

The Geography of Euripides' *Ion*

In the *Ion*, Euripides relates a tale of one of Apollo's ill-starred love affairs, with Erechtheus' daughter Kreusa, whose son, the title character, grew up as a ward of the sanctuary at Delphi. Although not securely dated, together with metrics, stagecraft, and subtle political allusions, the *Ion*'s patriotic tone seems to date the play to 418/417 before the ostracism of Hyperbolus and the massacre at Melos (Owen, xli). Through this vehicle, the author explores many facets of Apollo's character and functions, including his authority over prophecy, purification, archery, and colonization. Appropriate to Apollo's function as god of colonization, the play, whose setting is the most important center of advice for colonization, is replete with geographical references. Namely, the omphalos at Delphi was believed to be the center of the world (v. 223), and Ion's sons will be the founders of the four Ionian tribes (vv. 1575-1594). In his *rhesis*, Ion details a periegesis of Apollo's sanctuaries and haunts (vv. 154-178). The second choral *stasimon* praises Athens (vv. 452-509), and the chorus also sings of Parnassos (vv. 714-720). Kreusa's foreign husband Xeuthus seeks to establish legitimacy and continuity for his governance in Athens (vv. 659-660). Likewise Ion seeks to establish the legitimacy of his birth (vv. 556, 671; see Walsh) and to find a home for himself (vv. 585-647), just as colonists ritually sought to legitimize their residency in new homelands. Euripides emphasizes the theme that people belong to the land. Cecrops is the autochthonous serpentine founder of Athens (v. 267). Sustained is the motif of his Athenian descendants, especially Kreusa, as autochthonous (Loroux). The play's imagery of children and nestlings further accentuates the need to establish divinely sanctioned residency.

This paper will explore the play's geographical references as they relate to Apollo's cult and his function as a god of colonization. Questions to be examined include to what extent these references reflect current geographical knowledge as well as contemporary geopolitics – that is, how places cited in the text were then significant to Apollo or to the Athenian war effort. The geographical *topos* in the *Ion* underscores the cultural and religious significance of colonization in Greek culture and may bring new understanding of the Athenian approach to empire during the Peloponnesian War. The process of

colonization and its articulation in the play reflect Greek scientific accounts of ordering the natural and inhabited world for the purpose of controlling the *oikoumene*. Further, Greek geographical accounts served as (subtle) declarations of Greek cultural superiority over non-Greek peoples (c.f., Herodotus 3.106, Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* 12, 14). Hence, Euripides' *Ion* becomes an expression of Apolline order and the god's control over the inhabited world.

Works cited:

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