

By His Recklessness They Perished?

It is well established that ἀτασθαλίη marks culpable, hubristic choice and action in the *Odyssey*, particularly that of the suitors (cp. Heubeck et al 1988: 72, 356; Beck 2011). The only outlier to this otherwise clear usage is Od. 10.436, where Eurylochus accuses Odysseus of such behavior in Polyphemus' cave. Given the tradition of reading Od. 9.228 as a heroic confession of fault, it is tempting to follow de Jong (2001: 265) in reading the charge as exaggerated, but not groundless. This paper will argue that such a reading is not supportable in reference both to Eurylochus' subsequent character development and to leadership norms within the band of warriors. The accusation of Od. 10 serves, rather, as invitation to recognize Polyphemus as a further example of ἀτασθαλίη.

Eurylochus levels his accusation after Odysseus invites the men to Circe's hall, comparing the strategic situation to Polyphemus' cave. In the first place, we know his estimation to be inaccurate, for both hero and audience have witnessed guarantees of safety from Hermes and Circe. More important, in Od. 12, it is Eurylochus who will lead the crew revolt demanding to land on Thrinacia (279 ff.), swear an oath not to kill any cattle by ἀτασθαλίησιν κακῆσιν (300), and later incite his companions to break said oath (339 ff). Like Antinous among the suitors, he is both leader in and paradigm for the ἀτασθαλίη of his doomed comrades. In short, his accusation falls upon his own pate. It is also the first mention of ἀτασθαλίη since Od. 1 (7, 34), marking this passage as the beginning of the expanded form of Odysseus' justification regarding the death of his *hetairoi*, a scene promised in the prologue.

Eurylochus is no Thersites. The latter lacked standing to speak bluntly, being neither a prince nor clearly attached to one. Eurylochus, by contrast, is close kin to Odysseus by marriage (πηρός... μάλα σχεδόν, 10.441). More important, his words come shortly after his brief, less than

heroic, command of the first expedition to Circe's palace. As de Jong observes, forewarning is a normative component in ἀτασθαλίη (2001: 265). By accusing Odysseus on these terms, Eurylochos elevates the fear and desire for flight of those companions to the level of a divine admonition. It is a self-serving argument, for it would validate his own recent choice to heed such feelings and lead from behind. It is also a socially corrosive argument. Granted, this is not the plain of Troy, but as Sarpedon so eloquently articulated to Glaucon, the rewards of command are inseparable from one's duty as a πρόμαχος (Il. 12.310-21). Ultimately, the *Odyssey* delves more deeply into the questions of hereditary right and divine favor than the *Iliad*. But we are not yet on Ithaca and, in books 9-12, Odysseus still leads primarily through superior capability and fearlessness. Eurylochos' accusation is, thus, not merely a reproach; it undermines the very basis of Odysseus' legitimacy as a commander, anticipating Eurylochos' development as chief architect of the ἀτασθαλῖαι ἐταίρων.

Finally, such a reading of Eurylochos' accusation has implications for the interpretation of *Odyssey* 9. Far from violating divine admonition, Odysseus was led to the island by divinity (καί τις θεὸς ἡγεμόνευε, 142). The stake was olive-wood (320), suggesting Athena as the θεός in question. Most important, the seer Telemos warned Polyphemus that he would lose his sight to Odysseus (507-12), and he continued to hold the gods in disdain (274-6). Although the theme of ἀτασθαλίη is never applied to the monster explicitly in book 9, Eurylochos' claim invites the audience to weigh the validity of the charge by recalling these facts, and Polyphemus is revealed to be lacking. Moreover, the monster attributes his blinding to the fact that he was keeping watch for a powerful, mighty warrior who could overpower him, not a feeble nobody who would outwit him (513-16). In this respect, his demise prefigures that of the suitors, who will likewise

mistake appearance for reality, to their own destruction. Polyphemus thus becomes, by intimation, the first exemplar after the pattern of Aegisthus set forth by Zeus in *Odyssey* 1.

Bibliography

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