

## RESEARCH UPDATE

*Issued on behalf of the authors of  
'Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca' and Fugro N.V.*

### GEOPHYSICAL SURVEYS SUPPORT QUEST FOR HOMER'S ITHACA

- Latest geoscientific technologies are used to investigate Europe's earliest enigma
- Land, sea and airborne methods penetrate deep below surface of the key valley
- Helicopter-based scan reveals no limestone bedrock for 90 metres underground
- Marine tests pinpoint outflow of ancient channel identified by geographer Strabo
- Public lecture to be held at the Geological Society, London on October 2 2008
- UK Channel 4 TV News coverage expected this week between 19:00 and 20:00



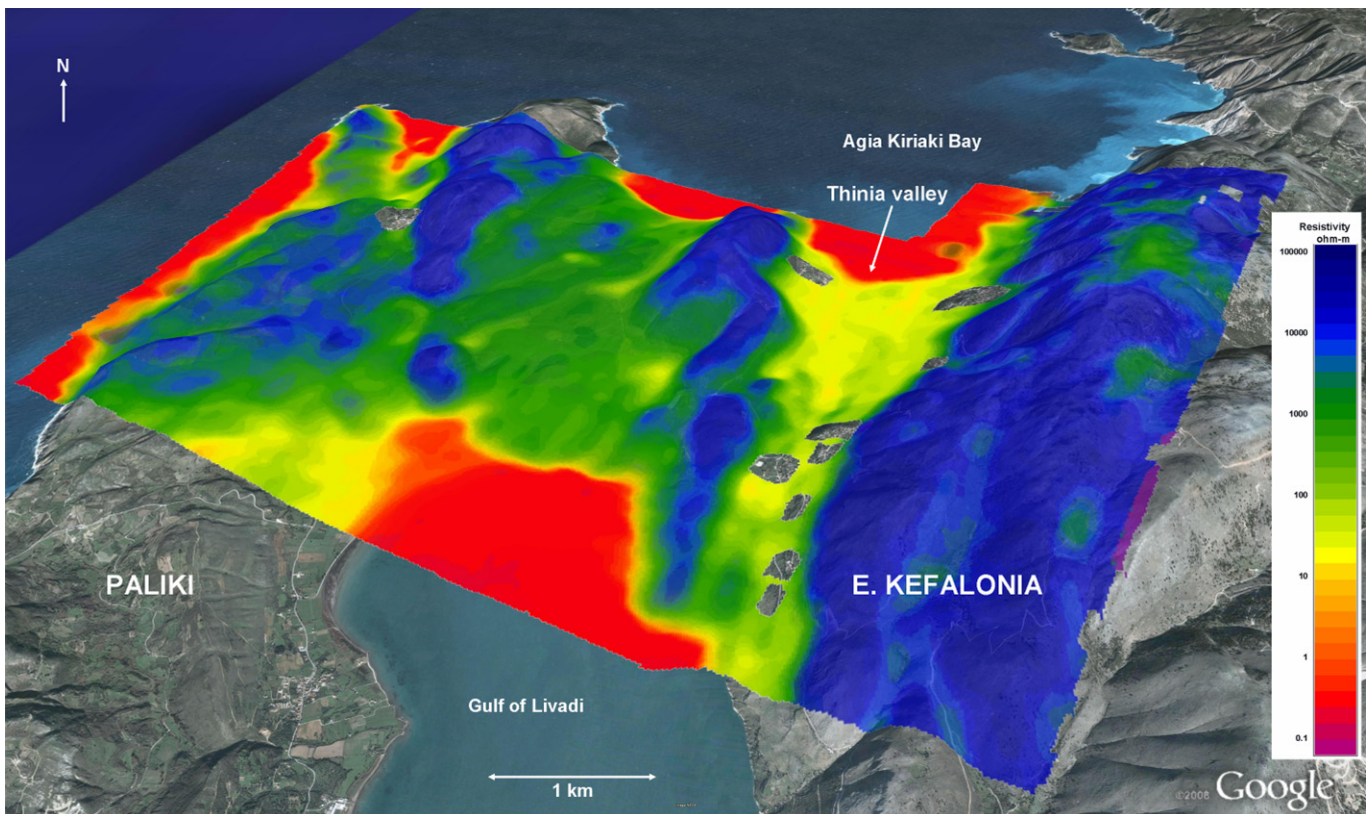
#### Helicopter survey of 'Strabo's Channel' (Thinia isthmus, Kefalonia)

**London and The Hague, September 1 2008.** Detailed results and photographs from the first year of sponsorship by Fugro of the *Odysseus Unbound* project are released today and published in *Geoscientist*, the monthly journal of the Geological Society of London. A carefully designed combination of land, sea and airborne techniques has provided a wealth of new data about the Thinia isthmus on the Greek island of Kefalonia that separates its western peninsula from the rest of the island.

The new research shows that this 6 kilometre long and up to 2 kilometre wide isthmus contains no solid limestone bedrock down to at least 90 metres below today's surface. The fill is loose material, some of which has originated through catastrophic rockfall from the earthquake-prone mountain range to the east, with the rest consisting of softer marl rock.

2,000 years ago the Greek geographer Strabo wrote of Kefalonia "Where the island is narrowest it forms an isthmus so low-lying that it is often submerged from sea to sea". This new evidence strengthens the case that Strabo's description was correct at the time and that the western peninsula of Kefalonia, today called Paliki, was often separated from the rest of Kefalonia by the sea at the Thinia isthmus.

The latest results also lend support to the proposal put forward by Robert Bittlestone in 2003 and described in the Cambridge University Press book *Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca*, that Homer's description of Ithaca in the *Odyssey* as the furthest out to sea and most western of the Ionian Islands referred to today's peninsula of Paliki, at that time a separate island cut off by 'Strabo's Channel'.



*Results of the helicopter-borne resistivity survey of the Thinia valley (proposed site of Strabo's buried channel) that today separates the western peninsula (Paliki) from the rest of Kefalonia. The instrument penetration depth is up to 90 metres below the surface. Blue and dark green colours correspond to limestone bedrock. Light green and yellow represent marl, conglomerate and loose rockfall. Orange and red represent conductive sea water or salt-saturated sediments. Uncoloured areas are villages that were not overflown. Background satellite image copyright Google Earth / Digital Globe.*

In March 2007 the global geotechnical, survey and geoscientific service company FUGRO announced its sponsorship of the *Odysseus Unbound* project. This provides the project team with industry-scale geoscientific resources and includes the sponsorship of a PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh as part of the Natural Environment Research Council CASE scheme. Geoscience leader Professor John Underhill of the University of Edinburgh comments on the latest results from this cooperation:

*“Fugro’s specialist air, sea and land-based divisions from around the world have worked together to collect an unprecedented amount of new data in a quest to image the sub-surface beneath the Thinia isthmus. The data collection was very successful and the interpretation of the results has now provided us with some remarkable new evidence and significant new geoscientific insights for the theory being tested.*

*The helicopter survey has used a technique called electromagnetic resistivity mapping to show that as far down as the instruments can penetrate, there is no solid limestone bedrock crossing this isthmus. Although this had already been demonstrated at one specific location by drilling a borehole in 2006, it is a major advance to be able to diagnose similar conditions for the full 6 kilometre length and up to 2 kilometre width of the Thinia valley down to around 90 metres below the surface.*

*As well as this very striking result from the helicopter survey, the acquisition of marine seismic reflection data has provided an unprecedented high-resolution undersea profile at the southern end of the Thinia isthmus. The interpretation of the marine seismic data has confirmed that the area of deepest marine bedrock is precisely aligned with the diagnosed southern exit of ‘Strabo’s Channel’ where a submarine platform has been transected.*

*So although it is not yet possible to state categorically that Strabo’s description of the Thinia isthmus is confirmed by geoscience, these new research results make it clear that his 2,000-year old account remains feasible. However, the hypothesis would be refuted if older geological formations lie buried across the whole valley, such as if a buried land bridge of limestone bedrock were to be encountered below 90 metres.*

*As a result of the successful acquisition of land, sea and airborne geophysical data made possible through Fugro’s support, we intend to deploy further surveys and drill additional boreholes from which core samples can be extracted, analysed and dated to test and refine the theory being examined.”*

Professor James Diggle of Cambridge University, who leads the classical research side of the *Odysseus Unbound* project, comments on the implications of these new findings for our understanding of Strabo’s *Geography* and Homer’s *Odyssey*:

*“Strabo probably never visited Kefalonia himself. But he had impeccable sources - writers of learned geographical treatises living two centuries earlier, who certainly visited the island and left behind eye-witness accounts of its landscape. We have no reason to doubt that the marine channel which they described once existed. Furthermore Strabo indicates clearly to which part of Kefalonia he is referring when he speaks of it.*

*These new research results from the Thinia valley support the proposal that the channel observed by Strabo’s sources really did once exist, and they should also help us to understand why it has subsequently disappeared from our view.*

*If we can demonstrate the historical existence of ‘Strabo’s Channel’ it will be impossible to resist the conclusion that Paliki was Homer’s Ithaca - for Paliki, as a separate island, is the only candidate that satisfies every one of Homer’s geographical criteria. So we are on the way to demonstrating that Homer’s geography was no less reliable than Strabo’s, and that the landscape of Paliki was the true location of Homer’s *Odyssey*.”*

The UK Channel 4 TV News programme is expected to broadcast a short bulletin about the research in Kefalonia this week between 19:00 and 20:00. A link to the broadcast will be provided on the project website afterwards.

**\*\*\* ENDS \*\*\***

## NOTES

The *Geoscientist* article *Testing Classical Enigmas* by John Underhill is available online at:

<http://www.odysseus-unbound.org/news.html> [full version as downloadable PDF]

[http://www.geolsoc.org.uk/page4237\\_en.html](http://www.geolsoc.org.uk/page4237_en.html) [abridged extract]

The full version is also published this month in the printed issue of *Geoscientist* (18.9)

High-resolution print-ready versions of the photographs and diagrams in the above article and this Research Update are available for Press access at the passworded Press Resources area:

<http://www.odysseus-unbound.org/press/index.html>

Journalists requiring a Press access password are requested to email [anne.stephenson@metapraxis.com](mailto:anne.stephenson@metapraxis.com)

For project details see:

<http://www.odysseus-unbound.org> (English)

<http://www.odysseus-lyomenos.org> (Greek)

For information about Fugro's sponsorship, visit the Fugro corporate website at:

<http://www.fugro.com> and look for the *Odysseus Unbound* sponsorship icon, or refer to:

<http://www.odysseus-unbound.org/sponsorship.html>

To book for lectures in London on October 2 (John Underhill) or October 6 (Robert Bittlestone) visit:

<http://www.odysseus-unbound.org/events.html>

For details of the book *Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca* visit:

<http://www.odysseus-unbound.org/book.html> (English edition, 2005)

<http://www.odysseus-lyomenos.org/greekbook.html> (Greek edition, 2007)

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