

Literary approaches to wine in the texts of the Odyssey and the role of digital culture in cultural preservation

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Abstract

This paper deals with the position and role played by wine in the case of an important text of ancient Greek literature, the Odyssey. Reading the Homeric epic reveals its importance, as it is revealed by the multitude of references to wine in the work. Through the detailed description of the various verses and episodes, the multiple roles of wine in the epic are demonstrated. With the methodology of text analysis, it is proven that wine is a daily habit of the life of the lords, either at meals or at special moments, considering it an important asset. It also played an important role in the religious life of that time, both because mortals offered it to the gods, and because the latter treated it as they saw fit. Also, the familiarity with wine becomes evident from its use as a means, either to achieve one's goal, or to advance the plot.

Keywords: Digital Culture; Wine; Odyssey; Literary Approaches.

1. Introduction

The Homeric epics are a rich source of knowledge from which one can draw a wealth of information on many topics that concern people's lives throughout time. One of these topics is the wine that accompanies a person in various circumstances of his/ her daily life. According to Stefanis (2011), wine was and is a basic element of the diet of both the Greeks and the rest of the Mediterranean people. (Manola. & Papani, 2020) Its consumption was sometimes associated with a positive and sometimes with a negative sign, depending on the occasion in which it was "present", but mainly in relation to the quantity consumed and, by extension, the consequences of its small or large consumption. It is no coincidence that wine has accompanied poetry and literature from ancient times until today. We find it in Homer, in Plato (Symposium) in Athenius (Dipnosophistae), as well as in the modern era, where, either it is a company confirmed by the respective author, or entire works are built on this theme (Varnalis, Papagiorgis).

From Homeric times already, there were practices and customs related to the consumption and use of wine, a fact that is also reflected in Homer's epics and especially in the Odyssey. The Odyssey, as an eminently anthropocentric epic, highlights man with all his sides, positive and negative, free will and its consequences, the weaknesses of the human character but also his resourceful nature. In this context, there are more social events, gatherings and banquets or other similar occasions where wine is also found. The numerous references to wine in the Odyssey indicate its widespread use in ancient Greece (Ganas, 2016). Through the study and textual analysis of the Odyssey, as well as the bibliographic review, this paper will focus on the role played by wine in this specific epic.

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2. Wine in the daily life of the lords

The first and most obvious use of wine was in the diet of the Mycenaeans; wine seems to have been strongly present in their daily life. The wine was drunk either before or during their meal. According to Fehér et al.(2007), wine was a good company that contributed to a pleasant mood. The most common occasion for drinking wine was the banquet. The banquet gathered people who had some common interest, common origins or political or other views. The drinking of wine was a necessary condition for a good mood and for the political, social, but also more relaxed discussions, which followed as a matter of course. Not only banquets, but also weddings, celebrations, as well as other religious ceremonies were accompanied by the consumption of wine. In the *Odyssey* there are numerous meal scenes in which wine is an integral element (Sherratt, 2004).

Lexically, wine occupies an important place in the *Odyssey* and so one can draw the conclusion that the same was the case with the role of wine in people's daily lives. In rhapsody a, the word "oinos" is found repeatedly in the form of phrases and word, such as "oinopa ponton", "oinopedio", "oinos" (Ignatiadis et al., 2001). An "oinopedion" in *Omiros* is the vineyard, where the wine is produced. Often heroes are found in their vines; eg. Laertes, Odysseus' father, goes to the vine trying to comfort himself about his missing son. The "oinopa ponton", i.e. the sea that looks like wine, referring rather to its black color, is often encountered by the reader in the epic, which shows how directly wine came to the poet's mind and word (Cahill, 2010).

In the first rhapsody the suitors drink wine and eat meat. The scene has various readings with wine playing an important role. Telemachus, son of Odysseus, is angry because the suitors are spending away his property (Maronitis, 2003). Wine seems to be an important asset for the royal family, the squandering of which by swindlers results in the anger of the legitimate heir, an anger that is also explicitly expressed in rhapsody b, in verses 57-58 (eilapinazousin pinousi te aithopa oynon mapsidios/ drinking our dark wine, with no care in the world). In the same rhapsody, the servants of the palace, by order of Telemachus, treat the guest stranger, who is actually the goddess Athena. Hospitality is sacred and guests are sacred persons who must be received with respect. The fact that in the context of the warm reception of foreign people they offer wine is indicative of the preciousness they attributed to it (Tzalas, 2003). This precious possession, which they are grieved to see squandered upon them by unappreciative men, they are glad to freely offer to holy strangers. Later in the development of the myth, Odysseus is also treated as a holy person by the Phaeacians, on the one hand because he is a stranger to the place and they host him, and on the other hand, as a supplicant as he asks for their help to return to Ithaca. Pleading was considered a sacred matter and supplicants were treated with respect. Hence again the royal family offers this important good of theirs to the foreign beggar. In the 14th rhapsody, Odysseus has returned to Ithaca but has not yet revealed who he is, while his appearance suggests a beggar rather than a king. And in this case, the foreign "beggar" is offered plenty of welcome wine, a process that always precedes the questions that follow to find out what the respective foreigner wants in their country.

In the second rhapsody Telemachus takes wine from what is kept as the pupil of the eye, not watered down, for the return of Odysseus, to offer it as a gift to King Nestor for a very important purpose, when he goes to find out news about his missing father. In the same rhapsody Penelope urges the singer Phemius to another song, different from the one that grieves her, so that the suitors can enjoy it, along with their wine. Therefore, wine was accompanied by music, in a context of euphoria that both cause to man(Manola, & Palanta, 2020).

3. Wine in religious life

Wine also held a prominent place in the religious life of the Homeric Greeks. Specifically, it seems that they very often offered it to the gods as libations. In the second rhapsody, Telemachus offers the wine to the gods, in order to have a good and effective journey for his purpose. In the third rhapsody Nestor's son says that they are used to pouring wine as a prayer to the gods, given that they all need their help. Wine is mentioned many times in this noble meeting of Nestor with Telemachus, either as an offering from the host to his guest, or as an offering to the gods. In the Phaeacians, the royal family pours wine to gain the favor of Zeus. Homer indicates, among others, that this religious custom was quite widespread geographically as well (Ogden, 2010).

The gods seem to understand the great importance of wine. In the fifth rhapsody, Calypso, when forced by Hermes to announce the gods' decision for Odysseus to leave her island and continue his journey, wants to take care of him and show him that she will do everything to help him. That is why she allows him to have red wine with him on the journey - which she presents as her own decision, and not as his inescapable destiny, decided by all the gods of Olympus. The capture by the poet of the recognition of the importance of wine has to do with the great importance that people attached to this good (Varriano, 2022).

It is worth noting the fact that in ancient literature as well as in the *Odyssey*, women are not shown drinking wine, especially those of the higher social strata. Female slaves are rarely shown drinking wine. Of course, Nausica, who is a noblewoman, goes with other girls to wash their clothes in the river and takes wine with her, as an exception that confirms the rule. (Ikonomou et al. 2024).

4. Wine as a medium and other cultural elements

The use and familiarity of people with wine is particularly highlighted in its use by Odysseus to get out of a very difficult situation in which he is trapped (Papakonstantinou, 2012). The resourceful hero is called to the island of the Cyclops to escape from Polyphemus, the one-eyed Cyclops, in whose cave he and his companions are trapped. Thanks to his shrewdness he thinks to take advantage of the effects of drunkenness resulting from the heavy consumption of wine. In fact, he realizes from very early that he will face a strong man and that is why he takes with him the only means that he thinks can actually help him, as this is the only one he believes can neutralize the power that he instinctively knows he will face. And as Homer informs, it is an extremely delicious and fragrant wine, truly exquisite, which no one can resist, saving in this way the development of the plot. So he gives Polyphemus enough Maronean wine to make him dizzy and, thus, succeeds in blinding him, with the result that both he and his companions are saved. (Papakonstantinou, 2012).

Through this incident, Homer highlights the negative consequences of excessive drinking and lack of temperance, which, as can be seen, the people of the time were aware of; hence Odysseus exploits them in this incident (Murray, 2023).

The worst consequence of the lack of prudence regarding the consumption of this sweet drink is presented in the eleventh rhapsody. There, Odysseus being in the underworld meets his companion Elpinoras, whom he has left buried in the palace of the goddess Circe. Elpinoras describes his death in detail, showing the reader that drunkenness can have many negative consequences, even the loss of life. Odysseus' companion, due to excessive drinking, did not step down the ladder but fell from the roof and died. (Manola, 2024)

Homer considers it important to state that the consumption of wine should be done in moderation, so that the drinker takes advantage of the pleasant mood it can bring and avoids the very unpleasant consequences it may cause (McGovern, 2013). An important cultural element that the scholar can draw from specific scenes in the *Odyssey* is the watering down of the wine into the cups they used for this very reason. This procedure was aimed at mitigating the consequences of drinking the wine, which were apparently known since then. It is even speculated that they used wine to be able to drink water without fear. Indeed, while Homer mentions the drinking of wine so many times, there is no mention of drinking water. So it is possible that, due to the fact that they did not have the modern methods of filtering water at the time, it caused them unpleasant consequences and possibly they were kept hydrated through the flow of wine, which seems to have finally found some medicinal application (Kourakou-Dragona, 2013).

The Goddess Calypso offered sweet wine to Odysseus and his fellow travelers to forget their homeland. The wine was (together with the food, the favors of the goddess and the general good time) so sweet, that the heroes of the epic forgot Ithaca for some time. The goddess Circe also uses wine with guile and manages to keep Odysseus close to her for a year. The existence of wine (and wheat) in another case, prevents Odysseus's companions from teasing the oxen of the god Helios, as Odysseus had commanded them to do. Its lack also advances the plot of the epic, as, gradually, the heroes will not endure and will do what was forbidden to them (Samara-Topouzis, 2018).

In the 21st rhapsody, in an event shortly before Odysseus's final match with the suitors that would definitively determine the fate of the latter, the suitor named Antinoos tells Odysseus that he "apparently drank too much wine and became dizzy." Otherwise he would not have said and done the specific things that put him in a difficult position to confront them – a tragic irony, of course, since the development is familiar to the readers (Moore, 2000). And by making an analogy, Antinoos sheds light on a famous myth, that of the Centaur Battle. Through this narrative, the cause that started this battle becomes known, and there was also the dizziness of Peirithoos' mind from the consumption of wine. (Manola, & Koufadakis, 2020)

5. The role of ICTs and Digital Culture

The term "digital culture" refers to the modern era of communication technologies, which includes digital images, networked computers, and personalized technologies. It comes after print culture in the 19th century and electronic broadcast culture in the 20th century. An increasing amount of communication technology is used in the actions that are typically linked to the creation of digital culture. Increased user participation, an environment with ever-richer visuals, and connection aspects that surpass personal dimensions are all implied by these uses. The rise of digital,

networked, and customized media in modern society, along with the shift from print and broadcast media-centered communication stages to more personalized and networked media, are the main causes of the shifts that digital culture represents.

New and creative ways to learn interactively about different languages, cultures, and customs are brought about by the digital age. Individuals can deeply connect with the nuances of diverse cultures through online language courses, cultural workshops, and virtual travel experiences. These tools can increase empathy, close cultural divides, and promote a feeling of oneness throughout the world. But in order to prevent oversimplifying or exoticizing cultural identities, it is essential that virtual encounters are carefully planned.

In conclusion, we emphasize the importance of all digital technologies in the field of culture, education, and training. These technologies are highly effective and productive in facilitating and improving assessment, intervention, and educational-cultural procedures through mobile devices that bring educational-cultural activities anywhere [22-25], various ICT applications that are the main supporters of culture and education [26-47], and AI, STEM, and ROBOTICS [48-55] that raise educational procedures and culture to new performance levels. In addition, the development and integration of ICTs with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation, and the development of emotional intelligence [56-84], accelerates and improves educational-cultural practices and results.

6. Conclusions

The thorough analysis of the Homeric work in question highlighted the importance of wine in all its dimensions. Wine has become an integral part of people's lives. The poet and the heroes of the play use it in various ways. It is their daily company or their special company, when they want to celebrate something or when they need to mourn. Gods and mortals, knowing the consequences of too little or too much wine, use it to achieve their goals. A thorough study of the issue in the Iliad, Homer's other epic, would be useful, in order to see how the issue in question has been included in the wider context of the battles and whether the poet remains consistent in his use. However, it would also be interesting to conduct a chronological literary review of the role of wine, in order to ascertain the changes, if any, in the way writers and poets deal with it in literature throughout the times and societies.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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