

# Peripeteia in the Atlantic: Ulysses' voyages between Europe and America

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**Abstract:** It was not Christopher Columbus who first discovered America. In fact, America was known in the Ancient Times. During the High Antiquity there was talk of an “awful country” located in the “far west”; a country that “ended” the “infertile and dark sea”. At the time of the *Pax Romana*, moreover, Strabo, the illustrious geographer, was emphatic: Ulysses' adventures happened in the Atlantic Ocean. As a result, the opinion that “Scheria”, land of the Phaeacians, was the island of Corfu, in Greece, should be rejected. For Scheria, “isolated from the rest of humanity”, should be in the Iberian Peninsula. Once more Strabo was categorical: a town therein was named after Ulysses, the king of Ithaca. Finally yet importantly, according to the tradition the very etymon of Lisbon is *Ulixes*<sup>1</sup>.

**Keywords:** Ulysses. Atlantic Ocean. Americas. Bermuda. Lisbon.

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## Prolegomenon

The writings on Ulysses and his extravagant voyages are so many, that, *prima facie*, it would be pointless to write something more. On the other hand, it is necessary to revisit the story, as it is known today, in order to make feasible a realistic representation of the world wherein he travelled.

Ulysses was king of Ithaca (*Il.*, II, 636); still his subjects were “Cephalonians” (*Il.*, II, 636). So what is the proper meaning of the terms “Ithaca” and “Cephalonia”? According to the generally accepted opinion, the Cephalonians, of whom Ulysses was the sovereign, lived on the Ionian Sea islands of Ithaca, Cefalonia, Zacynthos and Doulichion, but also in the western territory of mainland Greece (*Od.*, I, 245-247). As for Ithaca and the “wooded” Zacynthos (*Od.*, I, 246), there is no doubt that these were the islands which still have the same name. There are, however, problems as for Cephalonia, the name of which was Samē or Samos in Ancient Times (*Od.*, I, 246 and IV, 671); and that name, of Semitic origin, meant “high place” (Marinatos, 1962, p. 23). The name “Cephalonia” actually prevailed only in the 5th century BC (Marinatos, 1962, p. 23). The fact however that, according to Homer, Samos/Samē was an island

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<sup>1</sup> I would like thank Professor Eduardo Henrique Barbosa de Vasconcelos, from Universidade Estadual de Goiás, for his invitation to write this article and review it.

full of mountains and precipices (*Od.*, IV, 671), separated from Ithaca by a sea strait (*Od.*, IV, 671), leads to the deduce that the Homeric Samos/Samē is, indeed, the very island that bears the name “Cephalonia” today. Serious problems, however, arise because of Doulichion.

Doulichion, although a part of Ulysses' kingdom, in some cases appeared as an independent statehood, including the also “sacred islands” of Echinades, opposite to Elis, in the Peloponnese (*Il.*, II, 625-626). The fleet of independent Dulichion, moreover, was much larger than that of the king of Ithaca: forty warships against only twelve of Ulysses and his Cephalonians (*Il.*, II, 630). Further Doulichion was a “very fertile” island (*Od.*, XIV, 335), which had relations with Thesprotia (*Od.*, XIV, 334-335), i.e. Epirus' area stretching along the sea to the Greco-Albanian border of today.

What happened? Why this disorder? The explanation can only be found through the etymological explanation of the term Doulichion. The root of the latter is the adjective of Ancient Greek *doulichos/dolichos*, which means “long” (Beekes, 1, 2009, p. 346). In other words, Doulichion means “long island” and such an island in the Ionian Sea is only Corfu, another name of which was Makris, i.e. long island in ancient Greek (Marmoras, 1902, p.8). Even Euboea, the long and narrow island, opposite the eastern coastline of Attica and Boeotia, was called *Makris* as well (Kōnstantinidēs, III, 1904, p. 78), just like Icaria, another “long island”, but at the eastern end of the Aegean Sea this one (Apol., *Library*, II. 6. 3).

## In the Mediterranean Sea

After Troy was conquered, Ulysses and his Cephalonians set sail back to the Ionian Sea. As a rule, their ships were penteconters, i.e. galleys characterized “by decks fore and aft and carrying fifty rowers” (*Webster's*, 1993, p. 1673). Those vessels were painted with tar in order to avoid corrosion; as a result, in the Homeric Poems the boats are “black” (*Od.*, II, 430 and IX, 322). There were, however, also ships painted red with a mineral stain, *milton* in Ancient Greek (*Il.*, II, 637).

The vessels of the Homeric heroes were “hollow” (*Il.*, II, 516) and had a length to width ratio of 7:1 or even 8:1 (Loon, 1960, p. 120). The masts could be moved (*Od.*, IX, 77) and were made from fir wood (*Od.*, II, 424). They used to put them in a hole made for this purpose on the carling that covered the length of the boat and they moored at the prow with the help of forestay (*Od.*, II, 425). The sails were white (*Od.*,

IX, 77) and square, though later on, in the Mediterranean Sea, triangular shaped sails were mainly used (Loon, 1960, pp.108, 110). The sails were opened with shrouds made of leather and attached to the stern.

During the era of the Trojan War, the ships were equipped with a keel (*Od.*, XII, 421) and a stem (*Od.*, II, 428) in order to “better defend the waves”. In general, they could develop a speed of 6 or even 7 nautical miles per hour (Simpas, 1, 1982, p.103).

As aforementioned, after the Trojan War was over, Ulysses and his army sailed back to their native islands. Still, dragged by the wind, they came to Ismara (*Od.*, IX, 39-40), a city of the Cicones, allies of the Trojans (*Il.*, II, 846-847), on the Thracian coast (Herodotus, 7. 110). The Cephalonians took Ismara and put it in sack (*Od.*, IX, 40-42). The Cicones, nevertheless, did not delay to revenge their city’s destruction upon the Cephalonians. They attacked Ulysses’ men and slayed many of them (*Od.*, IX, 47-61). Those who did not succumb sailed southwards; for they aimed at circumnavigating the Peloponnese and, thus, reaching their native islands. Yet the winds pushed them away from Greece; and after having “fought with the waves” for nine days (*Od.*, IX, 82-83), they actually found themselves in North Africa, in the land of the *Lotophagi*, i.e. Lotus Eaters (*Od.*, IX, 83-84).

Those *Lotophagi* dwelled on the coast of today’s Libya; and the consequences of the arrival there of Ulysses and his Cephalonians are well known: Many among them ate lotuses, i.e. the fruits of the “Cyrenaic lotus” (Polybius, 12. 2), called *jujube* in Arabic (Kōnstantinidēs, III, 1904, p. 71) and tasted them so sweet, that they no longer wanted to go home. Merciless, however, the king of Ithaca brought them *manu militari* back to the ships, and immediately afterwards gave order to sail (*Od.*, IX, 91-104). Thus, the Cephalonians took the sea once more. Woe was they! For instead of arriving at their “desired islands”, they came to the country of the Cyclopes, “arrogant, immoral beings” who, unable to farm the land and exist in society, lived, each one isolated, in “deep caverns” (*Od.*, IX, 105-115).

That “country of the Cyclopes” where was it? According to the prevailing opinion, the Cyclopes lived in Sicily or somewhere else in *Magna Graecia*, i.e. southern Italy (*Marcellus*, 20). All the same, neither of Italy nor of Sicily is there mention in the Homeric text. In fact, the only information given by Homer about the “Country of the Cyclopes” is that, prior to Ulysses’ and his Cephalonians’ arrival there, the Cyclopes were the neighbours of the Phaeacians in the “immense [land of] Hyperia”. Yet the Phaeacians, thanks to the bellicosity of the Cyclopes, were compelled to migrate into

Scheria (*Od.*, VI, 4-6). We shall see further where that Scheria was to be found. For now, the point is Hyperia, the land of Cyclopes.

It is known that during the last stages of the Classical Antiquity, it was believed that the Cyclopes were in Sicily; and such an opinion was supposed to be corroborated by the following passage of Thucydides (6.2<sup>2</sup>):

“It [ Sicily] was inhabited in ancient times..., and these were the nations that held it: The most ancient inhabitants in a part thereof are said to have been the Cyclopes and Laestrygonians, of whose stock and whence they came or to what place they removed I have nothing to say. Let that suffice which the poets have spoken and which every particular man hath learned of them”.

In this passage, nevertheless, the great historian is not certain whether the Cyclopes truly dwelled in Sicily. In point of fact, he mentions only the “poetic rumour” according to which the Cyclopes lived in Sicily. In any case, after the Classical Era of Ancient Times was over, and thanks to poets once more, the Cyclopes' image was crystallized: They were supposed to live in caves, at the foot of Mount Etna (Euripides, *Cyclops*, 118), the famous Sicilian volcano, and fed on livestock and human flesh (Euripides, *Cyclops*, 122, 126). As a whole, they were one hundred (Stageirites, II, 1815, p. 224). The wildest among them was Polyphemus, son of Poseidon, god of the sea. He was gigantic (Stageirites, 1815, pp. 225-226) and his only eye looked like the “sun disc” (Stageirites, II, 1815, p.226).

The etymological roots of the word “Cyclops” are the Greek words *kyklos*, i.e. “circle” and *ōps*, i.e. “eye” (Xanthēs, 1876, p. 29); for they had only one eye, right in the middle of the forehead (Hesiod, 145). Still, it should be stressed once more that nowhere in the *Odyssey* is furnished precise information about the Cyclopes' land (Rankavēs, I, p. 544). As a result, the Laestrygonians, who allegedly had dwelled along with the Cyclopes in Sicily, may be regarded as the “key of the problem”.

### From the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean

Let us return to Ulysses. What happened to him in the land of the Cyclopes is too well known to be recounted here. The point, however, is that the king of Ithaca along with his Cephelonians came to Aeolia, i.e. the island of Aeolus, “lord of the winds” (*Od.*, X, 21), the “cherished of the immortal gods” (*Od.*, X, 1-2). In theory, the

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by Thomas Hobbes.

localization of Aeolia is infeasible, since it was “floating” according to Homer (*Od.*, X, 3). Towards the end of the classical era, nonetheless, it was believed that the island of Aeolus was one of the Lipari ones, near Sicily (Thucydides, 3. 88).

The “lord of the winds” had power over all the currents of air; and after having offered hospitality to Ulysses and his companions, he put all the winds, that could prevent the Cephalonians from going home, in a sack made of “ox’s leather” which he tied with a “silver cord” to Ulysses’ ship. Only Zephyr, the west wind, was left free to act; consequently the Cephalonians could sail safely for the Ionian Islands (*Od.*, X, 19-24). Alas! *Dis aliter visum!* For it is known what happened next: The Cephalonians, when they neared Ithaca and while their king was asleep, opened the famous Aeolus’ sack; as a result, the fierce winds were released and took the fleet of Ulysses back to Aeolia (*Od.*, X, 46-50).

Now then, where the island of Aeolus was to be found? For if one takes for granted that Aeolia was Lipari, there are two problems that arise:

I. The Cephalonians, sailing from Lipari to the Ionian Sea, should pass through the Strait of Messina. There, according to the prevailing opinion, Scylla and Charybdis resided. Why are not those monsters mentioned in the relevant passages of the Homeric text?

II. The journey from Lipari to Ithaca lasted more than nine days (*Od.*, X, 29), though, thanks to the “lord of the winds”, weather conditions were very favourable to the Cephalonians. As aforementioned, only Zephyr, that is the western wind, was blowing; and so Ulysses and his companions sailed gently towards their islands. The duration of their voyage, nevertheless, seems excessive; for the distance between Lipari and Ithaca is almost 270 nautical miles. In other words, Ulysses’ fleet, although the wind was favourable to it (*Od.*, X, 46), sailed at speeds of only 1,25 knots, something absurd, nay! Incredible (Petridēs, 1994, p. 216).

What happened then? Once more, the answer is to be found in the Homeric text. The lord of winds grew angry because of Cephalonians’ imprudence and turned them out (*Od.*, X, 72). Ulysses’ ships, therefore, sailed again and, after a six-day crossing, reached Telepylus, capital city of Laestrygonia, country of the Laestrygonians (*Od.*, X, 80-82). The localization of Telepylus is not difficult; for it was a country (*Od.*, X, 84-85) wherein

“... A herdsman calls to herdsman as he drives in his flock and the other answers as he drives his forth. There a man who never slept could have

earned a double wage, one by herding cattle, and one by pasturing white sheep; for the outgoings of the nights and of the day are close together”<sup>3</sup>.

As a rule, livestock goes out to pasture especially during the “beautiful season”; consequently, the information provided in the Homeric text means that the land of Laestrygonians was in a region of Europe where, in summer, the days are very long and the nights very short. This is the phenomenon of the “white nights”, well-known by the Ancients (Strabo, C 135). In short, Laestrygonia was a Nordic country; and finally yet importantly, there is literary evidence (Tacitus, 3) that Ulysses reached at least the modern-day Germany: “*Ceterum et Ulixen quidam opinantur longo illo et fabuloso errore in hunc Oceanum delatum adisse Germaniae terras...*”

The Laestrygonians, moreover, were eaters of human flesh; and during the *Pax Romana*, the peoples of northern Europe had the sinister reputation of being anthropophagi. “They also devour the corpses of their fathers”, wrote Strabo (C 200). It is not strange, therefore, that only Ulysses' ship got away from those “monstrous cannibals”; for the king of Ithaca was so cunning as to not enter the harbour of Telepylus (*Od.*, X, 95-97). All the other ships of his fleet were destroyed and their crews devoured by those awful men-eaters (*Od.*, X, 118-132).

Let us stress again that from the time of Thucydides onwards it was believed that the Laestrygonians lived near the Cyclopes, in Sicily or, generally speaking, in the Mediterranean (Apol., Epitome, 7. 2). Still the very fact that the Laestrygonians dwelled in Northern Europe makes us think that the Cyclopes lived there as well. In fact, only in the Late Antiquity was clearly adopted the view that they lived on the slopes of Sicilian mountains. In such a case, nonetheless, there are two more problems, i.e.:

I. The island of Aeolia which one was?

II. How did Ulysses' fleet sail from the Mediterranean Sea into the Ocean without any hints in the Homeric text?

As for the first problem, an accurate answer is not difficult to be provided. For Aeolia should be one of the Balearic Islands, that were well known by the Ancients (Strabo, C 144); and that because of the ten-day voyage between Aeolia and Ithaca (*Od.*, X, 29). What is more, the description of Aeolia's coast in the *Odyssey*, i.e. a coast with “smooth rocks” (*Od.*, X, 4), fits the eastern part of the Balearics, especially of Majorca; it was there, consequently, that Ulysses' fleet most likely arrived...

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<sup>3</sup>. (Translated by A. T. Murray.)

As far as the second problem, one should have in mind that travels between the western coastline of the Iberian Peninsula and the central Mediterranean Sea were by no means unusual during the Ancient Times (Strabo, C 144). As a result, Homer saw no reason to provide a full account of Cephalonians' exit to the Atlantic Ocean and vice-versa.

It is noticeable that during the *Pax Romana*, the common people believed that Ulysses' mishaps occurred in the Mediterranean<sup>4</sup>. The erudite ones, nonetheless, knew that the king of Ithaca had sailed in the Atlantic Ocean (Heraclitus, 79. 5-6). The famous geographer Strabo (C 26) was categorical: "It is clear that what Homer says [about Ulysses] happened in the Atlantic Ocean". In addition, that, because "the ancients made, both on land and in the sea, longer trips than their descendants" (C 48). An evidence of Homer's knowledge of the Atlantic is produced by the adjective "*apsorrhoo*s" that our poet used in order to describe the Ocean (*Od.*, XX, 65). For "*apsorrhoo*s" is called "he who moves water [also] backwards" (Kōnstantinidēs, I, 1902, p. 470). This is the event that takes place in the Atlantic (Strabo, C 4). Homer, nonetheless, represented this phenomenon as a legend and faked up the story of Scylla and Charybdis, which the posterity imagined to take place in the Strait of Messina (Strabo, C 43).

## The New World and the Underworld

After the tragic peripety in Laestrygonia, the ship of Ulysses reached the island of Aeaea, habitation of Circe the Sorceress (*Od.*, X, 135-136). Homer is not clear about the geographical location of Aeaea. According to Odyssey (X, 195), however, Aeaea was "isolated in the immense sea"; further it was heavily wooded (X 148, 151, 159), full of precipices and with a rich fauna (X, 158, 180, 212). As a result, the hypothesis that Circe's island was Cape Circeo, in Italy, is not plausible. Further, according to information gathered throughout the Homeric text, arises the conclusion that Aeaea was not far from America. In addition, the information in question are as follows:

I. The "miraculously therapeutic" herb *mōly*, the root of which was black whilst the flowers white (*Od.*, X, 302. 304-305). The *mōly* is mentioned only in the Odyssey; it is therefore logical to deduce that this word is not Greek. In all probability, *mōly* it is the American pepper (*Schinus molle* in Latin and *mulli* in Quechua), an

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<sup>4</sup> See for instance: Lucian, *A True Story*.

indigenous plant to America, with remarkable therapeutic properties (Mattievich, 1995, pp. 159-161).

II. The very fact that Ulysses' voyage from Aeaea up to the west end of the Ocean, where the Palace of Pluto, god of the dead, was to be found, lasted just one day.

The king of Ithaca and his companions, indeed, after they stayed a year on Circe's island, were free to leave and return to their native islands. Before starting their perilous voyage back, nevertheless, they must visit the residence of Pluto, god of the dead, in order to be given advice by the soul of Tiresias, the famous diviner. The "Palace of the god of the underworld" was at the "remote West", here the sea and the "starry sky" end, in other words at the west end of the Atlantic Ocean.

And so was done: After a short trip of less than 24 hours (*Od.*, XI, 12), Ulysses and those of his Cephalonians that had survived up to then, reached the limit of the "deep ocean" (*Od.*, XI, 11-13). The country was very cloudy, very dark; and not only was to be found therein the Palace of Pluto but were supposed to dwell in that doleful country also the famous Hesperides and the horrible Gorgons (Hesiod, 274-275). Having all these in mind, nevertheless, one is entitled to ask once more: Where Aeaea, Circe's island, was?

This is a question that cannot be accurately answered. At any rate, it was an island close to the eastern coastline of the American continent; and it is with good reason that Americas were viewed by Ancient Greeks as the "Land of Death". For generations and generations of Europeans were impressed largely by the almost impenetrable forests, nay! Jungles in Central and South America. Even during the year 1853, a scientific mission who tried to cross the Panama isthmus in a land of ten miles wide, gave up after the vain efforts of ten days (Olsen, 1957, p. 413). On the other hand, the etymology of the name Pluto, i.e. of that of *ploutos*, the Greek word for wealth (Plato, *Cratylus*, 403a). *Ploutos*, however, is derived from the verb *pleō* (= to navigate [Beekes, 1, 2009, p. 1212]). So if one takes into account the large amounts of gold and silver extracted in America after its 1492 discovery by Europeans (Manrique, 1995, p. 59), it becomes clear that this very land of Pluto, which could be reached by navigating, is the "dark earth of death and wealth".

Additionally, the "cult of death", to which certain Amerindian peoples used to devote themselves, had stunned the Spaniards who reached the "New World" from the year 1492 onwards. The description by Homer, further, of the land to be found where "finishes the ocean", a land "dark, cold and wet", more or less corresponds to the impressions that had of America the first Europeans who reached the "New



World". In other words, the arrival to America of human groups from Europe prior to the crucial year 1492 is a possibility that cannot be excluded any longer. In fact, there are various relevant clues provided by research. Besides the existence of the herb *mōly*, there is also the plant *helenium*, native to the Americas ( *Webster's*, 1993, p. 1050) and mentioned by Claudius Aelianus (9.21). Still, there are more indications as well. In Quechua, the "father" is *tayta* (Malaga, 1981, p. 65), *tata'aj* in the main Maya dialect ( Dōrikos & Chatzigiannakēs, 2005, p. 72) and the "mother" in Quechua *mamay* (Malaga, 1981, p. 57); and these words are similar to the Greek ones, *tetta*, *tata*, *tatas*, *atta*, i.e. "father", and *mamma*, *mammē*, i.e. "mother" (Kōnstantinidēs, III, 1904, p.54 and IV, 1907, p. 323). It is remarkable, moreover, that these terms, with exactly the same meaning, are to be found in various languages; for instance, Albanian, a tongue in which the word for "father" is *tat* and for "mother" *mam* (Gjini, pp. 498, 1030), and the old Turkish, where the "father" is *ata* (Mallouf, 1856, 576). Finally yet importantly, the Quechua word for the "wind"/"air" (*aēr* in classical Greek [pronounced *aeer*]) is *huaira/wayra* (Malaga, 1981, p.94).

But there is one more indication – and a strong one. The Aztecs of Mexico designated their temples by the term *theocali*, meaning: "God's house" (Ceram, 1960, p. 328). The affinity of the first part of this word, *teo* (=god) with the Greek term *Theos* (= god) is easily recognisable. What makes a big surprise, however, is the resemblance between the Aztecs' *cal/kal* and the *kal* of Ancient Greeks, the latter meaning "home" in general and the "house of god" in particular. It is remarkable, moreover, that the word "*kalyva*" (= cot), derivative of *kal*, does exist in Modern Greek.

Of course, there were also the "white divinities", "gods of goodness" namely Quetzalcoatl and Viracocha, who actually left Americas "walking on the seas". It would be, nonetheless, beyond the scope of this essay the exhaustive study and analysis of their significance. For the research is going on and its last word is not told yet. Therefore, let us go back to Ulysses' peripeties in America...

The king of Ithaca and his Cephalonians, after having visited "the gloomy palaces of death" (*Od.*, XI) on the western shore of the Atlantic Ocean (*Od.*, XI, 21), returned to the island of Aeaea, and were given by the sorceress Circe the necessary advice for a safe return to home. First, she showed them how to avoid the trap of the Sirens, the tragic end that most likely awaited them at the Strait of Scylla and

Charybdis, and the death that would menace them, if they slaughtered and ate the cattle of the Sun god on the island of Thrinacia (*Od.* XII, 37-141).

Ulysses took the advice of Circe; as a result, he and his companions escaped from the Sirens (*Od.*, XII, 165-200) as well as from Scylla and Charybdis (*Od.*, XII, 251-259), and managed to reach Thrinacia (*Od.*, XII, 261-262). Still on Thrinacia, because of adverse winds, Ulysses and the Cephalonians were forced to stay longer than expected. Ulysses' companions, therefore, ate the cattle of the Sun god (*Od.*, XII, 325-365). The latter, therefore, grew infuriated and asked Zeus to revenge the outrage (*Od.*, XII, 383-384); for otherwise, Sun would give light exclusively to the underworld. Thus, *nolens volens* the *pater deorum hominumque* gave in, and stroke a lightning that destroyed Ulysses' ship (*Od.*, XII, 430-446). The king of Ithaca was the only survivor, and managed at last to reach Ogygia, i.e. the island of the "terrible goddess" Calypso (*Od.*, XII, 449).

Ogygia may be accurately located. According to Plutarch (*Moon*, 941a-b) it was five days away from Britain. Moreover, from Ogygia, around which there were three more islands, if one is able to navigate through "a heavy sea, muddy and agitated by currents", can reach the continent that forms the western edge of the Ocean. Such a "heavy sea" can only be the Sargasso one, in the northern of the Atlantic Ocean, where Bermuda is located. Thus, Bermuda was most likely Ogygia, i.e. the famous island of Calypso (Petridēs, 1994, p. 239).

It is in the Homeric text that the relevant indications can be found. As a matter of fact, Ogygia was an island "far away" from Greece (*Od.*, V, 55), separated from any place wherein men used to live by an "endless sea", full of "innumerable waves" (*Od.*, V, 54, 100-101). This "endless sea", further, was "purplish" (*Od.*, V, 56), a colour reminiscent, as a rule, of blood (*Od.*, V, 132). Such a colour is that of Ocean's waters and not of the Mediterranean Sea ones; for the Mediterranean is "azure" (*Il.*, XVI, 34), even when the weather is stormy (Hesiod, 440); and this very difference was noticed by Christopher Columbus himself (Wassermann, 1945, pp.174-175).

Many still believe that the peripeties of Ulysses to reach Ogygia Island occurred in the Mediterranean. Yet the indications, nay! The evidence is irrefutable: the king of Ithaca "fought against the waves" of the Atlantic Ocean. A definitive proof is provided by the cyclone (*lailaps*), described by Homer regarding the island of Thrinacia (*Od.*, XII, 400). Such cyclones were more or less unknown in the Mediterranean Sea (*Od.*, XII, 404), which is always considered to be a "closed" sea.

That is why in the literature of Ancient Greece, the distinction between the “ocean” and “sea” is obvious and clear-cut (Hesiod, 131-134).

In addition, when Calypso allowed Ulysses to leave Ogygia (*Od.*, V, 1-159), he built a boat and began his long journey to Ithaca. But what kind of boat was it? A raft, as is still nowadays thought or a small ship? Once more, the answer is to be found in the Homeric text: The ship that Ulysses built had a “bridge”, *ikria* in Greek (*Od.*, V, 252). Therefore, it was not a “raft”, but a real boat, made small but suitable for the about twenty days voyage (*Od.*, V, 34) from Ogygia to Scheria, land of the Phaeacians.

Let us see now the geographical location of that famous Scheria...

## Nostos

Now then, Ulysses makes the crossing from America to Europe through the Atlantic Ocean (*Od.*, V, 275). The construction of his wooden vessel took him four days (*Od.*, V, 262). In conformity with the instructions of Calypso, Ulysses was careful of sailing with the constellation of the Ursa Major on his left (*Od.*, V, 277). For seventeen days the journey was without problems (*Od.*, V, 278); on the eighteenth day, he saw the rocks of Scheria (*Od.*, V, 279), country of the Phaeacians.

Alas! His tribulations were not yet over. A storm caused by his bitter enemy Poseidon, god of the sea, destroyed his boat (*Od.*, V, 286-369). Our hero put his feet on land only after a three-day struggle against the “black, huge, daunting” waves (*Od.*, V, 353, 367). And the rest of the Homeric story is well known. Ulysses finally managed to take shelter from the wrath of Poseidon in the “still waters” of a “beautiful river” (*Od.*, V, 441), where he arrived chiefly thanks to Athena (= Minerva), goddess of wisdom and his protector (*Od.*, V, 333-355). From there, he went into a forest near the river and stood in concealment under two bushes, which were “interlaced”: one of them was an olive tree and the other a wild olive (*Od.*, V, 477). And it is there that he met Nausicaa, daughter of Alcinöus, king of the Phaeacians. Ulysses then went to the royal palace where he was offered warm hospitality by Alcinöus.

It was from Scheria that Ulysses returned to his native island on a boat provided to him by the king of Phaeacians. Thus, the problem is the geographical location of Scheria. According to conventional wisdom, Scheria is Corfu (Virgil, *Aeneid*, III, 291), the largest one of the Ionian Islands. This opinion, however, has been already rejected (*Oxford*, 2012, p. 1325). Furthermore, “Phaeacian”, at least during the period of the *Pax Romana*, had the meaning of “hedonistic” and “corrupt”

(Heraclitus, 69.7, 79.9). This is a reason why the identification of Homer's Phaeacians with the Corfiots of antiquity is implausible. "Scheria", in fact, means literally "uninterrupted coastline" and even "continent" (Beekes, 1, 2009, p. 446 [*epischerō*]) after the "troubled sea" (*Od.*, VI, 204). This explains why the Phaeacians were isolated from the rest of humanity (*Od.*, VI, 205). Corfu, on the contrary, is very close to the coast of Epirus (Virgil, III, 292-293): "*Protinus aerias Phaeacum abscondimus arces [= Corcyram], /litoraue Epiri legimus portuque subimus/Chaonio, et celsam Buthroti accedimus urbem.*" Further, Corfu is an island inhabited since the "ancient times" (Kyranēs, I [n.d.], pp. 157, 182, 321).

So, where was the Homeric Scheria actually located? It is the Antiquity that provides us with the answer: it was located in the Iberian Peninsula. In fact, Spain and Portugal were full of the remnants of the presence and actions of the king of Ithaca and of other heroes of the Trojan War as well. According to the testimony of Strabo (C 149), even a town therein was named after Ulysses. Apart from that, nonetheless, there is also the tradition that the etymon of Lisbon is *UL*, i.e. the Latin form of the name of our hero. Let us remember of Camões (I, 3.1; II, 45.2; III, 74.8):

*A cidade Ulisseia.*

That is:

[*A cidade fundada por*] *o sabio Grego, o facundo Ulisses.*

This tradition has echo also in our contemporary literature:

"At the time of the labyrinth, Ulysses, the founder of Lisbon, was attached to the mast of his ship..."<sup>5</sup>

During the *Pax Romana*, today is Lisbon, at the mouth of the Tagus River, was called *Ulyssippo* (Pomponius Mela, 3.6). By all means, other etymons of this place's name have been suggested<sup>6</sup>; most likely, nevertheless, *Ulyssippo* was formed from "Ulysses". At any rate, the prosperity of *Ulyssippo* was due not only to its natural harbour but also to the gold of river Tagus (Pomponius Mela, 3.6). What is more, to the north of *Ulyssippo*, there were the *Turduli oppidani* ((Pomponius Mela, 3.8) a people linked with to *Turduli* and *Turdetani*, who lived in the southern part of modern

<sup>5</sup> Dominique de la Roux, *Le cinquième empire* (Paris : Pierre Belfond, 1977), p. 409. (Freely translated from French to English by the author of these lines.)

<sup>6</sup> <https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lisboa> (retrieved on November 26, 2017).

Spain. These were a civilized people, who, after the Romans conquered the Iberian Peninsula, became quickly Latinized (Strabo, C 151).

In all likelihood, the reason for the progress of the *Turdetani* was the fertility of their country (Strabo, C 150-151) as well as its natural wealth, especially copper and silver (Strabo, C 146-149, 151). *Turdetania*, i.e. the country of the *Turdetani* had its "natural borders" drawn by the riverbeds of *Ana* (Guadiana) and *Baetis* (Guadalquivir), the latter eloquently nicknamed "the silver river" (Strabo, C 148). The original name of *Baetis*/Guadalquivir was *Tartessos* and the place name *Tartessis* was given to the country stretching from the mouth of Guadalquivir up to that of Guadiana; and the capital was *Tartessos* (Strabo, C 148). This should be the famous *Tarshish* of the Bible (Jonah, 1:3), often confused with Tarsus, the city of Asia Minor wherein Saint Paul was born (Oxford, 2012, p. 1433).

The Tartessians, moreover, whose prosperity reached its peak during the years 750-550 BC, were renowned not only for their wealth, but also for their culture (Strabo, C 139). They were an "educated people" whose language was "developed" and had an important literary tradition. Moreover, they were friends of the Greeks. Thanks to Herodotus (1. 163), the story of Arganthonios their king, is well known:

"Phocaea was the first Ionian town that he [Harpagus, a Persian general] attacked. These Phocaeans were the earliest of the Greeks to make long sea-voyages, and it was they who discovered the Adriatic Sea, and Tyrrhenia, and Iberia, and Tartessus, not sailing in round freightships but in fifty-oared vessels. When they came to Tartessus they made friends with the king of the Tartessians, whose name was Arganthonius; he ruled Tartessus for eighty years and lived a hundred and twenty. The Phocaeans won this man's friendship to such a degree that he invited them to leave Ionia and settle in his country wherever they liked; and then, when he could not persuade them to, and learned from them how the Median power was increasing, he gave them money to build a wall around their city. He gave it generously: for the circuit of the wall is of not a few stadia, and all this is made of great stones well fitted together"<sup>7</sup>.

Regarding the Lusitanians (in Latin: *Lusitani*), who populated modern day Portugal, but only beyond the coastal area that was inhabited by *Turduli*, their manners were similar to those of the Greeks in general and the Spartans in particular (Strabo, C 154-155). Still, this is not surprising. For even the etymon of the Pyrenees is Greek: A friend of Hercules, Pyrene, left her last breath there (Silius Italicus, III. 415-441).

Anyway, where did the Phaeacians, those wealthy and famous navigators, live? First of all, their city was near the mouths of a river that should be either the

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<sup>7</sup> Translated by A. D. Goodley.

Guadalquivir or the Tagus, the first of which is navigable towards Seville, while the mouth of the second forms the port of Lisbon. So, which of the two? Once more, the answer is to be found in the Homeric text.

Let us stress once more that the waves of the sea that brought the king of Ithaca to the land were “black, huge” and “formidable” (*Od.*, V, 353, 367). No doubt this took place in the Atlantic Ocean, whose “giant waves” (Arago, 1893, p. 7) discourage even the most experienced swimmers. Furthermore, the river, the mouth of which Ulysses at last reached, was “fast” and “beautiful” (*Od.*, V, 441 and VI, 89); and its estuary formed a gulf flared and deep, that is the harbour which Ulysses was looking for. In addition, near the river, there was a forest and mountains (*Od.*, V, 279, 474-475, 477). But on the coast of the Iberian Peninsula, west of the Straits of Gibraltar and particularly around the mouth of the Guadalquivir, there are no mountains, while in small distance from Lisbon, there is the range of Sintra, famous for its volcanic rocks:

“The mountain range of Sintra is a granite block that forms a barrier (highest point in Cruz Alta: 529 m), on which condenses the rain from the ocean. This moisture... of the rock are the causes of the thick vegetation that covers all the range and largely masks the granite peaks generated by erosion. The flora is very diverse: oaks, cedars, tropical and subtropical trees, tree ferns, camellias etc. The beauty of the site has often been celebrated by poets and especially by Gil Vicente, Camões (in the *Lusiads*), Southey and Byron (*Childe Harold*)”<sup>8</sup>.

In conclusion, the “Homeric” river in question is the Tagus, whose bed was so rich in precious metals, that they called him “equivalent to Pactolus”, the famous gold river of Asia Minor (Silius Italicus, I.234).

Besides the Portuguese themselves who, as aforementioned, use to see in Ulysses the founder of their capital, there is also the experience of Christopher Columbus as well. He sailed on January 16, 1493, to go from America to Europe; but a few weeks later, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, a “terrible storm” made him turn to the Azores, “islands of the goshawks”. From there, he departed on February 24, to reach Spain, but the bad weather forced him to return to Portugal. He saw the mountains of Sintra first, then the estuary of Tagus and finally Lisbon. Then he wrote a letter to the king of Portugal to ask for permission to “go to Lisbon” (Olsen, 1957, pp.361-362). A story similar to that of Ulysses...

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<sup>8</sup> Guides Michelin, *Portugal, Madère* (1970), p. 117. (Freely translated from French to English by the author.)

Let us sum up: the Phaeacians were “wealthy” and unsurpassable sailors. The main key to their wealth was to be found in the Tagus River’s gold (Silius Italicus, *Punica*, I. 234); moreover, their very fast ships were able to “navigate anywhere”, “without helm”, “without master” and “regardless of danger” (*Od.*, VIII, 556-563). The Phaeacians, therefore, offered to the shipwrecked king of Ithaca a very cordial hospitality. Yet they had not taken part in the Trojan War: they knew Ulysses solely by repute. Therefore, the latter had to describe the Ionian Islands that formed his kingdom to his hosts, who did not know almost anything about those islands (*Od.*, IX, 21-28). Yet, the distance between Corfu and Ithaca is about 80 miles (*Oxford*, 2012, p. 1325). Moreover, the king of Ithaca told the Phaeacians that his city was “far from Scheria”; and they admitted their great ignorance of Greece and of the Greeks (*Od.*, VII, 319-321 and IX, 18). There is no doubt, therefore, that the hosts of Ulysses were indigenous to the Iberian Peninsula.

Although there were efforts to identify Scheria with Corfu, archaeological evidence has not been produced so far. Corfu, in fact, entered history only in 734 BC, i.e. after its colonization by the Corinthians...<sup>9</sup> Anyway, Alcinoüs placed a “magical”<sup>10</sup>, very fast vessel (*Od.*, XIII, 86-87) at the disposal of Ulysses, which arrived to Ithaca in only one night; our hero was left by the Phaeacian sailors asleep on his native island at the Phorcys harbour (*Od.*, 95-113).

The return (in Greek: *nostos*) was accomplished. The Homeric hero finally found his homeland after an absence of twenty years; in the meantime he had travelled across the whole world (Theocritus, 51-52). His adventures, nevertheless, were not over but their story is far beyond the scope of this essay...

### As an epilogue: History’s Metamorphosis

Ulysses’ voyages were a sequel of the Trojan War. Nonetheless, Kōnstantinos Paparrēgopoulos (1815-1891), the “National Historian” of Modern Greece, was the first to remark the existence of another version of Trojan War’s story, quite different

<sup>9</sup> *Grèce* (Paris-Munich: Nagel, 1977), p. 846; K. Bædeker, *Griechenland. Handbuch für Reisende* (Leipzig: Karl Bædeker, 1904), p. 254: *In die Geschichte tritt die Insel durch die Gründung der Kolonie Korkyra von Korinth aus im J. 734 vor Chr.*

<sup>10</sup> *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, entry “Scheria”, p. 1325.

from the traditional/conventional one<sup>11</sup>. In addition, it is Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40-ca.117 A.D.), a Greek philosopher, historian and philosopher<sup>12</sup>, who is credited with this different version, the quite contradictory to the dominant one; and that because of his famous *Eleventh Discourse*<sup>13</sup>.

In point of fact, Dio Chrysostom argued that Agamemnon and his brother, Menelaus, two of the main Iliad's characters, were not "autochthonous Greeks" but newcomers in Hellas. In fact, they were Phrygians from Asia Minor; and it was so, because they were offspring of Pelops, the Phrygian king of Pisa, after whom was named the whole of the Peloponnesian peninsula. That is why the two "fatal" brothers were related to the Trojan royal house, i.e. the one of Priam. Tyndareus, the actual king of Sparta, turned down the suggestion of marriage made by the –Phrygian– Menelaüs to his daughter, the "beautiful Helen". Therefore, Agamemnon, king of Argos (Mycenae?) incited the Greeks to war against the Trojans. For the "beautiful Helen" was given by his father to marriage to Paris, a Trojan prince, son of king Priam. Thus, Paris and Helen did not leave Sparta for Troy "furtively" but in public, as a blessed, legitimate couple.

What is more, the Greeks proved not to be able to defeat the Trojans, although they had a strong fleet that their enemies did not have. During the ten years they were trying to seize Troy, they suffered "famine and plague"; and the Trojans had a lot of allies. As a result, it was Achilles who was killed by Hector and not Patroclus; for the latter's tomb was never found. The logical conclusion is that the Trojan War ended with a compromised peace, according to which neither the Trojans, i.e. Phrygians, would go to war against Greece nor the Greeks would march out against Troy and, in general, Asia Minor. This deal was to be broken because of the Median Wars first and the campaign of Alexander the Great later on.

May the account of Dio Chrysostom be regarded as hyperbole? What happened next proves him to be right. The winners of the war, namely the Trojans, were able to found colonies in Epirus, thanks to Helenus, and Italy, thanks to Aeneas. In contrast to the Trojans, the Greek sovereigns who took part in the war had a

<sup>11</sup> Kōnstantinos Paparrēgopoulos, *Historia tou Hellēnikou Ethnous* (= A History of the Greek Nation), vol. I (Athens: « Galaxias », 1969 [first edition: 1860]), p. 59; cf. A. Grēgorogiannēs, *Ho Meizōn Hellēnismos* (= The Major Greek World), Athens: "Herakleitos", 1970, p. 145ff.

<sup>12</sup> Eleutheroudakēs, *Epitomon Enkyklopaidikou Lexikon* (= An Abridged Encyclopaedic Lexicon), Athens: "Eleutheroudakēs", 1935, entry "Diōn ho Chrysostomos" (= Dio Chrysostom), column 913.

<sup>13</sup> Dio Chrysostom, *The Eleventh Discourse maintaining that Troy was not captured*. Translated by J. W. Cohoon, Loeb Classical Library, 1949.



lamentable end. Agamemnon was slaughtered by Clytemnestra, his wife. If he was the leader of a victorious army, his soldiers would have prevented or, at least, revenge his murder. Menelaus, his brother, had to migrate into Egypt, where he married a pharaoh's daughter; and he came back to the Peloponnese, only after Aegisthus, murderer of Agamemnon and usurper of the Mycenae throne, was killed by Orestes, son of Agamemnon. And our Ulysses, king of Ithaca, having to confront the sedition of his kingdom's aristocrats, was in dread of coming back to his island and preferred to "wander throughout the world" for ten years.

And last but not least: Who Homer was? His language is an amalgam of the three main Greek dialects, namely Aeolian, Doric and Ionian (Geōrgoulēs, 1966, col. 901). Nothing is really known about his life, though he allegedly lived in the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C., i.e. in not so a remote time (Geōrgoulēs, 1966, col.896). Further, his name is quite unusual in the framework of all the varieties of the Greek tongue; for *Homēros* (= Homer) means literally "hostage" and nothing else (Stavropoulos, 2009, p. 623). Most likely, therefore, the initial form of the name *Homēros* was *Homaros*, of enigmatic etymology as well, which at last became *Homēros* according to the rules of the Ionian dialect (Geōrgoulēs, 1966, col. 898).

As a matter of fact, "*Homaros*" is mentioned in an inscription found in Delphi; and "Homarios Zeus" was worshipped in the Peloponnese as the deity of unification/unity (Geōrgoulēs, 1966, col. 898). The logical deduction of all these is that Dio Chrysostom was right: The Iliad and Odyssey were epics masterly "concocted", in order to prepare the Greeks' defence against the Persian aggression, long foreseeable before it occurred. In addition, as for Ulysses' voyages and peripeties, they reflect an astonishing wealth of geographical knowledge acquired long before the Ancient Greek Nationhood was crystallized. For the point was to indicate that the Persians were going to be defeated on the sea.

Who and how had such a good knowledge of the Atlantic Ocean and the Americas?

This is another story to be recounted...

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## PERIPETÉIA NO ATLÂNTICO: AS VIAGENS DE ULYSSES ENTRE EUROPA E AMÉRICA

**Resumo:** Não foi Cristóvão Colombo que primeiro descobriu a América. De fato, a América era conhecida nos tempos antigos. Durante a Alta Antiguidade, falou-se de um "terrível país" localizado no "extremo oeste"; um país que "acabou" com o "mar estéril e escuro". Na época da *Pax Romana*, além disso, Strabo, o ilustre geógrafo, era enfático: as aventuras de Ulysses aconteceram no Oceano Atlântico. Como resultado, a opinião de que "Esqueria", terra dos Feácios, era a ilha de Corfu, na Grécia, deveria ser rejeitada. A Esqueria, "isolada do resto da humanidade", deveria estar na Península Ibérica. Mais uma vez, Strabo foi categórico: uma cidade foi nomeada após Ulysses, o rei de Ítaca. E por último, mas não menos importante, de acordo com a tradição, a própria etimologia de Lisboa é Ulisses.

**Palavras-chave:** Ulisses. Oceano Atlântico. Américas. Bermudas. Lisboa.

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## Abbreviations

Apol.	Apollodorus
<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
<i>Marcellus</i>	Plutarch, <i>Marcellus</i>
<i>Moon</i>	Plutarch, <i>On the face in the moon</i>
<i>Od.</i>	<i>Odyssey</i>
<i>Oxford</i>	<i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i>

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