

## 1. Claudio Sansone

### Enslaved Women and their Speech in the *Odyssey*

In the second half of the *Odyssey*, we are granted oblique insight into the lives of fifty or so enslaved women working in Odysseus' *oikos*. In several instances, we also hear their complaints about the suitors, Odysseus (in disguise), and about the strenuousness of the labor they are required to undertake. Finally, twelve will be executed by Telemachus, on Odysseus' orders, after Eurykleia identifies them as "disloyal." While many of these episodes have been read closely in recent years (e.g. Wilson 2021, Thalmann 1998, Hunnings 2011), one feature of their representation has gone unnoticed: the manner in which the *Odyssey* reinscribes the speech of the enslaved women into a heroic-centered discourse of restoration (i.e. of restoring the *oikos*).

I offer a new reading of these passages that also draws on archaeological research on the role of enslaved women in Linear B tablets (Olsen 2015) and the presence of a commentary to *Odyssey* 20 in one of the lesser-known Oxyrhynchus papyri (P. Oxy. 3710). I will argue that the historical gap between the Homeric representation and the likely social orders at the time of the poem's rise to canonic status (8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE) permitted the composers of the *Odyssey* to engage in a peculiar sublimation of reported speech by enslaved figures—in simpler terms, their speech is made visible only to become coopted into the heroic code that continues to valorize the work of aristocratic men. This becomes particularly obvious when we look at the early receptions of these passages in the scholia, in the Byzantine commentators, and in the peculiar analyses offered in P. Oxy. 3710.

This paper sets the conventions of female representation in the Homeric epic in the context of broader sublimations of enslaved voices of men, as well as in a broader turn away from a pietistic overemphasis on Homer's supposedly self-evident humanism (e.g. Porter 2022).

### **Key Bibliography**

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