

## **“HOLY MONEY”: GODS, MEN AND ECONOMY IN ANTIQUITY<sup>2</sup>**

### **Abstract**

Religion and economy have had a very important role in shaping society and their connection to social matters has been present since the very appearance of money and birth of economic activities. In antiquity, the bond between religion and economy was very strong because ancient world was symbolic and was embedded with magic and religious ideas: economy was part of this “wholeness”, because it inherited from the past the social practices aimed at the well-being of people, which were under the direct protection of the gods. The aim of my paper, hence, is to analyze the religious dimensions of money and economy in ancient societies, following the perspective of philosophy and mythology. Through the guide of a careful observer of human behavior, the great philosopher Aristotle, both disciplines can give interesting insights on the effect economy can have on society. The background for my research will be the cultures of ancient Mediterranean world, in particular, Greece and Mesopotamia, for we have a considerable amount of documents and literary works, whereas, regarding the methodology, I will approach the texts from an historical and comparative perspective.

**Keywords:** money, gods, mythology, Aristotle, society, Greece, Mesopotamia

### **Introduction**

The relationship between money and religion appears to be paradoxical or limited to hobbies, such as collections of antiquities, or to erudite situations, such as etymological games. Few simple examples are enough to point to a direct link between money and religion: the word money comes from the Latin *moneta*, an epithet of the goddess Juno<sup>3</sup>; in ancient coins the representation of the gods was very common; temples were used as a bank. Actually, this connection is much more complex, because it has to do not only with economic needs, but also with the way the ancients interpreted the world that, although we do not

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2 This article originated from a paper I presented at the conference “Pensar el dinero”, held at Universidad del Pacifico (Lima, Perú) in 2015. It is an extended version of the text “El dinero y lo sagrado” that is going to be published in 2017 by Universidad del Pacifico, in the collective book *Pensar el dinero*, edited by Jorge Wiese and Cesare del Mastro. I would like to thank Mónica Navarro for the translation.

3 In ancient Rome in the temple of Juno *Moneta* was located the coin mint, so the attribute of the goddess also indicates what it was produced.

realize it, has left a trace even in our materialistic society.

Religions have always viewed wealth with distrust and the economy has tended to underestimate the religious and social elements that compose itself. However, since ancient times, philosophers and theologians of different religions have dealt with economic and social issues and the centrality of relations between these disciplines was rediscovered by the famous studies of Max Weber, who analyzed how and why the Calvinist confession was able to promote the economic renaissance of Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

If we go back in time, the implications that money has with magic and religion become much more articulated, since the ancient world was a symbolic world: the problems that affect men were reflected in literature, with which men of antiquity tried to bring their experiences to a higher level, to give it a universal dimension that, in many cases, helped them to understand it and explore the effects they could have.

Therefore, to reconstruct the meaning of money completely, it is necessary to consult not only the economy, but other disciplines, including religion.

Research on money and the sacred in antiquity presents some preliminary problems.

One of these has to do with the idea of economy itself. It is true that the economic system of the ancient world cannot be compared to the modern, for the historical-social situation was different (suffice to consider the fact that the old economy was based on slavery, that is, unpaid labor, which avoided many problems that the modern world had to handle, for example, the rights of the worker), but a study of money, religion and old economic and social forms, may reveal unexpected parallels with modernity. Another aspect to consider is that not all old societies knew the use of money and maintained an economy without a market throughout their history.

On the other hand, when speaking of ancient sources, we will refer to Greece, since, unfortunately, other cultures have not left us the same amount of information that we have received from it. In addition, we can rely on the reflections of some of the greatest thinkers of history, which allow us to know the impressions that men of that time had about the monetary phenomenon. One of the ancient authors vital for the study of history of money, and its function in ancient society, is undoubtedly Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher of the IV century BC, disciple of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great, because he dedicates himself to the subject more systematically and probably makes the most acute reflections on it<sup>5</sup>. For this reason, his texts are a good choice to help us think about economy and sacredness.

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4 A prominent German sociologist of the XX century, Weber studied the relations between economy and protestantism in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. He analyzed economic aspects in Judaism, Indian and Chinese religions as well.

5 There are several authors before Aristotle who treat economy. For an overview, see Borisonik Hernan, *Sacred Money. Politics, economics and sacredness in Aristotle*, Miño and Dávila, Buenos Aires, 2013, pp. 87-132.

Made these premises, in this article we will talk about the relations between money, economy and the sacred in classical antiquity, although, occasionally, we will also refer to the economic and social situations of other traditions, even those which did not get to know or use money.

The other principal reference will be Mesopotamia<sup>6</sup>, where, towards the end of the IV millennium BC, some of the principal discoveries of mankind –urbanization and writing– took place. Large archives were built in the prosperous cities of the country, whereby records of economic, administrative and legal activities and, especially, the literary heritage of the country have been preserved<sup>7</sup>.

Our historical-geographical context will be the ancient Mediterranean world, also because, in this cultural environment, money was born and spread. Hence, is the perfect starting point for this research about the links between money and the sacred in the ancient world<sup>8</sup>.

In our *excursus* to know the sacred dimension of money, we will briefly trace the history of money and, using the Aristotelian text as a guide, will review the economic data, then comment the information coming from disciplines external to it, especially mythology. With regards to the methodology, finally, we will use a comparative approach, since the ancient Mediterranean cultures, as we will see, shared many cultural features.

## A brief history of money

Nowadays, we have no problem understanding what money is, what its function is and how it is used.

If we consider coin in modern terms<sup>9</sup>, the archaeological and literary sources that we have about it in the ancient world draw a geographical and historical picture that points to Asia Minor<sup>10</sup>, and the VI century BC, as the more probable place and time for the birth of the first monetary forms. The coinage system was

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6 The ancient Mesopotamia corresponds approximately to the modern countries of Irak, Syria and Turkey. Its Greek name, meaning "(land) between the two rivers", invokes the vital importance the Tigris and Euphrates, which flows through its territory, had for its civilizations. For an overview on the history of Mesopotamia, see Oppenheim Leo, *La Antigua Mesopotamia*, Gredos, Madrid, 2003, chapter 1 and Márquez Rowe Ignacio, *La colección mesopotámica del museo de Montserrat*, Fundación Uriach, Barcelona, 2015, pp. 27-40.

7 Especially when debating mythology, we will often allude to another significant culture of ancient Near East, the ugaritic. Ugarit was a small city on the north-east of modern Syria, that flourished during the II millennium BC. Again, in its archives many documents and a rich mythology on the local gods and their adventures were kept.

8 Despite the amount of documents we can count on, it is no easy to survey the economic activity in Mesopotamia, basically because the sources are discontinuous, coming from different places and times, or, simply, not everything was recorded. Besides, many documents have not been studied yet. On the economy in Mesopotamia, see Oppenheim Leo, *La Antigua Mesopotamia*, Gredos, Madrid, 2003, pp. 95-105. On the Near East in general, see Seaford Richard, *Money and the Early Greek Mind*, University Press, Cambridge, 2004, chapter 15.

9 According to the definition of the Real Academia Española, a coin is "a piece of gold, silver, copper or other metal, regularly in the form of a disc and coined with the emblems chosen by the issuing authority to prove its legitimacy and value"

10 Asia Minor is the most westerly part of the Asian continent, almost entirely corresponding to what is now Turkey, known in ancient times as Anatolia.

possible only thanks to a few variables, for instance, the presence of a strong political power and the appropriate economic situation, that were encountered in this area, thanks mainly to the dynamism of the cities of the Aegean coast, founded in the previous centuries by Greek settlers, and by the rich and powerful kingdom of Lydia, whose territory covered the west of Asia Minor.

Because of its geographical position, this region was a bridge between the west of the varied cultures of the Mediterranean and the east of the great power of those years, the Persian empire. The coastal cities of Asia Minor always maintained intense commercial and cultural relations with the Greek cities that founded them and, for that reason, the use of coins soon was spread to Greece and, from there, to all the Mediterranean and Black Sea, although they will pass a couple of centuries before another of the great empires of the ancient world, Rome, adopted money in its commercial activities.

However, the VI century BC, when coins begin to circulate, is not exactly an ancient time in the history of the great civilizations of the Mediterranean. The case of Mesopotamia is significant. Here, the first word in documents that clearly refers to coins is from the third century, that is, from the time of the Seleucid domination in Mesopotamia<sup>11</sup>: the Akkadian *istatirru* is a replica of the Greek  $\sigma\tau\alpha\tau\rho$ , stater, the most used Greek coin in the ancient world<sup>12</sup>.

It is unthinkable that trade did not exist in the Mediterranean until so recent times: it is enough to mention the Phoenicians, famous in antiquity for their maritime skills, colonization, or the circulation of wine, slaves and soldiers. All of these were movements of resources, also human, that triggered commercial and, then, economic relations.

Therefore, it is more correct to say that trade and money existed even before the VI century BC, and that they appeared in a different way, that is, money was not in form of coins and trade operated without money. In this way, we can redirect our data to the Iron Age (II-I millennium)<sup>13</sup>, and affirm that the Eastern Mediterranean knew already in these times a kind of money, Greece around 800 BC and Rome around 500 BC.

In general, for Aristotle, who lived in the Athens of the IV century, when money had circulated for some time and had been integrated into the dynamics of society, money is exactly what it is for us, a mean that men invented to improve the exchanges<sup>14</sup>.

However, his reflections reveal the links that money, in years prior to those he

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11 After Alexander the Great death (323 BC), the vast territory he had conquered was divided into several kingdoms and entrusted to the administration of his generals. The Seleucid period (330-141 BC) marks the Greek domination of Mesopotamia.

12 Sumerian and Akkadian were the two main languages of Mesopotamia, spoken by people who entered the country at different times (Sumerian is the earliest).

13 Regarding the Mediterranean civilizations, usually the Iron Age is dated between the XIII century BC and the IX century BC.

14 This aspect is clearly explained, Aristotle continues, in the etymology of the generic term to indicate coins: νόμισμα derives from νόμος, "custom, law." Aristotle explains that currency is not natural, but legal: society decides its value and can change it and, also, annul it. (*Et. Nic.*, 1133a.30-31)

lived, had with different aspects of society.

In *Politics*<sup>15</sup>, a work on the functioning of the city, the economic topic is treated along the discussion on human associative forms, and Aristotle analyzes the necessary aspects so the *polis* (=the Greek city-state)<sup>16</sup> can work well, including, obviously, the economic forms. He traces a rapid history of trade and commerce, because it seems to him that the economic forms of his time, based on money, have evolved from the older one, and in particular from barter, the basic form of exchange.

In this passage, Aristotle emphasizes a very important concept in our research about money and sacredness, that is mediation, that leads us directly to comment the *ante litteram* forms of coins, which are strictly linked to forms of trade without the basis of a market.

In the earliest times of development of the *polis*, some objects or some kinds of goods were used as coins, and they had either great economic or symbolic value. In the first group, are included not only precious metals, but also goods essential for the daily economy, such as cows and barley, that were archaic forms of payment, especially in the case of salary<sup>17</sup>.

In the second group, there were objects that have no material value, as shells or glass beads, and the use of these coins is practically universal<sup>18</sup>.

It is clear, then, that in pre-monetary systems, the predominant element in the choice of objects or the material that had to be used for commercial mediations was the symbolic one<sup>19</sup>: in the case of animals or products of the land, for example, their value was the fact that they were necessary for survival, and were recognized as precious goods, because their scarcity threatened the life of the community. Magic and religion were the only resources against the uncontrollable forces such as climate, that could threaten the harvest, or epidemics, that could decimate animals.

All this indicates that the concept of mediation, basis for the invention of the coins, is old, but it did not have the abstract forms acquired with the use of coins.

It is also necessary to consider another system that, for its symbolic charge, was fundamental in ancient society and has much to do with commercial forms, say, the gift and other similar practices. This time, we will follow Aristotle's

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15 *Pol.* 1256a-1258b.8

16 On the *polis*, see the *Oxford Classical Dictionary (OCD)*, s.v. *polis*.

17 This kind of goods changed depending on the historical-geographic situation of each country: for instance, in the America of Mexico, we find another precious resource used as a currency, cocoa.

18 For example, in the Andean areas, a species of mollusk of the *spondylus* family, used in some religious rituals, also functioned as a coin.

19 It is very famous the study that the Polish anthropologist Malinowski dedicated to the *kula* system used by the Trobriand natives to trade: the basis of this type of trade were bracelets and necklaces made of shells, which had no intrinsic value and were hardly used, even as ornaments, and whose commercial importance was related to the social rank of merchants. Cf. Carpenter David, *Money, Encyclopedia of Religion*, MI: Thomson Gale, Detroit, 2005, vol. 9, p. 6137.

reasoning in the most known of his work on ethics, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and, in particular, the passages relative to the proportional relations of exchanges<sup>20</sup>.

Aristotle's complex speech on money is inserted in the treatment of virtues, one of which is justice, the central subject of the fifth book. When analyzing what form of justice is proper to trade, Aristotle introduces a couple of quick mentions to coins. Very briefly, he says that, considering that the community of men (= *the polis*) is born by the association of people who develop different activities, the exchange is generated between actors who need different things. This implies that a way to equalize goods that, by their nature, were different, had to be found, so to make the exchanges fair. Provided this difference, what really measures the value of things in the exchanges is necessity (that is, demand), a unit of measurement that has the clear defect of being not very objective and even subject to sentimental values. Introducing another measuring instrument that was more abstract, impersonal and as stable as possible was, at this point, necessary, in particular since business intensified and left the national limits: coins' mathematical dimension could make the exchanges faster and more precise.

Aristotle explains that the form of justice proper to the trade is the one that follows the principles of proportionality and not of equality, and he exemplifies the dynamics of reciprocity with a reference to the Graces<sup>21</sup>: what does he mean exactly with that?

One of the social practices of all ancient civilizations was the gift (in fact, the verb "to give" is one of the basic verbs in many languages).

The ancient society was strongly unequal, hierarchical and with marked differences between the different groups; most of the population was poor and only a minority, the kings, the noblemen and the priests, had power and wealth. In addition, there was no clear separation between the divine and the secular: the gods were guarantors of the universal and social order and, in turn, society was impregnated with magical-religious notions.

That is why alternative systems existed, so wealth, especially some kind of goods, like food, could be redistributed to the population according to a precise order that had social, magic and religious aspects rather than economic ones. Consider, for example, the sacrifice of animals to the gods: after the ceremony, the whole community ate the animal.

In this context, has to be placed the practice of the gift. It had several social advantages, because different groups came into contact by exchanging goods that were used, first of all, to consolidate the personal bonds between those involved: the importance of the exchange of gifts was not in the gift itself (although it was also a way of procuring goods difficult to obtain), but in the

20 *Et. Nic.* 1132b.21-1134a.16.

21 *Et. Nic.* 1133a.3-5. I talk about Graces in the next section.

social connections that helped build and that was maintained in time<sup>22</sup>.

The idea of reciprocity that fed this system implied an action that had three moments: give-give back-give again. This way a network of relationships that united people was created. Whoever received a gift had to give back, and this act of returning implied the obligation of another return, in a virtually infinite chain of benefits among those who began a relationship of this kind. Notice two important points: the return of a favor had not to be equivalent neither immediate, precisely because, since the first act generated a series of them, in the end an equivalence was reached.

Now, let us get back to coins. The initial idea that the exchanges are never equal remains, but with the introduction of coins the equivalence is immediate without the need of establishing a sequence of gifts for reaching a sort of parity between giving and receiving. On the other hand, with money, the idea of an exchange in the future is retained, because the coins received from a sale could be stored and used when the buyer wanted, a fact that did not happen in the barter, when the exchange of goods was direct. What was not maintained was the connection between people and this was detrimental to society.

So, why it was necessary to use coins? Aristotle has no doubt: coins were convenient, that is why they were introduced, and they solved a series of unknowns that threatened or, at least, delayed commercial operations. Some of the intermediate products, for example, were not easy to move from one place to another, considering we are talking of international exchanges. When using an intermediate product, another problem was that in each transaction was necessary to establish the corresponding value of the required good: coins, instead, had an already fixed value and suppressed the intermediate step of measurement in each operation; its value was also quite stable in the time, and in any case not so susceptible to change by unforeseeable factors<sup>23</sup>.

To conclude this section: The analysis of money and economy in the Aristotelian texts reflects the oldest categories of gift and reciprocity that had governed the human community until new times when the political system, and, consequently, the economic system, had changed. Particularly interesting is the fact that from his analysis we can see that Aristotle was aware of the destabilizing power that money has, because it eliminated those differences between the diverse social groups that integrated themselves into a peculiar system of exchange that little had to do with economic transactions. Nonetheless, it made the society work.

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22 For an overview of the social forms derived from the concept of reciprocity in several ancient cultures, see the *Encyclopedia of Religion s.v. money, hospitality, charity y gift giving*.

23 For this same reason, gold and silver universally had a monetary use because they had all the characteristics that later converged in the currency, such as indestructibility and homogeneity and, above all, a value which remained relatively constant over time.

### The symbolism: mythology and literature<sup>24</sup>

In the previous sections, we have seen that if we review the history of coins and exchanges, we immediately stumble into the symbolic thought behind them. However, as Aristotle points out, so innovative were money and the commercial forms that derived from it, that any relationship with this mythical-religious dimension was quickly left behind.

In the introduction, we saw several examples of the proximity of money and the gods, but subsequent reflections on the social structures in pre-market economies in Greece have begun to reveal that these connections are much deeper than we can imagine<sup>25</sup>.

To analyze them from the different perspective of literature, let us begin with an interesting statement that Aristotle does in *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the final book, the tenth, that deals with the highest of the virtues, happiness, the philosopher speaks of the gods represented as the quintessence of happiness and wonders what typology of action is proper to the gods, that is, what is the action that generates happiness. It should be contemplation, because, he remarks: "It would be absurd that they also had money or something similar"<sup>26</sup>. According to Aristotle, the gods cannot have money, nor other economic practices typical of human transactions and, considering that he does not develop much more this idea, we are allowed to suggest some ideas.

Money entered the social dynamics only at a certain time and represented a clear change in the associative forms; Aristotle does not consider this "good" because it is not ethical. We also know that in the ancient world there was a strong symbiosis between the divine and the human sphere, according to a conception of the world that saw in the gods an indispensable reference for all human activity.

Money appears in literature when society had already assimilated and separated its economic meaning from the magic-religious interpretation of previous years: the sixth century is the first fully monetized age of the ancient world, and the circulation and accumulation of money determined great economic changes that were accompanied by great social and political changes. No mention of it is made in the epic nor in mythology, where other social and economic forms, typical of a pre-monetary economy, are retracted instead.

24 For an overview, advices on bibliography and further readings on the Greek deities, heroes and other characters, a good dictionary of ancient world, like the *OCD*, can be consulted. Besides, for the Greek gods another good source is Burkert Walter, *La religión griega arcaica y clásica*, Abada, Madrid 2007, chapter 3, and the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, which is an excellent guide for the Mesopotamian gods, too.

25 One of these examples had to do with the image of the gods on the coins. It is a widespread opinion among scholars that, despite the religious origins of the vocabulary inherent to money and economy, the divine iconography in money served to recognize immediately the city that had put into circulation that type of coins, and nothing was better than represent in it the protective divinity. On that, see Carpenter David, *Money, Encyclopedia of Religion*, MI: Thomson Gale, Detroit, vol. 9, 2005, p. 6138, with bibliography. Seaford Richard, *Money and the Early Greek Mind*, University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 88-124 y Borisonik Hernan, *Sacred Money. Politics, economics and sacredness in Aristotle*, Miño y Dávila, Buenos Aires, 2013, pp. 35-85.

26 N. E. 1178b.14-15.

Considering the above mentioned, we will treat some mythological themes, whose undisputed protagonists are the gods, to see how the world of the gods worked without the use of money as well as human society has functioned without it, with a perfect mechanism, for a long time.

We already mentioned that in ancient times the coins were of gold and silver and that also other objects, such as sea shells, glass beads and pearls were used as coins. First, all of them had symbolic value: for example, the sea shells, which by their form reminded the female genital organ, were endowed with the power of improving fertility: one of the greatest Greek divinities, Aphrodite, was born of a shell<sup>27</sup>; just for the way a pearl is formed, it was believed to represent regeneration and, therefore, rebirth and immortality, so we find its representation in tombs.

Gold and silver, besides being the metals used in the first coins,<sup>28</sup> were also used, before the introduction of money, as an intermediate reference value of what was going to be exchanged. The combination of their extrinsic value and all that gold and silver represented on a metaphorical level, made them precious and required metals in all times. Silver is called *argentum* in Latin and ἄργυρος in Greek and in both cases the root of the word refers to the gray color and the brightness: silver represented purity, purification, and perfection. In Latin, gold is said *aurum*, word that refers to the brightness of the sun when it is born and also to the name of the goddess of the dawn, Aurora; gold as metal, besides being extraordinarily luminous, is incorruptible and, therefore, becomes the symbol of life and immortality.<sup>29</sup>

A separate mention deserves the iron, for the particular importance the blacksmith had in the history of humanity. In ancient times, man used the iron contained in the meteorites that had fallen on earth: in Sumerian, one of the words related to iron is *an.na*, which can be translated "from heaven." During the Iron Age, that represented a radical change in working techniques and also in the rhythms of production, that began to be "industrial", blacksmiths became such an important social class that they were assigned divinities of their own, as Hephaestus in Greece, a god, lame and ugly, but ingenious and indispensable to the inhabitants of Olympus.

All this have echo in mythology: the notion that the history of humanity is divided into ages is common to various religious traditions. In Greece, Hesiod<sup>30</sup>

27 There are two traditional legends about the birth of the goddess: according to one version, she was born of the genitals of Uranus, who had been castrated by Cronus (Hes., *Theog.* pp. 188-206) and, according to another version (Hom., *Il.* 5, pp. 370-417), she was daughter of Zeus and Dione.

28 The earliest coins were made of electro, an alloy of gold and silver occurring spontaneously in nature, and abounding in the rivers around Sardis, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, from where, as we have seen, come the oldest coins. Over time, coins were made only of pure golden and silver, and several copper-based alloys were also used. In Rome, the *denarius*, a silver coin, was the basis of the whole monetary system. Bronze was also used, while gold was kept only in imperial minted coins. The importance of silver for monetary aims is proved by the fact that still today, in several languages, like Spanish or French, silver is a general word for "money".

29 On the symbolism of shells and pearls, see Eliade Mircea, *Images and Symbols*, Taurus, Madrid, 1992, pp. 137- 158.

30 Unlike Homer, whose existence and literary activity are surrounded by doubts, in the case of Hesiod we have clear information

speaks of four ages: the Golden, Silver, Bronze, and Iron Ages. As it is clearly understood by the value of the listed metals, this sequence goes from the best to the worst time, being the first, the Age of Gold, a time of prosperity and the Iron, the present one, the worst<sup>31</sup>.

Among the pre-monetary economic forms, we have discussed the importance of the gift in ancient civilizations. A fundamental source of information for the ancient Mediterranean world comes from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Homer's<sup>32</sup> two great epic poems about the heroic world of the XII-XI centuries BC: here the gift and hospitality, which form the principle of reciprocity, appear as the commercial-social forms, while true commerce, that uses money, is mentioned with contempt, as a practice typical of non-Greeks - in particular of the Phoenicians - and the numerous economic transactions mentioned, ranging from spoils of war to marriages, never operate with money<sup>33</sup>.

The first example of interchange between the gods and men that we will touch is the most obvious, the sacrifice, the diffusion of which is practically universal: a direct bridge between the god and man, sacrifice is, above all, a gift that men make to the gods that, of course, is not something disinterested. As the prayer, sacrifice is made so the gods give something to men, but, in the case of sacrifice, things are exchanged. According to the typical rules of the gift, there is no quantitative correspondence between the gifts: it is true that men often sacrifice the most precious thing they have and know very well which are the offerings that each god prefers, but being the god infinitely more powerful than man, what the god will give in return is more valuable than what he could receive<sup>34</sup>.

What matters is, again, the bond of closeness that is established between the divinity and the man who becomes, thanks to the devotion he has demonstrated with his sacrifices, the protégé of the god, because the gods appreciate and reward the man who gives them gifts. The importance of the moral aspect in this relationship stands out especially in cases where the gods find themselves unable to help those who have demonstrated their deep devotion to them: in one episode of the *Iliad*, Zeus, who cannot save Hector because he is established to die in the duel against Achilles, questions his correction,<sup>35</sup> and in that of

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because he himself spoke of his life in his writings. He lived between the VIII and VII century BC in the Greek region of Beotia, and wrote several works: the *Theogony* is dedicated to gods.

31 Actually, the ages are five and there is the age of Heroes just before the Iron one. Cf. Hes. *Op.* 109-26. For other references, see  *OCD s.v. golden age*.

32 Criticism places the life and activity of Homer in the second half of the VIII century BC.

33 Deals exhaustively with the subject of reciprocity and economy in the Greek society through the analysis of epic poems, Seaford Richard, *Reciprocity and Ritual. Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State*, Oxford University Press, 1994 and *Money and the Early Greek Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004.

34 Walter Burkert dedicates the chapter 6 of his *The Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions* to the gift giving practice in religion.

35 Hom. *Il.* 22, 169-172.

Croesus, whose history we shall comment later, he feels the gods abandoned him to die with great suffering on a pyre.

Talking of the Aristotelian reflection on reciprocity, we have found the Graces, the Greek goddesses daughters of Zeus, associated with everything that has to do with grace, elegance and beauty. These are attributes understood not only physically but especially symbolically, because they inspire benevolence and gentleness and, therefore, promote reciprocity as they invite to the act of kindness and, above all, the willingness that makes people want to return a favor received.

Besides them, who are lesser goddesses in Greek mythology, in reciprocity comes into play none other than Zeus, the storm god who led the pantheon of the Greeks. One of the many epithets of Zeus was ξένιος, "hospitable", "protector of the guests", but also "foreign". In ancient Greece, the foreigner enjoyed a particular status and, as a guest, he was treated with the rules of hospitality which, in its most common form, implied food and shelter, but also the sharing of space and time; in this manner, a social relationship with the guest, that could last for several generations, was initiated<sup>36</sup>. Following these practices established a cosmic order because Zeus, the first of the Greek gods, guarantor of justice and sponsor of human laws, was himself a "foreigner"<sup>37</sup>.

On the other hand, the funerary field is particularly interesting for studying the sacred dimension of money, for several reasons, all related to mythology, being death a very sacred area presided by a very important god.<sup>38</sup>

The imagery of the underworld is very similar in several ancient cultures and it is often suggested that a river marks the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and that a boatman carries the dead from one side to the other, receiving a payment for his service<sup>39</sup>: this is the reason it is very

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36 To exemplify this concept, we refer to two famous episodes of the Homeric epic. During the Trojan War, which Homer sings in the *Iliad*, the Greek Diomedes and the Trojan Glaucus recognize that their families had a bond of hospitality and, instead of fighting, exchange gifts (6, 230-236). Likewise, in the *Odyssey*, which focuses on Odysseus' return to the home after the Trojan War, the hero is received as a guest by the king and queen of the Phaeacians, although he has arrived to their island as a shipwrecked, and made him to tell them his misadventures (6, 9-12).

37 Hospitality was clearly a way to obviate social problems, such as poverty, which is often an unjust reality, so we can imagine that this is the reason it was in charge of the gods symbols of justice. In general, the sun gods are guarantors of justice, by an obvious symbolism: from their position in the sky they see everything and can betray acts of injustice. In the Mesopotamian tradition, the sun god Utu/Shamash was the protector of the weak, orphans, widows and homelessness.

38 Continuing with the two mythologies we already mentioned, in the case of Greece, the god of the underworld is Hades who, together with his brothers Zeus and Poseidon, ruled the three universal dimensions - sky, water, and the underworld; in Mesopotamia, king and queen of the underworld are Ereshkigal and her husband Nergal, two of the most prominent deities of Mesopotamia; in Ugarit, the god of death is Mot, brother of Baal, the champion of Ugaritic gods and Yam, god of waters: the three are sons of one of the greatest divinities of Ancient Near East, El.

39 On the mythology of the underworld and boatmen in the different cultural traditions, see Siikala Anna-Leena, Diez de Velasco Francisco, Descent into the Underworld, in L. Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 4, Macmillan, Detroit, 2005, pp. 2295-2300, and, about netherworld in Greece, Mesopotamia and Ugarit, Corrente Paola, *Dioniso y los dying gods: paralelos metodológicos*, Madrid: Tesis Doctoral, 2012, chapter 4.3. [published on-line by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2013: <http://eprints.sim.ucm.es/18071/>].

common to find coins in the ancient graves<sup>40</sup>.

The most famous boatman of antiquity is the Greek Charon, who was paid an obol for the transport to the infernal riverside<sup>41</sup>. It is interesting that this character of Greek mythology does not appear in Homer whom, with Hesiod, is our oldest written source of knowledge of Greek mythology.

The two major epic poems of Greece are stories of indomitable warriors and war, and therefore, of death. Homer, many times, in describing scenes of death, introduces an indispensable figure, the psychopomp, which in ancient belief accompanied the dead to their last home. The poet speaks of three: two winged geniuses, the twins Hypnos, "sleep," and Thanatos, "death," and Hermes, the clever son of Zeus, mediator between the divine and the human and one of the main gods of the Olympic family. Throughout the mythological Greek tradition, only Hermes kept among its main prerogatives the guiding function for the dead, while Hypnos and Thanatos lost it as Charon replaced them<sup>42</sup>.

In iconography, while the first three are represented according to the typical canons of the divinities -they are young and beautiful, Charon, who became a very popular subject in the painting of vases of the V century BC, has the appearance of a village worker, with the cap and tunic typical of the sailors: and indeed, he does a job, that is the reason he receives a payment, while the three gods execute a sacred law, established by the archaic rules that govern the universe and, in the past, also ruled the communities of men.

Once the money comes into play, deception appears: false coins have been found in the tombs, because Charon, who is a citizen of the underworld and lives underground, does not know what legal coins are in use and, therefore, people must have thought that it was useless to waste such an important asset for life in this world.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Charon can be corrupted. At a certain point in the famous story of Eros and Psyche, the girl has to go to the other side and is advised to take two coins: one for the going and the other one for bribing Charon who has to do something forbidden, that is, return her to earth<sup>44</sup>.

It is significant that the part that money can corrupt has to do with the only character who does a job, because the gods, even the Homeric's, so human in their aspect and feelings, do not lend themselves to corruption when it comes to something as serious as death.

We have a lot of information available to analyze this aspect. Let us begin with one of the most famous myths of antiquity, that of the Thracian singer Orpheus: history tells us that, immediately after the wedding, his wife Eurydice

40 However, there are other possibilities. Some of them have to do more with magic: for example, the coins could be used as amulets against the possible dangers in the trip to the underworld.

41 Also in Mesopotamian tradition the boatman appears frequently, and his name changes depending on the myth: it is Sursunabu, or Urshanabi, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and Humut-tabal in *The Netherworld Vision of an Assyrian Crown Prince*.

42 About the four characters and their role as guides for the dead, see Diez de Velasco Francisco, *Los caminos de la muerte*, Trotta, Madrid, 1995, 1994, pp. 24- 62.

43 Grinsell, Leslie V., *The Ferryman and His Fee: A Study in Ethnology, Archaeology, and Tradition, Folklore*, Vol. 68, No. 1, 1957, p. 265.

44 The Latin novelist Apuleius (II century AD) tells the story of the two lovers in the sixth book of his *Metamorphoses*.

was bitten by a snake and died. Desperate, Orpheus goes to the underworld to recover her, despite knowing that there are unalterable rules in the underworld, the most important is that no one can get out of there and, if he does, he must leave someone in his place. Allowing someone to leave the underworld is a concession from the gods, who only grant this favor in special cases, because this contravenes the laws whose application they watch: Orpheus plays his lyre for Hades and Persephone who, touched by the beauty of his music, grant him to take his wife from the underworld.<sup>45</sup>

There are many more examples that prove this attitude. The underworld of polytheistic religions is a different place from the hell that monotheism has accustomed us, being not a place of punishment, but generically the place where the dead go after leaving the earth. In Greek mythology, there are only a few characters (Sisyphus, Tityus, Ixion, Lycaon and Tantalus) who, in the underworld, suffer a sentence consisting of atrocious punishments: their fault? To tried to outrage the eternal laws and to offend the gods with their infamous actions.

And if we move east, we find the same tendencies. The Mesopotamian tradition is very rich in myths that are developed in the underworld, some of which deals with important personages of Mesopotamian mythology or literature.<sup>46</sup>

In the myth of the descent of Inanna/Ishtar<sup>47</sup> to the underworld, the goddess goes there to take the kingdom from her sister Ereshkigal but, as a punishment for this daring action, is doomed to dead<sup>48</sup>. The god Enki/Ea<sup>49</sup> intervenes to save her by sending some magical creatures whom he instructs to show compassion for Ereshkigal who, in return for their willingness for her, will give them whatever they want: they will ask for the body of Inanna/Ishtar and will return her to life<sup>50</sup>.

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45 There are many authors who tell the story of Orpheus, for example, the Latin poets Virgil (*Georg.* 4. 453-525) and Ovid (*Met.* 10.1-11.84).

46 For a Mesopotamian myth, we can have a version in Sumerian and one in Akkadian (which may be the translation of the Sumerian text). In the case of the divinities, since there was syncretism, between the two traditions, usually when one speaks of them, it is correct to use the name they had in the two languages, although sometimes the Akkadian maintains the same name as the Sumerian: for example, Inanna is the Sumerian name and Ishtar is the Akkadian; Enki is Sumerian and Ea is Akkadian; Ereshkigal is preserved the same in Sumerian and Akkadian. About Mesopotamian gods, good references are Black Jeremy, Green Anthony, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, University of Texas Press, Austin, the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1992, and Jacobsen Thorkild, *The treasure of Darkness*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1976, chapter 4.

47 In general considered daughter of Nanna/Suen, the god of moon, Inanna/Ishtar was the goddess of *eros* and war, protagonist of the mythological and cultural life of Mesopotamia throughout all its history, and the prototype of Mediterranean goddess such as the Greek Aphrodite. In some of the numerous myths and poems about her, she even takes the power from the highest gods, Enki/Ea, Enlil and Anu/An, that sometimes are indicated as her fathers (see footnote 48).

48 Of this myth, we have a Sumerian version, longer and more detailed, and an Akkadian one. The two versions differ by several things. For the text of the former, see the database *ETCSL*: <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.4.1#>. The Akkadian text and a good commentary are found in Foster Benjamin, *Before the Muses*, CDL Press, Bethesda (2005), pp. 498-505.

49 Enki/Ea, from a generation before that of Inanna/Ishtar, is the skillful god of waters and leads the Mesopotamian pantheon with two other important deities, Enlil, god of winds, and An/Anu, the sky.

50 In the Akkadian version, Ea creates a single character to save Ishtar, and it is understood that he has to flatter Ereshkigal to raise her spirit. In the Sumerian version, Enki creates two creatures and the text shows that Ereshkigal is sad by a possible mourning and they must show compassion.

Very interesting is another text in Sumerian, a lamentation over the death of king Ur-namma<sup>51</sup>: when he travels to the underworld after his death, Ur-namma, a wise and just ruler, carries with him gifts for the gods and other dwellers of the underworld, respecting the ancestral rules of the kingdom of death.

We have just seen a few examples, that demonstrate very well that in myths and epics, the gods, although they know the concept of economy, work<sup>52</sup> and wealth<sup>53</sup>, do not want to use money, despite money was prevailing among men as “the” economic means.

Now let us advance a couple of centuries from the time of the epic poems (VIII-VII) to the VI-IV centuries when money was well established in society and see how all this has left its mark on the new literary genres that are being affirmed in this period, taking as reference the tragedy.

In general, these are decisive years in the life of the small European country, because there are emerging the phenomena that will be the hallmark of the Greek spirit (such theater or philosophy), and Athens, more than other cities, lives intensely this fruitful season.

Although the cores of tragedy originated into the traditional mythological heritage of Greece, that is to say, it uses the histories of the gods, kings or heroes that belong to old mythical cycles, its attention is totally centered in the man and in his personal and intimate search of the great questions of his existence. These almost never present a solution, as it did in the comforting mythical narrative, where everything went back to the universal order, which embraced both, the human and godly worlds; in fact, the great poetry of tragedy could not exist without the inquisitive and rational methodology of philosophy. The protagonists of the tragedies are “modern” men, as tragedy looks for the inner and universal condition of man, which, despite the passage of time, is always the same.

Sophocles and Euripides, who, with Aeschylus, are the three great Greek tragic poets, live in the V century BC and bring on stage a pair of situations that we can consider paradigmatic for our discourse on money, men and the gods.

51 King of the city of Ur, in southern Mesopotamia, Ur-namma actually existed, and was the founder of the third dynasty of Ur (2nd millennium BC).

52 About gods and economy, a yet little studied topic, see the study of Morris Silver, *Taking Ancient Mythology Economically*, Brill, Leiden- New York- Köln 1992, where mostly Greek tradition is researched. I would like to introduce a couple of fascinating ideas in Mesopotamian and Greek myths about divine work. In the first, in the Akkadian poem of creation, *Atrahasis*, the gods decide to create men so they can stop working: the gods are here divided in two groups, the *Annunaku* and the *Igigu*, and the last ones are obliged to perform work for the others. In fact, the poem starts with the word: “When the gods were men” (= were like men, say, they had to work). For this myth, see Foster Benjamin, *Before the Muses*, CDL Press, Bethesda, 2005, pp. 227-280. In Greek tradition, there is story about Apollo and Poseidon, who had to work for the king Laomedon in building the wall of Troy (among others, see II. 21, 441ss or D. S. 4, 35 ss.).

53 It seems that the gods were acquainted with the concept of wealth more than with of money: in Greece, Hades becomes identified with an originally independent deity, Plouton, who was the personification of wealth, so that the god of the underworld is “the rich one”, in a probable connection with grains (the vegetation, in general, was seen as “coming” from below the earth, where underworld was located).

Sophocles wrote *The Oedipus King*, whose history is well known: thanks to his cleverness, Oedipus vanquish the sphinx and obtains his reward, consisting of political power, because he becomes the king of Thebes, and of "love", since part of the prize is the marriage with the queen Jocasta, the widow of the old king Laius. At first glance everything is perfect: Oedipus is a young, powerful and skillful king, with a beautiful family and a prosperous city but, quietly, the misfortune is hidden, since the key of all this success is Jocasta, that in fact is his mother.

On the other hand, in *The Bacchae*, Euripides tells the story of Pentheus, young king of Thebes, who tries to stop the spread of the cult of Dionysus<sup>54</sup> that is devastating the city. And when the god asks him if he wants to see the secret rites of women, he responds that his desire is so great that he is willing to give the god a large amount of gold: a very strange phrase to tell a god<sup>55</sup>.

Pentheus and Oedipus are the paradigms of the *homo novus* of these years: great politicians, intelligent men, educated in philosophy, who speak well, and are skillful strategists. And yet, they will fall into disgrace and end badly: Pentheus will be torn apart by the worshippers of Dionysus, among whom is his mother, who guides the vicious attack, and Oedipus, already guilty for the death of his father, will be stained with the most horrendous of the crimes, incest, will cause the violent death of his mother and three of his four children-brothers and, old and blind, will head towards the exile<sup>56</sup>.

It was also said that the incredible wealth of two other kings had led them to an unhappy fate: Croesus and Midas were both native of Asia Minor, the area where coins were first minted, and stories with a strong moralizing dimension and where money played a preponderant role, were created about them. According to the legend, Croesus<sup>57</sup> was so sure of being the happiest man in the world for his possessions, that he did not believe the warnings of Solon, the eminent Athenian legislator, until fortune struck him harshly in the family and the kingdom. While Croesus is a figure who lends himself to tragedy,<sup>58</sup> Midas is a

54 One of the most relevant gods of Greece, Dionysus, son of Zeus, is universally recognized as the powerful god of wine and patron of theater.

55 Eur., *Ba.* 811. Similar to this is an episode of the Ugaritic *Epic of Aqhat*, but in this case, curiously, is a deity who desperately wants something from a mortal: Anat, the furious goddess of war, sister of Baal, offers gold and silver (and even immortality) to the young prince Aqhat, because wants the arrow that the artisan god, Kothar-wa-khasis, has done for him. Aqhat suggests her to follow a more appropriate procedures. Instead of trying "to buy" the arrow, she should give wonderful gifts to Kothar-wa-Khasis so he will make an arrow for her (*KTU* 1.17 VI, 10-34). For the text and a comment, see del Olmo Lete Gregorio, *Mitos, leyendas y rituales de los semitas occidentales*, Trotta, Barcelona, 1998, pp. 211-245.

56 Develops the role of money in poetry, Seaford Richard, *Dionysos, Money and Drama, Arion* 11.2, 2003, pp. 1-19.

57 Croesus was from Lydia and Midas from Phrygia, both in Asia Minor. The two kings were historical figures: Croesus lived in the VI century and tradition indicates that it was Croesus who ordered the minting of the first coins and his enormous wealth greatly impressed the Greeks. They mixed his real life with the legend, that involves his figure in some episodes of his life, among these, the one of his death. The story of Croesus is told, among others, by the Greek historian Herodotus (*Hist.* I, 29-84). About a king Midas who lived in the VIII century there are several news and he could somehow be the basis for the king of the legend, whose story is told, among others, by Ovid (*Met.* XI, 85-193).

58 The Greek tragedy revolves around the concept of ὑβρις, which can be translated by "insolence": Croesus believes himself omnipotent and happy above others due to all his possessions and the gods punish him according to the rules of tragic actions.

comical figure whose little farsightedness in decisions will determine ridiculous events in his life. It is said that the Phrygian king captured the old Silenus to obtain from him the knowledge of the most important things and, once he obtained it, released him. Dionysus, happy to recover Silenus, who was part of his entourage, in gratitude grants the king a wish, and Midas asked the gift to transform everything he touched into gold<sup>59</sup>: blinded by his greed, the clumsy king did not realize that he would not even be able to eat, because his food would turn into gold<sup>60</sup>. It is clear, especially in the history of Midas, the symbolism: Silenus represents nature and the natural order of things, and faces a “modern” man and a citizen, Midas, whose thought was so limited to think that money is the only thing that can procure happiness. The world of nature, represented by Silenus (and the sphinx of the Oedipus myth) is also a more backward world, which follows different rules than those of the city and that has a different economic system where money, invented for the city mainly, is not very known. There are several parallels between the two myths: Solon and Silenus think in traditional terms and their reflections look at the essence of things; Croesus and Midas are projected into new times, but they will understand firsthand, in particular Croesus, the first to mint money and the first to suffer its effects, the futility of human desires and, lastly, the emptiness of money.<sup>61</sup>

What we have seen in this part is that mythology also reflects the position of philosophy about money: why, then, the gods have no money?

Aristotle spoke about the convenience of money at a time when trade had increased in volume and involved several Mediterranean countries and the justice that had been achieved thanks to money. Coins, a preset measurement system, avoided several intermediate passages that delayed the economic operations which, by their nature, had to be fast and as fruitful as possible. Nevertheless, he indicated also the loss of social identities as the side effect of modernity.

The same discretions appear in epic, mythology and tragedy. Already since the earliest time of the Greek poets, there is a contrast between traditional economic forms, that were first of all advantageous to society, and those of the true merchants who, on the other hand, were considered suspicious because they have no other purpose than the production of wealth. Additionally, when mythology and tragic poetry deals with the sacred *par excellance*, the gods and

59 How far is the epic episode of the “judgement of Paris” (Il. 24. 25-30): the young son of Priam, king of Troy, chosen as a judge in the tricky competition among Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, proclaimed as the most beautiful the latter, since she has offered him love in order to get the title, whereas Hera would have given him power and Athena glory.

60 According to the myth, the gods liberated Midas from his gift by immersing him in the waters of the Pactolus river, where all the gold was poured; in this way, the river, already rich in the silver that flowed in it, was also abundant in gold and, as we have seen, the two metals were naturally associated forming the electro. The etiological motive in the curious history of the king is evident.

61 The subject of the extraordinary wealth of the Oriental kings, who in turn were doomed, seems to have drawn much attention to the Greeks. Above we have mentioned Tantalus, the king of Sipylus, a city between Phrygia and Lydia, who was extremely wealthy but had a sad fate (though his fault is not related to money).

the great themes related to primordial times and the order of things, make it clear that money and all its effects can only be fateful for this dimension, that works with rules exempt from any idea of individuality and materiality: money, especially, for reason of social and moral nature, did not finish convincing neither the gods of the myths nor the heroes of the epic.

The myth works on another level, that is why there is no reference about money, which remains a mean completely human and artificial, not natural. The thematic of death is the best proof of this, and the myths about the underworld are ideal to exemplify how things work between gods and human beings: deception, trading or blackmail are not permitted, it is only possible to appeal to the spiritual and ethical categories<sup>62</sup>. Death, or love, but not money, are cosmic forces that affect in equal measure the world of men and gods, for they are the natural phenomena that men of the pre-monotheistic age were lucky enough to share with their gods: the conniving maneuvers of Pentheus remained on another level.

Then, we can say that mythological thought and the art of poetry, which have different methods from those of the philosophical reflection, converge in the respective descriptions of the symbolism of money: literature, especially mythology, that by definition covers the major issues of sacredness, realizes the destructive power of money, placing itself in the same line of interpretation of the philosophers, here represented by Aristotle.

## Conclusion

What we have seen in these pages about money, economy and the sacred, has allowed us to consider the links that economy had with different aspects of social life in the ancient world, something we are no longer used to and are not able to expect, because for us, in general, the economy shows lesser and less ethical and social concerns.

On the other hand, the interests of our source were of another kind: Aristotle inserts his speculation on money and economy in *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, because the purpose of his reflections respond to the will of constructing the ideal city, that had to be, before anything else, a fair one, and this is exactly the aspect that the modern economy has left aside. Indeed, to us, knowing economics as an independent discipline, the studies of the Stagirite seem to be

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62 Of course, stories about deception and cunning character do exist in history of religion, like in the case of the trickster, the sly and humorous figure common in certain mythologies, like the American or the African (indeed, gods themselves are not always honorable). In Mesopotamia and Greece, certain traits typical of the trickster appears in various divine or semi-divine figures. For example, Enki/Ea sometimes acts as a trickster deceiving the other gods in order to help men, as in does the good titan Prometheus. However, Prometheus (who is not a major god, as Enki/Ea) was terribly punished for his unethical actions against the gods. Burkert Walter, *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge-London, 1996 discusses the deception as a biological element in the formation of the religion in several points, as at pages 23-27, or 143-144, where presents the platonic criticism to the whole idea of giving gifts to gods, which can be seen as a form of bribery.

more inclined toward the philosophy of economy than toward pure economics. Also for this reason, he dedicates a very little space to speculation on economy, if we consider the volume of production destined to his other interests.

However, despite the fact that the notion of economy of the ancients is different from the existing in the present, there are some aspects where our perception of money is very similar to that of the ancient: for example, they understood very well that money was first of all an abstract and impersonal mean that fulfilled a practical role.

We have also seen that we should not look for the true link between money and the sacred in the iconography, which was rather an “external” factor, but in the epoch when the magico-religious conception of the universe was still very strong. Money marked the beginning of a new historical era, and the process of transition from the old to the new systems was slow (and sometimes not fulfilled at all) because the processes involved were very different.

Money was presented as a powerful social leveler, which made seller and buyer perfectly equal, while in the gift system, the actors were not equal, their equality in the act of exchanging gifts was symbolic and rather proportional.

As Aristotle’s economic speculation clearly demonstrates, ancient society is a society of values and distinguishes very well the importance of things, and this has nothing to do with the amount of money needed to buy them. An indicative of this is the fact that for a long time people continued to weigh the coins and not counting them (which was much more convenient and fast, and the reason why money had been introduced in the first place), because it was recognized that the value was in the material, not in the coin itself.<sup>63</sup> That is why, in antiquity, commerce was never confused with other systems, trade with coins did not cancel barter or gift, and some civilizations never developed a monetary economy, but rather worked with the techniques of ancient times.

Additionally, we have found very important to expand the perspectives of the study of religion and in particular of mythology and to investigate how myths deals with money, because mythological thought interprets and sublimates, bringing them to timelessness, cosmic and human vicissitudes: as Aristotle had lucidly seen, money, that perverts the moral values of society, cannot touch the world of the gods.

On the other hand, literature, first of all satire and tragedy, presents a man that money has made free and independent and naturally rich, but who is empty and isolated from the social context. It is not difficult to recognize that these are the same effects that money produces today on people and society.

The great historian of religions Walter Burkert mentions a singular episode where an African diplomat, trying to appease a tempest, threw money to the water as an offering to the god who controlled it, in an attitude very similar to

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<sup>63</sup> In the same way, beginning already from antiquity, with time precious metals were not used to mint coins anymore, because it was not the intrinsic quality of the chosen material that interested in the new means of payment.

that of Pentheus, that had the audacity to offer money to a god: modern man does not differ much from the ancient man!<sup>64</sup>

In light of the above, we can conclude that ignoring completely the religious and magical dimension that money has, probably limits its understanding and, above all, the understanding of its effects on human life and society, which should be the real concern of the economic sciences.

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Note: The ETCSL is the *Electronic Texts Corpus of the Sumerian Literature*, a database of the Oxford University. Available online: <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>

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## „СВЕТИ НОВАЦ“: БОГОВИ, ЉУДИ И АНТИЧКА ЕКОНОМИЈА

### Сажетак

Религија и економија имају веома важну улогу у обликовању друштава и њихових веза са друштвом је присутна од првог појављивања новца и јављања економских активности. У антици, веза између религије и економије је била веома јака јер је антички свет био симболичан и повезан са магијом и религијским идејама: економија је била део ове целине, јер је наследила праксу усмерену ка добробити људи а која је била под директном заштитом богова. Циљ овог рада јесте анализа религијске димензије новца и економије у античким друштвима, из перспективе философије и митологије. Уз помоћ Аристотела, пажњивог посматрача људског понашања, обе дисциплине могу дати занимљиве погледе на ефекете економије на друштво. Позадина мог истраживања ће бити културе античког света Медитерана, посебно, Грчка и Македонија, јер су управо ова два случаја била предмет великог броја истраживања. Што се тиче методолошког приступа, анализираће се текстови кроз историјску и компаративну анализу.

**Кључне речи:** новац, богови, митологија, Аристотел, друштво, Грчка, Месопотамија

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