Why the Telemachy? Vyāsa's Answer

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Abstract: In the *Odyssey* the story of the main hero's return from Troy to Ithaca is preceded by the Telemachy (the outward journey from Ithaca via Pylos to Sparta). The journeys of father and son overlap in time, and the travellers eventually converge at Eumaeus' piggery. Many detailed parallels have already been found between Homer's epics and the *Mahābhārata* (attributed to the sage Vyāsa), and the paper asks whether, here too, the overlapping journeys in the Greek have Sanskrit parallels. In fact, it is while the central hero Arjuna undertakes a visit to heaven that his brothers and wife undertake a pilgrimage around India; and the two journeys end in a reunion. A dozen rapprochements are presented linking the pairs of journeys recounted in the two epic traditions. The similarities are best explained by postulating a common origin within the Indo-European-speaking world.

Keywords: *Odyssey, Mahābhārata,* Telemachy, Indo-European comparison, comparative epic, Otherworld journey, Hindu pilgrimage, Eumaeus.

Résumé: Dans l'*Odyssée* le récit du *nostos* d'Ulysse (de Troie à Ithaque) est précédé de la *Télémachie* (voyage d'Ithaque à la Sparte, en passant par Pylos). Le voyage du père et celui du fils sont à peu près simultanés, et à la fin les voyageurs se réunissent chez Eumée. On a déjà trouvé beaucoup de rapprochements précis entre les épopées homériques et le *Mahābhārata* (dont l'origine est attribuée à Vyāsa); donc on en cherche ici aussi. En effet, c'est pendant qu'Arjuna (héros central de l'épopée) voyage pour visiter le Ciel que ses frères et sa femme vont en pèlerinage autour de l'Inde. On propose douze rapprochements entre les voyages appariés dans la tradition sanskrite et ceux appariés dans la tradition grecque. Les ressemblances sont expliquées au mieux par l'hypothèse d'une origine commune dans le cadre du monde indo-européen.

Mots clés : *Odyssée, Mahābhārata,* Télémachie, comparaison indo-européenne, voyage au Ciel, pèlerinage hindou, Eumée.

Foreword

This paper was originally written, to a strict word limit, as a comparativist contribution to a volume of Homeric Studies, and I have retained its original form, with truly minimal retouches. However, I suggest that the paper can equally well be read as a contribution to the theme of 'Myth and Ritual'.

To answer the question asked in its title, the paper focuses on four more or less mythic journeys made by certain Indo-European epic heroes: two come from the Mahābhārata*, two from the* Odyssey*. A distinction is made between Journeys I and II. In Journey I, the Sanskrit and Greek travellers are the supreme heroes of their respective epics – Arjuna and Odysseus, and they travel for clear reasons to an 'Other World'. In Journey II, close relatives of the supreme heroes make terrestrial journeys for reasons*

that are less compelling. In each epic Journeys I and II overlap in time, and eventually the travellers reunite. The similarities between the Sanskrit and the Greek suggest that the traditions are cognate and derive from a proto-narrative that contained earlier versions of Journeys I and II. In other words, the Odyssey *contains the Telemachy because the proto-narrative contained a prototype of Journey II as well as of Journey I.*

Now the Sanskrit Journey II, a circumambulation of northern India, is clearly presented as a pilgrimage, and the travellers frequently participate in and hear about rituals. On the other hand, the Telemachy is presented, not as a pilgrimage, but (mostly) as an information-gathering exercise. However, at Pylos, the first place visited by Telemachus, the traveller is present at no less than two large rituals held within twenty-four hours. If the traditions are indeed cognate, the question arises whether the prototype Journey II was a pilgrimage (as distinct from a journey to a place where rituals happened to take place). If it was, the Greek has lost the theme of pilgrimage as such; the alternative is that the Sanskrit has gained the theme. The former seems to me more plausible, and suggests that, at the time when the proto-narrative was forming, pilgrimage, more or less as we understand the term, was already an established institution.

One reason for this judgement is that, as has been discussed elsewhere[1]*, the two journeys treated here are part of a larger set of journeys in* Mahābhārata 3. *Arjuna's visit to Indra's heaven is balanced by a journey made by the arch-villain Duryodhana, who is taken overnight to the Sanskrit equivalent of Hades – compare the* Odyssey's Nekuia. *I cannot pursue the topic here, but offer just two pointers. If the Sanskrit effectively groups three journeys (to an Other World that offers salvation, to sacred sites on earth, to an underworld inhabited by demons), the implicit cosmological schema works against the hypothesis that the original Journey II was an essentially secular undertaking unrelated to pilgrimage. Secondly, Arjuna's journey can be related to the shamanic roots of yoga*[2]*, and Duryodhana's journey arguably connects with necromancy. The implication is that all three Sanskrit journeys were ritual in nature.*

If these ideas are on the right track, comparison of the myths we read can indicate the early existence of rituals for which we have no direct evidence.

Named after its major hero, the *Odyssey* is mainly about that hero's long-drawn-out return from Troy to Ithaca, and his post-return adventures. So why are the first four books mostly about the journey of his son Telemachus? Why does the epic of Odysseus contain this secondary and subordinate journey? Explanations can be sought within the text and filled out by relating them to the rest of the Greek epic tradition, supplemented perhaps by 'folklore'. However, while not rejecting such approaches, I do not here engage with them, partly for reasons of space, but mainly because I come at Homer from the viewpoint of Indo-European cultural comparison.

1. Allen, 2000, p. 122-135.
2. Allen, 1998.

Considerable published evidence now suggests that Homeric epic is cognate with Sanskrit epic. In other words, it seems that these two narrative traditions go back to a common ancestor, versions of which diverged and were transmitted separately from at least the Greco-Aryan period onwards (and perhaps from earlier still). So the central question here is whether the related and overlapping journeys of the major Greek hero and his less important son correspond to cognate journeys in the *Mahābhārata*. Vyāsa is the reputed composer of this Sanskrit epic, and I use his name in my title as if he were the Indian equivalent of Homer.

The *Mahābhārata* only reached its current form in the early centuries CE, while the written *Odyssey* is most often dated to the seventh century BCE. But the common origin hypothesis assumes that the written versions of both epics were preceded by very long periods of oral transmission. During the transmission the language and narrative content were of course changing, but I scarcely consider the sequence of changes, let alone their dating. My central aim is to explore similarities that survived the changes and that presumably continue features that were already present in the proto-narrative or proto-epic. Theoretically such similarities could derive, not from common origin, but from chance, independent invention or borrowing (whether east-west or west-east). Although I regard such rival interpretations as implausible, I do not discuss them here. My minimal claim is that the similarities demand *some* explanation.

Reduced to essentials, the *Mahābhārata* recounts the quarrel between two branches of a royal family. The Pāṇḍavas, five brothers married polyandrously to Draupadī, have a legitimate claim to rule, but are denied their rights by the Kauravas. Each side assembles a vast coalition and fights the other in a great eighteen-day battle (books 6-10). After enormous losses on both sides the Pāṇḍavas win. Books 11-18 cover the aftermath of the battle while 1-5 cover the lead-up to it. What we are looking for occurs in book 3.

Following a disastrous game of dice, the Pāṇḍavas leave the capital (Hāstinapura) for a humiliating twelve-year exile in the forest, not returning until book 12. During this exile certain journeys of shorter duration can be distinguished. Firstly, after the first year of exile, Arjuna (third-born of the Pāṇḍavas) leaves his brothers to visit his divine begetter Indra, king of the gods, who lives in heaven. I refer to this journey as Arjuna's Visit to Heaven. Secondly, soon afterwards, the remaining brothers, led by Yudhiṣṭhira (the eldest), undertake a pilgrimage around the four quarters of India [3]. Thirdly, after the pilgrimage proper, Bhīma (the second Pāṇḍava by birth order), undertakes two one-day excursions in the Himalayas, being followed by the rest of his party.

3. The Sanskrit title of this *upaparvan* (division of a book) is the *Tīrtha-yātra-parvan*. I use the Critical Edition of the text, as do for instance Smith (2009) and Schauffelberger and Vincent (2013). Biardeau (2002) prefers the 'Vulgate' edition, but provides cross-references.

These paired journeys are so similar that some scholars regard them as doublets, and I refer to them as Flower Journeys A and B. Eagerly awaited, Arjuna now returns from heaven and is reunited with his family.

Rapprochements

Let us start the search for rapprochements with the most abstract ones, for which the main facts have already been given.

A Journey within a Journey

As we saw, the Pāṇḍavas leave Hāstinapura as exiles and return as victors after the Great War. Situated within this eventful journey, which lasts more than thirteen years, Arjuna's Visit to Heaven is only one episode, lasting five years. It is a subordinate component of a larger whole.

Odysseus leaves his palace in Ithaca for the Trojan War and returns to it twenty years later. His return journey (his *nostos*) can be subdivided in various ways, but for our purposes the most relevant distinction is between the part of the journey that Homer describes through the words of Odysseus – from Troy to Ogygia, and the part that he describes in (as it were) his own words – from Ogygia to Ithaca. Both parts are subordinate components of the twenty-year journey, but the second has the more important role: Odysseus is in Ogygia at the very start of the whole epic, and his return from there would round off the superordinate twenty-year journey even if the first part of the *nostos* (the flashback) were omitted.

Without similarities, comparison is pointless, so they have to take priority over differences, which can always be found. We shall not have much space for differences, but here is a major one. Within the Sanskrit superordinate journey, the Visit to Heaven comes fairly early on and the Great War comes close to the end, while in the Greek superordinate journey, the Trojan War precedes what we can call the Visit to Scheria. But the contrast is less straightforward than it appears, for two reasons. Many considerations demonstrate that the Kurukṣetra Great War is cognate with the Trojan War, but it can also be argued that the fifth phase of the former – that is, the nocturnal massacre in Book 10 – corresponds not only to the nocturnal massacre of Trojans but also to that of Penelope's Suitors. Secondly, although the Visit to Heaven is followed eventually by the Great War in Books 6-10, it is followed much sooner by the Pāṇḍavas' defeat of a Kaurava raid during the 13th year (end of book 4); and this too shows notable similarities to the Massacre of the Suitors. I have tackled these complex comparisons elsewhere (Allen 2009), and I raise them here in passing only by way of background. My point is that rapprochement 1 is not invalidated by the differences between the two superordinate journeys.

Overlapping Journeys

The Visit to Heaven starts before the Pilgrimage and continues after it. So the period during which Arjuna is away from his brothers overlaps with and includes the period during which the pilgrims are travelling. In the Greek the boundaries of the Visit to Scheria are less clear-cut. The story might or might not be said to start with the prolonged imprisonment on Ogygia and to end with the early morning arrival on the Ithacan beach, but the present rapprochement does not need such precision. Whatever delimitations one posits, a substantial overlap exists between the Visit to Scheria and the Telemachy, as it does between the Visit to Heaven and the Pilgrimage.

Objectives and Significance

When the visit to heaven is first mooted, its aim is for Arjuna to obtain divine arms (3,37.28, 30), and he emphatically succeeds (3,41-42, 171.2). Arjuna is the central Pāṇḍava warrior and will need these weapons for the Great War. He also receives, from a *gandharva* or divine musician, the knowledge of music and dance that he will need for his disguise in year 13 (which the Pāṇḍavas have to spend incognito).

When Arjuna departs, his family feel bereft and depressed (e.g. 3,161.14-15). The Pilgrimage distracts them from their grief, exposes them to much mythic lore, and earns them religious merit. But it provides them with nothing as practical as what Arjuna acquires.

The Visit to Scheria is mooted at the very start of the *Odyssey*, in the first Divine Assembly on Olympus. In Athena's first speech she laments that the hero is becalmed on Ogygia, and in her second she proposes that he be helped to complete his *nostos*, and that his son's journey be set in motion. Her first proposal is fundamental to the overall story of a deeply missed hero who, after long absence and many difficulties, regains his wife and home, but whether the *Telemachy* contributes significantly is debatable. The young man returns from Sparta with greater confidence and maturity, having acquired scraps of information about the Trojan War and its aftermath, and bearing some non-military gifts from Menelaus. Thereafter he helps his father in the fighting, but he could surely have done the same if he had stayed at home throughout, like Eumaeus and Philoetius. We can enjoy the presence of the *Telemachy* and the Pilgrimage in our epics even while recognising that their contribution to the plot falls far short of that made by the Visits to Scheria and Heaven.

The Travellers

In comparativism it is often useful to devise a single label to cover entities that are understood as cognate. Analogous to the starred

forms used by linguists, such labels can be read diachronically as referring to something that was present in the common origin. Let us accordingly refer to the more important pair of cognate journeys as Journey I, in contrast to the less important Journey II.

Journey I is made by a solo traveller, Journey II by a group. On Yudhiṣṭhira's pilgrimage the group includes not only the three remaining Pāṇḍava brothers and Draupadī, but also, as pilgrim guide and protector, the *ṛṣi* Lomaśa – not to mention the Pāṇḍavas' chaplain Dhaumya, other brahmins, a head charioteer, cooks, and other servants (3,91.25-28). Telemachus sets off accompanied by Athena in the form of Mentor, but also by the oarsmen that the goddess recruits (twenty of them, as planned in 1.280). Within Journey II Lomaśa parallels the guide and protector Athena/Mentor, and the drivers of the fourteen chariots parallel the Ithacan oarsmen.

The Journey I solo traveller is a very close male relative of the central traveller in Journey II: Arjuna is the younger brother of Yudhiṣṭhira, and Odysseus is the father of Telemachus. Rapprochements between the two solo travellers have been presented elsewhere (e.g. Allen 1998, 2005), but the apparent parallel between Yudhiṣṭhira and Telemachus cannot be regarded as significant. To explore the point properly would require introducing and applying the pentadic theory of Indo-European ideology, and cannot be attempted here. One can recognise that the Pilgrimage and the Telemachy are cognate journeys while remaining agnostic as to the identity of the chief traveller in the proto-narrative.

Journey II: The Group Splits

The Pilgrimage follows a common pattern in proceeding clockwise starting from the east. When the pilgrims have reached the northern quarter and are entering the Himalayas, Lomaśa warns of the dangers that lie ahead. Yudhiṣṭhira notes that such anxiety represents something new (3,140.15), and proposes that the party split up. Eventually the charioteers, servants, overseers, cooks, and Draupadī's entourage are left behind to stay with King Subāhu, from whom they will be recovered in 3,174.14. Without their chariots, the Pāṇḍavas and brahmins proceed on foot or, when necessary, are carried by *rākṣasa* spirits. The party are now aiming primarily for the expected meeting with Arjuna. The mountainous area is inhabited by seers and supernaturals, and the party cultivate scrupulous purity and find accommodation at hermitages; but they no longer seem like pilgrims.

Telemachus' party is much smaller, but it too splits up. After the visit to Nestor at Pylos, Athena/Mentor departs (as a bird, 3.372), and the next day the crew are left behind with the boat at Pylos, to be recovered on the return journey (15.217-219). Telemachus proceeds overland to Sparta in a chariot borrowed from Nestor and driven by Nestor's youngest son Peisitratus.

Journey II: Before and After the Split

The Pāṇḍavas' journey is preceded by two substantial accounts of similar pilgrimages made by earlier travellers; one is given by the ṛṣi Nārada, whom we shall meet again, the other by Dhaumya. During the Pilgrimage proper Lomaśa (or others) comment on the numerous *tīrtha*s that they visit, often narrating stories associated with them. A *tīrtha*, originally meaning 'ford', is a sacred site, close to water and usually on the banks of a river, where a pilgrim bathes or performs oblations. Thus the first chapter to describe the itinerary of the pilgrims (3,93) refers explicitly to at least six rivers where they bathe; and they also perform several other ritual acts – donations to brahmins, offerings of forest produce, and sacrifices. The same chapter ends with the party reaching the Lake of Brahmā, whence all rivers spring, and where Śiva is always present. The brahmin Śamaṭha tells them about an extraordinarily large-scale sacrifice once performed here by the royal ascetic Gaya: there were "mountains of rice by the hundreds and thousands", and twenty-five such mountains were left over.

When Telemachus and his party reach Pylos, they find its inhabitants gathered on the sea shore performing a large-scale sacrifice to Poseidon. Nestor's people are seated in nine groups, each consisting of 500 members and each having nine black bulls as victims (3.4-8).

It is worth pausing here to compare this initial Greek sacrifice to Gaya's. Both events are on a vast scale, as is emphasised by the use of numerals – 81 victims and 4,500 participants at Pylos[4]. Each ritual is held beside water: Poseidon is of course god of the sea while Śiva is not, but as Lomaśa explains (3,108.9, 16), the god played a crucial role in the descent of the Ganges from heaven to earth, and it was the Ganges that filled the sea with water. Moreover, both gods wield a trident, and both offer temporary but serious opposition to the progress of the hero in Journey I.

Whatever is made of the Gaya-Nestor comparison, the Telemachy certainly emphasises Nestor's piety (not specially in evidence in the *Iliad*). The initial seaside ritual is terminated in the evening (3.341), and after Athena departs, Nestor recognises her divinity and promises her a sacrifice. Thus, the next morning, she receives a heifer whose horns are overlaid with gold, the ritual being described in some detail. The pairing of Poseidon and Athena is interesting, but my point here is that, during his one-night visit to Pylos, Telemachus participates in two sacrifices.

After the Split, the Pāṇḍava party, as we noted, cease to behave like pilgrims following a recognised circuit. Their aim is now to rendezvous with the brother they have missed so deeply (3,142). As they traverse the mountainous terrain, the

4. For other comparably lavish sacrifices by Gaya see 3,121.3-12.

scenery, landmarks and inhabitants (mostly supernatural) are described, but no reference is made to sacrifices. Indeed the next salient event, Flower Journey A, has little to do with piety or religion.

A north-east wind brings a fragrant lotus, and Draupadī asks Bhīma to fetch more of them. Forcing his way uphill through rocks, forest, and creepers, the hero encounters and interacts with Hanūmān, king of the apes and, like Bhīma, a son of the god Vāyu (Wind). The elder brother promises to help Bhīma and Arjuna on the battlefield, and the younger continues to the lotus-filled pond. It lies close to the palace of Kubera, god of wealth, and its guards (*rākṣasa*s) challenge him. After killing a hundred of them he picks the flowers, but when Kubera is informed he takes the news cheerfully. Back at base, Draupadī explains Bhīma's mission. The party is transported to the pond and re-joins Bhīma. Yudhiṣṭhira rebukes his brother for recourse to violence.

After a night at Pherae, Telemachus and Peisander reach Sparta, where a double wedding is in progress. The wedding quickly fades from view, and most of the text consists of speeches by the two visitors and their royal hosts. On the first evening we hear about Odysseus' resourcefulness in the later stages of the Trojan War: Helen recalls meeting him when he entered Troy in disguise, and Menelaus recalls Helen visiting the Wooden Horse in which he and Odysseus were hiding. The next day (4.333-592), Menelaus gives his lengthy account of the post-War return journeys of himself, Agamemnon, the lesser Ajax, and (as far as he knows it) Odysseus. In book 15, on the urging of Athena, Telemachus departs with his gifts. At the departure Menelaus brings wine for farewell libations (15.148-149), but in Sparta this is the closest Telemachus comes to personal involvement in religious activities. The hecatombs Menelaus had to perform to leave distant Egypt (4.582) are irrelevant to the young man.

The present rapprochement is between two contrasts. The Pilgrimage proper contrasts with the Himalayan journey that climaxes with Flower Journey A as Telemachus' visit to Pylos contrasts with his visit to Sparta. Within each tradition the first item is oriented to religion, the second, after the Split, is not. But the rapprochement would gain in cogency if the two post-Split stories had something positive in common, rather than merely their contrast with the two pre-Split stories; and such a shared feature can be identified.

Despite the help he promises and provides to the Pāṇḍava champions, Hanūmān's role is a minor one in the *Mahābhārata*, a major one in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The latter Sanskrit epic, far shorter, is set in an earlier era of epic pseudohistory, and its theme is the abduction and recovery of Rāma's wife Sītā. The demonic Rāvaṇa has transported her across the sea to Lanka, and Hanūmān, in the service of Rāma, is the first to communicate with the captive. He enters his father (the Wind), leaps over 100 leagues of sea, and finds her in the women's quarters of Rāvaṇa's palace. The two establish each other's *bona fides*, and Hanūmān fires the

city before returning. Hanūmān's role is alluded to by both interlocutors during Flower Journey A (3,147.10-12, 34-35), and is presented at greater length in the summary of the *Rāmāyaṇa* that is narrated later in the twelve-year exile (see esp. 3,266.57-68).

We cannot here discuss the oft-noted parallel between the abduction and rescue of Sītā in the Indian epic tradition and that of Helen in the Greek. My point is simply that both post-Split episodes of Journey II emphasise a visit made in the past by a male hero to someone else's abducted wife who is living in an enemy city. In other words, Hanūmān entering Lanka in a previous era parallels Odysseus entering Troy ten or more years before Telemachus hears the story.

The parallel is reinforced by the absence of comparable stories in the pre-Split narratives. The Pilgrimage proper includes numerous stories from the past – nine are set apart under separate *upaparvan* titles; but it lacks references to the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Nārada's account of Pulastya's pilgrimage refers in passing to the *tīrtha* from which Rāma and his associates went to heaven, and to another where Rāma crossed the Ganges (3,82.63; 83.62), but these fleeting references do not recur in the itinerary of the Pāṇḍavas. Nestor has something to say about the wisdom and wiliness of Odysseus at Troy, and recounts one detail from the very start of that hero's *nostos* (3.162-164), but although he presumably knew the stories told by Helen and Menelaus, he does not pass them on [5].

Journey II: Intervention of an Enemy

Flower Journey A is immediately followed by a single-chapter *upaparvan* called the Slaying of Jaṭāsura (3,154). Presenting himself as a brahmin, this demon has been living with the Pāṇḍavas, enjoying their hospitality but scheming to acquire both their weapons and their wife. One day when Bhīma is away hunting, Jaṭāsura makes off with Draupadī and the remaining brothers. Bhīma catches up with them and kills the demon.

In book 15 Telemachus is summoned back to Ithaca by Athena. He leaves promptly and, nearing Pylos, separates from Peisander to re-join his crew. As Athena has warned him, a party of Suitors is waiting to ambush and assassinate him during his return voyage, but with divine help he eludes them.

The event and its outcome are very different in the two traditions: Jaṭāsura dies, while the twenty suitors under Antinous are merely disappointed. However, the rapprochement is based partly on the unsuccessful intervention of an enemy at just this point in Journey II, and partly on the behaviour and intentions of

5. The Bhīma-Hanūmān encounter as a whole is cognate not only with the second half of the *Telemachy* but also with the Odysseus-Argos encounter (Allen 2000). Entities in one tradition often have more than one parallel in the other.

the enemy before the moment of aggression. Like the Suitors, Jaṭāsura has been abusing the hospitality of a royal family whose most potent member (Arjuna, Odysseus) is absent; and he wants to seduce their queen.

Prelude to the Reunion

The Slaying of Jaṭāsura is followed by the *upaparvan* called '*War of the Yakṣas*' – a title that covers what is here called Flower Journey B (3,157-159). Much as previously, flowers are blown to the Pāṇḍavas, and Draupadī challenges Bhīma to clear the top of the mountain from which they came. Storming uphill by a narrow and rugged path, the hero massacres the mountain's guardian spirits (*yakṣas*), including Kubera's friend Maṇimat. The Pāṇḍava males follow him and are welcomed by Kubera, who has been freed from a curse by Bhīma's deed and will ensure that the party are fed and protected while they await Arjuna. A month later their brother descends from heaven in Indra's chariot (3,161.16-19).

Arriving from Ithaca, Telemachus is put ashore before his boat enters the harbour and walks to the home of Eumaeus (15.555), where the reunion at once occurs (16.11-12). At first sight the preludes to the reunion have little in common, but the rapprochement can be justified on four grounds. Firstly, Telemachus' journey on foot from the shore of Ithaca to Eumaeus' home echoes the journey made by Odysseus three days earlier, as the second Flower Journey echoes the first. This parallel is distinctly abstract, since in Greece the two travellers, father and son, are completing separate journeys, while in India a single individual, Bhīma, is completing Journey II; but it is not negligible. Secondly, the rough foot-path to Eumaeus' home goes uphill through woods (14.1-2, cf. 17.204), much as does Bhīma's route. Thirdly, Eumaeus proves highly welcoming and hospitable, as does Kubera. Finally, both the god of wealth and the humble food-producer can be interpreted as representing the third function. Like so many F3 figures, they are paired – respectively with Maṇimat and Philoetius; and they are members of sets that contain representatives of the other functions, namely the Lokapālas and the participants in the Massacre of the Suitors [6].

Narratology

A narrator describing two simultaneous journeys, I and II, has various options: he can recount the whole of I first and then move on to II; he can start with I, interrupt it with II, and then complete I; or he can zigzag back and forth in more complex ways. Our narrators combine the second and third options. Arjuna's journey starts in 3,37-38, and by 3,45 the hero is ensconced in heaven. The next three chapters treat first the Kauravas, then Yudhiṣṭhira's party, then the Kauravas

6. For more comparativism on Kubera and Eumaeus see respectively Allen and Woodard, 2013 (esp. p. 44-47), and Allen, 2002, 2014.

again (3,46-8). After this interlude, the focus fixes on the future pilgrims, who are told the story of Nala (3,50-78). This is followed by the Pilgrimage *upaparvan* (3,80-153), by Flower Journey B, and finally by the Reunion (3,161). Vyāsa now reverts to Journey I. Arjuna picks up the story from the day he left the Pāṇḍavas (so duplicates a little), but now rounds it off, reaching the Reunion again in 3,171.

In Greece the idea of overlapping journeys is proposed at the first Divine Assembly (1.80-95), where Athena mentions the Visit to Scheria before the Telemachy; however, the subsequent narrative reverses this order. Journey II is recounted up to a point when Telemachus is settled in Sparta, while the rest of book 4 (621-847) returns us to Ithaca; Journey I starts only after the second Divine Assembly in book 5. Odysseus' Visit to Scheria is followed all the way to Eumaeus' home, and the account of Telemachus' return from Sparta is deferred till book 15. Now comes a zigzag. The scene shifts abruptly back to Odysseus *chez* Eumaeus in 15.301, then back again to Telemachus in 15.497.

If we concentrate on the two main journeys, we can formulate as follows. Having opened with Journey I, Vyāsa breaks off when Arjuna has reached his intended destination; he then narrates the whole of Journey II; and finally he rounds off Journey I. As for Homer, having opened with Journey II, he breaks off when Telemachus has reached the furthest point of the trip that Athena planned; he then narrates the whole of Journey I, before rounding off Journey II. The difference is between I-II-I and II-I-II, but the similarity is that one journey is sandwiched between two parts of the other. Furthermore, in both epics, the break between the first and second of the three parts focuses briefly on the enemies of the main travellers.

A rapprochement that may merit a separate title concerns the hero of Journey I and his first-person account of his adventures. When he returns – i.e., after the Reunion – Arjuna tells his family about his trip, from the moment he left them. When Odysseus is fully at home, after the massacre, he gives his wife an account of his *nostos* from Troy onwards (23.310-341), but this account is in Homer's words and is only a brief summary of the first-person narrative in the Phaeacian palace (books 9-12). Let us, for once, think diachronically. If Journey I took the proto-narrative hero to heaven (as I suppose), he would hardly have needed to tell his story to the supernaturals. This suggests that the Greek tradition has innovated by situating the first-person narrative before the Reunion. In any case – returning to synchrony – each tradition allows its central hero to give a substantial account of Journey I in his own words.

Mobilisation for Journey I

Now that the content and ordering of the overlapping journeys have been explored, we are in a better position to consider their genesis.

The Pāṇḍavas have started their twelve-year exile and are discussing their situation. When Vyāsa arrives (3,37.20 – he is a prominent *ṛṣi* within the epic, as well as its purported composer), he privately gives Yudhiṣṭhira encouraging prophecies and instructions. To obtain weapons, Arjuna is in due course to be dispatched to meet certain gods; for this he will need a magic spell (*brahman*) which Vyāsa entrusts to Yudhiṣṭhira. In addition the Pāṇḍava leader is to leave Dvaita Forest and take his party elsewhere (he will choose Kāmyaka). One reason is that after a long stay in a single place the deer are consumed and the plants and herbs dwindle – for the Pāṇḍavas are supporting many brahmins (37.31-33, 36). Vyāsa vanishes, and in the next chapter, after the move, Arjuna receives the spell from his eldest brother, together with (somewhat amplified) instructions.

At the first Divine Assembly Athena proposes that Hermes be sent to Calypso to tell her to release Odysseus, and at the second Zeus duly despatches his messenger, adding some particulars of the hero's future journey (5.28-42). Hermes delivers Zeus's message and departs [7].

Although Vyāsa does not claim to be a messenger from Indra, he can hardly be acting on his own initiative; it is clear enough that Indra expects and wants the visit from his son. But the rapprochement rests on a better argument than the inference that Vyasa is transmitting the god's desire. It is striking that Vyāsa does not speak directly to the hero he mobilises, nor does Hermes: both leave their instructions with an intermediary. In that role Yudhiṣṭhira parallels Calypso.

Mobilisation for Journey II

The Pāṇḍavas are lamenting their absent brother when the *ṛṣi* Nārada arrives (3,80). Asked by Yudhiṣṭhira about the benefits of pilgrimage, he responds at some length and urges the Pāṇḍava party to set out; they are to travel with Lomaśa (83.106). After Dhaumya's account, Lomaśa arrives. His wanderings have taken him to the world of Indra, where he saw Arjuna. After reporting the hero's achievements, the sage details Indra's instructions. Lomaśa (about to embark on his third pilgrimage) is to teach and protect the travellers, ensuring their purity. Vyāsa and two other sages visit and reemphasise the need for purity (91.17).

Immediately after the first Divine Assembly Athena herself, taking the form of Mentes the Taphian, comes to the Ithacan palace and is greeted hospitably by Telemachus, who explains his plight. Suggesting that Odysseus is still alive and will return, Athena/Mentes offers her advice, including the idea of an expedition to seek news of the absent father (1.280-285, following up 1.93-94). The next day Telemachus announces his expedition in the Ithacan assembly (2.212), and afterwards Athena, this time in the form of the Ithacan Mentor, offers him her vigorous help (2.287).

7. Odysseus says later (12.374-390) that Hermes told Calypso more than is reported in the messenger god's 19+2 lines in book 5.

Thus in India, although the idea of a pilgrimage is Yudhiṣṭhira's, it is promoted in succession by two sages. In Greece the corresponding idea is Athena's, but she promotes it by adopting in succession two different human forms. More cogently, it is the second sage and the goddess in her second human form that set off with the Journey II travellers.

Mobilisation for Both Journeys

In all, each tradition has three mobilisers, one for Journey I and two for Journey II. Comparison of the triads is not facilitated by the difference in order of presentation, but it is interesting that of the six mobilisers, three are said to come to the travellers directly from a divine world, namely Lomaśa, Athena/Mentes, and Hermes. In promoting Journey II, Lomaśa parallels Athena/Mentes, and Lomaśa's report on Arjuna parallels Athena's cautiously worded report on Odysseus (1.196-199; the caution is expressed in the particle *πού* 'I think', though the goddess actually knows the facts). But Lomaśa also parallels Hermes as mobiliser of the 'sandwiched' journey, i.e. the one that interrupts whichever journey started first.

A more straightforward rapprochement concerns Vyāsa, who left instructions not only for the Visit to Heaven but also for the move away from Dvaita. The move involves all the Pāṇḍava exiles, including Arjuna, and is not part of the Pilgrimage; but its justification depends on ecology, or more precisely on the food supply. Vyāsa thus parallels Athena in the first Divine Assembly in two respects. Both figures envisage two journeys and mention first that of the solo hero (the future Journey I), and then, abruptly, as if it were an afterthought, a second journey, focusing respectively on Yudhiṣṭhira and Telemachus, who will be central to journey II. In addition, this second journey is partly motivated by overexploitation of the available livestock. Vyāsa's reference to the *mṛga* (forest animals, especially deer) killed for the Pāṇḍavas and accompanying brahmins, parallels Athena's reference to the domestic animals (sheep and goats), killed specially for the Suitors (1.91-92).

Concluding Remarks

This paper has been deliberately restricted to comparing the pair of journeys in the *Odyssey* with the pair in *Mahābhārata* book 3. But the Visit to Scheria can also be compared to Arjuna's previous solo journey in *Mahābhārata* 1[8], and in a fuller study the two comparisons would need to be integrated. In both Sanskrit passages Arjuna returns to Draupadī as Odysseus returns to Penelope, but in book 1 he brings back, not supernatural weapons, but the additional wife who (unlike

8. Allen, 1996, 1999.

Draupadī) will ensure the continuity of the dynasty. Of course nothing guarantees that these two are the only Sanskrit or Indo-European narrative comparisons that can cast light on Homer. The field is so enormous that many still regard the whole undertaking as hopeless, and I should like to express my gratitude to those relatively few scholars who have openly recognised its legitimacy.

Whatever is understood by 'Homer' – an individual bard (literate or not), an editor or *Bearbeiter*, a bardic tradition, or some combination of these, a student of the *Odyssey* is likely to wonder why the epic combines the *Telemachy* with the last part of the main hero's *nostos*. Part of the answer is that, in some form or other, the two overlapping journeys were already present in the proto-epic from which both the Greek and Sanskrit traditions descend.

Afterword on Anti-comparativism

When I initially submitted this article (as described in the Foreword), I received together with a polite rejection note the referee's reports on which the rejection was based. Anti-comparativists usually simply ignore the work of comparativists, so I thought it would be useful to publish these explicit criticisms (to which I have answers). Here was a rare and valuable opportunity not to be missed! However, as the reports were very properly anonymous, I could not ask their writers for permission to reprint the reports in full, so I extract and translate what seem to me their main points.

One report, in German, was clearly by an Indologist, while the other, in French, was clearly by a classicist. The Indologist opines that I have created a system whose components may fit together internally but are sealed off as regards everything external. In particular, I have ignored essentially all the secondary literature except my own previous publications. This alone would justify rejection of the essay, quite apart from the 'wholly implausible and absolutely undemonstrable thesis that the Mahābhārata *and* Odyssey *both go back to an Indo-European proto-epic which dealt with two interrelated journeys.' Should there after all be pressures to include the paper in the projected volume, the Indologist strongly recommended that at least some mention be made of the secondary literature offering explanations that arise out of the* Mahābhārata. *He or she then supplies six references bearing on the two journeys in the Sanskrit and on their relationship (references that I will happily forward electronically to anyone who asks me for them.)*

Having (correctly) located the paper within the comparative field of study examined magisterially by George Dumézil in his Mythe et épopée (1969), *the classicist states at once that he or she is not convinced. The impression given is that I extract from the texts what suits my case and disdain what does not. For instance, regarding the Journey II travellers (in rapprochement 4), I 'see no difference' between someone's father and someone's brother. When a marked difference arises between the two*

epics, a rather vague similarity is called on to justify the claimed parallel. The more everything is made to resemble everything else, the less plausible the rapprochements become. Moreover, against my apparent view that the epics are linked by a stemma, as are the languages, one need only recall that the name 'Odysseus' has consonantal variants that point to a non-Greek (and hence probably non-Indo-European) source. Similarly, Mycenaean Linear B texts show the co-existence of Mediterranean substrate deities alongside the future Olympian ones. Thus Greek tradition may well include elements completely alien to Sanskrit tradition. All this is apparently ignored, says the critic, before ending on what is admittedly a personal note: to explain the presence of the Telemachy in the Odyssey *in terms of descent from a proto-epic appears to devalue a poet who merits better treatment.*

Thus, reacting from within their respective disciplines, both reviewers criticise the failure to cite secondary literature from those disciplines. But as its title is intended to suggest, the paper is fundamentally comparative, and if I cite previous publications by myself it is because they are what is most relevant to this particular comparative study. To evaluate the rapprochements presented here it does help to be aware of the very considerable number of rapprochements that have been presented elsewhere. Naturally, the vast non-comparative literature on each epic is often interesting to a comparativist, but the questions it addresses and the assumptions it makes are so different from mine that I doubt whether references to it here would really help the reader.

Regarding more specific points, failure to cite does not necessarily prove ignorance. All three of the German scholars recommended by the Indologist have received mention somewhere in my previous publications; one of the recommended articles appears in the bibliography to the paper I cite from 2000. In any case, all the recommendations concern the order in which parts of the Mahābhārata *were written down, which is a different issue from whether or not the oral tradition lying behind the epic is or is not cognate with that lying behind Homer.*

Nowhere do I claim that Homer drew solely *on the tradition descending from the IE proto-epic; nor do I exclude the possibility of input from substrate cultures (or from loans, either in Greece or India). The aim, here as previously, has been to look for similarities between the two traditions – detailed similarities, hitherto unrecognised. I unapologetically put the emphasis on similarities since, provided they convince, they are more interesting than differences. I think similarities tend towards being finite in number, while one can always find innumerable differences – in language, geography, names, events, relationships... It is not the difference between the names Odysseus and Arjuna that is interesting but the similarities between the journeys they make. It is not true that I see no difference between the fraternal link of Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna and the filial link of Odysseus and Telemachus; on the contrary, I call attention to this puzzling difference. However, I am grateful to the critic for stimulating me to think further about it, and can now offer a brief addendum on the problem.*

In general, the Sanskrit seems to me more conservative than the Greek, so let us take it as starting point and rephrase the question. Does the Sanskrit contain a story about the youthful son of a major character who is sent on a journey to seek knowledge, but returns having learned rather little but presumably having gained confidence? It does indeed.

Vyāsa the sage is both the composer of the epic as recited by Vaiśampāyana and the biological grandfather of Duryodhana and Arjuna. Intervening quite often in the action of the epic, he certainly qualifies as a major character. Apart from his well-known role as begetter (on behalf of a king who died childless) of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu and Vidura (1,99.21-100.30), he has a less prominent son called Śuka. Śuka belongs to the inner frame story rather than to the main story: he was the first of the five pupils to whom Vyāsa taught the epic (1,1.63, 57.74). However, his career is not recounted until Yudhiṣṭhira asks about it in 12,309.1. Born miraculously via a boon from Śiva, the youth devotes himself to the religious studies that will lead him to mokṣa*. When he is twenty-five (309.62), he is sent by his father to put any further questions to King Janaka of Mithila (312.6), for whom Vyāsa officiates as priest. Making the long solo journey overland to the capital, he questions the king. Janaka offers fairly conventional replies before admitting that his teaching is already known to Śuka (313.41). The youth returns happily to his father and fellow pupils. Later he makes the journey he longs for to reach Brahmā and find release from the round of births and deaths.*

It would be easy to list differences from the Greek, but if the proto-narrative contained earlier versions of Śuka's knowledge-seeking journey as well as of Yudhiṣṭhira's pilgrimage, the Telemachy could have conflated those two journeys, drawing elements from each. This proposal clearly does not amount to a complete comparativist account of Telemachus, but it exemplifies the method by which the critic's objection can be countered.

To end on a personal note, I agree with the French scholar that the whole comparative enterprise becomes pointless if everything can be made to resemble everything else, but I leave it to the reader to decide whether I succumb to being tendentious or vague (dangers of which I am very conscious). However I do not think that the paper somehow disparages Homer. If Homer was an individual (a controversial view), to show the debt of a poet to his predecessors is not to disparage him (one might think of Virgil, Dante, Milton…). As for the German scholar, I am somewhat surprised at the confident dismissal of my thesis as völlig unwahrscheinlichen und absolut unbeweisbaren; *I would rather describe it as 'unexpected', and especially so for those unfamiliar with previous comparativist publications. Does the judgement reflect a feeling that current disciplinary assumptions and boundaries are unchallengeable and immutable?*

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