

Lesser known myths about Achilles

Myths in (Greek epic) *Odyssey* by Homer:

- *Od.* 8.74ff: Demodocus' song on quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus (presumably over how to take Troy, by force or by trick: nb horse)
- Not known elsewhere. One one level reworks hostility between Achilles and Agamemnon.



Myths in the *Odyssey*



Heubeck, West and Hainsworth (in their 1998 commentary) note that the *Cypria* [part of the epic cycle], according to Proclus' summary, included a quarrel of Agamemnon and Achilles at Tenedos on way to Troy in which Sophocles appears to have made Odysseus a participant. Schol. refers to a symposium after the death of Hector in which Achilles recommended **valour** and Odysseus **intelligence** as means of taking Troy.

They suggest that the allusion seems invented to meet needs of the moment (NB characterisation of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*)



Myths in the *Odyssey*

“Yet the exaltation of Odysseus into an opponent of Achilles (he has no such stature in the *Iliad*) is not without significance. Achilles was the last and greatest of those heroes who solved their problems by excess of violence: Odysseus represents a newer idea (though we might see a germ of it in Odysseus’ rational admonition of the impatient Achilles in *Il.* 19.153-83), probably congenial to many in the Homeric audience, the cool opportunist, valiant but prudent, and not ashamed to stoop to conquer.” (Heubeck, West, and Hainsworth, 1988. *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey: Introduction, Books 1-8* on *Od.* 8.75)



Myths of Achilles

- Homer's *Odyssey*: critique of Achilles:

nb Odysseus meets Achilles in the underworld in *Od.* 11 (where we find a revisionist portrayal of Achilles from the *Iliad*)

> Odysseus more fortunate

- non-Homeric episodes (from epic cycle) (often led to material for nearly 75 tragedies on Achilles in 5th/4th century BCE):

e.g. fight with Trojan warrior Cycnus (cf. Ovid *Metamorphoses* 11 episode on moodle)

Epic cycle myths

- Achilles' fight with Ethiopian king Memnon (cf. Ovid *Metamorphoses* 12: Memnonides: birds from pyre of Memnon)



- Achilles' death before Scaean gates (*Iliad* alludes to Achilles' premature death following his slaughter of Hector; brief reference at *Il.* 22.359-60: he will die before the Scaean gate at hands of Paris and Apollo) (cf. Ovid *Met.* 12.604-6 Paris shoots Achilles; 12.608-9 “so then, Achilles, you conqueror of the mightiest, you are conquered yourself by the cowardly ravisher of a Greek wife”)

Epic cycle myths

- judgement over Achilles' arms once he is dead
- Achilles' ghostly appearance to halt Greek fleet at Thrace and get sacrifice of Polyxena (Agamemnon's daughter) (cf. Catullus 64 and Ovid *Metamorphoses* 13)

NB the so-called 'Little *Iliad*' episode is at Ovid *Metamorphoses* 12.1-13.622

Ovid



NB Homeric Achilles concerned with his glory, *kleos*

“In Ovid’s treatment of all these incidents Achilles is the fierce warrior we know from the *Iliad*, but in the Roman text his obsession with *kleos* is entwined with a high and constant anxiety to prove his martial prowess, which often revolves around the polarity of gender. Even further, on several occasions the narratives of these epics portray a distinctly non-Homeric Achilles, at times an Achilles best defined as the warrior of love rather than the lover of war.”

(Papaioannou, S. 2007. *Redesigning Achilles: 'Recycling' the Epic Cycle in the 'Little Iliad'*, 14)



Ovid

- by the time of Ovid, the tradition of Achilles' partial invulnerability popular > in the case of Achilles and Cycnus, this renders questionable their heroism (physical prowess = key in Homer)
- Caenis/Caeneus (Ovid *Met.* 12, on moodle)

