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COMMERCE II. IN THE ACHAEMENID PERIOD

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In the Achaemenid period trade, both within the empire and outside it, developed on a scale previously unknown. The longest of many caravan routes was the Royal Road, which stretched for nearly 2,400 km from Sardis in Asia Minor through Mesopotamia and down the Tigris to Susa; stations with service facilities were located every 25-30 km along its length (Herodotus, 5.52-54; cf. Hallock, p. 6). Other roads connected Babylon with Ecbatana, Bactria, and the borders of India (Cook, p. 107), and Persia was also linked with the Indus valley by a road through Makrān (Khan, p. 121). In the west a road ran from the Gulf of Issus (modern İskenderun) through Asia Minor to Sinope (Sinop), thus serving as a link between the Aegean, on one hand, and the Transcaucasus and northern Asia, on the other (Cavaignac). Another important commercial route ran south from Sardis to the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor and thence to Tarsus, where it connected with a road through the Cilician Gates and north to the Black Sea (Cavaignac). The northern shore of the Black Sea was connected by road with Siberia via the southern Russian steppes and the Urals (Rostovtzeff, 1970, p. 219).

The Persian Gulf ports were major centers of Achaemenid maritime trade with

the west (Schiwek). A particularly significant link in this trade was Darius' canal in Egypt, which connected the Red Sea to the Nile and thus provided access to the Mediterranean (DZc; Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 147). At first the maritime trade between the Achaemenid empire and the west was chiefly in the hands of merchants from Phoenicia (Elayi, pp. 15-16, 27). Gradually, however, Greek merchants supplanted them in the Aegean and also began to compete with them successfully in other regions as well (Olmstead, p. 13).

Trade within the empire. Babylonia was a major hub in the trade between the western provinces of Asia Minor, Phoenicia, Palestine, and Egypt, on one hand, and the lands to the south and east of Mesopotamia, on the other. In Asia Minor Babylonian merchants purchased dyestuffs, iron, copper, tin, wine (Oppenheim, pp. 240-42). Iron and silver were mined in Asia Minor, copper in Cyprus and along the upper course of the Tigris; in the latter region limestone was also quarried. From Egypt and Syria the Babylonians brought alum (Wiseman, p. 155) for dyeing wool and bleaching cloth and also for glassmaking and medicine. Egypt also provided gold, ivory, ebony, and other luxury items; objects made by Greek artisans at Naucratis in the Nile delta have even been discovered in Central Asia (Piotrovskiĭ). Herodotus mentioned (3.6) the delivery to Egypt of amphoras filled with wine from Phoenicia, and this information is corroborated by the discovery of many jugs with Phoenician inscriptions in Egypt, as well as by an Aramaic papyrus referring to "wine from Sidon" brought to Egypt (Meyer, pp. 21-23). Phoenicia and Syria exported cedarwood, dyes, glassware, and other manufactured goods (Herzfeld, pp. 68-70; Oppenheim, p. 243).

The famous business house of Egibi, based in Babylon, played a leading role in trade, particularly with Media and Elam (Dandamayev, p. 259). The agents of Egibi bought slaves in Elam, and, according to Diodorus Siculus (17.67.3), a variety of agricultural products were also imported from Elam. Babylonia exported grain and woolen clothing, which was in great demand, especially in Elam (Dandamayev, p. 259).

In Persia itself the exchange of commodities and money was poorly developed. According to Herodotus (1.153) and Strabo (15.3.19), the Persians had no marketplaces, for they did not buy and sell in open markets. It is also noteworthy that in the abundant documentary evidence provided by the Elamite texts from Persepolis there is no direct information on trade. Mirrors, vases, and other objects produced by Persian craftsmen have been discovered in Egypt, however (Bresciani, p. 324). The names of some Persian merchants

are also known. For example, according to a Babylonian document drafted in the town of Humadeshu in western Persia during the reign of Cambyses, two Persians sold female slaves to a Babylonian; the same text refers to the Persian Artarushu, who bore the title “chief of the merchants” (Zadok, p. 76).

International trade. In the east, India exported gold, ivory, and aromatic oils to the Achaemenid empire (Basham, pp. 225-27). Lapis lazuli and carnelian came from Sogdiana and Bactria, turquoise from Choresmia (DSf; Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 144; cf., however, Schippmann, p. 48). Siberian gold entered the empire via Bactria. Judging by the Achaemenid objects that have been discovered in Sarmatian tumuli near Orenburg (Savel’eva and Smirnov, pp. 106-20), dated to the 5th and early 4th centuries b.c.e., the nomads of the southern Urals maintained trade contacts with the Central Asian satrapies. Excavations of Altaic tumuli dated between the 6th and 4th centuries b.c.e. also attest to trade relations between Iran, on one hand, and Central Asia and regions farther to the northeast, on the other (Rudenko, pp. 22-29).

In the west, Greece maintained active trade with the lands of the Achaemenid empire, exporting olive oil, wine, and ceramics in particular (Herodotus, 3.6; cf. Finley, p. 133). Athenian vases have been found not only on the shores of the Black Sea but also in major Achaemenid cities (cf. Starr, pp. 75-77, with literature; Finley, p. 134). A great deal of Greek pottery datable to the second half of the 6th century b.c.e. (Deubner, pp. 51-56) has been found at Babylon, as have Attic lamps of the 5th and 4th centuries. The scope of the Greek trade is also apparent from the distribution of Greek coins throughout the Achaemenid empire, from Afghanistan to Egypt (e.g., Schlumberger, pp. 6, 25-27).

The Lydians of western Asia Minor also played a significant role in international trade. Herodotus (1.93-94) mentioned market traders in Sardis and noted that the Lydians were the first in the world to engage in retail trade.

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