

LEGEND AND TRUTH IN THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE ODYSSEY

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ABSTRACT

This paper opens with a brief overview of the geographical world of Homer. Based mainly on the Homeric text itself and ancient sources, it is then maintained that the adventurous travels of Odysseus do not have the placeless «logic» of fable, as many believe, but are located in the then-known, real world of the Greek colonies in Sicily and Southern Italy. They may be local legends which Homer «adapted poetically» (Strabo).

Hesiod, Thucydides, Euripides and Callimachus are not arbitrary in locating Circe, Aeolus, the Cyclopes, Thrinacia, Ogygia and Scheria. The references in the *Odyssey* to constellations and especially winds which determine the direction of Odysseus' ships, then one ship and finally his raft, have been carefully studied by the poet and indicate specific, actual places all west of the Ionian Sea. Only *Hades* lies at the end of the world, beyond the *Ocean*, near the western «gate» of the Sun.

The Homeric descriptions of Crete, Ithaca and the *α-μφι* (surrounding) islands are most precise. The *αμάλαικαϊπανυπερτάθη* (low-lying and highest) Ithaca, facing *πρὸνζόφον* (towards dusk, i.e. towards the west), is the *αἶστυ* (city) of Ithaca, at the north-western, coastal end of the island, where Odysseus' seat actually was.

The re-examination of these subjects by a researcher who has seen all the places mentioned from Crete and the Ionian Islands to Southern Italy and Sicily, may be useful at a time when amateurs are once more expressing completely unfounded views on Homer and his geography.