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Makers of Athenian Trade Policy

The relationship between trade and politics has been a key issue in the long-running debate about the ancient Greek economy. Yet there exists no study of the trade policies of Greek city-states that examines the policy makers themselves and their proposals relating to trade. This paper will offer a preliminary examination of the most prominent makers of Athenian trade policy in the fourth century and show not only that their interests were broader than has heretofore been realized, but also that their proposals may have profoundly changed the economy of Athens.

The prevailing view concerning the trade policies of Greek city-states was inspired by Hasebroek's thesis that they were aimed solely at fulfilling the traditional political goals of obtaining public revenue and necessities, such as grain, for the citizenry. Adherents to Hasebroek's thesis (e.g. Finley) have argued further that such trade policies are indicative of a "primitive," "embedded," or "undifferentiated" economy, in which traditional social and political concerns, rather than the purely "economic" pursuit of profit, determined the nature and scope of economic activities.

An examination of the statesmen who made Athenian trade policy reveals that in several cases there is little reason to doubt the prevailing view. Euboulos, Androtion, and Lykourgos promoted policies whose goal was clearly to obtain greater revenue and/or grain for Athens through trade.

Two other prominent Athenian statesmen, Agyrrhios and Demosthenes, however, may have had interests in making trade policy that went beyond simply obtaining revenue and grain for the city. Newly discovered evidence, particularly an Athenian law of 374/3 edited by Ronald Stroud (*Hesperia*, Suppl. 29 [1998]), and a reevaluation of the old evidence reveals that these two statesmen may have promoted trade policies with the intention of creating profit-making opportunities for those engaged in trade and perhaps even for themselves.

It appears, then, that Hasebroek's thesis and the prevailing view are in need of revision. Although the traditional political goals of obtaining revenue and necessities, such as grain, were certainly important interests behind Athenian trade policy in the fourth century, other interests must also be considered. These interests, which were not tied to traditionally esteemed social and political concerns, but aimed instead at the pursuit of profit, might indicate a trend towards the "modernization," "disembedding," or "differentiation" of the economy in late Classical Athens.