

## The Postcolonial Concept of the ‘New World’ in Early Greek Colonization

Recent scholarship on Greek colonization has tended to shy away from the equation of those ancient undertakings with modern examples of colonial enterprise, most notably by the British, French, and Spanish empires. The term ‘colonization’ itself has come under fire as being inaccurate as a descriptor of the nature of the Greek movements around the Mediterranean during the Archaic and Classical periods (De Angelis 2010). Nevertheless, examining Greek colonization through the lens of these later colonial enterprises doubtlessly remains useful. In particular, concepts such as the middle-ground have helped shed light on Greek interactions with indigenous peoples, while network theory has been beneficial in reframing our conception of Greek colonization as a whole (Malkin 2004).

One perhaps overlooked postcolonial concept in relation to Greek colonization, however, is that of the ‘New World’. It has been concluded that the Greeks viewed their areas of colonization not as a ‘New World’, but as a familiar landscape similar to the landscape of the mainland or to the landscape of the particular *metropolis* from which the individual colonizer originated (Malkin 2004). This essay will aim to take a more in depth look at the postcolonial concept of the ‘New World’ specifically as it relates to Greek colonization in the West and in its earliest period—that is the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC—in order to describe more accurately the extent to which the individual colonist saw the colonial landscape as a ‘New World’ to be feared inhabited by ‘absolute others’ to be subjugated in the postcolonial sense versus as an intelligible, mundane landscape. While leaning more towards the latter, I argue that a case can be made for the former.

Because religion played an integral role in Greek colonial enterprises and since mythology was central in the Greek zeitgeist, this study begins by analyzing the *Odyssey*. In

some sense, the *Odyssey* reflects the actual experience of colonization, and Odysseus can be seen as a realistic protocolonial hero (Malkin 1998). Odysseus largely fails at colonizing the places he comes to and repeatedly faces strange and frightening monsters, or ‘others’. With regards to this aspect of the myth, the colonial landscape can be seen as a ‘New World’; however, in another sense Odysseus can be seen as opening up the seas, and by being the first to reach these novel places, he can be seen as transforming the ‘New World’ landscape into an intelligible one capable of being navigated by real Greek individuals and colonists (Malkin 1998; Eliade 1959).

In addition to the *Odyssey*, I will examine the foundation myth of the Western Greek colony of Rhegion, as well as consider the archaeological evidence from Pithekoussai. Pithekoussai is perhaps the earliest settlement of Greeks in the West. Rhegion, while not the earliest colony, still has a traditionally early foundation date in the latter half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, and it may be the first colony founded on the southernmost tip of the Italian peninsula (Malkin 1987). Rhegion is also particularly rich in terms of its foundation details with the story being related by Strabo, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Diodorus, and Heraclides Lembos and probably containing kernels of authenticity in the overlap between these authors (Malkin 1987). The analysis of these two sites of colonization paired with the literary and mythological analysis of the *Odyssey* will hopefully combine to produce a fuller picture of the actual experience of colonization. I will then use this picture to again highlight the differing extents to which the colonial landscape can be viewed as either novel or mundane.

## Bibliography

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