

New College MS 298: A Story of the Manuscript

Centennial olive trees on red-coloured earth—short drywalls divide lands and properties, casting a white net over the landscape. At midday the sun will have no mercy on these ploughed fields: there is no vegetation beyond old trees and dry bushes. Cacti offer prickly pears to the passers-by protruding along the many bends of the road; it leads downhill to the crystalline sea. Two miles on the right, after the dunes covered by beach-grass, waves roll gently on the sandy shore. Tiny fish dash around my feet while the water barely reaches my calves.

I do not know how effectively these childhood memories describe the Terra d' Otranto of the thirteenth or fourteenth century; however, that landscape did not differ much—I think—from what the wide eyes of an eight-year-old saw in the now-called Salento. It is there that the manuscripts forming New College MS 298 were written and composed. In the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, it was not uncommon that different manuscripts were bound together in larger volumes: binding was an expensive process, and leather which eventually covered the result was expensive too. Therefore, texts travelled in separate quires for some time until they found themselves in the hands of a bookbinder. But there is something more to the story of MS 298; the main strands of it can roughly be recalled, while the deepest causes and details still lay under the unploughed red soil.

What is now kept in a protective blue box in New College Library, at shelfmark MS 298, is actually two manuscripts in one, plus later additions. Opening the manuscripts, after four flyleaves, Tzetzes's *Allegories of the Iliad* start from line 129 of the prologue; the folio is made of western paper with a watermark.¹ At f. 9, everything changes completely: there is lower-quality oriental paper, the colour is browner than previous folios, and the margins are withering away,² even the text is different, as well as the hand who wrote it. It is the first book of the *Iliad*. The poem continues in the same hand and on the same kind of paper until the end of the twenty-fourth book at f. 109v. At f. 110, the *Allegories of the Iliad* resume on the same kind of western paper of the first folios written by the same hand. The manuscript continues with the *Allegories of the Iliad* until book twelve (f. 121), and then there are the scholia to the first two books of the *Iliad* (ff. 122–28)³, Homeric epimerisms (ff. 130–143), the *Homeric Allegories* by Heraclitus (ff. 143–49), Alphabetical Epimerisms⁴ (ff. 149–250), and finally two glossaries, the first from A to E, the second from E to Ω.⁵

What happened to the manuscript and the reason why there are two different kinds of paper seems straightforward: the folios with the *Iliad* come from one manuscript (manuscript A) which was later merged with a second manuscript (manuscript B) made of different paper and written by a different scribe. When the two manuscripts merged, ten folios of manuscript B were placed at the front to protect the Iliadic text of manuscript A; that is why MS 298 starts with one work which is then interrupted and resumes at the end of the older manuscript. According to

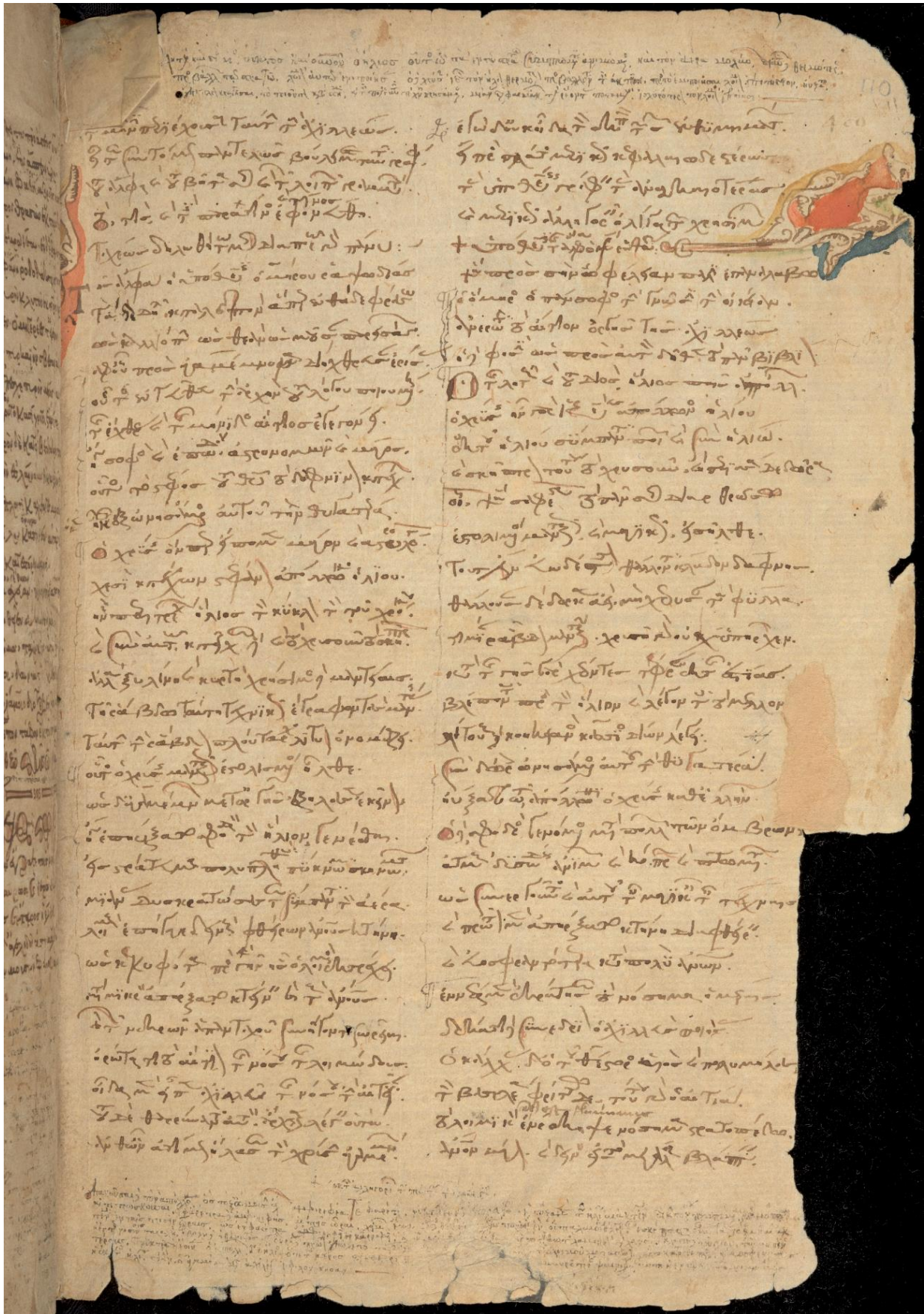
¹ See Irmgard Hutter, *Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturenhandschriften*, v.i (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1997), p. 145. She identifies the watermark as Mošin.Traljič 7260; this would date the production to 1320 to 1326.

² There is no sign of a watermark.

³ Folios 122 and 129—the last one is blank—are a later addition from the time of the merge. The paper is western and has a watermark close to Piccard Waage VI, 334 (a. 1478). See Hutter, *Corpus* and Elisabetta Sciarra, *La tradizione degli scholia iliadici in Terra d'Otranto* (Roma: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 2005), p. 58.

⁴ Both 'epimerisms' are edited by Andrew Dyck. See Andrew R. Dyck, *Epimerismi Homeric: Pars Prior: Epimerismos continens qui ad Iliadis librum A pertinent* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983) for the text at ff. 130–43; and *Pars Altera: Epimerismos continens qui ordine alphabetico traditi sunt: Lexicon AIMΩΔEIN quod vocatur seu verius ETYMOLOGIAI ΔΙΑΦΟΡΟΙ* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995). For Dyck's brief description of New College 298, see *Pars Prior*, pp. 26–7.

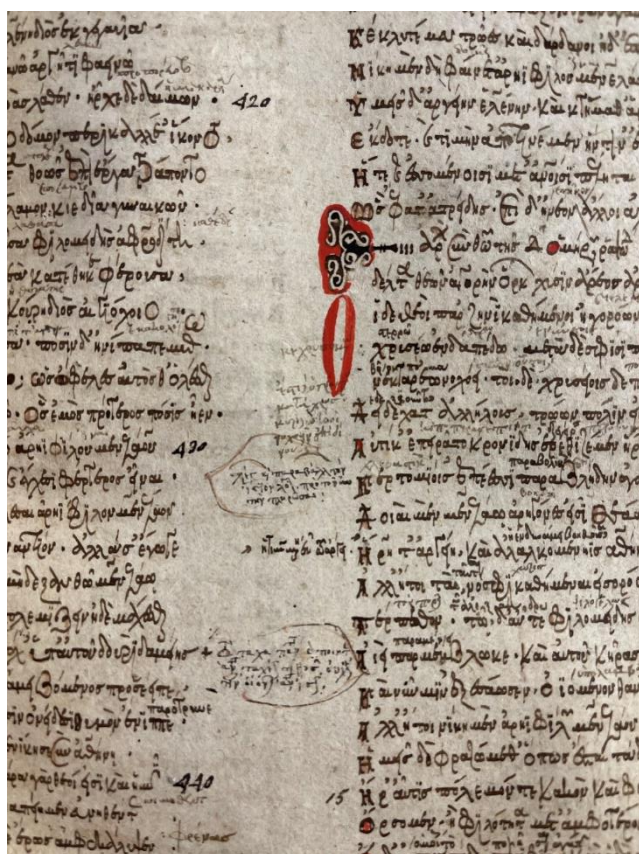
⁵ Dyck strongly believes that the text from f. 250v to 255v is the same text but written by two different hands (see *Ep. Hom.* 1, 27); however, not just the hand but also the paper is different, which, through the watermark, can be dated to between the end of the fourteenth to the beginning of the fifteenth century—see Hutter, *Corpus* and Sciarra, *Tradizione*. It is possible that the newer folios are the restored copy of the older ones; all hypotheses are open until a study on this lexicon is carried out. For a detailed description of the content, see Hutter, *Corpus* and Sciarra, *Tradizione*, p. 63.



New College Library, Oxford, MS 298, f. 110r
The *Allegories of the Iliad* resume after the insertion of the older folios with the *Iliad*

palaeographic analysis by Irmgard Hutter and Elisabetta Sciarra, A, the Iliadic manuscript, is older than the folios which precede and follow it and can be dated back to the beginning of the thirteenth century;⁶ the rest of the manuscript B, is written in the baroque minuscule typical of fourteenth-century Terra d' Otranto. Things, however, complicate further. In manuscript B, the more recent, the folios still record the old numbering—that is, the order which the folios followed before they were merged with A. This older numbering shows that the original B had a completely different arrangement; most notably, it started with the Homeric epimerisms and ended with the *Allegories of the Iliad*. Therefore, when A and B were bound together, the binder took the folios with the *Allegories* from the back of B and put them before and after A, in order to protect the older text of the *Iliad*. This change has a double significance: whoever did this—or requested it—cared most about the Homeric poem and least about Tzetzes's *Allegories of the Iliad*. This operation was not without consequence for Tzetzes's text. Since the work is not complete, it is possible that the many folios of the last twelve books were lost or removed; in addition, two other folios were lost: the initial one, and one other between f. 110 and f. 111, and eventually even the last two folios were swapped—f. 121 should be before f. 120.⁷

A question remains and it concerns the time when this 'unification' happened. An approximate dating of this intervention can be inferred by studying the folios and marginalia that



New College Library, Oxford, MS 298, f. 19r [detail]—the older text of the *Iliad* with the scholia by the *Hauptscholiast*

were added during the process, that means, those that were neither part of A nor B. These additions are the scholia to the first two books of the *Iliad* (ff. 128–29) and the final two folios with the end of the lexicon; the paper of the latter comes from the beginning of the fifteenth century, that of the former from the second half of the same century; in both cases it is western paper.⁸ Moreover, a hand from the same period added numerous scholia throughout the manuscript; for this reason, Irmgard Hutter named this person *Hauptscholiast*—i.e. main scholia-scribe. In the identification of this hand, Hutter and Sciarra diverge; while the latter identifies the hand of the scholia with the one responsible for ff. 122–29, Hutter convincingly argues for two different scribes. In any case, it is very likely that the *Hauptscholiast* was the person supervising and instructing the merging process. These other two fifteenth-century scribes added minor works and commentaries on the folios which they added and incorporated into the text already present by adding further notes and corrections.⁹

⁶ See Hutter, *Corpus*, p. 146, Sciarra, *Tradizione*, p. 61.

⁷ See Sciarra, *Tradizione*, p. 63. The fact that there is no gap in the numbering between f. 110 and f. 111, even if the text jumps from line 130 of the first book to line 277, shows that the loss of one folio took place before the numbering, hence during rebinding; for what concerns the misplacement of the last two folios, f. 120 contains from v. 242 of book 11 to v. 114 of book 12, while f. 120 goes from v. 33 to 241 of book 11.

⁸ See footnote 3, above, for details about the watermark of ff. 122–29, and footnote 5, above, for ff. 254–55.

⁹ Elisabetta Sciarra (see her *Tradizione*, p. 60) advances the idea of an intermediate arrangement of the manuscript supported by quire numbering she found at f. 17r, 105r, 150r, and 246r. She thinks that this numbering indicates that

In conclusion, there were two different manuscripts: one, A, written at the beginning of the thirteenth century which contained the *Iliad*—we do not know if that was the only text that original A had, but it is the only one which survived—and another one, B, written a century later with Homeric exegetical material in this order: Homeric epimerisms, Allegories by Heraclitus, Alphabetical epimerisms, and Tzetzes's allegories. At some point in the fifteenth century, a group of—at least two—scribes decided to merge the manuscripts, probably due to their poor condition. In so doing, they took Tzetzes's *Allegories* from the back of the previous manuscript, splitting it in two halves placed before and after the Homeric text to protect it. This was likely carried out in a professional scriptorium, as folios with further texts were added to the manuscript, in addition to the older content present; therefore, the scribes had access to other manuscripts that contained these additional texts. Most notably, they had access to a manuscript with scholia to the *Iliad* and with John Tzetzes's *On the Birth of Gods*, which were written on the marginalia respectively of the Homeric poem and of Tzetzes's *Allegories of the Iliad*. As I said at the beginning, all these actions took place in the Terra d' Otranto, which is also the place where they were initially produced. But what exactly is the Terra d' Otranto?

The name Terra d' Otranto indicates an area of the Puglia region—nowadays called Salento—during the last century of the Middle Ages, and it corresponds to the final part of the 'heel' of the 'Italian boot'. This area was characterised by a strong Greek component, which rooted back to the Magna Graecia and continued after the end of the Byzantine rule with the fall of the Catepanate of Italy in the eleventh century. In the twelfth century—as Pontani notes¹⁰—the Terra d' Otranto did not witness the twelfth-century Komnenian revival of letters and studies on Homer. This is for different reasons: on one hand, the flourishing of manuscript production had to wait for another century; on the other, the interest of the Terra d' Otranto towards letters and specifically Homer has always been very technical: the main aim was to acquire the structures and foundations of the Greek language.¹¹ The protagonist of this flourishing of studies and of manuscript production is Nicholas of Otranto (1155/60–1235) later abbot Nectarius of Casole, just outside Otranto.¹² Nicholas-Nectarius made frequent trips to the East and to Constantinople where he probably acquired new manuscripts which brought lore from the capital of the empire into the Terra d' Otranto. Elisabetta Sciarra, in fact, convincingly thinks that a twelfth-century Constantinopolitan manuscript with Homeric scholia—and perhaps even a text of the *Iliad*—is at the base of the tradition of Iliadic scholia in Terra d' Otranto; together with that manuscript, even Tzetzes's works found their way to the south of Italy: the commentary to Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the *Carmina Iliaca*, and the *Allegories of the Iliad* as in New College MS 298. Nicholas-Nectarius was a collector of manuscripts, which he also filled with his notes, but most importantly a *grammatikos*, a teacher. A community of scholars was formed around Casole: the seed was sown for the production of manuscripts with non-religious works which then flourished between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in parallel with the Palaeologan revival of letters;¹³ one of the most copied, and studied, texts was the *Iliad* and its exegetical texts, since the poem was used as a textbook to learn Greek.¹⁴ In fact, all the Homeric manuscripts analysed by Elisabetta Sciarra—

the older Iliadic manuscript initially followed the more recent one with Homeric material, and therefore this was the first arrangement the two manuscripts had when they were merged together.

¹⁰ See Filippomaria Pontani, *Sguardi su Ulisse: La tradizione esegetica greca all'Odissea*, 2nd edn. (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2011), p. 620.

¹¹ For a general overview of the Terra d' Otranto see Guglielmo Cavallo, 'Libri Greci e resistenza etnica in Terra d'Otranto', in Guglielmo Cavallo (ed.), *Libri e lettori nel mondo bizantino: Guida storica e critica* (Rome: Laterza, 1982), pp. 155–78, but also Pontani, *Sguardi*, pp. 203–208, and N. G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, rev. edn. (London: Duckworth, 1996), pp. 226–7.

¹² For a biographical profile of Nicholas-Nectarius of Casole, see the entry for 'Nicola da Otranto', by Frederick Lauritzen, in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (2013): <[www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/nicola-da-ottranto_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/nicola-da-ottranto_(Dizionario-Biografico))>.

¹³ See Pontani, *Sguardi*, p. 208.

¹⁴ For the role of Homer in Terra d' Otranto, see Pontani, *Sguardi*, and Guglielmo Cavallo, 'Lo specchio omerico', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Moyen-Age* 101 (2) (1989), 609–27. As Mazzucchi recently demonstrated, among the

among which is MS 298—were made between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries, and they all show a high degree of contamination; this means that scribes had different manuscripts available during the copying process, and they selectively chose from which manuscript to copy certain information.¹⁵ Therefore, these texts were transmitted horizontally and not vertically from one manuscript to its copy. Sciarra also adds that the purpose of all these manuscripts and their exegetical commentary was predominantly scholastic and, within this framework, the amount of exegetical material available in the final form of MS 298 is unparalleled; therefore, she considers it as a *summa* of Otrantine Homeric knowledge.¹⁶

This said, it must be remembered that between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, MS 298 was still split into Manuscript A, made at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and Manuscript B, from the beginning of the fourteenth century. It is only in the fifteenth century that the two manuscripts were merged, and scholia were added. Among this huge number of scholia, there is one at f. 32r, written by the same hand as the *Hauptscholiast*, which is particularly curious:

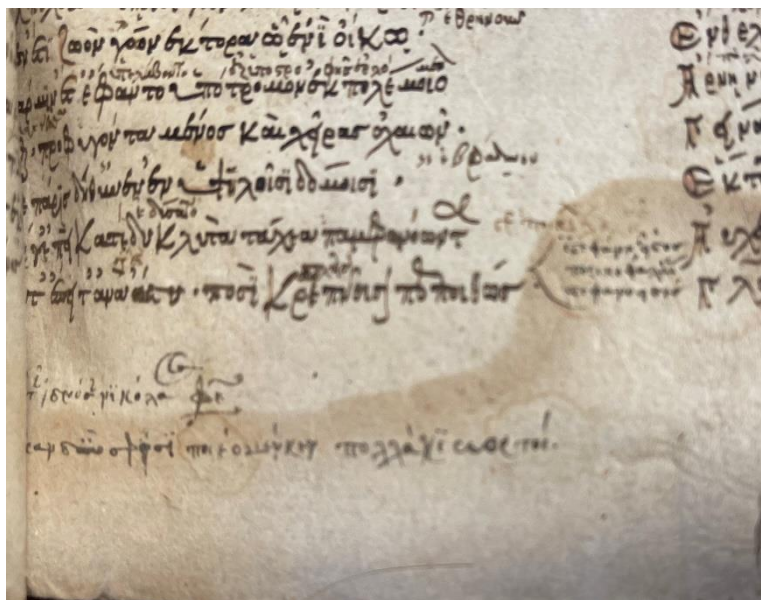
ὁ τῆς ἰδρούσης Νικόλαος φησίν·
μοῖραν δ' αὖ σφίσι ποιόμεν κεν πολλαίκι βορτοί

Nicholas of Hydrussa (?) says:
We mortals often shape our own destiny

Far from being an inspirational quote, this is probably an alternative reading of *Il.* VI 488, a line present in the same page. This is the final passage of Hector's moving speech to his wife Andromache, when he tells her that he is ready to face his destiny and goes to battle:

μοῖραν δ' οὐ τίνα φημι πεφυγμένον ἔμμεναι ἀνδρῶν

No man—I say—has ever escaped destiny.



New College Library, Oxford, MS 298, f. 32r [detail]—
the note by the *Hauptscholiast* that mentions a reading by a certain Nicholas

manuscripts circulating in the Terra d' Otranto there was also the famous Venetus A (Marc. Gr. 454), one of the most important testimonies of the *Iliad*: see Carlo Maria Mazzucchi, 'Venetus A e Ambr. B 114 sup.: Due codici del medesimo copista e la loro storia', *Aevum* 86 (2) (2012), 417–56.

¹⁵ See Sciarra, *Tradizione*, p. 241.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 251–2.

Nicholas's reading sounds quite absurd as it completely twists the meaning of Hector's speech; in fact, it adds an agency on human destiny which might have spared Hector the violent death by the hand of mighty Achilles. The interesting point of this note, however, is not the interpretation of the *Iliad*, but rather the identity of this Nicholas. This is a much-debated matter, and I have neither the intention nor the means to solve it.¹⁷ However, this same scholion, but written with the first person, appears also at f. 68v of Vind. phil. Gr. 49, another Otrantine manuscript from the third quarter of the thirteenth century. At f. 28v, the Viennese manuscript presents another scholion attributed to a certain Nicholas which appears also at f. 19r of MS 298, but without the attribution;¹⁸ Sciarra, however, believes that both the *Hauptscholiast* of New College MS 298 and the scribe of Vind. phil. gr. 49 copied these scholia from the same source, and not the former from the latter. Concerning the identity of this Nicholas, one option is obviously Nicholas-Nectarius—as Nigel Wilson suggested;¹⁹ the other one might be Nicholas of Otranto, the son of John of Otranto, a notary and master who lived at the same time as Nicholas-Nectarius. The third, and least probable, is Nicholas of Gallipoli, a scribe of the same period who wrote manuscripts Ang. gr. 122, Bodmer 85 and Laur. 32.5, all Otrantine manuscripts containing the *Iliad* with scholia,²⁰ but none of the manuscripts written by Nicholas of Gallipoli present the reading at f. 32r. The key to solve this conundrum may lie in the genitive τῆς ἰδρούσης; if—as Sciarra believes²¹—this means 'of Otranto' then the Nicholas of Otranto, son of John, could be the most probable guess, but a reference to Nicholas-Nectarius who was also born in Otranto cannot be ruled out. This example shows how important a witness New College MS 298 is, not just of the texts it carries, but also of the cultural milieu which produced it and left visible signs on its pages.

Now a question arises naturally: how is it that this manuscript arrived in Oxford from the Terra d' Otranto, the place where it was produced and then rebound? This journey did not leave concrete traces on the manuscript, but the manuscript did leave traces along its journey. My doctoral thesis is a study, with critical edition, of Tzetzes's *Allegories of the Iliad*, which is the text that was split—not to say sacrificed—in the latest arrangement of the folios to protect the 'older' *Iliad*. Studying the manuscript tradition of the text, I found that there are two manuscripts with the *Allegories of the Iliad* which were copied from New College MS 298. The proof of this connection is unmistakable: both manuscripts miss the lines contained in the lost folio between ff. 110–111 and they follow the order of the last two misplaced folios. This evidence is not just important for the manuscript tradition of the *Allegories of the Iliad*, but it informs us also as to the whereabouts of New College MS 298, after its rebinding and on its way out from the Terra d' Otranto. One of these two manuscripts is Neap. II F 2, nowadays kept in the National Library Vittorio Emanuele II in Naples; in addition to the *Allegories*, it contains the *Iliad* with scholia. According to Formentin, the manuscript was produced in the first quarter of the sixteenth century by three different scribes from the Terra d' Otranto.²² However, this does not imply that the manuscript was copied there; in fact, after the Ottoman invasion of Otranto in 1480–81, scribes and scholars from that area moved to work elsewhere. What is certain about manuscript Neap. II F 2 is that it belonged to the library of the Farnese family, a highly influential family of the Italian Renaissance. Their library started increasing after one of their most eminent members, Alessandro Farnese, became cardinal in 1493—soon to be elected Pope in 1539 with the name Paul III. The library was housed in the

¹⁷ See, e.g., Sciarra, *Tradizione*, pp. 148–9 and Pontani, *Sguardi*, p. 206 n. 464, for the *status questionis* and further bibliography.

¹⁸ The scholion is an exegetical note on *Il.* III 445. See Sciarra, *Tradizione*, p. 148 for the text.

¹⁹ See Wilson, *Scholars*, p. 228.

²⁰ On the figure of Nicholas of Gallipoli, see Daniele Arnesano and Elisabetta Sciarra, 'L'attività del copista Nicola di Gallipoli e la tradizione manoscritta dell'Iliade in Terra d' Otranto', *Segno e Testo: International Journal of Manuscripts and Text Transmission* 1 (2003), 257–307.

²¹ See Sciarra, *Tradizione*, p. 149 n. 281. The Greek name of Otranto is Ὑδρούς, Ὑδρούντος, in Latin *Hydruntum* and not Hydrussa.

²² See Maria Rosa Formentin, *Catalogus codicum Graecorum Bibliothecae Nationalis Neapolitanae*, II (Rome: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1995), pp. 116–7.

family's big palazzo in the centre of Rome, which nowadays serves as the French Embassy in Italy. Although not certain, it is possible that manuscript Neap II F 2 was commissioned to the three anonymous Otrantine scribes directly by a member of the Farnese family—perhaps Alessandro himself; what is certain is that those Otrantine scribes used MS 298 as a model—at least for the part on the *Allegories of the Iliad*.²³ If the Neapolitan manuscript was a commission from the Farnese, it is then very likely that the copying process took place in Rome; if so, MS 298 moved from the Terra d' Otranto to the capital of the Vatican State. The presence of scribes from the Terra d' Otranto in Rome is, in fact, well-attested; an example is Giovanni Onorio da Maglie—Maglie is a town in the terra d' Otranto—who was hired by Pope Paul III, former cardinal Alessandro Farnese, as scribe and keeper of the Vatican Library.²⁴ The time when Giovanni da Maglie was working in Rome is slightly later than the time palaeographers indicate for the creation of Neap. II F 2; therefore, it is unlikely that he was one of the three scribes who copied MS 298. It is very difficult to know what happened to MS 298 in that period. If it was copied for the Farnese family, this means that they could not acquire it; perhaps it had a powerful owner who was not willing to give it away. The library of the Farnese family was then moved to Parma, where the family was granted a duchy, and most of it eventually ended up in Naples. This, however, is not a fate shared with MS 298.

There is another manuscript that used MS 298 in order to copy the *Allegories of the Iliad*, and it is manuscript Vaticanus graecus 1759, now kept in the Vatican Library; as I already said, the lacunae of the Oxford manuscript unmistakably testify to this genealogy. Tzetzes's work is at the very end (ff. 345–428) of this Vaticanus, a very thick manuscript written by multiple scribes. Paul Canart identified about twenty different scribes, most of them from the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries; among them two prominent figures stand out: Gabriel Severos (before 1540–1616) and Alvise Lollino (1552–1625).²⁵ The former was metropolitan of Philadelphia in Lydia (nowadays Alaşehir) but lived in Venice for most of his adult life, where he was also head of the confraternity of San Nicolò dei Greci. The latter, Alvise Lollino, was born in Crete from a Venetian family; in his twenties he moved back to Venice, and in 1596 he was appointed bishop of Belluno. Both figures are known for their scholarly activity and for possessing a good library of Greek manuscripts.²⁶ A recent study by Erika Elia and Rosaria Maria Piccione places manuscript Vat. gr. 1759 among the ones which belonged to metropolitan Severos—mainly on palaeographical grounds; however, according to Batiffol, Vat. gr. 1759 belonged to the Greek library of Alvise Lollino. There are then two possible options: the manuscript either belonged to Severos and passed over to Lollino after his death, or it was simply made for Lollino and it happened to have folios written by Severos. The ownership of a copy of MS 298 does not really

²³ In his prolegomena to the critical edition of the *Iliad*, Allen mentions manuscript Neap. II F 2 (N³), but he did not collate it for the edition: see *Homeri Ilias. Prolegomena*, ed. Thomas W. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931) p. 29. Therefore, it is possible—though not demonstrated—that even the *Iliad* in the Neapolitan manuscript comes from MS 298.

²⁴ On Giovanni Onorio da Maglie, see the many publications by Agati, in particular the monograph about him, Maria Luisa Agati, *Giovanni Onorio da Maglie copista greco (1534–1563)* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 2001); for a specimen of his writing, see also Maria Luisa Agati, 'Giovanni Onorio da Maglie: caratteri a mano—caratteri a stampa', *Scriptorium* 48 (1) (1994), 122–40.

²⁵ Lollino is responsible for ff. 15–16v, probably also for ff. 1–10 and f. 222v. See Paul Canart, *Codices Vaticani Graeci: Codices 1745–1962*, I: *Codicum narrationes* (Vatican City: Vatican Library, 1970), p. 77. The hand of Gabriel Severos was recognised in ff. 219–21 and ff. 261–303v: see Paul Canart, *Les Vaticani Graeci, 1487–1962: Notes et documents pour l'histoire d'un fonds de manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Vaticane* (Vatican City: Vatican Library, 1979), p. 75.

²⁶ For a biographical profile of Alvise Lollino see the entry for 'Lollino, Luigi', by Stefano Benedetti, in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (2005): <[www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-lollino_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-lollino_(Dizionario-Biografico))>; for his library, see Pierre Batiffol, *Les manuscrits grecs de Lollino, évêque de Bellune* (Rome: P. Cuggiani, 1889), especially p. 15 for Vat. gr. 1759. For a biographical profile of Gabriel Severos, see Rosa Maria Piccione, 'Libri greci da Venezia a Torino e l'eredità di Gavriil Sevros', *Medioevo greco: Rivista di storia e filologia bizantina* 17 (2017), 193–210, at pp. 194–7. A first study on Gabriel Severos's library was published recently: Erika Elia and Rosa Maria Piccione, 'A Rediscovered Library: Gabriel Severos and His Books', in Rosa Maria Piccione (ed.), *Greeks, Books and Libraries in Renaissance Venice* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 33–82.

matter to this research; what matters is the evidence about the environment in which this copy was produced. One century after the Farnese, the manuscript is copied for two intellectuals of the Venetian philhellenic cultural milieu: MS 298 was no longer in Rome, but in Venice. In fact, only there could a manuscript have been produced with the contribution of both scholars; the Vaticanus reached Rome only later, together with many other manuscripts from Lollino's library. The presence of MS 298 in Venice is supported also by what comes after, although nothing can be said about its owner at the time.

MS 298 found its way up the Italian peninsula, stopping in the most relevant cities of the time. Once there, MS 298 still had one last journey to make: the one that brought it to Oxford and into New College Library. According to the Benefactors' Register of the library, in 1635 William Ferrars, a London merchant dealing with Ottoman Turkey, donated four manuscripts to the college, one in Arabic and three in Greek²⁷—one of these was MS 298. According to William Poole's reconstruction, with his donation Ferrars responded to an appeal made the year before by the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud; Laud ordered that every merchant ship of the Levant Company should acquire one Arabic or Persian manuscript for the archbishop, who would then donate them to the Bodleian. Poole identifies Ferrars as a merchant of the Levant Company and convincingly sees the manuscripts as coming from his mercantile activity.²⁸ It seems straightforward that Ferrars obtained the three manuscripts in Istanbul, where a lot of Greek manuscripts were probably still circulating. However, according to our reconstruction, MS 298 was not in Istanbul—as it never left Italy; so, there are two possible options: either the manuscript found its way to the Ottoman Empire, or Ferrars acquired it in Venice. The origins of one of the other two Greek manuscripts in the donation, namely New College MS 297, support the latter hypothesis. MS 297 was written by George Gregoropulus and Zachary Callierges, two scribes who were active in Italy at the end of the fifteenth century.²⁹ Therefore, given that even MS 297 was also likely to have been in Italy when William Ferrars acquired it, Venice remains the most likely place for these acquisitions. The city was, in fact, not just a required stop for all western merchants, but also one of the main ports used by the Levant Company to which Ferrars belonged.³⁰ Once the manuscript arrived in Oxford, the donation was registered in the Benefactors' Register. In the second half of the nineteenth century, James Sewell, warden of New College, noted the donation also on the counterplate of the manuscript:

This book was given by Mr William Ferrers formerly alumnus Gen(tlemen) Com(moner) a Turkey merchant from London A.D. 1633. The manuscript is of the 14th century.³¹

Interestingly, there is a two-year discrepancy between what is reported in the Benefactors' Register and the date when Sewell wrote on the counterplate, and I do not know whether this is due to a simple mistake, or if the Warden obtained his piece of information from somewhere else. Nevertheless, the manuscript reached England during the reign of Charles I, after having been passed through the hands of many generations of intellectuals, scholars, clergymen, and maybe even a pope.

²⁷ See William Poole, [‘The Receipt of Manuscripts in New College Library 1624–1852’](#), *New College Notes* 8 (2017), no. 11, at p. 3.

²⁸ See *ibid.*

²⁹ See the profiles of the scribe in the *Repertorium der Griechischen Kopisten, 800–1600*, especially the first volume dedicated to manuscripts of Great Britain; for George Gregoropulus, see RGK I, 58; for Zacharias Callierges, see RGK I, 119.

³⁰ The fact that the Levant Company was deeply involved in the exchange of goods in and out of the Republic of Venice and its territories needs no reference; however, see M. Epstein, *The Early History of the Levant Company* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1908), in particular p. 230 where Venice is listed among the ports used by the company. I thank Tom Alexander for his precious help and knowledge of the subject.

³¹ See also Hutter, *Corpus*, p. 146.

This story (of dual manuscripts) started under the southern Italian sun, and the manuscripts came together there, probably behind the thick walls of a monastery, in one of the most fervent European cultural environments at the beginning of the fourteenth century. When the Ottomans invaded Otranto in 1480, the manuscript found its way to Rome, where it was copied so that its text could stay in the library of the Farnese family—probably following the order of Cardinal Alessandro, future Pope Paul III. The manuscript reappeared in Venice more than a century later when a circle of clergymen and intellectuals copied it into Vat. gr. 1759; again, a century later, the manuscript found itself first in the hands, and then on the ship, of William Ferrars. It sailed to England, where it was acquired by Ferrars's former college; this act was probably prompted by the order of a bishop destined to be executed during one of the most tumultuous periods of English history.

There is history stored in that protective blue box. Outside the library, there is a drizzling cloudy sky. I walk alongside the old walls of New College towards the gate on Holywell Street. When I pass by the Turf Tavern, the drizzle has stopped. Now the Clarendon Building opens onto Broad Street, under a timid blue sky.

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