

Modern Economics and the Ancient World: Were the Ancients Rational Actors? (29–31 July 2021, online via zoom)

Organizers: Prof. Dr. Sven Günther, Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations, Northeast Normal University, Changchun, China (email: svenguenther@nenu.edu.cn / sveneca@aol.com) & Dr. Roland Oetjen, University of Rostock, Germany (email: roland.oetjen@uni-rostock.de)

Were the ancients rational actors? Is the rational-actor model a suitable tool to analyze their behavior? We want to answer the question in different ways. One way would be to ask the ancient texts directly. Another could be to use the rational-actor model to analyze the behavior of the ancients (in the economy, politics, or any other area of social life) and see whether the results are plausible.

In our conference, we explore the chances and limits of these approaches. The underlying question in each section is the extent of rational activity and actions that can be discovered by various methods of analyzing ancient societies across the globe. In particular, the papers focus on one of the following panel topics: 1.) Ancient texts: From theory to practice – How did the ancients think economy, and how do we reconstruct the ancient thoughts?; 2.) Economic analysis of the economy (e.g., landed property and real estate / financial investments / demand and supply); 3.) Economic analysis of politics and of other areas of social life (e.g., institutions and institutional change / taxation / public spending / social networks / law / religion / moral behavior).

Schedule

(all times are CET summer time (UTC +2) / 25 minutes talk plus 20 minutes discussion)

Day 1 (Thu, 29 July 2021)

10.00–10.30: Introduction (Sven Günther & Roland Oetjen)

10.30–11.15: Key-Note Lecture: George Tridimas (Belfast): Religion without clergy. The case of Ancient Greece

Break

13.00–13.50: Talk 1: Nicolas Krockner (Munich): On the sense and use of the Historical School of Economics for the analysis of ancient Roman economic history

13.50–14.40: Talk 2: Lothar Willms (Heidelberg): Adam Smith, Plato, and the Stoics – The birth of modern economic rationality and the classical heritage

Break

15.00–15.50: Talk 3: José Remesal Rodríguez (Barcelona): Alte Ideale und die Anpassung an die neue Realität: Columella's *de re rustica*, ein Überlebenshandbuch für eine Elite?

15.50–16.40: Talk 4: Daniel Silvermintz (Houston): A city fit for business: examining the economic sphere in the *Republic's* healthy city

Break

17.00–17.50: Talk 5: Constantine Karathanasis (St. Louis): Enter *homo oeconomicus*: Aristophanes on incentives and civic behavior

17.50–18.40: Talk 6: Kathryn Kelley (Toronto): Trouble brewing in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia

Day 2 (Fr, 30 July 2021)

8.30–9.20: Talk 7: Roland Ferenczi (Budapest/Hamburg): Trade, markets and money in the Old Tamil Caṅkam literature

9.20–10.10: Talk 8: Patrick Reinard (Trier): Price variations and economic strategies in the Roman imperial period

Break

10.30–11.20: Talk 9: Juan Carlos Moreno García (Paris): The rationale behind land transactions in ancient Egypt: investment, markets and private strategies

11.20–12.10: Talk 10: Bertram Schefold (Frankfurt): Land and credit in the history of economic thought. Traditional China and premodern Europe. Dian and *pactum antichriseos*

Break

14.00–14.50: Talk 11: Michael Leese (Durham, NH): Hoarding and rationality in Greco-Roman antiquity

14.50–15.40: Talk 12: Alain Bresson (Chicago): The Anonymus Iamblichi and the logic of money supply

Break

16.00–16.50: Talk 13: Michael Kozuh (Auburn): Ancient accounting and rational behavior

16.50–17.40: Talk 14: Jason Hagler (Philadelphia): Are the moderns rational actors? The view from Warring States Qin

Day 3 (Sa, 31 July 2021)

8.30–9.20: Talk 15: Christian Canu Højgaard (Amsterdam): Rational actors and the ancient Israelite jubilee legislation

9.20–10.10: Talk 16: Thibaud Nicolas (Paris): Was the sun-god Shamash a *deus oeconomicus*? Rationality and religion in the management of economic affairs in Old-Babylonian Sippar's temple «Ebabbar»

Break

10.30–11.20: Talk 17: Hannah Ringheim / Averil Ringheim (Zürich): Rational actors in ancient cult: Egyptian temples as economic hubs in the third century BCE

11.20–12.10: Talk 18: Peter Sarris (Cambridge): 'The encircling presence of death' – Governmental responses to bubonic plague in the sixth century AD

12.15–13.00: Final Discussion

Abstracts

(in alphabetical order)

Alain BRESSON

(The University of Chicago)

The *Anonymus lamblichii* and the logic of money supply

The *Anonymus lamblichii* is a short essay preserved for having been inserted into the work of the late Antique Philosopher Iamblichus (hence the name of the work in modern scholarship). Its author was a sophist living at the end of the fifth or in the early fourth century BCE. The treatise develops original views about the role of nature (*physis*) and convention (*nomos*), in an opposition that is characteristic of early Greek philosophy.

Among others, the *Anonymus lamblichii* also analyses the role of *chrēmata*. Given the debates that have taken place around the translation of this word, this paper will first provide a fresh translation of the passage, arguing that here the only possible meaning of *chrēmata* is “money,” not “goods” in general, in conformity with the usage of the word in the period when the author of the *Anonymus lamblichii* was active.

On this basis, the paper will reexamine what the treatise tells us about *chrēmata*. The author starts from the notion of trust (*pistis*), which itself is based on law and order (*eunomia*). Trust is a basic condition of social harmony, for those who fare well can thus safely help those do not. As for money more specifically, per se its quantity does not matter. What is important is trust: for with trust money becomes common (*koinon*), whereas when there is no trust, people hoard it. Using the word *pistis*, the treatise here implicitly refers to credit, for it is through credit that money can circulate.

Admittedly, the reasoning of the *Anonymus lamblichii* seems very familiar to us. But its logic should be reexamined. Analyzing it in economic terms allows us to draw major conclusions about the functions of money and its connection to credit and about the notion of money supply, in the ancient world and beyond.

Roland FERENCZI

(Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest / Hamburg University)

Trade, markets and money in the Old Tamil Caṅkam literature

The aim of this paper is to take a survey on the economic thinking of the ancient South Indian kingdoms in the first half of the first millennium AD, when the Cēra, the Pāṇṭiya, and the Cōḷa kingdoms had intensive trade relations with Roman Egypt, Western Asia, and other states of the Indian peninsula. This paper addresses an understudied topic of South Asian history, whose basic primary sources are the poems of the Old Tamil Caṅkam literature written by the wandering bards and the learned court poets of ancient Tamiḷakam, which poems will have to be compared with the available Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit accounts on South India. I believe that most of the previous researches have overestimated the role of the gift-giving custom of Tamil kings and attached too much importance to barter. This paper does not want to side with either the barter or the monetized nature of the ancient South Indian trading activities, but it does assume that different forms coexist in early times. Despite our extremely limited possibilities for historical reconstruction, I intend to scrutinize the Old Tamil literary sources in order to outline the engagement of the Tamil kings in the pre-modern Indian Ocean trade touching upon the nature of the traditional barter-trade and

the traces of monetization in early Tamil states, the role of gold and (prestige) gifts, the functioning of South Indian markets, and, last but not least, some of the archaeological findings and epigraphical remains that could shed light on the economic history of ancient South India.

Jason HAGLER
(University of Pennsylvania)

Are the moderns rational actors? The view from Warring States Qin

Examining archaeological reflexes of Qin policy 400–200 BC alongside discussions of economic and political theory and praxis seen in texts such as *The Book of Lord Shang* and *Guanzi*, this paper will use the Qin conquest of the Sichuan Basin to highlight the ways in which rational actors are embedded in a cultural context, which mediates not simply the approaches and outcomes, but the very goals themselves. Thinkers in the Late Warring States Period recognized that a state's fortunes relied on its infrastructure and army and set about considering ways to optimize their societies. In the Qin case, the policies we observe are based on applying models of human motivation and political economy to use self-interest to motivate the populace.

The results are striking, particularly in the utilization of human resources. Where nations from the 19th century to the present are grossly inefficient in their mobilization of their entire population through ethnic and racial discrimination, the Qin system's understanding of "citizenship" presented few barriers to entry for new subjects regardless of their often very different ethnic backgrounds and there is heavy investment in public works projects across the empire aimed at increasing production. While the system is certainly extractive akin to the usual sort of core-periphery model, the loci of extraction and redistribution are identical; the whole polity. Compared to the Qin polity, modern and contemporary nation-states are thoroughly irrational, prioritizing some segments of the population over others for trivial reasons that do not increase efficiency or output. These differences in priorities are not because the modern mind is somehow less rational than the ancient one, but rather because the nation-state system comes with a framework and has developed to protect certain interests. From this example this paper hopes to consider ways in which rational action is contextualized and conditioned by the models and categories the actor is working with.

Christian Canu HØJGAARD
(Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Rational actors and the ancient Israelite jubilee legislation

Large-scale debt remission and liberation of slaves occurred across the ancient Near East. Babylonian kings are known to have established *mīšarum* (justice) which involved the absolution of debt, freeing of debt slaves, and return of land property sold as debt. Similar practice is witnessed in the Hebrew Bible (also known as the Old Testament). It has been argued that Solon was inspired by this Near Eastern practice in his abolishment of debt (*seisachtheia*) in ancient Athens (Blok and Krul 2017).

Whereas *mīšarum* was normally a one-time event upon the accession of Babylonian kings, the Hebrew Bible contains legislations concerning cycles of debt remission and

freeing of bond slaves. One of these legislations prescribes a fifty-year cycle known as the jubilee. According to this document, every fiftieth-year bond servants should be released, their debt cancelled, and their property returned from the creditors. Curiously, the document is completely devoid of legal sanctions but contains recurrent appeals to solidarity with poverty-stricken fellow countrymen. Modern commentators have dubbed the document a “romantic manifesto” (Hartley 1992, 445) or “an ideal, which was rarely, if ever, realized” (Wenham 1979, 318). To be sure, there is little evidence that the jubilee was ever accomplished. It is therefore reasonable to ask whether the law is economical rational at all. On the one hand, large-scale debt manumission and restoring of landowners’ original inheritance can be seen as perfectly rational in the eyes of the king or the state. But why would wealthy citizens give up their legally acquired property and cancel the debt every fiftieth year?

This paper will discuss the economic rationality of the jubilee, in particular with respect to 1) the lack of legal sanctions and enforcement of the jubilee, 2) and the trust required by lenders and buyers of property. More generally, the paper will discuss the jubilee to address the broader question whether the rational choice theory accounts well for ancient law and economy.

References:

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Constantine KARATHANASIS
(Washington University in St. Louis)

Enter *homo oeconomicus*: Aristophanes on incentives and civic behavior

The rationality of the neo-classical *homo oeconomicus* provided an actor of conveniently calculable predictability; thus, by crossing disciplinary borders, this model of human behavior was deemed applicable to areas not traditionally considered in Economics. One of those areas was public action, in which incentives were gradually adopted as a *sine qua non* for the design of public policy. Since the mid-20th century, however, the assumed rationality underlying the economists’ model sustained heavy epistemological attacks. Additionally, from the 1970’s onwards, psychologists analyzed and measured empirically how external motivation, like a monetary incentive, reduces or “crowds out” individuals’ intrinsic motivation to act (Deci and Ryan 1985). More recently, behavioral economists documented how the use of market norms in non-economic spheres of activity can crowd out people’s social preferences across cultures (Bowles 2016), while political scientists criticized the noxious effects of incentives on civic motivation and behavior within a democratic regime (Ostrom 2000; Sandel 2012). As a result, given that the Athenian state employed payments for incentivizing the political participation of its citizens, an inquiry into the similarity of the way incentives affected pre- and post-modern agents in terms of civic behavior becomes intrinsically compelling.

In Classical studies, the last two decades have witnessed the refutation of the vision of Greek antiquity as a non-market and “irrational” world as well as the moderation of

formalist approaches (Lewis 2018). In view of that, my aim is to show that Aristophanic comedy is an invaluable resource on the behavioral makeup of Athenian citizens. By focusing on the *Knights*, I would like to demonstrate how Aristophanes' preoccupation with Athenian public finance in fact aimed at problematizing his audience with respect to the noxious effects of incentives in the civic sphere of activity. According to social scientists, incentives appeal to our utility-maximizing *homo oeconomicus*, and an excessive appeal to that aspect of our behavior "crowds out" other motivational factors, like altruism. In the same vein, Aristophanes sought to problematize the incentive-fueled onset of a myopic individualism. Consequently, it appears that Aristophanic comedy provides a historical case for the similarity of the ways market norms affect civic behavior across space and time.

References:

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Kathryn KELLEY
(University of Toronto)

Trouble brewing in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia

Beer is both a staple of the early Mesopotamian diet and a commodity whose production, distribution, and consumption is framed in cuneiform documents in relation to social status and the construction and maintenance of the social order. This is particularly observable in the textual record of the third and second millennia BC. The paper begins by briefly surveying the early cuneiform sources to demonstrate how brewers were typically integrated into large household organizations in early Mesopotamia. But while cuneiform sources represent the perspective of the powerful households, they also sometimes provide clues about activity at the margins of, or beyond, their remit. In this context, we can turn to a famous clause in Hammurabi's law collection (c. 1750 BC) which spotlights the female brewer-merchant called a *sābītum*, whose apparent profit-seeking activity through the sale of beer via silver equivalency is cited and specifically curtailed by the palace. To what extent was a *sābītum* integrated, materially and culturally, into the palace or other organizational economies? Or to what extent do her activities exemplify "private economic activity" in the Old Babylonian period, implying greater freedom to make entrepreneurial choices? The second half of the paper thus attempts to assess the possible motives (control over resource allocation, profit, PR campaigning, social attitudes, moral perceptions) of the palace's idealised ruling on the one hand and of the brewer-merchant's purported behavior on the other, with reference to a rational-actor model. In so doing, the nature of the sources and the implications for identifying effective methods of historical analysis are examined.

Michael KOZUH
(Auburn University)

Ancient accounting and rational behavior

This paper investigates rationality in Babylonian accounting in the mid-first millennium BCE. In particular, it focuses on the accounting for the management of temple livestock, an economic enterprise for which we have robust, diverse, and far-reaching documentation. Indeed, this area of the economy is particularly apt for such a line of inquiry. It was large scale—regularly dealing with tens of thousands of animals—so its management happened at levels well above the quotidian (with long-term planning, compartmentalization of tasks, executive decision making, etc.). Also, it had multiple players with differing economic incentives operating and interacting within it: there were people we refer to as entrepreneurs, who took on risk and operated outside direct temple control; they interacted with staff in the temple's multilevel bureaucracy, which exercised routine tracking and impersonal control. Finally, this area of the economy was important. Its proper operation was the concern of kings and lent itself to ideological expressions of stability and abundance.

I will take the position that assumptions of rationality work in some ways to elucidate this system, but fail in others. They work in that we find a tight adherence to schedules and calendars, and that that adherence created administrative pressures that led to action. Moreover, accountants used a set formula to figure obligations—the formula presupposes a maximizing position for obligees, and failure to meet the obligations led to real (if uneven) consequences.

Yet rationality can fail us in the most basic of ways here. It is nearly impossible to find much order and consistency in the accounting, much less to see it as a rational complement to (or technology for) utility maximization. Rather, the accounting was a mystifying patchwork of overlapping interests and largely unpredictable abstractions of economic and administrative activity, flexible in some ways but inflexible in others. To that end, I will argue that the so-called new accounting theory anticipates these particular issues quite well.

Nicolas KROCKER
(LMU Munich)

On the sense and use of the Historical School of Economics for the analysis of ancient Roman economic history

In the history of doctrine of economic thought, the Historical School of Economics was not judged favourably for a long time. The School was reproached with having practiced eclecticism devoid of theory by working inductively without having developed fruitful approaches of economic analysis. Whereas the Historical School was an influential branch of thought in economics and the history of economics in the 19th century, it almost lost its influence in the 20th century. With the rise of the New Institutional Economics (NIE) and the renewed interest in institutional factors, the Historical School has attracted the attention of historians again.

The New Institutional Economics has arrived in the economic history of antiquity and is being discussed widely. Against this backdrop, the question arises whether the Historical School could extend this analytic toolbox from the perspective of the history of antiquity. In the lecture, an answer shall be attempted in three steps. In the first step, a digression into the history of economic thought will classify the Historical School as a precursor if the NIE.

In the second step, the economy of antiquity will be shown to be one of the sources and fields of application of the theoretical approach developed by the Historical School. In the third step, those analytic categories of the Historical School will be brought out which allow antique sources to be examined fruitfully from the point of view of the history of economics.

Michael LEESE
(University of New Hampshire)

Hoarding and rationality in Greco-Roman antiquity

One definition of modern capitalistic behavior is the continuous reinvestment of profits into further productive enterprise, where capital is not wasted on consumption or left idle (Grassby 1999, 4–5). Also referred to as “thesaurisation,” hoarding has been cited by historians as being one of the major behavioral factors that constrained economic development in the premodern world (Marx 1863, 460; Jones 1981, 94; Harari 2015, 312–314).

For the ancient Greek and Roman economy, the practice of hoarding has been explicitly linked to rational actor theory, as one of the surest signs that ancients did not behave in an economically rational manner (Meikle 1995, 160–162; Millett 1991, 169–170; Austin and Vidal-Naquet 1977, 149). The evidence of ancient Greek business estate composition in fourth-century Athens, however, seriously undermines the claims for widespread hoarding. Far from simply lying idle, most capital was invested in productive ventures in business-oriented households (Leese 2021). Legal sources, the Attic orators and philosophers, and biographers widely attest that property was assumed to be used productively for profit and growth (e.g., Dem. 27.17–18, 27.35, 27.64, 59.52). *Emporoi* and moneylenders exhibit creative resourcefulness to ensure that their profits would not sit dormant (e.g. Dem. 35.36, 52.3-5, 56.17). Roman jurists likewise reveal a disdain for allowing money to lie idle (e.g., *Digest* 22.1.7 & 22.1.13.1).

Liquidity preference and the propensity for savings offer a far more dynamic view of these phenomena (Keynes); hoarding can be a rational strategy (Braudel 1982, 396). “Unproductive” consumption, moreover, coexists alongside rational, capitalistic reinvestment in the modern economy. The hoarding of specie at temples may have temporarily acted as a drain on the money supply, but this has nothing to do with economic rationality, which concerns behavior at the individual level and not the performance of the overall economic system. But even this was recognized to be unproductive, as dedications were mobilized as profitable capital by temple officials. Furthermore, much of this thesaurisation resulted from the conspicuous expenditures of tyrants and monarchs and therefore is not representative of ancient Greek behavior in general.

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Juan Carlos MORENO GARCÍA
(CNRS)

The rationale behind land transactions in ancient Egypt: investment, markets and private strategies

The written record from ancient Egypt contains many references about individual strategies revolving around the acquisition of land, both institutional (temple and crown fields) and private. In fact, there is evidence about people of a certain status that followed a two-fold strategy aiming to constitute substantial land portfolios. It combined purchases from private landholders as well as getting land grants from kings and institutions as remuneration for specific tasks. As for the use of the land thus obtained, in some cases landholders pursued an economic profit through a careful consideration of the crops to plant, the expected yields and the possibility of leasing additional land. That is why plots of land surrounding wells and basins were particularly coveted, as permanent irrigation made them ideal to plant lucrative crops like dates, vegetables and fruit trees. In other cases, landowners merely sought a secure income, so holding a plot of institutional land subsequently bequeathed to the holder's descendants was an ideal choice. Under these circumstances, land appears as a commodity in some specific contexts, when individuals sold and bought fields. Sellers were frequently pushed to dispose of their fields due to adverse conditions, like severe indebtedness, bad harvests, dividing inherited property, etc. As for buyers, profit did not exclude other considerations, like being accepted among the landed elite of a particular area or having access to powerful institutions and their patronage networks. So a limited market of land was operative in Egypt, at least from the middle of the third millennium BC. In all, land was the centre of diverse economic and social strategies that obeyed rational considerations beyond mere subsistence.

Thibaud NICOLAS
(EHESS / Collège de France)

Was the sungod Shamash a *deus oeconomicus*? Rationality and religion in the management of economic affairs in Old-Babylonian Sippar's temple «Ebabbar»

Could a god act as a rational economic actor? In this paper, we will try to answer this strange question. In Ancient Mesopotamia, gods and goddesses were acting as individuals: that's the reason why this paper will try to explain how Shamash, the Mesopotamian sungod, was acting in the economic and financial fields. We will focus on the example of the Ebabbar temple at Sippar, during the first half of the second millennium BC because it was a central and important shrine wherefrom we have an important textual documentation.

The ancient Mesopotamian economy was essentially non-monetary, redistributive, oikos-based and embedded in religious, social and political fields. Nevertheless, we can nowadays go far further than the Polanyian controversy about market economy in the Antiquity and about embeddedness of ancient near eastern economies, in order to answer to a simple and yet complex question: how rational could be religion-based decision?

There are evidences that ancient mesopotamians had their own economical fictions, as we have ours. If they probably didn't believe in a rational *homo economicus*, this paper intend to show that the sungod and his wife Aya were often acting in a logical and rational way, lending silver, bargaining and supplying the manies. This paper will also try to demonstrate that behind this economically active god we can find a social network of priests, notables and other individuals interacting in order to uphold the wealth and power of the sungod. We will try to understand how rational were their decisions. Finally, we will sketch the portray of a debt-based economy with it's own coherence and rationality.

Patrick REINARD
(University of Trier)

Price variations and economic strategies in the Roman imperial period

In numerous private letters from Roman Egypt, prices and price changes are discussed. The letter partners are concerned with obtaining as much information as possible and regularly updating their knowledge of the market, whereby an individual concept of the market ('market' understood as the sum of all available buying/selling opportunities of an individual) prevails here. Based on the permanently communicated information as well as on an empirical understanding of economic developments, the letter partners made economic decisions. From their individual point of view, an economic rationality can be established here. Whereby it must always be kept in mind that the market transparency was very underwhelming, as it depended on the available social contacts and the communication of an individual. This means that people always acted 'rationally' within the framework of their own level of information, whereas others participating in the market may have arrived at a completely different assessment. In the letters from Egypt, but also in documentary sources from e.g. Vindolanda and Vindonissa, this form of individual rationality becomes comprehensively apparent. Likewise, various strategies that served to secure the flow of information or to expand the individual economic sphere become apparent. These processes can be described and understood by the transaction cost theory and the principal-agent model.

José REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ
(University of Barcelona)

Alte Ideale und die Anpassung an die neue Realität: Columella's *de re rustica*, ein überlebenshandbuch für eine Elite?

Ich gehe von dem Kriterium aus, dass sich jedes Individuum entsprechend seinen Interessen bewegt und handelt und dass jedes Individuum ein mentales Schema erstellt, um seine Handlungen zu rechtfertigen. Diese „Rationalisierung“ ist eine Funktion wie Folge der eigenen Position im sozialen Rahmen der Welt, in der er lebt.

Augustus' Aufbau seines Reiches veränderte die politische und wirtschaftliche Struktur der Gesellschaft des republikanischen Roms radikal. Augustus konzentrierte in

seiner Person sowohl die politische Macht der *patres* als auch die des *populus Romanus*. Die jüngere Geschichte hatte ihm jedoch gezeigt, dass der Weg zur Kontrolle dieser Mächte über das Heer führte, das Augustus konsequenterweise ebenfalls reorganisierte.

Die Kontrolle der Versorgung des *populus* (Juvenals berühmtes *panem et circenses*) und des Heeres war meines Erachtens der Schlüssel zum Erhalt seiner Macht.

Rom war nicht mehr das Zentrum des römischen Expansionismus, sondern das Zentrum, das, wie in allen Imperien, die Ressourcen der riesigen Territorien, die in der Endphase der Republik sowohl von Caesar als auch von Pompeius erobert worden waren, an sich ziehen sollte.

Augustus war laut Sueton in der Lage, einen gewissen Ausgleich zwischen den Interessen des *populus*, der Provinzialen und der Händler zu finden. Diese *novi homines* waren nun nicht nur die Angehörigen der italischen Eliten, sondern auch die Angehörigen der Eliten der von Rom eroberten Gebiete.

Ein Betiker, Cornelius Balbus der Ältere, war der erste Provinzial, der den Konsulat erreichte, und er öffnete einer großen Gruppe von Betikern die Tür zur Integration in die römische Politik, deren Einfluss sich bis zu einem von ihnen, Trajan, als Kaiser ausdehnen sollte. Andere, wie z.B. Annaeus Mela, zogen es vor, sich dem *ordo equester* anzuschließen, mit der Begründung, dass es einfacher sei, reich zu werden, indem man dem Kaiser diene. Columella gehörte zu dieser zweiten Gruppe.

Columella war hin- und hergerissen zwischen den alten Idealen der römischen Elite und dem Bestreben, die landwirtschaftliche Produktion innerhalb des neuen, von der augusteischen Politik geschaffenen Rahmens zu rationalisieren. In dem Vortrag möchte ich den Kontrast zwischen alten Idealen und der Rationalisierung der Agrarwirtschaft als Anpassung der Elite an die neuen politischen und wirtschaftlichen Verhältnisse aufzeigen.

Hannah RINGHEIM & Averil RINGHEIM
(ETH Zürich & Allianz SE)

Rational actors in ancient cult: Egyptian temples as economic hubs in the third century BCE

As a result of the new Ptolemaic rulership, by the third century BCE, Egypt underwent numerous economic reforms, as documented in papyri, inscriptions and archaeological finds. Though the reasoning and consequences behind the reforms vary, one particular aspect indicates that the Ptolemaic elite indeed evaluated potential economic benefits and actions of the local systems available to them. It is evident that the deliberate utilization of Egyptian temples and cults as a central economic institution attests to evidence that the ancients, to an extent, functioned in line with the rational-actor model.

This paper draws upon three aspects of third century Egyptian temples to exemplify the presence of formalism in the rational-actor model. Firstly, the developing socio-political connections between the Egyptian elite, notably the priests, and the Ptolemies reveal purposeful negotiations that benefitted both parties. Contemporary priestly decrees demonstrate the support of Egyptian priests in return for Ptolemaic royal benefactions on temple land and tax benefits, thus illuminating political negotiations to secure economic control. Additionally, the Ptolemies utilized sanctuary complexes as centralized trading posts, as revealed by inscriptions and finds from Thonis-Heracleion and Naukratis, where they began to regulate taxes and mercantile movement to promote economic networks with the wider Mediterranean. Finally the implementation of temple taxation, as evinced in

specific texts from Edfu and the Fayyum, reflects the transition of temples to a regulated, systematized economic institution.

The evidence ultimately demonstrates the rational agency behind using Egyptian temples as economic hubs, as well as how these actions fulfill the prerogatives of the Ptolemaic kings and the Egyptian elite. It is clear that the Ptolemies interacted with Egyptian elite priests as a way to secure legitimacy as the rulers of Egypt, as well as economic control over temple activities with initiatives such as the temple tax. Likewise, they understood the benefits of sanctuary complexes as trading ports and made efforts to regulate and tax such ports accordingly, while simultaneously promoting interconnections with other regions. The way in which the Ptolemies used Egyptian temples as a central source for economic growth solidified their status as rational agents in this regard and their success was further replicated in Egypt for centuries to come.

Peter SARRIS
(University of Cambridge)

**‘The encircling presence of death’ –
Governmental responses to bubonic plague in the sixth century AD**

The 540s AD witnessed the arrival in the Mediterranean world of the first clearly attested and widespread outbreak of bubonic plague in the history of the West Eurasian world. This disease rapidly spread as far afield as the British Isles where it can be seen to have a significant impact on even isolated rural communities. Contrary to some recent claims to the contrary, there is every indication that in the more densely urbanised and inter-connected world of the East Roman Empire, its impact was even more severe. This paper will examine the policies adopted by the East Roman governmental authorities to attempt to minimise the fiscal, administration and broader economic disruption caused by the plague, focusing in particular on the legal evidence which has been seriously misunderstood and mishandled in some recent studies.

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**Land and credit in the history of economic thought. Traditional China and
premodern Europe. *Dian* and *pactum antichriseos***

The institutional arrangements regulating agricultural production have varied a great deal in history. I here compare ideas about land lease in the 17th and 18th century in Germany with land lease in China in about the same period. More specifically, German cameralist authors such as Kaspar Klock in his *De aerario* of 1651 speak of an ‘antichretical contract’, a contract for mutual use, in my example coupled with the giving of credit: A landowner leases land to a farmer who gets the annual harvest for a specified period of years and is obliged to pay at the beginning of the period of the lease, the land remaining the property of the owner. In the eyes of Klock, the landowner thus gets a credit from the farmer, for which he pays by means of allowing the farmer to harvest. Klock asks whether the contract is usurious, but he is unable to calculate the implicit rate of interest and whether it exceeds the legal rate. The same arrangement would in China be interpreted not as a nebulous credit relationship, but as a clear purchase, on the basis of a distinction between the ‘bone’ and the ‘skin’ of the

land: the farmer would have 'bought' the skin, but not the bone, for the duration of the lease. Paradoxically, the 'irrationality' of the prohibition of usury contributed, via the analysis of „licit“ reasons to take interest and via the mathematical analysis of compound interest (in which Leibniz was important) to intellectual progress (economic theory of interest, calculus of geometric series), while the Chinese (who looked down on merchants, but had no misgivings about interest) saw no need to develop their juridical categories in this area, until the growth of population and foreign interference led to the crises of the empire in the 19th century and credit began to be used on a grand scale.

Daniel SILVERMINTZ
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A City Fit for Business: Examining the Economic Sphere in the *Republic's* Healthy City

Socrates proposes that the interlocutors in the *Republic* imagine a perfectly just city as a model for conceptualizing justice in an individual; however, shortly after the first city with a claim to justice is founded, it degenerates into a deviant regime afflicted with numerous vices. The immediate subversion of the healthy city has led some scholars to consider it to be an unobtainable ideal. In contrast, I contend that Socrates does not consider this to be a desirable regime despite his judgment of it as healthy (*hugiēs*) and true (*alēthinē*) (*R.* 372e). In fact, when the passage is read carefully, one finds that a number of the city's most significant proposals have not been decided by Socrates, but rather by the acquisitive Adeimantus. This reading helps to explain the incongruity of implementing institutions to maximize productivity in a society that restricts consumption to subsistence. I further contend that Socrates presents the healthy city in order to show the shortcomings of a regime that exists solely for the sake of ensuring the economic interests of its citizens. Analysis of the city's mode of production, distribution, and system of valuation will show how the institutions and mechanisms implemented by Adeimantus undermine the city's standard of necessity, making the descent to the feverish city of luxuries an inevitable consequence of the city's first principles and not, as many scholars assume, a fall from grace.

George TRIDIMAS
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Religion without dogma or clergy: The case of Ancient Greece

The Ancient Greek religion did not feature a corporate class of priests. This was in sharp contrast to other branches of Indo-European religions such as the Iranian and the Indian ones which came from a common stem with the Greek religion, and to monotheistic religions like, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Using the insights of the economics of religion literature, this work examines doctrinal and political reasons to explain why the Ancient Greek religion did not feature a distinct class of professional priests as suppliers of religious goods. Doctrinal reasons relate to worshipping a multitude of powerful anthropomorphic gods with flawed characters; absence of a founder of religion and of a scripture; lack of religious dogma and of a code of moral behaviour; and piety manifested as mass participation in rituals. These factors denied religious suppliers the opportunity to form a monopoly acting as an autonomous intermediary between humans and gods. Political reasons relate to the

supremacy of the demos which watchfully guarded its decision-making powers and prevented other actors like a priestly interest group to challenge its authority.

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**Adam Smith, Plato, and the Stoics –
The birth of modern economic rationality and the classical heritage**

Adam Smith's seminal work *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) is widely acclaimed as a milestone in the foundation of modern economics. Although it has been demonstrated that the work of Smith was influenced by a wide range of classical authors (Vivenza 1999; 2001) there is a tendency among classicists of squeezing Smith between Plato and the Stoics (Schmitt 2003, 431–441; Föllinger 2008; 2016, 43–48). In this perspective, Plato appears as the proponent of a comprehensive social rationality in which economy is embedded whereas Smith, whose economic ideas would be chiefly inspired by Stoicism, is presented as the author of a reductionist rationality and anthropology that prevails in modern economics and that focuses exclusively on the *homo economicus*.

In my paper, I shall demonstrate through a close reading of core passages from both authors that Plato and Smith represent two different modes of economic and social rationality and that Smith's mode finds no match in ancient Stoics. This difference is part of his contribution to the constitution of modern economics. Whereas Plato yields a hierarchic top-down organization in society, economy, politics, and psychology, Smith both in *The Wealth of Nations* and his ethical treatise *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), favours a horizontal and bottom-up model in economy, ethics, and psychology that is based on the individuals' action and their peer-to peer interaction. Stoic theories such as *oikeiôsis* and universal *sympatheia* were only ingredients and ferments to this new model. Smith's mode of social rationality widely presupposes that people are able to behave as rational actors both in economy and ethics whereas Plato's model requires intensive education and institutional initiation before people are able to act according to his particular pattern of rationality.

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