Scholia on Odysseus in *Iliad* 8, Part Three

As mentioned in my previous posts in this series, Odysseus emerges as a problematic character for the scholiasts of the Venetus A and the Y.1.1 manuscripts when he does not stop to help Diomedes and Nestor during the Achaean retreat in *Iliad* 8. Both manuscripts contain numerous scholia on line 8.97, in which Odysseus either did not hear or did not listen to Diomedes’ request to aid him in rescuing Nestor. The scholia on this subject and their arguments justifying or condemning Odysseus for his behavior have been discussed in the first two posts in this series. This post is dedicated to some further commentary on this scene that appears in both manuscripts about 170 lines later.

At that point in Book 8, after the Greeks have retreated and are making their stand at the ships, the poetry begins to describe the various Greek heroes who go forth into battle following Diomedes (*Iliad* 8.261-8.267). Ancient Homeric scholars, perhaps sensitive to the behavior of Odysseus after line 8.97, take issue with the fact that Odysseus is not included in this list of men. It is noteworthy that to an ancient Homeric scholar, the absence of a character provides a worthy point for commentary as much as the presence of a character. The Venetus A includes for line 8.266 the following comment:

Τεῦκρος δ είνατος

ὅτι πάντων ὑποστρεψάντων, μόνος ὁ Ὀδυσσεὺς παρέμεινε πρὸς ταῖς ναυσὶν ὥστε τὸ ἐπάνω εὐκρινὲς "ὡς ἔφαθ’ οὐδ ἐσάκουσεν" (*Iliad* 8.97) ὅτι ἐκουσίως παρεπέμψατο⁑

“Teucer was ninth

The sign is there because while everyone turned around, Odysseus alone remained next to the ships with the result that the above line is in good order "as he spoke he did not listen" (*Iliad* 8.97) because he voluntarily sent himself past” (urn:cts:greekLit:tlg5026.msA.hmt:8.182). [Link to Image 1]

This scholion quotes the problematic passage in line 8.97. Furthermore the source for this comment makes a judgment on how to interpret the verb ἐσάκουσεν there. The scholiast, by saying that Odysseus voluntarily continued to retreat, implies that Odysseus heard Diomedes and continued to retreat anyway. This source takes the point of view that Odysseus’s refusal to help is the reason he does not play a further role in the immediate circumstances—that is, he is still in retreat.

The Y.1.1 scholion takes a different approach from that of the Venetus A scholion. The Y.1.1 focuses on why some men are given more prominence in these lines (the Greek numeral that connects the line of poetry to the scholion is written over the name Teucer), and why this emphasis is no reason for readers to believe Odysseus is not a part of the action. The text of that scholion reads:

διῄρηκεν ὡς μέλλων περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγειν· ἔνδον δέ ἐστι Ὀδυσσεὺς τὸν λαὸν διεγείρων. ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ Θόαντος μέμνηται· καὶ οὐ πάντως ἐστὶ δειλός ⁑

“The poet makes a distinction because he is about to speak about him [Teucer]. But Odysseus is within rousing the soldiers. Thoas is also not mentioned and he [Thoas] is not entirely cowardly [either]” (urn:cts:greekLit:tlg5026.e3.hmt:8.181) [Erbse helpfully notes in his edition of this scholion to see *Iliad* 7.168, where the poetry lists the Greeks who might be capable of fighting Hector. That is a similar list to the one here in *Iliad* 8.261-8.267, with the notable exceptions of Odysseus and Thoas who appear there and not here. This list seems to explain the otherwise odd reference to Thoas in this scholion.] [Link to Image 2]

According to this source, the reason men like Teucer and the Ajaxes are mentioned here is because they are about to be major players in the immediate action.

The scholiast also asserts that Odysseus is certainly among the men roused to action and is not a coward. Taken all together, the scholia from the Venetus A and the Escorial Y.1.1 do not give a single interpretation to whether or not Odysseus was a coward and heard but ignored Diomedes. What these scholia do highlight is that the role of the scribe was an active one in analyzing and interpreting the text to select scholia deemed useful to the reader of these texts. The scribe is not a mindless copy machine but a scholar in his own right, using the text and the ancient scholarship to render his own judgments on the text. Therefore we have manuscripts that give more weight to one opinion over another or outright disagree with each other.

These scholia speak to the individual scribal choices. Here we can see that on line 8.266, the Venetus A scribe includes a scholion that selects one interpretation for earlier lines and discusses that interpretation’s implications on the present lines. The Y.1.1 scribe includes the exact opposite opinion. Each scribe seems to have chosen sides, or at least shown a preference for one side, and not included the opposing opinion for line 8.266. That the scribes have their own preferences for certain material speaks to the development of this debate in ancient Homeric scholarship. For the Venetus A scholion we can consider the possibility that the scholion may have been composed by the scribe himself. According to the Erbse edition of the scholia, there are no parallels in other manuscripts for this material. There are, however, parallels for the Y.1.1 scholion in the Venetus B and the Townley manuscripts. It is evident that we are dealing with either scribes or sources that were active in their reading of scholarly materials with the text. The Venetus A scholion refers back to line 8.97 stating that the “he did not listen” interpretation is the correct one based on the evidence in line 8.266. We do not get a citation of Aristarchus here, so we cannot assume that the scholion is merely reinforcing the Aristarchean interpretation as discussed in the second post in this series. The Y.1.1 scholion is similarly reactionary, but as it does have parallels in at least two other manuscripts, contemporary with the Y.1.1 but clearly written in different hands, it is likely not an invention of this particular scribe. That is not to say it was not an interpretation first offered by a common source for these manuscripts, but it is a much more difficult path to trace. It does prove that the scholia are not comments in isolation. They are often considerate of material composed and compiled early within a book, and quite probably across books.

Images

1] <http://beta.hpcc.uh.edu/tomcat/hmtcite/images?request=GetIIPMooViewer&urn=urn:cite:hmt:vaimg.VA105VN-0608@0.1906,0.6104,0.216,0.077>

2] <http://beta.hpcc.uh.edu/tomcat/hmtcite/images?request=GetIIPMooViewer&urn=urn:cite:hmt:e3img.E3-103r@0.045,0.7464,0.6486,0.069>