



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### Commemoration through objects?

Homer on the limitations of material memory

**Citation for published version:**

Canevaro, L 2019, Commemoration through objects? Homer on the limitations of material memory . in M Giangiulio, E Franchi & G Proietti (eds), *Commemorating War and War Dead: Ancient and Modern*. Steiner Verlag.

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Commemorating War and War Dead

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



## Commemoration through Objects?

### Homer on the Limitations of Material Memory

Dr. Lilah Grace Canevaro, the University of Edinburgh

#### Introduction

Homeric women use objects to negotiate their agency, to express themselves and, as not conventionally spotlighted protagonists, to contribute to the action. Objects used by women in Homer can be symbolically significant and powerfully characterising. They can be tools of recognition and identification. They can pause narrative and be used agonistically. They can send messages and be vessels for memory. However, they are not infallible. This chapter considers the limitations of both women *as* objects and women *and* objects, in terms of the commemoration of the Trojan War and its heroes. It looks at how Homer reflects on the limitations of objects;<sup>1</sup> how the memories encased in objects are presented as transient; the gendered aspect of this transience; and how objects as commemorators of war are consistently presented as inferior to the medium of poetry. More generally, this chapter propagates what Vital Materialist Jane Bennett has called “attentiveness to things”<sup>2</sup>. It constitutes a case study in a methodology: that of reading Homeric epic not primarily through narrative or character, but through the objects which punctuate the poems.<sup>3</sup> Ian Hodder has written of objects being ‘entangled’ with the human world, and James Whitley has discussed “Homer’s entangled objects”.<sup>4</sup> This chapter contributes to the discussion by showing that the entanglement of things is presented by Homer as precarious, and the link between object and cultural referent not inextricable. Drawing on Jan Vansina’s concept of the ‘floating gap’ in oral traditional memory, this chapter uses its reading of objects to show that Homer is doing something

---

My thanks go to Elena Franchi and Giorgia Proietti for the organisation of and invitation to the conference *Commemorating War and War Dead, Ancient and Modern*, and to the other speakers and delegates for feedback on the beginnings of this chapter.

<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I use ‘Homer’ as a convenient descriptor for both narrator and author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. I make no assumptions about the historicity of such a figure.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett 2010:xiv. Vital Materialism is one of the so-called New Materialisms; for others, and on this emerging field more generally, see e.g. Brown 2004, Latour 2005, Coole/Frost 2010, Malafouris 2013.

<sup>3</sup> This is part of a larger project, funded first by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and then by the Leverhulme Trust, on Women and Objects in Greek Epic.

<sup>4</sup> Hodder 2012, Whitley 2013.

striking: he displays an *awareness* of this floating gap by pointing out the cracks in memory, revealing that there is in fact a remote past that is lost to his heroes.

### Monumental Memory

Andromache's life without her husband is predicted by Hector when he imagines that those seeing her will say:

Ἔκτορος ἦδε γυνή, ὃς ἀριστεύεσκε μάχεσθαι

Τρώων ἵπποδάμων, ὅτε Ἴλιον ἀμφεμάχοντο.

This is the wife of Hector, he who was ever the best fighter  
of the Trojans, breakers of horses, when they fought about Ilion.

*Iliad* 6.460-1<sup>5</sup>

This epigrammatic prediction acts as “a machine for producing *kleos*”, to use Svenbro's words (1993:164), commemorating Hector and his achievements in the Trojan War.<sup>6</sup> Though Andromache starts off as the grammatical subject of the epigram, she is quickly replaced by her husband as the focus, becoming the channel for Hector's *kleos*. Similarly, an epigram found in Thucydides and attributed by Aristotle to Simonides uses a woman, Archedike, as a catalyst for reflection on her men:

ἄνδρὸς ἀριστεύσαντος ἐν Ἑλλάδι τῶν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ

Ἰππίου Ἀρχεδίκην ἦδε κέκευθε κόνις,

ἧ πατρός τε καὶ ἀνδρὸς ἀδελφῶν τ' οὔσα τυράννων

παίδων τ' οὐκ ἦρθη νοῦν ἐς ἀτασθαλίην.

This earth covers Archedike daughter of Hippias,  
a man who stood out among the Greeks of his day.

Though she had a tyrant father, husband, brothers, and sons,  
she was not moved in her mind to pride.

---

<sup>5</sup> The *Iliad* text used is the Teubner edition of M.L. West (vol. 1 1998, vol. 2 2000), and the *Odyssey* text is that of H. van Thiel (1991). All translations are my own.

<sup>6</sup> The lines are called an epigram by [Plutarch] *On Homer* II ch.215; see also ΣβT *ad Il.*6.460b Erbse, and Elmer 2005. On tracing the first allusions to epigram back to Homer see e.g. Baumbach/Petrovic/Petrovic 2010:7. For detailed discussion of epigrams in Homer (and Homeric language in epigrams), focusing on the two epigrams imagined by Hector, see Petrovic 2016. Clay forthcoming uses Hector's sepulchral epigram in *Iliad* 7 (on which see below) to reflect on epic's awareness of writing.

The difference between Archedike's epigram and that of Andromache, however, is that whereas the former is inscribed on a tomb in Lampsacus, a physical entity which exists independently of the female commemorator, Andromache commemorates her husband by her very existence. She takes the place of a *sema*,<sup>7</sup> and becomes a static symbol, a living monument to the war dead, with the deictic linking woman with tomb, ἦδε γυνή with ἦδε κόνις. However, the mechanism is fundamentally flawed. Unlike a tomb inscription which might exist for thousands of years, Andromache's memorial can last only for as long as she lives. This limitation is twofold: the 'reading' of the woman is limited by her mortality, as she has to be around to be read; just as her own capacity to remember lasts but a lifetime. One's capacity to remember does not extend beyond death – unless, of course, one is Achilles:

εἰ δὲ θανόντων περ καταλήθοντ' εἰν Αἴδαο,  
 αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ καὶ κεῖθι φίλου μεμνήσομ' ἑταίρου.  
 Even though those in Hades forget the dead,  
 I will remember my dear companion even there.

*Iliad* 22.389-90

The longevity of Achilles' memory of Patroclus is highlighted in its departure from the normal model. Usually, memory is a capacity that perishes with death,<sup>8</sup> and indeed when Odysseus travels to the Underworld the shades of the dead must drink blood before they can communicate and recall (*Od.*11.147-9). We can remember our loved ones for as long as we are alive, but no more – likewise, embodied memorials last only for as long as the body survives.

There is a contrast, and more specifically a gendered one, between women as commemorators, limited by their mortality, and Homeric tombs proper, constructed by men to commemorate war dead, which have the capacity to outlast their builders. In *Iliad* 7 Hector's

<sup>7</sup> Scodel 1992:59 "Like a monument, she provokes a response in those who see her"; Graziosi/Haubold 2010 *ad Il.*6.460-1: "Andromache functions as a σῆμα, a living memorial of Hector's past achievements in war". The importance of *semata* is noted by Grethlein 2008:29 who describes them as "spatially sanctified acts of memory".

<sup>8</sup> See *Od.*10.494-5 for Teiresias as uniquely possessed of *noos* after death.

memory would be better served by a burial which someday someone will see, and remember him:

‘ἀνδρὸς μὲν τόδε σῆμα πάλαι κατατεθνηῶτος,  
ὄν ποτ' ἀριστεύοντα κατέκτανε φαίδιμος Ἔκτωρ.  
ὥς ποτέ τις ἐρέει, τὸ δ' ἐμὸν κλέος οὐ ποτ' ὀλεῖται.  
“This is the tomb of a man who died long ago,  
whom, though he was once the best, shining Hector killed.”  
So someone will say, and my fame will never perish.

*Iliad* 7.89-91

But in spite of Hector’s imaginings, these tombs too encase a memory that is temporally limited. Many reach back only one generation,<sup>9</sup> even the tomb of Ilos παλαίος mentioned four times harks back only three generations,<sup>10</sup> and some tombs have been forgotten by men altogether.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the tomb that will commemorate Hector is not his own but that of another man: as in Andromache’s epigram, his memory overshadows another’s, and this hints at the power of orality (the story of the tomb) over materiality (the tomb itself). It turns out that the physical entity does *not* continue to exist independently – at least not in its original incarnation.

### Material Memory

Jonas Grethlein in his 2008 article “Memory and material goods in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*” has explored what he calls “the biography of things”. I would add to his analysis a gendered element.<sup>12</sup> Biographed objects follow a similar temporal hierarchy to memorials, with an initial gendered division (the male having more longevity than the female) and a further temporal limitation even on the male. Male objects operate on a continuum. They evoke a past biography, containing memories of all those who have given, used, or been given this object before. By taking on an ‘entangled’ object, a man inserts himself into the life story of that object – Agamemnon and his sceptre (*Il.*2.100-9), for example, or Odysseus and his bow (*Od.*21.11-41). As Crielaard 2003:56 puts it, “For an individual to own such an object

---

<sup>9</sup> See Grethlein 2008:29 for examples, including the tomb of Aisyetes mentioned at *Il.*2.792-3.

<sup>10</sup> *Il.*10.414-16, 11.166-8, 397-72, 24.249-51. On the symbolic function of this tomb see Griffin 1980:22-3.

<sup>11</sup> *Il.*2.811-14, 23.326-33.

<sup>12</sup> My summary here is necessarily cursory, with the details to be published in full elsewhere.

implies that he or she is incorporated into the item's biography; to give it away means that the memory of the owner is preserved for posterity." Crielaard uses the ambivalent "he or she". However, this model applies overwhelmingly to 'him', rather than 'her'. Female objects do not usually have an explicit commemorative continuum. Rather, Homeric women take a non-biographed object, often one they have created themselves, and imbue it with symbolic and commemorative resonance. Female objects capture a moment and preserve it for posterity, whilst male objects evoke a past moment, usually for their own ends in the present (and, subsequently, into the future).

Yet with all this scholarly interest in the commemorative potential of objects, and male objects in particular, it is worth noting that the grand biographies of Homeric male objects do not, in fact, stand up to scrutiny. Homeric men, as well as certain unusual women such as Helen and Penelope,<sup>13</sup> reflect on the commemorative function of objects when they express the wish that they be remembered through gifts they give, prizes they win, and so on. But this is thrown into relief by the lack of any real example of an object, and the memory it carries, being transmitted down many generations.<sup>14</sup> This may be a symptom of the heroic age: being so close to the gods, to the moment at which the Olympian pantheon was settled and the generating of gods became the generating of demi-gods, there are not that many previous generations to refer to. It may also be a function of an oral society: it has been argued that accurate family memory in an oral society spanned only around 3 generations,<sup>15</sup> and so Agamemnon's sceptre or Odysseus' bow each passing down two mortal generations may have seemed almost like forever.<sup>16</sup> But perhaps Homer is hinting at the limitations of objects. Heroes may insert themselves into a continuum of commemoration – but the mechanism hasn't had much of a test run. The characters' wishes for remembrance through objects are just that: wishes. Nestor ambivalently describes a *sema* in *Iliad* 23 as "either the

---

<sup>13</sup> See especially Helen at *Od.*15.125-9.

<sup>14</sup> At *Od.*14.325-6 the treasures in Pheidon's palace are estimated to be worth enough to feed ten generations – this is an example of a long-term projection of objects, but there is no explicit mention of their biography or memorialising function. Rather, it seems to be a hyperbolic description of wealth.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas 1989:124.

<sup>16</sup> *Il.*2.100-9 Thyestes and Atreus are brothers, so although there are a lot of names in this passage there are not quite so many different generations. Agamemnon's sceptre does seem to be something a little bit special, as it is described as "imperishable forever" (ἄφθιτον αἰεὶ *Il.*2.46, 186) and is the only mortal object to be described in this way (the formula is used again at *Il.*13.22 of Poseidon's house, and at 14.238 of the throne Hera promises to Sleep).

tomb of a mortal who died long ago, or set as a turning post by men of a previous generation” (ἢ τεο σῆμα βροτοῖο πάλαι κατατεθνηῶτος| ἢ τό γε νύσσα τέτυκτο ἐπὶ προτέρων ἀνθρώπων·). This undermines the excuse of short human history. Homer points out that there has *already* been time to forget, and so objects, like mortals, are flagged up as flawed commemorators. Vansina 1985:23-4 identified two moments of memory which people in an oral tradition think they know: the recent past (for example family history of a few generations), and the remote past (such as origin stories and legendary connections with Homeric heroes).<sup>17</sup> He posited a ‘floating gap’ in between, which we see but the oral society does not. His argument has been followed by for example Jan Assmann and Rosalind Thomas.<sup>18</sup> However, Homer shows an awareness of this floating gap. By drawing attention to the memory ‘losses’, by describing material markers that no longer make their mark, Homer reveals that there is a remote past forgotten to his heroes.<sup>19</sup>

In *Odyssey* 11, Elpenor asks his companions to set up an oar in his memory:

σῆμά τέ μοι χεῦναι πολιῆς ἐπὶ θινὶ θαλάσσης,  
ἀνδρὸς δυστήνοιο, καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι.  
ταῦτά τέ μοι τελέσαι πῆξαι τ’ ἐπὶ τύμβῳ ἐρετμόν,  
τῷ καὶ ζωὸς ἔρρεσσον ἔων μετ’ ἐμοῖς ἐτάροισιν.  
Hear a mound on me by the shore of the grey sea,  
of a wretched man, for those in the future to know.  
Do these things for me and stick on the tomb the oar  
with which I rowed with my comrades while I was alive.

*Odyssey* 11.75-8

As Purves 2010:83 has noted, though Elpenor wants the grave mound and oar to preserve his memory, it is more likely to function as an anonymous symbol. Similarly, Odysseus’ prophesied planting of the *sema* of the oar described in *Odyssey* 11 and 23 marks a crossing of a boundary for Odysseus, but it too will remain anonymous. Purves 2010:83n57 suggests:

<sup>17</sup> Assmann 2011:36 calls the former ‘communicative’ memory, the latter ‘cultural’ memory.

<sup>18</sup> See e.g. Thomas 2001, discussing whether Herodotus is aware of and makes attempts to bridge the floating gap.

<sup>19</sup> Attempts have been made to apply Vansina’s ideas to the *Iliad*, for example by Assmann 1992, critiqued by Kullmann 1999. However, these attempts have focused on *historical* memory, equating the floating gap with the dark ages between the destruction of the Mycenaean palaces and the time of Homer. I would argue that the model can be more fruitfully applied to heroic memory within the narrative of the *Iliad* itself.

“The fact that Elpenor’s oar will be anonymous is perhaps – following his less than heroic death – also to be read as a parody of epic convention.” But perhaps this is less parody, and more paranoia. If one’s story is not sufficiently heroic one might not make it into epic: and objects alone cannot suffice to preserve memory.

Female objects are more flawed than most. Weaving is throughout the Homeric poems linked with limitation – with interruption, restriction, the fragility of the female domestic idiom. In *Iliad* 3, Iris calls Helen away while she is weaving, interrupting the act and stalling the finished product. At *Iliad* 22.448 Andromache drops her shuttle, marking the end of her weaving and her domestic stability upon her husband’s death – and for many years Penelope must not finish her weaving, because its completion would mark the end of her marriage. Furthermore, the transience of the woven product is highlighted. The adjectives used to describe textiles point to their fragility: objects woven by women are λεπτός, fine,<sup>20</sup> just like dust (*Il.*23.506 ἐν λεπτῇ κονίῃ). The adjective in its other uses refers to weakness: at *Il.*10.226 two heads are better than one, the one μῆτις alone being λεπτή, just like the mind of the young at *Il.*23.590. At *Il.*20.275-6 Achilles’ spear breaks through the shield of Aineias where the bronze is λεπτότατος and the ox-hide is λεπτοτάτη. Woven objects are admired for their beauty and grace, being χαρίεις (*Il.*5.905, 6.90, 271, 22.511, *Od.*5.231, 10.223, 544), and their fragrance, being θυώδης (*Od.*5.264, 21.52) – not for their strength or durability. Being καθαρός, clean (καθαρά χοῖ εἴμαθ' ἐλοῦσα at *Od.*4.750, 759, 6.61, 17.48, 58) and νεόπλυτος, newly-washed (*Od.*6.64), women’s woven objects are like a clean slate on which memories can be inscribed, but they are presented as, if we might use such adjectives of inanimate objects, naive and innocent. The only garments described as ἄμβροτος, literally ‘immortal’, are the ἄμβροτα εἴματα given to Sarpedon by the god Apollo (*Il.*16.670, 680), to Odysseus by the nymph Calypso (*Od.*7.260, 265), and to Achilles by the sea nymphs (*Od.*24.59); the veil given to Odysseus by the goddess Ino (*Od.*5.347); and the web woven by the goddess Circe (*Od.*10.222). Only clothing bestowed by divinities can itself be divine.

### Divine Durability

---

<sup>20</sup> *Il.*9.661, 18.595, 22.511, *Od.*2.95, 5.231, 7.97, 10.233, 544, 17.97, 19.140, 24.130.



But to complicate things further, not even the immortals feel secure in the durability of their objects. This anxiety is evident in the dispute over the Achaian *teichopoiia*. In *Iliad* 7, Nestor suggests that the Achaians build a grave mound with high towers, gates, and a ditch. A hundred lines later, the Achaians follow his suggestion – without the input of the gods. The construction causes consternation on Olympus. To Zeus’ surprise, Poseidon is worried:

τοῦ δ' ἤτοι κλέος ἔσται, ὅσον τ' ἐπικίδναται ἠώς,  
τοῦ δ' ἐπιλήσονται, τὸ ἐγὼ καὶ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων  
ἦρωι Λαομέδοντι πολίσσαμεν ἀθλήσαντε.  
Now the fame of this wall will last as long as the dawn is spread,  
but they will forget that wall which I and Phoebus Apollo  
built with our hard work for the city of the hero Laomedon.

*Iliad* 7.451-3

Zeus advises Poseidon to break down the wall, and in a prolepsis in *Iliad* 12 we are told that, after the war, he and Apollo do so. One question that has plagued critics is: why should Poseidon feel so threatened by the Achaian wall, and so lacking in confidence in his own Trojan one? This involves a bit of creative interpretation, and many different explanations have been offered. Ford 1992:150 gives a meta-poetic reading, mapping the wall onto a written *Iliad* and suggesting that the orally transmitted poem is critically reflecting on writing as a new technique. In this interpretation, epic is projecting anxiety about its own fragility onto objects. Grethlein 2008:35 argues “that there is a juxtaposition here of epic poetry and the ‘archaeology of the past’ as two different media of memory”. In this interpretation, material memory and epic memory highlight each other in their discrepancy. Porter 2011 uses the episode as an indicator of fiction and an authorial awareness of fictionality, suggesting that Homer gets rid of the wall poetically in order to explain why there are no traces of it physically. This latter explanation has persisted since the scholia, which argue that Homer destroyed the wall so as not to be vulnerable to inquiry into an object that never actually existed. As Porter 2011:33 writes, the wall “is a metapoetic object that exhibits the full force of Homer’s creative powers, which is to say, of a poet who can make and unmake objects at will”.

One thing these interpretations have in common is that they pinpoint the Achaian wall as a locus of reflection on objects and commemoration. The episode has something irresistibly self-aware about it, in its convoluted equations: the wall is built by mortals but

destroyed by immortals; its destruction coincides with the end of the Trojan War; it is built in one day but its destruction takes nine; its *kleos* and that of Poseidon's wall are mutually exclusive. As Grethlein 2008:33 notes: "Poseidon's words reveal that walls were seen as bearers of *kleos*. Moreover, they show that walls compete with each other for recognition. Memory, it seems, is reserved only for the most impressive constructions. The new wall threatens to outshine the old wall which evokes the services of Poseidon and Apollo for Laomedon and thus preserves the memory of events that happened two generations ago." Again, the temporal limits of material memory are tested, and again we find that the memory lasts for only a few generations before coming under threat. The memorial may have been one set up by the gods, but the medium is still one of questionable durability.<sup>21</sup>

What is striking is the unmaking of a made object within the narrative. Haubold 2013:67-8 notes that the destruction of the wall has much in common with Mesopotamian narratives of the flood, and indeed in response to Poseidon's anxiety Zeus offers help in this very form (*Il.*7.454-63): "As was the case in Mesopotamia, water is the most extreme option when it comes to obliterating what went before." It marks "total destruction, a clean break", and perhaps this is why it takes so long to bring the wall down. Importantly, the wall is not just destroyed but hidden, *Il.*12.31 κάλυψε: as in Hesiod's Myth of the Races in the *Works and Days*, this verb divides not just stages in a narrative but epochs (*Op.*121 the Golden Race, 140 the Silver Race, 156 the Bronze Race). This is emphasised by the description of the heroes as ἡμιθέων γένος ἀνδρῶν (*Il.*12.23): as Scodel 1982:34 notes, this is the only instance in either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* in which they are called ἡμίθεοι – but the word does occur in Hesiod's description of the Race of Heroes at *Works and Days* 160, and the use of γένος serves to encapsulate the heroic era. The very word ἡμίθεοι is divisive, as it marks out the heroes from the gods (they are only *part* god) and from ordinary mortals (they have something of the gods). Porter 2011:18 notes that "The difference between the wall and these other objects of Homer's fiction [Helen's tapestry etc.] is that the wall is made and then brutally unmade before our eyes. That is, unlike these other objects which signify poetic creation, the Achaean wall is both made and then obliterated...Through it, Homer shows himself to be a maker, not only of things, but *of their destruction*." I would point out, however, that this is not the only object in Homer that is unmade. We might think of Penelope

---

<sup>21</sup> As Scully 1990:125 notes of the Trojan fortifications: "So the city is at the end what everyone knew at the beginning, only an 'illusion of immortality' and not the real thing."

unweaving in order to keep the memory of her husband alive. Or Andromache's vow to burn her husband's clothing after his death:

ἀτάρ τοι εἴματ' ἐνὶ μεγάροισι κέονται  
λεπτὰ τε καὶ χαρίεντα, τετυγμένα χερσὶ γυναικῶν.  
ἀλλ' ἦτοι τά γε πάντα καταφλέξω πυρὶ κηλέω,  
οὐδὲν σοί γ' ὄφελος, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἐγκείσεαι αὐτοῖς,  
ἀλλὰ πρὸς Τρώων καὶ Τρωϊάδων κλέος εἶναι.

In your halls lie clothes,  
fine and graceful, made by the hands of women.  
But all these I will burn up in a blazing fire,  
no help to you, since you will never be wrapped in them,  
but in your honour, before the Trojan men and women.

*Iliad 22.510-14*

Andromache reflects on the transience of objects, recognising that the garments will not last forever and that encasing Hector's memory in them will not bring him that all-important κλέος ἄφθιτον. Some of the female characters, therefore, approach Homer's mastery of creation *and* destruction, suggesting that the onus of reflection is not on the powers of the poet, but on (as Grethlein puts it) media of memory. The wall is to be built on a funeral pyre (*Il.*7.336-8): object and person are intertwined, and as commemorators will be more or less co-extensive. The equation Garcia 2013:95 makes between the two walls, Achaian and Trojan, and the two heroes, Achilles and Hector, reinforces this point. However, as Scodel 1982:33-44 notes, "the narrative itself extends beyond the limits of the poem's action in a manner usually confined to prophecies or passages where a character imagines the future". Object and person are trumped by poetry, with epic commemoration reaching even beyond its own narrative confines.

### ἤματα πάντα

In his book *Homeric Durability*, Lorenzo Garcia conducts studies of particular temporal words or phrases to support his argument. One phrase he doesn't explore, however, is ἤματα πάντα – so I have done the job, and the results can be used to highlight the discrepancy between material and epic memory.

An accusative of time how long, ἡματα πάντα is usually translated as ‘for all one’s days’, i.e. for a lifetime, or ‘for all days’, i.e. forever. I would argue that in its basic meaning it refers to a lifetime: Nausicaa with a ‘til death us do part’ sentiment wants a husband for all her days (*Od.*6.281), Odysseus will give thanks to Nausicaa for all his days (*Od.*8.468), the suitors invade the palace and vie for Penelope all their days (*Od.*2.55, 205, 17.534, 21.156). When Achilles’ father hopes ἡματα πάντα for his son to return (*Il.*24.491), the pathos lies in an old man’s proximity to the *end* of his lifetime. The formula is often used in connection with life and death (at *Il.*19.226 too many men to mourn die ἡματα πάντα), and in particular with mortality and immortality. Homer plays with a juxtaposition of the two in connection with this phrase, for example in Odysseus’ stay with Calypso:

εἶ γε μὲν εἰδείης σῆσι φρεσίν, ὅσσα τοι αἴσα  
κῆδε’ ἀναπλήσαι, πρὶν πατρίδα γαῖαν ἰκέσθαι,  
ἐνθάδε κ’ αὖθι μένων σὺν ἐμοὶ τόδε δῶμα φυλάσσοις  
ἀθάνατός τ’ εἴης, ἰμειρόμενός περ ἰδέσθαι  
σὴν ἄλοχον, τῆς τ’ αἰὲν ἐέλδεται ἡματα πάντα.  
οὐ μὲν θῆν κείνης γε χερσίων εὖχομαι εἶναι,  
οὐ δέμας οὐδὲ φυήν, ἐπεὶ οὐ πῶς οὐδὲ ἔοικε  
θνητὰς ἀθανάτησι δέμας καὶ εἶδος ἐρίζειν.  
τὴν δ’ ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς·  
‘πότνα θεά, μή μοι τόδε χῶεο. οἶδα καὶ αὐτὸς  
πάντα μάλ’, οὐνεκα σεῖο περιφρῶν Πηνελόπεια  
εἶδος ἀκιδνοτέρη μέγεθός τ’ εἰσάντα ἰδέσθαι·  
ἦ μὲν γὰρ βροτός ἐστι, σὺ δ’ ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀγήρως.  
ἀλλὰ καὶ ὧς ἐθέλω καὶ ἐέλδομαι ἡματα πάντα  
οἴκαδέ τ’ ἐλθέμεναι καὶ νόστιμον ἦμαρ ἰδέσθαι.  
‘‘If only you knew in your thoughts how many cares  
fill up your fate before you reach your fatherland,  
staying right here with me you would guard this house  
and be immortal, although you desire to see  
your wife, whom you long for always for all your days.  
Surely, I profess that I am no worse than she,  
neither in form nor stature, since it is in no way fitting  
for mortals to compete with immortals in form and appearance.’’  
Much-cunning Odysseus said to her in reply:

“Lady goddess, do not be angry at me for this. I know this all very well myself, because prudent Penelope is weaker than you in appearance and size to see face to face, for she is mortal, but you are immortal and unageing. But even so, I wish and desire for all my days to go home and see my day of homecoming.”

*Odyssey* 5.206-20

When Odysseus is with Calypso, he longs ἦματα πάντα to go home and see Penelope who is specifically said to be mortal whereas Calypso is immortal (218-20).<sup>22</sup> Calypso comments on Odysseus pining ἦματα πάντα, arguing that mortals should not vie with immortals (209-13). She has promised to make Odysseus immortal and ageless “for all days” (*Od.*5.136, 7.257, 23.336 ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀγήραον ἦματα πάντα). Hector too wishes to be immortal and ageless ἦματα πάντα (*Il.*8.539),<sup>23</sup> and the golden dogs made by Hephaistos that guard Alcinous’ palace at *Od.*7.94 are described in the same way. In this formula, ἀγήραος ἦματα πάντα acts as a gloss on ἀθάνατος, and ἀθάνατος in turn exerts a contextualising force on ἦματα πάντα, extending it beyond a mortal lifetime. The formula ‘ageless for all days’ as a gloss on ἀθάνατος is played with in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*:

ὦς δ' αὖ Τιθωνὸν χρυσόθρονος ἦρπασεν Ἥως  
 ὑμετέρης γενεῆς ἐπιείκελον ἀθανάτοισι.  
 βῆ δ' ἴμεν αἰτήσουσα κελαινεφέα Κρονίωνα  
 ἀθάνατόν τ' εἶναι καὶ ζῶειν ἦματα πάντα:  
 τῇ δὲ Ζεὺς ἐπένευσε καὶ ἐκρήηνεν ἐέλδωρ.  
 νηπίη, οὐδ' ἐνόησε μετὰ φρεσὶ πότνια Ἥως  
 ἦβην αἰτήσαι, ξῦσαί τ' ἄπο γῆρας ὀλοίων.  
 So, too, did golden-throned Eos abduct Tithonos,  
 of your race, who resembled the immortals.  
 She went to ask the black-clouded son of Kronos  
 that he should be immortal and live for all days.  
 Zeus nodded assent to her and fulfilled her wish.

<sup>22</sup> Linked by their *homophrosyne*, Penelope too longs to see Odysseus ἦματα πάντα (*Od.*23.6).

<sup>23</sup> Similarly at *Il.*13.826 he wishes to be a son of Zeus and Hera and honoured like Apollo and Artemis – the language used is different, but the wish for divinity and immortality the same.

But the fool, revered Eos did not think in her mind  
of asking for youth for him, and exemption from baneful old age.

*Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite 5.218-24*

Eos foolishly forgets to add the ἀγήραον to her request for Tithonos ζώειν ἡματα πάντα, and the formula no longer functions properly. When the gods do something ἡματα πάντα (such as taking pleasure in Olympus at *Od.*6.46, or being grateful at *Il.*14.235, or loving at *Il.*14.269, 276), the meaning of the phrase necessarily extends to ‘forever’. In Hades, the shade of Achilles seems almost to taunt that of Agamemnon with the phrase, when he says:

Ἀτρεΐδη, περὶ μὲν σε φάμεν Διὶ τερπικεραύνῳ  
ἀνδρῶν ἠρώων φίλον ἔμμεναι ἡματα πάντα,  
οὔνεκα πολλοῖσιν τε καὶ ἰφθίμοισιν ἄνασσες  
δήμῳ ἐνὶ Τρώων, ὅθι πάσχομεν ἄλγε' Ἀχαιοί.  
ἦ τ' ἄρα καὶ σοὶ πρῶτ' ἀπαστήσεσθαι ἔμελλε  
μοῖρ' ὀλοή, τὴν οὔ τις ἀλεύεται, ὅς κε γένηται.  
Son of Atreus, we supposed that you were dear to Zeus who  
delights in thunder beyond hero men for all your days,  
because you were ruling many and mighty men  
among the people of the Trojans when we Achaians were suffering griefs.  
Yet terrible fate was about to stand beside you too, too early;  
fate which no one born can avoid.

*Odyssey 24.24-9*

Achilles points out that in spite of such a privileged position, fate overcomes Agamemnon too. Divine support lasted only for a lifetime: and a short one, at that (πρῶτ').

To reduce or extend the reach of the phrase, a temporal adverb or other specification can be added – and the force is pointed. For example, in *Odyssey* 10 Odysseus and companions are at the home of Circe. She invites them to stay, and there is a moment of tension: will Odysseus continue on his homeward journey, or will he be ‘distracted’ by this nymph just as he was by Calypso for a whole seven years?

ἔνθα μὲν ἡματα πάντα τελεσφόρον εἰς ἐνιαυτὸν  
ἦμεθα δαινύμενοι κρέα τ' ἄσπετα καὶ μέθυ ἠδύ·  
There every day until the year came to an end

we sat feasting on indescribable meats and sweet wine.

*Odyssey 10.467-8*

Homer tells us that they stayed there feasting ἡματα πάντα – for all their days? No, but rather every day for a year. They don't exactly beat a hasty retreat, but nor do they stay indefinitely. ἡματα πάντα has been limited. At the other end of the scale, we might consider this passage:

ῥεῖα δ' ἀρίγνωτος γόνος ἀνέρος, ᾧ τε Κρονίων  
ᾔλβον ἐπικλώση γαμέοντί τε γεινομένω τε,  
ὡς νῦν Νέστορι δῶκε διαμπερὲς ἡματα πάντα  
αὐτὸν μὲν λιπαρῶς γηρασκέμεν ἐν μεγάροισιν,  
υἰέας αὖ πιπυτούς τε καὶ ἔγχεσιν εἶναι ἀρίστους.

Easily recognised is the race of the man to which the son of Kronos  
allots fortune, both at his wedding and his birth,  
as now he has granted to Nestor always for all his days  
that he himself grow old comfortably in his halls,  
and that his sons be prudent and the best with spears.

*Odyssey 4.207-11*

Again ἡματα πάντα is associated with life and mortality. But διαμπερὲς emphasises its unusual longevity here. Firstly, Nestor's old age is proverbial: he is the ultimate Homeric elder, and seems to have lived many lifetimes. Secondly, the mention of γόνος and υἰέας extends the passage over multiple generations. Not only line 210 but also line 211 follows from δῶκε διαμπερὲς ἡματα πάντα: fortune is allotted for the sons' lifetimes too.

A comparison between two particular uses of this temporal formula can bring us back to the central argument of this chapter, highlighting the hierarchy between memory through objects and memory through song. On the one hand, Menelaus gives a gift to Telemachus with these words:

δώσω καλὸν ἄλεισον, ἵνα σπένδησθα θεοῖσιν  
ἀθανάτοισι ἐμέθεν μεμνημένος ἡματα πάντα.

I shall give you a beautiful cup, so that you might pour libations to the  
immortal gods, remembering me all your days.

The cup will carry with it the memory of Menelaus and his friendship: a memory which will be enacted every time Telemachus pours a libation. However, within the passage it is limited to Telemachus and his use of the object. We might imagine that the object, as an important one linked with guest-friendship, might be passed along a continuum – but this is not stated. Rather the contrast set up in line 592 between ἀθανάτοις and ἤματα πάντα emphasises the immortal/mortal dichotomy, and memories encased in objects fall on the side of the latter. Nestor's son reflects on this when he tells Telemachus to wait for Menelaus' gifts, because:

τοῦ γὰρ τε ξεῖνος μιμνήσκειται ἤματα πάντα  
ἀνδρὸς ξεινοδόκου, ὅς κεν φιλότητα παρὰσχη.  
A guest remembers all his days that man  
who gave him hospitality and furnished him with friendship.

*Odyssey* 15.54-5

Gifts channel memory of hospitality: but only for the duration of the guest's lifetime.

On the other hand, when Sarpedon is about to die at the hands of Patroclus, he urges Glaukos to have the troops recover his body, otherwise:

σοὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ καὶ ἔπειτα κατηφείη καὶ ὄνειδος  
ἔσσομαι ἤματα πάντα διαμπερές...  
I then will be a humiliation and reproach for you  
for all days forever...

*Iliad* 16.498-9

---

<sup>24</sup> Similarly of Alcinous' gift to Odysseus:

καὶ οἱ ἐγὼ τόδ' ἄλεισον ἐμὸν περικαλλὲς ὀπάσσω,  
χρύσειον, ὄφρ' ἐμέθεν μεμνημένος ἤματα πάντα  
σπένδη ἐνὶ μεγάρῳ Δί τ' ἄλλοισίν τε θεοῖσιν.  
And I shall give him a beautiful cup of mine,  
made of gold, so that remembering me all his days  
he might pour libations in his hall to Zeus and the other gods.

*Odyssey* 8.430-2



As in the Nestor passage, διαμπερές is used to extend the temporal scope. ἤματα πάντα extends beyond Sarpedon's lifetime, as he will only last a few more lines. It also extends beyond Glaukos' lifetime, as it will be something said about him by others. The neglect would be remembered in rumour, in words rather than objects, and these are not transient: they last not only ἤματα πάντα but διαμπερές.

So the Homeric formula for 'a long time' is, at a basic level, related to a human lifespan. This sheds some light on my earlier point about the shallow lineage of biographical objects: though three generations may not sound that impressive, this is three lots of a time unit that is meant to be expansive. Yet the linking of time with mortality ultimately emphasises the ephemerality of physical casings for memory, be they persons or things. Mortals are flawed commemorators, as they can keep memory alive only for one lifetime. According to Homer, objects cannot do much more. Tombs will eventually be forgotten; commemorative objects may not reach across more than a few generations; and fragile female objects certainly won't stand the test of time. Objects, in particular those made by women, are temporally limited. Findlen 2013:4 writes: "The durability of seemingly fragile objects, with many afterlives that have taken them halfway round the world, never ceases to amaze". This is indeed the appeal of archaeology, of museums, of material culture in general: the physical artefacts that reach us from far off times and places. Yet such afterlives are part of occasional success stories, rather than the norm of material transmission – for every pot or papyrus we recover, how many others have been lost to us? Homer, for one, is not convinced by objects' chances. What takes us from ἤματα πάντα to διαμπερές is another medium altogether: poetry. What we really need to commemorate war and war dead is the medium that professes to preserve the κλέα ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε: the medium of epic.

### Conclusion

At the core of Garcia's book *Homeric Durability* is the belief that Homeric poetry is transient. He argues that epic works in the realm of the 'not yet', with κλέος ἄφθιτον, for example, not meaning "imperishable glory" but merely "glory that has not yet perished". However, to prove this point about poetry he uses examples of mortals and materials, creating a circular argument. I hope this chapter has served to separate out these three media of memory, to show a hierarchy between them and where gender fits in. They *are* linked, but in ways that also need to be separated out. Most importantly, Homeric epic reflects on a distinction between oral memory linked to material triggers such as tombs, gifts – or widows;

and the oral memory of the bard. The hierarchies I have traced in this chapter do not stop with orality, then, but persist even in terms of modes of storytelling.

I close with my own strangely circular argument: an object that seems to throw into relief the limitations of the epic tradition. At the end of his journey, Odysseus is to set up an oar in the place where people do not recognise it. As Purves 2010:72 has argued, “The disturbing implication of Tiresias’s prophecy...is that – although Odysseus’s *kleos* may well ‘reach to the heavens’ (9.20) – there are places beyond epic’s range which his fame does not touch.” But perhaps we might read this as a further reflection on material commemoration. This object is no longer resonant – just like the tomb used for a turning post, or the burial that Hector appropriates, it loses its memory and is translated into something else entirely. But the bard doesn’t need such triggers, and so what prevails in the hierarchy of commemoration is not just oral memory, but epic poetry.

### Bibliography

ASSMANN 2011: J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, Cambridge 2011. [originally J. Assmann, *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und Politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, Munich 1992].

BAUMBACH/PETROVIC/PETROVIC 2010: M. Baumbach, A. Petrovic, I. Petrovic, I. (eds.) *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram*, Cambridge 2010.

BENNETT 2010: J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham, NC 2010.

BROWN 2004: B. Brown (ed.) *Things*, Chicago / London 2004.

CLAY forthcoming: J.S. Clay, “Homer’s epigraph: *Iliad* 7.87-91”, *Philologus* 159.

COOLE/FROST 2010: D. Coole, S. Frost (eds) *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Durham, NC 2010.

CRIELAARD 2003: J.P. Crielaard, “The cultural biography of material goods in Homer’s epics”, *Gaia* 7 (2003) 49-62.

ELMER 2005: D.F. Elmer, “Helen *Epigrammatopoiios*”, *CA* 24.1 (2005) 1-39.

FINDLEN 2013: P. Findlen, “Early Modern Things: Objects in motion, 1500-1800”, in P. Findlen (ed.) *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500-1800*, Oxon / New York 2013, 3-27.

- FORD 1992: A. Ford, *Homer: The Poetry of the Past*, Ithaca 1992.
- GARCIA 2013: L.F. Jr. Garcia, *Homeric Durability: Telling Time in the Iliad*, Cambridge Mass. 2013.
- GRAZIOSI/HAUBOLD 2010: B. Graziosi, J.H. Haubold, *Iliad 6: A Commentary*, Cambridge 2010.
- GRETHLEIN 2008: J. Grethlein, "Memory and material goods in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*", *JHS* 128 (2008) 27-51.
- GRIFFIN 1980: J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death*, Oxford 1980.
- HAUBOLD 2013: J.H. Haubold, *Greece and Mesopotamia: Dialogues in Literature*, Cambridge 2013.
- HODDER 2012: I. Hodder, *Entangled: an Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things*, Oxford 2012.
- KULLMANN 1999: W. Kullmann, "Homer and historical memory" in E.A. Mackay (ed.) *Signs of Orality: the Oral Tradition and its Influence in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Leiden 1999.
- LATOURE 2005: B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: an Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, Oxford 2005.
- MALAFOURIS 2013: L. Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement*, Cambridge, Mass. 2013.
- PETROVIC 2016: A. Petrovic, "Archaic funerary epigram and Hector's imagined *epitymbia*" in A. Efstathiou and I. Karamanou (eds.) *Homeric Receptions Across Generic and Cultural Contexts*, Berlin 2016, 45-58.
- PORTER 2011: J.I. Porter, "Making and unmaking: the Achaean wall and the limits of fictionality in Homeric criticism", *TAPhA* 141.1 (2011) 1-36.
- PURVES 2010: A. Purves, *Space and Time in Ancient Greek Narrative*, Cambridge/New York 2010.
- SCODEL 1992: R. Scodel, "Inscriptions, absence and memory: epic and early epitaph", *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 3.10 (1992) 57-76.
- SCODEL 1982: R. Scodel, "The Achaean Wall and the myth of destruction", *HSCP* 86 (1982) 33-50.
- SCULLY 1990: S. Scully, *Homer and the Sacred City*, Ithaca / London 1990.
- SVENBRO 1993: J. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia*, Ithaca 1993.
- THOMAS 2001: R. Thomas, "Herodotus' *Histories* and the floating gap" in N. Luraghi (ed.) *The Historian's Craft in the Age of Herodotus*, Oxford 2001, 198-210.

THOMAS 1989: R. Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens*, Cambridge 1989.

VANSINA 1985: J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, Madison 1985.

WHITLEY 2013: J. Whitley, "Homer's entangled objects: narrative, agency and personhood in and out of Iron Age texts", *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 23.3 (2013) 395-416.