

A DEBATE ABOUT WOMEN IN *ILIAD* 20.251-55? THE EVIDENCE OF FOUR SCHOLIA

By Robert Mayhew

Summary: In *Iliad* 20, Aeneas and Achilles trade insults, and at one point (251-55) Aeneas says that they are acting like women (ὡς τε γυναῖκας). Four *Iliad*-scholia provide evidence that the authenticity of this passage was disputed, and one of these scholia refers to a comment about women in Aristotle's *Historia animalium*, in order to explain or defend these verses. This note highlights these scholia and this dispute, which have not received sufficient scholarly attention, while illustrating one of the uses ancient Homeric scholars made of the *Historia animalium*.

Judging by the Homeric scholia, Alexandrian scholars not infrequently used Aristotle's *Historia animalium* like an animal encyclopedia, to explain or defend Homer's references to animals. For instance, a metaphor in *Iliad* 18, describing how Achilles misses Patroclus like a lion misses its cubs, refers to "a full-maned lion, whose cubs a hunting man has stolen"¹ (... ὡς τε λις ἠϋγένειος, | ᾧ ῥά θ' ὑπὸ σκύμνους ἐλαφηβόλος ἀρπάση ἀνήρ) (318-19). A T-scholion comments: "A lion bears [or 'sires'] two [cubs] alone, as Aristotle [says] in *On Animals*" (δύο μόνα τίκτει λέων· ὡς Ἀριστοτέλης ἐν τῷ Περὶ ζῴων : ~).² This is almost certainly a reference to *Historia animalium* 6.31.579a33-b2: "in most cases [the lion] bears two [cubs], at the very most six, but sometimes it bears even one" (τίκτει [sc.

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1 Translations from the Greek are my own.

2 Schol. T *Il.* 18.318-19 ex. (Erbse); Burney MS 86 (fol. 206v). For the main scholia discussed in this article, I have examined electronic copies of the relevant manuscripts, and (as here) I provide both the reference in Erbse 1977 and the manuscript folio number.

λέων] δ' ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ δύο, τὰ μέντοι πλεῖστα ἕξ· τίκτει δ' ἐνίστε καὶ ἕν). Perhaps some critics of Homer had questioned whether lionesses bear more than one cub.³

Sometimes, however, the *Historia animalium* was brought in to settle more substantive scholarly disputes.⁴ I briefly examine such a possible case here.

In *Iliad* 20, Achilles has a new set of armor and returns to the fighting. His first opponent is Aeneas. Before their short-lived duel (in which Aeneas escapes owing to divine intervention) they speak to each other and trade insults. Aeneas puts an end to this as follows (251-55):

But why must the two of us, with quarrels and insults,
insult each other, face to face, *like women*,
who, enraged about some spirit-devouring quarrel,
go into the middle of the street and insult each other,
much of it true, and much not – which rage commands them to say?⁵

ἀλλὰ τίη ἔριδας καὶ νεῖκεα νῶϊν ἀνάγκη
νεικεῖν ἀλλήλοισιν ἐναντίον, ὡς τε γυναικάς,
αἶ τε χολωσάμεναι ἔριδος πέρι θυμοβόροιο
νεικεῦσ' ἀλλήλησι μέσην ἐς ἄγυιαν ἰοῦσαι
πόλλ' ἔτεά τε καὶ οὐκί, χόλος δέ τε καὶ τὰ κελεύει;

According to an A-scholion,⁶ Aristonicus reports that Aristarchus athetized these five verses as ill-timed⁷ and annoying (or inappropriate) (ἀθετούνται στίχοι πέντε ὡς ἄκαιροι καὶ ὀχληροί), giving multiple reasons, one of which concerns me here:

3 For another example of this sort of use of the *Historia animalium*, see schol. D *Od.* 22.299-300 (Ernst), on the nature of the insect (οἶστρος) that appears in a cattle-stampede metaphor, describing the panic-stricken suitors. It contains a paraphrase of *HA* 5.19.551b21-23 and 557a24.

4 I discuss a clear case of this in Mayhew 2021a.

5 That is, rage makes them say what is not true. See Edwards 1991: 321.

6 Schol. A *Il.* 20.251-55a Ariston. (Erbse); *Venetus* A (fol. 264v).

7 Ill-timed, he believes, because already at 244 Aeneas says “But come, let us no longer discuss these things” (ἀλλ' ἄγε, μηκέτι ταῦτα λεγώμεθα), which supposedly makes 251 (“But why must the two of us,” etc.) another beginning (ἄλλην ἀρχήν).

καὶ τὰ λεγόμενα ἀνάξια τῶν προσώπων· καὶ παρὰ βαρβάροις δέ ἐστι τὸ τὰς γυναῖκας προερχομένας λοιδορεῖσθαι ὡς παρ' Αἰγυπτίοις.

Moreover, what is said is unworthy of the characters; and, for women to go outside to scold one another is something that happens among barbarians, as for instance among Egyptians.

This is inappropriate, I take Aristarchus to be saying, because Aeneas is not simply comparing themselves to women, but to *barbarian* women – which is not relevant here (as Aeneas and Achilles are not barbarian) and further is unworthy of (and inaccurate as a description of) the actions of Aeneas and Achilles.⁸

Two bT-scholia⁹ on *Iliad* 20.253 comment on the reference to women.¹⁰ Here is the B-scholion, *Venetus B* (fol. 274r):

ἵς περὶ ἔριδος εἰς χόλον ἀχθεῖσαι· τοῦτο δὲ περὶ ἀσέμνων γυναικῶν
:—

Having been led over a quarrel to rage; but this is about undignified women.

- 8 Schironi 2018: 729 comments: “We cannot but wonder whether this short, nasty comment about the Egyptians was inspired by Aristarchus’ own experiences in the streets of Alexandria. Whether or not this was the case, he seems to have considered the Homeric heroes (both Greeks and Trojans...) much better than his contemporaries – just as Homer was the best poet ever.”
- 9 The bT scholia are preserved in the b family of manuscripts (i.e. *Venetus B* [B], *Laur. plut.* 32,3 [C], *Escorial Y* 1.1 [E3], and *Escorial Ω* 1.12 [E4]) and in manuscript T (*Burney MS* 86). The source of both is thought to be a lost archetype (‘c’), the sources of which in turn are in large part ancient exegetical commentaries. See Erbse 1969: xvii–xxi and xxvi–xxviii (with a stemma on lviii). (Of the b mss., I have examined the relevant scholia only in *Venetus B*.)
- 10 Erbse presents these two combined as b(BCE³E)T *Il.* 20.253 ex.: αἱ τε χολωσάμεναι ἔριδος πέρι: περὶ ἔριδος εἰς χόλον ἀχθεῖσαι. τοῦτο ἐπὶ βαρβάρων γυναικῶν. He indicates the differences among them in his apparatus. But as I have argued elsewhere in this journal (Mayhew 2021b), where there are significant differences (as in this case), it is better to present and treat them as separate scholia.

In addition to including a lemma (instead of merely beginning with a mark indicating the relevant verse [ίς]), the T-scholion, *Burney MS 86* (fol. 224v), is significantly different:

αἶ τε χολωσάμεναι ἔριδος πέρι: περὶ ἔριδος εἰς χόλον ἀχθεῖσαι· τοῦτο ἐπὶ βαρβάρων γυναικῶν :—

“who enraged about some spirit-devouring quarrel”: Having been led over a quarrel to rage; this is in reference to barbarian women.

Given the brevity of these scholia, I cannot rule out the possibility that they are in effect making the same point as Aristarchus (or even have Aristarchus as their source). But I think it more likely that these are attempted explanations of the verses. Perhaps they are in response to Aristarchus; or perhaps they were prompted by some pettifogging critic like Zoilus, who may have complained about the inaccuracy of the verses on the grounds that this is not true of all women. In any case, whoever is behind these scholia likely considered these verses authentic, and accurate on Homer’s part because they are true *in a certain context*.

According to the B-scholion, Aeneas is not referring to all women but to undignified ones.¹¹ That seems quite straightforward. According to the T-scholion, Aeneas is not referring to all women but to barbarian ones. This makes sense only if the scholiast or his source takes Aeneas to be referring to *Trojan* women (the ones he, as a Trojan, knows). For why should the audience assume that Homer, in having Aeneas say ὧς τε γυναικας, is referring specifically to barbarian women apart from Greek or Trojan women? If I am right, then on this view (in contrast to Aristarchus’), Homer considered the Trojans barbarians.¹²

11 There is no implication that men cannot be undignified in a way characteristic of men, merely that the sort of undignified behavior Aeneas describes is more characteristic of undignified women than of undignified men.

12 This likely represents a later (and inaccurate) view of Homer, in that the epics do not seem to contrast Greeks and barbarians; and if they do speak of barbarians at all (I note only *Il.* 2.867 βαρβαροφῶνων, describing the Karians), they do not include the Trojans among them, though that would eventually become a more common assessment in the Classical period. See for instance Hall 1989: 5-13 and 21-40.

Finally, a bT-scholion on *Iliad* 20.252 (identical in *Venetus B* (fol. 274r) and *Burney MS 86* (fol. 224v))¹³ – a comment on ὥς τε γυναῖκας – states:

φησὶ γὰρ ἀριστοφάνης· γυνὴ ἀνδρὸς ἐπιφθονώτερον, μεμψιμοιρότερον, φιλολοίδορον φιλοπληκτικώτερον, μᾶλλον ἀρίδακρυ.

For Aristophanes claims: a woman is more jealous than a man, more complaining, fond of scolding, more fond of fighting, more given to tears.

I agree with Erbse that ἀριστοφάνης is a mistake for ἀριστοτέλης.¹⁴ Consider Aristotle's *Historia animalium* 8(9).1.608b8-11:

διόπερ γυνὴ ἀνδρὸς ἐλεημονέστερον καὶ ἀρίδακρυ μᾶλλον, ἔτι δὲ φθονερώτερον καὶ μεμψιμοιρότερον, καὶ φιλολοίδορον μᾶλλον καὶ πληκτικώτερον.

Hence a woman is more compassionate than a man and more given to tears, but also more jealous and more complaining, and more fond of scolding and more apt to fight.

Aristotle is clearly the source,¹⁵ and has been brought in to explain Homer's ὥς τε γυναῖκας etc.

As there is no other evidence to go on, besides these four scholia, I can merely speculate, which I do as follows: There was a debate in antiquity about *Iliad* 20.251-55, especially about whether these texts were genuine

13 b(BCE^{3E})T *Il.* 20.252 ex. (Erbse). The only difference is that, as with the previous bT scholia, the one in *Venetus B* lacks a lemma.

14 Erbse 1977, 44 sets ἀριστοφάνης between daggers, and refers to the passage from Aristotle. On the off chance that the reference to Aristophanes is accurate, then this is a passage that dropped out of the extant work known as the *Epitome of the Historia animalium* by Aristophanes of Byzantium (see Lambros 1885), in which case Aristotle would still be the source of the scholion, only indirectly.

15 The main differences: ἐλεημονέστερον has dropped out of the scholion; ἀρίδακρυ μᾶλλον is switched (μᾶλλον ἀρίδακρυ) and placed at the end of the scholion; ἐπιφθονώτερον has replaced φθονερώτερον; μᾶλλον was dropped from φιλολοίδορον μᾶλλον; φιλοπληκτικώτερον has replaced πληκτικώτερον.

and accurate. Part of the debate involved ὥς τε γυναῖκας (252), and there were, it seems, four positions:¹⁶ (1) Aristarchus', which takes the reference to women to count against the passage, as the words attributed to Aeneas describe women among the barbarians and (modern day?) Egyptians, but do not describe the Greek and Trojan women of the *Iliad*. The remaining three are likely explanations of Homer's text as it stands: (2) Homer is not referring to all women, but to undignified ones. (I find this the least interesting explanation, though it may well be correct.) (3) Homer has Aeneas refer not to all women, but to barbarian ones – that is to say, to Trojan women. Presumably it *would* have counted against Homer, on this view, if it were implied that this referred to Greek women as well. (4) Aristotle is brought in, as an authority on animals (including humans), to point out that Homer is right, because women – which is to say, women generally – do on his view have a greater tendency than men to quarrel and insult each other.¹⁷

As is so often the case, what bothered ancient Homeric scholars is of little concern to modern ones. Although “This section of the speech [sc. *Iliad* 20.244-58] has been heavily criticized for its repeated and time-consuming exhortations not to waste time talking” (Edwards 1991: 320),¹⁸ I am not aware of any modern scholar who suspects the authenticity of these verses on the grounds of the inappropriateness of the reference to women insulting each other in public.¹⁹

16 At any rate, it is clear that (1) and (4) represent distinct interpretations.

17 Whether Aristotle would have agreed with this application of *HA* 8(9).1.608b8-11 is not at all clear. On this Aristotle passage, see for instance Mayhew 2004: 92-104 and Connell 2021: 15-16 and 48-53.

18 See note 7 above.

19 Edwards 1991: 321 goes on to comment: “It can also be argued that the expansion is not excessive, but matches that of the preceding genealogy” – i.e. Aeneas' genealogy of the Trojan royal house. Lohmann 1970: 66-67 and 153 follows Aristarchus in rejecting the authenticity of *Il.* 20.251-55, but not because of the comment about women.

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