

## The Mythological Tradition of the Region of Elis in the *Odyssey*

The reader of the *Odyssey* can find few references regarding the region of Elis. This area of Northwestern Peloponnese seems to play no vital role in the Homeric epics. It is neither the home country of a hero of great significance in the *Iliad*, nor one of the places that are connected to Odysseus' travels in the *Odyssey*. The most enlightening passages about the role of Elis are Nestor's narration on the funerary games, which took place there (*Il.* 23.624-650), and Proclus' testimony of Odysseus' post-Homeric visit to Elis in order to inspect cattle (Bernabé 102.4-6). Marks (2008) explains these references by pointing out that the *Odyssey*'s establishment as a Panhellenic epic was chronologically parallel to the emergence of Olympia as a place of religious interest for all Greeks. Consequently, he claims, there must have been a local Elian tradition, which was gradually embodied in the *Odyssey* to fit its Panhellenic character. In this context, Elis seems to be closely related with the mythological tradition of another region of Western Greece, Aetolia, and with the Olympic Games.

In this paper, I support the idea that Elis' local tradition did not disappear totally, being subsumed by the Panhellenic character of the epic. In fact, it managed to survive through the tradition of city-foundation poems, such as Eumelus' *Corinthiaca*. Furthermore, there is a connection between Elis and a possible Ionian colonization through literary sources and archaeological evidence (Souyoudzoglou 2000). Also, archaeological evidence found in Olympia (Mallwitz 2002) gives credibility to Nestor's narration (Kullmann 2007). Therefore, references to Elis are more important than one might think at first. They help us understand better the relations between Elians and their neighbors.

I begin with a reconstruction of the genealogy of the Elian heroes found in the *Iliad* in order to prove the solid connection with the mythological figures of Aetolia. By discussing specific passages in the same poem, I establish a firm relationship between Elis and Doulichion. In the first part of the paper, I examine the citations to both Elis and Ithaca in Homeric epics and the *Telegony*. Together with archaeological evidence, these passages might imply a colonization of the Northwestern part of the Peloponnese by the Cephallenes. Finally, I explain in detail the reason that led the local tradition of Elis to be embodied in the *Odyssey*, namely the emergence of Olympia as a sacred region for all Greeks. It never ceased, however, to exist and be developed outside the Panhellenic tradition in its original, local level.

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