THE *EMPORION* IN THE ANCIENT WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Trade and Colonial Encounters from the Archaic to the Hellenistic Period

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THE *EMPORION* IN THE ANCIENT WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Trade and Colonial Encounters from the Archaic to the Hellenistic Period

Édité par
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Emporia: Spaces of Encounter and Entanglement

Michael Dietler

Over the years, archaeologists, historians, and geographers have expended a good deal of intellectual and rhetorical energy exploring the subject of *emporia*. Engagement with the topic has included textual analysis, the mining of historical archives, archaeological field research, spatial modeling, speculation, and more than a little polemic. Unfortunately, agreement has been elusive even on such basic issues as defining, identifying, and understanding the functions of these distinctive spaces of economic, cultural, and social interaction. This situation has led one scholar to opine that "Much nonsense has been spouted in relation to *emporia* and increasingly the literature is filling with contradictory assumptions and irreconcilable interpretations" (Samson 1999: 77).

This chapter makes no attempt to document the history of such disputes or reconcile competing perspectives, as that challenge is one of the collective aims of the volume as a whole (for a range of perspectives, see Anderton 1999; Bresson, Rouillard 1993; Dale 2010; Demetriou 2012; Gailledrat 2014; Hodges 2008). Instead, I want to sidestep terminological and classificatory controversies and selectively focus on a set of *processes* that are a recurrent feature of trade communities, however they are defined: that is, the interrelated processes of cross-cultural exchange, consumption, and entanglement. More precisely, I want to emphasize a common role served by *emporia*, trade enclaves, ports of trade, trading posts, market centers, or whatever other rubric one chooses to describe the wide variety of circumscribed locations that serve to concentrate and facilitate cross-cultural exchange and consumption, and to explore the entangling consequences of those activities. My interest in this theme arose originally from investigating the specific case of a set of *emporia* that developed in Mediterranean France, and the Western Mediterranean more generally, during the colonial encounter with Greeks, Etruscans, and Phoenicians in the first millennium BC (see Dietler 2007, 2010; Dietler, López-Ruiz 2009; Gailledrat 2014; Py 2012). However, this chapter makes only fleeting reference to that particular case. Instead, it offers some selective general reflections grounded in a comparative historical and anthropological perspective on cross-cultural trade and consumption.

It is my contention that placing *emporia* in the ancient Mediterranean, which are the primary focus of this volume, in comparative perspective can aid understanding by opening new questions and suggesting new paths of inquiry. These Mediterranean trading settlements represent a specific range of forms of a more general phenomenon that was a common feature of cross-cultural trade for several millennia. Indeed, Philip Curtin has claimed that trade settlements established by foreign commercial specialists became the most common institutional form mobilizing cross-cultural trade from the beginnings of urban life until the industrial age (Curtin 1984: 2). They were found on every continent, and they have been an especially prominent feature of colonial and pre-colonial situations. In my own prior research, I have been especially interested in the part these enclaves of exchange have played in the historical development of colonial relations of power, and that emphasis is reflected in my choice of themes here. Consequently, this chapter examines the roles that trade settlements have played in a variety of such contexts, treating particularly their part in articulating economic and social relations in different kinds of colonial situations and the consequences of their operation. Analysis is focused especially on how such communities of alien merchants have served as privileged spaces for the negotiation of dissonant cultural values, for the profoundly entangling consequences of exchange and consumption of various kinds of goods and services, and for the emergence of new practices, identities, and structures of power.

As noted, the establishment by specialist traders of delimited spaces facilitating cross-cultural exchange has been recognized in many contexts around the world, and in a wide variety of historical situations. Moreover, these trade communities have exhibited a great diversity of specific forms that reflect the intersection of different cultural dispositions, political structures, forms of social organization, and economic functions (for example, see Bresson, Rouillard 1993; Curtin 1984; Gray, Birmingham 1970a; Gupta K., Gupta M. 1998; Hirth 1978; Hodges 1978; Polanyi 1963). Among many observed variations, sometimes they have been homologous stations in a trade diaspora integrated by ties of common ethnicity, place of origin, or religion; while in other cases they were heterogeneous nodes in a loose network of ethnically diverse merchants. Sometimes they have been outposts of powerful mercantile empires, while in other cases they have been

weakly subservient, tolerated enclaves. Sometimes they have been spatially discrete settlements, while in other cases they were delimited spaces within larger local towns. As Curtin (1984: 26) has noted, Sub-Saharan Africa had quite different configurations of trade relations on each of its three "coasts" (the Sahara, and the Atlantic and Indian Oceans), and these variations resulted from the different cultural and political characteristics of the agents engaged in exchanges, as well as from the topography and the nature of trade goods.

1 Propositions

In the face of this great diversity, there are a number of basic analytical propositions that can be advanced, of which I will suggest four that are especially relevant to the focus of this chapter. The first is that, in studying systems of cross-cultural trade, one needs to distinguish between *sites* of interaction (the *emporia*, trade enclaves, trading posts, etc.) and the kinds of *relations* that connect and organize them (informal ethnic or religious trade diasporas, heterogeneous networks and commodity chains, state-chartered mercantile firms, etc.). Both of these features can vary in complex ways to produce a wide range of permutations, and there is no simple explanatory correlation possible. But the particular configurations are very important in understanding the logic and effects of trade systems.

The second proposition is that discerning these features requires a strategy based on shifting scales of analysis: that is, one must change perspective constantly by moving back and forth from the very local to the regional to the supra-regional. Studying one *emporion* in isolation is not likely to yield adequate understanding of its relations with local communities or other *emporia*, just as analysis uniquely from the supra-regional systemic level is likely to miss a great deal of crucial information. The practice of shifting scales reveals different forms of agency, structure, and historicity that otherwise remain elusive.

A third proposition is that trade systems are never static: they are constantly evolving, and they need to be examined from the dynamic perspective of "life histories". The origin of a trade system can rarely be explained by the economic or political logic under which it operated at a later stage. Indeed, as Curtin observed, "trade diasporas tend to work themselves out of business" (Curtin 1984: 3), meaning that, as the role of cross-cultural broker eventually erodes cultural barriers between merchants and consumers, the function and identity of trade enclaves may change radically

Change is characteristic of both networks connecting *emporia* and the life histories of individual trade enclaves. For example, the specialized function and form of individual *emporia* may shift in various directions as the organizing relations among them change. Historical cases show that various scenarios are possible. For instance, a small trading post set up by a particular diasporic group of foreign merchants or a formal trading company may attract a native settlement to grow around it until the trading post becomes subsumed within the town. That growing settlement might gradually welcome a diversity of other merchants such that one would have the development of a more open *emporion* situation with a diversity of resident merchants and a complex network of commercial relations. Alternatively, one might start with a native settlement that accepted a few resident foreign traders in its midst. As knowledge of such a market grew, it might also attract a growing diversity of traders. However, that diversity might be affected by exclusionary strategies among competing firms or among nearby native settlements. Changes in other segments of commodity chains (such as a decline in production of certain desired exports, political disruption of access to suppliers, the pull of other markets, or changes in the technology of transport), could also affect the fortunes of *emporia*. Cases are also known of trade diasporas that withdrew to their ethnic homeland, after which the commercial functions of trade settlements were taken over by local people: the Hanseatic League enclave in London is a case in point (Curtin 1984: 4). Finally, the intrusion of foreign traders can sometimes produce unintended changes in political structures and patterns of violence in the space beyond a contact zone that can have a marked effect on the life histories of *emporia* (Ferguson, Whitehead 1992). The growth of powerful, aggressive indigenous states and an increase in regional violence in the hinterland of European trading colonies in West Africa during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries is a prime example (Thornton 1999), as is the devastating expansion of Iroquois warfare on the margins of the European fur trade in eighteenth century North America (White 1991). This dynamic aspect means that the kind of shifting multi-scalar analysis proposed earlier must also be a historicized form of multi-scalar analysis: one that looks simultaneously at *comparative histories* of sites, regions, and systems.

A fourth proposition is that trade is always political: it is made possible by, and takes place within, a given political context and it has political effects. Hence, one needs to understand the structures of power that enable and regulate specific forms of trade, the political functions of consumption of trade objects, and the political consequences of trade. In particular, for *emporia*, one must attempt to discern the political context that makes possible the existence of these intrusive locations of exchange by asking how is peace maintained in potentially conflictual spaces of cross-cultural interaction, how are merchant activities controlled, how are the networks of trade connected to broader structures of power, and what political effects follow from the consumption of alien goods?

Many other observations could be made, but these propositions provide a basic background analytical framework for some reflections examining three key interrelated processes that shape the histories of *emporia:* exchange, consumption, and entanglement.

2 Exchange

Understanding the economic, social, and political logic of trade settlements and trade systems requires us to think about the precise agents, institutions, technology, and topography of exchange. Cross-cultural exchange does not occur by cultures coming into contact, but rather through

the actions of individuals and small groups of people in particular locations. Hence, we need to consider the identities and interests of merchants and the people with whom they trade—and not simply as members or representatives of cultures or civilizations, but as socially situated actors with particular sets of interests that are a product of both cultural dispositions and social positions. For example, in the case of Iron Age Mediterranean France, a variety of different kinds of evidence indicates that the traders who frequented the *emporia* along the coast were not Greek and Etruscan aristocrats, but rather the usual kinds of socially marginal foreigners (both *metics* and *xenoi*) who carried out most of the trade between Greek cities, with perhaps the addition of indigenous Gallic and Iberian traders as well (see Dietler 2010: 131–56; Morley 2007). Their interests would have been quite different from both the people who produced the goods they were trafficking and those who consumed them. Moreover, once foreign traders became established residents at *emporia*, their interests would begin to diverge from the continually mobile traders who transported goods from different sources of production. The commodity chains that linked agents of production, distribution, and consumption in this case were far more fragmentary and disjointed in terms of knowledge and control than would be the case, for example, with the trade stations of the British East India Company. However, in both cases, these chains crossed different regimes of value that gave new meaning to the objects of trade.

It is also important to recognize that cross-cultural trade can occur along a coast, for example, without the necessity of fixed trade stations or even professional traders. Such activity can occur in the form of a ship-based "floater" trade, which, as William Fitzhugh (1985) noted, can even be practiced by sailors who are not full time merchants: for example, by fishermen who occasionally dabble in trading. With a floater trade, access to imports by local people may be sporadic and unpredictable. But ships frequently develop a habit of returning to the same locations because of a well-protected port or anchorage or because of the presence of an indigenous group with a reputation for hospitality and an interest in trading. This can even result in a shift in local population towards such a regularly frequented trade site even without the presence of resident alien traders, as in the case of Basque merchants in Labrador (Kaplan 1985).

In fact, it is often more advantageous for local people not to allow foreign merchants to settle on their land. As Robert Grumet noted in the case of the Tsimshian fur trade along the northwest coast of America, "time works against the trader" (Grumet 1984: 28–29). Merchants sitting in a ship at anchor, with limited supplies of food and water, are at a disadvantage in negotiating with people on land who can afford to wait. Both sides have options: those on land can stall until a ship's provisions are nearly exhausted and play upon the fear that another ship may arrive with competing goods, while the ship can threaten to sail off and trade elsewhere (if it has some knowledge of likely prospects at other locations). But established loci of trade benefit both sides: local people because they can control trade in imports toward the interior and have privileged access to the arrival of ships, and merchants because they have the assurance of a place where they know exchanges can be made easily with a receptive consumer community ready with goods to exchange.

As the volume of trade increases, competition between coastal settlements for access to such trade can sometimes even provoke hostilities between rivals (as happened with the Tsimshian case noted above), and this can be a reason for some local settlements to tolerate the installation of resident foreign traders within their community or on their territory. This assures the ability to control a permanent link to an external trade network. For seaborne traders, such permanent stations are important because, especially in the pre-modern world, they faced a variety of serious risks from weather, pirates, and uncertainty about supply and demand conditions because of slow information flows. As Neville Morley noted, several strategies were commonly used to counteract these risks (Morley 2007: 31). One was to carry very mixed cargoes in the hope that something in the ship would always be saleable in one location or another. Alternatively, one could cultivate a regular route, develop knowledge of the preferences and tastes of particular communities of consumers, establish relationships with them, and specialize in trading the particular goods that they knew would find a receptive market. The role of the *emporion* is precisely to aid this second strategy, by having resident merchants who can serve as cultural brokers, pass on knowledge about local demand to visiting ships, store unsold imported merchandise for later sale, stockpile goods for export while awaiting the arrival of ships, and provide credit that helps to smooth the fluctuations in supply and demand.

The potential development of such settled trade enclaves depends upon the level of competition between local groups for imported goods, the nature of the indigenous societies involved, and the level of competition between merchants. But these enclaves are not normally a feature of the first phase of encounter. Rather, they are a possible result of the acceleration of trade. When they develop, such *emporia* can be articulated through either an informal trade diaspora, a more loosely heterogeneous merchant network, or a formally chartered mercantile firm. As Curtin (1984) has shown through cross-cultural historical analysis, these trade diasporas and networks can be highly variable in form. But the presence of *emporia* normally implies a more structured network than a floater trade. This is because the resident merchants are specialists in a single type of economic activity, whereas the host group constitutes a complete society, with a full range of economic roles and social statuses. Hence, the resident traders are entirely dependent on their long distance relations for their existence: it is the regular influx of exotic goods that enables the continued toleration of their presence in the community. That situation can change in the case of *emporia* that are founded as independent clusters of traders outside the boundaries of indigenous settlements: over time the population of such *emporia* may grow and the range of economic and social roles may expand to resemble a normal town, albeit one with a traditionally trading orientation.

The relations of power between resident traders and hosts are also highly variable, but nearly always asymmetric (Curtin 1984: 5–6). Often, these merchants are treated as a pariah group: that is, with disdain, suspicion, and exploitation (such

sentiments are frequently attached to both the status of foreigner and the morally dubious role of merchant). In other cases, alien merchants find ways to integrate better, often by marriage with local people. Alternatively, many strive to maintain ethnic distinctiveness, and sometimes even to carve out a kind of autonomy as self-governing communities (as in the case of the Hausa of the Sahel in Africa). The extreme form of this is represented by the state-chartered European trading firms that set up militarized trade settlements in Africa and Asia from the 16th century on, and which, in some cases, were later converted into territorial empires (Tracy 1991). But the situation of trade enclaves was usually precarious. It was generally their task to learn something of the language, customs, and trade practices of their indigenous hosts and to serve as intercultural brokers.

Cross-cultural exchanges depend upon traders and consumers finding some way of negotiating to reconcile their competing systems of value and to agree over the relative valuation of particular items that are to change hands in particular contexts. Initial attempts at such exchanges are usually subject to a wide variety of misunderstandings (gift versus commodity expectations, for instance), inadvertent breaches of etiquette, and conflict. But increasing habituation to such interactions results in the working out of systems of communication, cultural interpretation, and accommodation that smooth the process. Often this involves a process of mutual creative *misunderstanding* that can produce new meaning and new practices for both parties, of the kind that Richard White (1991) described in his analysis of "middle ground" situations. Frequently, it also involves the development of different types of hybrid vehicular trade languages known as *pidgins*, *creoles*, and *koines*, such as *Kiswahili* in East Africa, *Lingala* in the Congo and *Fiji Hindustani* (Dietler 2017; Mufwene 1997). The presence of resident traders at indigenous settlements serving as cultural brokers aids this process, not least through the formation of social relationships that can anchor networks of exchange, stabilize flows of goods, and enable the extension of credit. Individual exchanges always involve negotiations over the relative value of the specific items involved, but these can be increasingly carried out within the framework of mutually accepted sets of practices and understandings of value and commensurability.

It is also important to point out that *emporia* can either connect alien merchant networks with very local communities of indigenous consumers living around the enclave, or serve as points of articulation with indigenous trade networks extending far inland. In the latter case, the *emporion* serves as a meeting place of two or more alien trade networks, and each set of merchants may have no knowledge of the places where their goods are ultimately consumed (and perhaps little interest beyond comprehending the demand of their trading counterparts). Sometimes, the presence of coastal *emporia* may even provoke the genesis, expansion, or reorientation of indigenous networks. The case of the inland trade networks that brought slaves and gold to the European coastal enclaves of West Africa to feed the trans-Atlantic slave trade is a well-known example. Gray and Birmingham (1970) offer an interesting contrast between the *Lozi* of Zambia, where the arrival of European merchants fueled the rapid expansion of inland trade, and the *Kongo* kingdom, where Portuguese merchants arrived at the mouth of the Congo river to find already in place a vast inland trade network with its own currency system.

Aspects of the technology of trade are also significant in understanding the processes that take place at *emporia*. These include especially the media of exchange, the nature of the goods exchanged, and the means of transport. For example, one common feature of trade enclaves is that they frequently link monetary and non-monetary regimes of value—or systems with different kinds of currencies. This was the case, for instance, in Iron Age Mediterranean France, where it is clear that indigenous societies operated for centuries with a non-monetized economy in which exchanges were transacted through barter. In one segment of the commodity chain, merchants operated in a monetized economy, where they depended on the use of money to hire ships and purchase cargo. They then traded that cargo through *emporia* in France to indigenous people for products that they could later reconvert to money back in the monetized sector (Dietler 2010: 131–56). In colonial America, European money was meaningless to the native Americans of the northeastern woodlands, and merchants found that trade with them was impossible until the merchants discovered the native system of *wampum* valuables (made of shell beads). The Dutch and English then began to have wampum manufactured in workshops and treated it like a specialized trade currency (although this was not precisely the way Native Americans conceptualized it), which they could use to acquire pelts and other goods that could later be converted to currency in European markets (Rothschild 2006; Shlasko 1992). Similarly, in West Africa, traders had to negotiate currency zones in which imported cowries remained for a long time the preferred medium of exchange and some spheres where most exchanges were in the form of barter in kind (Saul 2004). Currency frontiers of this kind, including especially the intersection of barter and monetized economies, are significant not only because they entail differences in the ways that people calculate value, but also because general purpose monies act as a store of value that can serve as a kind of credit device and ease fluctuations in the supply of goods. *Emporia* are precisely kinds of spaces where these issues get worked out, and they can serve as laboratories for the transformation of systems of valuation.

3 Consumption

Given these reflections on the process of cross-cultural exchange, the fundamental question must be asked: why would people be interested in trading for alien goods in the first place? What is the logic of demand for objects that explains the willingness of people to accept foreign traders in their territory and the willingness of such traders to travel great distances at considerable risk?

One thing is clear: demand is never a simple or automatic response to the presence of goods. The history of trade is replete with examples of foreign merchants who had enormous difficulty in getting people to engage in exchanges for the goods they were peddling. Until the traders were able to

figure out what kinds of things people wanted and what they were willing to give in exchange, their approaches were met with indifference or hostility. For instance, I have already mentioned the problems Dutch and English traders faced in trying to trade with Native Americans until they discovered the demand for wampum (Rothschild 2006; Shlasko 1992). Similarly, Europeans first attempting to trade for pigs to provision their ships in the Marquesas reported great difficulties in persuading the local people to part with them. The Marquesans valued their pigs (which were important for ceremonial feasts) far more than the iron axes and hatchets the Europeans were willing to offer in exchange. They could only be induced to give up pigs in return for sheep (regarded as a special kind of pig) and birds (the feathers of which were used in ceremonial regalia); and the Europeans were unwilling to part with these items (Thomas 1991: 95–97). In like manner, during the early days of the Sino-British encounter, British diplomats and salesmen were perplexed by the fact that the Chinese failed to be impressed by, or to crave, the European guns and gadgets they were offering. It was only when they discovered the Chinese desire for sandalwood, and later opium, that they were able to open significant trade flows to satisfy the insatiable demand for tea on the English market (Sahlins 1999).

Demand is always a product of a specific social and cultural logic that results in culturally distinctive tastes and values and socially situated understandings of utility. In a sense, the attempts of archaeologists to understand *emporia* places us in the same situation as ancient merchants trying to initiate exchanges: we need to figure out the nature of desires, tastes, and regimes of value in different segments of commodity chains. These traders were specialists in mediating different realms of demand. They were cultural brokers who earned a profit by learning to understand the logic of different markets and moving appropriate goods among them. Fortunately, the anthropology of consumption provides us with an extensive comparative theoretical literature to help us in this endeavor (Dietler 2010, 2010a; Miller 1995; Mullins 2011).

Consumption, in the sense that it has come to be understood within anthropology, is never simply a satisfaction of utilitarian needs; nor can it be viewed simply as the final stage in a purely economic process, as an epiphenomenon of production (as it tends to be regarded in neoclassical micro-economic theory). Rather, it is a symbolic activity deeply embedded in social relations and cultural conceptions. But it is also a profoundly material practice. It cannot be reduced to the circulation of pure signs in an exclusively semiotic form of analysis that is divorced from consideration of the relations of power in which they are embedded or that ignores the crucial material dimension of the goods being consumed.

In the case of *emporia*, an anthropological approach to consumption leads us directly to the question: to what social conditions and opportunities and to what cultural values and dispositions was the consumption of alien goods a response? The answer to this question demands that we look 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, one must also address the equally crucial 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?

In dealing with the properties of things, one can begin by making a few basic distinctions: for example, whether the goods consumed are of a singular or a standardized character (See Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). 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 artwork in French museums and homes, or Kula valuables in the Trobriands, or bronze wine-mixing vessels in Hallstatt 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 boxes of Havana cigars, bottles of Coca Cola, or amphorae of Massalian wine? 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 as they circulated in very limited quantities. And amphorae of Massalian wine may have been common standardized commodities in southern France, but more singular valuables as they circulated further north in Burgundy. Moreover, finished goods in one context may be viewed simply as raw material in another, as with the Native American practices of chopping up European copper kettles to make their own jewelry and other implements (Turgeon 1997) or modifying gun barrels for use as flutes and tent stakes (Lohse 1988). 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 eighteenth century Hawaiian chiefs and Kawakiutl 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 (Sahlins 1999: xii.). 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.

An anthropological approach to consumption also requires reflection on a few other key concepts, beginning with culture. Rather than viewing culture as simply an inheritance from the past, it is important to recognize that it is also a kind of perpetual project. 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 through a creative process of structured improvisation. Among those problems/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 operates according to a specific cultural logic, but it also has a continual transformative effect in the reproduction of culture.

Consumption is structured by cultural categories and dispositions, but culture is also constructed through consumption (Comaroff J.L., Comaroff J. 1997). This statement implies two things. In the first place, objects "materialize" cultural order—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 (Baudrillard 1998; Bourdieu 1984; Douglas, Isherwood 1978). 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 (Bourdieu 1984). But more than simply reproducing static systems of cultural categories, consumption constructs culture in a more dynamic sense; and this is especially relevant to the issue of cross-cultural consumption (Howes 1996a). In effect, consumption is a process of structured improvisation that continually materializes cultural order by also dealing with alien objects and practices through either transformative appropriation and assimilation or rejection.

This understanding of culture enables one to recognize that the adoption of foreign goods and practices does not result in "deculturation"; nor does it render cultures inauthentic, incoherent, or imitative. As 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" (Sahlins 1999: xi). Moreover, cultural continuity usually consists of the distinctive ways that cultures change (Sahlins 1993:2). 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.

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" (Comaroff J.L., Comaroff J. 1997: 218). 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 generally mistaken belief that the use of particular objects or technologies would inherently induce certain kinds of desired behavior. For example, clothing played a very important role in the strategies of European missionaries to alter the mentalities of indigenous peoples in various parts of the world. Christian missionaries in the Pacific tried to use clothing as a means of transforming Samoan and Tahitian moral consciousness and instilling new concepts of work discipline, temporality, and gender relations (Thomas 2002). Similarly, among the Tswana in South Africa, both clothing and architecture served as vehicles for attempts by missionaries to inculcate European concepts of domesticity and bodily discipline. However, contrary to the plan, they became sites of struggle as the Tswana used these new material forms as an expressive language to structure identity in new ways and contest colonial categories and aesthetics (Comaroff J.L., Comaroff J. 1997). As this case suggests, such strategies to use material objects as vectors of control always have unintended consequences for all the parties concerned.

This leads to a further paradoxical point that needs to be emphasized: far from being signs of "acculturation," imported objects or practices can become salient symbolic markers of the boundaries of identity between consumers and the society of origin. Their use can expose in a highly condensed way the fundamental "misunderstandings" of values, aesthetics, and appropriate behavior that peoples from different cultures bring to their use of common objects. A striking example is the use of alcoholic beverages when foreigners drink together, as different ideas about proper etiquette, taste, and inebriated behavior suddenly expose cultural boundaries in a ritual that is supposed to create social bonds. Foodways offer another example, as different culinary techniques and temporalities of consumption can turn the same ingredients into foods that are distinctive ethnic markers (Dietler 2010: 183–256). And, as anyone who has navigated the "proper" setting of cutlery in France, Germany, England, and the USA can attest, the same utensils can create a sudden feeling of cultural strangeness simply by their placement and styles of use.

The issue of boundaries is a subject that also demands some clarification in discussing cross-cultural consumption and identity. It should be obvious by now that I am not advocating the old reified organic model of culture as a homogeneous entity with rigid boundaries that was common in the structural-functionalist period of anthropology. Rather, the processual understanding of culture outlined earlier implies a great deal of fluidity and socially differentiated embodiment of cultural categories, dispositions, and tastes. Moreover, it is clear that, from an analytical perspective, social and cultural boundaries do not necessarily involve spatial discreteness

or segregation. Rather, they are symbolically constituted and contextually defined and invoked, often with variable indexical attributes. Yet, for individuals, such boundaries have great affective importance and are often seen as clear and distinct, and group identities are often perceived in ways that make them seem primordial and stable, even as they are rapidly changing. In *emporion* contexts and colonial situations, such boundaries may be more distinctly perceived (in either emic or etic terms) at certain periods in the history of an encounter than at others, they may be very differently perceived by different parties in the encounter, and they may undergo significant transformations. Hence, the term cross-cultural, as used here, implies a sense of difference (in terms of categorical perceptions, dispositions to action, etc.) but not necessarily separation, discreteness, or stability. The boundaries in such processes are always subject to definition within specific contexts and they are always an evolving relational phenomenon. But perceived boundaries, both social and cultural, have real effects.

Trade communities such as *emporia* are important precisely because they are the concentrated spaces of inter-cultural communication and negotiation where cultural differences are worked out through contrasting logics of consumption, where alien goods, practices, and ideas traverse different regimes of value, and where boundaries are reified, broken down, or transformed into new configurations and new identities. For this reason, trade settlements have often been the vanguard of the development of colonial relations, in the same way that missionary stations have been in modern European colonialism.

4 Entanglement

As noted above, consumption of foreign goods entails consequences, both intended and unintended. *Entanglement* is a term I use to delineate those consequences that draw people and societies together into new cultural, political, and economic relationships (see Dietler 1997, 1998, 2002, 2010). This highly contingent process has a wide variety of possible transformative effects, depending upon the specific nature and history of entanglement. But the point of invoking this concept is to push scholars to pay attention to the ways in which cultural practices have political and economic consequences, and *vice versa*.

My use of the term grew out of dissatisfaction with concepts such as creolization and hybridity that were developed in postcolonial theory to explain the kinds of cultural fusions that occurred as a result of colonialism. I have a number of objections to these concepts as analytical tools (see Dietler 2010: 51–52; Palmié 2006), but here I want to emphasize especially the problem that they tend to frame the effects of colonialism in predominantly cultural terms. Entanglement, in contrast, is intended to direct attention precisely to the multiple ways in which actions in the cultural sphere simultaneously transform economic and political relations and ensnare people in new structures of economic and political power. And vice versa, of course: the process of entanglement is a complex relational phenomenon that entails a history of intended and unintended consequences in which no single domain of life has a privileged causal status.

Entanglement also stands in contrast to world-systems analysis, which attracted some popularity in prior archaeological analyses of trade and colonialism. World-systems theory was also interested in larger structures of economic and political power, but it tended to have an economically determined telos in which culture was largely viewed as an epi-phenomenon, if it was considered at all. It also had a preordained center-periphery structure, whereas entanglement is a process without a pre-determined form. Instead of inferring certain processes of domination and dependence by looking for signs of a predictable recurrent structure, entanglement focuses analysis on process as a way of revealing a variety of possible emergent and contingent structures in empirical contexts.

The term entanglement has recently acquired greater currency in archaeological and anthropological discussions of material culture and colonialism, but sometimes with a very different meaning than the way I conceive it (for example, Hodder 2012; Versluys 2014). Hence, to avoid potential confusion, let me briefly open a parenthetical explanation of what I mean by entanglement and how it differs from some other uses of the term. Let me say that I am not particularly interested in the kind of buzzword branding that we see far too much of in the field, but I do feel the need to intervene here at some length in a situation that has shown signs of rapid muddling.

Let me first point out the distinction between my own approach and that recently published by Ian Hodder (2012). Hodder's purported theory of entanglement can be viewed as essentially a rebranded variant of Bruno Latour's (2005) Actor Network Theory (ANT), and I am not a fan of either. In my opinion, there is a significant danger in attributing agency to objects, as ANT does, in networks of human and non-human *actants*. The danger is that this both trivializes the concept of agency and, most importantly, depoliticizes analysis by obscuring relations of power. But in studying the effects of trade, which have frequently led to the emergence of colonial situations and other asymmetrical relationships, relations of power should be at the center of our analytical concerns. This is one of the reasons why I find ANT, and Hodder's entanglement version of it, to be dangerously inappropriate in such contexts.

To explain this critique in a little more detail, I would suggest that the elevation of material objects to positions of agency creates an unduly myopic focus on the relationship between people and things in a way that replicates the kind of fetishization of the commodity that Marx was so concerned to explode in his analysis of capitalism (*Capital*: v. 1, p. 1, s. 4). In other words, it misidentifies and mystifies relations of power between people (which are mediated by objects) by representing them as if they were a relationship between people and objects. To use a concrete example, I would cite the case of speed bumps in the road often invoked by Latour and other ANT advocates. From my point of view, the fact that speed bumps force drivers to slow down is true, but also rather trivial. By focusing on the power of speed bumps to alter the behavior of drivers, ANT deflects attention from the

crucial issue, which is to understand who had the power to have speed bumps installed in the first place, and what the selection and use of this particular kind of material thing tells us about relations of economic and political power that connect drivers, property owners, politicians, taxpayers, and construction contractors. Why do some streets in some neighborhoods get speed bumps and not others? That is the location of non-trivial agency. Talking about the agency of speed bumps may be a sort of amusing thought exercise, but it doesn't really get us very far if we want to understand the power relations that determine the control of movement in public space.

This kind of belief in the magical power of material objects and the erasure of human power relations is similarly reflected in Chris Gosden's (2004: 3–4) description of colonialism as being "essentially a relationship with material culture" and his further definition of colonialism as "a particular grip that material culture gets on the bodies and minds of people". I would suggest that this constitutes an uncritical swallowing of one of the central conceits of capitalism, and it falls deeply into the trap of commodity fetishism. Employing Gosden's perspective, capitalism could just as easily be described as "essentially a relationship with material culture". But this notion would hide the exploitative power of bankers, corporate CEOs, lobbyists, and politicians (and their relationship to workers) behind a chimerical sway that objects come to exert on consumers. Just like the mystical invocation of the "invisible hand of the market" by neoliberal economists, this serves the interests of those in positions of power by removing them from the field of analysis and engaging in a perverse form of myopic reductionism. Material culture is certainly very important in colonial situations, but it must be understood in a radically different way; and I think we have to be very careful not to get swept away on a wave of enthusiasm for an intellectual fashion that involves a kind of dangerous magical thinking about the agency of objects.

Despite much else of interest in the article, the depoliticization problem to which this kind of "human-thing entanglements" fetishism easily leads is exemplified in especially glaring form in a recent piece by Miguel Versluys (2014) on the subject of Romanization. Building a case for a thing-centric perspective leads him to statements such as "If Roman archaeology were prehistory, Roman imperialism would be quite invisible in the archaeological record" (2014: 15). This is false, of course. But even if it were true, what is the point of blinding ourselves by ignoring evidence that is not strictly non-textual material culture (and texts are, after all, also material culture)? We might as well state that, if Roman archaeology were prehistory, slavery would be invisible in the archaeological record. This is actually truer than Versluys' statement, but also highlights the stunning irrelevance of this counterfactual game. Should we really ignore slavery and simply make this a story about material culture? As Versluys goes on to state: "A mind map of Rome in material culture terms is therefore not first and foremost about military conquest or about empire building in terms of imperialism and colonialism at all." Perhaps this simply illustrates that "a mind map of Rome in material culture terms" is not a very good way to understand history and relations of power, especially if it leads to the suggestion to ignore the fact that we know from a variety of sources of evidence that the Roman Empire was the direct product of territorial conquest by large armies, and that those wars of conquest resulted in the deaths of millions of people and the enslavement of millions more.

Thing fetishism leads to other surprising statements as well, such as the proposition that we may "see colonization as just one out of many more forms (and degrees) of connectivity," and "It is the degree of connectivity that matters when understanding 'material agency'"(Versluys 2014: 17). What about the hugely asymmetrical structures of political and economic power, the instruments of mass violence, and the tangled web of human agents that underlay the formation and evolution of the Roman Imperial world? I don't see how a focus on connectivity and material agency gets us even close to these questions—and, in fact, they lead us dangerously astray into a dreamworld where power, exploitation, and violence no longer matter. The analysis of Versluys ultimately sails perilously into the waters of functionalism, when it proposes that we should "think about the Roman world as a device trying to handle all these objects in motion" and asks if the prominence of things from the eastern Mediterranean within the system "might be the reason why the Roman Empire, as a device to handle objects in motion, eventually had to move east and make Constantinople its new capital?" (Versluys 2014:18).

This brief parenthetical discussion is not meant to be a polemic against Latour, Hodder, and Versluys, but rather a clarification of different meanings of entanglement. It is meant to emphasize that I am not advocating a program of analysis that focuses on "human-thing entanglements" or networks of human and non-human agents (or *actants*). Rather, my focus is on the ways that people use things to construct social relationships and how that process entangles them in complex webs of transforming cultural, economic, and political forces. Entanglement, in my sense, is the often unintended consequence of rather mundane acts of ordinary social life. I would argue that what we definitely do not need is a "non-anthropocentric approach", of the kind advocated by Latour and his followers, but rather a *fully* anthropocentric approach in which we recognize that material culture is made and used by humans according to culturally constructed moral, utilitarian, and aesthetic dispositions and socially situated desires, resulting in a host of unanticipated consequences.

As should be obvious, my own development of this quite different concept of entanglement grew out of a very different set of theoretical references. In brief, I share with Pierre Bourdieu a fundamental interest in the ways that practice both reproduces and transforms structures of power and exploitation and his conception of a kind of situated human agency located within social fields (for example, Bourdieu 1984, 1990). My approach is also deeply grounded in the historical anthropology of colonialism and consumption, especially as practiced by Marshall Sahlins (1993, 1994, 1999, 2004), John and Jean Comaroff (1992, 1997), and Nicholas Thomas (1991, 2002). In fact, it was the latter's 1991 book *Entangled Objects* that first got me thinking about the theme of entanglement.

Given this long preamble, how does the concept of entanglement help us to investigate and understand *emporia*? As noted above, I use it as a kind of analytical lens to focus attention on the unanticipated consequences of simple acts of social and economic exchange. I am interested, for example, in the ways in which decisions about the cross-cultural consumption of objects and practices—decisions based upon specific socially situated and culturally constructed logics of value and desire—can entangle people in complex unintended webs of social, economic, and political relations. I am interested in how asymmetries of power can emerge from situations that did not originally entail domination, and how all parties to such processes of entanglement become transformed. This means that analysis cannot be simply about *cultural entanglement*—the way that engagement with alien cultural logics transforms ones own cultural dispositions (although that is certainly a very important part of the story). Rather, one must seek to understand how cultural processes are interwoven with economic and political power, and how action in any one of these analytical domains implicates the others. This approach mandates that the material dimensions of consumption must be investigated in a way that goes well beyond the semiotic circulation of material signs that informs most of the recent "materiality" literature (e.g. Miller 2005; and see the critique of Ingold 2007). One needs to profoundly interrogate how consumption is articulated with the material basis of human life (that is, the means and relations of production, in Marxian terms), as these are very often in the balance in the development of colonial situations.

Emporia, trade enclaves, trading posts, and the like are frequently the nodal points at which cross-cultural trade is concentrated and facilitated, at least in the early stages of encounters. They are the restricted zones of contact at which different regimes of value and social logics of demand intersect, and where merchants often serve as cultural brokers in exchanges of goods and services. Hence, they are the locations at which processes of entanglement begin to unfold as a result of consumption choices made by small groups of people.

Those processes can involve a wide range of transformations, some of which I have already mentioned in the earlier discussion of exchange and consumption, including the expansion and reorientation of indigenous trade networks, people being caught up in increasing levels of violence, and the mutation of state-chartered trade firms into militarized mercantile empires that acquire sovereignty over territory. But many other effects have been documented. One is the gradual creation of economic or political dependencies, which can be mutual or asymmetric. For example, an escalating desire for imported goods in the host community of an *emporion*—a desire stemming from local cultural tastes and judgments of social utility—can lead to a gradual reorientation of local production towards goods sought by merchants in exchange. This can also transform the scale of production from one geared largely toward local subsistence into one focused on surplus production for export, including sometimes shifts toward monofocal cash crops that replace polycrop agriculture or the diversion of labor into mining, logging, slave-raiding, or other such activities. Trader networks can also create mutual dependencies between different sectors of commodity chains, for instance where one society comes to depend on the production of agricultural surplus or other raw materials to secure desired manufactured goods and another society that lacks adequate land to feed a growing population may come to depend on the production of manufactured goods to acquire food staples and other raw materials. In cases of politically centralized polities where local chiefs or kings begin to use imported objects in systems of redistribution, access to these goods can gradually affect the stability of political systems. But even in societies without centralized leadership, imported goods are often incorporated into local forms of status competition (feasting, for example) to the point that they cause an escalation of such competition and the emergence of dependency on exotic goods for the operation of political leadership.

Cross-cultural consumption can also create new alliances of interest that cut across cultural and social boundaries in unexpected ways and provoke new lines of tension and conflict in communities. It can also alter the context and meaning of consumption in ways that disrupt existing social relations.

The trade in alcohol in Africa provides a good example of the complexities of such processes. This began as a trade operated through European trading settlements in which wine, brandy, and rum were exchanged for slaves and gold. By the 19th century, the expanding colonial states in most regions came to rely upon taxes on alcohol for both a substantial part of their operating revenues (Akyeampong 1996; Crush, Ambler 1992; Diduk 1993; Heap 2002; Pan 1975) and for the mobilization and pacification of a native labor force (Crush, Ambler 1992; Diduk 1993; Holtzman 2001; Suggs, Lewis 2003). At the same time, anxiety about the effects of alcohol in producing an unruly subject population and disrupting work discipline also became pervasive. Moreover, the prevalence of a strong temperance ideology among Protestant missionaries led to both political agitation for state limitations on alcohol and direct attempts to influence African drinking practices and beliefs through religious conversion. The result of these conflicting forces was that alcohol became a constant subject of colonial legislation and (usually unsuccessful) attempts to control native consumption and production of alcohol while promoting the sale of revenue-producing imported varieties or state monopolies. At the same time, the alcohol trade produced a gradual shift toward the commercialization of alcohol and toward new contexts of consumption outside the traditional ritual sphere that governed such things as beer and palm wine, and this often began to alter the cultural meaning of drinking. These new contexts of consumption (beer halls, shebeens, etc.) were often seen by the colonial state as potential centers of subversive politics. Shifting alcohol from ritual to market contexts also sometimes set off conflict between generations and genders (as senior men felt their power challenged by liberalized access to a potent political symbol and tool), women used the new possibilities of commercialization to acquire independent economic capital, and frictions emerged between traditionalists and Christian converts over the use of alcohol. This process also sometimes produced curious alliances of interest, as in the case of senior women and young male drinkers uniting in opposition to

official alcohol restrictions in Windhoek (Gewald 2002), or in the case of colonial officials enacting restrictive liquor laws in Ghana, despite the loss of considerable revenues, in order to support the desire of local chiefs for selective access to alcohol and to shore up the social control of these senior men upon whom the state depended for maintaining order (Akyeampong 1996). Commoditization has also frequently altered the cultural meaning of drinking towards the celebration of individual prowess and away from community cooperation, and introduced new symbols of status distinction (such as the emergence of traditionalist and cosmopolitan factions). The continuities and transformative play on traditional symbols can be very complex in such situations (see Bryceson 2002; Suggs 1996).

The patterns of consumption stemming from the operation of *emporia* can also have significant demographic effects. Perhaps the most dramatic of these was the West African slave trade, in which the desire for guns, alcohol, and other goods by indigenous rulers near the European trade settlements led them to decimate large sectors of the interior in the search for slaves that could be brought to these ports and traded with European merchants. This then resulted in millions of slaves being shipped through other segments of the commodity chain in the Americas to work the sugar plantations that fed the escalating demand of the English working class for sugar and rum and produced vast quantities of rum that were shipped back to Africa in exchange for more slaves (Curtin 1969; Matthee 1995; Smith 2001). But smaller scale effects are also common, such as shifts in Inuit population in response to trade contacts by European whalers and traders (Gulløv 1985; Kaplan 1985).

One could produce a long list of other kinds of large-scale entanglements that stemmed from choices made by small groups of consumers. But this series of reflections was not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, it was meant to suggest why an approach to *emporia* focused on the entangling consequences of exchange and consumption can help us to understand their significance in the developmental history of colonial situations and other broad structures of economic and political power. It was also meant to suggest heuristic strategies for teasing out both the kinds of activities, choices, and logics that trade entails in local contexts and the ways one can begin to discern the complex processes of entanglement that follow from trade. Throughout history, *emporia* have been one of the most important kinds of incubator through which the local becomes global.

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