will continue to dominate contemporary socioeconomic culture, or that *laissez faire* economies are the “desired” end of human economic development (Bogle 2005). We agree with Polanyi and the substantivists that ideas such as the free market are not the desired end of human economic and mental evolution (Polanyi et al. 1957). We also suggest after Polanyi (1947) that blind belief in the hegemony of the bottom line and *Homo economicus* represents a mere stage in socioeconomic development.

It could be argued that these ideas were part of a paradigm within economic thought (Jessop 2002; Krugman 1987). The idea of the free and self-organizing and regulating market as a particular entity postulated by Adam Smith did affect business strategies in the 19th and 20th centuries and was reinforced and given limited and paradigmatic theoretical legitimacy by Milton Friedman and other neoclassical economists (Bogle 2005; Easterlin 2004; Mohan et al. 2000). There has, however, never been a free market in the world, not even the contemporary U.S. economy in which trading systems are mediated by the government and by the Securities and Exchange Commission with provision for fair behavior. The recent scandals and legal prosecutions of corporate greed also have cast doubt on the ability of a market to regulate itself when the market itself is an emergent property of human interactions and short-term greed motivates too many interactions (Bogle 2005; Brittan 1995; Mohan et al. 2000). As investment guru Bogle said to a group of fund managers who argued that Smith’s invisible hand would correct any such problems within the free market: “don’t you know that *we* are Smith’s Invisible Hand?” (Kiviat 2005, p. 8).

Ongoing work in economics and economic anthropology also suggests that economic irrationality has always played a major role in human economic development, that profit motivations and other commercial concerns also are tempered by social, political, and environmental processes (Acheson 1994; Dave 1992; Leeson 2005; Malkiel 1996; Sum 2002). All commercial transactions take place within a social context of gift, favor, or service exchange. History as well as social, political, and environmental factors are considered in making economic decisions (Gudeman 2001; Kranton 1996; Mingioni 1991). As Adam Smith (cited in Jessop 2002, pp. 209–210) himself suggested: “economic actors tend to make strenuous efforts to re-entangle economic relations in a nexus of social relations for the stability and predictability of markets.” In times of crisis or as a moral prerogative, all groups from bands to states exercise political power and regulate predatory “market mentalities” that lead to price gouging, hoarding, or smuggling by leveling mechanisms, “fairness rules,” temporary or contingent regulatory mechanisms such as subsidies, buying and reselling at lowered fixed prices, or emergency rationing and redistribution of products (Alexander and Alexander 1991; Allouche and Al-Maqrîsî 1994; Earle 1991a, b, c; Littrell 1997; Offer 1997). Unwanted traders and businesses seen as gouging or hoarding were and are often boycotted or marginalized by commoners and elites alike; monopolists are singularly disliked; and political and/or intellectual elite find themselves frequently at odds with traders or businessmen and take steps to censure the same and regulate their activities (Alexander and Alexander 1991; Bogle 2005; Gall and Saxe 1977; Gregory 1997).



Regulation by government agencies is and was common in the past, seen in the regulation of trading activities by various government agencies, structural adjustment, and continual protection of local and regional economies through import tariffs (Bogle 2005; Mohan et al. 2000). The French regulation economists reject the disembedding of economy from society and the overreliance on rationality, but also the subordination of economy to social ideology (Devine 2002; Jessop 2002). They maintain that capitalist economy is socially embedded through regulation. This is not the pure self-regulation of the neoclassicists but through actual political or social action. Society reacts to hypercommercialization by reembedding market forces in social process, sometimes violently, through confrontation or negotiation. Changes in capitalist organizations or independent trading concerns are then caused by internal decisions that are responding to social or political action (Devine 2002). The regulation theorists also refer to crisis-mediated movements in which one form of regulated capitalism shifts to another regulated form as an emergent property of ongoing relationships between merchants and their sociopolitical milieu (Jessop 2002). One could point to current economic populism directed against multinational corporations in particular but to economic neoliberalism in general as an example of noninstitutionalized regulation (Bogle 2005; Horowitz 2002; Krugman 1987; Littrell 1997).

Furthermore, ethnographic and ethnohistorical research on modern business suggests that weighing commercial decisions based on gift exchanges, favors, or alliances through friendship/marriage might lead to strategic choices that show low short-term profits but ensure long sustainability of business relations (Ensminger 1992, 2002; Goody 1982; Gupta 1987; Lisle-Williams 1984; Millman 1954; Rose 1995; Rudner 1994; Shoji 1966; Steensgard 1987; Udovitch 1967). These weigh heavily in commercial negotiations and guide decisions along with bottom-line rationality. Our contention is that trade in the past, as now, is a combination of commercial, social, political, and ideological interests, regardless of the mechanism used for exchange; some of these may dominate but all are present. Wise traders or businessmen factor (or have to factor) all of these into their negotiations and strategies (Ibrahim 1990).

Our call to go back to the middle and combine weak substantivism, weak formalism, weak primitivism, and weak modernism segues perfectly into Plog's suggestion for taking an inclusive approach: the main problem hindering research is assuming "mutual exclusivity" of theoretical perspectives, that reciprocity cannot coexist with redistribution, and that neither can coexist with market economies (Plog 1993, p. 288).

Plog further asserts that the study of trade/exchange needs to be separated from the larger context of political economy and seen as a separate and significant process in shaping social change, that all aspects of the trade process weigh in trading decisions. Following Plog, we suggest that overt attempts at political control have always been subverted through resistance, corruption, or moving trade away. On the other hand, overly visible freedom of trade also has been socially, ideologically, and politically regulated. The history of the relationship between traders and political elites can be read as a Leachian oscillation between two extremes, totalitarian political control and *laissez faire* economies, but never



successfully reaching one or the other (after Leach 1954, 1971). But if we move away from looking at the structure of political economy as an explanatory framework, what matters then are the strategies people use to mediate and regulate trade activities under economic, political, ideological, and social contingencies. We reach this conclusion based on the understanding that, over all, political economy is an emergent complexity of human interactions, and these interactions are guided by agentive strategies.

## Conclusion

Our major goal in this article, apart from reviewing theoretical literature on the archaeology of trade, is to argue for a new and inclusive approach to the study of trade. The main question that we raised in the beginning is how can we explain the fact that modern human behavior seems to coincide with a great dependence on exchange and trade and that despite temporal and geographic differences, trading behaviors from the past bear many similarities to the present? We also problematized the exclusivity of the different schools of thought—the substantivists and formalists but also the Marxists. These exclusive paradigms created the paradoxical problems succinctly framed by Granovetter (1985) and Isaac (1993): (1) how can we reduce all trading behaviors to economic considerations when social, political, and ideological imperatives are significant in conducting commercial transactions now and in the past, and (2) how do we remove all commercial aspects from ancient trade in favor of the ritual/social/political? As Price (1978, p. 232) puts it, if “a priest rides forth at the head of an army, [...] one calls him quite legitimately a general, [if he does] the work of a general.” We take this to mean that if goods, favors, and services are exchanged for individual or group gain, regardless of the social context in which it is embedded, then it is trade we are talking about.

Our survey of the various archaeological, historiographic, and ethnographic studies suggests that trade and trading behaviors in the past were parallel processes accompanying social evolution, and these behaviors functioned alongside, within, and frequently despite political attempts at integration or social/ideological populism—a certain independence of trade and trade specialists. However, this independence was and is tempered and regulated by social and political considerations, because commercial/economic specialists are as governed by social, political, and ideological constraints as they are by economic calculations. After Isaac (1993) and Plog (1993), we suggest that the problem is in the either/or perspective, whether it be substantivist/formalist, primitivist/modernist, or Marxist/capitalist dichotomies. We do not suggest disembedding trade from social process but rather embedding trade and other social/political processes within each other. We are aware that suggesting the presence and indeed significance of independent trade and trading activities with commercial motivations in past societies opens us to the charge of being Reaganomists as that leveled at Peter Wells (Levy 1986). However, in our defense, we assert that the presence of commercial/market behaviors are not the “desired” ends of human economic evolution or even the preferred state of affairs. Rather we argue that these behaviors are emergent properties of interactions between individuals

with investment in trade, as they respond to changes in their sociopolitical geography as suggested by Wright (1972). Trade, as the exchange of material commodities, forms the material component of a larger exchange network in which even strictly “social” or “political” actions and decisions might be commodified on the one hand, while economic decisions are made taking noncommercial factors into account on the other (Lomnitz 1988, 2002). In our forthcoming article, we will expand on the strategies approach and present the “trading systems” model for looking at trade behaviors in past societies. Our model draws from emerging interdisciplinary thought, including complex adaptive systems and resilience theory, and is meant to provide a bottom-up nonteleological evolutionary simulation of development of various trade behaviors within their commercial, social, ideological, and political context. In doing so, we hope to avoid the polemics that emerge from strict adherence to any particular paradigm (Plog 1993).

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