

Athenian Colonies

A Greek Colony could be either an *apoikeia* (“a dwelling away from home” or a *klerukhia* (a cleruchy, “a holding by allotment”). During the main colonizing period (8th and 7th centuries BC), many Greek city-states sent out settlers and established the *apoikeia* – daughter colonies of the mother polis, completely separate entities with their own citizenship. Athens, however, especially in the 5th and 4th centuries, normally formed cleruchies, in which settlers kept their Athenian citizenship. One spur to colonization was the safeguarding of the grain fleets from the Black Sea – hence the line of Athenian outposts from the Hellespont and the Gallipoli Peninsula through Samos, the Thracian Chersonese, Skyros and Salamis.

The Athenian (aka Delian) league, later the Athenian Empire, controlled through its fleet the islands and coasts of the Aegean. Consequently, Athenian ships went back and forth all the time and Athenian colonists wanted to retain their citizenship and travel back to Athens at will. If an Athenian had to give up his citizenship, he probably wouldn't settle in a colony. While other Greek cities were sending colonies out as far as Marseilles and the Black Sea, neither Sparta nor Athens participated much because they both still had plentiful land nearby to exploit and send their surplus population to. Even when Athens started to need more food than it could produce, it simply imported grain with its fleet.

Many early colonies were compulsory; any family with more than two sons had to send at least one (and colonists had to stay in the colonies), because population pressure was a main motive. But Athens' 5th century colonies were voluntary – an opportunity more than an obligation. One 5th century colony limited colonists to the bottom two (of four) classes of Athens. By the 4th century, it looks like the upper classes- including the highest and richest – could go.

Sources for study of Athenian colonies include the historians Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon (the least useful) and the orations of Demosthenes and his counterparts (since they reflect current conflicts – including that with Phillip of Macedon). Later writers are reliable: Diodorus (Augustan period), Plutarch (2nd century AD) and medieval commentaries on ancient texts. But the major sources are inscriptions, especially Attic inscriptions, foundation decrees, 5th century “regulations” (for areas of suppressed rebellions where the role of the newly settled cleruchs versus the older inhabitants were set forth). Other inscriptional material comes from property taxes, confiscations of property (sale at public auctions), Athenian inscriptions which quoted decrees passed by cleruchies, dedications (on gifts sent back by colonists), epitaphs (e.g., tombstones in the Ceramicus, like that of Dionysios, who speaks of 2 fatherlands, Athens & Samos). From the colonies come decrees of the settlers (“Resolved by the council of the Athenians in Samos...), dedications to gods, cultic documents, especially for the Hephaisiteia on Limnos.

In Attic inscriptions, a person is identified by his name, his father's name, his tribe and his deme (village). Proper names repeat, sons being named after their grandfathers. So it is easy to link inscriptions into families except for the commonest of names. If a demotic is given, the man must be an Athenian; colonists retained their Attic demotics. It's also easy to spot non-Athenians & foreigners, e.g., a Milesian living on Samos. Problems arise if only the name & place where the person is living on Samos. Problems arise if only the name & place where the person is living are given. Thus, salaminians could be Athenians or “native” Salaminians, like Leon of Salamis, the metic (resident alien in Athens) – or perhaps citizen – arrested by the 30 tyrants. (Socrates refused to join in prosecuting him.)

Athens' colonization pace starts off slowly. The Pisistratid tyrants – 560-510 – sent out 2 colonies, probably to protect the Hellespont: at Sigeum, near Troy, and on the Chersonese. In the 5th century cleruchies were established on Euboea, in the Black sea area, in Italy & in the Aegean, with perhaps 10,000 Athenians living abroad, from as few as 500 at a place to Thurii, which was too big for Athenians alone to colonize so Athens sent out other Greek volunteers. Similarly, Amphipolis in Thrace included many settlers from Athenian allies, whom Athens was unable to control, since Athenians were in the

minority. The most famous of the cleruchies were Mytilene (Thuc 3) and Melos (Thuc 5), but the fall of the Athenian Empire in 404 caused most Athenian colonies to be abandoned.

Some 1,117 individuals are attested as residents in Athenian colonies (about 600 from the 4th century), many of them Athenians with demotics, many foreigners, many others with local place names. Over 90% are male, probably not a true index of the actual population because most inscriptions involve citizen matters and therefore mainly refer to males. The later the time, the greater the proportion of female names (about 25%), as fewer names come from political documents and more from epitaphs and private dedications in temples. Some famous cleruchs include Herodotus (Thurii), Harmodius and Aristogeiton (if not himself, at least his son) and Euripides (Salamis) – all 5th century; 4th century had Plato (Aegina) and Epicurus (Samos).

Colonial Institutions replicate those of Athens on a smaller scale: archon as chief magistrate and tax dating, polemarch, thesmothete. There were no military officers; generals and cavalry commanders were sent out from Attica, since colonies could not wage war on their own. Assemblies probably consisted of all citizens who showed up. The number in the Council is unknown but probably smaller than the 500 in Athens. There was no deme political structure, but tribal divisions had their own assemblies and cults. Local decrees were almost all merely honorific rather than policy-making, since that was probably handled by Athens.

Colonies were outposts of Athens, often used to hold land. An attack on an Athenian cleruchy was an attack on Athens itself. Since no court cases are attested in the colonies, it may well be that litigants in the 5th and 4th centuries went back to Athens for trial. The calendars of no different Greek cities varied and could be tampered with for cultic or political purposes, since it was based on a lunar year, which periodically had to be brought into synchronization with the solar year by intercalation. There is, however, no evidence for independent calendar fiddling in the Athenian colonies (except perhaps one Samian decree with elaborate calendar equations to other places.) Probably the basic year was established in Attica, but there may have been some form of local option, especially since you could not always count on getting word from Athens about changes.