Scholia On Odysseus in *Iliad* 8, Part One

In *Iliad* 8, Odysseus emerges as a problematic character for critics from antiquity. As the Greeks retreat under pressure of Trojan forces, Diomedes presses forward to rescue Nestor from a chariot wreck. Diomedes calls out to those who are retreating urging them to stay and fight. Diomedes specifically calls on Odysseus, who either does not hear Diomedes or hears him and chooses to continue fleeing. The language seems to make both options possible. It becomes especially problematic for our interpretation of Odysseus’s character if he ignores Diomedes’ plea. We do not expect heroes to abandon their comrades to save themselves. It is obvious through the numerous scholia about Odysseus in Book 8 of the Venetus A and Y.1.1 manuscripts that the ancient Homeric scholars found this issue of interpretation problematic and so they attempt to explain his actions. As I edited the scholia, I began to take a closer look at these scholia about Odysseus. I will discuss these scholia over a series of blog posts since they are numerous and worthy of extended deliberation.

To begin, I will start with a pair of comparable scholia that captured my attention first in the Venetus A for its unusual set up and then in the Y.1.1 for its distinctly different choices in organization and content. This pair of scholia each take the epithet, πολυμήχανος (“resourceful”), in line 8.93 as their starting point and then begin to detail Odysseus’s various skills and occupations. The Y.1.1 explains the issue in the typical, paragraph form of scholia. It uses mostly complete sentences, introducing the roles and explaining why Odysseus is referred to as such, alluding to sections of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* and in one instance quoting the *Odyssey*. I have transcribed the text of this scholion as follows:

πρὸς ἐπιστροφὴν τὸ ἐπίθετον τέθειται· δεῖ γὰρ τὸν στρατιώτην τοιοῦτον εἶναι· γεωργὸς μὲν γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ καλῶς ἐν πόᾳ καὶ τὴν ἅρπην· καὶ τὰ ἄλλα τῆς γεωργίας ὅπλα κινεῖν γινώσκεται· κυβερνήτης. ἀπὸ τοῦ "πόδα νηὸς" [*Odyssey* 10.32]. ἰθύνειν καλῶς· τέκτων, ἀπὸ τῆς εὐθεσίας τῶν λίθων. καὶ τῆς εὐπριστίας τῶν ξύλων· ναυπηγὸς, ἀπὸ τῆς νηός· κυνηγὸς. ἀπὸ τῆς κυναγωγῆς καὶ τῆς ὀρεσινομίας· μάντις ἀπὸ τῶν ἐκβάσεων· μάγειρος ἀπὸ τοῦ ὡς δεῖ ὀπτᾶν καὶ δαιτρεύειν· ἰατρὸς. ἀπὸ τοῦ νόσους γινώσκειν καὶ τάμνειν ἰούς· μουσικὸς καὶ ἀοιδὸς. ἐξ ᾠδῶν κάλλους καὶ μύθων· πύκτης καὶ παλαιστὴς ἐξ εὐστροφίας καὶ χειρῶν συμπλοκῆς· τοξότης ἀπὸ διασκέψεως ἀρίστης· ἀκοντιστὴς. ἀπὸ τοῦ εὖ πάλλειν τὸ δόρυ ῥήτωρ ἀπὸ πιθανότητος· στρατηγὸς. ἀπὸ φρονήσεως καὶ ἀνδρίας· στρατιώτης. ἀπὸ πολυμηχανίας καὶ πολυπειρίας⁑

“The epithet is used because of the retreat. For it is necessary for him to be such a soldier. For he is a farmer [as is seen] from the passage in which he knows well how to move the sickle in the grass and all the implements for farming. He is a ship-steerer because he keeps the sail straight (*Odyssey* 10.32). A carpenter, from the good condition of the stones. And from the skillful sawing of wood. A shipbuilder from the ship. A hunter from leading the hunting packs and from the knowledge of the mountains. A seer from the landing places. A cook from, as is necessary, roasting and cutting up. A doctor, from the passages in which he diagnoses sickness and cuts out arrows. A musician and a singer from beauty of his songs and speeches. A boxer and a wrestler from versatility and his wrestling grip. An archer, from the best ability to survey. A javelin-thrower, from the passage where he throws the spear well. An orator, from his persuasiveness. A general from his foresight and manly courage. A soldier from craftiness and great experience”(urn:cts:greekLit:tlg5026.e3:8.58). [Embed Image 1]

A total of sixteen different categories are mentioned here: farmer, ship-steerer, carpenter, ship-builder, hunter, seer, cook, doctor, musician, boxer, wrestler, archer, javelin-thrower, orator, general, and solider. In some cases, it is rather difficult to know what episodes in the epic tradition each epithet might refer to, but it becomes clearer when we look at the corresponding scholion in the Venetus A.

The Venetus A does something we had not seen in the manuscript in the previous books that have been edited over the last few years, and may indeed not be repeat in any of the subsequent books (We have not seen it so far in creating editions of the scholia of Books 1–7 of the Venetus A). This scholion takes each role or occupation and organizes them into a numbered list [Embed Image 2]. This format presented a new issue for us in how we marked up this content in our digital edition of the text. Neither the Dindorf nor the Erbse edition of the text represent this scholion as a list. Neither editor formatted his edition in such a way and neither editor included the Greek numerals that are present in the manuscript’s format of this scholion. We felt that not only was the format rare, but it was also integral to the interpretation of the text. Therefore we introduced a new type of markup to our list of acceptable TEI elements: “list.” The list is then broken down into several instances of the element “item,” corresponding to each entry in the list. This combination of markup allowed us to set up the edition in a way that best reflected the fact that we do, in fact, see a list in the manuscript [Embed Image 3]. Set off at some distance, but clearly corresponding to each epithet, the scribe includes either quotes from or references to episodes from the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* to support each occupation. Quoting is much more frequent in the Venetus A version of the scholion, appearing with eleven of fifteen roles, whereas in the Y.1.1 there is only one quoted section. We have transcribed the text of the Venetus A scholion as follows:

πρὸς επιστροφὴν τὸ ἐπίθετον⁑

Α εστι δὲ γεωργος "ἐν ποίη δρεπανον μέν" (*Odyssey* 18.368)·

Β κυβερνήτης "ἀεὶ γὰρ πόδα νηός" (*Odyssey* 10.32)  
Γ τέκτων ἀπο τῆς κλίνης

Δ ναυπηγός ἀπὸ τῆς σχεδίας

Ε κυνηγός ἀπὸ τοῦ Παρνασσοῦ   
Ϛ μάντις "φημι τίς μοι φάσθω" (*Odyssey* 20.100)

Ζ μαγειρος "δαιτρεῦσαι τὲ καὶ ὀπτησαι" (*Odyssey* 15.323)

Η ἰατρος "ὄφρα οί εἴ ϊοὺς χρίεσθαι" (*Odyssey* 1.262-263)

Θ μουσικος "μῦθον ὥς τ' αοιδός" (*Odyssey* 11.368)  
Ϊ πύκτης "πῦν μὲν ενίκησα Κλυτομήδεα" (*Iliad* 23.634)

ΙΑ παλαιστής "Ἀγκαῖον δὲ πάλη Πλευρώνιον" (*Iliad* 23.635)

ΙΒ δισκευτής παρα Φαίαξιν

ΙΓ τοξότης "εῦ μὲν τόξον οῖδα" (*Odyssey* 8.215)

ΙΔ ἀκοντιστής "δουρὶ δὲ ἀκοντίζων" (*Odyssey* 8.229)

ΙΕ ῥήτωρ καὶ αστρολογος "Πληϊάδας θ' ορόωντι" (*Odyssey* 5.272)·

“The epithet is for the retreat.

1. He is a farmer "in the grass, a curved scythe" (*Odyssey* 18.368)

2. A steersman "for [I] always [steered] the sails of the ship" (*Odyssey* 10.32)

3. A carpenter from the bed (cf. *Odyssey* 23.189)

4. A ship builder, from the raft (cf. *Odyssey* 5.243-5.261)

5. A hunter, from [the hunt] at Parnassos (c.f. *Odyssey* 19.428-19.454)

6. A seer, "I say let someone speak to me" (*Odyssey* 20.100) [Allen’s OCT edition of the *Odyssey* reads φήμην τίς μοι φάσθω on this line instead of φημι τίς μοι φάσθω, which would make it “let someone utter an omen to me”]

7. A cook "cutting up and roasting" (*Odyssey* 15.323)

8. A doctor "so that he might have to rub on his arrows" (*Odyssey* 1.262-263)

9. A musician "a speech like a singer" (*Odyssey* 11.368)

10. A boxer "in boxing I overcame Klytomedes" (*Iliad* 23.634)

11. A wrestler "in wrestling [I beat] Ancaeus of Pleuron" (*Iliad* 23.635)

12. A discus thrower against the Phaiacians (cf. *Odyssey* 8.186-8.198)

13. An archer "I know the bow well" (*Odyssey* 8.215)

14. A javelin-thrower "throwing a spear" (*Odyssey* 8.229)

15. An orator and an astronomer "looking upon the Pleiades" (*Odyssey*  5.272)” (urn:cts:greekLit:tlg5026.msA:8.78).

One of the first notable differences between these two scholia besides format, is the choice of how to explain each epithet. The Venetus A scholion relies almost entirely on quotations whereas the Y.1.1 scholion summarizes for all but one epithet. Since both scholia start the same way, πρὸς επιστροφὴν τὸ ἐπίθετον, we are almost certainly dealing with divergent traditions in how this concept was explained to the audience. Both scholia start off explaining a particular epithet of Odysseus, and then proceed to reference many other skills and roles Odysseus is known for. However, these lists are not identical and their manner of proof is significantly different. The Venetus A predominantly quotes passages, while the Y.1.1 alludes to episodes with short words or phrases. Since both manuscripts have similar material the respective scribes were likely working with sources that ultimately go back to a similar body of material. With these two scholia as our points of comparison, it is obvious that choices have been made about how to present the list and how to cite examples of each role. What is not obvious is whether the scribe of each manuscript is himself making choices in format and content, or whether each scribe received the material from his source already in the form he used. Whether it is quotation or summarization, the way the scholia explain each epithet speaks volumes about the audience of these scholia. The intended audience of these scholia presumably knew the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* so well that they understood where the quotations came from and what episodes the scholiast alluded to in his summaries without citations.

Another difference is observed in the roles referred to in each scholion. The Y.1.1 scholion has sixteen different roles. The Venetus A also includes sixteen, but places both orator and astronomer with number 15, notably citing a quotation for astronomy but not oratory. However, matching up the roles across the manuscripts becomes even more puzzling. Although both scholia have sixteen roles, they do not correspond perfectly. Discus-thrower and astronomer appear in the Venetus A but not in the Y.1.1. The Y.1.1 contains general and solider, but the Venetus A does not. Here we likely see not just different choices in how to represent material, but also either differences in source material or different choices in what to include. Differences in sources presume that the Venetus A and Y.1.1 scribes each had material the other did not. Differences in choices presume that they had the same or similar sources and chose to include and exclude information.

Upon closer inspection of occupations 10 and 11, boxer and wrestler, in the Venetus A, I discovered that the quoted sections have nothing to do with Odysseus. Rather they refer to episodes in Nestor’s life, taken from a speech of his in *Iliad* 23. Klytomedes and Pleuron, named in these two quoted sections, are firmly established as opponents of Nestor, referred to explicitly in the *Iliad* as such. The Y.1.1 scholion avoids this discrepancy by offering as proof only Odysseus’s versatility and superior grip as a wrestler with no quoted citations. The fundamental question is: why are proofs being offered that actually refer to Nestor instead of Odysseus, who is the clear subject of this scholion? One tempting explanation is that material on Nestor may have accidentally been placed here, due to his relevance in the surrounding lines. This scholion appears very early in the scene in which Diomedes rescues the stranded Nestor from the swiftly approaching Trojan forces. When such a mistake could have occurred in the process of composing the scholia (i.e. the scribe of the Venetus A or one of his sources) is unclear. According to the Erbse and Maas editions of this scholion, the Townley manuscript contains the same two lines cited for these roles as the Venetus A, which, if this is true, would indicate that the two manuscripts likely shared a source that contained this mysterious attribution of Nestor’s boxing and wrestling to Odysseus. The roles themselves, boxer and wrestler, would seem to be otherwise valid as they appear also in the Y.1.1 version of the scholion, though it is hard to be sure when the scholia are not exactly parallel. It would be worthwhile to take a closer look at the Townley manuscript since the A and T scholia are more closely parallel according to Dindorf and Maass. There is no indication in their print edition whether or not the Townley also presents this material in list form. Their edition furthermore reads φήμην instead of φημι for the quoted evidence for “seer.” It is unknown whether the editors have made a correction or if the Townley offers a different reading from the Venetus A.

Turning to the larger issue at hand, why the interpretation of Odysseus’s actions in Book 8 is so problematic, we must consider why the manuscripts, seemingly unprovoked, include lengthy descriptions of Odysseus’s skills at the very moment he is retreating. Are the scribes and ancient Homeric scholars attempting to make Odysseus seem more favorable by reminding the readers of his more admirable qualities? This issue will be discussed more at length in the next blog post, when I treat the scholia that deal directly with the question of whether or not Odysseus heard Diomedes’ call for help.

Images

1] <http://beta.hpcc.uh.edu/tomcat/hmtcite/images?request=GetIIPMooViewer&urn=urn:cite:hmt:e3img.E3-099v@0.2613,0.7764,0.6687,0.117>

2] <http://beta.hpcc.uh.edu/tomcat/hmtcite/images?request=GetIIPMooViewer&urn=urn:cite:hmt:vaimg.VA102VN-0605@0.1692,0.1285,0.2523,0.1841>

3] see attached screenshot