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To the Finland Station ...

a review of F. Vinci, *The Baltic Origins of Homer's Epic Tales; the Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Migration of Myth* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2006), ISBN 1-59477-052-2

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The Baltic Origins of Homer's Epic Tales, by nuclear engineer Felice Vinci, is a classic example of the scientist 'doing history' unperturbed by his lack of control over the relevant academic disciplines. That there is as yet no incontrovertible evidence that the mound of Hissarlık excavated by Schliemann was ancient Troy is not a licence for uncritical and meretricious research strategies. As is so typical of publications in this genre, Vinci sets up a strawman – Troy cannot have been located in western Turkey – and rapidly loses touch with reality as he strains the facts to fill in the details of his alternative view. Thus, the claim that the Trojan War really took place in Finland degenerates into monstrosities such as the awkward redating of the event to the 18th century BCE (p. 198) and the transposition of the Egyptians to Lapland (p. 337)! To be fair, parts of Odysseus' mythical itinerary may well relate to the arctic world and the jury is still out on the northern provenance – though not as far north as the Baltic – of the Indo-European ancestors of the Greeks, but neither of these observations justify Vinci's relocation of Troy to the Baltic. The devil is in the details.

One of Vinci's mainstays is that the weather conditions set forth in Homer presuppose a northern climate, an argument presented earlier by Iman Wilkins in *Where Troy Once Stood*, though Vinci fails to credit him. The presence of snow and ice in the *Odyssey* (14. 475-477) or of fog and winds in the *Iliad* (p. 142f.) would warrant the conclusion that "in the Trojan region, as everywhere else in the Homeric poems, northern climatic features are very apparent" (p. 116, compare 186ff.), but the argument is really facile. Anyone who has visited western Turkey in winter knows that the winds can be bone-chilling, the fog can be dense, and snow does occur. Apart from that, while capitalising on climate change as the incentive of Bronze Age people to migrate southwards, Vinci fails to consider whether similar deteriorating conditions could equally have affected the Aegean world. One cannot just leap to conclusions. In addition, Homer's *amphilyke nýx* or "dimly-lit night" (*Iliad*, 7. 433) can satisfactorily be explained through other means than a boreal geography, such as the zodiacal light, which is seen worldwide.

The 'linguistic' evidence adduced by Vinci to buttress his ideas is utterly cavalier, clueless and embarrassing. Not a word is spent explaining why the names of so many individuals should be found in toponyms, as in the proposed case of Tiresias the seer and the Finnish town of Tyresö (p. 157). In the careless 'name game' of free associations, innocent Finnish townships such as Karjaa, Lyökki and Toija are linked with the Carians, the Lycians and Troy (p. 109), with no regard to the prehistory of

these settlements or the Uralic etymologies of the Finnish toponyms. Linguistic comparisons require *systematic* and *conditioned* phonological correspondences, not a concatenation of qualifications such as “sound remarkably like” and “sounds like” (p. 152) that constitute a veritable ‘Vinci code’ of sorts. One simply cringes at the “remarkable relationship” Vinci sees between the names of the Argives and the Swedish Varangians or that of the Achaeans as “readily seen” in the term ‘Vikings’ (p. 178, cf. 299). That certain Greek words originally had a *w* that was subsequently lost does not entitle amateurs to postulate the existence of that sound wherever it suits their purposes; on the contrary, earlier forms of the name arguably featured a *w* not at the beginning but in the suffix of the word, as evidenced by the Hittite form *Akhiyawa*, almost certainly the equivalent of ‘Achaea’. ‘Achaeans’ and ‘Vikings’ are at least 1,500 years apart in time and *Viking* has a proper Scandinavian etymology, not a Greek one. Vinci’s many correspondences simply prove nothing.

Just as deplorable is Vinci’s neglect of the important literary parallels between Homer’s poetry and the literature from the ancient Near East, including Homeric expressions that were clearly influenced by Akkadian turns-of-phrase and evidence that some of Odysseus’ adventures were based on Gilgamesh’ exploits; an excellent place to start is Martin West’s *The East Face of Helicon* (1997). Even more damningly, Vinci blithely suppresses the mounting academic confidence that the names of Troy, Ilion, the Achaeans, Priam, Alexander and Eteocles all show up in Hittite texts – in an Aegean context and contemporary with a Greek presence in Greece as demonstrated by Linear B (see especially C. F. Justus, review of Ch. Ulf (ed.), *Der neue Streit um Troia: eine Bilanz*, Munich, C. H. Beck, 2003, *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 32. 1-2, 183-193; T. Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites*, 1998: 394f.). It would seem overwhelmingly clear that the *Sitz im Leben* of Homer’s works really is the eastern Mediterranean of the late Bronze Age.

rating: 4 a daft idea, exacerbated by poor and bigoted research, but with good entertainment value