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The Neo-Babylonian period in Mesopotamia is characterized by important developments, of such importance that historians are led to analyse it as a time of organization of a new kind of economy. This paper focuses on the way those developments may have influenced the exchanges of goods imported from outside Mesopotamia. We first It will firstly describe these exchanges, and the actors who are in charge of them. Second, wely, it will focus on how the transformations which thoroughly changed the institutional and geographical background during the period may have influenced the overall organization of long distance trade. We will especially try to explain the puzzling fact that Neo-Babylonian actors, who were so often involved in long-distance trade in former times, seems to withdraw nearly entirely from this activity, at the very time when new and lucrativ camel-transport trade appears in the Near-East.

As usual in assyriology, this research is heavily reliant upon ancient evidence, which, for our subject, comes mainly from institutional sources. Neo-Babylonian age is one of the best documented period of ancient mesopotamian history, with thousands of texts from private and temple archives¹. Private texts belong to families of more or less well-established notables, involved in agricultural management, houses or field rentals. But their archives rarely mention trade, and very rarely long distance trade². The most explicit references to importation of exotic products are to be found in the numerous texts produced by the administration of the two main temples of Neo-Babylonian Mesopotamia, Eanna of Uruk, and Ebabbar of Sippar. Some of them mention regularly imported products, and give us some idea of how they where brought to Mesopotamia, and exchanged there.

The best known and most studied texts have already been gathered by Oppenheim in an article³

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1 Jursa 2005.

2 Several archives belong to private entrepreneurs dealing with trade. The most complete one, Iddin-Marduk's, and is part of Egibi's archive. Iddin-Marduk is a medium scale businessman. He buys agricultural staples in the countryside around Babylon, to sell them in the city. Wunsch 1993, Jursa 2010, p. 214-224. Others smaller archives dealing with local trade are to be found in Neo-Babylonian evidence. Sîn-ilī's archiv, from Babylon, describes the business activities of Ṭābia. Unlike Iddin-Marduk, Ṭābia does not buy agricultural products, but takes control of agricultural land. Other archives shed light on the trade of agricultural staples: one of their distinguishing feature is the relatively high number of "harrānu" contracts they include: those partnership agreements are commonly used by businessmen to gather funds for their activities: they are to be found in Nippur, Uruk, Larsa, Sippar of Kiš (Jursa 2010, p. 218-219). But those businessmen usually limited their activities to their cities' hinterland, even if their area of influence depends of the actual size of the city: it is larger around Babylon than around a smaller city like Larsa. One would have expected to find texts related to long distance trade among the *harrānu* contracts, furthermore because the actual name of those contracts refers to caravan trade. But those contracts are used to gather capital for various reasons, and very few of them explicitly refer to trade. The only exception is the text GC II 84, where a special clause requires that the capital be divided once one of the contractors comes back from a specific journey. Most *harranu* contracts are cited by Lanz 1976, p. 140.

3 Oppenheim 1969. On those textes, see more recently Joannès 1997, Graslin-Thomé 2009.

which has been for a long time the authority on Neo-Babylonian long-distance trade. Oppenheim's article was based on a thorough analysis of two texts who take the form of a list of foreign goods, associated with a price in silver. One text, quoted above, YOS VI 168, is dated from the 7th day of *tašritu*, in the 6th year of Nabonidus. Several foreign goods are associated with their value in silver. Some iron and dyed wool will be given as tithe⁴ on behalf on two agents, which name is given by the end of the text: Nādin-ahi and Šamaš-zēr-ibni. The second text, TCL 12, 84⁵, dated one year and two days before the first⁶ list a consignment related to the sole Nādin-ahi, and does not give the silver value of the entries.

YOS VI 168

600 minas of copper from Yamana, at 3 minas 20 shekels of silver,
81 minas 20 shekels of *inzahurētu*-dye at 2 minas 2 shekels
37 minas of tin at 55 1/2 shekels of silver,
16 minas 15 shekels of *takiltu*-dyed wool at 2 minas 40 shekels,
all this : related to Šamaš-zēr-ibni, son of Nanaya-iddin.

295 minas of copper from Yamana, at 1 mina 38^{1/3} shekels,
55 minas of lapis-lazuli, at 36^{2/3} shekels
153 minas of *ṭumanu*-fibers at 1 mina 42 shekels,
233 minas 20 shekels of *inzahurētu*-dye at 48^{1/2} shekels,
130 minas of iron from Yamana at 32 1/2 shekels,
257 minas of iron from Lebanon at 42^{2/3} shekels
132 quarts of assorted honey, at 26 shekels,
20 jars of white wine at 1 mina,
120 minas of *hūratu*-dye, at 30 shekels
40 minas of *hashaltu*-spice (?) at 2 shekels
1 kurru-measure of *taturru*-spice (?) at 10 shekels
1 kurru-measur of juniper resin at 3 shekels
all this related to Nādin-ahi.

Date : *tašritu*, 7th day, year 6 of Nabonidus, king of Babylon. 3 minas 10 shekels of the *takiltu*-dyed wool are the tithe of Nādin-ahi, 5 minas of the *takiltu*-dyed wool and 40 minas of the iron at the «tithe» of Šamaš-zēr-ibni.

Since the publication of Oppenheim's work, the knowledge on Neo-Babylonian economy improved significantly, thanks to the renewal of texts publications, and the numerous scholar studies on Neo-Babylonian history completed in the last years⁷. According to Oppenheim's wish, expressed at the end of his article, a few texts have been added to the list of documents related to long distance trade he managed to gather, some of them come from the administration of the Eanna temple in Uruk and one from Ebabbar, the temple of Sippar. Historians now deal with a small dossier of about ten texts, all of them produced by temple administration, which content share strong similarities to the texts known by Oppenheim. Some consist of a list of imported products, linked to a quantity and a value in silver⁸. Others are contracts concluded between temples and middlemen employed by the sanctuaries to

4 On tithe, see now Jursa 1998.

5 Oppenheim 1969, p. 236-237, Joannès 1997, p. 192-193, Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 38-39.

6 This date is probably mistaken, the two texts could be related to the same matter. Joannès 1997, Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 41-42.

7 Jursa 2010 is a important overview on Neo-Babylonian economy which dramatically improved our general knowledge on babylonian economy. But very few pages are devoted to long distance trade (p. 224-225).

8 YOS VI 168, PTS 2098, TCL XII 84.

provide typical imported produces such as dyes and metals⁹. These texts are quite similar in format regardless of whether they originate in Eanna or in Ebabbar. In some cases¹⁰, it is recorded in the contract that the intermediaries had to travel to procure the exotic products, often called *mereštu*, in distant places. Due to strong similarities between the texts, it is probably the case even when nothing is specified on this subject. Contracts refer once to Chaldea¹¹ and more often to Eber-nari¹². One text adds that the consignment has to be bought according to the prize of the city of Thapsuhu, probably the city called Thapsacus in classical texts, located in northern Syria¹³:

BM 61088

[2]+1 ma-na KÙ-BABBAR NÍG-GA ^dUTU a-na [KASKAL-II (?)]
 šá e-bi-ÍD ina muh-hi ^{md}EN-M[U A-šú šá]
^mLe-šir A ^{md}DÙ-eš-DINGIR u₄-mu šá
 ul-tu e-bi-ÍD ir-ru-ub
 a-ki-i ma-hi-ir šá ^{um} Ta-ap-su-hu
 hi-ši-ih-tu₄ šá É-KUR šá KÙ-BABBAR-a' 3 ma-na
^{md}EN-MU a-na NÍG-GA ^dUTU i-nam-din
 [ina] GUB-zu šá ^{md}EN-TIN-iṭ ^{lu}SANGA UD.KIB.NUN^{KI}

3 mina's of silver, property of Šamaš for [the trade venture] of Transpotamia, is against the account of Bēl-iddin [son of] Lēširu of the Epeš-ili family. When he returns from Transpotamia, Bēl-iddin shall pay this 3 mina's of silver, the temple's requirement, according to the rate of the city of Tapsuhu. In the presence of Bēl-Uballiṭ the šangū of Sippar. Witnesses. Date.

The different contracts have strong similarities. The temples provided one or two middlemen with capital, either in silver or in goods. Those middlemen had to deliver, in exchange, some goods which are often listed, after a unspecified timeframe. The temples and the intermediaries were bound by contracts, but do not appear to have shared long-term relations. In one example at least¹⁴, the contract was not honored by the middlemen, and was eventually ruled by a court decision. The middlemen enjoyed a relative liberty in decision making: the list of products is sometimes fixed, but neither prices nor timeframe are. This allowed a degree of freedom in order to be able to react to unexpected events, something necessary in the the highly unpredictable context of long-distance trade. Remunerations are not mentioned either, but one text¹⁵ stipulates that the travelers will have to pay the temple a tithe from their personal profits: the transaction negotiated with the temples is one of many arranged by the agent as part of this journey. It is impossible to know for certain who initiated these expeditions. The temples may have been the instigators, but more probably they contributed capital for an expedition organized independently by merchants who are not temple staff.

It is not clear either who were exactly the agents traveling on behalf of the sanctuaries. Their status is usually not mentioned. The text PTS 3068 is the only exception:

9 YOS VII 63, Nbn 637, BM 61088 = Macginnis 2004, p. 30-31, McEwan 1984, GC II 111, PTS 3068 = Kleber 2008, p. 327-328, YOS VI 52, YOS VI 61. AnOr VIII 70 and YOS XIX 1 are related to long distance trade as well.

10 YOS VII 63, BM 61088 = Macginnis 2004, p. 30-31, McEwan 1984, YOS VI, 62.

11 One text, PTS 3068 quoted below.

12 YOS VII 63, BM 61088, McEwan 1984, YOS VI 52, YOS VI 61,

13 BM 61088 = Macginnis 2004, p. 30-31. On the localisation of Thapsacus, see Graslin-Lemaire 2004.

14 AnOr VIII 70.

15 YOS VI 168.

3 ma-na kù-babbar šám 12 gun síg^{hi-a}
 níg-na ^dgašan ša unug^{ki} u ^dna-na-a
 ina muh-hi ^mdingir-sag-ia-uru ^{lu}-sag-lugal
 a-na hi-ših-tu₄ šá é-an-na kù-sig₁₇ zabar
 ù me-reš-tu₄ a-ki-i šá ina kur tam-tì
 i-mah-ha-ru a-na é-an-na i-nam-dim
 ki-i mé-reš-tu₄ pa-ni ^{lu}qí-i-pi
 u ^{lu}šà-tam la ta-an-da-har
 kù-babbar a₄ 3 ma-na a-na é-an-na
 i-nam-din e-lat ú-ìl-tì šá {ma}-mah-[]
 šá ina muh-hi-šú
 ina gub-zu šá ^mmu-še-zib-^damar-utu ^{lu}qí-i-pi
 šá é-an-na ^mba-ni-ia ^{lu}šà-tam é-an-n[a]
 a-šú šá ^mtab-né-e-a a ^{lu}šu-ha
 Scribes
 Witnesses, date (22 du'zū, first year of Nabonid)

Three mina's of silver, property of the lady of Uruk and Nanāja, price of twelve talents of wool, is against the account of Ilu-rēšia-ušur, servant of the king. According to the temple's requirement, he will pay gold, bronze and other trade goods to eanna, as he will find them in Meerland. In case the qīpu and the šatammu are not happy with those trade goods, he will give 3 minas of silver to Eanna. This is in addition to the earlier deficit owed by him. Done on behalf of Mušezib-Marduk, qīpu of Eanna, Bānia, šatammu of Eanna, son of Tabnēa, of the Bā'iru family.

The clauses of this contract are similar to other texts referring to the delivery of exotic goods at Eanna temple, but it is the only one to records that the goods will be provided by a royal agent, Ilu-rēšia-ušur, ša reš šarri. Ilu-rēšia-ušur will receive wool in exchange. It is well known that, in some times of mesopotamian history, royal agents played an important role for the importation of exotic products in Mesopotamia¹⁶. The mention of Ilu-rēšia-ušur, ša reš šarri, in the above mentioned text may seem to fit pretty well in this context. As the similarities between the texts are strong, it could sound tempting to argue that royal agents were usually involved in this context. However, despite similarities with the other texts dealing with import of exotic goods, this example may not be particularly significant. The goods are to be found in Chaldea, and not in Transpotamia as in other texts. Furthermore, the final clause differs from the other texts: it mentions that the sanctuary may reject the exotics goods if they do not serve its needs. This could mean that the procedure and the intermediary are unusual, and that the temple administrators are not sure what to expect from them¹⁷.

This small “dossier” gives information a specific form of of supply of exotics goods to the main temples of Babylonia: they used long-distance expeditions led by travelers who did not seem to belong to regular staff of the sanctuaries. The kind of relation between the temple administration and external

16 Radner 1999 for neo-assyrian period. However, it it possible that, even in neo-assyrian period, private merchants were acting in regional and maybe long-distance trade as well. Merchants active in regional trade are known in Aššur (Radner 2008).

17 In contrast to other texts dealing with exotics goods, the main subject of PTS 3068 is the selling of wool by the temple. In this case, the implication of a royal agent is not unusual. Kleber 2008, p. 243-246, showed that the palace is the main buyer of Eanna's surpluses of wool. It is also not unfrequent that this wool was not exchanged against money, but against goods not produced in Eanna's household (Jursa 2010). Is the case of PTS 3068, the temple administrators seem to have taken the opportunity of their business relation with somebody who usually travels in Chaldea, a usual place to buy gold, to fill its stocks in this metal.

businessmen to whom the administrators entrust part of the temple activities is now well known, particularly since M. Jursa's studies on Neo-Babylonian administration¹⁸: central administration of Neo-Babylonian temples seem to mainly control the economic activities performed in the immediate vicinity of the central administration. They delegate numerous tasks to outsiders, especially when those tasks are not done in the immediate vicinity of the temple¹⁹. In this way, goods entering or leaving the urban workshops and the main storehouses are accurately recorded, while land work or more generally any activities being carried out further from the central administration are only loosely accounted. The control on such activities, which is more difficult to operate for the central administration, is subcontracted to outsiders. The temple provides them with lands, tools, and seeds, and requires, in exchange, the delivery of a part of the crop. This way, temple administrators free themselves from the burden of controlling a unwieldy number of cultivators and herdsmen, and remain in direct relationship with only a limited number of business men²⁰. Purchases which relate to longer distance trade proceed in a similar way. Logistics of the organization of the trade expedition are subcontracted to intermediaries, despite the fact that this choice limits the profit-opportunity, and even the possibility to directly choose the required goods.

However, in spite of the considerable quantities provided by these expeditions, they were not sufficient to cater for day-to-day needs of the sanctuaries. One of the best documented example²¹ is the purple dyed clothes. The *takiltu* is the more common purple used in the temple, it is an imported good, coming from the West²². The amount of *takiltu*-dyed fabrics used in Neo-Babylonian temples cannot be evaluated accurately²³, but partial data can be found in some documents. The *lubāru*, piece of fabric used during *lubuštu* celebration, requires half a mina of *takiltu* dyed wool²⁴. The quantities imported from Transpotamia in TCL XII 84, 11 minas 22 shekel, could seem to be enough to cover those needs. But a few texts²⁵ show that the temples administrators are looking for other sources of supply. Some texts mention silver delivery for *takiltu*: in *Nbn* 262, 37 shekels of silver remains from a silver delivery for *takiltu*, in *nbn* 1101 2 shekels $\frac{3}{4}$ of silver are delivered for 16 shekels of *takiltu*. Those examples show that there was a way to get *takiltu* against money, outside of the big commercial expeditions illustrated by Oppenheim's texts. This is confirmed by an unpublished letter cited by M. Jursa²⁶ where a man called Nusku-hanania is exploring the country, looking for different products, among them purple.

Iron is an example of imported product whose need exceeds the amount listed in the Oppenheim's texts. In YOS VI 168, 4 talents 17 minas of Lebanese iron are imported alongside with 2 talents 10 minas 8 shekels $\frac{1}{2}$ of iron from Yamana. The volume is important, but less than the amount of iron (10 talents) given by Eanna to Šum-ukīn and Kalbā according to their agreement of rent farming²⁷. Even if iron is regularly imported by the trade expedition known through Oppenheim's texts, those expeditions cannot be enough to provide the iron required for the whole agricultural activities of the temples. Purchase of iron is, unsurprisingly, cited in several texts from the temples

18 Jursa 1995, Jursa 2004.

19 Jursa 2010.

20 Joannès 2000, p. 115, Jursa 2011.

21 Thanks, mainly, to Zawadski 2006.

22 On *takiltu*, see Zawadski 2006, p. 23, Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 196-204.

23 BM 101905, quoted by Zawadski 2006, p. 48, is unfortunately too badly preserved to even know if this «summary text» dating from the beginning of Darius' reign sums up the amount of *takiltu* wool used or left each year.

24 Zawadski 2006, p. 87.

25 *Nbn* 262, 37 shekels of silver left from amount given for the purchase of *takiltu*. *Nbn* 1101, 2 shekels $\frac{3}{4}$ of silver given for 16 shekels of *takiltu*. For the prices of *takiltu*, Zawadski 2006, p. 109, Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 203.

26 BM 103491, Jursa 2004b, p. 163.

27 Cocquerillat 1968, p. 39.

archives²⁸.

An other way for the temples to get exotic goods is to be mentioned: royal gifts. Numerous texts record gifts from the king, mainly gold, but other commodities are mentioned as well²⁹. Once again, a link is missing in the chain, and the texts do not mention how these products came in royal storehouses. One can think of tribute and other forced imports such as those well recorded in Neo-Assyrian evidence³⁰. In one case, one can be more affirmative: most records of iron from Hume, in Cilicia, found in Ebabbar archives date from the reign of Nabonidus³¹. They are probably gifts given by the king from the booty taken during military campaigns of the begin of his reign. In this case, exceptionally, we are maybe able to answer to the often open question to know how exotic goods were imported.

To sum up, ancient evidence mainly records importations of exotic goods made by institutions, temples or palace. They organized military or pacific expeditions to bring back in Mesopotamia the *mereštu* required for their all-day use. But huge incertitudes remains to explain import of exotic goods. Even if the quantities mentioned are important, they cannot cover more than a part of the needs. One has therefore the feeling that the importation of exotic goods best evidenced in our texts, big expeditions to Transpotamia or gifts made by the king on the tribute bought back from military campaigns provide the main stocks of the temples, while punctual needs were bought otherwise.

Actually, scattered references in the texts show that part of the needs are provided through local or regional purchase. The main trading center was Babylon, the political, religious, and economic center of this period³². The highest administrators of the babylonian temples regularly travel to the capital, for political, religious or economic reasons. Some of them even owned property there. Some senior administrators of the temples or craftsmen usually working for the sanctuary were, in this context, commissioned to buy there some exotics goods, on top of their usual task for the temples³³. TBER 67³⁴ shows how Amurru-šar-ušur, *qīpu*³⁵ of Eanna, took advantage of his travel to Babylon for unknown but probably extra-economic purposes to bring back some terebinth. The new year's and *akitu* feast required the travel of most high administrators of Eanna to Babylon, as well as people from all over Babylonia. As usual, in Mesopotamia³⁶ and elsewhere, those religious feasts provided good opportunities for business. In other cases, the temples sent specialists to Babylon, to buy commodities related to their craft: it was the best way to ensure of the quality of the purchased goods, to entrust to the specialists accustomed to use it the task to buy it. In Ebabbar, the master bronze craftsman (?), Libluṣ, chose the tin necessary for his craft in Babylon³⁷. In Eanna, Bēl-ibni, the son of Nādin, and his

28 TBER 67, Iron bought at Babylon. Iron bought in Sippar among other local products in Nbn 428. Silver against iron in YOS XVII 229.

29 Kleber 2008, p. 265. Gold is by far the more common gift, but the king sometimes gives some gifts in kind, like grain, dattes or cattle.

30 For neo-assyrian booties, see Jankowska 1969, Liverani 1992, Graslin-Thomé 2009. Neo-Babylonians booties are not as precisely described in royal inscriptions that they are in neo-assyrian times, but the building inscriptions, and the important building projects held in Neo-Babylonian Babylon are reliable witnesses of the amount to goods imported by Neo-Babylonian armies. Jursa 2010, p. 3.

31 CT 55 244, Nbn 571, YOS VI 210, CT 56 386.

32 Jursa 2010, p. 63-79 underlines the importance of Babylon, where converges most human and economic wealth of Babylonia.

33 The list of goods, exotic or not, purchased in Babylon, are cited by Jursa 2010, p. 74-75: metal, silver, textiles, dyed wool, aromatics or precious stones are recorded.

34 Joannès 1982, p. 246-248, text n°60.

35 Literally *qīpu* means «trustee», Beaulieu 1989 translates as «administrator», Bongenaar 1997 as «resident».

36 Biga 2002, for second millennium ancient orient, Chandezon 2000 for ancient Greece.

37 BM 75281 = Bongenaar 1997, p. 378.

son Hašdāia, are mentioned in several texts³⁸ related to the purchase of gold or other long distance trade products in Babylon. In this cases, the goods are purchased against silver, which, as M. Jursa showed recently turns to be more and more used for economic exchanges during the VIth century³⁹.

There is no way to know how the commodities have been brought in Babylon, and no way, either, to know how they have been purchased. Our texts, written by local administrators, only care for the amount of products bought, record sometimes the name of sellers, but never explain how the sellers got the products they provide to the temple emissaries.

There is only one exception, but it may be very specific as it concerns gold trade. Finding gold was apparently relatively easy in Babylonia: gold is never mentioned among commodities brought back from Transpotamia by the caravans described above. A reason of that is that there is no gold mine in the Levant⁴⁰, the gold seems to arrive from Egypt, India, maybe Iran. The temples supply partly themselves in the South, through exchange with the Sealand administration⁴¹. But an other part of the supply is bought in Babylon. Members of the temple staff bought it there in small quantities⁴², of a few shekels, from various merchants. TBER 67 or YOS VI 112 mention an amazing number of sellers. Each seller probably sold all the gold he could. One would not understand, otherwise, why the Eanna agents would have reasonless multiply the suppliers. A royal merchant is listed among sellers, but there is no way to know if he is acting on his own or for the palace. Despite the fact that some merchants are related to the palace, the multiplicity of sellers does not advocate for a centralized trade organized by the state. It looks more like a decentralized trade, in hands of individuals, who do not belong to an institution. They do not seem to be professional gold sellers either, the quantities of gold sold are too small, and one can think of travelers taking advantage of their stay in Babylon to take some business⁴³. The opportunity to sell small quantities of gold also explain the cupidity of thieves, whose gold thefts are recorded in some legal texts⁴⁴: they would not risk the huge penalties they face if they had no way to exchange the stolen gold.

The fact that agents from the sanctuaries are able to buy, in Babylon, imported commodities shows that these products circulated within Babylonia, through other channels than those appearing in the texts from the temples. Babylon is the main economic center, but some textual evidence confirms that some exotics goods are to be found in Uruk or Sippar. They are few of them, but enough to show that Ebabbar bought, against silver, several exotic goods such as dyed wool (Nbn 637), iron or dyes (Nbn 428) or gold (BM 74411). Such purchases are known in Enna as well, where the sums involved are significant⁴⁵.

In these cases, only the names of the sellers are known, neither their status nor the way they get the commodities are detailed. They deliver both exotic and local products. As an example Šula, during

38 TBER 68-69, YOS VI 115, TBER 67, YOS VI 112.

39 Jursa 2010, p. 772-780. In private archives, high-value commodities like animals or slaves are systematically bought against silver. In temples as well, use of money becomes common, contrary to the practices revealed by VIIIth century archives.

40 Moorey 1999, p. 220, Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 238-240.

41 Kleber 2008, p. 326-328, Jursa 2010, p. 93-94.

42 1 shekels $\frac{1}{4}$ of gold in YOS VI 112, l. 5. Other quantities are much more important, like the more than 5 minas of gold bought against more than a talent of silver in YOS VI 115, l.6-7.

43 Jursa 2010 p. 64-89 lists the members of temple administration traveling to Babylon.

44 Joannès (éd) 2000, p. 214 mentions a small dossier of nine texts where several members of Eanna, among them at least two goldsmiths, are involved in a big network of gold misappropriation and resell.

45 Jursa 2010, p. 556-557. Dyes in GC I 170, aromatics (GC I 178), wine (GC I 395), dyed wool (YOS XIX 218) papyrus (GC I 92).

Nabonid reign⁴⁶, sold to Eanna both sheeps and wool and exotics products such as lead, wine, and maybe the rare *kitinnu*-fabric⁴⁷. He is one among the local sellers recorded in many texts in the process of selling or buying ordinary products to the main sanctuaries of Babylonia. He, for sure, did not import the exotic goods himself, and is only a local retailer and we have no clue to know how the goods he is selling have been imported in Babylonia.

The positions of these sellers are many. Some sellers providing imported products such as gold, juniper, and possibly alum, are named *tamkarū*⁴⁸. This denomination, which appears throughout mesopotamian history, is often translated as merchant, but is acknowledged to represent a variety of functions⁴⁹. The *tamkāru*, depending on period or places, can either be a merchant, a money lender, or a royal agent responsible for importation of exotic goods⁵⁰. Among the temple intermediaries, texts occasionally mention *tamkarū ša šarri*, which may be translated as “king merchants”. Since both denominations, *tamkāru* and *tamkarū ša šarri*, may apparently be used one for another, M. Jursa⁵¹ suggests that both probably refer to professionals related⁵² to royal administration⁵³ or working at least partially for the king⁵⁴. A lot of other sellers are not named by other means than their personal names, and are never labelled as *tamkarū*. They probably are independent sellers, acting on their own behalf, like those known through some private archives⁵⁵. There are therefore, both for local and exotic goods, local sellers, sometimes linked to the palace, but sometimes not.

Very scarce evidence from private archives show traders travelling long-distance, apparently on their own purposes, which may include trade⁵⁶. Donkeys used for travel, exotics goods or distant places are, very seldom, cited in private archives. In an unpublished letter, cited by M. Jursa, a certain Sin-Ili tells to Ṭabia that he did not managed to find the *mereštu* he was looking for in several cities from north Babylonia. But the evidence is very scarce, and there is not a single text to explicitly refer to direct importation from distant places. This fact explains why the historians usually think that the importations were mainly done by no-babylonian⁵⁷ traders.

All in all the Neo-Babylonian sources shed light principally on institutional-related exchanges:

46 Years 9 to 15.

47 Nbn 439, but the text is badly damaged, only the *ki* of *kitinnu* remains.

48 GC II 39 a *tamkāru* provides gold to Eanna, maybe alum in TuM2/3 251 (Dandamayev 1971, p. 76).

49 On *tamkarū* in Neo-Babylonian times, Dandamayev 1971, Dandamayev 1995. Most of the time, they sell local products, like dates or fish.

50 Joannès 1997 p. 177, Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 281-282.

51 Jursa 2010 p. 580-581 and n. 3157.

52 Jursa 2010 p. 580 and n. 3157.

53 Evidence of *tamkarū* is scarce in Neo-Babylonian times, in comparison to Neo-Assyrian times. The word is to be found less than 30 times in Neo-Babylonian evidence according to Dandamayev's account. But that does not mean necessary that the function became less important : as we do not have royal archives, it is not surprising that we do not get the texts in which traders acting for the palace are mentioned.

54 Nothing in the evidence shows that all *tamkarū* are related to the palace, and directly depend from it. Part of their activity may be related to the palace, but they may very well acting on their own behalf as well, for an other part of their activity. Joannès 1997.

55 Two small dossiers related to traders sometimes called *tamkarū* are known : the royal merchant Sin-ahu-iddin (Dandamayev 1995) and a family of merchants of Judean extraction (Jursa 2007).

56 Jursa 2010, p. 225 sums up the very few mentions, in private archives, which can be linked to long-distance trade. Arad-Gula, from Ea-eppēš-ilī's, sell a donkey in a syrian city (Nbk 360). Mušezib-marduk delivers 18 liters of good quality wine to Bel-Remanni, but it is probably only for his personal use. In Ur, Sîn-uballitū ask for *musukkannu* wood for a writing board (UET IV, 185), on *musukkannu*, see Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 221-222. In Sippar, Iššar-tarībī kept in his archives several *harrānu* partnerships, and the geographical scope of his activities reaches as far as Humadešu in Iran. (Jursa 2005, p. 124).

57 Oppenheim 1969, Jursa 2007, Jursa 2010, p. 224.

the investment of temple capitals in expeditions of varying distances, royal bursaries and forcible importations. This is not surprising: temples and palaces were the main consumers of precious goods which account for the majority of imports. But this view is also distorted by the fact that our documentation generally comes from the temples: we can only look at the documentation from the end of the chain of supply which brought these supplies to the sanctuaries. The manner in which they were imported, the way they were distributed within Babylon is not documented: it does not matter much to the scribes who author the texts we are considering. The very fact that the sanctuary agents could buy from private middlemen attests to the reality that transactions existed outside the realm of the temples.

It is therefore quite difficult to quantify the proportion of both private and institutional involvement in this long-distance exchange. In fact, the very question is maybe not relevant: private and institutional trade are not clearly separated. Many people carry out private deals on the sidelines of missions for the palaces and temples, or, on the contrary, it is likely that the temples invested in expeditions whose initial purpose was private enterprise. We thus find a situation which is characteristic of the Neo-Babylonian —if not in general ancient— economy: the intimate link between private and institutional interests, with institutions relying upon the dynamism of businessmen who place themselves at the service of the palaces and sanctuaries.

Even if the picture of trade of exotic products remains incomplete, it is less puzzling than it was in Oppenheim's times, and allows some reflexion on the place long distance trade had among the transformations which mark the beginning of the first millennium. The second part of this article will try to give some directions to answer this question. The methodological approach proposed here is to use the theoretical tools provided by the so-called New Economic History, initiated by D. C. North⁵⁸. This school of thought, developed by economists, had some impact on ancient historians, mainly on those working on ancient Greece⁵⁹. It has been less influent in assyriology. The purpose of this article is not to import by force in assyriology a theoretical framework designed for an other academic field⁶⁰, but to use one of its theoretical tools to bring some light on transformations detected in first millennium economy.

One of the main theoretical tools proposed by D. C. North is the concept of institutions. D. C. North names as institutions all the rules, legal or informal, which enable exchange. How these institutions evolve is a considerable driving force for historical change in economy. Institutions are strongly related to transaction costs, defined by D. C. North as the entire costs associated with the exchange⁶¹. Costs of transport of course, but also costs of information, risk protection and more generally the total costs of arranging the set of contracts which contribute to making the exchange possible. These costs depend of external factors, like the state of the roads, the weather conditions, or the distance to mining area for example. But the institutional background is to be taken into account as well: cost to write contracts, to get state protection against risk, or cost of taxes for example. The evolution of those transaction costs, allowed or restrained by the institutions, is one of the motors of historical change: when transaction costs diminish, they sometimes allow new economic behavior. Conversely, some institutional deadlock which maintain high transaction costs can hinder necessary

58 North 1984, 1985, 1990 [2007], North and Thomas 1973.

59 See, for example, Bresson 2007.

60 The utility of theoretical models imported from other academic fields is not a new idea in assyriology. Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 99-131.

61 North 2007 [1990], p. 11: «If transaction costs were simply the costs of coordinating the increasingly complex interdependent parts of an economy they would be simply information costs or more specifically the costs of acquiring the information to measure the multiple dimensions of what is being exchanged. But they are also the costs of enforcing agreements and making credible commitments across time and space, necessary to realize the potential of this technology». Transaction cost are all the costs related to exchange.

evolutions. In the case of long distance trade, the importance of transaction costs is certainly not to be neglected⁶².

When one uses the term 'long-distance' one thinks especially of transport costs. These were notoriously high in antiquity, and often prevented the development of long distance trade, when the costs of the journey were greater than the dividend which could be expected from the goods brought back. During the first millennium, a number of factors changed the structuring of transport costs. The development of new routes and the upgrading of certain principal paths to service the needs of the empire⁶³ were favorable to exchanges. The integration of the region into a larger political framework is a favorable factor as well. However the costs, recently estimated by Michaela Weszeli⁶⁴, for local commerce remain high, especially when taking into account the various local taxes that were applicable. For long-distance commerce, the extra cost associated with risk also needs to be considered. The expeditions had to be escorted by archers. Such is the case in Sippar when the temple sends a group of carpenters to supervise the supply of wood to a sanctuary, most likely in Lebanon⁶⁵. This risk factor increases the cost of long distance trade.

Such high transport costs, as was the case during the whole of antiquity, meant that only rare and expensive goods were imported at all. The lists of imported goods by the above-mentioned temples feature little more than those goods imported in earlier ages: the same metals, dyed fabrics, wine and woods are found in the shipments⁶⁶. There appears to have been no significant development in transport costs which would have facilitated the importation of new items. Indeed, economists show that low transport costs lead to the development of regional specializations⁶⁷. Cities or regions specialize themselves in the productions for which they have what economists⁶⁸ call a «relative advantage»: the local supplies or specific skills allow them to produce better and cheaper than other economic partners. But, in order to direct more of their production force to such goods, cities have to give up the production of other goods, for which they are not as productive. They have to import them. This mechanism works as soon as transport costs get low enough to allow imports for a reasonable cost. When transportation costs are too high, it remains more profitable to locally produce goods required for the day-to-day running of a city or region locally. In Neo-Babylonian times, very few regions specialize in certain goods and choose to become dependent on the importation of others. It is maybe the case in Gibeon, where thousands of storage jars have been discovered, probably designed for exportations. The example of olive oil specialization in Ekron (Tell Miqne) is more controversial⁶⁹.

One significant factor in the development of transport costs during the first millennium is the domestication of the camel: its newfound use over long distances may be interpreted in terms of transport costs in the desert⁷⁰. This development is noticeable in some Neo-Assyrian documents, where

62 North 1984, 1985.

63 For Neo-Assyrian times, see Favaro 2007, for main routes in Neo-Babylonian times, Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 308-324, Jursa 2010, p. 62-98.

64 Weszeli, in Jursa 2010, p. 151.

65 Bongenaar 1997, p. 392-395. Some carpenters are, in Ebabbar, called LÚ NAGAR šá URU *labanānu*, «carpenters of Lebanon». When they are traveling abroad, the temple provides them travel rations, leather shoes and money to buy an donkey.

66 The commodities imported in III^d millenium BC are the same than the goods recorded in Oppenheim's texts. Snell 1982, p. 118, Faist 2001.

67 Krugman 1991, Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 325-330.

68 Following D. Ricardo.

69 Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 368-369. But see Schloen 2001, p. 141-147.

70 Bibliography on the domestication of camel is abundant. See, for example, Groom 1981, p. 33-37, Restö 2003, p. 122-123, Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 300.

camels are often associated with arab tribes⁷¹. The importance of transport by camels are well-known during the roman era⁷². However, camels are very rarely mentioned in Neo-Babylonian evidence. This is partly due to the fact that very few documents give concrete details about the manner in which high-value goods found their way into Mesopotamia. When camels appear in Neo-Assyrian texts, it is in official or royal inscriptions, those which are precisely lacking in Neo-Babylonian evidence. But this can not be enough to explain the total absence of transport by camel in Neo-Babylonian texts: when babylonian businessmen practice trade with distant places, the animals mentioned in texts are always donkeys, never camels⁷³. This gives the impression that this new means of transportation has not been adapted by Babylonians, despite the new opportunities it allows. A puzzling conclusion, which calls for an explanation. We will return to this question further down.

Another change of the modes of circulation which has an influence on long-distance exchanges is the population migrations which characterize this period. First millennium witnesses both forced movement of deportees⁷⁴, victims of Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian politics and voluntary migrations of Aramaic, Arab tribes or of other groups settled in Mesopotamia for various reasons. The letters of Nippur, which date from the middle of the eighth century, demonstrate how a system of exchange took place in the south of Mesopotamia between nomadic and settled groups⁷⁵. While this exchange was local in nature, commodities involved are mainly agricultural staples, it springs from long-distance commerce, and exotic goods like purple dye are sometimes cited⁷⁶. It reflects the settlement in the course of the eighth century of Aramaic people from Syria in the lands between Nippur and Bit-Iakin. It is not implausible that certain members of these tribes continued to move around with their herds between Babylon and Habur region. Information exchanged between various correspondents refer to certain spoken and written linguistic characteristics which demonstrate⁷⁷ the long-lasting privileged relationship between Aramaics settled in the south of Nippur and those from certain regions of Syria. These relations were beneficial to commercial links, especially if some Aramaics maintained their nomadic lifestyle and moved between Syria and Babylon with their animals⁷⁸. Links of this nature exist in the eighth century between the Nippur region and certain tribes settled at the foot of the Zagros in the Diyala region, thus aiding contact with Elam⁷⁹. One may suggest a similar analysis concerning the Arab tribes⁸⁰ who settled increasingly in Babylon⁸¹.

71 Restö 2003, p. 119-266.

72 Meyers 1997.

73 Jursa 2010, p. 224-225

74 Bedford 2007.

75 Cole 1996, Cole 1996b.

76 Cole 1996 n°1, Cole 1996 n°45.

77 According to Cole 1996, p. 27. See also Fales 2009 [2007], p. 289.

78 About Arameans, see Brinkman 1968, Frame 2007 [1992], p. 43-48, Lipinski 2000, Briquel-Chatonnet 2003, Fales 2009 [2007]. Evidence is scarce for Neo-Babylonian times, but it seems that Arameans are not as well integrated and settled than Chaldeans are. After the mass deportation from the end of Neo-Assyrian times Arameans mix up with the general population, are remain silent in our sources. Only the major tribes of Gambulu and Puqudu can still be clearly identified after the VIIe century BC. Fales 2009 [2007], p. 297.

79 Cole 1996, p. 27-29, Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 317.

80 Numerous cuneiform sources mention arrival of nomadic arabic tribes as soon as the beginning of VIII^e century. Eph'al 1978, Frame 2007 [1992], p. 50 . Restö, p. 190 finds mention of LÚ Arabāya in at least 20 texts from Nippur, Sippar and Uruk. Most of them date from from the time period 563-420: arab tribes are much more present in cuneiform sources during Neo-Babylonian and achaemenid times than before. Those texts show Arabs involved in various economic activities, some possess slaves, other are slaves themselves, some of them works for temples in Sippar evidence. A specific arabian organisation, *ālu ša arbāya* is known in Sippar: in those times, arabic tribes seem to remain a distinct group, but pretty well integrated in babylonian society,

81 Other strangers appear in cuneiform evidence. Egyptians appear in commercial background (Frame 2007 [1992], p. 49 and note 104, Eph'al 1978, p. 74-90), as well as Judeans (Jursa 2007).

The arrival of these populations results in reduced costs of transactions with the North's acceptance of the concept. It results in a relative cultural homogeneity, when aramean becomes the *lingua franca* of the near East. It also contributes to reducing transport costs for goods when commodities are traveling with men and herds. This is confirmed indirectly by the relative wealth of western goods in Southern Babylon. Be it through Neo-Assyrian tributes or the acquisition of the Neo-Babylonian temples, this region supplied gold and even purple fabric similar to that produced in Phoenician cities⁸². While it is difficult to prove, one wonders if its possible to identify these population migrations as the much-discussed vehicle of importation of exotic goods which is so absent in our archival sources⁸³.

This new place taken by nomads groups leads to the same direction than the domestication of camel: a new kind of commerce for exotic goods, dealing on longer distance, much more flexible than before, and much more difficult to control by local authorities as well. This can bring to clashes between new groups involved in trade and local authorities which try to rule them⁸⁴. But, in Neo-Babylonian times, this rather leads to a high involvement in long distance trade of people either coming from outside Mesopotamia, or recently settled there. This involvement has often been put forward to explain the scarcity of cuneiform evidence dealing with long-distance trade: this trade would nearly become a monopole of non-akkadian people during Neo-Babylonian times⁸⁵. Those new actors do not write in cuneiform. If they use some script, it is on perishable written medium, which explains why no written source remains for this period. But this point, often repeated, is not enough to explain why cuneiform-writing population withdrew from this economic activity. To answer this difficult and crucial question the kind of reasoning proposed by D. C. North can prove to be helpful. D. C. North actually stresses the place of institutions and of transaction costs to explain economic change in history. A change in institutions can allow a lowering of transactions costs, that can, as a result, make possible some new economic behaviour. But, to the contrary, they can also prevent appearance of new behaviour, or prevent some populations to take part to the economic change, when the institutional background does not change according to what would be necessary to allow a change in economic system. The transaction costs remains too high, and the economic change is impossible. Following this idea, the aim of this paper is to propose the idea that there is, in Neo-Babylonian time, a standstill in institutional framework which prevents babylonian businessmen from finding their place in the new long-distance trade network. Because of that, babylonians do not take advantage of the new kind of trade which arose in the second part of the first millennium BC.

To understand from where this institutional standstill is coming from, let us review the changes, or lack thereof, in institutions, in the broad acceptance of the word advised by D. C. North, that could impact the babylonian involvement in long distance trade. The existence of a simplified system of weight and measurement was a significant development. In Neo-Assyrian texts, the measurement of weight still lacks standardization, leading to a great deal of difficulties and errors, be they intentional or not⁸⁶. In Neo-Babylonian texts, the system is much simpler. We no longer find mention of the different

82 For chaldeans tributes, see Jankowska 1969, Graslin-Thomé 2009, p. 317-319. In PTS 3068 quoted above, gold, bronze and trade goods are to be found in Chaldea. For the economic links with Sealand, see Kleber 2008, p. 326-329.

83 The question to know from where the trade goods present in Sealand are coming is still pending. Jursa 2010, p. 93 thinks that they come from a southern route, but Byrne 2003 questions the very existence of direct trade routes between Arabia and Babylonia before persian times. In Neo-Babylonian texts, the arabs tribes always come from the west, and ride down the Euphrates. The entrance gate to Babylonia for caravans is, therefore, the middle Euphrates.

84 A well known example is the ambush set by Ninurta-Kudurri-Ušur, governor of Suhu in the middle Euphrates to a caravan of camels coming from the West. Liverani. 1992.

85 Oppenheim 1969, Dandamayev 1986, Jursa 2010, p. 224 for example.

86 Muller 2004 give several examples of additions of quantities expressed in minas who seems wrong to modern scholars. They have often been taken as a sign of the low calculation skills of the scribes, but may rather be the accurate result,

terms which abound in Neo-Assyrian texts⁸⁷. Nevertheless, the heterogeneity remains a reality and the multiplicity of terms used to define the quality of silver⁸⁸ is significant: payment remains a complex transaction⁸⁹, requiring the weighing of metal which did not protect against a quality of silver inferior to that expected. Costs linked to the weighing contribute to transaction costs remaining high, while the risks associated with the quality of the metal received were high enough to decisively encourage exchanges concluded with known and well-trusted partners. On the other hand, the establishment of a more monetary economy is favorable to the reduction of transactions costs and the development of exchanges. If we are to accept the conclusions of M. Jursa⁹⁰, money becomes increasingly used in transactions in the sixth century. The proportion of money-based exchange will be a subject of debate among Assyriologists. It has, in any case, a significant influence on transaction costs: it simplifies exchanges and limits risks. M. Stolper has already demonstrated how the increasing reliance on money, mostly for fiscal reasons, has led to the development of entrepreneurial activity by private businessmen acting on behalf of the palace or the temples⁹¹. Local commerce has benefited as a result. But we have seen that its effect is non-existent in the realm of long distance commerce which remains a secondary activity for the so-called «entrepreneurs⁹²». It is as if the broadened use of money had opened them to a large set of local or regional economic activities, enough for the ambition of wealthy businessmen, who do not need to expand their activities into long-distance commerce. In this case, a institutional evolution leads to what could appear, from the babylonian point of view, as a withdraw from some activities.

An explanation for this blockage can also come from the dysfunction of other institutions, in the meaning given by D. C. North. The accounting procedures⁹³, or the slowness in adaptation to new economical behaviour⁹⁴ could be part of the answer. The contracts, an other institution in the meaning given by D. C. North, probably played a role as well. Economic theory explains that contracts, be these formal or tacit in nature, are a way to reduce the risk involved by exchange. The purpose of these contracts was to limit the risks associated with transactions. In this matter, the long-distance commerce adhered to rules which were fundamentally different to local exchange. In the latter, in case of cheat, it is possible to plead to local authorities, even if dishonesty has been discovered in retrospect. The parties are likely to know one another, or at least to be able to find one another, if they realize that things the deal hasn't been carried out according to the rules. By contrast, long-distance trade occurs between parties who do not know one another and are likely never to meet again. It is, in this context, much more difficult to guarantee respect for the rules. Trade in gold is a good example of this difficulty. One text tells of agents from Eanna who bought gold in Babylon and hastened to verify its quality upon their return to Uruk⁹⁵. Mesopotamian techniques governing the quality of gold consisted of melting down a portion of the metal and this could only be done once the agents return home⁹⁶. At

incomprehensible for us because of the high complexity of the units of measure.

87 Powell 1990.

88 Joannès 1994, Vargyas 2000, Jursa 2010, p. 474-490.

89 A text from the Nur-Sin archiv (Wunsch 1993, n°65) deals with onions sold against a silver ingot. It foresees that the ingot will be cut by the buyer, not by the seller: M. Jursa 2010, p. 479 proposes that this clause can be due to the fact that the seller, a rural farmer does not know how to cut a large piece of silver, and prefers to trust the buyer, a businessman better accustomed to such a delicate task.

90 Conclusions presented in Jursa 2010.

91 Stolper 1985.

92 The word «entrepreneur» has been advocated by van Driel 1999, and often taken over in latter literature, with sometimes slightly different acceptances. See, for example, Graslin Vivel 2005, Jursa 2010.

93 Jursa 2004, Graslin-Thomé 2015.

94 Jursa 2010, Graslin-Thomé 2014. See below.

95 YOS VI 112, l. 23.

96 Joannès 1987, Joannès 1994.

this stage, it is a little late to think of returning to confront potential fraudsters. There is no legal way for the administration of the temple to react if the metal's quality does not meet expectations. As such, no judicial framework exists to protect merchants and enable commerce on a large scale. It is understandable how, under these circumstances, the sanctuaries entrust the supply of primary materials to specialists: their weathered eye is the best means of guaranteeing the acceptable quality of the goods procured.

However, the juridical framework of long-distance trade is an unsolved problem in Neo-Babylonian times. It does not provide merchants with the protection they desire. The Neo-Babylonian era hardly sees any development in the protection and legal control of large-scale commerce. The contracts are well-known: the merchants use contracts known as *harrānu*-contracts, literally «contracts of the caravan». But, despite their name related to long-distance trade, those contracts are, in reality, a means of gathering capital for a variety of reasons⁹⁷, usually on a very local scale. There is no specific formula for commercial transactions, let alone for long distance trade. There is therefore no specific clause precisely designed to respond to specific needs of long distance trade, most of all the difficult but essential protection against the risk.

Because of this lack of appropriate juridical framework, people involved in long distance trade have to look for other systems of protection against the risks specific to their activity⁹⁸. One strategy may perhaps be revealed through YOS XIX 1. In this document a big house is given to Šamaš-zēr-ibni, against exotic goods, listed in the contract. To pay the capital in the form of a house ensures that the person entrusted with the money will not disappear without having delivered the merchandise. This measure has its limits, however, as is demonstrated in another text, AnOr VIII 70: in this text we learn that Eanna had to initiate legal proceedings to recuperate, after ten years, a house entrusted as capital for the commercial goods. On the whole, Neo-Babylonians involved in long distance trade seems to lack legal protection against risk. The need to find other means to protect themselves may explain that the temple prefers to deal with individuals whose reliability can be guaranteed in some manner: agents of the king, or merchants they already know. It may also explain the dearth of evidence of exchanges with suppliers who have come from afar. In other words, long distance commerce, in the absence of any legal framework, appears too risky and it is preferable to deal with well-known partners. In any case there is no visible technical development during this period of contract law which might encourage the expansion of large-scale commerce.

This lack of legal background well adapted to long-distance trade may explain why babylonian businessmen do not invest in this kind of economic activity: M. Jursa has shown that most babylonian families that have enough money to invest in economy are for the most part of them «risk-averse»: they prefer to invest their money in activities where investment return is predictable⁹⁹, even if they are not as profitable as more hazardous ones. It is the case of the prebendary families labeled by M. Jursa as «rentiers»: for those wealthy families, the money is mainly used to secure or expand the family rural possessions. The «entrepreneurs», as M. Jursa calls an other kind of wealthy businessmen, accept to run more risk, but their activities are mainly local: agricultural business, providing cash for the crown, or other profit-gathering activities. The temples administrators behavior is close from the rentiers one: they avoid the risk and are not seeking the more profitable way to handle their possessions. That is how Ebabbar prefers to entrust outsiders to sell the bulk of its date production. This choice prevent the temple to get the best profite he could expect from his production, and makes it dependent to the main

97 Lanz 1976, Joannès 1983, Jursa 2010, p. 206-214.

98 Graslin-Thomé, in press a.

99 Iddin-Marduk is a good example of «risk-averse» entrepreneurs: he prefers to buy in advance the onions production that he will eventually sell in Babylon. In this way, he does not support the uncertainty of a good or bad harvest. He reduces the risk of loss, but of unexpected gains as well. Graslin 2002, Graslin-Thomé in press a.

traders¹⁰⁰. But it simplify the task of the administrators, and lows the risk their risk exposure. This behavioral choice can explain that neither temples nor well-being temple families choose to involve in long-distance trade: the juridical framework is not designed to reduce the risk sufficiently to encourage them to invest their money. Local business suffices for the small part of businessmen eager to face more risk, for higher gains. They content themselves with local and regional business, especially as the institutional framework which does not change in the case of long-distance trade, is touched by several improvement as far as local business is concerned.

The result, even if institutional development is occurring, and that they could, in theory, benefit long-distance commerce, is that the effect of such transformations is not very significant. While it is true that archival sources are few, this lack of evidence shows that long-distance commerce is not a favored domain for entrepreneurs. Within the big institutions, commerce held in trust continues to be significant, while private operators stay in the background. The institutional framework, in the sense given by D. C. North, is definitely evolving but at too slow a pace and in too incomplete a manner to inspire entrepreneurs to devote either energy or capital into it from other activities. As a result the distinction between local and long-distance commerce is significant. Major institutional changes, notably the growing move to a monetary economy, leads to the development of a dynamic business class. However the associated drawbacks appear to be a persistently poor adaptation by the institutions to long-distant commerce. This remains too prevalent to encourage entrepreneurs to invest in such projects. Babylonian businessmen choose to invest their capitals and energy in the enlarged local and regional activities permitted by economic change. This economic change has an opposite effect on long-distance trade: the changes exist, but are, from the babylonian point of view, less interesting than the changes which impacted local and regional economic activities. They therefore are used by other populations, newcomers in Babylonia, who capture to their benefit the changes ignored by Babylonians.

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100Jursa 2010, p. 592.

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