Introduction

In Aristophanes’ *Birds*, as Peisetairos prepares to perform a foundation sacrifice in his new city of Cloudcuckooland, he is rudely interrupted by a series of intruders. The intruders, a poet, a *chrēsmologos* (oracle monger), a surveyor, an inspector, and a decree seller, all shamelessly offer their unsolicited services in the hopes of being granted some reward. Thus, for instance, when the *chrēsmologos* arrives, he proceeds to spout a number of riddling hexameters from an oracle of Bakis that supposedly refer to the foundation of Cloudcuckooland.1 The *chrēsmologos* is exposed as a fraud whose real purpose is to wrangle clothes and food out of Peisetairos, and he is eventually sent running off stage, beaten over the head by his own collection of oracles. Before Peisetairos physically abuses the *chrēsmologos*, however, he first defeats the charlatan’s oracular claims by citing ones of his own (*Av*. 981–91):

ΠΕΙΣΕΤΑΙΡΟΣ
οὐδὲν ἄρ᾽ ὅμοιός ἐσθ᾽ ὁ χρησμὸς τουτῷ,
ὦν ἐγὼ παρὰ τἀπόλλωνος ἐξεγραφάμην.
“αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν ἄκλητος ἰὼν ἄνθρωπος ἀλαζὼν
λυπῇ θύοντας καὶ σπλαγχνεύειν ἐπιθυμῇ,
δὴ τότε χρὴ τύπτειν αὐτὸν πλευρῶν τὸ μεταξῦ—”

1. The *chrēsmologos* (often translated as “oracle monger”) was a figure separate from the seer (*mantis*) in the archaic and classical periods, but Aristophanes intentionally collapses the distinction between these two related types of diviners as a way of lampooning the more prestigious seer. I thus treat the *chrēsmologos* and the seer as roughly synonymous in this passage. For distinctions between the *chrēsmologos* and the seer, see Flower 2008b: 60–65; and below in the section “The Greek Seer: An Overview.”
This exchange marks the culmination of an oracular duel in which Peisetairos impugns the oracle monger’s prophecy with one he has personally received from Delphic Apollo. In his role as oikist (colonial founder) Peisetairos leverages his privileged connection with Delphi in order to discredit the chrēsmologos’s own religious authority. Peisetairos’s behavior here is in keeping with his conduct toward the other unwelcome intruders. Dismissing them all, he claims sole credit for the successful foundation of his city.

The entire scene is, of course, a parody, but it is a parody that captures the central claims of this book. For Aristophanes’ representation of Cloudcuckooland calls attention to the idiosyncratic way in which the Greeks often remembered the foundations of their cities: they reserved acclaim for the oikist alone and did so to
the exclusion of other experts present during the foundation. Most notably, in
colonial narratives, the oikist becomes not only a figure who wields political power
but also one who, endorsed by Delphi, possesses the religious authority accorded
in other contexts to the seer. We might paraphrase Peisetairos’s final insult to the
oracle monger—“Do your oracle mongering somewhere else!”—as “Your oracle
mongering does not belong in this foundation tale!”

This book develops a new understanding of the Greek seer by illuminating the
ideological motivations of colonial discourse. Seers were prominent figures in
ancient Greek society, but they rarely appear in archaic and classical colonial dis-
course. To be sure, Greek foundation tales are known for being lacunose, prefer-
ing to describe in detail certain components of a given colonial expedition while
passing over others in silence. For this reason we might assume that the absence of
seers from many foundation stories can be attributed to a kind of narrative indif-
ference: seers were simply not felt to be important enough to make the cut in the
Greeks’ highly compressed renderings of their colonial experience. This book sug-
gests another explanation for the absence of seers from colonial discourse: it
exposes the ideology behind this discrepancy and reveals how colonial discourse’s
privileging of the city’s founder and his dependence on Delphi, the colonial oracle
par excellence, entails a corresponding suppression of the seer.

It is worth stating clearly at the outset that this book does not include a compre-
hensive survey of colonial narratives featuring Delphi, nor does it attempt to
reconstruct the religious duties of seers during a foundation. Such endeavors have
been successfully carried out before, and the present study depends in many ways
on those investigations. Rather, this book represents a different type of undertak-
ing. It explains why the seer’s form of authority was seen to conflict with that of the
oikist (chapter 1) and then proceeds through a sequence of texts that allow us to
witness colonial discourse’s ideological promotion of the oikist and concealment
of the seer in action (chapters 2–6). It looks to moments in which colonial dis-
course can be figuratively caught in the act of occluding the seer as well as to
instances in which the seer appears to intrude on colonial contexts. Through close
literary analyses, it tracks the maneuvers and repercussions of these concerted
suppressions and disruptions. By reading the seer and the Delphi-sanctioned oik-
ist in relation to one another, it exposes the contests for authority between them.
Yet, precisely because this investigation involves central figures and institutions of
Greek culture, its conclusions extend beyond this framework. Colonial discourse
becomes a productive metonym for understanding both the contestatory and the

3. For a definition of colonial discourse, see pp. 6–8.
4. On colonial narratives that include Delphi, see esp. Malkin 1987: 17–91; Dougherty 1993: 15–80;
Miller 1997: 88–144. On the possible religious duties of seers in colonial contexts, see Malkin 1987:
92–113; 2009: 386–90.
collaborative dynamics between mantic, oracular, and political powers operative in archaic and classical Greece.

KEY TERMS AND METHOD

I adopt a historicizing approach that relies on many of the theoretical tenets of Cultural Poetics (New Historicism). It will thus be useful to begin by providing definitions for certain key terms—text, culture, and ideology—and to identify how they relate to one another from the perspective of Cultural Poetics. I will then outline several points of method that further clarify the application of such an approach to the study of archaic and classical Greek literary texts.

Cultural Poetics understands texts as sites in which the contestation and negotiation for power and authority are enacted. Texts are not the detached reflections of culture but actively intervene in culture, receiving but also refracting and reshaping cultural norms and conditions in turn. From this perspective, culture itself is viewed not as a unified, static system but as a dialectic of system and practice.

This contestatory dynamic of culture, and of texts as part of culture, necessitates ideology. Catherine Bell puts it succinctly when she defines ideology as "not a disseminated body of ideas but the way in which people live the relationships between themselves and their world, a type of necessary illusion." Because this "necessary illusion" is lived, because it embodies "worldliness," ideology is always evolving, incomplete, and unstable. Nor is ideology singular: as a number of literary theorists emphasize, there exists at any particular point in time within a given culture a range of ideologies in play, as current ones jostle with each other, with the remnants of older ideologies, and with incipient ideologies.


6. In this respect, Cultural Poetics has been profoundly influenced by poststructuralism and, in particular, Michel Foucault. Its theoretical foundations also include Jacques Derrida's concept of textuality, Mikhail Bakhtin's and Julia Kristeva's concepts of dialogism and intertextuality, and Clifford Geertz's cultural anthropology. For the core theoretical assumptions of Cultural Poetics/New Historicism, see, e.g., Stallybrass and White 1986: 1–26; Montrose 1989: 15–36; Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000: 49–74. For the productiveness of Cultural Poetics for the study of ancient Greek culture, see Dougherty and Kurke 1993: 1–12; 2003: 1–19.


8. See Bonnell and Hunt (1999: 12), summarizing the arguments of Sewell: "Culture is most fruitfully conceptualized as a dialectic between system and practice. It is a system of symbols and meanings with a certain coherence and definition but also a set of practices; thus the symbols and meanings can and do change over time, often in unpredictable fashion." See also Sewell 1999.


10. See Bell 2009: 81.

Since texts do not exist apart from culture, their content comprises ideology or ideologies.\textsuperscript{12} Inconsistencies, contradictions, and lapses in a text, including in the ways in which individual characters are conceived and constructed, are manifestations of the instability and tensions that inhabit ideology and arise between ideologies. By attending to textual ruptures and omissions, by looking for anomalies and discrepancies in the interstices of narrative, that is, by reading a text “symptomatically,” we can identify the ideologies themselves that are operative therein. That is to say, we identify an ideology more completely when we read not only for the elements that it valorizes and makes explicit but also for those elements that, by virtue of highlighting others, it necessarily obscures. In Pierre Macherey’s formulation, “meaning is in the relation between the implicit and the explicit, not on one or the other side of that fence.”\textsuperscript{13} Thus in the following chapters I will read literary texts with a view to ideology, alert especially to a given text’s strange and jarring components and to its moments of hedging ambiguity, and I will treat these aberrations and evasions as the symptomatic indices of its ideological strategies. As David Konstan observes, “Unity is not an ideal quality of a text, but a product of its ideological labor, and it is the task of the critic to lay bare the contradictory elements that the narrative welds together into an apparent whole.”\textsuperscript{14}

I turn now to three general points of method that relate this historicizing approach to the book’s interpretation of ancient Greek texts, especially archaic and classical poetry. First, classicists have long recognized that archaic and classical poetry was occasional and composed for performance and thus both entrenched in and engaged with its particular (social, political, religious) setting.\textsuperscript{15} I therefore consider it a necessary part of the interpretation of a given poem to attend to its historical and cultural framework. Epinikia (victory odes), the focus of chapters 4–6, readily lend themselves to historicizing readings, since these odes represent the “libretti” for ritual choral performances, and it seems logical to acknowledge the larger performance context as part of deciphering an individual ode’s significance.\textsuperscript{16} Yet recognizing the vibrant inextricability between texts and their contexts will inform my readings of archaic and classical literary works from a variety of other genres treated in the book as well, including Herodotus’s \textit{Histories} (chapter 1) and Homer’s \textit{Odyssey} (chapter 2).\textsuperscript{17}
Second, while this book centers on a set of selected texts dated to the archaic and classical periods, it simultaneously brings to bear on its arguments an array of other evidence, including evidence drawn from later sources. The use of later sources, such as Diodorus Siculus, Apollodorus, Plutarch, and Pausanias, amplifies our paucity of evidence from the archaic and classical periods. It does so both because such authors had access to more ancient material than is available to us, and, relatedly, because these authors often directly transmit earlier cultural phenomena, without necessarily understanding their original import. Such phenomena frequently stand out within these later texts as aberrant or confused, and by attending to these anomalies one is able to excavate earlier layers of cultural meaning and signification. Chapter 1, for instance, discusses an anecdote from Diodorus Siculus that presents, without explanation, how the archaic athlete Milo marched into battle wearing his six Olympic crowns, while chapter 6 traces the strange ellipses and contradictions embedded in Apollodorus’s compilation of the myth of the Seven against Thebes.

Finally, while the book is informed by Cultural Poetics, its arguments are simultaneously built up from close textual analyses and explications that recruit the reading practices of literary formalism. Each chapter comprises literary readings attentive to diction, narrative patterns, intertextuality and allusion, and generic expectations. This sort of granular sensitivity to the formal features and nuances of the literary works presented will allow us to detect in a more comprehensive way the textual strategies and aberrations that the book’s historicist perspective seeks to elicit.

COLONIAL DISCOURSE IN THE ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL PERIODS

The texts I consider offer instances of or reactions to the larger conceptual category of colonial discourse. I understand ancient Greek colonial discourse to be a discourse comprising the totality of literary texts and other cultural artifacts relating to foundations (of cities, regions, groups of people) as well as the rules and practices that underlie the production of these artifacts. That is, I take discourse in this sense to be systematic in character, with rules and practices that provide the metaphors, paradigms, analogies, and concepts for how it expresses its subject matter, for how it “delimits the sayable.” For colonial discourse, “the sayable”—


19. See Henriques et al. 1998: 105–6. This definition of discourse ultimately derives from Foucault (1972) but also appears in numerous adaptations of Foucauldian discourse (see Mills 2004: 43–44, 94–115). I provide a definition of discourse because of the fluidity and range of meanings accorded to the term between and even within discrete disciplines. For example, my definition of discourse differs from that of Mac Sweeney (2015: 3), for whom “foundation discourse” refers to the
the way in which a particular event or sequence of events is constructed and expressed—can take the literary form of a colonial narrative. Throughout the book, for the sake of variety, I will refer to particular colonial narratives as foundation myths, stories, or tales.20

There is no discrete, autonomous Greek genre concerned with *ktisis* (foundation) until the Hellenistic period.21 Rather, colonial narratives appear in a wide range of genres, in a variety of contexts, and in both poetry and prose. Yet the relative coherence and systematicity of colonial discourse entail that colonial narratives produced across this range of genres and contexts not only exhibit recognizable narrative patterns, metaphors, and concepts but also, as this book aims to show, maintain a degree of ideological integrity, a persistent angle of vision.22

The late archaic to the early classical period (ca. 520–440 B.C.E.) offers a productive time frame in which to study the conjunction of seers and the ideological motivations of ancient Greek colonial discourse. During this period the confluence and imbrication of an array of phenomena created a cultural environment in which colonial discourse became especially charged. The era witnessed the Greek colonial movement, which, begun in earnest in the eighth century, was still ongoing in the fifth century. It also marked the heyday of the Delphic oracle's Panhellenic influence and the height of its status as the principal colonial oracle. At the

---

20. While acknowledging the anachronistic nature of these terms, I use *colony*, *colonization*, and *colonial* in this book. I also treat *colony* and *foundation* as synonyms. In an influential article, Osborne (1998) campaigned against applying the term *colony* to archaic settlements of the eighth and seventh centuries, since these sites were not established in the same organized manner of later Greek colonies. He further argued against the term because of the "strong 'statist' overtones" it connotes to our modern, Western ears (1998: 251). Osborne's stance, however, has been so influential that, paradoxically, it has mostly liberated the word from many of the misconceptions he maintained it promoted. Thus note Kowalzig's (2007: 267n3) assessment: "Thanks to Osborne (1998) much attention has been drawn to the conceptual differences between Greek colonization in the Mediterranean and the colonial movement of modern European states, and the term should by now be free of any culturally specific baggage." See also Hall (2008: 38415): "Osborne . . . rightly points out that 'colonisation' is not an entirely appropriate term to describe the movements of Greek peoples from the 8th century, but since it has become conventional usage and since the perpetual search for synonyms becomes tedious after a while, it is here retained for the sake of convenience." See also Tandy 1997: 75; Tsetskiladze 2006b: xxiii-lxxiii; Malkin 2016. Osborne (2016) continues to argue for the inappropriateness of these terms.


same time, it included the florescence of the independent seer, who played a central role especially in the events during and surrounding the Persian Wars. The sixth and fifth centuries were also a period of stasis within individual poleis where the aristocracy’s traditional outlets of power became threatened and where the elite sought to maintain their foothold in part through assertions of personal charismatic authority, including as athletic victors and as colonial founders. Finally, the period’s vibrant poetic economy produced genres that readily accommodated colonial discourse, including elegy and epinikion. Thus upheaval and crisis, shifting populations and contested claims of authority, competing forms of oracular and mantic divination, each at the height of their power, and the embeddedness of Greek poetry—these are some of the main factors that, as we will see, converge in the sixth and fifth centuries and account for the ideological intensity of archaic and classical colonial discourse.

**PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP**

This book brings together two major strands of scholarly inquiry, the study of Greek colonization and of Greek seers and divination. As the preeminent oracle among the Greeks as well as the oracle by far the most connected to the Greek colonial movement, Delphi straddles the two subjects and provides a crucial point of contact between them.

Modern scholarship in both areas is massive, and an overview of even the most fundamental works would prove cumbersome and interminable. For scholarship on Greek colonization, I have elected to focus on key studies that have especially shaped the objectives undertaken here, while acknowledging other major scholarly contributions mainly in the footnotes. A number of these studies will be cited again in greater detail in the coming chapters. Whereas work on colonization continues to be diffuse and run the gamut from archaeological reports to modern historiography to literary studies to various combinations of these perspectives, in the case of divination it is possible to provide a brief overview of how this book converges with the social, cultural, and religious contexts of the archaic and classical periods.

---


24. For the different genres of poetry associated with foundations, see Dougherty 1994.

25. A discourse’s ideological strategies intensify the more forcefully it has to assert its unity and identity and overcome difference. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 112) argue, “Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of difference, to construct a centre.”

relates to certain recent trends in the field. I will then position this project in relation to the only book-length treatment of Greek seers to date, Michael Flower’s *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (2008).

Two groundbreaking studies, Iram Malkin’s *Religion and Colonization in Ancient Greece* (1987) and Carol Dougherty’s *The Poetics of Colonization* (1993), divergent though they are in their respective objectives, have both been instrumental in forming the concerns of this book. In *Religion and Colonization in Ancient Greece*, Malkin sought to offer for the first time a comprehensive account of the religious components of Greek colonization. Like earlier scholars, Malkin emphasized the importance of Delphic foundation oracles in the initial stages of the foundation process. What set Malkin apart from his predecessors, however, was his emphasis on the religious status accorded to the oikist himself and, relatedly, the significance of the oikist’s close connection to Apollo at Delphi. As he argued, the oikist’s session at Delphi was not merely when the oikist received a colonial oracle but also marked the moment at which Apollo was seen to confer on the oikist the necessary religious authority for the undertaking:

Apollo’s address endowed [the oikist] with a kind of religious aura which enabled him to make decisions about religion concerning, for example, the locations of sacred precincts, particular cults, and so on. In religious terms, the relationship of the oikist to the colonist was like Apollo’s relationship to him: an *exegetes*, an expounder of the god’s will.

Malkin’s reconstruction suggests that during his session at Delphi the oikist was seen to receive an extraordinary degree of religious authority: the “divinely appointed oikist” became a human counterpart to Apollo.

---

27. Donnellan and Nizzo (2016: 9) capture well the diversity of the field of Greek colonization: “This extremely dynamic and rapidly changing field comprises so many interrelated geophysical, hydrological, biological, cultural, social and economic realities which, as a consequence, allow for virtually endless varieties in scientific research.”

28. Two frequently cited dissertations focus on the seer: Kett 1966 (a prosopography of seers); Roth 1982.

29. Parke and Wormell 1956 and Fontenrose 1978 remain the classic compilations of Delphic oracular responses, including those concerning colonization. For Malkin’s take on the Delphic oracle and its role in colonization, as well as his own evaluation of Parke and Wormell and Fontenrose, see Malkin 1987: 17–91. See Kindt 2016: 5–10 for a concise evaluation of earlier scholarship and its singular and problematic focus on the authenticity and historicity of Delphic oracular responses.

30. Malkin 1989: 135; see also Malkin 1987: 27: “The most important aspect of the oikist’s consultation at Delphi was his personal designation by Apollo and the implied religious authority with which he was invested. . . . In this respect the religious authority with which the oikist was invested resembled that of Apollo himself, namely, the authority to expound religion.”

Malkin is also among the few scholars to address the role that divination played in Greek foundations. Noting the dearth of references to seers in archaic colonial contexts, Malkin accounts for their absence by suggesting that the oikist in this period was a figure in whom religious, military, and political powers all inhered and who thereby obviated the need for a separate seer. At the same time, he asserts that seers, by analogy with their well-documented presence on military campaigns, almost certainly did accompany colonial expeditions as members of the oikist’s retinue. For Malkin, then, the seer was most likely in attendance on archaic colonial expeditions, despite the silence of our sources, a plausible, but not crucial, presence on hand to assist the religious capabilities of the oikist himself.

Malkin’s interest lies in the historical reality of the religious and colonial phenomena he examines, and, to the extent possible, he attends exclusively to the historical evidence without incorporating references to these same phenomena found in Greek myths and legends. By contrast, in The Poetics of Colonization, Dougherty seeks to understand Greek representations of archaic colonization, be they historical, mythical, or legendary. Adopting a Cultural Poetics approach, Dougherty is less concerned with the realia of actual colonial practices than with the ways in which the Greeks chose to remember their foundations. To this end, she first collates the basic elements that constitute the archaic colonial narrative: A crisis within a community generates a Delphic consultation. At Delphi, Apollo prescribes a colonial foundation as a solution to this crisis and selects an oikist to lead the expedition. Resolution of the original crisis is achieved by establishing a new, independent polis. Dougherty then sets about deciphering the concepts, analogies, and metaphors manifest in this pattern that the Greeks deployed to articulate their colonial experience. As she shows, the representational strategies of colonial discourse helped the Greeks “familiarize the unfamiliar” and make sense of the challenging, disorienting experience of leaving home and settling a new land.

Dougherty demonstrates that the study of Greek colonial discourse is well served by Cultural Poetics methods of analysis as well as by the recognition of the inseparability of the historical and the mythical-legendary in the Greek cultural imaginary. The Poetics of Colonization accounts for much of the strangeness of

32. See Malkin 1987: 92–113, esp. 111–12. Flower (2008b: 4) notes our lack of Greek evidence for the progression from the concentration of mantic and political (“royal”) powers in a single individual to the allocation of these powers to discrete individuals.
33. See also Malkin 2003, 2009. Malkin remains one of the few scholars to consider seers in the context of foundations.
34. See Malkin 1987: 21. For a critique of Malkin’s attempt to keep myth and history separate, see Kearns 1991. Calame (2003) presents an extended argument for the inseparability of myth and history in Greek thought, using the foundation of Cyrene as a case study for demonstrating this point.