Contestualizzare la “prima colonizzazione”:
Archeologia, fonti, cronologia e modelli interpretativi fra l'Italia e il Mediterraneo

Contextualising “early Colonisation”:
Archaeology, Sources, Chronology and interpretative models between Italy and the Mediterranean

Quanto c’è di ‘greco’ nella ‘colonizzazione greca’?

Jonathan M. Hall - The University of Chicago

Anthony Snodgrass has written that, with respect to Greek colonization, ‘it is not only the noun but the adjective which is inappropriate’ (“Lesser breeds”: the history of a false analogy’, in H. Hurst and S. Owen, eds, Ancient Colonizations: Analogy, Similarity and Difference [London, 2005], p. 48). While few scholars today believe that the Greeks who established new settlements in Sicily and South Italy in the eighth century subscribed already to an overarching, subjective sense of a Hellenic identity, there is a relatively widespread opinion that the colonial experience was instrumental in forging Hellenic consciousness as settlers came into contact with indigenous populations whose language, customs and beliefs seemed so alien from those of the newcomers. There are, however, several objections to this point of view.

(1) The term ‘Hellenes’, used in a fully inclusive sense, is not attested in our literary sources prior to the sixth century; the term ‘Panhellenes’ appears a little earlier, but, as many scholars have pointed out, the pan- prefix connotes diversity rather than unity. The absence of the ethnonym from earlier texts is probably not due to the accident of textual survival because it is already noted by Thucydides (1.3.1-3). The reason why the absence of the term ‘Hellenes’ prior to the sixth century is important is because a collective name is a sine qua non for ethnic identity, however else we define it. One could perhaps imagine that there existed among the Greeks, at an unconscious or subconscious level, a vague awareness of commonalities with regard to language, religion or customs – what Pierre Bourdieu defines as the habitus. But this habitus needs to be reified and actively mobilized if it is to serve as the basis for a true ethnic consciousness. (2) Encounters between Greeks and non-Greeks were not a novelty of the eighth century but had occurred, albeit sporadically, as far back as the Mycenaean period. (3) The foundation of colonies, though often initially violent, did not result in an enduring sense of hostility between settlers and indigenes; an equilibrium would often be reached, sometimes fairly quickly, through intermarriage. (4) The phenomenon of acculturation, as witnessed in the archaeological record, is as much due to environmental, adaptive or sociopolitical factors as it is to ethnic loyalties. (5) The supposed ‘linguistic divide’ between Greeks and indigenes is complicated by attested instances of bilingualism. (6) The literary evidence of the Archaic period displays little of the derogatory or stereotypical characterization of the ‘other’ that we start to see in the fifth century. (7) Finally, it is difficult to imagine how encounters with non-Greeks, crystallizing originally in individual and isolated localities throughout the Mediterranean and Black Sea, could have been exchanged from region to region to present a common experience from which a collective and singular Hellenic

To this last objection, however, there has now emerged a stimulating answer with Irad Malkin’s new book, *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2011). Malkin appeals to ‘Network Theory’ to argue that the ‘connectivity’ established between multiple ‘nodes’ – in this case, communities that he defines as ‘Greek’ – created a network that was multidirectional and decentralized, facilitating the flow of information across the system. The intensity of certain ‘flows’ gave rise to clustered bundles, or regional networks – for example, a Rhodian network or a Phokaian network. But every so often, a few random ties were forged between distant nodes – e.g. by means of itinerant professionals – and these created ‘short cuts’ that provided connectivity across the entire network to form what Malkin calls ‘a small Greek world’. The proposition is very suggestive because it might explain the construction of a Greek ‘habitus’ which would eventually be endowed with an ethnic content.

For many of his case-studies, Malkin seems to imagine a process that lasted a few generations, culminating in the sixth century – precisely the period to which I (and others) would assign the crystallization of Hellenic self-consciousness. But in his discussion of Sicily, he argues that a regional Greek identity arose within the first generation of Greek settlement on the island. His argument is based chiefly on Thucydides’ description (6.3.1) of the altar of Apollo Archegetes outside Sicilian Naxos, which Malkin takes as the ‘ritualized focus of a Greek-Sicilian network…accessible only to the Greek residents of Sicily’ (p. 100). Yet, this is not the only – or even most natural – reading of Thucydides’ words. Furthermore, while the historian clearly refers to a practice that took place in his own day, it is impossible to establish that the sacrifices on the altar date back to the foundation of Naxos in 734 BCE – Appian’s reference (*Bellum Civile* 5.12.109) to Octavian’s visit to the sanctuary offers no independent testimony for the altar’s antiquity. In fact, if we accept Musgrave’s emendation of the codices, Appian implies that the cult of Apollo Archegetes was specific to the Naxians.

According to Malkin, the altar of Apollo at Naxos served as a ‘hub’, connecting, by means of the institution of the *theoria*, a pan-Sikeliote network with a pan-Hellenic network centred on Delphi. It is not unlikely that the Delphic oracle entered into service in the eighth century: on the basis of the archaeological evidence, Catherine Morgan (*Athletes and Oracles: The Transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the Eighth Century BC* [Cambridge, 1990]) argues that the years around 725 BCE mark the transition from a purely local sanctuary to one that was more ‘international’, though she does not date panhellenic ‘investment’ at Delphi or Olympia much earlier than the sixth century. However, the view that the oracle was intrinsic to the colonial process from the outset may have been exaggerated. A study of some 247 literary notices relating to the foundation of 27 colonies in South Italy and Sicily reveals that the Delphic *theoria* is mentioned in connection with just five of them (J.M. Hall, ‘Foundation stories’, in G. Tsetskhladze, ed., *Greek Colonisation. An Account of Greek Colonies and Other Settlements Overseas in the Archaic Period*, volume 2 [Leiden, 2008], pp. 383-426). Furthermore, the formulaic character of such traditions is probably a product of a specific *ktisis* genre which dates back only to the fifth or, at earliest, late sixth century. It is, in any case, far from certain that the Delphic *theoria* predates the organization or reorganization of the Pythian festival in the early sixth century.

Carla Antonaccio (‘Ethnicity and colonization’, in I. Malkin, ed., *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity* [Washington DC, 2001], pp. 113-57) has observed that the term ‘Sikeliotai’ appears for the first time in Thucydides and argues that it is a neologism of the fifth century. Linguistically, the term does not distinguish between Greeks and indigenes and, by the time of Diodoros (5.6.6), it certainly included all residents of Sicily, regardless of their ethnicity. It is, however, true that, for
Thucydides, ‘Sikeliotai’ seems to connote only Greek inhabitants of the island. Malkin argues that, on the basis of other island identities – for example, that of the Rhodians – we should *expect* the form ‘Sikeliotai’ to have existed before the fifth century. But in terms of size alone, Sicily is very different from Rhodes: one can easily imagine that the inhabitants of Syracuse were often oblivious to the fact that they were occupants of an island. Interesting in this respect is what Malkin has to say about the identity of the non-Greek Sikels. On the one hand, he regards Sikel ethnogenesis as a phenomenon of the fifth century; on the other, he proposes that the terms ‘Sikels’ and ‘Sikeliotai’ were ‘at once complimentary and adversarial’. This might suggest that both terms, and the identities they connote, emerged in the course of the fifth century.

What needs to be kept in mind is the fundamental anthropological distinction between ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ points of view. Most of the networks that Malkin discusses are defined ‘etically’, but ethnic identity is ultimately an ‘emic’ and subjective sentiment whose salience recedes, or fails to materialize, if it is not actively perceived and mobilized. While Malkin’s book offers an original and suggestive model for how we study the ancient Mediterranean and while he is almost certainly right to note that too much emphasis has been placed on ‘boundaries’ in definitions of ethnicity, at the expense of more positive, self-conscious practices, I continue to believe that Hellenic identity was a phenomenon of the sixth – not eighth – century and that its roots were in mainland Greece, around the sanctuaries of Delphi and Olympia, rather than in the colonial orbit.