

Anthropological Reflections on the Koine Concept: Linguistic Analogies and Material Worlds

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'Cultural koine' and 'material koine' are two closely related concepts that have recently been deployed with increasing frequency in studies of the ancient Mediterranean to describe and explain broad, regional archaeological patterns. Despite the growing popularity of these terms, my impression is that they have rarely been defined with much precision, and the theoretical justification for their use remains largely implicit. Much like the famous statement about the legal definition of pornography, it is simply assumed that 'people will recognize it when they see it'. But such semantic and theoretical laxity creates a breeding ground for those unfortunate maladies that afflict archaeologists and historians all too frequently: the fallacies of misplaced concreteness and affirming the consequent.¹ It also leads easily to a kind of 'cargo cult' approach to theory, where a vaguely apprehended rubric is appropriated in the hope that it will magically deliver interpretive meaning. It was to rectify these problems and to more systematically scrutinize and test the efficacy of the koine concept that the organizers of the 2015 Athens conference on *Material Koinai in the Greek Early Iron Age and Archaic Period* convened the group of scholars represented in this volume. Within that collective endeavor, the task allotted to me was to open the discussion with an anthropological perspective on the subject.

1 See Fischer 1970.

Let me preface my remarks in this chapter with the avowal that, despite having worked on Greek colonial encounters in the Western Mediterranean,² I can by no means pretend to be a qualified classical archaeologist, and even less a specialist on the Early Iron Age and Archaic periods of Greece that form the primary empirical target of this volume. Hence, I come to the questions addressed here as a sympathetic outsider with a kind of intellectual tourist visa. This also means that I am stumbling into a new disciplinary landscape of implicit tenets, goals, and semantic histories that is the product of a long series of shifting intellectual paradigms and polemics that remain somewhat obscure to the alien intruder. Accordingly, my intervention here will inevitably ruffle some feathers, even when not intending to do so. But I am assuming that this was part of the point of inviting my participation: the organizers were seeking a heuristically destabilizing intervention from outside the discipline as a kind of Brechtian 'alienation effect' that might produce some theoretical friction and create some sparks of provocation that could serve to animate debate.

In that spirit, my remarks here consist of some reflections on the koine concept seen from the perspective of recent developments in the discipline of anthropology. In particular, given that I cannot cover all of the potentially relevant domains in a brief chapter, I focus on the anthropology of material

2 For example Dietler 2007; 2010a.

culture and consumption. Specifically, this chapter discusses current understandings of the role that consumption plays in creating the material worlds that people construct and inhabit and of the nature and significance of culture. Before getting to that discussion, however, it seems crucial to begin with an exploration of the history of the koine concept and an examination of both the benefits and the dangers of applying linguistic concepts, such as the koine, to material culture. The chapter also examines some methodological implications for archaeologists studying ancient Greeks.

I hope that this cross-disciplinary transgression will not be taken as an arrogant assertion that anthropological theory holds the shining light that will illuminate the dark recesses of classical archaeology, or that anthropology even has the answers to the questions with which classicists grapple. Frankly, anthropologists are much better at asking questions than we are at answering them, and we spend a great deal of time arguing with each other about nearly all our basic concepts. So, let me more modestly suggest that the collective experience of anthropologists offers a set of potentially complementary tools for thinking about the issues of concern to this volume and that these *may* prove useful in refiguring some of the questions that have been posed about archaeological data and ancient history. The utility is for the reader to decide. But let me also suggest that one of the attractions of the inherently comparative nature of anthropology is that it offers a way to break out of the trap of Greek exceptionalism that has often plagued classical archaeology since its foundations in the German Romantic Hellenist movement of the 18th century.³ Looking for differences and similarities among societies can be a very revealing method for generating new interpretive insights, and *all* societies should be subject to comparative analysis, even ancient Greeks.

A History of the Koine Concept

In reflecting on the idea of cultural and material koinai, let me say, first, that koine is not a term employed by anthropologists. The one special case, as will be discussed later, is among linguistic anthropologists and other practitioners of sociolinguistics who study certain phenomena in the realm of language. Viewed from across the disciplinary border, a review of the classics literature shows that, as noted earlier, the concept is not often defined very explicitly when used in a cultural or material sense. Even books that feature the term in their title rarely deign to offer much of an explanation.⁴ The major exception consists of the much earlier and more extensive body of works that deal with ‘the *koinē*’ as a linguistic phenomenon.⁵ That discussion has spawned a massive analytical literature that dates back to at least the 19th century, and this fact points to the origin of the concept in the domain of language and underlines the nature of its later metaphorical extension to other aspects of social life.

In fact, the term *koinē* began life about 23 centuries ago: it was used by ancient Greeks to designate a particular linguistic dialect, and the first traces of this usage date to the 3rd to 2nd century BC.⁶ The phrase *ἡ κοινὴ διάλεκτος* (or ‘the com-

4 For example, Bresson *et al.* 2007; Counts & Tuck 2009; Marinatos 2010.

5 For example, Brixhe 1993; Bubenik 1993; Kretschmer 1900; Mullen & James 2012; Radermacher 1947). For the sake of clarity, I use *koinē* in italics when referring to its original Greek sense, indicating ‘the *koinē*’ (the standardized common dialect of the Hellenistic world), and *koinē* without italics when referring to its use as an analytical concept by modern scholars.

6 See Brixhe & Hodot 1993; Colvin 2007, 63–71. *Koinē* should not be confused with *koinon*, another emic term of the ancient Greek vocabulary. A *koinon* was a formal political community or organization, and the term is usually translated as ‘league’ or ‘association’ depending on the level of its operation and the composition of its members (see Constantakopoulou 2015). Archaeologists were undoubtedly attracted to the *koinē* as a more

mon language') was employed by writers of that period to indicate a hybrid Greek dialect, grounded in a simplified version of an Ionianized-Attic dialect, that had developed as a 'contact language' and had become a shared common supra-regional medium of communication (a kind of *lingua franca*) throughout the Eastern Mediterranean in the wake of Alexander's conquests. There are some ambiguities in ancient usage, but it is generally thought that ancient authors who mentioned *koine* Greek were concerned with a relatively standardized form used in elite communication (especially written) rather than a spoken vernacular of ordinary people. It was generally contrasted by ancient grammarians with foreign (non-Greek) languages, the classical dialects (Attic, Ionic, Aeolic, and Dorian), and local spoken vernaculars. The actual degree of standardization is open to some discussion, and it has been suggested that a perception that the Greek world was united by a common language may have been more important than the reality of linguistic uniformity. Morpurgo Davies has suggested that no common Greek language existed before the *koine* of the Hellenistic period, but that during the 5th century BC an abstract idea of a common language underlying the regional dialects gradually developed as various inhabitants of Greece began to sense that they shared a common Hellenic identity.⁷ Although a Greek language, as such, did not exist before the imperial conquests of Alexander, *koine* Greek eventually filled the role of this imaginary ideal and the grammarians inherited this ideology in their analysis of the relationship between the *koine* and the dialects.

To be sure, modern scholars have proposed that one can identify dialects with some *koine*-like functions in earlier periods, *avant la lettre*, such as the

fluid metaphor to explain cultural phenomena precisely because it escapes the boundaries of political organizations and avoids straightforward political interpretations (although, to be sure, the original *koine* was largely a product of Alexandrian imperialism).

7 Morpurgo Davies 2002.

Homeric literary language, imperial Attic, or Ionian.⁸ But none of these approached the scale or range of functions of the Hellenistic *koine*, and they were not called *koinai* by ancient grammarians. The development of the *koine* and the status it acquired would have meant that Greeks (at least educated ones) of the Hellenistic world would have been diglossic, and they would have been aware that the maternal dialect they spoke was not the same as this *koine* Greek.⁹ The fact of bilingualism itself was hardly a unique situation, as monolingualism was probably uncommon in the ancient world and there is evidence for multiple contact languages.¹⁰ But how many of these situations would have involved diglossic ideologies is uncertain.

Whatever the complexities of arguments about the origins and nature of the *koine* (and there are many), two main traits emerge from ancient usage of the term: the meaning of 'common' or being shared (between different populations), and the fact that it was used exclusively to describe linguistic phenomena.

Aside from having been analyzed and argued about by scholars of classical languages and literature for over a century, this ancient concept was also subsequently appropriated by modern sociolinguists beginning in the 1960s, with particular elaboration from the 1980s on.¹¹ These scholars adapted *koine* as an analytical concept that was applied to a variety of languages, only a few of which closely resemble *koine* Greek in form or function. Although there are variations in the definitions used by different

8 See Brixhe & Hodot 1993; Colvin 2007; Consani 1993; Lopez-Eire 1993.

9 Diglossia implies not only bilingualism, but also a status hierarchy between languages.

10 See Adams 2008; Adams *et al.* 2003; Mullen 2013; Mullen and James 2012.

11 For example, Bubenick 1993; Fishman 1968; Gambhir 1981; Mufwene 1997; Nida & Fehderau 1970; Siegel 1985; 1993; 2001; Trudgill 1986.

scholars, a common sociolinguistic meaning of a koine would be:

“... a stabilized contact variety which results from the mixing and subsequent leveling of features of varieties which are similar enough to be mutually intelligible, such as regional or social dialects. This occurs in the context of increased interaction or integration among speakers of these varieties”.¹²

In other words, a koine is a standard hybrid dialect with a simplified structure that emerges from prolonged contact between two or more mutually intelligible dialects of the same language and that serves as a common *lingua Franca*.

In addition to the original Greek *koinē*, examples of koine languages would include Australian English, Quebecois French, Standard Basque, Iraqi Koiné, Darija (or Maghrebi Arabic), Lingala in the Congo, diaspora Bhojpuri-Hindi, and Israeli Hebrew, among many others.¹³ In many cases, such as Irish *Gaelige*, a common standard koine version never developed, and a cluster of regional dialects persisted in the absence of koineization: in the Irish case, the imposed alien language of colonial domination — English — eventually took on the role of *lingua Franca*.

The value of the koine concept to sociolinguistics lies in its distinction from other kinds of contact languages called pidgins and creoles, thus offering expanded possibilities for comparative analysis. All these contact languages undergo processes of ‘mixing’, ‘leveling’, and ‘reallocation’, but, among other important differences, the contributing speakers of a koine dialect could already understand each other (albeit sometimes with difficulty), whereas creoles and pidgins emerged in the context of mutually unin-

telligible languages.¹⁴ Moreover, the degree of formal simplicity is much greater with pidgins than with koinai, to the extent that pidgins may be mutually unintelligible with their parent languages, whereas this is not the case with koinai.¹⁵ Sociolinguists have further refined the concept to discuss such things as distinctions between so-called ‘regional’ koinai (of which the original Greek *koinē* is an example) versus ‘immigrant’ koinai (such as Israeli Hebrew or Fiji Hindustani), and ‘natural’ koinai versus ‘artificial’ (or consciously planned) koinai (such as some German varieties examined by Mühlhäusler).¹⁶ They have also devoted a great deal of attention to analyzing the crucial processes of ‘koinization’ (or how koinai emerge and develop), which is contrasted with creole genesis. It has been suggested, for example, that koinai emerge from situations of “stable and continuous contact between neighboring systems that are adjacent on either the horizontal (regional) or vertical (social) axis”¹⁷ whereas pidgins and creoles emerge in situations of “sudden contact, resulting from invasion, migration or other population-shift, of systems not normally in contact hitherto”.¹⁸ The mere fact of prolonged contact between related linguistic communities, however, is not sufficient to result in a koine: that process depends upon social factors causing both “increased interaction among speakers of different dialects and decreased inclination to maintain linguistic boundaries”.¹⁹

As a note of caution, one should add that there is still a good deal of argument among sociolinguists about the nature and definition of koinai that has been impossible to discuss in any detail in this brief review.²⁰ Much of this controversy centers on whether scholars stress aspects of structure

12 Siegel 2001, 175.

13 See Fishman 1968; Gambhir 1981; Mesthrie 1993; Mühlhäusler 1993; Nida and Fehderau 1970; Siegel 2001.

14 Mufwene 1997; Siegel 1985; 2001.

15 See Gambhir 1981; Siegel 1985.

16 Mühlhäusler 1993.

17 Hinskens 2001, 214.

18 Siegel 1985; 2001.

19 Siegel 1992, 110.

20 See Siegel 1993.

or function, as well as on questions of appropriate data and methods of analysis. But the take-away for our purposes should be a realization of the complexity of the phenomena in question revealed by a theoretically-engaged program of systematic formal and comparative analysis.

A final strand in the history of the koine concept has been the adaptation of some aspects of this linguistic idea (or at least a loose version of it) to the analysis of non-linguistic phenomena by Mediterranean archaeologists and ancient historians, resulting in the appearance of the terms ‘cultural koine’ and ‘material koine.’²¹ Indeed, the concept has even been extended to propose the existence of ancient ‘musical koinai,’ ‘visual koinai,’ ‘religious koinai,’ ‘mythological koinai,’ ‘numismatic koinai,’ and ‘artistic koinai.’²² However, as noted earlier, my impression is that this has been largely a matter of using an implicit metaphor or analogy to the Hellenistic *koinē* to talk about broad regional similarities in material culture that emerge out of prior, locally distinctive patterns, and that there has rarely been much explicit discussion of the theoretical grounding, justification or implications of this gesture. Walter Burkert is often credited with first popularizing the idea of a cultural koine,²³ but he seems to have been equally reticent in his discussion of this concept, at least in his written work.²⁴

One of the few scholars to offer a more explicit and theoretically situated explanation of a cultural koine model is Kostas Vlassopoulos who defines it as a situation

“in which individuals and communities come to participate in a world of shared symbols and meanings, as expressed, for example, in literature, intellectual exploration and religion; use shared forms of material

culture; employ shared means of communication; and even partake of shared forms of identity.”²⁵

Moreover, for Vlassopoulos, cultural koinai are an outcome of clearly articulated processes of globalization and glocalization, and they may come about “either through the adoption of a previously existing cultural system or by the creation of a novel cultural system.”²⁶ He further situates these processes subtly within a discussion of four intersecting forces that structured the ancient Mediterranean: networks, empires, *apoikiai*, and Panhellenic currents, and he is quite explicit in refuting the idea that the formation of a ‘glocalized’ cultural koine based largely on Greek elements can be equated with Hellenization.²⁷ This represents one of the most promising attempts to move beyond the vague metaphorical extension of the *koinē* and to develop it into something with analytical potential.

But several questions arise from this brief review of the history of the koine concept and its linguistic origins. First, what kind of analytical work is this analogical move intended to accomplish and how? Is it intended to be simply a convenient descriptive metaphor for demarcating regional similarities in material culture, or something more powerful? If the latter, then what are the principles or assumptions that underlie this interpretive extension from language to other aspects of culture? In other words, is there an implicit assumption, or an overt assertion, that a correlation with explanatory value exists between linguistic koinai and other regional cultural phenomena? My sense is that, although a formal theoretical discussion of such linkages has rarely been offered, there has frequently been a tacit inference drawn about a relationship between the formation of regional material koinai and cultural unity and identity — specifically, an assumed process

21 For example, Bresson *et al.* 2007; Counts & Tuck 2009; Marinatos 2010; Rollefson 2004; Vlassopoulos 2013.

22 Franklin 2006; Marinatos 2010, 7, 166, 191; Vlassopoulos 2013, 23.

23 See, e.g., Marinatos 2010, x.

24 For example, Burkert 1985; 1992.

25 Vlassopoulos 2013, 19–20.

26 Vlassopoulos 2013, 20.

27 see Vlassopoulos 2013, 280.

of pan-regional ethnogenesis resulting from cross-cultural interaction of some type. In other words, the material koine is presumed to be a reflection, or a manifestation, of other kinds of cultural and social processes — and, perhaps, even an agent in generating those processes.

That seems fair enough if treated as an initial hypothesis that serves to stimulate empirical investigation and critical evaluation, but not as an unprobed conclusion. At a minimum, one would want to question and refine the ways that material koinai are identified and defined, as well as develop a better theoretical understanding of the social forces that can produce them. Given the nature of the analogy, this must necessarily begin with some reflection on the relationship between language and other aspects of culture.

Material Culture and Linguistic Analogies

To be sure, there is nothing inherently wrong with using linguistic models to approach thinking about material culture and other kinds of social and cultural phenomena. The anthropological structuralism popularized by Lévi-Strauss during the 1960s, which is grounded in Saussurian linguistics, is a prominent example of precisely this kind of program. The turn to the trope of creolization in postcolonial theory is another. Such adaptations of linguistic models and methods to the analysis of material cultural can provide revelatory insights and provoke useful questions, if done properly and prudently. But I would insist that, ultimately, it can take us only so far, and it poses certain dangers. As Ulf Hannerz has noted, “whenever one takes an intellectual ride on a metaphor, it is essential that one knows where to get off”.²⁸ To be useful, such analogical moves must be undertaken cautiously and with full realization

of the many limitations revealed, for example, by critiques of structuralism and creolization.²⁹ The post-structuralist turn toward the application of literary theory to material culture during the 1980s and 1990s is a good example of what happens when these caveats are forgotten. Works by Ian Hodder and others, that tried to treat material culture like language and to ‘read’ material objects like a text, show the dangers of naive application of linguistic and literary theory.³⁰

That kind of approach is potentially interesting as a limited first step, but what ethnographic work shows clearly is that, although all texts are material culture, not all material culture is a text. The material world is not fashioned primarily as a language or a text, nor does it operate like one. Unlike language, material objects are not constructed primarily as an overt system of communication. Certainly, they often become imbued with meaning by human actors, as indexical signs or symbols in processes of signification. But, unlike words or texts, they also (and indeed primarily) are intended to perform material actions: to chop wood, to cook meat, to brew beer, to carry water, to protect against the cold, to cross a lake, to play music, to kill animals or enemies, to nourish people and so forth. Moreover, they have to be crafted from physical materials through various processes of skilled transformation. And humans experience material objects through a broader range of sensual qualities than with language. To treat material culture *exclusively* as a text or an abstract system of signs is a reductionist error that causes one to lose sight of most of what is distinctive and important about material things and the material world.³¹ Hence, uncritically imposing linguistic models on the rest of culture is inherently flawed. But the use of linguistic analogies and linguistic theory can be heuristically productive if practiced in such a way

22 28 Hannerz 1992, 264.

29 See, e.g., Goody 1982; Palmié 2006.

30 For example, Hodder 1982; 1986; Tilley 1990; 1991.

31 See Dietler & Herbich 1994; 1998; Ingold 2007

that it forces us to think about the *differences*, as well as the similarities, between material culture and language. In what ways, for example, is a ceramic style *not* like a language dialect? In what ways would a material koine differ from a linguistic koine, and what might this tell us about the process of koineization in each instance?

In the case of the koine, I fear there is potentially an even more fundamental problem with the use of linguistic analogies that should urge us toward particular caution. In brief, I suspect there is often a problem with the nature of the linguistic theory underlying the way the concept is conceived by many classical archaeologists. Because the theoretical connections are so rarely explained or examined in explicit detail, my sense is that the models being employed by archaeologists have often been grounded tacitly in outdated ideas that derive from historical philology, and particularly from dubious assumptions of German Romantic nationalism, such as the Herderian axiom of ‘one language, one folk, one nation’ or von Humboldt’s assertion that “the character of a nation is.... primarily disclosed in language”.³² In other words, there is a lingering notion being smuggled in that language and identity are inherently coterminous, and material culture is an expression of that linguistic core. This was certainly the model adapted by Gustav Kossina in the elaboration of his famous Kulturkreis concept, and subsequently employed by Gordon Child in his mapping out of the culture history of prehistoric Europe.

One has to be especially wary in this case, I think, given the central role that German Romantic Hellenism played in the foundation of both the discipline of classical archaeology and the modern Greek state.³³ But one can also detect a dose of influence from the 19th-century Neo-grammarians with their biologically derived ideas producing models

of linguistic development represented by genetically inspired branching tree diagrams. All of this has been thrown into question by the last 50 or so years of linguistic anthropology, or sociolinguistics, which have demonstrated the enormous complexity of linguistic practice and language transformation. Indeed, the sociolinguistic remodeling of the koine concept is a very good illustration of this kind of complexity. Hence, if archaeologists want to use linguistic analogies based on the koine concept, it would be prudent to ground these in an explicit discussion of sociolinguistic analyses of koinai rather than a vague metaphor based on rough impressions of the *koiné*.

Finally, there is often a tendency when borrowing models from other disciplines to attribute a degree of consensus and precision to them which does not, in fact, exist. This has especially been the case with linguistic models because they appear, from the outside, to exhibit an unusual degree of law-like scientific precision. But the reality is far more complicated: indeed, the heated debates among linguists over creole, pidgin, and koine languages have been characterized, with perhaps a bit of hyperbole, as “a conceptual mess aggravated by a terminological mess”.³⁴ In brief, one should be wary of the dangers of epistemological naiveté and creating false realities when using linguistic models. They should not be taken too literally or imbued with unfounded concreteness.

Confronted with all these caveats, one might be tempted to imagine that my goal is to do away with the koine concept altogether. That is one possible solution, of course: some scholars may find it preferable to substitute some concept such as ‘interaction sphere’ that is less loaded with prior semantic bag-

32 von Humboldt 1999, 158.

33 See Marchand 1996.

34 Siegel 1985, 357.

gage.³⁵ But my intention really is simply to counsel a more rigorously critical and clear-eyed assessment of the possibilities and dangers of employing the koine linguistic analogy. I believe it may still have the potential to provide an intriguing metaphor for rendering visible certain kinds of regional patterning of material objects, as long as we do it cautiously and with an explicit demonstration of the bases of the analogy (and those bases should be grounded in sociolinguistic development of the concept to reveal complexities rather than simple latent reference the Greek *koinē*) — and as long as we don't expect it to be capable of doing a great deal of analytical work *by itself*. The danger is in assuming that naming something constitutes a form of explanation rather than being a way of framing an initial question. This has, similarly, been a problem for a lot of archaeological work done under postcolonial theory, for example, where the end point of analysis often consists of deciding that various forms of cross-cultural appropriation constitute examples of creolization or hybridity. This actually tells us almost nothing about what was going on in any particular case and projects a kind of false homogeneity on a variety of historical social processes. However — getting back to the koine — if it is understood as a descriptive metaphor that helps us to discern patterns that then need to be explained by other means, it seems perfectly admissible and heuristically useful. The question is how do we begin to explain the processes that lie behind the phenomena indexed by the mate-

rial koine? Here, I think Anthropology may provide some help.

Anthropological Questions and Methodological Implications

As noted, the material koine concept seems to be especially invoked to indicate the emergence of new patterns of pan-regional similarity in material styles or distributions of objects that emerge out of prior distinctive, local patterns. It has been used especially in situations of cross-cultural interaction to discern traces of new supralocal social and cultural phenomena. Given this indexical function, one must then immediately ask what kinds of social processes could conceivably have produced these koine patterns (however those are defined), and the answer is likely to be complex and multiple. There is no reason to assume that material koinai are a single kind of thing with a common explanation. Quite the contrary.

A good first methodological step is to determine how pervasive the commonalities that are being emphasized by employing this rubric actually are. Is such commonality limited to a few kinds of prominent objects with wide distributions, contrasting with a great deal of local heterogeneity in other categories of material culture? Or does the similarity extend across multiple domains or classes of objects — and, specifically, which kinds of objects serving what functions? For example, are we talking simply about a common style emerging in a set of elite metalwork or architecture, while household ceramics remain locally distinctive; or about an increasing simultaneous homogeneity in weapons, clothing, and ceramics? If we are looking at ceramics, is the commonality limited to cooking, service, or transport wares, or does it extend across these domains — and how is it related to changes in foodways?

Secondly, is the similarity confined to the *form* of objects, or does it extend to the ways in which they

35 American anthropological archaeologists developed the term 'interaction sphere' to delineate the kinds of pan-regional phenomena that are included under the term 'material koine' by classical archaeologists precisely to avoid this kind of unconscious importation of a priori interpretive assumptions. Although the concept has its own problems, it was envisaged as a convenient descriptive term that was sufficiently neutral to apply to the widespread movement of ideas and materials without presupposing the form or explanation (see Binford 1965; Caldwell 1962; Kuijt 2004).

are used as well? To return to our linguistic analogy, are we talking only about similarities in vocabulary, or about grammar as well? This is important because the linguistic koine model implies an already shared, mutually comprehensible grammar among related dialects. With a material koine, we should expect to see people in multiple communities doing similar things with newly acquired objects, styles, or practices. In other cases of cross-cultural borrowing we may see people doing quite different things with the same objects, and those situations would presumably be distinguishable as *not* being koinai. Again, the linguistic analogy goes only so far. Grammar is an abstracted, formalized set of rules that has little to do with how people actually learn or use language. People learn to speak their mother tongue before they have even heard of grammar, and most people would be hard-pressed to verbalize a set of rules that describes how they speak (unless they eventually learn this analytical metapragmatic discourse in school). That is because people actually don't learn or use linguistic rules, they acquire a series of dispositions toward the meanings of sounds and words and their effective use that become embodied through practice. I will return to this theme later, but, in any case, the basic methodological point of the vocabulary versus grammar analogy remains potentially useful in provoking questions.

Once this kind of detailed empirical scrutiny of material patterns has been applied, we are in a better position to explore the processes that could have generated such patterns. And it is here that, I believe, a consideration of anthropological approaches to *consumption* may be of some help.

Material Culture, Consumption, and Entanglement

Why consumption? The reason for a focus on consumption in evaluating the flow of objects and practices among different cultural groups is that it places

emphasis on issues of agency and choice in the analysis of the material worlds that people construct and inhabit, rather than attributing agency to structures or systems (in the same way that sociolinguistics shifts emphasis away from the abstract structure of language to the socially situated practices of speech acts and speech communities). It is important to recognize that inter-cultural consumption of objects or practices is not a phenomenon that takes place at the level of cultures, social formations, or other abstract structures. Nor is it a process of passive diffusion. It is an active process of creative appropriation, transformation, and manipulation played out by individuals and social groups with a variety of competing interests and strategies of action embedded in local political relations and cultural perceptions. People use alien contacts and goods for their own strategic political agendas and they give new meanings to borrowed cultural elements. Foreign objects are of interest not for what they represent in the society of origin but for their perceived use and meaning in the context of consumption.³⁶ Hence, the patterns identified as material koinai must always be very locally contextualized in the intersection of the different social and cultural logics of interaction of the specific parties involved. This is the level at which agency is potentially discernible in the archaeological analysis of cross-cultural interaction, and at which its operation is historically generative. It is also crucial to attempt to discern the *consequences* of such acts of consumption, because these are rarely benign: consumption almost always has a host of unintended consequences that entangle the participants in new kinds of social, economic, and political relationships. Material koinai, like linguistic koinai, must be understood as a product and a reflection of the broader unintended consequences of a series of very local intentional choices.

One of the main points of this kind of analysis is to understand how different societies, through

36 Dietler 2010a; 2010b; Howes 1996.

the operation of the disparate (and often contradictory) desires, interests, and practices of their diverse groups, categories, and classes of members, gradually became entangled in broader relational networks, fields of economic and political power relations, and cultural currents and were transformed in the process.³⁷ Such an understanding can emerge only from a consideration of multiple points of agency, their structuring contexts, and the consequences of action at a variety of scales.

Placing consumption at the center of our analysis in this way requires us to not just map the diffusion of objects, but to ask why people have an interest in interacting with alien groups through trade or other means. To what social conditions and opportunities and to what cultural values and dispositions was the consumption of specific alien goods or practices a response? The answer to this question demands that we look much more carefully at the particular things that were actually consumed and the ways they were consumed — that is, we must examine the specific properties and contexts of these objects and practices and try to understand the social and cultural logic of the desire for them and the social, economic, and political roles that their consumption played. It is also, of course, necessary to examine the counter-phenomenon — that is, what might be called the logic of indifference and/or rejection. It is necessary to understand what goods and practices were available for appropriation but were ignored or refused, and why this particular pattern of *selective* consumption emerged from a range of possibilities. In brief, we must find a way to discern and explain the *choices* that were made. Finally, as I noted earlier, one must also address the question of the consequences of consumption: what were the immediate and long-term social and cultural ramifications of the selective incorporation of these specific alien goods and practices?

Following years of neglect, consumption has become an increasingly prominent focus of analytical interest within anthropology and the social sciences in general over the past couple of decades.³⁸ This corresponds with both a renewed theoretical interest in material culture within cultural anthropology and a growing awareness of the significance of material culture and consumption in colonial processes by scholars of colonialism and postcoloniality. However, the nature of these new approaches to consumption and colonialism, as well as their relevance to the koine concept, require some discussion — not least a few initial caveats.

In the first place, let me make clear that I am not talking about consumption simply as the final stage in a purely economic process (as in neoclassical micro-economic theory), but rather in the sense that it has come to be understood within anthropology — as a symbolic activity deeply embedded in social relations and cultural conceptions. However, it should also be stated that an exclusive focus on consumption and its symbolic dimension, particularly as exemplified in some of the more semiotically oriented forms of analysis stemming from the early work of Jean Baudrillard, poses its own dangers. Most prominently, there is the risk of unhinging consumption from those more traditional domains of analysis, production and exchange. This would be especially troublesome because the political context of the articulation of production and consumption should be an ever-present concern. Hence, an abstract treatment of consumption as the circulation of pure signs that is divorced from consideration of the relations of power in which they are embedded, or that ignores the crucial material dimension of the objects being consumed, must be avoided.

A further danger is anachronism. Much of the theoretical work on consumption has been developed to understand the particular characteristics of modern and, especially, post-modern capitalist

37 For an explanation of the process of 'entanglement', in this sense, see Dietler 1998; 2010a, 55-74.

38 See Dietler 2010b; Miller 1995; Mullins 2011.

consumption (the so-called ‘consumer society’). For example, a great deal of attention has been focused upon an hypothesized major transformation in which consumption has supposedly replaced production as a primary basis for identity construction in post-Fordist Western societies. Similarly, analysts of ‘globalization’ have focused upon the role of consumption in the historically specific configurations of local/global relations and processes that have emerged recently in the post-colonial, late-capitalist cultural economy, with its peculiar conjunctures of electronic mass-mediation, mass-migrations, and global capital flows, that have created, arguably, new forms of diasporic communities and radically new trans-national spaces of imagination and identity. Clearly, these theoretical models cannot simply be universalized across all cultures and histories. Nor should they be allowed to substitute for the empirical investigation of particular historical contexts. As was noted in the earlier discussion of linguistic models, it is crucial to be attentive to *contrasts* as well as commonalities in juxtaposing cases or theoretical programs from different historical or geographic contexts — differences are, in fact, often more revealing than similarities.

I would suggest that the uncritical imposition of theoretical models from the literature on capitalist consumption or globalization studies clearly risks obscuring the historical distinctiveness of ancient cases, but a judicious critical engagement with this body of research (presupposing an eye toward contrasts) can prove heuristically fruitful. In any case, the basic insights of such studies, illuminating the fact that consumption is *never* simply a satisfaction of utilitarian needs or an epiphenomenon of production, but rather a process of symbolic construction of identity and political relations, are certainly relevant to the past. Moreover, contrary to assumptions of much neoclassical economic theory, anthropological studies of consumption have shown that demand can never be understood as a simple or automatic response to the availability of goods. Consumption

is always a culturally specific phenomenon and demand is always socially constructed and historically changing. These features offer, therefore, a good potential starting point for launching an exploration of the role of material culture and the operation of agency and contingency in these phenomena that are being called material koinai. Remember that linguistic koinai do not result simply from prolonged contact: they are the product of other social forces that create a demand for linguistic exchange and transformation. And the same would be true for material koinai.

But the approach proposed here first requires consideration of a few key concepts, starting with culture. This is important because not only is consumption structured by cultural categories and dispositions but “culture is also constructed through consumption”.³⁹ This statement implies two things. In the first place, objects ‘materialize’ cultural order. That is, they render abstract cultural categories visible and durable, they aid the negotiation of social interaction in various ways, and they structure perception of the social world. The systems of objects that people construct through consumption serve both to inculcate personal identity and to enable people to locate others within social fields through the perception of embodied tastes and various indexical forms of symbolic capital.⁴⁰ For example, in wearing certain kinds of clothes and eating particular kinds of food we both learn and perform a sense of who we are, while at the same time these practices allow us to identify and classify other people with whom we interact and allow others to classify us. This is by no means something unique to capitalist consumer societies, although it clearly operates in different ways in different contexts. But more than simply reproducing systems of cultural categories in a static way, consumption also constructs culture in a much more dynamic sense — and this is especially

39 Comaroff 1996, 20.

40 Bourdieu 1984.

relevant to the issue of cross-cultural consumption and the formation of koinai. In effect, consumption is a process of structured improvisation that continually materializes cultural order in a transformative way by dealing with alien objects and practices through either appropriation and assimilation or rejection.

To accept this perspective implies a current *anthropological* understanding of culture that differs fundamentally from the one held by many earlier scholars of ancient Mediterranean history, and many archaeologists in general — concepts that often derive from an older structural-functionalist phase of anthropology. Culture is not simply an inheritance from the past: it is also a kind of eternal project of creating the present and imagining the future. In other words, culture is not a fixed, static, homogeneous system of shared beliefs, rules, and traits, but rather sets of embodied categorical perceptions, analogical understandings, and values that structure ways of reasoning, solving problems, and acting upon opportunities. The operation of culture is always a creative process of structured improvisation. Among those problems and opportunities to be resolved is the ever-present one of dealing with exogenous peoples and objects. This process involves both the selective domestication (or ‘indigenization’) of formerly foreign goods, practices, and tastes, and the rejection of others. Such selective incorporation and rejection operates according to a specific cultural logic, but it also has a continual transformative effect in the reproduction of culture. Moreover, this process does not occur through the actions of reified cultures coming into contact, but rather through the often contradictory actions of individual human beings and social groups located differentially within complex relational fields of power and interest.

Perceiving culture in this way means rejecting the entrenched Western dichotomy between tradition and change (and the linked dichotomy between static and dynamic societies). It also means understanding that the adoption of foreign goods and

practices does not render cultures inauthentic or incoherent. As Marshall Sahlins has noted, “Anthropologists have known at least since the work of Boas and his students that cultures are generally foreign in origin and local in pattern”.⁴¹ Moreover, cultural continuity usually consists of the distinctive ways that cultures change. Hence, cross-cultural consumption is a continual process of selective appropriation and creative assimilation according to local logics that is also a way of continually reconstructing culture.

This is not to deny that such consumption has significant consequences in terms of altering the conditions of cultural reproduction. It clearly does, and focusing upon the role of consumption in the process of colonial entanglement, as my own archaeological work in southern France has tried to do, is intended to underline precisely this feature. But these effects are often subtle and gradual, and they frequently will not be perceived by the participants as marking a cultural discontinuity (although there will sometimes be generational or gender differences in such perceptions).

What I would also argue for here is a certain symmetry in the way such processes should be treated throughout the ancient Mediterranean. That is, this kind of cultural continuity and authenticity in the face of assimilation of exogenous objects and practices has been tacitly accepted for Greeks. But the consumption of Greek objects by so-called ‘barbarians’ is usually treated in a very different way. For example, Greeks are allowed an ‘Orientalizing’ period, when innumerable borrowed objects, tastes, and practices from the Near East and Egypt transformed Greek culture, without any perception of disjuncture or inauthenticity, because this was assumed to be a creative process of selection and adaptation. However, the consumption of Greek objects by, for example, the natives of Gaul usually has been seen as a clumsy attempt to imitate Greek culture, an incoherent aping of alien customs that has no

41 Sahlins 1999, xi.

indigenous cultural logic or authenticity. But both of these processes of consumption are actually quite similar and deserve to be subjected to a symmetrical analysis that shows how cultural dispositions guide consumption and how consumption continually constructs culture in all contexts. Moreover, it is important to recognize that situations of cross-cultural consumption involve appropriations by both sides and have transformative effects for both sides. Even in the context of powerful empires, the experience of colonial interaction has profound cultural and social ramifications not only in colonial outposts, but also in metropolitan centers of power.

Given the role of ancient Greece and Rome in the construction of modern European identities and imperial ideologies, it is not surprising that one can see parallel assumptions to those noted above operating in the case of Western societies and their colonial Others. For example, Euro-American societies are allowed any number of invented traditions (the Renaissance, for example) and indigenizations of foreign objects and practices (pasta and tomatoes in Italian cuisine, tea in England, or the decoration of American homes with African baskets, Indonesian cloth, Persian rugs, and Japanese furniture, for example). Yet these features provoke no sentiment of cultural crisis or inauthenticity in popular consciousness. However, similar kinds of adaptations of European or American objects or practices in places like Africa are often seen as somehow flawed mimesis of 'the West' rather than creative, and indeed subversive, appropriations. Jean Comaroff used a revealing example of a Tswana chief in South Africa of the 1860s, who had a Western-style suit made for himself out of leopard skin, to show that, rather than simply imitating Western goods in a curious way that did not quite get it right, he was creatively playing upon symbols of power from two domains to create an object that doubled its impact.⁴²

42 Comaroff 1996, 31.

As this example underlines, it is important to recognize that when objects cross cultural frontiers, they rarely arrive with the same meanings and practices associated with them in their context of origin. Commodity chains in such situations traverse different regimes of value. To use one of the most prominent contemporary examples, if one thinks of the consumption of Coca Cola, a bottle of this beverage consumed in rural East Africa does not have the same meaning as an identical one consumed in Chicago. In Chicago it is a fairly banal and ubiquitous drink enjoyed on a quotidian basis, especially by the young, and it is often associated with fast food consumption. However, in the countryside of western Kenya among the Luo people (during the period when I was engaged in ethnographic research there), Coca Cola was an expensive luxury drink. When consumed, it usually was consumed warm and was reserved for distinguished visitors and sometimes incorporated into ceremonial commensality (in a pattern reminiscent of the use of imported French wine in bourgeois homes in Chicago, where it would be unthinkable to use Coca Cola in a similar way). Hence, the presence of bottles of Coca Cola in rural Kenya is not a sign of the 'Americanization' of Africa, but rather of the 'Africanization' of Coca Cola.

Moreover, it would be wrong to assume that one can measure a purported process, or relative degree, of 'Americanization/acculturation' by simply counting the quantity of Coca Cola bottles consumed in an area (as has been done frequently with Greek ceramics on indigenous sites in Iron Age Europe). Nor does this give us reason to imagine the emergence of a Coca-Koine! Rather, it is crucial to understand the specific contexts of consumption in order to recognize its meaning and significance. The same would be true in Athens, Beijing, or Delhi, where the consumption of Coca Cola follows different patterns and signifies something quite different than in either Chicago or western Kenya.⁴³

43 See Dietler 2010b.

In order to be desired and used, exotic goods must always be imbued with culturally relevant meaning locally and incorporated into local social relationships. And these processes of redefinition and reorientation must be contextualized and understood if we are to comprehend the transformative effects of cross-cultural consumption and the nature and significance of material koinai that we identify in the archaeological record.

This discussion must also lead us to introduce the subject of the significance of material culture in strategies of colonialism. Given the importance of consumption in constructing culture and social relationships, it should not be surprising that goods have not only been appropriated and indigenized, they have also been used by both parties in exchanges to attempt to control the other — “making subjects by means of objects.”⁴⁴ This involved not only attempts to create novel desires for new goods, but also attempts to get people to use imported objects in particular ways, as well as the (misguided) belief that the use of particular objects or technologies would inherently induce certain kinds of desired behavior — the idea that objects have some kind of magical agency. For instance, it is clear that clothing played a very important instrumental role in the strategies of European missionaries in various parts of the world to transform the moral consciousness of indigenous peoples and instill new concepts of work discipline, temporality, and gender relations.⁴⁵ But such strategies to use material objects as vectors of control rarely worked in the way imagined, although they did have unintended consequences for all the parties concerned.

This leads to a further paradoxical point that needs to be emphasized at this stage (and that is highly relevant to the idea of cultural koine): far from being signs of ‘acculturation’, or shared identity, imported objects or practices (including lan-

guage) can become salient symbolic markers of the *boundaries* of identity between consumers and the society of origin. The ‘indigenization’ of the English game of cricket in India and the adoption of American baseball in Japan are classic cases in point. One might be tempted to use cricket as a sign of a British Imperial koine or baseball as a sign of an American cultural koine. In both instances, the games/rituals are played with the same implements and costumes under the same rules in constructed spaces of the same form. Yet, because of such things as the spirit motivating play, the behavior expected of players, and the social origin and position of the players, the games have come to be seen as profoundly different in each cultural context.⁴⁶ These shared rituals become privileged sites for the revelation and reification of cultural boundaries, and potential arenas of conflict and the contestation of values.

To cite a case that will be more familiar to scholars of the ancient Mediterranean world, Greek, Etruscan, and Roman versions of the wine-drinking ritual represent a similar situation. Greeks developed their version of the *symposion* incorporating elements from Near Eastern feasting practices, and Etruscans and Romans later developed their own versions while in contact with Greek colonies in Italy. Each version differed slightly, but in symbolically significant ways, from the others, while at the same time being sufficiently similar to invite cultural misinterpretations of assumed commonality.⁴⁷ Disapproving Greek references to the presence of wives at Etruscan symposia, a practice unthinkable to Greeks, should alert us to the nature of the differentiation being evoked through this practice.⁴⁸ Like Etruscans, Romans also allowed wives to join their husbands — but not to recline with them (they had to remain seated in chairs). For Greeks, the symposion was a resolutely male affair at which the only

44 Comaroff & Comaroff 1997, 218.

45 Comaroff & Comaroff 1997; Thomas 2002.

46 Appadurai 1996.

47 Dentzer 1982; Dunbabin 1998; Murray 1990.

48 Haynes 2000, 96-97.

women present were *hetaerai* (courtesans) providing entertainment for the men — one would never find proper women attending.⁴⁹ Cicero offered strikingly revelatory evidence of the cultural dissonance in this common drinking ritual in recounting an episode in which Romans joining a symposion in the house of a Greek suggested that the host's daughter join them, provoking a brawl during which one of the Romans was killed (Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.26.66).

Aside from these gender issues, other practices also subtly marked boundaries. Greeks and Romans used rooms of slightly different shapes and sizes (the Roman *triclinium* versus the Greek *andron*), involving different arrangements of the couches for reclining. There were also differences in the symbolic role of the krater and the ways of mixing water and wine. Finally, while the Greek spatial arrangement of symposiasts tended to emphasize egalitarian relations among the men present, the Roman arrangement marked clear hierarchies between men and women, between adults and youth, and between the status of the adult men.⁵⁰ Hence, one needs to be very careful in interpreting apparent similarities as evidence of common identity within a supposed material koine. In all three cases of these drinking rituals, shared practices and objects served as focal points for the revelatory definition of cultural boundaries and distinct identities.

Demand, or desire, for the cross-cultural consumption of objects is a product of the variable interplay of embodied categories and tastes, strategic decisions about the potential deployment of goods in particular social roles, creative analogical interpretations of new instrumental or social uses, semiotic understandings about the relationship among goods in 'systems of objects,' and other such factors. It is important to reiterate that demand is not a uniform property or product of cultures. It is socially situated and constructed; that is, it varies among classes and

categories of people as a result of the interplay of the factors noted above in the internal politics of social life. This is made very clear in, for example, Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of the differential distribution of tastes and cultural capital across social fields within late twentieth-century French society; but it is equally crucial to remember in analyzing situations of cross-cultural consumption in small-scale pre-capitalist societies, such as Archaic Greece. Demand for foreign goods and practices may vary according to social position or category, and the differences may be generated largely by the relational dynamics among social groups or fields. Obviously, in archaeological contexts we will usually not be able to discern the relative operation of *all* these factors in great detail. But we can distinguish demand as a selective force structuring consumption within a specific world of options and attempt to discern as completely as possible the logic of patterns of choices made — not in terms of marginal utility, but in terms of socially situated interests and cultural categories and dispositions.

As noted earlier, demand is never an automatic response to the availability of goods. Objects do not create desire; desire is a social and cultural phenomenon that makes people attribute value selectively to some objects. Historical accounts of early colonial encounters in various parts of the world during the period of European expansion demonstrate that, to the general surprise of European merchants, their goods were not inherently irresistible to indigenous societies: these peoples were usually very selective in both the goods they were willing to accept and to give in exchanges with colonial agents, and they sometimes refused to interact at all. To cite an illuminating example raised by Marshall Sahlins:⁵¹ in the early days of the Sino-British encounter, British diplomats/salesmen were vexed and perplexed by the fact that the Chinese failed to be impressed by, or to covet, the European guns and gadgets they

49 Davidson 1997; Kurke 1999.

50 Bradley 1998; Dunbabin 1995; 1998.

51 Sahlins 1999.

were offering. He attributed the astonishment of the British to the fact that they held a culturally embedded assumption of a natural functional relationship between technology and cultural sophistication that the Chinese did not share. As the British Sinologist Thomas Meadows wrote, the Chinese had an inability “to draw conclusions as to the state of foreign countries from an inspection of the articles... manufactured in them.”⁵² This deeply entrenched Euro-American assumption that people perceive immediately and “‘naturally’ the superiority of a culture by perusal of its objects and technology, and that this should stimulate an automatic desire for those objects and their parent culture, is one that has both plagued modern American ‘development’ strategies abroad and has been transferred by scholars to their investigations of encounters in the ancient Mediterranean. It is this assumption that lies behind the attribution of quasi-miraculous transformative effects of mere contact with Greek goods among so-called ‘barbarians.’

But why should we assume that native peoples of Illyria, Iberia, or Gaul (to cite the example most familiar to me) shared this culturally specific assumption? We must think realistically about what trade between Greeks and other peoples really involved. What did indigenous peoples of Gaul actually perceive when a small group of Greek traders pulled their boat up on the shore with a cargo of wine and ceramics? What they surely did not experience is rapturous visions of the Parthenon, Praxiteles, and Plato — that is, all the things that suffuse our modern Western sensibilities metonymically as we gaze admiringly upon an Attic vase under glass in a museum. We must be careful to recognize that peoples of the ancient Mediterranean lived long before Winckelmann, and it is a grotesque anachronism to impose our own Hellenophilic conceptions and aesthetic perceptions upon people of the past. Our own heightened valuation of Attic ceramics, for example,

as indexical signs of a panoramic ‘Greek culture’ could have had no meaning for ancient peoples; nor could it have played any role in their demand for these goods. We must try to understand demand on its own socio-historically specific terms, divorced from our own preconceptions about Greek culture and our own culturally specific assumptions about a natural functional relationship between technology and cultural sophistication.

I have suggested previously that the specific properties of objects and practices must be examined very carefully in evaluating the nature and meaning of demand for them. For the moment, let me simply note that one can begin the process by making a few distinctions: for example, whether the goods consumed are of a singular or a standardized character.⁵³ That is, is one dealing with more or less unique items valued for their distinctive, individual traits (even as they form a common functional class of objects) — such as art paintings or haute couture in Paris, or Kula valuables in the Trobriands, or bronze wine-mixing vessels in Iron Age Burgundy? Or is one dealing with items that constitute a common repetitive series produced in standardized, redundant form that are viewed as units and valued mostly in their quantitative abundance — such as bottles of Coca Cola in Chicago, or amphorae of wine in ancient Mediterranean France? For archaeological cases, especially, it must be emphasized that one cannot assume either singularity or standardization in the context of consumption based simply upon the characteristics of objects in their context of production: for example, beer mugs that were mass produced in Germany may have been valued for their singularity in the interior of colonial Africa if they circulated in very limited quantities. Moreover, finished goods in one context may be viewed simply as raw material in another, as with the Native American practice of chopping up European copper kettles to make their own jewelry and other imple-

32 52 Meadows 1847, 235 quoted in Sahlin 1999, xiv.

53 See Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986.

ments or modifying gun barrels for use as flutes and tent stakes.⁵⁴ This is a question that must be sorted out empirically by careful analysis of the context of consumption to determine how rare or common such goods actually were and how they were treated.

This issue can provide a very useful first clue to penetrating the nature of demand for objects in situations of cross-cultural consumption. For example, Marshall Sahlins offers the illustrative contrast between 18th-century Hawaiian chiefs and Kwakiutl chiefs of the northwest coast of North America. The Hawaiian chiefs monopolized trade with British and American trading ships and had a very precisely targeted demand for highly distinctive, singular, fashionable adornments and domestic furnishings that they could use to distinguish themselves from their fellow aristocratic rivals through personal possession and hoarding. Kwakiutl chiefs, on the other hand, sought standardized items in exchanges with fur traders (such as Hudson's Bay blankets) that they could accumulate by the thousands in preparation for giving them away at potlatches.⁵⁵ Hence, both the nature of the goods desired (singular versus standardized) and the practices of consumption (possessive hoarding versus distribution) were quite different in the two cases, although both were marshaled in strategies geared toward maintaining political power. One can also cite cases in which singular objects were distributed as gifts and standardized objects were hoarded. The key in trying to understand the nature of demand and the meaning of consumption in specific cases is to try to use contextual clues in the archaeological record to sort out the social and cultural logic of the process.

As noted earlier, the question of what might be called 'negative' demand is also very important to consider: that is, what things did people not consume, and why? After having satisfactorily established the range of availability, as well as having

taken appropriate measures to assure that one is not simply dealing with patterns resulting from differential preservation of goods in the archaeological record, one is then faced with the task of differentiating between indifference and rejection. In some cases, goods or practices may be rejected as an act of contestation or political resistance. Such acts may become particularly salient in colonial situations that Ranajit Guha characterized as 'dominance without hegemony'.⁵⁶ Contestations can take many forms, but very often they are materialized in the process of consumption. In such cases, some goods and practices come to be invested with especially strong value as indexical signs of reified identities or social boundaries, and such things as 'revitalization movements' may occur that focus upon the rejection of materialized signs of colonial domination (for example, Gandhi's rejection of English clothing). Such rejection may be as much lodged in the logic of internal relational struggles between classes, groups, or categories of people within a society as directed at external forces of domination, or they may be aimed at both. However, in many other cases, it would be a mistake to impute conscious resistance. In many encounters, particularly those without oppressive asymmetries of power, there may simply be indifference to objects that do not fit within culturally structured categories, tastes, or dispositions and for which there is no perceived utilitarian or social use for such objects. For example, Native Americans who failed to respond to early European traders were not initially trying to resist colonialism or contest European values: they were simply not terribly interested in the foreigners or what they were offering.⁵⁷ These patterns can, of course, change quickly in response to a variety of factors, and they can shift in various directions.

My own archaeological work in southern France has focused on the colonial encounter between

54 Turgeon 1997.

55 Sahlins 1999, xii.

56 Guha 1997.

57 See Shlasko 1992.

Greeks, Etruscans and Romans and the native Gauls during the first millennium BC, and it has shown how the encounter was articulated by a highly selective cross-cultural consumption of objects and practices that were used for quite distinctive purposes when they were appropriated within different regimes of value.⁵⁸ This process produced neither a material koine nor a hybrid or creolized culture, but what I would prefer to conceptualize as a zone of entanglement – a complex network of new economic and political relationships among groups with distinct identities that bound the various parties together in unanticipated ways and that created the conditions for new kinds of colonial relations to emerge. Could the koine concept have been usefully deployed in this situation? Perhaps. But mostly to highlight the differences between this situation and a koine (this was not the emergence of a common cultural ‘dialect’ from peoples sharing already mutually intelligible dialects, there was no mixing and leveling, etc.). Such illumination of difference is potentially quite interesting. However, this colonial encounter could not have been adequately conceptualized through linguistic models alone because it needed an approach that recognized the materialness of material culture and that paid careful attention to the ways that people construct and inhabit their material worlds and to the consequences of consumption.

Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned to do three things: first, to trace the origins and history of the koine concept that led to its analogical use in the realm of material culture; second, to assess the potential and pitfalls of using a linguistic concept such as the koine to understand material culture; and, third, to discuss some recent anthropological approaches to material

culture and consumption that might help us think about some of the social processes that could generate the kinds of material patterns that are identified by the material koine model.

To reiterate, linguistic metaphors and analogies can be useful in discerning patterns and provoking questions, but their limitations and dangers must be understood and explicitly addressed. In the case of koinai, if we want to retain this concept and make it analytically useful, I would suggest that it must be developed through the framework elaborated in sociolinguistics rather than remaining metaphorically attached to the very historically specific example of the Hellenistic *koinē*. For example, an explicit consideration of the differences between koinai, creoles, and pidgins, and of the distinction between vocabulary and grammar can point to some useful methodological questions to ask of material patterning. Such questions can be further enhanced if analysis is pushed in the direction of sociolinguistic concepts such as diglossia, bilingualism, code-switching, tag-switching, sociolects, speech communities, and metapragmatics. For instance, one might ask how material koinai might be distinguished from material creoles or pidgins — and to what extent those concepts make sense in the material world? Can we imagine material diglossia? Could material diglossia be signaled by code-switching or tag-switching, and what would that look like in material culture? To what kinds of material and contextual evidence should these questions make us look more closely? Ultimately, because of the differences between language and material culture enumerated earlier, these linguistic analogies can take us only so far in understanding the material worlds that people construct and inhabit. But they can provide a provocative point of view that might open up fresh lines of research.

A consideration of anthropological research on consumption offers one complementary means of expanding the possibilities for thinking about the social and political reasons people have for appro-

34 58 See Dietler 2005; 2010a.

priating alien objects and adapting them to local uses and how this results in the creation of patterns that are identified by searching for material koinai. This should also force us to think about the consequences of such practices of consumption: the ways in which it entangles people in new networks of social relations and new structures of economic and political power.

Admittedly, the discussion offered in this chapter has been rather abstract in nature. I would have liked to illustrate it with some more detailed empirical examples of archaeological research that would give a better sense of what such an approach can achieve, but I'm afraid that limits of space force certain choices. In any case, I hope that this intervention has at least served the provocative purpose the organizers had in mind, and that it generates some serious reflection on the koinai concept and its role in archaeological interpretation.

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