ALSO BY JACK WEATHERFORD

Tribes on the Hill
Porn Row
Narcóticos en Bolivia y los Estados Unidos
Indian Givers
Native Roots
Savages and Civilization

The History of Money

From Sandstone to Cyberspace

JACK WEATHERFORD

Three Rivers Press • New York

1

Cannibals, Chocolate, and Cash

The last conflict is at hand in which
Civilization receives its conclusive form—
the conflict between *money and blood.*
—OSWALD SPENGLER

IN THE CENTER OF THE AZTEC IMPERIAL CAPITAL OF Tenochtitlán, the priests performed their daily sacrifices. They marched the victim up the steep stairway to the top of the pyramid, where four priests grabbed his limbs and spread him out on his back on a large stone altar. One of the fearsome and blood-spattered priests raised an obsidian knife above his head and then plunged it into the heaving chest of the victim held down on the altar before him. Quickly yet delicately, he slit open the chest and thrust his probing fingers between the ribs in search of the victim's heart. The priest pulled out the still pulsing heart and tossed it onto a flaming brazier—an offering to Hutzilopchtli. The sacrifice could be performed in as little as twenty seconds; yet the heart could continue throbbing on the burning brazier for as long as five minutes.[1]

For Aztec merchants, the climax of the liturgical year of Aztec sacrifices came during the midwinter festival of Panquetzaliztli, the Raising of the Banners, when they could show off their success and wealth by sponsoring one of these human sacrifices. Unlike warriors who personally captured enemy soldiers on the battlefield for eventual sacrifice on the altar, the merchants had to buy their sacrificial victims at a price of up to forty woven cloaks.[2] After paying for his victim, a merchant had to feed, clothe, and care for him in lavish style over many months as he was being prepared for the grand spectacle. In order to sponsor the sacrifice, the merchant had to host four lavish banquets and celebrations for other merchants and military leaders. Each banquet required new costumes, jewelry, and regalia for the merchant and his sacrificial victim. After procuring the lavish goods especially for the banquets, the merchant had to offer them as gifts to the guests in appreciation for their participation in the celebration. Only after all the appropriate ceremonies had been performed, the banquets hosted, and the expensive gifts presented did the merchant finally escort his victim up the long flight of stairs to the altar where the priests ripped out his heart. After the sacrifice, the merchant took the mutilated body home, where the women cleaned it and cooked it. The merchant then served it in yet another ritual meal with corn and salt but without the customary chilies. Everyone was free to enjoy the flesh except the merchant himself, for whom the sacrificial victim was something like a son.

Under the guidance of the high priest, called the *tlenamacac* or fire-giver, the Aztecs orchestrated a series of sacrifices throughout the year. In preparation for these rituals, the priests pierced various parts of their own bodies, including the tongue and genitals, with maguey thorns as an offering of their own blood to the gods. An appropriately pious priest always had small open wounds on his temples from which blood oozed down the sides of his head. His hair grew long and matted with the blood, providing him with a frightening appearance and a horrendous odor that clearly set him apart from others in the Aztec world.

Each god and each commemorative place in the complex Aztec calendar called for its own kind of sacrifice. In the early spring, for example, people fasted for rain and sacrificed tamales and small children to Tlaloque and Chalchiuhtlicue. Later in the spring, they performed more rain ceremonies to Xipe Totec, the fertility deity, in the form of gladiatorial sacrifices. The priests tied the victim to a stone and armed him with a stick studded with feathers in place of blades. With this ritual weapon, he had to fight warriors with real weapons of sharp obsidian blades. The warriors strove to cut the victim only slightly so that he might be cut many times and thus bleed as much and as slowly as possible to prolong the power and spectacle of the sacrifice. The priests seized less cooperative victims who refused to play the role of ritual gladiator, bound them with ropes, and offered them to the fire god by slowly roasting them alive.

In subsequent ceremonies during the ritual year, priests flayed men and tortured children to death so that their tears might induce the gods to send more rain. The gods supposedly had a special fondness for babies born with a double cowlick; priests seized such babies from their mothers at birth and kept them in a special nursery until time for their ritual sacrifice. Throughout the year, special victims impersonated the gods. An impersonator of the god Tezcatlipoca had to be a handsome young man without a blemish. For a year, he lived as the god, participating in rituals, singing, dancing, and playing his flute throughout the city. People regaled him with gifts and flowers. He had four beautiful wives, but at the end of the year, he had to leave them and climb the pyramid, where his heart was ripped out and his head severed.

The most dramatic sacrifice came during a dance when priests seized the impersonator of Xipe Totec and quickly flayed him. A priest then put on the skin of the dead person and continued the ceremony. In a female version of the same ceremony, a woman was sacrificed and her skin worn by a priest of the goddess Toci.

Although the sacrifices sponsored by the merchants ended up on the dining table of a special banquet, most sacrificial victims had a more mercantile end. After the sacrifice, the priests rolled the heartless body back down the steep stairs that the victim had ascended only minutes before. At the bottom of the pyramid, attendants severed the head and placed it on a trophy rack containing the slowly rotting heads of previous victims. They disemboweled the corpse and sent the choicest cuts of meat to the *tianquiztli*, the city market, where they were sold for chocolate.

Chocolate Cash

The Aztecs used chocolate for money, or, more precisely, they used the cacao seeds, usually called beans. With these cacao seeds, one could buy fruits and vegetables such as corn, tomatoes, chilies, squash, chayotes, and peanuts; jewelry made of gold, silver, jade, and turquoise; manufactured goods such as sandals, clothing, feathered capes, cotton padded armor, weapons, pottery, and baskets; meats such as fish, venison, duck; and specialty goods such as alcohol and slaves.[3]

The Aztec marketplaces usually stood adjacent to the main government buildings so that the exchange of goods could take place under the close supervision of government officials. Markets like the one in central Tenochtitlán occupied a great area, but the government prohibited any buying or selling outside the officially prescribed trading zone. Government officials regulated prices and sales, and they stood at the ready to punish and even execute anyone violating the law of the market. The government also sponsored a hereditary caste of long-distance merchants, the *pochteca*, who had an important official status within the state and had their own god, Yahcateuctli. In addition to the *pochteca*, the Aztecs sent out official tribute collectors, or *calpixque*, to all parts of the empire to bring back goods for the central administration in the highland valley of Mexico.

The empire operated primarily on the basis of tribute, the markets functioned as subsidiary parts of the political structure, and many different standardized commodities served as forms of near-money. Several tribute lists have survived and show the amount due from various provinces in the form of corn, amaranth, beans, cotton armor, obsidian knives, copper bells, jade, gold, sandals, shields, feathered capes, cacao, shells, feathers, and other practical and ornamental goods. The vast bulk of goods that passed through the Aztec Empire moved primarily as tribute from the peripheral parts of the empire to its capital. In this regard, the Aztec Empire was like virtually all other empires in the era before the spread of money. Ancient Egypt, Peru, Persia, and China all functioned as tributary systems rather than market systems.

Within this tributary system, the local markets played a minor role in distributing goods, but cacao had a major role within that smaller sphere of activity. Of all the forms of Aztec money, cacao proved to be the most commonly available and the easiest to use. The cacao tree produces large greenish-yellow pods that look something like

cantaloupes. When ripe, the fruit has a fleshy white pulp that is quite delicious, though it tastes nothing like chocolate. When preserved by drying and toasting, the beans can last for many months before being ground up to make chocolate.

Cacao grew mostly in southern Mexico in what are now the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco, and Veracruz, and in the Central American nations. From these areas it was traded and sent as tribute throughout the Aztec Empire, particularly to the capital, Tenochtitlán, the site of modern Mexico City. Cacao became so important as a means of exchange that it produced its own counterfeiting industry. Criminals would take the small husk of the cacao bean, empty it, and replace it with mud. They then sealed the husk and mixed the fake cacao beans with real ones to further obscure them.

Commodity money like cacao operated in a system based more on barter than on purchase. An Aztec would exchange an iguana for a load of firewood or a basket of corn for a rope of chilies, and if the goods did not have precisely the same value, the traders used cacao to even it out. The cacao bean served as a way to calculate value and to round out the exchange, but it did not serve as the exclusive means of exchange. The seller who wanted to exchange a nopal (cactus) worth five cacao beans for an ear of corn worth six cacao beans, for instance, would turn over the nopal and then add one cacao bean to even out the trade.

For large purchases, merchants calculated values in terms of bags of approximately 24,000 beans, but such quantities proved too cumbersome for use in daily transactions. As in many primitive systems where commerce focused on certain important commodities, the Aztecs used more than one commodity to standardize exchanges. In addition to cacao beans, they used *quachtli*, cotton cloaks, the value of which varied from 60 to 300 cacao beans. The *quachtli* served for larger financial transfers such as the purchase of slaves or sacrificial victims, for which the bags of cacao beans would be too bulky.[4] Other standardized exchange commodities included beads, shells, and copper bells, which were traded as far north as the modern state of Arizona.

Commodity money has the great advantage of being an item of consumption as well as a means of exchange. The Aztecs could easily grind their cacao money into chocolate paste, then beat it vigorously into a container of water to make a delicious drink that they greatly prized. Unlike paper money and cheap coins that can easily lose their face value, commodity money has a value in and of itself and thus can always be consumed no matter what the status of the market.

Chocolate, like all other types of money, has no inherent value outside of a cultural context. In order for it to have value, people have to want it and know how to use it. The Mesoamerican love of chocolate as a food and as a means of exchange contrasted greatly with the values of the first European pirates to seize a ship loaded with cacao beans: the pirates mistook the cacao beans for rabbit dung and dumped the entire cargo into the sea.

The Aztec Empire of Mexico illustrates how complicated the economic and political relationships can become even in the absence of money. Their distribution system reached as complex a level as an empire and a protomarket system could reach within the confines of a tributary empire and primitive or commodity money. Through the use of particular commodities, they came almost to the point of creating a modern monetary system, but they never quite crossed the line.

Commodity Money

Throughout the world, commodities from salt to tobacco, from logs to dried fish, and from rice to cloth have been used as money at various times in history. Natives in parts of India used almonds. Guatemalans used corn; the ancient Babylonians and Assyrians used barley. Natives of the Nicobar Islands used coconuts, and the Mongolians prized bricks of tea. For the people of the Philippines, Japan, Burma, and other parts of Southeast Asia, standardized measures of rice traditionally served as commodity money.

Norwegians used butter as money, and in the medieval era, they used dried cod that could be easily converted into other goods or into coins by trading with the Hanseatic merchants living in Bergen. They, in turn, sold the fish in southern Europe where there was great

demand for it on Fridays, during Lent, and at other times when the Catholic church proscribed the eating of meat.

In China, North Africa, and the Mediterranean, people used salt as commodity money. At great risk in some of the hottest places on earth, tribesmen of the central Sahara mined large slabs of salt three feet long and several inches thick. The Sahara contains some of the purest salt in the world, and a caravan of passing salt merchants might at first sight be misperceived to be transporting slabs of white marble tied to the sides of their camels. Because of its purity, the salt can be easily cut into a number of standardized sizes. Merchants usually wrapped the smaller denominations of salt in a protective reed covering in order to reduce the danger of the salt chipping and prevent people from scraping off parts of it between trades.

The modern English word *salary* and the Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese word *salario* are derived from the Latin word *sal*, meaning "salt" or, more precisely, from *salrius*, meaning "of salt." It is thought that the Roman soldiers were paid in salt or that they received money for the purpose of buying salt to flavor their otherwise bland food.

Pastoral people often used live animals as a type of money in which the value of everything else was calculated. The Siberian tribes used reindeer, the people of Borneo used buffaloes, the ancient Hittites measured value in sheep, and the Greeks of Homer's time used oxen. Wherever people have had cattle, they have tended to use the cattle as a form of commodity money. Pastoralists calculate and pay virtually everything—from slaves and wives to fines for adultery and murder—in cows.

Cattle played an equally important role in the economy of many ancient European peoples from Ireland to Greece and throughout the Indian subcontinent. The cattle complex survives in modern times in eastern and southern Africa among tribes such as the Masai, Samburu, Dinka, and Nuer.

The traditional importance of cattle survives indirectly in several modern European languages. The word *pecuniary*, which means "related to money," is derived from the Latin *pecuniarius*, meaning "wealth in cattle." The *as*, a Roman coin, represented a value equivalent to one-hundredth of a cow. Related English words include *pecunious*, an obsolete term meaning "wealthy," and the more commony used *impecunious*, meaning "poor."

The importance of the bovine idiom in European culture is further illustrated by the word *cattle*, which is derived from the same Latin roots that gave us *capital*, another broader term for money. *Chattel*—any item of movable personal property such as a slave—is derived from the same source. Thus modern names for two of the most important economic systems in European history, capitalism and feudalism, can both be traced back to systems based on cattle.

Even human beings have served as a measure of money. In ancient Ireland, slave girls became the common value against which items such as cows, boats, land, and houses were measured. Viking raiders and merchants sold the young women to slave traders in the Mediterranean, where they were highly valued because of their red or blond hair. Irish males had far less value as slaves.

In parts of equatorial Africa, by contrast, male slaves had a higher value than females and children, who would be measured as mere fractions of the value of a male. Of all the forms of money, slaves proved one of the least reliable because of their high mortality rate and their tendency to escape.

Modern Commodities

The use of commodity money has never disappeared, and it rises again whenever the normal flow of commerce and economic life is interrupted. Cigarettes, chocolate, and chewing gum filled temporary monetary gaps throughout Europe at the end of the Second World War. Not since the fall of the Aztec Empire had chocolate had such a high purchasing power as when the American soldiers arrived in Europe.

During the tyrannical reign of President Nicolae Ceauşescu in Romania, the country had an ample supply of paper money and aluminum coins, but the money had virtually no value because the dictator and his wife exported almost everything produced in the country. They rationed food, allowing fewer than two thousand calories a day for each of the common people, and the temperature in their homes and offices was not allowed to rise above 55 degrees. Under such an austere regime, cigarettes—particularly Kents—

functioned as the real currency of the nation. Anything could be bought for cigarettes—food, electronic goods, sex, or alcohol. Cartons of cigarettes had the advantage of being easily broken up into ten packs per carton, each of which could in turn be broken up into twenty cigarettes.

Consumable commodities such as tobacco and chocolate serve as adequate means of exchange, but they cannot perform all the functions of money. For example, they make a poor store of value. Anyone who had to accumulate sacks of grain or a load of tobacco as a way of amassing wealth would soon find that the grain rotted or was eaten by insects and rats, and the tobacco would slowly lose its flavor and begin to fall apart. In order to store their wealth for use in the future, people need more durable items such as cloth, furs, feathers, whale teeth, boar tusks, or shells. These commodities last longer than food; yet they too eventually deteriorate and lose their value. Food items might function adequately for the exchange of goods, but they are not good stores of value.

Animal skins and furs proved extremely useful in Russia, Siberia, and North America, but they had little practical use in the warmer markets of the Caribbean, Africa, South America, and southern Asia. The Canadians used the thick, luxurious beaver pelts that their large country produced and that were so popular with European hatters and clothiers. Farther south in the British colonies, the settlers used the skin of the North American deer, which achieved great importance in trade. Each skin was known as a *buck*, a word that has survived as a slang term for the dollar.

Throughout history, commodities and valued articles sometimes created an economic system that superficially resembled a money system, but such systems were invariably limited in scope and utility. Primitive money works best in a tribal community or in a heavily regulated market. At one end of the political and economic spectrum, empires such as that of the Incas of Peru organized their entire realm without the use of any markets or any money. At the other end, the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán, built a tributary state allowing the limited use of money with a protomarket system largely controlled by a ruling military class.

Whale teeth served as items of great value in Fiji and a few surrounding islands, where they still play an important role in the ceremonial life and the prestige system of the people. Whale teeth, however, did not prove very effective in trade with other people, who simply had no interest in them. Similarly, dog teeth were valued as a medium of exchange in the Admiralty Islands, but outsiders frequently found them disgusting and did not want to trade for them.

The desire for rare and valuable objects often induced entrepreneurial individuals to make risky journeys high into the mountains, deep into the jungle, or far out to sea. The items became important as gifts, particularly at important moments in the life cycle such as birth, puberty, marriage, or death. They also became important as gifts between friends or as a part of the making and breaking of alliances among villages or particular groups of people.

Durable commodities such as shells, stone, and teeth provide a long-term store of value, but because they occur naturally, their size, texture, color, and quality varies, and that fact keeps them from being entirely fungible. One whale tooth will not precisely equal another in value, and thus it becomes difficult to use the teeth interchangeably in a commercial system. Some items such as shells may be so abundant in coastal areas that they are too common to serve as money, and yet in a mountainous area they can be too rare to serve as general money.

Even the cowrie shell, which had enormous popularity across much of Africa and other areas bordering the Indian Ocean, was of no use to most people in the world. They did not see its value, and therefore the shells always had limited circulation in specific areas. With items such as shells, however, tribal people came very close to developing real cash economies. Shells departed from the merely decorative aspect of culture and became a way of accumulating and storing wealth as well as a mechanism of trade.

Money never exists in a cultural or social vacuum. It is not a mere lifeless object but a social institution.[5] To function completely as money, a material cannot exist simply as an object; it requires a particular social and cultural system. Once the system is in place, many different objects can serve as money. Often these uses arise from within the political or prestige sphere of social life rather than the commercial or subsistence spheres. Such items may be used to buy titles, to mark deaths, to negotiate marriages, to claim the right to use magic spells, or to acquire ritually powerful songs. More rarely, they have been used in the exchange of land, cattle, and other major goods, but even these exchanges often came about as subsidiary parts of a larger political or marriage negotiation rather than as merely commercial activities.

The Love of Gold

Next to food, humans seem to value metal as one of the most popular commodities in exchange. Of all the substances that can be used to make money, metal has more practical applications and has held its value over a longer time and a wider distance than any other. Because it is long-lasting, it serves as a good store of value. Because it can be made into smaller and larger pieces, it serves as a good means of exchange. It is not as bulky as the logs used by the Hondurans, nor is it as cumbersome as the bags of corn used by the Guatemalans. Unlike food commodities, which disappear when used, metal can be converted into something useful at any time and yet retain its value. It can be jewelry or a spear tip on one day and serve as money the next.

From Scandinavia to equatorial Africa, people have used particular standardized objects made of iron as money. The Sudanese made iron into hoes. The Chinese used a slightly differently shaped hoe made of bronze as well as miniature knives of the same material. Ancient Egyptians used copper, while the people of southern Europe preferred bronze. The people of Burma used lead, and the people of the Malayan Peninsula used the tin that abounds there.

In West Africa, people used copper rings known as manillas as a specialized form of currency. Throughout Liberia and other parts of West Africa, people used long strips of iron flattened on both ends and known as Kissi pennies, after the Kissi tribe that manufactured them. The tribes of the Congo used brass rods, and in East Africa, many tribes manufactured metal objects in a distinctive shape for use only in their own society. The shape of their iron money was as much a form of identification for the people as their language.

As technology developed, the type of desired object became more sophisticated and made great advances with the discovery of different metals. Of all the metals, gold has been the most universally valued. Gold has relatively few practical uses outside of decoration and some sophisticated modern technological applications; yet people throughout the world have been attracted to it. Even if it lacks utility, empirical evidence shows that humans everywhere have wanted to touch it, wear it, play with it, and possess it. Unlike copper, which turns green; iron, which rusts; and silver, which tarnishes, pure gold remains pure and unchanged.

People around the world have closely associated gold and silver with magic and divinity. Sometimes the list of divine substances included other precious goods such as silk cloth in India, vicuña cloth in ancient Peru, olive oil in Judea, and butter in Tibet, but people almost everywhere regarded gold and silver as sacred substances. In most cultures, the gods valued offerings of precious metals more than flowers, food, animals, or even human beings.

The Maya of the Yucatán sacrificed gold, silver, and jade objects to their gods in their sacred cenotes, deep pools of water formed in the peninsula's limestone base. In one of the highland communities of Colombia before the arrival of the Europeans, the Chibcha Indians performed an annual ritual in which they covered their chief with gold dust. When he dived into the sacred lake, the water washed off the gold, becoming a gift to the gods. The chief was known to the Spaniards as El Dorado, the Golden One, and his wealth became the object of the greatest search in world history.

In particular, gold was considered a divine substance.[6] People around the world noted the resemblance of its color to the sun, a coincidence to which they ascribed a deeper meaning. The ancient Egyptians believed that gold was sacred to Ra, the sun god, and they buried great quantities of it with the corpses of their divine pharaohs. Among the Incas of South America, gold and silver represented the sweat of the sun and the moon, and they covered the walls of their temples with these precious metals. Even after conquest, when the Spaniards took the Indian gold and silver, the natives decorated their new Christian temples with foil paper to imitate the sacred substances, and they tossed gold- and silver-colored confetti into the air

in place of gold dust. The ancient people of India considered gold the sacred semen of Agni, the fire god; therefore they donated gold for any service performed by Agni's priests.

Protomoney

As early as the end of the third millennium B.C., the people of Mesopotamia began using ingots of precious metals in exchange for goods. Mesopotamian clay tablets inscribed in cuneiform in 2500 B.C. mention the use of silver as a form of payment. People called these uniform weights of gold and silver minas, shekels, or talents. An entire warehouse of olive oil, beer, or wheat could be reduced in value to an easily transported ingot of gold or silver. This system proved effective for merchants accustomed to dealing with a whole shipload or warehouse of goods, but gold remained too scarce and valuable for the average person wanting to sell a basket of wheat or buy a goatskin of wine. Such people had no access to this system of gold and silver ingots.

Once human technology and social organization developed to the point of using standardized amounts of gold and silver in exchange, it became only a matter of time before smaller coins appeared. The technological and cultural leap from primitive coins constituted the first money revolution in history, and to the best of numismatic knowledge, it happened only once. It took place in western Asia in what is today Turkey, and from there it spread around the world to become the global money system and the ancestor of the system in which we live and work today.

Money does not occur in nature, and no version or analog of it exists among any other members of the animal kingdom. Money, like language, is uniquely human. Money constituted a new way of thinking and acting that changed the world immediately. Only now, after nearly three thousand years, is the full power of money becoming apparent in human affairs, as it supplants or dominates many of the traditional social bonds based on family, tribe, community, and nation.

2

The Fifth Element

Money ranks as one of the primary materials with which mankind builds the architecture of civilization.

—LEWIS LAPHAM

THE OLDEST RECORDED WORD IN EUROPEAN LITature is the ancient Greek word for rage at the beginning of Homer's *Iliad*. In English, we usually translate his first line as "Sing, O Muse, of the rage of great Achilles," but the original text begins with the word that means "rage," "wrath," or "anger," and that emotion becomes the primary one in Homer's account of the Trojan War, ten years of conflict during which Greeks sacrificed, killed, tortured, raped, maimed, and enslaved one another. These rage-driven men lived in what modern scholars call the heroic, or Homeric, age on the edges of the great ancient empires of the time. Their world would have remained in the shadows of historical darkness had it not been for the two great Greek epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by Homer, which comprise an overture to civilization's recording of its own fateful unfolding. The Greeks portrayed to us in Homer's work were people of combat, not people of commerce. The heroes pursued lives of war, raiding their neighbors and defending their family honor. Homer described in vivid detail the weapons of his heroes, the armor they wore, the designs on their breastplates, and every implement they used in battle. He described the beauty of their ships, but he also grimly related where the spear entered the warrior's head, where it exited, and how long the slain warrior's mother and wife cried at his funeral.

Money had no place in the epic poems of Homer, just as it had no

place in the lives of his heroes. In the words of Voltaire, "Agamemnon might have had a treasure, but certainly no money." Commerce did not appear in Homer's poetry in which men pursued honor, not wealth; they imposed their will upon others at any cost. They did not negotiate, compromise, or argue over the value of worldly goods. The strongest demanded that goods be given to them as tribute for use in their campaigns; they did not deign to haggle with shopkeepers.

Fortified palaces, like that of Agamemnon in Mycenae and Priam in Troy, formed the center of the Greek communal life in the Homeric age, and markets did not figure as places of importance. Each town tried to produce as many of its own goods as possible so that it would have to trade as little as possible with other towns. In their spare time, the Homeric heroes hunted, feasted, and played ritual war games.

Homer gives no hint of thought or self-reflection among his heroes. Their ideas and impulses came either from a deep-seated desire to increase their own personal honor or as inspiration whispered into their ears by the gods. The heroes of Homer were men of passion rather than the men of moderation so admired in classical Greece. The phrase *gnothi seauton* (know thyself), which later became the motto of the classical Greeks of the Golden Age of Athens, would have been virtually meaningless to Achilles, Odysseus, Paris, Hector, Agamemnon, Priam, and the other Homeric heroes, who were men of action, not reflection.

How could we imagine Odysseus coming home from his ten years of wandering to establish a pottery workshop, oversee a farm, or open a wine shop? Like the other Homeric heroes, Odysseus cavorted with divine beings, fought dreadful monsters, drank heavily, seduced women (both mortal and divine), and lived among other heroes in an eternal game of defending and increasing honor. Commerce had little meaning for Odysseus and his comrades because they lived in a world that did not yet know money.

Despite their lack of knowledge of money, it was very near the walls of Troy that money was born. It was here in the little-known kingdom of Lydia that humans first produced coins, and it was here that the first great revolution began. This revolution was destined to have a far greater impact on our world than all the heroes of ancient Greece.

As Rich as Croesus

Through the millennia, a succession of kingdoms arose, flourished, and withered along the Ionian coast and adjacent islands. Each one left something that its neighbors and successors later adopted into their own culture. Of the many great civilizations that flourished and withered in ancient Anatolia, the Lydian does not rank among the best known. The Lydians spoke a European language and lived in Anatolia after about 2000 B.C. They formed a small kingdom under the Mermnadae dynasty beginning in the seventh century B.C., but at its height, the Lydian kingdom was little more than an overgrown city-state spread out from Sardis. The Lydian kings were not celebrated in myth or song as great warriors, conquerors, builders, or even lovers.

The names of the dynasties and kings are known to us through Hittite tablets and the books of the Greek historian Herodotus, but only one name of ancient Lydia is commonly known today—Croesus. "As rich as Croesus" is a common expression in modern English, Turkish, and other languages around the world.

Croesus ascended to the Lydian throne in 560 B.C. to rule a kingdom that was already rich. His ancestors had made a firm economic basis for the kingdom's wealth by manufacturing some of the best perfumes and cosmetics of the ancient world; yet these goods alone could not have raised Croesus to the level of wealth that myth accords him. For that, he depended on another invention of his ancestors—coins, a new and revolutionary form of money.

Something similar to money and something resembling markets can be found in Mesopotamia, China, Egypt, and many other parts of the world, but they did not actually use coins until the rise of Lydia and the subsequent minting of the first coins, between 640 and 630 B.C.[1] The genius of the Lydian kings can be seen in their recognition of the need for very small and easily transported ingots worth no more than a few days' labor or a small part of a farmer's harvest. By making these small ingots in a standardized size and weight, and by stamping on them an emblem that verified their worth to even the illiterate, the kings of Lydia exponentially expanded the possibilities of commercial enterprise.

The Lydians made the first coins of electrum, a naturally occurring mixture of gold and silver. They made the electrum into oval slugs several times thicker than modern coins, or about the size of the end digit of an adult's thumb. To ensure their authenticity, the king had each one stamped with the emblem of a lion's head. The stamping also flattened the lumps, beginning their transition from an oval nugget to a flat, circular coin.

By making the nuggets the same weight and thus approximately the same size, the king eliminated one of the most time-consuming steps in commerce: the need to weigh the gold each time a transaction was made. Now merchants could assess the value by tale, or by simply counting the number of coins. Such standardization greatly reduced the opportunity for cheating on the amount or quality of gold and silver in an exchange. One did not need to be an expert in handling a scale or in judging the purity of metal in order to buy a basket of wheat, a pair of sandals, or an amphora of olive oil. The use of coins that had been weighed and stamped in the royal workshop made it possible for commerce to proceed much more rapidly and honestly, and it allowed people to participate even if they did not own a scale. The commerce of coins opened up new dimensions for new segments of the population.

The wealth of Croesus and his ancestors arose not from conquest but from trade. During his reign (560–546 B.C.), Croesus created new coins of pure gold and silver rather than electrum. Using their newly invented coins as a standardized medium of exchange, the Lydian merchants traded in the daily necessities of life—grain, oil, beer, wine, leather, pottery, and wood—as well as in luxury goods such as perfumes, cosmetics, jewelry, musical instruments, glazed ceramics, bronze figurines, mohair, purple cloth, marble, and ivory.

The variety and abundance of commercial goods quickly led to another innovation: the retail market. Rather than leaving buyers to seek out the home of someone who might have oil or jewelry to sell, the kings of Sardis set up an innovative new system in which anyone, even a stranger, with something to sell could come to a central market. Numerous small shops lined the market, and each merchant specialized in particular goods. One sold meat, and another offered grain. One sold jewelry, another cloth. One sold musical instruments, another pots. This market system began in the late seventh century B.C., but its descendants can clearly be seen in the later Greek agora, in the medieval market squares of northern Europe, and in suburban shopping malls of the contemporary United States.

Marketing became so important for the Lydians that Herodotus called them a nation of *kapeloi*, meaning "merchants" or "sellers" but with a somewhat negative connotation akin to "hucksters" or "snake-oil salesmen." Herodotus saw that the Lydians had become a nation of shopkeepers. They had changed mere trade and barter into true commerce.

The commercial revolution in the city of Sardis provoked widespread changes throughout Lydian society. Herodotus reported with great amazement the Lydian custom of allowing women to choose their own husbands. Through the accumulation of coins, women became free to make their own dowries and thus had greater freedom in selecting a husband.

New services quickly entered the marketplace. Hardly had the first shops been put into operation before some enterprising individual offered a house specializing in sexual services for the many men engaged in commerce. The first known brothels were built in ancient Sardis. In order to accumulate their dowries, many unmarried women of Sardis supposedly worked in the brothels long enough to secure the money necessary to make the kind of marriage they desired.

Gambling soon followed, and the Lydians are credited with inventing not only coins but dice as well. Archaeological excavations clearly indicate that gambling and games of chance such as knucklebones thrived in the area around the market.

Commerce created the fabulous riches of Croesus, but he and the elite families of Lydia squandered their wealth. They developed a great appetite for luxury goods, and they became mired in an escalating game of conspicuous consumption. Each family sought, for example, to build a larger tomb than the families around them. They decorated these tombs with ornate ivory and marble, and they held elaborate funerals, burying their deceased relatives with golden headbands, bracelets, and rings. Rather than generating more wealth, they were destroying the wealth that their ancestors had accumulated. The elite of Sardis used their new wealth for consumption instead of investing it in production.

Ultimately, Croesus poured his wealth into the two bottomless wells of conspicuous consumption so common among kings: buildings and soldiers. He conquered and he built. Croesus used his vast wealth to conquer almost all of the Greek cities of Asia Minor, including the grand Ephesus, which he then rebuilt in even grander style. Even though he was a Lydian, not a Greek, Croesus developed a great fondness for the culture of Greece, including its language and religion. Because he was something of a Hellenophile, he ruled the Greek cities with a light hand.

In a famous episode in Greek history, Croesus consulted the Greek oracle of Apollo to ask what chance he might have in war against Persia. The oracle replied that if he attacked mighty Persia, a great empire would fall. Croesus took the prophecy as a propitious one, and he attacked the Persians. In the bloody campaign of 547–546 B.C., the empire that fell was the great mercantile empire of the Lydians. Cyrus easily defeated the mercenary army of Croesus, and he then marched on the Lydian capital of Sardis.

While the Persian army looted and burned the wealthy city of Sardis, Cyrus taunted Croesus by boasting of what his soldiers were doing to the city and to the wealth of great Croesus. Croesus responded to Cyrus: "Not mine any longer. Nothing here belongs to me now. It is your city they are destroying and your treasure they are taking away."

With the conquest of Lydia by Cyrus, the reign of Croesus ended, his Mermnadae dynasty died, and the Lydian kingdom disappeared from the pages of history. Even though the great kingdom of Lydia and its rulers never rose again, the impact of that small and relatively unknown kingdom has remained vastly disproportionate to its geographic size and relatively minor role in ancient history. Many surrounding peoples quickly adopted the Lydian practice of making coins, and a commercial revolution spread throughout the Mediterranean world, particularly to Lydia's closest neighbor, Greece.

The Market Revolution

Even though the great armies of Persia conquered Lydia and many of the Greek states, the highly centralized Persian system could not compete effectively with the revolutionary new mercantile system of markets based on the use of money. In time, these new markets based on money spread throughout the Mediterranean, and they continued to clash with the authority of traditional tributary states.

The great struggle between the market cities of Greece and the empire of Persia represented a clash between the old and the new systems of creating wealth. It represented a clash between the market system based on democratic principles and a tributary system based on autocratic power, and it was a clash that has erupted repeatedly in history right up to the modern day.

Enriched by their newly emerging markets, the Greeks displaced the conservative Phoenicians as the great traders of the eastern Mediterranean. The monetary revolution sparked by the kings of Lydia ended the heroic Greek tradition and set in motion the evolution of the Greeks into a nation based on trade. With the spread of coins and the Ionian alphabet, a new civilization arose in the Greek islands and along the adjacent mainland.

Coinage gave a great impetus to commerce by providing it with a stability it had previously lacked. Coins became, quite literally, a baseline against which other commodities and services could be more easily measured and exchanged. Coins provided the ancient merchants, farmers, and consumers with a permanent medium of exchange that was easily stored and easily transported. That ease of use, standardization of value, and durability as a store of family wealth attracted ever more people to the new commodity.

The classical Athenians enjoyed the advantage of having discovered rich deposits of silver in Laurium, some twenty-six miles south of Athens. The mines produced silver from the sixth to the second century B.C. They averaged 75 to 150 feet in depth, and some reached a depth of nearly 400 feet.

The uniqueness of Greek culture, in contrast to that of Persia and Egypt, did not rest on the heavy-handed authority of the state supported by a massive army. The Greeks could not even unite into a single state; they remained divided into many, each sharing to a varying degree in the economic and cultural flowering of this new land. The power and might of Greece never depended upon the army. Not until after the apogee of classical Greek civilization did the whole area unite under one leader and one army when King Philip of neighboring Macedonia conquered the city-states and when his son, Alexander, made his brief but spectacular path of conquest first around the eastern Mediterranean and then to the Indian subcontinent. The greatness of Greece came as a by-product of the monetary and mercantile revolution from Lydia, the introduction of money, modern markets, and wholesale and retail distribution.

Money made possible the organization of society on a scale much greater and far more complex than either kinship or force could have achieved. Kinship-based communities tend to be quite small: bands of sixty to a hundred people tied through kinship and marriage to similar neighboring bands. The power of tributary systems and the state to organize humans proved far greater than mere kinship. A tributary system could easily include millions of people divided into provinces and classes and administered by a bureaucracy with a well-established system of keeping records. The use of money does not require the face-to-face interaction and the intense relationships of a kinship-based system. Nor does it require such extensive administrative, police, and military systems. Money became the social nexus connecting humans in many more social relationships, no matter how distant or how transitory, than had previously been possible. Money connected humans in a more extensive and more efficient way than any other known medium. It created more social ties, but in making them faster and more transitory, it weakened the traditional ties based on kinship and political power.

Money also became the medium for the expression of more values, making a great leap forward when its use was expanded from the realm of articles and commodities to something as abstract as work.

A man or woman might be paid for cleaning out the stables, for a day's work at the spinning wheel, for help in chopping timber or in feeding the animals, or for a sexual act. Work and human labor itself became a commodity with a value that could be fixed in money according to its importance, the amount of skill or strength it required, and the time it took. As money became the standard value for work, it was also becoming the standard of value for time itself.

People found that money served as a convenient substitute for various services and tributes owed to political or religious authorities. Instead of giving a portion of his crops to the lord, the peasant would simply pay a tax. Instead of giving a portion of their produce to the church or temple, people could make monetary contributions. Even service to God became valued in monetary terms. God no longer wanted the first fruits of the harvest or the firstborn animals in the spring; God, or at least the priests, wanted money.

The value of a work of art or a musical performance could be as easily expressed in terms of money as could the value of a goat or an apple. Even justice itself became a monetarized activity. Instead of paying an eye for an eye, a limb for a limb, or a life for a life, people could pay for their crimes with money. Money spread into marriage and inheritance through dowries, bride purchases, and cash allotments at divorce or death.

With the rapid monetarization of value, virtually everything could be expressed in terms of a common denominator—money. In this way, a system of shared values was established to calculate the value of virtually everything from a loaf of bread to a poem, from an hour's sexual service to taxes, or from a rack of lamb to a month's rent. Everything could be expressed within the terms of one simplified system.

The Greek Genius

The introduction of coined money had an immediate and tremendous impact on political systems and the distribution of power. The tensions in ancient Greek society appeared starkly in the reforms made in Athenian law by Solon, the great lawgiver, in 594–593 B.C. Debts, for example, had become so out of control in Athenian life

that Solon outlawed debt bondage and canceled all outstanding debts in order to begin with a clean financial and commercial slate. Other politicians in the millennia since Solon have attempted to utilize the same strategy, but invariably the cancellation of debts has produced only a short-lived political reprieve and the same financial problems have soon returned.

The most radical of Solon's reforms, however, was the abolition of the traditional practice of limiting eligibility for holding public office to men of noble birth. Money had a liberating effect on the Athenians, and thenceforth eligibility for election to public office would be based on landed wealth. At the time, such a move was radical and much more democratic than the older system. Money was helping to democratize the political process; it was destroying the old aristocracy based on inherited rights, relationships, and offices.

Democracy arose primarily in city-states like Athens, which had a strong market based on solid currency. Of all the Greek cities, Sparta most resisted democracy, coinage, and the rise of a market system. Legend maintains that the rulers of Sparta allowed only iron bars and spear tips to be used as money; this permitted some internal commerce but effectively minimized private commerce outside the city-state. Not until the third century B.C. did Sparta begin to mint its own coins.

The vibrancy of the revolutionary spread of commerce among the Greeks produced new temples, civic buildings, academies, stadia, and theaters, along with a body of glorious art, philosophy, drama, poetry, and science. The center of the classical Greek city was not the palace of a great king, the fortress of the army, or even the temple. Greek public life centered on the agora—the marketplace. Theirs was essentially a commercial civilization.

After thousands of years of empires throughout the world, the marketplace emerged during the Greek era and changed history. Every great civilization prior to Greece had been based on political union and force backed by military might. Greece, which by then was unified, arose from the marketplace and commerce. Greece had created a whole new kind of civilization.

The wealth generated by this commerce expanded the leisure time of the Greek elite, thus allowing the opportunity to create a rich civic life and to pursue social luxuries including politics, philosophy, sports, and the arts as well as good food and festive celebrations. Never before in history had so many people had so much wealth; yet in a world with only a few luxury goods, they spent that wealth on leisure consumption. Scholars still today mine the rich intellectual deposits of words and ideas laid down by these Greeks, and their era marks the beginning of the academic disciplines of history, science, philosophy, and mathematics.

The emergence of the money system and its sibling, the public market, imposed a new kind of mental discipline upon human beings. Long before people needed to become literate, the market had made it necessary for them to be able to count and use numbers. People were forced to equate things that had never before been equated. It is often difficult for us to think back to the pre-monetary era, since we are so accustomed to thinking in terms of groups, sets, and categories of things.

Counting existed long before money, but outside of the city it had only limited utility. A good shepherd did not need to know only how *many* cows or sheep were under his control; he had to recognize each one by its appearance, sound, and hoofprint. It did not help him to know that one cow was missing; he needed to know *which* cow was missing. Knowing that particular cow, its appearance, its history, and its individual habits, the herdsman knew if she was likely to be in the bush giving birth or if she had wandered back to the water hole for one more drink. He knew where to look for the cow and how to spot her if she had joined another herd.

The use of counting and numbers, of calculating and figuring, propelled a tendency toward rationalization in human thought that shows in no traditional culture without the use of money. Money did not make people smarter; it made them think in new ways, in numbers and their equivalencies. It made thinking far less personalized and much more abstract.

Throughout most of human life, religion used stories and rituals to appeal to emotions such as fear of the unseen or to greed to have control over the invisible, to have eternal life, or some other commodity otherwise unobtainable on earth. Political institutions also appealed to emotions, most often to people's fear of outsiders or of their own rulers. Money and the institutions built on it respond primarily to the intellect rather than to the emotions. Money and the culture around it force a kind of decidedly logical and rational intellectual process unlike any other human institution. As Georg Simmel observed in *The Philosophy of Money*, "the idea that life is essentially based on intellect, and that intellect is accepted in practical life as the most valuable of our mental energies, goes hand in hand with the growth of a money economy."[2] Through the rise of their new money-based economy, the Greeks were changing the way people thought about the world. These new ways of thinking and organizing the world gave rise to new intellectual occupations. Simmel wrote that "those professional classes whose productivity lies outside the economy proper have emerged only in the money economy—those concerned with specific intellectual activity such as teachers and literary people, artists, physicians, scholars, and state officials."[3]

The First Economists

The ancient Greeks recognized air, water, fire, and earth as the four natural elements from which all substances were made. For many of them, however, money constituted a fifth, albeit cultural rather than natural, element. This was in keeping with a Greek saying, "*Chremata aner*" (money is the man).[4]

In Greek texts, we see myriad perspectives in the words of individual citizens and even slaves who wrote their own plays, poems, and philosophical dialogues. The Greeks bubbled over with records of the most mundane aspects of daily life at home or in the vineyard as well as with speculations about everything from the origin of life to the fluctuating price of wheat.

The philosophical trinity of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle seems to exemplify the classical age, but just how representative were they of the spirit and culture surrounding them? After all, the Athenians themselves condemned Socrates to death. In general, the philosophers constituted a rather aberrant part of the Greek psyche, a psyche that offered a much more practical bent than that seen in the great works.

Xenophon probably best exemplifies the character of classical Greek culture. He followed many pursuits over the course of his adult career as a politician, teacher, general, and writer, but he may be described best as a practical philosopher. On a military expedition to Persia, he and his fellow Athenian mercenaries defeated their enemies, but their leader, Cyrus the Younger, died in the battle. This left the Greek mercenaries stranded hundreds of miles from home in an enemy nation. The Greek forces, known in history as the Army of Ten Thousand, put their trust and their lives in the hands of Xenophon, who successfully led them on a three-month journey back through hostile lands to their Greek homeland. Like many famous generals he later wrote a best-selling book about his adventure.

In the *Anabasis*, Xenophon described the long campaign, but unlike Homer, Xenophon did not make himself or his fellow officers into heroes of the type described in Homer's works. As a practical man, he recognized that the focus of the story was the soldiers themselves. Without fancy phrases or high-flown rhetoric, the *Anabasis* probably represents the best Attic prose ever written. In some aspects Xenophon, the practical man, equally as comfortable with workers, soldiers, and farmers as with scholars, seems very much a predecessor to the more modern minds of Michel de Montaigne, Johann von Goethe, and Benjamin Franklin.

In the midst of his civic duties and commercial work, Xenophon wrote another book, *Economics*, in which he described in detail the running of a home. In writing this book he introduced the word *oikonomikos* (economics), which meant "skilled in managing a household or estate." Managing a home—women's work in the Greek world—was certainly nothing that Homer would have shown the least interest in doing. For Homer, women were trophies of war that enhanced a hero's honor, sacrificial offerings in hard times, or mere domestic props who wove and waited eternally for their fathers, husbands, and sons to return from their latest raid or campaign.

Even though Xenophon was not a feminist of the modern sort, he took the practical work of the household very seriously and depicted

the woman as the queen bee of a hive. He filled his book with the simplest, most practical information on how to arrange a home, train servants, store wine and foodstuffs, and impose order on every aspect of the domestic economy.

While the wife ran the household, the husband tended the farm and managed his own business as well as the civic business of the polis, or city-state. Like many books of its day, *Economics* is presented in the form of a dialogue, this one between Socrates and Ischomachus, one of the richest businessmen of Athens. In *Economics*, however, Socrates the philosopher does not loom quite so large or appear quite so clever as he does in the better-known Socratic dialogues written by Plato. Instead, Ischomachus, the simple man of business, has much more to say and emerges as the "hero" of the story. Ischomachus did not attain a very important place in literature or philosophy, and even he admitted that with his wealth and simple lifestyle, he was not well liked by many people. On the scale of literary value, Xenophon's works cannot compare with those of Homer; Ischomachus is certainly no Agamemnon or Achilles. Yet practical citizens like Ischomachus pushed and pulled the classical Greek world to the high pinnacle of commercial and artistic success that it attained.

Most Greek scholars lacked Xenophon's wide involvement in war and peace, and they did not share his interest in financial activities. With an attitude that presaged that of many generations of scholars to come, both Plato and Aristotle, his student, had great difficulty with some of the concepts of money and the market.

Plato, ever the dictator in moral issues, wanted to outlaw gold and silver as well as foreign money. According to his work *The Laws*, in place of real money there should have been some valueless coins, a kind of token or government script, to keep records among tradesmen. Anyone returning from a foreign port with money should have been forced to surrender it upon arrival. According to Plato, no honest man could ever be rich, since dishonesty always paid better than honesty; consequently, the richer a man was, the less honest and virtuous he must be. In Plato's view, people should be punished if they attempted to buy or sell their allotted land or home.

Plato's proposals for the regulation of the market seem harsh to us, even in a century of some strictly planned economies. In Book VIII of *The Laws*, for example, he writes that the market should be controlled by wardens who would inflict punishment on anyone violating the rules, of which there were many. Aside from the retail sales made by neighborhood vendors, Plato would permit three product-specific markets to be held each month, one every ten days, and people would have to buy supplies sufficient to last them a month. The first market would sell grain; the second, held ten days later, would sell liquids; and the third would sell livestock, slaves, and other related products such as hides, textiles, and clothes.

Aristotle never shared the totalitarian proclivities of Plato, but he did have some odd ideas about markets. He did not believe that everyone in the marketplace should be charged the same price. To him it seemed only natural that people with more money should pay higher prices than poorer people. He did not see impersonal market principles in operation; he saw individual relationships. The outcome of the interaction, according to Aristotle, should be determined by the status of the participants, not by the value of the merchandise. For him the purpose of the market was not merely to exchange goods but also to satisfy greed. Consequently, the market catered to a basically undesirable human instinct and had to be monitored carefully. Aristotle viewed the operation of the marketplace in personal rather than abstract terms. Even though he was certainly capable of abstract thought, we can see in his works the struggle of a person trying to understand the newly emerging phenomena of money and markets.

Prior to the invention of money in the form of coins, the chapters of history overflow with stories of many civilizations on different continents speaking different languages and worshiping different gods, but we see in virtually all of them a common pattern. Whether we consider the ancient Egyptians or the Aztecs, the Hittites or the Babylonians, the Cretans or the mysterious people of Mohenjo-Daro, we see that they all appear to have risen only to a similar level of civilization. It is almost as though each of them encountered the same invisible wall, which they were unable to penetrate. They developed their own architecture and religion, science and commerce, poetry and music only so far before they stagnated.

The Greeks, however, broke through this barrier. Suddenly, architecture, philosophy, science, literature, and the other arts and sciences soared to a level of attainment unknown to any earlier civilization. Some scholars would have us believe that this breakthrough arose from some superior quality of the Greek mind, psyche, race, or culture, from some more advanced sensibilities about humans and nature; but we see little in history before or after that time to indicate that the Greeks were unique among the many peoples of the world. What was different for the Greeks was that they lived next door to the Lydians, who invented money. Unlike other neighbors, such as the Phoenicians and the Persians who already had sophisticated social systems without money, the Greeks were a largely unformed civilization, and their adoption of money propelled them forward, past all the other peoples of the area. Greece was the first civilization to be transformed by money, but in a relatively short time, all cultures followed the Greeks down the same road and underwent the same metamorphosis.

Humans have found many ways to bring order to the phenomenological flow of existence, and money is one of the most important. Money is strictly a human invention in that it is itself a metaphor; it stands for something else. It allows humans to structure life in incredibly complex ways that were not available to them before the invention of money. This metaphorical quality gives it a focal role in the organization of meaning in life. Money represents an infinitely expandable way of structuring value and social relationships—personal, political, and religious as well as commercial and economic.

Everywhere that money went it created marketplaces. Money created a new urban geography by giving rise to towns and cities centered on the market rather than the palace. The exchange of goods necessitated new commercial routes over land and sea from one urban nodule to the next, thereby linking Greece and neighboring lands in a new web of commerce.

This new social network founded on commerce and money gave rise to a new political system. Philip of Macedonia saw an opportunity to bring all these interconnected points together into a united kingdom under his rule. His son, Alexander, expanded this system to parts of the world that had not yet been fully incorporated into the new commercial culture. As he conquered new lands, Alexander founded new commercial cities, which he often named for himself, that would unite that land to the expanding commercial world of his empire. In Egypt, he founded Alexandria on the Mediterranean so that it could serve as a link between the commercial Greeks and the more isolated riches of the Nile River valley.

Because of Alexander, Greek became the language of commerce. Merchants on the Nile Delta, on the island of Sicily, along the coast of Tunisia, and in the cities of Israel used Greek as the trade language.

The Greek spoken in the markets of Iberia and Palestine was not the classical Greek of Aristotle and certainly not the ancient Greek of Homer. The merchants used a simple, almost pidginized form of shop Greek, but this language proved capable of conveying great ideas far beyond the needs of simple market exchange. The marketplaces of the Mediterranean became focal points for discussing a new kind of religion. The followers of Jesus used the simplified market Greek to spread their ideas from one market center to another. His disciples and followers spoke in the marketplaces of cities such as Ephesus, Jerusalem, Damascus, Alexandria, and Rome. They wrote down their stories in this market Greek—sometimes called "God's poor Greek"—and their writings became the New Testament.

Prior to the rise of the Greek commercial system each country had its own gods. The gods of the Egyptians were different from those of the Greeks, the Persians, and the Hebrews. The common commercial culture, however, provided an opportunity for the rise of a common religion, open to all people. Christianity blazed through the cities of the Mediterranean as a totally new and revolutionary concept in religion. It was a uniquely urban religion that had none of the fertility gods or weather gods of the sun, wind, rain, and moon that were associated with farmers. It was the first religion that sought to leap over the social and cultural divisions among people and unite them in a single world religion. Its followers actively sought to make Christianity a universal religion; they did so in much

the same way that money was creating a universal economy.

The coining of the first money in Lydia unleashed a revolution that began in commerce but spread almost simultaneously to urban design, politics, religion, and intellectual pursuits. It created a whole new way of organizing human life. After nearly five hundred years of rapid social change, all of these forces came to focus in the rise of a new type of empire centered in Rome. This unique empire was to be the greatest extension of the classical civilization created by money, but it was also to be the beginning of the end of money as a system based on metal coins. Rome became both the climax of the classical world and its destroyer.