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INTRODUCTION:

THE CONSTRUCTION OF VALUE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

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The starting point for this volume is the basic premise that the concept of value is a social construct and is thus defined by the cultural context in which it is created. The questions we raise are not new. They have been asked often: How was value created, defined, and expressed in any given ancient or modern society? How can students of the past understand the value that might have been accorded to materials, objects, people, places, patterns of action, and so on by those who produced or used the things that compose the human material record? How was value articulated? (How many of these in exchange for how many of those? Why this word and not another?) What do we know about how objects were valued in the past, whether in the preindustrial market or premarket economies of the Mediterranean or in the “nonmarket” contexts of Oceania and pre-Columbian Andean societies? Why were certain materials (gold, silver, feathers, *Spondylus* shell, cattle, grain, and others) valued over other materials by people in many different parts of the world—Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas, Oceania? What qualities of physical substances—for instance, translucence, scarcity, durability, age—were at the heart of how cultures determined, negotiated, and on occasion sanctioned value? How were different quantities or numbers of objects, or their negotiated positions within ordinal sequences, related to judgments of value? What was the significance, in relation to questions of value, of how, how many, and where objects and human bodies were deposited?

Although cross-cultural comparison is a key aspect of this volume, ours is not an uncritical celebration of cross-cultural analysis. Indeed, several papers in this volume stress that the specifics of the particular cultural context of the determination of value within any given society are of paramount importance. Consequently, comprehensive models that attempt to explain the construction of value across different cultures may in some cases obscure as much as they reveal. Accordingly, context is here highlighted, for what happens in the Mediterranean—whether in prehistory or in the historic era—is not the same as in the Andes, China, Africa, or Oceania. In their discussion of money and the morality of exchange, Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch (1989:1) state the issue well:

It becomes clear that in order to understand the way in which money is viewed it is vitally important to understand the cultural matrix into which it is incorporated. This may seem a bland enough lesson, but it is one which has often been forgotten by anthropologists writing about money—and less culpably also by historians and sociologists. As a result they have commonly fallen into the trap of attributing to money in general what is in fact a specific set of meanings which derive from our own culture.

This said, cross-cultural generalizations can be important, particularly in the study of vanished social systems. As Bruce Trigger notes: “My own studies of similarities and differences among early civilizations indicates that, although every early civilization was unique in its totality, some aspects were shaped by factors that were culturally specific, whereas others can be understood only in terms of cross-cultural generalizations” (Trigger 2006:519; cf. Trigger 2003).

One goal of a cross-cultural, comparative perspective would be to refocus the discussion of the meaning of material culture beyond established analytical categories and explanatory paradigms—such as scarcity, labor-based theories of value, notions that economic exchange creates value—to broader and more nuanced conceptions of value informed by anthropological, art historical, linguistic, and semiotic perspectives. Such a project, comparing and contrasting Old World and New World experiences and contexts, potentially opens new avenues of interpretation of material culture and the relationships between people, places, objects, language, and how meanings are made and transformed in different social, political, economic, and ritual settings.

Our aim in this volume is to bring together an interdisciplinary group of scholars in the humanities and social sciences (anthropologists, archaeologists, art historians, economic historians, historians, linguists, philologists, sociologists), working in various parts of the world, to investigate the meaning and construction of value in the ancient world. The concept of value lies at the intersection of individual and collective tastes, desires, sentiments, and attitudes that inform the ways people select or give priority to one thing over another. How did past societies, and how do we in the present, place value on anything? What is it that we value in particular places or monuments, objects, materials, human bodies, or art? To what extent are taste, trade, and desire regulated by social and political mechanisms, however complex or specific?

The structure of this volume is loosely based on four overarching but closely interrelated themes, which serve as a focus for discussion: place value, body value, object value, and what we have termed number value. These are not monolithic, distinct categories; nor are they static. Above all, the categories we interrogate here are not juxtaposed. Rather, they are interrelated and often collapse into one another in the analyses offered herein. Running through the conceptions of each of these categories of value are issues of memory, nostalgia, identity, biography, ideology, style, symbolism, and exchange. This book is therefore about values, broadly defined, not just systems of value among material things (which is itself a

large topic). Mensuration and fungibility, or equivalence, and are critical elements in any discussion of value (e.g., Renfrew, this volume), but they are only components of a much larger analytical subject.¹ This is not a book about the archaeology of measurement (for which, see the excellent volume edited by Morley and Renfrew 2010) but about the construction of value in the ancient world. Value can be economic, social, and cultural. One can even speak of ritual or symbolic value, as the work of Bernhard Laum (1924; see also Papadopoulos, this volume) established long ago.

In putting together the papers that make up this volume, there was never any intention of promoting a particular agenda or orthodoxy. Our intent was to demonstrate the broad range of approaches possible when considering the importance of value when it emerges in projects of studying and interpreting the past. In addition, our investigation is not an end in itself, as if “value” could be conceived of in isolation or as an all-encompassing entity. Rather, our interest is in how value derives from, gives rise to, and interacts with other equally complex social concepts, such as power, authority, wealth, and equality/inequality.

The study of the past is more than just the study of ancient people, artifacts, events, and processes. At a broader, behavioral level, it is more about the relationship between people, material objects, processes, and space or place (cf. Reid et al. 1975:864). Consequently the blatancy of “place,” together with the physical corporeality of the “body,” cannot be taken out of the equation. Bodies, places, and things are all active agents in the construction of value, as are the range of terms and semiotic constructions that take shape in the language of numbers and quantification within any given society. These are all integral components in the ways people interact with their environment and with each other. Before we discuss why place, body, object, and number are important contexts of the formulation and expression of value, it is useful first to lay out what we mean by value and thereafter to contextualize, albeit briefly, our discussion within the broader history of the study of value.

THE MEANING OF VALUE

Several chapters in this volume offer various specific meanings, as well as etymologies, of value and of related words and concepts. We do not wish to reiterate these here, since specific meanings are applied to specific contexts and case studies. Instead, we offer a more general meaning of value, one that shaped the trajectory of the seminar that inspired this volume. Our effort to define value—and we hasten to add *in its usage in English*—takes into account a cautionary note enunciated by Barbara Herrnstein Smith:

Like certain other terms, such as “meaning,” “truth,” and “reality,” that have strong currency in everyday speech and also long histories as the focus of philosophical analysis, the term “value” seems to name an aspect of the world so fundamental to our thinking—so elementary and at the same time so general—as to be both irreducible and irreplaceable:

it defies attempts to analyze it into simpler concepts, and efforts to explain, define or even paraphrase it seem obliged sooner or later to return to the term itself.

As can be seen from the following extracts, the *Oxford English Dictionary* [1961, 12:29-30, 326] solves the problem of recursive definition by defining “value” in terms of “worth” and vice versa:

VALUE.

1. The equivalent (in material worth) of a specified sum or amount . . .
2. Worth or worthiness (of persons) in respect of rank or personal qualities. *Obs[olete]* b. Worth or efficacy in combat or warfare; manliness, valor.
3. The relative status of a thing, or the estimate in which it is held, according to its supposed worth, usefulness or importance . . .

WORTH.

4. Pecuniary value; price, money. B. The equivalent of a specified sum or amount.
5. The relative value of a thing in respect of its qualities or of the estimation in which it is held” [Smith 1995:178].

Smith goes on to distinguish that in English, value has always maintained two related but nevertheless distinct meanings. These two senses of the word involve two key ideas that are not the same: *amount* on the one hand, and *comparison* on the other (Smith 1995:178–179). The first of these is the material or monetary *equivalence in exchange*. This is the classic, economic sense, as in the price of an object in any market, sometimes referred to as exchange value (Smith 1995:178). The second broad sense of value is not monetary. Moreover, it is “not obviously or necessarily material, but a more abstract matter of relative quantity or measure. Examples of the value of something (or someone) in this second and rather more elusive sense include its relative effectiveness in performing some function or meeting some need, the relative degree of satisfaction it gives someone, its comparative handiness or suitability for advancing some purpose, and the object’s (or person’s) rank in scale” (Smith 1995:178). Although straightforwardly defined, it is this second sense of value that gave rise to notions of desire and fetishism, as we shall see. Consequently, it would be wrong to impose a straitjacket on the meaning of value, for the concepts of *amount* and *comparison* relate to an exceptionally broad range of practices and domains of human life (Smith 1995:179; see also Bourdieu 1984; Mukařovský 1970; Smith 1988). “Value”—not only as it is used in English—is polyvalent. At the same time, it is important not to go too far in the opposite direction—that is, to water down the meaning of value to such an extent that the term becomes nebulous and diffuse. An example may be the concept of pure aesthetic value—or beauty—as developed by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) (see Kant 2007 [1790]; Porter, this volume; Smith 1995:180).

This said, that the terms “value” and “values” are linked is not a freak of English. It is striking that in Greek, *timē* means both honor *and* price. Moreover, as Gary Urton (chapter 23) argues, a variety of terms in Quechua collectively echo forms

of value described in English. These include groups of terms related to barter, sale, and exchange; comparative and serial value; and intrinsic value.

As Smith (1995:180) goes on to note: “Although the term ‘value’ is characteristically produced in singular and genitive constructions (that is, as ‘*the value of*’ something), it does not seem possible to reduce the value of anything, including an artwork or work of literature, to a single, simple property or possession. It is sometimes useful, therefore, to think of ‘value’ as a general name given to a variety of different positive *effects*.”

The key terms “amount” and “comparison” are closely related to two theories of value in economics. The first, what may be termed the intrinsic theory of value, posits that the value of an object (or of any commodity or service) is intrinsic and is thus contained in the item itself. Most such theories, going back to the work of Adam Smith (1723–1790), are essentially based on the costs, not least the labor, involved in the process of producing an item (or service). In contrast, the subjective theory of value posits that value is quite distinct from price as arrived at through exchange. Consequently, the value of an item, commodity, or service can be ascertained only by a “value judgment,” which is to say that individuals choose for themselves what price they are willing to pay for any given object or service. Inherent in the subjective theory of value is the ability of an item (any object or service) to satisfy the desires of a given individual. The great champion of subjective value was Carl Menger (1840–1921), founder of the Austrian School of Economics, to whom we shall return. But the story of the articulation of theories of value does not begin in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries A.D. Rather, it spirals back to a more distant past.

HOMO ECONOMICUS: FROM ARISTOTLE TO KARL MARX AND BEYOND

Although the term *Homo economicus*—or *Homo oeconomicus*²—first appeared in the early twentieth century (Persky 1995 traces the term to Pareto 1971 [1906]), the concept of the “economic man,” at least in the modern era, can be traced back to critics of John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) (see Persky 1995). Mill (1874) believed that an arbitrary, though useful, definition of humans was that they inevitably sought to obtain the greatest amount of necessities, conveniences, and luxuries with the smallest quantity of labor and self-denial. For Mill, humans are essentially rational and broadly self-interested actors, able to make cogent judgments toward their own subjectively defined ends. Mill’s ideas subsequently gave rise to all sorts of related ones, not least “the principle of least effort” (Shackleton and Prins 1992). But ideas of humans as economic animals have an older history. Although earlier scholars, such as Plato, provided sketchy descriptions of market creation, economic analysis proper begins, at least in the Western world, with Aristotle’s *Politics*. For Aristotle

(384–322 B.C.), the fundamental idea is that material goods are tools of human functioning, but with clearly prescribed limits that float between the “natural” on the one hand, and the “unnatural” and immoral on the other. The relevant passage in Aristotle (*Politics* 1.10; trans. T. A. Sinclair) is worth quoting:

The answer also is clear to the question raised at the beginning whether or not it is the business of one engaged in household economy or in political economy to make money and add to property. The answer is that it is not: these should be at hand for his use from the start. Household management ought not to need to make money, any more than political science needs to make men, who are the material which nature provides and which political science takes and uses. Similarly nature can be expected to provide food, whether from land or sea or in some other way. It is only as a result of that that the economist can perform his duty of distributing these supplies. So weaving is not the art of producing wool but of using it, though it is also the art of knowing good yarns from bad and the most suitable types for different purposes. . . . Money-making then . . . is of two kinds; one which is necessary and acceptable, which we may call administrative; the other, the commercial, which depends on exchange, is justly regarded with disapproval, since it arises not from nature but from men’s dealings with each other. Very much disliked also is the practice of charging interest; and the dislike is fully justified, for interest is a yield arising out of money itself, not a product of that for which money was provided. Money was intended to be a means of exchange, interest represents an increase in the money itself. We speak of it as a yield, as a crop or a litter; for each animal produces its like and interest is money produced out of money. Hence of all ways of getting wealth this is most contrary to nature.

In this passage, Aristotle contrasts two different aspects of what may be termed value.³ In dealing with weaving, Aristotle clearly states that it is not the art of producing wool that is important but the process of *using* it. Here it is *use value* that is critical. In the same section, Aristotle points to commercial *exchange*, which he disdained, and highlights the reality, already in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., of *exchange value*. These two aspects of the meaning of value have recurred throughout the history of the Western world. They are perhaps nowhere more clearly stated than in the work of Adam Smith (1994:31 [1776]):

The word value, it is to be observed, has two different meanings, and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular object, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys. The one may be called “value in use”; the other “value in exchange.” The things that have greatest value in use have frequently little or no value in exchange; and on the contrary, those which have the greatest value in exchange have frequently little or no value in use.

Aristotle’s economic and political ideas did not go unnoticed, and they entered the canon of Western thought in part because they, not least his moralizing about material acquisition, appealed to church fathers. Aristotle’s work resurfaced in the thirteenth century A.D. in the writings of Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274), whose influence on the economic thought of the Middle Ages was well mapped out by Karl Polanyi (1971:79). Aristotle’s ideas segued well with various aspects of concern to the church. Among other issues, value loomed large. For example, where

is value when the merchant evidently creates nothing and the usurer earns money as he sleeps?³ As Parry and Bloch (1989:3) note, the “laborer is worthy of hire, but it was not clear that the merchant and the money-lender labored. It was essentially this idea of material production as the source of value (Le Goff 1980:61) which prompted Tawney (1972:48) to remark that ‘the true descendant of the doctrines of Aquinas is the labor theory of value.’”

The fundamental tenet of classical economics, that labor is the source of all value, has had a remarkably good run. Smith (1994:33 [1776]) encapsulated the concept succinctly: “The value of any commodity . . . is equal to the quantity of labour which it enables him to purchase or command. Labour, therefore, is the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities.” This, in turn, gave rise to all sorts of simplistic equations; one of the most cited is Smith’s statement, “If among a nation of hunters, for example, it usually costs twice the labour to kill a beaver which it does to kill a deer, one beaver should naturally exchange for or be worth two deer. It is natural that what is usually the produce of two days or two hours labour, should be worth double of what is usually the produce of one day’s or hour’s labour” (Smith 1994:53 [1776]).⁴ Smith tempers this by conceding that allowance should be made for superior “hardship” in the labor required to produce a particular object or commodity, as well as for uncommon dexterity and ingenuity.

Smith was a great believer in “Do ut des” (I give so that you may give), or “Give me what I want, and you shall have that which you want.” This idea is nowhere more elegantly stated than in his classic passage about the butcher, brewer, and baker: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages” (Smith 1994:15 [1776]). Smith also believed that the free market (to which we shall return), while appearing chaotic and unrestrained, is actually guided by an “invisible hand” to produce not only the right amount but also a variety of goods. In his discussion of restraints on particular imports from foreign countries, Smith (1994:484–485 [1776]) writes:

By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.

Adam Smith’s labor theory of value was much refined by David Ricardo (1772–1823). In addition to labor, Ricardo (1817:2) stressed scarcity: “Possessing utility, commodities derive their exchangeable value from two sources: from their scarcity, and from their quantity of labour required to obtain them.” In his *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, Ricardo (1817:11) refined Smith’s labor theory by stating, “It is the comparative quantity of commodities which labour will produce

that determines their present or past relative value, and not the comparative commodities, which are given to the labourer in exchange for his labour.”

Perhaps Ricardo’s greatest contribution to classical economics was his explanation of economic rent, which was consistent with a labor theory of value, the cornerstone of which was his explanation of prices. For Ricardo, the quantity of labor used by the least efficient producer of a good set the market price of that commodity: “The exchangeable value of all commodities . . . is always regulated . . . by those who continue to produce them under the most unfavorable circumstances” (Ricardo 1817:59). Ricardo was among the first to describe the interaction between demand and the quality of a natural resource. He also attempted to explain the origin of profit as a return to capital based on a labor theory of value. Building on Smith’s example of the value of a hunter’s catch relative to the time used to catch the animal, Ricardo (1817:17) stated: “The value of these animals would be regulated, not solely by the time necessary for their destruction, but also by the time and labor necessary for providing the hunter’s capital [tools].” Thus Ricardo also recognized the reality and importance of indirect labor costs (see Ricardo 1823).

Moreover, in his discussion of value, Ricardo (1817:2–3) drew attention to the importance of scarcity for determining the value of anything, though noting that such commodities formed only a very small part of the many goods and services exchanged at any given time. But “scarcity” alone is not what Ricardo actually describes. The relevant passage is worth citing in full:

There are some commodities, the value of which is determined by their scarcity alone. No labour can increase the quantity of such goods, and therefore their value cannot be lowered by an increased supply. Some rare statues and pictures, scarce books and coins, wines of a peculiar quality, which can be made from grapes grown on a particular soil, of which there is a very limited quantity, are all of this description. Their value is wholly independent of the quantity of labour originally necessary to produce them, and varies with the varying wealth and inclinations of those who are desirous to possess them [Ricardo 1817:2–3].

Not only does Ricardo articulate a form of art value by enumerating “rare statues and pictures,” he also throws desire into the mix. In a similar vein, Igor Kopytoff (1986) argues that there are two types of value: that of objects that can be valued as commodities, which can be compared to other objects, and that of unique objects, ones that defy comparison (cf. Bloch and Parry 1989:12–16). A natural extension of this line of reasoning is Lucien Karpik’s recent study (2010), in which he discusses the theoretical underpinnings and methodological tools needed to analyze markets for “singularities.” Examples of singularities include Ricardo’s fine wines and art-work, but Karpik also adds movies, novels, music, and the professional services of certain doctors and lawyers. Hence singularities can be both goods and services, but ones that are multidimensional, incommensurable, and of unclear quality.

Following in the footsteps of Smith and Ricardo, Karl Marx (1818–1883) also believed that labor was the source of all true value. This is clearly articulated early on in *Das Kapital*:

We see then that that which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour-time socially necessary for its production. Each individual commodity, in this connexion, is to be considered as an average sample of its class. Commodities, therefore, in which equal quantities of labour are embodied, or which can be produced in the same time, have the same value" [Marx 1906:46 (1867)].

Like many of his predecessors, Marx (1906:42–43 [1867]) stressed the difference between use value and exchange value, but he went on to apply this same twofold character—use and exchange value—to labor (Marx 1906:48 [1867]). Indeed, his explanation for profit consistent with a labor theory of value was one of his many important contributions. Marx noted that the value of labor was determined and defined by the same rules that applied to all commodities. The value of labor was therefore set by the quantity of labor required to produce, which entailed the time needed to work to earn wages sufficient to purchase all the commodities needed by the laborer and his or her family. The wage rate was the subsistence wage rate. "The minimum limit of the value of labour-power is determined by the value of the commodities, without the daily supply of which the labourer cannot renew his vital energy, consequently by the value of those means of subsistence that are physically indispensable" (Marx 1906:192 [1867]). However, laborers often worked longer than the time needed to produce subsistence commodities but were paid only the equivalent of subsistence commodities. This was because of the superior position of the employer (capitalist) and the fact that laborers had only their labor to sell. Marx (1906:342–353 [1867]) used the term "surplus value" to refer to commodities produced above subsistence, and this surplus value was profit.

Two other aspects of Marx's contribution to value studies need to be addressed here. The first is the circulation of value to produce capital: "Value . . . now becomes value in process, money in process, and, as such, capital. It comes out of circulation, enters into it again, preserves and multiplies itself within its circuit, comes back out of it with expanded bulk, and begins the same round ever afresh" (Marx 1906:173 [1867]). We shall return to the circulation (and deposition) of commodities of value within the context of the ancient world. The second important aspect is what Marx (1906:81–96 [1867]) calls the fetishism of commodities, an influential term subsequently used by Arjun Appadurai (1986a) and exploited to dizzying heights by David Graeber (2001:229–261). As Marx notes:

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour. . . . A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social

things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. . . . This I call Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities [Marx 1906:81, 83 (1867)].

Marx's "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" open all sorts of new avenues of interpretation, many of which have been pursued by economic historians and anthropologists. At a higher level, Marx contributed a further insight by ascribing historical importance to cultural traditions. In the 1852 edition of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, he stated: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (Marx 1951:247 [1852]). Trigger (2006:519) elaborates, "Marx made a major contribution to understanding how change occurred in human societies when he observed that human beings make their own history not on their own but within the context of institutions, beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior inherited from the past." This is a central precept of a historical and comparative understanding of value, one that is pursued to considerable depth and complexity in this volume.

The first volume of the first German edition of *Das Kapital* appeared in 1867. Menger's *Principles of Economics* was published four years later. In his study, Menger (1950 [1871]) brought to the fore the subjective character of the measure of value. By looking at the economic underpinnings of the value of the services of land, capital, and labor, Menger sought to define laws governing the value of goods of a "higher order." In so doing, he drew a somewhat more nuanced distinction between use value and exchange value (Menger 1950:chapter 6 [1871]) and in the process came up with the subjective theory of value, which is distinct from exchange value or price. Consequently, the value of an item, commodity, or service can be ascertained only by "value judgment," which is to say that individuals choose for themselves what price they are willing to pay for any given object or service. Inherent in the subjective theory of value is the ability of an item (any object or service) to satisfy the desires of a given individual. Menger's subjective evaluations of the usefulness of various goods and services are sometimes referred to as marginal utility, a term coined by Friedrich von Wieser (1851–1926), who succeeded Menger at the University of Vienna in 1903. For Menger, trade is the result of people's deliberate attempts to improve their well-being, not an innate "disposition to truck, barter, and exchange," as suggested by Smith (1994:18 [1776]). The exact quantities of goods exchanged (their prices) are determined by the values individuals attach to marginal units of these goods. A similar notion of value was articulated by Georg Simmel (1990 [1907]), who saw exchange and desire as the critical components; thus the value of an object is measured by how much the person desiring it is willing to pay.

It is important here to mention the work of Karl Polanyi (1886–1964), particularly his book *The Great Transformation* (Polanyi 1944), as it follows squarely in the tradition of Smith and Ricardo but with interesting twists. Polanyi classified both Smith and Ricardo as exponents of formalism. In addition to coming up with the term “formalism,” Polanyi coined the term “substantivism,” an empirical approach that focuses on processes through which a society provides itself with material goods, including food and shelter. For Polanyi, human nature lies behind economic theory, and here Graeber’s assessment of Polanyi’s contribution is worth citing, as it draws attention to the rift between traditional economics and alternative approaches. For Polanyi:

Human beings are driven by desires: these desires are unlimited. Human beings are also rational, insofar as they will always tend to calculate the most efficient way of getting what they want. Hence, if they are left to their own devices, something like a “free market” will inevitably develop. Of course, for 99% of human history none ever did, but that’s just because of the interference of one or another state or feudal elite. . . . The beauty of Polanyi’s book is that it demonstrates just how completely wrong that common wisdom is [Graeber 2001:10].

The theories of value of Aristotle, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Carl Menger, and Karl Polanyi discussed above form the underpinnings of traditional theories of value in classical economics. All are overarching theories, veritable blueprints that attempt to describe any and all contexts, or theories that could be forced onto any context. It is as if the value of goods and services is somehow divorced from social realities and relations; “society” itself is taken out of the equation.

Modern economics as a discipline has veered into several different directions, which are beyond the scope of this study, but one of the most notable is the use of game theory, which clearly derives from classic economics. Boiled to its essence, game theory mathematically attempts to capture human behavior in strategic situations—“games”—in which the success of an individual in making choices depends on the choices of others (see, among others, Myerson 1991). Various scholars working with game theory have built onto the foundational earlier contributions of John von Neumann (1928) and von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern (2004 [1944]) in interesting ways, extending the application of game theory in many fields, not least to biology (e.g., Harsanyi 1974; Harsanyi and Selten 1988; Maynard Smith 1982; Maynard Smith and Price 1973; Nash 1950; Selten 1970). Most recently, Brian Skyrms has focused on the evolution of social norms using evolutionary game theory (e.g., Skyrms 1996, 2004). In so doing he has contributed important insights into political philosophy, as well as the philosophy of language, biology, and the social sciences (see also Skyrms 2010). But like the traditional economic theories of value discussed above, modern economic theories strive to be overarching in that they describe, and can thus be applied to, any social context.

If value is socially constructed and thus defined by the culture that produced it—or, as Marx put it, within the context of institutions, beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior inherited from the past—it follows that the study of past societies can provide significant insights into modern patterns of exchange, value, and wealth. Added to this is the fact that no single factor, such as labor, utility, or energy, is by itself both a necessary and sufficient condition for the construction of value. Moreover, the stranglehold of Western notions, beliefs, and ideas fails to do justice to the wide range of human experience across time and space.

The field was thus ripe for a new and more vigorous approach, one that looked beyond the concerns of economists. This is where anthropological and sociological theories of value come to the fore, by attempting to expand on traditional theories of value employed by economists. The key difference between economics and anthropology is neatly stated by Graeber (2001:8): “Economics . . . is about predicting individual behavior; anthropology is about understanding collective differences.”

HOMO ANTHROPOLOGICUS TO THE RESCUE

Many of the founding fathers of classical economics looked to a wide range of contemporary cultural contexts, as well as Classical (Greco-Roman) literature, to account for some aspect of their work. For example, Adam Smith, in trying to explain the origin and use of money, cast his net far and wide in time and place:

Many different commodities, it is probable, were successively both thought of and employed for this purpose. In the rude ages of society, cattle are said to have been the common instrument of commerce; and, although they must have been a most inconvenient one, yet in old times we find things were frequently valued according to the number of cattle which had been given in exchange for them. The armour of Diomedes, says Homer, cost only nine oxen; but that of Glaucus cost an hundred oxen [*Iliad* 6.236; cf. Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 33.1]. Salt is said to be the common instrument of commerce and exchanges in Abyssinia; a species of shells in some parts of the coast of India; dried cod in Newfoundland; tobacco in Virginia; sugar in some of our West India colonies; hides or dressed leather in some other countries; and there is at this day a village in Scotland where it is not uncommon, I am told, for a workman to carry nails instead of money to the baker's shop or the ale-house” [Smith 1994:25 (1776)].

Despite all these different commodities, Smith went on to stress the ascent and importance of metals, which were eventually preferred on account of their durability and easy divisibility. The problem remained one of a definition of value that made sense only in the modern world of universal fungibility. The time had obviously come for a new approach that looked beyond traditional economics.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century there was a reaction to the universalizing tendencies of classical economics. The first salvoes came from a predictable quarter: anthropology and sociology. Here was the rise of *Homo*

anthropologicus, a knight in shining armor who was ready to put “society” back into economics. In many ways, the place from which the reaction came, though ultimately understandable, was initially unpredictable: the Pacific. Among the first voices was Franz Boas (1858–1942). In a series of studies, ranging from 1897 to 1966, on the Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwakiutl) of the Northwest Coast of North America, Boas (1897, 1966, the latter with reference to earlier works) focused on the potlatch—which in local jargon means “to give away” or “a gift”—a festival where a family, leading man, or chief hosts a feast in the family house, the primary purpose being the redistribution of wealth (see, among others, Jonaitis 1991). In the words of Mary Douglas (1990:viii), “The potlatch is an example of a total system of giving.” By engaging the honor of both giver and recipient, each gift is part of a system of reciprocity, involving items of material or spiritual value. The fact that every gift has to be returned in a specified manner establishes a perpetual cycle of exchange that can transcend generations (Douglas 1990:viii). What Boas brought to the fore was a system of exchange very different from those of classic Western economics.

A few decades later, Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942), in his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, among the earliest sustained, field-based studies of economic anthropology, took aim at the rationality of Mill’s “economic man.” Malinowski saw a similarly different (from Boas’s case study) form of economic behavior on the Trobriand Islands on the other side of the Pacific:

Another notion which must be exploded, once and for ever, is that of the Primitive Economic Man of some current economic textbooks . . . prompted in all his actions by a rationalistic conception of self-interest, and achieving his aims directly and with the minimum of effort. Even *one* well established instance should show how preposterous is this assumption. The primitive Trobriander furnishes us with such an instance, contradicting this fallacious theory. In the first place . . . work is not carried out on the principle of the least effort. On the contrary, much time and energy is spent on wholly unnecessary effort, that is, from a utilitarian point of view. . . . The most important point about this is, however, that all, or almost all the fruits of his work, and certainly any surplus which he can achieve by extra effort, goes not to the man himself, but to his relatives-in-law . . . it may be said that about three quarters of a man’s crops go partly as tribute to the chief, partly as his due to his sister’s (or mother’s) husband and family” [Malinowski 1922:60–61].

Here were cultures on both sides of the Pacific where the leading individuals, rather than “rationally” accumulating wealth, as any good *Homo economicus* would do, actually vied with one another to see who could give away the most. What is particularly interesting about Malinowski is that he appears to have taken to his fieldwork, as Douglas (1990:vii) explains, “the idea that commerce and gift are two separate kinds of activity, the first based on exact recompense, the second spontaneous, pure of ulterior motive.”

Although scholars such as Boas got the ball rolling, the one who elevated the concept of the gift and put it all together was Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), the quintessential *Homo anthropologicus* and one of the most influential anthropologists of the twentieth century. For Mauss, there was no such thing as a pure gift; the very

idea was a contradiction, nonsense. Building on earlier work with Henri Hubert on “sacrifice” (Hubert and Mauss 1964 [1899])—that is, a gift that compels a deity to give in return—Mauss’s *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques* (*The Gift*) (Mauss 1990 [1925]) went further by comparing the north-western American potlatch with the comprehensive competitive giving system of Melanesia, together with a variant in Polynesia. These systems derived their energy from individuals who faced discredit and disgrace from default and from beliefs that spirits would punish them. “The system would not be total if it did not include personal emotions and religion” (Douglas 1990:ix). As Mauss (1990:42 [1925]) put it, “The obligation to reciprocate worthily is imperative. One loses face for ever if one does not reciprocate, or if one does not carry out destruction of equivalent value. . . . The punishment for failure to reciprocate is slavery for debt.”

But this was only the starting point. Mauss also looked at functioning systems in other parts of the world where individuals vied with one another in generosity, including those of the Inuit (Mauss 1990:14–16 [1925]) and Australian Aborigines (Mauss 1990:76 [1925]). But beyond looking at living societies, Mauss (1990:47–64 [1925]) sought precedents (what he viewed as “survivals”) for his principles in ancient economies and ancient systems of law, including personal and real law in ancient Rome, the theory of the gift in classical Hindu law, the pledge and gift in Germanic law, and similar principles in Celtic and Chinese law. As Mauss (1990:75 [1925]) stated succinctly:

If some equivalent reason animates the Trobriand or American Indian chiefs, the Andaman clans, etc., or once motivated generous Hindus, and Germanic or Celtic nobles, as regards their gifts and expenditure, it is not the cold reasoning of the merchant, the banker, and the capitalist.

Mauss’s *The Gift* is a perfect example of a total social phenomenon, one that involves legal, economic, moral, religious, aesthetic, and other dimensions and that has had considerable influence in each of these areas in subsequent comparative analyses. For Mauss, gift exchange was related as much to individuals and groups as to the objects themselves. His analysis thus called into question social conventions and economic systems that had been taken for granted for generations. But *The Gift* did more, by introducing a realistic idea of individuals in a premarket social system, thereby breathing fresh life into the study of not only anthropology but also economics. As Douglas (1990:xiii–xiv) elaborates, Mauss also managed to incorporate individuals acting in their own interests, and in this he discovered a mechanism by which individual interests combine to make a social system without engaging in market exchange: “The gift cycle echoes Adam Smith’s invisible hand: gift complements market in so far as it operates where the latter is absent” (Douglas 1990:xiv).

A primary influence on Mauss was his uncle Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), with whom he founded *Année sociologique*. (They also coauthored *Primitive Classification*, Durkheim and Mauss 1963 [1903].) By employing positivist methods, Durkheim (cf.

1893, 1912) sought to establish sociology as a science. From this perspective, *The Gift* segued well into Durkheim's central project by producing a theory that could be validated by observation (see Douglas 1990:xii). Despite its scientific pretensions, the search for objectivity remains one of the great contributions of Durkheim and Mauss and a cornerstone for anthropology, sociology, and related disciplines.

The influence of Mauss was profound; his work provided the backbone for numerous seminal studies, from those of Edward Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) (see Evans-Pritchard 1940, 1951; Lévi-Strauss 1949) to those of Douglas and Isherwood (1996 [1979]) and Graeber (2001). But perhaps the scholars who took up and ran with the challenge of *The Gift* the most were Christopher Gregory (1980, 1982, cf. 1998), Marilyn Strathern (especially 1984a, 1984b, 1988, 1992, 1997 [1991]), Nancy Munn (especially 1983, 1986), and Annette Weiner (1985, 1992). What all four scholars share in common is their focus on Melanesia. Gregory effectively showed that gift economies personify objects whereas commodity economies do not. In the former, objects given take on the qualities of the people involved; the latter establishes an equivalence of value between objects. These are two very different concepts.

Here, Marshall Sahlins's discussion of how value has worked in traditional ethnographic contexts is important. For example, in his discussion of whale teeth as the highest of Fijian valuables, Sahlins (1993:22–23) states:

In Radcliffe-Brown's terms, they were goods of supreme social value, with the power of constituting greater social relationships and totalities. Ritually presented in the appropriate way, as transactions of chiefs, they arranged wars, assassinations, and noble marriages, made and unmade political alliances, saved villages and kingdoms from extermination, supplicated benefits from the god. In respect of their capacity to create society and to give life and death, whale teeth were like the god . . . the more whale teeth in circulation, the more power in existence in the Fiji Islands.

Strathern's great contribution was elegantly simple: she threw women into the mix (Strathern 1988; see also Weiner 1992). By demonstrating how Eurocentric dualities of nature and culture, female and male, subject and object distorted rather than clarified interpretations of society in Melanesia, Strathern (1988) developed an original approach to gender as something fluid. She came up with the notion of "permeable and partible" persons and things, which developed into highly influential analytical concepts.

Munn (1986) added that value lies in action—more particularly in the manner in which people represent the importance of their actions to *themselves*. What comes to the fore, therefore, is fame—which we see as a form of intrinsic value. This idea is not limited to the island of Gawa, where she carried out her fieldwork. When Achilles, the quintessential Greek hero, is given the choice between a long and happy life lived in obscurity and immortal fame (*kleos aphthiton*) but death on the battlefield at Troy, he chooses the latter, and his fame remains to this day undying.

The best-known and most often cited concept that Weiner (1985, 1992) brought to the fore was that of “inalienable objects,” a term deriving from Mauss’s *immeuble*. For Mauss, the term “inalienable” applied to certain gifts that, even after being given away, were still felt in some sense to belong to the giver. Moreover, the significance of the gift cannot be alienated or disengaged from the relationships of those who own the object. As Weiner (1992:33) states: “What makes a possession inalienable is its exclusive and cumulative identity with a particular series of owners through time. Its history is authenticated by fictive or true genealogies, origin myths, sacred ancestors, and gods. In this way, inalienable possessions are transcendent treasures to be guarded against all the exigencies that might force their loss.” Weiner’s work, building on Mauss, provided the grounding and the terminology for conceiving of value as constructed over time in cumulative processes, such as the movement of objects from one individual to the next in a network of prestige.

The stage was thus set for a new type of value that did not rely on Western economics. This is not to say there were no Maussian detractors. One of the most influential was Pierre Bourdieu (1977:171–172; cf. 1997), who adopted something of a formalist stance by returning to gift exchange as more or less an act of generosity and by seeing all economies as based on self-interested calculation, always involving “rational” decisions. What Bourdieu did, however, was to articulate the notion of cultural capital—*le capital culturel*—which refers to nonfinancial assets, especially educational or intellectual assets that might promote social mobility beyond economic means. Bourdieu, together with Jean-Claude Passeron (1979:14 [1964]), argued that cultural habits and inherited dispositions were fundamentally important because culture shares many properties that are characteristic of economic capital. Consequently, cultural habits and dispositions were a resource that could not only generate profits but could also be monopolized by individuals and groups and could even be transmitted from one generation to the next (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979 [1964]; see also Lareau and Weininger 2003).

As influential as it was, Mauss’s attempt to apply his insights and, more specifically, the theory of the gift to the contemporary world of industrial society, as he sought to do in the final chapter of *Essai sur le don* (1990:65–83 [1925]), in the words of Douglas (1990:xv) was “very weak. . . . Taking the theory straight from its context in full-blown gift economies to a modern political issue was really jumping the gun.” We shall return to Mauss, but if we as archaeologists look for a moment beyond the people in any living social system to the object, then what Mauss (1990 [1925]) established—together with others such as Boas (1897) and Malinowski (1922)—was that certain objects circulated without necessarily being consumed. The essence of this idea continued in the work of later scholars, including Georges Bataille (1933; see also 1967; Stoekl 1997), who focused on objects that were intentionally destroyed, and others who pointed to a whole slew of items of value that did not circulate and were not consumed (cf. Owens 1999).

The circulation, deposition, and destruction of objects and the fact that they could function as active agents was a theme effectively explored by many scholars, among whom the work of Arjun Appadurai (1986b) and Alfred Gell (1998) stands out. Their contributions, together with those of Viviana Zelizer (1997), have proved highly influential to the understanding of value.

In a single essay, Appadurai (1986a) brought into being terms that have reverberated throughout anthropology and archaeology, not least in this volume: “the politics of value”; “regimes of value”; “tournaments of value.” In the opening paragraph of the essay, he writes:

Economic exchange creates value. Value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged. Focusing on the things that are exchanged, rather than simply on the forms or functions of exchange, makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is *politics*, construed broadly. This argument . . . justifies the conceit that commodities, like persons, have social lives [Appadurai 1986a:3].

By focusing on the use and circulation of objects in various contexts, Appadurai (1986a, 1986b), together with Kopytoff (1986) and others, highlights human transactions and motivations as key to understanding the meaning that humans attribute to things. For Appadurai, at the core of any given social context lie specific social and political mechanisms that structure and regulate taste, exchange, and desire, however complex these may be. By focusing on these socially regulated processes of circulation and by looking at “things” as leading social lives, it is possible to uncover various ways in which people find value in things and things give value to social relations (see Hoskins 1998). For archaeologists working with the material record, it is easy to see the lure of the social life of things. Despite detractors (e.g. Graeber 2001:30–33), Appadurai’s “politics of value,” together with his “regimes of value” and “tournaments of value,” remain useful ways of thinking about value and its forms of construction. These ideas deserve to be developed and tweaked, not dismissed outright.

In so many ways, Alfred Gell took the notion of the agency of objects to a higher theoretical level by positing a theory that departed radically from all previous interpretations of art, including Jean Baudrillard’s (1968) discussion of authenticity in the evaluation of art and even Walter Benjamin’s (1968 [1936]) discussion of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. By pointing to the shortcomings of aesthetic theories, Gell emphasized art as a form of action and the making of things as a means of influencing the thoughts and actions of others. For Gell (1998:3), aesthetic judgments “are only interior mental acts; art objects, on the other hand, are produced and circulated in the external physical and social world,” and this “production and circulation has to be sustained by certain social processes of an objective kind, which are connected to other social processes (exchange, politics, religion, kinship, etc.).” Gell also argued that it was doubtful whether every “culture” had a notion that was comparable to what we call aesthetics: “I think that the desire to see the art of other cultures aesthetically tells us more about our own ideology and its quasi-religious

reverence of art objects as aesthetic talismans, than it does about these other cultures” (Gell 1995; 1998:3). In his theory, art objects and people merge into one another: “Art objects . . . have to be considered as ‘persons’” (Gell 1998:9). Thus Gell cogently saw art objects as embodying complex intentionalities. Indeed, objects and art mediate social agency. Gell’s dense study, which explores psychology, philosophy, linguistics, and even religious practices, cannot be easily summarized, but he came close to the gist of his argument in the following statement:

The art object is whatever is inserted into the “slot” provided for art objects in the system of terms and relations envisaged in the theory. . . . Nothing is decidable in advance about the nature of this object, because the theory is premised on the idea that the nature of the art object is a function of the social-relational matrix in which it is embedded. It has no “intrinsic” nature [here we may well add “value”], independent of the relational context [Gell 1998:7].

Gell’s work adds all sorts of significant elements onto that of Appadurai and has the potential to contribute to the study of material culture in innovative ways, beyond the discussions of agency in archaeology (well summarized in Trigger 2006:468–470 [with references]; cf. Dobres and Robb 2000).

Although often overlooked by anthropologists studying value, the contribution of Viviana Zelizer (1997) is singular inasmuch as it shows that, in the very heart of the modern industrial Western world, there is much more to the meaning of money—and indeed commodities—than economic theory can ever uncover or even imply. In her lucid study, Zelizer questions, if not overturns, beliefs in the power of money to corrupt, standardize, and depersonalize social networks and ties. By looking at pin money, paychecks, poor relief, and other currencies, she turns on its head the “powerful ideology of our time that money is a single, interchangeable, absolutely impersonal instrument—the very essence of our rationalizing modern civilization” (Zelizer 1997:1). She effectively shows how people have invented their own forms of currency in ways that baffle market theorists, incorporating funds into webs of friendship and familial relations and otherwise varying the process by which spending and saving take place. As Zelizer states in her opening paragraph:

Money multiplies. Despite the commonsense idea that “a dollar is a dollar is a dollar,” everywhere we look people are constantly creating different kinds of money. This book explains the remarkably various ways in which people identify, classify, organize, use, segregate, manufacture, design, store, and even decorate monies as they cope with their multiple social relations.

The recent work of another scholar is important to note here. In his *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life* (2009), David Stark’s starting point is in trying to understand how industrial organization differed in capitalist and socialist economies (Stark 2009:xi). His initial target is the “peasant-workers” of socialist eastern Europe because their workdays spanned the world of socialist industry and privately held agricultural plots—with entrepreneurship at the overlap (Stark

2009:13). From this base, Stark's comparative sociology embarks on a heady ethnography, beginning with a machine tool company in late and postcommunist Hungary (Stark 2009:35–80) and moving on to a new media start-up in New York during and after the collapse of the Internet bubble (Stark 2009:81–117) and to a Wall Street investment bank whose trading room—together with many of its employees—was destroyed on 9/11 (Stark 2009:118–162). Following in the footsteps of Bruno Latour (e.g. 1987; Latour and Woolgar 1979), Stark (2009:163–203) moves from “field research” to “the field of research.” Stark brings to the fore “the dichotomy of value and values and the perennial ‘structure versus agency’” (Stark 2009:13–14). He argues that in many cases, multiple orders of worth are unavoidable and that there is much to be gained in harnessing the benefits of such “heterarchy.”

We have already referred in passing to Graeber's *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*, and his influence is clearly manifest: his name appears in many essays in this volume. Graeber's is certainly the most recent and most sustained attempt at offering a broadly synthetic theory of value, and his provocative study will remain standard reading for years to come. But how successful is Graeber's theory of value? More to the point, how usable is it, especially for those, such as archaeologists, who cannot directly observe living social systems? Although this is not the place to review Graeber's study, it is important to look at the underpinnings of his theory of value. Graeber begins with three large streams of thought that converge in the word “value”:

1. “values” in the sociological sense: conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life
2. “value” in the economic sense: the degree to which objects are desired, particularly as measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them
3. “value” in the linguistic sense, which goes back to the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (1966 [1907–1911]), and might be most simply glossed as “meaningful difference” [Graeber 2001:1–2].

Desire is key to Graeber's first two streams. He then launches into a discussion of “values” as opposed to “value.” As Graeber (2001:2) notes, anthropologists rarely make an effort to define values, let alone to make analysis of values part of anthropological theory, even though they often speak of them. For Graeber (2001:2), the “one great exception was during the late 1940s and early '50s, when Clyde Kluckhohn and a team of allied scholars at Harvard embarked on a major effort to place the issue of values at the center of anthropology. Kluckhohn's project, in fact, was to redefine anthropology itself as the comparative study of values” (see Kluckhohn 1951a, 1951b, 1956, 1961). The central issues in Kluckhohn's (1951b:395) definition of values are “conceptions of the desirable” and that these play some role in influencing people's choices between different courses of action (Graeber 2001:3). The intellectual trajectory of Kluckhohn's project, and the fact that it had no real successors, is well mapped out by Graeber (2001:2–5), who

concludes: “For all its sterility in practice, there is something appealing about Kluckhohn’s key idea: that what makes cultures different is not simply what they believe the world to [be] like, but what they feel one can justifiably demand from it. That anthropology . . . should be a comparative study of practical philosophies of life” (Graeber 2001:5).

For both Kluckhohn and Graeber, the crucial term is “desire,” or rather “desirable.” But in many ways, the term itself is a charged one, which many scholars use but few, including Graeber, clarify. As Michel Foucault (1990) has shown, although desire has been a preoccupation of modern discourse, it is not always clear what a discourse on desire might be (Butler 1995:369). As Judith Butler puts it, “If we consider the discourse on desire since Plato, it seems that language is bound up with desire in such a way that no exposition of desire can escape becoming implicated in that which it seeks to clarify” (Butler 1995:369).

What Graeber does provide is a solid overview of various economic, sociological, and anthropological theories of value that have made their way into the literature, from the influential (Mauss) to the obscure (Kluckhohn). His treatment of earlier work is not always evenhanded, however. Thus the work of Simmel, Polanyi, and Appadurai, to name only a few, is summarily dispatched to the waste bin of ideas that went nowhere. For Graeber there is no shortage of intellectual dead ends. On structuralism, he writes (Graeber 2001:16), “The results are by now more or less in . . . the consensus is that its greatest weak point is evaluation.”⁵

To move beyond this morass, Graeber synthesizes by picking and choosing insights from two intellectual giants—who may at first seem strange bedfellows—Marx and Mauss. Graeber (2001:152) explains: “In many ways I think his [Mauss’s] work and Marx’s form a perfect complement. Marx was a socialist with an ongoing interest in anthropology; Mauss, an anthropologist who, throughout his life, remained an active participant in socialist politics.” Thus Graeber not only presents his own idiosyncratic, highly personal vision of the possible shape a theory of value might take, but he highlights the relationship of anthropology as a discipline—his particular brand of anthropology—to social activism. But what follows—namely, his discussion of wampum beads and the Iroquois (Graeber 2001:117–149), as well as his revisiting of Mauss and the gift in the Pacific (Graeber 2001:151–228)—does not take us particularly far; nor does it ultimately clarify much concerning the broader concept of value. In fact, we return to a remarkably familiar place. On the one hand is the Western world and the power of market theory, the world of *Homo economicus*. On the other is the vanishing world of the potlatch and its cognates, the world of *Homo anthropologicus*. They may well represent the “two sides of the same false coin” (Graeber 2001:257), but they appear more like two parallel monoliths quite distinct from one another. Although Graeber (2001:259–261) points to a possible alternative theory of value, albeit a very elusive one, we move from desire to pleasure, while all along the form of the alternative remains just that: elusive.

We wish to move beyond Graeber's "two sides of the same false coin," for value is a culturally assigned attribute, suffused with paradox. To paraphrase from Stephen Houston's abstract submitted for our conference, which he was unable to complete as a paper due to circumstances beyond his control, value can be absolute or fluid; sometimes intrinsic, sometimes negotiable; subject to quantitative formulas yet disobedient to them. The paradox, in part, results from the complexities and vicissitudes of positive and negative valuation. Positive value centers on elements that induce contentment when present, discontent when absent. Negative value displeases and repels. Defined by contrast, positive and negative exist in relation to each other and arise from an ongoing transaction, conditioned by setting, that relates the abstract to the particular and back again. What they do not do, at least not necessarily, is hinge on whether an element is plentiful or scarce, possessed or dispossessed, quantifiable or unnumbered, although these very properties loom large in many cases. For archaeologists, relational systems of value prompt a consideration of the judgments by which people assign value, whether negative or positive, to that which is seen, felt, smelled, tasted, or heard—that is, to various ways that what is deemed valuable and desirable is constituted in material form. The emphasis on sensory input is only part of the story, however. Intangible properties or essences known to be present may also affect value. In all this, context is critical.

In the sketch summaries of both economic and anthropological theories of value presented above, there is a broad array of perspectives—a veritable arsenal—from which the past may be approached. In so many ways, the study of the past, particularly the archaeological past, can contribute to the discussion of value in significant ways precisely because of the importance archaeologists place on context. *All* our material—not just art objects—is a function of the social-relational matrix in which it is embedded, as Gell (1998:7) so nicely puts it.

FOUR WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT VALUE

The structure of this volume is organized around four overarching but closely interrelated themes: place value, body value, object value, and number value. We have never conceived of the four themes as immutable categories; rather they were chosen to serve as a focus for discussion and as a structure for exploring a variety of interrelated subject matter, particularly given the breadth of time and space this volume subsumes. As we have stressed, the categories are neither monolithic nor static; rather they are dynamic and intimately interrelated. At a very basic level, valuable objects or commodities are circulated by people, whether commercially exchanged in a market economy or as part of gifting in a nonmarket context, and are often deposited—or even destroyed—with the dead. Moreover, the dead are not consigned to empty, meaningless spaces; instead they are laid to rest in particular, usually highly sacralized places. As John Chapman (this volume; cf. Chapman 2000a)

reminds us, the four common resources used to build an ontological model are the persons, objects, and landscapes enchaind to the place in question, as well as the history of the place itself as contained in cultural memory. Running through each of the categories of value into which the contributions in this volume are organized are issues of identity, biography, memory, and nostalgia. These qualities become entangled in complicated ways with ideology, style, symbolism, and exchange.

In what follows, we provide overviews of the central issues, problems, and empirical data discussed in the various contributions in each thematic section. It is our hope that these overviews will not only provide the reader with a clear sense of the contents of the volume but will also aid in charting a desired path through this collection of articles.

Place Value

As Susan Alcock (this volume) forcefully states in her opening paragraph, there is nowhere that cannot be “place” to someone. Here it is important to distinguish between two related but different terms: “space” and “place.” In his seminal articulation of “space” and “place,” Yi-Fu Tuan (1977:3) notes that these “are familiar words denoting common experiences. We live in space. There is no space for another building on the lot. The Great Plains look spacious. Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other.” For Tuan (1977:7), the key term is “experience”—not only the nature of the experience but the experiential perspective of space and place. “Human beings, like other animals, feel at home on earth” (Tuan 1977:199). Tuan argues that places are defined in contrast to spaces that separate them and that place and space are inextricably linked to movement. As Tuan (1977:6) further notes, “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with *value* . . . if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause” [emphasis ours].

In anthropology, the concept of place, together with the related notion of landscape, has long had something of a submerged presence. This long-standing interest may be related to the heightened consciousness of an individual’s experience of different places—home and elsewhere—which is most poignantly felt in the anthropologist’s fieldwork in some “other” place. Such an awareness of place served on the one hand as a framing device, informing the way anthropologists bring their study into “view.” On the other hand, it served as the meaning that local people impute to their cultural and physical surroundings (see Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995; cf. Bender 1993). In a similar vein, many archaeologists treat places as passive, inert backdrops, against which social and political ideologies are staged. As Steven Kosiba (this volume) brings to the fore, the objects that circulate through places, together with the discourses that circulate about them, invest places with accumulative social value. In chapter 4, Kosiba argues that the political construction of value occurs *through* and not *over* place. That is, places, like objects and people,

are active agents. By focusing on Cuzco, Peru, the capital city and sacred center of the Inka Empire, Kosiba demonstrates how a general regime of value—borrowing the term from Appadurai (1986a)—is constituted at specific places by highly localized collective practices of destruction, commemoration, and conversion. As Kosiba stresses, instead of defining value as a quantifiable “category,” it is more useful to examine “valuation” as an ongoing and situated process of categorization through which people, places, and things are defined and objectified (with reference to Ollman 1976).

There are various ways that place can be valued. At its most basic level, at various times and in specific cultural contexts, place (as in land or real estate) can be expressed in terms of equivalency for weights or other measures of grain (e.g., Papadopoulos, this volume). In such contexts, place can be a perfectly fungible commodity. Other perspectives look to the creation of value through the inhabitation of a place (Ingold 1993; see also Urton, this volume).

In chapter 2, Chapman tackles the question of how places are valued. His starting point is all encompassing in that everything that we do takes place somewhere. For Chapman (this volume) “place value may be defined as the combined significance of available affordances, both physical and symbolic.” Chapman combines two forms of value first brought to the fore by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century economists: use value—that is, the “affordances” given by a place to a specific project, whether hunting-gathering, agriculture, or settled habitation—and labor value, or the amount of labor invested in actualizing projects carried out in a place. For Chapman, place value is a generic form of symbolic value, summarizing the significance of people, buildings, and objects associated with any given place. An attack on place is therefore an assault on all aspects of place identity. Chapman points to the fact that the construction of place value, which rests on the ontological character of sites, monuments, and their landscapes, is the endless “(re)negotiated” result of disputes between different interest groups—the proverbial stakeholders—particularly the powerful and the weak, insiders and outsiders. Chapman’s cultural examples come from the Balkan Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Chalcolithic, including the emergence of tells (*toumbes* or *magoules*)—settlement mounds—and the abandonment of flat sites. He also looks at the reuse of Minoan monumental sites in the Cretan Early Iron Age, as well as the different place myths found among forager and farmer groups in the Iron Gates Gorge of the Danube. This discussion has important ramifications for the broader debate over a pacified or a warlike prehistory for place value. Chapman follows Rob Shields’s (1991) model for the emergence of place identity, which is closely related to the way place value is created. Chapman envisions an inhabitation of place that is dynamic and gendered, a suite of past social practices incorporating both peaceful interactions and violent opposition. Chapman’s paper builds on an earlier contribution (Chapman 1998b) that attempts to relate the concepts of objectification and valuation by means of a consideration of places as objectified and embodied spaces. Thus Chapman (1998b:106–107)

locates the study of place value within Bourdieu's framework and particularly the concept of *habitus*.

Spiraling back to an even more distant past, Christopher Scarre, in chapter 1, notes that European hunter-gatherer societies appear to have built very few visible monuments. In contrast, early farmers, in building their monuments, may have drawn upon landscape beliefs of considerable antiquity. (Such an articulation between preexisting and later agendas is found in many other parts of the world, including the Andes [Kosiba, this volume].) Consequently, the construction of megalithic monuments reconfigured an existing pattern of landscape beliefs, thereby appropriating the power of established place to create new places. Scarre draws on influential work on the phenomenology of landscape developed by Christopher Tilley (1994), whereby landscapes are conceptualized not from a universalizing map-based perspective but rather as a network of paths and places, interpreted as they would have been experienced by embodied individuals. As Scarre notes, specific locales became repositories of wisdom by means of the traditional stories with which they are associated. Such significant places in the prehistoric world of western Europe were marked on the landscape in permanent form through carvings on rock and through the creation of funerary monuments of earth, timber, and stone. The places thus chosen may have been significant in and of themselves—in a kind of instantiation of intrinsic value—but they also referenced significant other places through their incorporation of materials, sometimes brought from a distance. Consequently, Scarre turns to the nature of the premegalithic landscapes in which early monuments were built and from which they obtained their materials to understand the relationship between monuments and significant places. In this western European context, a key question concerns how values and the significance of places may have changed with the adoption of agriculture.

Both Scarre and Chapman point to the reality of “archaeological sites” already in prehistoric landscapes. The way these sites were perceived and whether or not they were preserved (cf. Alcock, this volume) or intentionally destroyed is not only part of the archaeological record but points to the importance of (pre)historical and cultural heritage. The importance of sites is well outlined in Alois Riegl's (1982 [1903]) discourse on monuments and their value(s),⁶ and this discussion is taken further in chapter 3 by Sue Alcock, who raises an important issue: that one very basic measure of place value is the decision to *preserve* places, whether from accidental damage, natural weathering, or the endless passage of time, as well as the decision by hostile forces to spare a place while choosing to destroy others. Echoing Riegl, Alcock focuses on the priorities established not only by place selection but by place preservation. By exploring the phenomenon of “sparing” places (in particular cultic and commemorative sites), mainly in the context of the Roman imperial expansion (200 B.C.–A.D. 200), Alcock adds more nuanced explanations to acts of preservation, not least by considering the intersecting, potentially competing values at work in each case. The decision not to destroy a place, whether an

entire settlement or a particular monument, has traditionally been assigned to the desires and sentiments of the conquering and annexing power. Yet local investment in and esteem for certain places inevitably shaped those desires and sentiments in ways that sometimes saved places and sometimes doomed them. Alcock poses an important question: How does the decision to spare a place reflect its value and, perhaps more importantly, affect its value? As Alcock (this volume) notes: “If you want to undercut the institutions and values represented by a nation or a city, don’t just defeat it. Punish it, mark it, wound it—all time-honored strategies, as any readings in the sorry litany of imperial systems, from China to Peru, will make clear.” For Alcock, sparing is itself a form of violence, perhaps best characterized as soft violence, but violence nevertheless. Alcock’s comments on the decision to destroy (or not) certain places reflect in interesting ways on Kosiba’s (this volume) detailed discussion of archaeological evidence pointing to the destruction and rebuilding of an outlier site near Cuzco, as the latter began its program of imperial expansion.

Imperial strategies are at the core of chapter 5, in which Charles Stanish addresses the concept of managing ideological power in imperial systems. By focusing on the construction of solstice observation places in the Inka Empire of the central Andes, Stanish uncovers a process by which the Inka valued and revalued physical space and place. As a means of reordering the ideological landscape, the Inka revalued physical places. Stanish borrows from semiotic anthropology, arguing that the concept of Peircean replication—first introduced into archaeological interpretation by Lawrence Coben (2006)—can lead to a better understanding of the transformation of place in the Inka Empire as a manifestation of an ideological ideal created among Inka intellectuals as part of an expansion strategy (see further Kosiba, this volume). Following Coben, Stanish posits that in their construction of new provincial capitals, the Inka reordered their worldview not by creating new Cuzcos but by establishing in architecture cultural ideals that embodied Inka concepts of proper political structures and social organization. Stanish applies this concept to Inka construction at the site of the Island of the Sun in Lake Titicaca, birthplace of the sun in Inka cosmology, where the complexities of social status, political tactics, religion, and imperial realities were played out in the context of elaborate ceremonies focused on place.

Body Value

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In so many ways, body value and object value merge into one inseparable entity. When gazing upon the remarkable display of sheer material wealth in the shaft graves of Bronze Age Mycenae (Voutsaki, this volume), like those of elite tombs in ancient Egypt (Cooney, this volume) or the Moche of Peru (Donnan, this volume), it is unclear where body value stops and object value begins. Part of this fusion of the two lies in the fact that in many cultures, what may be termed personhood is intimately linked with the display and use of valuable objects and commodities

(whatever those objects and commodities may be), particularly as they are displayed in burials. But part of the fusion is very much entwined with the broader issue of circulation and deposition of such objects and commodities, to which we shall return under object value.

In the humanities and social sciences, interest in the human body as a category, even as “material culture,” has come into its own (Hamilakis et al. 2002b [with references]; Meskell 1996; see also the important contribution by Mauss 1979 [1935]). An important aspect of this interest is that representations of the body create and define social ideologies relating to gender and agency; the body “has moved from being a universal and biological basis of subsequent experience, to being itself a culturally variable entity, demanding philosophical and critical attention” (Hamilakis et al. 2002a:4).

Various types of body adornment (Cooney, DeLeonardis, Donnan, this volume; cf. Camphausen 1997; DeMello 2007; Joyce 2000; Pitts-Taylor 2003), including tattooing (Gell 1993; Rainbird 2002), scarification (Clajot 2008), and piercing (Camphausen 1997), together with body modification (Pitts-Taylor 2003) such as skull deformation (DeLeonardis, this volume), foot binding (Levy 1966; Wang 2002), even tooth evulsion (Robb 1997), make living bodies, whether individually or collectively, not just vehicles for identity and expression but sites for the construction and enhancement of value. Moreover, in various languages the concepts of body and worth are closely interrelated (e.g., Bazelmans 2002:78–81).

As archaeologists, we can rarely observe in any direct manner forms of decoration of the body, such as tattooing, scarification, or hairstyles, though these are often clearly represented in iconography or burial remains. Notable exceptions include remarkable discoveries, such as Ötzi the Iceman, found in 1991 in the Schnalstal Glacier in the Ötztal Alps near Hauslabjoch, with approximately 57 carbon tattoos on his lower spine, behind his left knee, and on his right ankle (Fowler 2000); the bog bodies of northwestern Europe (e.g., Bahn 1997; Turner and Scaife 1995); and the mummies of Ürümchi (Barber 1999), ancient Egypt (Cooney, this volume) and Peru (DeLeonardis, this volume; Donnan, this volume). Therefore, the fusion of body value and object value is in part the result of the material record and our heavy reliance on the evidence of tombs.

Body value, however, is not solely defined by associated objects and commodities, for in many societies the body itself is an object of desire, something that can be possessed and owned, something with a fungible value—an exchange value—all its own. In certain times and places, the exchange and use of human slaves was every bit as real as the exchange and use of gold, jade, silver, feathers, shells, or whatever else was valued. But the commodification of the body is not limited to its fungibility. As Yannis Hamilakis et al. (2002a:11) note:

We have to be aware of the ways in which bodies may be considered as “material culture.” People’s living bodies may be commodified and objectified as labor, material or art, or for sexual pleasure. Whole or partial bodies may have meanings which are more artefactual

than individual; they may be fetishized, whether as preserved bodies in museums (Turner and Scaife 1995), as saints' relics [Geary 1986], or otherwise conserved and displayed (Rosaldo 1980). Bodily products and parts may be segregated, tabooed, used in magic, exchanged, consumed and even applied as beauty treatments (Bahn 1984, Loudon 1977, Scheper-Hughes 2000).

Just as body value and object value merge into one another, body value and place value are also inextricably connected. Places, particularly places of commemoration and death, can be "inalienable" in the sense that in many societies they become foci of special significance as the physical and spiritual attributes of the living pass into "intensely localized and personified places and landscapes as bodily powers are diffused and reconstituted" (Hamilakis et al. 2002a:11; cf. Chapman 2000a, 2000b). In his study of Oceanic art, Paul Rainbird (2002) notes that history was being physically marked on both living bodies and the land, in terms of tattoos on the former, petroglyphs on the latter. What is important is that in this particular case, as in many other prehistoric societies (cf. Scarre, this volume), the land had once been conceived of in bodily form in local mythology. As Rainbird (2002:244) elaborates, "Now petrified and potentially dangerous, both male and female ancestors are identified in the landscape, and parts of them have been adorned with images." Tattoos on bodies are here compared to rock engravings on the landscape.

Body value may also, in certain contexts, be closely linked with measurement and thus number value. One of the most basic forms of measurement beyond standard weights involves the articulation of units of measure, especially in architecture, based on body parts. A good case in point is a metrological relief from Salamis of the Greek Classical period, which depicts various body parts as standard units of length, in much the same way as an inch equals a thumb, a foot a foot, and so on in the imperial British standard, and is conceptually close to Leonardo da Vinci's adaptation of Vitruvian Man (Wilson Jones 2000).

Of the six papers assembled under body value in this volume, it may be useful to begin with that by Leslie Kurke, chapter 10, in which she examines the value of chorality in ancient Greece. The importance of this paper lies in the simple fact that it deals with philological evidence, the literary texts of Classical Greece. Kurke considers Greek *choreia*—choral song and dance—as a particular domain of body value. As evidence for special, transcendent choral value in Greek antiquity, Kurke cites three important pieces of evidence. First of all, she points to the analogy between a human chorus offered to a god and a sacrificial animal or dedicatory offering, as evidenced in inscriptions and literary texts (cf. Laum 1924; Svenbro 1984). Secondly, there is the assimilation of a perfectly ordered and synchronized chorus to a top-ranked precious object or a set of moving statues (*agalmata* or *daidala* in Greek), which are the products of divine or uncanny crafting. Finally, there is the assimilation of individual dancers to such highly valued materials as gold and silver and the assimilation of choral aesthetics to such highly valued qualities as translucence, scarcity, durability, age, shine, scintillation, and twinkle. In considering this

evidence, Kurke thinks of choral dance in Archaic and Classical Greece as a means of fusing or merging body value, object value, and place value and perhaps also as a privileged site for the beginnings of a model of art value. As Kurke elaborates, the Greeks themselves seem to have understood choral song and dance as an activity or process that conferred high sacral value and thereby forged social bonds or constituted society itself. Following Graeber's notion of the construction of value through action, Kurke sees the Greek *choreia* as an activity or process that conferred high sacral value, thereby forging social bonds. As Kurke (this volume) states: "the potent effects of *choreia* derive from a single source: the heightened aesthetic value or superlative beauty it conferred on bodies, whose impact on the audience the Greeks conceived as a heady fusion of *eros* (desire) and *thauma* (wonder). Indeed, to capture the aesthetic impact of *choreia*, Greek texts resort to a remarkable synesthetic fusion of the highest forms of body value and object value in descriptions of dance and its reception."

Although the Moche civilization that flourished on the north coast of Peru between about A.D. 100 and 800 had no writing system, the Moche left a vivid iconographic record of their beliefs and activities in metal objects, textiles, wall murals, and modeled and painted ceramic vessels. Moche art frequently portrays high-status individuals dressed in elaborate clothing and ornaments, with recent excavations providing actual examples of such objects—made of gold, silver, shell, and semiprecious stone—worn by the elite, who are understood to be costumed as certain commonly depicted deities (Alva and Donnan 1993; Donnan 2007). In chapter 8, Christopher Donnan enumerates nine forms of value represented in Moche ornamentation and ensemble construction, namely: precious materials, extraordinary craftsmanship, color, shining surfaces, shimmering light, a link to nature, sound, animation, and enhanced surfaces. What is particularly remarkable about these nine forms of value is that in the Moche material record, many of them mirror what is known about the Greek *choreia* in written form. The extraordinary overlap between Kurke's philological analysis and Donnan's study of the archaeological record shows how important certain elements—not least animation, sound, color, shiny surfaces, and translucence—are in constructions of value in societies quite far apart in time and place.

In chapter 9, Lisa DeLeonardis looks at how body value is understood and represented in the ancient Andean world through the analysis of two culturally linked societies that inhabited south coastal Peru in sequence, beginning in the first millennium B.C.: the Paracas and the Nasca. As DeLeonardis states: "The valued body, as understood by the Paracas, was a living organism that was modified and embellished, shaped and attired, and referenced in works of art. . . . Its parts were valued and made whole through surrogates and substitutes. It was the medium in which identity and personhood were shaped and expressed and was the carrier of a cultural-visual aesthetic." Both societies purposefully intervened in the appearance of the corporeal body through cranial deformation, ornamentation,

and attire, signaling a cultural concern for the identity of the living, visible body. The mummified, disembodied heads that both societies created, displayed, and carefully interred acknowledge the partial body—particularly the head—as a valued source of life essence. Burial processes and practices attest to the intentional effort devoted to body preservation at death. As DeLeonardis explains, the enveloped body, itself the object of veneration; the surrogate body or head; and the partial body all receive due attention in formal burial grounds. Yet cemeteries may be considered less “resting places” than active social arenas where the living and the dead interacted (cf. Chapman 2000b). DeLeonardis uncovers the complex role of Paracas and Nasca cemeteries, where tombs were revisited, mummy bundles reembellished, bodies stolen or destroyed, and space appropriated by others. Here, too, place value enters the discussion, since dedicatory burials indicate movement beyond the group setting, where bodies became portable, commemorative markers of sacred space or territorial claims.

Mummification is at the core of Kathlyn Cooney’s essay, as it is for much of Egyptian history (Cooney 2007). Her focus is on funerary arts from Thebes during the Egyptian Twentieth and Twenty-first dynasties (1190–945 B.C.). As Cooney explains, the Twenty-first Dynasty Egyptian mummy provides a useful case study of changing funerary values among Theban elites. Such mummies are particularly illustrative of a new kind of body value—that within elite social contexts—in which an idealized preserved human body was objectified, commodified, and ultimately transformed into a viable, unique, and defensive container for the soul. When necessary, mummified bodies could replace the coffin in case of theft or damage. The economic value of a Twenty-first Dynasty mummy was most likely high, but the embalmed corpse also held meaningful religious value, as well as the social value of prestigious display. In the troubled period of social unrest in the Mediterranean Late Bronze Age, Theban funerary preparations were challenged with limited burial space, increasingly scarce material resources, tomb robbery, and tomb reuse. Consequently, surviving funerary materials reflect a variety of defensive innovations while at the same time preserving the ability of elite families to shore up social power by means of funerary displays. Despite these constraints, funerary strategies still followed accepted norms, but the mummy itself provides the best evidence for defensive burial adaptations.

As Cooney elaborates, embalming techniques reached an apex in the early Third Intermediate Period; the mummy became the only part of the Egyptian burial that could not be reused by someone else and returned to the sphere of the commodity. Indeed, for the bulk of Egyptian history, the main focus of economic and material funerary investment was *not* the human body but the more visible and displayable funerary arts. The increased investments in mummification probably provided psychological security for Theban elites, with the heightened intent of perfectly preserving the flesh and bone of the deceased for eternity. Following Graeber (2001:76), Cooney notes that the mummy can be understood as the

result of a variety of human actions in pursuit of value—social, religious, and economic—which are displayed in a ritualized but at the same time competitive arena of comparative prestige.

The merging of body value and object value is perhaps nowhere more stark than in Sofia Voutsaki's chapter 7, which focuses on the burials of grave circle B at Mycenae. Her starting point is Marcel Mauss's famous dictum, "To give something is to give part of oneself. To give away is to give part of one's nature and substance, to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence." Building on her earlier research (Voutsaki 1997), in which she argued that the conspicuous consumption of objects establishes a different relation between persons and things, Voutsaki, following in the footsteps of Weiner (1992), argues that consumption allows one to absorb and appropriate transitory gifts with all their associations of distant places, famous previous owners, and exotic value systems. In her current contribution, she elaborates this point further by discussing the (re)definition of personhood in mortuary ritual by examining the use of valuable objects in bodily practices, such as body modification, adornment, grooming, arraying, disarticulating, and so on.

While conspicuous consumption at death is often discussed as a purely social strategy of display and aggrandizement, or at best as symbolic exchange with the ancestors, Voutsaki argues that it has a much deeper cultural significance—that it is an attempt to contain the drift of meaning and value and to counteract the disintegration of personal identities during the very process that dissolves and transforms persons into ancestors. Voutsaki distinguishes between total destruction of objects and commodities, on the one hand, and deposition of goods in graves, on the other. She also distinguishes between subject and object. For her, objects are valued by being positioned and ordered around the body, while facets of personal identity are constructed through the selection, combination, or omission of funerary offerings. Voutsaki's argument is that the creation of value should not be discussed only in connection with status but with other aspects of personhood, especially age and gender. By exploring the meaning and not only the social function of mortuary practices, Voutsaki argues that value is created from within a set of cultural values by means of ritual performance.

Building on his seminal contribution on sacred commodities and the circulation of medieval relics in Appadurai's *The Social Life of Things* (Appadurai 1986b), Geary presents, in chapter 11, a brief "state of the question" concerning practices involving saints' bodies and corporeal relics in the West in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Such relics, as Geary effectively shows, were some of the most valued commodities of the time, circulating by means of three processes: gift, sale, and theft. Moreover, the transfer of a relic broke the cultural context that provided the relic with its identity and value, and the details of this very transfer became a prime occasion to reconstruct its value. Relics, whether portions of human bodies or bits of cloth, wood, or other material that had come into contact with these bodies, are

a category of high-value and high-prestige objects. One might insist that relics are examples of object value, but their value lies precisely in the fact that they are parts of bodies. Without the body there would be no value. The whole issue is put into high relief with a description of the funeral of Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini in Iran in June 1989, at which time a crowd of millions surged the coffin, desperate to touch the corpse or to take a scrap of the Ayatollah's shroud. Geary's focus is on explicit claims and statements concerning the significance of saints' bodies in specific cult sites, as well as their implicit value as demonstrated by pilgrim itineraries, efforts to obtain relics from various sources—with or without formal permission—and efforts to control their dismemberment and distribution. Geary emphasizes the tension between saints' bodies as objects and saints' bodies as living persons and their roles in gift exchange mechanisms, commodity exchange, political networks, and competition for prestige.

Object Value

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In the history of the term “value,” one of its most central meanings or senses is the extent to which something, anything, is “held in esteem.” But value is often conceived as something residing or embodied in *objects*: “some essential quality or inherent property of a thing . . . that is independent not only of what amount of money (or anything else) it might fetch in some market but also independent of its performing any functions, or giving satisfaction to anyone, or being esteemed (or, in effect, ‘valued’ or found valuable) in any of these or other ways by anyone” (Smith 1995:179). Although common, this sense of value as *intrinsic* value remains problematic, as we have seen, precisely because there is no absolute value that is separate from cultural context.

For archaeologists, objects, or more correctly artifacts, have added significance as they represent the very stuff of the material record. As Renfrew (2003:208) has enumerated, there are various ways or standpoints by which artifacts have been studied, many of them ultimately deriving from Mauss's work on the gift. Quite apart from the “life histories” of artifacts (Appadurai 1986b), some scholars have focused on the use of artifacts as social instruments (Douglas and Isherwood 1996 [1979]) and as symbolic instruments (Lubar and Kingery 1993; Robb 1999). Some have considered their place in the construction of categories (Miller 1985), others have discussed interactions between social and technological aspects (Dobres and Hoffman 1999; Lemonnier 1993), and still others have considered their role in communication from a semiotic perspective (Schiffer 1999). Such notions of the active, constitutive force of objects in social and ideological constructions often appear under the rubric “materiality,” a perspective that emphasizes the agency of objects in constructions of meaning and—directly to the point here—value (see Gell 1998; Gosden 2005; Keane 2003).

The nine essays assembled in this volume under object value range from the Archaic, Classical, and Byzantine Mediterranean (Papadopoulos, Porter, Kalavrezou) to China (Flad), the Andes (Burger, Bray, Cummins), and Mesoamerica (Lesure). They begin with chapter 12, in which Colin Renfrew discusses systems of value among material things, laying heavy emphasis on the nexus of fungibility and measure. Renfrew focuses on the problematic term “intrinsic value,” eliding it with Appadurai’s term “prime value.” For Renfrew, the central issue is value; in contrast, *values* are quite apart, and he lays blame for the confusion he sees between value and values squarely at Graeber’s (2001) doorstep: “The word ‘value’ rapidly becomes meaningless when used in a thousand different ways to mask an illusory fungibility that is primarily the product of the rise of Western capitalism” (Renfrew, this volume).

For Renfrew, fungibility and exchange are critical elements in what we term object value. In adopting this position, Renfrew returns to a very economic mode of analysis. His argument is straightforward: a system of value among material things—that is, valuables and commodities—developed in eastern Europe and western Asia from the fifth millennium B.C. In contrast, places and bodies have nothing to do with the construction of value in this perspective. It is, rather, objects that came to play a unique role in world history, becoming active agents of distribution for technologies that have achieved the true globalization of communications and economies. These developments involved a critical nexus of exchange relationships relying upon both fungibility and mensuration. Out of this system, in the first millennium B.C., emerged coinage, a form of money that permitted a new degree of refinement in the expression of measurement of value and indeed in the development of a concept of monetary value.

For Renfrew (this volume; cf. Renfrew 2003:142) the story begins around 4500 B.C. in Bulgaria, at the Copper Age cemetery at Varna, where he traces the earliest evidence in the world for the energetic and systematic use of gold. In a series of graves, we see special objects of flint, shell, copper, and gold being used to enhance and reflect the prestige of those buried; the position and nature of the gold artifacts indicate that they were highly valued. Renfrew notes that similar arguments can be developed for the occurrence of gold in the treasures at Troy around 2500 B.C., in the royal tombs at Ur around 2300, and indeed in the shaft graves of Mycenae around 1600 B.C. So the notion that gold was highly valued in these contexts does not derive from our own, almost universal assessment of the high value of gold but from specific, contextual considerations. In virtually all the contexts enumerated by Renfrew, the valuables are buried with bodies in highly charged locales (the only exception may be Troy, but the circumstances of the find are far from clear) that may well be referred to as places of value or, at very least, places of power. Indeed, the argument could be made that it is the bodies and places with which the gold is associated that give added value to the commodities deposited with them. Like the proverbial chicken and the egg, which comes first? Here we return to the issue

of the circulation and deposition of commodities. We would argue that all three elements: place value, body value, and object value contribute to the construction of value in all these contexts.

Limiting the definition of value to fungibility and measurement, as Renfrew does, has a certain appeal, as it does away with all sorts of complex issues, and certainly the twentieth and twenty-first centuries bear elegant testimony to the success of the system that evolved in a part of eastern Europe and western Asia. But there remains the reality that in many other places and times, such a system of fungibility did not emerge, and this did not mean there were no commodities or objects of value. On the contrary, in numerous other contexts at various times and in many different places, a variety of materials was valued, with different commodities even serving as money: olive shells in Zaire, wampum beads in North America, copper axes in Mexico and the northern Andes, *tambu* shells in New Britain, “feather money” in the Santa Cruz Islands, raffia cloth in Angola, and *kina* pearl shell used to make payments in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, to mention only some (see Williams 1997). The circulation and deposition of such commodities, although serving as “money,” does not follow the eastern European and western Asian example.

As a region in which marketing and money—key components of the commodification of objects—generally did *not* develop (at least not widely in the case of marketing), the Andes offers an important perspective in thinking about how and why humans have used objects in constructions of value, particularly in ways that did not center on fungibility and market exchange. (Measurement was clearly highly developed in a variety of Andean production processes.) In chapter 14, Richard Burger takes us to the beginnings of the production, circulation (or lack thereof), and manipulation of objects in the construction of value in the Andes. From his survey of the archaeological record on the central coast of Peru during the long Preceramic period (5000–1800 B.C.), Burger finds virtually no evidence for systems of production and stratification based around exclusive access to and/or use of objects of value. Remarkably, these findings include periods such as the Late Preceramic (3000–1800 B.C.), when there is clear evidence of monumental construction of ceremonial centers, such as the site of Caral, a large complex of mounds that shows no evidence of craft specialization.

Convincing evidence of objects having been used as markers of special status and therefore constituting what we might commonly term objects of value does not appear until the Initial Period (1800–800 B.C.). This evidence appears in the form of items interred with an elderly male at the site of Cardal, including a necklace of sea lion canines and an ear-spool of whalebone. Burger notes that it is probably not coincidental that these materials, which he and coexcavator Lucy Salazar interpret as signs of political authority, were taken from the largest and most powerful marine animals on the Pacific coast of Peru. What is critical here is the apparent exclusive access to and display of such items by an individual who, because of the location of

his burial (atop the main mound at Cardal), Burger and Salazar interpret as having been a high political authority at the site.

The florescence of social valuables in the Andes occurred during the period termed the Early Horizon (800–200 B.C.), which is associated generally with manifestations of the Chavin culture on the coast and in the highlands of the central Andes. Our most spectacular evidence comes from the central highland site of Chavín de Huántar, which was excavated by Burger during the 1980s and remains the focus of much of his research. Here, three-dimensional objects were produced from a wide range of materials (stone, metal, ceramics, shell), all covered with a distinctive religious iconography. Most notably, objects of gold were produced by a variety of techniques. Shimmering objects made of beaten gold sheets appear to have been worn exclusively by the leaders of Chavin society, thereby distinguishing these individuals from the general populace. As Burger notes, “Precious metal objects of the Early Horizon are found almost exclusively in burials, so it seems likely that the objects were indeed the inalienable possessions of the deceased, crucial for authenticating and reinforcing their authority.”

Burger notes several features of these objects of value, including color, shininess, and the capacity to produce sound, that seem to have been particularly notable for the Chavin people (cf., Donnan, this volume). Less tangibly, these objects were generally made of exotic materials not available to commoners. Burger concludes that these social valuables “were used to construct and legitimize the authority . . . of the religious elite, who for the first time succeeded in establishing a pattern of profound inequality in the central Andes.” This pattern, Burger notes, continued through Andean prehistory, reemerging in such later cultural contexts as Moche (see Donnan, this volume) and Inka (see Bray, this volume) societies. Such values continued to inform processes of status and rank differentiation in the Andes during the colonial period (see Cummins, this volume).

What is critical about Burger’s study for the issues in this volume is that Chavín de Huántar evidences a process of the emergence and elaboration of the construction of value linked directly to social/political differentiation and stratification, but the value attached to these items was not (so far as we know) put into circulation via commodities either in a market system or in a *kula*-like circulation of valuables. Rather, the construction of value in the Andean case was directly linked to exclusive access to materials and manufactured products by an elite class in its attempt to promote a particular religious agenda. The representation and rationalization of this religious ideology, the specific features of which are still open to debate, underlay a system of broad and profound social and political inequality. In short, objects mattered in the process of the construction of power, and this process was coincidental with the construction of value.

The Chinese case study developed and presented by Rowan Flad in chapter 15 provides another fruitful avenue of inquiry in a non-Western context, one that shares certain features with the construction of value in Chavin culture discussed

by Burger. Flad's paper considers the relationship between object value and political power in ancient Sichuan in the late second and early first millennia B.C. By looking at several categories of valuable objects at the sites of Sanxingdui and Jinsha, Flad observes changes in the way that bronze, jade, gold, and ivory were employed as valuable objects in the context of political and ritual practices. Flad begins by embracing Graeber's (2001:115) argument that negotiations of value are essentially political. He goes on to stress that we cannot examine object value through a focus on only one attribute or even a set of attributes, such as scarcity of the raw material or labor investment. Instead, it is crucial to consider the intersection of several factors: raw material, labor investment, the identity of the producers and consumers, the divisibility or "commodifiability" of the object, and its capacity to accumulate history (cf. Appadurai 1986a; Weiner 1992). For Flad, the value attributed to objects is dynamic and contingent, the consequences of practices of production, use, and discard through the life history of the object. Flad stresses the importance of considering the production of objects, together with their use and discard, to tease out relationships between object value and political power. Production, use, and disposal are critical. The production stage of an object's life history instills initial object value through a series of mechanisms that Flad discusses. A number of factors affect the values—in the plural—attributed to an object through its use life. Finally, the deposition stage is all important, for the degree to which contexts of final disposal are public or private, and whether or not they were intended for recovery, speaks volumes about object values in the past. In comparing and contrasting the particular contexts of Sanxingdui and Jinsha, Flad sees no significant differences in terms of production, and the remains from both sites similarly reflect few differences in object use. But it is in the realm of deposition where the greatest differences occur, and here it may well be that a different set of values is associated with the deposition and destruction of commodities such as bronze, jade, gold, and ivory.

In three very different papers, we return to the heart of Renfrew's world of fungibility and measurement: eastern Europe. It may be useful to begin with two papers that deal with the earliest and latest material. In chapter 13, John Papadopoulos turns to the particular cultural context in western Asia Minor (Lydia) and eastern Greece, where the earliest coinage in the world was developed in the late seventh and the sixth century B.C. What is important to bear in mind is that coinage in Europe and the Near East was essentially a Greek phenomenon, which non-Greek peoples such as the Etruscans, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Egyptians were slow to adopt. Indeed, there was even some resistance to coinage in the Levant, so in this aspect, western Asia and eastern Europe should not necessarily be seen as a single economically operating unit. Contextualizing the development of coinage, Papadopoulos looks to the quest for metals—the very commodities that define our periodization of ancient Greece (Copper Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age)—but this is seen not simply as an issue of technological innovations or one of supply but as a real search for structuring commodities of value that ultimately leads to an

economic system of exchange not limited to elites. In the search for the origins of coinage, the specifics of the particular cultural context are of paramount importance. By focusing on the early coinage of several Greek centers, more particularly the emblems that certain city-states chose for their coinage—images that hark back to prehistoric measures of value, such as cattle, bronze tripods, and grain—this paper challenges long-held assumptions as to the economic underpinnings of coinage. Struck by the state, the polis, these emblems sought to represent a collective identity. By boldly minting their identity on silver coinage, the Greek city-states chose money, the very vehicle of value, to create relations of dominance and to produce social orders that had not existed before.

In chapter 17, Ioli Kalavrezou brings to the fore the issue of light in terms of precious objects, or “value” as it was seen by the Byzantines. Her focus is very much the cosmopolitan world of the court and the wealthy society of Constantinople and its provinces in the middle and later Byzantine period. As Kalavrezou shows, what the Byzantines recognized as valuable was in large measure provided by nature, appreciated as a gift of God, and perceived as miraculous and wondrous, the latter echoing the *thauma* (wonder) that Kurke spoke of in the context of fifth-century B.C. *choreia*. Apart from the magnificent mosaic surfaces decorating the interiors of Byzantine churches, precious commodities and substances discussed by Kalavrezou include *porphyra* dye (extracted from *Murex trunculus* shell), used in elaborate textiles, as well as gold, various colored marbles, and pearls. With regard to the latter, the Byzantines believed, as did the ancient Greeks, that pearls were created by lightning. It fell from the sky, hit an oyster in the sea, entered its shell, rolled around inside, and created the perfect spherical object, full of light itself. Indeed, the Virgin Mary is often equated with the shell, the sea, or some other type of container that bears within the “divine” or “heavenly” pearl—*o margarites* in Greek—that is, Christ. Here, as in earlier periods, value and religion are not easily separable. What is evident from Byzantine texts is the emphasis given to the brightness and translucency of the pearl, and in theological terms it is associated with purity and perfection, especially for its flawless and unblemished whiteness. The Byzantines recognized the importance of light and its effect on objects, which led to the qualities most appreciated in the various materials discussed by Kalavrezou: reflectivity, luster, shine, iridescence, and so on. Creating objects of value was to bring together or to combine selected materials with light. Many of the same terms and qualities are found earlier in Greek tradition (see Kurke, this volume), but they are also clear elements in cultures with which the Byzantines had no contact whatsoever, such as the Chavin (see Burger, this volume) and the Moche (see Donnan, this volume) civilizations of ancient Peru.

Arguably one of the most challenging—yet rewarding—papers in the collection is that by James Porter (chapter 16) on the value of aesthetic value. The paper deserves to be read in tandem with that of Renfrew. On the surface, these two contributions appear to present very different, if not contradictory, visions of value. However,

on closer study, the views on object value may well be more complementary than a first reading might suggest. Porter's interest lies in the origins of value, in what gives *anything* value and its basic status of having value. He is also interested in the primary and secondary processes of valuation and how these looked at various moments in the cultures of Greece and Rome, although for this contribution his focus is very much on Greece. Porter suggests that values in a culture generally, and aesthetic values specifically, are closely linked, so much so that locating one helps locate the other. We have already seen many shortcomings of the term "aesthetics" as it is applied to art in our earlier discussion of the work of Alfred Gell. Porter moves well beyond the strictly art historical and problematic use of "aesthetics" to the Greek word from which it derives: *aisthēsis*. In this, Porter makes a strong and important claim—namely that aesthetic processes, in their primary function of *aisthēsis* (that is, in their immediate connection to the senses, sentience, pleasure, and pain), are actually *indices* of cultural value. By looking at the language of aesthetic value and its expression in antiquity, Porter shows that aesthetics can be a meaningful category with which to approach objects and experiences in the ancient world. He casts his net wide, encompassing the work of the Presocratics (not least Protagoras and his famous doctrine of *homo mensura*), Epicurus, Spinoza, and Kant. Moreover, Porter's analysis is not limited to a linguistic or philosophical exercise, for one of his postulates is that whenever we attend to objects and dwell upon them with our mind or our senses, we tend to ascribe those objects value, whether positive or negative. In this he moves into the realm of materiality, especially in his discussion of grave markers and public inscriptions (decrees, memorials, laws, boundary stones). Porter moves well beyond an idea espoused by scholars like Kristeller (1990 [1951–1952]) and Shiner (2001), that art and aesthetics are an invention of the modern (Enlightenment) era, and thus comes up with a type of aesthetic value that is not tied to modern notions of high art. Porter's basic argument is that aesthetic values go hand in hand with larger operations of evaluation or value judgment and can be shown to be present wherever positive or negative ascriptions of value are at work. Such ascriptions, Porter argues, ultimately reach down to the level of basic sensations and up to the highest and most complex forms of socially embedded judgments.

The three final papers in this section deal with the Americas. The diminutive anthropomorphic clay figurines common across Mesoamerica during the Formative period (1800 B.C.–A.D. 200) are the focus of Richard Lesure's chapter 18. Although a few of these figurines appear as burial offerings, the vast majority were found as broken pieces in domestic debris. Their frequency in "household" contexts suggested to earlier scholars who studied the figures that they were little valued (e.g. Vaillant 1931:36). Given this, Lesure turns to aesthetic value, noting that the majority of modern observers react to these objects aesthetically, even though George Vaillant made it clear that the value of the figurines was heuristic. Lesure elaborates that like objects, responses to them would have occurred in concrete

situations and that these responses would have prompted actions, such as choices between one way or another of making figurines—that is, choices between styles. The important issue here is that stylistic variation as a record of choice is relevant to any investigation of aesthetic value, even if the content of original subjective experiences is lost to us.

By reviewing the three most common approaches in past studies of the figurines, Lesure finds each wanting. He goes on to propose an alternative inspired by the semiotics and sociology of fashion, particularly the work of Roland Barthes (1990 [1967], 2005 [1960], 2005 [1966]; see further Blumer 1995 [1969]). Among the figurines studied by Lesure, attributes cooperated to prompt the viewer not toward subject matter but instead toward the form of one figure in relation to that of others. In other words, the way a figurine was made seems to have been more important to the original makers and users than its manifest subject matter. One problem here is that if figurines referenced other figurines, we seem to have something of a closed loop and thus the question: How do we interpretively put *people* back into the equation? It is here where Barthes's semiotic analysis of fashion resonates in any effort to interpret figurines that mainly referenced other figurines. Thus Lesure's study points out that although evidently of little "intrinsic value," the figurines seem to have been the subject of lively "evaluation." It is this precept that has the potential to cast light on other types of objects in a variety of other contexts.

In Tamara Bray's chapter 19, we return to the Inka Empire and to a relational perspective that seeks to reconfigure the concept of value to discern ways in which premodern, non-Western peoples who inhabited the archaeological record may have conceived of, instantiated, and deployed ideas about value. Bray challenges the modern Western notion of value, with all its economistic baggage, a perspective that privileges the *matter* of value over the *spirit* of value. Instead, Bray focuses on three key issues: the ontology of value, the relational nature of value, and the concreteness of value. Rather than according priority to either abstract notions of value or the intrinsic properties of objects, Bray suggests that value is constructed as a relation between subjects and objects. Bray's approach thus advocates a consideration of the personal, social, and aesthetic contexts within which such relations are constituted, constructed, or expressed. In line with this approach, it is recognized that for value to be realized, it must be embodied; that value has a comparative nature; and that value is not an "either/or" quality but rather registers on a gradient. For Bray, it is paying attention to precisely these comparative, relational, and gradational aspects of value that provides the key for working with value in the anthropological and archaeological realms.

The starting point for Tom Cummins in chapter 20 is that some registers of value are perhaps universal. Cummins restricts his analysis to the materiality of value to examine the clash of systems of value created by the European conquest of the Americas. Although some registers of value may be universal, things within those registers can be radically different. Cummins suggests that value can be

understood to express materially different phenomena. For instance, some things may be intrinsically valuable; others, such as a ruin (place), an heirloom (object), or even a body, become valuable through time. Some things, such as exotic objects from distant lands or objects made from materials made elsewhere (cf. Scarre, this volume), become valuable through their association with place. Still other things, such as icons, *wakas* (sacred objects), and miraculous images, become valuable by their coming into being as manifestations of the sacred. By looking at these materially different phenomena of value, Cummins turns to the issue of how the clash and integration of values might alter how these phenomena are understood and/or experienced. Under the surface lurks a deeper question, which Cummins effectively brings to the fore: Are concepts such as desire, time, and space affected when things that express their value are, at the very least, put into doubt? To get to these issues, Cummins focuses on the “performance of value,” by which he means the acts in which different objects and materials perform or acquire their value. We return to a very familiar and significant vantage point, one where ritual and economics intertwine, which Marx articulated in his discussion of the commodity fetish. Cummins expands Marx’s notions beyond the realm of Western capitalism by looking at both Inka and Aztec registers of value and their rearticulation with the arrival of Spanish power, with its superimposition of registers of value. Cummins argues that what happens is the creation of simultaneous values, licit and illicit according to the Spanish point of view, and that values can cross between various registers depending on cultural context. This is to say that the same object can be recognized to have multiple values but within entirely different registers. By means of this simultaneity, an object can perform in radically different ways and can therefore serve as an active agent in maintaining pre-Columbian social, cultural, and artistic forms.

The importance of Cummins’s conclusions lies in the fact that systems of value of two very different worlds are neither absolute nor impermeable. For Andean peoples, participation in the new economic system meant being brought quickly into the sphere of mercantile capitalism while at the same time maintaining traditional economic forms of reciprocity. What this particular—often violent—colonial encounter brings to the fore is that two very different economic systems can merge to create something totally new and unpredictable.

Number Value

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In the case of number value, we enter a world of knowledge and practice that is often considered to be exempt from the ambiguities and fuzziness of meaning and reference in everyday speech and texts whose exploration has been the preoccupation of linguistic and discourse analysis from Saussure and Peirce through Wittgenstein and down to the present day. It is evident that in our everyday thinking on these matters, we tend to conceive of numbers as fundamentally exempt from, or at least not a primary domain of, the operation of metaphor, metonymy, and

other linguistic tropes. Such a view is considerably at odds with what we have learned from recent studies of the language of numbers (Hurford 1975, 1987) and ethnomathematics (Ascher 1991; Crump 1990) and from comparative studies of the history of numbers and mathematical systems worldwide (Chrisomalis 2010; Robson 2008; Robson and Stedall 2009; Urton 1997). Such studies have shown clearly that while numbers have always and everywhere been the principal instruments employed in quantification and mensuration, this field of cultural practice is nonetheless rich in metaphorical constructions linking different domains of the production, distribution, exchange, use, and discard of objects. Thus quantification and numerical manipulations are central processes in constructions of value in societies around the world, past and present.

In the five articles included in the number value section, we find many different concepts and principles employed in constructions of value. While it is difficult to do justice to the range of uses of numbers in the widely disparate societies discussed in the five articles, we note that the principal expressions of value in the domain of numbers are: a) *counting*, or enumerating items according to a standardized sequence of number names of the language in question; b) *positionality*, whereby (especially) ordinal numbers specify ranked positions among a group of items (first, second, third); such processes of ranking may also be performed by employing adjective qualifiers that designate sequential positions in hierarchical order (first, middle, last); and c) the *equivalence* of objects being brought into relation with each other through (reciprocal) gifting, marketing, and a variety of other exchange relationships (perhaps most importantly for connections with other forms of value discussed in this volume). Of the three concepts and practices, only counting is uniquely linked to numbers, as positionality and equivalence may be designated by other, non-numerical kinds of labels, depending on the conventions current within a given social and linguistic group.

The grounding condition of all numbering activities and mathematical manipulations is a conventionalized sequence of number names (both cardinal and ordinal). Numbers produced in the process of counting are intimately linked to constructions of value in that the count of items often takes the form of statements denoting the quantity of items in collections. Quantitative predicates on such enumerated sets of items are often used as the basis for differentiation and for asserting weighted valuations between sets of objects (each with its own quantitative label, deriving from being subjected to counting). A variety of different place value principles are at work in the numbering systems discussed in the articles included here, from the sexagesimal system of ancient (Ur III) Sumer to the vigesimal system used by the Maya and the decimal system used by the Greeks, Chinese, and Quechuas (although the decimal principle was incorporated into Sumerian and Mayan numeration as well). To the extent that numbers are one of the principal instruments for ordering and classifying objects, the existence of different number base systems and their

evolution over time are subjects of considerable anthropological and historical interest (see Chrisomalis 2010).

In addition to standard sequences of number names, many systems employ “numeral classifiers” to signal the class identity of particular types of objects (e.g., see Englund and Stuart, this volume). We also often encounter traditions employing distinct numbering systems or different numeral graphic systems of representation for referencing items enumerated in specific contexts. For instance, in their classic study of Sumerian economic accounting, Nissen et al. (1993) detail the some 60 different signs that were organized into a dozen or so distinct metrological systems, each of which was used to enumerate particular types of objects or products (grain measures, land measures, and so on).

Statements about the conclusions of counting, which we commonly term counts, can be used to make claims of quantitative equivalence between sets of different kinds of objects. For example, the statement “there are six apples” contains an expression of numerical equivalence with the statement “there are six sandals” *if* the question at issue is: How many objects are there in each set? Such claims regarding numerical-based equivalences, then, are not just the playthings of structuralist manipulation—of pointing to homologies between identical numbers of items in different contexts. Rather, expressions of equivalence and/or difference in quantities of items are the stuff of everyday discourse centering on the processes of production, exchange, and the circulation of goods that take place in social interactions among people, often under the purview of state institutions ensuring standardization of weights and measures, within any given society. Numerical identities and manipulations are important in a larger sense, as they constitute the forms of practice through which number and equivalence become embedded as more generalized qualifiers used in everyday conversations and in a wide array of cultural productions (rituals, offerings, sacrifice, story-telling). From reverberations between such everyday and formalized contexts and practices, we come to recognize how numbers and quantification are intimately entangled in virtually all domains of social life.

The concept of equivalence takes us to the heart of the numerical operations and manipulations that are often considered most directly linked to value *sensu stricto*. For instance, Renfrew (this volume) has argued that in looking critically at concepts of value in the ancient world, it is essential to hew to an understanding that privileges exchange relations, such as when one object is taken or “delivered in lieu of” another; this is the principle of fungibility. Renfrew argues that it is only in considering value in the context of exchange practices and the exchangeability of commodities that we can pursue a reasoned, comparative approach to the problem of the construction of value in antiquity. In terms of the three areas of concern in the number value articles mentioned earlier, equivalence is most directly implicated in the concept of fungibility. In principle, we agree that focusing on equivalence (or fungibility) allows one to investigate value without getting mired in questions of preference and desire and thereby becoming entangled in what Renfrew criticizes

as subjective, impressionistic, and emotion-laden distortions of the strict concept of value. Although there is much to commend this position, especially insofar as our studies must rely on the archaeological record (that is, in the absence of textual commentary), we argue that it is essential to allow counting and positionality within the tent of a strict construction of number value. As stated earlier, we also maintain that there are legitimate grounds for considering value constructs phrased in terms of desirability, esteem, worth, and even intrinsic worth, particularly when these are drawn on the basis of testimony recorded in ancient texts (for example, see articles by Porter and Urton in this volume).

In what follows, we provide an overview of the central issues with respect to number value discussed in the five articles in this section, which include material from Mesopotamia, China, the Andes, Mesoamerica, and the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world.

In chapter 21, Englund documents in extraordinary detail the complex world of ancient Sumerian (Ur III) equivalence values, which were manipulated by the privileged elites, through the efforts of their scribes, to exploit the large body of productive laborers. The concept of equivalency values is central to Englund's study. He makes clear that equivalencies were recorded in cuneiform tablets in various registers, or modes. These included equivalencies between objects or sets of objects such as those based on intrinsic (food, animals) versus nonintrinsic (presumed rarity, prestige) worth and those between producing agents and the objects they produced. Englund points out that in many instances, the calculation of equivalencies relied on conversion into common denominators—that is, the coordination of values among different commodities based on their mutual ability to be phrased in terms of units of a product bearing a fixed value. The most common examples of common economic denominators in the Sumerian case were barley or other grains and silver, the latter representing a common conversion value for all quantifiable goods and services in the Ur III economy. While the scribes who recorded the extraordinarily complex equivalencies documented in Englund's study did not provide metacommentary on the meanings of, or the principles underlying, the various manipulations (for example, of producers and products) within the economy whose details they were responsible for recording, nonetheless we are convinced by the end of this article of Englund's own observation that "central household accountants employed, with almost dizzying accuracy, a broad palette of equivalencies as part of their means of control of production. To the degree that one is concerned with how centralized authorities dealt with and manipulated units of volume, capacity, and ultimately value, Englund's discussion of the manipulations of equivalencies of the Ur III state is a highly relevant case study.

As in ancient Mesopotamia, the economy and bureaucracy of ancient China turned to a large degree on calculations of measures of different grains. Chemla (chapter 22) focuses on a central problem in present-day investigations of the units and values of those various grains. This problem concerns two seemingly different

referents of the term *bu*. On the one hand, *bu* designated a unit of capacity used to measure and express amounts of grain. On the other hand, the same term was used to designate a unit of value, based on a specific practice of measuring capacity. In the former context, a certain mathematical formula was used to determine equivalent amounts of different kinds of grains, whereas in the latter context, a given grain was measured by a particular set of vessels, so that one *bu* of any given grain had the same value as any other. From her study of the tables recording grains, Chemla concludes that the two different uses of *bu* were related by a key feature: the relationship between grains expressed in a well-known table of grain measures (*The Nine Chapters*), in which each kind of grain was measured by means of a specific standard vessel, was the same as the relationship between the volumes of the vessels used. The problem here, extremely subtle and according to Chemla difficult to extract in all its qualities from the ancient texts, was one of precisely measuring and establishing equivalencies among a wide variety of types of grains, measuring instruments, and mathematical calculations central to the ancient Chinese economy.

Chemla indicates that this system underwent changes over time, so that part of the problem researchers confront today is understanding the underlying principles by which grain capacities and volumes were measured and calculated in different periods. At the heart of this study is the proposition that “in addition to attending to numbers and measuring units, historians need to describe *practices* for determining and expressing the numerical value of things” (Chemla this volume).

In his study of Inka numbers, Urton (chapter 23) focuses on three principal (though not exclusive) concepts and practices relating to value that emerge from a review of terminologies for value in Quechua, the language of administration in the Inka state. The three forms are: a) trading, marketing, and evidence for an Andean money form (copper ax money); b) comparative formulations of value, which take the form of items that were accorded ranked positions in hierarchical systems of valuation; and c) intrinsic value. As for the first of these forms, most studies of the Andes emphasize the character of Andean economies as nonmarket based (a view deriving primarily from the research of John Murra). This does indeed appear to hold true for societies of the central and southern Andes under Inka domination. However, there is increasing evidence for specialized craft production and the circulation of preciousities along trade routes linking the central coast of what is today Peru with coastal and highland populations of northern Peru and the territory of present-day Ecuador. The latter trade network appears to have employed to some extent copper axes as a form of currency, although we have very little information on the mechanisms of such currency-based trade and marketing. Whether proceeding through marketing or the better-attested reciprocal relations of *ayllu* (clan) centered exchanges over multiple vertical ecological zones, Andean societies employed a rich lexicon of terms organizing the world of objects in hierarchical arrangements of relative worth or value (good, better, best). Urton explores a range of different

contexts in which such constructions of priority and precedence are testified in early colonial documents.

As for intrinsic worth, Urton's focus is on the analysis of places that were considered to be of value—primarily a class of places classified as *wakas*, a Quechua term denoting the sacred, whether referring to sites in the landscape, ruins or objects from the ancient past, or “unnatural” forms of otherwise ordinary objects (for example, ears of corn, children born with harelips). The focus on *wakas* allows Urton to raise the question of an analogy between the place value (positional) system characterizing Quechua decimal numeration, especially as formulated in *khipus* (knotted string recording devices), in which knots are linked to different positions/places along cords, and the notion of high-valued, sacred “places” in the landscape, as referenced in myths and other oral accounts. Urton suggests that such a connection could have been used by Inka cord makers to construct knot records linking person and place identities in myths and histories. This suggestion awaits further investigation and analysis, but if there is indeed interpretive potential in this approach, it may have implications as well for place value systems of numeration and their links to narrative formulations in other cultural and linguistic settings.

It is somewhat surprising that only David Stuart (chapter 24) explicitly reviews the sequence of number names used by a particular society. In this case he is concerned with a set of related Maya languages in Mesoamerica. Stuart notes that basically two different systems of numeration were in use in Maya territory. One method was used to count commodities and things (cacao beans, ritual offerings, and the like). Another, more restricted method was employed in reckoning days and years in the Maya calendar. Stuart notes that there are few terms in Maya that appear to reference the concept of value. The ones that exist include *ajil*, which appears to apply to value in the context of numbers and counting, and *tojool*, which meant “price” or “payment.” Stuart adduces certain evidence suggesting an active system of the circulation of goods, with traders transporting loads or cargos (termed *ikatz*, or *ikitz*) of precious commodities around the countryside. In addition, Stuart argues that cacao beans may have constituted something close to the instruments of a standardized monetary system, at least in some times and places in ancient Mesoamerica. The main unit for accounting practices relating to cacao traffic was the *pik* (8,000).

Stuart goes on to provide an intriguing analysis of the term *pik*. This term in fact designated fixed quantities keyed to specific *positions* in two different counting contexts: cacao beans and the days in the so-called Grand Long Count. The actual number of items occupying the position specified as *pik* in these two different contexts varied: *pik* equaled 8,000 cacao beans and 400 *tuns* (or 144,000 days), respectively. Stuart concludes that *pik* referred to the concept or principle of a specified position within numerical sequences composed of a number of positions but that the term was not equated with a particular quantitative value. In this case, what was apparently considered to be comparable were the relative positions within

the two different place notation systems. As he states the matter: “In the Standard Vigesimal count system [used for cacao beans, etc.] . . . the word *pik* stood for the number 8,000 (20^3), whereas in its calendrical setting, the same term referred to the third position in an exponential expression of time based on the 360-day year, or *haab*” (Stuart this volume). Thus we see in this instance terms and concepts for value as used in the trading of commodities that become entangled with the organizing principle of positionality.

In her article, Bailey (chapter 25) describes a wealth of exchange practices in the ancient Greco-Roman Mediterranean world centering on what she terms operational spaces, by which she means “organizing parameters enacted through specific instruments,” the latter primarily taking the form of coins and weights. Such transaction practices had great significance and implications for the nature and sense of community that underwrote market exchanges within ancient Mediterranean settlements. For instance, Bailey notes that the more people trusted in community authorities, the more likely they were to count rather than weigh their coins. In the Greco-Roman context, coins and weights were both based on fixed units having prescribed numerical properties. Such units could exist and be manipulated in different social and exchange contexts only when underwritten by a shared system of numeration. The numbers were the shared basis of communication; what the exchange value between any pair of enumerated objects was and on what terms one quantity might be exchanged for another were matters determined in the workings of the market. Bailey argues that in the creation of settings for exchanges in the Roman Empire not only were spaces created for numerical value manipulation but that such a circumstance gave rise to particular problems—specifically problems of *replication* and *validation*. Bailey defines the central problem here as “the less immediate the source of validation [of the standards of measure, the weight of coins, and so on], the more fraught the replication.” Acting together, coins and measures made up what Bailey terms a continuum of instrumentality in which a process of constant, reciprocal monitoring went on to validate continually and revalidate values within the grand Greco-Roman “community of circulation.” As Bailey concludes, “imperial authority . . . was not one of manipulating money supply or asserting values but of being the most powerful creator, concretizer, and replicator of an underlying metrology.” The numerical units of coinage and measures could be termed the founding conditions of value. Based on these initial conditions, the market went about its work of determining exchange values—that is, of determining how many of one thing might be exchanged for how many of another.

At the heart of the various operations and manipulations detailed in the articles on number value stands the concept or principle of value. Different concepts and formulations of value are at the heart of systems of knowledge and practices of quantification that emerge in descriptions and claims about the world of objects and identities made in the language of numbers in the five societies focused on here. In terms of the circulation of goods within societies, the critical issue in all the

articles—although perhaps most succinctly summarized in Bailey’s discussion—is one of reproducing or replicating standardized units of measure, weights, currency, and so on and of validating those units in such a way that exchange relations continue to function to provide for the production, circulation, and consumption of goods. In the absence of such processes and practices, society ceases to function. Just as today, it was in the everyday resort to standardized units of measure, weights, coinage, and so on in daily discourse, and through interactions within the home and marketplace (often through instrumentalities provided and overseen by state institutions), at the core of which were equivalencies among standardized numerical units, that we can situate some of the central processes of the construction of value by means of numbers in ancient societies.

CODA

Whereas value, broadly defined, has been something of a preoccupation of anthropology, it has not featured as prominently in archaeology until very recently (e.g. Barrett 2009; Bevan 2007; van Wijngaarden 1999). The first book-length study of the archaeology of value was a volume of essays edited by Douglass Bailey, with the assistance of Steve Mills, entitled *The Archaeology of Value: Essays on Prestige and the Processes of Valuation* (Bailey 1998). The focus of Bailey’s edited volume was not limited to value but included the related spheres of prestige and wealth, with the regional focus exclusively on Europe. The theoretical starting point of the volume was more prescribed, based as it was on Nancy Munn’s seminal work on the Gawa of the western Pacific, which we have already touched upon as it pertains to “fame” (Bailey 1998:1).

The most recent study, another edited volume, was put together by Iain Morley and Colin Renfrew and entitled *The Archaeology of Measurement: Comprehending Heaven, Earth and Time in Ancient Societies* (Morley and Renfrew 2010). In addition to an introduction coauthored by Renfrew, the volume includes papers by two of the participants in this volume (Stanish and Urton). The focus of Morley and Renfrew’s volume, although complementary to ours, is very different in that their purview is the construction of formal measurement systems and archaeological evidence for the development of measuring activities in various ancient societies. Indeed, as the editors argue, the construction of measurement systems underlies the development of science and technology, as well as economics, leading to new ways of understanding and explaining the world. More than this, measurement systems have provided the structure for addressing key concerns of cosmological beliefs and hence the comprehension of heaven, earth, and time as expressed in the subtitle.

Our aims for this volume are both more circumscribed and in some sense broader, as our focus is the construction of value in the ancient world. And like so many scholars interested in the construction of value, we return to Marcel Mauss’s

The Gift (Mauss 1990 [1925]), a small (in page length) yet profound and highly original contribution that had its greatest impact on what Douglas (1990:xvi) called the “small professional bodies of archaeologists, classicists, and anthropologists.” With some notable exceptions, the primary contributors to our volume are the same small professional bodies of (in alphabetical order) anthropologists, archaeologists, and classicists.

In so many ways, the brilliance of Mauss’s *The Gift* was the fact that he began by surveying living, functioning social systems—the American Northwest, Melanesia, and Polynesia, as well as functioning systems among Inuit and Australian hunters—before looking at texts that dealt with vanished systems (Roman, Germanic, Hindu, and other Indo-European laws) where there were also no free gifts. As students of the past, we cannot view functioning social systems with the immediacy and clarity of Mauss. So we begin where Mauss ended, not only in the hope of providing more depth and scope to the complexities of constructing value in long-vanished human systems but in the hope that these essays may contribute an insight into our own world. As Benedetto Croce (1966:4 [1917]) famously said, “Ogni vera storia è storia contemporanea” (all history is modern history). Or put another way, “we study the past to understand ourselves.”

NOTES

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1. As so many words in English, “fungible” enjoys a classical heritage, one that derives from the Latin *fungibilis*, *fungi* (“perform”; “enjoy”), as in *fungi vice* (“take the place of”). Fungible is a thing that precisely or acceptably replaces or is replaceable by another. “Fungible” does not appear in English vocabulary in noun form much before the early nineteenth century; “fungibility” was coined in the context of the early twentieth century.

2. As in the journal *Oeconomicus*, founded in Germany in 1983.

3. The fullest and most recent study of Aristotle’s economic thought is by Meikle (1995), which covers, among other things, exchange value, *chreia* (“need”; “want”), demand (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 5.5), exchange (cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1), money (as in Aristotle, *Politics* 1.8–1.10), and the notion of justice in exchange. Meikle’s study builds on the earlier work of Finley (e.g. Finley 1970, 1973).

4. Many prehistorians interested in the early prehistory of value and worth tend to follow a very economic mode of analysis; see most recently M. Smith 2010:47–49.

5. However, he does concede that Louis Dumont (see especially 1967, 1982, 1986) was the “only author who has made a consistent effort to develop a theory of value along Structuralist lines” (Graeber 2001:16).

6. Riegl’s essay “Der moderne Denkmalkultus, sein Wesen, seine Entstehung” was published in 1903 and reissued in 1929, almost a quarter century after his death, in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*. It was translated into English as “The modern cult of monuments” (see Riegl 1982 [1903]). In this paper, Riegl broke new ground by discussing the modern cult of monuments, their preservation—whether intentional or unintentional—and their *commemorative* value. For Riegl, “Age-value appreciates the past for itself, while the historical value singles out one moment in the developmental continuum of the past and places it before our eyes as if it belonged to the present. Intentional commemorative value aims to preserve a moment in the consciousness of later generations” (Riegl 1982:38 [1903]).

