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Seeking for the Lost: A Papyrological Search for Luke Fifteen's Lost Economics.

Erik Yingling

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Abstract: This paper draws upon Egyptian documentary papyri in order to show more fully the quantitative purchasing power of items of economic significance in Luke 15. Specifically, the stories of the lost drachma, lost sheep, and prodigal son each mention economic items which—when compared with the papyrological data—can more fully elucidate areas of economic import which have not been looked at before. In doing so, the article builds upon, and supports, the framework of Roman economic “middling groups” as posited by Longenecker (2009). Furthermore, a close look at Luke 15 when compared with the Egyptian papyrological data suggests the possibility of economic middling groups which have previously not been mentioned. Luke’s parables of the lost drachma, lost sheep, and the prodigal son are parables which describe individuals in three different economic levels of society. Luke tailors these three parables of the lost drachma, lost sheep, and prodigal son to the economic needs of the Lukan congregation circa 75–85 C.E. Although, Luke does not intend to address three stratified audiences such as a lower, middle, and upper “class,” Luke does intend the parables to reach a more economically diverse Christian community than just the wealthy and impoverished.

¹L15 has been mentioned as the heart of Luke’s gospel.² Indeed, the parables of the prodigal son and lost sheep might be some of Jesus’ more memorable parables. Yet in spite of all this attention, a thorough investigation of some of the quantitative economic details of the chapter has often been overlooked. The primary focus of this paper is to quantify the economic values of material goods in L15, which in turn shows Luke to be writing to a broad range of economic levels in the early church. In addition, its secondary focus is to show that the quantitative economic data from L15 allow for economic middling groups in addition to the wealthy and impoverished.³ Due to the fact that Luke’s intended audience did not live in an economic vacuum, looking at the economic context L15 allows us to put ourselves more fully in the world of Luke’s audience. Having an economic context aids in understanding the reaction of Luke’s audience who themselves were familiar with, and aware of the economic challenges the

¹ I am grateful for the generous funding provided by a grant from the Harold B. Lee library which made this research possible, as well as the insights and tutelage of Professor Thomas Wayment which were corrective, perspicacious, and encouraging.

² Léonard Ramaroson, “Le Coeur du troisième évangile : Lc 15,” *Bib* 60 (1979) 248–260; Joseph Fitzmeyer, *Luke* (2 vols.; AB 28–28A; New York: Doubleday, 1964), 2:1071–72.

³ Bruce Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle: A Revised Economy Scale for the Study of Early Urban Christianity,” *JSNT* 31 (2009): 243–78. The budding of some sort of acceptance for a more diverse “poverty scale” was activated in 2004 by Steve Friesen. Later Friesen’s “poverty scale” was more accurately modified by Longenecker who then proposed an “economic scale” of his own. Longenecker first used the term “middling groups” which is more accurate than the term middle class. The heuristic proposed by Longenecker took more accurately into account archeological evidence which had been overlooked in the past, and allowed for Roman economic middling groups.

church faced. What were the reactions these parables would have produced as they were adapted and retold by Luke? Was a lost drachma really worth enough to drop everything and spend the day searching? Or would it have been seen as a trivial loss? When Luke's audience heard of a shepherd with 100 sheep, was 100 sheep an astonishing quantity or merely an average amount? Using Egyptian documentary papyri opens novel perspectives and insights to many of these questions.

Some of the previously mentioned questions have not been answered because the answers have been sought from an inadequate range of sources. Commentaries on L15 at times can tend to overemphasizes literary sources or modern sources. For example, though Jeremias' study on Jesus' parables is very useful, often times its frequent comparisons to Bedouin tribes can yield improper interpretations. In the past, leaving out data in documentary papyri has produced large holes in textual interpretation. In the case of L15 this becomes very apparent.

Although, the overall issues of early Christian economics (or even Lukan economics) are much too large to be tackled in this paper, a thorough analysis of the economic aspects in L15 allows for the possibility of a broader range of economic structures in early Christianity which include an economic middle. Also, the Egyptian papyri clarify the value of coins, and products mentioned in L15. However, it needs to be kept in mind that the data gathered here only give approximations rather than prices corresponding exactly to the economics of the Lukan community per se. For, it is difficult to determine the degree to which prices varied from Egypt to other locations. Also, in spite of the fact that literally thousands of papyri have been discovered, some documentary evidence is still in such scant quantity that it is hard to know whether any given sample is an exception to the rule. Moreover, I acknowledge the inherent limitations in comparing Egyptian documentary texts with Luke, a text which may have a Greek

or Syrian origin. Different regions which used drachmas as their currency had varying weight standards, and one must know both the region a text comes from and the standard which was being used at the time in order to accurately interpret figures.⁴ This becomes problematic when trying to interpret economic figures in Luke because the origin of the composition of Luke is not entirely certain, although compelling arguments have been made both for a Greek origin as well as Antioch, circa 75–85 C.E.⁵ Egypt had a closed economic system, and horde evidence attests that Egyptian drachmas largely did not make it outside of Egypt, and foreign coins rarely made it in Egypt.⁶ Thus, most likely Luke was not referring to Egyptian drachmas, but rather some other standard of drachmas. In the first century, the Greek drachma was roughly equivalent to the Roman denarius, which in turn was traded in Roman-Egyptian transactions for the Alexandrian tetradrachma. Under Tiberius, both the Roman denarius/Greek drachma equaled approximately four Egyptian drachmas.⁷ Theoretically, the drachmas mentioned in Luke could have been traded at four times the value of the Egyptian drachmas. Substituting Egyptian drachmas for the Greek drachmas mentioned in L15 at a 4:1 ratio however, is not the most accurate way to glean economic insights from L15. Many commentators have pointed out that the daily wage of a land

⁴ Roger S. Bagnall, “Practical Help: Chronology, Geography, Measures, Currency, Names, Prosopography, and Technical Vocabulary,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology* (ed. Roger S. Bagnall; New York: Oxford, 2009), 189.

⁵ Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, 2:42.

⁶ Erik Christiansen, *The Roman Coins of Alexandria: Quantitative Studies* (Denmark: Aarhus University, 1988), 11.

⁷ idem. Although the weights are vastly different, the papyrological evidence is unanimous in this respect. For the period of discussion (100 B.C.E.–100 C.E.) it appears that the silver drachma was roughly worth the same amount as the Roman denarius outside of Egypt during the Roman period. The weight of the silver drachma was 1/96 of the Roman pound. And Nero devalued the denarius until it was also 1/96 of the Roman pound. Compare the weights mentioned in Bagnall, (“Practical Help,” 188, 190.) For Nero’s reforms and the value of the denarius see A. N. Zograph, *Ancient Coinage Part i: The General Problems of Ancient Numismatics* (Oxford: British Archeological Reports Supplementary Series 33, 1977), 76; D. R. Walker, *The Metrology of the Roman Silver Coinage* (Oxford: British Archeological Reports Supplementary Series 5, 1976), 25; D. R. Walker, *The Metrology of the Roman Silver Coinage* (Oxford: British Archeological Reports Supplementary Series 40, 1978), 110–111.

laborer was about 1 Greek drachma/Roman denarius.⁸ In Egypt wages are similar. Land laborers earned approximately 1 drachma per day.⁹ Thus, the earning power of peasants in both Egypt and other areas of the Roman Empire would have been similar. Since peasants could usually only afford the basics necessities in order to sustain life, one drachma per day both inside and outside Egypt, could have had a roughly equivalent purchasing power—that is, to purchase the minimal life sustaining essentials.

In spite, of all the limitations previously mentioned, using Egyptian evidence has many advantages, especially when compared to the alternatives. Outside of Egyptian documentary evidence the quantity of available data is so poor that we often search in vain, groping around in the dark, seeking for relevant economic comparisons.¹⁰ Also, the quality of the available data is less certain, and is mostly confined to literary texts, which as opposed to documentary transactions, can at times reflect biases of the author, and sometimes be difficult to date.¹¹ Additionally, outside of Egyptian evidence much of the economic evidence available is relegated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries and can reflect inflated prices. In striking contrast, however, the desert sands of Egypt have preserved thousands of true-to-life transactions, which can be dated more

⁸ J Duncan Derrett, "Workers in the Vineyard: a Parable of Jesus," *JJS* 25 (1974): 67; Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, 2:1081; Mary A. Beavis, *The Lost Coin: Parables of Women, Work and Wisdom* (London: Sheffield, 2002), 35; Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters a Feminist Social History of Early Christianity* (trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 92, 95.

⁹ P.Corn. 25, P.Fay. 102, and P.Oxy. IV 737.

¹⁰ The evidence used in this paper is almost exclusively limited to documentary papyri from 100 B.C.E.–200 C.E. The chronological limitation and avoidance of literary texts was chosen to construct a more accurate model which could be compared with Luke's community. However, for additional data a useful broad approach to economic purchasing power in Roman Palestine both in regards to chronology and locality has been presented by Sperber's series on Roman Palestinian economics: Daniel Sperber, "Costs of Living in Roman Palestine," *JESHO* 8 (1965): 248–271; Daniel Sperber, "Costs of Living in Roman Palestine II (Continued)," *JESHO* 9 (1966): 183–211; Daniel Sperber, "Costs of Living in Roman Palestine III," *JESHO* 11 (1968): 233–274; Daniel Sperber, "Costs of living in Roman Palestine IV," *JESHO* 13 (1970): 1–15. Also, for issues regarding the volume of trade between Egyptian and Palestinian Jews see Daniel Sperber, "Objects of Trade between Palestine and Egypt in Roman Times," *JESHO* 19 (1976): 146. Here Sperber concludes that in spite of the lack of evidence during the Roman period large volumes of trade were exchanged between the two regions. And that Alexandrian Jews who were key players in the shipping industry "...no doubt kept up their good relations with the mother country."

¹¹ See Sperber who says "reliable and dateable material is very scanty." Daniel Sperber, "Costs of living in roman Palestine," *JESHO* 9 (1965): 249.

closely to the composition of Luke. Sperber has sought to demonstrate that “...price relationships hold good not only for isolated instances but for a long span of time (covering our period) and over a wide, geographical area.”¹² Though there are many exceptions to this rule, I cautiously agree that generally geographically separate price relationships do hold true for different regions. Using Egyptian documentary papyri, though not a perfect fit, does allow us to produce a more complete model in approaching Lukan economics. In order to compare the broader economic context of L15 within the Roman world, this article will use as a backdrop the Roman economic structure posited by Bruce Longenecker which was a more accurate modification of Friesen’s model.¹³ According to Longenecker, Friesen’s model depended on data put forth by C. R. Whittaker¹⁴ and Walter Scheidel. Below is a table that compares Longenecker’s model to the data set forth by Friesen, Whittaker, and Scheidel. This paper seeks to apply Longenecker’s heuristic in the context of the economic issues facing the Lukan Christians at the time of the composition of the gospel of Luke.

Scale	Friesen’s Description	Friesen Includes: ¹⁵	Friesen’s %	Whittaker’s %	Scheidel’s %	Longenecker’s %
ES1	Imperial Elites	imperial dynasty, Roman senatorial families, a few retainers, local royalty, a few freed persons	0.04	-	-	ES 1–3 = 3 %
ES2	Regional or Provincial Elites	equestrian families, provincial officials, some retainers, some decurial families, some freedpersons, some retired military officers	1	-	-	“see above ”

¹² idem.

¹³ See n. 2.

¹⁴ Longenecker, “Economic Middle,” 252.

¹⁵ Longenecker notes that Friesen’s scale has the weakness of focusing on social status rather than just economic factors. Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle,” 249–50, n. 14.

ES3	Municipal elites	most decurial families, wealthy men and women who do not hold office, some freedpersons, some retainers, some veterans, some merchants	1.76	-	-	“see above”
ES4	Moderate surplus	some merchants, some traders, some freedpersons, some artisans (especially those who employ others), and military veterans	7	-	20–25	17
ES5	Stable near subsistence level (with reasonable hope of remaining above the minimum level to sustain life)	many merchants and traders, regular wage earners, artisans, large shop owners, freedpersons, some farm families	22	-	-	25
ES6	At subsistence level (and often below minimum level to sustain life)	small farm families, laborers (skilled and unskilled), artisans (esp. those employed by others), wage earners, most merchants and traders, small shop/tavern owners	40	30–40	-	30
ES7	Below subsistence level	some farm families, unattached widows, orphans, beggars, disabled, unskilled day laborers, prisoners	28	24–28	-	25

As with any model, the model used in this paper has its imperfections, and should be only treated as a model. Nevertheless, it allows us to estimate more accurately, and in novel ways, how L15’s parables were interpreted by Luke’s audience, and the economic motivations for Luke’s adaptations and redactions. Jeremias confronted, and explained the nature of Jesus’ parables well when he said:

...the parables of Jesus are not—at any rate primarily—literary productions nor is their object to lay down general maxims...but each of them was uttered in an actual situation of the life of Jesus, at a particular and often unforeseen point. Moreover, as we shall see, they were preponderantly concerned with a situation of conflict. They correct, reprove, attack. For the greater part, though not exclusively, the parables are weapons of warfare. Every one of them calls for an immediate response. The recognition of this fact indicates the nature of our task. Jesus spoke to men of flesh

and blood; he addressed himself to the situation of the moment. Each of the parables has a definite historical setting.¹⁶

Understanding the parables as weapons which were intended as solutions to conflict allows for a better understanding of the motive behind the Lukan arrangement of the parables of the “sheep”, “lost coin”, and “the prodigal son” which were meant to be told as a unit. As has been noted by many others Luke had strong economic motives in mind while compiling his gospel.¹⁷

Understanding these economic motives in the “heart of Luke’s gospel” provides a glimpse at the heart of the economic conflicts facing the Lukan church circa 75–85 C.E. For clarity and ease of comparison, I have chosen to comment on the parables of the lost drachma, sheep, and generous father, in order of the economic values they present—that is from least to greatest. Though Luke’s original audience would have had sufficient background information to understand the economics of the parables of this pericope in any order, lining them up in economic juxtaposition from least to greatest will—I hope, aid the modern reader to assess comparatively the economics in L15.

The Lost Economics of the Seeking Woman

For a long time, commentators on the parable of the lost coin have compared drachmas with other economic weights and currency. For example, Alfred Plummer notes that a silver drachma was “the equivalent of a quarter of a Jewish shekel”¹⁸ and that 10 drachmas would have been about 8 shillings. Joseph Fitzmeyer also commented that a silver drachma was in the days

¹⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1966), 15.

¹⁷ Fitzmeyer comments that the “L” material specifically emphasizes the situation of the poor and those condemned by society. Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, 2:1072; Manson, Thomas Walter, *The Sayings of Jesus: as recorded in the Gospels according to St Matthew and St Luke, arranged by T. W. Manson* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1964) 282.

¹⁸ Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to Saint Luke* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), 370.

of Nero 1/100 of a pound or mina, and that a drachma was 1/6000 of a talent.¹⁹ Frederic Godet has said that a drachma is “worth about 8 pence”.²⁰ While John Nolland is content to say merely that it’s a “silver coin whose value changed a good deal over time.”²¹ Concerning Egyptian evidence, Roger Bagnall tells us that Tiberius made the Alexandrian tetradrachma equal to the Roman denarius.²² Luise Schottroff explains that one Roman denarius was the equivalent of one Greek drachma.²³ In fact, most New Testament commentators who talk about the value of a silver drachma follow this same line of thought. Unfortunately, the two main commentators on the purchasing power of one drachma in Luke 15—Derrett and Schottroff—have not included in their studies Egyptian papyrological data.²⁴ These commentaries reflect the disconnect which can happen between New Testament studies and papyrology. As Howard Jackson has pointed out that occasionally New Testament scholars fail to notice “sub-literary” texts “since awareness of them is largely confined to papyrologists.”²⁵ Both Greek and Alexandrian silver drachmas were generally worth about 6 obols.²⁶ So, in practical terms what does all this mean? How long would it have taken to earn a drachma?

How many days’ wages is a Drachma?

Most commentators either say that the silver drachma was a day’s wage, or say nothing at all. Fitzmeyer has commented that “its purchasing power was considerable, enough to buy a sheep, or the equivalent of a day’s wage.”²⁷ However, a closer look at this statement reveals a

¹⁹ Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, 2:1081.

²⁰ Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1981), 375.

²¹ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (WBC; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1986), 775.

²² Roger Bagnall, “Practical Help,” 190.

²⁴ J Duncan M Derrett, “Fresh light on the lost sheep and the lost coin,” *NTS* 26 (1979): 41; Schottroff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters*, 92.

²⁵ Howard M. Jackson, “Ancient Self-Referential Conventions and Their Implications for the Authorship and Integrity of the Gospel of John.” *JTS* 50 (1999): 3.

²⁶ Bagnall, “Practical Help,” 190.

²⁷ Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, 1081.

more nuanced picture. First, if a drachma is the daily wage of a laborer (i.e. peasant labor) it cannot be conceivable to imagine peasants bringing home the equivalent of a sheep a day. Eating a sheep a day would make for quite the daily feast!²⁸ A sheep seems to be much more than the type of “daily bread” people could expect to receive (Matt 6:11). In addition, the wages for men, women and children doing farm labor were awarded according to size and strength.²⁹ The fact that children could begin working at age six suggests that at times wage differences could be disparate.³⁰ This paints a far different picture than the unilateral one size fits all “daily wage”. Clearly not all labor was paid equally as the following table of wages taken from documentary papyri indicate:

Type of Labor	Wage	Reference
A scribes wage ³¹	4 dr. 4 ob.	P.Mich. II 127
A scribes wage	4 dr. 4 ob.	P.Mich. II 123
2 scribes wages	8 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
Wage of a granary guard	2 dr. 2 ob.	P.Mich. II 123
Monthly wage for a desert guard	20 dr. roughly 4 ob. per day.	P.Oxy. XLVII 3333
Priests salary	5 ob.	P.Mich. II 123
A slave receives each day for working for a carpenter	2 dr.	P.Oxy. XVIII 2190
Workmen cutting down kamelakanthuses	1dr.	P.Corn. 25
Cow Tending	2 ob.	P.Corn. 25
Oxen Tandem Work	6 ob./1dr.	P.Corn. 25
Farm Labor	6 ob./ 1dr.	P.Corn. 25
Farm Labor (Men) each day.	1 dr.	P.Fay. 102
Farm Labor (Young Men) each day.	5 ob.	P.Fay. 102
Farm Labor (Boys) each day.	Between 1–4 ob.	P.Fay. 102
Payment for enameling a kettle	2 ob.	P.Oxy. IV 736
Wage of a weaver	3 ½ asses which equals approximately 5.25 ob.	P.Oxy. IV 737
Wage of a ‘hired person’	4 asses approximately 6 ob= 1 dr.	P.Oxy. IV 737
Wage of a foreman	6 asses = 9 ob.= 1 ½ dr.	P.Oxy. IV 737
Wage for grinding powder	5 ob.	P.Oxy. IV 793

²⁸ See Lev 5:7 where the economic situation of the poor precludes them from offering a lamb as a sacrifice.

²⁹ Bernard. P. Grenfell, Arthur S. Hunt, and David G. Hogarth, eds., *Fayum Towns and Their Papyri* (Oxford: Oxford, 1900), 248. Here Grenfell and Hunt mention that “The rate of wages paid is for men, 6 obols; young men, 5 obols; and boys, 4, 3 ½, 3, 2 ½, 2 obols, and even 1 obol, the amount no doubt being proportionate to size and strength.”

³⁰ Schottroff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters*, 93.

³¹ Sperber, “Costs of living,” 251. These wages are likely daily wages. On average they appear to be roughly twice the daily wage given to scribes in Palestine.

Many factors come into play in determining wage—and gender was a key factor. Although the primary evidence is scanty at best, Schottroff determined from Roman evidence that in general the wages of women were roughly less than half that of men.³² In the above table farm labor for grown men is paid at 6 obols (i.e. 1 drachma) per day. However, papyri in the British Museum that date around the time of the composition of the gospel of Luke (78–79 C.E.), record that the average daily wage for laborers was for men between 3–4 obols and for boys 2 ½ obols.³³ Assuming the daily wage for a farm laboring man could range between 3–6 obols, then the wage for a woman was conceivably between the range of 1 ½–3 obols in the first century.³⁴ For simplicity, and heuristic purposes the rate of 3 obols per day will be used in modeling the daily wage for an average working woman.³⁵ Consequently, the lost drachma would have represented roughly two days wages for the woman who lost her coin.

Purchasing Power of a Drachma

One drachma would have only been considered very valuable to the very poor. Individuals from the documentary papyri recorded “petty expenses” and “small expenses” as equaling 2 and 4 drachmas respectively.³⁶ Two commentators who have ventured to make estimates on the purchasing power of the drachma in L15 have been Derrett and Schottroff. Derrett, explains that the drachma was worth a “full day’s pay capable of sustaining a largish family for a day.”³⁷ He tells us that a drachma could purchase “a very fine meal,” 12 loafs of

³² Schottroff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters*, 94.

³³ Grenfell and Hunt, *Fayum Towns*, 248.

³⁴ I am currently unaware of any papyri during our time period which give examples of the wages for women per day. Wages for women are mentioned in the papyri but the time spent laboring for the aforementioned wages is not recorded.

³⁵ Although 3 obols per day might conceivably be the maximum wage for a day laboring woman rather than an average, I feel obligated to use 3 obols per day as the model wage because any wage under 3 obols appears to be only given to small children. And wage was awarded according to size and strength.

³⁶ P.Mich. II 127, P.Oslo III 143

³⁷ Derrett, “Fresh Light,” 41.

bread, or 1 amphora of oil.³⁸ While, Schottruff tells us that a drachma can purchase up to two days necessities. She goes on to say using Roman evidence that 1/12 of a denarius could pay for 500 grams of bread.³⁹ Egyptian documentary papyri dating from 100 B.C.–100 C.E. give us additional details about the actual purchasing power of a drachma. However, most of the daily purchases which people recorded were not made in drachmas but rather in obols and must take into account the conversion factor of 6 obols per 1 drachma. The following table takes these daily purchases and puts them in terms of drachmas:

Item Amount	Price	Reference
½ artaba of turnips	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
1/7 artaba cummin	1 dr.	P.Fay. 101
¼ keramion of oil	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
5/8 stathmia of wool	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
½ stathmia of wool	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
.56 stathmia of wool	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
½ stathmia of wool	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
1/16 artaba of wheat	1 dr.	P.Oxy. XLI 2958
1/16 artaba of wheat	1 dr.	P.Oxy. XLVII 3335
1/8 artaba of wheat. (requisitioned)	1 dr.	P.Oxy. XLI 2960
.147 ⁴⁰ artaba of wheat, (requisitioned ?)	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
3/10 ⁴¹ artaba of lentils. (approximate)	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
¼ artaba barley, also 3 measures barley	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
Between 3–6 fish (<i>korakinoi</i>)	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 123, P.Mich. II 123
4 baskets (empty)	1 dr.	P.Oxy. IV 793
Perfume for a mummy	1 dr.	P.Oxy. IV 736
6 breads	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 123, P.Mich. II 128
6 pigeons	1 dr.	P.Oxy. IV 736
A needle and thread	1/6 dr. or 1 ob.	P.Oxy. IV 736
3/10 stathmion of thread	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
400 figs	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 123
Between 15–18 eggs	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 123
4 bundles of fodder	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 123, P.Mich. II 128
Black ink and a reed pen	1/3 dr. or 2 ob. ⁴²	P.Mich. II 123
2 ¼ measures of dates	1 dr.	P.Mich. II 127
Cost to have 2 artabai of wheat ground	1 dr. 2 ob.	P.Oxy. IV 736
Cost of weaving a cloak	1 dr. 2 ob.	P.Oxy. IV 736

³⁸ Derrett, “Fresh Light,” 41 n. 2.

³⁹ Schottruff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters*, 95. This also equals 17.5 ounces.

⁴⁰ This average was taken from multiple accounts from P.Mich. II 127, Although the average appears to be .147 this is due to a few transactions which appear to be much above the norm. A standard price of 1/8 artaba of wheat per drachma appears in multiple transactions. However, a comparison with other samples reveals that wheat in P.Mich. II 127 was probably requisitioned.

⁴¹ The precise average from P.Mich. II 127 = .3025 artaba per 1 dr.

⁴² Black ink is almost always mentioned as 1 ob. Therefore, the reed pen probably was also 1 ob.

So what would the woman with the lost coin have purchased for the feast she had with her female friends? Although many possibilities exist the two most probable purchases in the ancient world were bread and wine. Mary Ann Beavis was the first to notice that the woman probably spent more than one drachma feasting with her friends, but did not quantify the specifics of the feast any further.⁴³ How much more than a drachma could have been spent? This fact is likely impossible to determine exactly, but feasts for “entertaining-treating visitors” are well documented in the papyri. Luke 15:9 specifically says that the woman invited her female friends and female neighbors. A party of only two friends is the absolute minimum one can assume (i.e. assuming that her neighbors are also her friends). In the papyri ‘entertaining’ two visitors usually can range from 3 1/3–7 1/3 drachmas.⁴⁴ However, “feasts” range from 12 drachmas⁴⁵ to a feast for the “the agent of the general” equaling 4 talents 130 drachmas. P.Oxy. IV 736 parallels the story of the woman feasting with her friends probably the most accurately. The papyrus describes the account of a certain woman—probably poor—who has “treated” certain female guests at various times. The amounts of each visit were 4 obols, 3 obols, 2 obols, and 2 ½ obols respectively. If this papyrus is used as a model for Luke 15:9 the poor woman could have spent on two guests probably between 2/3–1 1/3 drachmas (4–8 obols). It is hard to imagine a woman with only 10 drachmas spending much more than this on her festivities. In addition, most of the feasts mentioned in the papyri require a “contribution” so the person who holds the feast is not required to pay for the whole meal. Interestingly, it appears that for small feasts it was common for each attendant to bring roughly 1 drachma.⁴⁶

⁴³ Beavis, *Parables of Women*, 36.

⁴⁴ P.Mich. II 127; P.Mich. II 128.

⁴⁵ P.Oslo III 143

⁴⁶ P.Mich. II 123;; P.Mich. V 243. P.Tebt. I 180.

Concerning the value of ten drachmas Derrett rightly challenged the long entertained notion “which has haunted us for some while”⁴⁷ that the 10 drachmas were part of a woman’s headdress. The idea that the woman’s 10 drachmas were part of a headdress was made most popular by Jeremias.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the concept of the headdress still continues to be entertained by commentators.⁴⁹ Derrett reasoned that the coins could not have formed a headdress based on the fact that pierced coins do not pass current. In addition, Schottroff thought that 10 drachmas could not have been a dowry, but rather a fund for emergencies.⁵⁰ Nolland concludes the same as Schottroff that the 10 drachmas were an economic cushion for future days of difficulty. In doing so, Nolland also speculates that 10 drachmas could “help toward the cost of pilgrimage to Jerusalem....”⁵¹ Concerning the purpose of the 10 drachmas, Derrett says that “one immediately thinks of festivals...the sum would do very nicely for a trip of no very great distance for a family to spend a week.”⁵² However, are these speculations accurate? Is a savings of 10 drachmas more likely a dowry, an emergency fund, or vacation money? Furthermore, in what economic level would a woman with 10 drachmas pertain? By comparing a savings of 10 drachmas with documentary evidence for dowries in Egypt we can begin to more accurately assess the economic status of the woman in L15. The following table reflects various dowry amounts quantified in Egyptian documentary papyri:⁵³

⁴⁷ Derrett, “Fresh Light,” 40.

⁴⁸ Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables*, 106.

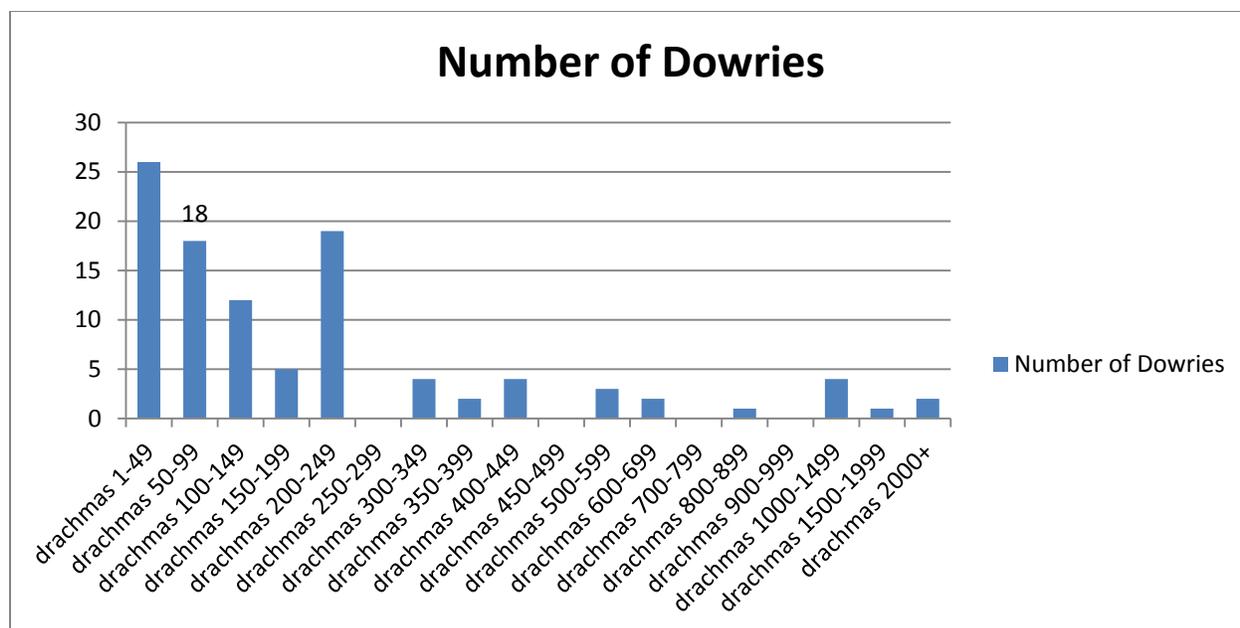
⁴⁹ Walter L. Liefeld, *Mathew, Mark, Luke (The Expositor's Bible Commentary 8*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984), 982. Liefeld borrows from Jeremias in saying that the 10 drachmas “...may have formed part of the woman’s headdress, which, being part of her dowry, she constantly wore.”

⁵⁰ Schottroff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters*, 96.

⁵¹ Nolland, *Luke*, 775.

⁵² Derrett, *Fresh Light*, 41.

⁵³ The data is limited to dowries from 100 B.C.E.–100 C.E. The data reflects parts of the dowry which can be quantified with little risk of distortion. In addition to monetary sums, the table also includes monetary equivalents which can be drawn from the jewelry. For the conversion of jewelry into silver drachmas see (Ogden, J. 1996. “Weight Units of Romano-Egyptian Gold.” In *Archaeological Research in Roman Egypt: The Proceedings of the Seventeenth Classical Colloquium of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, British Museum, held on 1-4*



Because people would have generally had more funds than only their dowry, dowries represent the *minimum* economic level that one could pertain. And in general, though a dowry is not synonymous with one's savings in the ancient world, for the impoverished it would have been probably very close to their entire savings. Luke's audience would not have needed economic graphs such as the one above, but would have intuitively been cognizant of the relative economic level to which the woman would have pertained. Though the woman's savings in L15 does not necessarily represent her dowry it does represent her entire savings. Thus, her dowry would have been equal to, or less than ten drachmas. Ironically, the smallest dowry (i.e. minimum savings) mentioned in the papyri for our time period is 8 drachmas. If her dowry-minimum savings (i.e. any number equal to or less than ten drachmas) were placed on the graph she would fit right at the very bottom. Under this standard, Luke's audience would have not only seen the woman's savings of 10 drachmas as pertaining to the most impoverished group of society, but as pertaining to the lowest level of that group. Schottruff was right in indicating that the woman's

December, 1993, ed. Donald M. Bailey, 191–196. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Journal of Roman Archaeology.) With this table, as well as all other tables in this paper, the primary sources were gathered from <http://www.papyri.info/>

savings could not have been for jewelry, or entertainment, but rather for emergencies. It appears that the woman from the parable is meant to represent the lowest economic level of society, which also comprises the largest portion of society. The only people who could be considered worse off economically would be beggars with no monetary cushion at all. Thus, Derrett's musing that the 10 drachmas represented a sum for festivals, parties, and vacations misses the mark. Probably the same could be said of Nolland's conjecture that the 10 drachmas were to be used for a pilgrimage. Also, Fitzmeyer's conclusion that "Luke may intend to depict her as miserly"⁵⁴ seems to be missing the point. Would a miser spend more than 1 drachma celebrating with her friends after finding her lost coin? Luke is demonstrating the desperate situation of a poor woman rather than her stinginess. Finally, the woman represented in the parable most likely pertains to Longenecker's ES7 level of society. The 10 drachma woman fits quite nicely with Friesen's description of the ES7 category which includes among other things, some farm families, unattached widows, and unskilled day laborers.

The Lost Economics of the Seeking Shepherd

Up until now the economic aspects of the parable of the lost sheep have not yet been looked at in detail. In order to more accurately estimate the economic level of the shepherd one must accurately know the economic value of one sheep. Marshall, Beavis and Fitzmeyer noted that in 300 B.C.E. a sheep was worth the price of a drachma. However, both Marshall and Beavis thought that one drachma may not have had the purchasing power of a sheep at the time of the parable.⁵⁵ But that is as far as they go, and no commentators on L15 have commented on the economic value of a sheep. Having said that, the price of sheep do appear in the papyrological

⁵⁴ Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, 2:1080.

⁵⁵ Howard I. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke, a Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; South Africa: Oxford, 1978), 603; Beavis, *The Lost Coin*, 36; Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, 2: 1076.

data, albeit not very often. Also, there appears no absolute rule for the price of sheep. Price probably was determined based on a number of factors including gender, health, age, size, and quality of wool. Generally the females appear to be worth more than male sheep. In 57 C.E. a sheep could be sold for between 12–20 drachmas.⁵⁶ And the average price of a sheep taken from these samples was approximately 15 drachmas. A papyrus dated to 98 C.E. also mentions a flock of 11 sheep being sold for 192 silver drachmas which equals an average of approximately 17 ½ drachmas per sheep.⁵⁷ Probably a good average estimate for the price of a male sheep during the composition of Luke would be roughly about 16 drachmas.

Debate over the size of a flock of 100 sheep and the economic situation of the shepherd has been variegated.⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, however, all agree that a shepherd of 100 sheep represented a much better economic situation than the woman of 10 drachmas. Jeremias using evidence from modern Bedouin tribes says that the shepherd in L15 had a “medium sized” flock and that “he was not a very rich man”.⁵⁹ Others have commented that the flock was “a large flock”⁶⁰ and that the shepherd was wealthy.⁶¹

So how big really was a flock of 100 sheep? Would it have been considered a mark of poverty or wealth? The following graph plots the sizes of privately owned flocks (as opposed to state owned) of sheep gathered in the documentary papyri:

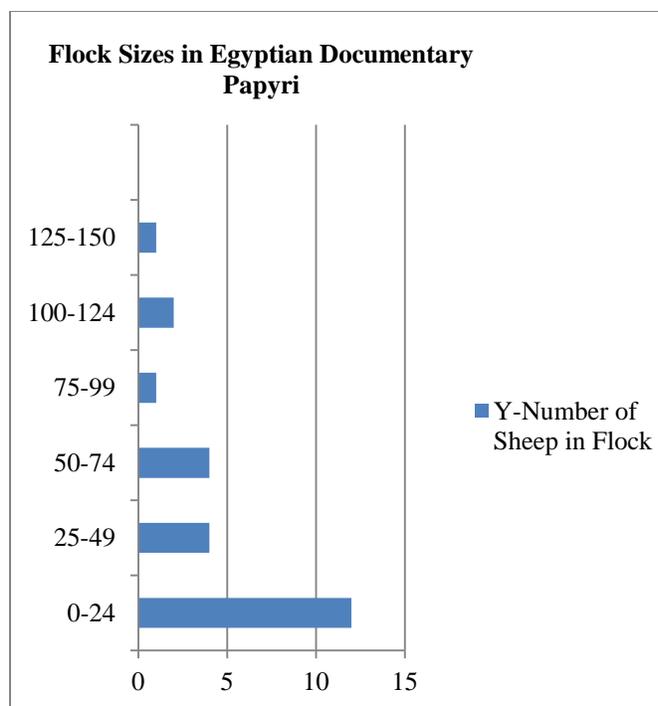
⁵⁶ SB XX 14525. These averages were taken from multiple transactions.

⁵⁷ P.Ross.Georg. II 15.

⁵⁹ Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables*, 105; Mark L. Strauss, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 342, 446. Strauss is firm in his opinion emphasizing on page 342 that although many things are unclear about the social status of shepherds “What is clear is that shepherds were among the lower class in Israel and so represent the poor and humble for whom the message of salvation is indeed good news.” But, on 446 he seems to elevate the status of the shepherd by saying “A hundred sheep was an average flock for a herdsman of modest means.”

⁶⁰ R. Alan Culpepper, *Luke –John* (NIB 9; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 49.

⁶¹ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18 :34*, 771. Nolland remarks that “to own a hundred sheep would be a mark of some wealth.” See also, Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, 2:1076, 1073. Fitzmeyer states that the shepherd was “moderately rich”. See also, S. Maclean Gilmour, *Luke* (The Interpreter’s Bible 8; New York: Abingdon, 1952), 265. Maclean asserts that “A hundred sheep would constitute a large flock in the Palestine of Jesus’ day. Nevertheless, the loss of even one animal would be considered a serious matter.”



The above table gives us a better look at how large a flock of 100 sheep would have been considered during Luke's day than Jeremias' evidence drawn from modern Bedouins. The evidence supports the idea that a flock of 100 sheep would have been a very large flock for a private owner. An important factor to consider in the dynamic of the economic status of the flock owner is to delineate whether the flock was both shepherded and owned by the same individual, or whether the flock required hired help. The following table reflects the sizes of the flocks used in the previous graph but also points out which flocks were owned and shepherded by the same individual as opposed to flocks which contracted out hired help.

Number in Flock	Hired Help vs. Owner-Shepherd	Year	Reference
580 (temple sheep)	Hirelings involved	199 B.C.E.–100 B.C.E.	P.Tebt. III.1 729
15	?	199 B.C.E.–100 B.C.E.	SB XXII 15370
30	?		
40	?		
60	?		

70	?		
75	?		
40 (sacred sheep)	Hirelings involved	110 B.C.E.–109 B.C.E.	P.Tebt. I 53
30 (28 sheep and 2 goats)	Owner only	20 C.E.–21 C.E.	⁶²
109 sheep + 3 goats	Hirelings involved	21 C.E.	P.Princ. II 24 R
7 sheep	Owner only	21 C.E.	SB XII 10794
12 sheep	Owners only ⁶³	26 C.E.	P.Oxy. II 245
22 sheep, 1 goat	Owner only	28 C.E.	P.Oxy. II 351
67 sheep + 6 goats	?	29 C.E.	⁶⁴
140 sheep	?	46 C.E.	P.Mich. II 123
6	Owner only (?)	1 C.E.–50 C.E.	P.Mich. XVIII 782
80 sheep + 22 lambs	Hirelings involved	July 24, 57 C.E..	SB XX 14525
20 sheep, 1 goat	Owner	1 C.E.–199 C.E.	P.Phil. 19
5 sheep	Owner		
6 sheep	Owner		
1 sheep	Owner		
19 sheep	Owner		
1 sheep, 1 goat	Owner		
11	Owner only	98 C.E.–102 C.E.	P.Ross.Georg. II 15
16	Owner only	100 C.E.–299 C.E.	P.Mich. XV 753

Anciently large flocks were taken care of by hired help while small flocks were usually watched over by the same person who purchased the flock. The evidence in the table shows that the largest flock pertaining to an owner-shepherd was around 20 sheep. Furthermore, and more specifically suited to the parable of the 100 sheep, is the fact that all the flocks consisting of at least 100 sheep employed the services of hirelings. Papyrus SB XX 14525 is interesting because it details the account of a certain Lucian who owned around 100 sheep. Lucian had employed a hireling named Phepheros to take care of his flocks. Phepheros was paid 16 drachmas a month for the care of the sheep. Phepheros' monthly wage is intriguing because it leads to a conclusion which does not appear to have been made previously.⁶⁵ That is, that the monthly wage of a shepherd was approximately the average price of a sheep, or roughly 16 drachmas. Phepheros'

⁶² This document is unpublished, but this papyrus, as well as all other unpublished papyri found in this paper can be found at <http://www.papyri.info/>. The unpublished papyri can be found by searching by the document ID number. In this case the document ID is the following: nyu.apis.4758

⁶³ Two brothers working together, each owning six sheep

⁶⁴ Unpublished, princeton.apis.p246

⁶⁵ SB XX 14525.

monthly wages reflect a much more accurate description of wages than earning the equivalent of a sheep per day.⁶⁶ The account shows that Phepheros was held accountable on a monthly basis for the number of sheep he had lost. Of the six months of which we have an account, 12 sheep were lost under the care of Phepheros. Phepheros' negligence reflects a common ancient sentiment that the hireling does not care about the sheep, but cares about their wages. The hireling cares merely enough that they don't lose sufficient sheep to be released from employment (John 10:12–13; Job 7:2). So does the shepherd in L15 more accurately reflect an owner-shepherd or a hireling? Despite the fact that in the papyri no owner-shepherds appear to have flocks of more than 20 sheep, the rhetorical purpose of the parable appears to favor the idea of seeing the shepherd of the lost sheep as the owner-shepherd of the flock. First, the shepherd in the parable is specifically meant to represent God's love in his search for lost sinners. The parable's imagery is unlikely to show God as a hireling, but rather as an owner. Second the attitude of the shepherd does not reflect the commonly understood attitudes of a hireling toward their flock. A big difference between the hireling and the owner-shepherd is essentially that the hireling is not willing to take risks (John 10:12). Hardly the attitude of one who is willing to risk leaving 99 in the wilderness and search for one lost sheep. Also the shepherd manifests much persistence and care as he keeps on going after the sheep until he finds it. Furthermore, seeing the rejoicing in the parable upon finding the sheep and then later with his friends, should be seen as genuine love and concern for the sheep. Reading the parable as "rejoice with me for I will now not lose my employment" seems to be missing the point. Thus, Luke intends to portray the image of an owner-shepherd rather than a hireling. A shepherd with 100 sheep could easily afford to hire others to do the work, but in this case the shepherd's love for the sheep is amplified by his own diligent work with the sheep. Luke's audience might have been initially astonished to

⁶⁶ Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, 2:1081.

hear of an owner-shepherd with a very large flock who does not hire out his work, and is willing risk leaving the whole flock for one sheep. The striking nature of the parable could be part of the reason it was so memorable in antiquity, being retold in the gospels of Mathew, Luke, Thomas, and Truth (Matt 18:12–14; Luke 15:4–7; *Gos. Thom.* 107:1–3; *Gos. Truth* 32).⁶⁷ In the end, the economic point of the parable is to contrast a shepherd owning 100 sheep with the previously mentioned impoverished woman. The economic contrast would have been obvious for Luke’s audience.

A shepherd with 100 sheep which on average could be worth roughly 16 drachmas was in a much better economic situation than the poor woman. In addition to the value of the flock if it were to be sold, (i.e. around 1,600 drachmas) the sheep’s skins, milk, cheese, meat, and particularly the wool could be sold for profit. Skins could be sold for 4 drachmas per sheep⁶⁸, and wool could be sold for 2 drachmas per stathmia.⁶⁹ Fine wool could be costly, and was eventually worth under Diocletian between 25 and 200 denarii per pound.⁷⁰ Additionally, sheep’s and goats milk was also highly valued and was more popular than any other type of milk for the Greeks and Romans.⁷¹ In short, a shepherd of 100 sheep would have been considered the owner of a well-to-do business capable of employing others and using various avenues for increasing profit. Nevertheless, a shepherd such as this would have much expenditure as is manifest in the papyri and would not be considered part of the economically elite.⁷² Thus, it is helpful to see the

⁶⁷ Marvin Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (San Fransisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 43, 152. I differ slightly with Plummer who says “The point is, not that he possesses so much, but that the loss in comparison to what remains is so small.” Plummer, *Luke*, 368. Though the main focus of the parable is on the loss of something “so small”, part of why this parable is memorable is the fact that the shepherd does “possesses so much” but without hired help still goes after the sheep.

⁶⁸ SB XX 14525.

⁶⁹ P.Mich. II 127

⁷⁰ Siegfried Laufer, *Diokletians Preisedikt* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1971), 168.

⁷¹ Laufer, *Preisedikt*, 95.

⁷² SB XX 14525

shepherd of the parable as representing part of the economic middle and possibly pertaining to Longenecker's ES4 group.

The Lost Economics of the Parable of the Generous Father

Although the parable of the prodigal son is the traditional title of the story found in Luke 15:11–32 the focus of the parable is actually on the attributes of the father rather than either of his two sons. The father is portrayed as the “hero” as he deftly balances delicate family issues concerning perfect mercy and justice. All the while, the father displays an abnormal degree of generosity to hired hands during a difficult time of famine (Luke 15:17). This final parable completes the unit comprising Luke 15:1–32. Although this parable has been interpreted in a multiplicity of effective ways, what is pertinent to this paper is quantifying the wealth of the “generous father.” The fact that the father illustrated in this parable is wealthy is unquestionable. However, the terms wealthy and poor are ambiguous terms which too often lead to economic binary divisions totally devoid any sort of economic middle. Thus, it is important to quantify the father's “wealth” and accurately compare it to the previous two sections. Unfortunately, I am unaware of any exercise which has been done to quantify the economics in this parable. As has been mentioned in the previous sections the papyrological evidence will shed new light on specific items that pertain to this parable. The price of miscellaneous items such as clothing depends on a number of different factors, and since these factors are not described in detail in L15 the data from the papyri can only give us relative estimates. However, these estimates still provide a better economic picture than what has been advanced previously. The following table gives prices for items specifically mentioned in the parable of the generous father:

Item	Price	Verse	Reference
3 bundles of fodder	4 ½ obols = ¾ dr.	16	P.Mich. II 123
Sandals	4 dr.	22	P.Oxy. XLVII 3356

A silver ring	2 dr.	22	SB III 6705
A gold ring	1 ½ quarters= ¾ dr.	22	SB III 6705
A house-bred slave	1 talent= 6000 dr.	22	O.Mich. I 117
Musicians (?)	40 dr.	25	P.Oxy. IV 731
A feasts (only in Egyptian documentary papyri)	Range between 12 dr.–4 talents 130 dr.	23	oslo.apis.134, Berkeley.apis.607
Prices for robes or similar clothing:			
A milk white robe	12 dr.	22	P.Oxy. II 267
Purple thread for a robe	20 dr.	22	P.Oxy. IV 793
A robe	1 talent + 4000 dr. (bronze)	22	P.Tebt. I 46
A robe	1 talent (bronze)	22	P.Mich. XV 688
A robe	60 dr.	22	SB III 6705
A cloak	10 dr.	22	P.Oxy. IV 736
A cloak	16 dr.	22	P.Oxy. LXXIII 4954
A garment	2700 dr. (bronze)	22	P.Fay. 12
A garment	10 staters= 2.5 dr. ⁷³	22	P.Tebt. II 278
A sleeved tunic	4000 dr. (bronze)	22	P.Tebt. I 46
A sleeved tunic	4000 dr. (bronze)	22	P.Mich. XV 688
The fattened calf and kid:			
A calf	20–25 denarii	23	⁷⁴
A cow	100–200 denarii	23	“ ”
An Ox	1–200 denarii	23	“ ”
A sheep/goat	12–20 dr.	29	SB XX 14525

Multiple items can be used to illustrate the fact that the father would have been seen as belonging to the upper economic levels of society. From the table above we can draw multiple conclusions. Luke 15:25 mentions that there were musicians who were hired for the festivities. Definitely this type of expenditure would not pertain to lower middling groups or to the poor. Also, the fact that the father has a “best robe” indicates that he had many others as well. Probably the “best robe” could be compared to the 60 silver drachma robe for heuristic purposes. If the robe truly was a wealthy man’s best robe then it might have had “purple thread” which dramatically increases the value of clothing. The purple thread alone costs twice as much as the average robe. Also, the older son’s disdain for not even being offered the pittance of a goat meets with striking contrast to the anxiety of the shepherd for even one sheep (Luke 15:29). It

⁷³ For the conversion rate of staters to obols see: Verne B. Shuman, "Again Three Accounting Terms of Roman Egypt," *CP* 46 (1951): 34.

⁷⁴ Sperber, “Costs of living,” 254.

must be taken into consideration that the father had already lost a substantial portion of what he owned when his son squandered it (Luke 15:30).⁷⁵ What needs to be kept in mind is that the story takes place during a time of famine, which undoubtedly means an economic downturn for the majority of society. One would expect during such difficult times for even a father in the economic middle to be in a tough situation. However, in spite of all these factors, the father still had lands, slaves, hired servants, contracted musicians, herds of cattle, and flocks of sheep. During times of famine the price of bread skyrockets putting poor people such as day laborers into situations of lack of food and malnutrition. However, the generous father apparently is prospering to the point of being able to give his day laborers “bread enough to spare” (Luke 15:17).⁷⁶ Luke is likely trying to portray the generous father as wealthy. Probably the generous father could be classified as a wealthy father in the ES3, or possibly ES2 category. Under Friesen’s model the generous father might fall under the category of a “wealthy men and women who do not hold office.” Although, the value of whether they held office or not is probably not so economically relevant.

Conclusions

Before making some conclusions a few final qualifications are in order. I must emphasize that Luke did not intend the overarching message of L15 to be an economic message, though the ethics in Lukan economics generally seems to be tacitly expressed in L15. Luke’s point is to emphasize the joy over the recovery of lost souls. The grumbling of the Pharisees over Jesus decision to teach “sinners” is the catalyst for the three parables of the lost (Luke 15: 1–2) . Luke makes this clear at the end of each parable which is concluded by a statement of rejoicing over the return of a lost soul (Luke 15:6–7; 9–10; 31–32). The first objective of this paper was to take

⁷⁵ No consensus has been reached about the legal situation regarding this inheritance, but many interesting albeit disparate conclusions have been reached. Fitzmeyer, *Luke*, 2:1086.

specific items of economic significance in L15 such as the lost coin, and lost sheep and show their economic value during the time of Luke. And the second objective, after defining these items of economic significance was to use these items to show the economic levels to which the woman, shepherd, and generous father pertained, in the context of Longenecker's economic model model. I believe these objectives have been achieved, though I realize that these contributions are chiefly heuristic in nature.

Although Luke 15 is the product of multiple redactions, the final product should not be seen as a meaningless patchwork of ideas. Rather, the final unit has been arranged into a compelling set of stories with the purpose of driving home specific lessons. L15 illustrates however, that Luke does not see this increasingly more economically diverse⁷⁷ Christian community as being devoid of economic middling groups.⁷⁸ Rather, the parables of the woman, shepherd, and generous father illustrate similar messages; they are specifically crafted to reach the hearts of a diverse array of Christians coming from vastly different economic backgrounds.

⁷⁷ Being placed in the middle of the journey narrative (Luke 9:51–19:44), chapter 15 is a key component into Luke's picture of gathering the community of God. It is believed that Luke's gospel was targeting a new influx of "wealthy" Christians, who had recently joined a previously "poor" Christian community. Gagnon has suggested that Luke seeks to alleviate the inherent tension between economically different groups which range from "rich" to "poor". And Luke intends to motivate these new "wealthy" disciples to use their riches for the benefit of the community at large. (Robert A. J. Gagnon, "Luke's Motives for Redaction in the Account of the Double Delegation in Luke 7:1–10," *NovT* 36 (1994): 142.)

⁷⁸ As a side note, though not specifically pertaining to the question of Christian economic groups, the data compiled on dowries and flocks show a rather fluid distribution from the impoverished to the economically elite. This new data falls in line with Longenecker's most recent observations. The data on dowries and flock sizes paints an economic picture far from showing economic black holes which divide the "rich" from the "poor", and thus producing drastically binary models. Rather transitions through economic levels are relatively blurred. Although the graph above shows a rapid descent in numbers from poor to rich, the transition is nonetheless rather smooth and continuous. Interestingly, the exception to the fluid transition is the dowry category of 200–249 which shows a sharp jump in numbers. Dowries represented by this category often show signs of relative affluence such as gold jewelry and other commodities beyond the basic necessities, and probably could be classed in Longenecker's economic middle. However, the data does not diminish the fact that the majority of people in the ancient world would still be considered part of ES6–7 (i.e. poor). Nor should a more accurate economic spread diminish our perspective of the cruel economic realities for the majority of society. Wallace-Hadrill sums it up most fittingly by saying "the vast riches squandered by the elite of the late Republic and early Empire, and the contrast with the undoubted squalor experienced by the poor, tempt us into polarizing the culture of the elite and that of the masses. It is easy (and perhaps for us morally satisfying) to dramatize this contrast" (Longenecker, "Exposing the Economic Middle," 249 n. 11.) If Christianity during the time of Luke in any way mimicked the economic spread of Roman Egypt than it would not have been quite as binary as has been imagined. And L15 gives us a clearer look at this un-binary Christian community.

In Luke's final form its economic details were not merely allegorical, but rather, Luke wove in the real economic life realities of the Lukan community in order to identify with specific target audiences. The economic message found in the poor woman's search for the lost coin, would have been very poignant for the impoverished members (ES 6–7) of the Christian community who knew what it was like to earn each drachma through bone-wearing effort and much sacrifice. However, and in contrast, the message would have lacked its impact for ES4 Christians who were not nearly so concerned with "petty expenses" such a one drachma.⁷⁹ The same principle holds true for the parable of the Shepherd. ES2–3 Christians who were targeted in the parable of the generous father would not have sensed the desperate urgency in seeking for a mere sheep, but the story of the father losing much of his inheritance to a wayward son would have piquantly been riveted in their minds. Luke has crafted these parables specifically in a way which identifies with, and centers on the lives of individuals in the Lukan community which could relate with the woman, the shepherd, and the generous father. Because Luke had strong economic motivations, it should not be surprising to see the use of these three parables as the means for delivering Luke's intended moral and economic messages—that is, for Luke, those souls who are lost to sin as well as to poverty must be reclaimed. As a master story teller, Luke has not only invited us to step into the lives of these three seekers of the lost, but into the lost economics of the Christian community itself—a Christian community who's economics may now be closer to being found.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ P.Mich. II 127, P.Oslo III 143

⁸⁰ In the future other passages which show similar economic spreads need to be explored. For example, the economic levels mentioned in Luke 16:1–8 could also be explored. Rather than painting an economically binary picture L16 tells the economics of the day in terms of four different groups: namely, a rich man, a steward, those who dig (i.e. those who do manual labor), and those who beg. I'm gratefully indebted to a colleague Alan Taylor Farnes for bringing this insight to my attention.