

## THE BALTIC ORIGINS OF HOMER'S EPIC TALES

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### Summary

The real scene of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* can be identified not in the Mediterranean Sea, where it proves to be weakened by many incongruities, but in the north of Europe. The sagas that gave rise to the two poems came from the Baltic regions, where the Bronze Age flourished in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. and many Homeric places, such as Troy and Ithaca, can still be identified. The blond seafarers who founded the Mycenaean civilization in the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. brought these tales from Scandinavia to Greece after the decline of the "climatic optimum". Then they rebuilt their original world, where the Trojan War and many other mythological events had taken place, in the Mediterranean; through many generations the memory of the heroic age and the feats performed by their ancestors in their lost homeland was preserved, and handed down to the following ages, until this oral tradition was put in writing and gave rise to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* about the VIII Century BC, when the alphabetical writing was introduced in Greece.

This key allows us to easily open many doors that have been shut tight until now, as well as to consider the age-old question of the Indo-European diaspora and the origin of the Greek civilization from a new perspective.

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Ever since ancient times, Homeric geography has given rise to problems and uncertainty. The conformity of towns, countries and islands, which the poet often describes with a wealth of detail, with traditional Mediterranean places is usually only partial or even nonexistent. We find various cases in Strabo (Greek geographer, 63 B.C. – 23 A.D.), who, for example, does not understand why the island of Pharos, situated right in front of the port of Alexandria, in the *Odyssey* inexplicably appears to lie a day's sail from Egypt. There is also the question of the location of Ithaca, which, according to very precise indications found in the *Odyssey*, is the westernmost in an archipelago which includes three main islands, Dulichium, Same and Zacynthus. This does not correspond to the geographic reality of the Greek Ithaca in the Ionian Sea, located north of Zacynthus, east of Cephallenia and south of Leucas. And then, what of the Peloponnese, described in both poems as a plain?

However, Homeric geography is as equally problematic for contemporary scholars. For example, prof. Moses Finley claims "the complete lack of contact between Mycenaean geography, as we know it from the tablets and from archaeology, and Homer's accounts. The attempts which have been made to reconcile them (...) are unconvincing"<sup>1</sup>. In turn, prof. Franco Montanari states that "as regards the correspondences between Homeric geography and the Mycenaean one, many steps backwards were taken, so far as people stress divergences now"<sup>2</sup>.

In other words, Homeric geography refers to a context with a toponymy with which we are familiar, but which, if compared with the actual physical layout of the Greek world, reveals glaring anomalies, which are hard to explain, if only on account of their consistency throughout the two poems. For example, the "strange" Peloponnese appears to be a plain not sporadically but regularly, and Dulichium, the "Long Island" (in Greek *dolichos* means "long") located by Ithaca, is repeatedly mentioned not only in the *Odyssey* but also in the *Iliad*, but was never discovered in the Mediterranean. Thus we are confronted with a world which appears actually closed and inaccessible, apart from some occasional convergences, although the names are familiar (this, however, tends to be more misleading than otherwise in solving the problem).

A possible key to finally penetrating this puzzling world is provided by Plutarch (46 – 120 A.D.). In his work *De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet* ("The face that appears in the moon circle"), chap.

XXVI, he makes a surprising statement: the island of Ogygia, (where Calypso held Ulysses before allowing him to return to Ithaca) is located in the North Atlantic Ocean, “five days’ sail from Britain”.

Plutarch’s indications lead us to identify Ogygia with one of the Faroe Islands (where we also come across an island with a Greek-sounding name: Mykines), Starting from here, the route eastwards, which Ulysses follows (Book V of the *Odyssey*) in his voyage from Ogygia to Scheria allows us to locate the latter, i.e. the land of the Phaeacians, on the southern coast of Norway, in an area perfectly fitting the account of his arrival, where archaeological traces of the Bronze Age are plentiful. Incidentally, on the one hand *skerja* in Old Norse means a “sea rock”, which corresponds to the obstacles which Ulysses comes up against in his landing, i.e., sheer cliffs, reefs and “great rocks” (“*petrēis megalēisi*”; Od. VII, 279), and, on the other, the whole narration squares with the morphology of the Norwegian coast, that “looked like a shield on the misty sea” (Od. V, 281). Moreover, in the narration of Ulysses’s landing Homer introduces the reversal of the river current (Od. V, 451-453), which is unknown in the Mediterranean world but is typical of the Atlantic estuaries during high tide.

From here the Phaeacians took Ulysses to Ithaca, located on the far side of an archipelago, which Homer talks about in great detail. At this point, a series of precise parallels makes it possible to identify a group of Danish islands, in the south of the Baltic Sea, which correspond exactly to all Homer’s indications. Actually, the South-Fyn Archipelago includes three main islands: Langeland (the “Long Island”; which unveils the puzzle of the mysterious island of Dulichium), Aerø (which corresponds perfectly to Homeric Same) and Tåsinge (ancient Zacynthus). The last island in the archipelago, located westwards, “facing the night”, is Ulysses’s Ithaca, now known as Lyø. It is astonishing how closely it coincides with the directions of the poet, not only in its position, but also its topographical and morphological features. And here, amongst this group of islands, we can also identify the little island “in the strait between Ithaca and Same”, where Penelope’s suitors tried to waylay Telemachus.

Moreover, the Elis, i.e. one of the regions of the Peloponnese, is described as facing Dulichium, thus is easily identifiable with a part of the large Danish island of Zealand. Therefore, the latter is the original “Peloponnese”, i.e. the “Island of Pelops”, in the real meaning of the word “island” (*nēsos* in Greek). On the other hand, the Greek Peloponnese (which lies in a similar position in the Aegean Sea, i.e. on its southwestern side) is not an island, despite its name. Furthermore, the details reported in the *Odyssey* regarding both Telemachus’s swift journey by chariot from Pylos to Lacedaemon, along “a wheat-producing plain”, and the war between Pylians and Epeans, as narrated in Book XI of the *Iliad*, have always been considered inconsistent with Greece’s uneven geography, while they fit in perfectly with the flat island of Zealand.

As to Ulysses, Homer mentions his “fair hair”, and Tacitus claims that he sailed the Northern seas (*Germania* 3, 2). Moreover, remarkable similarities exist between him and Ull, an archer and warrior in Norse mythology. On the other hand, Pindar mentions the “fair-haired Danaans” in his *IX Nemean*.

This would not be very surprising: as a matter of fact, we should not forget what prof. Stuart Piggott, a very distinguished scholar, claims about Homer’s world: “The nobility of the [Homeric] hexameters should not deceive us into thinking that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are other than the poems of a largely barbarian Bronze Age or Early Iron Age Europe. There is no Minoan or Asianic blood in the veins of the Grecian Muses (...) they dwell remote from the Cretan-Mycenaean world and in touch with the European elements of Greek speech and culture (...) Behind Mycenaean Greece lies Europe”<sup>3</sup>.

Let us look for the region of Troy now. In the *Iliad* it is located along the Hellespont Sea, which is systematically described as being “wide” or even “boundless”. We can, therefore, exclude the fact that it refers to the Strait of the Dardanelles, where the city found by Schliemann lies. The identification of this city with Homer’s Troy still raises strong doubts: we only have to think of Finley’s criticism in the *World of Odysseus*. It is also remarkable that Schliemann’s site corresponds to the location of the Greek-Roman Troy; however, Strabo categorically denies that the latter is identifiable with the Homeric city (*Geography* 13, 1, 27). On the other hand, the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, in his

*Gesta Danorum*, often mentions a population known as “Hellespontians” and a region called Hellespont, which seems to be located in the east of the Baltic Sea. Could it be Homer’s Hellespont? We can identify it with the Gulf of Finland, which is the geographic counterpart of the Dardanelles (as both of them lie northeast of their respective basins). Since Troy, as we can infer from a passage in the *Iliad* (XXI, 334-335), lay northeast of the sea (further reason to dispute Schliemann’s location), then it seems reasonable, for the purpose of this research, to look at a region of southern Finland, where the Gulf of Finland joins the Baltic Sea.

In this area, west of Helsinki, we find a number of name-places which astonishingly resemble those mentioned in the *Iliad* and, in particular, those given to the allies of the Trojans: Askainen (Ascanius), Karjaa (Caria), Nästi (Nastes, the chief of the Carians), Lyökki (Lycia), Tenala (Tenedos), Kiila (Cilla), Raisio-Reso (Rhesus), Kiikoinen (the Ciconians) etc. There is also a Padva, which reminds us of Italian Padua, which was founded, according to tradition, by the Trojan Antenor and lies in the Veneto region (the *Enetoi* or Veneti were allies of the Trojans). What is more, the place-names Tanttala and Sipilä (the King Tantalus, who ruled a region not far from Troy, was buried on Mount Sipylus) indicate that this matter is not limited to Homeric geography, but seems to extend to the whole Greek mythology.

What about Troy? Right in the middle of this area, halfway between Helsinki and Turku, we discover that King Priam’s city has survived the Achaean sack and fire. Its characteristics correspond exactly to those Homer handed down to us: the hilly area which dominates the valley with its two rivers, the plain which slopes down towards the coast, and the highlands in the background. It has even maintained its own name almost unchanged throughout all this time. Today, “Toija” is a peaceful Finnish village, unaware of its glorious and tragic past.

Various trips to these places, from July 11, 1992 onwards, have confirmed the extraordinary correspondence between the *Iliad*’s descriptions and the area surrounding Toija. In particular, we are referring to a hilly area north of Kisko, about 1 km east of Toija, where the placename “Kavasto”, meaningless in Finnish, means “the burned city” in ancient Greek.

What is more, there we come across many significant traces of the Bronze Age. Incredibly, towards the sea we find a place called Aijala, which recalls the “beach” (*aigialos*), where, according to Homer, the Achaeans beached their ships (Il. XIV, 34). The correspondence extends to the neighbouring areas. For example, along the Swedish coast facing Southern Finland, 70 km north of Stockholm, the long and relatively narrow Bay of Norrtälje recalls Homeric Aulis, whence the Achaean fleet set sail for Troy. Nowadays, ferries leave here for Finland, following the same ancient course. They pass the island of Lemland, whose name reminds us of ancient Lemnos, where the Achaeans stopped and abandoned the hero Philoctetes. Nearby is Åland, the largest island of the homonymous archipelago, which probably coincides with Samothrace, the mythical site of the metalworking mysteries. The adjacent Gulf of Bothnia is easily identifiable with Homer’s Thracian Sea, and the ancient Thrace, which the poet places to the northwest of Troy on the opposite side of the sea, probably lay along the northern Swedish coast and its hinterland. It is remarkable that the Norse mythology identifies the home of the god Thor, called “*Thrúdhheimr*”, with Thrace (*Younger Edda*, Prologue, chap. 3). Further south, outside the Gulf of Finland, the island of Hiiumaa, situated opposite the Estonian coast, corresponds exactly to Homer’s Chios, which, according to the *Odyssey*, lay on the return course of the Achaean fleet after the war.

In short, apart from the morphological features of this area, the geographic position of the Finnish Troas fits Homer’s directions like a glove. Actually, this explains why a “thick fog” often fell on those fighting on the Trojan plain, and Ulysses’s sea is never as bright as that of the Greek islands, but always “dark-wine” and “misty”. As we travel through Homer’s world, we experience the harsh weather which is typical of the Northern world. Everywhere in the two poems the weather, with its fog, wind, rain, cold temperatures and snow (which falls on the plains and even out to sea), has little in common with the Mediterranean climate; moreover, sun and warm temperatures are hardly ever

mentioned. There are countless examples of this; for instance, when Ulysses recalls an episode of the Trojan War: "The night was bad, after the north wind dropped,/ and freezing; then the snow began to fall like icy frost/ and ice congealed on our shields" ("*sakeessi peritrepheto krystallos*"; Od. XIV, 475-477). In a word, most of the time the weather is unsettled, so much so that a bronze-clad fighting warrior invokes a cloudless sky during the battle (Il. XVII, 643-646). We are worlds away from the torrid Anatolian lowlands. The way in which Homer's characters are dressed is in perfect keeping with this kind of climate. In the sailing season they wear tunics and heavy cloaks which they never remove, not even during banquets. This attire corresponds exactly to the remains of clothing found in Bronze Age Danish graves, down to such details as the metal brooch which pinned the cloak at the shoulder (Od. XIX, 226). Moreover, this fits in perfectly with what Tacitus states on Germanic clothing: "The suit for everyone is a cape with a buckle" ("*sagum fibula consertum*"; *Germania*, 17, 1).

This northern collocation also explains the huge anomaly of the great battle which takes up the central books of the *Iliad*. The battle continues for two days (Il. XI, 86; XVI, 777) and one night (Il. XVI, 567). The fact that the darkness does not put a stop to the fighting is incomprehensible in the Mediterranean world, but it becomes clear in the Baltic setting. What allows Patroclus's fresh troops to carry on fighting through to the following day, without a break, is the faint night light, which is typical of high latitudes during the summer solstice. This interpretation – corroborated by the overflowing of the Scamander during the following battle (in the northern regions this occurs in May or June owing to the thaw) – allows us to reconstruct the stages of the whole battle in a coherent manner, dispelling the present-day perplexities and strained interpretations. Furthermore, we even manage to pick out from a passage in the *Iliad* (VII, 433) the Greek word used to denominate the faintly-lit nights typical of the regions located near the Arctic Circle: the "*amphilykē nyx*" is a real "linguistic fossil" which, thanks to the Homeric epos, has survived the migration of the Achaeans to Southern Europe. It is remarkable that in Greek literature *amphilykē* is a very uncommon word, cited by Apollonius of Rhodes in a passage where he introduces the Hyperboreans, the mythical people of the North (*Argonautica* II, 671).

It is also important to note that the Trojan walls, as described by Homer, appear as a sort of rustic fence made of wood and stone, similar to the archaic Northern wooden enclosures (such as the Kremlin Walls up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century) much more than the mighty strongholds of the Aegean civilizations.

Troy, therefore, was not deserted after the Achaeans plundered and burnt it down, but was rebuilt, as the *Iliad* states: "At this point Zeus has come to hate Priam's stock,/ so Aeneas's power will rule the Trojans now/ and then his children's children and those who will come later on" (Il. XX, 306-308). On the contrary, Virgil's quite tendentious, and much more recent, tale of Aeneas's flight by sea from the burning city of Troy (a homage paid to emperor Augustus's family, considered Aeneas's descendant) is absolutely unrelated to the real destiny of the Trojan hero and his city after the war. As regards this "Finnish" Aeneas, the first king of the dynasty that, according with Homer, ruled Troy after the war (that is a kingdom which, under Priam, dominated a vast area in southern Finland; Il. XXIV, 544-546) it should be very tempting to suppose a relationship between his name and the *Aeningia*, Finland's name in Roman times (Pliny, *Natural History*, IV, 96). It is remarkable that farmers often come across Bronze and Stone Age relics in the fields surrounding Toija. This is proof of human settlements in this territory many thousands of years ago. Further, in the area surrounding Salo (only 20 km from Toija), archaeologists have found splendid specimens of swords and spear points that date back to the Bronze Age and are now on display in the National Museum of Helsinki. These findings come from burial places, which include tumuli made of large mounds of stones that can be found at the top of certain hills, which rise from the plain today, but which, thousands of years ago, when the coastline was not as far back as it is nowadays, faced directly onto the sea. Lots of such tumuli are also found on the hills near Perniö, a village next to Toija. This relates to a passage in the *Iliad*, where Hector challenges an Achaean hero to a duel, undertaking, in case of victory, to give back the corpse of his opponent "so that the long-haired Achaeans can bury him/ and erect a mound for him on the broad Hellespont,/ and some

day one of the men to come,/ sailing with a multioared ship on the wine-dark sea, will say:/ 'This is the mound of a man slain in ancient times,/ he excelled but renowned Hector killed him'" (Il. VII, 85-90; the description of Achilles' tomb in the last canto of the *Odyssey* is analogous). These Homeric mounds "on the broad Hellespont" and the Bronze Age ones near Salo and Perniö are remarkably similar.

Let us now examine the so-called *Catalogue of Ships* from Book II of the *Iliad*, that lists the twenty-nine Achaean fleets which took part in the Trojan War, together with the names of their captains and places of origin. This list unwinds in an anticlockwise direction, starting from Central Sweden, travelling along the Baltic coasts and finishing in Finland. If we combine this with the data contained in the two poems and in the rest of Greek mythology, we may completely reconstruct the Achaean world around the Baltic Sea, where, as archaeology confirms, the Bronze Age was flourishing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C., favoured by a warmer climate than today's.

In this new geographical context, the entire universe belonging to Homer and Greek mythology finally discloses itself with its astonishing consistency. For example, by following the *Catalogue* sequence, we immediately locate Boeotia (corresponding to the area around Stockholm). Here it is easy to identify Oedipus's Thebes and the mythical Mount Nysa (which was never found in the Greek world), where the Hyads nursed baby Dionysus. Homer's Euboea coincides with today's island of Öland, located off the Swedish coast in a similar position to that of its Mediterranean counterpart. Mythical Athens, Theseus's native land, lay in the area of present day Karlskrona in southern Sweden (this explains why Plato, in his dialogue *Critias*, refers to it as being an undulating plain full of rivers, which is totally alien to Greece's rough morphology). The features of other Achaean cities, such as Mycenae or Calydon, as described by Homer also appear completely different from those of their namesakes on Greek soil. In particular, Mycenae lay in the site of today's Copenhagen, where the island of Amager explains why it was in the plural. Here, in the flat island of Zealand (i.e. the Homeric "Peloponnese"), we can easily identify Agamemnon's and Menelaus's kingdoms, Arcadia, the River Alpheus, and in particular, king Nestor's Pylos, whose location was held to be a mystery even by the ancient Greeks. By setting Homer's poems in the Baltic, this age-old puzzle is also solved at once. What is more, it is equally easy to solve the problem of the strange border between Argolis and Pylos, which is mentioned in the *Iliad* (IX, 153) but is "impossible" in the Greek world. After the Peloponnese, the *Catalogue* mentions Dulichium and continues with Ithaca's archipelago, which was already identified by making use of the indications the *Odyssey* supplies. We are thus able to verify the consistency of the information contained in the two poems as well as their congruity with the Baltic geography. After Ithaca, the list continues with the Aetolians, who recall the ancient Jutes. They gave their name to Jutland, which actually lies near the South-Fyn Islands. Homer mentions Pylene in the Aetolian cities, which corresponds to today's Plön, in Northern Germany, not far from Jutland. Opposite this region, in the North Sea, the name of Heligoland, one of the North Frisian Islands, recalls Helike, a sanctuary of the god Poseidon mentioned in the *Iliad* (it is remarkable that the old name for Heligoland was Fositesland, where "Fosite", an ancient Frisian god, is identical to Poseidon).

As regards Crete, the "vast land" with "a hundred cities" and many rivers, which is never referred to as an island by Homer, it corresponds to the Pomeranian region in the southern Baltic area, which stretches from the German coast to the Polish same. This explains why in the rich pictorial productions of the Minoan civilization, which flourished in Aegean Crete, we find no hint of Greek mythology, and ships are so scantily represented. It would also be tempting to assume a relationship between the name "Polska" and the Pelasgians, the inhabitants of Homeric Crete. At this point, it is also easy to identify Naxos (where Theseus left Ariadne on his return journey from "Crete" to "Athens") with the island of Bornholm, situated between Poland and Sweden, where the town of Neksø still recalls the ancient name of the island. Likewise, we discover that the *Odyssey*'s "River Egypt" probably coincides with the present-day Vistula, thus revealing the real origin of the name the Greeks gave to Pharaohs' land, known as "Kem" in the local language. Moreover, "Egypt" is very similar to "Gepids", a barbaric

population who lived near the Vistula delta until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. (according to Jordanes, "Gepidos" was the name of an island on this delta). This explains the incongruous position of the Homeric Egyptian Thebes, which, according to the *Odyssey*, seems to be located near the sea. Evidently the Egyptian capital, which on the contrary lies hundreds of kilometres from the Nile delta and was originally known as Wò'se, was renamed by the Achaeans with the name of a Baltic city, after they moved down to the Mediterranean. The real Thebes probably lay in the area of the present-day Tczew, on the Vistula delta. To the north of the latter, in the centre of the Baltic Sea, the Swedish island of Fårö recalls the Homeric Pharos, which according to the *Odyssey* lay in the middle of the sea at a day's sail from "Egypt" (whereas Mediterranean Pharos is not even a mile's distance from the port of Alexandria). Here is the solution to another puzzle of Homeric geography that so perturbed Strabo.

The *Catalogue of Ships* now touches the Baltic Republics. Hellas lay on the coast of present-day Esthonia, and thus next to the Homeric Hellespont (i.e. the "Helle Sea"), today's Gulf of Finland. In this area also lies Kurland – the Curians' country, that is the mythical Curetes, linked with the worship of Zeus – where is found the figure of a supreme god, who is called *Dievas* in Lithuania and *Dievs* in Latvia; in local folklore he shows features typical of Hellenic Zeus (the genitive case of the name *Zeus* in Greek is *Dios*; Il. I, 5). Moreover, Lithuanian has very archaic features and a notable affinity with the ancient Indo-European language. In this area Livonia lies, whose name derives from the Livonians, who have long been farmers and breeders who attach special importance to livestock; in their culture newlyweds traditionally receive domestic animals as wedding presents, and animals play a leading role in funerals. These details remind us of a passage in which Homer describes Libya (*Libyē*) as a land of stockbreeders, where "flocks lamb three times in the course of a year./ Neither the owner or the shepherd ever lack/ cheese, meat or sweet milk,/ but sheep provide plentiful milk all the time" (*Odyssey* 4.86–89). The mild, humid climate along the Latvian coast allows Mediterranean plants to thrive there in certain areas. Moreover, the names of *Liepāja* (called *Libava* in Russian and *Libau* in German) in Western Latvia, as well as the *Lubāna* lake, seem to recall the Homeric *Libyē*.

As to Phthia, Achilles's homeland, it lay on the fertile hills of southeastern Esthonia, along the border with Latvia and Russia, stretching as far as the Russian river Velikaja and the lake of Pskov. Myrmidons and Phthians lived there, ruled by Achilles and Protesilaus (the first Achaean captain who fell in the Trojan War) respectively. As to the name of Phthia, it might be connected to the Greek verb *phthiō* or *phthinō* (whose meaning is "to finish") This could recall the Latin word *finis*, that is, "end," "border" (the plural form, *finēs*, specifically means border, frontier). Therefore, "Phthia" was the "borderland" of the Achaean world, which squares very well with its peripheral location as to the Baltic: actually, according to the *Iliad*, there were "many shady mountains" between Phthia and the sea (Il. I, 156-157). This lets us understand another ancient mystery, that is, why in the Homeric world Phthia was the land of the refugees. In the Myrmidon army there were no less than three: Phoenix, Epigeus and Patroclus; another exile, Medon, was enlisted with the Phthians. Therefore, at that time Phthia was a sort of Far East, where, taking advantage of the distance from the Baltic, many people with accounts to settle (being usually murders) took refuge to escape from the revenges of the relatives of their victims. On the contrary, in the Greek world the location of Phthia is not very peripheral, therefore, both its name and its function of refuge are unexplainable.

Next, proceeding with the sequence, we reach the Finnish coast, facing the Gulf of Bothnia, where we find Jolkka, which reminds us of Iolcus, Jason's mythical city. Further north, we are also able to identify the region of Olympus, Styx and Pieria in Finnish Lapland (which in turn recalls the Homeric Lapithae, i.e. the sworn enemies of the Centaurs who also lived in this area). This location of Pieria north of the Arctic Circle is confirmed by an apparent astronomical anomaly, linked to the moon cycle, which is found in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*: it can only be explained by the very high latitude.

In conclusion, from this review of the Baltic world, we find its astonishing consistency with the *Catalogue of Ships* – which is, therefore, an extraordinary "photograph" of the Northern Early Bronze

Age peoples – as well as with the whole of Greek mythology. It is very unlikely that this immense number of geographic, climatic, toponymical and morphological parallels is to be ascribed to mere chance, even leaving aside the glaring contradictions arising from the Mediterranean setting.

As regards Ulysses' trips, after the Trojan War, when he is about to reach Ithaca, a storm takes him away from his world; so he has many adventures in fabulous localities until he reaches Ogygia, that is one of the Faroe Islands. These adventures, presumably taken from tales of ancient seamen and elaborated again by the poet's fantasy, represent the last memory of the sea routes followed by the ancient navigators of the Northern Bronze Age out of the Baltic, in the North Atlantic (where the "Ocean River" flows, i.e. the Gulf Stream), but they became unrecognizable because of their transposition into a totally different context. For example, the Eolian island, ruled by the "King of the winds", "son of the Knight", is one of the Shetlands (maybe Yell), where there are strong winds and ponies. The Cyclops lived in the coast of Norway (near Tosenfjorden: the name of their mother is Toosa): they coincide with the Trolls of the Norwegian folklore. The land of Lestrigonians was in the same coast, towards the North; Homer says that there the days are very long (the famous scholar Robert Graves places the Lestrigonians in the North of Norway; moreover, in that area we find the island of Lamø, which is probably the Homeric Lamos). The island of Circe – where there are clear hints at the midnight sun (Od. X, 190-192) and the revolving dawns (Od. XII, 3-4), typical phenomena of the Arctic regions – lies north of the Lofoten, beyond the Arctic Circle. Circe, who is called *polypharmakos* (Od. X, 276), that is, "the one who knows many drugs", is a Lappish shaman; she and her brother are also called "Sun's children", which is just like the Lapps. Charybdis is the well-known whirlpool named Maelstrom, south of the island of Moskenes (one of the Lofoten). After Charybdis Odysseus meets the island *Thrinakiē*, that means "trident": really, there lies Mosken, a three-tip island. The Sirens are very dangerous shoals and shallows, off the western face of the Lofoten, before the Maelstrom area. The sailors could be attracted by the misleading noise of the backwash (the "Sirens' Song" is a metaphor similar to the Norse *kemningar*) on the half-hidden rocks, and deceive themselves that landing is at hand, but if they get near, shipwreck on the reefs is inevitable.

Besides, we can find remarkable parallels between Greek and Norse mythology: for example, Ulysses is similar to Ull, archer and warrior of Norse mythology; the sea giant Aegaeon (who gave his name to the Aegean Sea) is the counterpart of the Norse sea god Aegir, and Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea (who is a mythical shepherd of seals, who lives in the sea depths and is capable of foretelling the future) is similar to the "marmendill" (cited by the *Hálfs Saga ok Hálfsrekka* and the *Landnámabók*), a very odd creature, who resembles a misshapen man with a seal-shaped body below the waist, and has the gift of prophecy but only talks when he feels like it, just like Proteus. On the other hand, there are remarkable analogies between the Achaean and Viking ships: by comparing the details of Homeric ships with the remains of Viking ships found in the bay of Roskilde, we realize that their features were very similar. We refer to the *flat keel* (one infers this from Od. XIII, 114), the *double prow* (we can deduce this from the word *amphielissai* Homer frequently uses with regard to their double curve, i.e. at the stern and the prow), and the *removable mast* – this is a sophisticated feature typical of Viking ships, which was typical of Homeric ships, too: many passages in both the *Iliad* (I, 434; I, 480) and the *Odyssey* (II, 424-425; VIII, 52) confirm without a shadow of doubt that the operations of setting up and taking down the mast were customary at the beginning and the end of each mission.

More generally speaking, apart from the respective mythologies, remarkable parallels are found between the customs of the Achaeans and those of the populations of Northern Europe, although they are separated by almost 3000 years. The systems of social relations, interests and lifestyles of the Homeric world and Viking society, despite the elapsed years, are surprisingly alike. For instance, the "agorē", the public assembly in the Homeric world, corresponds to the "thing" of the Vikings: this was the most important political moment in the running of the community for both peoples. In his turn, Tacitus informs us that at his time the northern populations held public assemblies (*Germania*, chap.

11), that appear to be very similar to the “thing” (therefore, to the “*agorē*”, too). In a word, the parallels between the Homeric Achaeans, who lived during the Bronze Age, the Germans of the Roman period, and the Medieval Vikings testify to the continuity of the Northern world throughout the ages.

One could wonder now how this research places itself in regard to the outcomes of today’s science. We have already noted that Homeric geography, after giving ancient scholars a lot of trouble, is making things difficult for today’s also. Actually, when the decoding of the Mycenaean writing “Linear B” allowed to compare the Mycenaean world with the Homeric one, the results were puzzling. Besides the above-mentioned discrepancies between Homer and Mycenaean geography, scholars noted “the problematic relations between Homer and the Mycenaean world as well as the Hellenic Middle Ages”<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, there is evidence that the Mycenaean civilization had come from the North. In particular, the distinguished Swedish scholar, Professor Martin P. Nilsson, in his works reports considerable archaeological evidence uncovered in the Mycenaean sites in Greece, corroborating their Northern origin. Some examples are: the existence of a large quantity of Baltic amber in the most ancient Mycenaean tombs in Greece (which is not to be ascribed to trade, because the amber is very scarce in the coeval Minoan tombs in Crete as well as in later graves on the continent); the typically Northern features of their architecture (the Mycenaean *megaron* “is identical to the hall of the ancient Scandinavian Kings”); the “striking similarity” of two stone slabs found in a tomb in Dendra “with the menhirs known from the Bronze Age of Central Europe”; the Northern-type skulls found in the necropolis of Kalkani, and so on<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, archaeologists such as Geoffrey Bibby<sup>6</sup> and philosophers such as Bertrand Russell<sup>7</sup> think it probable that the Mycenaean civilization originated from fair-haired Northern invaders taking the Greek language with themselves.

All of the connections we have established thus far between Mycenaean culture and northern Bronze Age culture tally with a recent, extraordinary archaeological discovery: a bronze disk, about one foot in diameter, portraying the sun, moon, and stars (the cluster of the Pleiades is recognizable) found in Germany near the village of Nebra, about 50 km west of Leipzig. Amazingly, the disk, which dates back to the Early Bronze Age (1600 B.C.), depicts a subject very similar to that portrayed on Achilles’ shield in the *Iliad*: the sky with the sun, moon, stars and the Pleiades (II. XVIII, 483–487). Coupled with bronze swords found at the same site, which were fashioned in a technique unique to Mycenaean swords, this archaeological find contributes to the amazing correspondence among the northern world, the Homeric world, and the Mycenaean world.

On the other hand, prof. Klavs Randsborg stresses that Aegean art and some Scandinavian remains dating back to the Bronze Age – for example, the figures engraved on Kivik’s tomb in Sweden – present remarkable affinities, so much so that a 19th century scholar suggested the monument was built by the Phoenicians<sup>8</sup>. Another sign of the Achaean presence in the Northern world in a very distant past is a Mycenaean graffito found in the megalithic complex of Stonehenge in Southern England. Other remains revealing the Mycenaean influence were found in the same area (“Wessex culture”), which date back to a period *preceding* the Mycenaean civilization in Greece. All of this squares with the fact that Radiocarbon dating, corrected with dendrochronology, i.e., tree-ring calibration, has recently corrected the idea of the Eastern origin of European civilization. Prof. Colin Renfrew describes the consequences for traditional chronology: “These changes bring with them a whole series of alarming reversals in chronological relationships. The megalithic tombs of Western Europe now become older than the Pyramids or the round tombs of Crete, their supposed predecessors. The early metal-using cultures of the Balkans antedate Troy and the early Bronze Age Aegean, from which they were supposedly derived. And in Britain, the final structure of Stonehenge, once thought to be the inspiration of Mycenaean architectural expertise, was complete well before the Mycenaean civilization began”<sup>9</sup>.

In any case, studies performed on Mycenaean civilization and its origin, far from clarifying their relationship with the Homeric poems, brought to light a complex outline, where the problematic relations between Homer and the Mycenaean world, the lack of contact between Mycenaean geography

and Homer's accounts, the connections of the latter with the largely barbaric Europe during the Bronze Age, the evidence on the Northern origin of the Mycenaeans, and the similarity between Aegean and Northern remains coexist without any well-grounded rationale nor any sound interpretation. Given this puzzling mosaic, what could make it clear is the check that Homeric geography fits in with the Northern world whence probably the Mycenaeans moved towards Greece. This hypothesis can be deduced from the above-mentioned outline, is perfectly consistent with it, and is able to give sense to the whole of the data scholars gathered. In a word, it places itself naturally in the square of today's knowledge. Moreover, it can explain many other things, such as the Mycenaean traces found in Southern England. As regards this, the *Odyssey* mentions a market for bronze placed overseas, in a foreign country, named *Temesē* (Od. I, 184), never found in the Mediterranean area. Since bronze is an alloy of copper and tin, which in the North is only found in Cornwall, it is very likely that the mysterious *Temesē* corresponds to the Thames, named "Tamesis" or "Tamensim" in ancient times. So, following Homer, we learn that, during the Bronze Age, the ancient Scandinavians used to sail to *Temesē*-Thames, "placed overseas in a foreign country", to supply themselves with bronze.

This hypothesis also clarifies why Homer's world was decidedly more archaic than the Mycenaean civilization, as it is outlined by the Linear B tablets. Evidently, Mycenaeans' contact with the refined Mediterranean and Eastern cultures favored their rapid evolution, also considering their marked inclination for trade and seafaring, which pervades not only the Homeric poems, but also all Greek mythology. As a matter of fact, archaeologists found their trade stations scattered on the Mediterranean coasts. This is hard to explain with the current hypotheses about the continental origin of the Indo-Europeans, whereas the remains found in England fit in very well with the idea of a previous coastal homeland (by matching this with the typically Northern features of their architecture, as many scholars claim, we remove any doubt as to their place of origin). This also explains why any reliable information regarding the author, or authors, of the poems had been lost before classical times.

This theory – which has already undergone a positive check by means of inspections carried out on the territories concerned, and meets Popper's requirement on "falsifiability" – solves many other problems, such as the backwardness of the Homeric civilization compared to the Mycenaeans'; the absence of reference to seafaring and Greek mythology in the Minoan-Cretan world; the inconsistencies between the morphology of several Homeric cities, such as Mycenae and Calydon, and their Greek namesakes; the absurdities concerning the regions of the Peloponnese, the distance of the allies of the Trojans from the Dardanelles area, and so on. Another question, that puzzles historians of religions, is the fact that Dionysus – who is a very important god in the Greek world, both in the Mycenaean civilization and in classical Greece – is almost entirely neglected by the Homeric poems. This is incomprehensible if one places the latter after the Mycenaean age; on the contrary, by admitting that the Homeric world precedes it, everything becomes clear, for after the Achaeans settled in Greece, the features of their gods gradually changed, as they came under the influence of the great Near Eastern civilizations. This is consistent with the fact that the world described in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is more archaic than that of the Mycenaeans; and, also, it could also explain the remarkable differences between Homer's and Hesiod's pantheons, which are inexplicable if one assumes that these two poets are almost contemporaries. We should also note that oxen are of the utmost importance in the Homeric world: this is the yet further evidence that we are not dealing with a Greek setting, undoubtedly more suitable for goats than oxen, but with a Northern one. Moreover, in a Greek environment one would expect a surfeit of pottery, but this is not the case: in both poems tableware is made solely of metal (for the rich) or wood (for the poor), while pottery is absent. This is congruent with the Northern world, where scholars find a stable and highly advanced bronze founding industry, compared to the pottery one, which was far more modest. As to the poor, they used wooden jugs (Od. IX, 346; XVI, 52), i.e. the cheapest and most natural form of vessel, considering the abundance of this material in the North: Esthonia and Latvia have a very ancient tradition of wooden beer tankards.

Therefore, it was along the Baltic coast that Homer's events took place, before the Mycenaean migration southwards, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. This period is close to the end of an exceptionally hot climate that had lasted several thousands of years, the "post-glacial climatic optimum". It corresponds to the Atlantic phase of the Holocene, when temperatures in northern Europe were much higher than today (at that time the broad-leaved forests reached the Arctic Circle and the tundra disappeared even from the northernmost areas of Europe). The "climatic optimum" reached its peak around 2500 B.C. and began to drop around 2000 B.C. ("Sub-Boreal phase"), until it came to an end some centuries later. It is highly likely that this was the cause that obliged the Achaeans to move down to the Mediterranean for this reason. They probably followed the Dnieper river down to the Black Sea, as the Vikings (whose culture is, in many ways, quite similar) did many centuries later. The Mycenaean civilisation, which did not originate in Greece, was thus born and went on to flourish from the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C., soon after the change in North European climate.

The migrants took their epos and geography along with them and attributed the same names they had left behind in their lost homeland to the various places where they eventually settled. This heritage was immortalized by the Homeric poems and Greek mythology (the latter lost the memory of the great migration from the North probably after the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization, around the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C., but kept a vague memory of its "hyperborean" links). Moreover, they renamed with Baltic names not only the new countries where they settled, but also other Mediterranean regions, such as Libya, Crete and Egypt, thus creating an enormous "geographical misunderstanding" which has lasted until now. The above-mentioned transpositions of Northern place-names were certainly encouraged, if not suggested, by a certain similarity (which the Mycenaeans realized owing to their inclination for seafaring) between Baltic geography and that of the Aegean: we only have to think of the analogy Öland-Euboea or Zealand-Peloponnese (where they were obliged to force the concept of island in order to maintain the original layout). The increasing presence of Greek-speaking populations in the Mediterranean basin, with their cultural and trade supremacy, later consolidated this phenomenon, from the time of Mycenaean civilization to the Hellenistic-Roman period.

Besides the geographic correspondences, in favour of this theory there is the temporal concurrence between the end of the "climatic optimum" in northern Europe and the settling of the Mycenaeans in the Aegean area. This is the same age as the arising of Aryan, Hyksos, Hittite and Cassite settlements in India, Egypt, Anatolia and Mesopotamia respectively. In a word, the end of the "climatic optimum" can explain the cause of the contemporary migrations of other Indo-European populations (following a recent research carried on by Prof. Jahanshah Derakhshani of Teheran University, the Hyksos very likely belong to the Indo-European family). The original homeland of the Indo-Europeans was probably located in the furthest north of Europe, when the climate was much warmer than today's.

It is time, therefore, to start specific archaeological investigations in the areas of Toija and Lyø, which correspond to the Homeric Troy and Ithaca in all geographic, topographic, morphologic, and climatic respects. These represent very promising archaeological sites, as the tumuli of Perniö, so similar to those described in the *Iliad*, and the dolmen of Lyø, corresponding to the "Crow's Rock" mentioned in the *Odyssey*, confirm. If the validity of this theory is borne out by such investigation, new and fascinating horizons will open regarding the origin and prehistory of the whole European civilization, shedding light on the peoples of the northern Early Bronze Age and illuminating their life, culture, religion, and history, which have been almost totally unknown until now – not to mention that this "rediscovery" of Homer could foster a new cultural approach to the idea of European unity and could contribute to the birth of a new humanism in Western culture.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Finley, Moses. *The World of Odysseus*, New York 1977, Appendix II

<sup>2</sup> Montanari, Franco. *Introduzione a Omero*, Florence 1992, Chap. 6

<sup>3</sup> Piggott, Stuart. *Ancient Europe*, Chicago 1968, Chap. 4

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- <sup>4</sup> Montanari, Franco. *Introduzione a Omero*, Florence 1992, Chap. 6  
<sup>5</sup> Nilsson, Martin P. *Homer and Mycenae*, New York 1968, Chap. II, 3  
<sup>6</sup> Bibby, Geoffrey. *Four Thousand Years Ago*, Westport, Conn. 1983, Chap. 13  
<sup>7</sup> Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy*, London 1946, Chap. 1  
<sup>8</sup> Randsborg, Klavs. *Kivik archaeology and iconography*, in *Acta archaeologica* vol. 64 (1), København 1993, Chap. 10  
<sup>9</sup> Renfrew, Colin. *Before Civilization*, Harmondsworth, UK 1990, Chap. 4  
<sup>10</sup> Vinci Felice. *The Baltic Origins of Homer's Epic Tales*, Rochester, VT 2006

## INFO

The book "Omero nel Baltico. Saggio sulla geografia omerica" by Felice Vinci (5th edition, Palombi Publishers, Rome 2008) is introduced by Prof. Rosa Calzecchi Onesti, a scholar and translator of the Iliad and Odyssey into Italian. The author presented, upon invitation, the theory expounded in the book on the occasion of the International Conference held by the Simon Fraser University of Vancouver, Canada, in April 2002. On April 2005, he lectured twice on this topic at the University of Rome, Dpt. of Geography, where the book was adopted as a text on which students are examined. The author presented his theory at the University of Riga, Latvia, last November 2005, and at the University of Padova (Padua), Italy, in February 2006. Moreover, he presented it at the University of Pavia, Italy, in May 2006.

"Homer in the Baltic" was published in Russia in 2004. Its edition translation was introduced and edited by the Prof. Tatyana Devyatkina, who has the chair of Classical Philology at the University of Saransk.

Upon invitation, the author presented the Russian edition at the Academy of Sciences of St Petersburg on December 8, 2004.

The book has been published also in USA, under the title "The Baltic Origins of Homer's Epic Tales" (see please the website <http://www.innertraditions.com/Product.jmdx?action=displayDetail&id=2068> ). This book was adopted as a text for the students of the Bard College, New York, in 2007.

In June 2006 Prof. William Mullen, who teaches Classics at the Bard College, sailed from Stockholm, Sweden, on a sail boat with four of his pupils to follow Ulysses's course indicated in the book, as you can see in the website <http://vteam06.googlepages.com/> This event was financed by a 6,000 Dollars grant given by a prestigious USA Oceanographic Institute.

Here are some comments from American scholars on the book:

"It is hard to overstate the impact, both scholarly and imaginative, to be expected from dissemination of Vinci's compellingly argued thesis about the Baltic origins of Homeric epic. Scholars will be rethinking Indo-European studies from the ground up. And readers of Homeric epic will enter into fresh realms of delight as they reimagine the world in which its heroes first breathed and moved" (William Mullen, Bard College, NY);

"This book poses so many intelligent and pertinent questions and offers so many brilliant solutions to various problems contained in the Homeric epic that it would truly be a pity if it passed unnoticed" (Leszek Wysocki, McGill University);

"Felice Vinci has done what was considered an almost impossibility. He has opened up a new front in the battle lines of the Homeric question (...) After reading Vinci's Homer in the Baltic, one is irresistably tempted to say "yes" to the origins of the Greek peoples in Scandinavia" (Victor DeMattei, an United States historian and scholar specializing in Balkan civilization and culture);

"Your essay presents a remarkably compelling thesis which is very well researched and documented (...) Your thesis is, to say the least, both fascinating and revolutionary in terms of accepted lore" (Thomas Wyman, Stanford University);

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"Homer in the Baltic is a rare example of a work that turns received notions upside-down. Vinci has done so with such thoroughness that, if one only credits half his examples, one is compelled to accept his thesis" (Joscelyn Godwin, Colgate University)

"I find it powerful, methodical, important, and convincing" (Alfred de Grazia, Princeton).

Three lectures on this theory were planned in the Syllabus of the upper level "Homer" course at the Bard College last April; the USA edition of the book is a text for the students of the Bard.

Positive reviews were published on the Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana (an Academic journal here in Italy), on the Danish literary journal Klassikerforeningens Meddelelser, and on the German review PM Magazin. A 20 pages abstract was published on the Journal of Finnish Studies, Volume 6, Numbers 1 & 2, August & December 2002 (University of Toronto). A 35 pages presentation is found on "ARION. A Journal of Humanities and the Classics" of Spring-Summer 2007, published by the Boston University. Read please this presentation on the website

<http://vteam06.googlepages.com/shb>

A recent review of the book is on the website of an USA on-line journal:

<http://www.barnesreview.org/html/jan2007lead.html>

A scientific international workshop on "Homer in the Baltic" inspired to this book took place in Finland last 10 August 2007, with archaeologists and professors from the Universities of Milan, Rome, Pavia, Messina, New York, Riga, including Alessandra Giunlia-Mair, archaeologist.

See please the website <http://www.kiskoseura.fi/troija/english/seminar.html>

Upon invitation, the Author presented his theory at the INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES, held by the Athens Institute for Education and Research, in Athens last March, 20th. (website <http://www.atiner.gr/docs/Mediterranean.htm> ).

The book was published in Esthonia last June, 2008, under the title "HOMEROSE EEPOSTE LÄÄNEMERE PÄRITOLU". See please the website

<http://www.raamatukoi.ee/cgi-bin/raamat?165825>

Abstracts in sundry languages are found in as many websites:

in German: [http://www.bocksaga.de/vinci\\_german.htm](http://www.bocksaga.de/vinci_german.htm)

in Russian: <http://www.petergen.com/history/baltodis.shtml>

in French: <http://racines.traditions.free.fr/omerbalt.pdf>

in English: [http://www.bocksaga.de/homer\\_summary.htm](http://www.bocksaga.de/homer_summary.htm)

in Spanish: <http://www.geocities.com/symbolos/envinci.htm>

in Italian: <http://www.estovest.net/lettura/omero.html>

in Swedish: [http://www.svd.se/kulturnoje/nyheter/artikel\\_731671.svd](http://www.svd.se/kulturnoje/nyheter/artikel_731671.svd)

in Esthonian: <http://tuulepesa.zzz.ee/viewtopic.php?t=1428>

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