

Sympathy with the Spear: Iliadic Tree Similes and Achilles' Entanglement with the Pelian Spear

1. Schol. D 16.140

καὶ ἐπειδὴ τὰς μὲν ἄλλας ὕλας, ἐξ ὧν ὁ Ἥφαιστος ἐδημιούργει τὰ ὄπλα, τὸν χρυσὸν καὶ τὸν ἄργυρον, οὐκ ἀπίθανον εἶναι καὶ ἐν οὐρανῷ, δένδρον δὲ οὐράνιον λέγειν καταγελαστότατον ἦν, διὰ τοῦτο τὰ μὲν λοιπὰ ὄπλα πεποίηκε τὸν Πάτροκλον φέροντα, ἃ καὶ ἀπολόμενα ἐτύγγανεν ἂν τῆς Ἥφαιστου δημιουργίας, μόνον δὲ τὸ δόρυ ἐάσαντα, ἵνα σωθῆ καταλειπόμενον· τοῦτο γὰρ ἀπολόμενον οὐκ ἂν ὁ Ἥφαιστος κατεσκεύεε πιθανῶς διὰ τὸ τὴν ὕλην αὐτοῦ μὴ οὐράνιον, ἀλλ' ἔγγειον καὶ Πηλιῶτιν εἶναι.

Since it was not unbelievable that the other materials from which Hephaistos was making the arms—that is, gold and silver—were in heaven, but to call a tree heavenly was very ridiculous, for this reason [Homer] has made Patroclus bear the rest of the arms, which, even lost, would have been of Hephaistos' craftsmanship, but leave only the spear so that, left behind, it might be preserved. For, after it was lost, Hephaistos would not have believably fashioned another on account of the material not being heavenly, but earthly and from Mount Pelion.¹

2. II. 1.233-46

ἄναι μὰ τόδε σκῆπτρον, τὸ μὲν οὐ ποτε φύλλα καὶ ὄζους φύσει, ἐπεὶ δὴ πρῶτα τομὴν ἐν ὄρεσσι λέλοιπεν, οὐδ' ἀναθλήσει· περὶ γὰρ ῥά ἐ χαλκὸς ἔλεψε φύλλά τε καὶ φλοιόν· νῦν αὐτέ μιν υἴες Ἀχαιῶν ἐν παλάμῃς φορέουσι δικασπόλοι, οἳ τε θέμιστας πρὸς Διὸς εἰρύεται.'

“By this scepter, which will never grow leaves and shoots, since it first left its stump in the mountains, and will not sprout afresh. For the bronze stripped it all around of both leaves and bark. Now, on the contrary, the sons of the Achaians bear it in their palms, as judges, who maintain the laws from Zeus.”

3. II. 16.140-4

ἔγχος δ' οὐχ ἔλετ' οἶον ἀμύμονος Αἰακίδαο
βριθὺ μέγα στιβαρόν· τὸ μὲν οὐ δύνατ' ἄλλος Ἀχαιῶν
πάλλειν, ἀλλὰ μιν οἶος ἐπίστατο πῆλαι Ἀχιλλεύς,
Πηλιάδα μελίην, τὴν πατρὶ φίλῳ τάμε² Χείρων
Πηλίου ἐκ κορυφῆς, φόνον ἔμμεναι ἠρώεσσιν.

But only the heavy, great, stout spear of blameless Achilles did he not take, which no other of the Achaians was able to wield, but Achilles alone knew how to wield it—a **Pelian ash-tree, which Cheiron cut for his dear father from the summit of Pelion**, to be a slaughter for heroes.

4. II. 16.33-35

ἄνηλεές, οὐκ ἄρα σοὶ γε πατὴρ ἦν ἱππότα Πηλεὺς,
οὐδὲ Θέτις μήτηρ· γλαυκὴ δὲ σε τίκτε θάλασσα
πέτραι τ' ἠλίβατοι, ὅτι τοι νόος ἐστὶν ἀπηνής.'

¹ All translations are my own.

² πόρε is printed in the editions of Monro and Allen and West, but Aristarchus deemed both τάμε or πόρε to fit. A majority of manuscripts have πόρε.

“Ruthless man, then your father was not Peleus the horseman, nor was Thetis your mother. But the gray sea and the lofty rocks bore you, for you have a harsh mind.”

5. Hodder 2011: 163-4

[I]t may be better to think of the entangled web as made not of strings but of multi-stranded cables. It is precisely the interactions between the multiple strands—the material, biological, social, cultural, psychological, cognitive strands of the individual cables—that make the entanglement so strong.

6. *Il.* 16.141-4

τὸ μὲν οὐ δύνατ' ἄλλος Ἀχαιῶν
πάλλειν, ἀλλά μιν οἶος ἐπίστατο πῆλαι Ἀχιλλεύς,
Πηλιάδα μελίην, τὴν πατρὶ φίλῳ τάμε Χείρων
Πηλίου ἐκ κορυφῆς, φόνον ἔμμεναι ἠρώεσσιν.

Which no other of the Achaians was able **to wield**, but Achilles alone knew how **to wield** it—a **Pelian** ash-tree, which Cheiron cut for his dear father from the summit of **Pelion**, to be a slaughter for heroes.

Select Bibliography

- Edwards, M. 1987. *Homer: Poet of the Iliad*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Grethlein, J. 2008. “Memory and Material Objects in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 128: 27-51.
- Grethlein, J. 2020. “Odysseus and His Bed: From Significant Objects to Thing Theory in Homer.” *The Classical Quarterly* 69: 467-82.
- Griffin, J. 1980. *Homer on Life and Death*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Heath, J. 1992. “The Legacy of Peleus: Death and Divine Gifts in the *Iliad*.” *Hermes* 120: 387-400.
- Hodder, I. 2011. “Human-thing entanglement: towards an integrated archaeological perspective.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17: 154-77.
- Hodder, I. 2012. *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships Between Humans and Things*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Janko, R (ed.). 1994. *The Iliad: a Commentary. Volume IV: books 13-16*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Louden, B. 1995. “Categories of Homeric Wordplay.” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 125: 27-46.
- Lowenstam, S. 1993. *The Scepter and the Spear: Studies on Forms of Repetition in the Homeric Poems*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Schein, S. 1997. “The *Iliad*: Structure and Interpretation.” In I. Morris and B. Powell, edd., *A New Companion to Homer* (Leiden: Brill), 345-59.
- Seiradaki, E. 2014. *The Arms of Achilles: Re-Exchange in the Iliad*. University of Toronto, PhD dissertation.
- Shannon, R. 1975. *The Arms of Achilles and Homeric Compositional Technique*. Leiden: Brill.
- Stein, C. 2016. “The Life and Death of Agamemnon’s Scepter: the Imagery of Achilles (*Iliad* 1.234-239).” *Classical World* 109: 447-63.