

PART 2

EXCHANGE AND INTERREGIONAL DYNAMICS

JUST WHAT COLLAPSED? A NETWORK PERSPECTIVE ON 'PALATIAL' AND 'PRIVATE' TRADE AT UGARIT

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While the importance of international trade for our understanding of the Late Bronze to Iron Age transition in the eastern Mediterranean is hardly controversial, the same cannot be said for any specific proposition one might make about this trade. More than any other topic in the study of antiquity, trade has seen a sustained, energetic, and theoretically informed debate that encompasses not only issues of empirical interpretation, but also fundamental differences of opinion regarding the nature of human social life. It is true that, after more than a century, we may have grown tired of debating the relative merits of 'primitivist' versus 'modernist', or 'substantivist' versus 'formalist', understandings of ancient trade. However, most of the interim compromises meant to move us beyond these impasses have left untouched the underlying, and intransigent, conceptual issues. This is illustrated most clearly in discussions of palace administration versus private initiative in international trade in the eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age. Scholars now, almost universally, suggest that the question itself is misplaced, and that elements of both 'state' and 'private' initiatives can be seen in the archaeological record (*e.g.* Cline 1994; Knapp and Cherry 1994, 146). However, this open-minded pluralism glosses over the underlying framework by means of which categories such as 'state' and 'private' trade are defined. After all, the issue was never really about the conditions under which specific objects were exchanged or under which specific trading expeditions operated. Rather, the question has always been about social and economic totalities; what form did they take? How were they generated? Did they, in fact, exist (see Rowlands 1987; Sjöberg 1995; Liverani 2005)? Hence, when one comes to talk about the relationship between international trade and the dramatic changes that mark the end of the Late Bronze Age, in contrast to the more

polemic positions of the past, simple pluralism provides no tools for analysing and understanding these events in an historically dynamic manner.

An exception to this can be found in the slightly surprising convergence of recent work around a model of the place of long-distance trade in the Late Bronze to Iron Age transition, conducted by scholars beginning from rather different perspectives, most notably Susan Sherratt (1998; 1999; 2003; Sherratt and Sherratt 1991; 1998), Michal Artzy (1985; 1997; 1998) and Mario Liverani (2003). These scholars have characterised the transition from the Late Bronze to the Iron Ages in terms of a shift in the balance of international trade from palace to private dominance, emphasising in particular the initially marginal social position of private merchants, sailors, and caravan traders. To differing degrees, each scholar suggests that this 'privatisation' of trade began as a by-product of the routes, facilities, skills and demand engendered by state-sponsored trade, but that it went on to play a significant role in undermining these very same centralised palatial economies. Because this model manages both to accept the empirically attested co-existence of palace and private trade interests, and to construct a dynamic historical relationship between them, it has proven a popular and useful tool in recent analysis (*e.g.* White *et al.* 2002, 174–75).

While we do not deny either the attraction or the utility of this 'privatisation' model, reflection on empirical problems raised by the epigraphic evidence from Ugarit has led us back to those unresolved issues of how to conceptualise ancient societies lying at the heart of our old debates. Certainly, in the case of Ugarit, we would suggest that the palace was both more and less involved in Late Bronze Age international trade than the privatisation model implies. The palace was more involved in the sense that the range of exchange activities

that came under the purview of the palace at Ugarit was not as strongly defined by ‘high-level transfers of bodies of important commodities’ (Sherratt and Sherratt 1998, 341) as the model seems to require. The palace was less involved in the sense that palatial exchange relations were not exclusively characterised by ‘tightly controlled conditions of nominal gift-exchange and centralised redistribution’ (Sherratt 1999, 195). As we shall argue below, the boundaries between palatial and non-palatial economic activity at Ugarit are very difficult to draw, either in terms of participants or commodities. While most of this textually documented activity could be broadly defined as elite-dominated (whether or not the individuals were specifically ‘royal’), its dispersal and diversity raises many problems for the privatisation model. In particular, the central argument that it was the development of a decentralised private trade network independent of palatial control that undermined the social and political foundations of the Late Bronze Age palaces becomes difficult to maintain.

In empirical terms, what seems most problematic in the privatisation model is its tendency to cite markers of private, as opposed to royal, trade even as the traders themselves are held to move between each of these two circuits of exchange. In particular, with regards to cargoes, ships, and the production, distribution and consumption of so-called ‘added-value’ or ‘sub-elite’ commodities, we will show that evidence from Ugarit provides no easy or absolute basis for these divisions. Critique, however, is not an end in itself, and hence we also present an alternative ‘critical network’ approach to the issue of exchange relations at Ugarit. This approach attempts to account for the dominant position of the palace within Ugarit, without reifying the economy as a distinct sphere to be controlled by the palace, or presuming the easy separation of palatial and non-palatial economic activities. This approach will allow us to account for the shifts in trade already noted, but within a framework that rethinks, rather than sublimates, the difficult conceptual issues at the heart of our long-standing debates on the nature of ancient trade.

Beyond luxuries?

The international exchange of luxury items, especially by means of formal gifting, is a well-studied aspect of the Late Bronze Age, and rightly so (Zaccagnini 1987; Liverani 1990; Cochavi-Rainey and Lilyquist 1999; Feldman 2006). This striking feature of relations between various Late Bronze Age palaces must, of course, play a large role in our understanding of how such palaces were reproduced through time as social institutions. Our argument then is not about the importance of either luxury goods or international exchange in the Late Bronze Age. Rather, it is about the implications of isolating these issues from questions of internal exchange

relations and the production, distribution and consumption of bulk or utilitarian goods.

For Susan Sherratt (see Sherratt and Sherratt 1991; 1998; Sherratt 1998; 1999; 2003) luxury goods and raw materials have a particularly important catalytic role in the eastern Mediterranean; initially as objects of desire motivating long-distance trade, and later as marks of distinction, serving as social capital to be restricted and protected, thereby fuelling the market amongst sub-elites for substitute items like Mycenaean pottery. Both Artzy (1998) and Sherratt suggest that something approaching a dual-circuit developed between the 14th and 12th centuries BCE, with entrepreneurial ‘private’ traders dealing in ‘value-added’ sub-elite goods, often bypassing palace centres focused on the exchange of luxury goods and high-value raw materials. While seldom so clearly articulated, the presumption of something like a dual circuit would also seem to underlie attempts to identify the nature of given trading missions on the basis of the cargo recovered from Late Bronze Age shipwrecks (Muhly *et al.* 1977, 361; Knapp and Cherry 1994, 143; Pulak 1997, 256; Bachhuber 2006). This is most evident in the contrasts drawn between the apparently high-value cargo of the wreck at Uluburun and the more utilitarian cargo at Cape Gelidonya (esp. scrap metal; Knapp and Cherry 1994, 143) or Point Iria (agricultural products; Vichos and Lolos 1997, 330–31).

What light might the epigraphic material from Ugarit shed on this question of ‘dual circuits’ of exchange? As is well-known, French excavations conducted at the site of Ras Shamra since 1928 have uncovered numerous clusters of clay tablets, written in both syllabic Akkadian and alphabetic Ugaritic, in contexts defined as both royal and ‘private’. As in all cases of archaeologically derived texts, accidents of discovery and preservation play a large role in shaping what we know about Ugarit. Similarly, poorly attested languages such as these, recorded at times on poorly preserved texts, result in many uncertainties regarding the semantics and syntax of specific texts. Add to this the problem of the poor excavation and recording methods employed at Ras Shamra under the direction of Claude Schaeffer, and it soon becomes necessary to compose all interpretative statements based on these texts as interrogative sentences. Nevertheless, the content of these texts provides information on a wide-range of economic activities, including international trade. Additionally, the simple fact that certain people, things, and activities were being recorded provides often overlooked information on the relationship between those empowered to write and those who were the object of recording.

Cargo

There is no question that texts originating from the palace of Ugarit are concerned with the description (*e.g.* *KTU* 4.265)

and movement of luxury goods, metals and valuable raw materials. This includes tribute (e.g. *KTU* 4.369; 4.610; see also *KTU* 2.36 for Hittite expectations) and gifts (e.g. EA 49), but also contexts where exchange values are given in silver (e.g. *KTU* 4.132). We also find the royal palace acquiring and distributing metals directly to smiths, presumably for the purpose of producing finished goods (e.g. *KTU* 4.310).

Not surprisingly, we also find an enormous concern for the acquisition, distribution and/or exchange of labour (e.g. *KTU* 4.125), agro-pastoral products (e.g. *RS* 16.125, *RS* 16.357, *RS* 17.37), tools (e.g. *RS* 19.23) and other equipment (e.g. *KTU* 4.92). What is more surprising is that the few texts providing information on the contents of ships refer more frequently to the shipment of grain than they do to any other commodity (e.g. *KTU* 2.38, *KTU* 2.46, *RS* 20.212, *RS* 26.158, *RIH* 78.3+30). This is of course influenced by Hittite demands for grain as tribute. However, we also have at least two cases of grain shipments between Egypt and Ugarit (*KTU* 2.38, *RIH* 78.3 + 30), one of which mentions silver (*RIH* 78.3 + 30). Additionally, the Akkadian letter from Takhulinu of Ugarit to Haya of Egypt, discovered at Tel Aphek in Israel, also deals with a large shipment of grain, perhaps 15 tons in total, although no ships are actually mentioned (see Owen 1981; Singer 1983). Minimally then, we can conclude that bulk commodities played a role in sea trade initiated by the palace at Ugarit.

Interestingly, in *RS* 16.238 + 254, the well-known declaration of tax-exemption for Sinaranu on the return of his ship to Ugarit from Crete, states that his grain, beer, and oil will not enter the palace, suggesting perhaps that this would be the content of his ship. Given that this wording suggests that Sinaranu is a person external to the palace, this could show that grain (as well as ‘value-added’ agricultural products) was shipped to Ugarit by both royal and non-royal interests.

Besides grain, Ugaritic texts are not overly informative on what commodities were being shipped. The king of Amurru, one of Ugarit’s neighbours, enquires after an expected shipment of an uncertain type (*algamiššu*) of presumably high quality building stone for the construction of his palace (*RS* 34.135). While this is certainly a case of inter-elite exchange, the material involved is somewhere between a bulk and a high-value commodity. One text (*KTU* 4.394) does seem to meet archaeologists’ expectations in recounting the loss of what seems likely to have been a load of copper ingots in a shipwreck. However, before we begin to correlate excavated shipwreck cargoes with Ugaritic texts, we need to look carefully at the range of cargoes represented in the textual record. George Bass (1967, 163–4), for example, suggested on the basis of the eclectic mix of bronze tools, scrap metal, and ingots that the Cape Gelidonya wreck represents a travelling tinker, while Bernard Knapp, James Muhly and Polymnia Muhly (1988)

suggested that it was a founder’s hoard of scrap metal. Yet, as Elisha Linder (1972) noted, the fragmentary cargo list of a ship from Alashiya (Cyprus) recorded on *KTU* 4.390 has numerous parallels with the contents of the Cape Gelidonya shipwreck, especially if the ‘talents’ mentioned in line 4 refer to copper as some suggest (Zaccagnini 1970, 317–24).

KTU 4.390

1. (Inventory of the) Cyp[riote] ship
2. that is in Atallig:
3. fifte[en]
4. talents of co[pper],
5. six shields,
6. 2 baskets,
7. 3 *ul*-tools,
8. *krk*-tools (?) []
9. 5 jav[elins],
10. 6 sa[ccks],
11. ele[ven]
12. purple [dye]
13. *krk*-tools[]

Minimally, this shows that the palace at Ugarit was aware of, and carefully documented, ships with cargoes like the Cape Gelidonya wreck, whether the ship’s content is to be interpreted as ‘royal’ cargo or ‘private’ *bricolage*.

Evidence for overland trade similarly demonstrates the impossibility of defining trade as ‘private’ or ‘palace’, not only in terms of what is traded but who is doing the trading. Akkadian letters, recovered from what is now called the House of Urtenu at Ugarit, attest to a caravan venture running (at least minimally) between Ugarit, Carcemish, and Emar. The head of the enterprise was Šip#i-Ba’al, who was related to Queen Šarelli of Ugarit and acted as the manager of her commercial enterprises. In this venture, however, Šip#i-Ba’al may have been using his official status as a means of inaugurating or facilitating regional exchange transactions but he does not seem to have been acting on behalf of any royal interest. The correspondence was retrieved from the house of one of the managers working beneath Šip#i-Ba’al, Urtenu, and consists of letters from various other managers and economic actors within this venture. Given the small sample of texts that have been preserved from this venture, it is difficult to make generalisations. However, it is possible to make some suggestions about what was involved in this caravan venture, at the very least. At the end of *RS* 34.133, Tuna (another commercial agent) comments that purple wool, precious stone, and horse equipment is needed in ‘atti-land’ (presumably Carchemish and environs are included in this designation). *RS* 94.2284 similarly refers to purple wool as well as various manufactured garments. In addition, wine is discussed as a negotiable item and silver seems to be a major medium for exchange (although not the sole one). Wool, precious stone, and clothing are mentioned in *RS* 34.134; oil and clothes are the trade items

in *RS* [Varia 26]; and tin and oil are the subjects of *RS* 34.141. While this was likely not the extent of goods traded, this combination is difficult to categorise as solely luxury or solely staple, solely 'private' or solely 'royal'. Indeed, these products come closest to the Sherratts' 'value-added' category. Grain is not mentioned but given the particular challenges grain poses for overland transportation, it is not unlikely that overland grain trade would have been limited to relatively short distances.

Ships

Michal Artzy (1985; 1988) has argued that depictions of ships in the eastern Mediterranean suggest the introduction of two new forms during the latter part of the Late Bronze Age, namely long-boats for war and round boats for trade. She suggests that these ships were distinct from the traditional multi-purpose sea-going vessels used by palaces for both warfare and trade. In particular, Artzy (1997) suggests that the round boats were merchantmen, used by what she terms 'nomads of the sea' for tramping and small-scale private trade shipping. Hence, for Artzy, such ships were a material correlate of the development of entrepreneurial trade out of an expedient 'sailors' trade', precisely the process held to be fatal to Bronze Age palaces in the privatisation model.

The texts from Ugarit, however, raise certain questions with regards to Artzy's correlation. Alphabetic Ugaritic texts use several different names for types of ship. Most common is *any*, which appears to be a general term and is frequently used in the headings of lists, but is also used to designate ships from a particular location (e.g. *KTU* 4.81; 4.390) and ships belonging to royalty (king of Byblos – *KTU* 4.338; king of Ugarit (?) – *KTU* 4.421). As *KTU* 4.81 illustrates, *br* and *thkt* are subdivisions that can be made within the category of *any*. A single text (*KTU* 4.421) seems to distinguish within the category of *any* between *br* and, otherwise unattested, *'tk* vessels. The meaning of this later term, however, remains unclear.

Both *br* and *thkt* occur in Egyptian (see Sasson 1966, 131; Jones 1988, 136–7, 145–6) and appear to refer to a larger and a smaller vessel respectively. *br* is clearly a loan word in Egyptian, appearing exclusively in the New Kingdom (Jones 1988, 136–7). Ships transporting timber from Byblos in the story of *Wenamun* are referred to as *br*, suggesting this was a large transport or multi-purpose ship. *thkt*, attested in Egyptian as *sktt* (Jones 1988, 145–6; contra Loretz 1996), already appears as a term in the Old Kingdom and may have referred to a smaller vessel (Sasson 1966, 131; Hoftijzer and Van Soldt 1998, 337), although use of the term in Egyptian does not indicate a specialised function. Interestingly, the Hebrew equivalent of *any* (*'oniyah*) and *thkt* (*sekiyah*) appear in parallelism in Isaiah 2.16 (Lipiński

1971, 87), where 'ships (*'oniyah*) of Tarshish' is paired with 'stately vessels' (*sekiyah*). Unfortunately, while 'ships of Tarshish' in the Hebrew Bible are certainly merchantmen, the conventions of Biblical Hebrew poetry mean that the two phrases could have been intended either as synonyms (for emphasis) or antonyms (to represent a category by its two extremes).

Both *br* and *thkt* vessels are associated with personal names (e.g. *KTU* 4.81, 4.366, 4.647) that could refer either to the ship's captain or its owner, although in one case (*KTU* 4.647) the captain and owner of a *br* vessel are carefully distinguished. Minimally, this shows that ownership of the larger, apparently multi-purpose, *br* vessels was not exclusively royal. It is, of course, rather difficult to say with confidence that these two sub-divisions of *any* equate directly with Artzy's vessel categories. *br*, for example, seems most like Artzy's traditional large multi-purpose vessel. *thkt* is more difficult to equate with Artzy's categories, but is perhaps closest to her 'round-boat' merchantmen. However, in terms of attestation in Egyptian, *br* is the name that appears to have been introduced in the Late Bronze Age (when distinct long- and round boats are said to have been introduced), while *thkt* / *sktt* is used from at least the third millennium BCE. What we can say is that, much as Artzy suggests, Ugaritic texts witness a categorical division between vessels that seem to differ in size and perhaps also function. However, ownership and use of these vessels does not seem to divide along these same lines in any straightforward manner and, perhaps more importantly, both sorts of boats are clearly recognised and documented in the palace archives. Of course, neither *br* or *thkt* may have referred to Artzy's 'round boats', nor for that matter were the referents of these terms necessarily consistent or their semantic fields necessarily defined on principles equivalent to those used by Artzy to classify Late Bronze Age representations of ships. At the very least, however, Ugaritic texts require us to recognise that types of ships, patterns of trade, ownership and palatial engagement were likely to be interrelated in relatively complex ways rather than by means of direct equations.

'Value-added' and 'sub-elite' commodities

Susan Sherratt's argument is, of course, not limited to either luxury cargoes or the nature of ships. She makes much of Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery as the hallmark of the commercially oriented, decentralised trade that she sees being driven forward by urban centres on Cyprus from the Late Cypriot IIC period on. As Sherratt notes (1999, 169, 173), this pottery is absent from Late Bronze Age texts (see also Liverani 1986), although this is not entirely surprising given the general lack of enthusiasm pottery seems to have generated amongst ancient Near Eastern scribes. Mycenaean

pottery is also relatively under-represented in elite Egyptian and Hittite contexts, while it is widely distributed in the Levant. According to Sherratt, as a commodity that was easily imitated and hence difficult to control in terms of either raw materials or skilled craftsmen, Mycenaean pottery provided a sub-elite market with identity markers and consumption strategies independent of palatial control, ultimately undermining the ideological and economic basis of the palatial system itself. But is this really the case at Ugarit?

Archaeological find spots for Mycenaean pottery at Ras Shamra are infamously dicey, and it seems very likely that at least some of the Mycenaean and related pottery excavated by Shaeffer was not preserved or recorded (Yon *et al.* 2000, 1–3). This said, the published corpus of Mycenaean and related pottery from Ugarit continues to expand (Yon *et al.* 2000; Monchambert 2004b) and is now approximately twice as large as that analysed by Albert Leonard (1994) and Gert van Wijngaarden (2002). Most interesting for our purposes is the fact that 118 of the 414 previously unpublished vessels and sherds from the Louvre's collections catalogued by Marguerite Yon, Vassos Karageorghis, and Nicole Hirschfeld (2000, 68) are said to come from contexts in the *Palais Royale*. This rather dramatically changes the previously published evidence, in which only 5 of 554 Mycenaean vessels and sherds from Ugarit were said to come from the *Palais Royale* (see van Wijngaarden 2002, table 5.1). Whether these contexts are funerary, domestic, or storage in nature is unfortunately unclear. However, as Yon notes, it is clear that 'la ceramique mycenienne faisait partie du mobilier normal des habitants Palais' (Yon *et al.* 2000, 9).

While stressing the general distribution of Mycenaean pottery across distinct contexts at Ugarit, van Wijngaarden was clearly influenced by Sherratt in labelling it as a sub-elite commodity (van Wijngaarden 2002, 73). Clearly the publication of the Louvre collection, which van Wijngaarden (2002, 40) was not able to include in his analysis, requires that we take seriously the consumption of Mycenaean and related pottery in the *Palais Royale*. Indeed, several of the finds from the palace have been classified as locally made Late Mycenaean III C1B and so-called 'derivative' styles (Yon *et al.* 2000, 159–60), key components of Sherratt's proposed phenomenon of 'import substitution' (Sherratt 1998; 1999).

Beyond this, van Wijngaarden (2002, 73) bases his argument for the 'sub-elite' status of Mycenaean pottery on the presumed connection between inhabitants of the city of Ugarit and the social category *bunušu malki* or 'Man of the King' in Ugaritic texts, as defined in the so-called 'two-sector' model of Ugaritic society and economy (*e.g.* Heltzer 1982; Liverani 1989). This model presumes a two-fold division in Ugarit between free peasantry and royal dependants, with the latter forming a 'public sector' of craftsmen, soldiers, and merchants concentrated most particularly within the city

of Ugarit itself. As the critique of Ignacio Rowe (2002, 4) points out, this argument rests on interpretations of the term *bunušu malki* or 'Man of the King', which occurs clearly in only eight texts at Ugarit, but is then extended by Heltzer to cover all uses of the term *bnš* ('man'). Both Rowe (2002) and David Schloen (2001, 246) have rather vigorously, and we feel successfully, questioned the suggestion that this term refers to a permanent status. Rowe (2002, 9) in particular has offered the compelling alternative that it refers to a temporary relation of dependence, such as debt-servitude. Hence, it is no longer necessary to imagine the entire city of Ugarit inhabited by royal dependants distinct from a largely unattached countryside. Taken together, this evidence suggests that at Ugarit Mycenaean pottery is not a sub-elite commodity but a generalised one. It may be that, as van Wijngaarden notes (1999), differences in the distribution of specific forms suggests that perhaps 'Mycenaean pottery' is too blunt an instrument for the interpretation of imported pottery consumption at Ugarit. Yet, this fact in itself suggests that in the case of Mycenaean pottery distinctions between 'elite' and 'sub-elite' lie within, rather than between, categories of material culture.

Sherratt also suggests that the distribution of Mycenaean pottery in the eastern Mediterranean is tied to decentralised trade activities based on Cyprus, which eventually subverted palatial monopolies over the consumption of semiotically charged commodities. Certainly, trade relations with Cyprus/Alašiya are well attested in Ugaritic texts. However, these are not subversively decentralised, but rather frequently involve the kings of Ugarit and Alašiya directly (see Knapp 1983). Indeed, in letters between Alašiya and Ugarit (*e.g.* RS 20.238) the king of Ugarit takes the role of subordinate partner, calling the king of Alašiya 'father' in keeping with the stereotypical language of Late Bronze Age international diplomacy. So, while Cyprus may well have played a key role in the distribution of Mycenaean pottery to the Levant, one is hard-pressed to see this Cypriot trade as particularly distinct or 'subversive' in the manner that Sherratt suggests.

Interestingly, Sherratt does set Ugarit aside as a special case of an increasingly commercial exchange economy constrained by 'a macro-regional hierarchical structure' (Sherratt 1998, 299, n. 14) constituted through Hittite and Egyptian imperial interests. This, however, ignores the parallels in trade activities between Ugarit and inland sites such as Carchemish and Emar, as well as the parallels in political and ideological activities between Alašiya and various Near Eastern polities besides Ugarit. In short, both the distribution of Mycenaean pottery at Ugarit and the nature of economic and political relations between Alašiya and various Near Eastern polities including Ugarit, make it difficult to maintain Sherratt's argument that Cypriot-organised trade in this commodity was peculiarly subversive and threatening to the palatial systems of the Eastern Mediterranean.

External consumption vs. internal production

In many ways, archaeological approaches to trade necessitate the elevation of luxury goods, restricted raw materials, and imported craft products to a primary explanatory role. After all, since at least the Early Bronze Age everyone in the Mediterranean has had wheat and barley, sheep and goats, even wine and olive oil. Where then, amongst this commonality, does the socially and historically dynamic aspect of economic activity lie?

Recent work that isolates and analyses the consumption (e.g. van Wijngaarden 1999a; Steel 2002) of imported commodities has certainly demonstrated the potential of such a perspective for generating new social insights, especially in relation to the constitution of individual and group identities. Indeed, Sturt Manning and Linda Hulin (2005, 280), in their review of Late Bronze Age trade, go so far as to suggest that consumption is 'the proper focus' of studying trade, especially as it relates to the formation and negotiation of personal identities.

We agree that consumption is an important, and heretofore understudied, aspect of Bronze Age trade, but this celebration of 'pure consumption' makes us uneasy. In particular, Manning and Hulin deploy the language of globalised capitalism, where choice is largely unconstrained and 'social forces' do no more than 'simply stake out an individual's room to manoeuvre by determining what is appropriate' (Manning and Hulin 2005, 288). To quote James Carrier and Josiah Heyman (1997, 361), 'Such an approach ignores the fact that the people who confront, use and respond to objects and their meanings do so in terms of the material, social and cultural constraints of their own personal situations.'

To be clear, it is both true and methodologically important to note that the meaning and significance of objects are not fixed in their production and can change as an object enters and is consumed within a new context. However, one cannot separate such acts of consumption from the acts of production that make consumption possible. In other words, while the meaning and significance of a Mycenaean pot might change between its point of origin in the Argolid, or Cyprus, and its point of consumption at Ugarit, at Ugarit the consumption of that vessel has to be understood in relation to those acts of production that created the resources necessary for the vessel's acquisition. Certainly, within the corpus of Ugaritic texts, foreign goods are not separated out from local products, and indeed circuits of production, exchange, and consumption resist analysis in such terms. This means that understanding trade at Ugarit requires some larger understanding of economic activity in general, and herein lays our final problem.

Networks and 'economies'

One might ask if, by evoking the need for a larger understanding of economic activity in general, we were proposing a return to the totalities that so often constrained explanations in the past; Karl Marx's 'Modes of Production', or Karl Polanyi's 'Modes of Integration', for example. Here we would note one fact often overlooked in discussions of Late Bronze Age trade, namely that Polanyi's central concern was not to define the evolution of different modes of exchange, but rather to demonstrate that the autonomy of the economy as a distinct social sphere was a necessary myth of capitalism (esp. Polanyi 1964). Reflecting even for a moment on issues such as the relationship between the labour market and the social and biological reproduction of labour in 21st century Britain illustrates that even in highly developed capitalist economies this thing we call 'the economy' has very fuzzy edges indeed. Polanyi's insight suggests that in antiquity we should not be looking for 'an economy' that the state or palace could control. Indeed, with no 'economy' in this autonomous sense, it is difficult to see how modes of exchange could define social formations in the kind of all-encompassing and epochal manner suggested by Polanyi himself.

If one looks systematically at the syllabic and alphabetic texts from Ugarit, what one finds is a dizzying variety of exchange relations recorded and administered in an apparently *ad hoc* manner. Indeed, characterising the Ugaritic 'economy' in terms of any single mode of production or exchange requires rather drastic reductions in the complexity and diversity of these texts. For example, while forms of labour service and redistribution are the most commonly attested exchange relations within texts from the *Palais Royale*, one also finds evidence for royal land grants to individuals, directly commissioned craft production, agricultural and pastoral production on royal farms, tax and duty collection, loans, the direct purchasing of commodities with silver, the delivery and receipt of gifts and tribute, and of course, foreign trade. Interestingly, texts found in the houses of apparently non-royal elites, such as Yabinu and Urtenu, show a similar range of economic activities on a smaller scale. Since these archives include texts, or copies of texts, clearly addressed to the king, one cannot be certain that all of the economic texts in these houses relate to the activities of the apparent owners. However, texts naming, or addressed directly to, both Yabinu and Urtenu indicate their involvement in foreign trade and foreign affairs under the auspices of the king and, apparently, also on their own initiative. Certainly, cases such as that of Sinaranu, point to the existence of non-royal merchants with ships conducting overseas trade. However, we only know about Sinaranu because of the favours shown to him by the palace. In short, the ways in which non-royal elites move in and out of direct royal service presents a particular problem in terms of characterising economic activity at Ugarit.

The Ugaritic evidence necessitates thinking about economic activities in terms of networks of social relations, rather than in terms of over-arching structures. In current economic analysis networks are understood as formal systems of organisation that lack a formal source of sovereign authority. Rather, the organisation stems from informal relationships that are related through vertical relationships (Fukuyama 1999, 199). The defining aspects of a network are the rules that govern the connections between different nodes and the transformations that these connections go through in the various movements of the network (Wolfram 2002, 193). Network theory provides a useful model for the study of ancient economy. It suggests that contacts between individuals in an economic relationship are worthwhile focal points of study. Moments of contact between agents are governed by many social norms and rules. These patterns of associations (*i.e.* networks) provide consistent social frameworks for economic interaction. Roger Friedland and Alexander F. Robertson (1990, 28) describe these social frameworks in these terms: ‘The reality of economic life is that most actors interact repeatedly over time and thus form expectations about each other’s behaviour, constructing patterns of behaviour that are not only valued in themselves but become mechanisms for the dissemination of information and for the control of each other’s behaviour.’

At the same time, economic network theory remains problematically wedded to the individual decision-making models so dear to economists. It also confuses the absence of an overall hierarchy and organising intelligence in the relationship between nodes, with an absence of hierarchy and strategic agency within specific social relations, rendering the study of power and the perpetuation of inequality rather difficult. So, for example, it is very fruitful to imagine the diverse exchange relations witnessed in Ugaritic texts in terms of networks with different nodes shaped informally by norms and conventions that provide regularity to given relationships, indicating who gives tribute, who gives gifts, and who pays cash. However, it is not very fruitful to pretend that these relationships are all equal and free of compulsion, or to avoid asking how it is that the king stays king from one generation to the next. This is where the ‘critical’ part of ‘critical network theory’ comes into play. Fig. 3.1 is an attempt to represent graphically the various exchange relations reflected in Ugaritic texts. As one can see, the royal palace is marked by the particularly dense network of exchange relations within which it is embedded.

To be reproduced the nodal position of the palace had to be regularised, and to be regularised it had to be represented. As Schloen (2001) has shown in some detail, at Ugarit the palace was given substance (as a unity) and legitimacy through its representation as a household headed by the king. There is, in this sense, no public sector as the palace operated not as manager of a state-economy,

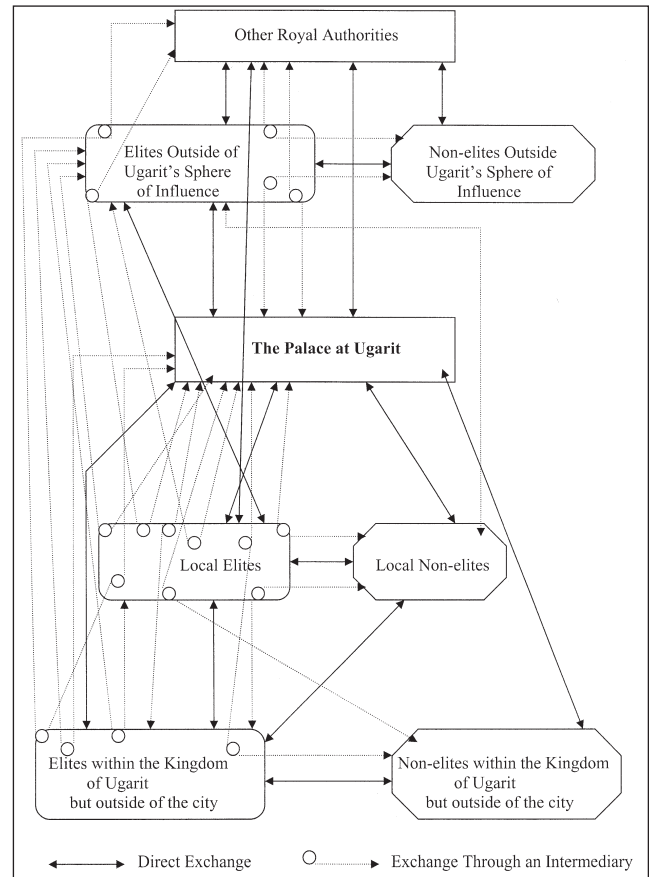


Fig. 3.1: A network-based model (NBM) of Ugaritic exchange relationships

but as the biggest household in a network of households. In this sense, as the supreme house, the palace could be represented as both encompassing and interacting with smaller households depending on the context and purpose of the representation.

The shared understanding of the palace as the supreme household of Ugarit provided the consistent social framework for economic interaction that network theory requires. However, it also provides a means of conceptualising the perpetual reproduction of inequalities central to political analysis and generally unaccounted for in the decision-making orientation of most network approaches within economics. In short, the political and strategic aspects of palatial power were not given in a structure, but were realised in the palace’s nodal position between different networks of social relations. Because the palace was able to transfer resources and social capital between the networks of foreign, military, religious, judicial, and economic relations within which it was embedded, the palace was able to achieve things that others, less extensively connected, experienced as impossible.

Conclusion

Returning now to the question of the transition from the Late Bronze to Iron Ages, we can both assimilate and reject various aspects of the privatisation model. First, our critical network approach suggests that merchants and sailors could be embedded to different degrees and with different intensities in networks interacting with the palace. In this way, the palace at Ugarit could play a major role in stimulating, structuring and influencing long-distance trade without needing to directly manage or control all relevant aspects of this trade. There is certainly more than enough room in this reconstruction for Artzy's (1997) 'nomads of the sea', and on this issue we see little reason to differ with the privatisation model. Our objections begin when this loose network is said to develop into entrepreneurial trade that is largely independent of palaces while still contributing directly to the demise of such palaces by actively undermining their ability to control and monopolise socially significant modes of consumption.

To begin with, most of the evidence central to the arguments of Sherratt and Artzy in particular dates between the mid-fourteenth and twelfth centuries BCE. It is important to remember that the majority of our evidence from Ugarit dates from the last century or so of its existence (*c.* 1300–1185 BCE) and so cannot be treated as representing conditions prior to the emergence of this putative decentralised private trade network. Furthermore, Ugarit was clearly burned and abandoned. Prior to this, texts suggest that Ugarit was experiencing harassment from the sea and that its resources were being stressed by Hittite demands for food, ships, and military support, and by land-based threats on their own borders. Additionally, given the evidence of the Amarna letters, there is no reason to doubt that the extractive economic relations between Late Bronze Age palaces and subsistence farmers were such that 'peasant flight' was an endemic problem easily worsened by poor harvests and rural insecurity (Liverani 1987; Bunimovitz 1994). What we do not see is any sort of 'legitimacy crisis', Burberry-like devaluing of semiotically charged commodities, or notable evidence for an alienation from maritime activity. In other words, at Ugarit we see none of the symptoms one would expect if political collapse had been brought on by the undermining of state-controlled trade by decentralised entrepreneurial activity. This is principally because the initial conditions required by the privatisation model, a state-controlled trade economy, never obtained at Ugarit.

In addition to this critique of the 'palace economy', we believe that a critical network perspective provides a better explanation for one of the phenomena that stimulated the privatisation model in the first-place; namely the uneven

decline of sea trade in the Early Iron Age. As Sherratt (1998, 304–6) well notes, Cyprus provides abundant evidence that long-distance trade did not cease everywhere in the twelfth century. Yet, if it was the growth and influence of decentralised, entrepreneurial trade that undermined the Late Bronze Age palaces of the eastern Mediterranean, why did this trade not go on from strength to strength across the region? Indeed, in the Early Iron Age why do we find only active fragments of the Late Bronze Age system, such as that between Cyprus and the Phoenician coast, rather than a pan-Mediterranean explosion in sub-elite consumption?

When viewed as informal networks linked to, rather than bypassing or undermining, key nodes like the palace at Ugarit, the fate of long-distance trade at the end of the Late Bronze Age can be understood somewhat differently. Even when such networks were built up initially on the back of palatial demand, the disappearance of palaces such as at Ugarit could very well have left certain segments of these networks intact. Cyprus and the Phoenician coast in the 12th and 11th centuries may represent one such segment. Notably, the Phoenician coast is one of the regions of the Levant that seems to witness social, political and economic continuity across the Late Bronze – Iron Age divide. Such fragmented networks are more in line with the actual scale and scope of international trade in the Early Iron Age.

In the end, just what separates our position from what we have termed the privatisation model? In terms of the sequence and nature of events, we agree that Late Bronze Age trade networks and agents were likely to have been diverse and dispersed and that in the Early Iron Age some segments of this Late Bronze Age network remained active despite the absence of anything resembling a palatial system. We differ most fundamentally, however, over the issue of causation. The argument that decentralised, entrepreneurial trade undermined the political and economic foundations of Late Bronze Age palaces contains within it a misunderstanding of the 'palace economy', at least insofar as it is manifested at Ugarit. Palaces were dominating, rather than managing or controlling institutions; the biggest house on the block, if you will. At Ugarit the palace was already diverse and at least partially decentralised in the terms of the arrangements and relations by means of which it acquired, used and dispersed human and material resources.

Not surprisingly, the idea that free trade was threatening to aristocratic interests vested in the prebendal control of agricultural surplus carries the conviction of the familiar – it is, after all, the story of the emergence of middle class Europe. We would argue, however, that it is not the story of the end of the Bronze Age.