

§20. The Wall

These circumstances all force us to see in this passage a later interpolation, and the argument is greatly strengthened when we come to follow the later fortunes of the wall. This is notably the case in the later portion of the “Menis,” in xvi. When the wall had been added to the story, it was hardly possible to ignore it when the Greeks came to sally out from their camp, but its insertion into the narrative was attended with obvious difficulties which do not fail to betray themselves. Whenever in that book we find the wall mentioned, it is always in immediate connexion with some obscurity or difficulty which vanishes if we remove the offending fortification.

– *Leaf Companion 152*

Leaf attacks the Embassy (Id 9) and the Greek Wall (constructed in Id 7) with very similar arguments: that some passages do not mention them, so that they must be late additions. If, as we have been arguing, Homer drew on earlier Trojan War material for part of his Menis, then another explanation is available: that early material was itself not wholly consistent; one early bard had envisioned a wall, some followed him, and others not. The inconsistency may then have been already present in the early material, and need not be due to anything in the formation of the Menis itself. In connection with Thersites (§11), we noted that the standard of editorial consistency which we can observe in Homer extends to the module, the single performance, but not to the entire work. Something inconsistent which the audiences will hear on another performance day is too remote to be a problem.

With the Embassy, we found (p12-13) not only an inconsistency, but a flat contradiction, which could only be resolved by removing one of two passages as an interpolation, and noticing just what was missing in Agamemnon’s offer. This does not work with the Wall, hence this chapter.

The Wall (τεῖχος) is built at 7:336-344 and 433-441, no doubt quickly, but to describe the many days of work it would take to build a great fortification, or grow a giant beanstalk, is against epic convention, and we may rest content. The wall figures prominently, not incidentally, at the beginning of 12 . . .

in the end of Id 7, and features prominently thereafter in Id 8. First, how. enthusiastic interpolation. sees everything between Id 1 and 11 as a later interpolation. We have restored Id 9 to the Menis core (p13-14). Our sense is that much of the intervening material, most obviously Id 3-4, was originally part of the Trojan War repertoire, and thus is earlier, not later, than the putting together of the Menis. Leaf (and Grote before him) have it upside down.

The building of the wall (and the trench before it) is described in Id 7, not itself a Menis core book.

Not only is the Menis confined to one year, gaining immensely in drama over its panoramic predecessor, it takes the Trojan War merely as a background. There is virtually no mention of it in Iliad 1. Helen is mentioned at 1:000, but there in a token way. The war is not being waged to secure her return; but to destroy Troy and loot it. The Greeks of the Menis are brigands, This is in contrast to the Trojan War itself, whose incidents include Helen's memories of Greeks she had known, and the duel of Menelaos and Paris. These are not later additions – for who, in adding to the Menis, would write as for the first year of the war? They are manifestly survivals of earlier tradition.

This opens up important possibilities. We have no guarantee that every episode in the Trojan repertoire was consistent with every other, so that different treatments of figures like Teucros might have been present, and been included in Homer's Menis without close editing to create consistency.

As for the Greek wall, same deal.¹ But there is an additional consideration. The wall is built, seemingly in a few hours, with no hint of where the materials, the stone and timber, came from. Then, at the end, Poseidon (normally on the Greek side) complains to Zeus that this wall is an offense to himself, the builder of the walls of Troy. Zeus rules that the wall shall be destroyed after the Greeks depart, leaving no trace. Thus, we might imagine, is the disappointment of later tourists addressed. The present absence of the wall proves its earlier reality.

And then there is 7:467-469, which answers a question best left unasked:
 Ships had arrived meanwhile, wine-laden, hailing from Lemnos,
 many in tale – Eumaus, the scion of Jason had sent them.
 He that Hypsipyle bare unto Jason, shepherd of peoples.

¹Be it noted that the Alexandrians athetized the whole Wall passage, 0:00.

But unto Atreus; sons, Agamemnon and Prince Menelaus,
 gave he gcargo of wine in particular, measures a thousand.
 Thence their supply of wine was obtained by the long-haired Achaians;
 some paid for it with bronze, some others with shimmering iron;
 some paid for it with hides, and with cattle alive paid others;
 Some with captives of war. And they set forth a sumptuous banquet.

Whence came those cattle? In what wide meadows had they grazed until now?
 Who baked the bread for the impromptu feasts, with grain from what fields?
 Where did those captive women sleep, while waiting to be bartered for wine?
 How wide a territory, how capacious a house, must be imagined not only for
 Achilles, his companions, and his swag, but for the other fifty men in that ship?
 These things are proposterous if thought upon, and thought is thus best advised
 to shrug the whole thing off as “epic convention,” and to let the asheer bsurdity
 of that convention not show through too much.

The whole sequence 7:442-482 (41 lines, 4 minutes) we will reject as an
 unwise explanatory addition. The end of Iliad 7 is then:

Gates in the midst thereof they constructed, firmly compacted,
 So that there was a way through them for the driving of war-cars.
 Lastly they digged in front of the rempart a moat on the outside,
 broad, deep, great in extent, and planted it densely with palings.

They are as safe as anyone can be, behind their fortifications, and this book,
 like others we will consider in the Endings chapter (§13), ends on something
 like a note of peace. We find, against Leaf, hat this original ending was later
 overridden by a silly addition, and as with interpolations in general, there
 cannot be an interolation unless there was previously somethign to interpolate.
 Iliad 7, as far as we have gone today, thus times out at 441 lines, 44 minutes.

So much for the possibility of accounting for passages which presuppose,
 and preclude, the existence of a Greek Wall. Mentioning that possibility will
 dispose of the issue for present purposes. But we have a little space left, and
 may as well consider the passages where a Greek Wall is clearly implied, and
 those where, just as clearly, it is not.