## SENECA'S PROPHECIES

*In his play* Medea, *the philosopher Seneca has the chorus prophesy about the discovery of astounding new worlds. As Acosta states below, there are very few such comments in ancient literature.*

Sed nonnullos maxime illud Senecae carmen movere solet, cum in suis anapesticis novi orbis res praedicere videatur. Ita enim illius Medaea habet:

venient annis saecula seris,
quibus Oceanus vincula rerum
laxet et ingens pateat tellus
Tethysque novos detegat orbes
nec sit terris ultima Thule. (Seneca *Medea* 375–379)

Ita esse factum negare non possumus . . . "Oceanum quoque rerum laxasse vincula, cum alios terrarum terminos ostendit et patuisse ingentem tellurem, tota certe Asia atque Europa maiorem, denique novos esse detectos orbes, omnes cernimus," ut Chorus ille praedixit . . . Mihi vero divina(vi)sse videtur, sed eo genere divinationis, quod prudentes viri familare habent. Videbat namque iam illo saeculo navigationibus mare inusitatis solicitari, (et) terram esse alteram Antichthonam ex Philosophia didicerat.

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## Vocabulary

**anapestic•um –i** *n* anapestic foot in poetry; has two short vowels or syllables followed by a long one. (See Appendix 4.)
**cern•o –ere crevi cretum** to see, discern, separate
**denique** *adv* finally
**de•tego –tegere –texi –tectum** to disclose, uncover, reveal
**disc•o –ere didici** to learn
**divinati•o –onis** *f* knowledge gained by unknown means, divination
**divin•o (1)** to understand by unknown means, divine
**inusitat•us –a –um** *adj* unusual, uncommon
**lax•o (1)** to open, relax
**nonnull•us –a –um** *adj* some
**praesertim** *adv* especially
**prud•ens –entis** *adj* wise **prudenter** *adv* wisely
**solicit•o (1)** to stir up, disturb
**tell•us –uris** *f* land, country
**Teth•ys –yos** *f* sea goddess, wife and sister of Oceanus
**Thul•e –es** *or* **Ultima Thule** *f* in classical mythology, a region in the far north; in medieval geographies, any distant place located beyond the known world
**vincul•um –i** *n* chain

## Neologism

**Antichthon•a –ae** *f* a hypothetical earth counter to ours; land on opposite side of the earth or sun

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Potuit iure et merito hominum industriam et audaciam eo aliquando progressuram (esse) existimare, ut magno Oceano enavigato novos terrarum orbes aperiret, cum praesertim ea aetate naufragia illa, quae Plinius narrat, longissimi Oceani nota essent. Nam post veterum quietem collaudatam, adiungit de audacia suorum temporum:

Nunc iam cessit pontus et omnes
patitur leges:

Et mox:

quaelibet altum cumba pererrat.
Terminus omnis notus et urbes
muros terra posuere (posuerunt) novos
nil qua fuerat sede reliquit
pervius orbis: (Seneca *Medea* 365–369)

Huius itaque audaciae hominum quasi incrementa extrema connectit.

"Venient annis saecula seris,"
et cetera, quae recitata sunt. (Seneca *Medea* 375)

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