

The Quarrel of Agamemnon & Menelaus (*Od.* 3.132-57)

In this paper, I argue that a scene in Book 3 of the *Odyssey* offers a brief glimpse of the relationship between Agamemnon and Menelaus that contradicts their representation in the *Iliad*, and that the *Odyssey*'s depiction may well be the more traditional one in view of later sources as well as some evidence internal to the *Iliad* itself. My conclusion is that the *Iliad* shows signs of poetic innovation in its depiction of the brothers' political relationship. The passage in question is from Nestor's speech in which he tells Telemachus what he knows about the homecomings of the Achaeans (*Od.* 3.132-57). This story begins with a disordered, nocturnal assembly of the Achaeans on the night after the sack of Troy, called by both the Atreidae simultaneously. In this assembly, the brothers quarreled (ἔριτυ, 136): Menelaus urged departure on the following day, while Agamemnon urged the Achaeans to remain until they could placate the wrath of Athena. In the sequel, the army splits into two factions, one of which (including Nestor, Diomedes, and at first Odysseus himself) takes the side of Menelaus and departs with him the next day. The passage has been described as a narrative device for splitting up a single Achaean homecoming into several different *nostoi* (Danek 1998: 84-85) or as an allusion to Athena's role as a wrathful goddess (Clay 1983: 47-49), but it also shows a marked contrast to the *Iliad*. The representation of Agamemnon and Menelaus, and their political roles within the Achaean coalition, could not be more different. It is often observed that in the *Iliad* Agamemnon enjoys full command of the army and full management of the war, while Menelaus plays a wholly subordinate role (e.g., Taplin 1990; Rousseau 1990: 325-27). Indeed, Menelaus does not even belong to Agamemnon's inner circle of *gerontes*, does not participate in its deliberations, and does not once speak in a general assembly of the Achaeans. Although Menelaus has a certain importance as moral figurehead of the expedition, he is carefully managed and exploited in this role by Agamemnon (Sammons 2009). That the Iliadic Menelaus would argue with his elder brother in the assembly is unlikely; that he would create a split in the Achaean host, and bring over to his own faction the likes of Nestor, Diomedes, and Odysseus (all mainstays of Agamemnon's power) seems almost unthinkable. Yet the greater traditionality of the *Odyssey*'s representation can be argued from two angles. First, there is evidence internal to the *Iliad* that its poet has downplayed Menelaus's significance: His formulaic epithets (e.g., ἀρηίφιλος) seem to be appropriate to a more important warrior than the *Iliad* depicts (Willcock 2004: 53); there are also various hints that Menelaus

traditionally had a more prominent political position among the Achaeans, but that the *Iliad* has greatly restricted his actions in this role (Rousseau 1990: 337-43; Willcock 2002: 24). The other line of evidence comes from later tradition: The story of the quarrel found its way into the Cyclic *Nostoi* (arg. 3-7 Bernabé), showing its plausibility to later audiences (cf. Severyns 1928: 370-71). I will also adduce passages in Attic tragedy in which Menelaus is depicted or described as being Agamemnon's political equal within the Achaean community, with specific discussion of the opening scene of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, in which the brothers actually come at loggerheads over management of the Trojan War. I will close the paper with some general remarks on the depiction of personal and political relationships (as opposed to simple mythological data) as an important field for the interplay of tradition and innovation in early Greek poetry.

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