

The Knees of Athena: Constructing Homer's Troy in Ancient Scholarship  
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There are distinct gaps between Homer's Troy and the Troy that ancient Homeric scholars knew. Relying on the evidence of the local expert Demetrius of Scepsis in his important lost work *On the Trojan Catalogue*, Strabo detects several instances where the physical descriptions of the city and its surroundings in the *Iliad* plainly fail to correspond with either his 'modern' Troy or any of the sites tentatively identified as that of 'ancient' Troy. The cult statue of Athena is standing, not seated, leaving Helenus's order in 6.92 to place a robe *epi gounasin* absurd; the dual hot and cold springs at the source of the Scamander (22.147-150) are gone, leaving only a cold spring. Some of these observations are reflected in the main scholia traditions as well, with additional allegorizing interpretations indicating these discrepancies were genuinely troubling to ancient students of the *Iliad*. Yet they have been largely neglected by these students' modern heirs. Ancient and modern discussions of Homer's fictional geographies have focused on the *Odyssey*; Clay (2007) and Romm (1992), among others, have dealt perceptively with the intersections of fantasy and geography in this poem while practically ignoring the *Iliad*—a reverse of the usual situation in Homeric scholarship. The reason for the difference is easy enough to explain, as for the most part the terrain on which the *Iliad* is played out corresponds to places that ancient scholars could visit and modern archaeologists can excavate. The improbable islands of the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, required—at least for the Alexandrians—a special effort of criticism to explain; hence the principle of *exokeanismos*, as colorfully defended by Eratosthenes and disapproved by Strabo (1.2.12). By placing the fantastic locations of the *Odyssey* beyond Ocean, Eratosthenes was able to talk about them as fictional places, outside the narrow reach of the Mediterranean and thus imaginary. Clearly no such solution was possible for the *Iliad* and for Troy, but the problem of identifying the Homeric city with anything in the actual Troad remained.

The solution, the special effort of criticism, that emerges here as parallel to *exokeanismos* is thus, as Strabo puts it, the “disappearance [*aphanismos*] of the city” (13.1.41). In other words, the only way to place Homer's Troy within a fictional framework is to emphasize its complete loss; physically, it belongs to the real world, but temporally, it is as far away as the islands beyond Ocean. The Troy that emerges from this discussion is thus simultaneously to be identified with the Homeric city to the greatest extent possible, and disassociated from it to an equal extent. For Demetrius, Strabo, and the scholiasts, as for modern students of Homer, Troy is the familiar city of historical period at the same time that it is the distant, mythical city of a legendary past.

### Selected Bibliography

- Clay, Diskin. 2007. “The Islands of the *Odyssey*.” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37 (1): 141-162.
- Romm, James S. 1992. *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.