

Just Monkeying Around? An Examination of Euboean Pottery from Pithekoussai

Study of Greek colonization in the western Mediterranean is not a new concept, but it remains crucial to understand the impact of Greek colonies within the greater Mediterranean world. The earliest permanent Greek colony in the west, Pithekoussai, which dates to the early 8th century BCE, was situated on the island of Ischia near the Bay of Naples (Boardman, 1999, p.165). In his *Geographica*, Strabo discusses the establishment of Pithekoussai by the Eretrians and Chalcidians (*Strab.* 5.4.9). These two groups of Greeks previously founded colonies in other areas of the Mediterranean, such as Al Mina in the Near East (Boardman, 1999, p. 39). Their joint venture was due to the presence of gold mines and good soil (*Strab.* 5.4.9). However, Strabo also mentions that such an enterprise was not without complications (*Strab.* 5.4.9); eventually the Eretrians split away from the Chalcidians due to an unspecified squabble (Boardman, 1999, p. 168). It is possible to determine whether Strabo was accurate in his assessment of the rift between the Eretrians and Chalcidians through the analysis of the archaeological record at Pithekoussai.

One of the best methods for the examination of colonialism and cultural interaction in the ancient world is through the study of ceramics. This paper compiles information on the ceramic typologies of the locally made wares and foreign imports excavated in the necropolis at Pithekoussai in order to determine whether a pattern exists between them (Bretschneider, 1993). This pattern will help clarify that the Eretrians had indeed departed the island. This should also verify that the Chalcidians had a greater influence on the local populations as they purportedly maintained their position at the colony for a longer time.

It is also essential to investigate the types of interactions which took place between the Euboean colonists and the local peoples at Pithekoussai. An awareness of interactions allows

archaeologists to determine how changes and innovations could possibly occur within a society over time. Colin Renfrew's idea of peer polity interaction provides a context for understanding how groups of people could have influenced one another and explains resultant changes in society (Renfrew, 1986, p. 1). When applying the theory of peer polity interaction to the case of Pithekoussai one can propose several reasons why a division developed between the Eretrians and Chalcidians. It is interesting to note how relations between the native Ischians, other foreign groups, and the Chalcidians (i.e. assimilation of cultural values or marriage between different cultures) might have alienated the Eretrians.

Another noteworthy reason for the disagreement between colonists involves possible disputed business deals. It is believed that the origin of "Pithekoussai" comes from the Greek word *pithekos*, meaning "monkey." However, there is a secondary meaning of *pithekos*, which is "trickster." If "Pithekoussai" actually means "Trickster Island," as opposed to "Monkey Island," it suggests that there may have been some friction among the Eretrians and Chalcidians in their colonial venture.

Works Cited

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