CHAPTER 6

Secondhand Homer

Michael Meerson

Be gracious, O Muse Grammatica, save from starvation!
Remedy you have discovered: Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά.
– LUCIAN[1]

1 Lot Oracles in Antiquity

A fourth-century compendium of magical spells containing a Homeromanteion,[2] an oracle composed of quotations from the poems of Homer, was first published by Carl Wessely and Frederic Kenyon in 1893,[3] and then, forty years later, by Karl Preisendanz as PGM VII 1–148.[4] Two other papyri with fragments of this oracle were published since then by Orsolina Montevecchi (P.Bon. 3) and Peter Parsons (P.Oxy. LXI 3831). These fragments were analyzed in a re-edition of PGM VII by Franco Maltomini, who has arrived at the conclusion that all extant papyri with the Homeromanteion stem from one source.[5]

One of the fragments, the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, contains the instructions for inquiring of the oracle: First, the practitioners have to consult the list of days and hours on which the oracle may be used. In PGM VII this list precedes

1 Lucian, *Epigrammata*, no. 22, εἰς γραμματικούς (*Anth. Gr.* 3:23 no. 12).

2 This title is mentioned in Preisendanz's edition (PGM VII, line 216). It is probably a marginal note being too long to fit the line. Neither Kenyon (see below) nor Maltomini include this note into their publications.

3 In the same year but independently: Carl Wessely, *Neue griechische Zauberpapyri* (Wien: F. Tempsky, 1893); Frederic Kenyon, *Greek Papyri in the British Museum* I, 83–115 (London: British Museum, 1893) = P.Lond. 121.

4 Karl Preisendanz, *Die griechischen Zauberpapyri* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1928; repr. with corrections and supplements by Albert Henrichs; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973; repr. Munich: K.G. Saur, 2002); English trans: Hans D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986; repr. 1992).

5 Franco Maltomini, "P.Lond. 121 (= PGM VII), 1–221: Homeromanteion," *ZPE* 106 (1995): 107–22.

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the oracle. Then, the practitioners must pray to Apollo, focusing at the same time on their question. After that, they take one die and cast it three times, thus obtaining a combination of three numbers, from one to six each. The oracle contains 216 such combinations, each linked to one full verse from Homeric poems that was supposed to answer the user's question.

At first glance, the Homeromanteion can easily be attributed to one of two major groups of the lot oracle, or *sortes*, as this sort of divination is also called.[6] To the first group belongs an oracle giving a positive or a negative answer to any question of the user. Usually this was a metric response with a sheer amount of allegory and uncertainty added to a simple 'yes' or 'no'; hence a wide spectrum of meanings could be applied to the practitioner's circumstances. The most ancient *sortes* belong in this category. Those who wished to consult the alphabet-oracle from Adada in Pisidia (*CIG* 43790, 3rd c. BCE) had to roll a four-sided knucklebone with number-letters of the Greek alphabet five times, and then to read a verse inscribed next to the obtained combination of letters on a pillar in the temple.[7] A divination device could also be less stationary; the Latin divinatory tablets, for example, contain an answer and not just a reference to a temple stone.[8] At first the practitioner had to visit a sacred place in order to consult these tablets, but eventually they were recorded in books of fortune, and their connection to a sacred place was disrupted. In compensation for this loss, books of fortune such as *Sortes sanctorum* and *Sortes apostolorum*[9] claimed a divine or prophetic origin and nature of their text as a reliable source of divination.

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6 From the Latin *sors*, 'a lot' or 'fate.' For a comprehensive bibliography on *sortes*, see Pieter W. van der Horst, *Sortes: het gebruik van heilige boeken als lotsorakels in de oudheid*, Mededelingen van de Afdeling Letterkunde. Nieuwe reeks 62:3 (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1999); Pieter W. van der Horst, "Sortes: Sacred Books as instant oracles in Late Antiquity." In *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 1999). For an analysis of the evolution of *sortes* from antiquity through modernity, see Michael Meerson, "Book is a Territory: A Hebrew Book of Fortune in Context," *JSQ* 13 (2006): 388–411.

7 For this and other alphabet/temple oracles in Asia Minor see Franz Heinvetter, *Würfel – und Buchstabenorakel in Griechenland und Kleinasien* (Breslau: Grass, Barth & Co., 1912). For a bibliography on Hellenistic oracles, see Fritz Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 51–98.

8 E.g., *CIL* I 2183, *CIL* I 2173, and *CIL* I 2173.

9 Edited in C. Chabaneau, "Les Sorts des *Apôtres*." *Revue des langues romanes*, 3rd ser. 4 (1880): 264–74. See also William E. Klingshirn, "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination," *JECS* 10 (2002): 77–130, with a list of manuscripts on page 129. For the Coptic version, see *Papyrus Vatican Copt.* 1 (7th–8th c. CE) in A. van Lantschoot, "Une Collection Sahidique de 'Sortes Sanctorum,'" *Mus* 69 (1956): 35–52.

Needless to say, such 'light-construction' oracles offered to their authors a greater flexibility and volume than stone pillars. Thanks to this flexibility, the second class of *sortes* emerged. Its hallmark was a list of specific questions attached to the oracle which was structured in such a way that a user could select any question from the list and then be directed to a precise answer concerning the subject matter. The Sortes Astrampsychi, with ninety-two questions,[10] and the Sortes Sangallenses, subdivided into 137 categories,[11] are the only oracle of this kind that survived from antiquity. Other books of fortune with specific questions are late-antique or medieval; among them are the Latin Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum,[12] Experimentarius Bernardini Silvestris,[13] and the Hebrew Geniza Goralot.[14]

10 Recently re-edited and analyzed by Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi. Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten*, Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). See also previous editions: Rudolph Hercher, *Astrampsychi oraculorum decades CIII* (Berlin, 1863); Gerald M. Browne, "The Composition of the Sortes Astrampsychi," *Bulletin of the London University Institute of Classical Studies* 17 (1970): 95–100; Browne, *The Papyri of the Sortes Astrampsychi*, Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 58 (Meisenheim am Glan: A. Hain, 1974) = P.Oxy. XII 1477, XXXVIII 2832, 2833; Browne, "The Origin and Date of the Sortes Astrampsychi," *Illinois Classical Studies* 1 (1976): 53–58; Browne, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983); Randall Stewart, "The Textual Transmission of the Sortes Astrampsychi," *Illinois Classical Studies* 20 (1995): 134–147; Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 2001); P.Oxy. LXVII 4581.

11 Alban Dold and Richard Meister, eds., *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908* (*die sogenannten Sortes Sangallenses*) *auf Grund neuer Lesung und mit erweitertem Text nach Materien geordnet* (Wien: Rohrer, 1948). See also Alexander Demandt, "Die Sortes Sangallenses. Eine Quelle zur spätantiken Sozialgeschichte," in *Atti dell'Accademia romanistica costantiniana. 8 convegno internazionale*, ed. G. Crifò and Stefano Giglio (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1991), 635–50; Karl Strobel, "Soziale Wirklichkeit und irrationales Weltverstehen in der Kaiserzeit. Sortes Astrampsychi und Sortes Sangallenses," *Laverna* 3 (1992): 129–141; Kai Brodersen, "Die Sortes Sangallenses: Ein antikes Losorakel," in *Alte Texte – neue Wege*, ed. Richard Kussl, Dialog Schule und Wissenschaft, Klassische Sprachen und Literaturen 38 (Munich: Bayerischer Schulbuch Verlag, 2004), 129–54; William E. Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: The *Sortes Sangallenses*," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê*, 99–128.

12 Edited by André Boutemy, "Recueil poetique du manuscript Cotton Vitellius A XII," *Latomus* 1 (1937): 290–313. See also Theodore C. Skeat, "An Early Medieval 'Book of Fate': the Sortes XII Patriarcharum," *MRSt(L)* 3 (1954): 41–54.

13 Edited by Mirella B. Savorelli, "Un Manuale di Geomanzia presentato da Bernardo Silvestre da Tours (XII secolo): l'Experimentarius," *RCSF* 14 (1959): 283–342. See also Ch. Burnett, "What is the Experimentarius of Bernardus Silvestris? A Preliminary Survey of the Material," *AHDL* 44 (1977): 79–125.

14 *Camb. T.-S. K* 21.78 (10th c. CE), *T.-S. K* 12.37 (11th c. CE), *T.-S. K* 1.79 (11th c. CE), *JTSL ENA* 2938.2 (10th c. CE), *JTSL ENA* 3072.3 (13th c. CE), forthcoming in Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked. *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. 4. Tübingen.

Whereas the *sortes* of the first category were believed to derive the binding force of their predictions from an outside source of magical power, such as a sacred place or a person that generated the text of the oracle, the lot oracles of the second category themselves became prophecy-generators with inherent magical potency, mysteriously giving a precise answer to a specific question. In order to augment the authority of such *sortes*, their creation was frequently attributed to famous magicians and philosophers such as Astrampsychos and Bernardus Silvestris.

The Homeromanteion apparently fits in the first category of the lot oracle. The user can ask any question, while the answers are vague enough to suit it. A closer look, however, reveals a peculiarity that can seriously disappoint the practitioner: some answers are too uncertain, giving no reason to consider them as either positive or negative. Lot 3–3–3, for example, could make a good riddle, but hardly an answer of any kind: "Plants her head in heaven and walks upon the earth." A not-too-well-read recipient of such a prophecy can only guess who she is![15] Equally disappointing is the mysterious innuendo in lot 5–3–6: "Keep quiet, friend, and do as I say." Verse 4–3–6 seems encouraging: "And you would gain every Trojan's thanks and praise." But is it really good? And what on earth is gender-oriented lot 1–3–6 supposed to mean? "I also care about all these things, woman, but very terribly."

At the same time, the majority of answers seem too specific. In fact, once we know the standard set of questions in the *sortes* of the second category, it is easy to see that the Homeromanteion was composed with these very questions in mind. For example:[16]

1.1 ***Enmity and Friendship***

115.4–2–1: Come now, let us make these concessions to one another (*Il.* 4.62).

175.5–6–1: Where are you two rushing? What causes the heart within your breast to rage (*Il.* 8.413)?

143.4–6–5: Had cast aside wrath and chosen friendship (*Il.* 16.282).

1.2 ***Journey and Safe Return***

26.1–5–2: Within this very year, Odysseus will arrive here (*Od.* 14.161; 19.306).

123.4–3–3: Surely then the journey will not be useless or fail to occur (*Od.* 2.273).

15 The proverbial description of Eris (Strife); cf. Galen, *De methodo medendi*, 10.7.9; Aelius Aristides, *Περὶ ὁμονοίας ταῖς πόλεσιν*, 532.13; Heraclitus, *All.* 29.4.5; Dio Chrysostom, *Dei cogn.* (*Or. 12*) 72.5.

16 Trans. Hebert Martin in Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*.

195.6–3–3: The man is nearby. Our search will not be long, if you are willing (*Il.* 14.110).

1.3 *Prospects of Marriage*

86.3–3–2: Would that such a man be called my husband (*Od.* 6.244).
150.5–1–6: So there's nothing else as horrible and vile as a woman (*Od.* 11.427).
158.5–3–2: Never to have gone to bed with her and had intercourse (*Il.* 9.133).

1.4 *Sickness and Cure*

55.2–4–1: So he spoke, and ordered Paion to administer a cure (*Il.* 5.899).
95.3–4–5: As there is no one who could keep the dogs off your head (*Il.* 22.348).
200.6–4–2: Take heart, and let your thoughts not be of death (*Il.* 10. 383).

It seems that a question concerning one's illness could hardly be answered by a verse taken from the journey-rubric. How, then, could the Homer-oracle direct the inquirer to the specific answer? And if it could not, how did it compensate for this apparent malfunction? Perhaps a quotation from Homer offered the interpreter something else in addition to a single verse in the chosen lot. To begin with, how and why were these particular verses selected from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*?[17]

2 Homeromanteion According to Homer

Homeric quotations in magical texts have been thoroughly discussed.[18] The mechanism of quoting and its rationale is explained by the historiola theory: The magician simultaneously addresses a current problem and refers to the well-known solution found for the problem's archetype in the mythical past.[19] The link between the past and the present situations is usually obvious, as

17 The same question was addressed also by Andromache Karanika, "Homer the Prophet: Homeric Verses and Divination in the Homeromanteion," in *Sacred Words: Orality, Literacy and Religion*, ed. André Lardinois et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 255–78. The author "investigate(s) the complex relation between orality and literature." Many of Karanika's observations were also made by the present author. This paper will check and specify some of them, as well as proceed with a more profound assessment of their significance.

18 Richard Heim, *Incantamenta magica graeca latina* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1892), 514–20; Derek Collins, "The Magic of Homeric Verses," *CP* 3 (2008): 211–36.

19 David Frankfurter, "Narrating Power: The Theory and Practice of the Magical *Historiola* in Ritual Spells," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 457–76.

in a spell for curing the pain in breast and uterus, PGM XIIa.9–10 (*Il.* 2.548): "The daughter of Zeus nourished, and the fruitful land bore." As Erechteus was born by the land and nourished by Athena, so a prospective child of the sick woman shall be born and nourished too. In some spells, however, the choice of a specific quotation from Homer has no explanation unless its original context in the poems is taken into consideration. In PGM XIIa.2–9, a "bloody flux" is to be healed by an amulet quoting *Il.* 1.75, "the wrath of Apollo, far-darting lord." An apparent curse actually paves the way for recovery, because the verse is taken from the speech of Kalchas, who reveals the reason of that very "bloody flux" plaguing the camp of the Achaeans and also explains how to cure it.

In the same way, the meaning of prophecies expressed with the words of Homer could be explained, enriched with nuances, and even reversed if considered in their original context. For example, lot 3–2–5 (*Il.* 22.50) promises "We will ransom with bronze and gold, for we have it in the house." This apparently favorable prediction is not about riches and a successful enterprise. Like another verse from Book 22 (lot 2–3–5), "And his mother for her part continued the lament amid a flood of tears," it describes the failed attempt of Priam and Hecuba to dissuade Hector from engaging in battle with Achilles, and it is Hector's body which will eventually be ransomed with gold.[20] The diviner could interpret it as advice to refrain from something which the inquirer desired to pursue. *Iliad* 22.185 (lot 3–4–2), detached from its context, seems unreservedly positive too: "Act in whatever way your mind is moved, and no longer hold back!" Yet this may be false encouragement, since these were the words of Zeus to Athena when he finally gave up on Hector and removed his protection. Line 268 of the same book (lot 3–1–2) also sets an entrapment for a naïve user of the Homeromanteion: "Remember battle skill, today you badly need it!" says Achilles to Hector, just to be sure, as Eustathius of Thessalonica explains, that Hector would not run and would not steal the victory of Achilles.[21]

20 *Il.* 22.50 points to the "pitiful ignorance" of Priam, as the exegetic scholia says. See Nicholas Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6: *Books 21–24* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 111.

21 Eustathius, *ad Iliadem* 4.614.3 ff., 616.17. In fact, such reversal of an oracle's apparent meaning was a well-known technique of ancient diviners. Cicero recounts a story in which a runner, preparing for the Olympics, dreamt that he was riding a swift chariot spanned with four horses. Whereas one diviner immediately predicted a victory for him, the sophist Antiphon objected: "Of course you will lose, for it is clear that four horses will run ahead of you." Cicero, *Div.* 2.144 = Antiphon 87 B 80 D-K = fr. 80.

An acquaintance with a broader context of the *Iliad* seems also useful for the interpreter of the Homeromanteion. Book 22, line 348 (lot 3–4–5) brings a bad omen: "As there is no one who could keep the dogs off your head." Yet not as bad as it seems, since in Book 23 Apollo did keep dogs off Hector's head, surrounding his body with indestructible mist. Verses 22.512–513 could leave the user unsatisfied because of the incomprehensive meaning of their advice: "All this I will throw into fire" (1–4–3), and "You made them useless, you will not be lying in them" (1–6–4). It is important, therefore, to remember that these verses belong to the lament of Andromache, that she is talking here about the clothing of Hector, complaining of not being able even to burn his clothing together with his body at a proper funeral. She is therefore burning Hector's possessions, and is clearly making a mistake because his body will eventually return home.

It follows from the observations above that the quotations for the Homeromanteion might be selected by its author in consideration of their original context. It can also be taken for granted that the Homeromanteion derived from oral tradition, since no diviner responsible for the oracle's composition was likely to possess the entire corpus of Homeric epos,[22] and even less likely to scroll through multiple papyrus-rolls with some 30,000 lines in order to find a suitable verse.[23] We may also suggest that the most dramatic parts of the Homeric poems were more likely to be learned by heart, and therefore were better represented in the Homeromanteion than the other parts with less intense texture. Indeed, the selection of quotations is far from even: almost all verses were taken from the speeches of the poems' characters, which naturally were easier to remember,[24] while the quotations from the much more popular *Iliad* are almost twice as many as those from the *Odyssey*.[25] The duels were one of the preferences: two heroes, before they engage in a melee combat, may address each other, or may be provoked or encouraged by their friends or gods. This exchange produced as many as twenty quotations from books four and five. The ultimate preferences, however, proved to be the culmination chapters of the epic, such as the delegation of Odyssey and Ajax

22 Cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* 4.2.10; Plutarch, *Alc.* 7.1.

23 A well-educated person was supposed to know large portions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, if not the entire poems, by heart. Thus Xenophon (*Symp.* 3.5) claims the knowledge of all of Homer's poetry as part of his education.

24 That is, about ninety percent of all verses in the Homeromanteion; compare to the different proportion of objective narrative and direct speech in *Iliad*: the latter takes up slightly less than a half of the poem. Geoffrey S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 2: *Books 5–8* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 28.

25 Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, 6:40.

to Achilles at the moment when Trojan army breached the wall and threatened to burn the Achaean ships (twelve verses from Book 9), and the death of Hector in Book 22, providing the maximum number of quotations – thirteen verses. The same analysis of the *Odyssey* displays an even clearer picture and supports the above observation. Whereas only four verses, at average, were quoted from any single book of the poem, as many as twenty-two verses were taken from Book 21, where an old beggar finally becomes the king Odysseus, strings his bow, and shoots the first arrow.

This may look convincing to the modern reader. Indeed, Book 22 of the *Iliad* is the climax of the epos,[26] and Book 21 of the *Odyssey* is a natural choice, as it seems, for the Cambridge Reading Greek course.[27] Yet preferences of the ancient readers of Homer seem to differ from ours. The following part of this chapter will test the hypothesis of the contextual derivation of Homeric verses, and will substantially reshape it.

The *Iliad* has survived in about 2,000 manuscripts, 1,500 of which are papyri dated from the fourth century BCE to the eight century CE.[28] In 1954, Victor Martin drew scholars' attention to his discovery of the independent transmission of the separate books of the *Iliad*.[29] A few years later, this was confirmed by John A. Davison who presented a comprehensive picture showing how many copies of each book from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* survived.[30] His research also demonstrated the occurrences of the books by centuries, from the first to the third century CE. The maximum number of occurrences was recorded for the first two books: thirty-five occurrences for each. The numbers then decrease: twenty-four for Book 5, thirteen for Book 6 and Book 8, and ten for Books 9, 11, and 13. The second part of the *Iliad* left substantially fewer textual witnesses: only five in average for each book, and only seven for Book 22. For the *Odyssey*, the occurrences of books also contradict the proportion of quotes selected for the Homeromanteion. Of eighty-three occurrences, as many as ten papyri contain Book 4, and only two contain Book 21.[31]

26 Many modern authors refer to Book 22 of the Iliad in these or similar words; see, e.g., Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, 6:105.

27 *The Triumph of Odysseus*, ed. The Joint Association of Classical Teachers' Greek Course (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

28 Graeme D. Bird, *Multitextuality in Homeric Iliad: The Witness of the Ptolemaic Papyri* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2010), 1.

29 Victor Martin, *Papyrus Bodmer I: Iliade* (Cologny-Genève: Bibliothèque Bodmer, 1954).

30 John A. Davison, "The Study of Homer in Graeco-Roman Egypt," in *Akten des VIII. internationalischen Kongresses für Papyrologie in Wien*, ed. Hans Gerstinger (Vienna: Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1955), 51–58.

31 Davison, "Study of Homer," 57.

If the survey of textual witnesses for the poems of Homer accurately testifies to the popularity of the poems' separate books, then the above hypothesis regarding the context-based selection of quotes for the Homeromanteion is wrong. But maybe the bare fact of finding the book does not testify to the book's popularity. Most of the papyri containing Books 1 and 2 are school exercises, which only prove their customary use for studying Greek language and literature. Teachers might want their students to learn the catalogue of ships by heart,[32] while the students, given a choice, might nevertheless find this catalogue too boring to keep a copy.[33] Reuse of the separate books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as a toilet paper,[34] or for writing an account or a petition[35] on its other side, was hardly a proof of those books' popularity. Like the gospels, most of the surviving papyri of the *Iliad* were found in the trash heaps of Oxyrhynchus. Therefore, the question addressed by AnneMarie Luijendijk about the pattern of the gospels' preservation is relevant for the *Iliad* as well: Why did the people choose to trash something that they were supposed to cherish?[36] Perhaps, they purchased a new, better copy of a 'dog-eared' book, or the books were thrown away simply because their owners disliked them. The logic goes in both directions. Choosing the right one involves another analysis.

The Homeromanteion is a cento-like composition[37] built up entirely of Homeric verses, but in contrast to real centos, it is devoid of any original meaning or correspondence between these verses. Only a few real centos from antiquity have survived: three short compositions in the Palatine Anthology,[38] a ten-verse cento in a work of Irenaeus,[39] a short second-century graffito inscribed on a leg of a statue of Memnon,[40] and a cento of 1,915 lines describing

32 Eustathius (*ad Iliadem*, 263.33), referring to Porphyry, reports that legal codes of some cities required the school-children to learn the catalogue of ships by heart.

33 A third-century papyrus with Book 2 of the *Iliad* as well some medieval manuscripts omits the catalogue of ships. See Michael Haslam, "Homeric Papyri and Transmission of the Text," in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry B. Powell, Mnemosine Supplement 163 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 55–100, at 59.

34 *Il.* 2.277–318 with scholia minora in P.Oxy. LXVII 4633.

35 E.g. *Il.* 5 in P.Oxy. II 223v (on the verso of a petition); *Od.* 1.289–312 in P.Duk. inv. 768r.

36 AnneMarie Luijendijk, "Sacred Scriptures as Trash: Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus," *VC* 64 (2010) 217–54.

37 A literary composition entirely made up of selections from one or more compositions.

38 9.361, 381, 382: See Herbert Hunger, *Der hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, vol. 2 (Munich: Beck, 1978); Mark D. Usher, "Prolegomenon to the Homeric Centos," *AJP* 118 (1997): 305–21.

39 Robert L. Wilken, "The Homeric Cento in Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses I, 9, 4," *VC* 21 (1967): 25–33.

40 Ewen L. Bowie, "Greek Poetry in the Antonine Age," in *Antonine Literature*, ed. D. A. Russel (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 53–90, at 65.

the passions of Christ. The last was originally a shorter composition written in the fourth century by bishop Patricius and expanded to its current state a half-century later by Empress Eudocia Augusta. A brief look at the index in the cento's latest edition[41] suffices to show an astonishing similarity between the proportions of numbers: a number of verses selected from the separate books of the Homeric poems for Eudocia's cento seems to match the number of the extant papyri containing these books.

A calculation confirms the impression. The first and second books of the *Iliad* were quoted most often – 184 times. Book 5 was also popular, although to a lesser degree: Eudocia derived seventy-two verses from it. Towards the middle of the *Iliad*, Eudocia's interest and perhaps knowledge started to fade, resulting in only 126 verses taken from Books 12–15 (18+46+32+30). A very similar picture emerges from West's edition of the *Iliad* referring to only eighty extant papyri for Books 12–15 (17+11+24+28) and 249 papyri for the first four books (101+70+43+35).[42] Eudocia's preference for specific books of the *Odyssey* shows an even greater degree of correspondence with the number of their textual witnesses: whereas only twenty-nine verses were chosen from Book 21 (fifteen verses from a book being an average), as many as 120 verses were selected from the mysteriously popular Book 4!

It may now be concluded that the number of the surviving papyri with Homeric poems indeed reflects the popularity of their separate books. This popularity was a primary factor for Eudocia's selection (naturally matching her own preference), but not for the selection by the author of the Homeromanteion. Consequently, the link between the Homeromanteion and the poems of Homer is not as proximate as has been assumed. Besides or even instead of the factor of popularity and intensity of scenes from which verses were selected for the Homeromanteion, there was another factor that directed its composition. But what could it be?

3 Homeromanteion beyond Homer

Separate books or passages of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* also circulated in works of grammarians, whose explanations were sometimes recorded in margins of the Homeric poems and sometimes transmitted separately. Copies of separate grammatical commentaries were few, and they hardly enjoyed the

41 Rocco Schembra, ed., *Homerocentones*, CCSG 62 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 447 ff.

42 Martin L. West, ed., *Homeri Ilias* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1998).

full respect due to a work of literature.[43] This cannot be said about exegetical commentaries on Homer. The *Cave of Nymphs* by Porphyry, commenting on only ten lines of Book 13 of the *Odyssey*, is a famous example of the exegetical allegory of Homer: two openings of the cave were interpreted as the entrance to and the exit from this world, the bees as souls, and the olive tree of Athena as wisdom that governs the earth.[44] In a similar vein, other authors expounded the shields of Agamemnon and Achilles as representations of cosmic powers,[45] and the theomachy in Books 21–22 as a struggle of Achilles with his own psyche,[46] to name only a few among the countless allegories discovered in the *Iliad*.[47] Interpretation in terms of parable, in practice limited only by the interpreter's imagination, was considered vital for a proper understanding of the Homeric poems.

Of course exegetes were not the only ones who quoted Homer. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were arguably the most popular source of citations in books on any topic: Plato alone quotes Homer some 150 times.[48] As a result, the verses of Homer quoted by authors in order to support their own ideas accumulated new meanings. Then, with quotations that became proverbial, the post-textual oral tradition of Homer began. For an educated seer in possession of the Homeromanteion, this tradition offered countless strata of interpretations, from a simple meaning of the isolated verse to a snowball of acquired contexts. In the following part of the chapter, I try to demonstrate the actual potential of the Homeromanteion. A sample group, as before, will consist of quotations from Book 22 of the *Iliad*.

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43 Davison ("The Study of Homer," 55) quotes a papyrus (*P.R.U.M.* I 19) containing a publisher's note that may provide evidence for the separate publication of commentaries on Homer. Davison also argues against popularity of such commentaries: Had they been popular, the books of the famous grammarian Aristarchus would hardly have disappeared without a trace.

44 Porphyry, *The Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey*, ed. and trans. Seminar Classics 609 (Buffalo: State University of New York, 1969).

45 By Crates of Mallos, *apud* Eustathius, *ad Iliadem*, 4.220.9 ff. See Philip R. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 341–42; Gregory Nagy, *Homer the Preclassic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 356–60.

46 Theagenes of Rhegium, A2 D-K 8.2, in Giuliana Lanata, ed., *Poetica pre-Platonica: testimonianze e frammenti* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1963).

47 On the allegoric exegesis by Heraclitus and in Greek literature in general, see Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell and David Konstan (Leiden: Brill, 2005), xiii–xxvii. See also Peter Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Dirk Obbink, "Early Greek Allegory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15–25.

48 George Edwin Howes, "Homeric Quotations in Plato and Aristotle," *HSCP* 6 (1895): 153–201.

In line 13 (lot 3–4–6),[49] Achilles threatens to kill Apollo, but Apollo escapes him, saying, οὐ μέν με κτενέεις, ἐπεὶ οὔ τοι μόρσιμός εἰμι, "you will not kill me, since I am not subject to fate." For Protagoras, the very fact that Achilles was able to engage in battle, first, the river Scamander, and then Apollo himself, signifies a sudden increase in Achilles's might and importance.[50] Yet Plato probably refers to this episode as an example of Achilles's arrogance and a complete lack of moral virtues.[51]

This particular verse was quoted in a variety of contexts. Theodorus Prodromus, in a poetic commentary on 1 Sam 14–31 addresses these words to Saul, proclaiming his inability to kill David (*1 Reg.* 130b.4): Τίπτε, Σαοὺλ… Δαβὶδ ἀποκτενέειν μεμαώς, τὸν ὁμόζυγα Μελχόλ; οὔ μιν ἀποκτενέεις, ἐπεὶ οὔ τοι μόρσιμός ἐστιν, "Why, Saul, are you so eager to kill David, the spouse of Michal? You will not kill him, he is not subject to fate!" Geogorius Cedrenus put them in the mouth of Apollonius of Tyana. In Rome, the astrologer Largios predicted Domitian's day of death, who in turn ordered the arrest of both Largios and Apollonius:

> At that moment, they say, Apollonius said *that proverbial phrase*, "you will not kill me, etc." (τότε φασὶ καὶ τὸ πολυθρύλητον ἔπος ἐκεῖνο τὸν Ἀπολλώνιον εἰπεῖν) and disappeared. He was then seen in Puteoli, at a three-day distance from Rome.[52]

A similar story was told in the Astrologica. Domitian sought to imprison the magician Proclus for the same offence, namely the prediction of the emperor's death. Proclus uttered the Homeric verse as if it were a charm, but instead of disappearing, he killed the emperor.[53] Be it a magical spell or not, this verse clearly was the proverbial phrase, τὸ πολυθρύλητον ἔπος, as Georgius himself put it.

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49 Always indicating the verse in Book 22 of the *Iliad* and the three-number combination in the Homeromanteion.

50 D-K 80 A30. See also the scholia to *Il.* 21.240 in Hartmut Erbse, *Scholia graeca in Homeri Iliadem* (*scholia vetera*) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969–1988), 101; and Andrea Capra, "Notes and Discussions: Protagoras' Achilles: Homeric Allusion as a Satirical Weapon (Pl. *Prt.* 340a)," *CP* 100 (2005): 274–77.

51 Plato, *Resp.* 391c. On references to Achilles in Plato's Republic, see Angela Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 199 ff.

52 Geogorius Cedrenus, *Compendium*, 1.431.5.

53 *Testimonia de astrologis Romanis* (excerpta e cod. Paris. suppl. gr. 607 A, fol. 43), ed. F. Cumont, *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum* 8.4 (Paris: Lamertin, 1921).

The deceptive encouragement of line 185 (lot 3–4–2) becomes more transparent in the context of analogous situations: In Book 4, Zeus proposes a peaceful solution to the Trojan war, Athena and Hera then protest and Zeus immediately surrenders using the same words he does to give up on Hector in Book 22: "Act however you wish, and don't hesitate." This is bad enough, but a possible interpretation may be further downgraded from thoroughly masked deceit to blatant mockery. For example, Eudocia Augusta in her homerocentones incorporates this verse into a passage describing the crucifixion of Jesus:

> ὣδε δέ τις εἴπεσκε νέων ὑπερηνορεόντων (*Od.* 2.324)
> "εἰ μὲν δὴ θεός ἐσσι, θεοῖό τε ἔκλυες αὐδὴν (*Od.* 4.831)
> καί πού τις δοκέεις μέγας ἔμμεναι ἠδὲ κραταιός, (*Od.* 18.382)
> *ἔρξον ὅπῃ δή τοι νόος ἔπλετο, μηδ' ἔτ' ἐρώει.* (*Il.* 22.185)
> ἀλλὰ τά γ' οὐ κατὰ κόσμον ὀΐομαι, οὐδέ με πείσεις (*Od.* 14.363)
> ὦ ξεῖν'· οὕτω γάρ νύ τοι εὐκλείη τ' ἀρετή τε." (*Od.* 14.402).
>
> One of the overweening youths was saying this: (*Od.* 2.324)
> "If you indeed are a deity, and hear the divine voice, (*Od.* 4.831)
> and think that you are great and mighty, (*Od.* 18.382)
> *act however you wish, and don't hesitate.* (*Il.* 22.185)
> Yet one thing is wrong, in truth you cannot persuade me, (*Od.* 14.363)
> my friend, otherwise you would have had a great name and reputation."
> (*Od.* 14.402)

On a more positive note, line 219 (lot 3–2–4) is misleading in its apparent intimidation: οὔ οἱ νῦν ἔτι γ' ἔστι πεφυγμένον ἄμμε γενέσθαι, "now is it no longer possible for him to find escape from us." In fact it contains a favorable prediction and "projects a good hope" (προβολή ἀγαθῆς ἐλπίδος) according to the commentary of Eustathius.[54]

Line 263 (lot 4–1–6) falls in a category of Homeric similes, which have enjoyed continuous popularity from antiquity to modern times. They could be frequently discussed and quoted in any context, thus absorbing and projecting a limitless number of associations. In the *Iliad* Achilles is the most frequent user of similes;[55] line 263 is one of them: οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν, "nor lambs with wolves possess according souls." With these words,

54 Eustathius, *ad Iliadem*, 4.608.15–21.

55 Caroll Moulton, *Similes in the Homeric Poems* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 100.

Achilles denies Hector's request for proper burial, which could simply signify to the user of the Homeromanteion that "your wish will not be granted." But there is more than this: in light of Euripides' scholia, this simile is fitting for the world of animals rather than the world of humans ruled by justice.[56] And indeed, in other chapters of the *Iliad*, the comparison with omnivorous (ὠμοφάγοι) wolves and lions is used to express the havoc of war and indiscriminate murder of both Achaeans and Trojans.[57] The meaning of the oracle may therefore be modified: "So-and-so openly commits injustice, but does not realize it yet."

Like many Homeric similes, this verse became a proverbial saying. It implied love affairs (ἡ παροιμία ἐπὶ τῶν ἐρωτικῶς ἐχόντων)[58] and also brought about another proverbial saying (ἐντεῦθεν ἡ παροιμία) referring to the unequal relationship of mature 'predators' and young 'lambs' – ἄρνα φιλοῦσι λύκοι, νέον ὡς φιλέουσιν ἐρασταί, "wolves love lambs, as lovers love youngsters."[59] In a similar vein, Maximus of Tyre quotes this proverbial verse to address the origin of enmity, saying that material possessions and physical beauty cause injustice in life, as if people were wolves and lambs.[60] The philosopher Atticus hints at another reason for people living in discord: different worldviews and scholarly concepts. As "men with lions form no faithful leagues, nor lambs with wolves possess according souls," so between followers of Plato and followers of Aristotle there is no friendship in regard to the doctrine of happiness.[61]

Indeed, proverbial similes might direct a seer to a number of interpretations only remotely connected with the meaning of a simile in the *Iliad*. Moreover, the use of similes had the potential to abandon this original meaning completely. Line 495 (5–3–3), for example, is another simile bearing an unfavorable prediction, according to its original context. The phrase χείλεα μέν τ' ἐδίην', ὑπερῴην δ' οὐκ ἐδίηνε, "and moistens the lips, but fails to moisten the palate," belongs to the lament of Andromache and describes the misery awaiting her son Astianax in the future. Surprisingly, Maximus finds this "failure to moisten the palate" suitable for illustrating an opposing idea – one's choice of a happier life. Just as "it moistens the lips, but fails to moisten the palate," he says, a small piece of trouble may make us stronger, but a full portion of disaster should be better avoided.[62]

56 Scholia in Euripidem, 938. Cf. Hesiod, *Op.* 276–80, describing the lack of justice among the animals.

57 *Il.* 15.592, 16.157.

58 Scholia in Platonem (Phdr.), 241d.

59 Scholia vetera in Iliadem, ad loc.

60 Maximus of Tyre, *Dialexeis*, 35.6b.2 (On Friendship).

61 Atticus, *Fragmenta*, 4.21.2 (On Happiness, quoted in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 15.4.21.2).

62 Maximus of Tyre, *Dialexeis*, 34.5a.10.

These examples certainly do not exhaust all sources quoting and commenting on the verses from the Book 22 of the *Iliad* that were selected by the author of the Homeromanteion; but they suffice to demonstrate how an oracle, which may seem dysfunctional at first glance, may conceal an incredibly rich apparatus of various interpretations created by continuous study and exegesis. In proper hands, the Homeromanteion could be more flexible and at the same time more specific than any other oracle from the two categories described in the beginning of this chapter: The inquirer could ask any question, and could be given a precise answer by a seer who knew his Homer. In other words, the Homeromanteion combined the benefits of oracles that allowed any question but gave oblique answers with those of oracles that gave precise answers to a set list of questions.

At the same time, not everyone equipped with a Homeromanteion could be a successful diviner offering his clients a compelling prophecy. It is likely that the Homer-oracle was a work composed by a grammarian and exegete, and was designed for someone like Aristarchus, the most famous of Homeric scholiasts, who was called 'a prophet' by the Rhodian philosopher Panaetius, "because (he) could so easily divine the meaning of (Homeric) poems."[63]

4 Conclusion

The above observations lead to a conclusion with twofold significance. First, they enrich our knowledge of divinatory practice in antiquity. Books of fate such as the Sortes Astrampsychi, with explicit answers to specific questions, represent the latest stage of the oracle's evolution when every literate person could be his or her own seer. The starting point of this evolution was the shrine-oracle. Its divine origin was commonly recognized, but its prophecies were notoriously obscure.[64] Shrine-oracles were bound to specific locations and could be delivered only through authorized personnel. All these limitations had an obvious purpose: the placement of a real decision into the hands of persons charged with corresponding authority. The priests dealt the cards, but it was the government that made the game.[65]

63 Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 14.634cd.

64 Joseph Fontenrose, *Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations; with a Catalogue of Responses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

65 Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 55–56, discusses this distribution of power and responsibility, referring to a famous story from Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.140–141: Apollo orders Athenian to defend themselves by surrounding their city with wooden walls, but it was Themistocles who decided to build ships.

Private matters, of course, did not require an authoritative interpretation; yet it could be desirable. A banal phrase might have different meanings; hence, for example, a scholarly disagreement about the divinatory tablet *CIL* I^2.2183, *Laetus lubens petito quod dabitur gaudebis semper*. Eric Warmington translates it as "Seek you joyfully and willingly, you will be glad forever, because of what you have been given,"[66] which would mean for the inquirers that they are fortunate since their wish is already fulfilled. Cristiano Grottanelli, however, discerns irony in the tablet's advice, "Happily and spontaneously, ask for what you shall be given: you shall be happy forever."[67] In the other words, ask for what is rightfully yours, and only in this case shall you have it. If the inquirers had the same deliberations as we do, who might help them if not an educated seer capable of linguistic speculations not unlike those of Warmington and Grottanelli?

The multilayered text of Homer went many steps ahead of such divinatory tablets and temple oracles but did not sever a connection with them. On the one hand, the Homeromanteion was loaded with allusions and became mobile, yet it was not a self-sufficient oracle such as the Sortes Astrampsychi. Everyone could have a 'Homeric' prophecy, but not everyone could understand its intertextuality and connect an isolated verse to the question. Bare literacy was clearly not enough.

The second implication of the current study pertains to the oral tradition of Homer. Both homerocentones and the Homeromanteion derive from oral tradition, yet exhibit different patterns of derivation. Whereas homerocentones were assembled from the verses which Eudocia Augusta learned directly from the poems of Homer, probably as her school exercises, the Homeromanteion derived from the secondary use of Homer, quotations and scholia. Ὅμηρον ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν – "Explaining Homer from Homer."[68] Of course, but not only!

66 Eric H. Warmington, *Remains of Old Latin*, vol. 4: *Archaic Inscriptions*, LCL (London: W. Heinemann, 1940), 246–48.

67 Cristiano Grottanelli, "Sorte unica pro casibus pluribus enotata: Literary Texts and Lot Inscriptions as Sources for Ancient Kleromancy," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê*, 129–46. Following the Italian translation by Carlo Carena, *Iscrizioni latine arcaiche* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1954), 28–29, 81–82.

68 Motto of Aristarchus, meaning that a commenter who is explaining questionable verses in Homer should use evidence from Homer.