

Odysseus' Fight with Iros and his Scar

At the beginning of Book 18 of the *Odyssey*, just before the fight with the beggar, Odysseus reveals his powerful body to Iros and the suitors by taking off the rags that clothe him; Athena, who invisibly stands beside him, magnifies his limbs in such a way that the suitors are astonished at their sight (71) whereas Iros starts to tremble in fear (75-7).

Odysseus' stripping in this episode raises a simple and natural question, which inevitably links this passage to his well-known scar; thus, since Odysseus gets unclothed and can display his 'splendid and large thighs', why is it that nobody in the hall can recognize Odysseus' scar, which is supposedly big (μεγάλη; cf. above 21.221), on one of his 'large thighs'? In fact, at 18.93-4, Odysseus tries to conceal his heroic identity during the fight with Iros.

The simplest answer to this question is that the poet did not think of the scar when he composed this memorable scene (Wilamowitz 1927: 28) I show that the way Homer planned this episode makes this hypothesis unlikely.

There are five characters in Ithaca who know about the scar; Eurycleia, Penelope, Laertes, and the faithful servants Eumaios and Philoitios. Other people are said in the *Odyssey* to know about the scar; Autolykos, his mother's father, and his sons obviously knew about it since they healed the wound; Odysseus' mother, Anticleia, also knew about it, since Odysseus had told her about it; cf. 19.455-66. None of these characters is present in Ithaca. I show that all these characters are deliberately removed by Homer from the fight scene. In other words, the absence of all the characters connected with scar at the fight between Odysseus and Iros does not seem to be a coincidence. The reason for this is

that no character that knew of Odysseus' scar in a way or another had to be present at that fight. Certainly it still remains unclear how Eumaios (and Philoitios as well) found out about the scar. This issue, however, becomes secondary if, as I noted above, the scar represents a literary device for identifying the people that are faithful to Odysseus. This observation has a very important consequence. Thus, one cannot say anymore that the episode of the showing of the scar in the well-known recognition scene between Eumaios and Odysseus in Book 21 is late and unnecessary. Both Fernández-Galiano (1992: 133, 171); von der Mühl (1940: 761) argue that the recognition scene with the servants Eumaios and Philoitios is superfluous since the servants had no way of knowing about the scar. The knowledge of the scar represents one of the essential and deliberately created traits of the character Eumaios; put differently, Eumaios' knowledge of the scar appears to be an important part of the general plan of the *Odyssey* as it stands.

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