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Semi-rational geography and eschatological gemination in Homer

Homer's description of the Aithiopes, some of whom live by the sun's rising and others by its setting (*Od.* 1.22-25), has long puzzled commentators. The location of the Aithiopes at opposite ends of the earth can be explained by examining Hesiod's description of the House of Night and Day. The concept of a single locus of change between Night and Day, articulated by Hesiod as the threshold of a home, has been partially rationalized in our *Odyssey*, resulting in the gemination of beings closely associated with the sun into eastern and western groups. This model explains not only the Aithiopes, but a number of other interpretive cruces in Odysseus' *Apologoi*.

In the Hesiodic account of Tartaros, Night and Day are said to share a house which always contains one of them (*Th.* 726-765). Thus, the rising and setting of the sun is conceived of as occurring at a single place (Frankel). Since Tartaros contains the roots of the earth, sea, and sky, the gate is located at the cosmological center of the world. The association of the place of the rising and setting of the sun with the *axis mundi* has close parallels in Near Eastern and Egyptian texts.

My model assumes that this notion was later rationalized in a geographical paradigm that located a gate of the dawn in the east and a gate of sunset in the west. Thus peoples such as the Aithiopes, whose mythical genealogy closely associates them with the sun, are simultaneously located at both gates. This pattern can also be discerned in the text of the *Odyssey*. For example, the Kimmerioi, located at the entrance to the Underworld, live in a world of perpetual darkness while the Laistrygones live in perpetual sunlight. At the same time, Homer's notoriously unexplained description of the land of the Laistrygones as a place where "the paths of night and day lie close together" (*Od.* 10.86) can be explained by the originary conception of solar change. This tradition, preserved in Hesiod, may or may not represent an 'earlier' *Weltbild* than the one found in Homer, but this has no bearing on the relative dates of the poems.

The Laistrygonian crux finds a clear parallel in the statement that Odysseus makes to his men on Aiaia, the island of Kirke: "We do not know where the darkness is, where the sunrise / nor where the Sun who shines upon people rises / nor where he sets..." (*Od.* 10.190-192). Kirke is associated with the sun, as the daughter of Helios, and is therefore connected to the east. Kalypso can be explained as her western twin, since Kalypso's island, Ogygia, is located in the extreme west. At the same time, the genealogy of Kalypso, daughter of Atlas, associates her with Tartaros, the location of the single gate of Night and Day in Hesiod. Looking beyond the *Apologoi* proper, one finds the cattle of the sun on Thrinakie balanced by the western herds of Geryon, both objects of heroic cattle raids (Cook). While the mythical geography of the *Apologoi* reflects a rationalization of the Hesiodic Tartaros, Homer retains some pre-rationalized features of the original cosmology. The *Odyssey* therefore mixes the tradition of a single gate of Day and Night preserved in Hesiod with a more rationalized view of solar geography.