A satellite-style map of the Mediterranean region, showing the Greek peninsula, the Aegean Sea, and parts of the Balkans and Asia Minor. The map is oriented with North at the top.

# MATERIAL KOINAI IN THE GREEK EARLY IRON AGE AND ARCHAIC PERIOD

Edited by

*Søren Handberg & Anastasia Gadolou*



Monographs of the Danish Institute at Athens  
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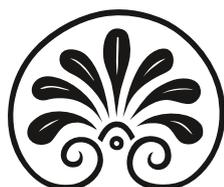


**MATERIAL KOINAI IN THE GREEK EARLY  
IRON AGE AND ARCHAIC PERIOD**

*Acts of an International Conference at the Danish Institute at  
Athens, 30 January – 1 February 2015*

Edited by

*Søren Handberg and Anastasia Gadolou*



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# Contents

- 7 Introduction to Material Koinai  
*Søren Handberg & Anastasia Gadolou*
- 17 Anthropological Reflections on the Koine Concept:  
Linguistic Analogies and Material Worlds  
*Michael Dietler*
- POTTERY PRODUCTION AND THE FORMATION OF MATERIAL,  
OR CULTURAL KOINAI**
- 43 The ‘Euboean’ Koine: Reassessing Patterns of Cross-Cultural Interaction and Exchange in  
the North-Western Aegean Region  
*Lieve Donnellan*
- 65 The Early Iron Age Pottery from Mt. Lykaion and the Western Greek Koine\*  
*Mary E. Voyatzis*
- 91 Material Koine: Constructing a Narrative of Identity in Archaic Corinth\*  
*Angela Ziskowski*
- 109 Scales of Ceramic Analysis on Naxos (Cyclades)  
*Xenia Charalambidou, Evangelia Kiriati & Noémi S. Müller*
- 133 Material Koine and the Case of Phaleron Cups: Conventions and Reality\*  
*Florentia Fragkopoulou & †Eleni Zosi*

**CROSS CULTURAL CONNECTIONS  
AND MATERIAL AND CULTURAL KOINAI**

- 169 Observations on Euboean Koinai in Southern Italy  
*Jan Kindberg Jacobsen, Sine Grove Saxkjær & Gloria Paola Mittica*
- 191 Material Koinai in The West: Achaean Colonial Pottery Production Between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>  
Centuries BC  
*Maria Rosaria Luberto*
- 221 Craftsmen and Technologies in the Corinthia: The Development of the Doric Order  
*David Scahill*
- 245 Archaic Chalkis in Aetolia: Evidence for a Specialised Textile Production Developed  
in the Adriatic-Ionian Region  
*Sanne Houby-Nielsen*
- 289 Regional Styles of Transport Amphora Production in the Archaic Aegean  
*Mark Lawall*

**THE MATERIAL KOINAI OF WINE DRINKING**

- 315 The 'Middle-Geometric Attic Koine' and the Rise of the Aristocratic Symposion  
*Marek Węcowski*
- 323 Thapsos-Class Pottery Style: a Language of Common Communication Between the  
Corinthian Gulf Communities  
*Anastasia Gadolou*
- 343 'Culture' in a Cup? Customs and Economies in the Western Mediterranean  
*Ulrike Krotscheck*
- 359 List of Contributors
- 363 Index of Ancient Names
- 365 Index of Place Names

# Introduction to Material Koinai

*Søren Handberg & Anastasia Gadolou*

The word *koine* is an ancient Greek word, the literal translation of which is ‘common’ or ‘shared’. In antiquity, the word was used, foremost, to describe the common Greek dialect that flourished in the Hellenistic period,<sup>1</sup> but in research within Mediterranean Archaeology the term has recently, and increasingly, been used conceptually to denote perceived similarities in various aspects of material culture, usually within a bounded geographical area or chronological period.

A prominent example of such a conceptual usage of the term has been the description of the apparent uniformity and spread of artistic motives in various materials in the Mycenaean Palatial period.<sup>2</sup> The term *koine* has also been used to denote various perceived regional groups of pottery styles, especially in western Greece, from the Mycenaean period through to Hellenistic times.<sup>3</sup> To a lesser extent, the term has also been used in regard to ancient Greek architecture, for instance, in similar-

ties in the use of architectural terracotta from the northern Peloponnese and the Achaean apoikiai in Italy.<sup>4</sup> Most recently the term has been used extensively in the ongoing discussion of the so-called ‘Euboean *koine*’, which centres on the question of the extent, both geographically and in terms of social and cultural homogeneity, of the Euboeans in the Aegean and on the Greek mainland.<sup>5</sup> Apart from describing regional groups in material culture, the conceptual framework of the term has also been extended to include notions such as religious *koinai* and cultural *koinai*.<sup>6</sup>

A precise definition of *koine* terminology is rarely offered by the scholars who use it, but, looking at the various ways in which the term has been employed in archaeological scholarship, it is clear that the term is loaded with an extensive range of implicit connotations. More precisely, concerning material culture, the term *koine* most often implies

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1 See Dietler *in this volume*, 18.

2 For Bronze Age material *koinai*, see e.g. Hood 1978, 291; Feldman 2002; 2006; Galanakis 2009; Petrakis 2009. For references to a late Bronze Age metallurgical *koine* that included Sicily, Sardinia and the Iberian Peninsula, see Sherratt 2012, 160.

3 The Bronze Age: Papadopoulos 1995, but see also the critical comment in Dickinson 2006, 19; The early Iron Age: Coulson 1991: 44; Coldstream, 2008, 220. The Archaic period: Papadopoulos 2001. The Classical period: Petropoulos, 2005; Gravani 2009. For these regional styles, see also Coldstream 1983.

4 Barello 1995, see also the review of the volume in Fischer-Hansen 1997. For the use of *koine* to describe similarities in Ptolemaic architecture extending to Rhodes, see Calì 2010.

5 For the Euboean *koine*, see especially Lemos 1998; 2002, 212-7; Papadopoulos 2011. For further discussions and modifications of the Euboian *koine*, see Desborough 1977; Papadopoulos 1997; 2014, 186; Gimatzidis 2011, 958-9; Mazarakis Ainián 2010; 2012. See also Donnellan and Jacobsen, et al. *in this volume*.

6 A ‘pan-Cyprian’ *koine* has, for instance, been recognised, see Iacovou 1999, 150; 2008; Knapp 2012, 46. See also Dietler *in this volume*, 21-2.

more than just shared features in the material culture of an area, whether this is expressed in, for instance, pottery styles, architecture or burial practices.<sup>7</sup> There has been a tendency in archaeological research to uncritically assume that some meaningful connection exists between shared material culture and, for instance, social values and forms of social organisation. The term thus carries with it concepts such as increased contact, influence, cultural and social integration as well as issues of common identity and aesthetic values. Such underlying connotations are, however, rarely examined in any detail, and explanations for the existence of shared material culture are often vague or ambiguous, as has recently been emphasised by some scholars.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that standardisation in local production, adoption of foreign objects or practices, is central to the conceptualisation of the koine terminology, and from this point of view, Vladimir Stissi has put the implicit character of the broader issues this way:

“For obvious reasons, archaeological studies of standardization usually take a series of similar objects as a starting point, but in post-prehistoric Greek archaeology, analysis is rarely taken further than simply assessing to what extent one could or could not regard the studied items as standardized, and evaluating the implications of this solely for the case at hand. Wider social or cultural significance is hardly looked at let alone questions regarding the more general roles of standardization and variation in their social, economic and/or cultural context.”<sup>9</sup>

At the core of the use of the concept of koine is the malleable notion of ‘influence’. The identification of

foreign ‘influences’ plays a prominent role in many archaeological studies. However, merely pointing to stylistic influences, and thus, in these cases, a process of *koineisation*, has little interpretive power in itself. In 1991, James Whitley described this in the following way in his book *Style and Society in Dark Age Greece*:

“The terminology of ‘influence’ subtly avoids the difficult but important questions of why any community would wish to make use of another’s material culture, and why there have always been different degrees of acceptance of, or resistance to, the exotic”.<sup>10</sup>

The underlying assumption that similarities in material culture can be equated with, for instance, shared religious beliefs cannot be taken for granted, but must be substantiated by paying close attention to the contextual circumstances of the archaeological material. In a sense, by employing the koine terminology we face the risk of using the term as a heuristic device, much as the concept of ‘culture’ has been used in the past.<sup>11</sup> Critics of the use of the term ‘culture’ as a heuristic concept have vehemently emphasised that particular types of material culture do not *per se* equal groups or societies.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the analytical use of constructed entities such as ‘archaeological cultures’ may hide variations in the archaeological record and guide us away from investigating fundamental questions about the underlying social mechanisms that form and maintain social and cultural cohesion and homogeneity.<sup>13</sup>

The three-day conference, of which the chapters in this volume are the outcome, was held at the Danish Institute at Athens during the days 30<sup>th</sup> of January – 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2015. The ultimate aim

7 For an overview of the use of the term in relation to the Bronze Age period, see Galanakis 2009.

8 See e.g., Gimatzidis 2011, 958-9; Papadopoulos 2011, 127-9; 2014, 186. See also Dietler, *in this volume*, 21-2.

9 Stissi 2014, 115.

10 Whitley 1991, 45.

11 Galanakis 2009, 5-6. See also, Dietler *in this volume*, 23.

12 See Kotsonas 2014, 13. For a good recent overview, see Roberts & Vander Linden 2011, 2-3.

13 Roberts & Vander Linden 2011, 3, but see also Stark *et al.* 2008.

of the conference was not to transform the koine terminology from a heuristic device to a rigorous operational methodology. The rationale was rather to emphasise the need to look more closely at the underlying mechanisms that led to standardisations in material culture and societal practices, i.e., to look at the process of *koineisation*. Among the important questions that the contributors were asked to consider were which factors facilitated the transference of changes in the consumption and appropriation of material culture either in inter-regional or local settings, and how such changes could be viewed as reflecting the changing social values of communities?

In this connection, the term koine is to be understood as a broad and encompassing term that covers not only the broad adoption of similar objects across a larger geographical area, but also in terms of changing conventions that become the common way of doing things. For the purposes of this conference, therefore, the term koine was defined as a flexible term that can be used to describe the consumption of material culture to various degrees, both in terms of geographic and chronological extent. Thus, according to this definition, koine can also be used to signal changes in established norms of how people engage with material culture that became, for shorter or longer periods of time, the new way of doing things; that is, a new convention. In this way, the introduction of, for instance, new burial costumes, pottery styles, or dedicatory practices may be understood as new material koinai even though their uses remained rather limited in time and space. What is important is not so much the geographic or chronological extent of a particular type of object, but rather the process of profound appropriation of new objects or a new way of engaging with material culture. The central question in understanding the phenomenon of koine should then, in line with the quote from Whitley, be ‘*why do things become popular?*’ What were the underlying socio-cultural mechanisms or

dispositions that facilitated the incorporation of new things?<sup>14</sup>

Making sense of material culture is as much about looking at differences as looking at similarities, a major focus of the conference was therefore also to explain such differences and similarities. Connectedness is a word that is increasingly being used to describe the Ancient Greek world of the Iron Age and the Archaic period, and during the past two decades several scholars have approached the history of the ancient Mediterranean from the perspective of globalisation. The realisation that the ancient Mediterranean world was perhaps more connected than we are accustomed to believe emphasises the need to understand and explain regional differences in material culture.<sup>15</sup> According to several studies, the world of the Greek early Iron Age can be divided into regional groups that were, although culturally interlinked, to some extent socially divided. These social differences can be expressed both in terms of the consumption of different objects and different consumptions of similar objects, each imbedded in their particular historical and social context.<sup>16</sup> Specific demands for certain types of objects, styles or ways of engaging with material culture do not only depend on availability, but are just as much responses to the social needs of a community; it is the logic behind these needs that the conference participants were encouraged to uncover.<sup>17</sup>

Some good examples of studies that move beyond the mere recognition of what might be labeled material koinai (but incidentally were not) to investigate

14 Morgan & Whitelaw 1991 is one example of this type of investigation.

15 For the view that the ancient Greek world was well-connected, see e.g. Horden & Purcell 2000; Morris 2003; Malkin 2011; Vlassopoulos 2013.

16 Whitley 1991; Morris 1997; 1998. Feldman 2002 is a particularly good example of how a ‘superregional koine’ can exist in different local social settings, although, in this case, for the late Bronze Age period.

17 Such types of conspicuous consumptions are clearly described in Dietler 2010, 55-74.

the mechanisms that guide, promote or encourage the adoption of new objects exist in the archaeological literature. B. Powell, for instance, has suggested that the sudden popularity and persistence of mythological imagery should be understood in relation to early Greek writing. Near Eastern iconography, such as that of the Assyrian hero Ninurta, was assimilated with Herakles, and the imagery spread precisely because the tales were communicated in writing, thus facilitating and maintaining its popularity.<sup>18</sup>

Another example of the logic behind a community's specific consumption is provided by studies of late Geometric Argive iconography. The 'horse-leader' motif is a central pictorial representation in the Argolid in the latter half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. As S. Langdon has shown, this motif had, like much of early Greek iconography, a Near Eastern religious pedigree, and its adoption in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC can be associated with the importance of the horse to members of a newly established elite social group who were described by Homer as horse tamers, and who conveniently utilised an old iconographic motif as a visual expression of their social power.<sup>19</sup>

Numerous other examples of profound analyses that attempt to understand the social complexities of changes in the adoption and use of material culture can be identified in this period of Greek antiquity, but the purpose of the present conference was not to identify any universal processes that facilitate such changes (which are not likely to exist), but rather to attempt to identify the social and cultural logic behind such changes in a few selected cases studies through discussion. As M. Dietler noted in his opening address at the conference, the application of the term *koiné* should especially serve the purpose of revealing complexities, rather than simply pointing

to similarities, precisely because the identification of a material *koiné* has little explanatory power in itself.<sup>20</sup> It is important to remember that the processes that led to phenomena that can be described as material *koinai* could be very different from place to place and in various socio-cultural environments, as the examples mentioned above illustrate. If we do not explain the processes that guided the adoption of specific material culture and the mechanism that lead to change or divergent consumptions of material culture, we leave the door open for unfounded historical reconstructions. As Dietler also points out, focusing on aspects of consumption patterns may provide one suitable methodological approach. By drawing attention to, and unfolding, the mechanisms and processes that lie behind cases of conspicuous consumption of material culture, we hope to move beyond description to valid interpretations and thereby, ultimately, achieve a more profound understanding of the dialectic relationship between objects and social constructions.

Apart from Dietler's opening address, which presents a discussion of the use of the *koiné* term from an anthropological perspective, the papers presented in this volume have been grouped into three thematic parts:

- 1: Pottery Production and the Formation of Material, or Cultural *Koinai*.
- 2: Cross Cultural Connections, and Material and Cultural *Koinai*.
3. The Material *Koinai* of Wine Drinking.

18 Powell 1998.

19 On the horse leader theme in its social context, see first and foremost Langdon 1989, but see also Papalexandrou 2005, 129-32; Pappi 2006.

20 Dietler *in this volume*, 24.

## 1. Pottery Production and the Formation of Material, or Cultural Koinai

Lieve Donnellan's paper *The 'Euboean' Koine: Re-assessing Patterns of Cross-Cultural Interaction and Exchange in the North-Western Aegean Region* discusses the difference between shared material culture and a cultural koine within the region, that has been characterized as an 'Euboean koine'. By tracing the circulation of objects and styles, and comparing the consumption of various types of ceramic vessels in funerary contexts, she shows that the use of the koine term within this region is questionable.

Based on the recent discovery of large quantities of early Iron Age pottery from the ash altar at the sanctuary of Zeus on Mt. Lykaion in Arcadia, Mary E. Voyatzis' paper *The Early Iron Age Pottery from Mt. Lykaion and the Western Greek Koine* analyses the meaning and significance of the shared ceramic tradition of the 11<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, referred to as a 'western Greek koine'. The pottery from regions that are traditionally associated with this koine, i.e. Messenia, Elis, Achaea, Aetolia, and Ithaka, exhibits considerable variations, and the author asks to what extent this new corpus of pottery actually fits with this notion of a 'western Greek koine'. The investigation suggests that the term might in fact refer to a large and more varied body of ceramics from an ever-growing number of regions that did not adopt the standard Protogeometric style (best characterized by Athens). Continuity into the early Iron Age provides an opportunity to identify the socio-political processes behind the conspicuous consumption in certain communities that led to the formation of a material koine, and Voyatzis concludes that the dissemination of styles reflects the movement of people.

Angela Ziskowski's paper entitled *Material Koine: Constructing a Narrative of Identity in Archaic Corinth* focuses on the production of decorated fine wares in the Corinthian community. Ziskowski

argues that a material koinai was deliberately created during the earliest phases of polis formation, not just on the initiative of the social elite, but by the entire community, with the intention of differentiating itself from neighbouring regions, like the Argolid and Attica, in the 8<sup>th</sup> through to the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. Through a discussion of iconographic scenes in early Corinthian pottery, the author demonstrates two significant transformations in the manifestation of identity, as expressed in the material culture. As such the study shows how the construction of a cultural identity occurred at all levels of society.

The paper *Scales of Ceramic Analysis on Naxos (Cyclades)*, by Xenia Charalambidou, Evangelia Kiri-atzi and Noémi Müller, presents the first results of an ongoing study of pottery production and consumption on the island of Naxos during the early Iron Age, using an integrated approach combining macroscopic, petrographic and chemical (WD-XRF) analyses. The study investigates the similarities and differences in the pottery production traditions on the island, and specifically traces the development of the manufacturing techniques of coarse wares, and discusses what roles consumers – particularly the elites – played in production. Through a comparison of Naxian coarse and fine ware productions, the authors show how a stylistic koine can be detected through an interdisciplinary approach.

The paper *Material Koine and the Case of Phaleron Cups: Conventions and Reality*, by Florentia Fragkopolou and Eleni Zosi, discusses the distribution of the well-known type of Phaleron Cups across Attica, from the late 8<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. The Phaleron Cups form a distinctive category of objects within the broader class of Protoattic pottery, whose significance has so far been largely neglected. Through a thorough study of the context of use of the cups in burials and sanctuaries, the authors argue that their deposition reflects both individual choice and the norms and expectations of the broader society across Attica, which can be characterised as a cultural koine.

## 2. Cross Cultural Connections, and Material and Cultural Koinai

Jan Kindberg Jacobsen, Sine Grove Saxkjær and Gloria Paola Mittica's contribution, entitled *Observations on Euboean Koinai in Southern Italy*, focuses on the spread of Euboean material culture in the western Mediterranean, with an emphasis on southern Italy. The authors discuss the connection between material and cultural koinai, and investigate the possibility of a shared cultural koine among the Euboean homeland and its overseas settlements. Furthermore, the authors discuss the possible existence of a cross-cultural koine among the Euboeans and the indigenous elite within the framework of consumption and an analysis of the different sites' historical and social framework.

In the paper entitled *Material Koinai in the West: Achaean Colonial Pottery Production Between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC*, Maria Rosaria Luberto suggests that Achaean colonial pottery production in southern Italy can be viewed as a material koine, which incorporated characteristics from the homeland. This reflected a complex series of relationships that grew out of the foundation of a large number of colonies within a small geographic region.

David R. Scahill's paper *Craftsmen and Technologies in the Corinthia: The Development of the Doric Order*, throws new light on the development, transmission and canonisation of the elements of the Doric architectural order. The author uses the Corinthia as a case study, to show that the development of the key elements of the Doric style were influenced just as much by the availability of materials and specialized craftsmen, as by political and social motivations. The author shows how the development of techniques, such as stone carving and terracotta roof tiles, intertwined with the development of new stylistic forms, that led to the formation of the Doric order at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. These new techniques and styles spread quickly through a diverse set of circumstances and

interactions throughout the Mediterranean, such as colonial expansion, trade networks and religious cohesion. Thus, the Doric order, as a cultural product, reflects the manifestation of a number of social and cultural processes.

The paper *Archaic Chalkis in Aetolia. Evidence for Specialized Textile Production Developed in the Adriatic-Ionian Region* by Sanne Houby-Nielsen, focuses on a koine of specialised textile industries in the Corinthian Gulf, the Ionian, Adriatic and in southern Italy. On the basis on the recent discovery of Archaic period loom-rooms in Aetolian Chalkis, Houby-Nielsen presents a thorough discussion of the evidence for fine textile production among the communities along the coasts of Aetolia and Achaea, which were in close contact with Corinth and certain communities in south Italy. By paying close attention to the weaving tools found in Chalkis and other sites, it becomes clear that specialized tablet weaving of borders, represented a valuable shared practice in these Gulf communities and their overseas settlements in southern Italy.

In Mark Lawall's paper *Regional Styles of Transport Amphora Production in the Archaic Aegean*, the phenomenon of these regional styles is discussed. The development of such regional koinai are explored in terms of population movements, long-distance shipping and Greek – non-Greek interactions. Lawall argues that the distinctive grey ware and red ware 'rat-tail' amphoras of Lesbos could have been inspired by Phrygian prototypes. Lawall also investigates the introduction of an Ionian amphora shape to the Northern Aegean in the light of the foundation of the Tean colony of Abdera, and ascribes the popularity of the type to commercial relations with the Pontic region.

### 3. The Material Koinai of Wine Drinking

Marek Węcowski's *The 'Middle-Geometric Attic Koine' and the Rise of the Aristocratic Symposion*, discusses a central element in the socio-political history of early Greece: the development of the symposion. On the basis of peculiarities in middle Geometric II Attic pottery, the author argues for a relatively early date for the rise of the Greek aristocratic banquet. Węcowski links the early rise of the symposion to the emergence of an Aegean aristocracy and its wish to define itself in cultural rather than economic terms. Athenian drinking pots become vehicles for, and material expressions of, the most desirable aristocratic lifestyle. According to this idea, the "Attic middle Geometric II koine" is closely related to the spread of the symposion in the Aegean. The adoption of certain Attic pottery shapes thus reflects the dissemination of a cultural phenomenon.

The theme of Węcowski's paper is further explored and supported in Anastasia Gadolou's paper, *The Thapsos-Class Pottery Style: a Language of Common Communication Between the Corinthian Gulf Communities*. By investigating the circulation and consumption of sympotic Thapsos-class pottery in different communities in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, the study seeks to achieve a better understanding of the underlying reasons for the conspicuous consumption of these vessels. The author reaches the conclusion that consumption was structured by the cultural value of wine drinking during feasting, a cultural value that gave birth to a pottery style koine.

The underlying cultural dynamics leading to the mass production and consumption of drinking vessels, is also the theme of Ulrike Krotscheck's paper "Culture" in a Cup? Customs and Economies in the Western Mediterranean, which discusses the distribution of so-called 'Ionian Cups' in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The author argues that the widely practised and ritualised consumption of wine in the Archaic western Mediterranean was part of a process of identity

formation, that necessitated the establishment of trade-networks to acquire desirable drinking cups.

Combined, the chapters in this volume inform us about a wide range of processes and mechanisms of consumption and appropriation of material culture, in inter-regional and local contexts, that may have led to the formation of regional material koinai. How, and to what degree, such changes in the consumption of material culture reflected social values, forms the key topic of investigation in most of the contributions. It is our hope that the case studies and reflections presented in this volume will contribute towards judicious use of the term in future studies.

We would like to thank our invited keynote speaker Professor Michael Dietler and all the speakers and participants of the conference, which raised many stimulating ideas and generated lively responses and discussions.

We are very much indebted to our co-organiser Professor Catherine Morgan for chairing the conference. A special debt of gratitude also goes to her for her constant interest and support during all the stages of preparation for the conference.

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

*Michael Dietler*

‘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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

Let me preface my remarks in this chapter with the avowal that, despite having worked on Greek colonial encounters in the Western Mediterranean,<sup>2</sup> 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

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1 See Fischer 1970.

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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 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> The major exception consists of the much earlier and more extensive body of works that deal with ‘the *koinē*’ as a linguistic phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> That discussion has spawned a massive analytical literature that dates back to at least the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.<sup>6</sup> 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<sup>3</sup>) 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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

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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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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

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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.