THINGS OF THE PAST: OBJECTS AND TIME IN GREEK NARRATIVE

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I. SEEING THE PAST

Wolfgang Ernst begins a 1999 article by asking, "Should the past, that fragmented landscape of data, always be described in stories?" (Ernst 1999.53). Ernst's question invites us to think about the interrelation of three contested terms: the past, data, and stories. If we agree, for example, that the past is constituted in stories, then what is that "fragmented landscape of data" that, in Ernst's metaphorical usage, pre-exists those stories?[1] In the writing of history, these data occupy what de Certeau has called the "position of the real," defined as that to which the historian has only mediated access.[2] This appeal to the "real" in conceptualizing the past seems both necessary and unremarkable. But its abstract (or philosophical) character also raises the question of predication: "real" what? This is the question that I'd like to think about in this paper: the referential quality of visible or material remains in the Greek narrative tradition. How do these remains—as objects of verbal description and emplotment—create and mediate the ancient past? And what can this kind of analysis tell us about the division between classical philology and archaeology (words and things) as past-making disciplines?

Two premises frame the discussion. First, the questions of evidence we find in the texts we study—for example, how visible or physical objects

1 Cf. Ankersmit 1995.153.
2 de Certeau 1975.48–57. Cf. Marincola 1999.301 note 75.

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give meaning to the past in ancient narrative—are formative of the questions we ask in our own work. And second, our questions are necessarily produced out of the culture of evidence in the West at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In her recent book titled *Herodotus in Context*, Rosalind Thomas cautions against "assuming that what [Herodotus] 'saw' was exactly what *we* would see if transported suddenly to the same spot" (Thomas 2000.196, emphasis in the original). This cautionary note is symptomatic of the predicament in which we find ourselves as contemporary readers of ancient texts and viewers of ancient objects. We can never see what Herodotus (or any ancient author) saw, although this is often the implied aim of our research. And when we see the remains of ancient objects, whether *in situ* or in a museum, their temporal distance seems more—not less—apparent.

This distance pertains not only to a history of temporal relations in the broadest sense, but also (as suggested above) to the disciplinary boundaries that divide classical philology and archaeology (Morris 2000.41–48). These boundaries are policed by, among other things, what Hal Foster refers to as the difference between "vision and visuality," or between "the datum of vision and its discursive determinations."[3] In the history of science, theories about the mechanics of seeing and, by extension, the "data" of positivist historical scholarship are the domains of what Foster means by "vision." The social, ideological, and rhetorical effects of "the visual" and "the gaze" in the fields of art history, literary theory, gender studies, and film studies are the domains of what he calls "visuality." These two categories are not entirely satisfactory, of course, since they collapse a multitude of perceptual variables and privilege the observer over the observed. They are also mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive; whatever their ontological status, visible data are both the cause and effect of visuality as a discursive phenomenon. In fact, the counter-intuitive notion that visual data are the *effects* of visuality is relevant to understanding how these effects are produced in the context of particular narrative forms. We can ask, for example, whether the visible objects featured in ancient epic or drama have a different relationship to time—or to a concept of the past—than those described in ancient history writing.[4]

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3 Foster 1988.ix, cited by Nelson 2000.2. Cf. Goldhill 1996.

4 It should be noted here that the ancient "art of memory," the *ars memoriae* described by Cicero and Quintilian, is an art of visualization. See the discussion of Alcock 2002.21–22 on this phenomenon.

As an example of "vision," the appeal to autopsy or eye witnessing in history writing is well known.[5] But autopsy in narrative history is only an effect of a larger field of inquiry that might be called the materialization of the past. For contemporary writers and thinkers, this materialization is principally produced in visual media that rely on photographic technologies with their perceived immediate relationship to the "real."[6] As a consequence of this perceived relationship, the past has become naturalized in the West *as* a visual phenomenon, a phenomenon expressed in the dominance of visual metaphors used to describe the apprehension of past events. The desire to "see what Herodotus saw," for example, is an effect of this post-photographic condition with its implicit claim to a closer visual proximity to a narrativized past. By a kind of reversal, the meaning of archaeological artifacts (as such) is expressed in their resistance to narrative or in what Ian Morris refers to as the "bits-and-pieces" approach of traditional Hellenist archaeology.[7] Morris's analysis refers to the idea that archaeological objects resist being transformed or translated into a coherent narrative; this is what defines them (in part) as archaeological. What I want to suggest is that the source of this resistance is due to what might be called the "effect of the fictional" (cf. Barthes 1982).

Joel Fineman's definition of the literary anecdote provides a useful model for thinking about how this effect works:[8]

> The anecdote, let us provisionally remark, as the narration of a singular event, is the literary form or genre that uniquely refers to the real. Two features, then—first, that the anecdote has something literary about it, and, second, that the anecdote, however literary, is nevertheless directly pointed towards or rooted in the real—allow us to think of the anecdote, given its formal if not its actual

5 See, for example, Schepens 1975 and the remarks of Kallet 2001.21–22.

6 See my discussion of this post-photographic condition in Bassi 1999. Cf. Auslander 1999 on the concept of "liveness."

7 Morris 2000.41; cf. Laurence and Berry 1998.1–9. A notable exception to the use of material culture as illustrations is Kurke 1999. See, in particular, her comments on methodology on pp. 35–36 and 65–66. Cf. White 1987.4 and Bielek-Robson 2000.78: "Because human existence is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence."

8 Fineman 1991.67. Cf. Kurke 1999.65–66.

> brevity, as a historeme, i.e., as the minimal unit of historiographic fact. And the question that the anecdote thus poses is how, compact of both literature and reference, the anecdote possesses its peculiar and eventful narrative force.

While we may wonder about Fineman's interest in reducing cultural forms to their "smallest minimal unit," it is worth considering how the archaeological object functions in much the same way as Fineman's anecdote, with the addition that it is "rooted in the real" by virtue of its material and extra-discursive reference. The usefulness of the comparison lies in raising the question of how this difference may be pertinent to the idea that the archaeological object "has something literary about it."

Which brings me back again to Ernst's question. Ernst focuses his own discussion on the so-called *Lapis Satricanus*, a stone dating from somewhere between the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. and bearing a partially preserved Latin inscription. He talks about the place of singular and often uprooted artifacts such as this one in the production of narrative history and the ontological status of objects defined as archaeological. Collected together in that "fragmented landscape of data," these objects, says Ernst, must be allowed to speak "archaeologically" and thereby to defy a [false?] "narrative coherence" (Ernst 1999.65–67). This approach raises the question of "archaeological" as a normative and prescriptive term that gives meaning to the past. Used in both a generic and specific sense (to refer to the academic discipline), archaeology works in Ernst's analysis as a kind of master narrative, even if his professed aim is to undo or problematize "narrative coherence."[9] If we ask how his argument might proceed without reference to archaeology as a discipline and to archaeological artifacts as such, we can begin to see how the category of "the archaeological" works against the kind of non-coherence he seems to champion.

It is a given that archaeological objects exist outside of and prior to what is said or shown about them. But this referentiality is not monologic; it can be the effect of objects described in narrative, portrayed in visual media (i.e., in paintings, photographs, and drawings) or seen *in situ* and in museums. The referentiality of some—if not most—archaeological objects finds expression in more than one form, of course. A more general distinction

9 See Ankersmit 1995.152–53 and Iggers 1995.

might be made between objects that still exist in the world and those that have been lost—where what is "lost" is necessarily the object's material existence.[10] The point here, however, is not to invoke some Platonic hierarchy of truth claims based on the relative reality or materiality of objects. Rather, the point is that visible objects signify past time in archaeology and history writing to the extent that they both demand and defy a coherent story. How, then, does this dilemma pertain to descriptions of visible objects in literature and fictional narratives that, at least in principle, do not bear the burden of a prior and unique material reality?[11]

Beginning with a distinction between *reading* objects and *finding* them, the objects in question here constitute neither a particular class (luxury goods vs. everyday goods, for example) nor a specific category (vases or statues, for example).[12] These classifications are important to the meaning of particular objects in context, but can also limit our understanding of their contingent narrative status. This contingency is related to what Arjun Appadurai calls the "idiosyncracies of things," where such idiosyncrasies work against a developmental model based on linear chronology or the evolution of genres (Appadurai 1986). My hypothesis is that objects in narrative in fact prefigure—rather than "reflect"—beliefs about objects in the world, including how they function as metonyms for past events. This is not the same thing as saying that there are no objects outside of or prior to what is said about them, but that these "textual" objects can help us think more productively about our disciplinary dilemma, its history, and its ideological implications.[13]

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10 In order for an object to be lost, of course, there must be a record (verbal or visual) of the fact that it was found. But cf. Ober 1995.97 on the possibility that some artifacts may exist in physical form but not be recognized as such, for example, natural rock formations that may have been ancient Attic boundary stones.

11 Objects in fictional narratives can obviously have external referentiality, i.e., they can be named within a class of similar objects in the world. What distinguishes them is the singularity accorded them by their narrative context.

12 Cf. Appadurai 1986.38 and Barthes 1981.133–34. On the literary representation of statues in archaic and classical Greece, see Steiner 2001.

13 Cf. Calame 1995.9, who warns against "an overly simplistic and reductive separation of interior discourse and exterior world. Returning to the image of the two sides of one sheet of paper, we must not forget that we already perceive the exterior or natural world as a series of significant images, and that it is the object of meaningful operations which, in turn, give it sociological shape." The question remains how such "images" become significant.

In what follows, I present an idiosyncratic selection of narrativized objects as case studies. It is obvious that this selection—which includes passages from Hesiod's *Theogony*, Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and Thucydides' *History*—does not add up to a comprehensive account of the temporal significance of visible objects in ancient Greek texts. To begin with, it necessarily minimizes the importance of two dominant variables in classical scholarship: genre and period. But in defense of the approach taken here, it seems to me that a self-explanatory or "natural" relationship between genre and period is too often—and too easily—assumed. This is not to suggest that the historical, social, and political context out of which "new" narrative forms are produced is insignificant. Nor does it mean that we shouldn't exhaust every means of discovering that context *if this is the aim of the research*. But while it may seem more appropriate to limit this discussion to the role of visible objects in a single genre defined by its emergence at a particular time (i.e., didactic poetry or comedy or history writing), I want to work across genres (and periods) in order to think about how narrative forms may, in fact, be defined by the ways in which they invest visible or material objects with temporal meaning.[14]

II. THE STONE OF ZEUS

In the Western narrative tradition, the story about the relationship of objects to time begins with Hesiod's *Theogony*. Here the idea of a "beginning" makes obvious reference to the early date of the poem's composition and to its narrative about the origins of the universe; it also refers to its opening line, which calls for a collective beginning of song (ἀρχώμεθ' ἀείδειν, 1). In short, the *Theogony* is about the simultaneous beginning of time and of poetic utterance. The question of how visible or material objects figure in this temporal environment has not been raised in any comprehensive way in the scholarship on the *Theogony*. In part, this is because the question itself seems better suited to discussions of history writing or archaeology than to discussions of poetry. After all, visible data are crucial to the ways in which these disciplines construct past events; one thinks of the visible θώματα or wonders of Herodotus's *Histories* or of Thucydides' discussion of the future ruins of Athens and Sparta in his Archaeology (to

14 As one referee points out, implicit in all this is the notion that the text itself is a physical object.

which I will return). It is less obvious that the disposition of visible objects comprises a useful category for analyzing poetic texts outside of ecphrastic passages (for example). But, as I've suggested above, this distinction is problematic, especially insofar as it can contribute to positivist approaches to the ancient past. It might also be objected that visible objects do not play a significant role in the *Theogony*, with the notable exception of the "great sickle" (μέγα δρέπανον, 162; cf. 175) used by Cronos to cut off Ouranos's testicles (161–82). But the number of visible objects that are accorded mention in any given text neither guarantees nor diminishes their significance. In any event, the point here is not to catalogue such objects but to think about their use in constructing temporal relations.

In Hesiod's well-known account of the ascendancy of Zeus, Cronos swallows in succession each of his newborn children in an attempt to avert the prophecy that he will be overcome by his own son (*Theogony* 453–506). Following the birth of Zeus, however, Gaia tricks Cronos by giving him a stone (λίθος) wrapped in swaddling clothes, which Cronos proceeds to swallow. But "as the years roll on" (ἐπιπλομένου δ' ἐνιαυτοῦ, 493), Gaia tricks him into disgorging the stone that Zeus then sets up in Pytho or Delphi to be a σῆμα and a θαῦμα (a sign and a wonder) for men of the future (*Theogony* 498–500):[15]

> τὸν μὲν Ζεὺς στήριξε κατὰ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης
> Πυθοῖ ἐν ἠγαθέῃ γυάλοις ὕπο Παρνησσοῖο
> σῆμ' ἔμεν ἐξοπίσω, θαῦμα θνητοῖσι βροτοῖσιν.
>
> Zeus fixed [the stone] in the wide-pathed earth
> At holy Pytho, under the glens of Parnassus,
> To be a sign thereafter (ἐξοπίσω), a marvel to mortal men.

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15 There is only one other λίθος in the extant Hesiodic corpus. At *Erga* 624, the plural refers to rocks that are used to dry dock a ship. Πέτρη (noun and adjective) is more common and is used of rocks as natural outcroppings (i.e., the rock from which the waters of the Styx flow, *Theogony* 785–92) or as weapons (i.e., those of Cottus, Briareos, and Gyes, *Theogony* 715). The proverbial use of πέτρη at *Theogony* 35 has recently been shown by Lopez-Ruiz 2003 to have Near Eastern antecedents; she also draws important parallels between proverbs, riddles, and oracular speech as a way of understanding the proverb in the context of Hesiod's poem. The meaning of the λίθος at Delphi may be as enigmatic as that of any proverb or oracle, with the crucial difference that its meaning, as described in the poem, is contingent upon its being seen *in situ*. Whether or not a qualitative semantic difference is maintained in archaic texts between λίθοι and πέτρη is difficult to say.

In Hesiod's story, Cronos swallows the stone last but vomits it up first (πρῶτον δ' ἐξήμησε λίθον, πύματον καταπίνων, *Theogony*, 497). This detail may conform to a temporal reversal that is "natural" in folklore, as West suggests.[16] Or it may demonstrate that Zeus is both the oldest and the youngest of the gods because he is born both last and (symbolically) first. But, in either case, the reversal marks the stone as an object whose unique meaning is tied to the passing of time. Or rather, it illustrates the idea that temporal relations can be the effect of physical or visible objects about which stories must be told. Its position in Hesiod's chronology of Zeus's rise to power, its placement in the Delphic landscape, its thaumatic appeal to human eyes, its mediation of past and future, its transition from divine fiction to mortal "fact" and its an-iconic deferral of meaning make the stone emblematic of the role of visible objects (as remains) in creating and mediating the past.

The story of Zeus's stone also illustrates two issues that are pertinent to the present discussion, one having to do with methodology and the other leading toward a conclusion. First, rhetorical figures often linked with visual description, e.g., ecphrasis and *enargeia*—and related questions of likeness, mimesis, or verisimilitude—pertain to my argument only to the extent that they bear false witness to the "presentness" or "liveness" of narrative events. In any case, Zeus's stone defies these tropes, both because it is an an-iconic object and because the poet devotes so little time to its physical or visible description. A second and related point is that references to visible or physical objects in narrative often signify the *deferral* of meaning rather than its immediacy. In this respect, Hesiod's story defies the evidentiary criteria and related questions of historicity or artifactuality that interest the historian and the archaeologist; the stone comes on the scene before the appearance of human beings in the world—at least until Pausanias sees it (or something like it) in Delphi in the second century (*Description of Greece* 10.24.6). It is this defiance, along with the stone's position as an Ur-object in cosmological time—and then as an object in Pausanias's fragmented landscape of Greece—that make it so useful for this discussion (cf. Elsner 1994).

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16 West 1966 ad loc.: "The items Kronos has swallowed naturally (in folk-lore terms) reappear in reverse order." This reversal may be "natural" because it is typical, but it still calls for interpretation in context. All references to the *Theogony* are from West's edition. All translations from the Greek in this paper are my own unless otherwise stated.

There have been several attempts to explain Hesiod's strange story about the substitute stone. West, for example, talks about the perceived holiness of meteorites and the prophetic stones in the Orphic *Lithica*.[17] In the context of Hesiod's narrative, however, the substitution facilitates Gaia's prophecy: it gives Zeus time to "increase his strength and glorious limbs" and thus eventually to overcome his all-powerful father (μένος καὶ φαίδιμα γυῖα ἠΰξετο, 492–93). But mythological narratives cannot be satisfactorily explained by references to external natural phenomena or by analogous narrative topoi. Such explanations only demonstrate how material objects in narrative seem to demand reference to an extra-textual reality. Moreover, the logic of the story is contradicted later in the *Theogony* when Athena emerges fully grown from Zeus's head after he swallows Metis (*Theogony* 886–929). In other words, there is nothing to prevent Zeus from emerging fully grown—and with all his bodily strength—from his father's belly (νηδύν, 487).[18] In fact, the explanatory gesture seems overly literal, and thus only emphasizes the story's singular and (in Fineman's terms) its anecdotal quality.[19]

But if we reject logical or literal explanations and find meteorites and prophetic stones only partially relevant, how do we account for the stone in Hesiod's narrative? And then what can it tell us about visible objects as the signifiers of human temporal relations? In the passing of time, the stone will come to refer to a significant past event for future generations of men, namely, Zeus's defeat of the older gods; in fact, it helps define them as men

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17 West 1966.303, who wonders whether "the Delphic stone too was supposed to have mantic properties"; cf. West 1983.167. See also Cook 1964.1.520 note 2 on representations of Zeus as a stone. On the omphalos at Delphi and its associations with the stone set up by Zeus, see Delcourt 1955.144–49, Parke and Wormell 1956.6–7, Roux 1976.31–33, Sourvinou-Inwood 1991.235–36. Davidson 1995.363–69 provides an overview of the scholarship on the passage. Jeffrey 1990.255 discusses an inscribed stone from Metapontion (uncertainly dated to 550–525) that she takes to be "a sacred stone of the kind seen by Pausanias at Pharai in Achaia, which he rightly recognized to be relics of the early tradition of aniconic stone worship (vii.22.4)."

18 On the story of Metis and the birth of Athena, see West 1966 ad loc. Cf. the birth of Apollo in the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* 119ff.

19 Another explanation for the stone is provided at 496 where Cronos vomits up his offspring because he has been "vanquished by the arts and might of his son" (νικηθεὶς τέχνῃσι βίηφί τε παιδὸς ἑοῖο). Here Zeus is somehow instrumental in making his father disgorge his brothers and sisters; this would presumably be impossible if he himself had been swallowed. The line is rejected by some editors; West 1966 ad loc. accepts it based on comparison with the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* 22–23.

with a past they don't yet know. In cosmological time, moreover, it is the first object to be designated as such in a specific and prominent locale and is the only object to be called a σῆμα in the *Theogony*.[20] Its "future" is plotted from the time that Zeus sets up the stone in Delphi, but it also foregrounds the time of the poem's enunciation and Hesiod's position as one of those mortals for whom the stone will be a σῆμα. Scholars have even been prompted to ask whether Hesiod might actually have seen the stone in Delphi, a question that illustrates again the stone's unique position in the poem's temporal and spatial landscape, a position enhanced by the promise of its extra-discursive or material reality or, in de Certeau's words, by its "position of the real."[21]

This is the promise that Pausanias's text comes close to fulfilling when he reports seeing a small stone (λίθος οὐ μέγας) in Delphi that, he says, may be the one that was vomited up by Cronos (ἔστι δὲ καὶ δόξα ἐς αὐτὸν δοθῆναι Κρόνῳ τὸν λίθον ἀντὶ τοῦ παιδός, καὶ ὡς αὖθις ἤμεσεν αὐτὸν ὁ Κρόνος, *Description of Greece* 10.24.6).[22] From this retrospective point of view, Hesiod's story predicts the founding of Delphi as a preternatural landscape where visible objects function as metonyms for prior significant events and where those events have potential (if necessarily deferred) meaning in the future.[23] In this context, Pausanias's uncertainty about the stone's history or, rather, his disavowal of certainty (ἔστι δὲ καὶ δόξα), illustrates the hermeneutic gap between visible objects in the world and the stories they produce, and we can recall here that the substitute stone was originally part of a "false" story. This gap may seem obvious and unremarkable, but its truth needs to be demonstrated in the specific instances where the past is embodied in objects or, more generally, where time becomes predicated of things in narrative. Perhaps most important of all, it signifies the human desire to give meaning to past events and predict their future effects: this may help to explain its status as a marvel (θαῦμα). But while the stone can be read as a response to this desire, it is also emblematic of the fact that visible objects can have the effect of breaking the spell of narrative and

20 On the σῆμα as a portent and a grave in Homer, see Steiner 1995.208–09.

21 Davidson 1995.365–66 remarks: "Th[e] reference to the subsequent history of the stone presumably reflects an interest in it as a cult object already in Hesiod's own time."

22 See Frazer 1965.6.354–55 on the worship of sacred stones.

23 On the process and effect of retrospection in reading, see Iser 1972.277–83. On the related concept (and consequences) of the belatedness of meaning, see Bielik-Robson 2000.

temporal coherence while they simultaneously evoke a desire for the "real" thing.[24]

III. DEAD THINGS IN ARISTOPHANES' *FROGS*

Aristophanes' *Frogs* is both a foundational text in the history of Western literary criticism and a text about the relationship of words to things.[25] These are obviously related phenomena, and, in this respect, the play epitomizes the disciplinary divisions whose ideological content we are trying to understand here. In addition to its formal emphasis on linguistic referentiality, moreover, the plot is concerned with the political consequences brought about by the death and (possible) resurrection of a tragic poet. What is the connection between these two aspects of the comedy, between the relationship of language to things and the death and resurrection of tragic poets?[26] This question is only partially answered by the fact that Aeschylus and Euripides were, in fact, dead at the time of the play's production. More to the point, the question of the referentiality of language—what we might call the "object" of the comedy—is intrinsically linked to the conceptualization and narrativization of the past.

A passage near the end of the play illustrates this link. Here Dionysus responds to Euripides' complaint about being left behind in Hades in favor of Aeschylus (*Frogs* 1476–78):

EU: ὦ σχέτλιε, περιόψει με δὴ τεθνηκότα;
DI: τίς δ' οἶδεν εἰ τὸ ζῆν μέν ἐστι κατθανεῖν,
τὸ πνεῖν δὲ δειπνεῖν, τὸ δὲ καθεύδειν κώδιον;

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24 Cf. Benjamin 1999.82–83: "Pausanias produced his topography of Greece around A.D. 200, at a time when the cult sites and many other monuments had begun to fall into ruin." The interesting implication here is that writing about objects is initiated by their falling into ruin.

25 Aristophanic wordplay includes puns, etymologies, and definitions, i.e., the topics that will be systematically—and humorously—treated by Plato in the *Cratylus*, and these technical aspects of language theory have dominated contemporary scholarship on the language of the play. On language theory in *Frogs*, see Dover 1993.29. On the history of etymology, see Sluiter 1997.159–63. All references to the text of *Frogs* are from Dover's 1993 edition.

26 Cf. de Man's notion (1984.121) that what we do with dead poets "is simply to bury them, to bury them in their own texts made into epitaphs and monumental graves."

EU: O you wretch, will you ignore the fact that I am dead?
DI: Who knows if living is dying,
Or breathing is dining, or sleeping is a little sheepskin?

As is commonly noted, Dionysus's first line is an abbreviated quotation from a fragmentary play—or possibly from two fragmentary plays—by Euripides.[27] In other words, it is an "old" piece of tragic text that, as Aeschylus says earlier, died with the younger poet (*Frogs* 868–69). But of course, the poetry of Aeschylus is also "dead," since all tragic quotations in the comedy (illustrated by those that are "weighed" on a scale in the final contest, 1378–1410) are no more than linguistic filler plugged in at random, like so many bits and pieces.

This anatomizing practice foregrounds the problem of linguistic reference, here literalized as a series of questions based on improbable equivalencies. More specifically, the wordplay that distinguishes Dionysus's "original" or comic contribution to the Euripidean tag (line 1478) depends on equivalencies of sound (repeated consonants and syllables) that contrast with unheard of equivalencies in sense; "breathing is dining" and "sleeping is a sheepskin" only in the sense that each pair shares phonetic material. The articular infinitives that denote the activities of breathing, dining, and sleeping—capped off by the final and only "thing" or noun (κῴδιον)—also contribute to the objectification of the terms, while the fact that breathing and sleeping are simply other ways of saying "living" and "dying" illustrates the interchangeability and hence the contingent relationship of words to things. To reiterate, this contingency is the basis of the play's comic action, including its political content.

Other sorts of "things" surface in the contest between Euripides and Aeschylus that forms the central agon of the play. Here Euripides famously says that he taught the Athenians to take better care of their household affairs (*Frogs* 971ff.), to which Dionysus replies with some examples (*Frogs* 980–88):

νὴ τοὺς θεούς, νῦν γοῦν Ἀθη-
ναίων ἅπας τις εἰσιὼν

27 See Dover 1993 ad loc. and on *Frogs* 1082.

κέκραγε πρὸς τοὺς οἰκέτας
ζητεῖ τε, "ποῦ ᾽στιν ἡ χύτρα;
τίς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπεδήδοκεν
τῆς μαινίδος; τὸ τρύβλιον
τὸ περυσινὸν τέθνηκέ μοι·
ποῦ τὸ σκόροδον τὸ χθιζινόν;
τίς τῆς ἐλάας παρέτραγεν."

Yes, by the gods, now
every Athenian goes home
and screams at his slaves
looking for answers: "Where is my jug?
Who ate the head off my fish?
My soup bowl
from last year died.
Where is yesterday's garlic?
Who has nibbled on my olives?"

This attention to everyday objects is part of the play's fooling around with literal vs. figural language and is acted out more overtly in the later scenes in which words are evaluated by being weighed on a scale (1364ff.) or when Aeschylus throws the "little bottle of oil" (ληκύθιον, 1209ff.) into Euripides' prologues.[28] The literalization of language in these scenes is embodied in the materiality of the objects mentioned together with the literal effects of Euripides' mimetic art (you are what you watch). Although Aristophanes' critique of Euripides is parodic, these references to everyday household objects (and foods) rely on the equation of literal language and mundane things. I am not forgetting the "death" of the soup bowl. Dover notes that "τέθνηκε: 'perish' can be used of abstract entities (e.g., λόγοι, Aeschylus *Choephoroi* 846), but is not used elsewhere of inanimate material objects" (Dover 1993 ad loc.). So while Dionysus allows himself this figural use of the verb, its uniqueness only highlights the concrete ordinariness of the noun.

In *Frogs*, the objects of everyday life (and by anachronism, we might refer to these as a certain class of archaeological artifact) are not the

28 Cf. Dover 1993 on line 1200: "Destroying a *lekythos* has no discernible point in this scene; losing one was no doubt a commonplace misfortune comparable to leaving an umbrella in a train . . . and its very triviality, attributed to mythical heroes, is intrinsically funny."

stuff of an idealized Greek past. The formation and maintenance of that past are the claims that Aeschylus makes for his plays (i.e., for a certain genre of literary work). As a survivor of the Persian Wars and the author of *Seven Against Thebes*, he says that he bequeathed to the city spectators who were fearless warriors (1016–17):

> ἀλλὰ πνέοντας δόρυ καὶ λόγχας καὶ λευκολόφους
> τρυφαλείας
> καὶ πήληκας καὶ κνημῖδας καὶ θυμοὺς ἑπταβοείους.
>
> [Euripides received from me] men who breathed spears
> and javelins and white-plumed helmets
> And headgear and greaves and hearts of seven-fold
> oxhide.

We are invited to compare Aeschylus's list of the warrior's equipment with the pots, pans, and fishheads Dionysus puts in the mouths (so to speak) of Euripides' spectators. The difference is that Aeschylus's "objects" signify war instead of domestic life; they are also lexical items borrowed from the Homeric poems. But most significantly, they are part of a striking metaphor governed by the verb "to breathe."[29] These objects obviously signify more than their use value, they are metonymic markers for manliness and valor—and labored breathing—in combat.

We are presented then with a network of associations between, on the one hand, figural language and a dominant militarism and, on the other, literal language and the objects of everyday life. We can read these associations in a number of ways, always conditioned by the fact that, in his bid to "save" Athens (*Frogs* 1419), Dionysus finally decides to revivify Aeschylus at the end of the play.[30] But what I want to draw attention to are the correlations between linguistic expression, objects in the world, and ideological formations or narratives (the narrative of martial combat vs. the narrative of domestic life). As a comic persona, Aeschylus is both the purveyor of figural or high literary language and a figure out of a dominant political history. In bringing the dead Aeschylus back to life, the drama enacts a metaphysics of presence with respect to this history, i.e., the idea

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29 Cf. Pindar *Ol*. 8.70: ἐνέπνευσεν μένος.

30 I discuss Dionysus's decision to resurrect Aeschylus in more detail in Bassi 1998.

that this highly rhetorical past must "come alive." By comparison, Euripides' jugs and bowls, his fishheads and garlic, are left to molder.

Here we may recall that Aeschylus had earlier cried foul because, unlike Euripides' poetry, his own poetry had not died with him (ὅτι ἡ ποίησις οὐχὶ συντέθνηκέ μοι, / τούτῳ δὲ συντέθνηκεν, *Frogs* 868–69).[31] In retrospect, the "dead" bowl (986) becomes a metonym for Euripides' dead poetry; in fact, these are the only occurrences in the play of finite forms of θνήσκω.[32] It may be worth noting, too, that Euripides is the only principal character in the play to be specifically referred to as a "dead man" (67 and 1476) and that Dionysus's decision in favor of Aeschylus means that Euripides remains a "dead man." The only other "dead man" (τεθνηκότα, 171) is the corpse that Dionysus can't hire to carry his gear in a scene that brings us back to the beginning of the play and the business about whether Xanthias or the donkey is carrying the baggage (*Frogs* 24–32). In addition to the pseudo-philosophical and linguistic parody about who is carrying what, both scenes raise the question of what exactly Xanthias and Dionysus have brought with them to Hades; they never seem to use any of this stuff, which is variously referred to as σκεύη, "implements" (12, 15, 108, 497, 521, 627), στρώματα, "bedding" (165, 439, 502, 525, 596), and σκευάρια, "small implements" (172).[33] Of course, the question of who is carrying this "baggage" is part of the visual exchange of identity between Dionysus and Xanthias—or master and slave—once they enter Hades: slaves do the carrying.

But this obvious social commentary is only one aspect of the meaning of these miscellaneous and ill-defined things in the play. The act of carrying things (σκεύη φέρουσι, 15) is the stuff of some well-worn jokes (τι τῶν εἰωθότων, 1–2), written by hackneyed or pedestrian comic writers.[34]

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31 See Pickard-Cambridge 1968.86 on the Athenian decree that gave permission for Aeschylus's plays to be produced after his death: "This may have been the point of his claim in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (866ff.) that his poetry had not died with him like that of Euripides." See also Dover 1993.23–24, who argues that the distinction that Aeschylus makes between his poetry and Euripides', i.e., that Euripides' died with him, is "ignored" in the play.

32 There are five other occurrences of the verb in the play, in addition to the three quoted, four participles (62, 171, 1175, 1476) and one infinitive (613).

33 At 523, Dionysus uses the verb σκευάζω to describe the activity of dressing up Xanthias as Heracles. But it is clear that the Heracles costume, i.e., the club and lion skin, is not the σκεύη they are carrying.

34 Dover 1993 ad loc. argues persuasively that the phrase σκεύη φέρουσι = "They present characters carrying baggage," in which the poet is equated with his characters as the subjects of the verb.

But this comic business may have another side to it. According to Greek custom, the dead were buried with objects or grave goods that make up a substantial part of the archaeological record.[35] The opening scene of *Frogs* may refer to this practice: Dionysus is carrying his own grave goods to Hades. If so, carrying these burdensome objects provides a suggestive complement to putting words on a scale. Or rather, it provides a visual analogue to the objectification of the spoken word, based on a shared metaphorical connection to death and to the contingency of meaning, whether it is based on verbal or visual phenomena.[36]

Material objects in *Frogs* and the language used to describe them can be talked about in terms of at least two competing temporal categories, each informed by the inevitability of death as the ironic "end" of the play. One, associated with the works of Euripides, consists of objects whose meaning is localized in the present, day-to-day world (νῦν γοῦν)—although the events might be called pseudo-historical: *last year's* soup bowl, *yesterday's* garlic. Questions about their whereabouts ("Who ate the head off my fish?") only situate them more solidly in that world. The other category, associated with the works of Aeschylus, consists of objects whose meaning is located in a more distant past; the fact that these objects do not belong in the day-to-day world is figured in Aeschylus's impossible "revival." The former category is empirical and literal, and has to do with what the eyes can see in a present characterized as "everyday"; the latter is figural and rhetorical and has to do with what is virtually or metaphorically visible, i.e., manly valor in war.

Both categories must be understood within the parodic world of the comedy, of course. But Aristophanes' presentation of the different effects of seeing the tragedies of the recently departed Euripides (who died in 407/6, a year before *Frogs* was produced) and the long-departed Aeschylus (who died fifty years earlier) points to the anecdotal and metonymic function of visible objects in fiction or poetry. It also illustrates the ideological content of objects defined in terms of social and political (or class-based) hierarchies that persist in a variety of contemporary disciplines, for example, those

35 On grave goods in fifth-century Athens (and elsewhere), see Morris 1992.103–28 and 184–90 (for Vroulia in the seventh and sixth centuries). Also, Kurtz and Boardman 1971.91–105. The archaeological research indicates that grave goods were rarely luxury items.

36 In the play, of course, we assume that these objects are not seen but are only talked about, i.e., that they, too, are only words. But this fact only enhances their metaphorical effect.

based on a distinction between everyday objects and prestige objects. Dionysus's decision to bring Aeschylus back to the world of the living—where his helmets and greaves await him (since his poetry did not die with him)—may be an effect of nostalgia or panic; a city that needs a dead poet is doomed. This decision also has the effect of projecting those objects that signify Aeschylus's symbolic baggage into "the position of the real," i.e., into a future that extends beyond the play's final line. But this future is also figured as the return to an idealized past whose comic eccentricities can only intensify the memory of a more immediate past marked by the military disaster in Sicily.

IV. THE REMAINS OF HISTORY

As suggested above, material objects in history writing function (in principle) as both discursive phenomena and as "data" that refer to singular or unique objects in the world.[37] In this respect, W. R. Connor's comment that "vision in Thucydides is the privileged sense" calls for an accounting not only of how this "sense" works with regard to the narrative of events that make up the *History* at large, but also to the more discrete visible objects that surface within that narrative.[38] This "visual sense" has been chiefly explored in studies of *enargeia* in the *History*, especially as this trope is exemplified in the narrative of events surrounding the Sicilian expedition.[39] Here I want to focus on how historical objects as such may be compared to objects in poetic or fictional narratives, and how this comparison may be pertinent to the history of discipline formation.

Thucydides' famous methodological statement establishes a hierarchy of truth-claims based on first-hand empirical observation in telling the

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37 Work on visible objects in Herodotus's *Histories* includes Dewald 1993, Elsner 1994, Thomas 2000, Lateiner 1986. The generic shift from poetry to historiography requires acknowledgement of the methodological principles laid down by the historians and the long-standing debates over their relative truth claims about the past. I will not rehearse these debates here, however.

38 Connor 1985.10, cited by Walker 1993.356, with note 6.

39 On *enargeia* in Thucydides, see Walker 1993, who cites as exemplary Winkler's groundbreaking discussion (1982) of the opening scene of Heliodorus's *Aithiopika*. See also Bakker 1997a. Gribble 1998 discusses the effects of focalization in Thucydides; Fowler 1996.69–71 treats what he calls the historian's "voiceprint"; Edmunds 1993 discusses the role of verb tenses in bringing Thucydides' narrative "into the present perspective of the author" (quotation on p. 843).

story of the "greatest war that ever was" (1.21.2).[40] But he begins with a consideration of the ambiguous nature of ruins, which he first illustrates by the example of Mycenae, followed immediately by the example of Sparta (1.10.1–2):

> Καὶ ὅτι μὲν Μυκῆναι μικρὸν ἦν, ἢ εἴ τι τῶν τότε πόλισμα νῦν μὴ ἀξιόχρεων δοκεῖ εἶναι, οὐκ ἀκριβεῖ ἄν τις σημείῳ χρώμενος ἀπιστοίη μὴ γενέσθαι τὸν στόλον τοσοῦτον ὅσον οἵ τε ποιηταὶ εἰρήκασι καὶ ὁ λόγος κατέχει. Λακεδαιμονίων γὰρ εἰ ἡ πόλις ἐρημωθείη, λειφθείη δὲ τά τε ἱερὰ καὶ τῆς κατασκευῆς τὰ ἐδάφη, πολλὴν ἂν οἶμαι ἀπιστίαν τῆς δυνάμεως προελθόντος πολλοῦ χρόνου τοῖς ἔπειτα πρὸς τὸ κλέος αὐτῶν εἶναι.
>
> And that Mycenae was a small place, or if some former town now seems to be unworthy of consideration, no one using an accurate sign (σημείῳ) could doubt that the expedition [against Troy] was of the magnitude that the poets have said and tradition maintains. For if the city of the Lacedaimonians should be destroyed, and the temples and the foundations of the public buildings should be left, I think that after a significant amount of time had passed there would be a great deal of disbelief about [the Lacedaimonians'] previous power among those [who saw the remains], in relation to their [the Lacedaimonians'] fame. (Crawley translation)

As Thucydides goes on to clarify, his point is that the small scale of Sparta's structural remains—like those of Mycenae—would cause a future viewer to underestimate the city's current power (cf. κατασκευαῖς πολυτελέσι, 1.10.2). It is obvious that Thucydides is not talking about "objects" as I've been using that term in this paper, although τῆς κατασκευῆς τὰ ἐδάφη could conceivably refer to things found on the ground of the abandoned city.[41] But

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40 The bibliography on Thucydides' methodological statement is vast. Gomme 1959 ad loc. has a useful discussion of the debates over translation and interpretation. See Hornblower 1991 ad loc. for more recent contributions to these debates. All references to the *History* are from Jones' 1974 Oxford edition.

41 Hobbes 1629 translates τῆς κατασκευῆς τὰ ἐδάφη as "the floors of the buildings."

he is talking about the role of visible remains in telling a plausible and coherent story about the past. In doing so, he establishes architectural ruins as the evidentiary standard, but also sounds a cautionary note on the inverse relationship between the small scale of the (future) ruins and the power of the city in the present (which is obviously in the past from that future point of view). Thus what is true for Mycenae and Sparta (that their power would be judged less formidable than it actually is or was) is also, but oppositely, true for Athens (*History* 1.10.2–3):

> ᾿Αθηναίων δὲ τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο παθόντων διπλασίαν ἂν τὴν δύναμιν εἰκάζεσθαι ἀπὸ τῆς φανερᾶς ὄψεως τῆς πόλεως ἢ ἔστιν. οὔκουν ἀπιστεῖν εἰκός, οὐδὲ τὰς ὄψεις τῶν πόλεων μᾶλλον σκοπεῖν ἢ τὰς δυνάμεις, κτλ.
>
> If the Athenians were to suffer the same thing, [I think that] their power would be reckoned to be twice as great as it is, judging from the still visible remains (ἀπὸ τῆς φανερᾶς ὄψεως) of the city. Therefore, [I think that] it is not reasonable to have doubt, nor [is it reasonable] to pay more attention to the visible appearance (τὰς ὄψεις) of cities than to their powers.[42]

The point of this digression is that "visible remains" can falsify rather than verify the past (here specified as the competing powers of cities) that is, in general terms, the subject of Thucydides' history. But in making this point, the easy slippage from legend to history, from twelfth-century Mycenae to fifth-century Sparta and Athens is noteworthy for the unexpected (if less than enthusiastic) confidence it confers on Homer as a source, especially

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42 In the passage quoted (1.10.2), σκοπεῖν shifts between a literal and a figural meaning; it means both to look at the visible evidence (τὰς ὄψεις) and to consider the powers that somehow exceed that evidence, i.e., it is an example of the metaphor of seeing the past in historical discourse. Cf. Kallet 2001.38–39, 56–58, and 98–100 on the parallels between 1.10.3 and the description of the fleet as it sets out for Sicily at 6.31.4; these parallels are based on a shared skepticism about visual displays of power. The variable I would add to this analysis is time: both passages look to the future for validating the discrepancy between Athens' actual power and its apparent power. The former passage appeals to a hypothetical future when Athens will be deserted except for its buildings; the latter appeals (implicitly) to the actual future when the Athenians (as the informed reader of Thucydides knows) will be defeated in Sicily.

given Thucydides' insistence that his work is a corrective to the fictional accounts of poets and logographers (ἐπὶ τὸ μυθῶδες, 1.21).[43] This presentation of visible evidence in the *History* thus leads to two related conclusions. First, the meaning of such evidence was conventionally assumed to be self-evident and, second, the writing of history is a means of correcting that false assumption.

What I want to draw attention to, however, is the fact that these hypothetical remains are visible from the point of view of someone who sees them in the future, just as Zeus's stone in the *Theogony* is a σῆμα and a θαῦμα for men to come (ἐξοπίσω), and Aeschylus's war paraphernalia in *Frogs* are part of a legacy whose effects are projected into the future (after he has died, as well as after he "returns" to Athens). I don't mean to imply that this temporal deferral is a necessary feature of Greek narrative or that the meaning of visible objects is always proclaimed in a "future" outside the narrative or dramatic frame. But the predicament of objects that are "left behind" (λειφθείη, *History* 1.10.2) for the purpose of being seen and interpreted in some future time is part of a "conceptual system" with implications for disciplines that take the past as their object.[44]

As we've seen, Thucydides' discussion of the evidentiary value of visible remains paradoxically corroborates Homer's narrative of the Trojan War, or at least the assumption that Mycenae was a formidable naval power. But Thucydides does not say that he actually saw the ruins at Mycenae, or even that his hypothesis is based on an eyewitness account.[45] He makes the claim from the point of view of a hypothetical "someone" who relies on an accurate "sign" or "trace" (ἀκριβεῖ ἄν τις σημείῳ χρώμενος, 1.10.1).[46] Thucydides' first example, Mycenae—unlike Sparta and Athens—is a ruin by the time the historian is writing his *History*. As a cautionary tale, it refers therefore both to the unexpected relationship between ruins and power and to the possibility that the two superpowers of Greece will one day be like Homer's Mycenae. On both counts, the hesitancy with which the example is offered suggests the simultaneous recognition and denial of that future eventuality. Coming at the beginning of a narrative that chronicles the rise

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43 Cf. Hedrick 1993.27–28.

44 This is Detienne's phrase (1996.19).

45 Loraux 1986.151–52 notes that Thucydides rarely refers to events that he himself witnessed. Cf. Edmunds 1993.841–42.

46 In the case of Sparta and Athens, Thucydides' counter-intuitive conclusions are reached by conjecture, i.e., they are based on what he "thinks" (οἶμαι, 1.10.2).

and fall, if not the utter ruin, of Athens, this disavowal has implications for reading the *History* to which I will return below.

Before doing so, however, I want to turn briefly to a passage in the *Iliad* that prefigures Thucydides' digression on the relationship between power and ruins. The point of doing so is not to suggest that the latter is a "reflection" of the former, but that the *differences* between the two passages are pertinent to the issues at hand.[47] At the end of *Iliad* 11, the Greeks are being hard pressed near the ships. As a response to their worsening situation, Nestor sends Patroclus to urge Achilles to re-enter the fighting or (alternatively) to send Patroclus into battle. On his way, Patroclus pauses to tend to the wounds of Eurypylus. It is at this crucial juncture between the possibility of Achilles' re-entry into the war and the threat of (an impossible) Greek defeat that Homer describes the future destruction of the wall around the Greek camp at Troy (*Iliad* 12.8–37):[48]

> Built against the will of the immortals,
> The wall could not endure (ἔμπεδον) for long.[49]
> While Hector lived and Achilles raged
> And the city of Priam was still not sacked,
> The great wall of the Greeks stood firm (ἔμπεδον).
> But when all the best Trojans had died,
> And many Greeks had fallen or had left,
> And after ten years Priam's city had fallen,
> And the Greeks had sailed back to their native land,
> Then Poseidon and Apollo conspired
> To sweep away the wall . . .
> This Poseidon and Apollo were going to do
> In time to come (ὄπισθε). But then (τότε δ') the battle raged

47 On "Homeric elements" in Thucydides, see Kallet 2001.97 and the works cited there.

48 Cf. Hornblower, who concludes his expanded entry on Thucydides in the 1996 edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* by suggesting that "two areas needing more work are Thucydides' detailed intertextual relation to Homer and to Herodotus." Another useful comparison here is with the description of the wall of Uruk in the Gilgamesh epic, on which see Pritchard 1969.73. The passage at *Iliad* 12 is anticipated at *Iliad* 7.442–63.

49 See Zeitlin 1995 on the use of ἔμπεδον to describe the bed of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. The meaning of the bed, like the wall in the passage under discussion, is linked to what could be called its archaeological function, although the endurance of the former is to be contrasted with the brief existence of the latter (οὔ τι πολὺν χρόνον ἔμπεδον ἦεν, *Iliad* 12.9).

> On both sides of the well-built wall (τεῖχος ἐΰδμητον),
> And the beams of the towers rang as they were struck.

In his commentary on this passage, Leaf suggests that the account of the destruction of the wall is "only meant to meet a prosaic doubt, based on the fact that no remains of the great fortification were known to men."[50] And on this point he quotes Strabo, quoting Aristotle: "he [Homer] says that the wall was recently built, or it wasn't built: once the poet fashioned the wall, he made it disappear, as Aristotle says" (νεωστὶ γὰρ γεγονέναι φησὶ τὸ τεῖχος, ἢ οὐδ᾽ ἐγένετο, ὁ δὲ πλάσας ποιητὴς ἠφάνισεν, ὡς ᾽Αριστοτέλης φησίν, *Geographica* 13.1.36). As Leaf explains, Strabo is suggesting that the wall may never have existed except as an imaginary feature in Homer's poem. And in support of his skepticism, Strabo argues that it made little sense for the Greeks to build the wall so late in the war and for the Trojans to have besieged the ships *after* it was built but not before.

Since there seems to be nothing in the extant works of Aristotle to confirm Strabo's quotation, he may simply be invoking Aristotle's authority on a long-standing debate to which Thucydides also contributes. In the Archaeology, the historian argues that the Greeks must have won a land battle as soon as they arrived in Troy, for otherwise "they would not have built a walled defense around their camp" (τὸ γὰρ ἔρυμα τῷ στρατοπέδῳ οὐκ ἂν ἐτειχίσαντο, *History* 1.11). It is unclear whether the wall to which Thucydides refers here is the wall described in the *Iliad* (i.e., the one built in the tenth year of the war) or one that is alluded to in the epic tradition outside the *Iliad* (i.e., one built soon after the Greeks' arrival).[51] But even if Thucydides is not talking about the wall whose future ruin is described in *Iliad* 12, his

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50 Leaf 1960.1.524. Cf. Leaf 1923.181–84. Camp 2000.41 argues that walls are the "most enduring evidence of antiquity surviving in the landscape today." He is talking about city walls, although not the Mycenaean kind. The wall described by Homer is presumably of a different order, even with its "high gates" (πύργους ὑψηλούς, 7.338 and 437). On the significance of city walls for the definition of the Homeric *polis*, see Scully 1990 passim: "Not infrequently, the circuit wall by itself stands as an ideogram for the city, expressing civic order set apart from natural forms and hostile forces" (p. 9); he discusses the beginning of *Iliad* 12 on pp. 27–28.

51 See Gomme et al. 1970.4 ad loc. See also Kallet 2001.99 and 106, who notes that "Thucydides' attention to the fortification he deduces the Greeks must have built in conjunction with their early, but unexploited victory compares with his emphasis on the Athenians' failure to construct a wall following theirs [in Sicily]; correspondingly, the Greeks at Troy won, the Athenians lost" (p. 99).

text contributes to a history of rationalizing arguments for the interpretation of past events based on the existence (or absence) of a particular physical object or structure. His hypothesis about the future ruins of Sparta and Athens is part of this same rationalizing discourse.

The anecdotal quality of Strabo's quotation, and its status *as* a quotation (ὡς Ἀριστοτέλης φησίν), constitute a formal acknowledgment of the persistence of this rationalizing discourse in which the debate about Homer's wall has some paradoxical effects. For example, the act of applying strict evidentiary criteria to the details of Homer's narrative works to validate the general historicity of the Trojan War, an effect it shares with Thucydides' discussion of the size of Mycenae's ruins. But more suggestive is the fact that the desire to recover the ancient wall is predicated on its future absence—or, rather, on the poem's projection of its absent ruins into the future (ὄπισθε).[52]

Because this interlude comes at a moment when the Greeks are facing the possibility of defeat, one effect of this projection within the *Iliad* itself is to forestall that possibility; the story of the wall affirms the Greeks' future victory and, in doing so, it simultaneously actuates and alleviates an implied resistance to that possible defeat. But this only raises the question of why the wall is the vehicle of this particular effect or, rather, why it serves this metonymic function. In the context of the discourse of power and ruins mentioned above, the "great wall" of the Greeks (μέγα τεῖχος, 12.12) and the "unsacked city" of Priam (ἀπόρθητος πόλις, 12.11) occupy equivalent positions; the Greek victory is verified in a future in which the wall will no longer be "great" and the city no longer "unsacked." But this equivalence also conveys a counter-intuitive conclusion similar to that which follows from the relative magnitude of ruins in Thucydides' text. Just as its insignificant ruins belie Mycenae's former power (while they prefigure the possibility of Athens' future defeat), so the ruined wall is a sign of the Greeks' victory rather than the defeat that seems imminent as the fighting around the wall rages in the present moment of the poem (a present that is retrospectively viewed from that projected future, δὴ τότε).

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52 Greek usage seems to conceptualize the future as being behind one (expressed in the adverbs ἐξοπίσω or ὀπίσω, as at *Theogony* 500), and the past as being in front of one (expressed in the adverbs πρόσω or πρόσθε, i.e., at *Agamemnon* 19). This spatial concept of time is usually explained by a visual metaphor: the past is in front because one can see what has already happened; the future is behind because it remains to be seen. See LSJ on ὀπίσω (2) with the T scholia on *Iliad* 18.250 and the analysis of Dunkel 1982–83.

But we are also faced with the magnitude of the wall's destruction. It is destined to disappear from the landscape without a trace: Apollo and Poseidon will cover it with water and bury it in sand (*Iliad* 12.24–33). Perhaps it is the absolute absence of the wall's future ruins that engenders the rationalizing discourses about it. In any event, the wall has come under what Ernst calls an "archaeological gaze" (Ernst 1999.65). And although Ernst doesn't fully explain its theoretical implications, this idea can help us to understand the wall as a visible object in the landscape whose construction and "disappearance" lead to the "prosaic doubt" that comes to be variously reiterated in the scholarly literature, from Aristotle to Strabo to Leaf. The story of the Greeks' ruined wall—like that of Zeus's stone, or the lost objects in *Frogs,* or the future ruins of Sparta and Athens—is predicated on the notion that the remains of visible objects are proof of the past.

Which brings me to my last object. When Thucydides says that his work "is put together to be a κτῆμα for all time rather than a competitive entertainment to hear on the spot" (κτῆμά τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν ξύγκειται, 1.22.4), he equates his history with a concrete (even mundane) "thing" or "possession." This statement has generated a great deal of scholarly discussion. A common conclusion is summed up in Hornblower's warning against taking " 'possession for ever' too literally: Th. is not systematic about explaining technical terms . . . and takes a great deal for granted."[53] But the phrase (or the metaphor) does not ask to be taken literally, just as the suggestion that Thucydides "takes a great deal for granted" is far from explanatory. The more interesting challenge is to think about how we should take the phrase figuratively.

In Homer, κτῆμα (which occurs in the plural κτήματα with one exception) refers invariably to the household possessions of elites; these are the things, for example, that were brought to Troy with Helen in the *Iliad* and that the suitors threaten to destroy in the house of Odysseus in the *Odyssey* (cf. Griffith 1995.71). Sometimes these possessions are described in more detail, e.g., as the "bronze, gold, and iron" that Odysseus says Pheidon has stored up for him in the false story he tells to Eumaios at

53 Cf. Edmunds 1993.387: "Thucydides speaks of his writing from the point of view of an ideal present time—his work is a possession ἐς αἰεί. If the adverb αἰεί is understood in its distributive sense, the work is a possession for each successive occasion, in contradistinction to the single, momentary, transitory performance for the listening audience of another kind of literature (1, 22, 4)."

Odyssey 14.323.[54] In addition to its singular appearance in 1.22, Thucydides uses the noun κτῆμα only one other time in the *History*, where he describes the sufferings of the Athenians after the second Peloponnesian invasion (2.65.2):[55]

> ἰδίᾳ δὲ τοῖς παθήμασιν ἐλυποῦντο, ὁ μὲν δῆμος ὅτι ἀπ᾽ ἐλασσόνων ὁρμώμενος ἐστέρητο καὶ τούτων, οἱ δὲ δυνατοὶ καλὰ κτήματα κατὰ τὴν χώραν οἰκοδομίαις τε καὶ πολυτελέσι κατασκευαῖς ἀπολωλεκότες, τὸ δὲ μέγιστον, πόλεμον ἀντ᾽ εἰρήνης ἔχοντες.
>
> Individually, [the Athenians] constantly felt the pain of their sufferings, the masses because, beginning with smaller means, they were even being deprived of these; the powerful because they had lost utterly their beautiful possessions (καλὰ κτήματα) in the country, including their residences and expensive furniture; but what they suffer from most is that they have war instead of peace.

As in Homer, the plural κτήματα refers here to the domestic property of the elite. It may not be surprising that Thucydides refers to his text as a "thing" and a "possession" that has these class-specific associations. But given the semantic range of the word, the claim that this κτῆμα is everlasting is complicated. Κτήματα are objects in the world and can only be eternal in a decidedly figural sense. Indeed, these are the very things that the Athenians have lost utterly (ἀπολωλεκότες) as a result of the war. So we are presented with a suggestive contradiction: whereas war has destroyed the Athenians' κτήματα, κτῆμα is used to describe Thucydides' *History* of the war as an everlasting object. In both cases, the term evokes a struggle against loss, specified in terms of a metonymic relationship to the war that the Athenians

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54 Here these stored-up possessions are also called κειμήλια. Cf. *Iliad* 23.619–21, where the urn that Achilles gives Nestor during the funeral games in honor of Patroclus is called a κειμήλιον.

55 Comparatively speaking, there are very few instances of κτῆμα in Herodotus: three to Homer's sixty-four. These are *Histories* 3.53 (with variant, κτῆσμα), 4.114 and 115, 5.24. Κτῆσις: 1.166, 6.41, 4.114 (pl.). For κτῆμα as a mental capacity in tragedy, see Euripides *Bacchae* 1152, *Orestes* 703, *Iphigenia in Aulis* 334; Sophocles *Antigone* 683 and 1050, *Oedipus the King* 549. See Dodds' (1966) comments on *Bacchae* 1152.

will eventually lose. Thucydides' claim thus epitomizes the uneasy relationship between things and words, objects and texts, visible evidence and events, literal and figural language that continues to affect our researches into the past. It also suggests that the history of disciplines—history, archaeology, philology—can be understood in terms of the relative "presentness" of their objects and the technologies (including writing, but also the evolving visual and cybernetic media) that enable that presentness.[56] In this view, the contradiction inherent in Thucydides' κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί is a founding principle of our own contact with the fragmentary and ephemeral κτήματα of ancient Greece.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is obvious that objects have histories or, rather, that their textual and inter-textual "lives" are embedded in stories about their creation (whether human or divine) and about the owners or viewers whose identity and status they help to define; the scepter of the Achaeans and the Shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* come immediately to mind. It is perhaps less obvious that objects (and ruins) in narrative are part of a history that transcends their unique place in time and space; in other words, that they constitute a category for conceptualizing the meaningfulness of time. It's this history, in spite of—or perhaps because of—its fragmentary and anecdotal quality, that I've tried to argue for in this paper.

The passages I've discussed above necessarily constitute a partial picture. But such an account can perhaps *only* be partial because singular visible objects—whether in the world or in narrative—never have the status of events; in fact, as I've tried to suggest, they seem to resist the coherence that defines an event as such, even if they finally become "eventful." This resistance is a feature of their implied reference to an external material reality, epitomized in the question of whether or not Hesiod actually saw the stone that Zeus set up in Delphi or whether the Achaeans actually built a wall in Troy. How does this resistance contribute to our understanding of the past as both a narrative and a conceptual category? A provisional answer lies in the observation that the objects I've considered here construct the past from the point of view of a projected future, i.e., from their position as

56 Edmunds 1993 discusses the grammatical and discursive strategies by which Thucydides makes himself "present" to the reader.

remains and/or ruins. This is especially true for Thucydides' κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί, in which the future existence of the *History* is expressed in terms of a resistance to the ephemerality of κτήματα. The fact that the *History* is still being read testifies to the prescience of Thucydides' belief in the longevity of his work. But this effect is also the cause of the persistent ambiguity that accompanies the metaphor, since the *History* is not and will never be a simple κτῆμα.

Like Zeus's stone or the objects of Aristophanic comedy, Thucydides' κτῆμα speaks to what might be called a prophecy of loss, based on an analogy between the indeterminacy of meaning (which calls for interpretation) and the ephemerality of objects; in other words, on the contingencies that define philology or literary study, on the one hand, and archaeology on the other. Their projection into the future may constitute a defense against these contingencies, but it also reveals the insufficiency of a strategy that transforms objects into remains or ruins. Perhaps the very possibility of such transformations governs the meaning of physical or visible objects in narrative. In any event, this possibility constructs the past (rather ironically) as a time before loss and, by extension, as a time that awakens a desire (in the present) for completeness and coherence. As such, it is both a symptom of the contest between philology and archaeology and the source of a critical response.

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