

Strabo and the Epeians of the *Iliad*

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A PASSAGE of the Catalogue of Ships in the *Iliad* describes the land inhabited by the Epeians, mythical predecessors of the historical Eleians: the Epeian country, consisting of “Bouprasion and divine Elis,” is enclosed by four topographical features. Strabo, to delimit for his readers the extent of the territory once controlled by the Epeians, attempts to establish the location of each of these features. It remains uncertain, however, whether the text of the *Iliad* was intended to lead the poem’s audience to the same conclusions about their location as those reached by the geographer. This paper, through an assessment of the accuracy of Strabo’s interpretation, along with a discussion of further epic and archaeological material, aims to contribute towards our knowledge and understanding of the Homeric topography of the northwestern Peloponnese. It also has implications for a significant matter of dispute in the Archaic and Classical history of the region of Elis, the question of how we might interpret reports in late texts of a struggle between the Eleians and the people of Pisa for control of the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia, situated in the Alpheios valley.

1. *Strabo and the Epeian entry in the Catalogue of Ships*

Strabo, who lived from the late 60s B.C. to the 20s A.D.,¹ received an education in Homeric scholarship while still young. Aristarkhos of Samothrake appears to have been “one of the first to make critical editions of Greek poetry, especially that of Homer, a talent he passed on to his student Menekrates, and the

¹ H. L. Jones, *Strabo: Geography, Books 1–2* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1917) xvi, xxviii; D. W. Roller, *The Geography of Strabo* (Cambridge 2014) 1–3, 13–14.

latter to his son Aristodemos, Strabo's teacher."² As Roller makes clear, "lurking everywhere" in the *Geography* "is an intense Homeric commentary," and Strabo appears to have believed, even in the face of contrary evidence, that his topographical research "validated Homeric geography."³ His rationale for including comparisons of present conditions with those described by Homer, clearly stated soon after the beginning of his discussion of the western Peloponnese, is the familiarity with the epics which both he and his audience had enjoyed since childhood, hence the belief that the poet should never be contradicted.⁴ While parts of Strabo's work may constitute "the beginning of topographical scholarship as practised today,"⁵ his own conclusions, even when supported in depth, need not be regarded as beyond contradiction. The determination of the geographer to prove Homer literally correct in every instance contains within it a seed which has the potential to obscure, rather than illuminate, the poet's meaning, particularly when associated with an unwarranted degree of confidence in the extent to which the toponyms in the text of the epics might accurately be identified with features of the landscape discernible in his own time.

An entry in the Catalogue of Ships records the contribution of the Epeians to the fleet which Agamemnon led against Troy:⁶

οἱ δ' ἄρα Βουπράσιόν τε καὶ Ἥλιδα διὰν ἔναιον,
 ὅσσον ἔφ' Ὑρμίνη καὶ Μύρσινος ἐσχατόωσα
 πέτρη τ' Ὠλενίη καὶ Ἀλήσιον ἐντὸς ἔέργει,
 τῶν αὖ τέσσαρες ἀρχοὶ ἔσαν, δέκα δ' ἀνδρὶ ἐκάστῳ
 νῆες ἔποντο θοαί, πολέες δ' ἔμβαλλον Ἐπειοί.

² Strab. 14.1.48; Roller, *Strabo* 5, 18.

³ Roller, *Strabo* 17.

⁴ Strab. 8.3.3; Roller, *Strabo* 20.

⁵ Roller, *Strabo* 17–18. The expressions "Homer" and the "the poet" are used in this paper as the ancients used them, to signify the creator(s) of both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

⁶ Hom. *Il.* 2.615–619 (text: D. B. Monro and T. W. Allen).

And then there were those who inhabited Bouprasion and divine Elis, all that Hyrmine and Myrsinos on the coast and the Olenian Rock and Alesion enclose between them, and who, in turn, had four leaders, with ten swift ships following each man; and many Epeians embarked upon them.

The term “Elis,” rather than describing the Classical and later *polis* of the same name, seems to signify a region, and Bouprasion must be either a settlement or district within the region of Elis or a separate, adjoining region which is also inhabited by the Epeians.⁷ Two of the four places which the poet says enclose the land of the Epeians, Hyrmine and Myrsinos, are clearly on the coast.⁸ The other pair, the Olenian Rock and Alesion, since they are not so described, appear to be located in the interior. Before appraising Strabo’s attempt to establish the significance of the toponyms mentioned here, it is necessary to address two matters: the doubts expressed by certain scholars concerning the provenance of an element of the Epeian entry; and the relationship of the passages which comprise the Catalogue of Ships to the *Iliad* as a whole.

Elsewhere in the *Iliad*, the construction ὄσσον ... ἐντὸς ἐέργει, seen in lines 616–617, clearly indicates enclosure or containment.⁹ Cantieni, however, pointing out that in these further

⁷ G. Bourke, *Elis: Internal Politics and External Policy in Ancient Greece* (Abingdon 2018) 17, 28–30, 95–98. The arguments of E. Visser, *Homers Katalog der Schiffe* (Stuttgart 1997) 560–563, that in the *Iliad* Elis can also be a place-name are unconvincing. On the yet unresolved question of the nature and location of Bouprasion see Strab. 8.3.8–9; F. Bölte, “Ein pylisches Epos,” *RhM* 83 (1934) 333–340; R. Cantieni, *Die Nestorerzählung im XI. Gesang der Ilias V. 670–762* (diss. Zürich 1942) 43–47; Visser 556–560; D. Frame, *Hippota Nestor* (Washington 2009) 664–667.

⁸ Cf. A. T. Murray and W. F. Wyatt, *Homer: Iliad Books 1–12* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1999) 107. Boiotian Anthedon, similarly described in the Catalogue as ἐσχατώσσα, was on the Euripos: *Il.* 2.508; Strab. 9.2.2, 13, 14; Paus. 6.10.1; 9.22.5, 6, 7, 26.2; J. Servais, “Le site de Khlémoutsi et l’Hyrminé homérique,” *BCH* 88 (1964) 37; R. Hope Simpson and J. F. Lazenby, *The Catalogue of Ships in Homer’s Iliad* (Oxford 1970) 32–33; Visser, *Katalog* 564.

⁹ *Il.* 2.845, 9.404, 18.512, 24.544.

examples “ἐπί is never there,” argues that line 617 must be a later expansion of the original Homeric text, as must further references to the Olenian Rock and Alesion at *Iliad* 11.757.¹⁰ Line 616, Cantieni argues, resembles *Iliad* 21.251, where ὄσον and ἐπί together denote “as far as.” This claim, however, presents further difficulties: without line 617, line 616 would seem to indicate that the land controlled by the Epeians extended “as far as Hyrmine and Myrsinos,” but we would not know from where.

Frame takes Cantieni’s claims a step further. In his view, line 2.617, and certain lines of Book 11, were inserted by Alkibiades during his sojourn in Sparta in order to please the Lakedaimonians by placing Nestor’s palace in Lepreatis and thereby justifying the independence of the Lepreans from the Eleians.¹¹ To explain how these lines came to be in the text of the *Iliad* known to both Strabo and ourselves, Frame hypothesises that upon his return to Athens Alkibiades, who “had simply grown fond of his own contribution to Homer and wished to see it perpetuated,” interpolated the relevant lines into the version of the *Iliad* recited at the Panathenaia. It is unlikely, however, that once removed from Sparta the Athenian general would have been prepared to abandon the close relations he enjoyed with the Eleians by promoting the independence of the Lepreans in this way, and the influence which a later Alkibiades exercised at Olympia suggests that his ancestor had not done so.¹² While it is not possible to consider all of the points raised by Frame here, his failure to adequately explain how an interpolation of this kind might have made its way into the Homeric text at such a late stage places his whole hypothesis in doubt. It thus seems best to proceed with our assessment of Strabo’s interpretation of this

¹⁰ Cantieni, *Die Nestorerzählung* 46 n.96; cf. Frame, *Hippota Nestor* 661–663 with nn.28, 29.

¹¹ Frame, *Hippota Nestor* 719–746.

¹² Thuc. 5.43.3, 5.44.2, 6.16.2, 6.88.9; Andoc. *Against Alc.* 26; Nep. *Alc.* 2.1, 4.4; Diod. 12.79.1; Plut. *Alc.* 1.1, 15.1; Paus. 1.29.13; Bourke, *Elis* 124.

passage regardless of the doubts of Cantieni and Frame concerning the provenance of line 2.617.

This brings us to the question of the place of the Catalogue of Ships in the text of the *Iliad* as a whole. Visser identifies five hypotheses which attempt to address “the problem of the content and genesis of the geographical details” in the Catalogue,¹³ but on credible grounds rejects all but one, that the name lists were composed during the eighth century.¹⁴ As he points out, this conclusion raises particular questions relating to the poetic technique employed and the historical reliability of the information. Focusing largely upon the matter of poetic technique, Visser argues cogently in favour of his view that, despite certain long-standing beliefs, the Catalogue constitutes an integral component of the *Iliad* created, as he believes, in the eighth century.¹⁵ In general accord with Visser, apart from the reservation that the epics may yet date from the seventh century rather than the second half of the eighth, it is assumed in this paper that the entire *Iliad*, though drawing information from varied sources, was composed in one location, most likely in Ionia, early in the Archaic period.¹⁶ Our main concern here, however, is the provenance and significance of the geographical information which the Catalogue provides.

¹³ Visser, *Katalog* 10–15, cf. 16–17, where three core positions are identified, and the discussion of modern scholarship 36–48. Noting that it does not explain how or why the Catalogue was embedded into the *Iliad*, Visser (14 with n.34) dismisses the view that it was composed later; cf. G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary* I (Cambridge 1985) 170. He thus implicitly rejects the proposition of Anderson that “the Catalogue is the work of a Boiotian poet living in the late eighth century B.C.”: J. K. Anderson, “The Geometric Catalogue of Ships,” in J. B. Carter et al. (eds.), *The Ages of Homer* (Austin 1995) 188; cf. Visser 46 n.58.

¹⁴ Visser, *Katalog* 12–13 nn.29–30, although noting that some scholars favour the seventh century, prefers the third quarter of the eighth.

¹⁵ Visser, *Katalog* 2–3 n.3, 7–10, 49–77, 741–745, 750; cf. Kirk, *Commentary* I 169.

¹⁶ See discussion in Kirk, *Commentary* I 1–10; Visser, *Katalog* 1–48.

Although historians have tended to reject any connection between myth and historical geography,¹⁷ Visser (24–27) takes an intermediary position, according to which “places named in heroic myth could, in some form, also once have been geographical-historical entities,” and these include those named in the Catalogue. Following Kirk, he reasonably concludes that the content of the Catalogue must originate from diverse times preceding that of its composition (48). Place-names from the Mycenaean period would most likely have come to the poet through the heroic mythology available to him, though the geopolitical conditions of the time of its composition also seem influential, and “Homer had a very detailed knowledge of ... the Greece of his own time;” this topographical knowledge may have come from either the personal experience of the poet or that of his contemporaries, such as wandering *avoidoi*, merchants, sailors, or craftsmen (744–750). Strabo, on the other hand, often following Apollodoros, “treats the Catalogue of Ships as an absolutely reliable geographical source” (33, cf. 32). It is to the geographer’s commentary on the Epeian entry that we now turn, leaving aside for a moment the question of the origin and significance of the information in this entry and focusing instead upon assessing Strabo’s identification of the settlements and topographical features named there.

2. *Strabo’s identification of the Homeric toponyms*

Strabo informs us that Hyrmine was a *πολίχμιον* (“town”) which no longer existed, and reports without comment that a headland near Kyllene was called Hormina or Hyrmina. He locates Kyllene somewhere between two capes which protrude into the Ionian Sea from the northwestern coast of the Peloponnese, Araxos and Khelonatas (Khlemoutsi), and 120 stadia (about 19 km) from the city of Elis.¹⁸ The distance of Kyllene from Elis specified by Strabo would allow this port to be placed at either of two locations: just to the north of Cape Khelonatas,

¹⁷ Visser, *Katalog* 22–24, with citations and discussion at n.15.

¹⁸ Strab. 8.3.4, 10; Paus. 5.1.11; J. Roy, “Elis,” in M. H. Hansen and T. H. Nielsen (eds.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004) 492.

near the site of the port known as Kyllene today; or about halfway along the stretch of coast between the two capes. Since no headland exists near the latter position, the former must be preferred, so he appears to place Hyrmine on Cape Khelonatas. Myrsinos, according to Strabo, was the Myrntounion of his own day, which reached down to the sea and lay on the road from Dyme to Elis, 70 stadia (ca. 11 km) from the latter. This would place it at least two thirds of the way from Cape Araxos to Cape Khelonatas, somewhere between the present-day Kotiki Lagoon and a location about 5 km eastward along the coast from Kyllene.¹⁹

Strabo also tells us that “they conjecture that the Olenian Rock is what is now called Skollis” (8.3.10). Although he makes it clear that this identification is only εἰκός, “probable,” he less tentatively reports elsewhere that the river Larisos, dividing Akhaian Dyme from Eleian territory, flows down from a mountain which some call Skollis, but which Homer calls the Olenian Rock.²⁰ “Aleision,” he confidently proclaims, “is the present-day Alasyaion, a *khora* around Amphidolis,” on the mountain road from the city of Elis to Olympia. Elsewhere in the *Iliad*, Strabo points out, Aleision is described as a κολῶνη, a hill.²¹

The geographer thus appears to understand from the Homeric text that the limits of the territory of the Epeians were two coastal settlements (one on Cape Khelonatas and the other towards Cape Araxos from that promontory), a mountain north-west of the city of Elis and a hill on the road from that city to Olympia. This would restrict their domain to a circle of ca. 20 km radius around the Classical and later city Elis.²²

Although Strabo is unwilling to claim any certainty concern-

¹⁹ Strab. 8.3.10; cf. Steph. Byz. s.v. Μύρσινος; Roy, in *Inventory* 492.

²⁰ *Il.* 2.617; Strab. 8.7.5; cf. Polyb. 27.31.11, Paus. 7.17.5.

²¹ *Il.* 11.757; Strab. 8.3.10. The forms Αλείσιον (rather than Αλήσιον) and Αλασσαῖον transcribed here follow the text of S. Radt, *Strabons Geographika II* (Göttingen 2003). See the discussion of these forms below.

²² Classical origins of the city of Elis: Bourke, *Elis* 17, 28–30, 95–98.

ing his location of Homeric Hyrmine,²³ the linguistic analysis of Servais suggests that it may indeed have been called Hormina or Hyrmina at a later time. Servais argues convincingly, furthermore, that the Mycenaean remains he investigated at the site of the medieval castle of Khlemoutsi on Cape Khelonatas are those of Homeric Hyrmine.²⁴ The conclusion of some earlier scholars that the historical port Kyllene, near which Strabo places Hyrmine, must have occupied the site of the medieval port of Glarentza, a few kilometres north of Khlemoutsi,²⁵ has now been confirmed by marine archaeology.²⁶ In the case of Hyrmine, it thus seems, Strabo accurately conjectures that the Homeric text refers to a settlement on Cape Khelonatas, the westernmost point of the Peloponnese.

Concerning Myrsinos, Servais accepts Strabo's identification with the later Myrtountion on the reasonable grounds that both names derive from *μυρσίνη* ("myrtle").²⁷ Hope Simpson and Lazenby, however, reporting that "Myrtountion is now rather scantily represented by some ruins" near the modern village of Kapaletto, find it "extremely unlikely that any major Mycenaean settlement would be located in such a flat and marshy area."²⁸ It

²³ Pliny *HN* 4.6 locates Hyrmine between Dyme and Cape Araxos and thus close to Araxos, but his knowledge of Eleian topography is, in general, highly inaccurate, so this may have been the product of mere conjecture from the Homeric texts.

²⁴ Servais, *BCH* 88 (1964) 9–36; Hope Simpson and Lazenby, *Catalogue of Ships* 97–98; cf. Roy, in *Inventory* 492; D. W. Roller, *A Historical and Topographical Guide to the Geography of Strabo* (Cambridge 2018) 435.

²⁵ J. Servais, "Recherches sur le port de Cyllène," *BCH* 85 (1961) 123–161; *BCH* 88 (1964) 9, 44, 48; Hope Simpson and Lazenby, *Catalogue of Ships* 97–98; Kirk, *Commentary* I 219.

²⁶ *ArchDelt* 54 B1 (1999) 243; *AR* (2005/6) 46; (2007/8) 42–43; (2008/9) 38–39; Bourke, *Elis* 30–31; cf. Roy, in *Inventory* 499.

²⁷ Servais, *BCH* 88 (1964) 37, 47; cf. Visser, *Katalog* 564, who sees in Myrsinos the Ionian form of an Eleian name.

²⁸ *Catalogue of Ships* 98; E. Meyer, "Myrtuntion," *RE* 16 (1935) 1183–1184; R. J. A. Talbert, *The Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (Princeton 2000) Map 58. Kirk, *Commentary* I 219, assigns Hyrmine to Cape Araxos, but

is far from established, on the other hand, that the ruins near Kapaletto are those of Myrtountion, since these lie a good 5 km inland, while Strabo, our only source for the location of this place, says that it reached down to the sea (8.3.10 ἐπὶ θάλατταν καθήκουσα). A thorough coastal survey has established, moreover, that before the eighteenth century A.D. the Peneios emptied into the Ionian Sea at a point between Cape Khelonatas and the Kotiki Lagoon, and the cessation of alluvial deposits has left the shoreline of the former Peneios delta subject to “marine transgression and coastal erosion.”²⁹ The scanty ruins near modern Kapaletto would thus have lain even further from the sea in ancient times than they do now.

A further consequence of the discovery that the course of the Peneios has altered since the time of Strabo is the realisation that the ruins of Myrtountion may now be submerged. Strabo’s indication that this place was situated about 70 stadia from the Classical and later city of Elis raises the possibility that it lay near the original mouth of the Peneios, an entirely plausible site for a settlement. Strabo places Myrtountion on the road between Dyme and Elis, which may well have run southwards along the coast from Dyme until it reached the Peneios near Myrtountion and then turned inland to follow the course of the river to Elis.³⁰ He would thus appear correct, after all, in locating Homeric Myrsinos at the site of a town called Myrtountion which stood, in his own time, on the coast 70 stadia from the city of Elis.

Strabo’s identification of Homer’s Olenian Rock with what was known as “Skollis” is less secure. Skollis (also now called “Santomeri”) is both a modern and an ancient name for the mountain which rises 985 m above the plain less than 20 km northeast of the ancient city of Elis.³¹ As Leake observed in the

without discussion.

²⁹ J. C. Kraft, G. R. Rapp, J. A. Gifford, and S. E. Aschenbrenner, “Coastal Change and Archaeological Settings in Elis,” *Hesperia* 74 (2005) 4, 10.

³⁰ Visser, *Katalog* 568, seems not to consider this possibility.

³¹ Hellenic Military Geographical Service *Tropaia* (1:100,000 Topographic

early nineteenth century, “the most remarkable of all the natural features of this part of *Eleia*, is the great insulated rock called the mountain of Portes or Sandaméri.”³² One of the twelve *poleis* of Akhaia, on the other hand, was Olenos, a port city near the mouth of the River Peiros.³³ Although situated beyond Dyme from Eleia and thus well within classical Akhaia, Olenos might yet have constituted one of the limits of the land of the Homeric Epeians, since, in a fragment of Hekataios preserved by Strabo, Dyme is counted as Epeian rather than Akhaian.³⁴ On the basis of two lines of Hesiod (quoted by Strabo) which report that a certain individual “lived on the Olenian Rock along the banks of a river, wide Peiros,” Hope Simpson and Lazenby place the Rock “near the later Olenos.”³⁵ There are, however, two problems with this identification: the city of Olenos was situated on the coast, but in Homer only Hyrmine and Myrsinos appear to be so described; and there is no significant peak in this locality. While there may have been some relationship between the name of the polis and that of the Rock, the fact that the polis stood near the mouth of the river need not entail that the Rock did the same, and the fragment of Hesiod suggests no more than that the latter was located somewhere along the course of the Peiros.

The only major stream which enters the sea in the district in question, the Peiros (Kamenitza), beside which Hesiod places the Olenian Rock and at the mouth of which Pausanias reports the ruins of Olenos, has its source in the most significant topographical feature of the northwestern Peloponnese, the 2224 m

Map, 1978).

³² *Travels in the Morea* (London 1830) I 4; cf. Visser, *Katalog* 564 n.21.

³³ Hdt. 1.145; Polyb. 2.41.7; Strab. 8.7.1, 4, 5; Paus. 5.3.3, 7.6.1, 7.18.1, 7.19.1, 7.22.1; Plin. *HN* 4.6; cf. Kirk, *Commentary* I 219; Visser, *Katalog* 565 n.22. Cf. the Aitolian Olenos at Hom. *Il.* 2.639; Strab. 8.7.4.

³⁴ *FGrHist* 1 F 25. Strabo 8.3.9 does not dismiss Hekataios’ claim.

³⁵ Hes. fr.85 Most; Strab. 8.3.11; Paus. 7.18.1, 7.22.1; Hope Simpson and Lazenby, *Catalogue of Ships* 98–99; cf. Leake, *Travels* II 156; Servais, *BCH* 88 (1964) 37; Roller, *Guide* 435.

Mt. Erymanthos.³⁶ Erymanthos (also known now as in Leake's time as "Olonos"), the source of the river which emptied into the sea near the polis Olenos, may well be Homer's Olenian Rock. ὠλένη is the "elbow, or rather *the arm from the elbow downwards*" (LSJ), and the general profile of Mt. Erymanthos suggests the forearm. It seems, in addition, to make general sense that such a prominent element of the landscape, forming the natural boundary between the plains of the Peneios and its tributaries on the one hand and the high mountains of Arkadia on the other, should both feature significantly in mythology and function as a territorial marker. Servais, unable to decide whether Skollis or Erymanthos constituted the Rock, concludes that they did so together.³⁷ As Leake was already aware, however, "a narrow valley watered by a branch of the Peneios ... separates the mountain of Portes from the great heights of Olonos" (I 4). These mountains are quite distinct geological formations, and we must choose between the two. The choice is not difficult, as the two lines of Hesiod are unequivocal in placing the Olenian Rock on the banks of the Peiros. Erymanthos is close to the Peiros while Skollis is not, so the great mountain, more than twice the height of its rival, must be preferred.

Strabo's association of the Ἀλήσιον of the Catalogue of Ships with a *khora* to the north of the Alpheiios called Ἀλασσαῖον in his own day might at first appear valid, since Ἀλήσιον may be the Ionic form of an Eleian toponym Ἀλάσσον.³⁸ The form Ἀλασσαῖον, however, is Wilamowitz's emendation of the text of Strabo, formulated on the assumption that the *khora* of the Alpheiios valley which the geographer identifies belonged to the ΑΛΑΣΥΕΣ whose name appears on a bronze dedicatory cauldron

³⁶ Paus. 7.18.1, 22.1; Leake, *Travels* II 155; F. Bölte, "Peiros," *RE* 19 (1938) 140–141; cf. A. Philippson, *Die griechischen Landschaften* III.I (Frankfurt 1959) 193; Hellenic Military Geographical Service *Tropaia*.

³⁷ Servais, *BCH* 88 (1964) 38–39.

³⁸ *Il.* 11.757; Strab. 8.3.10; Visser, *Katalog* 565 with n.23; C. Ruggeri, *Gli stati intorno a Olimpia: Storia e costituzione dell'Elide e degli stati formati perieci elei* (Stuttgart 2004) 151.

discovered at Olympia in 1880.³⁹ This *khora* was located near the district of Amphidolis, which lay on the mountain road from Olympia to Elis and to the north of the Alpheios between its mouth and Olympia, perhaps in the valley of the Enipeus (Lestinitza) River.⁴⁰ In the inscription, on the other hand, the Alasyes make their dedication at Olympia in common with the Ἀκρόρειοι, “the dwellers on the peaks,” whom we would thus most naturally assume to have been their neighbours. Diodoros’ account of the expedition of the Lakedaimonian king Pausanias in 401 B.C. shows that the Akroreians lived in the vicinity of the road between Lasion, the fortress on the northern section of the border with Arkadia, and Eleian Pylos.⁴¹ Although they have not yet been securely located, their name suggests that the Akroreians inhabited the peaks to the north of that route, the southern spurs of Mt. Erymanthos, which we have identified as the Rock of Olen.⁴² If the Homeric Alesion were indeed known

³⁹ W. Dittenberger and K. Purgold, *I. Olympia* 258, who accept Blass’s emendation Ἀλαισυέων in Strab. 8.3.10; P. Siewert, “Staatliche Weihungen von Kesseln und anderen Bronzegegenständen in Olympia,” *AthMitt* 106 (1991) 80, no. 3; Minon, *Les Inscriptions* no. 45; Servais, *BCH* 88 (1964) 39 with n.3; Bölte, *RhM* 83 (1934) 331; Radt, *Strabons Geographika* II 414.

⁴⁰ Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.25–26; Strab. 8.3.10; Paus. 6.22.8; Roy, in *Inventory* 490, 494 no. 247, 499–500 no. 258.

⁴¹ Diod. 14.17.8. On Classical and later Lasion see Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.30, 4.2.16; Polyb. 4.73.1–2; Diod. 15.77.1, 3; Roy, in *Inventory* 499 no. 256; T. H. Nielsen, “A Survey of Dependent *Poleis* in Arkadia,” in *More Studies in the Ancient Greek Polis* (Copenhagen 1996) 75; Ruggeri, *Gli stati* 163, 165. This site certainly accords with the poet’s designation of Alesion as a *kolone* (hill)—it stands on “a long, comparatively narrow ridge ... which on three sides falls steeply down to the glens”: J. G. Frazer, *Pausanias’s Description of Greece* IV (London 1898) 98–100, quoted in W. K. Pritchett, *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography* VI (Berkeley 1989) 29, cf. 28–30, plates 58–65. Lasion, which Diodoros describes as a *phourion*, lay on the border between historical Arkadia and Eleia and would thus constitute an appropriate boundary marker for the Epeian domain. An etymological relationship between Ἀλασίων and Ἀλάσουον, however, would be difficult to demonstrate.

⁴² M. Nafissi, “Elei e Pisati: geografia, storia e istituzioni politiche della regione di Olimpia,” *Geographia Antiqua* 12 (2003) 40, unnecessarily assumes

as Alasyon in the local dialect, this place would more likely be found adjacent to the mountainous region of northeastern Eleia inhabited by the Akroreians than in the vicinity of Amphidolis, to the northwest of Olympia. Those who made a dedication at Olympia during the Classical period in common with the Akroreians may thus have lived in the high country of northeastern Eleia, on or around the hill whose name appeared as Ἀλήσιον in the *Iliad*. Another passage of the *Iliad*, where the Pylians drive away the Epeians from their territory and pursue them to Bouprasion, the Rock of Olen, and the hill of Alesion,⁴³ suggests that Alesion lay either beyond the Rock or close to it. More than that cannot be established with any degree of certainty.

Unable to find any other useful criteria for determining the location of Alesion, Servais proposes that the four toponyms mentioned in the Catalogue of Ships may “correspond to a deliberate topographical order.” The poet, he suggests, in describing the limits of the land of the Epeians, went from Hyrmine to Myrsinos and the Rock in a clockwise motion, in which case Alesion would have “closed the circle as the southern limit.”⁴⁴ On this basis, Servais prefers to locate Homeric Alesion somewhere “towards the Alpheios.” As we have seen, however, Hyrmine and Myrsinos seem to have stood quite close to each other at the western extremity of Epeian territory, so, if there were any pattern to the Homeric description, the Rock of Olen and the

they lived on the plateau of Mt. Pholoe, south of the route from Lasion to Pylos. While Nafissi fig. 1 reproduces the map of Kiepert, which locates the *poleis* of the Akroreians named by Diod. 14.17.8, cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.14, to the north of the upper Peneios, at fig. 2 he also reproduces that of Mandl, where Akroreia appears on the southern portion of Pholoe, perhaps in order to make the association of the Akroreians in the dedication at Olympia with an Alesion placed in the valley of the Enipeus appear more feasible.

⁴³ *Il.* 11.756–758: ὄφρ’ ἐπὶ Βουπρασίου πολυπύρου βήσαμεν ἵππους πέτρης τ’ Ὀλενίης, καὶ Ἀλεισίου ἔνθα κολώνη κέκληται, “Until we walked our horses upon Bouprasion, rich in corn, and the Olenian Rock, and the place where is the hill called Alesion.” Cf. Bölte, *RhM* 83 (1934) 331.

⁴⁴ Servais, *BCH* 88 (1964) 50; cf. Kirk, *Commentary* I 219; Roller, *Guide* 435.

hill called Alesion would be found close together at the eastern extremity. The two pairs of toponyms in the passage under discussion would then indicate nothing more precise about the extent of the land of the Epeians than that it stretched from the shores of the Ionian Sea in the west to the mountains of Arkadia in the east. Just as none of the four places mentioned in the Catalogue appears to mark the northern frontier of the land of the Epeians, the Homeric text offers little to guide us in determining its southern boundary, and Strabo's rather diminished Elis is clearly not a valid inference from this passage of the *Iliad*.

The critical appraisal of Strabo's interpretation of the Epeian entry leads us back to Visser's observation that the geographical information incorporated into the Catalogue of Ships at the time of the creation of the *Iliad* seems to originate from diverse sources, and we now need to consider the extent to which the Epeian entry relies upon mythology, on the one hand, and contemporary sources, on the other. With regard to Hyrmine, maritime travellers of the period of the composition of the *Iliad* could not have failed to observe the hill upon which the impressive remains of the castle of Khlemoutsi now stand, the high point of the promontory of Khelonatas, which lay just a few kilometres from Kyllene and is clearly visible to anyone approaching that port by sea. The remains of the Mycenaean settlement would have been much more striking in the late eighth and seventh centuries than in the 1960s, when Servais excavated them,⁴⁵ and the inhabitants of Kyllene were most likely able to offer inquisitive travellers engaging information about their origins. Any remains of Mycenaean Myrsinos, if we have correctly located it at the original mouth of the Peneios, would also have attracted the curious attention of maritime travellers. While the poet could easily have encountered the names of both Hyrmine and Myrsinos in an originally local myth which incorporated toponyms of Mycenaean origin,⁴⁶ perhaps he relied upon contemporary

⁴⁵ Cf. Anderson, in *Ages of Homer* 185.

⁴⁶ Visser, *Katalog* 564, observes that "which myth that might have been remains, of course, completely in the dark." It may, however, be partly reflected

sources for their seaside locations.

The peak of Mt. Erymanthos, identified above as the Rock of Olen, is clearly visible from the sea, the coastal plain and, indeed, certain high points to the south of the Alpheios, and it would be surprising if such a dominant feature of the landscape remained bereft of mythological significance. Homer's exceptional reference in this case to a landmark rather than a settlement seems to have been inspired by its appearance in a mythical narrative of conflict between the Eleians and Pylians, also reported in the *Iliad*.⁴⁷ Since only those travellers who ventured to the inland of the Peloponnese would have come across Alesion, which is invariably paired with the Rock (2.617, 11.757), it seems reasonable to conclude that both toponyms appeared together in the same myth.

The poet, it seems, derived the four toponyms he uses to delimit the territory of the Epeians from local mythical narratives, some elements of which perhaps belonged to an oral tradition dating back to the Mycenaean period, disseminated by travelling *oidoi* through various parts of Greece, including the eastern Aegean. It also seems clear that, from among the various Mycenaean settlements known to him from such mythical narratives, he selected two which he was aware, either from the myths themselves or the accounts of maritime travellers, lay on the Ionian Sea coast, pairing them with two landmarks which had already been named in myth to indicate the inland extremities of the territory of the Epeians. Yet the Catalogue would not seem to delimit the southern extent of the land of the Epeians, and we must now consider whether it is possible, on the basis of further epic material, to establish such a limit.

in Pausanias' story of the foundation of "Hyrmina" by Aktor: Paus. 5.1.11; cf. Eustath. 303 (I 469 van der Valk); Kirk, *Commentary* I 220; Visser 568.

⁴⁷ *Il.* 11.670–761; Visser, *Katalog* 566–568. The expression πέτρη τ' Ὀλενίη found in both passages seems to suggest the existence of a mythical figure called Olen, perhaps the Hyperborean who Pausanias 10.5.7 reports led those who established the oracle at Delphi. A myth about such a figure, however, need not have directly inspired Homer, who clearly had access to a narrative of conflict between the Epeians and Pylians.

3. *Pylian coastal settlements*

In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (397–400), we hear of Apollo and his brother that:

τὼ δ' ἄμφω σπεύδοντε Διὸς περικαλλέα τέκνα
 ἔς Πύλον ἡμαθόεντα ἐπ' Ἀλφειοῦ πόρον ἴξον:
 ἀγρούς δ' ἐξίκοντο καὶ αὐλίον ὑψιμέλαθρον,
 ἠχοῦ δὴ τὰ χρήματ' ἀτάλλετο νυκτὸς ἐν ὄρηι.

The two very beautiful children of Zeus headed off
 To sandy Pylos and came to the ford of Alpheios.
 And they reached fields and a high-built cave,
 Where, indeed, the herds were sheltered by night.

Since the two gods are travelling towards Pylos from the north, it makes perfectly good sense that the first notable feature of their journey should be the ford of the Alpheios. Only upon, or perhaps after, reaching the river do they arrive at their destination, sandy Pylos, with its fields and lofty cave. This passage may be understood to imply that the ford of the Alpheios was part of the Pylian land, or that Pylian territory began once one crossed it, or merely that the ford of the Alpheios was a notable feature of the journey to Pylos.

A para-narrative from the *Iliad*, when considered with certain archaeological evidence, throws light upon this matter. Here Nestor narrates the story of a conflict between the Pylians and the Epeians. In his youth the Pylians raided the cattle of the Epeians and drove the captured stock into Pylos. The Epeians responded by marching in full strength against “a polis called Thryoessa, on a high, steep hill, far away on the Alpheios, the extremity of sandy Pylos.” Nestor and the cavalry proceeded to the river Minyeios, which emptied into the sea near Arene, where they waited for the dawn. Once the infantry had also arrived, the Pylians advanced, reaching the Alpheios by noon. At sunrise the next day, thanks to the heroism and prowess of the then-youthful narrator, the enemy ranks were broken and the Pylians pursued the Epeians across the open country, through Bouprasion and up to the Rock of Olen and the hill of Alesion. Then they withdrew from Bouprasion and returned

home.⁴⁸

The Homeric Arene near which the Pylians halt before marching northwards at dawn the following day has been convincingly identified with the site of Kleidhi. Situated on a low ridge rising from the plain between Lake Kaiafa and the Agoulenitza Lagoon (now drained for agriculture), below the western extremity of Mt. Lapithas (Smerna), this site, along with that of Samikon on the heights above, commands the narrow pass between the mountain and the sea, and was clearly of great strategic importance in ancient times. Archaeological work there has revealed graves and dwellings from Early Helladic to Late Helladic IIIB, including Cyclopean walls. In Helladic times, the site was either an island or a height joined to the mainland by a shallow wetland.⁴⁹

Another site, on a terrace about 15 km north of Kleidhi and only 500 m south of the Alpheios, near the modern village of Epitalio (formerly Agoulenitza), has also revealed evidence of Late Helladic occupation. In ancient times this, too, was “clearly an important strategic location, near the Early Helladic shoreline of the Gulf of Kiparissia and the mouth of the Alpheios river.”⁵⁰ The site has been identified as that of Homeric

⁴⁸ *Il.* 11.670–761. On Thyroessa as “the extremity of sandy Pylos” (11.711–712) see 9.154, 295, where the same words are used of the seven cities to the west of Taygetos which Agamemnon is prepared to promise Achilles.

⁴⁹ *Il.* 11.722–726; Strab. 8.3.19–20; Paus. 5.6.2; W. Dörpfeld, “Alt-Pylos III: die Lage der homerischen Burg Pylos,” *AthMitt* 38 (1913) 111–114; Bölte, *RhM* 83 (1934) 326; Kraft et al., *Hesperia* 74 (2005) 16–18; C. Rohn and J. Heiden, “Neue Forschungen zur antiken Siedlungstopographie Triphyliens,” in A. Matthaei et al. (eds.), *Stadtbilder im Hellenismus: the hellenistische Polis als Lebensform* I (Berlin 2009) 356–357; B. Eder, “Zur historischen Geographie Triphyliens in mykenischer Zeit,” in F. Blakolmer et al. (eds.), *Österreichische Forschungen zur Ägäischen Bronzezeit 2009* (Vienna 2011) 106–107; Bourke, *Elis* 32, 213 with fig. 11.1, 224; Roller, *Guide* 441–442; *ArchDelt* 37 B1 (1982) 133–134; 38 B1 (1989) 109–110; 52 B1 (1997) 250; 53 B1 (1998) 241; *AR* (1989/90) 32, (1990/1) 32, (2002/3) 35, (2004/5) 33.

⁵⁰ Kraft et al., *Hesperia* 74 (2005) 22, cf. 21, 34; P. G. Themelis, “Thyron-Epitalion,” *AAA* 2 (1968) 201.

Thryoessa, also called Thryon, described as “the ford of the Alpheios” in both the *Iliad* and the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*.⁵¹ Strabo equates Thryon with the historical settlement of Epitalion, from where the Lakedaimonian King Agis II, invading Eleia from Messenia in 401, crossed the Alpheios.⁵² If Strabo were correct in identifying Thryon/Thryoessa with Epitalion, we could be sure that it lay just to the south of the Alpheios. Excavations below and a little seaward of the Late Helladic site have revealed the remains of significant Hellenistic and Roman building works.⁵³ While Nielsen asserts that this site has not yet yielded any Archaic or Classical material, Kraft et al. report that “other evidence of occupation from the Archaic through Late Roman periods” has been found, and for Themelis the finds suggest the creation during the fifth century B.C. of a new settlement, later developed into the city of Epitalion.⁵⁴ It is thus entirely plausible that while Bronze Age Thryon/Thryoessa occupied the higher ground a little inland, Classical Epitalion was on the nearby coastal plain.

Bölte maintains, however, that the elevated site to the south of the Alpheios cannot be Thryoessa. In Nestor’s narrative, the besieging Epeians occupy an adjacent plain, but the Pylians march first to the banks of the Alpheios. Bölte finds it unintelligible (“unverständlich”), if Thryoessa lay to the south of the Alpheios, that the Pylians would have failed to attack as soon as they arrived. Assuming that they would have been obliged to take a path to the east of the city in order to avoid their enemies,

⁵¹ *Il.* 2.592, 11.711–712; *Hom.Hymn.Ap.* 423; Strab. 8.3.24; Themelis, *AAA* 2 (1968) 201–204; Kraft et al., *Hesperia* 74 (2005) 21; J. Taita, *Olimpia e il suo vicinato in epoca arcaica* (Milan 2007) 20; Eder, in *Österreichische Forschungen* 110–111; cf. further references in Bölte, *RhM* 83 (1934) 325 n.1. Late in the winter of 1805, when its waters would have been high, Leake was able to cross the river near its mouth: *Travels* I 45–49.

⁵² Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.25–30; Strab. 8.3.24, 29.

⁵³ Themelis, *AAA* 2 (1968) 201–204; Kraft et al., *Hesperia* 74 (2005) 21–22.

⁵⁴ Themelis, *AAA* 2 (1968) 202–204; T. H. Nielsen, “Triphylia,” in *Inventory* 543; cf. Taita, *Olimpia* 20; *AR* (2010/1) 52.

he concludes that the battle on the following day would have to have taken place in the hilly country inland from the site, which, considering the rugged nature of the terrain, is unthinkable (“undenkbar”). The flight of the Epeians, he continues, would be incomprehensible (“unbegreiflich”) if it had begun to the south of the Alpheios. He concludes from these considerations that Thyreoessa must have been located to the north of the river.⁵⁵

Rejecting both the site near Epitalio and that of the village of Koukoura (now Salmoni, also located to the north of the Alpheios) proposed by Dörpfeld, Bölte suggests that Thyreoessa occupied the height which now accommodates the modern village of Strefi, about 11 km inland from the current mouth of the Alpheios and 2.4 km north of the river, surrounded by an abundant plain.⁵⁶ Although conceding that no ancient remains had been found at this site at the time when he wrote, Bölte points out that they had not yet been seriously sought.⁵⁷ More than eight decades have passed since that time. Excavations conducted in 1968 to the east of the modern village of Kato Strefi (located on the plain about 1.5 km to the southeast of Strefi) have yielded a few Mycenaean sherds, found just above the remains of an Early Helladic II settlement.⁵⁸ Yalouris, earlier in the same decade, explored “a Mycenaean IIIB chamber

⁵⁵ *Il.* 11.714, 725–726; Bölte, *RhM* 83 (1934) 328.

⁵⁶ Bölte rejects the site suggested by Dörpfeld, *AthMitt* 38 (1913) 114–115, on the grounds that it is not surrounded by a plain. We may also reject it, but for a different reason: the finds have turned out to belong to the Early Iron Age: C. Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles* (Cambridge 1990) 63, 238; B. Eder, “Die Anfänge von Elis und Olympia: zur Siedlungsgeschichte der Landschaft Elis am Übergang von der Spätbronze- zur Früheisenzeit,” in V. Mitsopoulos-Leon (ed.), *Forschungen in der Peloponnes* (Athens 2001) 241, cf. 234 fig. 1, and “Im Reich des Augeias: Elis und Olympia zwischen 1200 und 700 v. Chr.,” *AnzWien* 138 (2003) 110; M. Köiv, “Early History of Elis and Pisa: Invented or Evolving Traditions?” *Klio* 95 (2013) 326.

⁵⁷ Bölte, *RhM* 83 (1934) 328.

⁵⁸ *ArchDelt* 23 B1 (1968) 171–173; 24 B1 (1969) 150–152; M. Koumouzelis, *The Early and Middle Helladic Periods in Elis* (diss. Brandeis Univ. 1980) 28–34.

tomb” nearer to Strefi, but this was also located on the plain.⁵⁹ Although the sherds from Kato Strefi and the tomb nearer to Strefi proper might suggest the presence somewhere in the vicinity of a settlement of Mycenaean times, no Helladic remains appear to have been discovered at the hilltop site.

Addressing the additional difficulty that Nestor’s narrative does not report a crossing of the Alpheios, Bölte argues that such a report would be insignificant (“gleichgültig”) for the narrative. Their sacrifice of a bull each to Alpheios and Poseidon upon arrival at the river bank, he further maintains, suggests that the Pylians intended to cross the river.⁶⁰ Nestor’s report, however, includes other apparently “gleichgültig” details of the progress of the Pylian forces towards Thryoessa, such as the rendezvous of the cavalry and infantry at Arene, so if the Pylians had indeed crossed the river we would expect to hear about it. The sacrifices offered by the Pylians to the sea-god Poseidon and the river-god Alpheios in equal measure, instead of suggesting that they intended to cross to the right bank, may indicate that they had reached a place where the sea and the river met, that is, the mouth of the Alpheios. Bölte’s premise that the Pylians, in order to avoid untimely contact with the Epeians, would have been obliged to advance to the river by a path which ran inland from the site near Epitalio appears unfounded, since they may instead have continued along the shore until they reached the river mouth, where they would have rested in order to prepare to join battle on the following day with the Epeians on the plain to their east. As Bölte himself acknowledges, “the troops had been long enough on their legs” (327), and no further explanation need be sought for the failure of the Pylians to attack as soon as they arrived.

It is now uncertain, it should be noted, that a plain existed on the left bank of the mouth of the Alpheios during Late Helladic

⁵⁹ *ArchDelt* 17 B (1961/2) 107; *AR* (1961/2) 11; G. Daux, “Chronique des fouilles et découvertes archéologiques en Grèce en 1961,” *BCH* 86 (1962) 743, cf. 741, figs. 2, 3; Koumouzelis, *The Early and Middle Helladic Periods* 34.

⁶⁰ *Il.* 11.728–729; Bölte, *RhM* 83 (1934) 327.

times. Although drained in the 1960s for agriculture, the 2 km-wide Agoulenitza Lagoon once stretched 13 km along the coast from Lake Kaiafa, all the way northwards from the site of Arene to just south of the Alpheios. In 6000 B.C. most of the area to the west of the Helladic site near modern Epitalio lay under water, and the plain which spread between the river and the lagoon in historical times seems to have advanced westward only gradually over several millennia.⁶¹ Even by Strabo's time, the shoreline to the south of the Alpheios may have stood some kilometres inland from its present position.⁶² Without an extensive adjacent plain, it might seem difficult to see how the site near Epitalio could be identified as Homeric Thryoessa. There are reasons to believe, however, that the poet implied the existence of such a plain for specific literary purposes.

Alden argues persuasively that the para-narratives in the Homeric epics, which include "secondary narratives related by the poet's characters," are directly relevant "either to the interpretation of their immediate context or to that of the main narrative, or to both."⁶³ Such para-narratives have often been adapted in order "to provide a parallel or paradigm for a present situation."⁶⁴ A clear example is Nestor's tale of the conflict between the Pylians and Epeians, where the narrator "uses his own exploits ... as a pattern for Patroclus to imitate."⁶⁵ Significantly for this investigation, even though the stories of his own exploits told by Nestor in the *Iliad* seem to derive from earlier epic

⁶¹ Kraft et al., *Hesperia* 74 (2005) 20–21, fig. 11.

⁶² J. A. Kaupert and W. Dörpfeld, *Olympia und Umgegend: Zwei Karten und ein Situationsplan* (Berlin 1882) 7, 9; N. Yalouris, "Δοκιμαστικά έρευναί εις τόν κόλπον τής Φειᾶς Ἡλείας," *ArchEph* (1957) 32; Themelis, *AAA* 2 (1968) 204; Kraft et al., *Hesperia* 74 (2005) 22; Bourke, *Elis* 9–10; *contra* J. Taita, "Olympias Verkehrsverbindungen zum Meer: Landungsplätze bei Pheia und am Alpheios," in *Olympia-Bericht XIII* (Berlin 2013) 356–367.

⁶³ M. Alden, *Homer Beside Himself: Para-Narratives in the Iliad* (Oxford 2000) 1, cf. 2–47.

⁶⁴ Alden, *Para-Narratives* 23.

⁶⁵ Alden, *Para-Narratives* 26, cf. 74–76, 88–101.

material, “their details correspond so closely to the details of the situation on the occasion of their telling, that they have often been regarded as *αὐτοσχεδιάσματα*, improvisations deliberately invented by the poet to correspond to their contexts.”⁶⁶ One such detail may be Nestor’s allusion to the plain around Thyroessa which the Epeians are said to have occupied in order to besiege the city.⁶⁷ Without changing the essence of his source material, the poet may well have intentionally set the city in a broad plain in order to make it clear to his audience that the speaker, Nestor, was drawing for his own listener a parallel to the fighting on the plain around Troy. We need not follow Bölte in expecting to find in the *Iliad* an accurate depiction of the surroundings of Thyroessa/Thryon, nor are we obliged to seek this place exclusively in locations surrounded by a plain. Themelis thus seems entirely justified in suggesting that “following the new finds [at the site near Epitalio], the opinion that Thryon must be sought north of the Alpheios in the district of the modern villages of Strefi or Kukura should probably be given up.”⁶⁸

This discussion suggests that consideration of Nestor’s narrative of the conflict between the Epeians and Pyliaans in relation to the relevant archaeological evidence makes it possible to identify, in regard to its coastline, a southern limit to the territory of the Homeric Epeians, the mouth of the River Alpheios. Yet another passage of the *Iliad*, however, raises an additional difficulty for this conclusion, one which can best be resolved by reference to further archaeological material.

4. *Myth and history*

A line of the *Iliad* quoted by Strabo himself, where Thyroessa (which he has no hesitation in locating to the south of the

⁶⁶ Alden, *Para-Narratives* 75, cf. 74; *Il.* 1.262–273, 7.132–156, 11.605–803, 23.630–642.

⁶⁷ *Il.* 11.714; the plain of the Skamander at 2.465.

⁶⁸ Themelis, *AAA* 2 (1968) 204. This conclusion also removes the basis for the arguments in Bölte, *RhM* 83 (1934) 329–333, in favour of placing the Olenian Rock and Aleision to the north of Strefi, in the valley of the Lestinitza River.

Alpheios) is the last Pylian polis, should have made it sufficiently clear to him that the poet considered this settlement the northern extremity of the Pylian country.⁶⁹ At *Iliad* 5.544–545, nevertheless, we find that the Alpheios “flows as a broad stream through the country of the Pylians,”⁷⁰ a statement which would seem to stand in blatant contradiction to the conclusion reached in the previous section of this paper. Strabo invests a considerable amount of cerebral energy in attempting to prove Homer literally correct in this regard, an objective which appears mainly responsible for leading him to argue extensively, against the prevailing opinion, that the Pylos of Nestor was the Triphylian, or Lepreatic, one, located up-country from Arene, rather than the Messenian one.⁷¹ The location of Nestor’s Pylos in the Homeric epics constitutes a substantial problem in its own right which, since Homer offers no direct clarification, has inspired much discussion in both ancient and recent times,⁷² and it cannot be adequately discussed here. The character of the Pylian dominion, nevertheless, may hold the key to resolving the apparent contradiction between the conclusion reached above

⁶⁹ *Il.* 11.711; Strab. 8.3.24. The geographer (8.3.24–25) seems unable to place to the north of the Alpheios any of the Pylian possessions named in the Catalogue; cf. Roller, *Guide* 445–447.

⁷⁰ This assertion is contextually isolated from any other statements about the topography of the northwestern Peloponnese found in the epics: *Il.* 5.541–560; cf. *Od.* 3.488–489, 4.798, 15.186–187; Strab. 8.4.4; Paus. 4.1.4; G. Shipley, “Messenia,” in *Inventory* 565 no. 320.

⁷¹ Strab. 8.3.1, 3, 7, 14, 16–17, 22–29. The Eleians of Pausanias’ time seem to have used the same lines of the *Iliad* to support their dubious claim that the Eleian Pylos, situated at the junction of the Eleian Ladon River with the Peneios, was that of Nestor: Paus. 6.22.5–6. Strab. 8.3.29 sufficiently exposes the absurdity of this claim; cf. Roller, *Guide* 446–447. On Eleian Pylos see Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.16, 26; Strab. 8.3.7; J. E. Coleman, *Excavations at Pylos in Elis* (Athens 1986); Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles* 239–242; Roy, in *Inventory* 501–502; Bourke, *Elis* 30–31.

⁷² E.g. Dörpfeld, *AthMitt* 38 (1913) 97–139; Bölte, *RhM* 83 (1934) 341–343; E. Meyer, “Pylos,” *RE* 23 (1959) 2149–2150; Frame, *Hippota Nestor* 651–671; Roller, *Guide* 439.

that Thyroessa, the last Pylian settlement, lay to the south of the Alpheios and the statement in the *Iliad* that the Alpheios flowed through the Pylian land.

Certain literary factors considered above suggest that a *prima facie* case exists for disputing the claim of Strabo that Homer had the Lepreatic Pylos in mind. If, as Visser convincingly argues, the *Iliad* is the creation of a poet of the early Archaic period who composed his work anew using material drawn from a variety of sources,⁷³ his source for the Epeian-Pylian conflict is likely to have been a myth of western Peloponnesian origin. It is unlikely, however, that such a myth would have taken the form of a first-person account narrated by one of its participants, and, as Alden makes clear, Homer appears to have refashioned the myth available to him from earlier times into a narrative delivered by Nestor for the purpose of convincing Patroklos of the need for heroic action.⁷⁴ Homer may have made the aged warrior exaggerate his own exploits, not because he wanted his audience to see him as boastful, but because he hoped to convey his eagerness to impress Patroklos. The poet may thus have intentionally made Nestor understate the periods of time taken to accomplish the journeys he recounts.⁷⁵ With that, the arguments of Strabo in favour of the Lepreatic Pylos, further elaborated by Bölte,⁷⁶ lose much of their weight, and the site of Ano Englianos in Messenia must be considered a likely location for the Homeric Pylos.⁷⁷

⁷³ Visser, *Katalog* 24–27, 48, 744, 746, 749–750.

⁷⁴ Alden, *Para-Narratives* 26, cf. 74–76, 88–101; see above.

⁷⁵ *Il.* 11.677–684, 707–726, 753–761.

⁷⁶ Strab. 8.3.27–29; Bölte, *RhM* 83 (1934) 324, 341–343.

⁷⁷ Roller, *Guide* 439, cf. 447, concludes that the Linear B tablets from this site prove that “the prevailing ancient opinion favoring Messenian Pylos had been correct, and Strabo was wrong.” Although this site is 8 km northeast of the Pylos occupied by the Athenians during the Arkhidamian War (Thuc. 4.3.1–4.4.3), as Strab. 8.3.26 points out in support of the Lepreatic Pylos (5 km from the sea) against Messenian Pylos, which he assumes to be coastal, the Pylos of Homer appears to be located some distance inland.

Eder observes that a considerable number of Mycenaean ceramics come from sites to the south of the Alpheios. To the north of that stream, on the other hand, apart from the site of Olympia, such finds are relatively rare. Similarly, while tholos tombs of the type found in Messenia are comparatively common to the south of the Alpheios, few have been discovered between that river and Akhaia. Early Mycenaean finds at Kakovatos, close to the Kyparissian Gulf between the River Neda and Kleidhi, have clear affinities with those at the major centres of Mycenaean civilisation.⁷⁸ Significantly, however, as Eder explains, for the Late Bronze Age “and in particular for the Mycenaean palatial period,” there are only two find-places in the district to the south of the Alpheios. These sites (those at Kleidhi and near Epitalio discussed above), she believes, both of which were in use until Late Helladic IIIB, that is, around 1190 B.C., when the palace of Pylos in Messenia was destroyed, correspond to Homeric Arene and Thryoessa/Thryon.⁷⁹ This evidence, of course, is entirely in accord with Nestor’s narrative (11.713), in which both Arene and Thryoessa are Pylian possessions, and the latter is the outermost of these.

Eder suggests, nevertheless, that the borders of Pylos may have extended further, since the people known as *u-ru-pi-ja-jo* in the Linear B texts from Pylos could be *Ulumpioi*, a term which would seem to resemble the later place-name Olympia, and the expression *o-ru-ma-to* could signify either the mountain or the river called Erymanthos. The name transcribed as *pi-ʹ82*, furthermore, could be identical to Pisa, later applied to the district around Olympia, and *me-ta-pa* might be related to the *Metapoi*, known from an inscription from Olympia of the historical period.⁸⁰ It would seem from their position in certain administrative lists, Eder believes, that *pi-ʹ82* and *me-ta-pa* are districts in the northern part of the Pylian “hither” (that is, western)

⁷⁸ Eder, in *Österreichische Forschungen* 106–110.

⁷⁹ Eder, in *Österreichische Forschungen* 110–111; cf. *AR* (2010/1) 24.

⁸⁰ *I.Olympia* 10; Minon, *Les Inscriptions* no. 14.

province and were probably located to the north of the Neda.⁸¹

The identifications of the people known as *u-ru-pi-ja-jo* with Olympia, the expression *o-ru-ma-to* with Erymanthos, and the district *pi-**⁸² with Pisa, on the other hand, are far from conclusive, and it is doubtful that *me-ta-pa* had anything to do with the later Metapians.⁸² Bennet, while entertaining the possibility that the ethnic *u-ru-pi-ja-jo* was indeed related to the historical toponym *Olympia*, also notes that in a document from Pylos the *Ulumpiaioi*, along with the other unidentified peoples mentioned, seem to be sub-groups of the *me-za-na*. This name is close to *Messana*, west Greek for Messene,⁸³ so the *Ulumpiaioi* and others could well belong to Messenia, rather than the Alpheios valley. It is unlikely, moreover, that the inhabitants of the Mycenaean settlement near the site of the later sanctuary of Zeus Olympios would have been known by this name during the Bronze Age, since there is a hiatus in the evidence for occupation of the site between that time and the Early Iron Age.⁸⁴ The sanctuary seems to have taken its name from *Olympios*, an epithet of Zeus derived from *Olympos*,⁸⁵ the name of a number of mountains in

⁸¹ Eder, in *Österreichische Forschungen* 112–114; Hom. *Il.* 5.545.

⁸² J. Roy, “The *perioikoi* of Elis,” in M. H. Hanson (ed.), *The Polis as an Urban Centre and as a Political Community* (Copenhagen 1997) 313–314.

⁸³ J. Bennet, “The Linear B Archives and the Palace of Nestor,” in J. L. Davis (ed.), *Sandy Pylos: An Archaeological History from Nestor to Navarino* (Princeton 2008) 132–133.

⁸⁴ B. Eder, “Continuity of Bronze Age Cult at Olympia? The Evidence of the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Pottery,” in R. Laffineur et al. (eds.), *Potnia: Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age* (Liège 2001) 206–207; H. Kyrieleis, *Olympia 1875–2000* (Berlin 2002) 215–217; cf. G. Ekroth, “Pelops Joins the Party: Transformations of a Hero Cult within the Festival at Olympia,” in J. R. Brandt et al. (eds.), *Greek and Roman Festivals: Content, Meaning and Practice* (Oxford 2012) 100.

⁸⁵ P. Siewert, “Die Frühe Verwendung und Bedeutung des Ortsnamens ‘Olympia’,” *AthMitt* 106 (1991) 66; G. Bourke, “The Statue of Zeus at Olympia and the *Polis* of the Eleans,” in J. McWilliam et al. (eds.), *The Statue of Zeus at Olympia: New Approaches* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2011) 12 n.17; contra W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1985) 184.

northern Greece, Lesbos, Mysia, Lykia, Kypros, Galatia, and Kilikia.⁸⁶ Reports in various texts of a Phrygian musician of the Archaic period known as *Olympos* suggest that the name originated in Anatolia.⁸⁷ It may not have become associated with the Alpheios valley until early in the seventh century B.C., when, perhaps under the influence of the Homeric epics, the sanctuary and its festival underwent fundamental reforms.⁸⁸ Both *pi-**82 and *me-ta-pa*, if indeed located to the north of the River Neda, may have been coastal settlements corresponding to the fortified positions at Arene and Thryoessa, mentioned together as Pylian possessions in the Catalogue (2.591–592).

The depiction of a fleet in a mural from the site at Ano Englianos suggests that the historical Pylians were a sea as well as a land power.⁸⁹ In order to control both shipping entering or leaving the river and land traffic making use of an important ford, they may have extended their domain to the northern bank of the Alpheios at its mouth, a state of affairs which would have been reflected in the statement in the *Iliad* that the river flowed through the land of the Pylians (5.545). The adjective εὐρύς

⁸⁶ Northern Greece: Hom. *Il.* 15.192–193; schol. Ap. Rhod. 1.598–599 Wendel. Lesbos: Plin. *HN* 5.140. Mysia: Hdt. 1.36.1, 43.1; 7.74.2; Xen. *Cyn.* 11.1; Strab. 10.3.14; 12.4.3–10, 8.1–10; Theophr. *Hist.pl.* 3.2.5, 4.5.4–5; schol. Ap. Rhod. 1.598–599. Lykia: Strab. 14.3.8, 5.7, cf. 3.3; schol. Ap. Rhod. 1.598–599. Kypros: Strab. 14.6.3. Galatia and Kilikia: Polyb. 21.37.9; Livy 38.19–23; Strab. 14.6.3.

⁸⁷ Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.4.2; Plut. *De mus.* 7; *Suda* s.v. "Ὀλυμπος; cf. Ar. *Eq.* 7 and other references in J. M. Edmonds, *Lyra Graeca* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1963) 4–11.

⁸⁸ Bourke, *Elis* 36–38. Even if the expression *u-ru-pi-ja-jo* were actually somehow related to an Olympos, this might just as well be the mountain in southwestern Arkadia otherwise known as Lykaion, or even a hill of that name to the northeast of Sparta: Polyb. 2.65.8, 66.8; 5.24.9; Paus. 8.38.2; schol. Ap. Rhod. 1.598–599.

⁸⁹ J. L. Davis, S. R. Stocker, and H. Brecolaci, "Of Ships – Sealing Wax – and Kings: A Pylian Fleet, the Theran 'Ship Fresco', and Power in the Mycenaean world," in M. Marthari (ed.), *Cycladic Seminar 2013: Sites of Major Significance and Iconography in the Prehistoric Cyclades* (Athens 2013) 109–129, esp. 127.

(“broad”) used by the poet to describe the stream as it did so might be taken to apply to the river in general. It would, on the other hand, seem a particularly appropriate description for a river mouth which was also a ford, and so perhaps both shallow and wide at this point during early times. The knowledge that the Alpheios as it approached the Ionian Sea had once passed through the *khora* of a Pylian outpost may have been reason enough for the epic poet to declare that this stream flowed διώ (“through”) Pylian territory. Such an interpretation of the Homeric text, although it would appear incapable of satisfying Strabo’s considerable appetite for demonstrating the literal precision of the poet, allows us to resolve the apparent contradiction noted above and to place the southern coastal limit of Epeian territory a little to the north of the Alpheios. It does not entitle us, of course, to place any limit upon the southern extent of the Epeian hinterland.

It is doubtful that any scholar would want to suggest that a Pylian kingdom which stretched along the western Peloponnesian coast, reaching as far north as the Alpheios, persisted into Archaic times, and the para-narrative discussed above seems to reflect the geopolitical conditions of the Late Bronze Age, rather than those of the period when the *Iliad* was composed. Visser observes, on the other hand, though with only partial justice, that dating the lists of names in the Catalogue to the eighth century B.C. “is supported by the territorial division of Greece recognisable there.”⁹⁰ The diversity, emphasised by Visser, of the sources used by Homer may have led to a discrepancy in regard to the periods depicted in these two passages of the *Iliad*, and the Epeian entry in the Catalogue, although drawn at least partly from myth, may yet have been influenced by the conditions of the early Archaic period. Since the ethnogenesis of the Eleians, whose name is mentioned in the *Iliad*, seems to have taken place before the period when the Homeric epics were composed,⁹¹ the land which these literary works assign to the

⁹⁰ Visser, *Katalog* 12.

⁹¹ *Il.* 11.671; Gehrke, in *Gegenwärtige Antike* 45; Köiv, *Klio* 95 (2013) 316 n.8; Bourke, *Elis* 17–19.

supposed heroic predecessors of this people might reflect the extent of Eleian territory during that period.

Early in the twentieth century, Niese brought into serious doubt the veracity of reports in certain ancient texts of Archaic conflicts over the control of Olympia between the Eleians and a people of the Alpheios valley known as the *Pisaioi* or *Pisatai*, arguing that the supposed history of these conflicts must have been fabricated in connection with the brief establishment of a Pisatan state in the Alpheios valley during the 360s B.C.⁹² Twentieth-century scholars generally remained unconvinced.⁹³ In the current century, however, while Nafissi, Möller, Gehrke, and Giangiulio have all supported Niese's proposal,⁹⁴ I have suggested that these reports may reflect internal political struggles among the Eleian communities during the decades leading up to establishment in 471 of the new, democratic polis of the Eleians.⁹⁵ Kōiv, on the other hand, defending the traditional interpretation, has argued that the region called Elis in the Homeric epics was restricted to the valley of the River Peneios. The valley of the Alpheios, in his view as in Strabo's, belonged to the Homeric kingdom of Nestor.⁹⁶ This suggests, he believes, that the poet of the *Iliad* viewed the district which included

⁹² Strab. 8.3.30, 33; Paus. 5.3.5–4.6, 6.22.2–4; Eus. *Chron.* 1.97–98; B. Niese, "Drei Kapitel eleischer Geschichte," in C. Robert (ed.), *Genethliakon Carl Robert* (Berlin 1910) 3–47.

⁹³ See especially E. Meyer, "Pisatis," *RE* 20 (1950) 1751–1752.

⁹⁴ M. Nafissi, "La prospettiva di Pausania sulla storia dell'Elide: la questione pisate," in D. Knoepfler et al. (eds.), *Éditer, traduire, commenter Pausanias en l'an 2000* (Geneva 2001) 301–321, and *Geographia Antiqua* 12 (2003) 23–55; A. Möller, "Elis, Olympia und das Jahr 580 v. Chr. Zur Frage der Eroberung der Pisatis," in R. Rollinger et al. (eds.), *Griechische Archaik. Interne Entwicklungen–Externe Impulse* (Berlin 2004) 249–270; H.-J. Gehrke, "Zur elischen Ethnizität," in T. Schmitt et al. (eds.), *Gegenwärtige Antike – antike Gegenwart. Kolloquium zum 60. Geburtstag von Rolf Rilinger* (Munich 2005) 17–48; M. Giangiulio, "The Emergence of Pisatis," in P. Funke et al. (eds.), *The Politics of Ethnicity and the Crisis of the Peloponnesian League* (Washington 2009) 65–85.

⁹⁵ Bourke, *Elis* 53–87.

⁹⁶ Kōiv, *Klio* 95 (2013) 336, 339.

Olympia as the domain of an *ethnos* distinct from that of the Eleians. As we have seen, however, there is little justification for assuming that Homer limited the land of the Epeians to the districts to the north of the Alpheios valley. Instead, he may well have intended to include in their domain all of that valley, apart from Thyroessa, the Pylian outpost at the mouth of the Alpheios, along with an element of its *khora* which extended across the river. Even if we could be sure that the description in the *Iliad* of the territory occupied by the Epeians did indeed reflect the extent of the land inhabited by the Eleians during the period when the Homeric epics were composed, we would still have little reason to conclude that this land did not include the valley of the Alpheios.⁹⁷

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