

Immortal Textiles and Immortals' Textiles: Death, Salvation, and Fabric in *Odyssey* 5

1. Calypso gives Odysseus provisions, “fragrant” clothes

τῷ δ' ἄρα πέμπτω πέμπ' ἀπὸ νήσου δῖα Καλυψώ,
εἶματά τ' ἀμφιέσσασα θυώδεα καὶ λούσσασα. (Od. 5.263-4)

And on the fifth day, shining/divine Calypso sent [Odysseus] away from the island, having washed him and thrown fragrant clothes around him.

2. Dunked in the sea, Odysseus is weighed down by the gifted clothes

τὸν δ' ἄρ' ὑπόβρυχα θῆκε πολὺν χρόνον, οὐδ' ἔδυνάσθη
αἶψα μάλ' ἀνσχεθέειν μεγάλου ὑπὸ κύματος ὀρμῆς:
εἶματα γάρ ῥ' ἐβάρυνε, τὰ οἱ πόρε δῖα Καλυψώ. (Od. 5.319-321)

But for a long time [the waves] held [Odysseus] underwater, and he wasn't able to lift himself up very quickly under the assault of a great wave, for the clothes weighed him down, the clothes that shining/divine Calypso gave to him.

3. Ino Leucothea tells him to take off the clothes and don her veil

εἶματα ταῦτ' ἀποδὺς σχεδίην ἀνέμοισι φέρεσθαι
κάλλιπ'...
τῇ δέ, τόδε κρήδεμνον ὑπὸ στέρνοιο τανύσσασι
ἄμβροτον: οὐδέ τί τοι παθέειν δέος οὐδ' ἀπολέσθαι. (Od. 5.343-4; 346-7)

“Having taken off these clothes, leave your raft to be born by the winds... But here, stretch this veil around your chest—it's immortal. And there will be no fear for you to suffer, nor will you die.”

4. Book 7: Odysseus recounts the events of Book 5 (here, the scenes of entry 1, above)

πέμπτε δ' ἐπὶ σχεδῆς πολυδέσμου, πολλὰ δ' ἔδωκε,
σίτον καὶ μέθυ ἠδύ, καὶ ἄμβροτα εἶματα ἔσσαν,
οὔρον δὲ προέηκεν ἀπήμονά τε λιάρὸν τε. (Od. 7.264-266)

“And she sent on the strongly-fastened raft many things that she gave me: food and sweet wine, and she clothed [me] in immortal clothes, and sent forth a fair wind, benign and warm.”

Immortal Clothes

5. Zeus, following the death of Sarpedon:

‘...πολλὸν ἀπὸ πρὸ φέρων λοῦσον ποταμοῖο ῥοῆσι
χρῖσόν τ’ ἀμβροσίη, περι δ’ ἀμβροτα εἶματα ἔσσον:
...ἔνθά ἐ ταρχύσουσι κασίγνητοί τε ἔται τε
τύμβω τε στήλη τε: τὸ γὰρ γέρας ἐστὶ θανόντων.’ (Il. 16.669-70; 674-5)

“... bathe [Sarpedon] in the streams of the river and anoint him with ambrosia, and put immortal clothes around him ...there, his kinsmen and clansmen will bury him with a tomb and a gravestone, for this is what is due to the dead.”

6. Description of the aftermath of Achilles’ death:

ἀμφὶ δὲ σ’ ἔστησαν κοῦραι ἀλίοιο γέροντος
οἴκτρ’ ὀλοφυρόμεναι, περι δ’ ἀμβροτα εἶματα ἔσσαν.
... ὀκτωκαιδεκάτῃ δ’ ἔδομεν πυρί...
καίεο δ’ ἔν τ’ ἐσθῆτι θεῶν καὶ ἀλείφατι πολλῶ
καὶ μέλιτι γλυκερῶ:

(Od. 24.58-9; 65)

“And around you, [Achilles], stood the daughters of the old man of the sea, crying miserably, and they put immortal clothes around [you] ...and on the eighteenth day [of mourning] we gave [you] to the fire...”

7. Athena and Hermes’ sandals:

ὧς εἶποῦσ’ ὑπὸ ποσσὶν ἐδήσατο καλὰ πέδιλα,
ἀμβρόσια χρύσεια, τὰ μιν φέρον ἡμὲν ἐφ’ ὑγρὴν
ἡδ’ ἐπ’ ἀπείρονα γαῖαν ἅμα πνοιῆς ἀνέμοιο. (Od. 1.96-98; cf. Il. 24.341-42, Od. 5.44-45)

Having spoken thus, [Athena] strapped beautiful sandals under her feet, immortal and golden, which carried her both over wet places and over the boundless land with the breeze of the wind.

Table: “Immortal” textiles and clothing items in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*

Text Location	“immortal” adj.	textile/clothing item	associated divinity/character(s)
Il. 2.446-7	ἀθανάτην	αἰγίδ’ “aegis”	Athena (bearer)
Il. 5.338	ἀμβρόσιος	πέπλος, “cloak”	Aphrodite (bearer)
Il. 14.178	ἀμβρόσιον	ἔανός, “robe”	Hera (bearer), Athena (creator)
Il. 16.670 and 680	ἄμβροτα	εἴματα, “clothes”	Sarpedon (bearer); Apollo (gifter)
Il. 17.194 and 202	ἄμβροτα	τεύχεα, “armor”	Hector (current bearer; Achilles and Patroclus, former bearers)
Il. 21.507	ἀμβρόσιος	ἔανός, “robe”	Leto (bearer)
Il. 24.341 [formula, cf. Od. 1 & 5]	ἀμβρόσια	πέδιλα, “sandals”	Hermes (bearer)
Od. 1.97 [formula, cf. Il. 24 & Od. 5]	ἀμβρόσια	πέδιλα, “sandals”	Athena (bearer)
Od. 5.44-45 [formula, cf. Il. 24 and Od. 1]	ἀμβρόσια	πέδιλα, “sandals”	Hermes (bearer)
Od. 5.346-347	ἄμβροτον	κρήδεμνον, “veil”	Ino Leucothea (bearer, gifter); Odysseus (bearer)
Od. 7.259 and 264	ἄμβροτα	εἴματα, “clothes”	Calypso (gifter); Odysseus (bearer)
Od. 10.221	ἄμβροτον	ἰστόν, “loom”	Circe (creator)
Od. 24.58	ἄμβροτα	εἴματα, “clothes”	Achilles (bearer); daughters of the old man of the sea (gifters)

Key:

Focus Passages

ἄμβροτα εἴματα/κρήδεμνον, ‘immortal clothes/veil’

ἀμβρόσια πέδιλα, ‘immortal sandals’

other ‘immortal’ items

Select Bibliography

- Alden, Maureen J. "The Role of Calypso in the Odyssey." *Antike und Abendland : Beiträge zum Verständnis Der Griechen und Römer und Ihres Nachlebens* 31, no. 2. 1985: 97-107.
- Holtsmark, Erling B. "Spiritual Rebirth of the Hero: 'Odyssey' 5." *The Classical Journal* 61, No. 5: 206-210. 1966.
- Güntert, Hermann. *Kalypso, Bedeutungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen Auf Dem Gebiet Der Indogermanischen Sprachen*. Halle A.S.: M. Niemeyer, 1919.
- Jenkins, I. D. "The Ambiguity of Greek Textiles." *Arethusa* 18: 109-132. 1985.
- Kardulias, Dianna Rhyan. "Odysseus in Ino's Veil: Feminine Headdress and the Hero in 'Odyssey 5.'" *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 131: 23-51. 2001.
- Levaniouk, Olga. "Odyssean Usages of Local Traditions." PhD Diss. Harvard University. 2000.
- . "The Waters of the Underworld and Ino in the Odyssey." *Proceedings of the 13th International Symposium on the Odyssey, 2017*: 279-314. 2020.
- Marinatos, Nanno. "The Cosmic Journey of Odysseus." *Numen* 48, No. 4: 381-416. 2001.
- Rank, Otto. *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: a Psychological Interpretation of Mythology*. Translated by F. Robbins and Dr. Smith Ely Jelliffe. New York: Robert Brunner. 1952.