DE NOVIS LIBRIS IUDICIA


This study mainly deals with book α of the Odyssey, of which it now and again offers a penetrating analysis. Moreover interesting views about the composition of the Odyssey as a whole are presented. Among other things I refer the reader to p. 61 (the character of the Odyssey); pp. 100 f. and 102; pp. 120 ff. (the arrival of Athena at Ithaca); p. 125 (about Mentes and Mentor). Schadewaldt, who defended the unity of the Iliad, attributed the Odyssey to different poets, but Rüter considers the poem to be a unity, which view, we may say, is as yet the prevailing one 1).

As a supplement to Rüter's observations, I should like to present a few notes on the proem of the Odyssey and on the first book in general. Rüter (p. 35) has rightly pointed out the frequent use of the word πολύς in ll. 1-4. It may be added that there is an alliteration of the letter μ in these lines (besides πολύς cf. also the words πλάγγος, πτολεμόροον, πόντος, πάθεν) which I think to be deliberate. The word πολύτροπος (α 1) in the Odyssey occurs only here and in α 330; both times it is used of Odysseus. Its meaning is not ambiguous, as Rüter thinks (p. 36), for it does not refer to Odysseus' wanderings and hardships, but no doubt denotes his shrewdness and sagacity. We must not forget that in α 330 Circe is speaking, who cannot but be astonished that a person has withstood her magical practices. Accordingly she says: "You are the shrewd Odysseus". Moreover, at the beginning of a poem, the hero whose fortunes are the theme of the poem, is likely to be depicted as favourably as possible. The most typical characteristic of Odysseus is his sagacity. Therefore, the poet informs us that he is going to sing about a hero who is πολύτροπος, 'very shrewd'.

The proem (α 1-9) is dominated by two ideas, (a) the hero has a great experience, for he has seen and suffered many things; (b) he has a high idea of the responsibility of a leader of men, for he has tried at all costs to save the life of his comrades. Since the hero has lost his comrades, it may be concluded that he will return alone and so the second half of the poem is prepared. Two themes are

1) See now also H. Erbse, Beiträge zum Verständnis der Odyssee (Berlin 1972).
missing from the actual proem, (a) the wrath of Poseidon, (b) the menace of the suitors. Perhaps they are not announced in the proem, because (a) the wrath of a god is dangerous and therefore presents an ill omen in the eyes of archaic man \(^2\), and (b) the motive of the suitors is humiliating for the hero.

The motif of Poseidon's wrath (\(\alpha 11-21\)) may be compared with the opening part of the *Iliad*. After the proem we are at once (A 8 ff.) informed about the immediate cause of the events: the wrath of Apollo and the events that led up to it. Likewise in \(\alpha 11-21\) we are informed about the wrath of Poseidon, which is the cause of Odysseus' evil fate and of his banishment at Ogygia. Whereas in A the cause of the evils that have befallen the Greeks, immediately precedes the events that are narrated in this book, in \(\alpha\) the stretch of time that has elapsed has been much longer and has ranged over many years. Thus Odysseus' misery is underlined the more. Whereas Apollo's anger in A can be satisfied by the Greeks, Poseidon's wrath cannot be allayed, and for this reason an assembly of the gods has to take place in which the return of the hero can be decided upon.

This assembly has, moreover, to serve another purpose. We expect first of all to be confronted with the hero himself and his adventures. In the *Odyssey*, however, the first four books treat of the adventures of Telemachus and of the situation at Ithaca. This may be explained from the fact that the main theme of the *Odyssey* is the vengeance of the hero on the suitors and his restitution. From book \(\nu\) onwards this is the main theme of the poem. For this reason the poet in \(\alpha\) does not introduce us directly to Odysseus at Ogygia, but rather transposes us to Ithaca, so that from the beginning we are familiar with this island and with the circumstances that prevail on it. In order to make his composition acceptable, the poet makes use of the assembly of the gods. At the end of it Athêna (\(\alpha 88-95\)) informs the gods that she will go to Ithaca. The archaic audience now could not take offence at the fact that the report of Odysseus' personal adventures will be delayed, for the activities of a god cannot be criticized by archaic man. Moreover, as we learn from \(\alpha\), the situation at Ithaca is nearly as critical as the personal fate of Odysseus.

In the first four books it is not Odysseus who is the leading character of the poem, but Telemachus. We may compare the *Iliad*, where likewise in the first books (B etc.) the attention is not focussed on Achilles, but on other heroes such as Diomedes and Agamemnon. However, from book \(\varepsilon\) onwards, it is Odysseus who

\(^2\) The wrath of Helios which is mentioned in the proem, was not directed against the hero but only against his comrades.