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## THE SCHOOL OF HOMER



Alexander V. Marriott

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THE SCHOOL OF HOMER



Vanguard Press

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## Dedication

For my family and my friends, I cannot thank you  
enough.

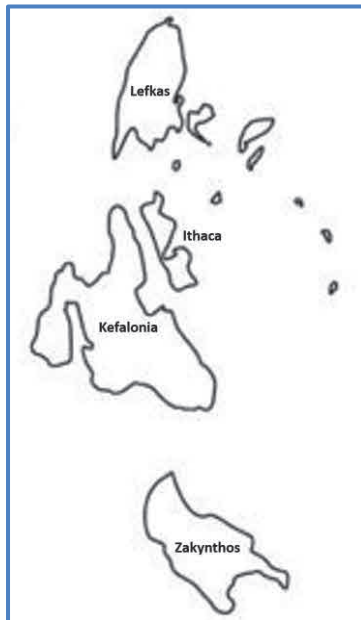
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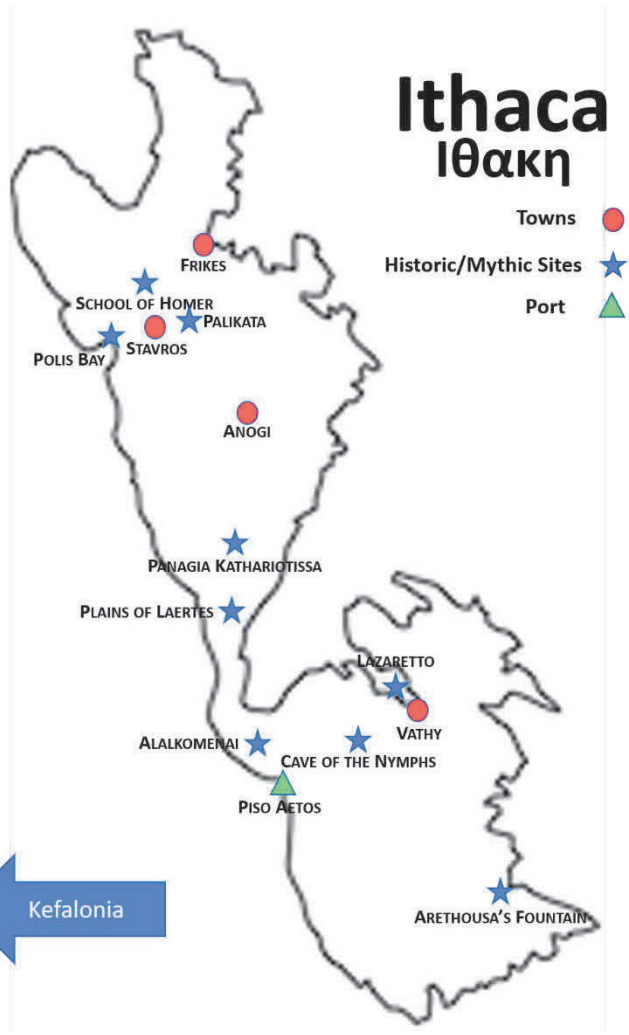
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# Ithaca Ιθάκη





PROLOGUE  
ANCIENT ITHACA, CIRCA 1165 BCE

The eagle soared over the sea slowly. It had come down from its mountain on the isthmus. Eukalos watched the bird float on the wind as he sat in the sun, overlooking the city's harbour.<sup>1</sup> The sea appeared blue close to shore. On the horizon, it looked much darker, almost like the wines from the mainland. The land of his birth was over there, somewhere. The smoke from the offerings wafted over him as he stared. The burning fat of the goats smelled rather acrid, while the scented perfumes could not block it out. They just mixed into an unearthly joint vapor that blinded while it scorched the lungs and throat. Fit for the Gods, but not for mortals. Eukalos could not enjoy his perch any longer and had to move. He watched the eagle a moment, and then he jumped up, straightened his wool tunic, picked up the heavy sack that sat beside him and began the descent from the bluff.

When he reached the beach, he watched the priests and sailors continue their offerings in the bronze tripods on the platform in the narrow harbour's rocky side. He

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<sup>1</sup> Pronounced "*Ef-ka-los*"

looked up to the bluffs directly over the platform where he had been sitting moments before. He tried to spot the eagle again, but the harbinger of mighty Zeus, an intrepid bird, had flown off somewhere. Maybe it had been a god and was now walking through the town. The thought made Eukalos smile. He had no doubts such things happened on this island, and often. Since his arrival — shipwrecked and orphaned on the coast — his adoptive family and neighbours had told him all about the island and its protective and jealous gods, especially Athena and Poseidon. As he pondered where the eagle had gone, he prayed that it had not flown towards the sea where the sun disappeared. That would be a troublesome sign.

He looked back at the supplicants on the platform. They mumbled mostly, but the basic invocation was for the missing king, Odysseus, to watch over these visitors to the shrine who made the appropriate offerings. They poured wine into the harbour and raised their arms to the sky, chanting. King Telemachos resisted this development as it conceded the death of his father, but he had relented when it was clear that the travelling mariners were not going to be deterred. Now, he taxed them when they came to worship his lost father who once ruled the island long before Eukalos was born. King Telemachos was older now than Odysseus had been when he left Ithaca for a second time, unable to stop wandering. The old dowager Queen Penelope still lived. She was a local shrine as well for those who were

important enough to see her. Eukalos had never seen the wife of old King Odysseus and he worked at the palace — his hut was on the same hill. But he worked in the fields of the palace — only the queen’s ladies, Telemachos and his family, and certain important visitors and priests were allowed up the stairs to see Penelope and her enormous olive tree bed, built by the lost king.

“Eukalos!” The familiar voice came from behind him.

As Eukalos turned, he saw his great friend, his older brother really, Okuwanos, striding towards him. It was Okuwanos’ father, Mentor, who adopted Eukalos when he was found on the shore and brought to the city. Okuwanos was already mostly grown but had always treated Eukalos like his flesh and blood. He was a burly man with black hair everywhere in massive tufts. He was about ten years older than Eukalos, who had just grown his first beard — in patches. While Eukalos was still rather scrawny, resembling too closely the boy he so recently was, Okuwanos was all sinew and muscle.

“Eukalos,” he said, closing in on his friend and brother, “where have you been? I have been looking for you! It is ready! Do you have the rest of the payment?”

“Yes, right here.” He held the bag up to Okuwanos, who grabbed it and weighed it in his arms.

“Ah, it feels right! Come! Idomeneia is waiting for you. Athena herself will not be able to save you if we keep her waiting much longer!”

At that, they both laughed and jogged from the harbour, along the path north of the city, past the great fountain, slowly ascending the plateau towards the palace of Telemachos.

When they arrived at the palace, they stopped to catch their breaths. The walls around the palace were low and functional for keeping in animals rather than keeping people out. The palace itself had two floors, built into the hillside with stone blocks making the base of the first floor while the remainder of the structure was made from fashioned logs and slated wood. The roof was open over the great hall, while the rest was thatched together with mud, clay and straw. After they admired the view, with the sun riding through the sky behind the palace, they veered left to the workshop and cottage of Okuwanos and Idomeneia, the king's artificers. They kept busy making pottery, repairing metalwork, producing new pieces to order for the royal household and fulfilling side orders for friends and customers like Eukalos when they could. They lived comfortably together with their four children — when those hardy little ones were not roaming the island, sleeping under the stars, like most of the island's boys and girls. The skilled husband and wife were always busy. Okuwanos did the metal work and repair. He also crafted most of the pottery from wet clay to sun-dried intermediate finish. Idomeneia finished all the pottery. She painted and coloured all of it with elaborate designs, patterns and representations. She also served as the consultant



and model for Okuwanos' bronze and gold jewellery creations. They shared their work and lives together, as most of Ithaca's men and women did. The island was simple, all the visitors said, but everyone seemed content. Being content is what brought Eukalos to the cottage of the king's artificers this day.

"Eukalos!" Idomeneia called out when the men sauntered in, giving her mountainous man a kiss. She then turned her attention back on their friend and relation, "Well, have you the payment?"

"I do, good woman!" Okuwanos dumped the contents of the sack on the floor and Idomeneia crawled about to examine the collection of cheeses, figs, and pears that had scattered about. She occasionally sniffed the specimens or took small bites. Then she looked back at Eukalos and smiled. While they were family, business was business.

"You did well, Eukalos! Very well!" The married masters of the cottage gathered the bounty together and put it all into a pit in the corner furthest from the hearth.

Then Idomeneia went outside. "She needs to get your piece from the kiln. It is quite something, Eukalos — possibly our best work. We were able to get Agelawos, he lived as a scribe in Pylos, to help us with the symbols you will see. He was a bit confused by the work, but I think it turned out well!"

Idomeneia came back in.

“You be the judge, Eukalos,” she said, hiding a large item under a white fleece. She rested the object on the floor and beckoned the men to sit near her. They did as commanded. Idomeneia then removed the fleece dramatically, revealing a large bowl with two handles on either side of it. It was perfectly crafted by Okuwanos, and even more breathtakingly decorated by Idomeneia. The main motif was the representation of a humble Ithacan man — Eukalos — and a humble Ithacan woman — Amphidora — joining together. Amphidora was the woman Eukalos intended to join himself with and to live with as Okuwanos and Idomeneia lived together. Around the top of the bowl, as Eukalos examined it wide-eyed, were strange symbols that had been etched into the clay before firing. While they watched him, Okuwanos and Idomeneia glanced at each other, quite pleased with themselves.



“What are these?” Eukalos asked of his friends, as they monitored his reactions.

“The scribe,” Okuwanos answered, “I asked him to include the names of the island’s great kings and the queen — so it reads in order: Laertes, Odysseus, Penelope and Telemachos. Do you like it? We have never had sounds on anything we have ever made, even for King Telemachos.” They both proudly smiled as they awaited the judgement of Eukalos.

Before he could answer, a shadow fell across the threshold. Eukalos looked but could not instantly identify the figure standing in the doorway.

“Okuwanos! Idomeneia! Eukalos!” the figure bellowed familiarly as he stepped into the cottage. His greyed beard and hair, still spliced with streaks of jet, along with his lovely tunic of the finest flax identified him as none other than Telemachos, King of Ithaca. They all bowed to their king.

“Please, get up!” Telemachos continued his bellowing. “I just need to borrow Okuwanos, I will let him come back to you in a moment.” Okuwanos followed his king outside.

“So, what do you think?” Idomeneia inquired of Eukalos as soon as Telemachos and her husband exited.

“It is so much more wonderful than I ever dared imagine,” Eukalos declared, “I must procure you a kid!”

“Oh, that’s really not necessary, Eukalos,” Idomeneia said, “you paid all that we agreed upon. We

love you like a brother, a son even! We were happy to do this for you. And we cannot wait until you bring Amphidora here to the palace of the king as your wife!" At that, she embraced Eukalos and kissed his cheek.

Walking in at that moment, Okuwanos boomed, "Ah, what's this! I leave my wife alone with a rogue and suddenly I'm forgotten!"

Idomeneia smiled. "Oh, if I were going to trade up, it would be for King Telemachos!" They all laughed.

"This bowl is fantastic, Okuwanos," Eukalos declared to his friend, "I will bring you a kid!"

"And we shall feast on it together and offer the rest to Athena!" Okuwanos embraced his brother and friend. He pushed back. "When will you give it to her?"

"Now!" Eukalos smiled. "No more waiting, that is all I have been doing and I am tired of it! Amphidora knows how I love her like Odysseus loved Penelope. This bowl is the perfect offering for her. She is no slave, and King Telemachos has consented to letting Amphidora join the ladies of the queens as soon as she is my wife. I am leaving today, this moment!"

"Eukalos! You are such a hot-blooded man!" Idomeneia mockingly admonished her young friend. "But go and tell this woman of your passions and feelings before you forget!"

As Eukalos made his way to the door, Idomeneia called out, "Eukalos! Wait!" He stopped to look at her as she came to him and wrapped the bowl in the white fleece that concealed it earlier. She then placed the bowl

in his sack and placed the sack around his neck and shoulder. “Do not break this bowl! This is a symbol of your love for her, and our love for you! If you break it before you give it to her, Eukalos, may Zeus on high Olympus strike you to dust with his thunderbolt!” She then kissed his cheek again, turned him around and pushed him out the door.

After watching the young man walk purposefully towards the city, Idomeneia turned to her husband and asked, “Were we so taken with each other and ourselves when we roamed the island at his age?”

Okuwanos strode to his wife, engulfing her in his arms. “Who said anything about ‘were’?”

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The walk to Amphidora’s home, where she lived and worked as a servant to the wife of Telemachos’ headman Ekhemedes, was a pleasant one. The fountain above the town of Ithaca had its usual line of supplicants. The offerings had been growing more and more desperate lately as less and less water was forthcoming. The assembly grounds were empty now. He remembered the most recent gathering, several moons ago, where the elders had discussed a trip to the oracle across the sea to ask the god about the water which the people needed, but which the trees, crops and livestock desperately required as well. The assembly had sent a delegation away with precious offerings.

They had not heard back yet. People were fairly lean-looking; times had been hard. Fortunately, Poseidon seemed less angry lately. Eukalos remembered the rumblings of his childhood; they had been frequent and damaging to the buildings in the city — some had even attributed Poseidon’s anger to the saving of Eukalos, proposing to return the boy to the sea in order to please the god. Eukalos remembered this without bitterness as he walked along the side of Mt Neriton, whose heights were covered with trees. He could see them swaying in the winds as he looked up, nearly tripping and falling over.

“You must be careful!” Eukalos said to himself, touching the covered object in his sack to make sure it was still in one piece.

There was a small ship in the channel to his right, the sail full of wind. Okuwanos and the elders talked often about how the channel was once full of vessels going with the winds or stopping in the harbour to wait for the winds, trading and bringing news. Now, a ship a day was considered busy. Days without visitors were becoming more and more common. The elders said Odysseus had left again because he was cursed, that Poseidon would never leave the island alone so long as he was there. The shaking did eventually stop after he left. But now, these other problems were adding up. Hopefully, the oracle would explain how to get out of all this. What was taking so long?

Helios was approaching his final climb through the sky when Eukalos finally arrived at the farm and orchards of Ekhemedes. He looked down at the small, but bountiful, collection of pear, fig and olive trees. Goats bleated on the hillside near him. There appeared to be a sail far off to the left.

*Two ships in a day?* Eukalos thought to himself, *Gods be praised!* Eukalos took a sip from the sheep's bladder that hung from his shoulder. There was not much water left. Hopefully, he could have some from the cisterns of Ekhemedes. He was normally quite generous, but the sun blazed mercilessly. No one took it as inhospitable meanness to be denied water any more.

He descended into the orchards, looking for Amphidora as he strolled. Then he saw her, carrying a basket of pears to the storehouse. He stood to admire her, the woman he loved and that would be his wife. Her hips were wide, and she was a bit shorter than he was, especially lately. Eukalos had been getting taller. Okuwanos no longer seemed like quite the giant any more, though he was still quite massive. Amphidora's hair was long and black. She had a silver clasp, a gift from Ekhemedes and his wife, that held it together in the back to avoid having it blow about in the wind and get in her face. Her tunic ran down to the middle of her thighs covering her breasts, which were still small. She walked, as did Eukalos, barefoot. Sandals were for the likes of Telemachos, Penelope and Ekhemedes. When she re-emerged from the storehouse with an empty

basket, Amphidora looked up to the sun and shielded her eyes. Then she looked straight at Eukalos. She obviously did not see him immediately blinded with the sun. After a few moments, she recognised him and blushed. She walked calmly over to him. She was covered in a sheen of sweat as she had been working hard all morning. She could not have looked better, Eukalos thought to himself.

“Eukalos? You have come all the way from the palace? Are you all right?” she asked her questions with concern and sweetness.

“Quite all right, my love!” Eukalos said, feeling the blood in his body move faster and faster.

Blushing again, Amphidora looked down. “Why have you come, Eukalos?”

“I have a gift, my love, for you!” He reached into his sack and brought forth the bulky white fleece.

“You have brought me a fleece? For a day like this? You said you loved me, Eukalos!” she even chided him sweetly.

He unwrapped the fleece and let it fall to the ground, revealing the elaborately decorated bowl. He presented it to her. “I had this made for you, my love! It will be our first bowl in our home as man and woman together!”

Bowls, cups, kraters and amphoras were highly prized everywhere on the island. Everyone kept them in their families as long as they possibly could. The breaking of a piece of pottery was a great tragedy, felt



by every member of a household. Amphidora's family did not have more than a couple of pieces that were usable.

"You had this made? For *me*?" She took the bowl, a krater really, from his hands and marvelled at its decorations and craftsmanship.<sup>2</sup> She blushed as she recognised the representations of herself and Eukalos. She stared at the etchings before looking into his eyes and asking, "What are these, my Eukalos?"

"A surprise, even to me! Okuwanos and his wonderful wife, Idomeneia, made and decorated this. Without telling me, they had the old scribe Agelawos write down sounds along the top. Those are the names of the kings and the old queen. I do not remember which is which. But this is the only such bowl in all Ithaca! Do you like it, my love?" Eukalos asked with the greatest excitement.

"Do I like it? Eukalos, I would marry you with your empty bladder, your discarded fleece and your hollow sack" — she laughed as she pointed at his meagre belongings — "but this" — she grabbed the krater in both hands again, much to the relief of Eukalos — "this is of the gods, Eukalos! I do not know what to say at such a thing as this."

"That is enough for me!" He gently kissed Amphidora's lips, carefully avoiding crushing the pottery in between them.

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<sup>2</sup> The handles and upward narrowing distinguish the krater from the simpler bowl.

“Eukalos!” The booming salutation came from the door of the cottage of Ekhemedes, from Ekhemedes himself.

Eukalos waved to Ekhemedes, who marched to the young lovers.

“You have finally come to pillage my orchards and take Amphidora to the north as booty, have you?” Ekhemedes was an intimidating and imposing man, but now he was all smiles.

“Yes, sir!” Eukalos stated with the confidence of love.

“Gods be praised!” Ekhemedes embraced them both as Eukalos and Amphidora desperately shielded the krater from being smashed by the force of his crushing arms. “This calls for a little wine, and sadly, even less water. Philona!” he called to his wife inside the cottage. “Bring some wine!”

Philona, in a long dress that reached to her shins, her feet clad in leather sandals, emerged after several moments with a jug of dark wine, mixed with far less water than everyone liked. It could not be helped.

“Amphidora!” Philona hugged her servant after she handed the jug to Ekhemedes. Amphidora showed her the krater. The third most elite woman in Ithaca — after Penelope and the wife of Telemachos, Nausicaa — was greatly impressed by the bowl. “Fit for a queen of Ithaca!” she declared.

Ekhemedes handed the wine jug to Eukalos. “On this day, young man, you drink first. Drink long!” He

smashed Eukalos on the back so hard that he nearly dropped the jug. Ekhemedes roared with laughter and delight.

Eukalos put the clay jug to his lips and tipped it upwards until the wine reached his lips. It was so sweet and strong, he only had two gulps before bringing it down. Amphidora smiled and giggled as the wine dripped down his meagrely bearded chin. He handed the jug back to Ekhemedes, who refused it, pointing to Amphidora. Eukalos gave the jug to his love, who grabbed it with eagerness and put it to her lips. She drank quite a bit more than Eukalos had managed. She *was* thirsty!

When she brought the jug down and offered it to Ekhemedes, her mouth was as purple as the wine that dripped from her chin to her tunic. Before the imposing monolith of a man took his own drink, he commanded, “Kiss your wife, boy!” Then he took a mighty serving from his wine jug.

Eukalos did as he was told, embracing Amphidora to himself and enjoying her wine covered lips and tongue, forgetting that there was an audience. When he came up for air, Ekhemedes and Philona were staring at them, smiling. Philona’s chin dripped of wine now too. The young lovers had kissed so long that they missed the great lady drinking to their love, health and long lives. They all laughed.

“You will stay tonight and eat with us! You can steal your wife from my service in the morning,”

Ekhemedes commanded. There was no way to refuse. Fortunately, there was also no reason.

“You are too kind, sir,” Eukalos said, appropriately.

“We insist,” Philona said, and she took the jug back to the cottage after handing the krater back to Amphidora.

After she had turned, shouts and acclamations were heard from the servants and slaves further in the orchard. One, then another, and another came running from the fruit trees. Some made their way to the mountain of eagles, others towards the slopes of Mt. Neriton. Eventually, one of them came to Ekhemedes and fell before him.

“What is the meaning of this!” the giant barked.

“Ships, master, ships!”

Ekhemedes, Eukalos and Amphidora made their way through the trees to the terraced ledge that would allow them a view of the sea over the terrace below. When they arrived, the sea below was full of sails, at least as many ships as pears on a healthy tree at high season. They were headed into the Bay of Phorcys. From this distance, the men aboard the vessels were distinctly visible. Odd-looking men, some with colour on their faces. The glint of their bronze spears and swords reflected the sun’s light.

Turning to them quickly, Ekhemedes blared so loudly that Amphidora dropped the bowl on the terrace wall. It broke. None of them noticed. “Get to Athena’s sanctuary on Neriton! Now!”

Eukalos looked to Amphidora, his eyes serene. “Go! Run to the sanctuary, I will be right behind you, my wife!” He kissed her again, still enjoying the wine in and around her mouth. He turned her to Neriton and pushed her, screaming, “Run!”

She ran across the rocks like a panicked deer, following the others up the slopes towards the sanctuary. She never looked back.

Eukalos turned to Ekhemedes, “Give me a weapon, sir!”

Ekhemedes laughed. “Ah, a man!” He slapped Eukalos on the shoulder and led him back to his cottage. Ekhemedes had his own armour, which he quickly put on. He gave his shield to the otherwise vulnerable young man. He picked up his bronze sword and leather scabbard, putting them over his neck and left shoulder. He hefted the two bronze spears that lay resting against the wall and handed one to Eukalos, before commanding, “Go outside, Eukalos.”

The young man moved himself out the door with the heavy shield and spear, trying to get used to the weight and appearing a bit ridiculous.

Ekhemedes looked into Philona’s eyes. She stared right back into his. Neither of them betrayed any hint of tears. “You need to head north, my wife. Get to the city and raise the alarm. Warn the king. If they are not under attack, have them send help. If they cannot, seek refuge in the palace and pray to the gods!” He kissed her gently on the forehead and then her mouth. “Go, now!”

She picked up her dress and tied it around her waist so that her bare legs might move more quickly. She ran from the house and turned left towards Neriton. She hugged the path on the coast of the channel and did not stop moving back along the route that brought Eukalos only a short time before. Ekhemedes came out with his spear glinting in the sun and his already imposing bulk even more threatening than usual.

He tapped Eukalos' spear with his own. "Do you know how to use that yet?"

"I think so," Eukalos said shakily.

Ekhemedes laughed thunderously. When he had finished, he said seriously, "Just stay by my side and try to make sure no one gets behind us — understand?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Well, my young friend, shall we?" He nodded towards the mountain of the eagles, where the pass into the lower island lay.

Without answering, Eukalos began marching. Ekhemedes followed him, laughing.