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# The Wanderer, the Philosopher and the Exegete. Receptions of the *Odyssey* in Twelfth-century Byzantium

## Summary

This paper will explore the reception of Odysseus' wanderings in twelfth-century Byzantium. Taking into account the Homeric writings of both Eustathius of Thessaloniki and John Tzetzes, I aim to demonstrate that the association between journey and knowledge was extremely productive in the context of the intellectual debates of the time. More specifically, I will show that the development of this traditional theme allowed the major Byzantine scholars to express their own standpoint on crucial matters such as the definition of philosophy, as well as to elaborate on their conception of Homer and their own activity as Homeric exegetes.

Keywords: Homer; Tzetzes; Eustathius; Byzantine scholarship; philosophy; Plato

Der vorliegende Artikel befasst sich mit der Rezeption der Odyssee im Byzantinischen Reich des 12. Jahrhunderts. Ausgehend von den Interpretationen Homers durch Eustathius von Thessaloniki und John Tzetzes zeige ich, dass die Verbindung zwischen Reisen und Wissen im Zentrum der intellektuellen Debatten der Epoche stand. Die Auseinandersetzung mit dieser traditionell wichtigen Thematik erlaubte es namhaften byzantinischen Gelehrten ihren Überzeugungen in wichtigen Fragen wie der Definition der Philosophie Ausdruck zu verleihen. Darüber hinaus bot sie ihnen die Möglichkeit, ihre Auffassung Homers und der eigenen Tätigkeit als Exegeten Homers zu erläutern.

Keywords: Homer; Tzetzes; Eustathius; byzantinische Gelehrsamkeit; Philosophie; Platon

## I Part one: Eustathius of Thessaloniki

Before leaving Constantinople to become archbishop of Thessaloniki, Eustathius wrote a long commentary on Dionysius Periegetes, which he presented to John Doukas at some point after 1168.<sup>1</sup>

In an interesting passage of the introduction to this work, the Byzantine scholar expounds on the usefulness and prestige of the *periēgēsis*.<sup>2</sup> The Ancients – he remarks – considered travelling an activity befitting the greatest of heroes: those who spent their lifetime exploring the world, such as Dionysus and Heracles were the most admired. Eustathius goes on to state that travelling is also a *philosophon* and *basilikon chrēma* (an activity suitable for philosophers and kings). To further persuade his reader, the scholar mentions two kings that were renowned for their travels, namely Alexander the Great and the Pharaoh Sesostris. He then moves on to the wanderings of Odysseus and Plato, whom he equally defines as ‘philosophers’

Καὶ Πλάτων δὲ, φασὶ, τοῦ πράγματος ἐρώων, οὐ μόνον ἐπὶ Σικελίαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπ’ Αἴγυπτον ἀπεδήμησε. Σεμνύνει δὲ καὶ τὸν Ὀμηρικὸν Ὀδυσσεῖα οὐχ ἧττον τῶν ἄλλων τὸ πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων ἰδεῖν ἄστεα καὶ νόον γνῶναι. Καὶ οὕτω συνάγουσιν οἱ παλαιοὶ ἐκ πολλῶν τὴν περιήγησιν φιλόσοφον εἶναι τι χρῆμα καὶ βασιλικόν.<sup>3</sup>

They say that also Plato, who was fond of the thing (i.e. the *periēgēsis*), travelled not only to Sicily but also to Egypt. Having seen the cities of many men and having known their mind, the Homeric Odysseus deserves to be honoured no less than the others. Thus, on the basis of many considerations, the Ancients conclude that exploring and describing the world is an activity suitable for philosophers and kings.<sup>4</sup>

If such a definition applies perfectly to the great Athenian thinker, it may sound more surprising when used to refer to the protagonist of the *Odyssey*. Of course, Eustathius was aware of the exegetic tradition interpreting the journeys of Odysseus as the allegory of

1 For the date of composition of the *Parekbolai* on Dionysius Periegetes see Cullhed 2014, 7<sup>\*</sup>–8<sup>\*</sup>, who briefly discusses previous studies. On Eustathius’ life and works see a recent overview with an extensive bibliography in Ronchey and Cesaretti 2014, 7<sup>\*</sup>–30<sup>\*</sup>.  
2 Eust. *in Dion. per.* epist. 482–490 Müller (Ἱστοροῦσι δὲ καὶ ὅτι διὰ τὸ ταύτης χρῆσιμον Ἡρακλῆς τε καὶ Διόνυσος ἐξετόπιζον ἑαυτοὺς, τὴν τῶν κλιμάτων γνῶσιν σπουδάζοντες. Καὶ ὅτι καὶ Ἀλέξανδρος διὰ

τοῦτο ἐφιλοτιμήσατο τὸν ἦψον ἱστορῆσαι ὠκεανόν. Καὶ Σέσωστρις δὲ, φασίν, ὁ Αἰγύπτιος πολλὴν περιεληλυθὼς γῆν πίναξί τε δέδωκε τὴν περίοδον, καὶ τῆς τῶν πινάκων ἀναγραφῆς οὐκ Αἰγυπτίους μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ Σκύθαις εἰς θαῦμα μεταδοῦναι ἠξίωσε).

3 Eust. *in Dion. per.* epist. 490–496.

4 Unless stated otherwise, all translations have been done by the article’s author.

the philosopher's struggle to reach authentically philosophical knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, despite his reliance on other sources, the learned archbishop provides an original interpretation of the connection between Odysseus, his wanderings, and his superior wisdom. Several examples from Eustathius' writings will help illustrate how he came to develop such an interpretation.

### 1.1 The wisest of the Achaeans

The long-established association between travelling and knowledge allows Eustathius to resolve an endless debate that had captivated generations of scholars and continued to intrigue his contemporaries and colleagues, including Tzetzes. For centuries, poets, writers, and exegetes had been trying to decide which hero truly represented the Homeric ideal of wisdom and eloquence. Needless to say, the two favored candidates had always been Nestor and Odysseus, the wise King of Pylos and the resourceful son of Laertes, respectively.<sup>6</sup>

This age-old debate was mostly prompted by the second book of the *Iliad*, where the two heroes played an essential role in preventing the untimely flight of the Achaean army.<sup>7</sup> In such a crucial moment, it was Odysseus and Nestor who managed to both calm and rebuke their confused comrades, thus providing an essential contribution to the final victory of the Greeks. In commenting on this very episode, Eustathius cannot help but participate in the controversy over who of the two heroes can claim supremacy. After a thorough analysis of the form and contents of the two speeches, Eustathius has no doubts: despite his evident talent and cleverness, Odysseus cannot surpass the admirable Nestor, who is able to take up and improve not only the style but also the ideas of his younger rival's speech.

5 Philosophers' interest in the *sophos* Odysseus dates back to Plato, and it would be impossible to summarize here the multifarious interpretations adopted by each philosophical and exegetical school. For a general overview see Montiglio 2011 and Jouanno 2013 (see especially pp. 191–222 on the Cynic and Stoic interpretation and pp. 223–231 on the Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean Odysseus). For Odysseus-*philosophos* see also the dated but still interesting study by Buffière 1973, 365–391 (with some insightful references to Eustathius' *Parekbolai*). On the reception of Odysseus by Neoplatonic and Christian interpreters see Lamberton and Keaney 1992, 126–130 and Pépin 1982, 3–18 (a useful comparison between the Neoplatonic and Christian Odysseus).

6 On the continuous competition between the two

heroes, see e.g. Pl. *Hipp. min.* 364c, 3–7, Lib. *Pro-gymn.* 8, 3, 12, 4–6 and the anonymous commentary on Dionysius Thrax's *Ars Grammatica* (*Grammatici Graeci*, vol. 1.3, p. 371, 29–33 Hilgard: Γίνεται δὲ τὸ συγκριτικὸν προὔποκεμένου τοῦ ἐν συγκρίσει πράγματος, οἷον ἄνδρειότερος Ἀχιλλεὺς Αἴαντος ἢ προὔποκεμένης τῆς ἀνδρείας, καὶ ἴσφοτέρως Ὀδυσσεὺς Νέστωρ ἢ προὔποκεμένης τῆς σοφίας).

7 On the traditional comparison between Nestor's and Odysseus' speeches in *Il.* 2 see e. g. Ps.-Dion. Hal. *Ars Rhet.* 8, 12, 29–31 (ἴθην καὶ παρέσχετο τοῖς πολλοῖς ζήτησιν, πότερος ἀμείων ῥήτωρ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις, Ὀδυσσεὺς ἢ Νέστωρ· καὶ μαρτύρονται γὰρ τὸν Ὅμηρον ἐκάτεροι λέγοντα, ὡς τὸν μὲν Ὀδυσσεὶα ἐπήνεσεν τὸ πλῆθος, τὸν δὲ Νέστορα ὁ Ἀγαμέμνων).

ὥστε δύο τούτων ὄντων ῥητόρων τοῖς Ἕλλησι, τὸν μὲν Ὀδυσσεύα καλὸν εἶναι, ἄριστον δὲ τὸν Νέστορα, ὅσγε καὶ πολλὰ τῶν τοῦ Ὀδυσσεύος νοημάτων, ὡς εἴρηται, διορθώσεται ἐπισκευάζων καὶ ἐκ ταπεινοῦ ἀνάγων εἰς τὸ σεμνότερον, καθὰ δειχθήσεται, Ὀμήρου κἀνταῦθα φιλοτίμως δεικνύντος, ὡς τὸ αὐτὸ νόημα οὕτω μὲν ῥηθὲν οὐ πάνυ καλὸν ἔσται, οὕτω δὲ λεχθὲν ἔσται ἄριστον.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, being Odysseus and Nestor the rhetors of the Greeks, we can conclude that the former is skilled, but the latter, Nestor, is the best. Indeed, he shall correct many of Odysseus' ideas both by rephrasing them, as it has just been said, and by elevating them from their original ordinariness, as it will be shown later on. In this case, too, the ambitious Homer shows that the same idea, if phrased in a certain way, is not very well expressed, whereas it will be perfectly formulated when phrased in another way.

However, the archbishop's initial assessment of Odysseus' skills seems to gradually evolve over the course of the *Parekbolai on the Iliad*<sup>9</sup>. When analyzing the speech that the son of Laertes addresses to Achilles in *Iliad* 19,<sup>10</sup> Eustathius observes that Odysseus seems to aim to outshine the older Nestor in this episode, thus making up for the defeat he had suffered in book two. According to the exegete, even though Nestor still remains an unsurpassed model of rhetorical talent and Odysseus cannot beat him, Odysseus can at least compete with him, showing skills that at the beginning of the *Iliad* had not yet been refined.

Ὅρα δὲ καὶ ὡς ἐν μὲν τῇ βῆτα ῥαψωδίᾳ ὑπὸ Νέστορος Ὀδυσσεὺς ἠττηται, κρατηθεὶς τὸν περὶ τὰς αὐτάς (5) ἐννοίας ἀγῶνα, ἐνταῦθα δὲ αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν παρευδοκμεῖ, ἀμείνω τὴν δευτέραν δημηγορίαν καὶ στρυφνοτέραν ἐκθέμενος, φιλοτιμησάμενος τοῦτο, ἵνα μὴ τὸν οἰκεῖον ἀπελέγξῃ ἔπαινον.<sup>11</sup>

Observe that, if in the second book Odysseus is outshone by Nestor in a rhetorical competition over the expression of the same concepts, in this case, he manages to surpass himself, since his retort is better phrased and more severe (than Achilles' speech). Odysseus is compelled to do so by his own ambition, lest his former self-praise be disclaimed.

8 Eust. in *Il.* 1.336.25–30 van der Valk.

9 Eustathius authored two lengthy commentaries on the Homeric poems, the *Parekbolai on the Iliad*, edited by M. van der Valk, and the *Parekbolai on the Odyssey*, edited by J. G. Stallbaum (E. Cullhed is currently working on a new edition of the latter work, part of which has been published as a PhD thesis:

see Cullhed 2014). In this paper, when alluding to both commentaries, I refer to them simply as the *Parekbolai*. Otherwise, I always specify which of the two commentaries I am dealing with.

10 Hom. *Il.* 19.154–237.

11 Eust. in *Il.* 4.317.5–8.

In Eustathius' interpretation, therefore, Odysseus is far from being a fixed character. In the course of the *Iliad*, the hero is able to evolve, gradually acquiring the experience he lacked at the beginning of the poem.

The final and decisive transformation, however, takes place in the *Odyssey*. In a passage clearly reminiscent of the commentary on Dionysius Periegetes, Eustathius insists again on the importance of travelling, the most enriching experience of all. After again quoting the example of Dionysus and Heracles, who spent their lives exploring the world, Eustathius proceeds to examine the well-known comparison between Nestor and Odysseus. This time, however, it is the son of Laertes that manages to eclipse the old King of Pylos.

Σημείωσαι δὲ ὅτι πλείω ἐμπειρίαν ὁ ποιητῆς ἐνταῦθα τῷ Ὀδυσσεῖ ἐπιμαρτύρεται ἢ περ ἐν Ἰλιάδι τῷ Νέστορι. ἐκεῖνος μὲν γὰρ, μιᾶ ἐναβρύνεται ὁδῷ τῇ ἐκ τῆς Πύλου εἰς τοὺς Θετταλικοὺς Λαπίθας (*Il.* 262–270). Ὀδυσσεὺς δὲ, πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω· (*Od.* 1.3) πλὴν οὐκ ἤδη τοῦ Νέστορος ἦν ὁ Ὀδυσσεὺς ἐν Ἰλιάδι σοφώτερος, οὐπω γὰρ ἦν τότε τοιοῦτος, ἀλλὰ μετὰ Τροίας ἄλωσιν, γῆν τε μακρὰν ἐπῆλθε, καὶ πολλὴν ἐμπειρίαν συνήγαγεν. οὐ μόνον πλανηθεῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλὰ καὶ οὐχ' ἀπλῶς πολλὰ, ἀλλὰ καὶ μάλα πολλὰ (cp. *Od.* 1.1). εἴη δ' ἂν ὅμοιος τῷ Ὀδυσσεῖ, καὶ παλαιὰ τε πολλὰ τε εἰδῶς (*Od.* 2.188; 7.157; 24.51: Nestor, Echeneus). καὶ ὃς γῆραὶ μὲν κυφὸς ἔην, πολλὰ δὲ ἤδει (*Od.* 2.16: Aegyptius). οἷς ἀνάπαλιν ἔχει, ὁ ἄκοσμά τε πολλὰ τε εἰδῶς (*Il.* 2.213: Thersites).<sup>12</sup>

Remark that here Homer credits Odysseus with more experience compared to Nestor in the *Iliad*. Indeed, the latter takes pride in just one journey, which led him from Pylos to the Lapiths in Thessaly (*Il.* 262–270). Odysseus, on the contrary, saw the cities of many men and got to know their minds (*Od.* 1.3). Save that Odysseus was not yet wiser than Nestor in the *Iliad*, since at that time he was still not the man he would become in the *Odyssey*. However, after the capture of Troy, he travelled through many lands, thus gathering much experience. Indeed, he has not just 'wandered' but he has wandered much, and not even 'much' but 'very much' (cp. *Od.* 1.1). Odysseus might, therefore, be compared to "he who knows many and ancient things" (*Od.* 2.188; 7.157; 24.51: Nestor, Echeneus), as well as "he who, despite stooping from old age, knew many things" (*Od.* 2.16: Aegyptius). To these, is to be contrasted "he who knows many inappropriate things" (*Il.* 2.213: Thersites).

12 Eust. in *Od.* 1.5.20–26 Stallbaum.

According to Eustathius, the experience that Nestor has gathered through his long life can no longer compete with the knowledge acquired by Odysseus in the course of his endless wanderings. Travelling is seen as the most educative of all experiences and Nestor, despite his old age, is surpassed by Odysseus, who can now be considered to be the wiser and more experienced one, despite being younger than his rival.

Inspired by his numerous sources and relying on a thorough analysis of the Homeric poems, Eustathius represents Odysseus' journey as a difficult path towards knowledge and wisdom. As the learned archbishop points out in another extract from the *Parekbolai on the Odyssey*, during his long travels Odysseus manages to investigate not only the mind of the people he encountered, but also his own.<sup>13</sup> Each phase of Odysseus' journey can, therefore, be seen as a new stage in a progressive acquisition of self-consciousness and self-control. Consequently, the diverse creatures faced by the hero represent a specific passion or instinct the wise man needs to overcome before being deserving enough to go back to Penelope, whom generations of exegetes interpreted as the personification of Philosophy itself.

To provide some examples, according to this line of interpretation, Circe represents the temptation of pleasure, which can transform those who cannot resist it into animals.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Calypso stands for the excessive preoccupation with one's own bodily wellness, another impulse that the true *philosophos* should be able both to control and ignore.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2 The philosopher's difficult path towards authentic *philosophia*

Of course, this kind of moral exegesis was particularly appealing to the Byzantine authors, as it provided them with the perfect justification for their interest in Homer.<sup>16</sup>

13 Eust. in *Od.* 1.5.27–31 (Ἰστέον δὲ καὶ ὅτι νόον ἐνταῦθα ἐστὶ νοῆσαι, οὐ μόνον τὸ κατὰ νοῦν τινὰ θέμενον ἔθιμον καὶ νόμιμον ἐν ἔθνεσι [...] ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν τοῦ Ὀδυσσεύος νοῦν). As E. Cullhed points out in his critical apparatus, Eustathius might have drawn this interpretation from some scholia on the first line of the *Odyssey* (see Cullhed 2014, 22 and schol. DFNs and DJeR<sup>28</sup> α 3f–g Pontani).

14 As remarked by Buffière 1973, n. 51 p. 379, this interpretation can already be found in Heraclit. *All.* 72.2 (Ὁ δὲ Κίρκης κικεῶν ἡδονῆς ἐστὶν ἀγγεῖον, ὃ πίνοντες οἱ ἀκόλαστοι διὰ τῆς ἐφημέρου πλησμονῆς σῶν ἀθλιώτερον βίον ζῶσι). In his *Parekbolai on the Odyssey*, Eustathius both adopts and enriches this exegesis: see e.g. Eust. in *Od.* 1.381.9–10; 16–20, where Odysseus resists Circe's dangerous charm

thanks to his *paideia*, symbolized by the mysterious *mōly*. On the various interpretations of the Circe episode, see also the useful overview by van Opstall 2017, 270–274.

15 On the Neoplatonic origin of this exegetical trend, see Pépin 1982, 5–6 and Montiglio 2011, 146. According to Buffière 1973, 461–464, this interpretation of the Calypso episode could also stem from a Neopythagorean background. Eustathius is clearly familiar with this reading, which he quotes and analyses in his *Parekbolai on the Odyssey* (see Eust. in *Od.* 1.17.7–20).

16 On the revival of Homer in twelfth-century Byzantium see Pontani 2015, 368–370 and Cullhed 2014, 3\*–5\*. Dated but still instructive is Browning 1975 (see especially pp. 25–29).

As mentioned earlier, Eustathius too accepts this allegorical reading of the poems. In the very first pages of the *Parekbolai on the Odyssey*, he clearly defines Odysseus' wanderings as a sort of psychological journey that each *sophos* should make to master his own passions and instincts. Only thus, will the sage finally obtain the self-control that befits the accomplished *philosophos*. However, despite often appropriating this exegetic trend, Eustathius seems to have a broader understanding of the meaning and contents of the *philosophia* Odysseus strives to reach during his wanderings.

As it would be too long to list all of the different nuances the archbishop attributes to the notion of philosophy, I shall here focus on an example that I deem particularly interesting, as it will help us understand how Eustathius blends the ancient exegetic tradition with his own personal beliefs. In the passage I examine, the Byzantine scholar is especially focused on providing a negative definition of philosophy. To be more precise, in the case at stake, Eustathius does not establish what an accomplished *philosophos* should learn; on the contrary, his goal is to determine what the lover of *sophia* should *not* be learning.

The Homeric passage prompting Eustathius' considerations is the aforementioned episode of the encounter between Odysseus and Calypso. After relating the traditional interpretation, according to which the beautiful goddess was the symbol of an excessive preoccupation with the body, the exegete presents the reader with yet another explanation. Such an interpretation has no parallel in any of Eustathius' usual sources and can therefore be considered as the expression of his personal position.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, according to the Byzantine exegete, being the daughter of Atlas, Calypso could also be seen as the very embodiment of astrology, a discipline which was very popular in Eustathius' times.

ταύτη δὲ τῆ Καλυψοῖ σύνεστι μὲν ὁ ἀποτελεσματικὸς φιλόσοφος Ὀδυσσεύς. ὁ καὶ Πλειάδας τε Ἰάδας τε θεωρῶν καὶ σθένος Ὠρίωνος κατὰ τὸν ποιητὴν (cp. *Od.* 5.272–275 and *Il.* 18.486) καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς. ποθεῖ δὲ ὅμως μάλιστα καὶ τὴν μεθοδικὴν καὶ κανονικὴν φιλοσοφίαν. ἀφ' ἧς ὡς οἶά τινος πατρίδος ὀρμώμενος, εἰς ταῦτα ἦλθε καὶ εἰς ἐκείνην ἐπανακάμπτειν γλίχεται ἧς χωρὶς οὐκ ἔστι φιλοσοφεῖν. ὅτι δὲ τοιαύτη τις ἢ Πηνελόπη, δῆλον ἔσται ὅτε τὸν ἰστὸν θεωρήσομεν τὸν ὑπ' αὐτῆς ὑφαινόμενον τε καὶ αὔθις ἀναλυόμενον.<sup>18</sup>

It is with this manifestation of Calypso that Odysseus lives. Here, the hero stands for the philosopher interested in astrology, he who observes the Pleiades, the Hyades, and Orion's might, and so on, to quote the poet's words (cp. *Od.* 5.272–275 and *Il.* 18.486). Nevertheless, the desire he feels for methodical and

17 As remarked by both Buffière 1973, 388–389 and Cullhed 2014, 80 (see especially his critical *apparatus*

*ad loc.*).

18 Eust. in *Od.* 1.17.38–43.

systematic philosophy is much stronger. Odysseus left the latter as one might leave one's own fatherland and he has come this far; but now he desires to go back to this kind of philosophy, without which philosophy itself cannot exist. The fact that this latter kind of philosophy is symbolized by Penelope will be apparent when we observe the web that she weaves and then untangles.

It is interesting to remark that astrology was especially cherished by Emperor Manuel I and by some of the most prominent literati of the time, including John Tzetzes.<sup>19</sup> Going against this trend, Eustathius had often voiced his disapproval of a discipline that he believed to be, at the very least, frivolous and totally unfounded.<sup>20</sup> Apparently, his preoccupation with the dangerous charm exerted by astrology was so strong as to infiltrate his *Parekbolai on the Odyssey*. After all, Homer represented an essential component of Byzantine education. Therefore, the *Parekbolai*, addressed to the archbishop's young students, were a perfect occasion to discuss the contents of the ideal *paideia*, which allowed no room for the study of the planets and their alleged influence on human life.

The philosophical knowledge that Eustathius' pupils were expected to aspire towards can sometimes be difficult to define, but it certainly did not include what he saw as petty and useless fields such as astrology. Just as Odysseus found the moral and intellectual strength to finally abandon the fascinating but dangerous Calypso, the lover of *sophia* had to be able to suppress his interest for noxious and secondary disciplines, in order to continue his difficult but rewarding journey to Ithaca.<sup>21</sup> There, he will finally reunite with Penelope, whose superiority to the maidservants can be compared to the supremacy of philosophy over all the other sciences.<sup>22</sup>

19 On the popularity of astrology at the imperial court see Mavroudi 2006, 73–83.

20 On Eustathius' hostility towards astrology see Cullhed 2014, \*44–45 and Kazhdan and Simon 1984, 180–182.

21 Eust. in *Od.* 1.17.7–11; 14–17; 20 (and especially lines 14–17: Ἐρμού μέντοι ὡς ἐν τοῖς μετὰ ταῦτα αἰνίζεται ὁ ποιητῆς μεσιτεύοντος ὃ ἐστὶ λόγου, γέγονε τῆς κατὰ τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ποθουμένης πατρίδος, ἧγουν τοῦ νοητοῦ κόσμου. ὅς ἐστι κατὰ τοὺς Πλατωνικοὺς, ψυχῶν πατρὶς ἀληθής. ὁμοίως, γέγονε καὶ τῆς Πηνελόπης φιλοσοφίας, λυθείς καὶ ἀπαλλαγείς τῆς τοιαύτης Καλυψοῦς). This theme resurfaces in another interesting passage of the

*Parekbolai on the Odyssey* (Eust. in *Od.* 1.22.11–16).

While commenting on the famous encounter between Odysseus and the Cyclops, Eustathius suggests an original interpretation that is clearly reminiscent of his exegesis of the Calypso episode. According to the learned archbishop, the Cyclops is the symbol of the κατάστασις τῶν οὐρανίων; therefore, Odysseus' blinding of the Cyclops represents the philosopher's decision to avoid the study and observation of the planets (τὸν τοιοῦτον Κύκλωπα ἐκτυφλοῖ ὁ φιλόσοφος Ὀδυσσεὺς, ἧγουν τῆς θεᾶς καὶ θεωρίας αὐτοῦ φιλοσόφως καθικνεῖται καὶ παραγίνεται).

22 See Eust. in *Od.* 1.27.10–19.

### 1.3 The exegete is a traveler

If in the *Parekbolai* the gradual acquisition of *paideia* and *sophia* is often depicted as a long and demanding voyage, so is the process of reading and interpreting the very poems that are the primary focus of the *Parekbolai* themselves. After all, according to a widespread biographical tradition, Homer too had been a wandering sage.<sup>23</sup> If this was true, what better way to acquire wisdom and knowledge than to read the very teachings of the wisest and oldest *sophos* of all? We might say that, in Eustathius' view, interpreting and understanding the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* becomes a sort of journey within a journey: to complete the path towards *paideia* and *sophia*, it is necessary to face another equally demanding voyage, namely the long journey across the immensity of Homeric poetry.

Indeed, in the preface of his commentary on the *Parekbolai on the Iliad*, Eustathius often compares the study of Homer to a long journey. Travelling across the works of the great poet is an enterprise that one cannot face without proper directions. To follow the right path, a guide is needed. Therefore, his *Parekbolai* are presented as a compass that guarantees a safe journey to those who intend to cross the expanse of Homer's poems. Only with Eustathius' guidance can they avoid becoming lost in the immensity of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

ἦν δὲ τὸ φιλικὸν θέλημα διὰ τῆς Ἰλιάδος ἔλθειν καὶ ἐκπορίσασθαι τὰ χρήσιμα  
τῷ διεξοδεύοντι, οὐ λέγω ἀνδρὶ λογίῳ, ἐκείνῳ γὰρ οὐδὲν ἄν τῶν τοιοῦτων  
εἰκὸς λαμβάνειν, ἀλλὰ νέῳ ἄρτι μανθάνοντι.<sup>24</sup>

It was my friends' wish that I should journey through the *Iliad* and provide other travelers with what is useful: I am not referring to the learned man (it is unlikely that he might be unaware of any such things), but to the young who have just started to learn.

The representation of the exegete as a sort of guide and fellow traveler is further developed in the very first lines of the preface to the *Parekbolai on the Iliad*. In this case, however, Eustathius perceives his exegetical activity as a maritime journey across the vast waters of the Homeric Ocean.

The comparison between the breadth of the poems and the immensity of the sea was a traditional motif that the Byzantines were familiar with.<sup>25</sup> Before them, many ancient

23 Both Eustathius and Tzetzes were familiar with this biographical tradition that probably originated with the anonymous *Vitae* of the poet. More specifically, both scholars often refer to Homer's journey to Egypt, where he gathered precious material for his poems. See e.g. Eust. in *Od.* 1.2.22–29 with Pizzone 2014, 178–179 and Tzetz. *Exeg.* p. 53.1–8

Papathomopoulos.

24 Eust. in *Il.* 1.3.5–7.

25 On the image of Homer as the ocean in Tzetzes and Eustathius see Cesaretti 1991, 180–181 and 214–215 respectively. For Eustathius' refashioning of this traditional theme, see also the excellent analysis by van den Berg 2017.

authors had developed this imagery to stress the unparalleled talent of the great Homer: compared to his oceanic abundance, the works of all the other poets were nothing but small rivers.<sup>26</sup> Eustathius, however, further refines this motif, blending it with another widespread simile that equaled the sweetness of Homeric poetry to the melodious voices of the Sirens. It is the very combination of these two images that opens the archbishop's monumental *Parekbolai on the Iliad*.

Τῶν Ὀμήρου Σειρήνων καλὸν μὲν ἴσως εἶ τις ἀπόσχοιτο τὴν ἀρχὴν ἢ κηρῶ τὰς ἀκοὰς ἀλειψάμενος ἢ ἀλλ' ἑτέραν τραπόμενος, ὡς ἂν ἀποφύγῃ τὸ θέλημα τρον. μὴ ἀποσχόμενος δέ, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ῥῆθης ἐκείνης ἐλθὼν, οὐκ ἂν, οἶμαι, οὔτε παρέλθῃ ῥαδίως, εἰ καὶ πολλὰ δεσμὰ κατέχοι, οὔτε παρελθὼν εἴη ἂν εὐχαρις.<sup>27</sup>

Maybe it would be better to avoid Homer's Sirens from the beginning, either turning away or plugging one's ears with wax, so as to escape their enchantment. But if one did not avoid them and started travelling through their song, I believe that he would not easily sail by even if he were restrained by many ties, nor, having done so, would he be graceful<sup>28</sup>.

If the Homeric poems are here compared to both the ocean and the Sirens' song, we cannot help but conclude that Eustathius, who travels across the abyss and is able to resist the creatures' voice, is nothing but the equivalent of Odysseus himself. Continuing along this sequence of parallelisms, we might also suggest that the exegete's readers correspond to Odysseus' companions: neither could survive the dangerous trip without the guidance of their master.

26 For a well-known example see Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 24.16–19 Radermacher (κορυφή μὲν οὖν ἀπάντων καὶ σκοπός, ἐξ οὗ περ πάντες ποταμοὶ καὶ πᾶσα θάλασσα καὶ πᾶσαι κρήναι, δικαίως ἂν Ὀμηρὸς λέγοιτο).

27 Eust. in *Il.* 1.1.1–4.

28 For the sake of simplicity, I adopt here the translation proposed by van den Berg 2017, 32, who suggests to render εὐχαρις as 'graceful or elegant'. According to this interesting interpretation, Eustathius is here warning his readers that only through an accurate and scrupulous study of Homer can one become an educated and graceful orator. However, the meaning of this passage – and especially of the term εὐχαρις – remains doubtful, as recently pointed out by E. van Opstall (see van Opstall 2017, 277–278, n. 43). I am convinced that a comparison with the long section of the *Parekbolai on the Odyssey* where Eustathius comments on the Sirens' episode might

help solve the enigma. Particular attention should be devoted to a short paragraph where Eustathius again uses the adjective εὐχαρις to describe the (difficult) situation Odysseus found himself in after listening to the Sirens' song (Eust. in *Od.* 2.19.19–21: Εἰ δὲ μετὰ τὰς Σειρήνας μεγάλοις κακοῖς περιέπεσεν Ὀδυσσεύς, ἔστιν ἠθικῶς ἐκλαβέσθαι αὐτὸ εἰς δεῖγμα τοῦ ἔπεσθαι ὡς ταπολλὰ τῇ ἡδονῇ τέλος οὐκ εὐχαρι). In my opinion, the similarities between this passage and the preface to the *Parekbolai on the Iliad* bring to the fore Eustathius' ambivalent attitude towards the dangerous charm exerted by Homer and his poetic voice. The archbishop seems to imply that as Odysseus had to face dire consequences after listening to the Sirens, so the reader of the Homeric song might be exposed to the ambiguous effects of the poetic voice, whose charm is both pleasant and treacherous.

Despite drawing from different sources, in this passage Eustathius emphasizes the elements that better fit both his perception of Homeric poetry and his conception of the exegetic activity. More specifically, the learned archbishop seems not only to stress the beauty and the magnificence of the Homeric Ocean, but he also appears to be drawing the reader's attention to its potential dangers. The immensity of the poems is at the same time majestic and threatening, since it can hide fascinating and dangerous creatures, such as the Sirens, Calypso, and Circe, that only the wise philosopher Odysseus can face safely.

This insistence on the dangers of poetry is a recurring motif in Eustathius' commentaries and is particularly evident in his detailed interpretation of the very episode that opens the *Parekbolai on the Iliad*, namely the encounter between Odysseus and the dangerous Sirens. Indeed, in commenting on this famous passage of *Odyssey* 12, the exegete resumes traditional themes such as the comparison between the Sirens' voices and Homeric poetry.<sup>29</sup> Odysseus is presented again as the ideal teacher and philosopher, who can safely guide his disciples through the dangerous waters of the Sirens' domain.<sup>30</sup> However, despite stating that a secure journey across the Homeric Ocean is possible as long as one follows a reliable guide, Eustathius does not appear completely convinced by his own statements. On more than one occasion, he seems to wonder whether it would have been better for Odysseus to plug his ears and avoid the Sirens' song, as he taught his comrades to do.<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere, he observes that in this situation the hero's friends proved to be more restrained than their guide, since they could resist the very temptation Odysseus succumbed to.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, at the very end of his commentary on the same episode, the archbishop reaches the surprising conclusion that all the pain

29 See e.g. Eust. in *Od.* 2.4.26–29 (‘Ὅρα δ’ ἐν τούτοις τοῖς Ὀμηρικοῖς ὀκτῶ στίχοις, ὡς ἐτόλμησεν ὁ γλυκὺς καὶ μελίγηρὺς ἀοιδὸς Ὅμηρος ὑποκρίνεσθαι τὰς Σειρήνας ὡς ἐν ἠθοποιῶν, οἷα εἰδῶς τὴν ποίησιν καὶ μάλιστα τὴν αὐτοῦ Σειρήνων οὖσαν ἀοιδὴν. ἔοικε γὰρ ἐν οἷς εἶπε τὰ καθ’ ἑαυτὸν ὑπαινίττεσθαι ὁ ποιητής, καὶ ὅπως εἰπεῖν, τὰ τῆς ποιήσεως).

30 On Odysseus' decision to plug his comrades' ears with wax see Eust. in *Od.* 2.3.40–43. In this passage, the wax used by Odysseus is interpreted as the symbol of the philosophical teachings the hero imparts to his disciples: ὁ δὲ κηρὸς ... πρὸς ἀλληγορίαν δὲ φιλόσοφον τινα διδασκαλίας λόγον ὑπαινίττεται.

31 See Eust. in *Od.* 1.4.1–4, where Eustathius goes as far as to say that sometimes even the *sophos* needs to be restrained, exactly as Odysseus was held back by his friends, who proved to be more self-controlled (ἐγκρατέστεροι) than their master (ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ μέ-

γας ὀρθοῖτ’ ἂν ποτε ὑπὸ σμικροτέρων κατὰ τὴν τραγωδίαν, εἰκὸς καὶ τὸν φιλόσοφον εἰ ποτε τῶν Σειρήνων μὴ χρεῶν ὄν ἀκούειν, ὁ δὲ πειρᾶται τοῦτο κωλύεσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν φίλων παρηγγελμένων κανόνι φιλίας, μὴ καὶ προσεπισπάσαιτο βλάβος τι καὶ αὐτοῖ, προσεσηκῆτος τοῦ φιλοσόφου ἐταίρου τῇ λιγυρᾷ τῶν Σειρήνων ἀοιδῆ).

32 See e.g. Eust. in *Od.* 1.4.1–4 and 1, 2, 3.21–25 (αὐτὰρ ἐπειδὴ τὰς γε παρήλασαν, οὐδ’ ἔτ’ ἔπειτα φθογγῆς Σειρήνων ἠκούομεν οὐδὲ τ’ ἀοιδῆς, αἴψ’ ἀπὸ κηρὸν ἔλοντο ἔμοι ἐρίρηρες ἐταῖροι, ὃν σφιν πᾶσιν ἄλειψα, ἐμέ τ’ ἐκ δεσμῶν ἀνέλυσαν (cp. *Od.* 12.197–200), ἐγκρατέστεροι δηλαδὴ αὐτοῖ φανεῖντες Ὀδυσσεῶς. ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἤττητο τῆς ἡδονῆς, ὁ δὲ μαρτύριόν ἐστιν ὅσον ἰσχύει ἡδονῆ, οἱ δὲ, πρὸς ἰσχύος ἔχοντες ἀπαγαγεῖν τὸν κηρὸν καὶ ἀκούσαι τῶν Σειρήνων, οὐκ ἐποίησαν οὕτως).

and tragedies the son of Laertes had to face after his encounter with the Sirens were the consequence of his inability to avoid their songs.<sup>33</sup>

If we now go back to the introduction to the *Parekbolai on the Iliad*, we might note that this text is characterized by the same ambivalence.<sup>34</sup> Even though he deeply admires the great Homer and the majestic immensity of his work, Eustathius is also conscious of its dangers. Despite all the precautions he took, the philosopher Odysseus was tempted, imprisoned, and endangered by the Sirens and the other creatures he met during his long travels across the sea. Likewise, the exegete will have to face the hidden dangers of the Homeric Ocean. Regardless of the risks, Eustathius shall set sail anyway, just as Odysseus did. However, being well aware of the perils of the journey, he tries to at least warn his companions, suggesting that “maybe it would be wiser to completely avoid the Homeric Sirens”<sup>35</sup>. A rather unexpected introduction indeed, especially if we keep in mind that the archbishop devoted almost an entire lifetime to interpreting the voice of these very Sirens.

## 2 Part two: John Tzetzes

It is now time to turn to Eustathius’ slightly older colleague and rival, namely the irascible *grammatikos* John Tzetzes.<sup>36</sup> As we will see, Tzetzes too elaborates upon the theme of Odysseus’ wanderings. However, despite relying on the same sources that inspired Eustathius’ works, he adopts a completely different perspective.

Let us start with the very same topic we analyzed at the beginning of the section devoted to Eustathius, that is, the comparison between Odysseus and Nestor. We have seen that the archbishop’s opinion evolved along with Odysseus’ skills and personality. Despite being extremely wise and eloquent, in the *Iliad* the son of Laertes was outshone by the more experienced Nestor. In the *Odyssey*, however, the situation was reversed: thanks to his journeys, Odysseus had acquired unparalleled knowledge and experience, finally surpassing his older comrade.

33 See Eust. in Od. 2.19.19–21, quoted and discussed previously (footnote 28, p. 226).

34 On the similarities between the preface to the *Parekbolai on the Iliad* and Eustathius’ commentary on the Sirens episode see also the interesting remarks by Cesaretti 1991, 225–226.

35 Eust. in *Il.* 1.1.1: Τῶν Ὀμήρου Σειρήνων καλὸν μὲν

ἴσως εἰ τις ἀπόσχοιτο τὴν ἀρχὴν ...

36 On Tzetzes’ life and works see the dated but still useful study by Wendel 1948, and, more recently, Grünbart 1996 and Grünbart 2005, as well as Rhoby 2010. The date of Tzetzes’ death has recently been the subject of an interesting debate between Agiotis 2013 and Cullhed 2015.

## 2.1 Nestor versus Odysseus revisited

If compared to Eustathius' rather complex attitude, Tzetzes' stance appears to be more clear-cut. According to the quick-tempered *grammatikos*, there are no doubts: Nestor had always been and would always be far superior to Odysseus. Despite this fact, however, Homer decided to give more prominence to the son of Laertes, devoting an entire poem to celebrating his supposedly adventurous journey. According to Tzetzes, such a debatable choice was dictated by the poet's desire to show his own rhetorical skills: writing an encomium of Nestor or Ajax, who were undoubtedly gifted, was too easy a task for the great Homer, who preferred to spend countless words on behalf of despicable figures such as Diomedes and, even worse, Odysseus. In Tzetzes' opinion, the Homeric poems – and the *Odyssey* especially – were nothing other than a long *Eulogy of the Fly*, a rhetorical exercise that Homer wrote only to show his ability to glorify even the lowest of the low.

Ὁ Ὅμηρος πρὸ πάντων δε ρητόρων, φιλοσόφων,  
 αἰνεῖ τὸν Διομήδην μὲν παρ' ὄλην Ἰλιάδα (750)  
 καὶ Ὀδυσσέα σὺν αὐτῷ ἔν γε τῇ Ἰλιάδι,  
 καὶ ὄλην βίβλον ἔγραψεν ἐγκώμιον εἰς τοῦτον,  
 ἦν ἐξ αὐτοῦ Ὀδύσειαν τὴν κλῆσιν ὀνομάζει.  
 Τὸν Αἴαντα τὸν μέγαν δε τῶν Ἀχαιῶν τὸν πύργον,  
 καὶ Νέστορα τὸν σύμβουλον, τὸν μελιχρὸν ἐκείνον. (755)  
 Ὡν περ τὴν λυσιτέλειαν στρατῷ τῷ τῶν Ἑλλήνων  
 ἴσασι καὶ αἱ ἄψυχοι τῶν ἀναισθήτων φύσεις.  
 Ῥητόρων ὧν δεινότατος ἀπάντων τῶν ἐν βίῳ  
 σιγᾶ καὶ παρατρέχει δε δεινότητι τῶν λόγων,  
 ἔν ἧ καὶ δύο τὰ ρητὰ φήσας εἰς τούτους μόνα, (760)  
 εἰς δὲ ἐκείνους ἰκανοὺς λόγους πληροῦν βιβλία.  
 Τὸ ἀσθενὲς γὰρ δέεται πολλῶν ἐρμηνευμάτων·  
 τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς καὶ ἰσχυρὸν οὐ δεῖται ποικιλίας.  
 ...  
 Τὸ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐπαινεῖν, ψύλλας, φαλάκρας, μυίας,  
 καὶ ψέγειν τὴν ῥητορικὴν καὶ ἐπαινεῖν θανάτους,  
 αἰνεῖν καὶ τὴν πενίαν δὲ πλοῦτον αὐτὴν δεικνύντα, (800)  
 καὶ Διομήδην καὶ αὐτὸν αἰνεῖν, τὸν Ὀδυσσέα  
 ὑπὲρ τὸν μέγαν Αἴαντα καὶ Νέστορα ἐκείνον,  
 κἂν Ὅμηρος καὶ ταῦτα δε δεινῶς παραδεικνύη,  
 καὶ πάντα τοιοῦτότροπον ἔπαινον τὲ καὶ λόγον,  
 τὸν προφανῶς τοῖς φανεροῖς γράφοντα τάναντία, (805)  
 ἤττονα λόγον λέγουσι τὰ φιλοσόφων γένη,

ὡς ταῖς Νεφέλαις δέικνυσι καὶ ὁ Ἀριστοφάνης,  
τῷ παίζειν.<sup>37</sup>

Before all the other rhetors and philosophers, Homer | praises Diomedes in the whole *Iliad* | and along with him he commends Odysseus, again in the *Iliad*. | He has also composed an entire poem in praise of the latter, | and this poem is called *Odyssey* from the name of this hero. | As for Ajax, the gigantic tower of the Greeks, | and Nestor, the counsellor whose words were as sweet as honey, | – their usefulness to the Greek army is well-known | also to lifeless and senseless creatures – | they are left out and neglected by Homer, who, following the rhetorical method of forcefulness, | says once or twice about them the words I have mentioned before,<sup>38</sup> | while filling entire books with long speeches about the other two. | Indeed, weak arguments need multifarious explanations, | whereas the true and strong ones have no need of variety. ... | The praise of such things as fleas, baldness, and flies, | the blame of rhetoric and the praise of death, | the encomium of poverty that presents it as the authentic wealth, | the praise of Diomedes and of Odysseus himself | above Ajax the Great and the famous Nestor | – even if Homer skillfully demonstrates this as well – | and every other eulogy or discourse of this kind, | that amounts to writing the opposite of what is evident, | is called ‘weaker argument’ by the philosophers’ ranks, | as Aristophanes, joking, shows in his *Clouds*.<sup>39</sup>

Despite his apparent admiration for the ‘golden Homer,’ Tzetzes never comes to terms with the poet’s decision to write an entire poem in praise of a worthless traitor such as Odysseus. In order to exalt the son of Laertes, not only did Homer alter the truth – an unforgivable crime in Tzetzes’ eyes – but he also neglected the true protagonists of the war of Troy, such as Nestor, Ajax, and the great Palamedes, who was treacherously killed by Odysseus himself.<sup>40</sup> Determined to restore the authentic version of the Trojan War, the scholar will even launch into the composition of a new poem, the *Carmina Iliaca*, where each hero shall finally get the space and renown he deserves.

37 Tzetz. *Hist.* 11.749–763; 788–808 Leone.

38 Cp. Tzetz. *Hist.* 11.787–797.

39 Tzetzes’ interest for the *hēssōn logos* antedates his well-known scholia on Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. Homer is represented as the inventor of this dubious rhetorical technique already in the *Allegories on the Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The extracts from the *Chiliads* here quoted represent only the final stage of the scholar’s

reflection upon this topic.

40 Tzetzes goes as far as to identify with both Ajax and Palamedes, whom he considers to be the *true* heroes of the Trojan War. In some passages of his works he even depicts himself as the ‘living portrait’ of Palamedes (see *All. Il. prol.* 724–734 Boissonade and *Hist.* 3.173–184). On the reasons for Tzetzes’ affinity with the wise hero see Lovato 2016, 330–336.

## 2.2 Philosophy, the art of telling plausible lies

In light of these considerations, it is no surprise that Tzetzes never accepts the well-established allegorical interpretation of Odysseus' wondrous travels. To him, the hero's wanderings are far from being a long journey towards knowledge and self-consciousness; on the contrary, they appear to be nothing other than a protracted piratical jaunt, in the course of which the son of Laertes kidnaps princesses, tricks kindly kings,<sup>41</sup> and mingles with prostitutes and the like.<sup>42</sup>

Actually, on closer inspection, we might say that, in Tzetzes' interpretation, Odysseus also manages to gradually acquire a deeper self-consciousness and show his true self. However, in his understanding, the hero's authentic nature proves to be a rather repulsive one, as Tzetzes' reading of the encounter with Circe clearly shows:

Τζέτζης τὸν Ὀδυσσεά δέ φησιν ἐκχοιρωθῆναι  
πλέον τῶν φίλων τῶν αὐτοῦ, ἐφ' ὀλοκλήρῳ ἔτει  
τῇ Κίρκῃ συγκαθεύδοντα πορνείοις τοῖς ἐκείνης.  
Οὕτως ἡ Κίρκη λέγεται καὶ γὰρ χοιροῦν ἀνθρώπου.<sup>43</sup>

Tzetzes claims that Odysseus became more of a pig | than his comrades, because for an entire year | he slept with Circe in her brothels. | For this reason, Circe is said to be capable of transforming men into pigs.

Far from representing the symbol of the *philosophos* that faces temptation and rescues his dehumanized comrades, Odysseus revels in pleasure (*hēdonē*), showing his unrestrained nature and proving himself to be less controlled than those he was supposed to lead.

Not surprisingly, when dealing with the episode of the Sirens, Tzetzes does not even take into account the traditional interpretation, according to which the creatures' voice represented the poetic song. Far from being the symbol of the accomplished *philosophos* who can approach poetry without being affected by its potentially dangerous appeal,

41 See e.g. Tzetzes' interpretation of the Polyphemus episode (*All. Od.* 9.111–179 Hunger and *Hist.* 10.914–930). According to the scholar, who is clearly drawing from Mal. *Chron.* 5.17–18 Thurn, Odysseus' blinding of the Cyclops is nothing but the allegorical magnification of a much less heroic feat: despite having been generously welcomed by the Sicilian King Polyphemus, Odysseus and his companions kidnapped their host's daughter, who was the "apple of the king's eye".

42 See Tzetzes' reading of the Circe episode, discussed here, as well as his interpretation of the encounter

between Odysseus and the Sirens (*Hist.* 1.346–355), which will be examined in the following pages. As remarked by van Opstall 2017, 271 n. 32, the euhemeristic representation of the Sirens and Circe as *pornai* can already be found in Ps.-Heracl. *De incred.* 14 and 16, respectively. On the Sirens as prostitutes in Greek and Latin literature see also Courcelle 1975.

43 Tzetz. *All. Od.* 10.14–17. On this interpretation of the Circe episode see also Tzetz. *All. Od.* 10.33–34, as well as Braccini 2011, 53.

the figure of Odysseus holds no allegorical meaning.<sup>44</sup> What is more, Tzetzes even suggests that the mysterious Sirens might be nothing but humble *pornai* that try and attract every passing traveler.<sup>45</sup> Nothing could be farther from the complex and deep analysis developed by Eustathius.

On closer inspection, however, there might be at least one common element between the two otherwise incompatible interpretations of Tzetzes and Eustathius. Indeed, in some cases, Tzetzes too seems to consider Odysseus as a fitting symbol for the *philosophos*. In his eyes, however, the kind of philosopher the Homeric hero might represent is always a *negative* and *unreliable* one.

In a letter addressed to the *philosophos* Stephanos, Tzetzes complains about the unreliability of his addressee, who never kept his promise to send the scholar a precious notebook. In order to stigmatize his correspondent's deceitfulness, the disillusioned *grammatikos* declares:

καὶ τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἐντεῦθεν καλῶ οὐ γνῶσιν τῶν ὄντων ἢ ὄντα εἰσίν, ἀλλὰ διδασκαλίαν καὶ παιδευσιν τοῦ ‘ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὄμοια’<sup>46</sup>

From now on, I will define philosophy not as the science of the true nature of things, but as the discipline that teaches how to tell “many lies that seem to be true”.

As Tzetzes himself explains in the *Chiliads*, a verse commentary on his own *Letters*, this quotation comes from the *Odyssey*. More specifically, the line cited is the well-known passage of *Odyssey* 19 where the poet describes Odysseus' ambiguous skill in telling plausible falsehoods.<sup>47</sup> To criticize the unreliable Stephanos, Tzetzes compares him to the most untrustworthy hero of all; consequently, Stephanos' would-be science becomes nothing else than masterful lying.<sup>48</sup>

### 2.3 Plato, an Odyssean philosopher

Apart from the untrustworthy Stephanos, there is at least one other *philosophos* that attracts Tzetzes' violent criticism and is seen as deserving of association with the repugnant

44 Even when he mentions the widespread interpretation according to which the Sirens were the symbol of *hēdonē*, Tzetzes refuses to acknowledge Odysseus' restraint. Moreover, the scholar does not seem to approve of this reading, which he clearly ascribes to other poets and interpreters (see e.g. Tzetz. *Hist.* 1.336–338: Μόνον δὲ ταύτας παρελθεῖν φασὶ τὸν Ὀδυσσεά | κηρῶ μὲν παραχρίσαντα τὰ τῶν

ἐταίρων ὄτα | αὐτόν δε κατακούοντα κρεμάμενον ἰστίῳ).

45 Tzetz. *Hist.* 1.346–345.

46 Tzetz. *Epist.* 32, p. 48, 3–6 Leone.

47 See *Hist.* 8.52–56, where Tzetzes clearly refers to Hom. *Od.* 19.203.

48 For a more detailed analysis of these passages see Lovato 2016, 339–342.

Odysseus. I am referring to Plato, whose famous travels Eustathius likened to the wanderings of the philosopher Odysseus. As we will see, Tzetzes too seems to establish a connection between the Homeric hero and the Athenian thinker. However, his agenda is rather different from that of the learned archbishop.

The association between Odysseus and Plato features for the first time in an interesting passage of Tzetzes' *Carmina Iliaca*, a poem meant to both summarize and correct the traditional version of the war of Troy. In a scholium that our scrupulous *grammatikos* adds to his own text, Odysseus' undeserved popularity is compared to Plato's absurd theories. More specifically, in the passage at hand, Tzetzes criticizes Homer's unbelievable account of the funeral games in *Iliad* 23. According to the poet, the small and hideous Odysseus almost won the wrestling contest against the enormous Ajax, an outcome that our scholar considers rather dubious, at the very least. To stress the unreliability of the Homeric account, Tzetzes concludes that the Iliadic version, as with Plato's *Republic*, is to be considered as unlikely as a white raven.<sup>49</sup>

νῦν δὲ Διομήδης τοῦτον (*scil.* τὸν Αἴαντα) τιτρώσκει καὶ Ὀδυσσεὺς πάλῃ νικᾷ  
 ..., δόξαν Ὀμήρῳ ὡς ὕστερον ἔδοξε Πλάτωνι πλάσαι τὴν πολιτείαν καὶ φιλο-  
 σοφοῖς ἑτέροις ἐπινοεῖν ἄλευκούς τινα κόρακας'.<sup>50</sup>

But now, in Homer's opinion, Diomedes wounds Ajax and Odysseus defeats him in the wrestling contest ...: similarly, later on, Plato deemed appropriate to make up his *Republic* as other philosophers thought it right to theorize their white ravens.

This theme is further developed in a long section of the *Chiliads*, entirely devoted to Plato's dubious accomplishments. As a general remark, we might note that Tzetzes gives Plato exactly the same – negative – features that he usually ascribes to Odysseus. Just as the son of Laertes, the Athenian philosopher does not deserve his fame. His philosophical works, for example, are nothing but the result of theft and trickery. As Odysseus tried unsuccessfully to surpass the superior Palamedes and finally decided to resort to treachery, so Plato betrayed his own benefactors, stealing their ideas and passing them off as his own.<sup>51</sup> Both Plato and Odysseus, moreover, shared a tendency to flattery and parasitism, as shown by their opportunistic attitude towards the powerful.<sup>52</sup> The similarities between the two, however, become even more apparent when Tzetzes proceeds

49 According to Leone's critical apparatus, Tzetzes might have drawn this evocative simile from *Anth. Pal.* 11.417.4.

50 Tzetz. schol. in *Carm. Il.* 2.241b, p. 196, 9–12 Leone.

51 See e.g. *Hist.* 10. 790–803 (Plato's dialogues are nothing but the result of plagiarism) and 865–875 (Plato

plots against Dionysius, who had welcomed him in Sicily and generously supported his work).

52 On Plato's tendency towards flattery see Tzetz. *Hist.* 10. 814–820, a short *historia* with the telling title Ὅτι τυράννου ὁ Πλάτων ἐθώπευεν (On Plato, the tyrant-flatterer).

to describe Plato's famous journeys. In this case too, the philosopher's travels are compared to Odysseus' long wanderings. However, the implications of such a connection are rather different to those stated by Eustathius in the preface to his commentary on Dionysius Periegetes.

For instance, in a long extract from the *Chiliads*, Tzetzes clearly compares Odysseus' adventure in the Laestrygonians' land to Plato's dangerous encounter with the Aeginetans. The latter, who loathed Athens with all of its citizens, had once tried to stone Plato to death when he happened to be sailing by their island. Similarly, the Laestrygonians almost killed Odysseus and destroyed his trireme by throwing enormous rocks in its direction.<sup>53</sup>

Κατὰ τοὺς Λαιστρυγόνους οὖν τότε καὶ Αἰγινῆται,  
πρὸς τοὺς λιμένας τρέχοντες μίσει τῷ Ἀθηναίων,  
μικροῦ ἂν διεχρήσαντο τὸν Πλάτωνα τοῖς λίθοις.<sup>54</sup>

On the day, following the Laestrygonians' example, the Aeginetans, | driven by their hatred towards the Athenians, rushed to the harbor | and almost stoned Plato to death.

Some lines later, moreover, Plato's famous trip to Sicily is equalled to the hero's perilous navigation through Scylla and Charybdis.<sup>55</sup>

Τοῦτο τρισσάκις ἔπλευσεν ὁ πάνσοφος ὁ Πλάτων. (985)  
Τρὶς γὰρ ἔλθων εἰς Σικελοὺς τρισσάκις ἀπηλάθη.  
Ἔδρα γὰρ ἔχθρας Δίῳ καὶ τῷ Διονυσίῳ.<sup>56</sup>

Three times the most wise Plato sailed across this strait: | having gone to Sicily three times, three times he was driven away, | having drawn upon himself the hatred of Dion and Dionysius.

As we have already pointed out, Tzetzes' interpretation of Odysseus' travels was hardly flattering to the wily hero. Far from being the allegorical representation of the wise man's path towards *sophia*, Odysseus' journey is seen as nothing more than a piratical enterprise. We can, therefore, safely conclude that by comparing Plato's travels to those of Odysseus, Tzetzes hardly intends to compliment the Athenian philosopher.

In the case of Plato's journeys, however, Tzetzes' criticism appears to be even harsher. A closer analysis of the latter two excerpts<sup>57</sup> shows that the *grammatikos* does not limit

53 See Hom. *Od.* 10.118–132.

54 Tzetz. *Hist.* 10.939–941.

55 See Hom. *Od.* 12.234–259.

56 Tzetz. *Hist.* 10.985–987.

57 See Tzetz. *Hist.* 10.939–941 and 985–987, discussed here.

himself to depicting the Athenian thinker as a sort of treacherous and hateful replica of Odysseus. In Tzetzes' representation, Plato is not only despicable but also rather ridiculous. For instance, if the son of Laertes is threatened by gigantic creatures throwing equally gigantic rocks towards his ship, Plato barely avoids being stoned to death by a group of furious – but much less impressive – Aeginetans. Moreover, in Plato's case the perilous navigation through Scylla and Charybdis is nothing but a sort of grotesque coming and going caused by the philosopher's utter incompetence. Since his conspiracies never worked out, the treacherous Plato was constantly banished from Sicily by his former protectors and had to sail across the deadly strait over and over again. Odysseus might indeed have been repugnant and insufferable, but at least his perfidious plans were effective.

#### 2.4 The exegete is a new Moses

In light of these considerations, we will not be surprised to observe that Tzetzes does not seem to use the travelling or sailing metaphor in order to depict his exegetic task. Of course, as it has already been pointed out, the famous comparison between the vastness of the Homeric poems and the immensity of the sea was familiar to Tzetzes, who employs it in many passages of his works. However, his use of this traditional theme is much different to that of Eustathius, who did not hesitate to depict himself as a new Odysseus, ready to cross the potentially dangerous waters of the Homeric sea.

Having an extremely negative opinion of Odysseus and seeing Homer as a skillful but often unreliable rhetor, Tzetzes could never adopt a similar imagery. Far from being another Odysseus, the *grammatikos* sees and represents himself as a new – or even a better – Homer.<sup>58</sup> Adopting a totally different perspective to that of his colleague, Tzetzes does not perceive his exegetic activity as a long and difficult journey: to him, interpreting the immense sea of the Homeric poems amounts both to a building and a bridling process. Far from being an insignificant sailor faced with the overwhelming immensity of the sea, the Byzantine *grammatikos* appears as a miraculous builder of bridges, as a reincarnation of the great Cyrus who tamed the impetuous waters of the Gyndes.<sup>59</sup> The Ocean that sometimes frightened the Odyssean Eustathius poses no threat to Tzetzes, who chooses another symbol for his exegetic efforts, that of the biblical Moses.<sup>60</sup> Why undertake a difficult and dangerous crossing, when you already have the skills to not just navigate, but to utterly part and control the waters of the Homeric sea?

58 See for example the introduction to Tzetzes' *Allegories of the Iliad* (vv. 480–487): addressing the Empress Bertha-Eirene, the scholar proudly declares that the readers of his *Allegories* can do without

Homer and all the other poets who wrote about the Trojan War.

59 Tzetz. *All. Od. prol.* 19–31.

60 Tzetz. *All. Il. prol.* 24–31.

### 3 Conclusion

Despite being almost exact contemporaries and despite belonging to the same environment, Tzetzes and Eustathius could not have been more at odds. As we have just seen, though they both spent much of their life reading and interpreting Homer, they had completely different perceptions of the import of their exegetical work. Even though he deeply admired Homer, Eustathius was also well aware of the potential dangers of his enchanting songs. Consequently, he saw himself as a practiced sailor that was nonetheless always exposed to the unpredictable waters of the Homeric Ocean. Tzetzes too was conscious of the potential risks that the Homeric reader might face: these dangers, however, were much less subtle and more easily confronted than those perceived by Eustathius. In Tzetzes' view, reading the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* might be a perilous task, not because of the seductive nature of their myths, but because of the many lies Homer told in order to celebrate his favorite heroes. These falsehoods, however, can be easily unmasked by the competent exegete, who is able to both identify and correct Homer's fabrications, just as Moses was capable of controlling the apparently untamable currents of the Red Sea.

This difference in the way the two exegetes both perceive and depict Homer can be traced back to their contrasting personalities. However, their divergent life experiences and careers might have equally played a role in molding their opinions and beliefs. Contrary to Eustathius, Tzetzes always had to struggle to make a living from his literary career. Thus, he was constantly forced to advertise himself and his own work to attract the attention of rich patrons who might be willing to finance his works. In such a context, presenting oneself as a new and better Homer was undoubtedly an effective strategy of self-promotion. Eustathius, on the contrary, quickly integrated into the Constantinopolitan cultural elite and often obtained the prestigious and well-paid posts that Tzetzes unsuccessfully longed for. Along with his more restrained personality, such a successful career might explain the archbishop's more careful approach to Homer, whose poems were one of the main topics of his well-attended lessons. Similar considerations might explain the two scholars' different approaches to philosophy.<sup>61</sup>

61 It is important to remark that in Comnenian times, philosophy was at the centre of a rather heated debate. Not only were the literati divided between partisans of rhetoric and advocates of philosophy (see Garzya 1973), but philosophy itself had undergone a strict trial after the conviction of the Neoplatonist John Italos (see Kaldellis 2007, 228–230 and Magdalino 1993, 332–333). Of course, both Eustathius and Tzetzes were involved in these debates and their different treatment of Odysseus and Plato might be

a consequence of the stances they adopted in this respect. For instance, it is possible that Tzetzes' particularly violent attacks against Plato were aimed at gaining imperial favour, which, as we know, was essential to the scholar's survival. Moreover, Tzetzes' fierce outbursts against the Athenian thinker might also stem from his rather problematic attitude towards philosophy in general. Despite aspiring to write a commentary on Aristotle (Agiotis 2013) and in spite of being a sincere admirer of Pythagoro-

Yet, in spite of the various factors that might be at the heart of Tzetzes' and Eustathius' irreconcilable perspectives, the two exegetes share a commonality, namely the crucial role they both assign to Odysseus and his legendary wanderings. Even though he is seen and interpreted in opposed ways, the hero is constantly involved in the two scholars' discussions over the reception of the Homeric poems and the relevance of philosophy, both essential issues in Comnenian times<sup>62</sup>. After having divided generations of scholars, poets, and writers, Odysseus keeps captivating the most prominent literati of twelfth-century Byzantium, confirming once more the irresistible charm of his multifarious nature and his mysterious travels, which can take on different meanings time and again. Both intriguing and disconcerting, the son of Laertes is always ready to guide any willing traveler along an unpredictable journey across ideas, themes, and issues as *polytropoi* as himself.

ras, the scholar repeatedly claims the superiority of rhetoric to philosophy (see e.g. Tzetz. *Hist.* 11.720–736, where Tzetzes contrasts the rhetors' βιωφελῆ διδάγματα with the philosophers' ἀσυντελῆ διδάγματα πρὸς βίον). In many instances, moreover, he insists that a *grammatikos* like himself is undoubtedly more knowledgeable and competent than any philosopher (cp. schol. in Aristoph. *Nub.* 255.12–15 Holwerda: ὅς τοιοῦτος γραμματικὸς πολλῶ φιλοσόφων ὑπέρτερος· οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐπικαλοῦνται φιλόσοφοι ὡς φιλοῦντες σοφίαν, οὐχ ὡς εἰδότες).

Such criticism might have been elicited by his difficult relationship with the members of the so-called Senate of the Philosophers (see Pontani 2015, 385 and Luzzatto 1999, 53–55). These considerations might also help explain why Tzetzes had such a negative opinion of Odysseus, a character that for centuries had been interpreted as the very symbol of the *philosophos*.

62 Here I refer mainly to the time period stretching from the reign of Alexios I to that of Manuel I (ca. 1081–1180).

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