

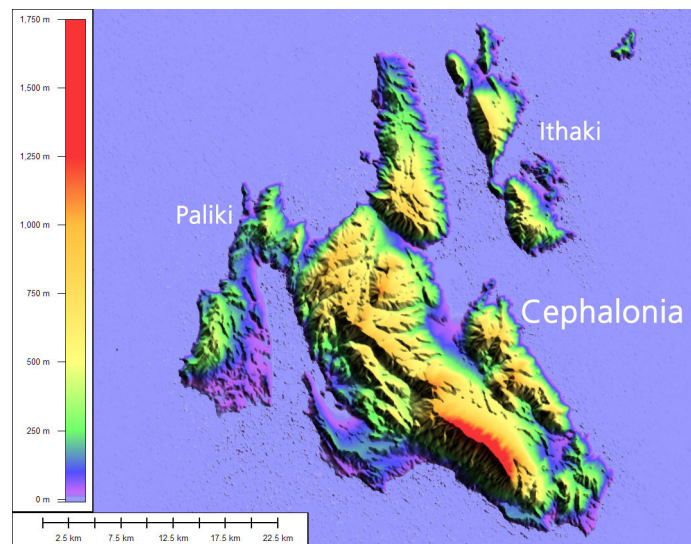


University of Cambridge - Saturday September 23 2006 at 12:15

Sidgwick Avenue Site - Law Faculty Building - Room LG18

Where was Homer's Ithaca?

Twelve months ago Robert Bittlestone, James Diggle and John Underhill hosted a Press conference in London at which they announced a new location for ancient Ithaca, the homeland of Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*. Drawing on Homer's description at Od. 9.25 "Ithaca itself lies low, furthest to sea / Towards dusk; the rest, apart, face dawn and sun", they argued that because today's island of Ithaki is neither low-lying, nor furthest out to sea, nor facing the western dusk, it cannot have been Homer's Ithaca. They proposed instead that the far western peninsula of Cephalonia, called Paliki, must be the location to which Homer was referring, because it meets all three clues perfectly.



But there was one major obstacle: Homer describes ancient Ithaca as an island, whereas Paliki is joined to the rest of Cephalonia via an isthmus. Could this be the same isthmus that the geographer Strabo described many years later as "so low-lying that it is often submerged from sea to sea"? Could catastrophic landslides from the adjacent mountains have covered over this narrow channel since the time of Odysseus, obscuring all trace of his island kingdom?

In their book "*Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca*" they make a very strong case that this is precisely what did take place. The story rapidly became a media sensation: it was reported by over 100 news outlets and since then there have been many articles, TV programmes and radio interviews about the authors' proposal and the work that is in hand to test it. The book has already sold around 10,000 copies and a Greek edition is in preparation, while classicists and geologists world-wide are evaluating their proposed solution to one of western civilisation's oldest mysteries.

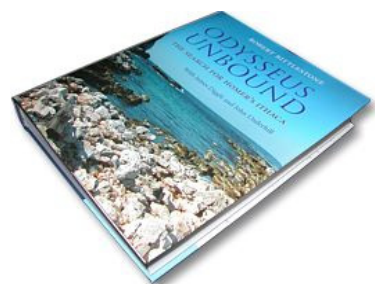
The speakers will present their argument together with the latest news and research from the former island that is believed to be Odysseus' homeland. Their topic will be illustrated throughout with slides, satellite photography and computer animations. The content is aimed at a non-specialist audience as well as those who are studying or lecturing in ancient history, languages, geology, classics or archaeology. The speakers will answer questions at the end and they will be available for further discussions afterwards.

ROBERT BITTLESTONE (centre) was educated in classics and science before reading economics at Christ's College, Cambridge from 1970-73. He is the founder of Metapraxis Ltd, a company specialising in the detection of early warnings for multinational companies. He is the author of many articles about the importance of visualisation and he has applied these principles to the enigma described in the book. He is married with four children and describes himself as an enthusiastically incompetent skier, sailor and windsurfer.



JAMES DIGGLE (right) is Professor of Greek and Latin at Cambridge and a Fellow of Queens' College. His publications include *The Oxford Classical Text of Euripides* (Oxford, 1981-94), *Euripidea: Collected Essays* (Oxford, 1994) and *Theophrastus: Characters* (Cambridge, 2004). He was University Orator at Cambridge for eleven years and has published a selection of his speeches in *Cambridge Orations* (Cambridge, 1994).

JOHN UNDERHILL (left) is Professor of Stratigraphy at the University of Edinburgh. His primary research interest lies in the use of geological fieldwork and geophysical methods to investigate the structure and stratigraphy of sedimentary basins. He has been investigating and elucidating the geology of the Ionian Islands of western Greece since 1982. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He also referees professional football matches and in 2001 was promoted to the FIFA List of International Referees.



Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca 618 pages, 340 colour illustrations. Cambridge University Press, October 2005. ISBN 0521853575. RRP £25.00. The book will be available for purchase after the seminar and for signature by the authors. It contains an extensive bibliography and references to prior attempts to solve this puzzle, from William Gladstone back to Eratosthenes.

REGISTRATION The Alumni Office, 01223 332288, email alumni@foundation.cam.ac.uk, <http://www.foundation.cam.ac.uk/weekend.php>. By kind permission of the Alumni Office, this lecture is also open to those who are studying or teaching classics, geology, archaeology and related subjects.

