

Issued on behalf of the authors of “Odysseus Unbound –
The Search for Homer’s Ithaca”

12 September 2005

Discovery of the location of Homer’s Ithaca

Countdown to the solution of the mystery of Odysseus’ island which has baffled scholars for over 2,000 years

Where is the Ithaca described in such detail in Homer’s *Odyssey*? The answer to this question which has baffled scholars for over 2,000 years will be revealed later this month¹ by consultant and businessman Robert Bittlestone², who has been investigating the mystery since 1998.

As well as travelling to western Greece for a series of intensive field expeditions, Bittlestone, who is Chairman of the Metapraxis consultancy and software group, used computer based technology to visualise and analyse a mass of data, including literary, geological and archaeological clues. Combined with advanced satellite imagery and sophisticated 3D global visualisation techniques developed by NASA, this enabled him to identify and master the hidden meanings of the landscape in a way which would previously have been impossible.

At the outset he proposed a radical geological hypothesis which has now been investigated by experts and described as increasingly likely to be correct. This new location for Homeric Ithaca agrees very closely with descriptions of the island in the *Odyssey* and supports the view that Homer’s geographical descriptions of ancient Ithaca in the *Odyssey* were exact.

The story of the discovery is told in a new book – “Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer’s Ithaca” – to be published by Cambridge University Press in early October. The book’s co-authors are James Diggle, Professor of Greek and Latin at the University of Cambridge³ and John Underhill, Professor of Stratigraphy at the University of Edinburgh.⁴ Diggle and Underhill have been working with Bittlestone since 2003 in the development of these radical new findings and their explanation in the forthcoming book.⁵

Potentially one of the most significant classical finds since Troy

Potentially one of the most important classical discoveries since the unearthing of Troy in north-western Turkey in the 1870s, the identification of this new location for ancient Ithaca is likely to be regarded as a matter of international interest and of national significance within Greece itself.

Robert Bittlestone is cooperating closely in this research with Greek Government Ministries, with local Government representatives and with the Greek Institute of Geology and Mineral Exploration (IGME).

“The Greek authorities clearly need to evaluate the credibility of these proposals and to orchestrate what follows,” says Bittlestone. “We also look forward to the reaction of Homeric scholars and geological experts worldwide. Irrespective of whether this is critical or supportive – and we anticipate a wide spectrum of response – some form of secretariat will be required to ensure that existing information and new developments can be shared effectively.”

“From the business perspective it has been fascinating to see how the concepts and techniques of data visualisation that we provide to our clients at Metapraxis can shed light on a problem that has baffled scholars for so long.”

The next phase, he suggests, will be to use modern technology on a much more intensive scale to provide the intelligence that will then facilitate subsequent excavation. This second phase can be performed without disturbing the sites below the surface at all but it will require much more substantial resources than have been available so far.

He adds: “I hope that what has been achieved so far will represent only a beginning. Our purpose has been to demonstrate that there is something both very new and very old to be found at this new location and that we should now treat the existence of ancient Ithaca very seriously. But we shall ultimately learn the truth about Odysseus’ homeland only if we have the courage and the confidence to look.”

ENDS

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¹ A press conference will be held in London at 12.30pm on September 29 2005. Contact Amy Wilson of Mattison Public Relations – tel 020 7645 3636 or email aw@mattison.co.uk for details.

² Robert Bittlestone is a management consultant and founder of Metapraxis, a consultancy and software group specialising in Directors' Early Warnings and Business Performance Visualisation for multinational clients. He has advised the CEOs, CFOs and other directors of over 250 multinational enterprises on how best to define, diagnose, predict and present Board-level management information. He is the author of many business articles and a frequent conference speaker on both sides of the Atlantic. Robert was educated at school in classics, mathematics and science and he graduated in Economics from Christ's College Cambridge in 1972.

³ James Diggle 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).

⁴ John Underhill 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.

⁵ *Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca* will be published by Cambridge University Press on October 6th 2005 for worldwide distribution. It is printed in full colour with 618 pages and 340 illustrations and has been written both for general readers with no prior knowledge of the *Odyssey* and also for experts in classics and geology. Further details are available at the following websites:

UK: www.cambridge.org/uk/0521853575

USA: www.cambridge.org/us/0521853575

Australia: www.cambridge.org/aus/0521853575

The book can also be ordered at Amazon and other international bookshops.

Advance reviews for *Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca*:

'This curious, spellbinding book is a masterpiece of writing for the general public. The geological argument in particular is first-class and leaves me in no doubt about the possibility of the theory being proposed.' - Professor Tjeerd van Andel, Honorary Professor in Earth History, Quaternary Science and Geo-archaeology, University of Cambridge

'This book is a gem. Its reconstruction of prehistoric Ithaca has a convincingly Homeric 'look and feel' to it. Reading the Odyssey is unlikely ever to be the same again.' - Professor Gregory Nagy, Francis Jones Professor of Classical Greek Literature, Harvard University and Director of the Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington DC

BACKGROUND

The oldest books in Western literature are the Iliad and the Odyssey, both attributed to a poet called Homer. They describe the Trojan War and the return of Odysseus (the hero of Troy who devised the trick of the wooden horse) from the battle to his palace on Ithaca, an island somewhere to the west of Greece. These events are dated to around 1200 BC and the poems are so ancient that they were composed before the introduction of writing in the Greek alphabet itself. But the stories had a massive influence on philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Socrates and they shaped the intellectual and cultural development of Greece throughout the classical era. For that reason Homer is not only the earliest but also the foremost architect of our western civilisation.

Despite Homer's immense influence, for three thousand years it was thought that the Iliad was a work of fiction and that Troy as Homer described it had never existed. Then in the 1870s Heinrich Schliemann conducted excavations in north-western Turkey which led to the discovery of the ancient city and, buried within it, the gold of Troy.

However, Ithaca itself has remained a mystery. Homer's descriptions in the Odyssey cannot be reconciled with the layout of today's island called Ithaki and no convincing Bronze Age remains have been found there despite a series of excavations. Scholars and archaeologists have therefore come to the uneasy conclusion that, although Troy was a real city, Ithaca itself must have reflected the poet's imagination.

But in 2003 Robert Bittlestone proposed a radical alternative hypothesis. He suggested that researchers over the centuries have been looking for Ithaca in the wrong place because the impact of earthquakes has changed the local geography since Odysseus' time. This new location for Homeric Ithaca agrees very closely with descriptions of the island in the Odyssey and this is particularly evident in the case of well-known Homeric passages that have previously appeared inconsistent. In every case this new location supports the view that Homer's geographical descriptions of ancient Ithaca in the Odyssey were exact.

Robert Bittlestone and his co-authors conclude that some 3,200 years after the events that are described in the Odyssey, ancient Ithaca has at last been discovered – a discovery which will revolutionise our understanding of the ancient world and is of profound importance to our understanding of the origins of western civilisation.