



Centro di Ricerche
e Documentazione
"Piero Sraffa"

Surplus Approach and Institutions: Where Sraffa Meets Polanyi

Sergio Cesaratto

Centro Sraffa Working Papers

n. 61

April 2023

ISSN: 2284 -2845

Centro Sraffa working papers

[online]

Surplus Approach and Institutions: Where Sraffa Meets Polanyi

Sergio Cesaratto

University of Siena

Abstract

Relying on anthropological and archaeological research based on the notion of social surplus, and on the lessons of Marx, Polanyi, Sraffa and Garegnani, the paper argues that the classical surplus approach is naturally associated with institutional and historical analysis. The concept of social surplus is a skeleton which is given muscles by institutional analysis while the latter would be enervated if not anchored to a base of ultimate material interests. Institutions should be looked at in relation to the extraction and distribution of the social surplus and the resulting inequality and social conflict. The paper offers a novel Post Keynesian view of institutions in an interdisciplinary perspective.

Keywords: Surplus; Economic History; Institutions; Marx; Sraffa; Polanyi

JEL Codes: A12; B51; B52

“Task of the economic theory of any system consists in formulating the laws governing the volume of economic surplus and its utilisation [...]”

Witold Kula ([1962] 1970, 10, my translation)

1. Introduction*

Famously Piero Sraffa (1951, 1960) recovered the classical economists’ surplus approach “submerged and forgotten” after the marginalist revolution. In other social sciences like anthropology and archaeology, however, the concept of social surplus has never been abandoned since it was first adopted in pre-classical “stage theory” (Meek 1976) and it is

* I thank Michele Cangiani and Stefano Di Bucchianico for useful comments and suggestions. A revised version of this paper will appear in the *Journal of Economic Issues*.

still “lively and kicking”, so to speak.¹ An exploration of this wide use may be beneficial both to the modern classical surplus theory and to the mentioned social sciences, bringing some economic clarifications in socio-historical studies of earlier social formations on the one hand, and proving the merit of the classical approach reinvigorated by Sraffa some sixty years ago on the other. This potential mutual fertilisation between sister social sciences did not pass unnoticed. Long ago, Clark (1992, 458) maintained that “most Sraffians will mention the importance of historical and institutional factors, yet these factors are given no active role”, while Adams (1991, 189) argued that “relative surpluses appear simultaneously with the enabling institutions-rules, procedures, and sortings that achieve their realization and distribution”. Blankenburg, Arena and Wilkinson (2012, 1272) later observed that in the opening chapters of Sraffa (1960) we find “different types of societies” that are “differentiated by their respective rules of income distribution. Other societies with yet different rules of income distribution can and should be considered, if we want to build a more general type of economics”. In this regard, Garegnani “noted in the opening pages of his *Il capitale nelle teorie della distribuzione* [...] that ‘in the classical theories of distribution, the central problem is the determination of the circumstances which rule the size of the social surplus’ (Garegnani, 1960, 3), *not price theory*” (Arena 2013, 98, italics in the original).

Relying on some previous research on the concept of surplus in economic anthro-archaeology and economic history,² this paper takes inspiration from these fields in order “to build a more general type of economics”, in particular one in which institutions (political and cultural) and the historically determined production and distribution of the social surplus form a unique feature of social formations (Martins 2014). As long ago advocated by anthropologist Stephen Gudeman (1978, 349, 365), anthropology, archaeology and economic history’s embrace of the surplus tradition may add much needed institutional (cultural and political) substance to the classical surplus approach, while the latter may provide the sister social sciences the necessary economic foundations alternative to marginal economic analysis. Chris Gregory (2000, 1004), a well-known anthropologist also trained in classical economics, argued that anthropology “is a treasure trove of ethnographic description and theoretical speculation unknown to most in the [economic] discipline to day (including the [classical] political economy traditions)”. Marx’s historical materialism and the concept of modes of production have a major influence on this approach despite the incompleteness of these notions, which yet makes them open and non-doctrinal (Cesaratto 2023c).

Section 2 dwells upon the possible definitions of economic surplus. Section 3 examines the objection to this concept especially raised by Karl Polanyi and his school. Section 4,

¹ The first number of *Economic Anthropology* (2014) and a special issue of *World Archaeology* (2017) were devoted to the notion of economic surplus. In the introduction to a book on the “archaeology of subsistence, specialisation and surplus food production” Groot and Lentjes (2013, 8) ask themselves “what justifies another volume on subsistence and surplus production. After all, the subject matter is not new and numerous publications have been dedicated to it in the past”.

² Cesaratto and Di Bucchianico (2021a/b); Cesaratto (2019, 2023a/b).

5 and 6 show how some anthropological and archaeological work over the Neolithic and Urban revolutions help to meet the Polanyian objections proving that historical and institutional analysis of pre-capitalist social formations well combines with the concept of economic surplus, particularly in the explanation of the origins of inequality. The conclusions emphasise that, independently of historical materialism, the adoption of the surplus approach naturally leads to an historical and institutional analysis aimed at explaining its material generation and distribution. Notably, approving the Polanyian criticism of mechanical utilizations of the surplus approach (often also in historical materialism), we do not put the surplus first and institutions later, but suggest a codetermination. The concept of social surplus is quite general and is substantially mute until historical and institutional analysis gives it life. It goes without saying that institutional analysis is in turn evanescent if not anchored to material base. The surplus approach is one possible anchor. Marginalism is another, as shown by mainstream New Institutional Economics (NIE) (e.g. Maucourant 2012). Fortunately, criticism of marginalism from Sraffa, Garegnani, Pasi-netti and others guides us about the right anchor. We finally suggest some further lines of research concerning, in a comparative analysis perspective, the just mentioned NIE, historical materialism and the surplus approach to institutions.

2. On the concept of economic surplus

A number of meanings of economic surplus can be envisaged in the social sciences literature, which is useful to specify with inter-disciplinary communication in mind (cf. Darmangeat 2018, 55-56). Following a somehow historical sequence, we distinguish between *normal*, *sectoral* and *foreign trade* surpluses, and the classical economists' *social* surplus.³

2.1 Normal or intertemporal surplus

It is an evident consequence of the Neolithic adoption of agriculture 12,000 years ago or so that social output begun to materialize typically at one point of the year while consumption was spread all over the year. As Childe (1936, 71) put it⁴, with the Neolithic

³ In an important book on surplus in anthropology, Morhart and De Lucia (2015, 5) “resist the tendency to offer single, uni-faceted definitions of surplus” vaguely defined as “the excess amount left over after subsistence needs have been accommodated, calculated in reference to the individual, the household, the community, the population, or the region” (ibid, 18). While I feel unhappy with this, I understand that economic surpluses may be pursued at various societal levels possibly with multiple purposes, not only for supporting an élite, but also as a cover for risk, for trade, for community ceremonies etc. (Morehart 2014, 161). We are here mainly concerned with the link between surplus and social stratification at an aggregate economy level. However, as pointed out below, this link may well emerge as an unintended consequence of the initial existence of surpluses motivated by a variety of particularistic purposes. A concept of “surplus” is also used by marginalists but with a totally different meaning (cf. Cesaratto 2019).

⁴ Gordon Vere Childe (1892-1957), a Marxist, was likely the greatest (and most fascinating) archaeologist of the last century.

revolution, “food production, even in its simplest form, provides an opportunity and a motive for the accumulation of a surplus. A crop must not be consumed as soon as it is reaped. The grains must be conserved and eked out so as to last till the next harvest, for a whole year. And a proportion of every crop must be set aside for seed”. Economic anthropologists have also pointed out that agricultural subsistence communities, and even the hunter-gatherers pre-neolithic communities, might produce and store surpluses for precautionary motives (e.g. in view of a draught). These forms of intertemporal transfers of current production to smooth intertemporal consumption or to cover for future scarcity risks have been defined “normal surpluses” (Halstead 1989). They are consistent with both a subsistence economy, one in which producers consume all the social product over a whole production cycle from one harvest to the next, and with an economy generating a social surplus in which, over the cycle, producers receive less than the social product. In a subsistence economy the management of a normal surplus may have been the occasion for an élite to emerge by imposing the production of an additional social surplus to support its needs (Halstead and O’Shea 1989; Groot and Lentjes 2013, 9; Morehart and De Lucia 2015, 11, 14; Bogaard 2017; Frangipane 2018). We shall come back on this.

2.2 Sectoral or Smithian surpluses

In an economy in which division of labour prevails, single industries will produce a surplus, intended as an output exceeding their own requirements, that is exchanged with the surplus of other industries. In principle, this does not imply the existence of a *social* surplus, once all industries are considered. Sraffa’s (1960) initial price equations, for instance, provide an example of a “subsistence economy” (primitive economy in the Italian translation) in which the surplus of each single industry is just sufficient to guarantee the reproduction of the system on the same scale (with no superfluous consumption or net capital accumulation). It is therefore inaccurate to identify the social surplus with the agricultural food surplus, as sometimes done in economic anthropology. For instance, if manufactured goods are used as an input in agriculture (as necessities or means of production), then the respective surpluses of the two sectors might be exchanged in a measure just sufficient to assure the reproduction of the system with no social surplus. However, if the social output basically consists of agricultural products only, and this sector self produces the simple tools it uses, the identification of the social surplus with the agricultural food surplus is approximately correct.⁵

2.3 Foreign trade surplus

Similarly to the former case, while the existence of a surplus in some industries is a necessary condition for foreign trade, these individual surpluses do not imply the existence of a *social* surplus. Suppose for instance that countries X and Y produce respectively the

⁵ This case should not be confused with that of Ricardo’s *Essay on Profits* (1815) in which a primary and a secondary sector exist, but the rate of profits is determined in the agricultural sector in the presumption that in this sector wages, capital inputs and gross output approximately consist of a same commodity (corn).

two commodities a and b , each of which used as an input to produce the other, and with each country producing a surplus (respectively of a and b) just enough to satisfy the reproductive needs of the other economy. In practice, we have just taken a two-commodities subsistence economy, drawn a national border between the two industries and called the exchange of the respective commodity surpluses “foreign trade”. This might be the case of Neolithic miners in some regions, “highly skilled specialists” that “certainly lived by bartering their products for the surplus corn and meat produced by farmers” located in foreign regions (Childe, 1942, 33). Childe suggests that *normal surpluses* may provide an occasion for foreign trade: “The surplus thus gathered will help tide the community over bad seasons; it will form a reserve against draughts and crop failure. [...] Ultimately it may constitute a basis for rudimentary trade, and so pave the way to a second revolution” (quoted by Morehart and De Lucia 2015, 11).

2.4 The classical social surplus

The dominant meaning of economic surplus is by far the one that we derive from the classical approach according to which the social surplus is defined as that part of the output that any society can freely utilise once the quantity needed to reproduce the same product in the subsequent period has been set aside (Garegnani 1984; Cesaratto 2020). The surplus is therefore the difference between the final product and its replacements (e.g. consisting in a simple corn economy of grain to sow and to feed the peasants):

$$(Gross) \text{ social product} - \text{replacements} = \text{surplus} \quad (1)$$

Of course real societies never exactly ‘reproduce’ themselves; they are perpetually in a process of flux and evolution. The abstraction is however useful for understanding certain aspects of how real societies function.

Slightly modifying the exposition by Aspromourgos (2005), let us consider a simple formulation of the classical surplus approach in a two-commodities economy with no joint production, no fixed-capital and abundance of fertile land; the production process over a given period, say one year, can be described as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} A_a + c_a N_a &\rightarrow A \\ c_a N_b &\rightarrow B \end{aligned}$$

In this simple model commodity a , say corn, is used as means of production in its own production and as subsistence good, while commodity b requires no material inputs aside the wage goods paid to workers. More specifically, A_a is the quantity of commodity a employed in the production of the quantity A of commodity a (of itself). Given the length of the working day (measured in hours) N_a and N_b represent the respective number of workers necessary to the production of levels A and B of the two commodities. Finally c_a is the historically given amount of commodity a necessary for the reproduction of each workers. It is assumed that c_a remunerates each worker independently of the daily working time (which is therefore a social variable with some maximum physical limit).

As long as industry a just reproduces itself – that is $A = A_a + c_a N_a$ – production of commodity b is zero. If, however, $A > A_a + c_a N_a$, the surplus (S_a) can be utilised to activate industry b , that is:

$$S_a = A - (A_a + c_a N_a) = c_a N_b \quad (2)$$

Industry a is a self-contained subsystem able to reproduce itself with a possible surplus. The surplus of commodity a allows the production of commodity b . In Sraffian jargon, commodity a is a basic commodity while b is non-basic. More interestingly, N_a can be defined as *necessary labour* and N_b as *surplus labour*: the existence of a surplus in the production of the necessary commodity (corn) allows the maintenance of a surplus labour producing luxury commodities or infrastructures (say, silk or temples). The classical notion of social surplus is naturally associated with the existence of social stratification albeit is potentially applicable to any society, equalitarian or stratified.

The condition for the existence of a potential social surplus rests in the fact that in industry a net output per worker is higher than the historically defined necessary consumption. Given the homogeneity of inputs and outputs in industry a (e.g. corn) we can express this as:

$$\frac{A - A_a}{N_a} > c_a \quad (3)$$

That is, net output per worker of commodity a is higher than her subsistence.⁶ This condition depends on both social and technical circumstances as shown by equation (4):

$$\frac{A - A_a}{L_a} h > c_a \quad (4)$$

In this equation we express the number of workers N_a as the number of hours of work (L_a) necessary to produce A , divided by the given length of the working day (h), that is $N_a = L_a/h$.⁷

From a social perspective, the length of the working day (h) can vary depending on the relative power of social classes and anyway by social choices. A change in working time determines, for a given per-worker subsistence level (c_a), a corresponding variation in

⁶ In an economy with heterogenous means of production and subsistence goods industry a could be defined as the integrated subsistence-good sector, the vertically integrated sector that produces the subsistence goods for the whole economy and its own means of production (cf. Garegnani 1984, 313-320). As just recalled, in the terminology of Sraffa (1960) these means of production and subsistence goods are *basic commodities*, that is commodities that are used, directly and indirectly, in the production of *all* other commodities. A non-basic commodity enters at most in the production of itself. In our simple system, commodity a is a basic commodity, while commodity b is non-basic.

⁷ If one million of hours of work is necessary to produce a daily product A , and the length of the working day is 10 hours, the number of workers is 100 thousands (for a more detailed discussion see Di Bucchianico 2022).

output and surplus of commodity A (depending also on the prevailing economies of scale). A larger surplus of A will for instance allow production of B to be increased too.⁸

Technical progress may induce a fall both in A_a and L_a so that a given quantity of labour may generate a larger output of both commodity a and b . If it is L_b to fall, only the potential output of commodity b will rise.

Finally, *ceteris paribus*, as seen in equation (2) a variation in the historically determined subsistence level c_a will also determine a corresponding variation of the surplus of commodity A and in the output and employment in industry B .

Foreign trade would be associated to a *social* surplus in case of our simple example if industry b is a non-basic industry located in a foreign country. In this case country X will exchange its surplus of commodity a in exchange of the luxury commodity b . (If country Y produces an excess of commodity b once imported the necessities for its labouring class, its élite will also enjoy a social surplus.) According to Childe, trade in luxuries (“non essentials”) during the Neolithic between self-sufficient communities was the earliest form of trade (1936, 74). Childe (1958, 71) observed also that: “metal was the first indispensable [basic] article of commerce (as contrasted with luxuries [non basic] which, at a pinch, society could do without and had admittedly been traded even in the Old Stone Age)” and that “metal workers were always professionals, who did not grow their own food”. Of course, commodities a and b can both be basic, both produced with a surplus which is partly traded and partly consumed by the élite that thus enjoy a surplus composed by both commodities.⁹

In the rest of the paper we are mainly concerned with the classical social surplus.

⁸ Production of B increases both by the rise of the working day and because N_b will rise because of the investment of the larger surplus of A . Social choices can be such that h is so small that no surplus of commodity A and therefore output of B are produced. The community opts for more free time and less luxuries. A sign “ \geq ” should be put in equations (3) and (4).

⁹ The case is again equivalent to a closed economy in which we draw an international border between the two industries. Assuming that commodity a is a consumption good and b both a production and luxury good (say copper), the production process may be now described as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} B_a + c_a L_a &\rightarrow A \\ B_b + c_b L_b &\rightarrow B \end{aligned}$$

Suppose that both a and b can be produced with a surplus over the requirements of both industries (countries), so that:

$$\begin{aligned} A &> c_a L_a + c_b L_b \\ B &> B_a + B_b \end{aligned}$$

The two countries will trade both the respective imported production requirements (B_a and $c_b L_b$ respectively) and part of the respective surplus. In market economies with free capital mobility, the surpluses will be distributed according to the value of the anticipated capital and a rate of profits must be calculated along relative prices (Sraffa 1960, chapter 2). These concepts apply to pre-capitalist economies only *cum grano salis*.

3. Between Childe and Polanyi: material and institutional origins of the social surplus

As said, the social surplus has both technical and social determinants. Looking at equations (3) or (4) we observed that the possibility of a social surplus depends upon net output per worker of commodity a being higher than historically given subsistence. Since an objective definition of the subsistence level is impossible (even the difference between biological and cultural elements is blurred), and the same applies to the length of the working day, an absolute concept of surplus must be abandoned in favour of a relative, historically defined *social* concept (Pearson 1957; Arena 2015). Moreover, while labour productivity intended as product per worked hours is mostly dictated by technology, the intensity of effort per hour worked, and the length of the working day (governing per-worker productivity) are distinct societal choices, as Marx pointed out.¹⁰ The double nature of the social surplus, technical and social, has sparked off an important controversy in anthropology and archaeology which we shall regard in positive, constructive terms (see also Morehart and De Lucia 2015, 18-24).

Since the pre-classical “stage theory” was formulated (particularly by Turgot and Adam Smith) and critically picked up by Marx and Engels’ theory of the modes of production, the emergence of a social surplus has been traditionally associated with the neolithic (or agricultural) revolution.

On this basis, many anthropologists and archaeologists have linked the existence of a social surplus to the emergence of socially stratified, sedentary, and politically and culturally structured societies that can be defined as complex “civilisations” (without necessarily giving this term a positive ethical-moral valence). In fact, the surplus allows one or more social classes to live without having to provide for the direct production of their sustenance, thus being able to take care of other activities, e.g. political-administrative, military, ideological-religious, cultural, and in highly advanced societies, scientific. A materialistic account of the emergence of a social surplus and with it of civilisation has been provided, inter alia, by Jared Diamond ([1997] 2005). The most influential earlier supporter of this view was Gordon Vere Childe.¹¹

For these scholars, the Neolithic revolution, i.e. the adoption of agriculture in certain areas of the world particularly predisposed, e.g. the Near East, is the necessary precondition for a surplus-producing economy and thus for the subsequent “urban revolution”.

¹⁰ Marx (e.g. [1867] 1974, 299) distinguished, for example, between relative and absolute surplus value variations: the former is an increase in the surplus produced per capita due to technical improvements or a decrease in the product destined for workers’ subsistence; the latter due to a lengthening of the working day.

¹¹ The first handbook of economic anthropology, Herskovits (1952), was also based on the concept of social surplus. The first edition of the book in 1940 sparked off an aggressive marginalist reaction from Frank Knight. Notably, Herskovits moved within the precincts of the old American institutionalism *à la* Veblen. In earlier societies the admiration of producers for the opulent (conspicuous) consumption of the élite supported the surplus-based social inequality. For Herskovits this was a *de te fabula narratur* of what more hiddenly happens in capitalism (see Cesaratto 2019, Cesaratto and Di Bucchianico 2021a).

Necessarily, in fact, the city and its manifold political-religious, administrative, ideological, craft and military activities depend on agricultural surplus and thus on the subordination of the countryside to the city (Childe 1950). The criticism that has traditionally been levelled at Childe, however, concerns his “insistence on the technological fact as the prime motive for progress [which] contributes to conferring a materialistic, and particularly economistic, tone to his explanation of social evolution” (Liverani [1998] 2017, 4, my translation). On a similar vein, Darmangeat (2020, 60) notes that surplus theory “remains silent on the social forms under which inequalities and exploitation are supposed to have developed”.

Impressing, in an autobiographical note written shortly before his suicide in 1957, Childe (1958, 73) refers to his first major popular book *Man makes Himself* (Childe 1936) by writing that “discredited fictions like ‘Economic Man’ still haunt its pages”, and more precisely a mechanical view of historical materialism:

In *Man makes Himself* (1936) the archaeological record is interpreted as documenting a directional process wherein men by applications of science steadily increased their control over non-human nature so that their species might multiply and incidentally secrete laws and political institutions, religions and art. That falls short of Marxism in so far as it failed to emphasize that and how science can only be applied, means of production only operated, within an institutional framework that is not itself entirely economic.

Childe ([1949] 1979, 93) simplified historical materialism by writing that: “The way people get their living should be expected in the long run to ‘determine’ their beliefs and institutions”, but warned later that Marxism differs “radically from environmentalism or geographical determinism [...] It is not the individual human animal that has to be ‘adjusted to his environment’ in order to ‘survive’, as each rabbit or each rat must be. It is his society that must be adjusted, and the adjustment is precisely what anthropologists [...] have called culture” (ibid, 94).

The social aspect of the economic surplus has been underlined by Karl Polanyi and his school.¹² Although largely implicit in the classical and Marxian notion of social surplus, the open rejection of an *absolute* concept of social surplus in favour of a historical and cultural notion of *relative* surplus is due to this school.¹³ This emphasis is reflected in the Polyanian criticism of the *mechanicism* that in some (often Marxist) approaches accompanies the transformation of a potential surplus into an actual surplus.¹⁴ More specifically, according to Polanyi and his followers, there is no automatism between potential and actual surpluses, and the social mechanisms that lead a human society towards social stratification, i.e. towards the establishment of a surplus extraction of one part of society

¹² See Polanyi, Arensberg and Pearson (1957), in particular Pearson (1957); see also Darmangeat (2018, 2020).

¹³ On Childe and Marxism see Faulkner (2007), but the topic deserves more in-depth analysis.

¹⁴ The existence of potential surpluses is associated to the relative nature of an economic surplus, that is the flexibility that social choices have to produce it or not by manoeuvring the subsistence level, the length and intensity of work and, possibly the techniques in use (what in actual Marx fully acknowledged, see footnote 10 above).

from another, must be explicated. While this criticism should be taken in the constructive sense of a much needed historical and institutional contextualization of the concept of social surplus, Polanyi and his school remain dismissive, without much in-depth analysis, about the classical economics and Marx.¹⁵ This is a pity, since many Polanyians insights can be seen in continuity with the classical approach and Marx.

Insights begin with Polanyi's interest on the location of the economy in the institutional structures of different societies (1977, xliii and passim), and with his "substantivist" definition of the economy that is in continuity with that by Marx: "The economy as an instituted process of interaction of material wants forms a vital part of every human community. Without an economy in this sense, no society could exist for any length of time" (ibid, 31).¹⁶ And similarly to Marx, Polanyi denounces the "economistic fallacy" of "equating the human economy in general with its market form" (ibid, 6).¹⁷ As much as Marx, then, Polanyi identifies in personal and political ties (and not in market prices) the connective tissue of economic relations in pre-market societies, what he labels "forms of integration" designating "the institutionalized movements through which the elements of the economic process – from material resources and labor to the transportation, storage, and distribution of goods – are connected" (ibid, 35).¹⁸ The well-known main forms of integration (reciprocity, redistribution, and exchange) also vaguely recall Marx's ([1857-1858] 1973, 471-479) tentative classification of past economic formations. Polanyi also points out that, on the one hand, "the integration of man and nature into the economy was largely left to the working of the basic organization of society, which took care almost incidentally of the economic needs of the group" (ibid, 56). On the other hand, he writes, "[a]ll this, of course, concerns only a subjective awareness of the economy. The objective process, as it actually unrolls, is give apart from any conceptual awareness on the part of the participants, *for the causational sequence to which we owe the availability of the necessities of life is present no matter how men conceptualize their existence*" (ibid, 56, my italics). In this way, perhaps surprisingly, Polanyi gives the economic sphere a high degree of autonomy.

Polanyi's view can thus be rationalised: while "the [objective] unity and coherence of [...] economic activities may remain unconscious in the minds of the participants"

¹⁵ Polanyi (1977, pp. 8-9) shows little understanding of the generality of the classical concept of social surplus as above defined (section 2.4) and circumscribes its existence to a market economy. Polanyi does not note, for instance, that Quesnay proposes a double economic circuit, economic and institutional, in which, assuming that wages consist of agricultural goods, the agricultural surplus sustain both the feudal or town élites and the production of handicraft products (see below section 6).

¹⁶ For comparison see Marx ([1857-1858] 1973, 85 and ff). A famous controversy ran through the 1960s in economic anthropology between *substantialists* (Polanyians) and *formalists* (marginalists). The latter defended the use of the marginalist apparatus for the analysis of primitive and ancient societies, an approach later supplanted by the more sophisticated NIE. An excellent review of these debates in view of NIE in view is Krul (2016) who, unfortunately, misses the surplus approach as a third possibility between Polanyi and NIE.

¹⁷ Correspondingly, Marx denounced "those economists who smudge over *all* historical differences and see bourgeois relations in all forms of society" Marx ([1857-1858] 1973, 105, original italics).

¹⁸ For comparison see Marx ([1867] 1974, 81-82) and Anderson (1974, 403).

(ibidem), the institutional set up of society (the forms of integration) assure a consistent economic behaviour and ideological participation of agents. This eco-institutional arrangement is, of course, “largely responsible for the absence of a concept of the economic in primitive societies” (ibidem). The economic and institutional sides thus live in symbiosis.

While this is inspiring, what is missing in Polanyi is an economic analysis of the economic structure – that, as seen, Polanyi recognized having an autonomous existence – and more specifically of distributional issues. To be sure, with regard to distribution, for Harry Pearson (who edited and introduced Polanyi’s posthumous 1977 book), the “*appropriational power* is the key to any consideration of the economy as a social system. It locates the institutional matrix which orders man-to-man economic relations and defines the place of the economy in society in the sense that it locates the societal source of rights and obligations which sanction the movements of goods and persons into, through, and out of the economic process” (Pearson 1977, xxxii, my italics; see also Polanyi 1977, 31-32). However, while, as Pearson acknowledges, this evokes Marx’s “relations of production”, neither Pearson nor Polanyi pay any attention to the “innermost secret” of Marx’s analysis ([1894] 1974, 791-792), that is the forms of extraction of the social surplus (or communitarian renunciation to extract it).¹⁹

It is also unfortunate that while Polanyi dismisses with poor arguments the surplus approach, he ends up to identifying economic analysis with the study of market relations in precisely the marginalist manner, conflating de facto economic science with marginalism. He argues for instance that: “To link the satisfaction of material wants with scarcity plus economizing and weld them into one concept may be both justified and reasonable under a market system” (1977, 20). He has also words of appreciation for Karl Menger’s marginalism that “ranks high among the achievement of the human mind” and of “superb relevance” (1977, 21), as far as his theory is not applied to pre-market economies.

In this way Polanyi makes the double severe mistakes of precluding an economic analysis of ancient societies in non-marginalist terms, while approving the marginalist interpretation of capitalism (whose criticism is left to moral arguments, even those largely anticipated by Marx) (Cesaratto and Di Bucchianico 2021 a/b).²⁰

¹⁹ Polanyi (1977, 43) is in fact critical of Marx’s “grouping of economic systems into slavery, serfdom, and wage labour traditional with Marxism” and of “the conviction that the character of the economy is, above all, set by the status of labor. Clearly, he points out, “the integration of land into the economy should be regarded as hardly less vital”. It is surprising that a humanist like Polanyi rejects the centrality of labour exploitation in economic analysis, while Marx’s triad is based on the historical relations between labour and the means of productions, including land. Assigning the same status to labour and land (and why not to “capital”) may reflect the marginalist notion of production factors.

²⁰ See also Krul (2016, 23). Sebastiano Taccola (2020, pp. 99-100) reports that similar critiques to Karl Polanyi were well present among Italian Marxists in the 1970s. For Andrea Carandini (a world-know archaeologist) Polanyi fails “to recognise, on a theoretical-abstract level, the centrality of the production process”. For the anthropologist Pier Giorgio Solinas, Polanyi “merely states that primitive economies functioned differently from the market economy, but does not question the validity of the marginalist-formal definition for the modern economy”, hence “the substantial ineffectiveness of the political proposal, limited to a simple moralistic outrage, which often takes on humanistic overtones, against capitalist society”. Quoting historian Sarah Humphreys (a former pupil of Arnaldo Momigliano in London), Taccola concludes that

The celebrated economic historian Moses Finley (1912-1986), a student of Karl Polanyi, reinforced the view that, before capitalism, the economy only constituted a subordinated social activity little amenable to an independent analysis. More specifically, he regarded the Graeco-Roman economies as simple rural economies, mainly described as household production, and with a pre-eminence of extra-economic moral values and political institutions over economic interests.²¹

In a famous passage Marx mocked this stance from a materialist point of view arguing that: “This much [...] is clear, that the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on Politics. On the contrary, it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why in one case Politics, and in the other Catholicism, played the chief part” (Marx [1867] 1974, fn 1, 86). On similar lines, Oxford historian Geoffrey de Ste. Croix (1910-2000) criticised Finley (1973) by asking the question: from where did the surplus on which the affluent Greco-Roman classes prospered come from? (de Ste. Croix, 1981, 172).²² And predating Polanyi’s criticism of a mechanical equation between *potential* surplus and *actual* exploitation, in vol. 1 of *Capital*, Marx offers a crystal clear example of a population that can provide its subsistence by working just one day per week, so that “Nature’s direct gift to him is plenty of leisure time” ([1867] 1974, 482-483). “Before he can apply this leisure time productively for himself – Marx points out – a whole series of historical events is required” for “before he spends it in surplus labour for strangers, compulsion is necessary” (ibidem). That is to say, surplus labour (production above subsistence) is not a technical or natural event, but a social one: “The bounty of Nature does not explain why he would then have to work 6 days a week, or why he must furnish 5 days of surplus labour. It explains only why his necessary labour-time would be limited to one day a week. But in no case would his surplus-product arise from some occult quality inherent in human labour” (ibidem).

In this regard anthropologist Morehart (2014 154-155) recalls, on the one hand, the Polanyian warning that “there are always and everywhere potential surpluses available. What counts is the institutional means for bringing them to life” (Pearson 1957, 334). On the other hand, Morehart underlines that to concretely explain relative surpluses (relative

“regardless of how one wishes to attempt to bring Marx and Polanyi into dialogue, the strongest point of rupture between the two is the one pointed out by Humphreys in these terms: ‘Polanyi seems to have considered the exchange of goods as the primary moment [...]. This is certainly the point of sharpest break with Marxist theory [...]. The essential point is that social relations expressed and supported by the transfer of material goods come before the *Produktionsverhältnisse*’ (Relations of production)” (my translations from Italian).

²¹ In this way Finley sparked off the controversy between *primitivist* and *modernist* in economic history, parallel to that between substantivists and formalists in economic anthropology. On these controversies (including Finley’s positive contributions to our understanding of the ancient economies), see Cesaratto (2019, 2023a).

²² de Ste. Croix also criticises Finley (and Max Weber) for grouping people according to the individual social and political status without reference to the economic status as in the Marxian concept of class. For de Ste. social status is a mere descriptive category while thus defined, social groups “are not necessarily (like Marx’s classes) in any organic relationship with one another” (1981, 91). For Marx the lack of organic relations in income distribution is a case of vulgar political economy. On this important criticism to Finley, see Cesaratto (2023a, section 3.3).

to the given political and cultural context) absolute surpluses must also be identified and measured avoiding a fall in an chicken-egg vicious circle in which if institutions explain the social surplus, then this cannot be used to explain institutions, and vice versa (cf. Morehart and De Lucia 2015, 21). On a similar tone, Risch (2016, 34) denounces that whatever “the importance of subjective perceptions and belief systems in history, all forms of power or domination depend on economic resources in order to achieve political goals”. Finally, Liverani speaks of the “revolution in agricultural techniques” developing “in the aftermath of the urban revolution and proto-state forms”. and of how of “an enormously important historical event” such as this “little is said [...] in the current historical-archaeological literature on the subject, predominantly focused on developments in social structure and ruling elites, developments often estranged from those relating to the mode of production” ([1998] 2017, 25-26).

Cesaratto and Di Bucchianico (2021a/b) drew a positive message from these controversies suggesting the indissoluble connection between the social surplus and the institutions that preside over its production and distribution: “surplus production occurs as a political process”, as Morehart and De Lucia (2015, 15) put it. An important conclusion is therefore that the study of historical institutional sets up is anchored to the historical manifestation of surplus extraction and destination. Surplus and institutions are two side of the same coin. Authoritatively, the Oxford historian Sheilagh Ogilvie (2007) suggests, in open opposition to NIE, an explanation of institutions as regulators of the distributive conflict. Unfortunately, she does not go far enough to endorse the classical surplus approach.

4. The double transition

A test of the useful association between surplus and institutional analyses can be found in the anthropological and archaeological research on early economic formations. Following the standard Childean classification, we may distinguish here between the (complex) passage from the earlier communities of hunter-gatherers to agriculture (neolithic revolution), and the later emergence of town-centred societies (urban revolution). It is amply acknowledged that these transitions overlap with a social transition from the egalitarian communities of hunter-gatherers and early peasant/pastoralists to the urban social stratification (e.g. Darmangeat 2020; Risch 2016).

To begin with, the objective reasons of the (long) neolithic revolution are still unclear. While the refinement of agricultural knowledge and techniques was a millennial process promoted by local favourable conditions (Diamond [1997] 2005), it is also likely that for millennia human populations have known the basic principles of agriculture, but not necessarily adopted it, not only because of the need to refine techniques, but because it was considered not convenient from the point of view of the effort/return ratio, we would say today from the point of view of quality of life. As Scott (2017, 33) put it, there was an

age “when it was good to be a barbarian”. Exogenous factors may have eventually stimulated the adoption of agriculture, such as environmental changes due to natural or endogenous factors, for example, depletion of natural resources due to human action (Svizzero 2017 and Svizzero and Tisdell 2014 are useful surveys).

Be this as it may, institutional change accompanied the transitions. Influenced by Polanyi (e.g 1977, 55-56, 60 and passim), a vast literature initiated by Sahlins (1972) has developed on the relative opulence of the hunter-gatherers and their balanced social life designed to discourage the formation of elites through the control of potential surplus (also the earlier agricultural communities are said to be egalitarian).²³ The consideration of the social surplus as a societal choice means that its absence does not entail resource “scarcity” in an open criticism to the marginal approach which sees scarcities (and greed) everywhere (ibid, 8, 36 and passim). But which is the origin of these egalitarian social choices? Were hunter-gatherers or neolithic egalitarian communities the result of a benevolent human nature – a reminder of Rousseau’s good savage – or of social strategies openly aimed at limiting stronger individuals to dominate given the advantages of cooperation – a reminder of the Hobbesian social contract (Ames, 2007, 2010; Trigger, 2003; Gintis, Van Schaik and Boehm 2015; Risch 2016, 2018)?²⁴ According to Risch (2018, 46): “Economic equality is no less a social outcome than its opposite”, but the deep mechanism leading to equality are still object of research. Symmetrically, according to Risch (2016, 34), an exploitative surplus “is not the mechanical result of all economic development but depends, rather, on certain social conditions which require historical explanation”. Something more consolidated can be said in this regard.

5. Unintended generation of surplus and stratification

As Polanyi and his school pointed out, the exploitation of a social surplus to the benefit of an élite is not a mechanical outcome of potential surplus.²⁵ Agriculture does not imply

²³ On the late Sahlins (1930-2021) cf. the special issue of *Annals of the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* (vol. 55, 2021). As observed in the previous section, the deliberate choice of primitive societies of *not* producing a surplus did not pass unnoticed by Marx. Engels (not Marx) is sometimes accused of the view that “the lack of economic inequalities and exploitation in hunter-gatherer societies is a consequence of the low level of their labour productivity” (Darmangeat 2020, 60).

²⁴ Neoclassical Richard Posner (1980) maintains that the Hobbesian egalitarian and cooperative social contract of primitive societies is a sort of social insurance of mutual help vis-à-vis the highly uncertain environment. Although based on methodological individualism, insofar as it refers to an objective condition (uncertainty), this theory should not be rejected. Cf. Svizzero and Tisdell (2016) for a useful review of theories of human cooperation.

²⁵ Darmangeat (2020, 65) considers a “dead end” the idea that inequality is the result of prominent individuals called “aggrandizers”, at least as long as individual strategies are not explained by material and social circumstances that favour or discourage them. This issue reminds of the *vexata questio* of the role of human agency in economic history. This view evokes a famous quotation from Marx ([1852] 1937, chapt. 1, pp. n/a): “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past”.

the actual production of a potential social surplus that, even if produced, might well be finalised to and destroyed in social religious rituals or festivals preserving a degree of equality. Earle (2015, 309-311 and *passim*) talks, however, of the “unintended consequences” of earlier communitarian uses of surpluses that “often created conditions that resulted in social hierarchy and inequality” (this is also alluded in Polanyi 1977, 60). For instance, costly social obligations like bride prices or reciprocal gifts may induce the production of surpluses and the incurrence of debts, the non-observance of which may lead to servitude (Risch 2016, 37, 40; 2018, 47). Another “unintended” material occasion of surplus appropriation and stratification which has attracted much attention is product storage (Darmangeat 2020, Groot and Lentjes 2013 for reviews). The existence of a storable, measurable, transportable surplus, not easily hidden by producers and therefore appropriable without difficulty, may have provided the occasion for the emergence of an élite living out of rent or taxation. Appropriable output is typical of the storable staple products like cereals, that Diamond ([1997] 2005) singled out as the dietary base of the neolithic revolution.²⁶ In fact, the adoption of agriculture requires not only the existence of a package of products with sufficient yield and nutritional value, but this basket must also be storable between harvests, as it is the case of cereals or rice. We already met what anthropologists have called the ‘normal surplus’, the surplus that populations generally set aside as insurance for scarcity years. The possibility of a ‘normal surplus’ may suggest the potential for larger surpluses with which one part of the working population can support another part of the population that is detached from productive activities.²⁷ Stockpiling was initially a communitarian affair whose management was entrusted to particular figures, usually religious in character, thus representing the community and ensuring divine protection over subsistence. The administration of the communal collection and redistribution of stocks involved the invention of numbers and writing (and of bureaucracy). It is then possible that social elites emerged from an unforeseen transformation of religious elites into upper social castes.²⁸ Thus, redistributive states arose in which a productive

See Saitta (1994) and Veneziani (2012) for related debates in archaeology and Marxism, respectively. Cesaratto (2023c) for Popper’s and Douglass North’s accusation to Marx of holism and neglect of human agency.

²⁶ Testart (1988, 4 and *passim*) maintains that cases of output storage existed also among sedentary ‘egalitarian hunter-gatherers’. In this sense, Testart (*ibid.*, 6) concludes that ‘it is not the agricultural revolution that represents the major break among societies but the adoption of an economic structure of which the central feature is storage’. With the agricultural revolution, Testart acknowledges, storage became systematic, and control of warehouses by an elite constituted the key step for stratification.

²⁷ Halstead (1989, 69) is often credited to have seminally identified the unplanned transformation of a stored “normal surpluses” in social surpluses appropriated by an élite. The anthropologist moved from the “circular argument, in which the élite is a precondition of its own existence”. More specifically he moved from the consideration, on the one hand, of the traditional view elaborated by Childe that production “beyond subsistence is a necessary precondition of an elite (the basis of)” and, on the other, from the arguments advanced by Pearson and Sahlins that production “beyond subsistence is stimulated by the elite”. The vicious circle may be broken if the élite “could appropriate an *existing* surplus, rather than having to stimulate its *creation*” (my italics).

²⁸ According to Earle (2015, pp. 312-313) also the emergence of sectoral surpluses due to households specialization in specific productions may give unintended occasions to the rise of an élite. Engels argued on similar lines: “the division of labor slowly insinuates itself into this process of production. It undermines

population living in the countryside supported a city population. A recent famous anarchist-inspired (anti-state) text is in this regard significantly titled ‘Against the Grains’ (Scott 2017) in so far as it is the storability of grains that, according to the author, gave the state the opportunity to draw its lifeblood, i.e. taxes. Scott (2017, 21, 23-24) calls this the ‘grain hypothesis’.²⁹

The storage hypothesis does not exhaust the theories on the emergence of social stratification and of the state (in the standard sequence villages, chiefdoms, state). A classic theory is by the American anthropologist Robert Carneiro (1927-2020) in which population pressure and relative land scarcity would induce territorial conquests and the creation of larger political entities where military chiefs would be the natural candidates to take the lead of the state and of surplus extraction (Carneiro 1970). Other irons in the fire have recently been added by the late David Graeber in a voluminous book (Graeber and Wengrow 2021) which challenges the standard sequences looking at the hunter-gatherers age as a long epoch of institutional experimentation. These also included example of large, self-ruled urban conglomerates which would contradict the necessity of hierarchies to govern complex human settlements. Not well received by anthropologists and archaeologists,³⁰ this (often convoluted) work will require separate examination.

Scott, Carneiro or Graeber all sporadically employ the concept of social surplus, or of coerced/surplus labour. Much more systematic is this use by archaeologists working in the classical surplus tradition of which we provide a sample in the next section.

6. From storage to the urban revolution

With the urban revolution and social stratification, the town became the centre of complex economic flows both with the dominated countryside producing subsistence goods and with foreign communities. Ancient towns are, of course, the Mecca of archaeologists.

Mesopotamia is the locus of Childe’s urban revolution, at least in the western hemisphere. The world eminent archaeologist Mario Liverani can be taken as an example of a rich tradition in the surplus approach influenced both by Childe and by Polanyi’s reaction to “modernism”, the application of neoclassical market models to ancient economies (Liverani [1998] 2017, 3-9).

the collectivity of production and appropriation, elevates appropriation by individuals into the general rule, and thus creates exchange between individuals” (1884, 94).

²⁹ A similar argument linking physical appropriation of crops and the emergence of social stratification has been proposed by mainstream economists Mayshar, Moav and Pascali (2022). Scott (2017, 268, footnote 23) criticises them on the grounds that they see the state as playing a positive role in ‘protecting’ economic activities against illegal ‘racketeering’, whereas he basically sees it as the main confiscator. From our perspective, it is interesting how Mayshar, Moav and Pascali (2022) elect the surplus approach as their main opponent (cf. Cesaratto and Di Bucchianico 2021b, pp. 44-45, 50-52). See Tauger (2018, 435) for a critique of Scott’s only negative view of the emergence of the state (see also Risch 2018, 46).

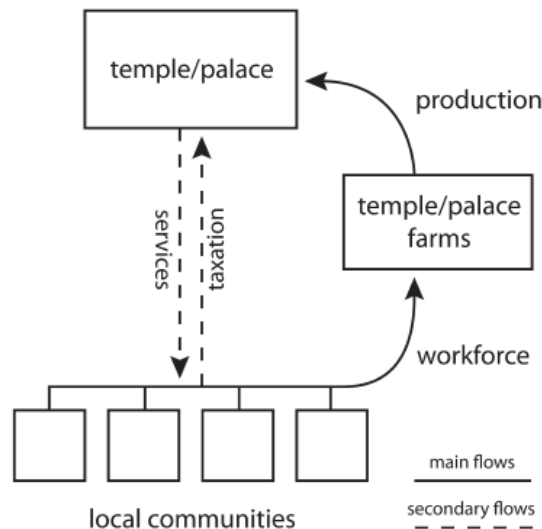
³⁰ See e.g. the special 2022 issue of *Cliodynamics*: “Leading Scholars of the Past Comment on Dawn of Everything” (https://escholarship.org/uc/irows_cliodynamics/0/0).

According to Liverani (2011, 42-43) ancient Mesopotamia was characterised by two modes of production, “palatine” and “domestic”:

The first is the result of the urban revolution, and is the outcome of the centralization of the means of production in the hands of the so-called ‘great organizations’ (temple and palace); of the servile status of the producers towards the holders of political/administrative power; of a centripetal and redistributive flow of goods and the consequent hierarchical arrangement of the various productive sectors. The ‘domestic’ mode, on the other hand, is residual from the Neolithic period, and is characterized by the coincidence between the productive forces and the owners of the means of production; by a network of multidirectional and reciprocal exchanges; by the absence of full-time specialization [...]. The two modes stand in an obvious relationship of hegemony/subordination [...]. (my translation).³¹

Figure 1 is Liverani’s representation of the economic circuit at the time of the urban revolution in Uruk in the fertile Southern Mesopotamia (about the fourth millennium BC).

Figure 1: Economic circuit diagram in ancient Mesopotamia



Source: Liverani [1998] 2017 fig. 2 (reproduced in Nakassis, Parkinson and Galaty 2011, fig. 2, 179).

At the centre of this town-country scheme we find the temple in which “it is possible to identify the institutional body that managed the transformation: its growth is the disruptive fact, the real structural change, that transformed the low-Mesopotamian settlements from egalitarian communities to complex organisms” (ibid, 31-32, my translation). In line with the “storage hypothesis” the granary is likely at the origin of its power as in

³¹ On the hierarchical coexistence of two modes of production, in which actually the hegemonic exploit the subordinate, which retains, however some autonomy (e.g. property of the land and means of production and self-sufficiency), see also Liverani (1976, pp. 8-12). Liverani’s and other archaeologists’ description of the Mesopotamian economies evokes Marx’s controversial Asiatic mode of production, at least in general terms (see below footnote 38). Feudalism, Liverani argues, brought about a stricter control of the élite over household production.

“assuming economic functions (complementary to the cultural ones) the temples can have assumed and redefined old practices of ‘common storehouses’ already present in the neolithic villages since remote ages, conferring them however quite other dimension and quite different social and ideological valence.” (ibid, 31). In the scheme most of the surplus is extracted from peasant communities living in villages by means of part-time forced labour (corvees) in farms managed by the temple, and only secondarily by taxation (possibly receiving back some “unlikely” services as military protection or religious ceremonies). In line with the classical economists tradition, Liverani’s schemes evokes Quesnay’s *Tableau Economique* in which a rural productive class supports, by producing a surplus, an urban aristocratic class and a city artisan sector.³² Nakassis, Parkinson and Galaty (2011) extend Liverani’s analysis to “Agean palatial societies”.

In line with the surplus tradition, for Liverani exploitation was mainly based on ideological persuasion: “The extraction of resources from producers (and their household consumption) and the channelling towards social uses, requires a strong dose of coercion that can be either physical (but the use of force is expensive and in the long run counterproductive) or better ideological. And the temple was the only institution capable of convincing producers to surrender substantial shares of their labor for the benefit of the community and its leaders, under the species of their divine hypostasis” (Liverani 2011, 33-34). Much importance is indeed attributed by Liverani (ibid, 50) to the political-ideological component of a social formation: “The real inscriptions that we read were accessible only to a few, but they are only the tip of a submerged iceberg of political (or more generally ideological, usually with strong religious connotations) propaganda that held together the whole social and political community giving it security and compactness” (see also Earle 2015, 311).³³

Liverani (2011, 96) also concedes a relevant role to the famous “hydraulic hypothesis” according to which the need for controlled irrigation of the land and the cultivation of

³² With the ancient Rome in mind, the image of the town living off the food surpluses from the countryside has been revived by Max Weber’s notion of “consumer city” (Erdkamp 2001 for an interesting discussion based on the concept of social surplus; see also Cesaratto 2023a). Liverani (2011, [1998] 2017), likely representing many other archaeologists, clearly predates Scott’s (2017) presumptuous claim to have first identified grain production as the key to the urban revolution because of its ease of storage.

³³ A well-known Marxist archaeologist, Maurice Godelier (1974, pp. 264, 271), singled out the subtle way in which the élites may have concealed exploitation behind earlier communitarian customs. Kim (2014, 271) explains how the progressive élite control of community potential surpluses required a manipulation of minds “instilling a kind of false consciousness into the wider population” so that “actual producers voluntary surrender their property rights”. Another notable Marxist archaeologist, Eric Wolf, follows Marx’s distinction between capitalist, market-mediated relations of production and pre-capitalist relations based on personal and political ties (as said, Marx’s distinction clearly predates Polanyi’s own between embedded [personal] and disembedded [market] social relations). Wolf then classifies modes of production in capitalist, tributary, and kin-ordered modes. Particularly in the tributary mode (that would include a long period from the early Mesopotamian states to feudalism) the prevailing cosmology would project the material tribute extraction into a cosmic realm thus validating exploitation as a manifestation of a wider divine order (see Wolf [1982] 2010, 83). See also above footnote 11 on Herskovits.

cereals (barley) induced a centralized water management (see also Earle 2015, 316).³⁴ Other material bases, Liverani concludes, proved to be “unsuitable for generating similar urban revolutions” so that the eventual surpluses took the form of “family accumulation, ostentatious waste, noble competition, and military arrogance”, giving rise to the so-called “chiefdom”, proto-state structures (Liverani 2011, 33). On the opposite in southern Mesopotamia we have an invasive State in which, according to the archaeologist (ibid):

The bureaucracy, made up of scribes and divided into departments and hierarchy, takes care of the economic management of large entities such as the city-state. Establishes and records the influx of surpluses from the villages to the city, determines the redistribution of surpluses to workers, manages land, issues provisions for specialists, designs and implements the works of agricultural infrastructure (canals) and urban (temples, walls), undertakes the exchange with distant regions.

Marcella Frangipane (2018), another notable archaeologist from La Sapienza, underlines the extreme variety in which “surpluses were produced for various reasons and purposes, and were used in different ways in differing types of societies, depending also on the political and economic role taken on by the elites (ibid, 677). While storable agricultural productions by definition suggested the idea of an output larger than “immediate consumption”, “we need to reflect – Frangipane argues – on the various possible ways of intending and using surpluses, the reasoning behind its production, and its social function” (ibid, 678). In his regard, she classifies Mesopotamian economies according to the degree of State interference in the governance of the production and distribution of the social surplus. Centralised management was higher in Southern Mesopotamia where we can speak, in the wake of Polanyi, of a “centralised and redistributive” economy. Frangipane also refers to the hydraulic hypothesis (2018, 680).

The characterization of the complex low Mesopotamian economies as redistributive (or tributary) States has been object of criticism of marginalist-oriented archaeologists who support (here as elsewhere) market explanations of the ancient economies.³⁵ For instance, the Hungarian archaeologist Péter Vargyas and his followers have been particularly vocal in this regard, as Warburton (2014, 425) explains:

Péter Vargyas belonged to the small circle of those who realised that on the theoretical level, the “redistribution” hypothesis proposed for the archaic economies was incompatible with the evidence of the prices in the markets of the Ancient Near East, meaning that the markets do not represent a contrast to the modern world, but rather a common point. This meant that there was something else about the ancient world that was different. This market-oriented position differed fundamentally from that of those who thought in terms of subsistence or controlled economies where the market played a marginal role (at most)

³⁴ According to Anderson (1974, 472-474), the hydraulic hypothesis was launched by Adam Smith, later endorsed by Engels and Marx and eventually by the German historian and sinologist Wittfogel (1957) defined a “vulgar charivari”. An active communist in Weimar times, in 1951 in the United States a repented Wittfogel denounced Moses Finley for communist activities.

³⁵ Cesaratto (2023c) critically reviews the important works of historian Allain Bresson (2016) and Peter Temin (2013), both influenced by NIE, on ancient Rome.

– and Vargyas’s approach reflected a legitimate theoretical interpretation of the empirical evidence, in contrast to the substantivist approach. This in itself was a major project as it meant that economic theory should take account of ancient history – whether the economists are willing or not.

Followers of Vargyas particularly accused Johannes Renger, another distinguished archaeologist openly working in the classical surplus tradition on lines closer to Liverani (and explicitly referring to Sraffa). Renger retorted to Vargyas of limiting himself to “a viewpoint that is basically determined by neoclassical theory without taking cognition of the critique voiced also by economists (those who favour classical political economy theory) about a different approach when analysing premodern economies [...]” (Renger 2016, 17). In fact, both Renger (2005, 2016) and Liverani admit market activities on the fringe of the redistributive State. For instance, Liverani ([1998] 2017, 58-62) speaks of a double circle of relations: internal, relative to the work which directly depends on the temple-palace and lives on the redistribution of the surplus accumulated by it; external, relative to the “free” work which originates the surplus for the temple-palace by means of taxation or work. Liverani also speaks of the coexistence-integration of commerce administered by the temple-palace, aimed at ensuring the supply of necessary goods (like metals), and a private mercantile system that carried out, in practice, foreign trade. Often referring to the work of Renger and inspired by Polanyi, Michael Hudson (2020a) talks of mixed economies where palaces were sponsor of trade demonstrating from the beginning that functioning markets have almost always been regulated by the State to preserve social stability. Periodical events of debt forgiveness were for instance part of this strategy. Also the origin of money is in relation to the accounting practices of economic transactions in the palatial system, contrary to the *Metallist* view which relate it to the inefficiency of barter (Hudson 2020b).

7. Surplus theory and institutions: concluding remarks

Let us take stock of the preceding arguments, putting them in a wider perspective. Taking advantage of the work in anthropology and archaeology based on the notion of social surplus, and of the lessons of Marx, Polanyi, Sraffa and Garegnani, this paper has argued that the classical surplus is naturally associated with institutional and historical analysis. As Gregory (2000, p. 1003) put it, Sraffa’s contribution “serves to remind us that *homo economicus* is [only] a neoclassical form of Homo Sapiens”. The concept of social surplus is a skeleton which is given muscles by institutional analysis; the latter would be a phantom if not anchored to the former concept. Post Keynesian theory is still incomplete or irresolute over the theory of income distribution and institutions; it should instead more decisively refer to the classical surplus approach and look at institutions as regulating the extraction and distribution of the social surplus and the relate social conflict (Ogilvie 2007

for a similar view). The analysis of the deep origins of inequality necessitates of such an approach.³⁶

In actual, modern surplus theory has so far focused upon a restricted nucleus of formal economic relations characteristic of market economies notoriously labelled “core” of the surplus approach by Garegnani (1984) (see Cesaratto and Di Bucchianico 2021b). The institutional analysis is thus deferred to a separate analytical stage less liable to formal analysis as rather to historical investigation. This is fine as far as it goes, as a device for an ordered scientific analysis that may require different method at different stages (keeping in mind that also the relations within the core are not merely technical but conceal social relations, thus avoiding falling back into the commodity fetishism denounced by Marx). The main message we get indeed from the preceding sections is that the existence and extraction of a social surplus is eminently a social and not (just) a technical fact, also in capitalism. Symmetrically, the Polanyian mistake of neglecting the material basis of social stratification in pre-capitalist economies must also be avoided. Polanyi’s well-known classification of economic systems as based on reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange (Polanyi 1957, 253-254; 1977, 36), reflects a misleading asymmetry between pre-market economies (the realm of institutionalists) and market economies (the realm of marginalists). In fact, Marx and most anthropologists and archaeologists acknowledge that personal or political relations are the prevailing institutional modes of regulating production and distribution in pre-capitalist economies. The modern resurgence of the surplus approach suggests, moreover, that the economic analysis of market economies should not be left to marginal theory, which is analytically problematic in many respects. The surplus approach expresses indeed a general principle applicable to any society, including ancient societies amenable therefore, *cum grano salis* (as Marx put it), to *modern* economic analysis.³⁷ This helps to avoid Polanyi’s and Finley’s somehow

³⁶ Milanovic, Lindert and Williamson (2007) for empirical measurement of historical inequality using surplus theory.

³⁷ In a thoughtful paragraph of his *Ludwig Feuerbach*, Friedrich Engels ([1886] 1946, part 4) suggests that the relative definiteness of distributive relations in capitalism (once identified by a correct economic analysis) helps to reveal those of pre-capitalist societies hidden by personal-political elements: “But while in all earlier periods the investigation of these driving causes of history was almost impossible – on account of the complicated and concealed interconnections between them and their effects – our present period has so far simplified these interconnections that the riddle could be solved. Since the establishment of large-scale industry – that is, at least since the European peace of 1815 – it has been no longer a secret to any man in England that the whole political struggle there pivoted on the claims to supremacy of two classes: the landed aristocracy and the bourgeoisie (middle class). [...] And since 1830, the working class, the proletariat, has been recognized in both countries as a third competitor for power. Conditions had become so simplified that one would have had to close one’s eyes deliberately not to see in the light of these three great classes and in the conflict of their interests the driving force of modern history – at least in the two most advanced countries”. Similarly, in a famous paragraph of the *Grundrisse* Marx ([1857-1858] 1973, 105) pointed out that as much as “Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape. [...] The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient, etc.”, warning that: “Although it is true, therefore, that the categories of bourgeois economics possess a truth for all other forms of society, this is to be taken only with a grain of salt”.

dismissive view of economic analysis of ancient societies and their acceptance of marginalism as the correct analysis of market economies. The surplus approach is however mute if not merged with an historical-institutional analysis, which in turns is invertebrate if not structured around a materialist base. Eric Wolf ([1982] 2010) above-mentioned classification of modes of production in kin-ordered, tributary and capitalist reminds, for instance, of Polanyi's triad but it more successfully merges the material side of exploitation with the cosmological justifications and institutional regulations that each mode takes in its historical manifestation. Marx himself in famous paragraph from vol. III of *Capital* argued that while *forms of exploitation* are the "innermost secret" of any society, nonetheless this "does not prevent the same economic basis [...] from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances" (Marx [1894] 1974, 790-792).³⁸

The institutional ways of extracting a surplus and the cultural ways of justifying exploitation thus become the centre of social history. All in all, what we derive from the above (albeit obviously partial) review of surplus-oriented anthropological and archaeological studies³⁹ is that the analysis of the social surplus and of the accompanying institutions are two sides of a same coin of social history.

While in this paper we focused on the classical surplus approach in view of the Polanyian criticism (that we welcomed as far as it goes), current research is carried out into supplementary directions. The first regards the surplus approach and historical materialism (Cesaratto 2023c).

Leaving aside any possible teleological legacy, Marx left us with definitions of modes of production and social formations and, above all, with an explanation of their laws of change that is relatively undefined (change of production aka technology, social relations aka class struggle, or else?). Albeit often convoluted, Marxist debates on the notion of modes of production and economic formations should be reconsidered in view of the "infinite variations" that associates surplus extraction, institutions and accompanying ideologies, on the one hand, and of the forces that generate change on the other (once simplistic technological determinism as well as teleological elements are put aside).

In this connection, central in historical materialism, but indeed in every social discipline, is the structure-agency relationship in human behaviour. Since the Popperian criticism to organic theories, the methodological diatribe between organicist and methodological individualist approaches to economic behaviour has continued. Holistic theories

³⁸ In Chapter XLVII of the third volume of *Capital* Marx considered a vast range of economic formations between primitive egalitarian communities and proper capitalism as based on the extraction on a non-capitalist ground-rent from peasant communities either as tributes, tithes, or coerced labour. Well-known Marxist historians John Haldon (1993) and Chris Wickham (2008) closely follow Marx in this (Cesaratto 2023b). The mentioned Wittfogel's hydraulic hypothesis, Polanyi's redistributive state, Haldon's tributary state as well as Wolf's tributary order evoke Marx's Asiatic mode of production envisaging a despotic state extracting a surplus on autonomous local communities. On Marx's contortions around this concept, which he never treated systematically, see the widely appreciated appendix B to Anderson (1974). Less severe is Wolf ([1982] 2010, 81-82).

³⁹ See also Cesaratto (2023a) on the ancient Graeco-Roman economy.

are accused of functionalism harking back to an occult direction that drives individual behaviour neglecting human agency. An alternative way to methodological individualism is perhaps in that strand of cultural-historical studies (including post-processualism and cultural relativism) that, apparently opposite to more objectivist and materialist strands (Trigger 1993; Shanks 2007; Viglietti 2018), might instead be seen as their complement, looking at behaviours and agency through class-oriented lenses (besides other glasses like gender and race).

Finally, there is little doubt that Douglass North found in Marxism the main challenge for NIE in the field of historical studies. Given the appeal of NIE even in non-mainstream quarters (e.g. Hodgson 2017), a comparison between the surplus and Polanyian approaches to institutions *and* NIE sounds a timely further direction of research (Cesaratto 2023d). Contrary to the imperialist attitude of marginalism and NIE, the surplus approach looks with interest, respect, and openness at the debates that take place in sister social and historical sciences.

References

- Adams, J. (1991), Surplus, Surplus, Who's Got the Surplus? The Subtractivist Fallacy in Orthodox Economics, *Journal of Economic Issues* 25(1): 187–197.
- Ames, K. M. (2007), The Archaeology of Rank, in Bentley, R. A., Maschner, H. D. G. and Chippendale, C. (eds), *Handbook of Archaeological Theories*, Lanham, Alta Mire Press.
- Ames, K. M. (2010), On the Evolution of the Human Capacity for Inequality and/or Egalitarianism, in Price, T. D. and Feinman, G. M. (eds), *Pathways to Power: Fundamental Issues in Archaeology*, New York, Springer.
- Anderson, P. (1974), *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London, NLB.
- Arena, R. (2013), Sraffa's and Wittgenstein's Reciprocal Influences: Forms of Life and Snapshots, in Levrero, E., Palumbo, A. and Stirati, A. (eds), *Sraffa and the Reconstruction of Economic Theory*, Vol III, Palgrave Macmillan UK, Basingstoke.
- Arena, R. (2015), The Role of Technical and Social Factors in the Distinction between Necessaries and Surplus: Classical Economics after Sraffa, *Cahiers d'Économie Politique / Papers in Political Economy* 69(2): 185–202.
- Aspromourgos, T. (2005), The Invention of the Concept of Social Surplus: Petty in the Hartlib Circle, *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 12(1): 1–24.
- Blankenburg, S., Arena, R. and Wilkinson, F. (2012), Piero Sraffa and 'the True Object of Economics': The Role of the Unpublished Manuscripts, *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 36(6): 1267–1290.
- Bogaard, A. (2017), The Archaeology of Food Surplus, *World Archaeology* 49(1): 1–7.

- Bresson, A. (2016) *The Making of the Ancient Greek Economy. Institutions, Markets, and Growth in the City-States*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Carneiro, R. L. (1970), A Theory of the Origin of the State, *Science* 169: 733–738.
- Cesaratto, S. (2019), Heterodox Economics and Economic Anthropology: Reflections Prompted by Two Books, *Working paper DEPS* 807.
- Cesaratto, S. (2020), *Heterodox Challenges in Economics – Theoretical Issues and the Crisis of the Eurozone*, Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Cesaratto, S. (2023a), Preliminary Notes on the Economic Analysis of the Graeco-Roman Economies in a Surplus Approach Perspective, *Quaderni DEPS* 897.
- Cesaratto, S. (2023b), Preliminary Notes on the Marxist Debates on “Historical Forms of Social Production” in a Surplus Approach Perspective, *Quaderni DEPS* 898.
- Cesaratto, S. (2023c), Surplus Approach, Marxism and Institutions (forthcoming *Centro Sraffa Working Papers*).
- Cesaratto, S. (2023d), Three Approaches to Institutions in Economic Analysis: Polanyi, North and the Surplus Approach’s Third Way, *Quaderni DEPS* 899.
- Cesaratto, S. and Di Bucchianico, S. (2021a), The Surplus Approach, Polanyi and Institutions in Economic Anthropology and Archaeology, *Annals of the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* 55(1): 185–216 (special issue “Marshall Sahlins’s Stone Age Economics, a Semiscentenary Estimate”).
- Cesaratto, S. and Di Bucchianico, S. (2021b), The Surplus Approach, Institutions, and Economic Formations, *Contributions to Political Economy* 40(1): 26–52.
- Childe, V. G. (1936), *Man Makes Himself*, London, Watt.
- Childe, V.G. (1942), *What Happened in History*, Hardmansworth, Middlesex (UK), Pelican Book.
- Childe, V.G. (1950), The Urban Revolution, *The Town Planning Review* 21(1): 3–17.
- Childe, V.G. (1958), Retrospect, *Antiquity* 32(126): 69–74.
- Childe, V.G. ([1949] 1979), Prehistory and Marxism, *Antiquity* 53(July): 93–95.
- Clark, C.M.A. (1992), An Institutional Critique of Sraffian Economics, *Journal of Economic Issues* 26(2): 457–468.
- Darmangeat, C. (2018), Le ‘surplus’ et la stratification socioéconomique. Une causalité au-dessus de tout soupçon?, *Bulletin de la Société préhistorique française* 115(1): 53–70.
- Darmangeat, C. (2020), Surplus, Storage and the Emergence of Wealth: Pits and Pitfalls, in Moreau, L. (ed.), *Social Inequality Before Farming. Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Social Organization in Prehistoric and Ethnographic Hunter-Gatherer-Fisher Societies*, Cambridge (UK), McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.

- de Ste. Croix, G.E.M. (1981), *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests*, London: Duckworth.
- Di Bucchianico, S. (2022), The Role of Commodity Speculation and Household Debt Accumulation During Financialization: a Classical-Keynesian Analysis, *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 46(2): 317–340.
- Diamond, J. ([1997] 2005), *Guns, Germs and Steel: A short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years*, London, Vintage.
- Earle, T. (2015), Surplus and the Political Economy in Prehistory, in Morehart, C.T. and De Lucia, K. (eds), *Surplus: The Politics of Production and the Strategies of Everyday Life*, University Press of Colorado.
- Engels, F. (1884), *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, revised translation in PDF available at Marx Engels Internet Archive: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf Accessed March 15, 2023.
- Engels, F. ([1886] 1946), *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Progress Publishers edition; quotations from Marx Engels Internet Archive: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/index.htm> Accessed March 15, 2023.
- Erdkamp, P. (2001), Beyond the Limits of the ‘Consumer City’: A Model of the Urban and Rural Economy in the Roman World, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 50(3): 332–356.
- Faulkner, N. (2007), Gordon Childe and Marxist archaeology, *International Socialism* 116, http://isj.org.uk/gordon-childe-and-marxist-archaeology/#116faulkner_2 Accessed March 15, 2023.
- Finley, M. (1973), *The Ancient Economy*, London: Chatto and Windus.
- Frangipane, M. (2018), From a Subsistence Economy to the Production of Wealth in Ancient Formative Societies: A Political Economy Perspective, *Economia Politica* 35(3): 677–689.
- Garegnani, P. (1960), *Il Capitale nelle Teorie della Distribuzione*, Milano: Giuffrè.
- Garegnani, P. (1984), Value and Distribution in the Classical Economists and Marx, *Oxford Economic Papers* 36(2): 291–325.
- Gintis, H., Van Schaik, C. and Boehm, C. (2015) “Zoon Politikon: The Evolutionary Origins of Human Political Systems, *Current Anthropology* 56(4): 327–353.
- Godelier, M. (1974), On the Definition of a Social Formation. The Example of the Incas, *Critique of Anthropology* 1(1): 63–73.
- Graeber, D. and Wengrow, D. (2021), *The Dawn of Everything. A New History of Humanity*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Gregory, C. (2000), Anthropology, Economics, and Political Economy: a Critique of Pearson, *History of Political Economy* 32(4): 999–1009.

- Groot, M. and Lentjes, D. (2013), Studying Subsistence and Surplus Production, in Groot, M., Lentjes, D. and Zeiler, J. (eds), *Barely Surviving or More Than Enough? The Environmental Archaeology of Subsistence, Specialisation and Surplus Food Production*, Leiden, Sidestone.
- Gudeman, S. (1978), Anthropological Economics: The Question of Distribution, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7: 347–377.
- Haldon, J. (1993), *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production*, New York (NY), Verso.
- Halstead, P. (1989), The Economy Has a Normal Surplus: Economic Stability and Social Change among Early Farming Communities of Thessaly, Greece, in Halstead, P., and O'Shea, J. (eds.), *Bad Year Economics: Cultural Responses to Risk and Uncertainty*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Halstead, P., and O'Shea, J. (eds.) (1989), *Bad Year Economics: Cultural Responses to Risk and Uncertainty*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Hodgson, G.M. (2017) Introduction to Douglass C. North Memorial Issue, *Journal of Institutional Economics* 13(1): 1–23.
- Herskovits, M. J. (1952), *Economic Anthropology: A Study in Comparative Economics*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf (originally published in 1940 as *The Economic Life of Primitive Peoples*).
- Hudson, M. (2020a), Debt, Land and Money, from Polanyi to the New Economic Archaeology”, in Desai, R. and Polanyi Levitt, K. (eds.), *Karl Polanyi and Twenty-first-century Capitalism*, University Press Scholarship Online. Available at <https://michael-hudson.com/2020/09/debt-land-and-money-from-polanyi-to-the-new-economic-archaeology/> Accessed March 15, 2023.
- Hudson, M. (2020b), Origins of Money and Interest: Palatial Credit, Not Barter, in Battilossi, S., Cassis, Y. and Yago, K. (eds), *Handbook of the History of Money and Currency*, Springer Singapore. Available at <https://michael-hudson.com/2018/04/palatial-credit-origins-of-money-and-interest/> Accessed March 15, 2023.
- Kim, J. (2014), From Labour Control to Surplus Appropriation: Landscape Changes in the Neolithization of Southwestern Korea, *Journal of World Prehistory* 27(3/4): 263–275.
- Krul, M. (2016), Institutions and the Challenge of Karl Polanyi: Economic Anthropology After the Neoinstitutionalist Turn, *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Paper* 168.
- Kula, W. ([1962] 1970), *Teoria economica del sistema feudale*, Torino, Einaudi.
- Liverani, M. (1976), Il modo di produzione, in Moscati, S. (ed.), *L'Alba della Civiltà*, Torino, UTET.
- Liverani, M. (2011), *Antico Oriente. Storia, società, Economia*, Bari, Laterza (English transl. London; New York, Routledge, 2014).

- Liverani, M. ([1998] 2017), *Uruk la prima città*, Bari, Laterza.
- Martins, N.O. (2014), *The Cambridge Revival of Political Economy*, London, Routledge.
- Marx K. ([1852] 1937), *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Progress Publishers, Moscow; quotations from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire>. Accessed March 15, 2023.
- Marx, K. ([1857-1858] 1973), *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, New York, Penguin Books.
- Marx, K. ([1867] 1974), *Capital. A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, Vol. I, London, Lawrence & Wishart.
- Marx, K. ([1894] 1974), *Capital. A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* [Engels' 1887 edition], Vol. III, London, Lawrence & Wishart.
- Maucourant, J. (2012), New Institutional Economics and History, *Journal of Economic Issues* 46(1): 193–207.
- Mayshar, J., Moav, O. and Pascali, L. (2022), The Origin of the State: Productivity or Appropriability?, *Journal of Political Economy* 130: 1091–1144.
- Meek, R. L. (1976), *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, London, Cambridge University Press.
- Milanovic, B., Lindert, P. and Williamson, J. (2007), Measuring Ancient Inequality, *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* 4412.
- Morehart, C. (2014), The Potentiality and the Consequences of Surplus: Agricultural Production and Institutional Transformation in the Northern Basin of Mexico, *Economic Anthropology* 1(1): 154–166.
- Morehart, C. T. and De Lucia, K. (2015) An introduction, in Morehart, C.T. and De Lucia, K. (eds), *Surplus: The Politics of Production and the Strategies of Everyday Life*, University Press of Colorado.
- Nakassis, L.G., Parkinson, W.A. and Galaty, M.L. (2011) Redistribution in Aegean Palatial Societies. Redistributive Economies from a Theoretical and Cross-Cultural Perspective, *American Journal of Archaeology* 115(2): 177–184.
- Ogilvie, S. (2007), ‘Whatever Is, Is Right’? Economic Institutions in Pre-industrial Europe, *The Economic History Review* 60(4): 649–684.
- Pearson, H.W. (1957), The Economy Has No Surplus: Critique of a Theory of Development, in Polanyi, K., Arensberg, C. and Pearson, H.W. (eds), *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, 320–341.
- Pearson, H.W. (1977), Editor's Introduction, in Polanyi, K., *The Livelihood of Man*, xxv–xxxvi.
- Polanyi, K. (1957), The Economy As an Instituted Process, in Polanyi, K., Arensberg, C. and Pearson, H.W. (eds), *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, 243–270.

- Polanyi, K. (1977) *The Livelihood of Man*, edited by H.W. Pearson, New York, Academic Press, Inc.
- Polanyi, K., Arensberg, C. and H.W. Pearson (eds) (1957), *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press.
- Posner, R. (1980), A Theory of Primitive Society, with Special Reference to Law, *The Journal of Law and Economics* 23(1): 1–53.
- Renger, J. (2005), Archaic versus Market Economy, *Topoi* 12-13(1): 207–214.
- Renger, J. (2016), Weber–Polanyi–Sraffa: A Consideration of Modes of Production,” in Bartolini, G. and Biga, M.G. (eds), *Not Only History, Proceedings of the Conference in Honor of Mario Liverani*, The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Ricardo, D. (1815), *Essay on Profits*, in Ricardo, D. (1951-1973), *The works and correspondence*, Vol. 4.
- Ricardo, D. (1951-1973), *The works and correspondence*, edited by P. Sraffa with the collaboration of M.H. Dobb, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Risch, R. (2016), How Did Wealth Turn into Surplus Profit? From Affluence to ‘Scarcity’ in Prehistoric Economies, in Risch, R., Meller, H. and Jung, R. (eds), *Rich and Poor – Competing for Resources in Prehistoric Societies*. Tagungen des Landesmuseums für Vorgeschichte Halle Band 14 Halle (Saale).
- Risch, R. (2018), Affluent Societies of Later Prehistory, in Meller, H., Gronenborg, D. and Risch, R. (eds), *Surplus without the State. Political Forms in Prehistory*. Tagungen des Landesmuseums für Vorgeschichte Halle Band 18, Halle (Saale).
- Saitta, D.J. (1994), Agency, Class, and Archaeological Interpretatio, *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 13(3): 201–227.
- Sahlins, M. (1972), *Stone Age Economics*, Chicago, Aldine.
- Scott, J.C. (2017), *Against the Grain. A Deep History of the Earliest States*, Yale University Press.
- Shanks, M. (2007), Post Processual Archaeology and After, in Bentley, R.A., Maschner, H.D.G. and Chippindale, C. (eds), *Handbook of Archaeological Theories*, London: AltaMira Press.
- Sraffa, P. (1951), Introduction, in Ricardo, D. (1951-1973), *The works and correspondence*, Vol. 1.
- Sraffa, P. (1960), *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Svizzero S. (2017), Persistent Controversies about the Neolithic Revolution, *Journal of Historical Archaeology & Anthropological Sciences* 1(2): 53–61.

- Svizzero, S. and Tisdell, C. (2014), Theories about the Commencement of Agriculture in Prehistoric Societies: A Critical Evaluation, *University of Queensland School of Economics Working Papers* 68.
- Svizzero, S. and Tisdell, C. A. (2016), Economic Evolution, Diversity of Societies and Stages of Economic Development: A Critique of Theories Applied to Hunters and Gatherers and Their Successors, *Cogent Economics & Finance* 4(1): 1–18.
- Taccola, S. (2020), Categorie marxiste e storiografia del mondo antico. “Critica” e “storia” in un dibattito italiano degli anni Settanta, Tesi di perfezionamento, Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Academic year 2019-2020 (published by Manifestolibri, Rome, 2022).
- Tauger, M.B. (2018), Not by Grain Alone, *Agricultural History* 92(3): 429–435.
- Temin P. (2013), *The Roman Market Economy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Testart, A. (1988), Some Major Problems in the Social Anthropology of Hunter-gatherers, *Current Anthropology* 29(1): 1–31.
- Trigger, B. (1993), Marxism in Contemporary Western Archaeology, in Schiffer, M.B. (ed.), *Archaeological Method and Theory*, Vol. 5, Tucson, University of Arizona Press.
- Trigger, B. (2003), All People Are [Not] Good, *Anthropologica*, 45(1): 39–44.
- Veneziani, R. (2012), Analytical Marxism, *Journal of Economic Surveys* 26: 649–673.
- Viglietti, C. (2018), Economy, in Bettini, M. and Short, W.M. (eds), *The World through Roman Eyes: Anthropological Approaches to Ancient Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Warburton, D. A. (2014), Understanding Economic Growth: The Importance of Money in Economic History and Theory, in Csabai, Z. (ed.), *Social History of the Ancient Near East in Memory of Péter Vargyas*, Budapest, The University of Pécs, Department of Ancient History, L’Harmattan.
- Wickham, C. (2008), Productive Forces and the Economic Logic of the Feudal Mode of Production, *Historical Materialism* 16(2): 3–22.
- Wittfogel, K. (1957), *Oriental Despotism*, New Haven, USA, Yale University Press.
- Wolf, E. ([1982] 2010), *Europe and the People Without History*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

Author contact information:

Sergio Cesaratto

University of Siena

Siena, Italy

Email: sergio.cesaratto@unisi.it