

Dolon

E Bruce Brooks

University of Massachusetts at Amherst

(25 Nov 2017)

Book 10, usually called the Doloneia, has a unique position in the Iliad, in that it is a complete incident in itself, and could be removed from the epic without leaving any trace. The wonderful horses captured by Diomedes are never referred to again, not even in the chariot race . . . in Book 23.

– Willcock *Companion 113*

Willcock’s first sentence reminds us of one test of an interpolation: it can be removed without leaving a trace, and the text on both sides closes up like your finger when you take a splinter out.

His second sentence gives more evidence of interpolation, and that evidence is all the stronger since in Book 23:290-292, we read

. . . the son of Tydeus, strong Diomedes,
and led under the yoke the Trojan horses which he had taken
by force from Aineias . . .

Not only are the horses of Rhesus (10:435-437) not here mentioned, but *other* horses taken by Diomedes *are* specified.

Further points against Iliad 10 are:

- It takes place at night (there is no other night exploit in the Iliad).
- Dolon is an “insignificant person” (Willcock ap 323); in fact, a low-class person. The only other Iliad example is Thersites, in a passage in Iliad 2 which is itself suspect as an interpolation.¹ But the low-class herdsmen Eumaios and Philoitios are vital to Odysseus’ success in the Odyssey.
- Bathtubs (βάμυνθος) occur only at line 576 in the Iliad, but 10x in the Odyssey; they are another Odyssean trait. A bathtub is incongruous on the beach at Troy; it implies a palace context. Palaces abound in the Odyssey. Here again, the poet of Iliad 10 is assuming a different world, a world which in this detail too resembles that of the Odyssey.

Such are the points favoring an interpolation scenario, for a piece with marked Odyssean characteristics. That conclusion has been widely shared.²

¹See Brooks **Reader** 25-26

²West **Iliad** 233, “It is the almost unanimous (and certainly correct) view of modern scholars that this rhapsody is an insertion in *Il* by a different poet . . . The preceding considerations would be compatible with the *Doloneia*’s being a last insertion by P. But its peculiarities of style, language, and composition are such that one cannot believe it is by the same poet as the rest, even allowing for evolution of his technique over time.” See further Henry (1906), Danek (1988) 230-234, Willcock (1989). For the prohibitive stylistic difference between Iliad 10 and the preceding Iliad 9, see Brooks **Chinese** 23.

Rhesus

The really significant figure in Iliad 10 is not Dolon, but rather Rhesus. What happens in Iliad 10 is that the Trojan spy, Dolon, is intercepted and killed, but the two Greek spies, Diomedes and Odysseus, successfully enter the enemy camp, kill the newly arrived Thracian king Rhesus while he is sleeping, and steal his wonderful horses, returning with them to the Greek camp.

There exists a play by Euripides, the *Rhesus*, which covers much of the same ground. What is the relation between the two?

Ritchie **Rhesus** has demonstrated, to our satisfaction, that the Euripides play is derived from Iliad 10. What is interesting is that he then goes on to show that the *Rhesus* can be placed stylistically within the Euripidean corpus:

Not only has it appeared that *Rhesus* is stylistically like the works of Euripides, but it is consistently associated with his early plays in all aspects of composition in which a development of Euripides' style is to be discerned . . . On the other hand, *Rhesus* shares no feature which belongs peculiarly to Euripides' later style or technique (p348).

The question of date is complicated by conflicting evidence. Ritchie concludes:

The sum of the evidence leaves us with a strong preference for dating *Rhesus* as the earliest of Euripides' extant works. There are good grounds for placing its composition between 455 and 440, with a preference, in view of the testimony of Crates, for an earlier date within this period.

We may therefore reasonably settle on the date c450 as that of the play *Rhesus*. This, plus the above, gives us the following chronological sequence:

Iliad 9 and 11 > Odyssey > Iliad 10 > Euripides' *Rhesus* (c450)

The relative chronology at the beginning is more important for Homeric purposes than the absolute date at the end. But even that connects Homer with later literature; Aeschylus is said to have described himself as picking up tidbits from Homer's table.³ So too, in his turn, Euripides.

Works Cited

- E Bruce Brooks. *The Reader in the Text*. Alpha v1 (2017) 25-29
 E Bruce Brooks and A Taeko Brooks. *Stylistic Difference in Chinese and Greek*. Alpha v2 (2022) 21-36
 Georg Danek. *Studien zur Dolonie*. Wiener Studien 12 (1988)
 R M Henry. *The Doloneia Once More*. CR (1906) 97-99
 William Ritchie. *The Authenticity of the Rhesus of Euripides*. Cambridge 1964
 M L West. *The Making of the Iliad*. Oxford 2011
 Malcolm M Willcock. *A Companion to the Iliad*. Chicago 1976
 M M Willcock. *Homer*. 2v Macmillan 1974, 1978
 M M Willcock. [Review of Danek **Studien**]. CR ns v39 (1989) 178-180

³Athenaeus 8:374e. The word here translated "tidbits" is τεμάχην; it is not found in Homer, but is common in classical times in the sense "slice of meat or fish."