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HOW FAR WAS EUMAIOS' PIGFARM FROM ODYSSEUS' PALACE ?

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Résumé. – L’Odyssée d’Homère se base-t-elle sur une île réelle ou imaginaire ? Malgré le fait que la description que le poète en a fait (en IX, 19-26) ait longtemps paru énigmatique, de récentes recherches sur la péninsule de Paliki à Képhallénie (www.odysseus-unbound.org/results.html) permettent de penser plutôt à un endroit existant réellement. Ceci révèle la probabilité excitante qu’un lieu tel que la Porcherie d’Eumée ait également existé à la fin de l’Âge du Bronze et souligne l’importance de la connaissance détaillée qu’ils avaient de leur géographie locale.

Abstract. – Is the Ithaca of Homer’s *Odyssey* based on a real or imaginary island? Although the poet’s description (at 9.19-26) has long appeared enigmatic, recent research on the Paliki peninsula of Kefalonia (www.odysseus-unbound.org/results.html) now points towards a real location. This opens up the tantalising possibility that specific sites in the poem such as Eumaios’ Pigfarm may also have existed in the Late Bronze Age, emphasising the importance of a precise understanding of their local geography.

Mots-clés. – Homère, Odyssée, Ithaque, Paliki, Eumée, Diggle.

« There remains especially one doubt : If it is 1.5 km to go from *Eumaios' Pigfarm to Odysseus' Palace*, how would it be possible for Odysseus to say that the city – which is nearby the Palace – is 'hekathēn' 'far away' (Od. 17.25) and for Eumaios – departing after breakfast (Od. 16.2-155) and coming home in the evening without any longer stay (Od. 16.452 f.) – to need the whole day for his trip ? »

Matthias Steinhart, reviewing « *Odysseus Unbound : The Search for Homer's Ithaca* » (Robert Bittlestone, James Diggle and John Underhill, Cambridge University Press 2005) in the *Revue des Études Anciennes* 2007, pp 322-324

At *Od.* 17.24-5 Odysseus is at the pigfarm and he says to Telemachos and Eumaios « I fear that the morning frost may overcome me ; and you said that the city is far away ». But the word ἔκαθεν, translated here as « far away », is an imprecise description for two reasons. First, Odysseus is in disguise as an old man who has to be led to the city with a stick. His stated concern is about getting frost-bitten, so any journey of more than ten minutes or so is going to be hazardous from that perspective. Second, although the word does not recur in the *Odyssey*, we find it in the *Iliad* at 2.456 (a forest fire seen from afar), at 13.179 (a mountain seen from afar) and at 16.634 (a woodcutter heard from afar). Now although one can see a forest fire or a mountain from many miles away, in a world without motorised chainsaws one does not normally hear a woodcutter at that range. So the adverb is inherently imprecise in relation to measurements of distance and we cannot therefore rely on it.

Furthermore James Diggle points out to me that ἔκαθεν can be translated as « some distance away », as opposed to τηλόθεν, which always means « far away ». The adverb expresses separation, as much as distance. This comes out clearly in some uses of the commoner form ἐκάς, such as at *Od.* 17.73, where Telemachos « did not turn away from (ἐκάς) his guest, but came and stood beside him ». Here the notion of « far away » would be inappropriate. So all that Odysseus means is that the city has been described as not closely adjacent to the farm, but separated by some (unquantified) distance from it.

Diggle also notes that Odysseus, in describing the city as ἔκαθεν, is imputing this knowledge to what he has picked up from Eumaios and Telemachos (the « you » in « you said that the city is ἔκαθεν » is plural). Now, neither Eumaios nor Telemachos has in fact said anything as explicit as that. Odysseus must therefore mean « I infer from what you have been saying that... ». And that is a perfectly reasonable thing for him to infer, because that is certainly what Eumaios and Telemachos have made patently clear by the way they have talked about the city and their journeys there and back. It also suits Odysseus's immediate purpose to stress that the city is not just a stone's throw away since he does not want to accompany Telemachos to the palace.

Do we have any other sources of information about the distance between the palace and the pigfarm that might support this interpretation ? We do, and in two distinct passages.

First, at *Od* 17.190 we read that Eumaios and Odysseus did not start on their journey from the pigfarm to the palace until « the day was far spent ». But after they had reached it, at 17.599-606 Eumaios ate a meal and then commenced his return journey to the pigfarm when « evening had now come on ». So we now know that the following events can all be accomplished in the short period of time between a day being far spent and evening coming on : (a) the walk from the pigfarm to the city (a slow walk during which Odysseus lent on a staff) ; (b) the altercation with Melanthios at the city fountain ; (c) the walk from there to the palace ; (d) the episode with Argos ; (e) conversations with Telemachos, Antinoos and Penelope and (f) eating a meal. If the poet was considering an actual landscape and timescale for these events then the pigfarm surely cannot have been more than about an hour's walk from the palace. I find it very hard to see how, for example, this fits in with the 30-mile round trip favoured by J.V. Luce (*Celebrating Homer's landscapes : Troy and Ithaca revisited*, Yale 1998, p. 218 and map p. 177).

Second, at 20.162 Eumaios delivers three live boars to the palace shortly after the dawn which arrived at 20.91. This is almost immediately after the handmaids go to fetch the water in time for the suitors' breakfast, which at 20.156 Penelope says will be especially early that day. If these descriptions are intended as realistic then I cannot see Eumaios setting out with those unruly hogs in the middle of the night, with 15 miles of pitch-black countryside ahead of them.

These two independent items of evidence support the proposal that the pigfarm was « some distance away » but not « far away » from the palace, a location that also contains obvious merit from the viewpoint of effective animal husbandry. If the pigfarm was a real one it would be remarkably obtuse of Eumaios to have established it many miles away from the palace, and if it was a poetic creation it would have been equally pointless for the poet to stretch his audience's credibility in this way.

How then would it be possible « *for Eumaios – departing after breakfast (Od. 16.2-155) and coming home in the evening without any longer stay (Od. 16.452 f.) – to need the whole day for his trip ?* ».

The crucial point here is that although we know that breakfast took place at the pigfarm around dawn (16.2) and that Eumaios departed at some time after this for the palace, we are not told at what time he left. This is in any case Telemachos' second breakfast : he had the first with his shipmates when they landed at dawn (15.495-500) and he then had to walk from the landing to the pigfarm (which must therefore have been quite close to the sea). Several conversations take place between Telemachos' arrival at the pigfarm and Eumaios' hour of departure for the palace (16.4-155) but we cannot presume that they represent the entirety of the corresponding time interval. Once the decision has been taken for him to leave, Eumaios is encouraged to travel briskly (16.130) and to minimise his stay at the palace (16.150). This he does (16.466), but again, nothing in this information tells us at what time he left the pigfarm.

However, at 16.333-4 we hear that on his way to the palace Eumaios meets a herald who has been sent from the harbour by the crew of Telemachos' returned ship. This means that there has been enough time for this ship to reach the harbour from the bay at which Telemachos was landed at dawn (15.495-6) and for the crew to disembark and brief the herald, who has also had sufficient time to travel from the harbour towards the palace. In the Paliki landscape the sea journey is a distance of 23 km (*Odysseus Unbound* pp. 469-70) and so at an average speed not exceeding 5 km per hour (p. 369) at least 5 hours have elapsed between dawn and Eumaios' meeting with the herald near the palace, and probably rather more than that. Although this could mean that the pigfarm is a long way from the palace and that Eumaios started on his journey very early, an equally valid explanation is that the pigfarm is only 'some distance away' from the palace and that Eumaios did not leave the pigfarm until later in the day and met the herald about an hour afterwards. Either way, he probably did not arrive at the palace until the afternoon.

Likewise, unfortunately we do not know the hour of Eumaios' departure from the palace to the pigfarm. All we know is that he arrived back at the pigfarm in the evening (16.452) and this is also consistent with either a late departure for a short journey or an early departure for a long one. The evidence from this latter passage is therefore ambiguous on the question « How far was Eumaios' Pigfarm from Odysseus' Palace ? ».

Consequently this description does not contradict the previous two passages which indicate that the pigfarm and palace were simply « some distance away », in line with the estimate of 1.5 km proposed in *Odysseus Unbound* (p. 457).