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A NEW INTERACTIVE PARADIGM FOR THE STUDY OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

Abstract: The study of the interaction among ancient civilizations with a special focus on the Archaic period has developed three paradigms, including a comparative approach, a regional approach that regards the Mediterranean as a *Koine*, and a historical approach based on the Networks theory. This article addresses the theoretical superiorities of the “Mediterranean *Koine*”. Although it has been demonstrated differently in various historians’ works, the pattern of “Mediterranean *Koine*” can be categorized into four common features: the cultural exchanges based on commercial activities, the integrated “region” formed through communication, the balanced relationship between individuality and commonality, and the high level of economic and cultural connections determined by the unique ecological environment. The cultural exchanges based on commercial activities are the fundamental character of the “Mediterranean *Koine*” from the eighth to sixth century BC. Thanks to modern archaeology, these commercial activities and the cultural exchanges have been largely reconstructed. Al Mina is a perfect example of getting a fundamental understanding of the “Mediterranean *Koine*”. For better utilizing the “Mediterranean *Koine*” in research we should also direct attention into the differences among civilizations, such as their various scopes of time and space, different social structures, and the uniqueness of particular ecologies

Keywords: *Mediterranean Koine, comparative study, interactive study, Networks theory, paradigm shifts.*

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In recent years, maritime history with a focus on cultural exchanges has been increasingly popular among Chinese academic circles. The top ten hot topics of Chinese history research in 2018 include “A New Expansion and New Features on Maritime History Research”. In May 2019, the topic “Exchanges and Mutual Learning Among Civilizations and An Asian Community” was taken as the main theme at the opening ceremony of the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations held in Beijing. Many research fields can be further explored under these two themes. In the new expansion of maritime history, Mediterranean history has become a new academic sensation. However, ancient Mediterranean history received comparatively little attention. Of its relevant cultural exchanges, scholars mainly focused on cultural communication in the eastern section of the Silk Road, paying little attention to its western section which runs from Asia to Europe during the early period of the Silk Road. There are even lesser studies on that period’s Mediterranean interactive study. This paper attempts to synthesize the study of Mediterranean history and the study of exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations, with a focus on some related issues of the “Mediterranean *Koine*”, a new paradigm for the interactive study of ancient civilizations.

I. PARADIGM SHIFTS IN INTERACTIVE STUDY OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

After the general collapse of the Late Bronze Age civilizations,¹ the main civilization centers in the Mediterranean Sea gradually resumed their vitality from the tenth to the eighth century BC, and the cultural exchanges became increasingly frequent. Scholars have increasingly paid attention to this since the twentieth century. Through examining relevant historiography, I conclude that paradigm shifts in the interactive study of ancient civilizations have passed through the comparative study through the “Mediterranean *Koine*” into the Networks theory.

The comparative study is the first and typical research paradigm over this topic. Scholars usually put their eyes on comparing ancient Greece and the Near East due to its revival and flourishing developments in the tenth and eighth centuries BC which has great significance for the later period.² In the 1930s, the similarities in both myths and literary works of ancient Greece and the Near East have been perceived by some scholars. With the deciphering of Linear B in the 1960s, the field of comparative study was further broadened.³ Walter Burkert epitomized the research field of the comparative study with the publishing of *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur*⁴ in 1984. Based on massive historical materials, he has carried out a detailed textual study and a comparative study on several specific issues, such as migrant craftsmen, witchcraft and medicine transmitted from the east to the west, and the relationship between Akkadian literature and early Greek literature. In 1996, Burkert delivered four lectures on the cultural interaction between the ancient Oriental World and Greece at Università Ca Foscari in Venice, Italy, which were quickly compiled into a book and translated into French, Spanish, German, English, and Chinese. In this book, he made an in-depth and detailed comparative study on the Oriental characteristics of Homer’s Epic, Oriental wisdom literature and creation myth, and the issues about Orpheus and Egypt. Another notable but controversial scholar in the comparative study is Martin Bernal. His *Black Athena: Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* was published in 1987, followed by the second and third volumes⁵ in the next two decades. Bernal’s radical viewpoints aroused heated debates, stimulating the enthusiasm for the comparative study of the early Greek civilization and the Oriental civilization.⁶

The second research paradigm can be summarized as “Mediterranean *Koine*”. As early as 1949, to some extent, Fernand Braudel studied the Mediterranean world in the second half of the sixteenth century as a unit in his notable work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the*

Age of Philip II.⁷ In fact, it has already implied the concept of “Mediterranean *Koine*”. This research method has gradually been accepted and applied by historians of ancient history. It was German scholars Seybold and Sternberg who came up with the concept of the “Mediterranean *Koine*”⁸ in the paper *Amos and Hesiod: Several Aspects of Comparative Study*⁹ in 1993. Kurt A. Raaflaub put forward the concept again at the academic seminar “*Heirs of Assyria*” held in Finland in 1998.¹⁰ Although they haven’t illustrated the connotation and extension of this concept in-depth, they reached a consensus that the Mediterranean world in the Archaic Period is a culturally intertwined community. Obviously, before Raaflaub’s conceptualization of the “Mediterranean *Koine*”, many scholars have already made similar studies and interpretations. In 1987, Ian Morris argued that from the mid-eighth century BC onward, Greek society started to change structurally, which was derived from the process of early civilization development in the Mediterranean community.¹¹ People’s ideas about the gods, the past and the space structure were refreshed by new ones. Sarah Morris proposed, in *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art*¹² published in 1992, that from the Bronze Age to the Archaic Period the Eastern Mediterranean world is actually a cultural community, with the interconnecting and interactive normalcy. Ancient Greece is also a part of it. However, these scholars haven’t clearly defined the relevant connotations of the “Mediterranean *Koine*”. Except for a few scholars such as Seybold, Sternberg and Raaflaub, when other scholars mentioned this issue, they usually referred to “a community of Mediterranean” and did not consider this community as a specific entity, but simply used the term “community” to express the close connections and interactions which existed in the Mediterranean since the Bronze Age.

In 2003, Irad Malkin proposed a new interpretation mode “Networks Theory”, which can be regarded as the third paradigm for the interactive study of ancient civilizations.¹³ The concept of the Networks is a prominent feature of postmodernism and post-colonialism. It replaces the concept of the “center and periphery” structure, providing a new perspective of the human place and human space. Based on M. Rostovtzeff’s and H. Pirenne’s argument that the Mediterranean is the “Networks of intertwined trading routes”, Malkin drew on the concept of the Networks to further elaborate on this issue. He illustrated that between the end of the second millennium and the fourth centuries

⁷ BRAUDEL 2013. The first edition of the Chinese version published in 1996, which was titled as *The Mediterranean in the Time of Philip II and The Mediterranean World*. In fact, these two different (translated) titles not only reflect quite different historical views, but also reflect the profound influence of new academic trends such as global history and environmental history in the past 30 years in China.

⁸ The word *Koine* comes from ancient Greek and its basic meaning is “common” or “general”. It is often used to refer to the Greek common language based on the Attic dialect. The “Mediterranean *Koine*” discussed in this article refers to the basic meaning of the term “community” in the field of sociology, that is, a traditional regional society based on the essential will of human existence and geography.

⁹ SWYBOLD/UNGERN-STERNBERG 1993.

¹⁰ RAAFLAUB 2000.

¹¹ MORRIS 1987, 171.

¹² MORRIS 1992. She also outlined the close connections between Greece and the East in *Homer and the Near East*, see MORRIS 1997.

¹³ MALKIN 2003.

¹ For the collapse of the Late Bronze Age, see DEMAND 2011, 193-219.

² The Near East is a geographical term, defined differently in different academic fields. In the discussion of civilization history, early modern western geographers referred to the “Near East” as the east adjacent to Europe. According to the International Geographic Association, Near East and Middle East refer to the same areas, including the Arabian Peninsula, Cyprus, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Syria and Turkey.

³ ASTOUR 1967.

⁴ BURKTER 1984. The English version was titled *Orientalizing Revolution*, see BURKTER 1992.

⁵ BERNAL 1987-2006.

⁶ WEST 1997; LÓPEZ-RUIZ 2010.

BC, numerous Greek settlements were established on the coastline of the Greek mainland, the Aegean sea, Asia Minor, Propontis, the Black Sea, Italy, Sicily, France, Spain, and North Africa, resembling the Networks.¹⁴ Each political community, whether it is a city-state or an ethnic group, has its own “micro-regions”, and each element within these micro-regions, such as towns, sanctuaries, neighbors, etc., has heterogeneous relationships with each other. Thus, these political communities, especially the city-states, also formed the Networks. In *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean*, he argued that the ancient Mediterranean first forms a “Mediterranean civilization” during the Archaic Period (eighth to fifth centuries BC), which mainly consists of independent political and commercial communities scattered along the Mediterranean coastline. In the whole Networks of maritime civilization composed of various coastal cities and islands, Greeks, Egyptians, Etruscans, and Phoenicians are the main actors. There is no strict cultural boundary among these civilizations which were formed by various ethnic groups, and the entire Mediterranean region has formed a community with civilization interactions.¹⁵ It is noteworthy that although Malkin does not explicitly use the concept of “Mediterranean *Koine*”, his “community of interactive civilizations” is obviously influenced by relevant trends.

Certainly, there is no distinct shifting point in these three paradigms. The paradigm shifts mentioned above, for the purpose of facilitating the study, were respectively concluded by distinctive characteristics in chronological order. Among these three research paradigms, the comparative approach is, of course, the foundation and cornerstone. Only through a detailed and in-depth study and comparison of the basic and specific historical materials can the relevant macroscopic theoretical research be carried out. However, the comparative approach tends to collect and examine material sources relatively uncritical or ignorant of historical contexts. On the one hand, materials themselves cannot provide reliable evidence of civilization communication, the comparative study lacks an interpretive framework within a more historical macroscopic context, which to some extent ignores the changes and differences in the process of communication. Therefore, the evidence provided by the comparative study based on superficial interpretation of materials could be imprecise. On the other hand, Malkin’s Networks theory is actually an extension of the concept of “Mediterranean *Koine*”, with more reflections but still couldn’t transcend it. If we examine the Mediterranean civilization interactions in a historical method, I prefer the paradigm of “Mediterranean *Koine*”. Based on previous studies, I attempt to summarize some general and basic characteristics of the “Mediterranean *Koine*”, and to figure out its feasibility as a research paradigm for communication and interaction among ancient civilizations.

II. “MEDITERRANEAN KOINE” HISTORIOGRAPHY

In specialized studies of Mediterranean history, there are not many works focusing on the Archaic Mediterranean.

¹⁴ MALKIN 2003, 57.

¹⁵ MALKIN 2011, 31.

Among few related publications, although most haven’t applied the concept of “Mediterranean *Koine*” in an explicit way, a loose understanding of the Mediterranean community has been on display.

In their celebrated *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, published in 2000, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell attempted to reconstruct the image of the Mediterranean Sea from the perspective of “microecology” and human interaction with the environment. While Horden and Purcell emphasized the diverse micro-region environment of the Mediterranean, they still stressed the connectivity among them. The geographical conditions of the Mediterranean’s fragmented coastlines, countless islands, interlocking lowlands, and frequent tidal flats and rivers make possible a system of ready communication. They point out that people in different micro-regions interact with each other due to convenient maritime connections, thus capturing the fundamental attribute that the historical “regions” were formed by connectivity.¹⁶ As for the Archaic Mediterranean, they take Kommos and Zagora as early examples to examine widespread interactions across the Mediterranean. Kommos is located on Crete, on the opposite side of Pseira, where archaeologists had found supporting evidence for the significant connection between Crete and the Phoenician world. Research on its local ancient graffiti suggests that Greeks from different regions, including Euboea and central Greece, also arrived here in the eighth century BC. Archaeological evidence from Zagora on Andros, a small island near Euboea, indicates that this settlement is involved in the material redistribution system of the Mediterranean in the eighth century BC. Horden and Purcell must have also given attention to the colonization of the Greeks as all other historians have perceived it. They believe that it is in the Greek colonial era (eighth to sixth century BC) that the potential of mutual connectivity was fully released throughout the whole Mediterranean navigation history. By the fifth century BC, the entire Mediterranean was looked on as a single unit resulting from not only the intricate and pervasive maritime interaction but also the subsequent development of the custom of establishing settlements. The Greeks themselves have regarded the world composed of Greek overseas settlements as a cultural and social unity.¹⁷ However, Horden and Purcell’s extensive narrative does discuss the Mediterranean history during the Greek colonial era much, but merely mentions briefly the subject as an insignificant episode. The interactive study of Mediterranean civilizations awaits further exploration.

In the stimulating book *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*, David Abulafia regards the course of Mediterranean history from 1000 BC to AD 600 as the “second Mediterranean” of his “five Mediterraneans”. He argues that around the eighth and seventh centuries BC, new commercial Networks emerged, bringing Oriental cultures to the west as far as Etruria and southern Spain. The formation of these commercial Networks is not achieved with the aid of large-scale imperial expansion, but by groups of merchants. Greeks traced the precedent footprints of

¹⁶ XIA 2019a, 12.

¹⁷ HORDEN/PURCELL 2000, 134.

Mycenaean, intentionally or not, turning their eyes to Sicily and Italy. Etruscan pirates and traders appeared on the land of the just rising cities. Even more, Canaan merchants in Lebanon, who were well known to the Greeks as Phoenicians, also appeared there. They were known for their enthusiasm for trading and pursuing profit. Abulafia holds that the best way to trace the commercial empire of the early Phoenicians is to take a tour of the Mediterranean around 800 BC. The sailing route started from Tyre, alongside the northward sea route, passing through Cyprus, Rhodes, and Crete, then crossing the vast Ionian Sea to southern Italy, south Sardinia, Ibiza, and southern Spain. On their return journey to Tyre, Phoenicians would travel along the long coastline in North Africa.¹⁸ As for the description of the Mediterranean world at that time, Abulafia places special emphasis on the commercial activities of Phoenicians and other people, including the main actors of Greeks and Etruscans. Although Abulafia has limited narratives on the further detailed evidence of cultural exchanges, he points out that the core of “Mediterranean *Koine*” in the Archaic Period is civilization interactions based on commercial activities. This also provides a macro-level guide for us to study cultural exchanges in the context of “Mediterranean *Koine*”.

In *Rethinking the Mediterranean* edited by William V. Harris, several scholars also discuss the unity and connectivity of the ancient Mediterranean world. In the article “Mediterranean and Ancient History”, Harris disagrees with Horden and Purcell’s theory. He points out that many scholars (including Horden and Purcell) only use “Mediterranean” as a synonym for “Greece and Rome plus other ancient world as I may happen to pay attention to”.¹⁹ Therefore, the unity of the Mediterranean is a key question that must be discussed, as well as its distinctiveness compared with other regions and the significance of this distinctiveness itself. Harris suggests that unity and distinctiveness are well linked with each other. Harris illustrates in detail to what extent the ancient Mediterranean could be counted as a cultural unity. He points out that a unity appeared in both a weak and a stronger sense. The unity in the weak sense, at least in terms of natural conditions, refers to a relatively concentrated unit with relatively obvious physical boundaries. Its temperature and humidity are relatively moderate, and the water is enough to support agriculture and town alongside the Mediterranean coastlines. Within similar climates, living with similar kinds of animals and plants, there must be similarity and continuity in the way people live. The unity in a stronger sense depends on whether the local economy is closely connected with the wider Mediterranean (and cut off from the rest of the world). If many of the people living on the Mediterranean coastlines at any given time are self-sufficient fishermen, herders, or farmers, then the Mediterranean is not a unity in this sense. But if the economies of the various Mediterranean region are connected, then what are the elements of this connectivity? Not only the trade alongside coastlines, long-distance commercial activities, piracy and migration, but also many other forms of human and non-human activities,

¹⁸ ABULAFIA 2011, 71ff.

¹⁹ HARRIS 2005, 2.

including the spread of plants and diseases.²⁰ In “Ecology and Beyond: The Mediterranean Paradigm”, Alain Bresson points out the key theme discussed in *The Corrupting Sea*, the high level of economic and cultural connections, is determined by the unique ecological environments of the Mediterranean. He argues that the shipping has considerable advantages in cost and speed, especially in the transportation of heavy goods. In this sense, it is recognized that the Mediterranean may serve as a special connective space. This function applies to every coast of the Mediterranean, especially Greece and Italy, with their exceptionally long coastlines. Therefore, the important role of shipping in ancient history is not by occasion. It should be noticed that islands in the Mediterranean also provide additional support to this potential connectivity. The Aegean Sea, with various small islands spreading all over the place which formed the archipelago, could be the most prominent example of this feature. The internal communication within the archipelago is one of the Mediterranean in miniature. Bresson points out the Mediterranean connectivity has greatly accelerated the process of its historical development. In the first millennium BC, the concentration of the Mediterranean wealth and the level and pattern of thought and culture is out of reach for people in any other contemporary region.²¹

Among these works, in *The Corrupting Sea*, *The Great Sea* and *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, the “Mediterranean *Koine*” is not conceptualized as an interpretive tool, and also there is not much narratives about cultural exchanges of the Archaic Mediterranean. But still, the core issue is actually the same, and that is, how to deal with the fragmentation and unity of the Mediterranean world. Of course, answers to this are inconsistent, reflecting two different traditions that have long formed in the study of Mediterranean history. The first tradition was put forward by Rostovtzeff in 1941. He emphasized the subjectivity of human economic activities, placing special emphasis on the macro-interaction of the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, he regarded the Mediterranean as the Networks consisting of trading routes that were significantly affected by Greek colonial activities.²² Rostovtzeff’s view of the Mediterranean as unity is followed by Pirenne and Abulafia. Arguably, the subsequent concept of the “Mediterranean *Koine*” and Malkin’s Networks theory are both further continuations of this tradition. The prominent feature of this tradition is to emphasize that the principal part of cultural exchanges and interactions is humans and their activities. As Abulafia pointed, one must examine those traditional societies settled along rivers flowing into the Mediterranean, that is, to research those who have set foot in the Mediterranean, preferably those who have sailed across the sea. In some cases, they have been directly involved in the cross-cultural trade, and the spread of religion and other ideas. Meanwhile, some of them also have participated in the fight for the power of controlling the sea.²³ The second tradition comes from Braudel. Although Braudel also examined the Mediterranean as a unit, his emphasis is the area’s diversity and distinctiveness, attempting

²⁰ HARRIS 2005, 21-26.

²¹ BRESSON 2005. See also LI 2015.

²² ROSTOVITZEFF 1941, 92.

²³ ABULAFIA 2011, Preface, 4.

to identify the unified nature of the area by integrating differences.²⁴ This tradition echoes in *The Corrupting Sea*. The typical feature of the research method in *The Corrupting Sea* started from the research of the very specific Mediterranean scenery. It aims to examine the interactive relationship between humans and the environment, and to explore the formation of microecology. Then it would pay more attention to the unity of Mediterranean history, which is formed by its connectivity.²⁵ The “rethinking” of Mediterranean studies in *Rethinking the Mediterranean* is largely a “rethinking” of the Braudel model. However, these reflective practices basically continue the research paradigm of “History of the Mediterranean” initiated by Braudel.

III. CULTURAL EXCHANGES IN THE “MEDITERRANEAN KOINE”: TAKING AL MINA AS AN EXAMPLE

The concept of “Mediterranean *Koine*” can be used in the studies of cultural exchanges in the Archaic Mediterranean from the eighth to sixth century BC. Although many scholars have not directly narrated the ancient Mediterranean with this concept, the core issue they discussed is consistent with that of the “Mediterranean *Koine*”. That is the unity of the Mediterranean. Among those scholars who mentioned this concept, some take the Mediterranean as a “political and commercial unity”, and the other regard it as a “cultural unity”. Despite this different emphasis, four general common features of the “Mediterranean *Koine*” can be drawn: 1) indicating the cultural exchanges based on commercial activities; 2) indicating the “regional zones” formed by regional connections; 3) being characterized by both the unity and uniqueness; 4) indicating the high level of economic and cultural connections determined by the unique ecological environment. The first one is the most prominent but also a basic feature of the concept of “Mediterranean *Koine*”.

The “Mediterranean *Koine*” during the period from the eighth to the sixth century BC was first a commercial unity that cultural exchanges followed it as shadows. The general geographical scope covers the Greek mainland, Aegean islands, Greek colonial settlements along the Black Sea, Asia Minor, most area of Levant, the North African region including Egypt, and the cities along the Mediterranean coastlines where Phoenicians were actively involved; certainly, it also includes Phoenician and Greek settlements in Sicily and southern Italy. Greeks and Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Etruscans were active traders. Greeks and Phoenicians established hundreds of settlements along the coast of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, which have been called “colony” by later scholars. During immigration and settlement in the Mediterranean, it is commercial activities that built corridors for cultural exchanges. Trading posts, especially those located in nexus positions in the Mediterranean, provided relatively free stages for merchants from different ethnic groups of various culture zones. For example, Al Mina in North Syria connected Greece and the Near East at least from the eighth century BC, and Naukratis

in the western part of the Nile delta conducted trading activities for Greeks and Egyptians and other ethnic groups.

Al Mina was a nexus of the archaic Greek trading networks in North Syria with the Near East. The excavations and subsequent publications of Al Mina from 1936 onward have changed previous narratives that Cyprus was the southernmost point of ancient Greek commerce to the East.²⁶ The site of Al Mina was located at the mouth of the Orontes River, open to the eastern Mediterranean sea and through the river valley into the eastern inland.²⁷ The transport trade of Al Mina ran the mainstream of Archaic Greek commercial activities with the Near East, which has been strongly supported by the archaeological evidence. The site was excavated, with massive Archaic Greek potteries from Euboea, Corinth, Rhodes, Lesbos, Chios, and Athens.²⁸ The amount of Greek potteries at Al Mina accounts for almost half of the total pottery on this site,²⁹ compared with 10% of Greek materials at other Syrian sites. At the same time, the volume of Greek potteries at Al Mina is the largest among all Syrian sites. Other materials from Phoenicia, Egypt, North Syria, Cyprus, Levant, and Mesopotamia were also found at Al Mina.³⁰

The commercial connections built via Al Mina between Greece and the Near East provided an entrance for Greek commodities to the Near East, and an exit for Oriental civilization elements to the Greek world. Oriental influence reached the Greek world alongside trading routes from the Assyria inland through the Near East.³¹ The best example lies in Corinthian and Rhodian pottery in the seventh century. The Rhodian and Corinthian potteries found at Al Mina in this period saw a transformation from sub-geometric to an Oriental style with more vivid decorations and animal patterns.³² At Corinth and Rhodes, the Orientalizing period in the Archaic period indicates the culture flowing from the East that was, to a large extent, connected by Al Mina.³³ Other objects found at Al Mina were also the indicators that Al Mina had evolved into a complex commercial network, being a corridor of cultural exchanges. The casting mold for the jewelry of the late eighth and early seventh century found at Al Mina refers to a mixed fashion. The cast ornament of the hoop earrings with short ‘mulberries’ is of Syrian fashion and the ornament of lunar pendants is of Phoenician. They were popular in Archaic Greece and widespread in the Mediterranean and the Near East in the Geometric and Early Archaic Period.³⁴ This type of silver earrings was found in tombs in Syria, Cyprus, Cilicia, and Italy in the seventh century BC, while golden ones appeared in Phoenician tombs from the seventh to the sixth century BC.³⁵ The appearance of Syrian-Hittite elements and craftworks of Urartu in early Greek art has haunted scholars on how these cultural

²⁶ WOOLLEY 1937; BEAZLEY 1939; ROBERTSON 1940; MUHLY/WHEELERT/MADDINT 1976; BOARDMAN 1990.

²⁷ WOOLLEY 1937.

²⁸ ROBERTSON 1940; KEARSLEY 1989.

²⁹ WOOLEY 1937, 1-15; WOOLLEY 1938, 133-170; KEARSLEY 1995, 71-72.

³⁰ TAYLOR 1959.

³¹ BURKERT 2004, 9.

³² WOOLLEY 1938a, 20.

³³ PELTENBURG 1969.

³⁴ TREISTER 1995, 160.

³⁵ LI 2018, 112-114.

²⁴ BRAUDEL 2013, 20.

²⁵ XIA 2019b, 14.

influences crossed such a long distance into the Greek world. Cyrus Gordon even came up with the concept of “Bronze age *Koine*”, attempting to illustrate the consistent cultural elements between the Near East and the Mediterranean civilization. The commercial connections established through Al Mina provided a channel for cultural exchanges between Greece and the Near East and even beyond.³⁶

This regional circulation of commodities and cultural elements that existed between Greece and the Near East from the Archaic into the Classical period was involved in a larger “Mediterranean *Koine*”. The potteries found at Al Mina were widely distributed throughout the Mediterranean. Excavations in the Level IX (around 750 BC) of Al Mina unearthed a considerable amount of Euboean *skyphoi*,³⁷ and this pottery has been found at Pithekoussai, the earliest Greek overseas settlement in the western Mediterranean, Cyprus, and Crete.³⁸ The *pendent semi-circle skyphos* of Levels IX and VIII (about 750 BC-700 BC) originated from Euboea and was also widely distributed in Thessaly, Attica, Cyclades, Crete, and Cyprus in the eighth century BC. At Al Mina, there are imported potteries from Rhodes, Corinth, Lesbos, Chios, and Attica which can be found in regions as far as the Southern coast in Spain.³⁹ Small commodities, such as fibulae from Syrian and eastern inland, amulets and beads from Egypt, were found in hundreds at Al Mina, which indicates a trading purpose, not daily usage.⁴⁰ The circulation of small unnecessary commodities in the long-distance trading network illustrates the large extent and complexity of the commercial structure.

This commercial complexity brought the multiplicity of the cultural exchanges. For the Archaic period, the cultural exchanges have been documented by the presence of mixed ethnic groups at Al Mina. At level VIII (about 750BC-700 BC) of Al Mina, room 8 was decorated with drinking vessels, dishes, storages, and lamps in a mixed style from Greek, Greek-Levant, and the Near Eastern style, indicating a mixed population. Neither specific alter nor single currency have been found at the site due to the loose control of the Syrian political power. Another nexus of Archaic Greek commercial network is in Naucratis with Egypt where Phoenicians, Cypriots, and Egyptians conducted commercial activities alongside the Greeks. Both Al Mina and Naucratis have implied the feature of cosmopolitanism with cultural exchanges. Multiple ethnic visitors at Al Mina enabled the culture exchanges to expand in the eastern Mediterranean. The different language was not an obstacle in communicating, and a common lingua franca was used among voyagers and traders.⁴¹ The Greek alphabets adopting Semitic elements in the eighth century is might through the trading affairs between the Phoenicians and Greeks at Al Mina.⁴² The early Greek pottery fragments appeared graffito of letters.⁴³ Phoenician traders recorded the account of commodities in written words, and the Greek merchants might accidentally

³⁶ KEARSLEY 1989, 1.

³⁷ POPHAM 1983, 282.

³⁸ DESCOEUDRES 2002, 51.

³⁹ MUNN 2003, 195-217.

⁴⁰ WOOLLEY 1938b, 133-170.

⁴¹ BOARDMAN 2001, 35.

⁴² KEARSLEY 1989.

⁴³ BOARDMAN 1982, 365-367.

notice and learn it. Cultural exchanges were possible through commercial activities that wove the networks of the “Mediterranean *Koine*”.

The archaeological evidence proves the direct and indirect commercial connections between the Eastern Mediterranean and the far west. The sanctuary of Heraion of Samos has been excavated with a large number of Oriental and Egyptian ivory and bronze objects, as well as massive Cyprus pottery from the end of the eighth century to the early sixth century BC.⁴⁴ Most of the bronze products came from Syria, Phoenicia, and Cyprus around 650 BC. Three ivory combs with carved patterns were identified as Phoenician, but are identified from Phoenician workshops on the downstream of the Guadalquivir River in Spain.⁴⁵ A horsehead statue carved with the Aramaic inscriptions indicates that they were rewards given by King Hazael of Damascus.⁴⁶ It indicates that during this period, the entire Mediterranean from Damascus in the east to Andalusia in the west has been involved in a complex commercial network.

IV. FURTHER QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE “MEDITERRANEAN KOINE”

To sum up, the cultural unity with cultural exchanges formed on the basis of these commercial Networks mentioned above reflects an important feature of the “Mediterranean *Koine*” from the eighth to sixth century BC, and it can be conceptualized as cultural exchanges driven by commercial activities. This is the basic feature of the “Mediterranean *Koine*”. However, if we regard the “Mediterranean *Koine*” as a paradigm for the study of ancient cultural exchanges, we need to pay more attention to the following questions.

Firstly, the concept of “Mediterranean *Koine*” applies not only to the period from the eighth to the sixth century BC but also to the subsequent Mediterranean cultural exchanges, lasting a longer period and within a larger space. Although scholars who first proposed this concept focused on the period around the eighth century BC, the commercial and cultural communication in the Mediterranean world continued and was further strengthened with the improvement of navigation technology and enhancement of national strength. Therefore, the period from the eighth to sixth century BC should be regarded as the formation stage of Mediterranean unity. The geographical range of the Mediterranean community changed continuously afterwards. The Mediterranean cultural exchanges during the period from the eighth to the sixth century BC, noticed by scholars who have directly illustrated the “Mediterranean *Koine*”, mainly occurred in the Eastern Mediterranean. By the Roman Empire period, the range of cultural interactions expanded to the entire Mediterranean and even beyond the scope of the Mediterranean. Both West Asia and Britain were affected by commercial activities in the Mediterranean.

Secondly, in the eighth to sixth centuries BC, agriculture was still the main form of economic activity in most areas of the Mediterranean coastlines. Commercial

⁴⁴ LIPINSKI 2004, 155; BARNETT 1956, 87-97.

⁴⁵ LI 2018, 110-111.

⁴⁶ EPHAL/NAVEH 1989, 192-200.

activities and cultural exchanges didn't play a dominant role in the overall historical development of this period. Although ancient Greek commerce and navigation were relatively developed, agriculture was still the main social and economic foundation. The main social and political forces of Greek city-states were free farmers, not craftsmen or merchants.⁴⁷ In ancient Egypt, agriculture was also much more important than commerce. As long as the Nile Valley was suitable for cultivation, and the Nile maintained a normal water level, the supply of the whole country would not be a problem. Although Egyptians contacted with their neighboring communities at a much earlier period, the purpose of this contact was mainly to obtain raw materials and some valuables, such as metals, gems, oils, and wine.⁴⁸ Therefore, the cultural exchanges, which were based on immigration and commercial activities, formed a very important historical trend for the entire Mediterranean world at that time, which formed a *Koine* in a certain sense. However, this community is not about social development or political structure, but in the sense of cultural exchanges. It did not change the basic pattern of society, and the basic characteristics of each civilization involved.

Thirdly, as for the Mediterranean world from the eighth to the sixth century BC, the independence and difference between civilizations are still far greater than the commonality, and regional communication is far more than holistic communication. "*Koine*" is an academic term that expresses the connectivity and commonality in some respects which are the same object as those discussed in the Networks theory. For example, the Apollo worship Networks from Greece to Sicily, the hero worship Networks from Hercules to Melqart,⁴⁹ the sanctuary Networks throughout the Mediterranean,⁵⁰ and the interdependent of taxation administration in the ancient Mediterranean.⁵¹ These are specific issues of inter-civilization communication, reflecting the flow and commonality of certain cultures and ideas. However, the Archaic Mediterranean community is not totally all in one. As mentioned above, Mediterranean commercial Networks constituted the Mediterranean community with commercial and civilization communications as its basic features. The trading routes ran by various actors towards different directions, and some mainly focused on Greece, some took Egypt as the center. Meanwhile, some trading routes mainly commuted between Greece and Egypt, or between Greece and Asia Minor. Overall, the Mediterranean cultural exchanges from the eighth to sixth century BC are still in the early stage, with regional and relatively short-distance exchanges. The large-scale and long-distance commercial and cultural exchanges mainly consisted of regional ones, not a unity formed at one stroke. Therefore, if the research paradigm of "*Mediterranean Koine*" were applied to the interactive study of ancient civilizations, it is necessary to solidify the studies on each civilization center, and only in this way can the studies of cultural exchanges be examined more specific and detailed.

⁴⁷ HUANG 1995, 3.

⁴⁸ JIN 2003, 3-6.

⁴⁹ MALKIN 2011, 97-142.

⁵⁰ GUNTER 2009, 152.

⁵¹ PURCELL 2005.

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