

## FORUM

# Redistribution in Aegean Palatial Societies

## Redistribution and the Political Economy: The Evolution of an Idea

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### *Abstract*

Whether the Bronze Age Aegean economies can be described as “redistributive” depends on how one defines the term. The concept of redistribution itself has undergone several decades of critical archaeological analysis, much of it stemming from my early work in Polynesia. I consider here how Polanyi’s ideas about redistributive economies have been expanded since the 1970s. My review complements the article in this Forum by Nakassis et al. and the contribution by Halstead, who discusses why and how the concept of redistribution still matters in studies of the Minoans and Mycenaeans. To some degree, we all agree: chiefs, and later kings, who sought power in archaic societies did so through many highly variable, contingent, and changing means, all designed to support political-economic strategies based on multiple systems of finance. The Bronze Age Aegean societies provide excellent examples of this process, as demonstrated by the contributors to this Forum.

### INTRODUCTION

In their introduction to this Forum, Nakassis et al. admirably summarize the history of the concept of redistribution and ask whether the Bronze Age economy of the Aegean world should be classified as redistributive.<sup>1</sup> They believe that it should not. In support of this conclusion, the articles in this Forum call for a description of the economy from the bottom up. The Aegean regional economy was made up of rather ad hoc connections between specific segments of local communities, palaces, and sanctuaries. The real economy of the Bronze Age Aegean was a changing, checkered mosaic of elements, for which the single term “redistribution” is inadequate. Although in fundamental agreement with Nakassis et al., Halstead emphasizes that the concept of redistribution continues to have utility for the Bronze Age Aegean, and he stresses the centrality and asymmetry of economic relationships.<sup>2</sup> As a nonspecial-

ist, I would be unreasonable to try to judge the quality of the evidence and give a new synthesis of the Aegean economy; rather, I simply ask what is gained by calling (or not calling) the economy “redistribution”?

Systems of classification have lost favor in anthropology and archaeology. To classify an economy, its specialization, or its broader social formations according to specific types appears to be a rather mindless exercise that does injustice to the observed variety in human societies. Classification can also have unintended consequences, offending people with societies or histories measuring up “poorly” in such classification exercises. I, however, believe in the usefulness of the ideal (Weber-like) types, as long as we realize that they are not real categories but act as models to capture distinctive patterns of economic, social, and political interconnections. Thus, I advocate using ideal types, like redistribution, to define a broad category of processes. Our purpose in using such types is not to classify societies or economies but to recognize cases with similar processes and structures that we can compare in order to identify and explain the observed variation. Employing this framework, we would want to ask how and why the redistributive economies of Mesopotamia and the Aegean differed and not assume that calling both redistributive means they are the same. Rather, variation within types and macroregional formations should focus our attention. Although the Aegean Bronze Age world represented common historical themes, to understand it requires us to focus on regional and temporal differences. The ideal type of redistribution points to specific variables of interests and strategies for our investigation.

Redistribution encompasses the political economies of archaic societies, broadly grouped as chiefdoms and early states. Surpluses in staples and wealth objects

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<sup>1</sup>Nakassis et al. 2011.

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<sup>2</sup>Halstead 2011.

were mobilized and distributed centrally to finance institutional apparatuses of power (e.g., warriors, managers, and craftsmen of wealth items and weapons) with the goal to expand political reach. The economy of any archaic society can best be thought of as divided into various intertwined sectors, including its political economy, religious economy, community economy, and trading economy. Each sector has some degree of independence in terms of logic and motivation, and all are interconnected within constantly changing resource flows. The concept of redistribution focuses attention on the processes of political power and finance that girded emergent political structures to organize populations in the thousands, tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands and eventually to form the basis for the first complex imperial systems of the ancient worlds.

In this brief article, I summarize the history of my views on redistribution, archaic political economies, and the role of centrally managed economies in the evolution of stratified and politically centralized societies. This is little more than a narrative of an idea. The ultimate question is: how do chiefs, and eventually kings and emperors, try to control local and regional resource flows to finance their apparatuses of power? The answer shows the highly variable, contingent, and changing means used to develop political economies, and I seek to encapsulate this political strategy into a model of redistribution as an archaic system of finance.

#### THE NARRATIVE OF AN IDEA: REDISTRIBUTION AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

In the early 1970s, as a graduate student at the University of Michigan, I hoped to unravel how complex societies emerged with strong leaders, elaborate institutional structures and public displays of artwork, and economic differentiation. My endeavor was part of what was then a central anthropological objective with roots extending back to the beginnings of the discipline. In the spring of my first year, I took Sahlins' course in economic anthropology (his engaging lectures presented Polanyi's substantivist economics), which he later published as *Stone Age Economics*.<sup>3</sup> A world of hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists, the Stone Age was a time when social relationships dominated economic relationships. Later, working with Sahlins in Hawaii, I came to focus more on how social economies were transformed by the political economies of chiefdoms and archaic states. Summa-

rized in my book *Bronze Age Economics*,<sup>4</sup> my questions concentrated on redistribution as a means to mobilize and direct surplus to finance emergent institutions of power and management. The new political economies were based on what I now call bottlenecks, restrictions to flows in resources that allowed would-be leaders to channel flows for their institutional purposes. But I am getting ahead of myself.

When I entered graduate school, economic anthropology was healing from a heated debate between formalists seeking to apply cross-culturally formal theories of economics and substantivists looking to Polanyi's defining publications. Sahlins and other followers of Polanyi argued that human economies involved the production and distribution of goods to meet the material wants of a society; economies were first and foremost "substantive," built for the substance of life. Furthermore, economies were organized, that is, "instituted," as part of the varying structures of those societies. Provisioning was thus socially embedded, and the range of different economic organizations tracked the range of human social formations. Reciprocity reflected egalitarian relationships, redistribution reflected centralized relationships, and market exchange reflected the particular relationships of modern capitalism.<sup>5</sup> All exchange relationships (reciprocity, redistribution, or market exchange) were thought to be functionally the same, meeting material wants and reinforcing existing social formations.

The American neo-evolutionists Service and Sahlins took the next logical step. They argued that the development of complex (hierarchically organized) societies was linked to redistribution. Service wrote a popular book, *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective*, which was oriented to a general, largely undergraduate audience.<sup>6</sup> In the book, he defined chiefdoms as redistributive societies in which chiefs distributed goods among locally specialized communities to meet their populations' needs. Following Polanyi, Service viewed redistribution as a system of exchange (an alternative to reciprocity or market exchange) in which chiefs provided central management to assure the transfer of goods from each according to his ability to each according to his need. Although helpful heuristically to organize undergraduate classes, Service's short, introductory book created three problems. First, a generation of processualist scholars started the sterile endeavor to classify individual societies into generalized, evolutionary types. For example, chiefdoms became a checklist of traits, including redistribution. Second,

<sup>3</sup>Sahlins 1972.

<sup>4</sup>Earle 2002.

<sup>5</sup>Polanyi 1957.

<sup>6</sup>Service 1962.

the significance of redistribution was reduced to its adaptive function, ignoring the political significance of economies. And third, a subsequent generation of postmodernist scholars found in the book a caricature of neo-evolutionists as unilinear and progressive, allowing them to ignore the substantive case materials analyzed by many processualists. If they had looked instead, for example, to Sahlins' *Social Stratification in Polynesia*,<sup>7</sup> they would have seen a systematic attempt to understand the highly variable scale and integration of Polynesian chiefdoms, characteristics that were tied to historical differences (eastern vs. western Polynesia), island size, and gross island productivity.

In 1971, I accompanied Sahlins back to Polynesia, seeking to understand the nature of Hawaiian polities, which had been at the very apex of the evolutionary spectrum of chiefdoms in that region. While Sahlins was transforming his approaches to become increasingly structural, I remained focused on the ideas put forth by the younger Sahlins. My dissertation research evaluated three then-popular theories of social evolution: Wittfogel on irrigation, Service on redistribution, and Carneiro on warfare.<sup>8</sup> Each emphasized that chiefdoms evolved to solve emergent problems in society; I found these theories to be substantially wrong for the Hawaiian case.<sup>9</sup> My model for the evolution of Hawaiian complex chiefdoms emphasized the same variables but organized them into a model of the growth-oriented political economies responsible for the emergence and elaboration of chiefdoms. Let me explain.

The emerging organization of chiefdoms in Polynesia depended on generating and allocating (i.e., redistributing) surplus to finance governing institutions. The generation of surplus depended on control over highly productive staple farming. Although the irrigation systems of the Hawaiian Islands were small-scale and required no central management,<sup>10</sup> they were highly productive and concentrated in the limited valley bottomlands. The concentration of farmland created the bottleneck in subsistence production that permitted chiefs to mobilize surplus.<sup>11</sup> New power specialists—the warrior elite and land managers—mobilized a percentage of the resources in each community. In return for subsistence rights to irrigated and other productive lands, commoners provided corvée labor and specified goods to their chiefs.

Within the Hawaiian chiefdoms, redistribution did not distribute subsistence goods among specialized communities.<sup>12</sup> Rather, the redistributive economy mobilized and distributed “surplus” for institutional finance. The hierarchy of Hawaiian chiefs channeled the flow of mobilized staples to finance specific operations and personnel in control. Surpluses were used (1) to build and maintain irrigation systems, fishponds, and dry-field complexes; (2) to support an enforcing and expansive warrior elite; and (3) to support priests, their elaborate ceremonies, and monument construction.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, exchanges in desired specialty products existed outside redistribution within family and trading networks.

Although redistribution, as defined by centralized flows, could be applied to many economic systems, it appears to have had a much narrower and more specific use as a means of mobilization and central allocation.<sup>14</sup> The Hawaiian case was based almost exclusively on the mobilization of staples from intensive agricultural fields, over which chiefs exerted ownership rights. The important point was that redistribution was not a different social mechanism to organize exchange;<sup>15</sup> it was a new tributary mode of production,<sup>16</sup> an archaic form of political economy.

Redistribution is thus best seen as a system of controlled mobilization of surplus for institutional finance. It was never a total economy. As I investigated redistribution, I could see that central control over the economy was always contingent, never complete, and that control could be exercised in many different contexts and with different degrees of exclusiveness. In the Hawaiian case, mobilization was based on ownership of highly productive resources, especially irrigation, and I suspect that many (if not most) chiefdoms used land ownership to mobilize surplus. Interestingly, in many archaic states, of which the Inca empire became my main example, mobilized staples also formed the primary means for finance.<sup>17</sup>

An alternative way to control flows to support the emergence of complex political systems was through the manufacture and distribution of primitive valuables or highly valued raw materials. For example, the increased volume and decreasing variation in long-distance exchange of obsidian was identified as a characteristic of redistribution.<sup>18</sup> Of particular im-

<sup>7</sup> Sahlins 1958.

<sup>8</sup> Wittfogel 1957; Service 1962; Carneiro 1970.

<sup>9</sup> Earle 1978.

<sup>10</sup> Contra Wittfogel 1957.

<sup>11</sup> Earle 1980.

<sup>12</sup> Contra Service 1962.

<sup>13</sup> Kolb 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Earle 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Contra Polanyi 1957.

<sup>16</sup> Wolf 1982.

<sup>17</sup> D'Altroy and Earle 1985.

<sup>18</sup> Flannery 1976, 291–92.

portance were primitive valuables, objects of symbolic and intersubjective value used to mark status within emergent stratification. Examples of primitive valuables include specialty ceramic serving vessels, fine cloth and bird-feather paraphernalia, unusual stone, amber and shell ornaments, metal jewelry and weapons, and much else. The fine feather cloaks, helmets, and accoutrements of the Hawaiian chiefs were objects that marked the chiefs as gods on earth.<sup>19</sup> With many wealth objects produced and moving through many conduits, and with objects valued so differently in one social context or another, control over primitive valuables would seem always to have been problematic. But, as I came to argue, these valuables were critically important in chiefly redistribution, when control could be exercised through spheres of exchange, expensive transport technologies (esp. ships), and attached specialized production.

Bohannon, a leading substantivist, coined the phrase “spheres of exchange” to differentiate traditional economies from modern market ones.<sup>20</sup> Essentially, traditional economies were thought to have been organized differently, not because of their function, but because of the different structuring characteristics of traditional societies. With spheres of exchange, valuables were convertible only for other valuables and not for subsistence goods; this lack of convertibility was in sharp contrast to the integrating distribution of all commodities within market systems. When I looked at the ethnographic record for primitive valuables in the western Pacific, however, I saw quite a different pattern for traditional economies. In some cases, valuables were exchanged freely for subsistence items, while in others, they moved in distinct spheres of exchange. This variation in exchange (isolated in separate spheres vs. open and interchangeable) proved to be highly political and can be linked to our understanding of redistribution.<sup>21</sup>

Spheres of exchange reflected emergent social stratification linked to an ability to control the exchange and redistribution of socially and symbolically charged objects. In the *kula* exchange of chiefdoms in the Trobriand Islands, the valuables were shell necklaces (*soulava*) and armbands (*mwali*), which circulated in opposing directions and were largely exchangeable only for each other. On the Trobriand Islands, chiefs controlled the interisland movement of the *kula* objects and then “redistributed” them to their support-

ers for use as bride wealth payments and other social exchanges. In this way, the chiefs controlled the social life of their followers. An ability to control the movement of the valuables was apparently based on the relative isolation of the Trobriand Islands, which required the use of large sailing canoes in the trade. Reflecting their exclusive sponsorship of canoe manufacture, Trobriand chiefs were the exclusive owners of the elaborate trading canoes. Controlled trade and local distribution of primitive valuables thus provided an alternative mechanism for chiefly finance of political institutions.

As my analysis fell into place, three alternative bottlenecks appeared to exist in the supply chain for valuables: attached specialization, resource ownership, and/or specialized transport. Attached specialization appeared initially to be the easiest means for elites to control production and distribution of socially significant objects.<sup>22</sup> As in the Hawaiian case, staples mobilized from the chiefs’ fields supported skilled crafters, who made the specialty feathered regalia of chiefly status. The development of such highly crafted display objects using special materials generally accompanied the emergence of centralized economies. Most often, they were linked directly to control over staple production.

The complexity and difficulty of control over the production of wealth are well illustrated by the Danish example.<sup>23</sup> With the beginnings of the Bronze Age, metal became a major import into Scandinavia and was linked to the general emergence of social stratification. New bronze weapons and elaborate dress with bronze accoutrements marked the regional chiefs and their warriors. Control was rather complicated, involving the procurement, manufacture, and redistribution of the new and dramatic metal objects. First was the need to control local exports used to obtain foreign metal. I believe that the rapid construction of chiefly burial monuments in Scandinavia and elsewhere asserted chiefly ownership over grazing lands that allowed for chiefly control over secondary animal products (such as hides), which were traded internationally.<sup>24</sup> A limited number of highly gifted metallurgists were apparently also attached to chiefly households, where metal production debris was concentrated early in the Bronze Age. The chiefs, who sponsored the gifted craftsmen, then would use the special metal objects themselves and distribute them

<sup>19</sup> Earle 1987.

<sup>20</sup> Bohannon 1955.

<sup>21</sup> Earle 1982.

<sup>22</sup> Earle 1981, 1987.

<sup>23</sup> Kristiansen 1987; Earle 2002, 2004; Earle and Kristiansen 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Earle 2002.

to their warriors. Later, this system of long-distance trade changed. Areas with substantial cattle production and wealth, such as Thy, became socially leveled, and other areas, such as the island of Fünen, became new centers of power. At this point, the bottleneck in the commodity chain of metal wealth ceased to be the controlled export of hides; chiefly barrows were no longer built, and metal production became quite widespread. The bottleneck for control appears to have shifted to ownership of long-distance boats and specialized warriors to protect their excursions.

Control over valuables was frequently part of chiefly redistribution, but I feel that such control is more difficult and problematic than control over staple production based on land ownership. Chiefdoms and states based on control over wealth production and trade were probably secondary, arising in broad arcs around agrarian states.<sup>25</sup> The increasing demand for luxury items in the developing states would have created extensive systems of trade, with opportunities for control by bottlenecks in transportation routes, as along the Danube and other rivers of Europe, and in specialized trading vessels and the naval means to defend them. In medieval Europe, the Vikings provide a good example of this phenomenon, and, as I will return to, the Aegean Bronze Age was perhaps another example.

To understand redistribution is to understand archaic political economies. When looking at the largely agrarian-based Inca empire, D'Altroy and I suggested the notions of staple finance and wealth finance as alternative means to support political institutions.<sup>26</sup> Based on ownership of productive facilities, staple finance involved the mobilization of staples, their storage, and redistribution to support ruling institutions. These systems were difficult to control at any distance, because heavy staples were impractical to move far. Based on control over valuables, wealth finance involved the production and/or procurement of special objects to mark status, which were therefore useful as payment. Staple and wealth finance could often be joined. Staples were used to support attached specialists, who converted the staples into the more easily moved valuables that would allow for a centralized political economy over a greater distance. These ideas link to Blanton et al.'s distinction between corporate and networked strategies.<sup>27</sup>

Synthesized in *How Chiefs Come to Power*, the development of chiefdoms and other complex societies was based on three interlocking and variable sources of

power, namely, economy, warrior might, and ideological right.<sup>28</sup> The development of a political economy was based on bottlenecks in resource flows as mobilized resources were invested (redistributed) into the three sources, supporting the construction and maintenance of intensive agricultural facilities, an enforcing warrior elite, and the priests, ceremonies, and monuments of the ruling religion. This model of the emergence of a political economy emphasizes the highly flexible, adaptive, and changing nature of control, as new opportunities emerged and threats challenged. This is a model of a political economy that takes no special form, except the ability to mobilize and direct resources in support and extension of ruling institutions.

#### A HYPOTHETICAL MODEL OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

Redistribution as an economic type has outlived its usefulness, but, with 50 years of broad use, it should be retained as a way to understand emergent political economies that mobilize and allocate resources to support developing political institutions. No total economy should be characterized as redistributive, only the sectors that were centrally managed for finance. Among complex societies, resource channeling was essential for finance. But it was highly variable from society to society and from microregion to microregion within a society. In the Aegean world of the Late Bronze Age, a system of interconnected political economies apparently resulted in dynamic emergence and decline in the political fortunes of small-scale polities, and this variation in political fortunes should be the focus of our studies of redistribution.

I offer an outsider's overview of the Bronze Age Aegean political economies. Bronze Age Aegean economies can be divided into interlocking sectors: the subsistence economy in the local communities, the trading economy of entrepreneurs, the religious economy of sanctuaries, and the political economy of palaces. Each sector had specific objectives and operations, but they were linked together. The overall economy of any region was not managed centrally in any comprehensive way, a conclusion that probably applies to the economies of all chiefdoms and states.

With the summary provided by Halstead, the case materials from the contributors to this Forum, and, especially, remedial help from the editors of this Forum, I have constructed a rough model of the Bronze Age political economies in the Aegean that may help

<sup>25</sup> As argued by Parkinson and Galaty (2007) for the Aegean.

<sup>26</sup> D'Altroy and Earle 1985.

<sup>27</sup> Blanton et al. 1996.

<sup>28</sup> Earle 1997.

guide future debate and investigation. My approach involves two analytical steps meant to identify both the bottlenecks in resource flows that created opportunities to mobilize surplus and the investments of the resources into alternative sources of power.

In terms of bottlenecks, although the options are many, three seem most likely for the Bronze Age Aegean. First is land ownership by an elite.<sup>29</sup> Based on intensive, engineered agricultural landscapes of irrigation, terracing, and/or drainage, in many chiefdoms and archaic states, ownership of productive field systems allowed elites to mobilize staple resources in return for access to the land by commoners. While ownership of land was undeniably important throughout the Aegean world, it appears to have played a lesser role here than in many complex societies. Although the land was probably intensified with systems of terraces and managed grazing areas, the absence of irrigation and of heavily engineered landscape created a rather fragmented pattern of ownership. The specifics of land tenure across the Aegean were probably quite variable and might be studied archaeologically by investigating contrasting patterns in the demarcating features of the landscapes, which include walls, monuments, and the like. As a generalization, the local communities (*damoi*) seem to have owned most of the land, which they managed for their own subsistence and other objectives. Sanctuaries held lands, too, which they used to support their personnel. Land owned directly by the palaces appears to have been quite small, so the surplus directly controlled by them was probably modest. Storage for staples at the palaces, for example, was tiny compared with some complex chiefdoms and archaic states, and the primary use of these staples probably supported the immediate palace retinue of guards and attached craft specialists. Although difficult to document archaeologically, it seems likely that palaces maintained an overarching control over their territories that allowed the overlords to mobilize gifts in staples and labor. Feasting, festivals, major building projects, and wars would have necessitated substantial demands on communities to contribute to palace activities.

Second, many chiefdoms and trading states generated surplus by taxing traders.<sup>30</sup> Although the direct evidence for this is lacking for the Bronze Age Aegean, I believe that revenues from trade were probably significant and could help explain the unusually complex societies that arose here in contrast to elsewhere in Bronze Age Europe. The geographic position of Aegean societies suggests a maritime source of wealth

tied to trade in specialty materials (esp. metals) and prestige goods moved throughout the eastern Mediterranean and tied ultimately to Middle Eastern and Egyptian demand. Trade is always difficult to assess, because it produces so few archaeological residues. Most evident, however, are the Bronze Age shipwrecks that document lively commerce. Other evidence may include specialty production for export. Mycenae was, for example, involved in the production of export ceramics. Pylos, in contrast, has little evidence for export production.

We need to consider carefully how the palaces could have obtained metal that, as I discuss below, was probably central to the emergent political economy. The high-end prestige goods produced by the specialists attached to the palaces would have offered one way to obtain valued foreign commodities, including the metal imported from a distance. Probably the primary bottleneck that allowed the extraction of metal derived from the fact that all trade would have been carried on ships with limited routes of safe travel for such high-value cargo. Palaces could have extracted payments from merchants for access to safe harbors and/or for the protection of shipping lanes. The beginnings of a small-scale navy during the Bronze Age would, for example, have given palaces considerable control over the movement of wealth. Trade in wealth items is always a high-risk endeavor, for which chiefdoms and states can guarantee “protection” from piracy.

Third, many chiefdoms and archaic states were involved in high-end craft production of items that were used both as export products and as local wealth distributed by elites to build networks of support. The high level of crafting and the specialty materials created a bottleneck in the commodity chain for such wealth. For example, in Bronze Age Denmark, the largest chiefly residences housed bronzeworkers—attached specialists who produced bronze swords, finery, and specialty items that armed a warrior elite and distinguished elite status. By supporting and thus controlling the manufacture of weapons and wealth, an elite could control their distribution to the political system of chiefs and warriors. In the Aegean, craft production of high-end wealth was apparently controlled in two ways. Staple rations could be used directly to support gifted attached specialists living at the palaces, or, alternatively, metal could be distributed to craftsmen, who were required to return a portion of the wealth items to the palace in the *ta-ra-si-ja* system. Part of the control over these dispersed specialists, who

<sup>29</sup> Earle 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Oka and Kusimba 2008.

were involved in metal, ceramic, and other high-end production, could have been based on providing the specialists with land for their support. Although the palace apparently controlled this land only indirectly, their political influence may have been strong.

Staples and wealth obtained by mobilization would then have been strategically distributed in ways that developed palatial sources of power, involving attached craft specialists, a warrior elite, and an organized religion. The use of mobilized staples was apparently quite limited but still should not be underestimated. The staples would have supported the palace retinue of high-end crafters, who produced the items for metal export, internal distribution, and alliance-building gifts. Staples also would have been needed to support both gifted craftsmen (architects, stone masons, painters) and workers building the palace and its many facilities, which were used to display a sumptuous lifestyle and to sponsor ceremonial occasions that measured status. Support of a palace guard would have been necessary to protect the palace and to extract so-called surplus payments from reluctant peasants, crafters, and traders. A primary use of surplus from palace lands and from other lands in the territory would have been to support elaborate feasts and festivals associated with the palace and sanctuaries. These festival occasions would have developed the lord's sanctity with reciprocal bonds to the gods who could help guarantee, in the minds of the participants, the safety and productivity of the palace region.

Distribution of metal and wealth was central to the redistribution on which the political economies of palaces depended. Partly controlling metal imports through maritime trade allowed for control over production by attached specialists, who were provisioned either directly by mobilized staples or indirectly by the distribution of land for their support. The points of control in the commodity chains of prestige objects and weapons probably varied greatly from place to place and through time. The wealth obtained through distant trade and transformed by attached specialists would have served to obtain loyalty of regional warriors and to build alliances with other palaces. The Bronze Age political economy created a networked strategy dependent on gift exchanges of wealth, especially metal objects.<sup>31</sup>

I envision highly dynamic fields of power stretching across the Aegean world that sought both to bind warriors to the palaces and to create regional confederacies between palaces based on opportunistic alliances.

The contingent and changing nature of this system of networked polities should be evident; each attempt to centralize power would be balanced by forces trying to dissolve that centrality. The key to success of one local lord or another would have rested on control of bottlenecks in the systems of land tenure, trade in metal and other wealth, and production by attached specialists of high-end weaponry and prestige objects. The religious economy of ostentatious ceremonial events would have been linked to the distribution of weapons and wealth that bound warriors to their patrons and motivated the warriors to defend flows of staples and wealth that provided for the needs of the gods. As has been discussed many times for the rise of city-states and empires among later Greeks, this was a system of prestige measured by wealth, ceremony, and personal exploits. It was, however, ultimately deeply grounded in a political economy that mobilized staples from land and commodities from trade to supply a centralized distribution of wealth used to build the dynamic political system. This model is not meant to describe how the Bronze Age Aegean operated; it simply lays out some likely economic processes that would have made it possible.

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<sup>31</sup> Blanton et al. 1996.

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