Scholia on Odysseus in *Iliad* 8, Part Two

After his trace horse is slain by Paris, Nestor is stranded and under threat of the quickly approaching forces of Hector. Diomedes, on his way to rescue him, calls out to Odysseus to assist him. The Venetus A and the Y.1.1 manuscripts share the reading of our modern print editions in describing Odysseus’s reaction: οὐδ’ ἐς ἄκουσεν (*Iliad* 8.97*).* The phrase can be understood as “he did not listen” or “he did not hear.” (Kelly 2007:48-49, footnote 55 provides a brief summary of the scholarship on this issue up to that point. Frame 2010:§2.73 provides a new understanding of what is happening in this scene.) The former translation implies that Odysseus made an active choice not to heed Diomedes’ urgings after he had heard them. The latter implies that Odysseus never heard Diomedes in the first place and therefore could not have known he was refusing to aid Nestor. Both manuscripts contain scholia defending Odysseus. The Venetus A has three scholia, two of which are remarkably similar, differing only in the spelling of a few words and the structure of the beginning of the scholia. The first one reads:

ὡς ἔφατ’ οὐδ’ ἐσάκουσαι:

προς τὸ ἀμφιβολον πότερον οὐκ αντελάβετο καθόλου τῆς φωνῆς δια τὸν θόρυβον, ἠ ἀκούσας γὰρ ἐπαρεπέμψατο, ὅπερ δέχεται ὁ Ἀρίσταρχος

“So he spoke, but he did not hear/listen:

Regarding the ambiguity, whether he [Odysseus] did not generally perceive his [Diomedes’] voice on account of clamor, or having heard him he passed along, which is how Aristarchus takes it” (urn:cts:greekLit:tlg5026.msA.hmt:8.81). [Link Image 1]

The second one reads:

οὐδ’ εσάκουσεν,

"οὐδὲ ἤκουσεν" ἐξηγεῖται δὲ πότερον οὐκ αντελάβετο καθόλου τῆς φωνῆς δια τὸν θόρυβον, ἢ ἀκούσας παρεπέμψατο, ὅπερ δέχεται ὁ Ἀρισταρχος

“He did not hear/listen,

"οὐδὲ ἤκουσεν" It is interpreted whether he [Odysseus] generally did perceive his [Diomedes’] voice on account of clamor, or having heard him he passed along, which is how Aristarchus takes it” (urn:cts:greekLit:tlg5026.msA.hmt:8.82). [Link Image 2]

A third Venetus A scholia, begins in a similar way to the second one, but goes off in another direction to further explain the issue. It reads as follows:

οὐδ’ ες ἄκουσεν:

"οὐδὲ ἤκουσεν" ἐξηγεῖται δὲ πότερον ἄρα οὐδ’ όλως ἤκουσεν ὁ Ὀδυσσεὺς, ἢ οὐκ ἐπείσθη δειλίαν τοῦ ἥρωος κατηγοροῦσιν ἀγνοοῦντες τὸ "οὐδ’ ἐσάκουσεν", οὐ γὰρ τὸ παρακοῦσαι. ἀλλα τὸ μὴ αἴσθεσθαι τελείως δηλοῖ καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ῆν δειλὸς τῶν ἄλλων εσχατος φεύγων καὶ τῆ βραδυτῆτι τὸ φιλοκίνδυνον ἐπιδεικνύμενος ⁑

“He did not hear/listen

"οὐδὲ ἤκουσεν" It is interpreted whether Odysseus did not wholly hear, or whether he was not persuaded. They charge the hero with cowardice, ignoring the "οὐδ’ ἐσάκουσεν." For it is not “not listening.” But rather it is a lack of perfect perception, and because he is not a coward since he flees last of all the other men and because of his slowness he is a specimen of a man who loves danger” (urn:cts:greekLit:tlg5026.msA.hmt:8.83). [Link Image 3]

These three scholia overlap in their content, leading to a couple different possibilities. The scribe could have been copying from multiple sources with similar material and these overlapping scholia may be a reflection of the vast material available to the scribe and to previous generations of scribes and scholars. However, since the first and second scholia end the same way and the second and third scholia start the same way, it is also possible that the second scholion is a mistaken combination of the other two copied by accident at some point in the transmission of the text. The second scholion certainly does not seem to contribute anything new to the discussion, and the scribe could have saved space for other scholia by not including it. It is most likely a mistake of the Venetus A scribe, though we should note that it is not a mistake corrected by any of the editorial passes we know the scribe must have made. (Allen 1899: 169-170 and 172-180 offers a comprehensive explanation of the types of correcting present in the Venetus A and a theory on how this was done.) These scholia together offer both alternatives of interpretation. The first two cite a tradition that Odysseus’s behavior can be explained because of the noise of battle. That possibility is complicated by consideration of Diomedes’ traditional epithet βοὴν ἀγαθός, “good at the war cry.” Surely someone good at the war cry would have no problem raising his voice over the thunder of battle so that Odysseus could hear him. Perhaps something along this line of reasoning made sense to scholars like Aristarchus, whom both the first and second scholia cite as favoring the latter opinion that Odysseus heard Diomedes and kept on retreating. That is not to say that Aristarchus goes as far as to accuse him of cowardice. We must bear in mind that these scholia do not use these terms. They merely state that Aristarchus takes the interpretation that Odysseus heard Diomedes but continued to retreat.

The third scholion notably disagrees with Aristarchus’s interpretation, surprisingly so, since he was one of the most prominent ancient Homeric scholars. This scholion presents both interpretations but ultimately concludes that Odysseus did not hear Diomedes. It further states that Odysseus seems like a coward because readers are misinterpreting the line and because Odysseus happens to be last, making him the only person singled out in the retreat—a concept that will be more explicitly stated in the Y.1.1 scholion I will examine below. In fact, according to this scholion’s argument, we should interpret Odysseus being the last person besides Diomedes to leave the battlefield and therefore the bravest of the Greeks who retreat. Within just these three scholia we can see a range in the development of opinions on the controversial issue. Because this scholion is both third in order and seems to respond to discussion in the first two, I would argue that the third scholion reflects a later development in the Homeric scholarship and possibly one that was working with and responding to the work of Aristarchus.

The Y.1.1 also comments on line 8.97, but focuses primarily on justifying Odysseus’s actions rather than discussing the various interpretations. The Y.1.1, concisely but perhaps more explicitly, lays out the two interpretations of the text. The views are clearly stated either that Odysseus did not hear Diomedes because of the noise of battle or that Odysseus was not persuaded to action after he heard Diomedes. The Y.1.1 wastes little more time on these interpretations but moves primarily to defend the actions of Odysseus as if it does not really even matter that there are possibilities for different interpretations. Instead, the scholion in this manuscript highlights how unreasonable it would be to accuse him of cowardice, utilizing arguments similar to those we also see at the very end of the third Venetus A scholion. The opposing viewpoint is not fully represented in this manuscript and Aristarchus goes unmentioned on the topic. The text of the scholion on line 8.97 in the Y.1.1 reads:

οὐκ ἤσθετο ὑπὸ τοῦ θορύβου· ἢ οὐκ ἐπείσθη διὰ τὸν καιρόν· φεύγει γὰρ σὺν Αἴαντι καὶ θεομαχεῖν οὐ θέλει· πῶς γὰρ δειλὸς. ὁ μετὰ πάντας φεύγων· οὐ γὰρ ἂν Διομήδης τοῦτον μόνον ἐκάλει·⁑

“He did not hear because of the noise or he was not persuaded because of the crisis. For he flees with the Ajaxes and he does not want to wage war against the gods. For how is that cowardly? He is fleeing with everyone else. Because Diomedes would not have called out to him alone” (urn:cts:greekLit:tlg5026.e3:8.62). [Link Image 4]

This scholion is perhaps the most vehement defense of Odysseus. Here we can see signs of scribal choice in content. The scribe of the Y.1.1 or one of his sources determined that the appropriate interpretation of line 8.97 was that regardless of whether Odysseus heard Diomedes, Odysseus is part of the larger retreat and just happens to be the one man named in the retreat. It is noteworthy that the Aristarchus’s viewpoint is left out entirely as he goes unmentioned. We can determine that at least some Aristarchean material was available to the scribe of the Y.1.1 because he is cited elsewhere in the Y.1.1. Not only is the name left out here, but his preference is also abandoned. Although we cannot be entirely sure that the scribe of the Y.1.1 did not have access to the Aristarchean material we saw in the Venetus A scholia on this line, the absence of the Aristarchean interpretation here offers evidence for how particular scribes valued or had access to the materials of Aristarchus, who is generally considered to have one of the most authoritative editions of the *Iliad* and commentary.

We can also begin to consider how much influence scribes and their sources had on interpreting controversial issues in the text. The Venetus A scribe shows a broader range in analyzing this particular passage of the *Iliad*. The scribe cites Aristarchus where his opinion is known and also shows an alternative viewpoint. The scribe of the Y.1.1 offers both interpretations of the issue, but does not cite a particular source for either opinion and dismisses the alternative interpretation in defending Odysseus’s actions. In the Y.1.1, the scribe has already decided that the most important argument for these lines is to prove that Odysseus’s actions do not make him a coward. The issue is complex and my third (and last) post on this subject will take a look almost two-hundred lines forward in the text to examine how the two manuscripts continue to debate the circumstances here in Book 8.

*Look forward to a forthcoming response to this series of posts from Douglas Frame, author of* Hippota Nestor *(*[*http://chs.harvard.edu/wa/pageR?tn=ArticleWrapper&bdc=12&mn=3196*](http://chs.harvard.edu/wa/pageR?tn=ArticleWrapper&bdc=12&mn=3196)*), who will provide a interpretation of Odysseus’ actions that the scholia do not consider.*

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Bibliography

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Frame, Douglas. *Hippota Nestor*. Center for Hellenic Studies, Hellenic Studies Series: 2010. <<http://chs.harvard.edu/wa/pageR?tn=ArticleWrapper&bdc=12&mn=3196>>.

Kelly, Adrian. *A referential commentary and lexicon to Iliad VIII.* Oxford UP, Oxford: 2007.

Images

1] <http://beta.hpcc.uh.edu/tomcat/hmtcite/images?request=GetIIPMooViewer&urn=urn:cite:hmt:vaimg.VA102VN-0605@0.1843,0.3051,0.226,0.0586>

2] <http://beta.hpcc.uh.edu/tomcat/hmtcite/images?request=GetIIPMooViewer&urn=urn:cite:hmt:vaimg.VA102VN-0605@0.1829,0.3536,0.2394,0.0635>

3] <http://beta.hpcc.uh.edu/tomcat/hmtcite/images?request=GetIIPMooViewer&urn=urn:cite:hmt:vaimg.VA102VN-0605@0.1874,0.4096,0.2391,0.1281>

4] <http://beta.hpcc.uh.edu/tomcat/hmtcite/images?request=GetIIPMooViewer&urn=urn:cite:hmt:e3img.E3-100r@0.0531,0.1358,0.6837,0.0495>