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Koinon, Polis and Ethnos: A New Historical View of Ancient Greece from Their Relationships

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This book is a study of a type of community known as a koinon (pl. koina) in ancient Greece. The traditional view of ancient Greek history has focused on poleis, which were understood within the framework of the modern nation-state, but since the 1990s, some studies have criticised this understanding and focused instead on communities, one of which being a koinon, rather than poleis. Koinon is typically translated as a “federal state”, even though many aspects of koina differ from those of modern federal states. In this book, I elucidate the relationship between koina, which I regard as a unique type of community in ancient Greece, and its member poleis and other groups under its influence. By doing so, I aim to outline an ancient Greek history that includes not only poleis, but also koina.

As explained in the introduction, J. A. O. Larsen, who laid the basis for the study of koina in a book published in 1969, argued that tribal states (ethne) developed poleis or koina. His argument, however, has been undermined by more recent studies. For example, because the Copenhagen Polis Centre revealed that autonomia (independence) is not a requirement of the polis, we need not distinguish member poleis of a koinon from independent poleis. Then, emerging studies of ethnicity suggested that ethno-identities survived even under other communities such as koina, so we should not regard communities based on ethnic identities like ethnos as only primitive and undeveloped. Following this trend, koina were studied by scholars such as E. Mackil and H. Beck; however, the relationships between koina, poleis and ethne remain somewhat unclear. In this book, I reconsider the relationships between these communities to enable a more comprehensive understanding of koina in ancient Greece.

To accomplish this, in Part I (Chapters 1–4), I examine three koina that were formed in Boeotia, Aetolia, and Achaea. In Chapter 1, I analyse the meaning of “autonomia” in the Boeotian koinon. From the second half of the fifth century B.C., autonomia was used as a verbal counter-measure against the Boeotian koinon, which threatened the independence of its member poleis. The meaning of autonomia as “independence” was established in the King’s Peace in 386 B.C., which specified the securing of independence for all poleis in Greece. Under this treaty, the Boeotian koinon was dissolved because participation in a koinon was regarded as violation of the King’s Peace. However, the Boeotian koinon was rebuilt in 378 B.C. as the King’s Peace and other treaties, called Koine Eirene, which were often concluded in the middle of the fourth century B.C. and included the same stipulations as the King’s Peace, were disregarded. As a result, the meaning of autonomia as “independence”, gradually became nominal. Since the Koine Eirene concluded at Corinth in 338 B.C., its meaning changed to “autonomy” under greater powers such as Macedonia, Rome, and koinon. This change demonstrates the latent confrontation between koina and their member poleis, and became an issue when the tension between them heightened.

In Chapter 2, the relationship between koina and their member poleis is considered from the perspective of citizenship. A citizen of a member polis in a koinon had two citizenships, namely, those of the polis and the koinon. Such dual citizenship is one of the most distinctive features of koina, as described by Larsen. What is important in studying this dual citizenship is that two citizenships were not independent
of each other, but rather, overlapping. For example, an individual who was a citizen of a member polis could participate in an assembly of its koinon, while another individual who was a citizen of a koinon could own land within the territory of all its member poleis. In widely accepted accounts, no permission was needed to exercise these overlapping rights. In other words, both citizenships were automatically linked with each other. J. Rzepka, however, analysed cases concerning double citizenship in the Aetolian koinon and opposed these accepted accounts. He argued that even individuals with dual citizenship needed permission from each community when they wished to exercise overlapping rights. I re-examine the sources used by Rzepka and conclude that permission was needed in some, but not all cases. For example, being a citizen of Naupaktos was automatically linked with being a citizen of the Aetolian koinon in a case involving isopoliteia (StV III 508). These two different cases are understood as a change in institutions concerning citizenship, which correspond to changes in the diplomatic policy of the Aetolian koinon.

When the Aetolian koinon was most powerful in the middle of the third century B.C., no permission was needed to exercise these overlapping rights because the Aetolians could easily and quickly make diplomatic connections with foreign communities by allowing its member poleis to grant citizenship, which was automatically linked with the citizenship of the koinon. However, when the Aetolian koinon gradually declined from the end of the third century B.C. and the diplomatic circumstances around it worsened, the koinon adapted its institutions to deal with the situation, so that permission to exercise these overlapping rights was needed. In other words, the koinon severed the automatic link between citizenships. This change in regard to dual citizenship in the Aetolian koinon indicates that the koinon and member poleis made use of their overlap and mutually influenced their institutions of citizenship; this relationship can be considered a type of symbiosis.

Chapter 3 focuses on the relationship between koina and ethne through an analysis of the allotment of officials in the Achaean koinon. Th. Corsten and other scholars have argued that the allotment of nomographoi to member poleis in the Achaean koinon was based on districts (synteleia). However, the sources that argument was based on were dubious, and it seems at least that synteleia in the Achaean koinon did not function as military or taxing districts. Analysing where all officials of the koinon, including nomographoi, came from, I suggest that the allotment was based on ethne as communities mainly sharing regional identities. Since more officials were allotted to a leading polis in each ethnos in the Achaean koinon compared with other member poleis, it can be considered that the Achaean koinon attempted to integrate ethne through their leading poleis, which resulted in integrating even other member poleis in ethne. Ethne survived and continued to have their own identities under the koinon, so tension might have existed between the koinon and ethne, such as in Lacedaemon and Messenia. Taking this in consideration, the koinon therefore needed to push for integration.

Chapter 4 discusses what roles the koinon and ethnos played in settling the conflicts of its member poleis. Although Larsen and S. Ager attempted to describe the initiative of koinon in settling such conflicts, few cases in which a koinon settled conflicts directly were available, according to my analysis. In other cases, member poleis had the initiative to settle conflicts and could rely on practices such as international arbitration by other communities outside the koinon or attempt to settle conflicts within their own ethne.
Member poleis had many means to settle conflicts and could select the best means for such a purpose quickly and favourably. This was profitable for the koinon because direct settlement by the koinon might open up cracks in its relationships with member poleis, especially with the unconvinced. Koina settled conflicts directly when they could influence its institutions and maintained good relations with member poleis by keeping its hands off conflicts between member poleis as much as possible. On the other hand, koina supported member poleis in disputes with outside communities, which enabled the koinon to announce publicly that the member poleis were within its sphere of influence. Many means for settling conflicts coexisted in koina. Even though the Boeotian koinon had a stronger initiative to settle conflicts than did other koina, this does not mean that member poleis were unfamiliar with practices such as international arbitration because the koinon itself took part in the practice. Settlement within ethne was also an effective means and could function to contain unwanted intervention by koina.

Through these four chapters in Part I, a new relationship, different from Larsen’s argument, among koina, their member poleis and ethne is proposed. Koina coexisted with not only their member poleis, but also their ethne. They were sometimes confronted by its member poleis over independence and had to integrate ethne carefully. On the other hand, member poleis and ethne were not influenced one-sidedly by koina. For example, diplomatic connections between member poleis and the foreign community were important for the koinon, and institutions of citizenship in the koinon originated from that of its member poleis. Member poleis also had the initiative to settle conflicts. Ethne were utilised for the allotment of officials in the koinon, and a polis belonging to the same ethnos could settle conflicts better than could the koinon; they also influenced the koinon and its institutions. This relationship is converted into a model I refer to as the “multilayered communities model”, which clarifies the features of each koinon discussed in Part I. Koina are communities based on various relations of poleis and ethne. I believe that these relationships were integral to the koinon.

In Part II, changes in and receptions of koina after the Hellenistic period are discussed. Although koina in ancient Greece lost their political independence under Roman rule, their relationship with poleis and ethne, the substance of koina, did not disappear. Changes in the Lycian koinon in Asia Minor are considered in Chapter 5. The role and official organization in the Lycian koinon changed considerably under Roman rule. Based on their inscriptions of honorific decrees, however, the Lycian people intended to keep the framework of the koinon before Roman rule, even as late as the second century A.D. The connection with koina in the past was recognized by the Lycian people at that time as an effective means to display their honours. The koina in the past were considered “a tradition” in the Roman period.

Chapter 6 focuses on koina on the Greek mainland under Roman rule. It is thought that, although they were dissolved after being defeated by the Roman, they were rebuilt under Roman rule. These rebuilt koina were quite conscious of their inheritance from koina in the past. For example, the traditional games and festivals that had been held in the Hellenistic period were reorganised under the rebuilt koina. On the other hand, they had to adjust themselves to Roman rule. One such adjustment was the foundation of “Panachaea”, which consisted of some rebuilt koina, including the Achaean and Boeotian koina, and this seemed to have functioned like an organisation to contact for negotiations with Rome on behalf of the
Greeks. In the second century A.D., those who had connections with Rome served as important officials and priests of an imperial cult in koina. We can also recognize, for the first time, a case in which such local elites held offices in two koina. The roles of koina in the Roman period primarily involved managing games and festivals and conferring honours. In other words, the koinon was the place where local elites could receive honours. At the same time, the officials and great figures of the koinon in the past were referred to in honorific inscriptions to emphasize the glory of the honoured. Therefore, the history of the koinon was also a resource of honour.

The considerations given in Chapters 5 and 6 show that the “multilayered communities model” can be applied to koina in the Roman period, and even that Rome can be placed within it. This means that the substance of koina, that is, the various relations of poleis and ethne, continued and was seen under Roman rule, despite their loss of political independence. The “multilayered communities model” has the potential to characterize relationships among various communities throughout ancient times, including the Roman period.

The subject of Chapter 7 is the reception of koina in the modern world. In ancient times, there was little recognition that koina were unique communities, and early signs of such recognition were barely seen in Polybius, suggested by G. A. Lehmann. Because of this imperfect recognition, koina in ancient Greece were referred to conveniently in discussions involving the Constitution of the United States, which was a new type of community, namely, a federal state, and therefore different from koina. Particularly in The Federalist, which is now a classical work in American political thought, koina were estimated highly as an archetype of modern federal states. This influenced the establishment of recognition that the koinon in ancient Greece was a kind of federal state, and this recognition fixed the course of study on koina. Recent studies have come to regard the koinon as a unique community in ancient Greece, as noted in the introduction, but it is inevitable that such studies be restricted by contemporary influence. The foundation and development of the European Union, which is not regarded as modern national-state, but rather, as a unique community, particularly influenced contemporary studies of koina. How should the Greek koinon be viewed today? Through a comparison between koina and the European Union from the perspective of the theory of multilevel governance, I propose to take the present-day influence into account and venture to make good use of it. By regarding contemporary influence as a shared interest, studies on koina in ancient Greece can contribute to the discussion among scholars who study other periods or disciplines.

Part II shows that the Greek koinon was involved with subsequent historical development. The potential of studying koinon signifies not only the study of ancient Greek history, but also that of the classics and history as a whole.

The book concludes by noting that koina coexisted with its member poleis and ethne, and these were closely related; therefore, they often influenced and sometimes confronted each other. These various relationships were integral to the koinon. The “multilayered communities model” is proposed to offer a way to gain a better understanding of these new relationships and historical viewpoints. It also clarifies how koina kept their substance under Roman rule. Although the koinon was a unique community in ancient Greece, it was conveniently received in United States in the latter part of the eighteenth century and in the
European Union today; the way to view *koina* varies depending on the time, society, and position of the individual. Therefore, this book, by studying the *koinon* in ancient Greece, offers a viewpoint through which to consider the contemporary world. Finally, I present a new historical narrative from the perspective of the *koinon* that reveals what this book has achieved and what issues need to be considered next.