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Myth as an Instrument for the Study of Greek and Indigenous Identities II: Myths in Western Greek Colonies

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Des études récentes sur la notion d'ethnicité ont montré que l'identité d'un peuple ou d'une communauté peut se construire à partir d'éléments culturels différents et hétérogènes. Ce sont les acteurs sociaux eux-mêmes qui déterminent les critères qui les différencient dans leur relation aux autres. Ces critères peuvent varier dans le temps et dans l'espace, mais ils fournissent toujours les limites définissant les frontières entre les différents groupes ethniques qui se font face. Ainsi, il peut y avoir étanchéité des ethnies sans étanchéité des cultures. En Grèce ancienne, le problème est assez différent car les Grecs ne reconnaissent pas d'autre culture que la leur, et sont donc incapables de penser l'altérité ou la diversité culturelle en dehors du couple antithétique Grec/Barbares. Cela crée un système de relation à l'autre totalement dissymétrique. Néanmoins, en milieu colonial les Grecs se retrouvent en situation particulière parce que leurs voisins sont précisément des populations non grecques avec lesquelles ils sont contraints d'établir des relations quotidiennes normalisées. Ils doivent alors produire pour eux-mêmes une représentation de ces autres, et pour ce faire, ils utilisent le mythe sous la forme d'un récit de fondation. En conséquence, l'étude de ces mythes nous permet de saisir la perception que les Grecs ont du monde étranger qui les entoure et de leurs propres expériences dans cette relation aux autres. Le récit mythologique apparaît ainsi comme un instrument privilégié pour comprendre comment les Grecs ont construit leur propre identité et celle des autres.

On se propose ici d'étudier deux récits de fondation, celui de la cité de Tarente dans le sud de l'Italie, et de la cité d'Apollonia en Illyrie, à travers les témoignages d'auteurs anciens (Justin pour Tarente, et Pausanias pour Apollonia). Il s'agit donc essentiellement d'une étude de documents. On verra que dans les deux cas, en dépit des variantes dues à des contextes locaux évidemment différents, le problème des colons est de justifier l'appropriation d'un sol qui ne leur appartient pas, et par voie de conséquence, de normaliser leur rapport avec les populations indigènes auxquelles ils ont volé une partie du territoire. En Grèce propre, à Athènes par exemple, le mythe de l'autochtonie pouvait fonctionner, et c'était la base de la citoyenneté et de l'identité civique ; dans les colonies c'était plus difficile du fait du contexte multiethnique, mais le mythe conserve la même fonction identitaire.*

The foundation of a Greek colony generally gives rise to narratives preserved by literary tradition, all using a mythical discourse because it entails speaking of origins. The value of these stories is significant, as they justify the very existence of the colony and determine its principal identity traits. Several versions of such narratives often exist, the origins of which are not always easy to explain because they reflect the antagonistic interests of different groups involved in the colonial process. The difficulty in comprehending these myths lies especially in the fact that as stories that became impressive when and where they were told, they should not be detached from their context. This context, which refers to a very remote past, is still little known to us. However, studying these myths enables us to throw some light on the history of the colonial world by highlighting the cultural paradigms which allowed the Greeks to conceive the colonial phenomenon and, indeed, even models of action.

A case in point is the story of how Tarentum was founded, as conveyed by the Latin writer Justin. Tarentum was established about 706 B.C. by Spartan colonists on the gulf known as Tarentum on the Ionian coast of southern Italy, situated on the remote borders of Oenotria and Apulia. Not much is known about Justin as an author. Some place him in the 2nd century A.D., others in the 4th. He abridged a monumental work which would otherwise have been lost, the *Philippic Histories* by Pompeius Trogus, a Roman historian of Gallic origin living in the Augustinian era. This Universal History in 44 books compiled information from different Greek sources and, as a result, it should contain a combination of all traditions relative to one given theme. It is evidently difficult to know what Justin preserved or discarded from the original, but in the abridgement he presents, the different versions are fairly obvious. Here is the unabridged version of his story (Book III, chapter 4):

Thanks to its morals, Sparta was soon so strong that when they declared war on the Messenians who had outraged their daughters during a ceremonial sacrifice, they swore by the most fearsome oath not to return home before taking Messenia, so much did they count on their strength or luck. This was the beginning of dissension between Greeks and the cause of an internal war. But they were mistaken in their predictions and remained six years outside the walls of the city. Recalled by the complaints of their wives, who were tired of such a long widowhood, they feared that this determination to wage war would be more fatal to them than for the Messenians. Indeed, they compensated for the losses that war caused amongst the youth through the fertility of their women, while combat caused the Spartans continual losses that the fertility of their wives, in the absence of their husbands, could not recoup. Consequently, they chose young men from relief troops after the pledging of the oath and sent them back to Sparta with permission to indiscriminately mate with all women, convinced they would conceive more quickly if each of them tried with several men. The children born as a result of this policy were called Partheniae, as a reminder of the dishonour of their mothers. When reaching the age of thirty, fearing destitution, because none of them had a father they could hope to inherit from, they took Phalantus, the son of Aratus, who had advised the Spartans to send the youth back to father children, as their leader. As they owed their very existence to the advice of the father, they hoped to find support for their expectations and their honour in the son.

Without taking leave of their mothers, who they regarded as tainted with the infamy of adultery, they left in search of a settlement, and after being tossed about for a long time in diverse adventures, they seized the citadel of Tarentum, captured the former inhabitants and established

themselves in the town. But after many years, Phalantus, their leader, was banished by sedition. He retired to Brundisium, where the Tarentinians had taken refuge after being chased from their country. In his final moments, he persuaded them to grind his bones and final remains and to scatter them in secret in the agora of Tarentum because, he told them, the oracle at Delphi had declared that they could recover their homeland through such action. Believing that he had revealed the destiny of his fellow citizens to avenge himself, they followed his recommendations, but the prophecy had an entirely contrary meaning. The god had actually promised perpetual possession and not the loss of the town, and this is how, through the counsel of the exiled leader and the intervention of their enemies, the possession of Tarentum was forever assured to the Partheniae. In memory of this, they awarded Phalantus divine honours.

The narrative is organised around two distinct periods: the war between Spartans and Messenians, and the departure of the Partheniae and their difficult occupation of Tarentum¹. There is, of course, a very close unity between the two periods. Firstly, due to the filiation of Aratus and Phalantus, and secondly, due to the logical relation which made the episode of the adulterous coupling the cause of the departure of the Partheniae. The first part is evidently dependent on the local tradition of Sparta because it revolves around the war against the Messenians – an episode regarded as historical – and the inferior status of the Partheniae in relation to the *homoioi* or citizens with full rights. The context is therefore quite easily identified here.

The term ‘Partheniae’ is in itself interesting, because it conjugates the masculine of the article with the feminine form of the noun. This formation is a product of the rites of symbolic inversion linked with the initiation practices which structured Spartan society. The most well known is the *crypteia*, which allowed the passage from the ephebe class to that of adult citizens. It is clear that the Partheniae represented a social category that could not acquire citizenship because firstly of their fathers who, not being bound by the oath, were not fully-fledged warriors and therefore could not transmit complete citizenship, and secondly, because of the infamy of adultery as underlined in Justin’s account. We also know that in Spartan society, the possession of a *kleros* that allowed contribution to the *sysitia* was a condition of citizenship. The Partheniae could not receive *kleros*, since they were of unknown fathers. Although Justin put the economic aspect in the foreground – they feared destitution – in a strictly Spartan context, the handicap was mainly political. The real problem of the Partheniae was that they could not attain full rights of citizenship, and their only remaining hope was to leave and form another city. Their departure was also a condition for the proper functioning of Spartan society, where the number of inferiors could not be allowed to increase without endangering the very status of the *homoioi*.

The first episode that awaited the Partheniae was war. In a rare occurrence, they did not found a new town, but took an indigenous city by force. The war episode and military victory constituted the first stage of reinstated citizenship, as the Partheniae had to first prove they were capable of being real warriors. It is interesting to note that in other traditions, the oracle of Delphi, who was consulted before the departure of the colonists, expresses itself in these terms:

Here: I offer you Satyrion as a gift
 And also allow you to people the region
 Of lush Tarentum, and to be the plague
 That must wreak havoc on the Iapygian².

Installation in Tarentum, or the foundation process, is therefore presented as the last episode that terminated a crisis caused by the estrangement of a whole generation. We have here the three characteristic moments of rites of passage with inversion of status and exile from the original community, the phase of wandering and banishment, and then the acquisition of a new status, the foundation in this case equating to a process of integration. If it is possible for the rites of initiation to furnish a paradigm for foundation stories, it is because the two phenomena can be described in accordance with the same sequence.

However, this scenario is not the only one. Justin's story also integrates another event: that of the banishment of Phalantus and his return to the agora of Tarentum by means of his dispersed ashes. The action unfolded as two parallels: after the Partheniae had to leave Sparta, the exile of the founding father having to leave Tarentum to take refuge at Brundisium seems to be the same ordeal repeated. Therefore, a new etiological story is brought into play in a context which is no longer that of Sparta but of Tarentum in its relations with the locals. It is very likely that Justin follows the Tarentum tradition here. This story was not tacked on to the preceding one. Justin's text is skilfully constructed and only comes to an end with the death of Phalantus, whereas it began with his father Aratus. The latter originated the Partheniae, and the son, assuming his father's responsibility, as was the case in archaic societies, had to put an end to the Partheniae. The father had created inferior citizens who had to live in exile and the son had to durably establish fully-fledged citizens. But why was this new story necessary?

In actual fact, the first episode restores the Partheniae to their status of authentic warriors and accomplished adults entitled to claim full citizenship. They are in a position to found a city, but the capture of Tarentum does not amount to a real foundation. Rather, it is an act of war which in itself does not justify the appropriation of a territory, and that is why they needed another rite to secure the foundation of the city on a long term basis. This rite did not appear to be a Greek rite, but an indigenous one. Indeed, incinerating corpses and dispersing the ashes was not a Greek funeral custom. This is why, since its origin, the Tarentum necropolis has only provided burial tombs. On the other hand, it seems that this was the practice peculiar to the neighbouring Iapygian population, also called Messapians. In fact, archaeological research in their territory has not found any burial sepulchre before the 6th century B.C., a date when, according to other evidence such as the use of the Tarentum alphabet or the Greek mythological scenes on representative vases, Hellenic influence began to impact on local culture. Messapian habitats had existed from at least the 8th century. If the necropolises left no trace, it is because there was not any burial, which confirms the rite of incineration and dispersion of ashes.

It is therefore necessary to wonder why the myth needs to resort to non-Greek practices. In actual fact, Phalantus' stratagem to secure the foundation of his town was to

translate the Greek routine of the foundation ritual into an indigenous version. The Greek version envisages the institution of worship of the founding father with a tomb in the agora. At the end of the text, the worship is well-established – the sign itself of an authentic foundation – but through a dispersion of ashes that refers to an indigenous ritual. Therefore, the indigenous ritual serves as mediation to restore the Greek heroic figure. It is at this point that the reference to the oracle of Delphi is made, without which there is no authenticated colonisation. Normally, in these stories, the oracle intervenes earlier, before the colonists depart for their new destination. One finds the figure of the cunning and clairvoyant hero capable of understanding the enigma of the oracle, a feature common to all founding fathers, but what is original is that the oracle makes the indigenous people intervene for its fulfilment. In other words, one has the impression that it was the indigenous people themselves who founded the Greek city by conceding their land in spite of themselves, seeing that they had been fooled by Phalantus who deceived them about the meaning of the oracle. Once again, we are faced with symbolic inversions. We have an exile and barbarians, the very two faces of ‘the anti-citizen’ which established the civic community. At the end of the text, there is clearly a return to a stable situation after a crisis phase. Phalantus, an exile and a political refugee among the indigenous peoples, comes back to his homeland and receives the worship that is due to him. But this worship can only be established once the city has really been founded. What is made legitimate here is the appropriation of indigenous land by the Greeks. The right of the victor, far too prosaic, is not enough. The Greeks could only obtain this legitimate character as a gift from the legitimate owners. Consequently, the introduction of a native funeral ritual of territorial appropriation by dispersing ashes in the agora allowed a violent occupation to become perpetual concession. This resolved the contradiction that literary traditions have preserved well – the presence of a Greek founding hero, Phalantus, along with that of a native eponymous hero, Taras. It was not easy for Greeks to assume a mixed or mingled identity. Only the myth, rooted in a very particular ethno-cultural context, allowed this.

This problem of legitimate right to the land where the colony was founded is recurrent, and all foundation narratives aim at establishing this legitimacy. Indeed, for the Greeks, only indigenesness ensured inalienable right to the land. That was valid for a metropolis, but for colonies it was difficult to claim that the colonists were returning to the land of a former homeland³. The most extreme case is probably that of Apollonia of Illyria. The colony was founded about 600 B.C. by colonists, led by Gylax, from Corinth and Corfu. The town was allegedly called Gylakeia, before taking the name of the god. There is no actual foundation narrative available, but an Olympia inscription on an *ex voto*, erected by the Apollonians after a victory over a neighbouring city, alludes to the foundation of the city in these terms:

“We are dedicated in memory of Apollonia, which long-haired Phoebus founded in the Ionian Sea. Those who have conquered the borders of the land of the Abantide have erected this monument here with the help of the gods as a tribute to Thronion”⁴. Pausanias’s text further annotates this inscription as follows:

the country called Abantide and the city of Thronion were part of the Thesprotic of Epirus along the Ceraunian Mountains. The Greek fleets having been scattered on their return voyage from Troy, the Locrians from Thronion, at the mouth of the Boagrius river, and the Abantes of Euboea, each with their eight ships, were swept along toward the Ceraunian Mountains. They settled there, founded the city of Thronion, and by a mutual accord gave the name Abantide to all the portion of territory that they shared. But later, they were expelled from it after having been defeated in war by their Apollonian neighbours.

Pausanias's text is very clear. The Apollonians settled in a region that did not belong to them, as the first Greeks to disembark there were the Euboeans (the Abantes), on returning from the Trojan War. This tradition is also attested to by Apollodorus:

After the sacking of Ilion (Troy), Menestheus, Pheidippos, Antiphos, the companions of Elephenor and Philoctetes navigated in convoy up to Mimas... Elephenor, according to him, died at Troy, but his companions, who were carried away to the Ionian Gulf, settled at Apollonia in Epirus⁵.

The Abantes and the character of Elephenor are well known to Homer, who mentions them in the Catalogue of Vessels.

Those who honoured Euboea, the Abantides radiating ardour, Chalcis, Eretria and Histiaea of abundant grapes, Cerinthus on the seaside and the high citadel of Dion, those who honoured Carystus and those who honoured Styra, these were led by Elephenor, the offspring of Ares, descendant of Chalcodon, the kind-hearted leader of the Abantes. He is the one who followed the swift Abantes who had long hair at the back of his head⁶.

The tradition is therefore unanimous in recognising in the Abantes, the Euboeans of Elephenor, who came to settle in Epirus in the Apollonian region after the fall of Troy.

The Olympia inscription claims that the founder of the town was not a man, heroic or otherwise, but Apollo himself. One could believe that it exists only to explain the origin of the name of the town, but the inscription also refers to the country of the Abantes, and to 'long-haired' Apollo, which calls to mind the hair of the Abantes of the *Iliad*, this connection signifying that Apollo, founder of Apollonia, is also Apollo protector of the Abantes, which is a priori paradoxical⁷. But why remember the foundation of the town by a military event that took place a century and a half later? Also, why remember that this land was that of another Greek population that had arrived there well before the Corinthians who, therefore, had no legitimate right to occupy it? The answer is in the text itself. It is Apollo himself who decided. In fact, only he could be the founder of the town. The Apollonians could not be unaware of the very solidly established tradition of a Euboean presence in the region before their arrival. Neither could they erase their Corcyra-Corinthian origin and, consequently, it was very difficult for them to justify the conquest of land to which they had no legitimate right. They had two remaining solutions. One, they claimed to be descendants of the first Trojans that arrived in the area, but this Trojan identity card had already been taken by the Molossians and the Chaonians living in Epirus and nothing connected the Apollonians to these two peoples, and two, they shifted the heavy responsibility over to a divinity. If, in addition, this god happened to be the same one that protected the conquered people and territory, there could be no better alibi!

It was in this manner that the Apollonians came to be at home on the territory of the Abantes. They even had the right to increase its size (if this was not the case, how would the gods have granted them victory?), because Apollo was home there and was the Archegete, as in the case of Naxos for the Euboeans. The tradition which keeps the memory of the name change of the colony must therefore be taken seriously. It is impossible to know when the change took place, although it was probably before the conquest of Thronion, which occurred in the course of the 5th century. This name change corresponds to a foundation myth, the echo of which is found in the Olympia inscription.

The difference between the story of Justin, who had to stage two different episodes to legitimise the foundation of Tarentum, and the three lines of the Olympia inscription, using a simple name change to justify the foundation of Apollonia, seems huge. However, it is still the myth that is at work, because it alone can feed the narrative of origins that supports the appropriation of a territory and grants durable identity.

NOTES

- * L'intégralité du texte en français est disponible sur le site: <http://web.upmf-grenoble.fr/SH/Person-Hist/Lamboley/Lamboley.html/>. La traduction a été réalisée par Mme Hutchinson que je remercie personnellement.
- ¹ The second period is itself divided into two episodes: the capture of the village and expulsion of its inhabitants, and the exile of Phalantus and the return of his ashes.
 - ² Oracle kept by Strabo (VI, 3, 2) who quoted the historian Antiochus. The Iapygia are the indigenous peoples who, in Justin's text, found refuge at Brindisi, a town situated about sixty kilometres from Tarentum on the Adriatic coast. As regards Satyrion, it concerns an Iapygian site identified by archaeological digs and located on the Ionian coast about twelve kilometres south of Tarentum.
 - ³ The myths of autochthony are numerous: just as with Thebes, Cadmus sowed the teeth of the local dragon in the soil from which the *Spartoi* were born (= the sown ones, those who were born from the soil) at the origin of the Thebans. As a first king, Athens had Erichthonius, who was born from the sperm of Hephaestus which had fallen on the land of Attica. Legend says that Erichthonius had a body that ended in the tail of a serpent, which is normal for creatures born from the Earth. The Spartans called themselves descendants of Heracles, whose homeland was the Peloponnese.
 - ⁴ Inscription read and preserved by Pausanias, V, 22, 2-4.
 - ⁵ Apollodorus, *Epitome* VI, 15b. The verb used by Apollodorus is *oikein*, which means "to live, reside" and not *oikizein*, which is used for colonial foundations. We are, therefore, not in a colonial context, which is normal as the episode is placed after the fall of Troy, well before the colonial period. The Abantide is, therefore, viewed as the new homeland of the Euboeans.
 - ⁶ Homer, *Iliad*, 2, 536-543.
 - ⁷ Excavations on the site at Eretria have shown that the main sanctuary of this town was consecrated to Apollo. Furthermore, the first Euboean foundation in Sicily, on the site at Naxos, was constructed under the protection of Apollo Archegete, founder of the town (Thucydides VI, 1, 3). This makes clear the importance of this divinity to the Euboean peoples.

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