A recent putative contribution has come from an Italian engineer named Felici Vinci, who published a book called *Omero nel Baltico. Le origini nordiche dell'Odissea e dell'Iliade*, in 1995, translated into English as *The Baltic Origins of Homer's Epic Tales* (Rochester, VT, 2006). Vinci's thesis is that the Achaian Greeks lived, in the early 2nd millennium B.C., in the Baltic region, and emigrated thence to their more commonly supposed homeland in the Aegean, in the middle of that millennium, conquering the Minoan Cretans and seizing control of the Helladic mainland where they installed themselves in and augmented the fortress settlements and palaces of the 'Mycenaean' civilization; and bringing along with them oral 'texts' of what we know as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. According to Vinci, these texts describe events of heroic saga originally located in the Baltic and North Sea areas, in great detail. When the Achaians (or Danaans–whose name really represents, or is cognate with, for Vinci, the Danes) settled in the Aegean, they gave names of the 'Homeric' locales to sites in the new homeland–but imperfectly, or not fully successfully or consistently. (For how could one expect a perfect match between itineraries and topographies which do indeed fit perfectly geographical realities of Finland, Estonia, Britain, and other northern European settings, and what is to be met with in Greece, Turkey, and southern Italy?) After oral transmission for, apparently, about 900 years, the great epic poems were at length written down in 8th or 7th century B.C. Ionia, no one suspecting that they had had this original northern genesis and passing on until Vinci appeared on the scene.

One's initial reaction is indeed to see this as on the crackpot not the inspired genius side of the ledger. Vinci makes, though, a detailed case; and at least a few investigators, including some classicists and archaeologically-informed scholars, have concluded that that case has arresting substance, and merits judicious consideration, at least. Thus the workshop, at the site indicated–Toija, Finland, the supposed original of Troia, or Troy–and the volume of workshop proceedings under review.

On a very general plane the idea at the centre of Vinci's thesis is by no means impossible. At any rate, there is at least one confirmed parallel, of sorts. There is impressive, indeed initially astonishing, evidence–confirmed presence–of an Indo-Aryan-speaking military cadre of chariot warriors in 16th-century Syria, worshippers of Indra, Varuna, Mithra, and the Nasatyas (the Divine Twins) far, it would be supposed, from their Indus-valley homes.

Although the Mitanni kings they served were of a non-Indo-European-speaking dynasty, those kings took names in Old Indic, and worshipped these gods among others. Evidently non-negligible numbers of Indo-European horse-riding or chariot-using warriors were considerably more mobile, more rapidly, than early prehistorical reconstructions have supposed. There will have been Indo-European-speaking populations in the Scandinavian and Britannic areas in the early 2nd millennium, and trade routes connecting those regions and the Aegean, and migrations of one sort or other in single or multiple stages from north to south could well have taken place. Nor is the idea of such invaders bringing with them folk poetry, including heroic tales in poetic form, at all fanciful. There have independently been argued to be a number of mythic motifs appearing in the mythological and legendary materials which have survived of a number of the Indo-European cultural communities, including some with Homeric provenance–e.g., the motif of a princess captured by a foreign prince, then pursued and retrieved by a pair of brothers. (A story which of course happens twice, in the Hellenic versions, to Helen of Troy–an earlier seizure, by Theseus, with pursuit and retrieval by the Dioscuri, and then the better-known capture, by Paris, with successful pursuit by the Atreidai.) It is not at all impossible, finally, that two reasonably lengthy and complex heroic tales might have been transmitted orally over some centuries before being recorded in writing.

So far, so–reasonably–good. The devil, in these territories, is in the details; and the details, for Vinci’s theory, don’t really turn out particularly impressively well. First of all, he insists that there are immense improbabilities or problems in the Aegean or Mediterranean localizations which we find in the Homeric poems. There are indeed some: puzzles or perplexities which have posed themselves from the beginnings of the attempts which the classical Greeks made to locate Homeric sites, or identify and coordinate Homeric topography. These need to be put into three categories: places in the Greek world proper—the Greek mainland and its offshore islands—which at least seem (and seemed to the ancients) to be more or less familiar places, some still inhabited, some not; the sites of Odysseus’s wanderings, in the *Odyssey*; and places presented as or implied to be real, either not certainly locatable or identifiable, or outside the Greek world proper. The identifications or places in the latter two categories are, obviously, somewhat unstable. Some think all of Odysseus’s landfalls are pure poetic invention, some adding that their topography may well correspond frequently to real places known to the poet even if the supposed sites

themselves are fictional; others think that some of these sites are real, but that it will be wholly unsurprising if details are garbled and, again, some genuine topographical description get mixed up with fanciful pieces of putative detail; and others of course think that an actual sequence of voyage and landfall, at precisely conceived locations, is intended and recoverable from the poem. It should be plain that a theory meaning confidently to tell us where Odysseus went is going ipso facto to be on shaky ground. The second category of places also provides a weak reed for reconstruction. Much had changed, and much early geographical information or speculation will very naturally have altered in the centuries between the monumental Homeric compositions and the investigations or commentary of ancient scholarship, such as it was; and—as Vinci's own theory will also imply—much which appears in the 8th-century Homeric texts will itself fossilize or record items from long before that time. As for what Homer says or implies about places in (what is now) Greece itself, there are actually only a few true puzzles, and they are dwarfed by what is otherwise an incredibly detailed geographical account which—not to put too fine a point on it—fits Hellenic realities like a glove. Even the puzzles—Homeric Ithaka implied to be a westmost island in a group of four, for example, when the historic Ithaka at least wasn't westmost in its island group—can readily enough be accounted for as errors or confusions stemming from a poet probably living in Ionia, i.e., in the eastern Aegean, describing an archipelago he may never have seen (even if that poet wasn't in fact blind!).

The fact is that the classical or traditional conception of settings isn't genuinely in such particularly bad shape. And the further facts are that Vinci's own lengthy and detailed identifications have immensely less to recommend them than he, or his advocates, claim. Much is made of the huge number of proposals of matches which Vinci makes. The whole enterprise is wholly uncontrolled. If Vinci finds a place name in contemporary Finland, or elsewhere in the Baltic, which bears the most remote similarity to a name of a place or people in Homer (or, for that matter, anywhere in the post-Homeric legendary or mythological corpus), and which can then be fit into a larger geographical scheme to correspond to details of story in *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, it is added to his ledger. In fact if his thesis were sound, these names would have to have been employed, for the places they now name, prior to 1500 B.C., entered two large epic poems of about that date, then been preserved orally for eight or nine centuries before being recorded in writing and transmitted thereafter. Credulity is stretched, frankly, to breaking point with the

accumulation of these transitions, and assumptions.

Vinci's advocates, among them an American professor of classics, William Mullen, of Bard College, also make arguments that do not pass muster. (Mullen's contribution comprises well over 40 % of the volume under review.) Mullen notes that people (and peoples) bring place names with them when they emigrate, and apply them to new domiciles in their new homes. Indeed they do. What Vinci's case requires is however more than this: namely, people applying place names from stories they bring with them to new places, in geographical *orderings* that correspond to those of their stories. It is doubtful whether there is a single well-attested case of this to be found among any culture or period in the history of the world.

Again, a thesis that ancestral versions of the Homeric poems might have had an original provenance and setting elsewhere than in the Aegean region, from a period prior to the Middle or Late Helladic periods, and, perhaps, that such an origin might have been in the Baltic region, faint but detectable echoes of which can arguably be discerned in or recovered from the poems—this might be an idea worth listening to, or considering. That the Catalogue of Ships of *Iliad* 2 is a verbatim transmission of an oral record of the geography of Sweden and Finland in the earlier 2nd millennium B.C., is not. (Vinci calls it (31) "an extraordinary 'photograph' of the Northern Early Bronze Age peoples".) The linguistic history of Greek is fairly well understood. Many of the formations in the Homeric poems, including many repeated originally oral formulae, and including as well formations and formulae found in the Catalogue of Ships, are of demonstrably "late" provenance—i.e., not earlier than the eighth century B.C. (just as many are of probably much earlier, even Mycenaean origin). It is not possible that the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, or any distinct part of either of any significant length, is an intact transmission from *any* period in the second millennium B.C. This will not preclude Bronze Age survivals that have been partly or significantly "recomposed" in later diction—options which are argued for the descriptions of the boar's tusk helmet in *Iliad* 10, the tower shield, other 'heirloom' objects, and perhaps the two Catalogues of *Iliad* 2. But every transmission which innovates linguistically increases the likelihood of change of content, including distortions. The distance from 1500 B.C. to a written Homer is a long, long one; and there is no serious reason to view Homer as

other than Aegean Greek. The Vinci thesis belongs in the dustbin; or wherever it is that fantasies about literary originals should be put.