



Summary :

The Aeolian Colonisation spans an extensive period of time, from the end of the 12th to the late 9th c. BC. It included Aeolian peoples from Thessaly and certain areas of mainland Greece, as well as Achaeans from the Peloponnese. One of the first destinations was the island of Lesbos and subsequently the coasts of Asia Minor. The region of Aeolis also included the island of Tenedos as well as the coast of Asia Minor from the bay of Elaea in the north to the gulf of Smyrna in the south. The Aeolian colonies were predominantly agrarian settlements. The tribes speaking the Aeolic dialect imposed their language, their calendar and their religious practices, while many royal families often invoked Achaean descent.

Date

From the end of the 12th to the late 9th c. BC

Geographical Location

Coasts of Asia Minor

1. Aeolian Colonisation

From the end of the 12th to the late 9th c. BC, the Greek peoples moved from the barren, mountainous areas of mainland Greece towards the fertile lowlands in central Greece, the Aegean islands and the coasts of Asia Minor.

Aeolians, Ionians and Dorians sailed over to the eastern Aegean and settled in specific geographical units, the boundaries between which were not always fixed. A typical example is [Smyrna](#), a settlement which, though it started as an Aeolian colony, at some –very early– point became Ionian.

The Aeolian unit included Lesbos, Tenedos, the Hecatonnesoi and the coasts of Asia Minor, from the bay of Elaea to the gulf of Smyrna. During the 7th c. BC, the region of south [Troad](#) was added to this unit.

2. Ancient Sources

The earliest direct reference to [Aeolis](#) is found in Hesiod,¹ who asserts that Cyme is Aeolian, without, however, providing any other information about the colonisation itself.

Modern historians accept that, roughly speaking, the tradition relating to the Aeolian Colonisation was consolidated as late as the 5th c. BC, through the work of Hellanicus of Mytilene which treats the lineage myths of the Aeolians of Lesbos.²

A primary source of evidence is the work of the geographer [Strabo](#),³ according to whom the Aeolian Colonisation began four generations before the Ionian but proceeded at a much slower pace. Orestes, son of Agamemnon, started the preparation for the colonisation and after Orestes' death in Arcadia, his son, Penthilus, continued his father's task and reached as far as Thrace. The son of Penthilus, Archelaus, crossed over to Cyzicene and Archelaus' younger son, Gras, got as far as the river Granicus. From there he sailed to Lesbos and conquered it. The onset of Orestes' progeny was prepared in Aulis of Boeotia with the participation of many Boeotians.⁴ In the meantime, two more of Agamemnon's descendant's, Cleues and Malaus, were active during the same period as Penthilus. Setting forth from Locris they reached the coast of Asia Minor, where they founded [Cyme](#), also called Phrikonis, from the namesake mountain in Locris.

Always according to Strabo, the mainland Aeolis extended from Cyzicene to the area between the rivers Caicus and Hermos. There were approximately 30 Aeolian cities, with [Lesbos](#) and Cyme being characterised as metropolises.⁵



[Pausanias](#) also mentions the Aeolian Colonisation briefly.⁶ According to him, the Lacedaemonians and Orestes' grandson, Gras, partook in it. As for the geographical determination of Asiatic Aeolis, Pausanias relates only that it was situated between [Ionia](#) and [Mysia](#).

The same source mentions the expulsion of the Aeolians from Smyrna and the city's capture by the Ionians of Colophon.⁷ According to a different tradition, the founder of Aeolis was Orestes himself and not his descendants. A clan from Tenedos traced their descent from Peisander, who had come to Amyclae together with Orestes.⁸

In the matter of the geographical area of the region of Aeolis, the earliest reference comes from [Herodotus](#), who cites a list of all Aeolian cities.⁹ According to this list, 12 Aeolian cities had been founded in mainland Aeolis, that is, in Asia Minor, but their number was reduced to 11 after the capture of Smyrna by the Colophonians. These cities are: Cyme (also called Phrikonis), Larissa (or Larissa), Neon Teichos, Temnos, Cilla, [Notion](#), Aegiroessa, Pitane, Aegaeae, Myrina and Gryneia.¹⁰ Based on these attested cities, the Asiatic Aeolis extended from Smyrna (before it became Ionian) to the South as far as Pitane in the North, to the shores of the gulf of Elaea. The easternmost cities were Temnos and [Aegai](#) or Aegaiiae. Elaea, which is not mentioned by Herodotus, should be added to them.

During the Archaic and Classical periods, the Aeolian cities of Asia Minor constituted –together with Lesbos, Tenedos and the largest of the Hecatonnesoi– a union of autonomous city-states sharing a common national, linguistic and political character. Aeolian were also the cities in the region of the Troad, situated around Mt Ida. It appears, though, that for Herodotus these northern Aeolian cities, which were founded at a later phase and belonged to the realm of Mytilene, constituted a distinct group. This dissociation resulted in part from the fact that during Herodotus' time, these two groups of Aeolian cities of Asia Minor belonged to different satrapies. Apart from this, there is evidence that the Aeolian cities cited by Herodotus maintained close political and military ties, forming a kind of coalition, comparable to the Panionion of the Ionic cities.¹¹

3. The origins of the Colonists

Ancient sources trace the lineage of the Aeolians to populations speaking the Aeolic dialect in pre-Thessalian Thessaly, to the Boeotians, to colonists from Locris, as well as to Peloponnesians. Orestes is proposed as the leader of the colonisation, which is depicted as an organised undertaking, while sometimes this role is reserved for his progeny.

Unfortunately, in the surviving local traditions of Thessaly there is no mention of even one name of a Thessalian city or area, except merely a single name of an Aeolic-speaking tribe, the Lapiths. Apart from the Lapiths, before the end of the Mycenaean era, there existed a tribe called Aeolians. This explains why this appellation was adopted for the Greeks speaking the dialect predominant in Lesbos, Tenedos and the opposite coast of Asia Minor.¹² The similarities between the Aeolic and Thessalian dialects proves beyond doubt the accuracy of the tradition about the descent of the Aeolians.

Moreover, Thucydides himself stresses the kinship between the Boeotians and the Aeolians of Lesbos and Asia Minor.¹³ This relationship was accented during the Peloponnesian War for political reasons, when the oligarchs of Lesbos desired to enter into the Laconian League by securing the Boeotians' support.¹⁴

Apart from the Thessalians and the Boeotians, denizens of Locris also took part in the Aeolian Colonisation, founding Larissa and Cyme in Asia Minor. This is reported by Strabo and probably Hellanicus.¹⁵

As mentioned above, through Orestes or his descendants, the House of Atreus plays a leading role in the tradition of the Aeolian Colonisation. The foundation of Cyme is attributed to the descendants of Agamemnon, about the genealogy of whom we know nothing though. Apparently there were several traditions. According to the Athenian Pherecydes,¹⁶ [Androclos](#), son of the Athenian king Codrus, founded the Aeolian cities after having played a key role in the settlement of the Greeks in Ionia. These two contrasting traditions possibly reflect the confrontation which occurred during the 5th c. BC between Athens and Lesbos concerning dominion over the Aeolian cities of the Troad.¹⁷



The relations between Aeolis and the Peloponnese are not limited to the leading role of the Achaeans and to the Lacedaemonian participation, according to Pausanias, in the colonisation of Aeolis. Although the Aeolic-speaking colonisers eventually imposed their dialect, rituals and calendar, the royal families in many cities traced their descent to the Achaeans and acted as guardians of the Achaean traditions. Aristotle reports that the powerful clan of the Pentilidae, who descended from Pentilus, son of Orestes, controlled the kingship of the city of Mytilene during the early archaic period.¹⁸

Dynasties bearing the patronym Pentilidae are also attested in other cities of Lesbos.¹⁹ Stephen of Byzantium relates that Pentilus was the eponymous hero of a small town in Lesbos called Penthile.²⁰ During the 8th c. BC, some Agamemnon ruled in Cyme, a person who most certainly traced his descent from the namesake hero of the Trojan War.²¹ According to one interpretation, the name Cleues, very common in mainland Aeolis and Lesbos, as well as the Aeolian place-names Malene, Malous, Malia, etc. can be associated with the figures of Cleues and Malaus, the two descendants of Agamemnon who participated in the Aeolian Colonisation.²²

According to one view, the existence of two cities, one in Achaea and one in Asiatic Aeolis, bearing the name Aegae is not coincidental, since the worship of Poseidon is attested for both settlements.²³ Finally, Sappho attributes the founding of the Temple of Hera in Lesbos to the family of Atreus. This piece of evidence constitutes one of the central arguments of scholars who consider that the worship of Hera on the island of Lesbos stemmed from Argos, an area with which the goddess appears to have had a particular connection.

The evidence mentioned above points towards the fact that the relationship between the Aeolians and the Peloponnesians were not restricted to the Peloponnesian origins of the mythical leaders of the Aeolian Colonisation. In contrast with the view that used to be predominant, that is, that the participation of Achaeans from the Peloponnese in the Aeolian Colonisation was rather limited, scholars today accept that, together with the Aeolic-speaking colonisers from Thessaly and certain areas of mainland Greece, Achaeans from Argolis and Laconia settled this region.

4. Dating the Colonisation

The chronological evidence that can be gleaned from the ancient sources is scarce and often contradictory. Pherecydes offers some very general information, reporting simply that the Aeolian Colonisation occurred before the Ionian.²⁴ Strabo is somewhat more forthcoming and stresses that the venture was prepared in Aulis following the Boeotians' arrival in the region which from then on has taken their name.²⁵ Thucydides dates this arrival to sixty years after the fall of Troy.²⁶ This means that the preparations for the colonisation predate the descent of the Dorians, which the historian places chronologically to 80 years after the fall of Troy. Another chronological clue is offered by Strabo, according to whom the Aeolian Colonisation began four generations before the Ionian Colonisation. He notes, however, that it proceeded at a much slower pace. According to his testimony, this process was only completed during the fourth generation. It could therefore be concluded that the chronological difference with the Ionian Colonisation cannot have been great.

The Roman historian Velleius Paterculus²⁷ recounts that the sons of Orestes settled on Lesbos 15 years after their expulsion by the descendants of Herakles. Thus the colonisation of the island occurred before the Ionian Colonisation, which is roughly dated to 60 years after the descent of the Heraclidae. Another passage of the same source mentions that the foundation of the Aeolian colonies in Asia Minor and Lesbos predates that of the Ionian. Certain scholars consider these two pieces of information contradictory and challenge the credibility of this source. On the contrary, others see no contradiction here, claiming that the author does indeed date the beginning of the Aeolian Colonisation before that of the Ionian, but situates the Aeolian Colonisation's end after the completion of the Ionian.

Pseudo-Herodotus²⁸ dates the foundation of the cities on the island of Lesbos to 130 years after the Trojan War. The Aeolian Cyme was founded twenty years after the cities on Lesbos, and 18 years later the Cymeans founded the city of Smyrna, in the years of Homer's birth. Based on the chronology of [Homer's](#) birth, which is dated to 622 years before Xerxes' expedition against Greece, the



following foundation dates result concerning the Aeolian colonies: Smyrna, 1102 BC, Cyme, 1120 BC and Lesbos, 1140 BC, while the Trojan War is dated to 1270 BC. Pseudo-Herodotus refrains from correlating the establishment of the Aeolian cities with the descent of the Heraclidae and the Ionian Colonisation, and this complicates attempts at assessing his testimony. According to him, however, the Aeolian Colonisation is dated after the Trojan War and was completed in various phases.

Eusebius, a 4th c. AD source, reports a different chronology:²⁹ The fall of Troy is dated to 1182 BC, the descent of the Heraclidae to 1098 BC, the foundation of Cyme in Aeolis to 1050 BC, the establishment of Myrina to 1046 BC, and finally, the Ionian Colonisation is dated to 1036 BC. It may be concluded that the establishment of the Aeolian cities is situated chronologically roughly half a century after the descent of the Heraclidae and only 10 years before the Ionian Colonisation.

Based on literary tradition, it appears that the Aeolian Colonisation commenced after the end of the Trojan War, lasted a long period and was completed at the approach of or at the time of the start of the Ionian Colonisation. Due to its geographical location, one of the first destinations would have been the island of Lesbos and, consequently, the coasts of Asia Minor.

Modern scholars have suggested various chronologies for the Aeolian Colonisation. These cover a period ranging from the beginning of the 12th to the end of the 9th c. BC. It should be noted that the colonisation of Asia Minor is but one step in the long series of ethnic group movements occurring in the Aegean during this period. The scarcity of the archaeological evidence that can be used for the dating of the settlement of colonists leads to the conclusion that by the 10th c. BC the shores of Asia Minor were already inhabited by Aeolians. Excavations on the site of Smyrna have shown that the first Greek settlement there dates to about 1000 BC. Monochrome grey ware, which is characteristic of Aeolis, has been unearthed in the early strata of the settlement. This pottery diminishes markedly in the layers dated to the 8th c. BC. This is the period to which the archaeologists date the capture of Smyrna by the Ionians. There is, therefore, archaeological evidence to substantiate the transformation of Smyrna from an Aeolian to an Ionian colony. The establishment of Larissa on the banks of the Hermos River must have followed later, for the earlier pottery unearthed during the excavations dates to the 7th c. BC.

On Lesbos the earlier settlements confirmed by excavations are situated in Methymna, Mytilene and Antissa, and date between the 10th and the 9th c. BC.

The archaeological finds corroborate the literary tradition for the Aeolian Colonisation in its broad outlines. It began early, sometime between the second half of the 11th and the early 10th c. BC, and at a slow pace it concluded around 800 BC. By the 8th c. BC, the Aeolian unit with its ethnic and political character had already taken its shape.

5. Causes of the Colonisation

In the ancient sources the Aeolian Colonisation is described independently of the other large population movements of the end of the Mycenaean Era. One exception is the historian Velleius Paterculus,³⁰ who connects it with the descent of the Heraclidae, probably in the context of an attempt to systematise the various traditions and coordinate events. Many ancient writers attribute the Aeolian Colonisation to an oracle that the Pythia gave to Orestes. According to this utterance, the pestilence ravaging Greece and ruining the crops after the Trojan War would stop, if the descendants of Agamemnon were to sail to the Troad to establish cities there and restore the worship of the gods.

Herodotus³¹ compares the fertile soil of Aeolis to that of Ionia, thus implying that the need to obtain arable land motivated the Aeolian Colonisation. The fact that the Aeolian colonies were not sea-trading posts but agrarian settlements is confirmed by another story according to which the Cymeans left their harbour unexploited and did not use the income raised from it for 300 years after the establishment of their city.

The Aeolian Colonisation began early but unfolded at a slow pace with the participation of Aeolic-speaking Greeks from Thessaly, Boeotians, Locrians and Peloponnesians. The Aeolic-speaking peoples imposed their dialect, calendar and religious practices, while many royal families often invoked their Achaean descent. The region of Aeolis also included the islands of Lesbos and Tenedos as



well as the opposite shores of Asia Minor from the bay of Elaea in the north to the gulf of Smyrna in the south. Most prominent among the Aeolian cities were Cyme and Lesbos.

-
1. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 636.
 2. Vanschoonwinkel, J., *L'égée et la méditerranée orientale a la fin du dixième millenaire* (Louvain-La-Neuve 1991), p. 410, note 39.
 3. Strabo, 13.1.3-4.
 4. Strabo, 9.2.3-5.
 5. Vanschoonwinkel, J., *L'égée et la méditerranée orientale a la fin du dixième millenaire* (Louvain-La-Neuve 1991), p. 407, note 12 for all relevant quotations in Strabo's work.
 6. Paus., 3.2.1.
 7. Paus., 7.5.1.
 8. Pindar, *Nemean Odes*, 11.33.
 9. Hdt., 1.149-151.
 10. About the location of these cities, see Müller, D., *Topographischer Bildkommentar zu den Historien Herodots* (Berlin 1997).
 11. Rubinstein, L., 'Aiolis and South-western Mysia', Hansen, M.H. – Nielsen T.H. (edit.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004), p. 1035.
 12. *IEE* II p. 22 (Μ. Σακελλαρίου).
 13. Thuc., III.2, VIII.100.
 14. Αρχοντίδου, Α. – Αχειλαρά, Λ., *Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Μυτιλήνης* (Mytilene 1999), p. 20.
 15. About the references in the sources and their critical analysis, see Vanschoonwinkel, J., *L'égée et la méditerranée orientale a la fin du dixième millenaire* (Louvain-La-Neuve 1991), p. 411, note 46.
 16. Jacoby, F., *FGrHist* 3, quot. 155.
 17. Rubinstein, L., 'Aiolis and South-western Mysia', Hansen, M.H. – Nielsen T.H. (edit.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004), p. 1036.
 18. Aristotle, *Politika*, 5.1311b.
 19. Vanschoonwinkel, J., *L'égée et la méditerranée orientale a la fin du dixième millenaire* (Louvain-La-Neuve 1991), p. 412 and p. 414, notes 77, 78.
 20. Stephen of Byzantium, see entry 'Πενθίλη'.



21. Vanschoonwinkel, J., *L'égée et la méditerranée orientale a la fin du dixième millenaire* (Louvain-La-Neuve 1991), p. 412, note 59.
22. Vanschoonwinkel, J., *L'égée et la méditerranée orientale a la fin du dixième millenaire* (Louvain-La-Neuve 1991), p. 414.
23. Vanschoonwinkel, J., *L'égée et la méditerranée orientale a la fin du dixième millenaire* (Louvain-La-Neuve 1991), p. 413, note 66.
24. For a detailed presentation of all the sources related to the matter, see Vanschoonwinkel, J., *L'égée et la méditerranée orientale a la fin du dixième millenaire* (Louvain-La-Neuve 1991), pp. 417-419.
25. Strabo, 9.2.8.
26. Thuc., I.XIII.3.
27. Velleius Paterculus, I.2.3.
28. Ps.-Hdt., *Vita Homeri* 38.
29. For a detailed list of the dates, see Bérard, J., 'La migration éolienne' *RA I* (1959), pp. 17-18; Vanschoonwinkel J., *L'égée et la méditerranée orientale a la fin du dixième millenaire* (Louvain-La-Neuve 1991), p. 418.
30. Velleius Paterculus, I.2.3.
31. Hdt., 1.149.

Bibliography :

	Bengtson H. , <i>Griechische Geschichte von den Anfängen bis in die Römische Kaiserzeit</i> , 4, München 1969
	Lemos I.S. , <i>The Protogeometric Aegean</i> , Oxford 2002
	Schachermeyer F. , <i>Griechenland im Zeitalter der Wanderungen</i> , Wien 1980, Ägäische Frühzeit 4
	Vanschoonwinkel J. , <i>L'Égée et la Méditerranée Orientale à la fin du IIe millénaire Temoignages archéologiques et sources écrites</i> , Louvain – La-Neuve 1991
	Bérard J. , "La migration éolienne", <i>RA I</i> , I, 1959
	Boruchovič V.G. , "Die ägäische Kolonisation", <i>Klio</i> , 70, 1988, 124-126
	Cook J.M. , <i>The Greeks in the Ionia and the East</i> , London 1970
	<i>Die altgriechische Siedlungskolonisation im Mittelmeerraum</i> , Tübingen 1963
	Coldstream J.N. , <i>Geometric Greece</i> , 2, London 2002
	Rubinstein L. , "Aiolis and South-Western Mysia", Hansen, M.H. – Nielsen T.H. (eds), <i>An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis</i> , Oxford 2004, 1.033-1.036