

Tracking an Ancient Near Eastern Economic System: The Tributary Mode of Production and the Temple-State

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ABSTRACT

Making sense of ancient economies requires careful attention to particular details as well as a consolidating model that combines the detail into a coherent form. While there is always the danger that economic models will over-determine the detail, models are useful heuristic devices. In this article a model that draws on Marxist economic analysis is assembled and then used to trace a geographically pervasive and historically enduring economic system in the ancient world, stretching from the Ancient Near East to Greco-Rome, and so underlying much of biblical history and story. The article argues that the model of a tributary mode of production, administered through a city-state political system, may also prove useful exegetically and ethically, enabling us to understand particular texts more "economically" and to provide important perspective to our present day economic decisions.

A INTRODUCTION

"Models matter," says Marvin Chaney in his exegetical analysis of Micah 6:9-15.¹ More specifically, "[a]dding the perspectives of political economy to the exegetical toolbox," he argues, "has proved fruitful enough in the interpretation of Micah 6:9-15 to invite similar study of other pericopes in the eighth-century prophets that presume and address the same systemic dynamics."²

The larger claim being made by Chaney, and other Old Testament scholars like Norman Gottwald, David Jobling, Gunther Wittenberg, and Itumeleng Mosala (to name an eclectic cross-section) is that theory, method, and data are inseparable. The archaeological and textual artefact only has meaning within a model. In a recent collection of essays entitled, *The ancient economy: evidence and models*, the editors and authors carefully demonstrate the power of explanatory models in our construal of the economic past.³ And in

¹ Marvin L. Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter: Political Economy and Micah 6:9-15," in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context*, (ed. Philip F. Esler; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

² Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 160.

³ Joseph G. Manning and Ian Morris, eds., *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Ian Morris and Joseph G. Manning, "Introduction," in *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models*, (ed. Joseph

the essays in this volume that deal directly with the Ancient Near East and Egypt there is a clear recognition of "certain basic common structures that were shared in the ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian empires and Canaanite city-states."⁴ More importantly, perhaps, Manning and Morris' edited volume makes a case for structural similarities underlying the economies of the Ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world, contesting Moses I. Finley's claim that these were fundamentally different.⁵

This article considers one such economic system, the tributary mode of production, characteristic of the imperial political economies of the Ancient Near East, tracing its trajectory across biblical text and time. As David Jobling argues, "'Mode of production' is a concept of the utmost comprehensiveness. Based on the model of base and superstructure, it extends the latter to include every aspect or 'sector' of the workings of a society (law, art, religion, etc.) considered in terms of the systems of implication that them together."⁶ Nuancing the work of Karl Marx and his successors,⁷ Frederic Jameson moves away from the idea that a given society at a given time exemplifies just one mode of production. Instead, argues Jameson,

every social formation or historically existing society has in fact consisted in the overlay and structural co-existence of several modes of production all at once, including vestiges and survivals of older modes of production, ... as well as anticipatory tendencies which are potentially inconsistent with the existing system but have not yet generated an autonomous space of their own.⁸

Most scholars who use "mode of production" terminology do so with an overt recognition that they are using a Marxist economic category. My use of this terminology is deliberate too. I am not insisting a Marxist analysis is the only way of analysing ancient economies. My claim is more modest. In this article I want to recover and revive our engagement with economic systems in

G. Manning and Ian Morris; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁴ Richard A. Horsley, *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 3, referencing this work.

⁵ Peter R. Bedford, "The Economy of the near East in the First Millennium BC," in *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models*, (ed. Joseph G. Manning and Ian Morris; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 68.

⁶ David Jobling, "'Very Limited Ideological Options': Marxism and Biblical Studies in Postcolonial Scenes," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, (eds. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 193.

⁷ See the useful analysis and overview in Umberto Melotti, *Marx and the Third World*, (trans. Pat Ransford; London: Macmillan, 1977).

⁸ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 95. See Jobling, "Marxism and Biblical Studies in Postcolonial Scenes," 193.

general and Marxist economic systemic analysis in particular. My argument will be that we can use the notion of "mode of production" to reconstruct a geographically extensive, historically enduring, sociologically significant, and exegetically suggestive economic system within the worlds that produced our biblical texts.

B MODES OF PRODUCTION

In his analysis of the Ancient Near Eastern economic systems that undergird biblical societies, Jobling adopts Carol Meyers use of the term "household" mode of production for pre-monarchic Israel (rather than Marx's "primitive commune"),⁹ and Norman Gottwald's notion of the "Asiatic" mode of production (following Marx),¹⁰ though he prefers the term "tributary" for this mode of production, because "many important examples are not Asian."¹¹ As Jobling goes on to state, the household and tributary modes of production, together with the slave-based mode of production (relevant mainly to the economic world behind the New Testament), "provide a most effective large-scale historical framework for the Bible."¹²

But Jobling goes further, arguing that important as "mode of production" theory is to the socio-historical work of biblical studies, "its contribution to the history of biblical interpretation is no less vital. It raises a necessary caveat to all suggestions of analogy between the biblical world and later ages, including our own". Continuing, he says

Analogies between ancient times and the present, of course, abound in Biblical Studies, but any proposed analogy needs to be brought to the bar of MP [mode of production] theory, in order to test the limits of 'translating' between societies which worked in fundamentally different ways.¹³

What this article attempts to do is to reaffirm the place of mode of production theory on the table of biblical scholarship, especially at a time when biblical scholarship is paying more attention to economic matters.¹⁴ While it may be true that "[e]conomic issues are rarely found to be a special interest in

⁹ Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 142.

¹⁰ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and in Ours* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), xxv-xxvii.

¹¹ Jobling, "Marxism and Biblical Studies in Postcolonial Scenes," 193.

¹² Jobling, "Marxism and Biblical Studies in Postcolonial Scenes," 193.

¹³ Jobling, "Marxism and Biblical Studies in Postcolonial Scenes," 194.

¹⁴ See for example the recently established Society of Biblical Literature consultation on "Early Christianity and the Ancient Economy" and Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood, eds., *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

New Testament exegesis,"¹⁵ they have been an important element of Old Testament socio-historical work, even if only among a rather small group of scholars.

There are, of course, a number of other economic models on offer, as the work of Joseph Manning and Ian Morris mentioned above demonstrates. But, as the title of Umberto Melotti's useful introduction to mode of production theory indicates,¹⁶ for those of us doing biblical scholarship in "third world" or postcolonial contexts, the mode of production model is particularly important. The debt to Marx in this model is apparent; indeed, as Jobling acknowledges, "The greatest theoretical debt which Biblical Studies owes to Marxism ... is the understanding of historical modes of production."¹⁷ But precisely because of its debt to Marxist analysis, there is the very real danger that the modes of production model has fallen into disuse or, worse, disrepute. But, I will argue, this model still has much to offer, particularly to postcolonial biblical scholarship.

We begin with the "birth" narrative of the tributary mode of production, narrated in 1 Samuel 8, and then explore in more detail the mechanisms of the tributary mode of production in general, before focussing on the role of the temple-state. The article follows this mode of production through the Old Testament into the New Testament, concluding with some reflection on the temple narrative in Mark's gospel. Spanning the long "biblical" history between these two texts, 1 Samuel 8 and Mark 12, is an economic system that emerges from the Ancient Near East, the tributary mode of production. In engaging with particular biblical texts I am not arguing that these texts "record" or "document" the development of the tributary mode of production. The most I am claiming is that they may represent different forms of engagement within different biblical genres with a pervasive economic system. More importantly, I am suggesting that this underlying economic system may be used as an exegetical resource with which to read biblical texts, across the testaments.

C THE TRIBUTARY MODE OF PRODUCTION

1 Samuel 8 may well be a textual manifestation and recognition of a shift in the political economy of ancient "Israel." Disillusioned by internal corruption (v. 3) and the constant externally-driven rhythm of being a farmer one day and a soldier the next (v. 5), the people yearn for another system of governance, more like the city-state systems they see around them (v. 5b), where there is a centralised system of governance and where a professional army does the work

¹⁵ Markus Lang, "Review of Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood, Eds., *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*," *Review of Biblical Literature* 10 (2010).

¹⁶ Melotti, *Marx and the Third World*.

¹⁷ Jobling, "Marxism and Biblical Studies in Postcolonial Scenes," 192.

of keeping the Philistines at bay. That God and Samuel, their judge, respond as they do is an indication that this text represents a moment of intense contestation. Alternative political economies are being debated!

Socio-historical reality, of course, is not so simple, and Marx amongst others reminds us of the slow and relentless grind of material conditions in bringing about change. Nevertheless, summing up decades, even centuries, of socio-economic forces in a single textual moment, 1 Samuel 8 grapples at the narrative level with the mechanisms by which the emerging political economy would operate, and concludes, succinctly: "He will take." Samuel outlines the socio-economic cost of a city-state; there can be no city-state without mechanisms of economic extraction, Samuel says. So, the king will take some of the sons and daughters of the peasant farmers (vv. 11-13), he will take some of their land (v. 14), he will take some of their produce (v. 15), he will take some of their slaves and livestock (v. 16); in sum, says Samuel, "you shall be his slaves" (v. 17b).

According to 1 Samuel 8, "in exchange for defending the people (see 1 Sam 8:20), the monarch acquired the right to exact tribute in the form of products or a levy."¹⁸ But, as Carlos Dreher goes on to argue, socio-historical data indicate that it was a shift in agricultural capacity that enabled a shift in political economy. "The surplus production required to guarantee the maintenance of this emergent state was achieved through the technological revolution represented by the introduction of the ox as a plough animal in Israelite agriculture."¹⁹ Indeed, it was this shift in agricultural technology that led to some of the internal disease captured in 1 Samuel 8:3. In the early stages of the monarchy, under Saul, the impoverishment of peasants was less a result of emerging state systems as it was "a result of the internal economic imbalance caused by the enrichment of those who owned oxen and who succeeded in progressively marginalizing those in their debt."²⁰ Gunther Wittenberg agrees, arguing that within ancient "Israel" there was an emerging recognition of two types of wealth, namely non-systemic wealth, where a farmer steadily increased his possessions through diligence and hard work, and what Proverbs 20:21 refers to as "hastily gotten" gains, through systemic means, such as money-lending and dubious mercantile transactions.²¹

Each of these forms of wealth is captured, Wittenberg argues, in two similar sounding but quite different Proverbs. Proverbs 22:2 reads: "The *rich*

¹⁸ Carlos A. Dreher, "Solomon and the Workers," in *Subversive Scriptures: Revolutionary Readings of the Christian Bible in Latin America*, (ed. Leif E. Vaage; Trinity Press, 1997), 25.

¹⁹ Dreher, "Solomon and the Workers," 25.

²⁰ Dreher, "Solomon and the Workers," 25.

²¹ Gunther H. Wittenberg, "Job the Farmer: The Judean *Am-Haretz* and the Wisdom Movement," *Old Testament Essays* 4/1 (1991): 157, see also 60.

and the *poor* have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all." However, Proverbs 29:13 reads: "The *poor* and the *oppressor* have this in common: the Lord gives light to the eyes of both."²² As Wittenberg points out, the two sayings are almost identical, but there is a significant difference, indicating in his analysis different political economies.²³ While the second lines of both proverbs affirm the presence of God as creator and sustainer of all, the first lines show a significant shift. In the first saying it is possible to speak of the "the rich and the poor" in non-relational terms; "the rich" and "the poor" are descriptive terms designating two different yet structurally unrelated social sectors. In the second saying the term "the rich" is replaced by the pejorative "the oppressor." The rich and poor are here linked relationally; there is now a structural, systemic, relationship between these two social sectors. We have moved from a political economy in which wealth is the product of diligent work and therefore a blessing from God, to a political economy in which wealth is the product of the oppression of the poor.²⁴ "The rich" are wealthy because "the poor" are poor. As Dreher indicates, the primary systemic mechanism that linked the rich and the poor was tribute induced debt. The emerging tributary mode of production of the early monarchy both exacerbated and enabled systemic economic relationships.

The Davidic state, Dreher argues, did not develop a fully-fledged tributary system, largely because it was able to rely extensively on "the booty of war" and "the tribute extracted from conquered peoples (2 Sam 8:1-14; 10:19; 12:26-31)," but there are indications of an emerging tributary system, for David had "an administrator of forced labor (2 Sam 20:24)" and "the census taken by David (2 Sam 24:1-9; 1 Chr 21:1-6) ... must certainly have had the objective of extracting tribute from the population under his rule."²⁵ Most significantly, David played a direct role in establishing a city-based elite, distributing the fertile alluvial plains of Canaan, secured when he defeated the Philistine, to his military retainers, leading to the establishment of a new class of "Israelite aristocrats and bureaucrats."²⁶ The needs of this city-based elite would form the core of the tributary mode of production.

The tributary mode of production came to maturity during Solomon's

²² The emphasis is mine.

²³ Wittenberg, "Job the Farmer," 163.

²⁴ Wittenberg, "Job the Farmer," 163.

²⁵ Dreher, "Solomon and the Workers," 26. Again, it must be stressed that I am not making specific arguments about the historicity or socio-historical location of these texts. What I am suggesting is that these texts may be textual manifestations of a particular community's engagement with an economic system.

²⁶ Marvin L. Chaney, "Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets," in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, (ed. Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 255.

reign, during which he initiated large-scale public works (1 Kgs 6-9), particularly the building of the temple.²⁷ This, together with the extravagance of "normal" court life (1 Kgs 4:22-28), and the maintenance of the security of the state, increased the need for tribute and forced labour. Ethnic patronage protected Judah to some extent from the demands of this political economy, with the northern tribes bearing the brunt of the burden of economic extraction.

Another factor which placed escalating pressure on the surplus of peasant farmers was the importation of building materials, luxury goods, military technology, and skilled labour (1 Kgs 5).²⁸ Solomon's city-state became a part of the larger political economy of the region, including other city-states and empires. Just as local debt was integral to the tributary mode of production, so too was state debt. Solomon's excessive consumption and accumulation led to state debt. In order to service this debt, not only was it necessary to secure a stable surplus, but it was also necessary to dictate what must be produced on peasant land (1 Kgs 5:11).²⁹ Even this was not enough, and Solomon had to "sell" twenty northern cities to Hiram of Tyre to pay off state debt (1 Kgs 9:11).³⁰

The excesses of the Solomic state led not only to international dependency, but also to internal revolution (1 Kgs 12). But the division between the north and south was not the end of the tributary mode of production in Israel and Judah. Because of its geopolitical situation, with Israel and Judah occupying "the land bridge where the regional superpowers met and clashed," "stimulus for change in their political economies often came from beyond their borders."³¹ However, as Marvin Chaney argues, during the long and overlapping reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel (ca. 781-745 B.C.E.) and Uzziah of Judah (ca. 781-747 B.C.E.), "the two small kingdoms were relatively free from external military threat," enabling the elites of the two states "to initiate change in their political economies."³² So that by the time foreign imperial power reasserted itself over Israel and Judah in the person of Tiglath-pileser III, "it served mostly to intensify the dynamics of political economy initiated earlier in the eighth century."³³

Chaney goes on to analyse the distinctive features of this tributary mode of production. The active participation of Israelite and Judahite elites in international trade provided both them with the incentive and the opportunity to

²⁷ Dreher, "Solomon and the Workers," 28.

²⁸ Dreher, "Solomon and the Workers," 20-35.

²⁹ Dreher, "Solomon and the Workers," 30-31, 36.

³⁰ Dreher, "Solomon and the Workers," 37.

³¹ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 146.

³² Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 146.

³³ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 146.

change their political economies.³⁴ Luxury goods, military technology, and the raw material and skilled labour required for building projects were imported, leading to the establishment of an import/export trade through the maritime city-states of Phoenicia.³⁵ In order to pay for these imports, foodstuffs and fibre were exported. Among these, "[w]heat, olive oil, and wine, the triad of Palestinian agriculture, headed the list of exports."³⁶ "Faced with a finite supply of exportable goods but possessed of an almost infinite appetite for imported luxuries," Chaney goes on to argue, "the elites of Israel and Judah had a powerful incentive to increase production of the three major export crops."³⁷ But, as Chaney demonstrates, "the costs and benefits of this trade were grossly disproportionate by class. Imports benefited the elite few, but their cost in exported foodstuffs cut deeply into the sustenance of the peasant majority."³⁸

An increase in production of the three preferred agricultural commodities was brought about by regional specialisation in agriculture, including increased grazing (under the guard of the royal army) and agriculture,³⁹ and to the consolidation of "arable land into fewer and fewer hands."⁴⁰ 2 Chronicles 26:10 documents, argues Chaney, such a process for Uzziah's Judah, and archaeological surveys "show a marked proliferation of rock-cut olive and grape processing installations in the hill country in the eighth century B.C.E.," a royal standardisation of the capacity of wine and oil amphorae, and a system of royal vineyards in the uplands of Judah and in the north.⁴¹ The mechanism which coerced this change was a state tax-rent system "that discouraged the subsistence farming of cereals in the hill country, and thereby incentivized the raising of olives and grapes instead."⁴² Furthermore, "not only were agricultural labor and land ownership separated, but the various factors of production were segmented and subjected to separate rent."⁴³

While agricultural specialisation and intensification generated technological innovation and population growth,⁴⁴ it also brought about an increase in "command economies," "in which urban elites reduced or usurped villagers' power to make their own decisions regarding the priorities and

³⁴ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 146-47.

³⁵ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 147.

³⁶ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 147.

³⁷ Chaney, "Bitter Bounty," 253.

³⁸ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 147.

³⁹ Chaney, "Bitter Bounty," 253.

⁴⁰ Chaney, "Bitter Bounty," 255.

⁴¹ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 147.

⁴² Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 148.

⁴³ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 148.

⁴⁴ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 147.

techniques of agricultural production."⁴⁵ Peasant sufficiency required the spreading of risk, including the rotation of crops, the diversification of crops, and allowing land to lie fallow for periods during which it was used to supplement grazing.⁴⁶ The demand from an urban elite for oil, wheat, and wine would have placed massive pressure on the peasant farmer. Agricultural intensification in the hill country meant that "multi-purpose land which had helped spread risk was gradually converted into terraces growing vineyards and olive trees."⁴⁷ Pressure to grow ever-increasing amounts of the few preferred export crops "concentrated risk and effaced the risk-spreading mechanisms of the peasants' more traditional subsistence agriculture."⁴⁸

"Such a system pressed the typical peasant cultivator hard even in good years, because there was incentive for the elite to extract every possible surplus, leaving only the barest subsistence necessary to continue production. In less than optimal years cultivators stripped of the insurance of diversification were forced to take out survival-loans."⁴⁹ While interest free loans within kinship groupings were probably a feature of a diversified subsistence community, "the intensified system saw the only funds available increasingly in the hands of wealthy moneylenders bent on becoming wealthier," leading to a debt system in which there was "long-term or even permanent dependence because of the high interest rates."⁵⁰ "In many cases", Chaney argues, "a cycle of encumbered harvests was created, each pledged to repay debts incurred in the prior procurement of the factors of its production."⁵¹ The end result was a growing number of "debt-slaves" and a transfer of land from peasant owners to urban elites.⁵²

The prosperity and luxuries of the cities led to a growth in absentee landlords. "With their promise of imported luxuries and greater access to political influence and social prestige, the capital cities drew landlords away from their country estates and their need for clientele support."⁵³ Sociologically what had previously been a multi-stranded and somewhat mutual set of relationships between landlord and peasant "were reduced to a single strand of economic exploitation."⁵⁴

Centred in the cities, absentee landlords became estranged from the

⁴⁵ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 148.

⁴⁶ Chaney, "Bitter Bounty," 256.

⁴⁷ Chaney, "Bitter Bounty," 257.

⁴⁸ Chaney, "Bitter Bounty," 148.

⁴⁹ Chaney, "Bitter Bounty," 258.

⁵⁰ Chaney, "Bitter Bounty," 258.

⁵¹ Chaney, "Bitter Bounty," 258.

⁵² Chaney, "Bitter Bounty," 259.

⁵³ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 148.

⁵⁴ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 148.

religio-cultural dimensions of land, reducing land to an economic commodity. So that when risk-spreading measures rendered peasants ever more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of an erratic climate and indebtedness, "foreclosure on family land and/or the indentured labor of family members pledged as collateral was often at the discretion of the wealthy urban creditors."⁵⁵ "Debt instruments thus served as a major means of accomplishing both land consolidation and the pauperization of the peasantry."⁵⁶ Traditional village-based socio-theological safeguards were eroded, along with the land. As Chaney argues,

Increased socioeconomic stratification gave urban elites the power to coerce or suborn their decisions. Thus perverted, these courts gave a façade of legality to foreclosures deemed illegal by most peasants and other members of the lower classes. Against this background, the rhetoric of the eight-century prophets appeals these cases to YHWH's divine law court in the sky. As auditors on the proceedings in God's court, the prophets report the vindication there of the peasant's cause, and declare that YHWH has found the urban elites guilty with regard to the matters under adjudication.⁵⁷

D RELIGIOUS LEGITIMATION: THE TEMPLE

David's attempts to shift the political economy from a war-economy to a tribute-economy required the building of a temple (2 Sam 7:1-3) it could be argued for the religio-cultural memory of captivity and slavery within an imperial tribute-economy in Egypt needed to be countered with a new religio-cultural legitimation. But clearly the people, prophets, and God were not yet ready for this change in political economy (2 Sam 7:4-17), and so the plans of the Judahite elite were put on hold. Again, the biblical text may well be engaging with socio-economic matters or memories.

So how was the state extraction of surplus religiously rationalised by the ruling class in monarchic Israel and Judah? Norman Gottwald provides a succinct analysis, reiterating some of the distinctive features we have already considered.

The ruling class in monarchic Israel extracted surplus in two ways that were systemically connected: a state tax-rent, compounded by foreign tribute, was the initial and dominant method of extraction, which in turn spawned a credit/debt system that was formally outside the state administration, but that was necessitated by the peasant hardship that the state generated via the tax-rent. The class fraction that lived off the tax-rent was made up of state functionaries and the class fraction that lived off the debt payments was made up

⁵⁵ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 148.

⁵⁶ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 148.

⁵⁷ Chaney, "Micah - Models Matter," 148-49.

of latifundaries [absentee landlords], who probably for the most part had a base in state administration which gave them command of resources enabling them to extend credit to peasants. At the same time, . . . the state legitimated the tax-rent as payment due to Yahweh's servants who protected the patrimonies of the free agrarians, and the latifundaries explained their taking of possession of indebted lands as the work of "custodians" or "keepers" of the patrimonial shares of those who fell hopelessly into debt.⁵⁸

In his detailed, but little known, study of the socio-historical background to the Jerusalem temple in the time of Jesus, the Indian biblical scholar Sam P. Mathew examines the economic dimension of the Ancient Near Eastern temple-state within the tributary mode of production. Beginning with the Egyptian city-state, Mathew shows that both the cult temples and the funerary temples of Ancient Egypt "were a branch of the state."⁵⁹ "In every temple in Egypt, the Pharaoh was depicted as the real high priest, who had total control over the temples and their wealth," and in many instances "the overseers of the temple domains were not priests but government workers," paid out of the temple treasury.⁶⁰ They were "repositories for the revenue of the empire," and during the empire period (ca. 1540-1100 B.C.E.) "the temples in Egypt became very wealthy through war booty, tribute and donation of large estates."⁶¹

The basic economy within which Egyptian temples played a central role was a local subsistence economy, dictating modes of production, extracting the surplus from peasant farmers in the form of tribute, storing, and redistributing what were considered resources of the state.⁶² Priests and temple workers were not only exempted from many of the obligations that were demanded from other citizens, they also received a share of the daily offerings and controlled the landed possessions of the temple.⁶³

The role of the temples in Egypt in formal education, with all educated males in the country being trained by priests,⁶⁴ ensured the ideological legitimation of its economic dimensions among the ruling elites. The temples produced and sustained the professional class, including astronomers, doctors, scribes, and singers, most of whom were priests.⁶⁵ The temples provided a site

⁵⁸ Norman K. Gottwald, "A Hypothesis About Social Class in Monarchic Israel in the Light of Contemporary Studies of Social Class and Social Stratification," (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 163.

⁵⁹ Sam P. Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel: The Economic Role of the Jerusalem Temple During the First Century C.E.* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 2.

⁶⁰ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 2-3.

⁶¹ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 3.

⁶² Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 3-4.

⁶³ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 4.

⁶⁴ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 4.

⁶⁵ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 4.

and sustenance for sectors of the merchant class, for Egyptian temples were involved in trade, including the selling of meat, wine, and cakes.⁶⁶ The temples in Egypt were also sites of healing, sites of divine knowledge, and sites of safety (in times of war).⁶⁷ Though it is important not to caricature every feature of the temple as ideologically driven by economic factors, such institutional roles may well have played a part in the legitimation of the temples' role in economic extraction.

Similarly with respect to Mesopotamian temple-states, Mathews demonstrates that "the temple households in Mesopotamia were very rich and prosperous."⁶⁸ The temples of Uruk, Sumer, and Girsu "had abundant resources in livestock and agricultural products," and the Babylonian temples "constituted the richest agricultural, industrial and commercial unit within the society."⁶⁹ Mathews cites Isaac Mendelsohn, who argues that the Babylonian temple, as with Assyrian, Syrian, and Palestinian temples, was a "well organised and efficiently run corporation, controlling extensive tracts of land, enormous quantities of raw material, large flocks of cattle and sheep, sizeable amount of precious metal and large number of slaves."⁷⁰ Most Assyriologists agree, says Mathew, "that the arable land, which was the basis for nearly all economic activities in lower Mesopotamia, was owned either by the temple or the palace."⁷¹

The big temple estates employed a large workforce of different crafts and professions including bricklayers, carpenters, smiths, masons, spinners, weavers, butchers, bakers, farmers, fishermen, shepherds and swineherds. In these temple estates there were large warehouses, workshops, granaries and stables, where the immense wealth of the deity was stored and administered by a special body of priests.⁷²

The temple was also a site of export production, where the workshops of the temple "produced not only for the needs of the deity and the priests but manufactured also export goods in order to buy precious metals, stones and timber that were not available in Babylon."⁷³ In addition to being a site production itself, "royal gifts and endowments together with the tithes from the people" were an integral part of the wealth of the temple.⁷⁴ In Babylon tithes

⁶⁶ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 5.

⁶⁷ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 5.

⁶⁸ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 5.

⁶⁹ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 5.

⁷⁰ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 5.

⁷¹ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 5; see also Bedford, "The Economy of the near East in the First Millennium B.C.E.," 80-81.

⁷² Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 6.

⁷³ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 6.

⁷⁴ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 6.

were paid in kind to the closest temple, each of which had an efficient administration controlled by a highly developed and extensive bureaucracy.⁷⁵ "Thus", argues Mathew, "the temple households in Mesopotamia dominated or at least played a vital role in the economic life of the city."⁷⁶

As in Egypt, "the basic attitude between the state and the temple in Mesopotamia was that of collaboration and mutual ideological assistance."⁷⁷ As in Egypt, ancient Mesopotamian temples legitimated their forms of economic extraction and production through religion and education. "Ancient Mesopotamian temples served as the house of the city's patron god or goddess," where as the city's patron and protector, "the deity was regarded as the true landlord of the wealthy temple household;" and the temple played a formal role in education.⁷⁸

The temple in Mesopotamia was also a site in which judicial authority was exercised and where the vulnerable of society were cared for.⁷⁹ Again, such activities, while beneficial to the people, could be construed as forms of legitimation, alongside the religious, of the temple economy.

E "LIKE OTHER NATIONS"

That God intervened, from a narrative-theological perspective, in David's desire to build a temple in the "Succession Narrative," notwithstanding the prophet Nathan's assumption that God was with David (2 Sam 7:3), probably indicates how contested the emerging tributary mode of production and its legitimating temple were, whether in the formative moments of this political economy or later in its development, depending on the narrative's socio-historical location.⁸⁰ But, the narrative and historical evidence indicates, a temple was built, not by David but by Solomon. From the very outset, according to the narrative, the project is marked by economic extraction, beginning with tribute (1 Kgs 4:21) and a levy of thirty thousand forced labourers (1 Kgs 5:13).

Like the temples in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the Jerusalem temple was "the house of God." The biblical literature reiterates, across a variety of genres, the temple as God's dwelling place, whether the Deuteronomistic narrative (1 Kgs 8:10-13), the psalms (27:4; 76:3; 132:13-14), or the prophetic texts (Amos 1:2; Isa 6:1-4).⁸¹ As in so many other Ancient Near Eastern temples, in

⁷⁵ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 6.

⁷⁶ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 6.

⁷⁷ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 6.

⁷⁸ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 6.

⁷⁹ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 7.

⁸⁰ John Van Seters, "The Artistry of Imitation as a Means to the 'Truth' in the Story of David," *Old Testament Essays* 16 (2003).

⁸¹ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 17.

Jerusalem the temple "stood side by side with the palace," and "the king controlled the priesthood of the temple."⁸² Indeed, Mathew argues, scholarship shows the temple "as an essential part of state formation rather than as a by-product of state formation;" "it helped those who contributed labour and resources to the Temple project to be convinced that their service was divinely ordained."⁸³ Furthermore, "there was only a theoretical distinction between the national and religious treasuries," with the king exercising "total control of the Temple treasury."⁸⁴

However, the establishment of rival sanctuaries in Judah, even during the time of Solomon, and in Israel, both before and after the schism, demonstrate vigorous contestation of both the tributary mode of production and its religious legitimation. Prophetic criticism of the Jerusalem temple, including Nathan, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah,⁸⁵ confirms this contestation.

But Zerubbabel's temple, completed in 515 B.C.E., performed a similar economic function to the earlier Jerusalem temple. The difference here was that, "[s]ince Zerubbabel's Temple stood alone with no adjacent royal compound, it gave legitimacy to a new form of community that was not linked to monarchic rule,"⁸⁶ but continued with the same old forms of economic extraction, amassing "immense wealth in its building and treasury."⁸⁷ Once again, however, that there were other temples outside the district of Judea during the post-exilic period, at Elephantine, at Leontopolis, and at Gerizim indicates that Judean religious hegemony was contested,⁸⁸ even if it is not clear to what extent these sanctuaries represented a different form of political economy.

With Herod's temple we move from life in Judah and Israel under Ancient Near Eastern empires to life in Judea and Galilee under the Roman Empire. What remains the same, however, is a tributary mode of production. As Peter Bedford argues, against Finley, "Near Eastern forms of socio-economic organization are far from being completely different from the Greco-Roman world in the first millennium B.C.; they are typologically connected and so can be studied in an integrated fashion."⁸⁹ Again, my argument is not that

⁸² Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 19.

⁸³ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 20.

⁸⁴ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 21.

⁸⁵ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 25-28.

⁸⁶ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 31.

⁸⁷ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 31.

⁸⁸ Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 32-34.

⁸⁹ Bedford, "The Economy of the near East in the First Millennium B.C." Bedford is here drawing on the work of Igor M. Diakonoff, "Slaves, Helots and Serfs in Early Antiquity," *Acta Antiqua* 22 (1974); Igor M. Diakonoff, "The Structure of near Eastern Society before the Middle of the 2nd Millennium B.C.," *Oikumene* 3 (1982); A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago:

the tributary mode of production is the only way of analysing these ancient economies. There are, of course, other accounts;⁹⁰ my claim is simply that Marxist modes of analysis have something to contribute.

Again, the biblical narrative can be read as engaging with this economic reality. Luke captures the economic dimensions of this succinctly early on in his gospel: "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be taxed" (2:1).⁹¹ But, as Richard Horsley argues, Roman colonisation meant more than taxation, for "the Romans impacted economic relations in Judea and Galilee in three main areas: the devastating effects of their repeated wars of (re-)conquest, their extraction of tribute, and the complications they introduced in their shifting arrangements of client rulers."⁹² After conquering Galilee, Judea, and other districts of Palestine, consistently practising a scorched-earth policy,⁹³ the Romans continued the basic economic structure we have observed, "in which rulers demanded and the peasant producers rendered up tithes, taxes, and tribute – while the rulers and their officers found ways to enhance their income by exploiting the people's need for loans to pay the tithes and tribute."⁹⁴

The Roman warlords complicated the political-economic structure in Palestine when, "unhappy about rival factions in the Hasmonean high priestly family", they installed Herod as "king of the Judeans."⁹⁵ Herod kept a tight control on Judea and the surrounding districts of his realm, and engaged in intensive economic "development." He embarked on ambitious building projects, including "the massive expansion and rebuilding of the temple complex in Jerusalem, which became one of the wonders of the Roman

University of Chicago Press, 1977); Max Weber, *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations* (London: Humanities Press, 1976).

⁹⁰ See for example Greg Woolf's argument that "the tributary and redistributive operations of the political economy can provide at best only a partial explanation." Greg Woolf, "Imperialism, Empire and the Integration of the Roman Economy," *World Archaeology* 23/3 (1992): 190. I accept this caution, and thank the *OTE* reviewer who pointed me to this reference, but would argue that we must not neglect this "partial explanation." See also Bedford's argument that "the Near Eastern economy cannot be typified as a state-run enterprise in which private or communal ownership of land has but an inconsequential role." Bedford, "The Economy of the near East in the First Millennium B.C.," 68. I agree, but have argued in this article that ownership of land, whether state or private or communal ownership, was shaped by an overarching economic system, namely a tributary mode of production.

⁹¹ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 82.

⁹² Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 82.

⁹³ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 82.

⁹⁴ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 83.

⁹⁵ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 83.

imperial world."⁹⁶ Like Solomon, he established a lavish court in Jerusalem.⁹⁷

In order to meet his huge expenses, Herod "had to generate revenues far in excess of what the territory he ruled had previously produced;" he intensified production on the royal estates in the fertile great plains just south of Galilee, he extended the areas cultivated into the lands east of the Sea of Galilee that Caesar placed under his control, and he incentivised "the cultivation of speciality crops such as balsam in the Jordan Valley, on which the regime had a monopoly."⁹⁸ However, it was the peasants in the village communities of Judea and Galilee and other districts Herod ruled that "constituted the principal economic base from which Herod had to extract more production."⁹⁹ He did this by "increased demands for royal taxes – on top of the tithes and offerings for the temple and priesthood – and increased the efficiency of tax collection."¹⁰⁰

Herod had kept the temple-system intact, though he replaced the remaining members of the previous (Hasmonean) high priestly family with his own appointments. "By the time Herod died in 4 B.C.E., the priestly aristocracy in Jerusalem consisted of four extended families."¹⁰¹ But after ten years of royal rule by Herod's son Archelaus, "the Romans placed Judea (along with Samaria and Idumea, but not Galilee) under the command of a Roman military governor, who in turn ruled Judea through the high priestly aristocracy."¹⁰² "Structurally there were thus still at least two levels of rulers with demands for revenues from the peasantry, the Romans looking for their tribute and the Jerusalem high priesthood for tithes and offerings," with the priestly aristocracy "being responsible for collecting the tribute as well as managing their own revenues."¹⁰³

As Horsley argues, the Jerusalem temple "was the centralized religious institution of Judean society, where the priesthood offered various sacrifices and offerings to God and where the people of Judea and Judeans from the Diaspora communities came on the great pilgrimage festivals, particularly Passover;" and precisely because of those sacrifices and offerings and festivals, "the Temple with its high priestly aristocracy was also the centralized economic institution that dominated the economy of Judea."¹⁰⁴

Besides tithes and offerings, the temple priesthood supplemented their

⁹⁶ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 84.

⁹⁷ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 84.

⁹⁸ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 84.

⁹⁹ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 84.

¹⁰⁰ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 84.

¹⁰¹ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 85.

¹⁰² Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 85.

¹⁰³ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 85.

income through their access to the choice cuts of sacrificial animals that were reserved for them, through changing Roman money into temple money and then exchanging temple money for festival sacrifices, and through a temple tax on all adult males, including those resident in diaspora communities.¹⁰⁵

An additional source of income was to use the surplus wealth of the temple for loans. "It has been reasonably surmised", says Horsley,

that resources coming into the Temple from Diaspora communities as well as from local revenues created a surplus of funds. High priestly families and others with access to such funds drew upon them to make loans to villagers who were struggling to feed their families after meeting their obligations for tribute, tithes, and offerings. From the interest charged from foreclosure on loans, well-positioned families increased their wealth.¹⁰⁶

When Herod died in 4 B.C.E., his son Antipas was installed by the Romans as ruler in Galilee (and Perea, east of the Jordan River). Like his father, he launched ambitious building programmes, including the rebuilding of the fortress town of Sepphoris, not far from Nazareth, and a second capital city on the south-west shore of the Sea of Galilee, named "Tiberias" for the new emperor.¹⁰⁷ Adopting a city-state-type political economy mimicking Ancient Near Eastern city-states, Antipas "was one of the first Roman client rulers to implement the policy of urbanization, establishing cities as a way of controlling and exploiting the countryside."¹⁰⁸ Between them Antipas' two capital cities "literally had oversight on nearly all of the villages of lower Galilee."¹⁰⁹ For the first time the ruler of Galilee resided in the area, enabling Antipas to "mount far more efficient tax collection than previous rulers working from distant Jerusalem."¹¹⁰

Indications in the gospels and early rabbinic literature suggest, Horsley argues, "that many, perhaps most, Galileans were still living on their ancestral inheritance of land" during this period, but that the debt-cycle brought about by the dual mechanisms of the tributary mode of production was beginning to bring about a shift in land tenure in which peasant land "was transformed into large estates under absentee landlords."¹¹¹ What is clear is that, "in a pattern that continued from the ancient Near East," officials in the regime of Agrippa

¹⁰⁵ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 85-86.

¹⁰⁶ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 86.

¹⁰⁷ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 87.

¹⁰⁸ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 87.

¹¹⁰ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 87.

¹¹¹ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 91.

II, Antipas' successor as ruler of Galilee, had "estates beyond the Jordan."¹¹²

What has gone "almost completely unnoticed in New Testament studies," Horsley points out, is "that the Romans' appointment of Antipas as ruler of Galilee meant that Jerusalem rulers no longer had direct jurisdiction in the area."¹¹³ During the century of Hasmonean high priestly control over the area, the Jerusalem temple-state had exerted its economic systems of extraction in Galilee. Under Antipas much of this must have changed, reducing the revenues of the Jerusalem temple and high priesthood. As Horsley says, it is reasonable to doubt that most Galileans would have made voluntary contributions to the Jerusalem temple-state during the rule of Antipas, and "neither Antipas nor the Romans would have been happy about the Jerusalem high priesthood's active competition for revenues from Galilean villagers."¹¹⁴ But, suggests Horsley, it may be "that the high priesthood and its scribal staff¹¹⁵ developed circuitous devices by which they might extract offerings from Galileans."¹¹⁶

F FROM SAMUEL TO MARK

The tributary mode of production, born in the Ancient Near East, has traversed texts, contexts, and times, shaping "biblical" history, shaping both the Old Testament and the New. Indeed, much remains the same, economically. What Samuel warns against, Jesus flatly condemns. Clearest in its economic critique, according to a trajectory of biblical scholars for whom Marxist economic categories are considered exegetically useful, the gospel of Mark engages in a sustained critique of the temple-state system, focussed on the Jerusalem city-state.¹¹⁷ Mark adds the voice of Jesus to the many other voices of the first century, such as the Essenes,¹¹⁸ raised against the temple-state. Significantly, Mark's Jesus confronts the Jerusalem city-state in both Galilee and Jerusalem. The narrative link is the geographical journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, and his overt critique of the dominant economic order in Mark 7:1-13 and Mark 11:11-13:2. The socio-historical connection is the impact of the tributary mode of production hovering barely beneath the surface of 7:1-13:2.

¹¹² Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 88.

¹¹³ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 87-88; see also Richard A. Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*, Second Edition. (New York: Continuum, 1994), 76-78.

¹¹⁴ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 88.

¹¹⁵ For further details see Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 86; and Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, 44-46.

¹¹⁶ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 88.

¹¹⁷ Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*; Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

¹¹⁸ *Damascus Document*, CD 6:11-14, CD 7:21-8:10

This is not the place for a detailed discussion and exegesis of this literary unit, but it is worth indicating that in the conclusion to this literary unit, Mark 13:1-2, the disciples, like most readers/commentators,¹¹⁹ "do not get it," so Jesus says it bluntly (13:2):¹²⁰ "Do you see this political economy? This socio-economic system will be completely destroyed."

G CONCLUSION

Like Marvin Chaney, Richard Horsley argues that models matter. However, he shows, the study of economics in Ancient Near Eastern societies "tends to focus on the plethora of documents (such as records of tax collection) that have been unearthed in the last century or so," while "[l]ittle attention has been given to broad patterns of economic structure and relationships."¹²¹ While we must always allow the detail to challenge and reconstitute our models, models matter, not only for enabling us to locate our exegetical work within socio-historical systems, but also because they enable us to be more responsible in our appropriations of particular texts.

With respect to exegesis, Markus Lang's comment, cited earlier, namely that "[e]conomic issues are rarely found to be a special interest in New Testament exegesis,"¹²² signals the necessity of keeping economic models on the exegetical table, particularly those economic models that have become unfashionable but that retain considerable explanatory power. Marxist analytical categories have fallen out of favour in much of biblical scholarship, even within postcolonial biblical criticism,¹²³ and while economic analysis in terms of the tributary mode of production might not be able to explain fully the particularities and complexities of Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman

¹¹⁹ Even those commentators who do "get it," at least partially, go on to hedge their analysis; see for example John R. S. J. Donahue and Daniel J. S. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (ed. Daniel J. S. J. Harrington; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, A Michael Glazier Book, 2002), 363-65.

¹²⁰ This is my socio-economic translation.

¹²¹ Horsley, *Covenant Economics*, 2. See for example Morris Silver, *Prophets and Markets: The Political Economy of Ancient Israel* (Boston/The Hague/London: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, 1983). Even when Morris Silver does come close to engaging with the systemic dimensions of political economy he refuses to acknowledge the agency of the state. Rejecting Mendenhall's position which sees the prophets as defending peasant producers against the state, Silver responds, "land consolidation, a presumed peasant grievance, was not the result of state action but of market forces." See Silver, *Prophets and Markets: The Political Economy of Ancient Israel*, 127.

¹²² Lang, "Review of Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood, Eds., *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*."

¹²³ Roland Boer, "Remembering Babylon: Postcolonialism and Australian Biblical Studies," in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

contexts, Marxist models offer explanatory and exegetical resources to biblical scholarship.

With respect to appropriation, by locating particular texts within their socio-historical systems we are able to construct more responsible analogies, between the text in its socio-historical systems and us in our socio-historical systems. Both Gottwald and Jobling caution those of us who would mobilise around the Bible for economic transformation of the limits of our analogies. "Given the reality that economic systems cannot be 'imported' from the Bible to meet our needs," Gottwald says, "the ethical force of the Bible on issues of economics will have to be perspectival and motivational rather than prescriptive and technical."¹²⁴ But even these contributions are dependent on a careful delineation of the precise explanatory power that a particular model has.

This article has attempted to provide evidence of the durability of the tributary mode of production model (and its association with and location within the temple-state). Durability both in terms of the viability of Marxist notions of modes of production for our exegetical and interpretive work in our post-Marxist world, and in terms of the capacity of the model to increase our economic of understanding across a long period of biblical history, bridging the testaments.

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¹²⁴ Norman K. Gottwald, "How Does Social Scientific Criticism Shape Our Understanding of the Bible as a Resource for Economic Ethics?" (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 345.

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