

# Outlining the *Iliad* in the Komnenian Age: Between Trojan Matter and Achilles' Wrath

*Alberto Ravani*

*Et breviter Troiae supremum audire laborem*  
Vergil *Aeneid* 2.11

**N**OWADAYS, at least in Europe, many people have a rough idea of what the Trojan War is. There are TV series, a major blockbuster starring famous Hollywood stars, and thousands of general books on the topic.<sup>1</sup> Many people may still have memories of children's books with abridged Greek myths and an illustration of a wooden horse towering over a city on fire—at least I do. The readers of those books and the watchers of those series perhaps know that *the* poem on the Trojan War is called the “*Iliad*,” and that its author was Homer—whether he was real or legendary is not relevant here. But how many of them know that both the story of the wooden horse and the sack of the city are not in the *Iliad*?

Counterintuitively, the main poem on the Trojan War leaves out its most iconic part, the spectacular siege, and many readers across the centuries have probably been baffled by this absence. This was the case during the so-called Byzantine millennium, and especially during the twelfth century, a period that stands out for a flourishing of Homeric scholarship described as a

---

<sup>1</sup> The latest television series is probably *Troy, Fall of a City* made by the BBC in 2018; the blockbuster was *Troy* (2004) with Brad Pitt, Orlando Bloom, and Diane Kruger. For what concerns the books the catalogue could be endless, I will just name Madeline Miller's bestseller *The Song of Achilles* (2011) and *The Women of Troy* by Pat Barker (2021).

“Homeric revival.”<sup>2</sup> Ingela Nilsson has distinguished between the *Troy matter* “the legendary subject matter”—defined by Eustathios of Thessalonike as τὰ Τρωϊκά—and the “Homeric epics” which is exclusively the matter of the two poems written by Homer. In Byzantine literature, she concluded, “the borders between the two are not clear-cut: poetic license allowed authors to express non-Homeric Troy matter in a Homeric style, or Homeric legends in vernacular verse, or to mix material taken from different sources.”<sup>3</sup>

This paper addresses these borders. In particular, it studies how, during the twelfth-century Homeric revival, Byzantine writers and scholars addressed the difference between the Homeric *Iliad* and the entire Trojan matter. Did they see any borders between the two? After a short introduction on the Classical and early Byzantine debate on the matter, the paper considers two chroniclers, George Kedrenos and Constantine Manasses, and then moves to other writers: John Tzetzes, Isaac Porphyrogenetos, and Eustathios of Thessalonike. The paper demonstrates that their critical outlooks on the Homeric *Iliad* did not distinguish between epic and historiography—as is done nowadays—but instead were shaped by the theoretical framework of late antique rhetorical handbooks which went so far as to influence their definition of an “Iliad.”

<sup>2</sup> A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2007) 241–250. Of the treatments of the reception of Homer in Byzantium, a brief list is R. Browning, “Homer in Byzantium,” *Viator* 8 (1975) 15–33 (repr. *Studies in Byzantine History, Literature and Education* [London 1977]), and “The Byzantines and Homer,” in R. Lamberton et al. (eds.), *Homer’s Ancient Readers* (Princeton 1992) 134–148; C. Cupane, “Die Homer-Rezeption in Byzanz,” in J. Latacz (ed.), *Homer: der Mythos von Troia in Dichtung und Kunst* (Munich 2008) 251–258; M. Mavroudi, “Homer in Greek from the End of Antiquity 1: The Byzantine Reception of Homer and His Export to Other Cultures,” in C. O. Pacheet al. (eds.), *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge 2020) 444–472.

<sup>3</sup> I. Nilsson, “From Homer to Hermoniakos: Some Considerations of Troy Matter in Byzantine Literature,” *Troianalexandrina* 4 (2004) 9–34, at 11–12.

## I

*The classical debate*

One of the most famous, and authoritative, explanations of the reasons why Homer does not cover the entire Trojan War in the *Iliad* is given by Aristotle in his *Poetics* (1451a16–7, 24–29; 1459a31–b 2):

Μῦθος δ' ἐστὶν εἷς οὐχ ὥσπερ τινὲς οἴονται ἐὰν περὶ ἓνα ἦ ... Ὀδύσειαν γὰρ ποιῶν οὐκ ἐποίησεν ἅπαντα ὅσα αὐτῷ συνέβη, οἷον πληγῆναι μὲν ἐν τῷ Παρνασσῷ, μανῆναι δὲ προσποιήσασθαι ἐν τῷ ἀγερμῷ, ὧν οὐδὲν θατέρου γενομένου ἀναγκαῖον ἦν ἢ εἰκὸς θάτερον γενέσθαι, ἀλλὰ περὶ μίαν πράξιν οἷαν λέγομεν τὴν Ὀδύσειαν συνέστησεν, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὴν Ἰλιάδα ... τῷ μὴδὲ τὸν πόλεμον καίπερ ἔχοντα ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος ἐπιχειρήσαι ποιεῖν ὅλον· λίαν γὰρ ἂν μέγας καὶ οὐκ εὐσύνοπτος ἔμελλεν ἔσεσθαι ὁ μῦθος, ἢ τῷ μεγέθει μετριάζοντα καταπεπλεγμένον τῇ ποικιλίᾳ. νῦν δ' ἐν μέρος ἀπολαβῶν ἐπεισοδίοις κέχρηται αὐτῶν πολλοῖς, οἷον νεῶν καταλόγῳ καὶ ἄλλοις ἐπεισοδίοις οἷς διαλαμβάνει τὴν ποιήσιν. οἱ δ' ἄλλοι περὶ ἓνα ποιοῦσι καὶ περὶ ἓνα χρόνον καὶ μίαν πράξιν πολυμερῆ, οἷον ὁ τὰ Κύπρια ποιήσας καὶ τὴν μικρὰν Ἰλιάδα.

A plot is not unified, as some think, if built around an individual ... Though composing an *Odyssey*, he [*scil.* Homer] did not include every feature of the hero's life (e.g. his wounding on Parnassus, or his feigned madness in the call to arms), where events lacked necessary or probable connections; but he structured the *Odyssey* round a unitary action of the kind I mean, and likewise with the *Iliad* ... though the war had beginning and end, he did not try to treat its entirety, for the plot was bound to be too large and incoherent, or else, if kept within moderate scope, too complex in its variety. Instead, he has selected one section, but has used many others as episodes, such as the catalogue of ships and other episodes by which he diversifies the composition. But the others build their works round a single figure or single period, hence an action of many parts, as with the author of the *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Text and transl. Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle Poetics, Longinus On the Sublime, Demetrius on Style* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1995) 56–59, 116–117.

Aristotle's answer is clear: to write an epic poem Homer focused the entire plot (μῦθος) on a single action (περὶ μίαν πράξιν), for writing the entire war would have been unsustainable, as the examples of the *Cypria* and *Little Iliad* demonstrate. Writing events in their entirety and including their full development belongs to historiography; epic is a separate genre. Aristotle's explanation still informs our understanding of classical genres and allows us to see Homer as a distinct author of epic and not as a deficient historian. That said, the *Poetics* was not known or read during the Byzantine period, and so did not have any influence on the twelfth-century debate on Homer.<sup>5</sup>

What was known and widely read in Byzantium were the scholia to the first book of the *Iliad*. In the *scholia vetera*, right at the beginning of Book 1, two classes of scholia (D-scholia and exegetica) discuss why Homer decided to focus solely on Achilles' wrath.<sup>6</sup> There are different entries and formulations, but they can be summarised as two main lines of thought: first, Homer chose the events surrounding Achilles' wrath because they are the most interesting moment of the entire war. It is the peak of the action, which is what an author needs to gain the listeners' attention. Second, that section of the war is the best for praising the virtues of Greek heroes.<sup>7</sup> This intention to praise heroes even answers the (legitimate) question "why is the poem called *Iliad* and not *Achilleid*?" given that Achilles is at the core of the action.<sup>8</sup> The answer is that the poem wants to showcase the

<sup>5</sup> On this point see L. Taràn and D. Gutas, *Aristotle Poetics. Editio Maior* (Leiden 2012) 37.

<sup>6</sup> H. Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem I* (Berlin 1969); Erbse's edition of the D-scholia is incomplete, see also H. van Thiel, *Scholia D in Iliadem: Proecdosis Aucta et Correctior* (Cologne 2014). For an explanation of the different classes of scholia to the *Iliad* see F. Montana, in S. Boodts et al. (eds.), *Sicut dicit Editing Ancient and Medieval Commentaries on Authoritative Texts* (Turnhout 2019) 97–125.

<sup>7</sup> See Erbse, *Scholia I* 3–4.

<sup>8</sup> The question appears only in class bT of the scholia exegetica: Erbse, *Scholia I* 4.30–38.

virtues of many heroes, not just of Achilles, and this is why it is called *Iliad*.

Byzantine Homeric scholarship relied mainly on scholia and epimerisms, probably in manuscripts which were even richer than the ones that have survived. A still open question about the transmission of Homeric scholarship is whether certain treatises or texts were still read in their ‘original’ form or already abridged and fragmented. A practical example could be Porphyry’s *Homeric Questions*. In this case, Marchinus van der Valk believes that Eustathios of Thessalonike had access to the entire work (*ipsam Hypomnema*) while writing his *Parekbolai*.<sup>9</sup>

#### *New Trojan narratives*

A watershed in the Byzantine understanding of the Trojan matter is the account of the war in Malalas’ *Chronicle* (sixth century) which occupies the entire fifth book. The account starts with Hecuba’s pregnancy with Paris, when she received a forecast of doom about the child she was bearing (5.2), and ends with the story of Agamemnon’s wretched homecoming and the vicissitudes of his son Orestes (5.30–37); most notably, Malalas’ main source is not Homer but the (alleged) eyewitness account of Dictys of Crete, which dates to the Roman period.<sup>10</sup> There are many differences between Dictys’ account and the Homeric one; the most evident is probably the complete absence of gods, goddesses, and their interventions. Dictys offers a narrative which reads as more reliable, “more historical” than Homer. Such an account was particularly suitable for a Christian audience which would hardly have stomached accounts of how pagan deities intervened and changed the course of the battle. As Adam Goldwyn has convincingly shown,<sup>11</sup> Malalas’ version

<sup>9</sup> *Eustathii Archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem* I (Leiden 1971) LXIV. On the *Parekbolai* see below.

<sup>10</sup> On Dictys of Crete and his influence see P. Gainsford, “Diktys of Crete,” *CCJ* 67 (2012) 58–87, at 58.

<sup>11</sup> A. J. Goldwyn, “John Malalas and the Origins of Allegorical and

of the Trojan War was instrumental in informing Byzantine narratives on the subject.

*New theoretical guides*

A key element for the understanding of Byzantine texts is the prominent role of rhetoric in Byzantine education. Rhetoric was taught in secondary stage of education by the *grammatikos* who used handbooks from the first centuries of the Roman Empire or later commentaries thereon;<sup>12</sup> the most popular handbooks were those of Hermogenes (second/third century) such as *On Staseis* and *On Ideas* and the *progymnasmata* of Aphthonius (second half of the fourth century).<sup>13</sup> Writing composition was based on specific exercises, *progymnasmata*; within these, Aphthonius distinguished between fable (μῦθος) and narrative (διήγημα)—while fables are imaginary like those of Aesop, narratives, whether true or fictional, are about reality (Aphth. p.113.1):<sup>14</sup>

Διήγημά ἐστιν ἕκθεσις πράγματος γεγονότος ἢ ὡς γεγονότος. Διενήνοχε δὲ διήγημα διηγήσεως ὡς ποιήσεως ποίημα· ποίησις μὲν γὰρ πᾶσα ἢ Ἰλιάς, ποίημα δὲ ἢ τῶν Ἀχιλλέως ὀπλων κατασκευή.

Narrative (*diégēma*) is an exposition of an action that has happened or as though it had happened. Narrative differs from narration (*diégēsis*) as a piece of poetry differs from a poem (*poiēsis*). The *Iliad* as a whole is a *poiēsis*, the making of the arms of Achilles a *poiēma*.<sup>15</sup>

Novelistic Tradition of the Trojan War in Byzantium,” *Troianalexandrina* 15 (2015) 23–49, at 24–25. According to Gainsford’s analysis, all the twelfth-century authors considered in this paper had no access to the text of Dictys: *CCJ* 67 (2012) 70–74.

<sup>12</sup> The book of *Progymnasmata* attributed to Hermogenes is now considered to be spurious. For an overview of Byzantine education see e.g. A. Markopoulos, “Education,” in E. Jeffreys et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford 2008) 785–795, esp. 788–790 on the curriculum.

<sup>13</sup> On the general dependence of Byzantine texts on Aphthonius see M. D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres II* (Vienna 2019) 20.

<sup>14</sup> M. Patillon, *Corpus Rhetoricum I* (Paris 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Transl. G. A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata. Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta 2003) 96.

Within this framework, the whole *Chronicle* of Malalas is a narration (διήγησις), while the story of the Trojan War is a narrative (διήγημα). Aiphthonius listed six features—or attributes—that each narrative, and each narration, must have (p.114.3–4):

Παρέπεται δὲ τῷ διηγήματι ἕξι· τὸ πρῶξαν πρόσωπον, τὸ πραχθὲν πρᾶγμα, χρόνος καθ' ὃ, τόπος ἐν ᾧ, τρόπος ὅπως, αἰτία δι' ἣν. Ἄρεται δὲ διηγήματος τέσσαρες· σαφήνεια, συντομία, πιθανότης καὶ ὁ τῶν ὀνομάτων ἑλληνισμός.

There are six attributes of narrative: the person who acted, the thing done, the time at which, the place in which, the manner how, and the cause for which it was done. The virtues of a narrative are four: clarity, concision, credibility, and a proper use of Greek.<sup>16</sup>

This list was the one that all Byzantines learned in school, and it outlines the basic features that a well-written text must have.

## II

### *Twelfth-century chroniclers*

After Malalas' *Chronicle*, which devoted ample space to the story of the Trojan War, most later chronicles ignored these events. A reason might be that the Trojan War, part of Greek history before Alexander the Great, did not fit into the narrative of the 'succession of empires',<sup>17</sup> derived from the prophecy in the Book of Daniel (7) about the four empires to rule the world, the last interpreted as Rome. The Trojan War reappeared in the chronicles only in the twelfth century, with renewed interest stemming from the revival of Homer and the classics. The Trojan matter regained its importance for Byzantine world history. Chronicles offer an ideal starting point to look at the Trojan matter in the twelfth century, as they offered the framework that other scholars eventually followed.

<sup>16</sup> Transl. Kennedy 96–97, modified.

<sup>17</sup> See C. Mango, "Discontinuity with the Classical Past in Byzantium," in M. E. Mullett et al. (eds.), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham 1981) 53–54, and E. M. Jeffreys, "The Attitudes of Byzantine Chroniclers towards Ancient History," *Byzantion* 49 (1979) 199–238.

*George Kedrenos*

The *Chronicle* of George Kedrenos dedicates considerable space to the Trojan War. It probably was composed towards the end of his life, in the first quarter of the twelfth century.<sup>18</sup> Kedrenos follows Malalas' model: the section on the Trojan War starts with Paris' birth (140.10–13) and ends with the enslavement of the surviving Trojans and the return of Helen with Menelaos (140.332–344); there follow a short summary of the return-journeys of the Greek heroes (141).<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly, Malalas is Kedrenos' main source for this part together with the still-unedited chronicle of Ps.-Symeon, which also offers a non-Homeric version of the war, slightly different from the one by Malalas.<sup>20</sup> Kedrenos' heavy dependence on his sources is probably the main reason why this *Chronicle* is little studied and often disparaged, generally considered a mere patchwork of older chronicles, especially John Skylitzes' *Synopsis historiarum* (second half of the eleventh century).

*Constantine Manasses*

A more interesting chronicle is that of Constantine Manasses, written in the decade 1143–1153.<sup>21</sup> Manasses' account of the

<sup>18</sup> See W. Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (New York 2013) 340–341.

<sup>19</sup> L. Tartaglia, *Georgii Cedreni Historiarum Compendium I* (Rome 2016) 245–268. For the content of the section and an analysis of its sources see C. Jouanno, “Pratique de l'emprunt dans les chroniques universelles byzantines: l'exemple de la matière troyenne,” *Kentron* 30 (2014) 94–99.

<sup>20</sup> On Malalas as a source for Byzantine historiography see A. Goldwyn, “John Malalas and the Origins of the Allegorical and Novelistic Traditions of the Trojan War in Byzantium,” *Troianalexandrina* 15 (2025) 23–49. Jouanno does not mention the chronicle of Ps.-Symeon among the sources, but she does postulate a second source with suggestions: *Kentron* 30 (2014) 97–99. For the presence of Ps.-Symeon as a source see Tartaglia, *Cedreni Compendium I* 20–21, and 240–268 in the apparatus of the sources of chapter 140.

<sup>21</sup> The two termini are the ascent of Manuel I to the throne in 1143 and the death of Manasses' patron Eirene the Sevastokratorissa in 1153: see A. Paul and A. Rhoby, *Konstantinos Manasses. Verschronik* (Stuttgart 2019) 7–9.

Trojan War occupies a small portion of his *Synopsis Chronikē*, some 360 lines in the total 6620.<sup>22</sup> Manasses covered exactly the same time span and events as the chroniclers already mentioned; in addition, like the chroniclers, his account of the war starts with Hecuba's pregnancy and her ominous dream about the destruction of Troy (1119–1126) and ends with a brief mention of the homecoming journeys. Unlike the others, Manasses draws from multiple classical sources, including Homer, giving to the story an almost 'mythological' flare.<sup>23</sup> An example is at 1277–1280 where the events of Achilles' wrath and its causes are drawn from Philostratus' *Heroicus*:<sup>24</sup> Achilles is angry not because Agamemnon offended his honor and took Briseis, but because his beloved friend Palamedes was framed by Odysseus and executed by Agamemnon. To this story and his source, Manasses adds a dramatic touch: two invocations, one to envy (βασκανία 1278) and one to jealousy (φθόνος 1325), both treated almost as agents of evil plotting against the harmony of the Greek army. Despite his new sources and emphatic interventions, Manasses never includes pagan gods and goddesses, which did not appear in any chronicle, while in Homer they serve as essential engines of the narrative.

What is most interesting in Manasses' account is, at its conclusion, a comment on Homer and his style (1111–1117):

ταύτην ἐγὼ βουλόμενος τὴν μάχην ἱστορήσαι  
 καθὼς τοῖς ἱστορήσασι γράφεται περὶ ταύτης,  
 καὶ μέλλων λέγειν, οὐ καθὼς Ὅμηρος ἀναγράφει,  
 συγγνώμη ἐξαιτήσομαι παρὰ τῶν εὐγνωμόνων·  
 Ὅμηρος γὰρ ὁ μελιχρὸς τὴν γλῶτταν καὶ θελξίνους

<sup>22</sup> O. Lampsidis, *Constantini Manassis Breviarium Chronicum* (Athens 1996); the Trojan War is at 1108–1470.

<sup>23</sup> See M. Augerinou-Tziōga, *Hē synopsis chronikē tou Kōnstantinou Manassē: synvolē stēn hyphologikē meletē mias emmetrēs chronographias* (Thessalonike 2013) 114–115.

<sup>24</sup> Philostr. *Her.* 33.31–36. The same source is also used by Tzetzes, see n.43 below.

μεθόδοις χρώμενος σοφαῖς οἰκονομεῖ τοὺς λόγους,  
ἐνιαχοῦ δὲ τὰ πολλὰ στρέφει καὶ μετατρέπει·

Wishing to narrate this battle  
as the historians have written about it,  
and not intending to speak as Homer described it,  
I will ask indulgence of my reasonable readers:  
Homer, honey-sweet of speech and charming,  
arranges his stories using skilful methods.  
Sometimes, however, he overturns and alters many things.

Homer occasionally altered the narrative matter and overturned it, while Manasses strove to write as a historian. Line 1117, Manasses' comment on Homer's convoluted arrangement of the narrative, is merely a polite understatement. The words ἐνιαχοῦ ("sometimes") and πολλά ("many things") have clashing meanings, and στρέφει and μετατρέπει reinforce the judgment on Homer's twisted narrative and are only apparently smoothed by the initial "sometimes."<sup>25</sup> The comment is interesting because it assesses Homer as a "writer of the battle" along with all the other historians on whom Manasses relied; Homer did not write history but an epic poem which covered just a small portion of the entire war. Instead, what Manasses praises are the qualities of the Homeric verse: charming and as sweet as honey.

Manasses' judgment on Homer is rooted in the prescriptions of Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata*, which are the same rules he followed in his own work. The account of the Trojan War is a "narrative" (διήγημα) within the larger narration (διήγησις) of the *Synopsis Chronikē*; it tells the causes, the actions, the actors, and the time in world history. That the *Synopsis* is in verse while the other chronicles are in prose does not matter in regard to the compositional rules of *progymnasmata*; in Byzantine literature most kinds of text could be written either in prose or in verse

<sup>25</sup> For an alternative comment on these lines—more from the point of view of Aristotle's *Poetics*—see G. Spatafora, "Antehomerica e Posthomerica nella letteratura bizantina," *MEG* 6 (2006) 207–208.

irrespective of their genre.<sup>26</sup> From the gracious comment on the qualities of Homeric verse, it is likely that Manasses appreciated reading Homer and his poems; however, when he came to judge his qualities as an historian, he found Homer lacking in conciseness and chronological clarity.

*John Tzetzes*

To turn from the chroniclers to the scholars, in the twelfth century John Tzetzes is probably the one who dedicated most works—but not most pages—to the Trojan matter.<sup>27</sup> They are three: in chronological order, the poem *Little-and-Big Iliad* (*Carmina Iliaca*),<sup>28</sup> the *Exegesis of the Iliad* in prose,<sup>29</sup> and the *Homeric Allegories*, a poem of nearly ten thousand political verses initially written for empress Bertha-Eirene, the first wife of Manuel I (1143–1180).

The title *Little-and-Big Iliad* (ἡ Μικρομεγάλη Ἰλιάς) refers both to its short (μικρός) length of 1696 hexameters—barely two books of Homer’s *Iliad*—and to the large (μεγάλη) scope of the events covered.<sup>30</sup> In fact, *Little-and-Big Iliad* encompasses the entire story

<sup>26</sup> On this point see M. D. Lauxtermann, “Texts and Contexts,” in W. Hörandner et al. (eds.), *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry* (Leiden 2019) 21; E. Jeffreys, “Why Produce Verse in Twelfth-Century Constantinople?” in P. Odorico et al., “*Doux remède...*” *Poésie et poétique à Byzance* (Paris 2009) 219–228. For an overview of poetry and prose in the twelfth century see N. Zagklas, “Experimenting with Prose and Verse in Twelfth-Century Byzantium. A Preliminary Study,” *DOP* 71 (2017) 229–231.

<sup>27</sup> For a recent overview of Tzetzes’ life and works see E. E. Prodi, *Τζετζικαὶ ἔρευναὶ* (Bologna 2022) ix–xxv.

<sup>28</sup> P. A. M. Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Carmina Iliaca* (Catania 1995); also known as the *Antehomerica*, *Homerica* and *Posthomerica*. On the question of the author’s title ἡ Μικρομεγάλη Ἰλιάς see P. L. M. Leone, “I ‘Carmina Iliaca’ di Giovanni Tzetzes,” *QCSAM* 6/12 (1984) 377–405.

<sup>29</sup> M. Papatthomopoulos, *Ἐξήγησις Ἰωάννου γραμματικῶ τοῦ Τζετζέου εἰς τὴν Ὀμήρου Ἰλιάδα* (Athens 2007).

<sup>30</sup> For this reading of the title see M. Cardin, “Teaching Homer through (annotated) Poetry,” in R. C. Simms (ed.), *Prequels, Sequels and Retellings of Clas-*

of the war, as stated in the proem (1.1–6, 17–19):

Ἀργαλέου πολέμοιο μέγαν πόνον Ἴλιακοῖο  
 ἔννεπε, Καλλιόπεια, ὑφ' ἡμετέρησιν ἀοιδαῖς,  
 ἀρχῆθε δ' ἐπάειδε καὶ ἐς τέλος ἐξερέεινε,  
 ἐξ ὅτεο Πρίαμος λοιγὸν Τρώεσσι φυτεύει  
 Δύσπαριν οὐλόμενον, ἀρχὴν πολέμοιο κακοῖο,  
 τὸν νόος οὐκ ἐρέεινεν Ὀμήρου κυδαλίμοιο

...

εἰπὲ δὲ καὶ πτολίπορθον Ἐπειοῦ δούριον ἵππον,  
 εἰσόκεν ἥϊστωσε πελώρια τείχεα Τροίης.

Ταῦτά μοι εὐπατέρεια, Διὸς τέκος, ἔννεπε Μοῦσα.

The great toil of the arduous Iliadic war  
 tell, Calliope, through our songs,  
 from the beginning sing and search through to the end,  
 from when Priam nurtured havoc for the Trojans,  
 wretched ill-Paris, cause of this evil war,  
 whom the mind of glorious Homer did not tell

...

and sing also the wooden horse of Epeios, destroyer of cities,  
 until it destroyed the mighty walls of Troy.

These things, daughter of Zeus noble father, sing me, Muse.

Tzetzēs asked the muse to tell (ἔννεπε) the great labour of the Trojan War from beginning to end, listing the main episodes from Paris' birth, the ruin of the Trojans, to the wooden horse. This is exactly what is then delivered. Such a large subject-matter openly contrasts with Aristotle's distinction according to which an epic poem cannot encompass all the events of a war.

The choice of this timespan and also his compositional principles are clearly described in Tzetzēs's first scholion to his *Little-and-Big Iliad*, which reads as a programmatic statement (p.101):<sup>31</sup>

*sical Epic* (Leiden 2018) 90–114, at 94, and T. Braccini, "Erudita invenzione: riflessioni sulla piccola grande Iliade di Giovanni Tzetzēs," *Incontri triestini di filologia classica* 9 (2009–2011) 153–173, at 154.

<sup>31</sup> The scholia were conceived as scholastic explanation of the poem. Given that they were written by the same author who wrote the poem, they still

Ὁ παρὼν ποιητής, φιλοσύντομος ὄν καὶ τῆς ὀφελείας τῶν νέων φροντίζων, συνοπτικῶς τὴν πᾶσαν Ἰλιάδα ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ βίβλω ἐξέθετο.

The present poet, since he loves brevity and is concerned for the benefit to young men, laid down, in a glance, the entire *Iliad* in the present book.

Almost every word of this statement has a meaning rooted in late antique rhetoric.<sup>32</sup> It begins with the nominal compound “the present poet” which openly contrasts with Homer’s usual appellative “the poet” (ὁ ποιητής) as he was the poet *par excellence*.<sup>33</sup> Then, Tzetzes’ love for concision (φιλοσύντομος) recalls one of Aphthonius’ four virtues of a narrative: clarity, concision (συντομία), credibility, and proper use of Greek (see 133 above). Another key word is “synoptically” συνοπτικῶς (“in a glance”); this term is more rooted in the eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine tradition of didactic works, especially poems. It valued a quick overview of the subject—recall Manasses’ chronicle, entitled *Synopsis Chronikē*.<sup>34</sup> Finally, Tzetzes describes his broad chronicle-like time span as the entire *Iliad* (τὴν πᾶσαν Ἰλιάδα),<sup>35</sup> which clearly implies that Homer’s *Iliad* is not “entire,” and therefore incomplete.

provide an effective hermeneutical tool to the modern reader; see Cardin, in *Classical Epic* 105–108, and U. Mondini, “Composing the Μικρομεγάλη Ἰλιάς. Macro- and microstructure of a Byzantine Homeric Poem,” *ByzZeit* 114 (2021) 325–354, at 330–331.

<sup>32</sup> For a detailed commentary on this passage (scholion and related lines) see Mondini, in *Τζετζικαὶ ἔρευναὶ* 238–254.

<sup>33</sup> On Tzetzes comparing himself to Homer see F. Conca, “L’esegesi di Tzetzes ai *Carmina Iliaca* fra tradizione e innovazione,” *Koinonia* 42 (2018) 75–100, at 75.

<sup>34</sup> Specifically on this passage see Mondini, in *Τζετζικαὶ ἔρευναὶ* 242–247, and, more generally, F. Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry, 1025–1081* (Oxford 2014) 238–240.

<sup>35</sup> On πᾶσα Ἰλιάς see Mondini, *ByzZeit* 114 (2021) 351–353, and A. Ravani, “‘And Wishes Also a Paraphrase of Homer’s Verse’: Structure and Composition of the *Prolegomena* to the *Allegories of the Iliad*,” in *Τζετζικαὶ ἔρευναὶ* 261–289, esp. 276–284.

The *Little-and-Big Iliad* has two parallel structures: an external macrostructure which encapsulates the narration, and an internal one which connects the individual episodes; in particular, as Mondini has shown, the external macrostructure is demonstrably based on Hermogenes' prescriptions.<sup>36</sup> Hermogenes is the other author who, together with Aphthonius, formed the basis of the late antique rhetorical tradition. The evidence for this structure mostly comes from Tzetzes' scholia, which use the same vocabulary of Hermogenes' *Progymnasmata*.<sup>37</sup> So e.g. the scholion to line 20—the first after the passage quoted above—which, at the end, also reproduces almost word-for-word Aphthonius' four virtues:

ἦτοι μὲν Τροίη] ἐντεῦθεν ἄρχεται ἡ διήγησις ῥητορικωτάτη μετὰ μικρᾶς τῆς προδιηγήσεως. Τὸ γὰρ ἀπ' αὐτῆς τῆς διηγήσεως ἄρχεσθαι ἀρητόρευτὸν τε καὶ ἄτεχνον, τὸ δὲ πόρρωθεν ἄρχεσθαι καὶ μὴ συντόμως εἰσβάλλειν εἰς τὴν ὑπόθεσιν κακία ἐστὶ διηγήσεως· ἀσαφῆναιαν γὰρ ἐμποιεῖ. ἀρεταὶ γὰρ διηγήσεως τέσσαρες· σαφῆναια, συντομία, πιθανότης καὶ ὁ τῶν ὀνομάτων ἑλληνισμός.

In fact, Troy] From here the rhetorical narrative starts with a short preliminary account. To start directly with the story shows poor rhetoric and low skill, but also starting much later without getting concisely to the point is an error of narration: it makes it unclear. The qualities of narration are four: clarity, concision, credibility, and a proper use of Greek.

The “preliminary account” (προδιήγησις) mentioned is the passage (quoted above) in which Tzetzes briefly states the subject-matter of the poem. This scholion shows, beyond how much Tzetzes relied on the teaching of the *Progymnasmata*, also what he found lacking in the Homeric *Iliad*. In this regard, the definition that Tzetzes gives of an “*Iliad*” is particularly telling. This is found in his second Homeric work, the *Exegesis of the Iliad*, a prose commentary written after the *Little-and-Big Iliad*, divided into two

<sup>36</sup> Mondini, *ByzZeit* 114 (2021) 331–337 (macrostructure), 340–350 (internal microstructure).

<sup>37</sup> For the similarities between Tzetzes' scholia and Hermogenes' works see e.g. Mondini, *ByzZeit* 114 (2021) 332 n.26, 334 n.33.

parts: an introductory essay and then a running commentary on Book 1. At the conclusion of the first part, Tzetzes defines the meaning of “Iliad” (*Ex.II.* 67.12–20):

Ἰλιάς ἡ παροῦσα ποίησις ἐπιγέγραπται, ὡς τὰς τῶν Ἰλιέων, ἦτοι τῶν Τρώων, συμφορὰς περιέχουσα ... Ὀμήρου δὲ πρὸς ἀντιδιαστολὴν τῶν μικρῶν Ἰλιάδων· καὶ γὰρ Λέσχης ὁ Πυρραῖος, Κιναιθῶν τέ τις Λακεδαιμόνιος καὶ ὁ Ἐρυθραῖος Διόδωρος, Τριφιόδωρός τε καὶ Κόϊντος ὁ Σμυρναῖος καὶ ἕτεροι Ἰλιάδας συγγεγραφήκεσαν.

The present poem is called *Iliad* because it contains the misfortunes of the Ilians, i.e. the Trojans ... Homer’s *Iliad* has to be distinguished from the small Iliads: for Lesches of Pyrrha, the Spartan Cinaethon, Diodorus the Erythrean, Tryphiodorus, and Quintus Smyrnaeus and others too have written Iliads.

For Tzetzes, “Iliad” is not only Homer’s poem, but every poem that covers the events of the Trojans; Homer’s *Iliad* is the most famous and the greatest, but also just one among smaller ones. In fact, Achilles’ wrath, the object of the Homeric poem, is only a small and carefully selected section of “the misfortunes of the Ilians.”

The *Exegesis* is particularly useful since, in its didactic prose, it explains Tzetzes’ understanding of Homer. In the introductory essay, when Tzetzes summarises the events before the beginning of the Homeric *Iliad*, he starts from Hecuba’s dream, but gives two versions of the story: one is more mythical and more “Homeric” (58.2–60.17);<sup>38</sup> the other version is that of the chronicles that draws on the works of Dictys and (like Manasses) Philostratus. Even if Tzetzes considers the second version, from the chroniclers, to be the more reliable (61.1–67.11), he still shows a greater interest in Homer and other mythological accounts than all the other authors analysed so far.

<sup>38</sup> The sources of this passage seem to be various. Their common denominator is that Tzetzes does not trust them entirely; one of them for example (59.10–11) is the poet Colluthus. Interesting is Tzetzes’ approach to the Judgment of Paris, which has been discussed in E. Jeffreys, “The Judgement of Paris in Later Byzantine Literature,” *Byzantion* 48 (1978) 112–131.

Another proof of this interest is that, at the end of the opening essay of the *Exegesis*, Tzetzes addresses the question of why Homer, despite Aphthonius' precepts, decided to start with the final part of the war. Initially, he draws explanations from the scholia: first, he argues that perhaps the previous nine years did not have anything worth telling.<sup>39</sup> But then, he wonders, why does the poem focus on the wrath? For this Tzetzes provides two reasons (σκόποι) and neither of them derives from the scholia. The first is moral (*Ex.II.* 71.12–14):

ἀποδεικνύς ἡμῖν ὅσα ἢ Ἀχιλλέως μῆνις εἰργάσατο, κελεύει μὴ μνηῖαν μηδ' ἀτιμῶν τοὺς ἀρίστους.

[Homer, who] shows us all the things that Achilles' wrath has done, exhorts us not to be angry and not to dishonour excellent people.

The second reason is to celebrate Achilles, exactly as Homer does with Odysseus in the *Odyssey* (72.2–3). But, if so, why is the poem not called the *Achilleid*? Tzetzes fills many lines to provide a suitable answer, which is then summarised in the concluding sentence of the prologue (73.12–14):

ἴστω ὡς μειζόνως καὶ περιουσιαστικῶς κὰκ τούτου τὸν ἥρωα πάλιν τιμᾶ, προσάπτων αὐτῷ καὶ μόνῳ τὸ αἴτιον τῆς Ἰλιακῆς συμφορᾶς.

And so, it is a way to honour the hero once again, in even a greater way: to him alone he ascribes the cause of Troy's catastrophe.

This explanation openly contrasts with the scholia vetera, for they say that the reason the poem is called *Iliad* and not *Achilleis* is precisely the opposite: Homer wanted to celebrate all the Greek heroes and not just Achilles.<sup>40</sup> In Tzetzes' view, the only way he could 'justify' Homer's narrow selection of material was

<sup>39</sup> *Ex.II.* 71.2–4, 6–9: δι' ἧντινα αἰτίαν ποτὲ ἀπὸ τῶν τελευταίων ὁ ποιητὴς γράφειν τῆς μάχης ἀπῆρξατο ... ὁ πρὸ τοῦ δεκαετοῦς δὲ χρόνος οὐκ ἀναγκαίως τὰς πράξεις ἐκέκτητο, "For what reason did the poet start writing the war from the last events? ... the time before the tenth year did not have any important actions." Cf. Erbse, *Scholia* I 4.19–26.

<sup>40</sup> Erbse, *Scholia* I 4.32–36.

by positing a clear focus: exalting Achilles and his military virtue.

This idea becomes even clearer in the last of Tzetzes' works on Homer, the *Homeric Allegories*, a long allegorical poem on both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.<sup>41</sup> The poem opens with a lengthy prolegomena telling the whole backstory of the Homeric *Iliad*.<sup>42</sup> Again, Tzetzes starts from Hecuba's dream (prol. 176–183) and finishes with the two versions of Achilles' wrath (1113–1147);<sup>43</sup> again, Tzetzes is aware that even an allegorical paraphrase of the *Iliad* cannot fail to mention the causes of the event, as he did in his two previous works. This awareness implies the need to address Homer's belated start. The *Allegories* lack the thorough explanations of the *Exegesis*, but—surprisingly—the reasons provided differ from those presented in the *Exegesis* (1148–1153, 1157–1167):

Ὁ δ' Ὀμηρος δεινότατος ὑπάρχων λογογράφος  
 τὰ μέχρι τούτων σύμπαντα πανσόφως παρατρέχει,  
 καὶ Παλαμίδην οὐδαμῶς ἔγραψε τῇ ποιήσει,  
 ἵνα τὸν Ἀχιλλέα μὲν ἐπίορκον μὴ δείξῃ,  
 τὸ κράτιστον κεφάλαιον αὐτοῦ τῶν ἐγκωμίων,  
 διὰ γυναῖκα ποταπὴν τοῦς ὄρκους παραβάντα·  
 ...  
 Ὅθεν οὐδὲ τὴν πόρθησιν τῆς Τροίας ἀφηγεῖται,  
 σιγᾷ δὲ μέχρι τῆς σφαγῆς Ἑκτορος ῥαψωδίσας.  
 Τὴν πόρθησιν τῆς Τροίας δὲ παρέδραμε πανσόφως·

<sup>41</sup> As recently demonstrated, the *Allegories of the Iliad* and the *Allegories of the Odyssey* from a unitary poem, the *Homeric Allegories*: A. Ravani, "The Engineer and the Ocean. Structural Hints for John Tzetzes' 'Homeric Allegories,'" *ByzZeit* 116 (2023) 885–910. The available edition of the *Allegories of the Iliad* (the first part of the *Homeric Allegories*) is J. F. Boissonade, *Tzetzae Allegoriae Iliadis accedunt Pselli Allegoriae* (Paris 1851). I am in the process of completing a new edition of the *Homeric Allegories*.

<sup>42</sup> For more on the structure and composition of the *Prolegomena* see Ravani, in *Τζετζικάϊ ἔρευναί* 261–289.

<sup>43</sup> Like Manasses, Tzetzes follows Philostratus when it comes to assessing the 'real' story of Achilles' wrath; see also *Carmina Iliaca* 1.370–2.4. For further information and comparison of these two versions see Jeffreys, *Byzantion* 49 (1979) 211–212.

πρὸ γὰρ αὐτῆς ὁ Ἀχιλεὺς γυναικωδῶς ἐσφάγη.  
 Οὕτω πανσόφως καὶ δεινῶς ῥητορικῶ τῷ τρόπῳ  
 πρὸς μὲν τὸ τέλος εἶασε τὴν πόρθησιν τῆς Τροίας,  
 ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς δὲ μέχρι νῦν τοῦ χρόνου τοῦ δεκάτου  
 τὰ πάντα παρετρόχασε δεινὸς ὢν λογογράφος,  
 ἄρχεται δ' ἐκ τῆς μῆνιδος δεινότητος μεθόδῳ,  
 γράφων αὐτὴν ὡς βούλεται, καὶ γράφει γεγονέναι  
 διὰ γυναικας καὶ αὐτὸς λέγων αὐτὴν γενέσθαι.

But Homer, being a most skillful writer,  
 most wisely omits everything leading up to these events,  
 and did not write about Palamedes at all in his poem,  
 so as not to reveal Achilles,  
 the mighty subject of his encomium, as a perjurer,  
 transgressing his oaths for a woman of no account,  
 ...

That is why he does not narrate the sack of Troy either;  
 he stops singing until the slaying of Hektor.  
 He most wisely omitted the sack of Troy,  
 for Achilles was slain like a woman prior to the sack.  
 Thus, most wisely and skillfully, in his rhetorical manner  
 he did not conclude with the sack of Troy;  
 from the beginning until the tenth year  
 he omitted everything, being a skillful writer,  
 and skillfully he begins with the wrath,  
 writing about it as he wishes,  
 saying also that it happened because of women.<sup>44</sup>

Homer does not want to offend his heroes, so he does not tell how Achilles broke his oaths and how, shortly before the sack of Troy, he was brutally slain. This explanation is not found in the scholia.

Tzetzes' concern for the causes, but in general more for the precepts of late antique rhetoric, can be finally confirmed by his commentary on Hermogenes' *On Invention*. Concerning the qualities that a good narrative should have, he stresses once

<sup>44</sup> Transl. A. J. Goldwyn and D. Kokkini, *John Tzetzes. Allegories of the Iliad* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2015) 87–89.

again the importance of the causes:<sup>45</sup>

ἐν τῇ προδιηγῆσει μὲν ὁ ῥήτωρ προδιδάξας  
 ὅπερ χρεῶν κατάρχεσθαι μὴ ἀκεφάλῳ τρόπῳ,  
 λέγει δὲ προδιήγησιν, εἶτα καὶ διηγεῖσθαι.  
 ἐπεὶ νῦν τὴν διήγησιν ἀπῆρξατο διδάσκειν,  
 λέξει τοὺς ταύτης πλατυσμούς, καὶ πόσοι τούτων τρόποι.  
 Πέντε δὲ διηγῆσεως τῶν πλατυσμῶν οἱ τρόποι·  
 πράγματα τὰ πραττόμενα, αἰτία πραττομένων·  
 καὶ τὰ παραλειπόμενα, καὶ αἱ αἰτίαι τούτων,  
 καὶ σὺν αὐτοῖς οἱ λογισμοί.

In the preliminary account the rhetor shows that it is necessary not to start without a beginning, which he called *prodiēgēsis*, and then to start narrating; he will say how to expand a narrative and in what ways. Five are the ways of expanding a narrative. The acts that are accomplished, the cause of the acts, those that were omitted, and their causes, and, with them, the reflections.

This is the method Tzetzes followed in his composition of the *Little-and-Big Iliad*, a narrative of an event (the Trojan War), as all the “Iliads” are, which starts from its causes. As we have seen, in his other works Tzetzes always made sure to add a brief introduction or preliminary account on the causes of the war.

#### *Isaac Porphyrogenetos*

It was Frederik Kindstrand who convincingly demonstrated that Isaac Porphyrogenetos, author of poems and commentaries, was one of the younger children of Alexios I and therefore brother of Anna Komnene and John II.<sup>46</sup> Isaac Komnenos

<sup>45</sup> Cramer, *Anecd. Ox.* IV (1837) 58.1–8; λογισμοί has been written instead of λόγοι for metrical reasons, see Waltz, *Rh. Gr.* III (1834) 625.26. A new edition of Tzetzes’ *Commentary on Hermogenes* is in preparation under the supervision of Aglae Pizzone. The commentary on Hermogenes’ *On Invention* will be edited by Baukje van den Berg.

<sup>46</sup> J. F. Kindstrand, *Isaac Porphyrogenitus. Praefatio in Homerum* (Uppsala 1979) 13–20, which also contains a list of his works. For a biographical profile see

(1093–1152) was recognised as a learned man and praised for his knowledge even by the poet Theodoros Prodromos.<sup>47</sup> Among several scholarly works,<sup>48</sup> Isaac is known for having written three Homeric prose works—essentially three short essays: *On Homer*, *On the things left out by Homer*, and *On the quality and features of Trojan and Greek Heroes*.<sup>49</sup> As Filippomaria Pontani has shown, these works were all conceived to accompany Isaac’s own edition of the *Iliad*, which was copied into *Paris.gr.* 2682 [diktyon 52318].<sup>50</sup> The manuscript dates to the first half of the fourteenth century and so cannot be Isaac’s personal copy.<sup>51</sup> However, according to Pontani’s analysis, this manuscript reproduces a master copy conceived by Isaac himself with his original scholia. The *Parisinus* opens with the preface *On Homer* and ends with the two other works which, as Kindstrand correctly observes, should actually be considered a single concluding essay divided into two parts.<sup>52</sup> In addition, in *Paris.gr.*

K. Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν* I (Thessalonike 1984) 238–254 (K 36), and V. F. Lovato, “Isaac Komnenos and the *Letter of Aristeas*,” in *Isaac Komnenos Porphyrogenetos. Walking the Line in Twelfth-century Byzantium* (Abingdon 2024) 10–21.

<sup>47</sup> W. Hörandner, *Theodoros Prodromos. Historische Gedichte* (Vienna 1974) no. 42, esp. lines 7–12.

<sup>48</sup> Listed by Lovato, in *Isaac Komnenos* 17–18, and cf. the other contributions in the volume.

<sup>49</sup> The edition of the first is Kindstrand, *Isaac Porphyrogenitus. Praefatio* 27–32, the other two are in H. Hink, *Polemonis Declamationes quae extant duae* (Leipzig 1873) 57–88 (*De rebus ab Homero praetermissis* and *De proprietate et characteribus Graecorum et Troianorum, qui ad Troiam convenerant*). For an overview of the Homeric works see A.-L. Rey, “Isaac Komnenos and the Scholarship of a Learned Prince,” in *Isaac Komnenos* 151–168.

<sup>50</sup> See F. Pontani, “The First Byzantine Commentary on the *Iliad*: Isaac Porphyrogenitus and his Scholia,” *ByzZeit* 99 (2006) 551–596. For a description of how the Homeric works tie in with the manuscript and the layout see Rey, in *Isaac Komnenos* 151–168.

<sup>51</sup> See Pontani, *ByzZeit* 99 (2006) 554–555.

<sup>52</sup> Kindstrand, *Isaac Porphyrogenitus. Praefatio* 11. The same is suggested by

2682 the text of the *Iliad* is a commented edition made by Isaac Porphyrogenetos himself.<sup>53</sup> This manuscript is not only a wonderful testimony for Homeric reception, but also contributes substantially to our knowledge of Komnenian book culture.

What is relevant here are the works Isaac wrote as a conclusion to his Iliadic manuscript and, in particular, the first part of the concluding essay on “the events that Homer left out” (τῶν καταλειφθέντων παρὰ τοῦ Ὁμήρου). In the opening, he says that he decided to furnish his manuscript of the *Iliad* with a text that provides the reader with the end of the story. Far from being a rushed composition, this concluding essay is a well-researched account not just of the siege of Troy, but also of all the events before it (*Praef.* 61.7–13):

ἐγὼ δὲ ... τὰ παρὰ τοῦ ποιητοῦ καταλειφθέντα καὶ σποράδην διαφόροις παλαιῶν βίβλοις ἐγκείμενα ἱστορίαις τε καὶ ὑφηγήσεσι συλλέξας τῷ παρόντι πέρατι τῆς Ὀμηρείου βίβλου συνεπτυγμένως ἐκτίθημι.

I have collected the events left out by the Poet which are preserved here and there, in various books of old writers, in histories and stories; I present them here, bound together to the end of this Homeric book.

Isaac writes this additional essay because he feels that the reader would be disappointed by not learning the end of the story. His admission of using various sources is an acknowledgement that the Homeric poem lacks information; however, it is also a statement of the highly derivative nature of these writings, which is also why Isaac's essays have been little studied and too quickly dismissed.<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, both parts of the concluding essay recall an alleged short treatise attributed to

Pontani, *ByzZeit* 99 (2006) 557, and Rey, in *Isaac Komnenos* 162. Hink gives two titles, but in his edition makes no formal separation between the two works (*Polemonis Declamationes* 79) as in the manuscript (*Paris.gr.* 2682 f. 373r: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10723100m/f355.item>).

<sup>53</sup> See Pontani, *ByzZeit* 99 (2006) 557; the second part of the article gives an overview of the commentary.

<sup>54</sup> On this point see Kindstrand, *Isaac Porphyrogenitus. Praefatio* 11–12.

Porphyry called *On the names omitted by the poets*, which Hartmut Erbse demonstrated to be just a single *zetema* from Porphyry's *Homeric Questions*, excerpted from the commentary on Book 2 of the *Iliad*.<sup>55</sup> That said, Porphyry does not seem to be among Isaac's sources. While the first part of the final essay draws on multiple sources like Malalas and even Euripides' *Hecuba*, the portraits of the Greek heroes are taken directly from Malalas' *Chronicle*.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, Isaac himself admits to not knowing why Homer did not include—at least—the final siege of Troy in his *Iliad*; he openly criticizes Homer and his selection of material, without any attempt to justify the omissions (*Praef.* 59.13–16):

τὸν τρόπον τῆς πανωλεθρίας Τρωϊκῆς ἀλώσεως τοῦτον, οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως, τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις καὶ ἐντυχοῦσι τῇ παρουσίᾳ βίβλω οὐδ' ὅποσοῦν διεσάφησε.

the very way in which Troy was utterly destroyed—I do not know why—he did not at all explain to the listeners and readers of this book.

Here is Isaac's remedy. When he prepares his own manuscript with the text of the *Iliad* and his commentary on it, he feels the need to fill the gap that the main author, the poet, has left. Isaac was aware that a good author, when writing a narrative, should always include the causes of the event and then tell it from the beginning to the end—as Aphthonius prescribed. At the same time, he does not renounce Homer: he could have presented a version of Malalas or another account of the war; instead, Isaac chose Homer. The reason why Isaac kept the *Iliad* and integrated that account with his own writing at the end is only speculative; however, it seems logical that Homer's new-found eminence and general value for both Byzantine education and

<sup>55</sup> For an overview of the issue see the summary in J. A. MacPhail, Jr., *Porphyry's Homeric Questions on the Iliad* (Berlin 2011) 11–12.

<sup>56</sup> On some of these see F. Pontani, "The Dignity of Kingship Asserted: Isaac's 'political' Notes on the *Iliad*," in *Isaac Komnenos* 137–148. These kinds of portraits appear also in Tzetzes' *Allegories of the Iliad* prol. 508–835.

Kommenian society may have influenced his decision. What matters is that Isaac provides us with a material example of how to deal with Homer's gaps and, therefore, with the gaps that Isaac's own choice implied.

*Eustathios of Thessalonike*

In her *Homer the Rhetorician*,<sup>57</sup> Baukje van der Berg dedicates an entire chapter to describing how, in his rich *Parekbolai on the Iliad*, Eustathios of Thessalonike, metropolitan and renowned scholar of the twelfth century,<sup>58</sup> explains Homer's compositional method. His works on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are called *parekbolai*: this implies that the commentaries have been compiled, rather than written, drawn from a huge selection of exegetical material assembled with the purpose of teaching rhetoric by using Homer—and not explaining Homer.<sup>59</sup> The *Parekbolai* is a handbook for schoolmasters and—unlike the scholia—allows for consultation, or, more generally, reading without the Homeric text.<sup>60</sup>

In her analysis, van den Berg clearly explains why, according to Eustathios, Homer selected and arranged the matter in such a way.<sup>61</sup> Even if Achilles' wrath is only a segment of a longer war, it is the “peak of the action” (ἀκμή τῶν ἔργων), so it captivates

<sup>57</sup> *Homer the Rhetorician: Eustathios of Thessalonike on the Composition of the Iliad* (Oxford 2022) 57–103 (“The Skilful Composition of the *Iliad*”).

<sup>58</sup> For an overview of Eustathios' life see Ronchey in P. Cesaretti and S. Ronchey, *Eustathii Thessalonicensis Exegesis in Canonem Iambicum Pentecostalem* (Berlin 2014) 7\*–30\*, with previous bibliography.

<sup>59</sup> The complete name should be Παρεκβολαὶ τῶν εἰς τὴν Ἰλιάδα / Ὀδύσειαν see E. Cullhed (ed.), *Eustathios of Thessalonike. Commentary on Homer's Odyssey. Volume 1, on Rhapsodies α–β* (Uppsala 2016) 2\*–3\*: extracts from works on the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*.

<sup>60</sup> This difference is mainly that Tzetzes' *Exegesis of the Iliad* like the *Little-and-Big Iliad* and the *Allegories*—at least the *Prolegomena* and the first fifteen books—were conceived to be read without the Homeric text. Eustathios marks the difference between his *Parekbolai* and an *exegesis* at *Comm. ad Od.* 10.12–14 Cullhed.

<sup>61</sup> For the full explanation see van den Berg, *Homer the Rhetorician* 63–73.

the audience more than a chronological sequence.<sup>62</sup> This explanation is essentially drawn directly from the scholia which also had explained that this last segment of a ten-year war was the only one worth telling. For Eustathios, this is a display of Homer's rhetorical abilities: the pre-planned arrangement of the events, called οἰκονομία, and the elaboration of the plot (διασκευή) from the story-line, or *fabula*.<sup>63</sup> For Eustathios, Homer does rearrange and further elaborate the plot both at the level of books or single episodes and at the more general level of the poem as a whole.

On the other hand, Eustathios is fully aware that the tale of the Trojan War starts long before the Homeric *Iliad*, with the birth of Paris, ending after the end of the poem with the siege of the city. He states this at the beginning of his commentary, reassuring his "gluttonous" readers that all the events of the war will be told, just not chronologically.<sup>64</sup> Homer starts *in medias res* but gives his readers some background by scattering previous events in the narrative. At the end, the reader has a complete view of the events.

It is then interesting to see that Eustathios' definition of an "Iliad" essentially coincides with that of Tzetzes. In the first lines of the prologue, Eustathios explains the meaning of the title of the Homeric poem, the *Iliad* (*Comm. prooem.* 5.8–10, 14–21):

ταύτην δὲ τὴν βίβλον συλληπτικώτερον Ἰλιάδα ἐκάλεσε καὶ οὔτε ἀπὸ ἐνός τινος ὡς ἐὰν Ἀχιλλεῖα ἢ τι τοιοῦτον ἐκαλεῖτο, οὔτε διὰ τοὺς Ἰλιεῖς, ὡς δηλαδὴ τὰ τῶν Ἰλιέων μόνων περιέχουσιν κακά, ἀλλ' ὅτι περιέχει τὰ κατὰ τὴν Ἰλιον συμπεσόντα ἤτοι τὰ Τρωϊκά ... οὐχ' ἀπλῶς ἐνταῦθα ὁ ποιητὴς περὶ τῶν Ἰλιέων λέγει τί ἔπαθον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο μὲν, σκοπὸς δὲ αὐτῷ τοῦ βιβλίου, ὡς

<sup>62</sup> This explanation is given at *Comm. ad Il.* ad 7.34–35; see further van den Berg, *Homer the Rhetorician* 64–66.

<sup>63</sup> See van den Berg, *Homer the Rhetorician* 69–73.

<sup>64</sup> *Comm ad Il.* prooem. 5.8–15. For an analysis of Eustathios' readership and the gluttonous readers see A. Pizzone, "Audiences and Emotions in Eustathios of Thessalonike's Commentaries on Homer," *DOP* 70 (2016) 225–244, esp. 229–230.

καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν προοιμίῳ ἐκτίθεται, εἰπεῖν ὅσα κακὰ ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως μῆνιδος καὶ οἱ Τρῶες καὶ οἱ Ἕλληνας ἔπαθον καὶ μάλιστα οἱ Ἕλληνας.

He more comprehensively named the present book *Iliad*; it was named neither after one person, e.g. *Achilleid* or something similar, nor after the Ilians, as if, of course, comprising the misery of the Ilians only, but [it is called *Iliad*] because it contains the events that happened in relation to Ilium, i.e. the Trojan War. (transl. van den Berg 193–194)

The answer is clear. The poem is called “Iliad” because it contains (περιέχει) the facts which happened in Ilium, that is, the Trojan matter (τὰ Τρωϊκά). Eustathios again follows the scholia by saying that Homer does not name the poem “Achilleid” since what he offers is a comprehensive view of the events that unfolded on both sides of the battlefield during a specific timespan, the “accursed wrath” of Achilles. This equivalence between “Iliad” and Trojan matter is further strengthened a few lines later, at the end of the prologue, where, after a morphological analysis of the word “Ilias,” Eustathios concludes that the expressions “The Homeric *Iliad*” and “the Trojan matter by Homer” are equivalent.<sup>65</sup>

Both Eustathios and Tzetzes give their own explanations of why Homer covers only a small portion of the war and omit both the beginning and the end of the war. While Eustathios draws more faithfully on the previous exegetical tradition, Tzetzes innovates, suggesting his own ideas. Despite the diverging explanations, both scholars share the same definition of “Iliad,” which is essentially that of a historical account of the war.

#### *A Conclusion*

For Byzantine authors the Trojan War was a historical reality. Every account of it was therefore considered a narrative of a real event. Narratives of real events had to be written according to the rules set out by Aphthonius and Hermogenes on narratives.

<sup>65</sup> *Comm. ad Il.* prooem. 5.24–27. The expressions are Ὀμήρου Ἰλιάς and Ὀμήρου Τρωϊκά.

Homer and his *Iliad* were therefore a potential problem: there are no causes and no start of the war, there is no conclusion, and the timeline is not always clear; Homer however was the Poet, an author taught in school, whom all who could read deeply admired, as Manasses and Tzetzes show.

This importance and value attributed to Homer clashed with how they were taught to write—and read—a text; in the meantime, alternative versions of the Trojan War enjoyed great popularity. This started in the Roman period with Dictys, but it is the *Chronicle* of Malalas that secured great popularity for this more historical version, one which is complete and has no divine interventions.

In the twelfth century, chroniclers included the Trojan War in their accounts of world history, again drawing mostly from Malalas. Manasses is the first to mention Homer, but essentially only to criticise him. Tzetzes praised Homer and dedicated many of his writings to the Homeric poems; nonetheless, he is aware that the events of the Trojan War must be told from the causes of the war to the tragic siege of the city. This is in fact the content of his own *Iliad* written in Homeric style. A slightly different perspective is offered by Isaac Porphyrogenetos, who remains perplexed by the fact that Homer does not tell the end of the story; therefore, he decides to add it himself in a prose work, a *coda* to his own edition of the *Iliad*. Finally, Eustathios reassures his readers that Homer only wanted to showcase all his rhetorical abilities; if read in its entirety, the reader will find that the book contains all the events from the start of the war to the end.

When analysed closely, all the authors analysed see an “*Iliad*” as it was defined by Eustathios and Tzetzes: an account of the Trojan matter. The problem arises when they have to explain why Homer, the best writer of all, wrote a poem without the causes and the end of the war. The Homeric *Iliad* does not start from Paris and Hecuba’s ominous dream and does not finish with the sack of Troy. This contravenes the theoretical principles that they were taught and followed. However, despite the

criticism, those scholars found ways to clarify or excuse Homer, either by praising other qualities, as Manssases does, or by finding explanations—perhaps even far-fetched and inconsistent—to clarify his choices. Such a great author cannot fail, even if he does something wrong.

In conclusion, an answer to the initial question is due: are there borders between the Trojan matter and Homeric epics in twelfth-century Homeric scholarship? No, there are not. Homer is the writer of the Trojan matter: one of the many—of course—but absolutely the best, or at least the one with the best style.<sup>66</sup>

*September, 2024*

Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies  
Princeton University  
alberto.ravani@princeton.edu

<sup>66</sup> A draft of this paper was presented at the Oxford University Byzantine Society Graduate conference in February 2020. It was then thoroughly reviewed and rewritten during my stay at the Austrian Academy of Sciences funded by the OeAD (Ernst Mach scholarship and WTZ CZ11/2023 Förderprogramm “Late Byzantine Narratives between Primary and Secondary Orality”). During its many phases this paper profited from the advice of many friends and scholars; I thank Krystina Kubina for her constant advice and support and (in alphabetical order) Frederick Bird, James Cogbill, Markéta Kulhánková, Andreas Rhoby, and Nikos Zagklas.