

Questions of Greek Identity in the Western Mediterranean

Leslie Feldballe

The Greeks from the city of Phocaea journeyed far from their home to establish trading posts in the far western Mediterranean. The Phocaeans encountered a veritable melting pot of peoples on their journey: Celts, Ligurians, Iberians, Phoenicians, Etruscans and eventually Romans all played a significant role in the western Mediterranean. Was there a unique Phocaeian identity on the Iberian Peninsula? How did that cultural identity evolved over the course of generations? Using both the literary and archaeological records, I will paint a picture of a thriving Greek culture surrounded by indigenous influences, examining how the two cultures interacted commercially and domestically. I will also examine the means by which the Phocaeian Greeks at Emporion were able to preserve ties to the motherland, even if many had never set foot on Ionian soil.

The Phocaeian Greeks journeyed far from their Ionian home to establish trading posts in the western Mediterranean, first among the Celts at Massalia, then among the Iberians at Emporion. The far west is known in myth as a land of mystery: of cannibals and temptresses, the stage for the tenth labor of Herakles. The far western Mediterranean was an area largely uncharted by Greeks but known for precious metals and other natural resources. By examining Phocaeian interaction with the Iberians, it is possible to shed light on the concept of Phocaeian identity as it existed in the Iberian Peninsula, and how that cultural identity evolved over the course of generations. Both the literary and archaeological records paint a picture of a thriving Greek culture surrounded by indigenous influences, showing how the two cultures interacted commercially and domestically. Examining the means by which the Phocaeian Greeks at Emporion were able to preserve ties to the motherland, even if many had never set foot on Ionian soil, can also shed light on how they saw themselves, and presented themselves to outsiders.

When examining ancient colonial endeavors it is tempting to rely on the terms “colony” and “colonize” to describe the movements of people, but there are various and diverse ways to define the term “colony”. In order to study the Greeks and their “colonial” presence outside of the area that we call “Greece” during the Archaic, Classical and Roman periods, one must consider these definitions of “colony.” The Greeks used the term ἀποικία to signify a settlement, nearly always independent or self-governing, of Greeks in a foreign country.¹ They also employed the term ἐμπόριον to mean a trading post, market town or factory, such as were established in the western Mediterranean by the Phoenicians.² ἀποικία, meaning “from home”, does not neatly translate into “colony” in our modern sense of the word. Nor were the first Ancient Greek “colonists” from the Archaic period colonists as we think of them today. The settler was the

οἰκιστής,³ the person setting out from the motherland to found a city.⁴

The first Greeks to lead the movement away from the homeland to establish permanent commercial settlements were Euboeans from Chalcis and Eretria, who established settlements on the Italian mainland in the 8th century B.C.E., and went on to found numerous settlements in Magna Graecia in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C.E. By the 7th and 6th centuries B.C.E., there were Greek settlements in Asia Minor, along the Black Sea coast, in North Africa and in the Western Mediterranean, which opened up valuable trade routes and forged economic relationships with indigenous peoples, as well as the Phoenicians and the Etruscans. In the 8th century B.C.E., inhabitants of the city of Phocaea, located on the Ionian coast of Asia Minor, began to look west in order to exploit lucrative trade routes already established by the Phoenicians and Etruscans.

The trading post called Massalia was founded in the 7th century B.C.E. by Phocaeans at the site of modern Marseilles in France, and was one of the first Greek ports in Western Europe. We know very little about the archaeology of Massalia because the modern city of Marseille has developed continuously atop the ancient settlement. From here, the Phocaeans looked even further westward in pursuit of trade and natural resources, and set their sights on the Iberian Peninsula. The far western Mediterranean was a mystery to many Greeks, and several myths swirled about its climate and inhabitants. The Pillars of Heracles, or the rocky outcroppings on the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa flanking the Strait of Gibraltar, were famous in the Ancient Greek mythic past.⁵ What the Greeks knew to be true, however, was that the west was rich in metals, especially tin, and that these metallurgical resources were already being exploited through complex trade routes previously established by the Phoenicians.

The Greeks also knew of an indigenous Iberian people called the Tartessians with whom the Phoenicians had ample trade, and of the wealth of their kingdom, Tartessos. Comprised of a harbor city and its surrounding area, Tartessos was located on the southern coast of the Iberian Peninsula, in modern Andalusia at the mouth of the Guadalquivir River.⁶ The Tartessians were famed in antiquity for their wealth in minerals and precious metals. The areas that are now known as Southern England, France, Spain, and Portugal were rich in tin deposits to which the Tartessians had relatively easy access. The Tartessians were extremely successful at exploiting the natural resources of the region, and they appear to have profited immensely from their ability to control the flow of precious metals down the Guadalquivir River and into the hands of waiting tradesmen.⁷

With precious metals so accessible in the Iberian Peninsula, there is little reason to wonder why the Phocaeans moved west from their settlement at Massalia to found a trading post on the eastern coast of modern Spain. This new site, Emporion, whose name supports its intended function, was founded circa 575 B.C.E., although the ancient sources disagree as to whether it was Phocaeans from Phocaea or Phocaeans from Massalia who first settled there.⁸

The original settlement at Emporion is known as the *Palaiapolis*, located on a small island at the mouth of the river Fluvia. Once the *Palaiapolis* was established, Greek pottery began to appear at indigenous sites further inland, at places like Ullastret, an indigenous settlement nearby, which showed signs of having prospered once Emporion was established. After about a generation, some of the settlers of the *Palaiapolis* moved to the mainland and created an additional settlement known as the *Neapolis*. Despite the fact that most of the remains date to the Roman period, it is possible to get an idea of what the *Neapolis* looked like in the Greek period. Prior to 200 B.C.E. it appears that the city lacked a theatre or other structure for entertainment. This is not surprising since the settlement in its earliest phases was a trading post. Both Strabo and Livy describe the *Neapolis* as a *dipolis*, or a “double city”, with separate neighborhoods for Iberians and Greeks which were separated by a wall within the city itself.⁹ Excavations at Emporion have yet to yield the location of the indigenous quarter of the city that was so widely reported in the ancient sources, nor are there any indications of a wall which separated the Iberians and the Greeks. Analyses of the *necropoleis* at Emporion indicate that Greeks and Iberians shared cemeteries and were often buried with a mixture of Greek and indigenous grave goods, and the Emporitans enjoyed a prosperous relationship with the Iberians at the nearby settlement of Ullastret. It appears that the inhabitants

of Ullastret benefitted immensely from the nearby Greek presence and the huge influx of eastern Mediterranean goods which poured into Emporion. Extensive trade with Emporion is attested by a large number of Emporitans coins from the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C.E.¹⁰ Given the friendly relations between the Emporitans and their indigenous neighbors, it would not be radical to assume that they would have shared their urban space.

In addition to Emporion, there is a collection of other settlements known through the literary record to have been established by the Greeks on the Iberian Peninsula.¹¹ Only one of these settlements, Rhode, has been attested in the archaeological record. Rhode is located across the Bay of Roses from Emporion, and the two comprise the only two known Greek settlements, or “colonies” on the Iberian Peninsula. A popular theory tells us that Rhode was founded by settlers from Rhodes in the 8th century B.C.E., but it was likely founded in the 5th century B.C.E. by settlers from Emporion and Massalia.

In order to understand how the western Greeks viewed themselves and their cultural identity as part of the larger cultural milieu of the Mediterranean, one must first try to understand the idea of cultural identity in and of itself. In Greek, the term ἔθνος has been employed by many authors throughout history to mean a variety of things. Liddell and Scott define ἔθνος in its simplest form as a number of people living together, a company, or a body of men.¹² It has been used to describe tribes, groups and nations. The common denominator of all these uses, however, is that it essentially describes a group of people living and acting together, although not necessarily belonging to one race, tribe or kinship group (γένος).

In modern English, we have no term like ἔθνος. The closest approximation that we have has been identified by the sociologist Anthony Smith as the French word *ethnie*. According to Smith *ethnie* does not describe an objective ethnic reality, but more the meanings “conferred by a number of men and women over some generations on certain cultural, spatial and temporal properties of their interaction and shared experience.”¹³ There are several dimensions of *ethnie*, according to Smith, including a collective name, Thucydides focuses on this concept in the *Archaeology*, the first book of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, when he discusses the development of the peoples of *Hellas*. Another dimension is that of a common myth of descent: foundation mythology is widespread in the ancient literature. A common foundation myth can help groups of people answer questions about why they are all part of the same community. Once this has been established, this can be carried away from a specific

geographical region with colonies or even colonies of colonies. Other dimensions of ethnicity include a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity.¹⁴

Before these dimensions can be explored through the lens of emigration, one must first examine how the Greeks viewed themselves even before they began to send settlers to faraway lands. There is an idea of a common “Greek” identity, but the inhabitants of the area that we know as Greece can fundamentally be seen as speakers of a set of related, mutually intelligible dialects of what we know as Greek. These ancient speakers, however would likely not have thought of it in such broad terms. Dialectical differences between Dorians, Ionians and Aeolians, would have been glaring to native speakers. We know that throughout the ancient texts, the Greeks are split into these dialectical and regional groups, the Dorians, the Ionians, the Aeolians, the Lesbians, the Arcadians, the Cypriots – the list can go on as one narrows down regional and dialectical differences.

But did these regional differences prevail once Greeks began to emigrate and the settlers now viewed themselves not on a stage with other Greeks, but on a stage with completely different cultural and linguistic groups? It seems unlikely that when the first Greek settlers came out to the west in the 8th century B.C.E., that they carried with them the “preconstituted consciousness of belonging to a wider Hellenic community.”¹⁵ These Greeks would have begun to view themselves in contrast with the indigenous populations they encountered. In their journey westward, the Phocaean Greeks would have crossed paths with a host of indigenous peoples: the Celts in the lower Rhône basin of France and the interior regions of France, Spain and Portugal, the Ligurians, along the north Italian coast east of Massalia and on the Iberian Peninsula, the Iberians along the coastal zones of Southern and Eastern Spain.¹⁶ These settlers would have been living a great distance from and out of regular contact with the motherland, among populations with whom they shared no common language or customs. In this situation, they may have thought more proudly of themselves as “Greeks” than they did before they left home.

According to Strabo, prior to the founding of Massalia, the Phocaeans consulted Artemis of the Ephesians for guidance in this venture and were provided with an Ephesian woman named Aristarkhe as the leader for their expedition. The night before they set sail, the goddess appeared to Aristarkhe in a dream, ordering her to take along with her the sacred image of Artemis.¹⁷ The Phocaeans solidified their distinctive

Ionian identity, which the sociologist Smith names as a fundamental aspect of *ethnie*, when they brought with them the cult of Ephesian Artemis. Ephesian Artemis was venerated at Massalia and Emporion, although no archaeological remains of the cult have been located, and there is evidence of worship of the goddess at Ibiza and other sites around the Iberian Peninsula.

When a city like Phocaea was in the planning phases of emigration, it would appoint a person or a group of people who would function as the *oikist* or *oikists*: the founding member or members in charge of organization and control. This person would have overseen construction, religious ritual and “foreign policy” - interaction with the indigenous peoples. The *oikist* of Massalia is reported to have been a man named Protis, a merchant. Protis would have been the man to oversee the veneration of Ephesian Artemis, as well as other gods worshipped there, and establish temples in her honor. Aristotle tells us that there was a γένος at Massalia known as the Protidaei, who were descended from this *oikist*.¹⁸ Although there would indeed have been an *oikist* at Massalia, it is likely that “Protis” was invented for the self-glorification of this *genos* and the reinforcement of the symbolic power that the *oikist* had in the settlement. Protis is derived from the Greek word for “first” and is likely a symbolic name of the *oikist*. The γένος of the Protidaei had claim in name to being the first inhabitants of Massalia, and the Massaliotes were unified under the foundation tale of Protis.

It appears that, at the time of their foundation, the inhabitants of Massalia and Emporion did not come into violent conflict with the indigenous populations. At Emporion especially, the Iberians seemed to welcome the permanent Greek presence, and the local population thrived as partners in the trade relationships forged in the Iberian Peninsula. The flow of precious metals from the west and goods from the east created a prosperous environment that appeared to last for several generations.

The Emporitans appear to have been open to sharing their space with their indigenous neighbors: recall that they are reported to have shared the same settlement at Emporion; numerous *necropoleis* there indicate that they shared the same burial space as well. But how did they set themselves apart? The Phocaean Greeks were only a part of a melting pot of peoples in the western Mediterranean. How does one go about looking at the ways in which they distinguished themselves in this cultural milieu? Changes in architectural style and urban planning can shed light upon possible answers to this question.

In the 2nd century B.C.E. the city of Emporion underwent a series of massive renovations and was expanded to include a religious complex and enlarged agora. With the city having been originally founded as an *emporion*, as its name so rightly proclaims, it is not unusual that the residents would have wanted a large commercial center, even if it does come at a later phase. By this time, the settlement at Emporion had been growing for generations, and most of the Greeks here would never have set foot on the soil of the Ionian motherland. The 2nd century B.C.E. brought with it the arrival of a Roman military presence on the Iberian Peninsula in response to the Carthaginian threat led by Hannibal. The Romans came in 218 B.C.E., under the leadership of Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Calvus, and added another layer to the complex relations which surrounded the Greeks there. Emporion became a strategic location for the Romans in the fight against Hannibal in the 2nd Punic War. The Roman presence cast a blow to Emporitan autonomy in the Iberian Peninsula. In response to this new and aggressive Roman presence, the Emporitans appear to have felt the need to reaffirm their ties to Phocaea and to reestablish themselves as the trade and commerce hub of the Iberian Peninsula. As Kaiser hypothesizes, the addition of permanent, monumental architecture to their city plan was perhaps not spurred by increased prosperity brought by the Romans, but was a response to political stress. The Romans likely upset the delicate balance that the Emporitans had cultivated with the Iberians since they first arrived.¹⁹

By the time the Romans appeared at Emporion, most Emporitans had likely never set foot in Phocaea. They may have been descended from Phocaeans, or Massaliotes, or they may have been of mixed Greek and Iberian heritage. But one must wonder if the fact that they had never visited the city that had sent forth their ancestors affected them at all. To the Emporitans, Emporion *was* Phocaeen soil. These 2nd century B.C.E. renovations were likely emblematic of the desire to maintain economic control of the area, as well as establish the settlement more permanently with public architecture. It is clear that the Emporitans were working to distinguish themselves in some capacity, at the very least from the Iberians.²⁰

It is important to remember that any Greek identity was diverse and in a constant state of evolution. This is especially true when examined outside of the areas in which the Greeks were the dominant indigenous culture.²¹ In addition, similarities between the Phocaeen settlements at Emporion and Massalia, as well as other Phocaeen settlements like Lampsacus and Elea, might suggest other trends that show that there developed a distinct Phocaeen identity. Recall that several ancient sources tell us that Emporion was

populated by Phocaeans *and* Massaliotes, and the ancient authors have a tendency to regard these western settlements as either Phocaeen *or* Massaliote, often without distinction. An inscription from the Phocaeen settlement at Lampsacus in Ionia, relating to peace agreements between Rome and Philip V, describes Massalia as the sister city of Lampsacus. The Massaliotes declare themselves to be the brothers of the Lampsacenes, and that good will always accompanies kinship.²² This indicates that even in the 2nd century B.C.E. close ties remained between the daughter cities of Phocaea, long after the first Massaliotes sailed across the Mediterranean from Ionia. The inhabitants of these cities had an awareness of their Phocaeen ancestry and their identity as Phocaeans.

One cannot ignore the archeological evidence for Greco-Iberian interaction at Emporion and the surrounding Iberian settlements. This can likely be ascribed to the fact that Emporion was established by the Phocaeans as a trading post, and thrived on interaction with the indigenous population to fuel trade and commerce. Their reason for settling was to reap the natural resources from these lands and partake in the lucrative trade routes controlled by Tartessians, Phoenicians and Etruscans. Understanding and interacting with the local peoples would have been entirely to their benefit. Similarly, the locals would have viewed the settlers as potential for increased wealth and thus worked to preserve friendly relations.

The trend of good relations between the settlers and the indigenous, the consistency of religious traditions with sister cities and the motherland and the evidence of political solidarity all coalesce to form a sense of Phocaeen heritage that recalls the sociologist Anthony Smith's dimensions of *ethnie*, or *ἔθνος*. Even if the Massaliotes and Emporitans of the 2nd century B.C.E. could not feel the same connection to the motherland that their founding fathers did, they were still able to project a Phocaeen identity to the outside world. In the later years of their development, their Phocaeen identity was not a last vestige of a culture disappearing under the influence of the Romans, but was consciously maintained by the communities in order to project that identity to the rest of the Mediterranean.

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¹ Websters New International Dictionary. “Colony” 528.

² Liddell and Scott 1889, “ μπόριον” 256.

³ Liddell and Scott 1889, “ο κιστής” 546.

⁴ I will use the terms “settlers” and “settlements” rather than “colonists” or “colonies” to ensure that no unwanted connotations come with the terminology. This will allow the author to discuss ancient Greek settlements in a general sense, and to differentiate where needed to discuss more specific terminology.

⁵ As the tenth of his twelve labors, Heracles journeyed west to obtain the cattle of Geryon on the island of Erytheia in the far western Mediterranean. (Strabo. *Geog.* 3.5.5).

⁶ Pausanias. *Description of Greece.* 6.14.3.

⁷ Herodotus. *Hist.* 1.163

⁸ Livy tells us that it was colonists from Phocaea itself that founded Emporion (*History of Rome.* 34.9.1) who also resided there with Massaliotes and Iberians. Strabo says that the founders were from Massalia (*Geography.* 3.4.8).

⁹ Strabo. *Geog.* 3.4.8, Livy. *Hist. of Rome.* 34.9.1-2

¹⁰ Martin i Ortega 2001.

¹¹ Carpenter 1925.

¹² Liddell and Scott 1889, “ θνός” 226.

¹³ Smith 1986, 22.

¹⁴ Smith 1986.

¹⁵ Hall 2004, 38.

¹⁶ Dietler 2009.

¹⁷ Strabo. *Geog.* 4.179

¹⁸ Preserved by Atheneus 13.576a.

¹⁹ Kaiser 2001.

²⁰ Kaiser 2001.

²¹ Lomas 2004, 475-490.

²² Dominguez 2004.