

SHORTER NOTES

A HOMERIC GOAT ISLAND (OD. 9.116–41)

Recently, Jenny Strauss Clay has put forward the suggestion that the ‘goat island’ on which Odysseus lands before crossing over to the Cyclopes is ‘none other than Hyperia, the former home of the Phaeacians from which they emigrated to Scheria under the leadership of Nausithoos on account of the depredations of the Cyclopes.’¹ She arrives at this suggestion by combining the former proximity of the Phaeacians and Cyclopes (6.4–6) with the fact that the island *ἀνδρῶν χηρεύει* (9.124), ‘is bereft of men’ (i.e. in her opinion the Phaeacians).

The argument seems debatable. First, the word *χηρεύει* is a *hapax*, which Homer may or may not have used in a metaphorical way; our words ‘desert’ and ‘deserted’ are also used of places which have not been inhabited before.² Second, nothing in the description of the island suggests previous habitation. Third, the Phaeacians are said to have left Hyperia to escape the plundering of the Cyclopes (6.4–6), but the Cyclopes are also explicitly described as lacking ships and shipbuilders (9.125f.). Consequently, Hyperia will hardly have been an island, nor the ‘goat island’ Hyperia.

Modern studies of Odysseus’ visit to the Cyclopes often focus on the nature/culture aspects of the episode.³ The wild goats of ‘goat island’ in line 124 – *βόσκει δέ τε μηκάδας αἴγας* – have regularly been included in these analyses. For example, C. Calame has well pointed out that ‘ce dernier trait distingue le complexe sémantique que définit l’Île Petite de celui que représente Polyphème et son monde: alors que Polyphème avait avec le monde des hommes le trait commun de l’élevage du petit bétail, la figure sémantique de l’Île Petite inverse exactement les traits caractérisant le monde des hommes.’⁴ Strauss Clay (p. 263 n. 10) even suggests that the wild goats indicate ‘a blurring of a simple nature/culture distinction’, since domesticated goats can become wild again. This suggestion seems too subtle. Nothing suggests that these particular goats can or ever will be domesticated. These approaches, as well as modern commentaries, all neglect one particular aspect of the goats which seems worth while to comment upon.

In his study of heroic poetry, C. M. Bowra observes that heroic poets describe natural scenes when they are to fulfil some special function in the story.⁵ We have already seen how the description of the island fits into the general episode. The question then remains – how natural is the scene? In other words, were islands populated with goats a well-known feature of the ancient Greek world? Demonstrably so: in a discussion of *IG XII 7*, 509, an inscription concerned with the pasturage of goats on the small island of Herakleia, Louis Robert showed that many modern travellers mention such islands.⁶ From his abundant material I give two examples.

¹ J. Strauss Clay, ‘Goat Island: *Od.* 9.116–141’, *CQ* 30 (1980), 261–4.

² A. Heubeck, *Omero Odissea III* (1983) simply notes: ‘è senza uomini’. I am grateful to Professor C. J. Ruijgh for a discussion of this problem.

³ See most recently P. Vidal-Naquet, *Le Chasseur noir*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1983), 39–68; J. Strauss Clay, *The Wrath of Athena* (Princeton, 1984), 112–32.

⁴ C. Calame, ‘Mythe grec et structures narratives: le mythe des Cyclopes dans l’*Odyssée*’, in B. Gentili (ed.), *Il mito greco* (Rome, 1977), 371–91, esp. 372.

⁵ C. M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (London, 1952), 132–78, esp. 133.

⁶ L. Robert, *Hellenica* 7 (1949), 161–70. J. Psichari, ‘La chèvre chez Homère, chez les Attiques et chez les Grecs modernes’, in *Bibl. de l’École des Hautes Études, Sciences hist. et phil.* 230 (1921), 303–46, esp. 333, had already noted the existence of goat islands. On wild goats in Greece see

Tournefort, an eighteenth-century traveller, noted: 'comme la mer était grosse, nous relâchâmes [de Stenosa à Amorgos] à Nicouria, roche escarpée à un mille d'Amorgos. Nicouria est un bloc de marbre au milieu de la mer peu élevé, mais d'environ cinq milles de tour, sur lequel on ne voit que des chèvres assez maigres et des perdrix rouges d'une beauté surprenante.' In the nineteenth century, Hoskyn notes: 'The island Avthokea... is rocky and barren, and affords pasturage for a few goats. To the S.E. of it are several rocky islands called Kazil Ada; a few goats are fed on the largest' and (after Tersana) 'several small islands and rocks, known to the Greeks as Stavro Nisia, or the Cross Islands. N. of this is Agio Kisiachi. All these are of serpentine, and afford pasture for a few goats.' In antiquity, as Robert notes, we have at least two Greek islands called Polyaeos, and the inscription of Heraclia. Regarding the name of Aegina and similar names, Chantraine (*DEG* s.v. αἴξ) also comments that 'ils doivent avoir été rattachés à αἴξ par étymologie populaire'. Robert restricted himself to the Greek world, but one of the Balearic Islands, the present Cabrera, was called 'Capraria' by the Romans – surely a 'goat island'. Another Capraria, the present Capraja, was located in the Tyrrhenian Sea, but the best known Roman 'goat island' is clearly Capri.⁷ We can now also make a small correction to Ruijgh's analysis of δέ τε in line 124. The combination does not so much concern 'un fait valable pour tout pays inculte' but for 'toute île inculte'.⁸ Homer's description of 'goat island', we may conclude, was based on his knowledge of similar goat islands in the Greek world.

*Instituut voor Geschiedenis,
Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht*

JAN N. BREMMER

now also the interesting study by D. J. Georgacas, 'The αἴγαιος: A study in Greek etymology', in K. J. Rigsby (ed.), *Studies presented to Sterling Dow* = Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Monograph 10 (Durham, 1984), 101–20.

⁷ For all references see *ThLL Onomasticon* II s.v. *Capraria*.

⁸ C. J. Ruijgh, *Autour de 'τε epique'* (Amsterdam, 1971), 688.

DARKNESS FROM LIGHT: THE BEACON FIRE IN THE *AGAMEMNON*

The fire beacon in the opening scenes of the *Agamemnon* commands attention and creates the positive image of light from darkness. In the immediate context the light of the beacon relieves the watchman of his toil and brings joy to Argos. The image, however, is not totally positive. The fire signal announces both the fall of Troy and the return of Agamemnon to Clytemnestra. The negative aspect, furthermore, is emphasised at the opening – the watchman's joy at seeing the beacon (lines 22ff.) gives way at line 36 to foreboding (τὰ δ' ἄλλα σιγῶ).¹ For the original audience of 458 B.C. I suggest that this fire beacon proclaiming victory must have conveyed other negative overtones.² In brief, it will have recalled to them vividly the signals used by the Persian commanders during the great invasion of 480 to announce Athens' capture to an expectant Persian court.

¹ On the watchman and the opening in general, see J. T. Sheppard, 'The prelude of the *Agamemnon*', *CR* 36 (1922), 5–8; E. T. Owen, *The Harmony of Aeschylus* (Toronto, 1952), 62–9; E. Fraenkel, *Der Agamemnon des Aeschylus, Ein Vortrag. Kleine Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie* (Rome, 1964), 329–32; J. W. Vaughn, 'The watchman of the *Agamemnon*', *CJ* 71 (1976), 335–8.

² See T. N. Gantz, 'The fires of the *Oresteia*', *JHS* 97 (1977), 28–38, who examines the fire imagery in the trilogy and finds that 'fire repeatedly serves to symbolize the destructive aspects of vengeance' (28).