

## 'HOUSE' AND 'PALACE' IN HOMER

THE interesting thing about the word for 'palace' in Homer is that there is no such word.<sup>1</sup> All the words that mean 'house' (δόμος, δῶ, δῶμα, μέγαρον, οἶκος, οἰκία) may be applied to a royal palace, but all of them (and their plurals) may equally well be used of the house of an ordinary citizen. μέγαρον is often translated 'palace', or some other word with connotations of kingly majesty. But it too, when it is not more narrowly localised to the living-room, means just a house in general.

Just as there is no separate word to designate a palace in Homer (τὰ βασιλεία occurs first in Herodotus), so a qualifying adjective is never used to indicate that a particular house is 'royal' (the first occurrence of such a periphrasis is βασιλῆιοι οἴκοι, Aeschylus, *Ag.* 157). In fact, to Homer there is no sharp distinction between a palace and a house, except that a king is likely to have a bigger and better home, more sumptuously furnished.

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are much concerned with kings. So it is odd that no word serves to designate the king's palace and no other dwelling, especially when the poet so delights in describing the splendour of royal homes (for example, the description of Alcinoüs' palace and its grounds in *Od.* vii 81 ff.). The major archaeological sites of the Mycenaean period, in which the main stories of the poems are set, all contain a palace which is easily recognised, even in its ruinous state. Can one imagine a new arrival at a great Mycenaean site needing to be shown which was the palace, as Odysseus was shown at Phaeacia?<sup>2</sup> It seems highly unlikely that the Mycenaean should have had no special word for a palace, though there is so far no firm evidence for (or against) the existence of such a word in Linear B.<sup>3</sup> If a 'palace' word existed, its special significance, if not the word itself, must have been forgotten by Homer's time, when a great many houses might be found within the city wall, as at Smyrna.<sup>4</sup> There may, however, be traces of the 'palace' meaning still detectable.

In Table 1, which has been compiled from the concordances of Prendergast and Dunbar, I have tabulated the frequency with which each of the regular words for 'house' is used to denote a dwelling occupied by gods, lesser divinities, mortals or animals. Various interesting points arise from this table.

It is apparent that there is a far higher proportion of gods' houses mentioned in the *Iliad* than in the *Odyssey*. The figures for δόμος and δῶμα show this particularly clearly. But the difference is probably due entirely to the subject-matter: far more of the action is taken up with scenes among the gods in the *Iliad* than in the *Odyssey*.

Much more likely to be significant is the total lack of οἶκος or οἴκοι referring to gods'

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<sup>2</sup> Nausicaa tells Odysseus to ask, when he reaches the city, which is the palace, but she adds (*Od.* vi 300 ff.):

ρέϊα δ' ἀρίγνωτ' ἐστὶ καὶ ἄν πάϊς ἠγήσασατο  
νήπιος· οὐ μὲν γάρ τι εὐκότα τοῖσι τέτυκται  
δῶματα Φαιήκων, οἶκος δόμος Ἀλκινόοιο  
ἦρωος.

This sounds like a conflation of two worlds, the traditionally remembered Mycenaean palaces and

the little towns of the Geometric period. Perhaps each is introduced here for a purpose: Mycenaean splendour mentioned to prepare for the description of the glories of the palace (vii 82 ff.), and contemporary insignificance implied to prepare for Athena's appearance as guide (vii 18 ff.). Or perhaps, more simply, the poet inadvertently began to speak as though of contemporary houses, and then caught himself up with an attempt to contradict the anachronism.

<sup>3</sup> qa-si-re-wi-ja is not now thought to mean a palace, or indeed any sort of house at all (cf. Morpurgo, *Mycenaeae Graecitatis Lexicon* 272 s.v.; Palmer, *Phoenix* xiv [1960] 182). Nor is there any sign that wa-na-ka-te-ro can mean a palace (cf. Palmer, *Mycenaean Greek Texts* 461 s.v.).

<sup>4</sup> J. M. Cook, *BSA* liii (1958-9) 1 ff.

TABLE I. . HOMERIC WORDS FOR 'HOUSE'

The number of occurrences of each word referring to the houses of various classes of people<sup>5</sup>

<i>sing.</i>	<i>Iliad</i>				<i>Odyssey</i>			
	gods <sup>6</sup>	divinities <sup>7</sup>	humans	animals	gods	divinities	humans	animals
<i>δόμος</i> <sup>8</sup>	10	—	12	1	7	1	45	—
<i>δῶ</i>	8	—	1	—	2	—	12	—
<i>δῶμα</i>	14	1	11	—	4	9	71	—
<i>οἶκος</i>	—	—	12	—	—	3	120	—
<i>μέγαρον</i>	1	1	10	—	—	4	79	—
<i>pl.</i>								
<i>δῶμοι</i>	6	2	11	—	11	—	37	—
<i>δῶματα</i>	11	5	10	—	5	12	95	—
<i>οἶκοι</i>	—	—	1	—	—	—	4	—
<i>οικία</i>	1	—	7	3	—	1	11	—
<i>μέγαρα</i>	2	1	—	—	1	10	148	—

houses. The figures are large enough that this is unlikely to be the result of chance variation.<sup>9</sup> Even of minor divinities the word is only used three times, all in the *Odyssey*. It refers once to Circe's house (x 489), and once to Heracles' (xxi 27). Once, perhaps for special effect, it is applied to the Cyclops' cave (ix 478), which is normally regarded more

<sup>5</sup> The purely adverbial forms (e.g. *δόμονδε*) have been omitted, as some of these probably came to be regarded as words in their own right and so would weight the figures wrongly. Singulars and plurals are given separately, because it cannot be assumed that they will behave identically. The figures for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are separated for the same reason.

<sup>6</sup> Under 'gods' I have included only the Olympian pantheon, with Poseidon and Hades; the latter *contra* Page (*History and the Homeric Iliad* 326, n. 8), who believes that there is no personal Hades in Homer. Even if this is true for the time of Homer himself, it is impossible to see how the expression 'the house of Hades' could have arisen except as noun plus possessive genitive.

<sup>7</sup> 'Divinities' means all the more or less supernatural persons who are not included under 'gods'. These are Calypso, Circe, Dawn (*Od.* xii 4), Oceanus, Heracles, the Muses, Polyphemos and Erechtheus (*Od.* vii 81, cf. *Il.* ii 546 ff., which indicates, though it does not quite prove, that Erechtheus is a divinity in Homer). It is, however, possible that neither Heracles nor Polyphemos is regarded as more than mortal (cf., for Heracles, *Il.* xviii 117 ff.).

<sup>8</sup> I have omitted the use of *δόμος* once of a temple (*Il.* vi 89). If the conclusions drawn in this paper are correct, *δόμος* is in fact the word we should expect to find for a temple, not *οἶκος*. But in later times either word might be used (e.g. Ar. *Ran.* 1273, *Nub.* 600).

<sup>9</sup> *οἶκος/-οι* is used in the *Iliad* for human or gods' houses 13 times in all; for *δόμος*, *δῶ*, *δῶμα*, *δῶμοι* and *δῶματα* the human and divine total is 94 (*μέγαρον* and *μέγαρα* are omitted from this calculation as it is often

impossible to be sure whether the entire house or just the living-room is meant; references to houses of minor divinities are also omitted, because of the uncertainties mentioned in n. 7 above). Thus the total number of times these words are used for human or divine houses is 107. Fifty-eight occurrences refer to human houses and 49 to gods' houses. Thus the number of times *οἶκος/-οι* would be expected to be used of human houses is  $\frac{58}{107} \times 13 = 7.0$ , and of

gods' houses  $\frac{49}{107} \times 13 = 6.0$ . In fact *οἶκος/-οι* are used all 13 times for human houses and not at all for gods' houses. The  $\chi^2$  test (cf. M. J. Moroney, *Facts from Figures* [1956] 246-70) gives the probability of this distribution of *οἶκος/-οι* occurring by chance as approximately one in a thousand.

A similar calculation for the *Odyssey* gives the probability (that *οἶκος/-οι* being used only for human houses is due to chance) as much less than one in a hundred.

If both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are taken together, the probability is very much less than one in a thousand. Such a result is normally considered highly significant (cf. Moroney, *op. cit.* 218).

It may be felt that as the poet's choice of vocabulary was largely at the level of formulae rather than single words, counting occurrences of words is of little value. However, the fact remains that when a god's house was mentioned the poet never chose a phrase containing *οἶκος*. It has recently been shown (J. B. Hainsworth, *The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula*) that if he really wanted to use a certain formula there were many ways he could adapt it to fit metrical requirements.

as an animal’s lair than as a human or divine home. *μέσσαυλος*, a farmyard word, is used of it once (*Od.* x 435). In *Od.* ix 478 f., Odysseus taxes the Cyclops, *ξείνους οὐκ ἄζεο σῶ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ ἐσθήμεναι*. The fact that this is the only time one of the regular house-words is used of the cave may enhance the effect of the reproach (on the poet’s audience, if not on Polyphemos). It is never *δόμος*, *δῶ*, *δῶμα* or *μέγαρον*. Calypso’s cave is of quite a different sort. It is *δῶμα* three times, *δῶματα* twice, *μέγαρα* three times, never *οἶκος*.

*μέγαρον* is used of gods’ houses, but comparatively rarely. Of the four times it is so used (*Od.* i 27; *Il.* xi 76, xviii 374 and xxiv 427) all but the last probably refer specifically to the living-room, not to the whole house.

The normal words in a divine context are *δόμος*, *δῶ* and *δῶμα*.

This clear demarcation between the *δόμος*-words and *οἶκος* is likely to reflect some original difference in meaning, which survived as a vague recollection while the epic tradition was viable and was afterwards quite forgotten. The only marked difference between types of houses in the period likely to be concerned, the Mycenaean, is that already noted: the difference, only very occasionally blurred, between palaces and houses. If *δόμος* and related words were originally properly used only of the great palace-complexes, and not of ordinary houses, it would be natural that they should also be the words used of the imagined heavenly palaces of the gods.

On the original meaning of the words, the evidence from the Linear B tablets is of little help. *οἶκος* is attested with reasonable certainty (KN As 1519.11, wo-i-ko-de) but the context is not illuminating.<sup>10</sup> Palmer has suggested that the verb wo-z-, which seems to refer to an obligation of some sort on leaseholders, is connected with *οἶκος*, and could mean something like ‘occupy and cultivate’.<sup>11</sup> An *οἶκος* would then have meant originally an estate, and/or the family or group of people cultivating it, and only secondarily an actual house.<sup>12</sup>

*δόμος*, on the other hand, is generally thought to be more concrete in origin, and connected with *δέμω*, ‘build’.<sup>13</sup> It is not so far attested on the tablets, though *δέμω* is (PY An 35.1, de-me-o-te; cf. to-ko-do-mo, ‘a mason’(?), *ibid.*).

Linear B, therefore, provides no evidence either for or against the theory that at some time before Homer (i.e. earlier than the eighth century) the distinction between the *δόμος*-words and *οἶκος* was that between ‘palace’ and ‘house’.

After the collapse of the great palaces, when many people could live in the citadel where formerly the king and his household had the best (if not the only) site, any house might be a *δόμος* as well as an *οἶκος*. The implication is that the king became *primus inter pares* rather than a being apart. His home was a rather luxurious house, not the pre-eminent magnificence of a Mycenaean palace. But the old terminology would remain fixed for the gods (religious conservatism in matters of language is well known; people would feel that the house of a god could not fittingly be referred to as an *οἶκος*), helped by formulae involving the old palace-words, which would remain particularly suitable for evoking the traditional majesty of a god’s house. The *δόμος*-words are much more often coupled in formulae with a variety of adjectives than is *οἶκος*; some of these adjectives are very regal-sounding and perhaps traceable to actual features of Mycenaean architecture (*χαλκοβατές*, for example, *Il.* i 426, etc.).

*δόμος* is qualified by a formulaic adjective, usually basically architectural or aesthetic in

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Morpurgo, *Mycenaeae Graecitatis Lexicon* 365.

<sup>11</sup> *Mycenaean Greek Texts* 203 ff.

<sup>12</sup> The dual meaning of \*wic- is fundamental in the IE languages (cf. Skt vic-, Lat. vicus), and there is no certainty which meaning is older.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. for example Boisacq, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* 195 f. However, Benveniste (*BSL*

li [1955] 14 ff.) believes that *δόμος* and *δέμω* are from different roots, and that *δόμος* in early Greek has as its basic meaning a social or territorial grouping, like *οἶκος*. But there is no example of *δόμος* with such a meaning in Homer. All Homeric *δῶμοι* are dwellings in the most concrete sense, and when a household or family is spoken of, the word is *οἶκος*.

significance (e.g. *πύκινος, περικαλλής*), in a sixth of its occurrences (24 out of 144). *δῶ* is so qualified half the time (12 out of 23) and *δῶμα* about a fifth of the time (52 out of 247). *θεῖος* occurs once with *δόμος* (Menelaos' house, *Od.* iv 43) and *ἱερον* three times with *δῶμα* (Circe's palace). But *οἶκος* has only three different formulaic adjectives, which are found with it in only about a fourteenth of its occurrences altogether (10 out of 139). The adjectives are all concrete in meaning: *εὐκτίμενος, ὑψόροφος* and *πίων*.<sup>14</sup> *μέγαρον*, like *οἶκος*, has only a few fairly concrete formulaic adjectives, which occur with it comparatively rarely (in about a twelfth of its occurrences, singular and plural; it is impossible to give exact figures, as it is not always possible to tell whether the whole house is meant).<sup>15</sup>

The same sort of feeling can perhaps be traced into later Greek literature too. *δόμος* and *δῶμα* are both largely poetical, whereas *οἶκος* is the normal prose word for a house.<sup>16</sup>

*οἰκία*, a comparatively rare word, does not seem to be the exact equivalent of any of the other house-words. In most instances it means rather 'domicile' or 'home', without the actual house necessarily being envisaged. Sometimes (e.g. *Od.* ii 154) it appears to be a real plural, 'houses' or 'settlement'. We may compare the English 'he had (or made) his home in London', which simply means he resided there, with the Homeric *οἰκία ναίων*, 'who lived in'.<sup>17</sup> The uses of *οἰκία* are listed in Table 2. It shows a far greater tendency

TABLE 2. THE USES OF *οἰκία*

	<i>Iliad</i>	<i>Odyssey</i>
'Home' in general, domicile	6	6
Animals' homes	3	—
One specific house	1	4
Several houses	1	2

towards the generalised meaning than any of the other house-words (except their adverbial forms, e.g. *οἰκάδε*, which I am regarding as probably divergent in semantic development and, in general, irrelevant to this study). It is noticeable that no-one is ever said to enter, to be in, or to leave *οἰκία*. The meaning was probably never as concrete as that.

In the Homeric vocabulary, then, there are the following words for 'house':

*δόμος, δῶ, δῶμα, δόμοι, δόματα*: perhaps originally the palace of king or god, but by Homer's time used of any house. They retain, however, a feeling of dignity or magnificence, reinforced by their formulaic associations.

*μέγαρον, μέγαρα*: general house-words, not confined to the houses of any particular class of person.

*οἰκία*: 'home', 'place of abode'. A vague word.

*οἶκος*: any mortal house, with no special implications. *οἶκοι* is always a real plural.

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<sup>14</sup> Professor Webster has suggested (by letter) that *πίων* (*Od.* ix 35) may in fact mean 'fertile', its basic meaning, and *οἶκος* here refer rather to an 'estate' (cf. p. 119 above). Compare however *πίονος ἐξ ἀδύτοιο*, *Il.* v 512.

<sup>15</sup> I have not counted possessive adjectives in these figures.

<sup>16</sup> The possible objection to confining the 'palace' meaning to *δόμος*, that the word for the palace of the King of Persia was regularly *οἶκος*, proves invalid, as of the ten times it is so used (once in Thucydides, nine times in Herodotus) eight refer unmistakably to the King's household, and the remaining two may do so (*Hdt.* iv 97.6 and v 31.4).

<sup>17</sup> Oddly, this expression does not occur in the Catalogue, where in view of the subject-matter ('the such-and-such people, who dwelt in . . .') one might expect it to be frequent. In fact, however, *ναίω* and *ναϊετάω* are themselves comparatively rare in the Catalogue (six times with this meaning, out of a total of 33 times in the *Iliad*, compared with 17 out of 24 for *νέμω*, and 18 out of 18 for *εἶχον* in the sense of 'they lived in'). The scarcity of *οἰκία* in the Catalogue (once, with *τίθημι*) is probably to be explained by this stylistic difference.