

To begin with, this very issue is a strange question in itself: how can you say that there should be concrete and precise geographical roots for a mythical story? On the other hand, the book argues in a very powerful way that there might be some Nordic or Baltic origin of phenomena arising eventually in the Mediterranean region and close links between the North and the South of Europe. In truth, we can say that the book provides a whole new perspective on the ongoing process of European unification, because the classics might have been since the beginning part of the larger whole of Europe. From this perspective alone, the book contributes significantly to European integration in that it revolutionises and re-describes Europe's cultural foundations. To be frank, after reading the book, you hardly believe what you have read, namely that the famous, ancient Greek stories of Homer originated in Scandinavia. Indeed, it is recommended hereby to read the book more than once in order to get an objective overview of the ideas presented in the book.

This edition of the book is a translation of the English version of the Italian volume *Omero nel Baltico. Le origini nordiche dell'odissea e dell'iliade* by Felice Vinci (5th edition, Palombi Publishers, Rome Italy), introduced by Rosa Calzecchi Onesti, a renowned scholar and translator of the Iliad and Odyssey into Italian. The author has travelled to many countries to propose his thesis and the ideas of the book, which may baffle *prima facie*, have been received as worthy of consideration in many academic quarters. For one, the volume has been adopted as a textbook for the students of Bard College in New York in 2007. And in order to experience the story, a professor of classics at Bard College has been sailing with his students on Ulysses' course, as this is charted in the book; the event being supported by the US Oceanographic institute. Many American scholars have stated that the book is very interesting and provides new perspectives on Homer and his ideas. The fact that the book is used by the students at Bard College also shows how important Vinci's work is as regards providing a completely new contextualisation of the works of Homer.

When we think about the importance of the Iliad and Odyssey for European culture, it is mesmerizing to meditate upon the possibility that these poems may describe events and peoples from old Scandinavia, as it is stated in the book. Besides, although revolutionary, the thesis of the book is not entirely new. Many researchers have argued that the origins of Homer's stories may have a basis in a broader European setting. Under this perspective, it is most interesting how Vinci bases his analyses on concrete interpretations of the peoples, natural landscapes and travels described in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey.

The book argues that the geographical description of Homer's poems corresponds to different Scandinavian and Nordic islands, for example some Danish islands, such as Lyo,

Fyen Langeland, Tåsinge and Sjælland. And it is in the Danish island next to Fyn that Ulysses is supposed to have had his home. At the time Homer wrote, according to Vinci, there was a much warmer climate in the Nordic countries; hence there is no obvious climate argument against the notion that those parts of the world could have been at least as populated and active as the Mediterranean area. We can also find much resemblance between the Nordic stories of different heroes and the stories presented in Homer's poems. Perhaps some of the Greek tribes may even have come from the Baltic region.

The first part of the book offers an in-depth analysis of the world of Ulysses. It discusses where we should locate geographically his home and it shows how we can find the tracks of his travels in the Baltic and also in other parts of the Scandinavian and Atlantic regions. This part of the book also makes a comparison between Nordic mythology and the Greek world and it discusses how the Greek world bears many resemblances with Nordic mythology. In particular, the author tries to identify Ithaca with the Danish island of Lyø, near Fåborg and Fyn, Fyn itself being described as the "dark" countryside. In general, this is the part of the book in which the author tries to show most carefully how specific geographic places in Scandinavia can be identified as places in the Odyssey.

The second part of the book discusses the geographical reality of Troy in the Nordic regions, on the basis of the descriptions provided in the Iliad. This part also tries to link the Trojan War with remote events in the Northern countries. According to the book, Troy was not situated in the Mediterranean Sea, but rather along the Baltic coast of Finland.

On this basis, the third part of the book tries to show how the myths of classical Greece have their origins in the Nordic—i.e. Baltic and Scandinavian—mythology of ancient times. And it is further shown how the climate at the time was very different, in order to support the idea that the events narrated in Homer's Iliad took place in the Baltic and Scandinavian regions.

The fourth part of the book discusses the relations between the myths of Scandinavia and the Baltic region with those mentioned in the works of Homer. Finally, the book contains discussions of the reasons for the migration of Nordic populations to the Mediterranean regions commonly associated with classical Greece.

The book is very provocative to a hermeneutically or textually oriented literary critique, because it takes the scientific and positivistic reading of literature and of the origins of literature to their extreme point, by searching for geographical explanations of all aspects of Homer's fictional works. The logic implied is such that Homer's poetic depictions must correspond to specific places and that there must be a real-world explanation to the

structure of the literary universe deployed therein. However, we have to understand that literature is characterized by being something that proposes an imaginary universe, which carries only limited adherence to reality. This is also the case with the Iliad and the Odyssey, which are, *pace* Schlimann's and Blegen's archaeological excavations, works of fiction that create an imaginary world that you can enter and live in. As such, they possess only tenuous connections with actual reality.

However, apart from its stark break with the methods of literary hermeneutics and the idea of the non-reference of a literary work, we can also try to read Vinci's book as partly a literary text itself. It is not just or perhaps not even mainly a scientific book. It is rather a dream about a hypothetical world in which the classical Greek myths are also Scandinavian. And why not? We can enter this new literary world of Troy and Ithaca and all the other mythical figures of the Iliad and Odyssey and we can conceive of ourselves as both Vikings and people from the classical world. After all, this is the privilege of the European civilization, which combines the North of Europe with Southern Europe and their rich legacies of myths and literary works. I therefore recommend the reader to enjoy the book on its own premises and dream about the adventures of the classical and Nordic worlds at the same time.

Share this:

- [Share](#)