



NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY  
HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

*Vladimir V. Fayer*

**DID ARISTARCHUS OF  
SAMOTHRACE INFLUENCE  
HOMERIC VULGATE?**

BASIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

WORKING PAPERS

SERIES: HUMANITIES  
WP BRP 11/HUM/2012

Vladimir V. Fayer<sup>1</sup>

## **DID ARISTARCHUS OF SAMOTHRACE INFLUENCE HOMERIC VULGATE?<sup>2</sup>**

This study questions a widespread opinion that Alexandrian scholars did not influence Homeric vulgate (or at least did not influence it substantially), because the overwhelming majority of their readings was absent from the manuscript tradition of *The Iliad*. This opinion is based on the calculations of Alexandrian readings made by Thomas W. Allen, and they are demonstrably in need of revision. If we also take into account not-attested Aristarchean readings that are cited in Martin L. West's edition of *The Iliad*, there will be a strong tendency for them to agree with vulgate variants. All those adjustments may seriously affect the proportion of Aristarchus–vulgate discrepancies. Moreover, it is not impossible that our vulgate *is* generally identical to the Aristarchean edition of *The Iliad*.

JEL Classification: Z.

Keywords: Aristarchus of Samothrace, Homeric vulgate, *The Iliad*, textual criticism.

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant professor at the Faculty of Philology and senior research fellow at the Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (IGITI), National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. E-mail: librarius@narod.ru

<sup>2</sup> This study was carried out within “The National Research University Higher School of Economics’ Academic Fund Program in 2012-2013, research grant No. 11–01–0120”.

There exists an important problem in Homeric textual criticism: how is our Homeric vulgate related to the editions of Alexandrian scholars Zenodotus, Aristophanes and Aristarchus? The clearer understanding of these relations may lead us to much more precise reconstruction of the earliest stages of the Homeric text, which is important to many fields of classical studies. Here I will limit my consideration to only one scholar — Aristarchus of Samothrace, and to just one poem — *The Iliad*, however, this material is evidently the largest and the most problematic.

Having collected and calculated all the extant readings of Aristarchus in *Prolegomena* to his *editio major* of *The Iliad*, Thomas Allen found out that only 9% of them are present in all our manuscripts and only 18% are in the majority of copies. That means that Aristarchus failed to influence the manuscript tradition of *The Iliad*, as the greater bulk of his readings has little or no support in the other surviving manuscripts. “His views therefore were never represented”, Allen concludes, “not at all in antiquity ... and only in this casual manner in the Middle Ages” (Allen 1931 I 200).

The situation seemed obvious until the newly found Egyptian papyri posed a new question. The earliest Homeric fragments included many more lines than what we have now and didn't include some verses known to us, but ever since the middle of the 2 century BC the tradition had become unified and the “wild papyri” had disappeared at once (West 1967). The number of verses after this unification is identical to Aristarchean edition (Bolling 1925). How could that happen if the Alexandrian philologist had no influence on the manuscripts? Several explanations were suggested: the vulgate might have existed before Alexandrians and the “wild papyri” was just an Egyptian phenomenon; maybe, the technology of book copying and book trade was sensitive to the number of lines and less susceptible to the details of textual criticism (West 1988, 47–48<sup>3</sup>); possibly, many Alexandrian *variae lectiones* were intended to be *Parallelstellen* and as such could not have been copied in ordinary manuscripts (van Thiel 1992, contra see Schmidt 1997); possibly, it was someone else and not Aristarchus who managed to produce an influential edition in Egypt c. 150 BC (Finkelberg 2006).

I would like to add some hopefully important considerations and calculations to this long-lasting discussion. First thing that needs revision is the concept of vulgate.

### **The vulgate**

On the one hand, this term reflects the fact that extant Homeric manuscripts can hardly be arranged in an ordinary stemma, as it was shown clearly enough by Allen, who had chosen to

---

<sup>3</sup> “We are invited to envisage a public so insistent on having Aristarchean texts that all non-Aristarchean lines were cancelled, yet so ignorant and uncaring that Aristarchean readings could be routinely passed over” (Haslam 1997, 85).

reject his own manuscript family system (Allen 1920) in his later *editio major* of *The Iliad* (Allen 1931). In Middle Ages manuscripts of *The Iliad* were comparatively abundant, which allowed comparatively frequent horizontal transfer of the variants from one copy to another regardless of their genealogical relations. This “average” mediaeval text turned out to be identical to the majority of Egyptian Homeric papyri; thus we may trace the vulgate back to Late Antiquity.

On the other hand, it is obvious that the reading of the majority of manuscripts strongly depends on our choice of the manuscripts. In numerous instances the edition of Thomas Allen, based on almost 200 manuscripts, and the edition of Martin West (West 2000), who uses less than 20 earlier copies (plus papyri), disagree about vulgate readings. But this study is focused only on those cases that affect interpretation of Alexandrian variants. In Table 1 I am quoting Aristarchean readings to those lines in 15<sup>th</sup> book of *The Iliad* where the two editors disagree about vulgate. Readings that differ from the variants by Aristarchus are centered.

Table 1. Agreement of Aristarchean variants with the readings of vulgate (15<sup>th</sup> book of *The Iliad* 4).

<b>Verse</b>	<b>Aristarchus</b>	<b>Allen’s vulgate</b>	<b>West’s vulgate</b>
15.31	ἀπολήξης	ἀπολήξης	ἀπολλήξης
15.72	παύω	παύσω	παύω
15.82	εἶην	εἶη	εἶην
15.741	μειλιχίη	μειλιχίη	μειλιχίη

Aristarchus (not only in this sample) more often agrees with West’s vulgate, because the variants of the Alexandrian are closer to the small selection of ancient manuscripts than to the vast majority in Allen’s edition, including many later *codices*. Thus our treatment of vulgate is not irrelevant to the question in the title of this article, because Allen’s methodology constructs the vulgate that is slightly more distant from the Aristarchean edition.

Among hundreds of Aristarchus’s variants a few examples of the kind do not form a marked group. Nevertheless, the theoretical importance of the problematic concept of vulgate is often underestimated.

---

<sup>4</sup> The abundance of dubious readings of the kind in the 15<sup>th</sup> book is not typical in *The Iliad*, as my preliminary calculations show. Some other books have no examples where we can only guess about Aristarchus’s agreement or disagreement with vulgate, although discrepancies between the two vulgates are numerous.

### Small and dubious variants

There is a group of Aristarchean variants which are not mentioned by Allen and are absent from his statistics. They can be classified as self-evident minor variants. Here are several examples; *The Iliad* is cited from Allen's edition, the scholia are given according to Hartmut Erbse's edition (Erbse 1988).

Table 2. Small readings not mentioned in Allen's apparatus (16<sup>th</sup> book)

Verse		Scholia
16.129	δύσσο τεύχεα θᾶσσον, ἐγὼ δέ κε λαὸν ἀγείρω.	ἀγείρω· οὕτως δὲ καὶ Ἀρίσταρχος.
16.185	Ἑρμείας ἀκάκητα, πόρην δέ οἱ ἀγλαὸν υἷον	<ἀκάκητα:> Ἀρίσταρχος προπαροξύνει.
16.324	δρῦψ' ἀπὸ μῶνων, ἀπὸ δ' ὀστέον ἄχρισ ἄραξε·	ἄχρισ ἄραξε: Ἀρίσταρχος ὡς „μέχρις” ἀνεγίνωσκε
16.415	αὐτὰρ ἔπειτ' Ἑρῦμαντα καὶ Ἀμφοτερόν καὶ Ἐπάλτην	Ἀμφοτερόν: ὁ Ἀρίσταρχος ὡς „δεξιτερόν”
16.483	ἦὲ πίτυς βλωθρῆ, τὴν τ' οὖρеси τέκτονες ἄνδρες	οὖρеси τέκτονες: Ἀρίσταρχος κατ' ἰδίαν τὸ οὖρеси καὶ τὸ τέκτονες.
16.508	Γλαύκῳ δ' αἰνὸν ἄχος γένετο φθογγῆς ἄϊοντι·	<ἄϊοντι:> ὡς λέγοντι. οὕτως Ἀρίσταρχος.
16.542	ὃς Λυκίην εἴρυστο δίκησί τε καὶ σθένει ῶ·	εἴρυστο: Ἀρίσταρχος τρίτην ἀπὸ τέλους τὴν ὀξεῖαν ποιεῖ, ὑγιῶς πάνυ.

Why did Allen omit these readings? He most likely found some of them obvious and even refused to consider them *variants*, because they might have no alternative. This approach is adverse to the readings that are in accordance with vulgate and affects, although slightly, the calculations in favour of discrepancies. And it is important that not all readings in this group actually had an alternative (e.g. 16.483).

Not all the details of Allen's calculation are clear, but it can be seen that he omitted a very important group of variants: double Aristarchean readings. Their interpretation may vary: sometimes the scholia pointed out that Aristarchus had supported one variant earlier, and the other later<sup>5</sup>; sometimes two readings are most likely *Parallelstellen*.

<sup>5</sup> “Apparently he first produced a commentary on Aristophanes' text, then a text of his own and then a commentary to go with it; finally his pupils made another text incorporating his last thoughts” (Janko 1985, 26).

If I am not mistaken, Allen did not take into consideration double variants at all; he certainly had a good reason for that: they are uncertain. Nevertheless, in almost all the pairs one reading agrees with vulgate. If we conjecture that the agreeing variant is mostly the later one, we get a marked group of Aristarchean readings identical to vulgate.

### **Horizontal vs. vertical readings and omission vs. athetesis**

Homeric scholia make clear distinction between omission and athetesis<sup>6</sup>; the latter means the situation when a line is marked as dubious, but it remains in the edition of the given scholar. Omissions (especially, made by Aristarchus) are rare. Atheteses are much more frequent, and normally they are not counted as variants. The usage of athetesis is widely recognized as an evidence for cautiousness on the part of the Alexandrians, who prefer to question and not to delete these lines. Omissions and additions affecting the number of verses are known as vertical variants and are opposed to horizontal readings, which are limited to wording of a line.

When one of the Alexandrian critics omits the line and the other athetizes it, we have vertical variant. In all probability Allen ignores these cases. For example, in his table “Aristarchean readings found in MSS” he puts 33 readings for book 8 (Allen 1931 I, 199). That corresponds to his apparatus where he cites Aristarchus 34 times for 35 readings; the other two are 8.213 (double variant) and 8.535 (athetesis). I think that the last reading should be counted as a vertical one, because Zenodotus omitted this line, and Aristarchus obviously did not. His text here is identical to vulgate.

Another problem with horizontal and vertical readings is that — as one may assume — they strangely enough required different methods. Rare omissions were counterbalanced by more frequent atheteses, but we cannot see any analogy in horizontal readings. I do not think that the methodology of work with large and small readings differed thus much, although single words were definitely more favourable to conjectural changes than whole lines and word combinations. We do not find in the scholia any specific technical terms which would distinguish between readings intended to be in the texts and variants that had to remain in the commentary. This terminological gap most probably led to the confusion between confident and hypothetical readings and to the emergence of double Aristarchean variants. One of the possible explanations is Helmut van Thiel’s hypothesis: “This text seems to be revised and edited posthumously by one of his disciples, who did not know by this time the old Zenodotean method<sup>7</sup> which Aristarchus used in his personal copy, and gave false interpretations” (van Thiel 1997, 25). Here I would prefer not to enter the discussion, whether the *variae lectiones* which were not intended to

---

<sup>6</sup> I agree with Michael Haslam that we should not revise the mainstream interpretation of οὐκ ἔγραφεν (Haslam 1997, 73).

<sup>7</sup> I.e. that many “readings” are in fact parallels or commentaries — V.F.

change the Homeric text were parallels and commentaries, or, more traditionally, hypothetical readings. The more important fact is the necessity to discriminate between the two various types of horizontal readings.

### **The challenge to Allen's statistics.**

Allen's statistics are usually correct and consistent with the apparatus of his edition. But, as I tried to demonstrate, principles of these statistics are open to criticism in several specific aspects and in general. In Table 3 I compare (1) above-mentioned statistics of Allen's and my own calculations: (2) Aristarcean variants according to scholia and (3) according to the edition of West. The readings of the Alexandrian philologist are divided into three groups: (I) those identical to the variant of the majority, (II) those agreeing with the minority of manuscripts, (III) the others. The third group is twofold: (a) the readings that agree with a half of Allen's manuscripts and (b) dubious variants (mostly double readings and cases of uncertain vulgate readings). In my calculations the cases of type (IIIa) are dissolved in the first two groups; in Allen's statistics the cases of type (IIIb) are not taken into account, so the corresponding cells of the table are left blank.

Table 3. Aristarcean readings in editions and in scholia.

	I	II	IIIa	IIIb	Total
Allen	240	558	76		874
West	1021	677		92	1790
Scholia	387	516		80	983
%					
Allen	27,5%	63,8%	8,7%		100,0%
West	57,0%	37,8%		5,1%	100,0%
Scholia	39,4%	52,5%		8,1%	100,0%

What are the reasons for the differences between statistics presented by Allen and the evidence of scholia according to my calculations? The reasons are the following: Allen

- considered several dozens of hypothetical readings that mostly disagreed with vulgate;
- constructed a vulgate more distant from Aristarcean variant;
- excluded some smaller readings mostly agreeing with vulgate;
- did not include Aristarcean atheteses that replaced someone's else omissions.

The question needs a detailed examination, because Allen did not explain clearly his methodology. The best way is to compare these two methods on the example of a particular book.

Allen cited 46 Aristarchean readings to book 11: 11 variants are present in all manuscripts, 3 in the majority of them, 2 in about a half, 10 in the minority, 12 in a few, 8 in none (Allen 1930 I, 199). In Allen's apparatus to book 11 I have found 52 readings, but 6 of them are dubious in some respect, which makes 46 a net result<sup>8</sup>. These dubious variants are of two groups: contradictions in the scholia that do not allow certainty in Aristarchus' will (11.144, 686, maybe 424 and 754), and double readings, where two Aristarchean variants are extant (632, 639). Apart from these 52 cases Aristarchus is mentioned in scholia to the book 8 times, and this makes up the disagreement of the two methods.

Table 4. Aristarchean variants that are not mentioned in Allen's apparatus to the 11<sup>th</sup> book, but are cited by the scholia.

Verse	Text	Scholion
11.72	ἴσας δ' ὑσμίνη κεφαλὰς ἔχεν, οἱ δὲ λύκοι ὡς	ὅτι Ἀρίσταρχος ὑσμίνη γράφει χωρὶς τοῦ ι
11.142	νῦν μὲν δὴ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀεικέα τίσετε λώβην.	τινὰς μέντοι φησὶν Ἀρίσταρχος „σφοῦ πατρός“, αὐτὸς δὲ τοῦ πατρὸς.
11.179	πολλοὶ δὲ πρηνεῖς τε καὶ ὕπτιοι ἔκπεσον ἵππων	Ἀρίσταρχος τοὺς δύο ἀθετεῖ, Ζηνόδοτος οὐ<δὲ ἔγραφεν>.
11.356	γαίης· ἀμφὶ δὲ ὅσσε κελαινὴ νύξ ἐκάλυψεν.	Ζηνόδοτος οὐ γράφει, Ἀρίσταρχος ἀθετεῖ.
11.636	ἄλλος μὲν μογέων ἀποκινήσασκε τραπέζης	ἄλλος μὲν: ὁ Ἀσκαλωνίτης ψιλοῖ, ... πολὺ πρότερον δὲ οὕτως καὶ Ἀρίσταρχος.
11.649	αἰδοῖος νεμεσητὸς ὃ με προέηκε πυθέσθαι	Ἀρίσταρχος μεμψίμοιρος· οἱ δὲ ἐκάστῳ τὸ δέον νέμων, ὅθεν καὶ νέμεσις. ἴνα οὖν μὴ δόξωσιν ἀμελεῖν αὐτοῦ, ταῦτά φησιν.
11.659	ἐν νηυσὶν κέαται βεβλημένοι οὐτάμενοί τε.	οὐτάμενοί τε: Ἀρίσταρχος ὡς „ἰστάμενοι“
11.677	ληΐδα δ' ἐκ πεδίου συνελάσσαμεν ἤλιθα πολλήν	ληΐδα δ' ἐκ πεδίου: Ἀρίσταρχος ὡς „Χαλκίδα“

<sup>8</sup> This agreement is not very typical, because sometimes Allen includes hypothetical Aristarchean readings. All in all, Allen's hypothetical readings are few and do not seriously affect the proportion.



Seven of these cases are readings that agree with vulgate. The variants to verses 636, 659 and 677 deal with diacritical signs; the commentary to line 72 discusses the orthography of a rare word. In the scholion to 11.142 Aristarchus specifies the choice of the pronoun. 11.179 and 11.356 are the cases where athetesis is opposed to omission, and we can count it as a vertical reading. Finally, the case of line 649 is not a *varia lectio*, but Aristarchus' commentary to a rare word preserved by the exegetical scholia and obviously not intended to enter the Homeric text.

To sum up, Allen counted 11+3 readings that agree with vulgate and suppressed on different grounds 7 variants, i.e. a half of the former group. This constant suppression of some types of readings leads to the result that according to Allen only 27% of Aristarchean variants agree with vulgate, while the scholia give almost 40% to this group. If we bear in mind the fact that almost all double readings include one variant of majority, the proportion will be even higher.

“No one, in my opinion”, Gregory Nagy writes, “has yet been able to refute successfully the observation of T. W. Allen that Aristarchus's editorial prescriptions exerted practically no effect on the Homeric text as preserved in the medieval “vulgate” manuscript tradition” (Nagy 1996, 97). The 40-percent coincidence that I have found in the scholia is not yet the decisive argument in favour of Aristarchean influence on ancient manuscript tradition. Nevertheless, I think these calculations to be a serious challenge to Allen's opinion if not a way to refute it.

But this challenge seems to be not very important as compared to the dramatic discrepancy of Allen's and West's statistics seen in Table 3. The proportion of agreements between Aristarchus and vulgate according to these two editions is exactly the opposite. Why so? Unlike Allen, West includes in his apparatus a great bulk of hypothetical readings that have no direct support in the scholia. One might call this approach ill-grounded but I am sure that in many cases West's opinion has no convincing alternative.

For example, there are dozens of cases when a reading by Zenodotus contradicts manuscript tradition and Aristarchean variant is not mentioned. Sometimes these two scholars agree, but normally they do not. When the senior one does not agree with vulgate, the junior most often supports manuscript reading. That is why we can confidently conclude, together with Martin West, that many *obvious* Aristarchean variants should be reconstructed against Zenodotean ones. It applies equally to several minor scholars who defended exotic readings and lived before Aristarchus. West can be mistaken in some particular cases, but overall, I suppose, his conclusions must be close to the real state of things. For methodological correctness we should place all that numerous hypothetical readings in a separate group, but they deserve examination which is not less serious than well-attested Aristarchean variants.

Examination of c. 1000 Aristarchean variants to *The Iliad* and several hundreds of his hypothetical readings (according to the opinion of Martin L. West) shows that calculations by Thomas W. Allen can no longer be considered a reliable factual ground for Homeric textual criticism. That is so not because they are blatantly mistaken (although sometimes they are not very precise), but because they are methodologically disputable. Does that mean that the question in the title of this article: “Did Aristarchus of Samothrace influence Homeric vulgate?” should now be answered positively? No, but the negative answer concerning horizontal readings is no more acceptable. There may be two possible reasons for the agreement between Aristarchus and vulgate: either the scholar relied on pre-Alexandrian vulgate, or he formed extant manuscript tradition. I do not think that we will ever know the definite answer to the question, but further exploration of Homeric scholia might give us many new facts for the discussion.

## References

- Allen T.W.* (1920) *Homeri Opera recogn.* David B. Monro et Thomas W. Allen. [Ilias.] T. I–II. Oxonii.
- Allen T.W.* (1931) *Homeri Ilias ed.* Thomas W. Allen. T. I–III. Oxonii.
- Bolling G.M.* (1925) *The External Evidence for Interpolation in Homer.* Oxford.
- Erbse H.* (1988) *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem.* Vol. I–VII. Berlin.
- Finkelberg M.* (2006) *Regional Texts and the Circulation of Books: the Case of Homer // Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies.* 46. P. 231–248.
- Haslam M.* (1997) *Homeric papyri and transmission of the text // A New Companion to Homer.* Leiden—NY—Köln, 1997. P. 55—100.
- Janko R.* (1985) *The text and transmission of the Iliad // The Iliad: A Commentary.* General editor G.S. Kirk. Vol. IV. Cambridge. P. 20–37.
- Kirk G.S.* (1985) *Introduction // The Iliad: A Commentary.* General editor G.S. Kirk. Vol. I. Cambridge. P. 1–43.
- Nagy G.* (1996) *Homeric questions.* Austin, 1996.
- Schmidt M.* (1997) *Variae Lectiones oder Parallelstellen: Was notierten Zenodot und Aristarch zu Homer? // Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 115. S. 1–12.
- van Thiel H.* (1992) *Zenodot, Aristarch und andere // Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik.* 90. S. 1–32.
- van Thiel H.* (1997) *Der Homertext in Alexandria // Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik.* 115. S. 13–36.
- West S.* (1967) *The Ptolemaic Papyri of Homer (Papyrologica Coloniensia 3).* Köln.
- West S.* (1988) *The transmission or the text // A Commentary to a Homer’s Odyssey.* Edd. A. Heubeck, S. West, and J.B. Hainsworth. Vol. I. Oxford, 1988. P. 33–50.
- West M.L.* (2000) *Homeri Ilias. Recensuit, testimonia congressit Martin L. West.* Stutgardiae–Monachii–Lipsiae.

Vladimir V. Fayer

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). Faculty of Philology. Assistant Professor; Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (IGITI). Senior Research Fellow.

E-mail: vvfire@hse.ru, Tel. +7 (495) 772-95-90\*25-04

**Any opinions or claims contained in this working paper do not necessarily reflect the views of HSE.**