

# A Respectable Gospel: The Passion ‘According to Homer’ in Eudocia’s *Homerocentones*

KARL OLAV SANDNES

*MF Norwegian School of Theology, Oslo*

## Homer and the New Testament

Homer was the primary text of the ancient world. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were true companions of life, particularly for those with some education. Heraclitus, the Stoic philosopher, puts it succinctly in his *Homeric Problems* 1.4–7:

From the very first age of life, the foolishness of infants just beginning to learn is nurtured on the teaching given in his [i.e. Homer] school. One might almost say that his poems are our baby clothes, and we nourish our minds by draughts of his milk. He stands at our side as we each grow up and shares our youth as we gradually come to manhood; when we are mature, his presence within us is at its prime; and even in old age, we never weary of him. When we stop, we thirst to begin him again. In a word, the only end of Homer for human beings is the end of life.<sup>1</sup>

Homer was ubiquitous, as his texts were present throughout the various levels of education. It was the means whereby children – mostly boys of the social elite – were introduced to the skills of reading and writing.<sup>2</sup> Homes of the well-situated, as well as public squares, were ornamented

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from *Heraclitus: Homeric Problems*, ed. and trans. D. A. Russell and D. Konstan (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> See Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 100–19, 320–21; Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnasiums of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 140–42, 194–97, 204–5.

with scenes taken from these writings.<sup>3</sup> Literary style and story-telling found a prime model in Homer's writings. These writings were essential for the development of textual interpretation and hermeneutics,<sup>4</sup> and were means of preserving 'Greek-ness' and a cultural identity.<sup>5</sup> They were also means of entertainment, as they were parts of literary contests and performances. 'Homer was a cultural inevitability', as Dennis R. MacDonald has put it.<sup>6</sup> This was the air they breathed. According to Margalit Finkelberg, Homer's writings enjoyed the status as a 'foundational text' since they met three criteria: 1) They occupied a central place in education; 2) They were the focus of exegetic activity aimed at defending his texts from any type of criticism; and 3) These writings were the vehicle by which the identity of the community to which it belonged was shaped.<sup>7</sup>

This was also the wider context in which the New Testament writings came into being. Against the backdrop of Homer's pivotal role in the contemporary world, it is natural that the question of Homer and the New Testament is on the agenda of New Testament and Early Christian scholars. For reasons most natural, the Old Testament writings have been considered adjacent texts to New Testament interpretation, which particularly applies to the narrative texts. With some few exceptions,<sup>8</sup> scholars have

<sup>3</sup> Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Gospel 'According to Homer and Virgil': Cento and Canon*, NovTSup 138 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 8–11.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Lamberton and John J. Keyney, *Homer's Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic's Earliest Exegetes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Folker Siegert, 'Early Jewish Interpretation in a Hellenistic Style', in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation Vol. I.1*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 130–98; Maren Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Benjamin Sargent, "'Interpreting Homer from Homer": Aristarchus of Samothrace and the Notion of Scriptural Authorship in the New Testament', *TynBul* 65 (2014): 125–39. Several contributions in Maren Niehoff, ed., *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters*, JSRC 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2012) are relevant.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer: School, Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, LNTS 400 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 40–58.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Margalit Finkelberg, 'Canonising and Decanonising Homer: Reception of the Homeric Poems in Antiquity and Modernity', in *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters*, ed. M. R. Niehoff, JSRC 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 3–28 (for the criteria see p. 16).

<sup>8</sup> In particular Homer and the Old Testament; see Christoph Auffahrt, *Der Drohende Untergang: 'Schöpfung' in Mythos und Ritual im Alten Orient und in Griechenland*, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Besinnungen 39 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991); Bruce Louden, *Homer's Odyssey and the Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Meik Gerhards, *Homer und die Bibel: Studien zur Interpretation der Ilias und*

therefore turned a blind eye to the primary text of the surrounding world. Some distinct Homeric phraseology most likely appears in the sea voyage in Acts 27:41 (ἐπέκειλαν τὴν ναῦν) ('they ran the ship aground').<sup>9</sup> But citations and phraseology only form the 'Hinterland', directing the readers to a more sophisticated and creative interplay with the culture and its foundational texts and stories.

In his study *Homer in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Justinus* (1968), Günther Glockmann says that 'das Neue Testament weder eine Äusserung über Homer noch eine bewusste oder unbewusste Benutzungen der Homerischen Dichtung enthält.'<sup>10</sup> Due to more literary and narrative approaches in New Testament research, the judgement of present-day scholars should be more cautious. Within this process of a re-orientation one man stands out, namely Dennis R. MacDonald. In several works over the last few decades, he has argued that New Testament narrative texts, particularly Mark's Gospel and the Book of Acts, are steeped in the Homeric literary world.<sup>11</sup> In many cases, stories, plot and wording all derive from there. For MacDonald, this implies turning from history and tradition toward aesthetics and fiction.<sup>12</sup>

---

*ausgewählter alttestamentlicher Texte*, WMANT 144 (Göttingen: Neukirchener Verlag, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> This is pointed out by F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 498; Susan Marie Praeder, 'Sea Voyages in Ancient Literature and the Theology of Luke-Acts', *CBO* 46 (1984): 683–706 (701); Dennis R. MacDonald, 'The Shipwrecks of Odysseus and Paul', *NTS* 45 (1999): 88–107 (95); Loveday Alexander, *Acts in its Ancient Literary Context: A Classisist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 175.

<sup>10</sup> Günther Glockmann, *Homer in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Justinus*, TU 105 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1968), 57.

<sup>11</sup> See also Dennis R. MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). MacDonald has recently put together many of his works on the field in *The Gospels and Homer: Imitations of Greek Epic in Mark and Luke-Acts*, vol. 1 of *The New Testament and Greek Literature* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) and *Luke and Vergil: Imitations of Classical Greek Literature*, vol. 2 of *The New Testament and Greek Literature* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark*, 189–90. In a similar way, Thomas L. Brodie, *Beyond the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Memoir of a Discovery* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012) argues on the basis of Old Testament mimesis that the historical foundation of the stories is indeed weak. He questions whether Jesus ever lived. Brodie seems to think that historical authenticity is free from literary models. What history is not literary, in drawing upon previous patterns of telling a story? For sure, mimesis poses a challenge for simplistic views on tradition and history in New Testament narratives, but literary dependence by itself is not sufficient to question historicity.

It is not my intention here to enter into a discussion with this doyen of Homeric New Testament studies since I have addressed that elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> In my view, it suffices here to say that MacDonald is overdoing his case, and that the analogies claimed are not always convincing. I hold that a distinction between a reader perspective and the authorial intent is called for in such studies. As claimed by MacDonald, authorial intent comes with many problems. That being said, I find the most intriguing part of his contributions to be the fact that he takes the practice of mimesis in ancient storytelling as his point of departure. MacDonald's contributions are therefore well-situated within new approaches to the Gospels, namely that they are studied within the framework on ancient rhetoric and progymnastic exercises.<sup>14</sup>

One of the things I miss in MacDonald's argument is that he appears almost negligent when it comes to testing his exegesis against the most explicit Christian Homeric text, namely Eudocia's *Homerocentones*.<sup>15</sup> For sure, Eudocia's method is open to multiple applications of Homer's writings; but in any case, her expositions do represent a historical example or a *tertium comparationis*, of the endeavour to which MacDonald has devoted so much work. My aim now is to look into the passion story told within her Homeric Gospel, concentrating on the crucifixion scene.

## What Is a Cento?

Centos represent a genre, or rather a compositional technique whereby verses lifted verbatim or with slight modification from classical epics make up new poems. Lines taken from the epics are stitched together, thus

<sup>13</sup> Karl Olav Sandnes, 'Imitatio Homeri? An Appraisal of Dennis R. MacDonald's "Mimesis Criticism"', *JBL* 124 (2005): 715–44. See also Margaret M. Mitchell, 'Homer in the New Testament', *JR* 83 (2003): 244–60. MacDonald has responded to myself and Mitchell in his 'My Turn: A Critique of Critics of "Mimesis Criticism"', published at [www.iac.cgu.edu](http://www.iac.cgu.edu). My book *The Gospel 'According to Homer and Virgil'* is a response to MacDonald's claim that the *Homerocentones* might form a model for how the Gospels came into being; see his review in *RBL* 9/2011, [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/7971\\_8718.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/7971_8718.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> It suffices here to mention the works by Samuel Byrskog; see, e.g., 'From Memory to Memoirs: Tracing the Background of a Literary Genre', in *The Making of Christianity: Conflicts, Contacts, and Constructions: Essays in Honor of Bengt Holmberg*, ed. M. Zetterholm and S. Byrskog, ConBNT 47 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 1–21.

<sup>15</sup> In his recent *The Gospels and Homer*, MacDonald occasionally includes references to *Homerocentones*.

yielding a new text. From the classical legacy, then, a new text was culled, equally epic and biblical. It is an extreme form of paraphrase or intertextuality, in which recognizable lines from another existing poem, mostly highly valued literature, are turned into new texts. Scott McGill puts it in the following way: ‘To present a cento is always on one level to trade in cultural capital and to affirm one’s highbrow credentials.’<sup>16</sup> Centos therefore represent an idiosyncratic attempt to accommodate biblical narratives within the classical epics.<sup>17</sup> In her recent study on Proba’s Latin Virgilian cento, Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed draws on Stephen Harrison’s distinction between ‘guest’ and ‘host’ to explain the phenomenon: ‘centos representing the generic base (“host” genre) that integrates one or several episodic modes from other genres (“guest” genres).’<sup>18</sup> In my view, this assigns to the gospel stories a too modest role in the composition of Christian centos. In my own study on centos, I distinguish between *res* or *sensus*, which is provided by the Gospel stories, and *verba* taken from the epics.

Fundamental to a Christian use of Homer is the way Homer was perceived of in antiquity more generally. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not only the primary texts; they were also the omniscient texts. With the help of interpretation, Homer’s writings were seen to be encyclopedic. By way of interpretation, everything could be extracted from these texts. This is, of course, the reason that questions pertaining to interpretation flourished in ancient Homeric readings. Although Plato says the following with irony, he in fact passes on how these epics were held to be both omniscient and inspired: ‘These poets know all the arts and all things human pertaining to virtue and vice, and all things divine (πάντα δὲ ἀνθρώπεια τὰ πρὸς ἀρετὴν καὶ κακίαν, καὶ τὰ γε θεῖα)’ (*Resp.* 598E).<sup>19</sup>

Homer could also be used to understand things of which he himself was not necessarily aware (Ps.-Plutarch, *Vit. poes. Hom.* 218).<sup>20</sup> The pic-

<sup>16</sup> Scott McGill, *Virgil Recomposed: The Mythological and Secular Centos in Antiquity*, ACSt 48 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), xvi.

<sup>17</sup> Other attempts at making this, albeit not in the form of a cento, was made by Nonnus of Panopolis in his paraphrase of the Gospel of John, in Christian Latin epics of Juvencus, Sedulius and Arator and in Apollinarius’ Platonic dialogues; see Roger P. H. Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament: Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Sandnes, *The Gospel ‘According to Homer and Virgil’*, 97–104.

<sup>18</sup> Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet: The Christian Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitilla Proba*, MnS 378 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 12.

<sup>19</sup> Thus also Xenophon, *Symp.* 4.6.

<sup>20</sup> See [Plutarch] *Essay on the Life and Poetry of Homer*, ed. J. J. Keaney and R. Lamberon, ACSt 40 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

ture of Homer as one who knew everything made a deep impression on the students. An anonymous schoolboy has aptly expressed this on his writing board, containing the following text: Θεός οὐδ' ἄνθρωπος Ὅμηρος, meaning 'Homer is a god, not a human being.'<sup>21</sup> This was the impression given to many students of Homer. He held the key to knowledge on all topics; hence, he was more than an ordinary human being. In his *De Homero* (*Or.* 53), Dion of Prusa (Chrysostom) addresses the issue of Homer's inspiration and considers him a prophet.<sup>22</sup> It follows from this that the epics were open, ready to yield new texts.<sup>23</sup> For Christians, this worked as an invitation to accommodate the story of Jesus and the Gospels within the Homeric legacy, thereby turning the Christian faith into a respectable Christianity if judged by the classical legacy.<sup>24</sup> Eudocia considered Homer's texts as buried treasures of wisdom which she was about to unearth.

Tradition says that Eudocia devoted herself to this task. She was an Athenian who in 421 became the wife of Emperor Theodosius II.<sup>25</sup> For reasons not obvious, Eudocia fell out of favour and left the court to finally settle in the Holy Land.<sup>26</sup> Jerusalem is likely the place where she composed her cento; in the midst of the biblical land, this classical Greek text came to life.

<sup>21</sup> See Erich Ziebarth, *Aus der antiken Schule: Sammlung griechischer Texte auf Papyrus Holztafeln Ostraka* (Bonn: Marcus & Weber, 1913), 12 (text no. 26), and Raffaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, ASP 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 220 for detailed information on this text (no. 200 in her list). She also refers to PMich VIII 1100 where the same maxim is found (p. 222 text no. 209).

<sup>22</sup> Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer*, 46–47. Proba conceives of herself as an inspired interpreter bringing out the full meaning of the prophetic messages of Virgil; see Sandnes, *The Gospel 'According to Homer and Virgil'*, 149–54; Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, 129–35.

<sup>23</sup> Sandnes, *The Gospel 'According to Homer and Virgil'*, 118–21.

<sup>24</sup> In *The Gospel 'According to Homer and Virgil'*, 65–105, I give two main reasons for the composition of centos; one is the general feeling of a lack of culture in the Gospels, and the other is the specific decree of Julian the Emperor (362 CE) on teaching that many Christians, especially among the learned, saw as a ban on their participation in the classical legacy.

<sup>25</sup> Brian Patrick Sowers, 'Eudocia: the Making of a Homeric Christian' (PhD Diss., University of Cincinnati, 2008), [www.ohiolink.edu/etd/send-pdf.cgi/sowers](http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd/send-pdf.cgi/sowers), 3–4.

<sup>26</sup> For biographical information on Eudocia, see Alan Cameron, 'The Empress and the Poet: Paganism and Politics at the Court of Theodosius II', *YCS* 27 (1982): 270–79. According to Zonaras *Epitome Historiarum* 13.23, a series of events led Eudocia to flee the court; mentioned in particular is the suspicion of a marital affair which upset the Emperor and also the death of her protégé Paulinus.

## Crucifixion ‘According to Homer’

- 1854 Above the earth is raised a dry piece of wood (ξύλον) with length  
about six feet *Il.* 23.327
- 1855 of oak or pine; in the rain it does not rot. *Il.* 23.328
- 1856 The mark showing (σημα) a man that died in time past, *Il.* 7.89
- 1857 so huge it was in length and breadth to look upon.<sup>27</sup> *Od.* 9.324
- 1858 They bound around the man a twisted rope. *Od.* 22.175
- 1859 Forcefully they pulled, trusting their strength and power of their  
hands. *Il.* 11.9
- 1860 Men of the people, who at games arranged everything well.  
*Od.* 8.259
- 1861 Fools, who thus prepared these naught (μήδεα).<sup>28</sup> *Il.* 8.177
- 1862 The labourers (δρηστῆρες)<sup>29</sup> on the other hand shouted aloud in  
the hall. *Od.* 22.211
- 1863 Straight on they charged like wolves ready to devour.  
*Il.* 17.725 + 5.782
- 1864 Like a ram (ἀρνεῖω) he seemed to me, a ram of thick fleece,  
*Il.* 3.197
- 1865 walking through a great flock of white sheep. *Il.* 3.198
- 1866 A ram, far best of the flock, *Od.* 9.432
- 1867 and he moved among them, confidently in his purpose, *Il.* 2.588
- 1868 bound with bitter bond, suffering hardships (ἄλγεα πάσγων).  
*Od.* 15.232
- 1869 They bound feet and hands together in the anger of their hearts,  
*Od.* 22.189 + 477
- 1870 led him into the midst, and put up both hands. *Od.* 18.89
- 1871 Swiftly laid down his cloak of purple. *Od.* 14.500
- 1872 And when the sun had come round to mid-heaven, *Il.* 8.68
- 1873 they took him, stood apart and stretched him out *Il.* 17.391
- 1874 with stake after stake, now here, now there, incessant, *Od.* 14.11
- 1875 naked body, since clothes lay in the palace *Il.* 22.510
- 1876 straight up at the foot of the mast-beam, then fastened cables  
around him, *Od.* 12.179
- 1877 very high up in the air, while the mob was shouting behind him.  
*Il.* 17.723<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> The line immediately following upon this (*Od.* 9.325) has terminology also found in the Homeric cento I. 1854, thus suggesting that the centonist combines texts with the help of the same key terminology.

<sup>28</sup> The Homeric text here has walls (τ ε ι χ ε α).

<sup>29</sup> The Homeric text here has suitors (μ ν η σ τ ῆ ρ ε ς), quite naturally since this is what the Homeric story is really about.

<sup>30</sup> The translation of line 1872–77 is taken from M. D. Usher, *Homeric Stitchings: The Homeric Centos of the Empress Eudocia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 70.

1878	Like this he was left there, stretched in deadly bond (δεσμῶ)	<i>Od.</i> 22.200
1879	between earth and starry heaven,	<i>Il.</i> 5.769
1880	in spring-time, when days are long,	<i>Od.</i> 18.367
1881	that he may stay alive a long time, and suffer harsh torment, (ἄλγεα πάσχω), <sup>31</sup>	<i>Od.</i> 22.177
1882	not a limb to move nor to raise up,	<i>Od.</i> 8.298
1883	nowhere to put firmly the feet or to sit steadfast.	<i>Od.</i> 12.434 <sup>32</sup>

This text renders the first part of the crucifixion scene, starting in line 1825 and running until line 2017 (CP 1835–2027). The section is closed in the following way: ‘Then had ruin come and deeds beyond remedy been wrought’ (*Il.* 8.130). That line serves to introduce Judas’ destiny. A note on biblical names in the cento is now necessary. Due to the limitations this genre forces upon the centonist, neither biblical names nor places appear, as characters are identified through the help of periphrasis. Judas is often called ‘he who did more harm than everyone else put together’ (*Il.* 22.380) or ‘a man who hides one thing in his heart and says another’ (*Il.* 9.113).<sup>33</sup> As a consequence of this, the reading of the cento assumes an intimate familiarity with biblical traditions and passages, and proceeds from this assumption.

Lines 2010–11 leave no doubt that it is about Judas.<sup>34</sup> The ‘deadly rope from the ceiling’ (*Od.* 11.278), and the fact that ‘his gold in no wise availed to ward off woeful destruction’ (*Il.* 2.873) make this abundantly

<sup>31</sup> This phrase was also used in line 1868, taken from *Od.* 15.232, demonstrating how Eudocia proceeds with the aid of key terminology.

<sup>32</sup> CP lines 1864–93. The five versions (Conscriptio Prima, Conscriptio Secunda, A, B, Γ) of this cento are found in Roco Schembra, ed., *Homerocentones*, CCSG 62 (Turnholt: Brepols, 2007). The differences between the versions are indicative of some kind of ‘living text’, which implies that a different version circulated. The cento approach was indeed open to be used in different directions. The Greek text used here is the Iviron edition found in M. D. Usher, ed., *Homerocentones Eudociae Avgvstae* (Stuttgart: Teubner 1999), which is identical with Schembra’s CP (although the number of lines differs); hence, I will give Schembra’s CP in parentheses or footnotes. CS = André-Louis Rey, ed., *Centons Homérique (Homerocentra)*, SC 437 (Paris: Cerf, 1998); A, B, Γ are shorter versions. This translation is first rendered in my *The Gospel ‘According to Homer and Virgil’*, 207–8. Quotations from Homer’s texts are taken from LCL, or slightly altered. The alterations are due to the fact that Eudocia at points accommodates the Homeric text to the story *she* is telling, and also that I have brought LCL’s text up to more modern English.

<sup>33</sup> Usher, *Homeric Stichings*, 45–49.

<sup>34</sup> CP 2020–2021.



clear. Thirteen times, Jesus is named the God-fearing itinerant prophet Theoklymenus, ‘he who hears from God’, or he may be called ‘he who rules over all gods and men’ (*Il.* 12.242).

I will now draw attention to observations illuminating the centonist at work; whenever helpful, I will also look into how the crucifixion scene comes into play at other places in the cento. The passage is Homeric throughout, both in style and wording, but beneath the Homeric surface level lies a narrative plot easily recognizable from the passion stories of the New Testament. The starting point for the composition is the New Testament stories, with Christian traditions developing from them. The crucifixion scene known from there provides not only the *res*, but also the narrative structure into which the Homeric lines are fitted.

## Favourite Homeric Type Scenes

At the same time, the crucifixion is accommodated into Homeric scenes, some of which are essential for understanding how the two ‘canonical’ texts involved merge in this poem. These scenes bring into the picture motives and details unknown to readers of the Gospels. They therefore expand on and add dimensions to these biblical texts.

To be noticed firstly is that the crucifixion is portrayed as a binding with ropes to a pole. This portrayal is due to lines taken from *Od.* 12 (lines 1876, 1883, 1967, 1976<sup>35</sup>), according to which Odysseus had himself fastened or fixed to the mast of his ship, in order to stand firm against the temptations of the Sirenes. Odysseus binding himself to the mast of his ship pictures Christ’s crucifixion. In Christian theology, this scene was from quite early on taken as a reference to the crucifixion, most famously found in Clement of Alexandria’s *Strom.* 6.10–11 and *Protr.* 12/118.4: ‘Sail past the song; it works death. Only resolve, and thou hast vanquished destruction; bound to the wood of the cross thou shalt live freed from all corruption. The Word of God shall be thy pilot and the Holy Spirit shall bring thee to anchor in the harbours of heaven.’<sup>36</sup> This tradition explains why Eudocia so consistently depicts crucifixion as binding to a pole.

<sup>35</sup> Schembra makes reference to *Od.* 9.68; some lines are stereotypical, and appear more than once in Homer’s writings. Here, I follow Usher’s edition (line 1976), who mentions *Od.* 12.314. The lines in CP are 1886, 1893, 1977, 1986.

<sup>36</sup> The translation is taken from LCL, but slightly altered. For further references, see Hugo Rahner, *Griechischen Mythen in christlicher Deutung* (Basel: Herder, 1984), 281–328; Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer*, 134–40, 177.

Hence, this invention comes *not* from Homer directly, but rather from an already established Christian *topos* originally taken from Homer. What to modern readers appears as invention was to Eudocia probably a piece of Christian tradition.

A second Homeric scene, or rather motif, is of outmost importance, since it appears rather frequently; it binds together the plot of the *Odyssey*, the hero's homecoming including the vengeance on the suitors with the death of Jesus (*Od.* 22, with some passages from 23–24 that also pertains to the battle with the suitors) (lines 1858, 1862, 1869, 1878, 1881, 1916, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1926, 1927).<sup>37</sup> The fighting of the suitors comes into play, especially when we notice how the crucifixion works in the cento at large. Bruce Louden has demonstrated how Odysseus' destruction of the suitors in antiquity widely came to represent the inappropriate behaviour of men who did not fear the gods.<sup>38</sup> Within the *Odyssey*, the suitors brought death upon themselves as early as in *Od.* 1.227–229; they provoked divine wrath for their violation of hospitality ideals. Thus, Odysseus' destruction of them towards the end of this epic brings together his doing away of evil with his homecoming. This is important because it paves the way for Eudocia's way to see crucifixion in tandem with homecoming (see below). In the cento itself, the suitors hold a key role in unlocking how Eudocia conceives of the Jesus story.<sup>39</sup> What is this story really about?

Her theological rationale at work in the crucifixion scene is best seen in the light of the Old Testament part of her cento, in which Genesis 2–3 form the backdrop against which the entire cento may be understood. The focus is on humankind's need for salvation. Therefore, the Father made a plan for how to bring salvation to humankind (lines 88–201b; CP 90–205):

88	But there was no one there to protect from the mournful destruction,	<i>Il.</i> 6.16
89	for blinded by their folly they perished.	<i>Od.</i> 1.7

<sup>37</sup> The lines in CP are 1868, 1879, 1888, 1926, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1936, 1937. In addition, there are also lines taken from elsewhere which really are about the suitors, such as line 1941 (CP 1951) (*Od.* 15.327) and 1984 (CP 1994) (*Od.* 24.163). *Homerocentones* CS 1270–1280, 1282–1283 and 1285–1292 use lines from Homeric passages on the suitors in formulating the so-called cleansing of the temple (Mark 11 par.); see MacDonald, *The Gospel and Homer*, 312–15.

<sup>38</sup> Louden, *Homer's Odyssey and the Near East*, 244–57.

<sup>39</sup> Sandnes, *The Gospel 'According to Homer and Virgil'*, 189–96.

Against this background, the ‘best plan ever’ (lines 99–100)<sup>40</sup> is orchestrated in the heavenly council (cf. Mt. Olympus) and presented to the son. A rather long section gives a catena of Homeric sins, not unlike Paul in Rom 1:18–3:20. In these lines of the poem, the perspective is widened beyond the woman’s sin in the fall; there is no loyalty, no truth, no kindness and no hospitality. The lack of hospitality brings the suitors into the picture, as precisely that was their mischief against Pallas Athena, mentioned in *Od.* 1 (see above). The shameful lifestyle of Penelope’s suitors in *Od.* 22.230–232 (lines 108–110) and *Od.* 22.414–445 (lines 113–114) forms the climax of this catena.<sup>41</sup> The plan implies that the son will suffer opposition, being slain and despised (lines 140–147).<sup>42</sup> Lines 166–168<sup>43</sup> elaborate on this by recalling the death of Hector (*Il.* 22.488–490), thus anticipating Jesus’ death, which appears later in the story.<sup>44</sup> Lines 467–468<sup>45</sup> introduce the teaching of Jesus by citing from *Od.* 18.351–52, thereby making his ministry an assault against the ‘suitors’, who represent

<sup>40</sup> CP 101–102.

<sup>41</sup> Here is an obvious contradiction to the role of women in Genesis, which Eudocia explored above. The lines in CP are 110–112 and 115–116.

<sup>42</sup> CP 142–149.

<sup>43</sup> CP 168–170.

<sup>44</sup> According to Dennis R. MacDonald’s review of my *The Gospel ‘According to Homer and Virgil’* (*RBL* 9/2011), a major deficiency is that I have neglected the fact that several times lines also appear in their Homeric sequence in the cento: ‘Such examples ... suffice to demonstrate that the Byzantine poets recognized affinities between the biblical stories and the Homeric stories that seem to have informed the Evangelist in the first place.’ No doubt, centonists claim profound similarities between the biblical accounts and the epic scenes, and the examples where Homeric lines are given in a row serve to emphasize that this similarity applies not only to individual lines, but to scenes as well. In my view, the question if the author of Mark’s Gospel (take notice of the authorial perspective) is informed by the tales of epic finds no answer in the fact that sequences of lines appear in the cento. MacDonald’s claim about Mark does not follow from this observation regarding the cento. In the preface to Eudocia’s cento, the phenomenon of lines given in their Homeric sequence of two or more lines in a row is addressed (lines 15–18): ‘If someone should blame me because there are many  $\delta\omicron\iota\ \acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\zeta$  of Homeric verses in this excellent book, which is not allowed, let him know that we all are slaves of necessity ( $\acute{\alpha}\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\ \kappa\ \eta\ \zeta$ )’; see Usher, *Homero-centones*, ix; and M. D. Usher, ‘Prolegomenon to the Homeric Centos’, *AJP* 118 (1997): 305–21 (313–15). What is implied in ‘necessity’ here can, of course, only be a matter of speculation. I suggest that here Eudocia conveys that the fact that she proceeded from a given text (the practice of a four-fold Gospel) had an impact on her cento. If that is so, MacDonald’s argument with regard to how Mark’s Gospel came into being is even less convincing – as far as the cento comparison is concerned. A four-fold gospel tradition is the primary, not the Homeric text.

<sup>45</sup> CP 474–475.

sinful humanity: ‘Hear me, suitors of the glorious queen, that I may say what the heart in my breast bids me.’

The suitors represent the evil to which Jesus and his death is opposed. Accordingly, lines from *Od.* 22 describe Jesus’ enemies, or the Romans overseeing the crucifixion, as it occurs in line 1862.<sup>46</sup> This fits perfectly well Eudocia’s use of the suitors in the beginning of the cento (see above). Then appears a somewhat surprising shift in the cento, in which the binding of the suitors, commanded by Telemachus and Odysseus, serves to describe Jesus on the pole (lines 1858 and 1869).<sup>47</sup> Here, the tables are turned, and lines about the suitors now portray Jesus as the victim. This demonstrates that Eudocia’s lines are not always adapted to the scene from which they are taken; at times, it seems that finding appropriate wording is the more important. Obviously, Eudocia is more concerned about finding appropriate terms than with appropriate characters.

Thirdly, Achilles’ killing of Hector and the burial of Patroclus (*Il.* 22–23) has provided Eudocia with many lines as she centonizes the death of Jesus.<sup>48</sup> The first is the most famous battle scene in this literature, and the second is connected to Achilles’ wrath, which is the centre of the *Iliad*, as stated in the very first lines: ‘The wrath do thou sing, O goddess, of Peleus’ son, Achilles, that baneful wrath which brought countless woes upon Achaeans, and sent forth to Hades many valiant souls of warriors ...’ The crucifixion scene is introduced with two lines about the marking of Patroclus’ burial place. Line 1875<sup>49</sup> describes Jesus on the pole in terms taken from descriptions of Hector’s naked body by the women lamenting his death.

Lastly, *Il.* 17 provides Eudocia with battle-scenes and lines picturing enemies, such as the Roman soldiers. They are compared to wolves ready to devour. It is indeed worth noting that the Homeric text, from which line 1863 is made, has κύνεσσιν (dogs), not wolves.<sup>50</sup> Why wolves then? The reason is that the Homeric texts do not represent the source here. The Ro-

<sup>46</sup> CP 1872.

<sup>47</sup> CP 1868 and 1879.

<sup>48</sup> See lines 1875, 1890, 1904, 1930, 1931, 1956. The Jesus–Hector analogy is one of the strongest cases that MacDonald calls upon for claiming that Mark’s Passion story depends on *Il.* 22–23. According to MacDonald, ‘Mark seems to have created much of the Passion Narrative in imitation of Homeric epic’ (*Homeric Epics*, 136). See Sandnes, *The Gospel ‘According to Homer and Virgil’*, 211–14, 232–33.

<sup>49</sup> CP 1885.

<sup>50</sup> CP 1873. *Il.* 5.782 has lions.

man soldiers are presented as wolves because they are contrasted with the sheep as their enemies.<sup>51</sup> It therefore becomes clear that the mentioning of sheep is of some importance here, and probably guided the centonist to speak of wolves instead of dogs. In fact, this minor detail is quite significant; it challenges the position of Mimesis Criticism, at least when seen from the perspective of CP, namely that Homeric scenes are sources for the Gospel stories. The biblical idea of lamb or sheep here takes control over the Homeric text, and not the other way around (see below).

## The Passion Narrative as Subtext

The pattern according to which the Homeric lines are organized is the passion accounts of the Gospels. In the text rendered above, this subtextual terrain shines through in the details of Jesus being surrounded by an inimical mob, the mentioning of his clothes, and the laying down of his purple cloak (Mark 15:16–20, 29, 31; Matt 27:27–31, 35, 39; Luke 23:34, 36; John 19:1–3, 23–24). This emphasis on details is, in fact, pathways to how the cento really works. This impression is substantiated in the rest of the crucifixion scene:

- Line 1872: ‘And when the sun had come round to mid-heaven’ (*Il.* 8.68)<sup>52</sup> According to Mark 15:33/Matt 27:45/Luke 23:44, Jesus died at the ninth hour of the day.
- Line 1886: ‘they mocked and jeered at him in their talk’ (*Od.* 2.323).<sup>53</sup> See Matt 27:27–31, 39–44, Mark 15:16–20, 29–32; Luke 23:35–39; John 19:2–3.
- Line 1888: ‘thrice shouted he then loud as a man’s head can shout’ (*Il.* 11.462).<sup>54</sup> Mark 15:34/Matt 27:46; Luke 23:46; John 19:30.
- Line 1889: ‘he was wild with thirst, but he had no way to drink’ (*Od.* 11.584).<sup>55</sup> Mark 15:36; Matt 27:34, 48; Luke 23:36; Joh 19:28–29.

<sup>51</sup> Thus also Usher, *Homeric Stitching*, 134.

<sup>52</sup> CP 1882.

<sup>53</sup> CP 1896. In the Homeric context, this refers to the suitors.

<sup>54</sup> CP 1898.

<sup>55</sup> CP 1899.

- Line 1890: ‘his lips he made wet, but his palate he did not wet’ (*Il.* 22.495).<sup>56</sup> This detail is taken from John 19:29 (cf. Matt 27:34).
- Lines 1891–1915 (CP 1991–1925) give a rather long section which takes as its point of departure the Roman centurion. References to “an arrogant young man” (1891, 1939)<sup>57</sup> may also have picked up on the story of the robbers crucified with Jesus. For the centurion, see Mark 15:27; Matt 27:54; Luke 23:47. For the robbers, see Mark 15:39; Matt 27:38, 42; Luke 23:32, 39–42; John 19:18.
- Lines 1916–29: Jesus prays to his Father.<sup>58</sup> The dicta of Jesus on the cross are addressed to God.
- Line 1950: ‘Save (σῶσον) now, that all may know and understand’ (*Od.* 18.30).<sup>59</sup> This echoes the mocking of Mark 15:30; Matt 27:42 and Luke 23:35, 37 formulated in terms of ‘saving oneself’ (σῶσον σεαυτόν). Worth noticing here is how the Homeric line is understood in light of the Passion Narrative. In the Homeric setting, this line is taken from the fight between Irus and Odysseus, and is the words of Irus as he summons Odysseus to the fight, saying ‘Gird (ζῶσαι) yourself now ...’ In the cento, the only alteration – outwardly speaking – is that σῶσον replaces ζῶσαι (from ζώννυμι); but in fact, this minor change is immense. Preparing oneself for a fistfight is replaced by the mocking of a Roman soldier, as echoed in the Passion Narratives. Such observations, which are found throughout the cento, are to me important when it comes to the question of the nature of this cento. Clearly, ‘the host inviting guests’ here is the biblical accounts of the passion, and not the other way around.
- Line 1951: ‘if not smitten by my spear you will lose your life’ (*Il.* 11.433).<sup>60</sup> This line identifies the one who mocks Jesus in the preceding line to be the Roman soldier who pierced Jesus’ side with a spear (see the lines below), a tradition known from John’s Gospel.

---

<sup>56</sup> CP 1900.

<sup>57</sup> CP 1901 and 1949.

<sup>58</sup> CP 1926–39.

<sup>59</sup> CP 1960.

<sup>60</sup> CP 1961.

- Line 1957: ‘all the flesh it tore from his side, nothing prevented it’ (*Il.* 11.437).<sup>61</sup>
- Line 1958: ‘There did he stab and smite him, tearing the fair flesh’ (*Il.* 5.858).<sup>62</sup>
- Line 1959: “Then immortal blood flowed from the wound” (*Il.* 5.870) (cf. line 1951).<sup>63</sup> See John 19:34.
- Line 1996: “O friends, a proud deed has been accomplished (ἔτελέσθη)” (*Od.* 4.663).<sup>64</sup> According to John 19:30, Jesus said: ‘It is finished’ (τετέλεσται).
- Lines 1967–83, 2002–2006 are long sections on portents given by God in the nature as Jesus passed away.<sup>65</sup> These portents echo Mark 15:33; Matt 27:45, 51; Luke 23:44.
- The way Judas is introduced with clear references to biblical traditions (see above).

These examples manifest the *res* for which Homer provides both *verba* and style. The lines pick up on important details in the narrative accounts of the New Testament, but also pave the way for an important conclusion: Eudocia’s cento is a gospel harmony, with an emphasis on both words. Her mentioning of Jesus praying thrice captures this precisely, as the figure of three prayers depends entirely upon a harmony of the Four Gospels. The most famous example of a four-fold gospel is, of course, Tatian’s *Diatessaron*.<sup>66</sup> Tatian fixed what already with Justin Martyr had become a practice.<sup>67</sup> Eudocia’s cento witnesses to this practice of a unified Gospel, in which lines from all the four make up one continuous story.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>61</sup> CP 1967.

<sup>62</sup> CP 1968.

<sup>63</sup> CP 1969.

<sup>64</sup> CP 2006. Here, Schembra makes reference to *Od.* 16.346, which is identical.

<sup>65</sup> CP 1977–83 and 2012–2016.

<sup>66</sup> See e.g. Tjitze Baarda, *Essays on Diatessaron* (Kampen: Pharos, 1994).

<sup>67</sup> A. J. Bellinzoni, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Writings of Justin Martyr*, *NovTSup* 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 139–42.

<sup>68</sup> It is worth noticing that the blow of the spear (John 19:33–34) in Eudocia’s cento comes before the death; in John’s Gospel, this takes place afterwards to confirm that Jesus was already dead. Rey, *Centons Homérique*, 452 points out that the chronology of Eudocia here is in accordance with *Diatessaron*. However, this is not necessarily an indication that she is familiar with Tatian’s fixed harmony, since a number of manuscripts and translations (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Ephraemi Rescriptus, etc.) bring John 19:34 after Matt 27:49, which is before his death.

## Theology of Crucifixion

In making a Homeric scene out of the crucifixion, Eudocia is by necessity also involved in *making sense* of this event. What interpretation comes out of the epic poem she composed? Through her Homeric lines, this scene from Jesus' life comes with multiple interpretations, a fact that is not surprising, as Christian tradition from early on developed various ways of making sense of this event.

### *A Divine Plan of Salvation*

It makes sense to distinguish between three modes of interpretation that come into play here. Firstly, there is the idea of fulfilling a divine plan of salvation that Genesis 2–3 called for. We pointed out above that the entire cento is construed as the story about God's plan of salvation (lines 99–176): 'The plan implies that the son will suffer opposition, being slain and despised (lines 140–147).'<sup>69</sup> The lines following upon this elaborate by recalling the death of Hector (*Il.* 22.488–490), thus anticipating the crucifixion scene (lines 166–168). In other words, the divine plan of salvation and the death of Jesus are intimately connected. Hence, Jesus is said to be obedient to his Father (line 1915) (*Od.* 22.23).<sup>70</sup>

According to line 1917, Jesus says: 'Father, surely this is a great marvel (μέγα θαῦμα) that my eyes behold' (*Od.* 19.36). The context of this line is Eurycleia recognizing in the stranger the homecoming of her master Odysseus.<sup>71</sup> At the return of his father, Telemachus, Odysseus' son made this exclamation. In the cento, this phrase becomes an iconic

<sup>69</sup> Sandnes, *The Gospel 'According to Homer and Virgil'*, 193.

<sup>70</sup> This line is taken from Odysseus' anguish when he has arrived home, before he turns against the suitors. Speaking to himself, he is able to comfort his troubled heart, and thus to remain obedient to his mandate. Louden, *Homer's Odyssey*, 280–82, has made an interesting observations regarding *Od.* 20.24–54 and the Gethsemane scene in the Gospels, particularly Luke's version. This Homeric passage has several striking similarities to the Gethsemane scene, but it did not attract Eudocia's attention as she formulated her Homeric version of Gethsemane. She took this Homeric passage as a helpful way to formulate Peter's reaction as he regretted having denied Jesus (1807–1811; CP 1817–1821).

<sup>71</sup> Kasper Bro Nilsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John*, BIS 93 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), has made the story of Eurycleia's recognizing Odysseus' scar the point of departure for reading John's Gospel.



statement for what Jesus accomplished, both in his death and through his re-surrection (see below).<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, the death of Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of ‘a proud deed’ (μέγα ἔργον) (line 1996).<sup>73</sup>

### *Destruction of Evil*

Crucial for the fulfillment of this plan is the destruction of evil, just like Odysseus did when he finally arrived home and did away with the suitors. The plot of the *Odyssey* equals the purpose of Jesus’ ministry according to Eudocia: Both Jesus and Odysseus set out to destroy evil, disguised as ‘suitors’. At first sight, the role given to lines taken from Odysseus settling the case with the suitors adds a sense of vengeance, punishment, or even hatred, to the portrayal of Jesus:

- Line 1944: who knows if he one day comes and takes vengeance, (βίαις) (*Od.* 3.216)<sup>74</sup>
- Line 1999: take vengeance on the violence (βίαις) of overweening men, (*Od.* 23.31).<sup>75</sup>
- Line 2000: take vengeance on their soul-biting outrage and evil deeds (κακὰ ἔργα) (*Od.* 24.326).<sup>76</sup>

All these lines are about Odysseus’ coming home to punish and do away with the suitors. The translation that I have rendered here is based on A. T. Murray’s Loeb edition (revised by George E. Dimock), and makes ‘vengeance’ a key word; no doubt that fits the plot of the *Odyssey*, as βία primarily refers to violent acts or punishment.<sup>77</sup> The lines are embedded in a context of vengeance and hatred. Whether we label it a transformation, re-interpretation or emulation, Eudocia clearly shapes and alters the Homeric setting in ways conducive of her Christian faith and tradition (see also below).<sup>78</sup> The centonist allegorizes her Homeric lines, and this is the case with the suitors: They represent evil, sin and death. In that light, the crucifixion becomes the means whereby Jesus defeats all evil powers in

<sup>72</sup> Sandnes, *The Gospel ‘According to Homer and Virgil’*, 205–7.

<sup>73</sup> CP 2006.

<sup>74</sup> CP 1954.

<sup>75</sup> CP 2009.

<sup>76</sup> CP 2010.

<sup>77</sup> LSJ s.v.

<sup>78</sup> Sandnes, *The Gospel ‘According to Homer and Virgil’*, 41–44.

line with New Testament passages such as Col 2:15 and early Christian usage of Ps 110:1–2 on the subjection of all powers.<sup>79</sup>

This explains why Hades occupies such an important role in the crucifixion scene (lines 1931–1936, 1985–1995).<sup>80</sup> The following lines picture Jesus leading the dead out of the mist of Hades:

- |      |   |                                |
|------|---|--------------------------------|
| 1992 | ‘Come, swiftly, I will lead the way.                                      | <i>Od.</i> 6.261 <sup>81</sup> |
| 1993 | There is my father’s estate and fruitful vineyard.’                       | <i>Od.</i> 6.293 <sup>82</sup> |
| 1994 | So he spoke and led the way, and they followed.                           | <i>Il.</i> 13.833              |
| 1995 | And thus would one speak, when seeing one’s neighbor:                     | <i>Od.</i> 13.167              |
| 1996 | ‘Oh friends, a proud deed (μέγα ἔργον) has been accomplished (ἔτελέσθη).’ | <i>Od.</i> 4.663               |

The ‘proud deed’ accomplished (line 1996) is that Jesus through his death led the way out of Hades for those who were there. Bruce Louden demonstrates that the phrase μέγα ἔργον in Homer often is associated with betrayal.<sup>83</sup> This applies to *Od.* 4.663 as well, since this is a statement by Antinous, who plots against Telemachus, but realizes that the hero’s son has managed to get away. To Eudocia, however, this depreciatory meaning is of no concern here. The opening of the gates and bars of Hades (line 1987) is an invention in the crucifixion scene, but here Eudocia possibly takes advantage of Matt 27:52–53: ‘The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.’ According to Matthew, this took place in the moment that Jesus passed away. For Eudocia, it is no problem that this event is related to both Jesus’ death and resurrection, since her ‘homecoming’ interpretation of the death of Jesus sees the two as intimately connected in the great plan of salvation, not unlike what happens in the Fourth Gospel in the terminology of Jesus being ‘lifted up’ (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34).

<sup>79</sup> The role of this mode of interpretation in the early Church and Christian tradition more generally has been worked out in a classic study by the Lund theologian Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1983) (first published 1931).

<sup>80</sup> CP 1941–1946, 1995–2005.

<sup>81</sup> CP 2002.

<sup>82</sup> CP 2003.

<sup>83</sup> Louden, *Homer’s Odyssey*, 277.

Lines 1992–1993 are lifted from the scene where Odysseus comes to the land of the Phaeacians. Line 1992 is Nausicaa’s words as she leads Odysseus into her father’s city. This context suggests that Eudocia envisages Jesus bringing the dead to his Father’s kingdom. This is a flashback to line 490 about the resurrection, thus showing how closely the two events of crucifixion and resurrection are in Eudocia’s cento: ‘They shall rise up and return from the realms of misty darkness.’ This is said by Achilles after he has killed many Trojans on the river Xanthus (*Il.* 21.56), remarking that it is the best vision (μέγα θαῦμα) given to his eyes (*Il.* 21.54). Vengeful, Achilles hence sees an opportunity to kill his enemies a second time. In its Homeric setting, this line is therefore testimony to the unaltered wrath of Achilles. In Eudocia’s text, this grim line becomes an opportunity to present the true μέγα θαῦμα about the resurrection, even though the phrase μέγα θαῦμα is not found here. There is every reason to believe that Eudocia knew perfectly well that this line engaged her with a major plot in the *Iliad*. Wrathful, Achilles unceasingly unleashed war and revenge. A line taken from that particular context attests resurrection! This must have appeared to her as a fundamental example of the outstanding role of Christian faith, a transvaluation of a recurrent theme in the *Iliad*.

Eudocia was concerned about the hatred that the home-coming-analogy with Odysseus brought with it. As the plan for salvation is unfolded, the sufferings of the son appear in the words of Odysseus about his readiness to fight and even die to eliminate the suitors from his house (line 190 = *Od.* 16.107; cf. line 200 = *Od.* 16.189).<sup>84</sup> At this point, Eudocia feels obliged to clarify that Jesus is *not* fighting the sinners, as did Odysseus. Consequently, she has Jesus, the son, say: ‘I will rather that your people are saved than perish (βούλομ’ ἐγὼ λαὸν σὸον ἔμμεναι ἢ ἀπολέσθαι)’ (line 199 = *Il.* 1.117).<sup>85</sup> Jesus prepares for fighting as did Odysseus against the suitors, but unlike Odysseus, Jesus’ aim is not destruction, but salvation. This runs contrary to the Odyssean story, but Eudocia here brings into her poem an Iliadic line taken from Agamemnon after he had sacrificed his daughter; thus the Homeric hero stated the purpose of the killing of his own daughter. To Eudocia, this line concisely formulates the Father’s perspective on the death of his son. Thus, Eudocia transvalues the example of Odysseus with the help of Iphigenia. Father and son have

<sup>84</sup> CP 192; cf. 202. For the latter line Schembra gives *Od.* 13.310, which is identical.

<sup>85</sup> CP 201.

agreed on a plan to bestow favour on mankind (χάριν δ' ἄνδρεσσι φέροντες) (line 201b = *Il.* 5.874).<sup>86</sup> This observation paves the way for the next type of observation regarding an interpretation of Jesus' death.

### *Atonement?*

It says that Jesus at the cross appeared like a ram with a flock of sheep (lines 1864–1866),<sup>87</sup> an observation liable to express atonement theology. Its Homeric background is Priam's simile about Odysseus, and the favourite sheep in the flock of the Cyclops, under which Odysseus was able to hide. M. D. Usher considers this an example of the considerable *Verfremdung* accompanying the cento throughout,<sup>88</sup> but he does not explain how. *Verfremdung* is a term that Usher borrows from Berthold Brecht, a heuristic device aimed at 'depriving an event or character of any self-evident, familiar, or obvious quality, and to produce instead astonishment or curiosity about it in order to bring about heightened understanding'.<sup>89</sup> This means that the term is closely associated with the transvaluation at work throughout the cento.<sup>90</sup> This is what MacDonald labels *Kulturkampf*, which is about how the classical epic is brought to convey another and superior message. In short, it is about recasting the meaning of the epics, thereby bringing them to their completion.

A key to understanding how the lines about the ram are being recast is possibly to be found in the combination of the fact that 'Jesus as a lamb' is at home in the interpretative traditions that accompanied the passion stories, as well as the story of the Cyclops' favourite sheep. Odysseus escaped from the cave; he escaped death, as it says in *Od.* 9.466, thanks to his hiding beneath this sheep. For a theologically and Homerically creative mind like that of Eudocia's, this line about Odysseus hiding under a sheep and thus being saved, aptly described the salvation-plan (βουλή) at work. In The Book of Revelation, ἀρνίον is a favourite term for Christ, one intimately connected to his sufferings (Rev 5:6; 6:1; 7:14, etc.). The idea of Jesus as the Lamb of God is also found in John 1:29, 36 and in Christian theology derived from Isa 53:7, e.g., in Acts 8:32 and 1 Pet 1:19.

<sup>86</sup> CP 205.

<sup>87</sup> CP 1874–1876.

<sup>88</sup> Usher, *Homeric Stitchings*, 133–34.

<sup>89</sup> Usher, *Homeric Stitchings*, 12–13.

<sup>90</sup> MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer?*, 15; see also Sandnes, *The Gospel 'According to Homer and Virgil'*, 41–43, 95, 233–35.

Lines 1864–1868<sup>91</sup> in the midst of the crucifixion scene bring to mind Isa 53:7: ‘Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.’ Eudocia saw this life-saving effect of Jesus’ death as a sacrificial lamb at work in Odysseus finding rescue under the sheep of the Cyclops.

Line 1924 may be taken to support a sacrificial interpretation: ‘Yes, Father, this desire fulfil thou for me’ (*Il.* 8.242),<sup>92</sup> put in the mouth of the centurion who witnessed the μέγα θαῦμα (Mark 15:39). For obvious reasons, here Eudocia replaces Zeus with ‘Father’ in this prayer. According to line 1923, the centurion says that the plan is to have ‘the beloved son’ killed, taken from *Od.* 5.18 about the plan of the suitors to have Telemachus killed. The centurion prays that this will not come upon him (line 1925 ‘allow us to flee and escape’ taken from *Il.* 8.243).<sup>93</sup> In Eudocia’s allegorical exegesis, that may well be a reference to sacrificial theology. The context from which the lines in *Il.* 8 is taken may offer supportive evidence: ‘but upon all I burned the fat and the thighs of bulls, in my eagerness to lay waste well-walled Troy’ (240), a reference to Agamemnon’s attempt at pleasing Zeus with sacrifices. The centurion’s plea to save his life embodies what ‘the great or marvellous plan’ is really about. However, such exegesis drawing upon the Homeric context always comes with uncertainty in the cento, since the centonist at times leaves us in doubt as to whether she is really concerned about the Homeric setting from which the line is lifted, or if here she only found a helpful line. This is a constant challenge in the interpretation of the Empress’ cento.

## Recasting *Nostos*

We have noticed that Eudocia brings the homecoming of Odysseus into her crucifixion story. Odysseus’ homecoming (*nostos*) is the recurrent motif that sets the plot of the *Odyssey*. The starting point is the hero’s longing for his return home (*Od.* 1.13). Throughout the story, he is on his way home (οἴκαδε).<sup>94</sup> This take on the crucifixion unites it with resurrection and ascension in ways comparable only to how the Fourth Gospel narrates the story of Jesus.

<sup>91</sup> CP 1874–1878.

<sup>92</sup> CP 1934.

<sup>93</sup> CP 1935.

<sup>94</sup> E.g. *Od.* 1.326–327, 350; 5.19; 12.345; 13.130–139, 305; 19.85; 24.400. See Sandnes, *The Gospel ‘According to Homer and Virgil’*, 222–23.

In *Il.* 15.286–287, Eudocia finds a line that aptly describes Jesus’ resurrection. Here, it says about Hector in the midst of a battle: ‘Now, look you, a great miracle (θαῦμα) my eyes behold, that he has risen again (ἀνέστη) and avoided death’ (line 2237), and in *Il.* 1.57 (= line 2248) about Achilles who stood up (ἤγερθεν) to speak.<sup>95</sup> Hence, the two iconic heroes and enemies both give witness to the resurrection. To Eudocia, a simple ‘standing up’ becomes a line appropriate for expressing resurrection, which is natural since she is familiar with this terminology from her Christian belief and tradition. It is hardly possible to imagine such Homeric lines as the formative basis for the stories of Jesus’ resurrection found in the Gospels.<sup>96</sup> The only link between the two is the appearance of key terms. These Homeric lines can only work as witnesses to the resurrection if this had already been established as a story within which this terminology is fixed. In these Homeric lines, Eudocia found terminology that resonated with the New Testament traditions on the resurrection.

The resurrection is conceived of as homecoming, as clearly demonstrated in line 2258: ‘now finally, has the desire been fulfilled (ἐκτετέλεσται)’ (*Od.* 23.54).<sup>97</sup> This dictum, now in the mouth of Theoclymenus (Jesus), is taken from Eurycleia as she rejoices over her master who has returned home. As she puts it in *Od.* 23.55, ‘he has come alive (ζωός) to his own hearth’. Line 2258 brings together the resurrection of Jesus, which in Eudocia’s version include several lines taken from *Od.* 23–24 (lines 2252, 2256, 2258; cf. *Od.* 17.35 cited in line 2253 and *Od.* 16.205 cited in line 2259).<sup>98</sup>

The homecoming hero provides Eudocia with both a Homeric scene and language in which to recount Christ’s resurrection in tandem with the ascension. By bringing together these two events from Jesus’ life, Eudocia brings to mind the Johannine perspective of the Son returning to his Father as dominant in her understanding of his death (John 13:1–3; 14:12, 28; 16:28; 20:17). This becomes very clear as the cento comes to a close with the following lines, inspired by Luke-Acts:

2337      He went to his mighty Father’s well-built house (πρὸς πατρὸς  
ἐπισθενέος πυκινόν); *Il.* 19.355<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup> CP 2248 and 2259; as for the latter Schembra gives *Od.* 2.9, which is identical.

<sup>96</sup> Pace MacDonald.

<sup>97</sup> CP 2269.

<sup>98</sup> CP 2263, 2267, 2269 and 2270.

<sup>99</sup> CP 2347.

- 2338 He went amid the clouds up to heaven broad, *Il.* 5.867<sup>100</sup>  
 2339 imperishable, decked with stars, pre-eminent among the  
 immortals. *Il.* 18.370<sup>101</sup>  
 2343 He started running, and eagerly he arrived with his beloved Fa-  
 ther (μάλα δ' ὄκα φίλον πατέρ εισαφικανεν) *Od.* 22.99<sup>102</sup>  
 2344 and then sat down again at the seat (ἐπὶ θρόνου) from which he  
 had once left. *Od.* 21.139 = *Od.* 18.157<sup>103</sup>

Eudocia's cento closes with a Homeric line that echoes John 17:5, 24 about Jesus receiving from his Father the glory he once enjoyed with him, before his coming to the world. Line 2337 is about Pallas, who returns to Mt. Olympus, the abode of the gods; for obvious reasons, Eudocia therefore changes the feminine into ἀντὸς. Line 2338 describes a similar departure, now with regard to Ares. The two last lines are especially interesting since they alter the Homeric homecoming motif in accordance with biblical thought, particularly in its Johannine version. The homecoming Odysseus, obviously the father of his house, becomes in these two lines the son returning to his Father. In their Homeric setting, both lines are really about Telemachus. Line 2343 is about Telemachus embracing his father, whereas line 2344 is about his sitting down in the house of his father. This example demonstrates how the classical homecoming motif is altered by the biblical idea to be expressed, or in other words, how the macro level bends the micro level, which is its immediate Homeric surface.

The macro level, that is the biblical subtext, is not equally visible, so it therefore takes a reader familiar with both texts to get at it. This 'hidden' text informs the reader how the lines are organized in order to create a new text. The macro level in this cento does not come from Homer; instead, it is the biblical texts about resurrection and ascension, thereby providing Eudocia's perspective on crucifixion.

## Summary

Taking as its starting point the view that Homer's texts are open to yielding new texts and meanings, Eudocia wrote a cento that brought this epic to its completion. A Christian rearranging of Homer's text represented a

<sup>100</sup> CP 2348.

<sup>101</sup> CP 2349.

<sup>102</sup> CP 2353.

<sup>103</sup> CP 2354.

fulfilment of the treasures hidden in the classical text. In so doing, she was certainly idiosyncratic, but still the centonist stood on the shoulders of the ancient culture's trading in the same text. In other words, her procedure is not idiosyncratic. However, her procedure brought with it interpretations that expanded on the biblical texts in various ways.<sup>104</sup> The two 'canonical' texts, Homer and the Bible, represent the micro and macro level, respectively. The macro level is a 'hidden' text, and it takes a reader familiar with the Gospels to get at it. The centonist proceeds from the conviction that there is a need of ameliorating both canonical texts, though in different ways; one with regard to meaning and sense, and the other with regard to words and style. We have studied the crucifixion scene, and observed how it is deeply embedded in a theology derived from both Genesis 2–3 and Odysseus' homecoming to bring the suitors to silence.

---

<sup>104</sup> See Andromache Karanika, 'Female Voice, Authorship, and Authority in Eudocia's Homeric Centos', in *Fakes and Forgers of Classical Literature: Ergo Decipatur!*, ed. J. Martínéz, *Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity 2* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 95–107.