

MONEY MATTERS; SOME REMARKS ON THE ECONOMIC SITUATION  
IN THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH DURING THE SEVENTH CENTURY B.C.

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Abstract

By implementing some aspects of Wallerstein's World Systems Theory different facets of the economic history of the Kingdom of Judah during the seventh century BC can be explained. Economic interrelatedness between core and peripheral structures within a supranational world system, on the one hand and the prestige goods systems on the other may account for much of the social and political transformations that took place.

A. INTRODUCTION

Currently there are several theories and models by means of which socio-economic issues are addressed. Binford's (1972:8) ecological systems theory of culture comprises technofacts, sociofacts and ideofacts according to which culture is seen as being composed of a number of closely interrelated operational subsystems and functional contexts (Scheepers 1990:332). Sharer and Ashmore's (1979:524) culture-ecological model is based upon the assumption that a given culture interacts with an environmental system composed of three complex subsystems, namely the physical landscape (habitat), biological environment (biome) and cultural environment (other, adjacent human groups). Both these system theories assume the important role of economic interface.

Like texts, artifacts and ecofacts are mute sources which do not give answers to all our impertinent questions, as seen specifically in the present case of the economy of Ancient Judah. In his recent *History of Ancient Palestine* Ahlström says,

there will always be a need for a method that uses reasoning, hypotheses, logic and imagination in order to *construct* (my italics) something from the available material and to fill in the gaps between the sources (1993:23).

It is evident that the economy of Ancient Judah cannot be typified from the available sources alone. The many attempts to characterise it alternatively as a storage, barter, redistributive, urban capitalistic, money, or a market economy underline the confusion and perplexity of the topic (cf Heichelheim 1958:2; Silver 1985:164). Moreover, it hardly serves any purpose to eliminate or to narrow down various possibilities by which this important 'engine that causes change' (Dever 1991:86) can be accounted for. We need to have, among others, an economic theory from which

perspective we can attempt to explain social and cultural changes. One such a theory is the *World Systems Theory* formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein.

## B. THE MODERN WORLD SYSTEMS THEORY OF WALLERSTEIN

Contrary to unilineal models which describe society in terms of orthogenetic progressions from simple to complex or agrarian to industrial organisation Wallerstein's world system theory provides a framework that systematically integrates different geo-political economic organisations; it explains change in terms of forces which originate **outside** of any particular local region or community (Schneider 1991:45). Chase-Dunn (1991:7) defines world systems as **intersocial networks** in which the interaction is an important condition of the reproduction of the internal structures of the composite units and importantly affect changes which occur in these local structures.

For the present discussion I would like to underline two major facets of Wallerstein's world system model, namely that of the interrelatedness of core and periphery structures within the dynamics of world economic organisation and, secondly, that of the prestige-goods system.

### 1. Core and periphery structures

According to Wallerstein the relationship between core centres and peripheral areas forms the basis of a regional socio-political and economic system. Core and periphery relationships are interdependent, hierarchical and unequal by nature. Highly centralised and well organised core groups get into a position to demand and to mobilise energy resources from a vast peripheral domain. The core always dominates the periphery in the sense that it directs the flow of wealth from periphery to core. The peripheral region on the other hand becomes dependent upon the political structures of the core/centre for its means of production and reproduction (Wallerstein 1974:349f; Schneider 1991:46). The primary core-periphery relationship is between the core's core and the periphery's core. 'The periphery's core serves as a bridgehead between the core's core and the resources of the periphery which the core needs to exploit' (Steele 1990:27). In terms of interaction the core enriches itself more than the periphery. The periphery is decisively affected by changes or crises in the core area (Rowlands 1987:4f). When affected by the core's expansion, the peripheral groups may generate defensive or competitive strategies. They can adapt or submit to external pressure or they can resist and form a new core (Schneider 1991:46). According to Wallerstein this process interrelates with a second, namely

the creation and maintenance of interdependent relationships between various national and regional entities according to which particular populations come to play **particular roles**, their economic, political and cultural institutions changing to meet the demands of specialization (Schneider 1991:46).

Consequently, the dynamics of local societies in Judah in the seventh century should be viewed against the backdrop of their dependent and thus peripheral position in a regional system in which the independent variable is the expansion of dominant centers such as Assyria, Egypt (Redford 1992:445f) and Babylonia. The walled centres of Judah (eg Jerusalem) should be regarded as peripheral cores and Nineveh or Babylon as the core's core.

## 2. The prestige-goods system

The second facet of Wallerstein's World System Theory is that of the prestige-goods system. It integrates with the core periphery model: 'It provides a specific processual model of internal core-periphery relationships in the periphery' (Steele 1990:27). According to Frankenstein and Rowlands (1978:76) the specific economic characteristics of a prestige-goods system are dominated by the political advantages gained through exercising control over access to resources that can only be obtained through external trade. These resources are not for the general well-being but wealth objects needed in social transactions or the payments of social debts. Fundamental to the prestige-goods system is the fact that those with power control the abilities of others to reproduce socially by controlling the means of social production. In other words, those who control the prestige goods (luxury objects other than local goods such as material resources and foodstuffs like salt, flint, cereals and fruit) also control the means to strengthen their position *vis a vis* social reproduction and control. Large scale agriculture and horticulture as opposed to a mixed agricultural-pastoral economy would increase the available agriculture surplus for exchange of prestige goods from external trading partners.

These models could account for changes in socio-political organisation in Judah. The world system model places Palestine in a structural regional relationship while the prestige-goods one presents a processual internal model of Palestine's socio-political changes, according to Steele (1990:29).

## C. IMPLEMENTING WALLERSTEIN'S MODEL

The expansion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire during the second half of the eighth through most of the seventh century brought the independent territorial and national states of Palestine into the orbit of a world system (Ahlström 1993:665). It is to be assumed that the hierarchical, unequal and interdependent relationship between the centre/core (situated in Mesopotamia) and the Levantine peripheral regions did affect the economic systems and strategies within the Kingdom of Judah in significant ways.

1. In the initial stages the effects of the devastating wars on the regional economies must have been disastrous. The foreign Assyrian army looted and plundered resources such as temple and state treasuries and personal valuables. They confiscated stored-up agricultural reserves, tools and draught animals; they butchered livestock, destroyed terraces, damaged water conservation

systems, burnt houses, removed the securities against invaders, et cetera. In short, the food procuring and distribution strategies were seriously curtailed because the means of economic production were disrupted. In the ensuing period considerable manpower was needed only to repair the damages and losses caused by the new overlords. Moreover, the implementation of imperial economic strategies implied that regular tribute and various taxes, euphemistically called 'gifts', were imposed in addition to conscription in terms of forced labour and military service to ensure Assyrian supremacy within the region. Existing trade relationships between the Levantine economic centres (cores) were severely affected, if not exploited, by reducing them to peripheral entities only to serve the interests of the outside supranational core/centre in Mesopotamia. As peripheral regions they became dependent upon Assyria for its means of production or reproduction. The reaction strategies of the various peripheral entities involved resistance or adaptation to the external core's pressure, as are epitomised in Hezekiah's and Manasseh's policies.

2. It was, however, in Assyria's interest to stabilise regional political structures, to safeguard interregional trade routes, to create exchange mechanisms and to enable craft and trade specialisation over a much broader spectrum (Bondi 1992:312). The process of creating interdependent relationships between various national and regional entities emphasised 'regional differentiation' in which particular populations came to play particular roles in terms of specialisation and labour diversification (Schneider 1991:46). This interdependence between core and periphery was reflected further in the (politically) unequal patron-client relationships of the Empire. Such relationships were formally ratified by very specific treaties to ensure the regular delivery of tribute and the occasional presentation of 'gifts' (TUAT 1/4:400 11.80, 86), consisting almost entirely of prestige-goods. (Cf 'gold, silver, tin, iron, antimony, linen garments, with multicolored trimmings, garments of ... dark purple wool ... all kinds of costly objects be they products of the sea or the continent, the [choice] products of their regions, the treasures of [their] kings, horses, mules' et cetera. [ANET 282].) The tribute consisted almost entirely of prestige-goods, ie manufactured products of high value, that were easily transportable because of their low bulk (Routledge 1992:3). Since it was primarily destined to be consumed within the royal court of Assyria any interruption of its regular flow was seen as an act of rebellion against the Empire. The position of the different client rulers from all over the Empire remained intact as long as they would keep to their agreements loyally. Political stability and economic growth maintained and re-enforced the client ruler's local power base (social production). Consequently, the so-called *Pax Assyriaca* effectuated the development of major economic centres within the peripheral regions of the Levant as was especially the case in the Kingdom of Judah during the long reign of Manasseh (Redford 1992:438).

3. Economic growth was achieved mainly through the core's insistence upon the delivery of prestige high value low bulk goods as tribute. The local client ruler was forced, accordingly, to

convert his primary agricultural products into prestige goods. Since these goods comprised items not readily available within his own domain he needed to trade with other periphery areas within the world system of the Empire. Thus the local producers were compelled to commercialise their products. The Assyrian economic policy did leave much room in the peripheral regions for agricultural intensification, labour diversification and manufacturing specialisation as well as for mercantile entrepreneurship (Elat 1982:245). Agricultural produce that was previously stored locally found its way to the trading centres and international ports where it was exchanged for imported prestige goods such as aromatics from Arabia, precious metals from Asia Minor, bitumen from Transjordanja, medicinal herbs from Palestine, wood and alum from Phoenicia, exotic manufactured goods from Egypt, et cetera. (Eph'al 1982:12f; Finkelstein 1992:156). The Assyrian king only needed to control the maritime ports, access points and gateway cities along the long distance overland trade routes to ensure the stable flow of taxes and tribute in the form of such prestige goods.

4. The effects of the Assyrian economic policy on the local or peripheral production system are not too difficult to foresee.

- (a) The growing dependence on interregional trade and markets for converting agricultural produce into prestige goods led to the production policy of cash crops which would yield the highest output for labour input. It seems highly unlikely that cash crop producers would adhere to the traditional local production measures such as crop diversity, fallow and rotation practices, effective interchange between agriculturalists and pastoralists, et cetera. Without natural replenishment of soil fertility (by means of animal droppings) together with crop specialisation the ecosystem came under growing pressure which would increase the risk factor in the event of droughts or pests.
- (b) It encouraged the cultivation of new land as well as the construction of water systems, terraces and industrial installations as is evidenced by numerous archaeological excavations, eg Tell Miqne, Sataf, Arad, Tel ed Duweir, et cetera. (Weippert 1988:634f; Thompson 1992:339). On account of such higher investment it stimulated estate instead of communal ownership of family land, thereby distorting family rights, values and local customs. As a result of non-subsistence, ie, surplus production, further labour diversification and craft specialisation took place. Especially around the larger urban centres there emerged communities and classes not engaged in agriculture production.
- (c) It supported the centralisation of regional economic management systems that provided **greater security** against incursions and promoted interregional trade. However, more people were left more vulnerable because of the changes in motivation, mode and system of production. In nucleated peripheral communities' reaction against some forms of agricultural intensification practices and surplus management systems clearly coincided

with other reasons for resisting the inequalities of the economic system. Since the peripheral economy depended largely on its protected position in the world systems network any change in the power or core structure would transform it radically. The very moment when Ashurbanipal died the world system collapsed. The peripheral economies were seriously affected because of the lack of a centre core that demanded and structured the exchange of produce and goods. The client rulers were left without the security their patrons had provided. Those who had previously resisted the incorporation into the world system seized the power and either reverted to the traditional subsistence economies in which the system of trade was based on barter rather than converting products into prestige goods, or they became client rulers of new patrons in a world system only with another core(s) like Saite Egypt (Redford 1992:445) or the New-Babylonian Empire (Malamat 1990:73).

5. The external demand to exchange surplus products for prestige goods by means of international trade within a world system created the need for an alternative for the traditional barter system. Converting produce into something totally different which can be used as 'currency' to obtain something else denotes essentially what money is all about, namely to transcend the restrictions and limitations of bartering.<sup>2</sup>

A money economy became operative when goods could be acquired in terms of market related values. The external demands of tribute and taxes in terms of high value low bulk goods necessitated such exchange system to be implemented within the realms of the different successive empires. Consequently, a limited money orientated system surely began to matter!

#### **D. WORLD SYSTEMS THEORY AND THE LAST DECADES OF JUDAH**

It is to be surmised that while the disintegration of the Assyrian Empire brought about the end of the core-peripheral structures of the Assyrian dominated world system its internalised structures and operational effects could not be disposed of easily. The core eventually changed, but the system remained. Thus established core-centres of the peripheral regions still benefited from the existing infra-production and trade structures in as far as they could revert, retain or redirect the flow of taxes and surplus. High power politics between the major core centres of the Levantine region enabled the continuation of trade. In the kingdom of Judah the disadvantages of having an outflow of economic resources were immediately cancelled (if not already earlier) when the imminent collapse of the Assyrian Empire became obvious. Consequently, the surplus of economic production was retained within the confines of the region. In its turn the surplus was most probably employed to promote the so-called reform endeavour of king Josiah. His capital became the centre/core of the surrounding peripheral regions. It absorbed the economic surplus, but provided some degree of stability and security.

On the other hand, it would have been far more difficult to have the prestige goods system abolished. Agricultural production of cash crops was labour and capital intensive. Vineyards and olive trees were not uprooted; deliveries of wool, hides or salt were not discontinued; specialisation in terms of crafts and the manufacturing of commodities were not necessarily curtailed, because of the vested interests of traders. Sustained economic growth could only be attained by continuing the prestige goods system and by keeping the international trade routes from Arabia to the Mediterranean ports safe and operative. Exchange of economic surplus and manufactured goods as well as the exaction of toll and excise must have profited a core centre like Jerusalem. Further, it would explain Josiah's building activities as well as his political overtures to the regions north of Judah.

Though highly speculative it would also be interesting to view the ideological intentions and concerns behind the Josianic reform measures from this perspective. How would he have coped with the different social, political and religious entities regarding their claims for land utilisation and ownership, or the resistance of cash crop producers to be prescribed by religiously and ideologically motivated officials? (Thompson 1992:339) How could he economically afford not to tolerate foreign traders and entrepreneurs? Did he succeed in preventing the accumulation of too much wealth in the hands of too few people?

After two decades of political independence and economic interregional interdependence the supranational world system was enforced again, first by Egypt but soon afterwards by Babylonia. It must have caused immense economic tensions within Judah for the next eighteen years.

The growing animosity between different economic productive entities, the renewed tax demands by the core centres, disadvantageous exchange of surplus for prestige goods, the increase in military expenses, the lack of security in distant regions that disrupted trade and commerce, fostered the general spirit of complete disillusionment. These and many other factors may have contributed to the perception that the process of economic, political and social decline was irreversible. Every economic move was only to be perceived as an indicator of something negative. Even their history was reviewed in the light of the negative effects of total economic, social and political disintegration.

## CONCLUSION

The application of Wallerstein's World Systems Theory to the economic situation in Palestine during the seventh century B.C. seems to be more than an exercise in creative imagination for probabilistic perspectives; it serves to elucidate the intricate and interrelated economic fibres of an ancient society and explains some of the 'hidden' concepts in the story line of that society, namely that money matters indeed matter.

## APPENDIX: THE ECONOMY OF 19TH CENTURY HEBRON

One could rightly ask whether there exist parallels which would corroborate the claims this application of Wallerstein's theory made in connection with an ancient economic system. I would like to venture some comparison with the economic situation of nineteenth century Palestine, specifically the peripheral region of Hebron which was incorporated within the world system of the Ottoman Empire with its core in Istanbul. The similarities regarding the geophysical constraints, modes of existence, social organisation and value system as well as the similarities of interdependent, hierarchical and unequal economic and political relationships between core and periphery substantiate the fairness of such undertaking.

Hebron is situated on a large plateau (20 x 12km), almost level (between 900 - 1000m) and in terms of topography particularly well isolated, on the escarpment between Jerusalem and Ber Sheva. Deep good soils in the rocky hills and the wide intramontane valleys, a pleasant climate, steady rainfall, natural diversity and ecological variability as well as natural exchange outlets to the surrounding areas such as the Negev, Shephela and Judaeen Desert are all factors that may account for its flourishing economy as was evidenced by the early nineteenth century travelogues.

Hebron apparently functioned as a peripheral core for the whole of the region, including the villages situated on the plateau. The economy was well diversified, based mainly on agricultural produce such as the cultivation of cereals in the lower rainfall zones to the east and south, of grapes in the terraced zones nearer to the villages, and of animal husbandry in the grazing zones towards the desert (Karmon 1975:78). Reference is made to the production of cash crops signifying the existence of a market economy in the tax and revenue registers from as early as the sixteenth century [Cohen & Lewis 1978:107]). Hebron functioned as a market for the Bedouin to barter merchandise such as cheese, wool, hides, salt, sulphur, asphalt, fuel, caustic soda, medicinal herbs, et cetera in exchange for foodstuffs, manufactured goods, utensils, cloths, jewellery, spices, et cetera. Seetzen (1854:II:47-51) who visited Hebron in 1806 referred to its various prosperous industries, eg wine, soap, shoes, carpets and glass (26 kilns produced glass objects) that were dependent on the delivery of raw materials by the Bedouin from the periphery on the one hand, and the marketing of the finished products within an extensive commercial network on the other.

When Burckhardt visited Hebron in 1812 the situation was more or less the same. He observed, additionally, the fabrication of dyed woollens, and of pharmaceutical/cosmetic products. Contrary to other regions in Palestine (cf De Volney 1787:II:406) it then enjoyed a high degree of prosperity because of its difficult accessibility and of its privileged position as prestigious religious centre to which much of its taxes were rechanneled for the upkeep of the Haram el Halili (Karmon 1975:83). One may safely assume that Hebron functioned as a fairly independent core-centre within a peripheral region of Palestine, and yet within the world system of the Ottoman Empire



(Issawi 1966:213). Substantial surplus was made from the production of and trade in goods to be exchanged for high value low bulk luxury goods demanded as tax by the Pasha of Damascus.

Hebron's fortunes were seriously challenged with Ibrahim Pasha's conquest of the Holy Land in 1831. The new Egyptian administrative measures, forms of taxation and especially conscription system led to revolts all over Palestine, Hebron included, that were brutally crushed. The communications and commercial networks were disrupted and the trade redirected. Moreover the discontinuation of the delivery of raw materials by the Bedouin heavily affected Hebron's local industry. Apart from the disastrous effects of an earthquake in 1837 faction fighting broke out between the various Bedouin tribes of the vicinity resulting in looting and plunder of the agricultural settlements on the plateau (Schölch 1986:150). Skilled people moved elsewhere, the glass and clothing industry came to a complete standstill because of the lack of supplies and because of the flooding of the markets with cheap European mass manufactured goods. Due to the lack of security the Hajj pilgrims bypassed Hebron. Ibrahim Pasha's short-lived rule in Palestine (1831-40) completely destroyed the economy of Hebron and its vicinity. Only after the Tanzimat reforms (1856) families began to return to Hebron and started to rebuild the terraces, houses, communication networks, et cetera. By 1875 it resumed a high degree of its former role as core-centre in the peripheral region (Polkehn 1986:116). The dramatic changes in the fortunes of Hebron over such a short period points to the intricate relationship between core and peripheral structures within a supranational world system. Economic interrelatedness and prestige goods systems account for much of the social and political transformations in Hebron.

## NOTES

- 1 This research was carried out at the Biblisch-Archäologisches Institut of the University of Tübingen in 1992. Financial support of the Centre for Research Development of the Human Sciences Research Council and of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation is acknowledged gratefully. I am deeply indebted to its director, Prof Siegfried Mittmann for his generous support and hospitality.
- 2 According to Dothan and Gitin (1992:152) the silver pieces discovered at Tel Miqne served as currency in the seventh century BC at about the same time that minted coins were first being used in the eastern Mediterranean basin. Others argue that three systems of weights and measures were operative in Palestine reflecting the diversity of the economy (Ephal & Naveh 1993:62).

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