

Athena Disenchanted

Eustathios of Thessalonike on Ethical and Rhetorical Prudence in Homer and Beyond

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FOR MANY CENTURIES, a large bronze statue of the goddess Athena stood in the Forum of Constantine, the heart of the Byzantine capital. According to the tenth-century poet Constantine of Rhodes, this statue of a helmeted Athena accompanied by serpents and a Gorgon came from his homeland, from the goddess' sanctuary at Lindos.¹ The first book of the *Patria*, a tenth-century collection of notes and anecdotes about the history, statues, and buildings of Constantinople, records that Constantine the Great placed two statues of Pallas Athena in the same forum.² One of them might be the statue described in the second book of the same collection, where we find the goddess represented with helmet, shield, spear, and a Gorgon head on her breast plate. These, according to the anonymous author, were allegorical representations of Athena's steadfastness, courage, wisdom, and intelligence.³ The historian Niketas Choniates describes the statue of Athena in the Forum as likewise displaying her warlike attributes and relates how the eventual destruction of the statue was due not to invading crusaders but to the inhabitants of Constantinople themselves. In his account of the

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¹ Constantine of Rhodes, *On Constantinople and the Church of the Holy Apostles* 153–62. For bibliography on the statue of Athena in Constantinople, see James ad loc. (2012, 106–07).

² *Patria* 1.46; translation in Berger 2013.

³ *Patria* 2.3; cf. *Suda* α 727.

events leading up to the capture of the city in 1204, Choniates narrates how a drunken mob, ignorant of the points of the compass, smashed the statue, thinking that it beckoned the western armies into the city.⁴ Choniates gives us an appreciative *ekphrasis* of the statue's enchanting beauty, before castigating the crowd for its rash and misinformed actions:

As the result of such misconceptions, they shattered the statue of Athena, or, rather, guilty of ever-worsening conduct and taking up arms against themselves, they discarded the patroness of manliness [*andreia*] and prudence [*phronesis*] even though she was but a symbol of these.⁵

Choniates here takes the allegorical reading of the *Patria* one step further, seeing in the crowd's demolition of the statue of Athena the obliteration of their own virtues of courage and prudence as represented by the goddess.⁶

Choniates' interpretation of Athena is firmly grounded in the long tradition of allegorical readings of ancient myth as we find them only a few decades earlier in the monumental Homeric commentaries of Eustathios of Thessalonike (ca. 1115–1195) and various works on ancient poetry by John Tzetzes (ca. 1110–1185).⁷ Both Eustathios and Tzetzes begin with the assumption that poets such as Homer endowed their enchanting mythical fictions with a deeper allegorical meaning discoverable by expert exegetes like themselves. They generally distinguish three types of allegory: with historical allegory, true past events are turned into something more marvellous according to poetic convention; in the case of natural allegory, the mythical gods represent natural elements and parts of the cosmos (e.g. Zeus = ether; Hera = air; Apollo = sun); in ethical allegory, the gods symbolize emotions, intellectual faculties, and psychological forces (e.g. Zeus = the

⁴ Choniates, *History* 558.46–559.77. On the power of statues, see e.g. James 1996, with further bibliography.

⁵ Choniates, *History* 559.74–77: Οἱ μὲν οὖν μετὰ τοιούτων κινήματων τῆς διανοίας τὸ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς συνέτριψαν ἄγαλμα, ἢ μᾶλλον τοῖς χείροσιν αἰεὶ προβαίνοντες καὶ καθ' αὐτῶν ὀπλίζεται γινόμενοι τὴν ἀνδρείας καὶ φρονήσεως ἐπιστάτην καὶ τοῖς τύποις αὐτοῖς ἀπεώσαντο. Translation by Magoulias 1984, slightly modified.

⁶ On this episode in Choniates' *History*, see Papamastorakis 2009.

⁷ On Eustathios and Tzetzes as scholars, see Pontani 2020, 460–67 and 452–59, respectively.

intellect; Ares = irrational emotion; Aphrodite = desire).⁸ In ethical terms, Athena was commonly interpreted as *phronesis* or prudence, an interpretation already widespread in ancient exegesis.⁹ Despite their ancient origins, such allegorical interpretations involved a significant amount of hermeneutic flexibility so that Byzantine exegetes could project contemporary ideas and values on the myths of Homer.¹⁰ By exploring Eustathios' reading of the goddess Athena in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and putting it into dialogue with ideas on prudence in other Eustathian texts, this paper aims to demonstrate how allegorical interpretation could turn the stories of the Trojan War and the wanderings of Odysseus into vehicles for ethical reflection and moral education.¹¹

5.1 TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF PRUDENCE: ATHENA, ACHILLES, AND ARISTOTLE

We find the most influential definition of the virtue of prudence in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, a text that enjoyed great popularity in Byzantium and was given new commentaries by twelfth-century scholars such as Eustratios of Nicaea and Michael of Ephesos.¹² In the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses the five intellectual virtues that belong to the rational part of the soul. Among them is prudence or practical wisdom (*phronesis*), which Aristotle defines by describing the qualities of a prudent man:

⁸ On allegory in the Homeric scholarship of Eustathios and Tzetzes, see e.g. Hunger 1954; Cesaretti 1991; Cullhed 2016, 25*–33*; Goldwyn 2017; Van den Berg 2022, 49–54, 163–80.

⁹ See Buffière 1956, 279–89 and Wissmann 2009, 425–49 for Athena as prudence in ancient allegoresis. See also Murrin 2007, 500–03.

¹⁰ Although within certain boundaries: Psellos' Christianizing interpretation of Homeric myth was strongly criticized by Tzetzes. See e.g. Cesaretti 1991, 127–40 and Savio 2020, 42–47.

¹¹ See also Van den Berg 2023.

¹² On twelfth-century commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see the papers collected in Barber & Jenkins 2009; see also Trizio 2021, with further bibliography. For the Palaiologan period, see Xenophonotos 2021.

[I]t is held to be the mark of a prudent man to be able to deliberate well about what is good and advantageous for himself, not in some one department, for instance what is good for his health or strength, but what is advantageous as a means to the good life in general.¹³

Aristotle explains that prudence does not involve invariable things and eternal truths but things that are variable and therefore require deliberation. Prudence is the ability to reflect and decide on the best course of action in the service of one's general well-being, and as such it relies heavily on foresight: after all, one needs to consider the consequences of certain courses of action if one wishes to make a good decision.¹⁴ Because the factors involved are variable and particular rather than invariable and universal, one needs to gain experience in order to become good at deliberating, which is why *phronesis* is acquired with age.¹⁵ As the ability to choose the best course of action towards certain ends, prudence is required for all other virtues, since, in Aristotle's view, virtue needs a practical application. One cannot simply *be* virtuous but being virtuous means *acting* in accordance with virtue—virtue equals action.¹⁶

Aristotle's definition of prudence has many points of contact with Eustathios' reading of Athena in the Homeric commentaries, as his interpreta-

¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.5, 1140a25–28: δοκεῖ δὴ φρονίμου εἶναι τὸ δύνασθαι καλῶς βουλευσασθαι περὶ τὰ αὐτῷ ἀγαθὰ καὶ συμφέροντα, οὐ κατὰ μέρος, οἷον ποῖα πρὸς ὑγίειαν, πρὸς ἰσχύν, ἀλλὰ ποῖα πρὸς τὸ εὖ ζῆν ὅλως. Translation by Rackham 1934.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.7, 1141a26–28, with commentary in Eustratios of Nicaea, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 327.25–328.15; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.2, 1139b5–11. On the ability to deliberate well as the principal characteristic of the prudent man, see also *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.7, 1141b8–14.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.8, 1142a11–16; cf. 6.11, 1143b11–14. On the importance of experience for prudence, see also Eustratios of Nicaea, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 335.7–336.13, 344.1–15, 350.6–13.

¹⁶ On the practical nature of prudence, see e.g. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.7, 1141b14–23; on prudence in relation to virtue and action in general, see *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.12–13, 1144a11–1145a14. On prudence and action, see also Eustratios of Nicaea, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 335.7–336.13, with Trizio 2021, 195–96. The literature on *phronesis* in Aristotle is extensive. See e.g. Reeve 1992, 67–98 and 2013, Hursthouse 2006; for an overview, see also Celano 2016, 12–51, with further chapters on the reception of Aristotle's thought in the medieval West.

tion of Athena's first appearance on the Trojan battlefield in Book One of the *Iliad* illustrates.¹⁷ The Greeks are gathered to discuss the pestilence that has been raging through their camp for nine days already. The seer Calchas reveals that the disease was sent by Apollo and will end if Agamemnon's concubine Chryseis is returned to her father Chryses, Apollo's priest. When Agamemnon thereupon announces that he will deprive Achilles of Briseis by way of compensation, Achilles is furious:

Within his shaggy breast his heart was divided in counsel, whether he should draw his sharp sword from his side and break up the assembly, and kill the son of Atreus, or whether he should check his wrath and curb his spirit. While he pondered this in his mind and heart, and was drawing his great sword from its sheath, Athena came from heaven, sent by the goddess, white-armed Hera ...¹⁸

Athena approaches Achilles from behind, pulls him by the hair, and orders him to check his anger: he may reproach Agamemnon with words but should refrain from violent actions.¹⁹

Eustathios gives an elaborate allegorical interpretation of this scene, and of the figure of Athena in particular, which sets the stage for his reading of the goddess' subsequent appearances in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. He explains that we should not apprehend Athena as a goddess here but as Achilles' own readiness of mind (*anchinoia*).²⁰ Her descending from heaven (i.e. from Achilles' head) represents Achilles' reason (*logos*) descending into the future and reflecting on the severe consequences killing Agamemnon might have.²¹

¹⁷ In his funeral oration for his former teacher, Michael Choniates praises the efficiency and breadth of Eustathios' teaching, which included Aristotle (*Or.* 16, 286.29–30). On Eustathios' use of Aristotle and Aristotelian commentaries in his work on Homer, see Van der Valk 1971, CIII–CIV.

¹⁸ *Iliad* 1.188–95, translation by Murray 1999.

¹⁹ *Iliad* 1.197–214.

²⁰ Eustathios, *Commentary on the Iliad* (hereafter: *in Il.*) 81.26–27=1.128.35–36; 82.13–22=1.129.35–130.6. Cf. schol. D *ad Il.* 1.195 and Heraclitus, *Allegories* 20.1, where Athena is interpreted as Achilles' *phronesis*.

²¹ Eustathios, *in Il.* 81.27–33=1.128.36–129.4. Athena is the *logistikos* or rational part of the mind that can counteract irrational impulses, as she does, for instance, by preventing Ares from intervening in the war against Zeus' orders in *Iliad* 15: see Eusta-

Agamemnon is a mighty king whereas Achilles rules only a minor kingdom; this is why refraining from killing Agamemnon is the better course of action for Achilles' own sake. Eustathios argues that attacking a powerful king can only end badly: should Achilles try to murder the king and fail, nothing good will come of it; should he manage to kill Agamemnon, he will bring disgrace upon himself and destruction upon the Greeks.²² This emphasis on Agamemnon's royal authority and the dangers involved in disrespecting it is without parallel in Eustathios' sources and appears to reflect the autocratic imperial world in which he himself lived.²³ More relevant to this paper, however, is Athena's role as Achilles' own readiness of mind and, later in Eustathios' interpretation of this passage, his prudence.²⁴ In the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle contrasts the speed of *anchinoia* to the excellent deliberation that defines *phronesis*. Like Aristotle, Eustathios draws a distinction between *anchinoia* and *phronesis*: the former involves a swift consideration of what is necessary, whereas the latter requires deliberation over a longer period of time.²⁵

The idea that *phronesis* involves considering various courses of action and their outcomes has much in common with Aristotle's definition of the virtue, as does Eustathios' emphasis on the forethought involved in making a prudent decision. In Eustathios' view, the fact that Athena approaches Achilles from behind is connected to this reflection on the future that prudence involves: it symbolizes that the goddess allows the hero to understand the future for, according to the ancients, the future lies behind

thios, in *Il.* 1008.58–60=3.710.26–29. On heaven representing the head, see also in *Il.* 82.2–8=1.129.22–29. Cf. Tzetzes, *Exegesis of the Iliad* ad 1.195, 1.222, 1.420; *Allegories of the Iliad* 1.82–92; *Allegories of the Odyssey* 1.227–29.

²² Eustathios, in *Il.* 81.33–42=1.129.5–15. Eustathios suggests that this is also what Hera's involvement might point to: as the queen goddess, Hera represents the monarchy and royal life.

²³ On contemporary ideology in the Homeric commentaries, see also Cullhed 2017.

²⁴ E.g. Eustathios, in *Il.* 84.36=1.134.8 and 89.1–7=1.140.7–13 as quoted below.

²⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.9, 1142b5–6, with Eustratios of Nicaea, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 355.10–356.4; cf. *Posterior Analytics* 1.34, 89b10–20. Eustathios, *Commentary on the Odyssey* (hereafter: in *Od.*) 1742.62–1743.2=2.51.14–16. For Eustathios' definition of *anchinoia* (based on its etymology), see also in *Il.* 82.21–22=1.130.5–6, 821.50–52=3.122.18–20.

us as it is hidden from our view.²⁶ Eustathios' etymological interpretation of Athena's name further underlines the connection between forethought and prudence: "Athena" derives from the verb *athrein*, "to perceive", "as she is someone who is perceptive in that she is able to foresee the future and the things that are necessary".²⁷ Her epithet *glaukōpis*, "with gleaming eyes", points in the same direction: Eustathios explains that the verb *glaussēin* is a near synonym of *athrein*, which means that their derivatives, i.e. *glaukōpis* and *Athene*, are likewise related. The owl is therefore sacred to Athena not only because it can see in the dark just as understanding (here *sunesis*) can penetrate the obscurity of the future, but also because *glaux* ("owl") is etymologically derived from *glaussēin*.²⁸ Athena's epithet "Pallas", moreover, derives from the verb *pallein*, "to move", and hence refers to the swiftness involved in *phronesis* and *pronoia*.²⁹

According to Eustathios, it is these virtues as represented by Athena that command Achilles to restrain his anger toward Agamemnon. When she appears, Achilles is amazed; he turns around and recognizes her at once (*Iliad* 1.199–200). In Eustathios' reading, Achilles' turning around symbolizes that it is impossible to defy correct reasoning. That he recognizes Athena immediately points to his *anchinoia*; it shows that he is aware that his line of reasoning was wrong, that he needs to draw better conclusions, and that

²⁶ Unlike the present and the past, which lie before our eyes: *in Il.* 81.44–82.2=1.129.18–22. See also *in Il.* 82.18–20=1.130.2–5, 1141.61–63=4.172.1–5 on *anchinoia* as foresight. For the idea that the future lies behind us, see schol. bT on *Iliad* 18.250b.

²⁷ Eustathios, *in Il.* 83.33=1.132.14–15: [ἡ παρὰ τὸ ἀθρεῖν τὸ βλέπειν] ἀθρήνη τις οὔσα ὡς τῶν μελλόντων καὶ δεόντων προβλεπτική; cf. *in Il.* 86.42=1.137.9–10. For similar etymologies, see e.g. Heraclitus, *Allegories* 19.8; *Etymologicum Magnum* 24.44–47; Tzetzes, *Exegesis of the Iliad* ad 1.194 and *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* ad 76, where the focus is more on clear perception and understanding than foresight.

²⁸ Eustathios, *in Il.* 86.35–87.1=1.137.1–16. For similar etymological explanations of *glaukōpis* in relation to *phronesis*, see e.g. Tzetzes, *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* ad 76. Cf. *Etymologicum Magnum* 233.10–13: an owl is called *glaux* from *glaussēin* because it is sharp-sighted. Eustathios uses *phronesis* and *sunesis* synonymously and repeatedly interprets Athena as understanding. See e.g. *in Il.* 1006.9=3.702.31 and *in Od.* 1431.4 Cullhed.

²⁹ Eustathios, *in Il.* 84.35–37=1.134.7–9. For a similar etymology, see Tzetzes, *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* ad 76.

prudence has now come to him.³⁰ Eustathios sums up his interpretation as follows:

The poet clearly does not permit us to understand Athena here as a goddess but as conjectural *phronesis* of the future when he writes “one day three times as many glorious gifts will be yours on account of this insult. Restrain yourself, therefore, and obey us” (*Iliad* 1.213–14) [...] For Achilles does not hear these words from the mythical Athena but draws these conjectural conclusions of his own accord.³¹

Employing various hermeneutic strategies and building on various ancient traditions, Eustathios offers his own intricate reading of the goddess Athena in the opening book of his commentary. In this way, he is able not only to display exegetical ingenuity but also to bring Homer in line with deeper philosophical ideas, thereby making the *Iliad* a vehicle for moral education and its heroes models of *phronesis* with Aristotelian overtones. He turns Athena from a supernatural element in Homer’s narrative into something innately human and creates heroes that rely on their own prudence to make the right decisions.³²

5.2 MODELS OF MANHOOD: ATHENA AND HER PRUDENT HEROES

Throughout the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Athena assists various Homeric heroes, most notably Achilles, Odysseus, and Diomedes in the *Iliad* and Odysseus and Telemachus throughout the *Odyssey*. In the first book of the *Od-*

³⁰ Eustathios, *in Il.* 85.10–13=1.134.31–135.1. See also *in Od.* 1395.10–15 Cullhed: Athena’s golden sandals in *Odyssey* 1.96–97 symbolize the radiance and swiftness of prudent thought. See Wissmann 2009, 437–38 for different interpretations of Athena’s attributes in the ancient scholia. On correct reasoning, cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.9, 1142b15–33, where it is considered essential to the deliberative excellence that defines the prudent man.

³¹ Eustathios, *in Il.* 89.1–7=1.140.7–13: “Ὅτι φανερώς ἐνταῦθα ὁ ποιητὴς τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν οὐ θεὰν ἀφίησι νοεῖν, ἀλλὰ φρόνησιν στοχαστικὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος ἐν τῷ «καὶ ποτέ τοι τρίς τόσσα παρέσsetai ἀγλαὰ δῶρα [ἕβριος εἵνεκα τῆσδε· σὺ δ’ ἴσχειο, πείθεο δ’ ἡμῖν]» [...] οὐκ ἐξ Ἀθηνᾶς γὰρ τῆς μυθικῆς ἀκούων, ἀλλ’ οἶκοθεν ἐννοεῖται τοιαῦτα στοχαστικῶς ὁ Ἀχιλλεύς.

³² For a similar disenchantment of Homeric goddesses in Malalas and Tzetzes, see Goldwyn, this volume.

yssey, Athena prompts Telemachus to travel to Sparta and Pylos in search of information about his father, and thus sets the entire plot of the poem in motion towards the killing of the suitors, which, in Eustathios' view, is the culmination of the narrative.³³ Eustathios' interpretation of this episode places a great deal of emphasis on action: Athena's approaching Telemachus (in the shape of Mentès) and instructing him on what to do indicates that the young man has matured and has gained natural *phronesis*, which, as we saw in Aristotle, comes with experience and age.³⁴ Eustathios explains that this Athena, his new-found *phronesis*, incites Telemachus to move from deliberation to *praxis* or action.³⁵ Her connection with action is further underscored by her attributes, and in particular by her spear, which, in Eustathios' reading, illustrates her activeness (*energon*), manliness (*androdēs*), and effectuality (*drasterion*).³⁶ That Athena leaves Telemachus a little later on does not mean that he loses his prudence. Rather, it means that after due deliberation he has come to a decision and can stop pondering the issue, knowing that he has thought everything through and can proceed to doing what he has decided to do. Athena's departure merely signals the end of the deliberation process.³⁷

We find a similar combination of *phronesis* and action in connection with other heroes, not least Athena's favourite Odysseus. When in the tenth book of the *Iliad* Diomedes volunteers to enter the Trojan camp in order to spy on the enemy, he asks Odysseus to accompany him because he considers him the most discerning of all the Greeks at Troy and because Athena loves him (*Iliad* 10.242–47). In his comments on this passage, Eustathios underscores

³³ On the slaying of the suitors as the culmination of the *Odyssey*, see Eustathios, in *Od.* 1393.55–1394.2 Cullhed.

³⁴ Eustathios, in *Od.* 1393.42–50 Cullhed. On *phronesis*, experience, and old age, see also Eustathios, in *Il.* 240.19–20=1365.29–31 and the example discussed on p. 129 below. Cf. Heraclitus, *Allegories* 61–63. On Athena and Telemachus in ancient exegesis, see Wissmann 2009; see also Murrin 2007.

³⁵ Eustathios, in *Od.* 1393.46, 1398.28–29 Cullhed.

³⁶ Eustathios, in *Od.* 1395.25–29 Cullhed.

³⁷ Eustathios, in *Od.* 1419.60–64 Cullhed. Athena as the *phronesis* of women is often related to deliberation as well as skills in weaving and other crafts: see e.g. Eustathios, in *Od.* 1436.23–25, 1437.44–49 on Penelope; cf. Tzetzes, *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days* ad 64 (on the story of Pandora).

that Diomedes chooses Odysseus not because he is braver than all the rest but because he has more *phronesis*. Assuming that the world of heroes is as rife with competition as his own, Eustathios adds that there is no reason for the wise Nestor to be jealous now that Diomedes has awarded Odysseus first place in *phronesis*: Nestor knows that, at his age, his is a prudence stripped of action, while Odysseus' prudence is the active and practical *phronesis* that Athena represents.³⁸ Eustathios recognizes this as the heroic ideal formulated by Homer. In his view, Homer's depiction of the heroes shows that, ideally, manliness and valour in war should be accompanied by *phronesis*. Action should be guided by prudence. Eustathios, moreover, argues repeatedly that Homer in fact valued *phronesis* more than *andreia* and prefers courageous prudence over valorous actions *per se*.³⁹

This model of heroism resonates with ideas found in other Eustathian texts, not least in his panegyric orations for Manuel I Komnenos, in which the emperor is often presented as a military hero.⁴⁰ In his 1174 Epiphany oration, for instance, Eustathios underscores Manuel's prudent courage by comparing his actions at the battle of Zeugminon years earlier to the impetuous actions of Alexander the Great at the Rock of Chorienes.⁴¹ Unlike Alexander, Eustathios argues, Manuel did not climb the siege ladder recklessly, unnecessarily risking his own life. Rather, "my performer of great deeds and the greatest emperor both commanded as general and showed his manhood, and besieged that notable city alone, and did everything

³⁸ Eustathios, in *Il.* 801.7–27=3.54.15–55.21. Cf. in *Il.* 196.1–22=1.300.7–14: Odysseus is not more *phronimos* than Nestor, but his *phronesis* is more practical and active. On Odysseus as *phronimos*, see also Eustratios of Nicaea, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 392.31–393.1.

³⁹ See e.g. Eustathios, in *Il.* 473.23–27=1.748.22–27, 801.20–27=3.55.12–21, 1200.48–51=4.382.23–383.2. The literature on Homeric heroism is vast; see e.g. Horn 2014 with references to earlier bibliography. On the importance of *euboulia* as counterpart to courage in the *Iliad*, see Schofield 1986.

⁴⁰ On military ideology in Komnenian panegyric oratory, see Magdalino 1993, 418–22, 448–49, 469; on Komnenian military ideology, see also Neville 2012, 89–103, 121–38. On the reception of Homeric epic in discussions of good rulership in antiquity and beyond, see the contributions in Klooster & Van den Berg 2018.

⁴¹ Arrian, *Anabasis* 4.21.

with prudent courage”.⁴² Indeed, Eustathios continues, there was no danger involved in Manuel’s actions at all, as the emperor acted according to a wise plan and climbed a siege ladder whose construction he had supervised himself.⁴³ Eustathios’ emphasis on the prudence that prevents courage from becoming recklessness may well have parenetic overtones here: as Andrew Stone points out, in Kinnamos’ account of the events, Manuel’s actions at Zeugminon could easily have been considered as rash as Alexander’s.⁴⁴

Whether parenetic or not, prudence was one of the key virtues for which Manuel was praised in the panegyric oratory of his reign.⁴⁵ In his funeral oration for the emperor, Eustathios formulates *phronesis* as the essential virtue for good governance, which Manuel possessed in abundance:

And this single man divided his time generously between the wide parts of the empire in an energetic way, displaying the initiative of his courage [*andria*] and his burning intelligence [*sunesis*] in a manner resembling an ambidextrous man, as much in matters related to the rest of practical wisdom [*phronesis*] as in those requiring readiness of mind [*anchinoia*]. For while he exhibited thoughtfulness in great matters, deliberating at length, in the majority of cases his mind got close to the heart of the matter and he lost no time in grasping the situation, right to its very depths, not superficially like those who are quick to come to a decision but without ensuring its reliability and soundness. And while he could also claim extraordinary deeds of bravery [*andria*], far more numerous were his acts of prudence [*phronesis*], which, even if we considered them individually, we enjoy in great numbers.⁴⁶

⁴² Eustathios, *1174 Epiphany Oration* 267.14–17: ἀλλ’ ὁ ἐμὸς μεγαλουργὸς καὶ μέγιστος βασιλεὺς καὶ στρατηγὴ καὶ ἀνδρίζεται καὶ μόνος πολιορκεῖ τὴν σπουδαίαν ἐκείνην πόλιν καὶ πάντα μετὰ θάρσους ἔμφρονος. Translation by Stone 2013.

⁴³ Eustathios, *1174 Epiphany Oration* 267.17–23.

⁴⁴ Stone 2013, 26, n. 137; Kinnamos, *History* 241.6–242.2. On the parenetic value of imperial oratory, see also Angelov 2003.

⁴⁵ Magdalino 1993, 435, 488.

⁴⁶ Eustathios, *Funeral Oration for Manuel I Komnenos* 14: Καὶ ἄνθρωπος εἰς οὗτος τοῖς μεγάλοις οἰκουμενικοῖς ἑαυτὸν μεγαλοφυῶς ἐπεμέριζε τμήμασιν εἰς τὸ ἐνεργόν, προβαλλόμενος ὅσα καὶ χεῖρας ἀμφιδεξίου, τὸ τῆς ἀνδρίας δραστήριον, καὶ τὸ τῆς συνέσεως ἐμπύριον, ὅσον τε ἐν τῇ λοιπῇ φρονήσει, καὶ ὅπόσον εἰς ἀγχίνουαν. Ἦν μὲν γὰρ καὶ σκεπτικῶς ἔχων ἐν τοῖς μεγίστοις, καὶ ἐφιστάνων διανοητικῶς, τὰ πλείω, δὲ ἀγχιστα τῇ νοήσει παρίστατο, καὶ ἀχρόνως οἷον τοῦ νοουμένου ἐδράττετο, καὶ τούτου, βαθύτατα, καὶ οὐχ’ ὥς ἐπιπολάζειν κατὰ τοὺς ταχεῖς μὲν φρονεῖν, οὐ τι δὲ καὶ ἀσφαλεῖς. καὶ ἦν μὲν

Like Homer's heroes, Manuel exhibits the right balance of bravery and *phronesis*, with *phronesis* taking precedence over bravery—indeed, earlier in the same oration, Eustathios awards Manuel first place in *phronesis*.⁴⁷ Moreover, we find here the same combination of *anchinoia* and *phronesis* that governed Achilles' actions in the first book of the *Iliad*: Manuel's readiness of mind allows him to swiftly penetrate to the core of the matters at hand, while he simultaneously excels in the longer process of deliberating that characterizes the prudent man. Even if Eustathios' image of Manuel here might be a portrait of an ideal ruler rather than a real emperor, the similarities between his reading of Homer and his ideas on good rulership as formulated in the funeral oration are evident.⁴⁸

Eustathios' reading of Homer's heroes, grounded though it may be in ancient reflections on Homeric heroism, thus ties in with his ideas on contemporary rulership and excellent manhood more broadly. The emperor's combination of valour and prudence is in line with a general model of *theoria*-with-*praxis* that finds its expression in different contexts throughout Eustathios' oeuvre. We find an example in the profile of the ideal civic philosopher as expressed in the *Commentary on the Odyssey*, in which Eustathios reads Odysseus as such a perfect philosopher who combines theory and practice, philosophy and rhetoric. Strengthened by his philosophical steadfastness, Odysseus can resist the Sirens' allure and draw theoretical knowledge from their wisdom-providing song. He does, however, not stay in the realm of theoretical knowledge forever but moves on to *praxis* by sharing his knowledge with his companions, just as the civic philosopher is expected to use his philosophical wisdom for the benefit of the community. It is rhetoric, the rhetorical skills of the civic philosopher, that allows him to pursue this practical purpose and communicate his wisdom to

αὐτῷ, λίαν καλὰ καὶ τὰ τῆς ἀνδρίας σεμνά· περιττότερα δέ γε τὰ τῆς φρονήσεως, ἥς καὶ καταμόνας, εἰς μυρίον πλῆθος ὠνάμεθα. Translation by Bourbouhakis, slightly modified.

⁴⁷ Eustathios, *Funeral Oration for Manuel I Komnenos* 12.

⁴⁸ On prudence and paraenesis in the funeral oration, see Bourbouhakis 2017, 67*–81*, 114–15, 121.

less educated souls.⁴⁹ It has been repeatedly argued that Eustathios presents Odysseus as an alter ego of himself,⁵⁰ an idea supported by resonances of this ideal elsewhere in the Eustathian corpus.

We find a striking echo of the ideal of the civic philosopher in Eustathios' definition of the good monk in his *Inquiry into Monastic Life*. In his view, a monk is "God's herald" (*theokerux*) and therefore needs to be educated: how would a wholly uneducated person be able to spread the good deeds of God? Drawing on the *Psalms*, Eustathios defines the ideal monk as someone who "understands [*suniesin*] all the works of God by, alone, fashioning his heart anew".⁵¹ This centrality of understanding, Eustathios continues, demonstrates that monasticism is both theoretical and practical: being an intellectual virtue, *sunesis* implies *theoria*, while the expression "all the works" implies *praxis*, since the one who is active (*praktikos*) in virtue can be considered hard-working (*ergatikos*).⁵² He argues that, even if practical virtue is a form of God-given knowledge, bestowed upon educated and uneducated alike, to gain understanding, the ideal monk should read or listen to Scripture at the bare minimum. Yet to achieve the pinnacle of the philosophical way of life that is monasticism, one needs education and an active life to illuminate the mind. In Eustathios' view, then, the contemplative and active life complement each other: to pursue one without the other is like being half blind.⁵³

⁴⁹ Eustathios, in *Od.* 1709.18–30=2.4.35–5.1. See Van den Berg 2022, 25–26 for further references. Cf. the ideal of the *politikos bios* as formulated by Psellos and discussed in Trizio 2022, 83–85; on rhetoric and philosophy in Psellos, see also Papaioannou 2012.

⁵⁰ See e.g. Cesaretti 1991, 215, 224–26, Pizzone 2016, 241, Lovato 2022, Van den Berg 2022, 26–27.

⁵¹ Eustathios, *Inquiry into Monastic Life* 141.1–7; quotation from ll. 5–7: πλάσας [...] καταμόνας τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ συνήσιν εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ. Metzler identifies allusions to Ps. 32.15 and 27.5. The question of education is the topic of chapters 126–32, 141–47. On Eustathios' views on monastic education and their contexts, see Metzler 2006, 57–58 and the commentary on pp. 489–99, 508–19.

⁵² Eustathios, *Inquiry into Monastic Life* 141.7–10.

⁵³ Eustathios, *Inquiry into Monastic Life* 141.10–142.16. On *theoria* and *praxis* in Eustathios' treatise and their place in the monastic tradition, see Metzler 2006, 187–88, 201–12. On the monk as philosopher, see also *Inquiry into Monastic Life* 131. Eustathios' discussion seems to be part of a wider twelfth-century debate on ideal monkhood. Eustratios of Nicaea, for instance, draws a sharp distinction between the truly

In Eustathios' definition, contemplation involves reading books, firstly those that record divine deeds and, secondly, pagan ones as well. He recommends that the good monk study a selection of pagan histories, maxims, and *apophthegmata*, supporting his suggested reading programme with the authority of the Church Fathers: these most holy men of the past drew from such ancient texts material for their own works, thereby using them as beehives for their own honey.⁵⁴ Conversely, the monastic communities of Eustathios' day neglect the study of pagan and Christian books alike: Eustathios narrates an anecdote about an abbot so ignorant that he even sold off books with the works of a theological author as important as Gregory of Nazianzos.⁵⁵ He stresses the practical use of the knowledge to be gained: how can one define doctrinal questions and settle doctrinal disputes without being familiar with the arguments of previous theologians? How will one speak of God's great deeds after having cut off one's own tongue and lips?⁵⁶ The monastics of his day, Eustathios complains, focus exclusively on prayer, church services, and their communal table, going so far as to actively oppose learning. Yet, in Eustathios' view, this is not the complete definition of monastic virtue. A good monk needs knowledge—both theological and otherwise—with which to benefit the greater community.⁵⁷ Echoing his definition of the civic philosopher, Eustathios thus stresses that the ideal

contemplative life of monks and civic happiness: see Trizio 2016, 199–223 and 2022, 86–87. In his *Funeral Oration for Anna Komnene* (281.4–14), George Tornikios similarly distinguishes between two types of philosophers: monastics, who preach in an unadorned style, and civic philosophers, who combine rhetoric and philosophy; see Trizio 2022, 85–86 for discussion. A more elaborate investigation of the twelfth-century debate on the ideal monk would help to further contextualize Eustathios' views but this lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

⁵⁴ Eustathios, *Inquiry into Monastic Life* 143.1–5. The image of the bees famously occurs in a similar context in the fourth chapter of *Address to Young Men on Reading Greek Literature* by Basil the Great.

⁵⁵ Eustathios, *Inquiry into Monastic Life* 144; cf. 128.

⁵⁶ Eustathios, *Inquiry into Monastic Life* 146.1–7.

⁵⁷ Eustathios, *Inquiry into Monastic Life* 146.9–16; cf. 154: contemporary monks feel no need to either read or do good deeds. On Eustathios' rejection of gratuitous asceticism, see e.g. Kazhdan & Franklin 1984, 168–71, Magdalino 1993, 483, Metzler 2006, 211–12. See also his *Oration on a Certain Thessalonian Stylite*, with discussion in Stratigopoulos 2017.

monk, the ideal monastic philosopher, should implement the fruits of the contemplative life in an active life for the wellbeing of Christian society at large. That is to say, the monk needs an action-oriented understanding that is not altogether different from the active prudence that Eustathios recognizes in the Homeric heroes.

5.3 FROM *PHRONESIS* TO *DEINOTES*: THE RHETOR'S PRUDENCE

Throughout his Homeric commentaries, Eustathios remains first of all a rhetorician, attentive not only to the ethical qualities of Homer's heroes but also to their rhetorical skills. Yet, as we have seen above, ethics and rhetoric often work in combination. The elderly Nestor provides a good example. While Odysseus may outdo Nestor in active *phronesis*, Nestor surpasses Odysseus in rhetorical excellence: Nestor is *the* Homeric rhetor, while Odysseus comes second. When Homer praises Nestor by saying that "from [his] lips the streams of words ran sweeter than honey" (*Iliad* 1.2.49), Eustathios explains that Homer here testifies to two things: Nestor's rhetorical prowess and his *phronesis*. From this passage, Eustathios suggests, Strabo may have derived his definition of rhetoric as "*phronesis* in words" (1.2.5).⁵⁸ He continues by ascribing Nestor's *phronesis* to the experience he accumulated in his lifetime, since "experience is the mother of *phronesis*."⁵⁹ The aged hero himself supports this idea with repeated stories about his earlier feats; among them is the famous battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths, which he refers to in the first book of the *Iliad* (182–535). In Eustathios' reading, the rhetor Nestor tells this story to emphasize that he possesses understanding based on experience, cleverly downplaying his courage in order to lend even more weight to his *sunesis* in a skilfully arranged speech meant to convince the Greek army to heed his words.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Eustathios, in *Il.* 96.38–43=1.151.22–27. On Nestor as the best orator, see also in *Il.* 220.40–221.20=1.335.33–336.30, with discussion in Lovato 2018, 219–20; on Nestor as rhetor in Eustathios' commentaries, see Lovato 2017, 42–62, 64–70. On Nestor's *euboulia*, see also Roisman 2005.

⁵⁹ Eustathios, in *Il.* 96.43–45=1.151.27–30; quotation from 96.45=1.151.30: μήτηρ γὰρ φρονήσεως ἐμπειρία.

⁶⁰ Eustathios, in *Il.* 102.45–103.19=1.161.8–32.

Eustathios sees this close connection of *phronesis* and eloquence embodied in the goddess Athena. Let us return once again to Athena's role in the first book of the *Odyssey*. Parallel to his allegorical reading of the goddess as Telemachus' new-found *phronesis*, Eustathios offers a different interpretation. He explains that of all the possible scenarios that Homer could have chosen in order to steer the narrative towards the killing of the suitors,

the poet, true to himself, chose something more marvellous and indeed more difficult; something that, if tended to with proper rhetorical method and made plausible in a sound way, could prove his excellence in words. Moreover, one must know that Athena here is the method of Homer's rhetorical excellence [*deinotes*], by which the poet contrives Athena's descent to Ithaca and the events there, as well as those concerning Hermes' visit to Calypso.⁶¹

In this reading, then, it is not Athena as anthropomorphic goddess nor Athena as Telemachus' *phronesis*, but rather Athena as the poet's own rhetorical skilfulness or *deinotes* that sets the plot of the *Odyssey* in motion. While *deinotes* denotes the highest rhetorical skill in both the ancient and Byzantine rhetorical traditions, in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* it is closely related to *phronesis*: *deinotes* is cleverness that can be either good or bad, yet when used towards a good purpose such cleverness may become true virtue, *phronesis*.⁶² Blending these two traditions, Eustathios interprets Athena as Homer's *phronesis* and *deinotes*, as the personification of the poet's rhetorical skill. In his view, Homer himself anticipated such a reading by repeatedly giving Athena the epithet *deine* in the sense of "awe-inspiring". By connecting this meaning of the adjective *deinos* with the formidable nature of *phronesis* and rhetorical skill, Eustathios is able to bring his different

⁶¹ Eustathios, in *Od.* 1394.5–9 Cullhed: ἀλλ' ὁ ποιητής, οἷος αὐτός, τὸ τερατωδέστερον ἐπελέξατο καὶ ἀληθῶς δυσεξέργαστον καὶ ὅπερ εὐμεθόδως μελετηθὲν καὶ ἀσφαλῶς πιθανολογηθὲν, ἔχοι ἂν ἐξελέγχειν τὴν ἐν λόγοις αὐτοῦ ἀρετὴν. "Ἐτι ἰστέον καὶ ὅτι Ἀθηνᾶ ἐνταῦθα καὶ ἡ κατὰ τὴν Ὀμηρικὴν δεινότητα μέθοδος ἐστὶ, καθ' ἣν ὁ ποιητής ἐπινόεῖται τὴν τε τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς εἰς Ἰθάκην κάθοδον καὶ τὰ ἐπ' αὐτῇ καὶ τὰ κατὰ τὸν Ἑρμῆν ἐπὶ τῇ Καλυψοί. Translation by Cullhed 2016, slightly modified.

⁶² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.12–13, 1144a23–b4; see also Hursthouse 2006, esp. p. 298. On the difference between *deinotes* and *phronesis*, see also Eustratios of Nicaea, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 392.7–394.2, 395.24–396.7.

interpretations together and support them with the authority of the Poet himself. For Eustathios, Homer is not so much a divinely inspired poet but rather a poet who relies on his own rhetorical prowess to compose a narrative that enchants by means of excellent rhetorical techniques rather than supernatural goddesses.⁶³

The passages discussed in this section mention various other deities connected with the art of speaking. When, in the first book of the *Odyssey*, Zeus sends Hermes to Calypso at Athena's request, Eustathios interprets the messenger god as reason or *logos*, both our natural *logos* and uttered *logos* more specifically, while Calypso represents the human body, the flesh to which Odysseus the philosopher was bound and which his reason now urges him to disregard.⁶⁴ When discussing the honey of Nestor's speech, moreover, Eustathios remarks that the tongue is like a beehive for the Muses, whom he elsewhere interprets as allegories of the knowledge existing in the intellect (= Zeus).⁶⁵ Both Hermes and the Muses are the offspring of Zeus *quous* or intellect, while the fact that both "Muse" and the name of Hermes' mother Maia etymologically derive from the verb *mo*, "to inquire", further demonstrates their kinship.⁶⁶ Eustathios underscores that, despite this close connection, the Muses and Hermes represent significantly different types of discourse on account of their gender. Eustathios' gendered interpretation is worth quoting more extensively:

⁶³ For Athena as Homer's *deinotes* in Eustathios' commentaries, see Cullhed 2014, 70*–71*, Van den Berg 2017, 137–39. The virtue of *phronesis* becomes connected to rhetorical *deinotes* in Sikeliotes' *Commentary on Hermogenes' On Types of Style* 62.29–63.4; see Roilos 2005, 144–45 for discussion. See Van den Berg 2022, 169–72 for a more elaborate discussion of the nexus Athena-*phronesis*-*deinotes* in Eustathios' commentary.

⁶⁴ Eustathios, in *Od.* 1389.41–51 Cullhed. On Hermes as *logos* in Eustathios' commentary, see also Van den Berg 2022, 172–74.

⁶⁵ Eustathios, in *Il.* 96.33=1.151.16 (τινος Μουσῶν σίμβλου). On the Muses as knowledge in Eustathios' *Commentary on the Iliad*, see Van den Berg 2022, 167–68 with references to examples and further bibliography.

⁶⁶ For the etymology, see Eustathios, in *Il.* 10.30–31=1.17.14–16. The etymology of Μοῦσα – μῶ is also found in *Etymologicum Magnum* 589.41–42; cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 406a: Μοῦσα derives from μῶσθαι ("to search").

Notice furthermore that active speech, the kind of speech one observes in the dignified and, so to speak, manly practical art [sc. rhetoric], is called ‘Hermes’ in accordance with its masculine utterance; this means that, just as a loud roar of the sea, figuratively, becomes masculine when it is called “masculine [i.e. mighty] sound of the sea” [Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 1455], so also excellent speech—that is to say, noble philosophy escaping its female voice—is ‘Hermaic’ in its utterance. Zeus/the intellect in fact even uses this Hermes as a messenger and like an assistant. The kind of speech, however, that is not such, but is clad in women’s clothes, as it were, with its predominant striving for elegance, pleasure, brilliance, and beauty, this type [of speech] is represented by the Muse Calliope or by the Muses in general; they are spoken of as being of the female sex and they were born from Zeus as well, but they most of all care for the song-loving Apollo [...] and thus, they demonstrate through themselves how they differ from Hermes.⁶⁷

This passage ties in with various points of our discussion of Athena and prudence above. The type of discourse that Hermes—*logos*—involves, is masculine, active, and practical, not unlike the prudence that characterizes our Homeric heroes. Moreover, it consists of the same combination of philosophy and rhetoric that characterizes the civic philosopher, of philosophy cast in the manly language of rhetoric rather than the feminine elegance of the Muses. Eustathios’ reading emphasizes that even if this feminine type of discourse is also born from the intellect, it might not have much to do with the *nous* after all: the Muses prefer to associate with the melodious Apollo rather than with their father, the supreme god himself. Even if Eustathios’ intricate interpretation cannot be further unpacked here, it is clear that mas-

⁶⁷ Eustathios, in *Il.* 10.20–30=1.17.3–14: “Ἐτι σημείωσαι καὶ ὅτι ὁ μὲν δραστήριος λόγος ὁ κατὰ τὴν πρακτικὴν τὴν ἐμβριθῆ καὶ οἷον εἰπεῖν ἀνδρῶδη θεωρούμενος Ἑρμῆς λέγεται κατὰ προφορὰν ἀρρενικὴν, [ἵνα ὥσπερ ἰαχὴ πόντου μεγάλη τροπικῶς ἀρρενοῦται, λεγομένη «κτύπος ἄρσην πόντου», οὕτω καὶ λόγος γενναῖος, ταῦτὸν δ’ εἰπεῖν εὐγενὴς φιλοσοφία φεύγουσα τὸ θηλύφωνον, ἐρμαΐζεται τῇ προφορᾷ.] ᾧ δὴ Ἑρμῇ καὶ χρᾶται ἀγγέλω Ζεὺς ὁ νοῦς καὶ ὥσπερ ὑποδρηστήρι. ὅσον μέντοι τοῦ λόγου μὴ τοιοῦτον, ἀλλ’ οἷον θηλύστολον, τῷ στοχάζεσθαι ὠραΐσμου τὰ πλείω καὶ ἡδονῆς καὶ φαιδρότητος καὶ κάλλους, Καλλιόπη Μοῦσα ἢ ὅπως Μοῦσαι τὸ τοιοῦτον εἶδος, θηλυγενῶς ἐκφωνοῦμεναι καὶ Διὸς μὲν οὔσαι καὶ αὐταί, τῷ φιλωδῶ δὲ Ἀπόλλωνι μάλιστα μέλουσαι [...] καὶ οὕτως αὐταῖς ὑπεμφαίνουσαι τὸ πρὸς τὸν Ἑρμῆν διάφορον, [οὗ τὸ συγγενὲς πρὸς τὰς Μούσας καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ Μαῖα δηλοῖ. Μοῦσά τε γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ μῶ, τὸ ζητῶ, γίνεται καὶ Μαῖα ὡσαύτως.]

culinity is connected with action and practice, with rhetorically formulating ideas of philosophical depth, with the *logos* of Hermes and the *phronesis* of Athena, both offspring of and servants to the human intellect.

5.4 CONCLUSION

When Choniates writes that the drunk Constantinopolitan mob crushed their own *phronesis* and *andreia* by shattering Athena's statue on the eve of the city's capture, he presents them as anti-heroes who lacked the active prudence and prudent courage of an Odysseus or an Achilles. Not unlike Choniates, Eustathios sees these qualities as still relevant to contemporary heroes both on and off the battlefield. His reading of Athena as discussed in this paper demonstrates how he brings Homer's heroes in line with his own views on ideal manhood and good governance as he expresses them in different contexts elsewhere. Athena's favourite heroes, the civic philosopher Odysseus, the good ruler as exemplified by Manuel I Komnenos, and the ideal monk are all defined by a combination of contemplation and action that, although in different forms, revolves around deeds governed by intelligence, most often for the benefit of the community. Eustathios gives the prudence embodied by Athena Aristotelian overtones in line with the popularity of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the twelfth century; with the same Aristotelian connection, he brings Athena's prudence into the field of rhetoric, his own profession, and makes the *deinotes* of the rhetor a veritable virtue. The issues discussed here are only a small part of how Eustathios turns Homeric poetry into a vehicle for moral reflection and redefines the cultural authority of Homer in terms relevant to his own day. Reading Eustathios' scholarship in dialogue with his oeuvre at large adds depth to his Homeric exegesis while simultaneously allowing us to see how the enchanting stories about the gods remained relevant—and indeed acquired new meaning—in Komnenian society.

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