COLONIES – COLONISATION – COLONIALISM:
A TYPOLOGICAL REAPPRAISAL

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Abstract

Colonies, colonisation and, in particular, colonialism are concepts carrying heavy ideological subtexts – yet they loom over the current debate about the dynamism of the Iron Age Mediterranean. Forty years after M.I. Finley's 'attempt at a typology', this paper tries to thin out the terminological jungle: by employing cross-cultural historical comparison, it demonstrates how complex and manifold seemingly straightforward ideal types are; and that 'colonies' and 'colonialism' in the classical period of European imperialism were altogether different from the settlements Greeks and Phoenicians established in their Mediterranean diasporas.

Intellectual Rigour: Logomachies?

All scholarship works with concepts, ideas. This holds true especially for the humanities and again in particular for the historical disciplines which attempt at explaining and understanding the past by applying paradigms and terminologies derived from the present. Max Weber has taught us to view such concepts not as reflections of a – however defined – historical 'reality', but as images of thought ('Gedankenbilder'): utopias, emerged from our minds, 'ideal types', how he calls them.[1] Ideal types are a tool, not the purpose of knowledge: theory serves historical knowledge, not the other way round. By means of abstraction and generalisation, the scholar creates the instruments of his investigation by himself.[2]

From the historian, Weber's methodology demands a great deal of modesty, intellectual self-discipline and rigour. Not only must he be aware that his conclusions based on ideal types bear their expiry date in themselves, are subjective and depend on a series of assumptions; he also needs to distinguish ideas from ideals: the ideal types he constructs are not exemplary, neither positively nor negatively, but explanatory; ideal types are indifferent to normative points of view.[3] Who

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[1] Weber 1956a, 235: 'In seiner begrifflichen Reinheit ist dieses *Gedanken*bild nirgends in der Wirklichkeit empirisch vorfindbar, es ist eine *Utopie*, und für die historische Arbeit erwächst die Aufgabe, in jedem einzelnen Falle festzustellen, wie nahe oder wie fern die Wirklichkeit jedem Ideal-bilde steht [...].'

[2] Weber 1956a, 250.

[3] Weber 1956a, 245: 'Demgegenüber ist es aber eine *elementare Pflicht* der *wissenschaftlichen Selbstkontrolle* und das einzige Mittel zur Verhütung von Erschleichungen, die logisch *vergleichende* Beziehung der Wirklichkeit auf Ideal*typen* im logischen Sinne von der *wertenden Beurteilung* der

leaves the ground of normative indifference, violates intellectual rigour: 'Die Worte, die man braucht, sind dann nicht Mittel wissenschaftlicher Analyse, sondern politischen Werbens um die Stellungnahme der anderen. Sie sind nicht Pflugscharen zur Lockerung des Erdreichs des kontemplativen Denkens, sondern Schwerter gegen die Gegner: Kampfmittel.'[4]

Weber's appeal for intellectual rigour may sound somewhat old-fashioned in an academic world soaked with post-modernist paradigms, but it should make us aware for the pitfalls of analytical terminology. If concepts are loaded with normative assumptions – negative and positive – they are likely to prove difficult to operate in an analytical investigation. Terminological accuracy is hence the precondition for any serious academic debate.

Colony, colonisation, let alone colonialism *are* terms loaded with historical, if not ideological weight; and around them and their applicability to processes of expansion, settlement and conquest in the ancient Mediterranean has evolved a vigorous discussion which has not always been led *sine ira et studio*. Especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, which is only too aware of its own complex colonial past (and no less of the patterns of neo-colonial dependency that characterise our present), the debate as to whether and how 'colonial' (and, respectively, 'post-colonial') paradigms should be applied to the study of the Greek – and, often ignored – Phoenician overseas expansion. Whereas a book published a few years ago has undertaken to reverse the perspective and view colonisation in the Iron Age Mediterranean through the eyes of the 'colonised' (i.e. the local populations of the areas affected by overseas settlement),[5] some scholars have suggested that 'colonial' terminology be dropped altogether from the discussion.[6] Still others have embraced the jargon of 'post-colonial' studies, some very cautiously and for purely analytical reasons,[7] some more cheerfully and with considerable anti-colonial zeal.[8]

Classicists and archaeologists from outside the Anglo-Saxon world dealing with the Iron Age (and indeed other periods of antiquity) find it difficult to understand

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Wirklichkeit aus *Idealen* heraus scharf zu scheiden. Ein "Idealtypus" in unserem Sinne ist, wie noch einmal wiederholt sein mag, etwas gegenüber der *wertenden* Beurteilung völlig Indifferentes, er hat mir irgend einer anderen als einer rein *logischen* "Vollkommenheit" nichts zu tun.'

[4] Weber 1956b, 325.

[5] Hodos 2006; see also Hodos 2010.

[6] Most notably Osborne 1998, 119–20; 2005; 2009; Purcell 2005, 134–35. See also Hall 2007, 93–94 (who calls the colonial terminology 'misleading'); and Horden and Purcell 2000, 395–400 (who have a much wider scope and emphasise the 'cosmopolitan' character of the 'Mediterranean colony', which has been, they criticise, often been represented as 'monochrome').

[7] Most prominently Malkin 2004.

[8] For instance Webster 1996; 1997; Webster and Cooper 1996; van Dommelen 1997; 1998; 2002; 2005; 2006.

why the debate about a period of Mediterranean history so remote is so charged with political tension: in particular, the allegation of 'colonialism' against pioneering scholarship in the field seems exaggerated.[9] Considering the current state of debate, one might be tempted to follow R. Osborne and N. Purcell in abandoning the 'colonisation' paradigm and emphasise aspects other than the relationship between newcomers and locals: aspects such as the 'Mediterranisation' of elites, the development of trans-Mediterranean networks and the adoption of certain commodities and consumption patterns, as archaeologists have done in recent years.[10]

In order to bring the debate about ancient 'colonies' back on track, refining our analytical tools might be helpful. Terms like 'colony', 'colonisation' and 'colonialism', as I understand them, are Weberian ideal types (and will hence be used from here onwards without inverted commas): we apply them knowing that they are our own constructs and were – though the word family comes from the Latin *colonia* – never used by Greeks or Romans the way we use them. Therefore, we need to ask a few rather simple questions: what is a colony? What is colonisation? What is colonialism? The best way of breaking down a complex term to its various meanings is a typology, and towards this M.I. Finley has pointed the way a generation ago.[11]

Colony

Essentially, a colony is a collectivity of people. However, Finley demonstrates how manifold the seemingly straightforward concept actually is. He takes into account a vast array of variables: resources, the labour force, demography and the sociopolitical framework in which colonisation occurs. However, his study remains indeed an *attempt* at a typology (albeit a very sophisticated one), as Finley focuses on the *variables* rather than on classifying *types* of colonies. A true typology needs to establish some sort of hierarchy, through which Finley's parameters can be ranked, resulting in a classification.[12]

[9] Dunbabin 1948 and Boardman 1999 may have pursued a Greek perspective in their work; they may have underestimated local elements in 'colonial' cultures; their language may seem outmoded; their investigation may also have been implicitly guided by modern paradigms (the British Empire); but the allegation of 'colonialism' seems far-fetched.

[10] Networks: see the contributions in Malkin *et al.* 2009. Elites and patterns of consumption: see, for instance, Kistler 1998; Matthäus 1999–2000; Malkin 2002; Niemeyer 2003a; Kistler and Ulf 2005; Lemos 2005. For an overview and discussion, see Ulf 2009.

[11] Finley 1976.

[12] For European colonial empires in general, see Geiss 1976; 1991; 1994; 2007; Reinhard 1983; 2008; Osterhammel 1997; 2009; Marx 2004. For the British Empire, see Ferguson 2004; for the Spanish Empire, see Elliott 1990; Brown 2005.

Demography appears to be the most decisive variable: how many people are involved in the establishment of colonies? Frequently, processes of colonial expansion entail the transfer of substantial (sometimes: entire) populations.[13] Overseas settlements in the Iron Age and in Hellenistic Asia and Egypt, Roman *coloniae*, Spanish, French and English 'plantations' in the Americas and Australia – they all depended on the influx of newcomers, who eventually outnumbered the locals. Other colonies are founded and maintained by settlers who were still numerous, but less numerous than the local populations (English, Dutch and German settlers in Southern Rhodesia, South and South West Africa; Spanish and Portuguese settlers in Latin America; the French Maghreb; Dutch Indies). Still others involve the mobility of only a few civil servants deployed for the administration of conquered territories (British India, European colonies in sub-Saharan Africa).

Colonies established by few or some migrants tend to be peripheries of strong political centres ('empires'). Almost invariably, they are imperial colonies politically depending on the motherland (British India, Africa; in principle, provinces of the Persian, Roman, Ottoman, etc. empires). Colonies with substantial immigrant populations are sometimes imperial (British and French North America, parts of Spanish South America, Australia) sometimes non-imperial (Greek and Phoenician colonies in the Iron Age). The stronger the immigrant population of the colony (New England, the Thirteen Colonies in North America), the stronger is usually its strife for political independence from the motherland.

Immigration in strong numbers usually results in the assimilation, marginalisation or extinction of the original population (North America, Australia, some parts of Latin America, Greek colonies in the Iron Age). Extinguished or shrinking local populations often require the importation of labour from third parties (African slaves in the Americas, free Chinese workers in Indonesia). Colonial immigration in smaller numbers tends to entail the enslavement or disenfranchisement of local populations and/or the creation of a colonial elite of immigrant descent (Spanish America, British India, Africa, Iron Age Mediterranean, Hellenistic Asia and Egypt). Imperial colonies usually become subject to tributary exploitation, with taxes and contributions being extracted by, and transferred to, the centre.

Another factor, largely independent of the other variables, is the driving force behind the establishment of colonies. We need to distinguish between individual and collective motivations. Individuals settle away from home because they seek adventure or freedom. First and foremost, however, they pursue 'happiness' in

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[13] Here, further questions of gender and age arise. Who migrates? Young men? Men and women?

its original, very basic meaning: leaving behind dismal economic conditions, they hope for better luck abroad. They are both pushed and pulled. Collectivities also use colonies to improve their wealth; but they serve political and strategic ends, as well. To colonies, societies export excess labour force (like the Greeks), through colonies they gain access to markets and deposits of raw materials, from colonies they obtain agricultural goods and tributes. Arable land, raw materials and trade are the economic pull factors allowing further differentiation. But colonies are also the starting points for further imperial expansion; they can serve as naval bases or command centres; and they can be used to infiltrate enemies.

Finally, an all important parameter is space. The distance or proximity between motherland and colony is decisive (albeit decreasingly, with improving technology) for the relationship between the two entities and the quantity of migrants. In a pre-modern environment, sea routes tend to narrow the gap and create proximity over substantial distances. Accordingly, most colonial expansions throughout history resulted in overseas colonies (with the Russian East and the American West, which can hardly be labelled 'colonies', being the most significant exceptions).

Given the chameleon like manifoldness of colonies, the term is hardly operational as an ideal type. British Nigeria, ruled by a limited number of professional British administrators who were dispatched for limited periods of time, and Greek Sicily, which was settled by a massive wave of immigrants from, but not territorially annexed by, mainland Greece, have hardly anything in common. If used as an analytical concept, 'colony' needs to be broken down to its constituent parts. We have to distinguish between at least four types:[14]

1. Pure imperial colonies ('provinces'), established through conquest for the purpose of tributary exploitation; low influx of colonial immigrants (specialised administrative personnel only): British India, French Indochina, British Egypt, African colonies, provinces of (Assyrian, Persian, Roman, Ottoman, etc.) empires. Special cases are the Hellenistic empires, the Seleucid one in the first place, where military conquest was flanked by colonial settlement of Greeks and Macedonians.

2. Imperial settlement colonies, established through massive settlement colonisation flanked by military power with the purpose of exploiting local labour and/or exporting excess population. Colonisation may involve extinction or marginalisation (New England, Canada, Australia) or disenfranchisement (Southern Rhodesia, South and South West Africa, French Algeria) or importation of labour-force deported from third countries (Caribbean). Colonies are dependent

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[14] The following considerations are inspired by Osterhammel 1997, 17–18.

on imperial centres ('motherland'), but ties tend to be loser than in the case of pure imperial colonies (often resulting in independence).

3. Pure settlement colonies, established through massive settlement colonisation, often flanked by violence, with the purpose of land seizure. This type of colonisation tends to result in local populations being marginalised (the Russian East, the American West, Greek Sicily, Magna Graecia, partly Phoenician colonies in North Africa, Sardinia and Spain).

4. Outpost colonies, established through conquest or peaceful agreement, with a moderate influx of (usually specialised) colonial immigrants, for the purpose of gaining (strategic or commercial) access to a hinterland: Hong Kong, Batavia, Malacca, Singapore, Aden, Shanghai, Pithekoussai, Phoenician trading posts in Spain, Sicily and North Africa.

The typology yields some rather surprising results – and it confronts us with a big caveat. First, if the dynamics of the Iron Age Mediterranean is comparable to any development in the modern age, it is the land-based frontier type of colonisation we encounter in 18th- and 19th-century North America and Russia (and, to some degree, the colonial networks of outposts like Hong Kong and Singapore) rather than the imperial forms of colonial conquest we have to look at. Second, the way a historian of the modern world would define the concept of colony (as a political entity created, by means of invasion, on the base of pre-colonial conditions, whose foreign authorities are permanently dependent on a spatially distant 'motherland' or imperial centre, which lays exclusive claim to the colony[15]), is not applicable to ancient colonial settlements. Namely the element of permanent dependence on a 'motherland' is generally absent from the Iron Age Mediterranean. We should, therefore, be very cautious when applying another other concepts – 'colonisation', 'colonialism' – largely associated with the modern definition of colony to ancient societies.

Colonisation

The most general definition of colonisation could be 'invasion' or 'seizure of land'. There is colonisation without colonies (frontier colonisation like in the Russian East and the American West or 'internal' colonisation claiming so far unsettled

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[15] Osterhammel 1997, 16: 'Eine Kolonie ist ein durch Invasion (Eroberung und/oder Siedlungskolonisation) in Anknüpfung an vorkoloniale Zustände neu geschaffenes politisches Gebilde, dessen landfremde Herrschaftsträger in dauerhaften Anbhängigkeitsbeziehungen zu einem räumlich entfernten "Mutterland" oder imperialen Zentrum stehen, welches exklusive Besitzansprüche auf die Kolonie erhebt.'

areas from nature) and there are colonies without colonisation (the case of pure imperial colonies above). The common theme is expansion: societies exporting people to distant places, creating networks of outposts or pushing forward their boundaries into 'barbarian' peripheries are growing, regardless of whether they expand as political entities (empires, such as the Roman or British) or civilisations (Greek or Phoenician, for instance). Colonisation appears to be a sub-type of expansion: expansion as the result of permanent mobility of many ordinary people as opposed to expansion involving the temporary mobility of armies and few administrative staff.

Defined as such, the conquest of the American frontier was colonisation, establishing British India was not; the Romans' sending out veterans to build *coloniae* was, Caesar's conquest of Gaul was not; the foundation of Syracuse was, the transformation of the Attic League into an informal empire was not; the development of the east Elbian frontier in mediaeval Germany was, the establishment of the network of the Hanseatic League was not – and so forth.

Once again, we find the processes of expansion in the Iron Age Mediterranean under scrutiny in this series of articles and 'colonial' expansion from the 15th century onwards on opposite sides of the hermeneutic fence. Assyrian and Roman imperial expansion rather than the Phoenician and Greek city-states' migratory expansion in the Mediterranean (and Black Sea) are the ancient parallels to the processes that resulted in the colonial empires of the 19th and 20th centuries. This makes it doubtful that colonialism – a term tailored for the conditions created by such modern colonial empires – may work as a guiding concept for the study of Phoenician and Greek expansion.

Colonialism

But what is colonialism? It has been defined as 'domination of people from another culture'. But this definition is too inclusive to be of analytical value; it embraces all forms of imperial rule, colonial or not, which by definition include cultural difference between the rulers and the ruled. To sharpen the ideal type, J. Osterhammel has added three attributes: colonialism implies (1) that one society completely deprives a second one of its potential for autonomous development; that an entire society is 'remote controlled' and reconfigured in accordance to the colonial rulers; (2) that the ruling and the ruled are permanently divided by a cultural gap; (3) the intellectual 'yoke' of an ideology whose purpose it is to legitimise colonial expansion. According to Osterhammel, colonialism is the rule of one collectivity over another, with the life of the ruled being determined, for the sake of external interests, by a minority of colonial masters, which is culturally 'foreign' and unwilling

to assimilate; this rule is underpinned by missionary doctrines based on the colonial masters' conviction of their being culturally superior.[16]

Greek ethnocentrism and its discourses of barbarian 'otherness' do not fit into this category. The 'spirit of colonialism' (Osterhammel) requires more: namely the translation of such discourses into a consistent ideology serving the colonisers' practical needs. It further requires the persistent unwillingness, on the part of the colonisers, to accommodate, in one way or the other, the culture of the colonised – and hence a continuing cultural gap between both collectivities, which need to be clearly defined as the bearers of distinct cultural and ethnic identities. Nothing of this applies to the people who, in the Iron Age, embarked on their Mediterranean adventure; nor does it apply to those whom they met at the destination of their journey. On the contrary: the data assembled so far by archaeologists studying the Greek and Phoenician diasporas, point in the opposite direction: the gap was narrowing; Greeks and Phoenicians were borrowers as well as teachers.[17] It was not before the Classical period, at the dawn of Hellenism, that some Greek intellectuals developed ideas which somewhat resembled the modern 'spirit of colonialism': Isocrates (*Pax* 24) suggests that Greeks divert their excess population to Thrace, invading the country and systematically reducing its native population to the status of helots. He develops a similar programme for Asia, which, he claims, can be annexed and plundered without any risk (*Panaegyricus* 166). His Athenian compatriot and contemporary Xenophon (*Anabasis* 6. 4. 6) considers possible the complete subjection and helotisation of Asia. Both authors justify and legitimise their programmes of conquest and colonisation with their fellow *Hellenes*' innate superiority.[18]

To conclude, the Greeks and Phoenicians of the Iron Age established colonies (of type 3 and, to a lesser extent, type 4) in a *longue durée* process of colonisation, transforming the entire Mediterranean and converting it, in the long run, from a conglomerate of heterogeneous local cultures and disparate, highly unequal political entities into Plato's proverbial frog pond. Both colony and colonisation, if applied properly, work as ideal types in order to *explain* and *understand*,

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[16] Osterhammel 1997, 21: '[…] eine Herrschaftsbeziehung zwischen Kollektiven, bei welcher die fundamentalen Entscheidungen über die Lebensführung der Kolonisierten durch eine kulturell andersartige und kaum apassungswillige Minderheit von Kolonialherren unter vorrangiger Berücksichtigung externer Interessen getroffen und tatsächlich durchgesetzt werden. Damit verbinden sich in der Neuzeit in der Regel sendungsideologische Rechtfertigungsdoktrinen, die auf der Überzeugung der Kolonialherren von ihrer eigenen kulturellen Höherwertigkeit beruhen.'

[17] It is the achievement of Hodos 2006 to have shown this process of giving and taking. *Cf.* for Sicily, De Angelis 2003; for Magna Graecia, Musti 1988; for the Pheonicians, Coldstream 1982; Niemeyer 1990; 1995; 2002; 2003b.

[18] Briant 1982, 255.

in the Weberian sense, the dynamism of the period and the changes brought about by the mobility of people and ideas. Colonialism, on the other hand, is a much more exclusive category, from which classicists and archaeologists, when dealing with phenomena intrinsic to their period, should wisely abstain.

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