

## ODYSSEUS AND SPAIN

The search for the lands visited by Odysseus on his ten-year voyage of return to Ithaca from Troy has long been a chimæra on the fringes of classical studies. As early as the Hellenistic period Eratosthenes warned that it would be as easy to find the tailor who sewed up Aeolus' bag of winds as find the location of Odysseus' travels (1). Despite its perils however, like the Sirens' song, the idea has remained irresistible (2). Given the great dangers involved, the searcher for Odysseus, if he is not to succumb to the snares of fantasy, must, like the hero himself, be firmly bound to a mast of common sense.

It is a vain to search for a complete 'voyage' of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, as it is futile to look for an historical period which embraces all aspects of the chronologically overlapping worlds of the *Iliad*. Taken *in toto* the world through which Odysseus journeys is, in the words of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, a fairyland. Even so the philosopher David Hume reminds us that the imaginary is, as often as not, merely a novel combination of the actually existent. If, therefore, we can find, as we do, historically correct references in the *Iliad*, is it too much to hope that some faithful geographic reminiscences may be present in the *Odyssey*? This likelihood ought to increase where the poem describes a point of landfall; psychologically such areas remain firmly embedded in sea-farers' minds and are remembered in great detail (3).

When we turn to our classical sources we find that the belief that Odysseus had visited Spain already existed in antiquity. The weakest expression of this view is that found in the geographer Pomponius Mela, who states that Lisbon, the ancient Olisippo, was founded by the hero (4). No evidence is presented save the similarity of the town's name to the Latin version of Odysseus' name, Ulixes. Indeed Mela uses an alternative version of Olisippo's name, Ulisippo, to strengthen his case (5). There is little to comment

(1) Apud Strabo 1.2.15 φησὶ τότε ἂν εὐρεῖν τινα ποῦ Ὀδυσσεὺς πεπλάνηται, ὅταν εὕρῃ τὸν συρράψαντα τὸν ἀνέμων ἄσκόν.

(2) For an early example see S. Butler, *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1897), for more recent examples see E. Bradford, *Ulysses Found* (1963) and T. Severin, *The Ulysses Voyage* (1987).

(3) I owe this point to Mr. J. G. Griffith of Jesus College, Oxford.

(4) A view echoed by Solinus (23.6), and Isidore of Seville (*Etym.* 15.1.70).

(5) This variant is also found on the tombstone of an *incola* of Eborā, Marius Quinti-

on here save to note the fatal ancient fascination with the construction of false etymologies.

Pomponius' fellow geographer, Strabo, has more to say on the subject. He believed that Odysseus' wanderings were, in reality, a voyage of exploration to Spain, and that the hero founded a town, complete with a temple of Athene, called Odysseia in the mountain country behind the town of Abdera, i.e. in the present-day Sierra Nevada (6).

The Roman province of Baetica, which comprised the present-day region of Andalusia, contained two towns whose names could have produced this account. One is Oducia. However this city probably occupied a site near the modern town of Tocina which lies beside the Guadalquivir river, far away from the Sierra Nevada (7). Consequently, despite its name, it appears to be ruled out as a candidate for Strabo's Odysseia. The other town, Ulisi, seems more promising. It was located on the site of the present-day pueblo of Ugíjar, near the town of Villanueva de Trabuco, which does indeed lie in the Sierra Nevada close to Abdera's modern successor, Adra (8).

Nevertheless the only 'Odysseian' etymology which can be constructed from Ulisi, is from the Latin name Ulixes. As Strabo, and more particularly the three sources he cites in his support, Posidonius, Artemidorus, and Asclepiades Myrleanus, were all Greek speakers, and the name of Odysseia is clearly derived from the Greek Ὀδυσσεύς, not 'Ulixes', Ulisi too seems not to be a suitable candidate for Strabo's town, and so the mystery of its location remains.

The above accounts belong to the study of the folklore of the ancient world and can tell us nothing about the any genuine reminiscences of Spain in the *Odyssey*. More interesting in this respect is Strabo's further attempt to link the legendary Spanish town of Ταρτεσσός with the Greek underworld, Τάρταρος (9). While this in itself is simply another piece of false etymologising, it opens up a further intriguing possibility. Was Spain regarded as the site of the entrance to the underworld by the early Greeks?

lianus, who is styled Ulisiponensis by his grieving parents, *C.J.L.* 2.124.

(6) Strabo 3.2.13, 3.4.3.

(7) G. E. Bonsor, *The Archaeological Expedition along the Guadalquivir* (1931) p. 44. The *lintrarii*, or lighterman, of the town made a joint dedication with their colleagues from Naeva and Canania, both towns beside the Guadalquivir, to their patron, C. Aelius Avitus, at Seville (*C.J.L.* 2.1182) which tends to confirm Bonsor's location of Oducia.

(8) See I. Millán González-Pardo, *Ara funeraria de «Ulisi» y pruebas de un nuevo municipio de Roma en la Bética*, "Archivo español de Arqueología" 50-51, 1977-1978, 57 ff. and A. Canto, *Inscripciones ineditas andaluzas* 1, "Habis" 5, 1974, p. 221 ff., n° 7 pp. 227-229.

(9) Strabo 3.2.12.

Our best evidence concerning this theme is found in the tenth and eleventh books of the *Odyssey*. Here Circe tells Odysseus he must speak to the shade of the seer Teiresias. He is to do this not, as might be expected, in an area sacred to Hades, the lord of the underworld, but rather in groves dedicated to Hades' wife, Persephone, ἄλσεα Περσεφονείης. These are to be found at a rock where two of the rivers of hell, the Periphlegethon and the Cocytus, flow into Acheron, here envisaged as a lake. The site lies beyond the bounds of Ocean, πείρατα Ὀκεανοῖο, in the land of the Cimmerians, a tribe who possess a city, and whose territory is covered in perpetual night (10).

The Ocean stream was believed by the early Greeks to have encircled the whole world, nevertheless it appears to have been associated with the far west more than any other region (11). In later antiquity Gades, the ancient Cádiz, was regarded as standing on the bounds of ocean, owing to its position past the straits of Gibraltar, which were regarded as the boundary proper (12).

However the fabulous tends constantly to recede before man's expanding horizon of knowledge. Had this horizon already grown to the extent that the boundaries of Ocean had been pushed back as far as the Straits of Gibraltar by the time of the *Odyssey's* composition? The answer to this question is probably yes.

By the time that the Homeric poems were written the Greeks were in contact with the Phoenicians, as is shown by the two works themselves (13). Perhaps the most relevant reference for our purposes is an abusive reference to a Phoenician trader in the fourteenth book of the *Odyssey*, which shows awareness of the Phoenicians' sea-faring activities (14). Gades was traditionally founded by the Phoenicians in 1100 B.C. (15). Even if this date is too early, archaeological traces of Phoenician settlement here go back as far as the eighth century B.C. (16). Early Greek material, dating from the seventh century B.C., is also found in southern Spain, which may show an Hellenic presence in the region at this date, although this is not conclusive

(10) *Odyssey* 10.504-515, 11.13-22.

(11) See for example *Iliad* 8.485, *Odyssey* 4.567.

(12) See, for example, Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 4.69-70 and Lucan, *Pharsalia* 3.279.

(13) See P. Wathelot, *Les Phéniciens et la tradition homérique*, 'Studia Phoenicia' I (1983), 235-243.

(14) *Odyssey* 14.288-9 δὴ τότε Φοῖνιξ ἦλθεν ἀνὴρ ἀπατήλια εἰδώς, ἰ τρώκτης, ὃς δὴ πολλὰ κάκ' ἀνθρώποισιν ἑώργει.

(15) Velleius Paterculus 1.2.

(16) For a general survey of early Phoenician settlement in Spain see R. J. Harrison, *Spain at the dawn of History* (1988), ch. 3.

evidence (17).

The *Odyssey* itself may contain references to the Straits of Gibraltar. One of these is the mention of the pillars of Atlas found in the first book of the poem (18). The other occurs at the beginning of the final book in the so-called second *vékvia*. Here the journey of the shades of the suitors to the underworld is briefly described. The ghosts are said to pass by the Streams of Ocean and the White Rock, the Gates of the Sun and the People of Dreams (19). Like Odysseus' journey the setting here appears to be in the far West. The "White Rock" by the streams of Ocean is probably a reference to the Rock of Gibraltar which is composed of white limestone, and looks exactly a huge white rock looming out of the sea (20).

Herodotus speaks of voyages by the Phocaeans to the south of the peninsula. These cannot be dated firmly, but should refer to the seventh century B.C. (21). If, therefore, we accept that the *Odyssey* was written in the early seventh century B.C. (22), it seems clear that the Greeks would have known of Spain by this time as a semi-fabulous land in the far west.

The south of Spain therefore seems an ideal setting for Odysseus' encounter with the underworld. Given that this is the case, there are some arresting similarities between Homer's account and a description of the coastline of this area in a much later poem, the *Ora Maritima* of Avienus (23).

After describing the country of Cyneti, who lived in the Algarve, Avie-

(17) Most famously an early Corinthian-style helmet, found in the river Guadelete near Jerez de la Frontera. On Greek contact with the region in general see R. J. Harrison, *Spain at the Dawn of the History* (1988), ch. 4.

(18) *Odyssey* 1.53, cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 517-520. See the comments of W. W. Merry & J. Riddell, *Homer's Odyssey* (1876) vol. 1, p. 7, and A. Heubeck, S. West, & J. B. Hainsworth, *A commentary on Homer's Odyssey* (1988), vol. 1, pp. 81-82.

(19) *Od.* 24.11-12 *παρ' δ' ἴσαν Ὠκεανοῦ τε ῥοὰς καὶ Λευκάδα πέτρην, ἣ δὲ παρ' Ἡελίοιο πύλας καὶ δῆμον ὀνείρων ἦ ἴσαν.*

(20) An alternative western location for the White Rock identifies it with the North African cape Punta Blanca near Ceuta, L. G. Pocock, *Reality and Allegory in the Odyssey* (1959) p. 72 f., p. 80 f.

(21) Herodotus 1.163. They should be prior to the voyage of Colaeus to 'Tartessos' which was perhaps made in c. 640 B.C. See also A. García y Bellido, *La colonización phókaiá en España desde los orígenes hasta la batalla de Alalé*, "Ampurias" 2, 1940, 55 ff.

(22) For the date of the *Odyssey*, a matter of some controversy, see S. West, *The transmission of the text*, in: A. Heubeck, S. West, J. B. Hainsworth, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* (1988), vol. 1, p. 33 ff., esp. p. 35.

(23) Postumius Rufius Festus qui et Avienus, the author of several other poems including an *Aratea*, lived in the middle of the fourth century A.D. His tombstone has been found at Rome, *I.L.S.* 2944. See J. Matthews, *Continuity in a Roman Family; the Rufii Festii of Volsinii*, "Historia" 14, 1967, 484-509 and A. Cameron, *Macrobius, Avienus and Avianus*, "Classical Review" 69, 1967, 385-399.

nus moves on to the land around a cape sacred to the West Wind, *iugum Zephyro sacratum*, the present day Cabo de Sta. Maria by the Portuguese town of Faro, remarking that this area is perpetually covered in mist (24). He then continues:

*Iugum inde rursus et sacrum infernae deae  
divesque fanum penetral abstrusi cavi  
adytumque caecum. Multa propter est palus  
†Etrephaea† dicta quin et Herbi civitas  
stetisse fertur his locis prisca die,  
quae pr(o)eliorum absumpta (tem)pestatibus  
famam atque nomen, sola liquit caespiti (25).*

"Thence (we come to) the cape sacred to the infernal goddess, her rich sactuary dug into the rock, and her dark grotto. Hard by is the marsh called Etrephaea. The city of Herbi too was once said to stand in these parts, which now carried away by the storms of battle leaves only its fame and name to the land..."

Here we have a shrine dedicated to a female chthonic deity, offering a parallel to Persephone, probably the local Iberian goddess Ataecina (26), which lies beyond the bounds of Ocean in a perpetually misty land, and by a city and a marsh, both of which have "hellish" associations (27).

Schulten identified the site of this *iugum* of Avienus as the site of the monastery of Sta. Maria de Rábida, near Huelva (28), a suggestion with which Bonsor concurs (29). As Schulten realized, this site is of great significance, as it offers extremely strong parallels with the account of the entrance to hell in the *Odyssey*. The monastery sits on a rocky promontory where two rivers, the Odiel and the Rio Tinto, run together into a large marshly lagoon, the Ría de Huelva, before flowing out to the sea (30). This seems to fit the *Odyssey's* description of the site of the groves of Per-

(24) Avienus, *Ora Maritima* 228-234.

(25) Avienus, *Ora Maritima* 241-247.

(26) A. Schulten, *Fontes Hispaniae Antiquae* fasc. 1 (1922), p. 91. For a general discussion of Ataecina see J. Ma. Blázquez, *Diccionario de las Religiones Prerromanas de Hispania* (1975) p. 39 ff.

(27) Schulten *Fontes Hispaniae Antiquae* 1 (1922), pp. 91-2 plausinily amends *Etrephaea* to *E[t]rebea*, a proposal accepted by amongst others C. Pemán, *El Pasaje Tartessico de Avieno*, p. 42. Similarly *Herbi* can be amended to *Erbi*.

(28) A. Schulten, *Hispania* (1920) p. 40, and more fully in the *Fontes Hispaniae Antiquae*, 1 (1922) p. 90.

(29) G. Bonsor, *Tartessos*, "Boletín de la Real academia de la Historia" 79, 1921, 57ff.

(30) See R. J. Harrison, *Spain at the Dawn of History* (1988), p. 54, fig. 28.

sephone almost perfectly, and led Schulten to conclude that these were in fact accounts of the same place (31).

One further point in favour of this identification is the choice of the rivers of hell found in the *Odyssey*. One of these is the river of fire, the Periphlegethon. One of the two confluent rivers at La Rábida is the Rio Tinto, which is aptly named as its waters are dark red. What better inspiration could there be for a river of fire?

The "Cimmerians" of course are a marked discrepancy. Their presence in the Homeric poems has always excited great dispute (32). However there is general agreement that Homer's Cimmerians ought not to be linked to the nomadic tribes, also called Cimmerians, who settled in the Crimean area (33). The name seems, at this point in time, to have been used generally of far-flung tribes and only later acquired a more specific connotation (34). If the name was used in this way, several tribes round about the area of Huelva, such as the Cyneti, the Conii, and the Cempsii, have names which could easily have been mutated into the more familiar Cimmerii for a Greek audience.

After his discussion of this area Avienus passes on to the island of Cartare, which he says was occupied by the Cempsii (35). Schulten places Cartare further south than the Ría de Huelva, in the present day marshland of Doñana, which formed the estuary of the Guadalquivir in antiquity (36). However this identification cannot be correct, as Avienus later refers to such an island separately from that of Cartare (37).

(31) A. Schulten, *Fontes Hispaniae Antiquae* 1 (1922) p. 92: "poeta hanc ipsam regionem respicere videatur." See also page 130.

(32) The problem is discussed as early as the time of Strabo 3.2.12.

(33) A. Heubeck, A. Hoekstra, *A commentary on Homer's Odyssey* vol. 2 (1989) pp. 77-79; W. B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer* 1 (1947) p. 382; W. W. Merry & J. Riddell, *Homer's Odyssey* 1 (1886) p. 444. For the 'historical' Cimmerians see Herodotus 1.15.

(34) See R. Dion, *Tartessos, l'océan homérique, et les travaux d'Hercule*, "Revue Historique" 224, 1960, 27 ff., for interesting speculations that geographical sense breaks beyond a fixed boundary, here the Straits of Gibraltar.

(35) Avienus, *Ora Maritima* 255-9:

... Cartare post insula est,  
eamque pridem influx(a) e(t est) satis [est] fides,  
tenuere Cempsii. Proximorum postea  
pulsu duello, varia quaesitum loca  
se protulere...

(36) A. Schulten, *Fontes Hispaniae Antiquae* 1 (1922) p. 93.

(37) Avienus, *Ora Maritima* 283-5. See A. Bertholet, *Festus Avienus: Ora Maritima* (1934) p. 78 f.

We must therefore look for another site for Cartare. One possibility would be the present-day island of Saltes, which lies at the mouth of the Ría de Huelva. Saltes was certainly densely occupied in the Moorish period, and an early Arab geographer, Al-Himyari, notes traces of earlier occupation (38). The name "Cartare" may contain the Punic root "qart" meaning city. If this identification is correct, it is easy to see the Cimmerians and their city as the Cempsí of Saltes. However even if it is not the case, the Cimmerians' city is paralleled by Avienus' Herbi, and the archeological record shows that there were settlements dating from this period on the mainland by the nearby modern town of Huelva (39).

It could be objected that the *Ora Maritima* is too late a composition upon which to base valid comparisons with the *Odyssey*. Is it not possible that Avienus deliberately imported Homeric overtones into his poem to give it an air of antiquity, and that consequently that there is nothing to be seen in the parallels between the two poems but a poetic device? Avienus however based the *Ora Maritima* on a much earlier work describing a *periplous* of Spain which dates from the sixth century B.C. (40). This fact strengthens the argument drawn from the two poems' similarities and shows that this area of Spain was well known early in the history of the western expansion of Eastern Mediterranean peoples and made a substantial impact on their imagination. It is also significant in this context that some of the earliest finds of Phoenician and Greek materials found in Spain come from around the Huelva district. The area would have been sought out for its mineral wealth, for which it was later to become famous in classical and in later times (41).

Given the close parallels between the two poems, and the other supporting information presented above, it appears that Schulten and other early German scholars were correct to conclude that when the *Odyssey* speaks of a journey to the groves of Persephone it is referring to Southern Spain (42).

(38) E. Levi-Provençal, *La péninsule ibérique au Moyen Age d'après le Kitab al-Rawd al mi' tar d'Ibn 'Abdal-Mun' im al-Himyari* (1938) s.v. *Salts*, p. 135 f.

(39) M. Fernández Miranda, *Huelva, Ciudad de los Tartessos*, in G. Del Olmo Lete y M. E. Aubet, *Los Fenicios en la península ibérica* (1986), t. 2, p. 227 ff.

(40) The view of Schulten, *Fontes Hispaniae Antiquae* 1 (1922) p. 54, and generally accepted, see, for example, E. H. Warmington, *Avien(i)us*, in N. G. L. Hammond & H. H. Scullard (ed.s), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1970<sup>2</sup>). For a summary of rival theories see J. P. Murphy, *Rufus Festus Avienus, Ora Maritima* (1977) p. 1 ff.

(41) R. J. Harrison, *Spain at the Dawn of History* (1988), p. 52, fig. 26; p. 70, fig. 43.

(42) E.g. Mullenhof in his commentary on the *Periplus* of Avienus in "Deutsche Altertumskunde" 1 (1870).

Their work was unfortunately marred by vain attempts to reconstruct an entire voyage for Odysseus, a task doomed to failure, and equally futile attempts to locate the town of "Tartessos", and even Atlantis, in the same area, thus leading to doubt being cast upon all their conclusions. Consequently the view that there is a Spanish aspect to the Odyssey has been reduced to the fringes of Homeric scholarship. Nevertheless here Schulten was right: Odysseus communed with the dead on the banks of the Ría de Huelva in Andalusia.

That one of the first maritime adventurers came to La Rábida seems entirely appropriate from the perspective of later history. Some 2,500 years after the traditional date of Odysseus' voyaging, and almost 500 hundred before the present time of writing, another great sea-farer arrived at the monastery of Sta. Maria on the beginning of a journey, which, like that of Odysseus, was to lead to the discovery of fabulous lands in the West. His name was Cristoforo Colombo, known as Cristóbal Colón in Spain, more commonly known in the English speaking world as Christopher Columbus.

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