

Critical signs — drawing attention to “special” lines of Homer’s *Iliad* in the manuscript Venetus A

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A first glance at a typical page of the manuscript Venetus A shows a beautifully arranged, coherent structure, with the larger, darker main Homeric text in the central prominent position, and the smaller and lighter *scholia* (plural of *scholion*) or marginal comments, fitted around this main text, above, below, to the sides, and even between lines. A good number of pages also have decorative capital letters for the beginning of a book (e.g. 12r, the first page of the *Iliad*), some have diagrams (e.g. page 100v, which has a schematic representation of heaven, earth, and Hades) and still have others schematic arrangements of scholia (again see 12r¹).

In addition, such a typical page will most likely have a variety of symbols to the left of one or more of the lines of text—symbols of various shapes, sometimes next to single lines, sometimes with groups of lines; and some lines have more than one of these symbols next to them.

These symbols, called “critical signs,” serve a function that is not immediately obvious to the first-time reader of Venetus A. They provide information about the views of early Homeric scholars, in particular Aristarchus (the greatest of the Hellenistic scholars of the Homeric text, chief librarian at Alexandria from 153–145 BCE), on certain aspects of the text, such as whether a given line should be removed or “athetized,” a comment on some interesting or unusual feature of a word in the line, or if a group of lines has, in Aristarchus’ opinion, been written in the wrong place. More specifically, the critical signs link the marginal notes or scholia with the specific lines of text to which they refer. These scholia provide explanations as to why the signs are present, by expounding on the relevant textual, linguistic, or interpretive issue. The term “critical” comes from the Latin word *criticus*, itself derived from the Greek verb κρίνω (*krino*) meaning “I separate, distinguish, judge”; and accordingly these signs are used to distinguish and make judgments about certain lines of text, and single them out for particular attention.

Almost every page of Venetus A possesses both critical signs and scholia. The exceptions are a few pages which were somehow lost or destroyed, and were then



FIVE

¹ In the page (or folio) reference “12r,” the “r” stands for the word “recto,” indicating the right hand page, whereas “v” stands for “verso,” meaning the left hand page, after the page has been turned (from Latin *verto*, “I turn”).

replaced by more recently written pages containing neither scholia nor critical signs (see Allen 1931b [vol. 1]:11).

The German scholar Wilhelm Dindorf (1802–1883) published four volumes of *Iliad* scholia beginning in 1875, with a further two volumes added by E. Maass after Dindorf’s death. These six volumes contain the scholia to Venetus A and B, as well as those to the “Townley Homer” manuscript known as “T.” Although much of Dindorf’s work has been superseded by Erbse’s seven-volume series on the scholia to the *Iliad* (see Erbse 1969–1988), there is some still useful material in the introductory sections of Dindorf’s books (in Latin) dealing with the scholia in general and the critical signs in particular. In the preface to his first volume, Dindorf discusses the use of the critical signs in Venetus A and elsewhere. It is clear that these critical signs were in fact used by Aristarchus, both in his “editions” of Homer, and in his “commentaries,” which were originally separate documents. When Aristarchus wished to draw the reader’s attention to a particular line in his edition of the text, he would put a sign next to the line. Then, in his commentary, he would have a scholion describing an issue relating to that line. Aristarchus first repeated the critical sign, and then repeated the first few words of the text (known as a *lemma*, plural *lemmata*)—both of these placed before the scholion in the commentary, and this method allowed the reader to easily locate the specific scholion corresponding to the line in the text. This helped ensure the reader would correctly match scholion with text, not an easy task when a reader was using two separate scrolls (see Dindorf 1875:xviii–xx).

A group of four scholars dedicated to preserving the work of Aristarchus made excerpts of his commentaries, with each of the four focusing on a specific aspect. We are given the details in a subscript written at the end of nearly every book of the *Iliad* in Venetus A:

ΠΑΡΑΚΕΙΤΑΙ ΤΑ ἈΡΙΣΤΟΝΙΚΟΥ ΣΗΜΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΑ ΔΙΔΥΜΟΥ ΠΕΡΙ ΤΗΣ
ἈΡΙΣΤΑΡΧΕΙΟΥ ΔΙΟΡΘΩΣΕΩΣ, ΤΙΝΔ ΔΕ ΚΑΙ ΕΚ ΤΗΣ ἸΛΙΑΚΗΣ ΠΡΟΣΩΔΙΑΣ
ἩΡΩΔΙΑΝΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΕΚ ΤΟΥ ΝΙΚΑΝΟΡΟΣ ΠΕΡΙ ΣΤΙΓΜΗΣ

placed in the margins are *the signs of Aristonicus* and the work of Didymus entitled “On the Aristarchean edition,” and some material also from the “Iliadic prosody” of Herodian and from the work of Nicanor entitled “On punctuation.”

(translation from Nagy 2004:6–7)

This combined work is usually known by its German name *Viermännerkommentar* (abbreviated as VMK) or “four-man commentary.”

As mentioned, Aristonicus was the scholar who concentrated on the preservation and explanation of the signs of Aristarchus. Since Aristonicus (roughly contemporaneous with the Roman emperor Augustus) and the other three scholars lived some time after the death of Aristarchus, they were working from his written commentaries rather than having direct access to the man himself.

There is in addition on page 8r of Venetus A, what appears to be a portion of the preface to Aristonicus’ work “Concerning Aristarchus’ Signs of the *Iliad*.”² In it we get mention of some of the signs themselves: the unpointed *diple*, the pointed *diple*, and the *obelos*, before the document breaks off. Interestingly, Aristonicus describes the use of the *obelos* by Aristarchus (who took it from Zenodotus, the first to use it) in this way: παρατίθει δὲ αὐτὸν τοῖς ἐκβαλλομένοις ἐκ τῆς ποιήσεως στίχοις ὡς τοῖς νεκροῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων “he (Aristarchus) placed it next to the lines being removed from the poem, as (one does) with the dead bodies of humans.” The point of this unusual analogy seems to be that, just as one does not immediately dispose of a dead body but rather allows time for eulogies and final respects before getting rid of it, so these lines are permitted to remain for a certain amount of time—for reflection?—before presumably being completely excised.³ Aristarchus’ use of critical signs depends to some degree on that of his two predecessors at the library at Alexandria, Zenodotus of Ephesus and Aristophanes of Byzantium. As mentioned, Zenodotus first used the *obelos*, while Aristophanes added some signs, and Aristarchus further modified the system by adding some signs, and removing at least one sign used by Aristophanes (the κεράυνιον “*keraunion*,” resembling a modern capital “T,” apparently used by Aristophanes singly next to a group of lines considered spurious; see Dindorf 1875:xlx).

By the time Venetus A was created in the early to mid tenth century CE, text and commentary had already, perhaps for the preceding several centuries, been incorporated into a single document, at least partly for convenience and ease of access.⁴ This had allowed the scholia, excerpted chiefly by Aristonicus and his contemporary Didymus, to be written on the same page as the text to which they were referring. In addition, the scroll had been superseded by the codex (see Chapter 3 by Mary Ebbott in this volume), making for much easier reading and matching of specific passages to their relevant lines of text. Although the lemmata were in general preserved along with their scholia in their new location (at least the lemmata of the primary marginal scholia), the critical signs, while kept in their places to the left of the lines of text, were presumably felt to be redundant next to the scholia and were mostly omitted; only about one hundred and fifty of the critical signs survive in

²Printed by Dindorf 1875:1–2; Dindorf emphasizes that this preface is of equal importance with the scholia themselves by numbering its pages with Arabic instead of Roman numerals: the preface is on pages 1 and 2, and then the scholia themselves begin on page 3.

³On the differences between “athetesis” and deletion, see below.

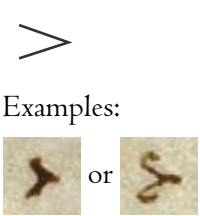
⁴See McNamee 1995, who argues that the transition from separate commentary to scholia began in the 5th century CE.

this location⁵ whereas there are approximately twenty-eight hundred of them next to lines of the Homeric text. Thus well over ninety percent of the critical signs that used to accompany the lemmata had “fallen away,” to use an English translation of the Latin word *excidere*, so often used by Dindorf and other eighteenth and nineteenth (and some twentieth) century scholars writing in Latin.

A further indication that the critical signs used to be with the lemmata is the fact that many if not most scholia begin with a Greek word such as ὅτι ‘*hoti*’ (“because”), the sense being (for example): “(the *obelos* is placed here) *because*...” with the scholion following (Dindorf 1875:xviii–xx). Thus the original commentary would have had the critical sign, followed by the lemma, followed by the scholion itself. Conversely, there are several places where a critical sign survives, but the scholion appears to have dropped out. In many of such cases, knowing the significance of the sign can help to “recreate” the gist of the missing scholion (e.g. *Iliad* I 5, discussed in Dindorf 1875:xviii).

Below is a list of the critical signs found next to lines of Homeric text in Venetus A, along with their frequencies and a description of their primary functions. I first give the Greek term(s), then a transliteration and an English translation, followed by the frequency of each sign in Venetus A.⁶ Accompanying these is a diagram of the sign, followed by one or more examples of the sign as it actually appears in the manuscript. We recall that these signs were used by Aristarchus to signal that he had an opinion or comment on the line in question.

1. διπλὴ ἀπερίστικτος, *diple aperistiktos*, plain (i.e. unpointed) *diple* (1875)



The *diple* draws attention to some significant use of language in the line, such as a word only used here in all of the *Iliad* (and perhaps the *Odyssey*), an interesting use of diction, or a word of disputed meaning.

2. ὀβελός, *obelos*, obelus (440)

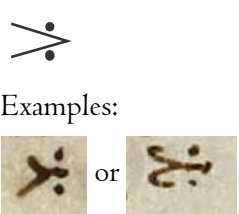


The *obelos* indicates that Aristarchus “athetized” the line. In other words, he judged it as being “not worthy of Homer.” This could be for various reasons, the most frequent ones being that the line was ἀπρεπές “inappropriate,” ἀνάρμοστον “not suited,” or περισσόν “redundant.”

⁵ Listed in Dindorf 1875:xx–xxiii.

⁶ Thanks to Neel Smith for organizing the numerical data, which are taken from Allen 1931a, itself based on Venetus A.

3. διπλὴ περιεστιγμένη, *diple periestigmene*, dotted *diple* (292)



The dotted (or pointed) *diple* indicates that Zenodotus’ text of the line in question differed from that of Aristarchus. In this case the scholion will generally provide a justification for preferring Aristarchus’ text over that of Zenodotus.

4. ἀστερίσκος (καθ’ ἑαυτόν), *asteriskos (kath’ heauton)*, asterisk (alone) (73)



The asterisk indicates that the same line occurs elsewhere (maybe with minute variations), but that Aristarchus considers it also belongs in this location.

5. ἀντίσιγμα, *antisigma*, plain *antisigma* (i.e. reverse *sigma*) (5)



The *antisigma* is used to mark lines that Aristarchus feels are in the wrong place and should be moved to a different location in the text.


6. ἀντίσιγμα περιεστιγμένον, *antisigma periestigmenon*, pointed *antisigma* (2)



The pointed *antisigma* is used to indicate that a line or group of lines is repeating something already said, and therefore is judged by Aristarchus to be redundant.

7. σίγμα περιεστιγμένον, *sigma periestigmenon*, pointed *sigma* (3)


Example:



The purpose of the pointed *sigma* (plural *sigmata*) is not entirely clear; we will be looking at the one passage in which it occurs. Suffice it to say that there was felt to be a problem with the lines in question. Some scholars think the point was written first, correctly, and then the *sigma* mistakenly written around it.


8. στιγμή, *stigma*, point (3)

Example:



The point, in the one passage in which it occurs, appears to indicate that Aristarchus felt “uneasy” about the lines in question, but was not prepared to athetize them with the *obelos*. There is another passage in the *Iliad* (X 397–399) in which the scholia seem to indicate that there were originally three points next to the lines, because Aristarchus had qualms about them but was not ready to athetize them. Subsequently he came back and wrote the *obelos* next to each one, signifying that he had at last decided that they did not belong (see Montanari 1998:16–18).

In addition, these critical signs occur in combination, indicating that each function applies to the line in question.

For example, the asterisk plus *obelos*:  (occurring 52 times in this combination, and 14 times with the signs in the opposite order, apparently with the same meaning) next to a line indicates both that the line occurs elsewhere, and that Aristarchus believes it does not belong in this location.

There is even one case of three signs in combination, *diple* plus asterisk plus *obelos*:



We note that the line occurs elsewhere (where it “belongs”) but should be athetized here, according to Aristarchus; and also that he had a comment relating to the language of the line. This brings up the point that often a line could both be athetized and also be commented on for some linguistic issue; we see also that athe-

tizing was not the same as the outright deletion of a line (on this important distinction see e.g. Nagy 2004:34–36, 63–64).

There a few other combinations of critical signs, none of them frequent, but all easily recognizable as to their functions in their respective lines.

In summary, when we see a critical sign next to a line of text in Venetus A, we know that a) Aristarchus had commented on something about the line, b) Aristonicus had copied, or more accurately, “excerpted” Aristarchus’ comment(s) in his own work, and c) these excerpts and the critical signs keying them to the text had eventually made their way (over the centuries, after many copyings) onto our page of Venetus A, where we may read them today. Thus the presence of a critical sign tells the reader to look for a comment somewhere on that page of Venetus A. As we will see, the comment could be in one of several locations: above, below, or to the side of the main text (the side furthest from the binding).

Yet, as one might expect, throughout the process mistakes occurred: sometimes the wrong critical sign appears to have been written (most often a plain *diple* for a pointed *diple*), or else the right sign was placed next to the wrong line; sometimes (as noted above) the scholion has dropped out; sometimes perhaps the sign itself has been lost. But in general each page presents a unified whole—a portion of text with explanatory notes, and devices (critical signs and lemmata) which link the two together.

Critical signs are not unique to Venetus A, although they are more fully used in it than in any other surviving Greek manuscript. And not every Greek manuscript of the *Iliad* uses this system: the manuscript Venetus B uses a numeric system of signs, evidently dispensing with Aristonicus’ system based on that of Aristarchus. Several Homeric papyri preserve critical signs as well: the earliest, known as P37 (dating to the late 2nd century BCE), which contains portions of *Iliad* II, has examples of the *diple* and *obelos*; also P51 (1st century BCE, portions of *Iliad* XX), has the *diple*, *obelos*, point, and what appears to be a combination of *diple* and *obelos*.⁷ Papyri of other Greek authors, both poetry and prose, survive with critical signs, including the works of Archilochus, Pindar, Sophocles, Hippocrates, and Plato. The two most frequent critical signs in Greek literary papyri are the Greek letter “*chi*” and the *diple*, whose functions seem to overlap.⁸ Origen in his Hexapla edition of the Hebrew text and Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible also used critical signs, particularly the *obelos* and asterisk.⁹

⁷P51 is also an example of the so-called “wild” papyri, with several “additional lines”; see S. West, 1967:132–133; and for a list of Homeric papyri, see M. L. West 2001:88–129.

⁸See Turner 1968:113–117 as well as Fowler 1979:25–28, who gives a list of critical signs occurring in the papyri of Hesiod and the lyric poets.

⁹ See Allen 1924:315–320, referenced in Nagy 2004:21.

One might also note for comparison early manuscripts (and some printed copies) of the Hebrew Bible itself, where signs in the text lead the reader to the margin or bottom of the page where a textual variant was often recorded. Like Venetus A, such manuscripts leave the text intact while relegating alterations to the margins; a similar respect, even reverence for the text is apparent.¹⁰

We’ll look at a selection of four pages from Venetus A, which together contain examples of all the signs listed above. Each page has a different collection of critical signs, some appearing alone and some in combination. I choose these particular pages to show both the variety of signs used, and also the different ways in which they are employed to highlight some significant view of Aristarchus about the respective lines of Homeric text.

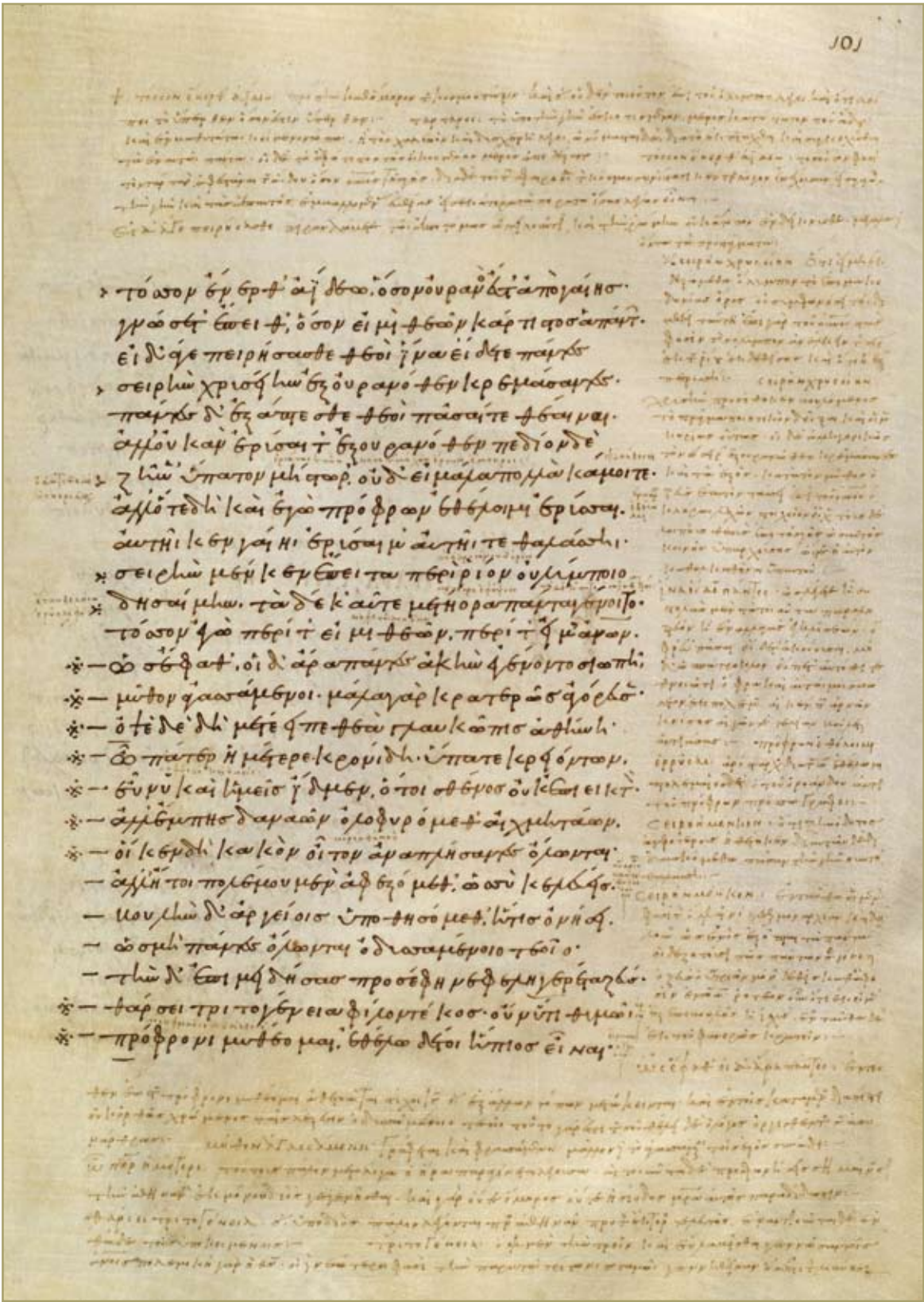
I.

Let’s begin by looking at folio 101r (opposite). An initial look at this page shows scholia generally filling the top, bottom, and right hand margins; in addition most lines have at least one critical sign next to them. Folio 101r contains lines 16–40 of *Iliad* VIII (in general there are 25 lines to the page).

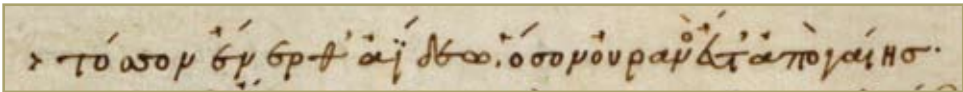
First, some context. In the previous book of the *Iliad*, the Trojan warrior Hector has engaged in a duel with the Greek Ajax, and after agreeing to cease fighting, a truce has been agreed on so that each side can gather and bury their dead. Book VIII begins with Zeus summoning the other gods and goddesses, and warning them not to interfere in the coming battle between the Greeks and Trojans by giving assistance to either side. He threatens violence upon any one of them who dares to try; then he goes further and taunts them into using a golden cable for a tug-of-war contest with him, a contest, he boasts, he would easily win. Here is a fairly literal translation of lines 16 to 27 (this and all subsequent translations of the *Iliad* are partially based on that of Wyatt 1999), with a lead-in from the previous few lines. Zeus is evidently seeking to drive home the point that he is far superior to all other divinities, even if they collectively fight against him. I include representations of each of the signs as they occur on the original page (but excluding the “*paragraphoi*,” for which see below).

- (10–15 “Whoever disobeys me ... I will hurl down to Tartarus ...)
- 16 > “As far below Hades as heaven is from the earth;
- 17 Then you will know how much I am the strongest of all gods.

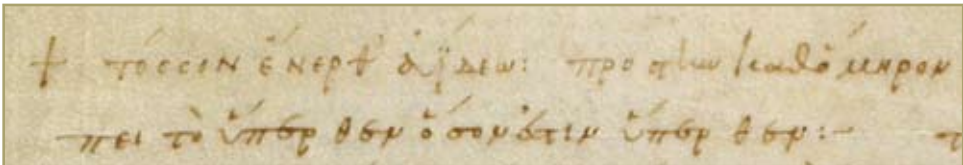
¹⁰ Lieberman 1962:38–43 discusses similarities between the use—and the appearance—of the Hebrew “inverted Nun” and the Greek *antisigma* to indicate dislocated lines. Thanks to Jon Levenson of Harvard Divinity School for this reference.



- 18 But come now, try, gods, so that you all may know.
- 19 > Hang a golden cord from heaven
- 20 And all you gods and goddesses take hold of it;
- 21 But you would not drag from heaven to earth
- 22 > Zeus the highest counselor, not even if you toiled greatly.
- 23 But whenever I myself earnestly wished to pull it,
- 24 I could drag it together with the land itself and the sea itself;
- 25 > And then I would tie the cord around a peak of Olympus,
- 26 > And all these things would become suspended in mid-air.
- 27 So far am I above gods and above men.”



Next to the first line on the page, line 16, we see the *diple* (see above). As mentioned earlier, the *diple* is used to indicate something significant about the line, such as a word or expression used only at that particular point in all of the *Iliad* (known in Greek as a ἄπαξ λεγόμενον “*hapax legomenon*”), an unusual use of words, a figure of speech, an example of contradictory language, or some other interesting issue. So we expect some comment of this sort on line 16.



At the very top of the page of Venetus A (above) is a *lemma*, or a repetition of the first few words of the line in question: ΤΟCCON ἔNEPΘ’ ΔΙΔΕΩ “as far below Hades.” Notice also that the lemma is written in a different script from the rest of the scholia, called “semi-uncial” (see the chapter by Gregory Nagy in this volume). This draws the reader from the line itself to the comment on the line. Note too that there is a “+” sign at the start of the scholion, and a “:–” at the end; these are fairly frequent in Venetus A, making it easier to separate different scholia from one another. In this case the scholion reads as follows: “concerning the arrange-

ment of the world according to Homer; and because he says nothing similar about Olympus; and because he leaves out the word ‘above’—i.e. (he should say) as far as heaven is *above* the earth.” Thus there are three reasons to draw attention to the line, two of them important for interpretation, the third a matter of one word.

We conclude that the *scholiast* (the writer of the scholion, here Aristonicus, based on the commentary of Aristarchus) felt the need to explain the structure of heaven, earth, and the underworld and relate it to the Homeric text. The previous page of Venetus A actually contains a diagram purporting to illustrate this structure (as Kirk 1990:297–298 points out, this diagram actually does not correspond exactly to the text). The main problem seems to be that Mount Olympus is not mentioned here (as it is further down in line 25), leaving some uncertainty about where precisely Zeus is located. The third reason for the scholion seems less significant—that Homer says “from” instead of “above.”

As sometimes happens, there is a lemma and scholion for line 18, but no critical sign next to the line itself. In cases like this, the reader could miss the scholion altogether if not paying close attention.

Next to line 19 is another *diple*. This time the scholion is to the right of the line of text, and again is introduced by a lemma. The scholion reads: “Because if we will not accept Olympus as the mountain in Macedonia, it will not agree with this arrangement. For while standing in heaven he (i.e. Zeus) says he draws Olympus up, the golden cord having been bound from the peak. And because the (Greek word) ἐξ ‘ex’ (meaning “out of”) is redundant.” This last refers to the Greek phrase which says ἐξ οὐρανóθεν “*out of* from heaven.” However, as above, the main issue seems to be that it is unclear whether Olympus is on earth or in heaven.

Next, we see a *diple* next to line 22. This time the scholion is very brief, and is to the left of the line. It reads: “Because (it says ‘him’) instead of ‘me,’ as if concerning someone else.” In other words, Zeus is talking about himself in the third person instead of the first; a more natural way to say this would be “... you could not drag *me*...”

Next to lines 25 and 26 we see examples of the *diple periestigmene*. This sign indicates that Zenodotus (one of the earliest commentators on the Homeric text) had expressed an opinion about these lines which differed from that of Aristarchus. In this case the scholion reads: “Because Zenodotus *athetized* both lines,” i.e. did not think they should be included in the “genuine” text of Homer. “But,” the scholion goes on to say (disagreeing with Zenodotus), “through them (these two lines)

we learn that he (Zeus) draws up all the earth with the sea.” This last part of the scholion has a textual uncertainty. But it is clear that Zenodotus did not think these two lines should be part of the text whereas the scholiast, reflecting the view of Aristarchus, defended the lines because they give us important information about precisely what Zeus draws up with the golden cord.

Here is a translation of the rest of the page:

- 28 ✂ — Thus he spoke, and they all were hushed in silence
- 29 ✂ — amazed at his word; for he had spoken very strongly.
- 30 ✂ — But at last indeed spoke the goddess bright-eyed Athena:
- 31 ✂ — “O our father, son of Kronus, highest of rulers,
- 32 ✂ — Indeed we well know that your might is irresistible;
- 33 ✂ — But nevertheless we pity the Danaan spearmen,
- 34 ✂ — Who will perish, fulfilling an evil fate.
- 35 — However we shall stay away from the battle, if you command,
- 36 — But we shall suggest counsel to the Argives, which will help them,
- 37 — So that they may not all perish because of your wrath.”
- 38 — And smiling, cloud-gathering Zeus said to her:
- 39 ✂ — “Have courage, Tritogeneia, my dear child; not at all
- 40 ✂ Earnestly do I speak my will, but I wish to be kind to you.”

Every one of these lines has one or more critical signs next to it. First they all have the *obelos*, meaning that Aristarchus thought them all worthy to be athetized, or removed from the text. In addition to this, nine of the lines (the first seven and the last two) have an asterisk to the left of the *obelos*. We recall that the asterisk means that the line occurs elsewhere; hence the combination of the two signs indicates that those nine lines are felt by Aristarchus to belong in their other location, but not here. The four with the *obelos* alone should just be eliminated, according to Aristarchus—although he still includes them in his text (see above, page 96).

The *obelos* (the term comes from the Greek word for ‘a spit’ for cooking; it is frequent with this meaning in Homer, and still has this signification in modern Greek) was

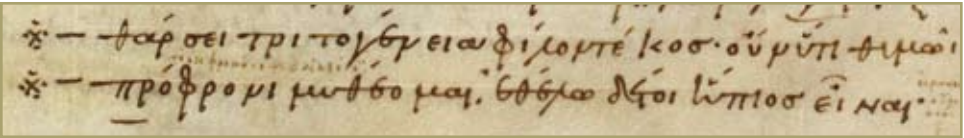
the most “drastic” of the critical signs, and it is worth exploring why ‘obelized’ lines were thought unworthy of Homer. One reason given is that they had been “interpolated” from another part of the epic poem, where they really belonged; another is that because of some perceived “inappropriateness” they were thought to be un-Homeric. Those lines with the asterisk as well as the *obelos* occur somewhere else in Homer (*Iliad* or *Odyssey*), and are considered to properly belong there instead of here (they may have minor textual differences in their other locations).

In this passage too there must be reasons for such drastic action on the part of Aristarchus. And indeed there is a scholion referring to these thirteen lines, right underneath the last line of text, starting at the right hand end: “Thus he (Aristarchus) said, and all (the rest), from here up to line 40, thirteen (ΙΓ in Greek) lines are athetized, because they have been moved from other locations ...”

I note here that Aristarchus was evidently unaware of the fact that the *Iliad* was originally “composed,” performed, and transmitted orally, and that so called “repeated lines” are a typical feature of such poetry (as well as “formulas” in general; on which see Lord 1960 and Parry 1971). He (naturally) assumed that he was dealing with a poem that had always existed in written form, whose poet would have been unlikely to repeat lines (see Nagy 2004 Chapter 5).

As far as the scholiast is concerned, the main point here is that the lines in question do not seem to belong. Indeed, some of them do occur elsewhere, and are deemed more appropriate there: a scholion next to lines 32–34 points out that “Hera says these words again a little later (i.e. in lines 463–465 of this book).” There is also a scholion on lines 39 and 40: “For these words are said by Zeus to Athena before Hector’s death (i.e. book XXII, lines 183–184); and here they are in opposition to the context.” In other words, Zeus has just scolded and threatened all the gods and goddesses, and now he appears to be contradicting himself, completely changing his tone and his intention as well. It is fairly clear that if the lines remain, Zeus “undermines his whole position” (Kirk 1990:300).

Below see lines 39 and 40, with their combination of asterisk and *obelos*. Note also under line 40 the *obelos*-like sign or “*paragraphos*” that indicates the beginning or end of someone’s speech, in this case the end of Zeus’ words to Athena.



Interestingly, at the very end of line 40, on the right, is a short scholion: “Because he (Zeus) is either deceiving her or being sarcastic with her (i.e. Athena).” This is a less drastic way (than athetesis) of trying to avoid the apparent sudden change of heart of Zeus toward Athena.

So our first page contains a large number of lines which Aristarchus wanted “athetized,” along with comments justifying his decisions, and additionally further notes on various lines. The critical signs allow the reader to immediately get an overview of these important features, which he or she can subsequently follow up on by means of a more detailed examination of the scholia.

II.

Next we look at folio 27v (opposite), which contains *Iliad* II 161–186 (line 168 is not in Venetus A). Note that there are fewer scholia, with some empty space to the left of the text; also a different set of critical signs than on 101r.

The book opens with Agamemnon receiving a destructive and false dream from Zeus, in which he is told he can defeat Troy this very day if he fights now. He foolishly decides to test his men by telling them that, on the contrary, they are all going back to Greece. They respond very enthusiastically to this, and immediately start preparing the ships for departure. The goddess Hera, who hates Troy and the Trojans, is naturally very distressed, and complains to Athena; page 27v begins (with lead-in):

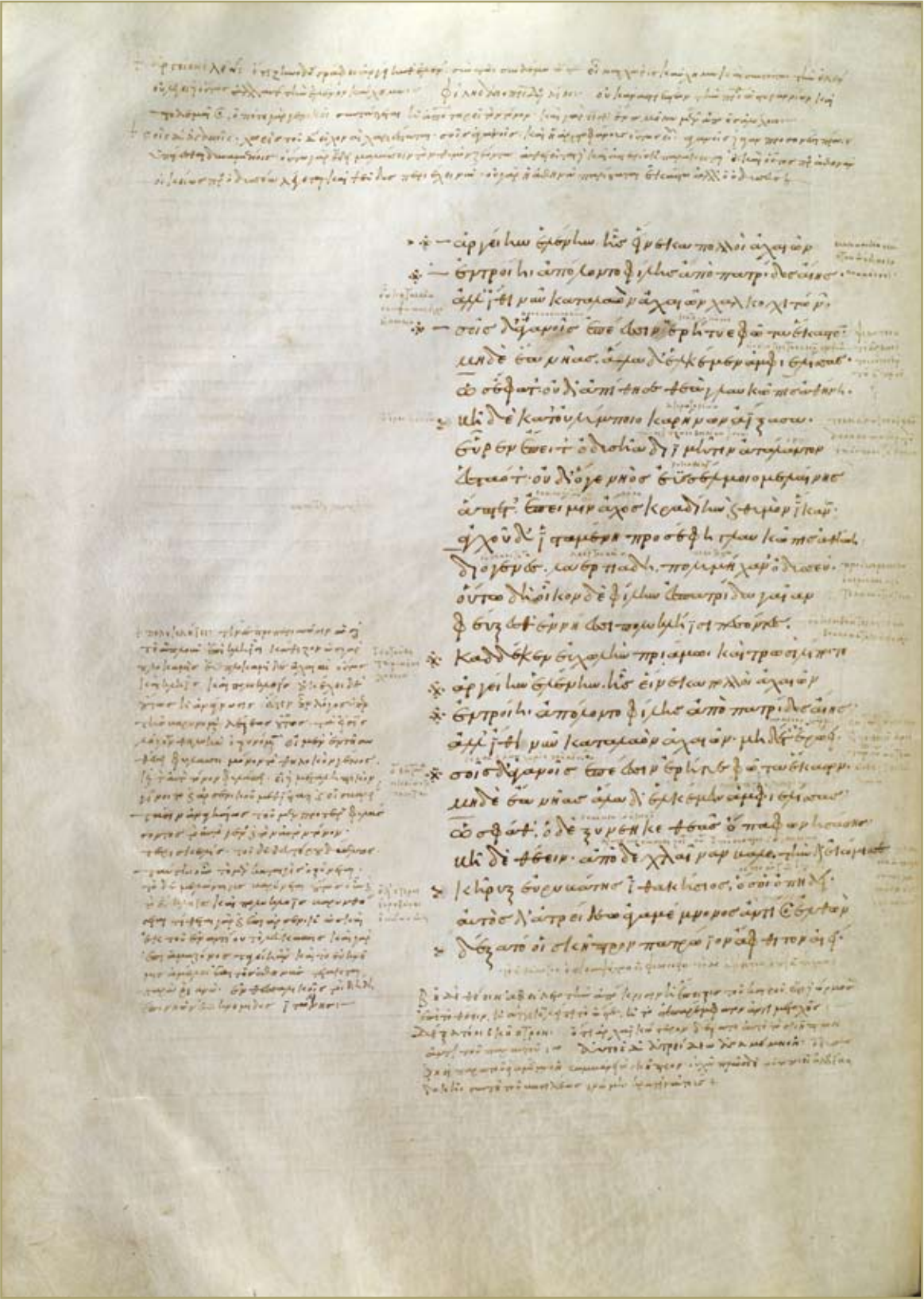
(157–160): “... child of Zeus...will the Argives flee thus...? And leave behind a cause for boasting for Priam and the Trojans

161 > ✱ — (namely) Argive Helen, on behalf of whom many Achaeans

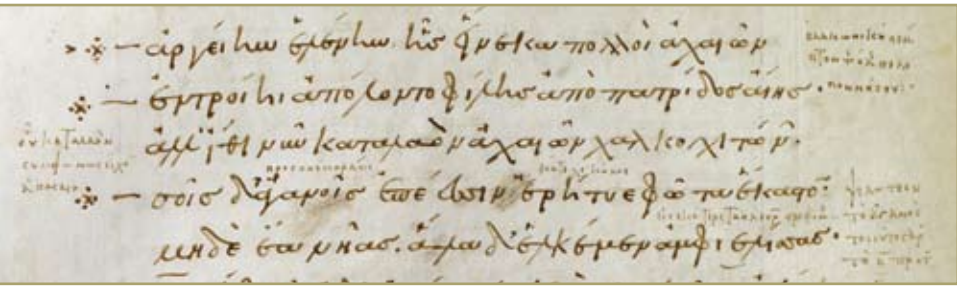
162 ✱ — have perished at Troy, far from their dear native land?

163 But go now, among the army of the Achaeans of the bronze tunics;

164 ✱ — with gentle words hold back every man,



Below are lines 161–165. Note the *paragraphos* just below line 165 to indicate the end of Hera’s speech to Athena.



We notice that lines 161, 162, and 164 all have both the asterisk and the *obelos* next to them, indicating that the lines occur somewhere else and are judged to belong there rather than here. In this case, their “proper” place is further down on this same page, namely lines 177, 178, and 180. Line 160, from the previous page (27r), is also supposed to belong in line 176. Notice too that line 163 is felt to belong in *both* places, i.e. 163 and 179, hence no critical sign (although we might have expected a plain asterisk).

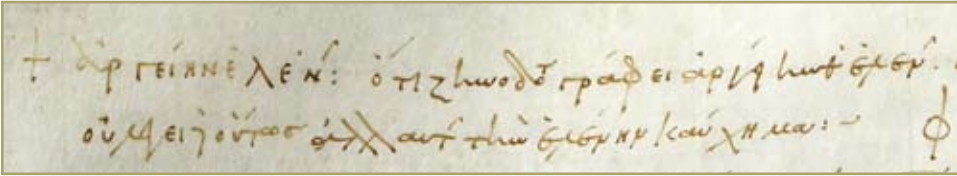
The previous page (27r) has a scholion saying “(these three lines) are athetized, and asterisks placed (next to them), because they are more appropriate arranged together in the speech of Athena (i.e. lines 176–178); but now they are spoken more inappropriately.” The point seems to be, according to Aristarchus, that in particular line 164 with its “gentle words” doesn’t suit Athena, but rather Odysseus in line 178, when he is speaking to the high-class men (see also lines 188–189); when he talks to the commoners in lines 198ff., he shouts and cajoles, and even uses his staff. We note again that Aristarchus is not only seeking a “consistent” text, but that the concept of repeated lines seems distasteful to him: he feels that a line really has only one place where it belongs, with any repetitions of that line most likely being the result of careless or even willful scribal activity—“interpolation”—as it is frequently labeled by both ancient and modern commentators.¹¹

Note further that the first line of the page has three signs together, the only time in all of Venetus A that more than two signs occur next to one line. As well as the asterisk and *obelos* already discussed, there is a plain *diple*. It turns out that the related scholion, which is at the very top of the page, concerns a reading of Zenodotus (therefore the *diple* should presumably have been pointed). The reading of Zenodotus in question involves inserting one letter before “Helen”—it now

¹¹ The asterisk alone occurs 73 times in Venetus A, the combination of asterisk plus *obelos* (in either order) occurs 66 times, suggesting that Aristarchus was at best ambivalent about repeated lines in his text.

would read “*and* Argive Helen.” The reason given is that “with the connective word Helen is separate from the cause for boasting and in addition to it”; however (the scholiast says, disagreeing with Zenodotus’ reading): “he (i.e. Aristarchus) does not read it this way, but (he makes) Helen herself the cause of boasting.” The line is singled out for a seemingly minor issue dealing with the text but it has significant ramifications for its interpretation, and in addition it is deemed by Aristarchus as not properly belonging here anyway. We notice again that even though a line may be athetized, it is still written rather than being actually excised.

Below is the scholion from the top of the page (notice the signs at the beginning and end of the scholion, as we saw above): first comes the lemma (in “semi-uncial” script) ἈΡΓΕΙΗΝ ἙΛΕΝΗΝ “Argive Helen,” then the scholion ὅτι Ζηνόδοτος γράφει Ἀργεῖην θ’ Ἑλένην “because Zenodotus reads *and* Argive Helen.” The word ‘and’ in Greek here is represented by the single letter θ ‘*theta*’ (fifth letter from the right in the top line; the word ‘Helen’ is abbreviated here) with its following ε ‘*epsilon*’ elided (and the theta resulting from an original ‘*tau*’).



Here is a translation of the remaining lines of page 27v:

- | | |
|------|---|
| 166 | Thus she spoke, nor did the goddess bright-eyed Athena disobey, |
| 167 | ➤ And she went down rushing from the peaks of Olympus. |
| [168 | <i>And quickly she reached the swift ships of the Achaeans.]</i> Not in Venetus A |
| 169 | Then she found Odysseus, equal to Zeus in cunning, |
| 170 | Standing; and he was not grasping his black well-benched |
| 171 | Ship, since grief had come upon his heart and mind. |
| 172 | And standing near bright-eyed Athena spoke to him: |
| 173 | “God-born son of Laertes, Odysseus of many devices, |
| 174 | Will you thus flee to your dear home and fatherland, |

- 175

Throwing yourselves into your many-benched ships?
- 176

✂And would you leave a source of boasting for Priam and the Trojans
- 177

✂Argive Helen, for whose sake many Achaeans have perished
- 178

✂In Troy, far from their dear native land?
- 179

But go now among the Achaean troops, and do not hold back any more;
- 180

✂Urge each man on with your gentle words,
- 181

And do not let them drag their curved ships to the sea.”
- 182

Thus she spoke, and he recognized the voice of the goddess speaking,
- 183

And he went running, and threw off his cloak; and the Ithacan herald
- 184

➤Eurybates, who attended him, picked it up.
- 185

And he coming right up to Agamemnon son of Atreus,
- 186

➤Took from him his father’s staff, always imperishable.

As noted above, this page is not as packed with scholia as some pages are, and for that reason there is plenty of room to arrange them. Allen (193 1a [vol. 2]:38–39) thinks the *diple* next to lines 167, 184, and 186 has been “corrected” in each case—they do each seem to have a smudge just to the right of the sign, which may possibly indicate 2 points that have been erased. This would then indicate a reference to a reading of Zenodotus.

Line 167 has a *diple* and two different scholia: i) on the left, a small scholion: “Because the mountain is Olympus”; ii) “A period after the (last word) αἴξασα ‘*aixasa*’; for the next (line) is not connected to the previous one.” This would not be the case if line 168 were on the page; but since it is missing, line 169 is the next line, and it has no connecting word. This second scholion is to the far right, known as “inter-marginal” (or A^{im}).

Between 172 and 173 is another example of a *paragraphos*, as can be deduced from its placement between two lines as opposed to being next to a single line: it is here

being used to mark the beginning of Athena’s speech to Odysseus. A similar sign is visible between lines 181 and 182, there indicating the end of Athena’s speech.

There are a few remaining signs with scholia on the page:

To the left of the asterisk in line 176 is the scholion “because here they (i.e. lines 176–178) belong.” Similarly to the left of line 180 and its asterisk we read “Because here it is placed appropriately.”

184: *diple*; scholion to the left of the sign: “Because (there is) also another Eurybates of the same name (see *Iliad* I 320).”

186: *diple*; scholion is at the bottom of the page, third line down: “Because he received the staff rather archaically, ‘to him’ rather than ‘from him.’”

III.

We proceed to the immediately following page, 28r (next page), containing *Iliad* II 187–212 (line 206 does not appear). This page is fairly crowded with scholia, and there are some critical signs we haven’t seen as yet.

Following on from 27v; Athena has just urged Odysseus to round up the Achaeans and stop them from preparing to leave Troy for home.

Here are the 25 lines (note that line 206 is not in Venetus A; note too on the original page itself the *paragraphoi*, not reproduced below, after lines 189, 199, and 205, to indicate the beginning and end of a speech):

- 187

➤With it he went among the ships of the bronze-clad Achaeans.
- 188

☉Whichever king or noble man he encountered,
- 189

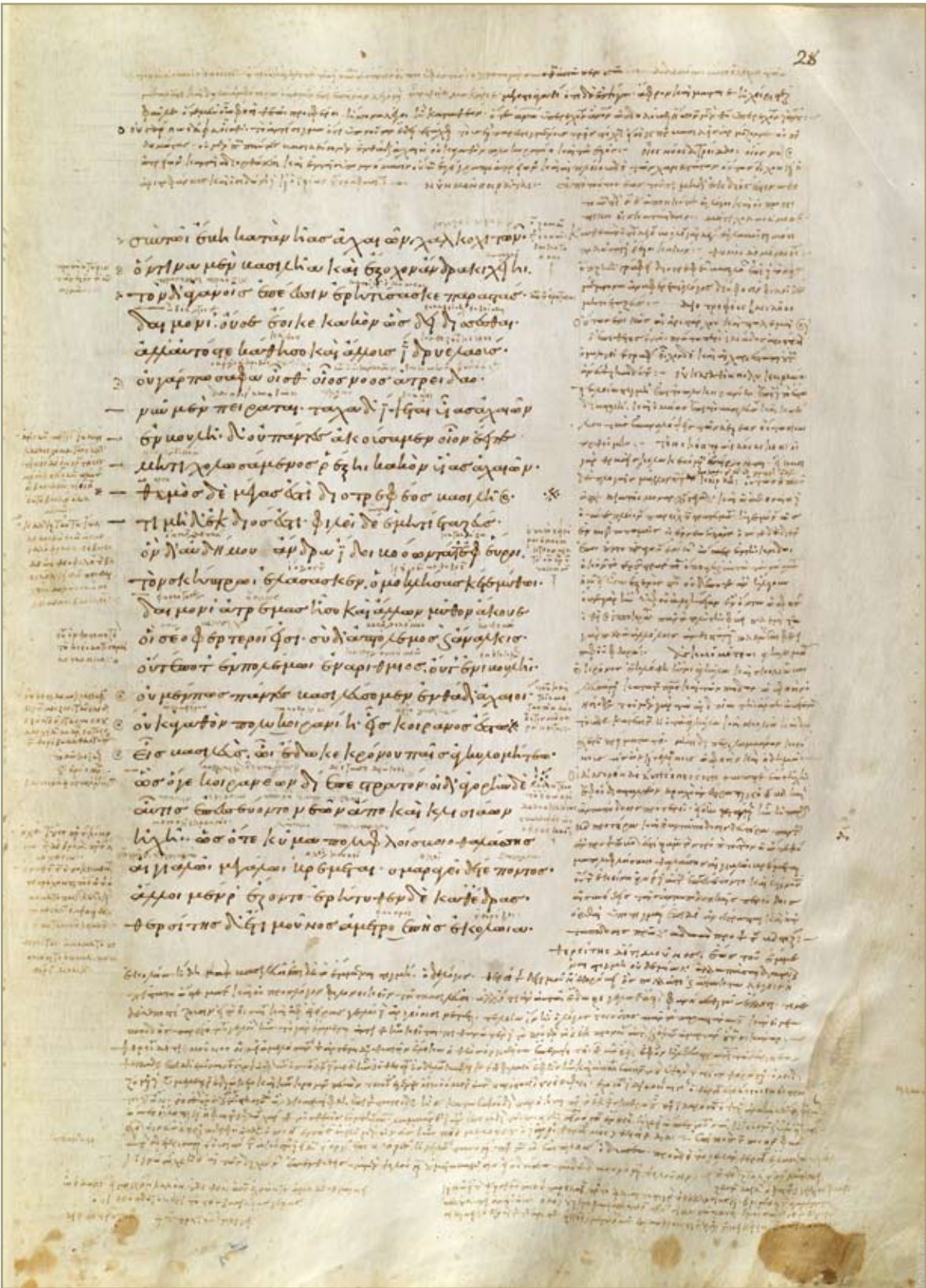
➤Standing next to him, he restrained him with kind words:
- 190

“My good man, it is not fitting for you to be afraid thus like a coward,
- 191

But sit yourself down and make the other people sit.
- 192

☉For you do not yet know clearly what is the mind of the son of Atreus.
- 193

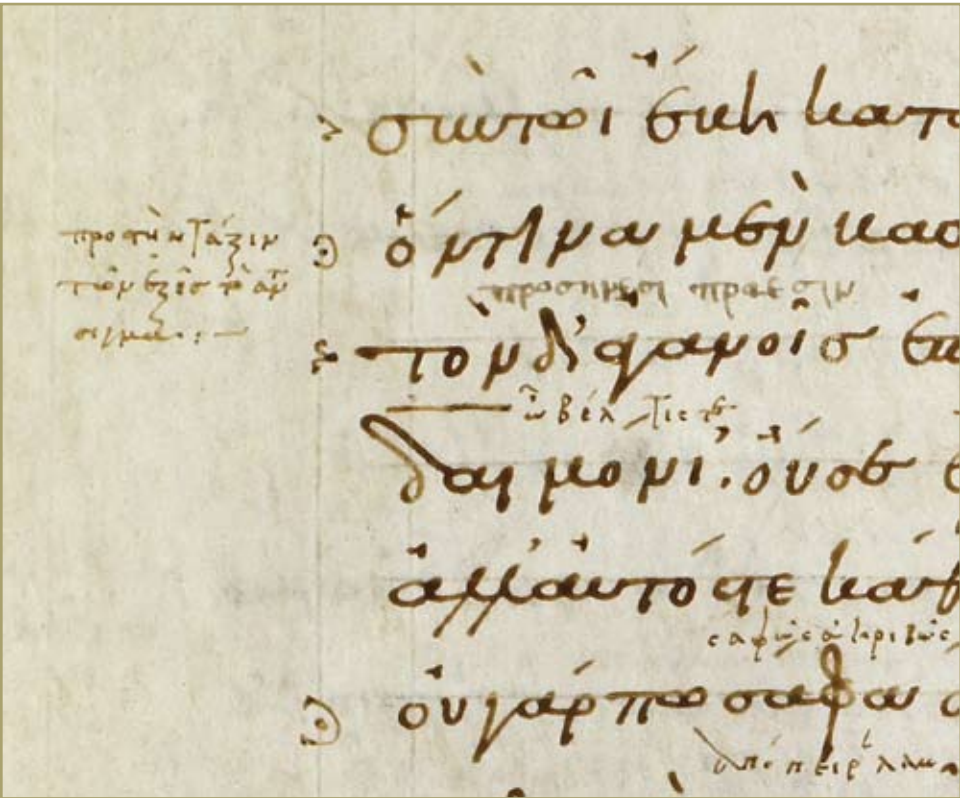
—Now he is testing, but soon he will strike the sons of the Achaeans.



- 194 — Did we not all hear what he said in the council?
- 195 — Lest in his anger he do harm to the sons of the Achaeans.
- 196 ☞ — Great is the heart of a god-born king,
- 197 — His honor is from Zeus, and wise-counseling Zeus loves him.”
- 198 But whichever commoner he saw and found shouting,
- 199 Him he would strike with his staff and rebuke saying:
- 200 “Foolish man, sit there quietly and hear the word of others
- 201 Who are better than you; you are unwarlike and cowardly,
- 202 Nor are you to be counted in war or in counsel.
- 203 ☉ We Achaeans will not all be kings here;
- 204 ☉ The rule of many is not a good thing; let there be one ruler,
- 205 ☉ One king, to whom the son of Kronos of the crooked counsel has given
- [206 *The staff and the laws, so that he may take counsel for them.*] Not in Venetus A
- 207 Thus he went through the host acting as leader, and they rushed
- 208 Back to the place of assembly from their ships and tents
- 209 Noisily, as when a wave of the loud sounding sea
- 210 Crashes on the long shore, and the ocean roars.
- 211 The others sat down, and settled in their seats;
- 212 But Thersites, out of control, alone kept on gabbling..

Next to line 187 we see a *diple*, indicating some sort of literary or grammatical comment. In this case the scholion, which is in between the text and the right hand marginal scholia (and is thus smaller than the other scholia; named “inter-marginal”

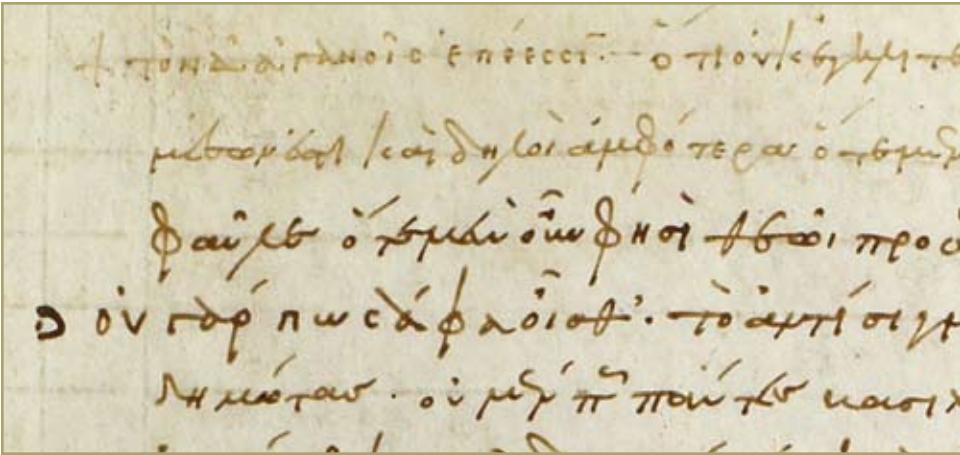
scholia), says “because Zenodotus writes βᾶς ‘bas’”; i.e. a participle instead of a finite verb. We might have expected a pointed *diple* here, since it is a comment referring to a reading of Zenodotus.



Next to lines 188 and 192 (see above) we see the only two occurrences of the pointed *antistigma*; the scholion for line 188, to the left of the sign, and smaller in size, states: πρὸς τὴν τάξιν τῶν ἐξῆς τὸ ἀντίσιγμα “the *antistigma* (is) for the arrangement of the sequence of lines.” The scholion for line 192 (this time at the top of the page, fourth line down; see below), reads “the *antistigma*, because under this (line) should have been arranged the three consecutive pointed lines (i.e. lines 203–205); for they are appropriate to kings, not to commoners.” Then, just to be sure the meaning is clear, the scholiast quotes line 203 and the first half of line 204, “and the rest.” This scholion is unusual in that there is a critical sign placed next to it, not just next to the line of text (see below). And this sign, the dotted *antistigma*, differs in its appearance, and in the position of the point, from the two dotted *antistigmata* below next to the lines of text. Perhaps it was added at a later date, by a scribe using a different reed and ink.¹²

Note the lemma to the right of the sign, words repeated from the text of line 192: οὐ γὰρ πω κάφα οἶσθ’ “for you do not yet know clearly...”

¹² Thanks to Myriam Hecquet for this observation.



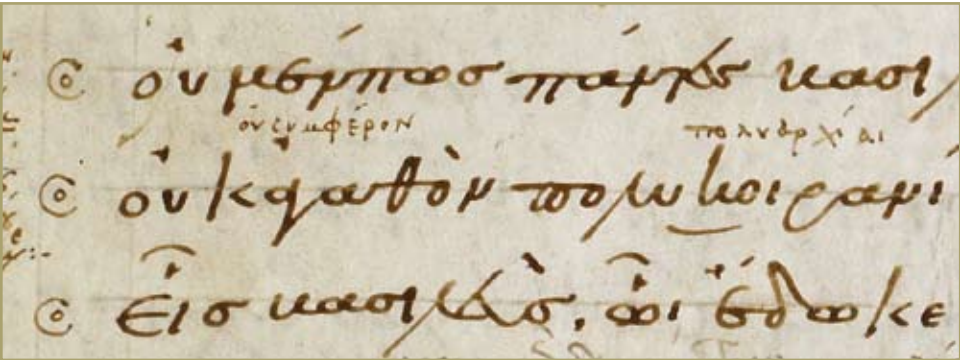
Line 189 has a *diple*, drawing attention to a scholion discussing a whether τὸν ‘ton’ and δὲ ‘de’ should be written separately or as one word.

Next to each of the five consecutive lines 193–197 we find an *obelos*, indicating that these lines were deemed by Aristarchus worthy of athetesis. The scholion continues: “because the words are inappropriate, and not suitable for a sense of decorum”; in other words, Agamemnon as leader is demeaned by these lines.

In the midst of these five lines, we find line 196 with a pointed *diple*, indicating a comment of Zenodotus. Interestingly, in this line Venetus A reads “of a Zeus-nurtured king,” whereas most manuscripts, and our usual printed texts, read the plural “of Zeus-nurtured kings.” The scholion tells us that (unlike the text of Venetus A), “Zenodotus writes the plural. But (the scholiast, Aristonicus, says, disagreeing with Zenodotus) the expression refers to Agamemnon, because he (Homer) says (in the next line) ‘... Zeus loves *him*.’” An additional scholion adds that “Aristarchus’ copies, and everyone else’s except that of Zenodotus, have the singular.”

To the left of each of the lines 203–205 (see below) we see a most unusual sign (only these three times in Venetus A)—a pointed *sigma*. The scholion, in this case in the right intermarginal area, says “The point (*stigma*) is placed next to this line and to the following two lines (although these “points” look rather like tiny circles).” As there are not only points but *sigmata*, it appears that the *sigmata* were added later, perhaps to show where the lines were coming from that were to be transferred to where the second *antistigma* was. However, here the *sigmata* and their “points” have the same ink shade (unlike the example above on this page), indicating that the scribe of Venetus A wrote both at the same time, having found both in his exemplar. Alternatively, the scribe may have found only the “points” and himself added the *sigmata*.¹³ There is also an asterisk to the right of line 204, just below the scholion.

Presumably this is included to draw attention to the significant change in line ordering that is being indicated (rather than its “regular” use).

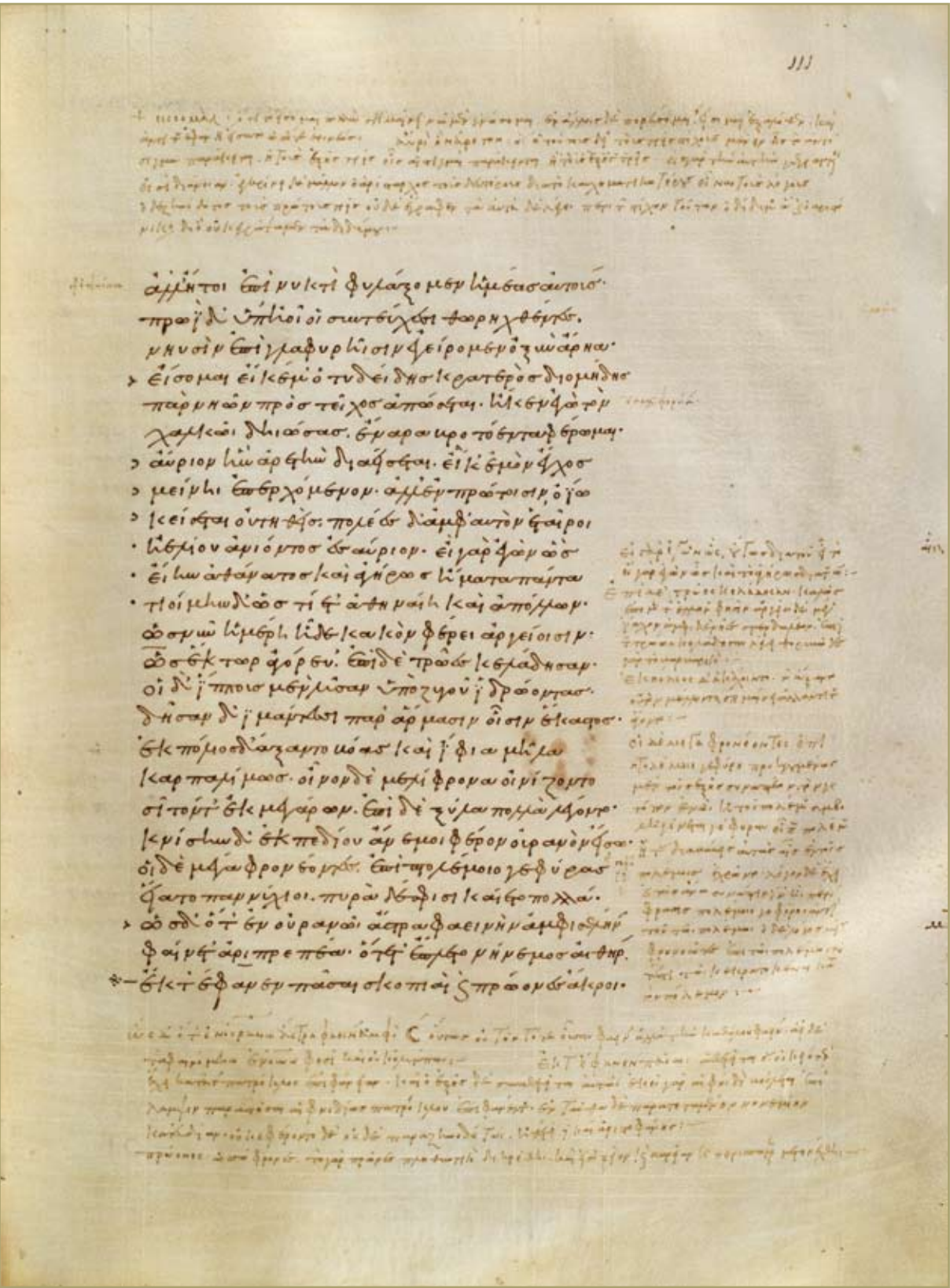


IV.

Finally, we look briefly at page 111r (opposite), containing *Iliad* VIII 529–557 (lines 548 and 550–552 are not in Venetus A, nor any other manuscripts; they occur in a dialogue of Plato). This page, like 27v, is less crowded with scholia than some pages, and it has fewer critical signs; however once again we find signs we haven’t seen before, and in fact one that only occurs on this page.

Here is a translation of the first few lines. Hector is making a speech to the Trojans, as night is falling; he is encouraging them for battle the next day.

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 529 | “However for the night we will protect ourselves; |
| 530 | But in the morning with the dawn, girded with our armor, |
| 531 | Let us raise sharp battle at the hollow ships. |
| 532 | ➤ I will know whether the son of Tydeus, mighty Diomedes, |
| 533 | Will thrust me away from the ships to the wall, or whether I |
| 534 | Will kill him with bronze and carry off his blood-soaked spoils. |
| 535 | ○ Tomorrow he will know his valor, whether he can |
| 536 | ○ Endure my approaching spear. But among the foremost, I think, |
| 537 | ○ He will lie pierced by a spear, and many comrades around |



¹³ Thanks again to Myriam Hecquet for these observations.

- him,
- 538

•

When the sun rises tomorrow. I myself wish
- 539

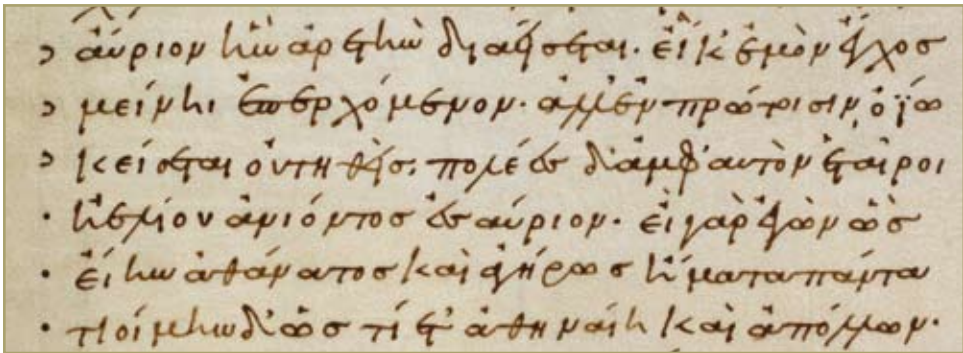
•

That I might be immortal and ageless all my days,
- 540

•

And that I might be honored just as Athena and Apollo,
- 541

As now this day brings evil upon the Argives.”



Next to lines 535–537 (see above) are three of the five examples of the plain *anti-sigma*, and below that, in lines 538–540, the only three occurrences of the plain *stigma* or point (this time looking more like real points). The sense seems to be that some of these lines don’t belong here, for one reason or another, but the scholiast is unclear as to precisely why.

The scholia report that Aristarchus, unusually, is unable to decide which of the two groups of three lines should be kept and which dispensed with, since both say the same sort of thing. The scholion goes on to say that Aristarchus judged the second set of lines (538–541: it appears that Aristarchus may not have read line 540) to be “excessively boastful.” Kirk (1990:338–339) believes that the three points have been mistakenly moved from lines 532–534; those lines certainly are more similar to 535–537; however this would make 535–537 the “excessively boastful” lines, which seems less convincing. M. L. West (2001:204) takes a different position, believing that lines 535–537 should be excised. At any rate, this is not only a page with an extremely unusual collection of critical signs, but a page with lines that even Aristarchus himself seemed unable to make up his mind about.

As we have seen, the critical signs are an integral part of each page of Venetus A. They are not unnecessarily obtrusive, but nevertheless convey a good deal of significant information to the careful reader. One could imagine the pages not looking remarkably different without the critical signs, and yet they serve such an important

purpose—helping to link the Homeric text with the mass of scholia that otherwise might prove overwhelming. At a glance one can see which lines occur in other locations, which were deemed “dispensable,” and which had comments that one could choose to stop and examine.

The reader of Venetus A, no doubt a careful and learned reader, would have had the choice of reading quickly through a passage for enjoyment, or else of engaging in a “close reading,” studying each line carefully, examining (and judging) the reasons for the athetized lines, stopping and reading every comment, every note, as he or she savored the richness of the commentary on virtually every page—something now possible for us modern readers as well, thanks to the intersection of the latest technology with the best of ancient scholarship.