

Lost island home of Odysseus found after 3,000 years

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FOR almost 3,000 years, its location has been a mystery, but classical scholars around the world are now convinced that a British businessman and amateur archaeologist with a passion for Homer has found the island of Ithaca, home of the Greek hero Odysseus and the site of his palace.



Many thought that the island existed only in the imagination of the Greek poet Homer and in his epic, the *Odyssey*. Certainly his description of it did not match the Ionian island now called Ithaca, but, after following a detective trail of literary, geological and archaeological clues, scholars led by Robert Bittlestone, a management consultant, have identified Paliki, an area of Cephalonia, as the site.

Classicists have been overwhelmed by the compelling evidence.

James Diggle, Professor of Greek and Latin at Cambridge University and co-author of a book on the discovery, said that almost all of the 26 locations that Homer described in detail can be identified today in northern Paliki and its neighbourhood.

The topography of Homer's island fits the area "like a glove", he said.

Paliki was once a separate island. Since Homer's day, earthquakes triggering massive landslides had filled in a narrow sea channel that separated it from the island of Same — modern Cephalonia, the setting for *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*.

Professor Diggle said: "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."

Homer's epic poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the oldest books in Western literature. They describe the Trojan War and the return of Odysseus — who devised the wooden horse that helped to end it — to his palace on Ithaca. Homer's accounts of events around 1,200BC inspired the philosophers Plato, Aristotle and Socrates and shaped the intellectual and cultural development of Greece.

Troy was also thought to be fictional until the 1870s, when Heinrich Schliemann conducted excavations in northwestern Turkey that led to the discovery of the ancient city and, buried beneath it, the gold of Troy.

Scholars and archaeologists had been baffled by Homer's description of Ithaca: "Around are many islands, close to each other,/Doullichion and Same and wooded Zacynthos./Ithaca itself lies low, furthest to sea/Towards dusk [ie West]; the rest, apart, face dawn and sun [ie East]."

Today's Ithaca lies to the east of the other islands, not to the west, and it is not low-lying but mountainous. Scholars therefore came to the uneasy conclusion that Ithaca must have come from the poet's imagination.

However, after field trips to western Greece and computer analysis of literary, geological and archaeological data, the use of the most advanced satellite imagery and 3D global visualisation techniques developed by NASA, Mr Bittlestone found up to 70 clues leading to Caphalonia.

The research has convinced leading academics worldwide, including John Underhill, Professor of Stratigraphy at Edinburgh University, who has now co-written a book with Professor Diggle and Mr Bittlestone.

Their research will be published by Cambridge University Press on October 6 in *Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca*.