



Quentin Metsys.
A moneylender and his wife.

Money, time and space

REFLEXION ABOUT THE ORIGIN AND TRANSMISSION OF MONETARY USE

To create something by making an exchange?

Everybody in the world uses currency, but some difficulties can rise in our minds to realize that currency might be a piece of salt, (although this one, may have an authentic practical and economic interest); but what about shells, abundant and worthless things which seem to be chosen for this reason? In fact, this kind of currency only makes sense in an economic system where it is only **used as the evidence of an exchange.**

However it is obvious than, facing to simple **barter**, this use represents a real progress. When people exchange baskets for arcs and arrows, this means to say that these societies have acquired industries and production. In such an exchange, the shell is worth for what it is not or more precisely states what it is not: one or the other of the bartered things.

However, this makes the production easier, because it does not depend on the time (or case) when the bartered of things is used, and makes the exchange

easier because it does not depend on production system (process). Such an economic system does not require that things, used as evidence (the shells) had a value by itself. Although shells are most abundant over the world, and in spite of fact that everybody can be a cheat, false currency can not exist. The main reason resides in the fact that, if the idea exists to exchange what has been created, **the idea to create something by making an exchange does not exist.**

On this condition, shells can be used as money in a way that could approach to our current concepts. They apply to a deduction, they don't have more value than the instruments which are used to write number of arcs, arrows and baskets exchanged. The volume of their exchange would not allow anybody to become rich by accumulating them.

In its current occidental form and use, money is more than the simple evidence of an exchange. This invention is not recent. It is typically "Occidental", and it will appear that, settled at the beginning, was a process of *planetarisation*. It is not separable from emergence of **abstract thought**; in other words, from what is called the "Greek miracle".

[Note of JP Morenon: Here, the Doctor Jean Morenon made two errors (conceptual and historic): It is important to distinct the money as value unity and the money as material support of this value. Because the first preceded the second of 2000 years! And it is this last that is the present object of study. Today with computers it would be easy to make all the commercial trades without pieces of money or banknotes. But we have to imagine scriptural money without computers... That is what the Mesopotamians do 4000 years ago! And all their commercial counting was made without paper or papyrus, on argil tablets. We have to imagine the importance of the administration necessary for that... This is with these monetary techniques they developed Empires and inedited technologies as the wheel and the channels and forms of organisation as cities and commercial companies. They developed also trades all over the known world as far as India only with scriptural money. The bill of exchange preceded of two millenary the metallic pieces and not the inverse! This means that abstract thought occurred in Mesopotamia (if money and abstract thought are bounded), and not in Greece.]

It is right to notice that Greco-Roman societies knew advanced economic capitalism, since, on this point of view, **Middle Age** was a regressive period. We will better understand the problem while examining this medieval break: it was not in the mental attitudes of nobility to get a return on his money. The money was a sign of power and richness, and a safety to pay ransoms - the natural risks for these warriors. Feudal ones really had only servile people as a capital and they could not draw any profit from their gold.

This kind of monetary management was reserved for monasteries and Jewish communities (Thanks to the languages which they used, Latin and Hebrew, ones and the others saved trade across vestiges of the Roman Empire).

In opposition to villages and the agricultural work force, subjected to serfdom and true richness of lords, a craft industry and a commercial society has developed in market towns, and from there, a middle-class, which later became the active and creative element of revolutions.

Meanwhile the "Tuscan Miracle" occurred, propelled by the invention of printing works. The Renaissance was the resurgence of ancient thought. It was joined again with capacity of abstraction in such matters as economy, technical sciences and arts. Powers of money reconstitute themselves. The Ancient use of currency has been reviving thanks to the Renaissance.

An invention which upsets time and space.

What is this Hellenic invention? It is attributed to a **king of Lydia**, some centuries B.C. and here is the story: one could suppose that Greeks used the more invaluable object they own to be exchanged. It was oxen (in the beginning they were pastors but not a seafaring nation). At all events, they soon use gold instead of animals. But it was necessary to evaluate quantity, i. e. the marketing value. So they were compelled to weigh each pieces of metal.

Here take place of the invention of this King: the idea was to make gold pieces marked with a seal, which guaranteed the **constant weight of each coin**. From there, to count pieces was sufficient, it was useless to weigh. Very quickly, on the historical time scale, banks were developed and cheques substituted to hard cash. If the invention of the cash gold is remarkable, one will see that it does not summarize how mind and society were going to change.

It has been told, above, that all people in the world use currency as evidence of exchange. We added that if it was a common idea to exchange products of the human activity, the idea did not exist to draw any profit from exchanging. One could accumulate produced things, but the idea did not exist that exchange could product anything by itself.

While acquired capacities to think by abstraction, it occurred an absolute inversion: the Greeks discovered that **one can obtain money only by making exchanges**. This implies that with the difference to shells, the cash was guaranteed by an exchange-value.

One will never insist sufficiently on the fact that this discovery lies beyond the

questions of trade and economy.

Here summarized consequences. Headlines are necessary to understand our problem.

In traditional agrarian world (an-historical societies) invested time and space are limited or, more exactly, made circular by the *logic* of production:

- * **space is limited by the periphery of the useful and accessible field, whose peasant occupies the centre (and often venerate it);**
- * **time follows the annual recurring cycle of seasons (annual = annulus).**

Between past and future, people is always checking that:

- **everything which is now known as existing, formerly existed;**
- **everything which is now existing must exists again, according to a prescribed and sacral established order.**

But, when it "is transformed" by merchant into currency or gold, harvest **can indefinitely be continuing from a year to another**; in a same way, time becomes for him independent of annual cycle. Same manner, space becomes unlimited, for merchant, and, for the trader, it does not matter the place where these goods have been produced.

The *monetarization* of exchanges thus leads to a rupture of concrete mental links with space and time. By this way, scientific and historic unfinished and unlimited time and space are inseparable from abstract thought.

A linear concept of time and space is substituted to a circular concept where everything must happens which already occurred.



French Franc of Jean le Bon (1350-1364).

[Note of JP Morenon: At the picker's and huntsmen's stage, humans are totally dependant of the nature and their existence is not so far that animal live. Barter exists and who say barter say accord about the value of the trade. The value appears and it is fixed by mutual agreement and individually situation. But barter concern only real objects (a necklace, a flint) and consecutively a result of a concrete action that may be hazardous (hunt). The value may be understood only as natural or issue of a concrete action. The property is transferred by the barter itself and all notion of time is absent.

At the farmer's and artisan's stage, the work appears and become object of swap. But it is not prudent to definite the value "on piecework" because the property of the work's result may be occasionally source of conflicts (don't forget that we are saying of a frontier between barter and monetary exchange). Otherwise, if the task's result can be hazardous, the work may be effective. It's why the employer quick understood it was better to definite the value of the work by the time. So the property of the work's result never passes by the worker and stays property of the employer. By consequence time become constitutive of the value and can't be circular (like seasons time) if not what happens to the value?...]

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