

# **“In the Shadow”**

The Greek colonies of North America and the Atlantic

1500 BC – 1500 AD

A 3000 years old story that remained “in the shadow”

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## **Introduction**

The questions that triggered the research presented in this book arose from a curiosity about the name of the the westernmost island of the Faroe Island complex in the North Atlantic: “*Mykines*”. Where does this name come from, i.e. who gave it this name, and when? Is there any possible connection with the ancient Greek city of Mycenae (“Μυκίνας”, in Greek) in the Peloponnese, or is it simply a coincidence? And if there is a connection between the two places, what is it?

The basis of the research were the works of ancient authors like Plutarch, Hesiod, Homer, Plato and Apollonius Rhodius, who in their works provide detailed descriptions of heroic journeys like those of the Argonauts, Cronus, Heracles and Odysseus to areas “*beyond the ocean*”.

With geographical analysis as the main vehicle, “*In the Shadow*” tries to decode these voyage descriptions, put them on the modern map, and document their validity.

The result bears surprises and unexpected relationships, offering a new, alternative but documented reading of an untold story of at least 3000 years old.

## **Chapter 1: Plutarch’s Ogygia**

In his *De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet*, Plutarch, the ancient Greek writer and priest of Apollo at Delphi, quite vividly describes journeys by ancient mariners in the seas west of Britain, and makes reference to the “mythical” island of *Ogygia*. Specifically, Sulla, one of the key characters in Plutarch’s above work, informs us that he had met a priest of the pre-Olympian god Cronus, who had just returned from the “*great mainland*” (i.e. North America, as comes out in the analysis). This priest had told Sulla that the areas around Ogygia were still inhabited by descendants of Greeks who had arrived at the island in the distant past, the first group originally arriving with Cronus, and the second at a later time with Heracles.

Through geographical analysis of information provided by Plutarch, the island of Ogygia has been located on the present-day map and is identified with the island of St. Paul which lies in the entrance to the Gulf of St. Lawrence in Canada.

## Chapter 2: The journey of Odysseus

Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey* narrates the exciting adventures of the hero Odysseus during his legendary 10-year journey to return to his home and family on the island of Ithaca after the Trojan War. According to Homer, Ogygia is the island of Calypso, the "goddess-priestess-daughter" of Atlas, who rescues the shipwrecked Odysseus and entices him to remain with her for many years. The identification of the geographical location of Ogygia based on Plutarch's work in the previous chapter, led the way for the identification of essentially all the other stops mentioned by Homer during Odysseus' journey which, as it turns out, are all located in the Atlantic.

In short, according to our alternative perspective, Homer is presumably describing Odysseus' trip to and from the American continent, the most likely aim of which involved the acquisition of metals, a valuable trade commodity. Thus, Odysseus was not "lost" at sea but rather, having detailed knowledge about the sea routes, was in fact heading for the already established Greek colonies of North America (the same places as those mentioned by Plutarch a millennium later), where he spent eight years before returning to "Ithaca".

Homer, in our view, aimed to describe real events that took place in the Atlantic Ocean, but in such a way that to the general public and those not "in the know", the places and events seem to refer to the Mediterranean Sea. The possible reason for this unusual stratagem is discussed in the final chapter of the book.

The following are provided as examples of what we call Homer's "place-games", that is, games with place names bearing dual reference:

- The Homeric Ithaca, as it turns out, is not located in the Ionian Sea or even in the Mediterranean. Based on references to geography, topography and flora in the ancient texts, the island which we have identified as the one most likely referred to by Homer is that of Faial in the Azores. In our view, Homer "baptized" this island as Ithaca in order to serve the needs of the dual writing by directing the attention of the general public from the island's true location to the Ionian Sea. As for why Homer chose to utilize the island of the Ionian Ithaca, its location makes it unique among the Greek islands in that it satisfies the requirements of the dual narrative, as illustrated in the book.
- The Homeric text, most likely, makes explicit reference to the colonization of today's Prince Edward Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Canada, by a number of ancient Greek tribes: Achaeans, Cretans, Cydonians, Dorians and Pelagsians. The Homeric reference is made in a way which meets the requirements of the dual narrative, since this island is called "Crete" (possibly because the two islands have a similar shape), giving the impression that the reference is to the "known" Crete of the Aegean. Closer analysis, however, reveals that the reference relates to Prince Edward Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.
- Odysseus' grandfather Autolycus lived in *Parnassus*, but according to our analysis and findings, this was not the well-known mountain of Greek Boeotia. Autolycus was, most likely, located at the Inderøy peninsula, in the greater region of Trondheim of Norway, which Odysseus calls "native land", while much later, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Norwegian cadastral lists a farm named *Parnassus* (among dozens of other farms with names of Greek origin).
- Relying on information from both Homer and Plato, we conclude that *Hades*, the area of the Greek underworld, was located in the Arctic Circle island of Svalbard that today

belongs to Norway. Interestingly, Plato provides impressive details regarding ocean currents and areas of the Atlantic from the Gulf of Mexico up to the North Pole.

- There is evidence that possibly a large part of today's Macaronesia (i.e. the region containing the archipelagoes of the Azores, the Madeira Islands, the Canary Islands and the Cape Verde Islands) was inhabited by ancient Achaeans.
- The *Elysian Fields* (the resting place of the souls of the Greek heroes), the *Islands of the Blest* and the *Islands of Hesperides* are identified to be located in the region of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in Canada.

### Chapter 3: The labors of Heracles

Having located *Hades* and the *Islands of Hesperides* in the previous chapter paved the way for the geographical identification of places involved in some of Heracles' legendary "labors".

Specifically, according to our analysis, in his search for the "*apples of the Hesperides*" and the "*cattle of Geryon*", Heracles most probably visited the area where the Greek North American colonies were located, an assumption that is corroborated by the narrative of Plutarch. As for Heracles' going to *Hades* to capture Cerberus, in our view he visited the island of Svalbard that we have previously identified.

### Chapter 4: The voyage of the Argonauts

The travels of the Argonauts took place much earlier than those of Odysseus, indicating the ancient Greeks had been travelling the seas for many centuries before the time of Homer. In the *Odyssey*, Circe warns Odysseus to avoid travelling in a certain area (the entrance of the Gulf of St. Lawrence), telling him that the only ship to ever safely pass through it was the *Argo*, under the protection of the goddess Hera.

The identification of the Argonauts' route has been a subject of confusion and controversy among various writers since antiquity. Based on the earliest versions of references by Homer, Hesiod and Mimnermus, we plot an alternative version of *the Argo's* route. According to our findings, "*Aea*", the land of "*Aeetes*", where the Argonauts headed to obtain the "*golden fleece*", is most likely in today's *Haiti* in the Caribbean Sea. As for their return trip to home Iolcus, they followed the ocean currents north along a circuitous route, passing from the Gulf of St. Lawrence and then taking a route similar to that of Odysseus' for his return to "Ithaca".

Why include the Argonauts in our analysis? This will become evident in the next chapter.

### Chapter 5: The "footprints" on the "great mainland"

The narratives of the Greek classicists for journeys to the "*great mainland*" could perhaps be considered imaginary if evidence of "footprints" of the existence of the Greek colonies in North America were not found. However, such footprints can be traced in various sources, and still survive even in the present era in the cultures of indigenous peoples from the areas we presume to have been colonized by the ancient Greeks, relating to aspects like etymology of names and place names, knowledge of botany and therapeutical uses of plants, origin and religious myths, and astronomical knowledge.

Following are brief examples of some of the most striking footprints, all of which are described in detail and fully discussed in Chapter 5 of the book.

- The Viking Sagas tell the story of the first attempts of the Icelanders to colonize North America around 1000 AD (i.e., five centuries before Columbus). They refer to the native people by the name "*skra-elnir*", the second part of which could stem from the word "*Hellenes*" (Greeks).
- The indigenous peoples who were settled in the areas that were presumably inhabited by Greeks, such as the Ojibwe tribe, consider their ancestors to be five "beings" who, in the distant past, came out of the ocean. These ancestors taught them the religion of "Medawe", which lengthens life through the use of medicinal herbs, while the religious leaders who know the herbal art are called "*Medas*". The apparent similarity of the name and profile of *Medea*, the famous ancient Greek female with special knowledge of the uses of herbs, with that of the Ojibwe *Medas* is further reinforced by the fact that *Medea*, while accompanying the Argonauts, is reported by Homer to have passed from the shores of the Gulf of St. Lawrence where the Ojibwe were located in the distant past.
- Herbs such as *Rubus idaeus*, *Verbascum thapsus*, *Nepeta cataria* and others which are not endemic to the American continent (and according to the prevailing view they could not have reached America before the arrival of Columbus) were traditionally used by the Native Americans living in the area of presumed Greek colonization. Apart from the question of how and when these plant species reached the American continent, there is the question of how the indigenous peoples acquired the knowledge to use them in a way very similar to that prescribed by Dioscorides (a key representative of the ancient Greek medicinal tradition).
- Maps made by the first post-Columbus (15<sup>th</sup> century) explorers and, in particular, the French missionaries, in the presumed Greek-colonized area, record place names such as "*Thessalon*" and "*Minoa*", which bear obvious similarities to the Greek names "*Θεσσαλία*" ("Thessaly") and "*Μίνωας*" ("Minos").
- Native American names such as "*Mixinen*", an Ojibwan chief, and "*Mishine-macki*", a local tribe, bear apparent similarity to the Greek name of "*Μυκῆνες*" ("Mycenae"), while other tribal names in the areas of the analysis resemble the Greek names and/or words "Athens", "Attica", "Minos", "Hellenes", and "Naus".
- Some names of local deities also intriguingly resemble the names and characteristics of ancient Greek gods. For example, the tribes of the Huron and the Iroquois, named their god of war "*Areskoui*" and "*Agreskoue*" respectively, leading the early French missionaries working in the area to comment that the names shared a common root with the name of the Greek god of war "*Ἄρης*" ("Ares"). Similar evidence is reported for a female deity whose name is strikingly similar to that of the Greek goddess "*Athena*".
- As for astronomical/astrological similarities, the celestial constellations of both the Ojibwe and the ancient Greek traditions recognize similar formations in the sky, and they have similar names.

From the exploration of criteria like those mentioned above, some possible clues arise which support the hypothesis of the colonization of the American continent by the Greeks in antiquity. However, the fact that significantly increases this probability is the "parallel occurrence" of the various pieces of evidence together in the same geographical area.

## Chapter 6: The trail of Atlantis

After the analysis provided in the previous chapters, the following reasonable question arises: Why was there such a great preference for one particular area in the eastern North American continent? Cronus and Heracles, according to Plutarch, and the Argonauts, Odysseus and Rhadamanthus, according to Homer, visited the area, leaving behind a heritage of colonies; even the Islands of the Blest, the area where the souls of the Greek heroes were resting, seem to have been located there. What was special about this location?

Based on the geographical descriptions contained in Plato's dialogues, combined with geological evidence of the area after the receding of the glaciers at about 10000 BC onwards which illustrate sea level changes and other geological parameters, strong evidence emerges that the legendary Atlantis was once located in this area. Specifically, today's Magdalen Island complex in the Gulf of St. Lawrence is probably the remnant of the long-lost island. As for Ogygia (St. Paul island), it was also probably part of Atlantis, thus justifying its name, which denotes the "ancient land".

## Epilogue

As mentioned in the Introduction, the similarity of a place name in the Faroe Islands encountered by chance to that of an ancient Greek city piqued our curiosity. The search for answers led us on a long journey through time and space, back and forth across the Atlantic, as well as up and down and around it. Many interesting and surprising questions arose from the research, which we try to provide answers to in this final chapter, such as:

- Why did Homer as well as other ancient writers choose to write in a dual, obscure and even misleading way?
- Who had knowledge of the sea routes, and how was it shared with others?
- When might the Greek colonization of the American continent have taken place?
- What attracted the ancient Greeks to these areas?
- What role, if any, did the ancient Mysteries play as far as sea travel was concerned?
- Why did the knowledge of the sea routes to the west gradually disappear?