Homeric talents and the ethics of exchange*

The Homeric talent, a quantity of unworked gold, has attracted very little scholarly comment. Yet it is a conspicuous enough feature of the Homeric economy: when Agamemnon lists the gifts with which he hopes to win over Achilles, he includes ten talents of gold (*khrusou talanta*) in the first line of his plutocratic catalogue. The same sum also features among the gifts Achilles receives from Priam. In what follows, I argue that the talent occupies an anomalous position within the system of Homeric gift exchange, and that this anomaly has interesting implications both within and beyond the Homeric text.

The essence of the Homeric economy is that wealth follows or is an expression of personal worth (*aretē, timē*) and that all properly heroic transactions involving material things are directed towards intangible, honorific ends, rather than towards material gain. It is what anthropologists have called an 'embedded' economic system, in contrast to the 'disembedded' systems of modern capitalism, in which money has a life of its own and exchange may cut across or even break down existing social structures, rather than being circumscribed by them.[1] In the Homeric poems all valued items derive their value from the uses to which they are put by the heroic aristocracy. Since their way of life is dedicated at all levels to the pursuit of personal *timē*, all the property with which Homeric narrative is concerned is valued according to its perceived capacity to express that *timē*.[2] Value in the Homeric economy, therefore, is related to utility, but not the utility of subsistence. The system is coherent, even complete, but Homer's concentration on the struggles of aristocratic heroes means that certain economic phenomena which external evidence and theory tell us should be present even in an embedded economy are either not represented in the Homeric text, or appear there in a marginalised or distorted form. So, for instance, trade of the sort which archaeology has shown was that in which Homer's contemporaries engaged, and the conversion of agricultural surplus into prestige items (enabling social mobility) are largely absent from the poems.[3]

As a metal, gold falls into what is perhaps the most prestigious of the three principal categories of valued items, the other two being livestock and textiles. Metals fit well into the pattern of wealth-worth equivalence outlined above. They are essential to the production of weapons: in battle the victor always seeks to enhance the prestige of his exploit by stripping the corpse of his opponent; if he takes him alive, he releases him only when honour has been satisfied by a generous metallic ransom.[4] Metals are also the primary material of *keimēlia* and *agalmata*, and hence of the 'commerce noble' among heroes:[5] the household that is to receive many guests needs at least some bronze tripods and cauldrons, and the more vessels it has in more precious metals to impress, and (through gift or use) honour *xeinoi* and *hetairoi*, the better. Although bronze is the metal most frequently mentioned in all these contexts, and silver and iron appear occasionally, gold is arguably the material epitome of what we may call the honorific economy of the epics. The typically aristocratic ambitions of Penelope's suitors are expressed by saying that they want to become 'richer in gold and fine textiles' (*Od.* 1.165); the man who is 'most kingly' among the Greeks is the 'king of Mycenae rich in gold' (*Il.* 9.69, 11.46); Troy owes some of its fame and prestige simply to its being 'rich in gold' (*Il.* 18.289). The identification of gold with the honorific function of property is so complete that to gold, and objects made of or decorated with it, the adjectives *eritimos* and *timēeis* are attached almost formulaically.[6]

The last point begs a question. Generally, *eritimos* and *timēeis* simply convey the sense 'honoured' or 'revered'; but when they qualify gold, they do so in contexts with something of a mercenary flavour: translators tend to render them with words like 'costly' or 'precious' (Eriphyle was not thinking of her 'honour' when she accepted *khruson ...timēenta* from Polynices).[7] While gold embodies clearly the basic principle of the honorific economy, it also highlights some of the complexities of the relationship between wealth and worth, which is, of course, more problematized in the Homeric texts than the brief summary given above suggests. To explain the contribution the talents make to this process, I shall first consider them in general terms, and then examine in more detail the passages in which they appear.

Most valued items in Homer do not change their form according to whether they are being seen in a quantitative or a qualitative light. A tripod is always a

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[1] For the theoretical background, see C.A. Gregory, 'Exchange and reciprocity', in T. Ingold (ed), *Companion Encyclopaedia of Anthropology* (London 1994) 911-39; S. Narotzky, *New directions in economic anthropology* (London & Chicago 1997), esp. Ch. 2.

[2] See W. Donlan, 'Reciprocities in Homer', *CW* 75 (1972) 137-75; 'The politics of generosity in Homer', *Helios* n.s. 9.2 (1982) 1-15.

[3] S. Humphreys, *Anthropology and the Greeks* (London 1978) 70 f.; van Wees 218 ff.; von Reden 59; V.D. Hanson, *The Other Greeks* (New York 1995).

[4] *Cf.* n. 22 and 28 below. Weapons also feature as gifts and ornaments.

[5] See L. Gernet, 'The mythical idea of value in Greece', in *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece*, tr. J. Hamilton *et al.* (Baltimore 1981); Finley 61; van Wees 53, 103 f., 244 ff.

[6] The epithets are not used to describe any other metal. Note in particular the application of *timēeis* to golden or gilded gifts at *Od.* 4.614 (= 15.114), 8.393 (cf. *Od.* 1.312), and of *eritimos* to gold won as a prize by racehorses (*Il.* 9.126=268).

[7] *Od.* 11.326: *cf.* 18.161 f. and *Il.* 9.125 ff., 18.475; contrast *Od.* 1.312, 4.614=14.114, 8.393, 13.128 ff. Note that as early as *h. Dem.* 132, *timē* itself is used to mean 'value' or 'price' in a commercial sense (*cf.* the use of τίω at *Il.* 23.703 ff.). On the story of Eriphyle and other related myths, see most recently, A.S. Brown, 'Aphrodite and the Pandora complex', *CQ* 47 (1997) 26-47.

'tripod', whether it is called 'an unfired tripod' (qualitative), or 'a tripod holding twenty measures', or whether seven of them are given at once (both quantitative). It is also generally the case that valued items do not take the form of unworked metal: craftsmanship, or at least shape, makes an essential contribution to an object's value even when it is being considered in bulk. Gold is an exception to both these general rules, for when it is quantified it does not appear in crafted forms: nobody in Homer is ever given seven gold cups, or even two. Quantities of gold are not expressed in terms of numbers of more or less standard objects, but in terms of weight, as so many *khrusou talanta*; and there is moreover hardly any possibility that these talents of gold, which are prominent in some of the most impressive and honorific presentations of gifts mentioned in the poems, are anything more than lumps of unworked metal.[8] It is worth asking why this is so.

The surviving written records of the cultures concerned make it clear that the use of recognized weights of precious metal bullion for commercial, judicial or fiscal transactions was practised by the Mycenaean Greeks, and common in the Near East from the third millennium until long after the invention of coinage.[9] The fact that in contexts known to the poet's audience weighed bullion fulfilled most of the essential functions of money (means of exchange, repository of value, unit of account—though perhaps nowhere all at once) suggests another way in which the talents are an exception to the general rules of the Homeric economy, since money and its equivalents are generally taken to be a hallmark of a 'disembedded' economy, where wealth is no longer guaranteed to follow worth.[10] The discovery of Geometric hoards including miniature globular ingots of gold at Eretria and Khaniale Tekke has been taken to suggest that Homer's contemporaries were again using weights of bullion in trade.[11] But even if the root meaning of 'talent' is no more than 'weight',[12] the audience was surely not to imagine the heroes weighing out gold in the exiguous quantities with which Geometric jewellers worked.[13] The 'weights' Homer thought appropriate for his heroes are big enough for a half-talent to be visible to the spectators at Patroclus' funeral games when Achilles sets it up as a prize in the foot race.[14] Gold is an extremely dense material: if the Homeric audience thought of a talent as the weight of more than 25 kg which the word designated for later Greeks, they would have imagined half a talent as an ingot about the size of a modern facing brick.[15] While to try to put any precise weight on the Homeric talent is folly, we can show that it serves to complement the range of items of treasure, which are otherwise either of mostly symbolic value, or reflect a level of wealth scarcely distinguishable from that of the aristocrats among the poet's audience, by adding an indisputable indicator of great riches which separates the heroic from the contemporary economies in two ways. For not only do the talents demonstrate that the heroes were, in quantitative terms, much wealthier than the very richest archaic aristocrats, but (more importantly) they show the very particular way in which the heroes valued such wealth. The poem makes clear that the bullion Homer's contemporaries are likely to have seen as representing, at least partly, enormous purchasing power, is valued in almost purely non-market-economic, symbolic terms by the heroes. Not only that, but at times the poet seems to go out of his way to show that, within the honorific system, the talents are subordinated to symbolic objects which in substantive or market terms must be worth much less than them.

The last point is perhaps the easiest to prove. When Achilles prepares for the chariot race at *Il.* 23.262-70, it is hard to resist the impression that some sort of hierarchy of *keimēlia* exists: the prizes are (in descending order) a skilled woman and a twenty-two measure tripod; a mare pregnant with a mule foal; a brand-new four-measure cauldron; two talents of gold; a two-handled

[8] At *Od.* 9.202 (*cf.* 24.274) and 13.11, talents of gold are described by the epithets *poludaidalos*, 'intricate' and *euergēs*, 'wrought' respectively. *Od.* 13.11 refers to the gold Odysseus receives from the Phaeacians, which does not consist exclusively of talents (*Od.* 8.393, 430-2); in 9.202 f. and 24.274 f., the talents of 'wrought gold' are balanced by a 'solid silver mixing bowl'—the gold here is perhaps well-wrought in the sense of being refined and therefore pure, like the silver of the bowl (the purity or otherwise of gold as a result of refining is something of a *topos* in Archaic poetry: *cf.* e.g. Theogn. 415-8, 447-52, 1105-6; Ibycus *PMG* 282(a) 420-5). It is certainly possible to consider crafted artefacts merely in terms of their bullion value, as later temple inventories did, but I do not think that these three passages indicate that Homer considered them in this way. Alternatively, the epithets in these passages may convey proleptically the metal's suitability as a decorative material. *Cf.* D.H.F. Gray, 'Metal-working in Homer', *JHS* 74 (1954) 1-15.

[9] See M.S. Balmuth, 'Remarks on the appearance of the earliest coins', in *Studies Presented to George M.A. Hanfmann* (Mainz 1971) 1-7; M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*² (Cambridge 1973) n. 238; J.M. Keynes, *A treatise on money* (London 1929) 3-12.

[10] *Cf.* L. Kurke, 'ΚΑΠΗΛΕΙΑ and deceit: Theognis 59-60', *AJP* 100 (1989) 535-44.

[11] See G. Kopcke, *Handel* (Göttingen 1990 = *Archaeologia Homerica*, H.-G. Buchholz and F. Matz (ed) Teil M) 97, 120 (Anm. 551).

[12] P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique*⁴ (Paris 1968) s.v. ταλάσσαι.

[13] There is a theory (*cf.* W. Ridgeway, 'The Homeric talent; its origins, value and affinities', *JHS* 8 [1887] 133-58; C. Seltman, *Greek coins*² [London 1955] 4-8) that the Homeric talent was a precise historical weight of some 8.5 g. It is based chiefly on the assertion found in an Alexandrian source (F. Hultsch, ed., *Metrologorum Scriptorum Reliquiae* i [Leipzig 1864] 301) that 'the Homeric talent weighed the same as the later Daric'. We have no reason to suppose that the anonymous metrologist who wrote this in the first or second century AD knew the exact weight of a Homeric talent any better than we do; for the rest, Ridgeway's theory largely depends on a misunderstanding of the nature of the copper so-called ox-hide ingots (on which see Kopcke [n. 11] 33). If the Homeric talent really did weigh 8.5 g. then whoever left a 500 g. hoard of gold in a pot at Eretria (P.G. Themelis, 'An eighth century goldsmith's workshop at Eretria', in R. Hägg (ed.), *The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century BC* [Stockholm 1983] 157-65) would have possessed almost sixty 'Homeric talents' of gold—that is, more than are mentioned in the whole of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* put together. Such a listener would not have been much impressed by the wealth of the epic heroes!

[14] *Il.* 14.751: note that the high density of gold means that even a cubic inch of it weighs 320 g.

[15] On the talent in general, see *RE* Suppl. 8, 791-848.

bowl.[16] It is the third and fourth prizes that are really interesting, since their sequence suggests that a bronze cauldron is valued more highly than a quantity of gold which would by any reasonable reckoning be enough to pay for it several times over in a reasonably developed market economy. We can try to produce a variety of reasons why this could be so: the cauldron may have been overvalued because of a general tendency to value craftsmanship above raw materials, or because of a specific desire to put first in the prize lists items about which something can be said: since nothing can be said about a talent of gold, it is consigned to the lower range of prizes that are passed over more quickly. From the victor's point of view, a tripod can be set up in his house as a very visible sign of his achievement, inviting admiring guests to ask where it came from, and giving him full scope for Nestorian reminiscence about the event; talents always remain anonymous, and spend most of their time in the obscure security of the *thalamos*.[17] I am not entirely convinced by any of these suggestions, and therefore mention a further possibility, which seems to me to give a more satisfying explanation. As we have already observed, if bullion was indeed circulating in small quantities in the at least partly disembedded economy of Archaic Greece, it would be hard for some sections of the Homeric audience not to consider a lump of gold–of whatever size–in terms of its contemporary purchasing power. That must set it apart from things like tripods and cauldrons, which are much less likely to have had this sort of circulating value at the time of composition. In short, the competitor who carried off two talents from the race might be thought of as getting the equivalent of a modern 'cash prize', something that would be more highly esteemed by the sort of person the Phaeacian Euryalus disapproves of (*Od.* 8.159-64) than by a true hero. To put it another way, a victor who wins a tripod may choose to dedicate it to a god rather than take it home with him–as Hesiod dedicated the tripod he won at Chalcis to the Muses–but we know of no Greek, victor or otherwise, dedicating to a god undifferentiated lumps of gold (or any other metal).[18]

In short, where the poet has gone out of his way to show heroes assigning a surprisingly low relative value to gold it appears in a form that unmistakably marks it out as of huge commercial worth.[19] This point is well illustrated in a celebrated passage in which talents are not mentioned, but in which gold is valued directly against the ox standard of value. As Glaucus exchanges his gold armour for the bronze armour of Diomede (*Il.* 6.234-6), the poet comments that Zeus must have taken away his wits when he swapped a suit worth a hundred oxen for one worth nine. The perception that Diomede has made a material gain comes exclusively from the commercially aware perspective of the poet and his audience. The point of the episode is not that Glaucus was duped, but that because both parties behaved with exemplary chivalry, a happy conclusion was reached (if Paris had shown as much respect for *xenia* as Diomede, the two would never have been facing each other in battle). The gap between heroic and contemporary notions of value is exploited to make a moral point: the heroes are capable of behaving in a way which, though it may seem deeply illogical to the poet's audience, makes perfect sense to themselves, and in doing so they are portrayed as wholly admirable.[20]

Turning to the *Odyssey*, and the dishonourable activities of Aegisthus, we can observe a very different exchange. When Agamemnon came home from Troy, he was spotted by a watchman who had been set in place by Aegisthus a year earlier, and promised a *misthos* of two talents of gold in return (*Od.* 4.524-6). We are not told anything more about this watchman, but his job is tedious and unheroic, and the talents he is promised for doing it are described by a word that almost everywhere else in Homer refers to the wages of hired labour.[21] Why did the poet choose these words, and this wage? Perhaps we should imagine the watchman as of somewhat lower social status than most of the characters in the poems, the sort of individual who would have little use for a tripod or a fine horse, but for whom the (potentially practical) material enrichment represented by gold was irresistible. The compactness and anonymity of gold bullion also makes it suitable for secretive transactions, such as this must have been, and such as suit the underhand character of Aegisthus.

[16] Later, in the foot race, the prizes are a Sidonian silver *crater*, a fine fat ox, and a half-talent of gold. This should not lead us to conclude that, for instance, 1 ox = 1 talent of gold, because what determine the prizes for the foot race are the very characteristic outcomes the poet has in mind for each competitor. Athene helps Odysseus to win the (unquestionably most valuable) first prize and humiliates Ajax the son of Oileus–see O.P. Taplin, *Homeric Soundings* (Oxford 1992) 253; while the tactful Antilochus gets his prize doubled. Ajax's prize is not only among the least distinguished in these games, but peculiarly reminiscent of the manner of his defeat: he slips in the cow-dung and wins an ox (*Il.* 23.775-81). Thus the ox, which was initially the prize for second place, becomes in effect the wooden spoon.

[17] For the importance of the 'personal history' of items of symbolic exchange, and useful examples of 'ordinal ranking systems', see Gregory (n.1) 918-9.

[18] Of course, later temple accountants did weigh gold and silver dedications (see for instance R. Meiggs and D.M. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions*² [Oxford 1988] No. 76; *cf.* the admittedly exceptional case of Croesus, Hdts. 1.50 f.), and doubtless those wealthy enough to make such offerings were as conscious of their precise weight–and as keen that others should be aware of it–as the *mikrophilotimos* of Theophrastus is to let his neighbours know that he has sacrificed an ox (*Characters* 21.7).

[19] The context is also significant: we have here the germ of the Archaic controversy over the true value of athletic success and the proper form of the athletic competitor's reward (Tyrtaeus 12.1-4; Xenophanes 2; Hdts. 8.26.3)–see most recently S. von Reden, 'Money, law and exchange, coinage in the Greek polis', *JHS* 117 (1997) 154-76 (esp. 164-8, with bibliography).

[20] *Cf.* W. Donlan, 'The unequal exchange between Glaucus and Diomedes in light of the Homeric gift-economy', *Phoenix* 43 (1989) 1-15; D.B. Traill, 'Gold armor for bronze and Homer's use of compensatory TIMH', *CPh* 84 (1989) 310-15; von Reden 26. On the episode as a whole, see also I.J.F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers* (Amsterdam 1987) 162-8.

[21] So e.g. *Il.* 21.444 f.; *Od.* 10.84; 18.358; (cf. *Il.* 12.435). There is also the unheroic Dolon (*Il.* 10.303-31): to find parallels for his legalistic approach to Hector's call for volunteers we must look either to farmers in Hesiod (*WD* 370 f.) or the divine low comedy of *Il.* 14.270-79. All these (Dolon, the farmer, and Hypnos) nicely illustrate Bourdieu's observations on the need for guarantees as a function of social distance (P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, tr. R. Nice [Cambridge 1977] 173-4). On *misthos*, see von Reden 89-92.

A similarly undesirable exchange was apparently accepted by the Trojan Antimachus, who, having been given gold by Paris argued with particular vigour that Helen should not be returned to her husband when Odysseus and Menelaus visited Troy at the start of the war (*Il.* 11.123-5).[22] Admittedly, there is no reference to talents here, but the episode presents us with an interesting perspective on gold itself. What was the precise nature of this transaction? There seem to me to be two possibilities. Either the gold Antimachus received from Paris was given at least ostensibly in the normal way of giving to friends and kinsmen—for instance on the occasion of his return from the voyage on which he abducted Helen; or that the gift came at the time of Menelaus' embassy, as a specific bribe (perhaps even taking the form of bullion). Note that it is the poet who tells us about the bribery in his capacity as omniscient narrator, as if only he and the two characters involved were aware of it: after all, the advice of Antimachus might have had less effect on the Trojan elders if Paris had given him some more visible item that made it clear he spoke under an obligation. Again, the compactness of gold makes it the ideal medium for underhand dealings.[23] Whether we can go further, and say that in its less ethically commendable Homeric employments it begins to assume the role of a dangerously flexible and morally neutral medium that often characterizes coined money in later Greek and other literature, will depend on the view we take of Paris' gifts.[24] If Antimachus was bribed, we may see his acceptance of them as gold overcoming the promptings of conventional morality (since Paris has no right to keep Helen); but in any case, the metal's effect demonstrates the power of generous gifts to put their recipients under strong obligations to the giver.[25]

What impact does the fact that gold can represent the amoral power of wealth have on the 'conceptual homology of wealth, social status and moral excellence indicative of the world of heroes'?[26] While from one perspective it looks as if the esteem in which gold is held is so high that on occasion it undermines the very system of values which it is supposed to support, there are other ways of viewing these episodes. For one thing, Aegisthus, Paris and Antimachus (through the death of his sons) all pay the penalty, sooner or later, for manipulating the system to dishonourable ends. All the wealth Aegisthus usurps at Mycenae is powerless in the end,[27] while all the wealth of Troy cannot avert the punishment of Paris' crime, and the destruction of the city that protected him.[28]

A complementary analysis of the behaviour of Aegisthus and Paris is suggested by the work of those economic anthropologists who have stressed the importance to gift exchange of the counter-gift being deferred. In particular, Bloch and Parry have found a fundamental and widespread distinction between long-term exchanges which are 'concerned with the attempt to maintain a static and timeless order [such as *xenia*]', and therefore 'positively associated with the central precepts of morality', and 'a cycle of short-term exchanges associated with individual appropriation, competition, sensuous enjoyment, luxury and youthful vitality' which is 'morally undetermined'. What is obtained in the short term becomes morally positive only if it is converted to serve the reproduction of the long-term cycle: if, however, individual involvement in the short-term cycle becomes an end in itself, its moral value is negative, the strongest censure of all being reserved for the occasions on which 'grasping individuals divert the resources of the long-term cycle for their own short-term transactions'.[29] Since gold is the archetypal 'resource of the long-term cycle'[30] this model offers a very neat account of the exchanges between Aegisthus and his watchman, and Paris and Antimachus, both of which fall squarely within this last category.

However, such a model will not fully explain the two talents which appear on the Shield of Achilles: as well as being the watchman's wages and the fourth prize in Achilles' chariot race, this sum appears in Hephaestus' depictions of a city at peace. A dispute has arisen over compensation for a man's death: as heralds hold back the supporters of either party, the elders sit in a circle on stone seats and take it in turns formally to rise and give their judgement on the case—in the middle of the circle lie two talents of gold, to be given to whichever of them makes the straightest judgement (*Il.* 18.503-8). The gold is a prize, publicly offered, and publicly competed for, which will enhance the prestige of whoever wins it. This passage might seem to undermine the hypothesis that talents are a sort of second-class valued object tainted with the suggestion of contemporary commercial trafficking. Yet if we ask why the prize takes this form, rather than that of, say, a tripod or gold cup, the answer that most readily comes to mind is that the poet considers it important that the straightest judge should go home not merely with a token of the community's esteem for his judgement, but substantially wealthier. Composing in a period when judicial corruption was commonplace (Hes. *WD* 38 f.), Homer imagines a better

[22] According to Agamemnon, Antimachus went so far as to argue that the ambassadors should be killed then and there. It is with some irony that the Trojan's sons plead for mercy from Agamemnon in the familiar terms (cf. *Il.* 6.46-50 and 10.378-81) that refer to the quantities of gold and other metals their father possesses. For gold as the distinctive metal of ransom-payments, *cf.* Thersites at *Il.* 2.229 ff., and n. 28 below.

[23] So it is that Odysseus' men assume that the bag he received from Aeolus and of which he has been keeping such careful guard must contain gold and silver (*Od.* 10.35, 45): it is harder to hide a tripod.

[24] See e.g. Alcaeus *PMG* 69; Pind. *Pyth.* 3.54-6; L. Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise* (Ithaca & London 1991); von Reden.

[25] *Cf.* Gernet (n.4) 83 ff.

[26] Von Reden 46.

[27] His attempts to avert the anger of the gods with lavish offerings (*Od.* 3.273-5) were, of course, ineffectual.

[28] As a prelude to final defeat, the futile erosion of the Trojans' treasuries is highlighted more than once in the *Iliad* (e.g. 18.288-92). Valued items are needed both to pay the Trojans' ransoms when they are captured, and to retain the support of their allies. The slow bleeding of these articles simply prolongs the war and hence the suffering of both sides. Cf. *Il.* 24.380-84, 543-48; *Ilias Parva* fr. 29; Σ *Od.* 11.521; van Wees 39 f.

[29] M. Bloch and J. Parry (eds.), *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (Cambridge 1989) 24-7.

[30] For gold highlighting the values of *xenia*, see e.g. *Il.* 9.670, 18.385-87; *Od.* 1.136-42; its immortal lustre also makes it particularly appropriate for offerings to the gods (see e.g. *Il.* 24.304 ff; *Od.* 3.382-4).

state of affairs, in which the temptation to be swayed by any inducements offered by the parties is removed by the existence of a substantial incentive to produce the fairest and most disinterested verdict possible. Then again, we could just take the scene at heroic face value and note that, even if it is a substantial rather than a symbolic reward, at least it is another case of wealth being assigned to worth. What we have here is a scene that is open to two distinct but complementary readings: one based solely on the honorific system, the other working off more cynical contemporary values. The feasibility of such a double interpretation is enhanced by the scene's appearance in the ekphrasis on the shield, a context not too firmly attached to either the heroic past or the present.

Ambiguity over the talents is present even on occasions when one might expect the most purely heroic attitudes towards gift exchange. When the time comes for Odysseus to return to the world of men, Zeus announces that the Phaeacians will escort the hero home, having given him a greater quantity of gold and fine textiles than he would have brought home with him from Troy if his return voyage had bee uninterrupted (*Od.* 5.38-40). So it is that, amongst other things, Odysseus receives on Scheria the largest sum of gold bullion mentioned in the poems. Each of the twelve *basilēes* on the island will contribute a cloak and a talent of gold, with Alcinous making the thirteenth (*Od.* 8.390-3). The Phaeacians' generosity to their distinguished guest fulfils Zeus' intention to compensate the hero for the loss of his share of the spoils of Troy (and the gifts that he would be expected to have amassed in ten years' travel), enabling him 'to return home with a fuller hand'.[31] On his return to Ithaca, the hero in disguise is careful to tell those who matter most to him on Ithaca not only that Odysseus is alive and well, but also that he has been richly honoured by those he has visited on his wanderings;[32] and as soon as he talks to Telemachus and Penelope *in propria persona*, he loses no time in telling them about the real Phaeacian gifts instead of their fictitious equivalents.[33] It is no small thing to have been honoured as he has been: if we look at what the Phaeacians give Odysseus less as divinely pre-ordained compensation for lost men and booty, and more as Alcinous spontaneously decrees it, we see that the host is responding step by step to his guest's progressive revelation of his full heroic stature. And yet the gifts serve no material purpose—they are shut away in the cave of the nymphs (*Od.* 13.366-71) and play no further part in the narrative. This neglect (by the poet, as opposed to Odysseus) is significant: while his story revolves around fairy-tale motifs, Odysseus is not a fairy-tale hero in as much as he has to achieve his full reinstatement on Ithaca by his own efforts. The fabulous treasures of the Phaeacians will not help him to vanquish the suitors, nor will they enable him to replenish his depleted flocks and herds once the suitors have been disposed of. This point has to be made the more clearly because Odysseus is the character he is, known for an interest in gain which is so lively that it sometimes looks more like mere acquisitiveness than a search for the honour embodied in treasure.[34] The Phaeacians' gold is noted as a manifest token of divine justice and mortal respect, but no more.[35]

It is the anger of Achilles which provides the most thoroughly worked out exploration of the tensions inherent in the Homeric concept of value, and a short examination of his behaviour will provide us with an appropriate conclusion to the present discussion. When Odysseus catalogues the fabulous gifts offered by Agamemnon as compensation for his early slighting treatment of Achilles (*Il.* 9.262-98), Achilles ignores them for the first seventy lines of his reply, which he bases instead on the four lines of Agamemnon's speech that Odysseus has been tactful enough to omit—the demand that Achilles give way to him as a matter of rank.[36] Achilles may love Briseis, but the dispute is really about his subordination to the king of Mycenae. The prominence of gold among Agamemnon's gifts has already been pointed out; his list is marked throughout by sheer quantitative accumulation of gifts, and this tendency is nowhere more clearly to be seen than when he mentions gold. Achilles is to get seven talents immediately (*Il.* 9.122≈264), and may take a shipfull of gold and bronze when Troy falls (*Il.* 9.137≈279). Even when emphasizing the quality of what he is offering, Agamemnon has a pronounced tendency to do so by stressing the potential of his gifts to enrich Achilles still further: so, for instance, not content to promise twelve prizewinning thoroughbreds, he dwells on the large amount of treasure, and particularly gold, that they have won for him in the past (9.125 ff.≈267 ff.): all this is wasted on Achilles, who we may feel was justified in calling Agamemnon 'keenest of all on possessions' (*Il.* 1.122). As it is the source of the gifts that is unacceptable to Achilles, their opulence is at best irrelevant, and at worst counter-productive, since if understood simply as compensation for the temporary misappropriation of Briseis and some hard words in the assembly, they are so over-adequate that they end up (like all excessive gifts) conferring obligations on the recipient. To anyone, acceptance would signal submission: Achilles explores this implication to the furthest possible extent—if Agamemnon is going to behave as he did in Book 1, and there is to be no *charis* in continuing to fight at Troy (and dying there), he might as well go home, since all the treasure in Troy or at Delphi is not worth dying for (*Il.* 9.401-9). Neither the hero's life, nor his pride, are for sale: only by adopting this radical approach to explaining his position can he make himself understood. If it were just a matter of restoring the honour lost in the removal of Briseis, refusal of the gifts would be absurd, but Agamemnon's abuse of his power in this case has caused Achilles to focus on a more fundamental problem:

[31] *Od.* 11.359. Among the gifts that have been lost along the way are seven talents given to Odysseus by Maron when his life was spared (*Od.* 9.202).

[32] *Od.* 14.323 f., 19.269 ff., 24.271-9 (this last including seven talents of gold).

[33] *Od.* 16.266-31, 23.338-41 and 355—note that the gifts are most often collectively referred to as *khrusos*, although they contain much else besides gold.

[34] See von Reden 36 f., and Ch. 3.

[35] Compare the poet's emphasis on how Menelaus' wealth has been acquired at the cost of great suffering (*Od.* 3.301-5, 4.71-135, with R.B. Rutherford, 'At home and abroad: aspects of the structure of the *Odyssey* (*PCPS* 31 [1985] 133-50, 140).

[36] *Il.* 9.308-77 answer the unrepeated 158-61.

how can he continue to co-operate with a system which subordinates him to a man whom he considers objectively to be his inferior? For one so acutely aware of his own excellence as Achilles, and so directly honoured by the gods, what need is there to swell his already huge stocks of *keimēlia*?[37] None of his peers endorse the position he takes over the gifts in Book 19, and the poem shows that there are two great dangers inherent in it. In the first place, as Achilles will have to learn, it is not possible at will to separate the *timē* one receives from men from the *kleos* one may acquire from the gods: the two are interdependent;[38] secondly, by so completely disesteeming Agamemnon, Achilles exacerbates the difficulty of his own situation: for if the recipient does not value the giver, the gift can only be valued according to the scale of the market.[39] He is however consistent throughout: he will have no truck with the gifts in Book 9; in Book 1 he showed no interest in the prospect of material advantage set out by Athene (1.212 ff.); in Book 19, when it is very important for Agamemnon to fulfil his promise publicly and hand over the gifts, and when they come without strings attached, Achilles still shows no enthusiasm for them.[40]

The anthropologists can offer a plausible explanation of what is wrong with Agamemnon's approach in Book 9. He demands an immediate return on his gift, making giving itself conditional on Achilles' return to the fighting, and this is unacceptable.[41] As Bourdieu says, 'what distinguishes the gift from mere "fair exchange" is the labour devoted to *form*: the *presentation*, the manner of giving, must be such that the outward forms of the act present a practical denial of the content of the act, symbolically transmuting an interested exchange or a simple power relation into a relationship set up in due form for form's sake, i.e. inspired by pure respect for the customs and conventions recognised by the group'.[42] We can see how Agamemnon fails by this standard. We can even imagine what he could have done to conform to it (more modest gifts, a less clearly stated return, supplication in person), but we have only to do so to see the unbridgeable gulf between Homer and the anthropologists' systems, for we know that neither Agamemnon nor Achilles could do otherwise than they do, because of the sort of men they are, and because of the direction in which the plan of Zeus is guiding the poem's tragic plot.

By the point at which he finally receives Agamemnon's gifts, Achilles' life has no purpose other than avenging the death of Patroclus, by killing Hector. The duel of Book 22 involves the last of a series of rejected battlefield supplications of Greeks by Trojans,[43] which provides further evidence of the pricelessness of heroic anger. Before the combat, Hector himself knows (*Il.* 22.111-25) that there is no possibility of avoiding a fight by offering the return of Helen and the possessions stolen by Paris from Sparta. The wrongs done to Menelaus could not be further from Achilles' thoughts at this point, and Hector's suggestion that they should both undertake to respect the corpse of the vanquished party suggests an increasingly clear awareness of his adversary's mood. Once beaten, however, he makes a second and more desperate attempt to gain this concession (*Il.* 22.338-43). The reply is as uncompromising as ever: not even if Priam were to offer Hector's weight in gold would his corpse be kept from the dogs and birds (*Il.* 22.349-54); again, the hero asserts the inadequacy of a quantitative assessment of the price of his anger.[44]

In itself, the death of Hector does not resolve anything: yet a resolution is achieved by the end of the poem, in which Priam, unlike Agamemnon, goes in person to Achilles, with gifts including ten talents of gold (*Il.* 24.232), and finds him minded to accept his supplication. The gifts themselves are not the prime reason for Achilles' acceptance, which is motivated chiefly by divine instruction and human sympathy for Priam, but they satisfy the essential formal requirements of such a transaction.[45] Priam would never have dared go without them, and little as Achilles may care for such things now, the gods are determined that he should be honoured for his honourable behaviour.[46]

Even if the hero himself remains irretrievably alienated from the processes in which he is involved, the audience can appreciate the gold on his behalf, and the poet has demonstrated that the honorific system has not been permanently damaged. Van Wees stresses 'the importance of being angry' in his model of heroic self-aggrandisement, but although anger is innate in the heroic temper, and related to its competitive drives, we surely misread a poem whose very opening lines dwell on the destructive qualities of that emotion unless we look at the presentations made by Agamemnon and Priam not as rewarding rage, but as marking its abatement. It is, after all, only while in the grip of fury, either at Agamemnon, or at Hector, that Achilles refuses gifts, and if he gains any more in material terms by the stance he takes he manifests no satisfaction as a result of this. He receives Agamemnon's gifts at the point he rejoins the community he had broken with. No doubt he does so in the first place to kill Hector and avenge Patroclus, but in fulfilling that aim he also more than makes good the damage the Trojans have been enabled to do the Greeks

[37] *Cf.* Taplin (n.16) 66 ff; R. Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual* (Oxford 1994) 23-5.

[38] Von Reden 21 f.

[39] *Cf.* J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford 1980) 99 f.

[40] *Il.* 19.146-50. The importance of a formal handover of the gifts is not lost on Odysseus, as his two interventions in the scene show (see esp. 172 ff.). The importance of the gold is indicated by its being mentioned last of all (247).

[41] It is interesting that Odysseus, sensitive to matters of tone, substitutes δίδωσι (*Il.* 9.261) for Agamemnon's more legalistic τελέσαιμι (*Il.* 9.157).

[42] Bourdieu (n.21) 194. The result is an 'endless reconversion of economic capital into symbolic capital' through a process of 'collective misrecognition which is the basis of the ethic of honour, a collective denial of the economic reality of exchange [which] is only possible because, when the group lies to itself in this way, there is neither deceiver nor deceived' (195-6).

[43] References in n. 22 above. *Cf.* also *Il.* 21.34-135.

[44] Achilles' behaviour towards Hector, though it eventually becomes excessively savage, is not without parallel: parts of *Od.* 22.54-64 are almost an imitation of *Il.* 9.379 ff., but the Odyssean episode lacks the moral and emotional complexity as well as some of the rhetorical intensity of its original. *Cf.* R.B. Rutherford, 'From the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*' (*BICS* 38, 1993) 44 f.

[45] See Macleod on *Il.* 24.594 f.

[46] Note in particular Hera's concern that the *timē* of Achilles should be differentiated from that of Hector, *Il.* 24.55-63.

in his absence; and by killing Hector, he brings the fall of Troy itself within sight. Agamemnon, although Achilles' new motivation renders any encouragement from him superfluous, nevertheless publicly honours his earlier promise by handing over treasures which not only (we may suspect) mean something to him, however little they may mean to their recipient, but which also constitute a more satisfying statement of public apology than he seems able to bring himself to make verbally. The gifts Priam takes with him add considerably to the dignity of the journey which is his one heroic exploit in the poem: they are part of the stature that enables him to meet Achilles on an equal footing, and contribute to the great moment of mutual admiration at *Il.* 24.629-32. At the same time they are a recognition of Achilles' humanity, of his obedience to the dictates of religion, and above all of his finally relinquishing his anger even in the form in which he had transferred it to Hector.

I have tried to show that on balance the two great collections of gifts given to Achilles do something to reinforce the central tenets of the honorific economy, even as the hero himself questions them: even Agamemnon's gifts are ultimately made to fit into the positively valued long-term transactional order. So in the poems as a whole, although the simplicity of heroic values is repeatedly complicated both by the plot and by the poet's juxtaposition of contemporary attitudes with those of the epic past, underlying every exchange is the notion that wealth follows worth. Most of the time this suits the poet's moral viewpoint very well, and the characteristic activities of the heroes make it seem perfectly natural–so much so, that there is a danger of the audience perceiving the acquisitiveness engendered by the heroes' competitive struggle to obtain valued items as a search for purely material gain. The tag, *khremata, khremat' aner*, 'wealth/money/possessions make(s) the man', used by later generations to deplore the rise of the parvenu, could equally stand as a paradigm of the *status quo* of Homer's honorific economy–the difference is only the subjective one of the light in which the 'man' concerned looks on his 'wealth', whether he sees it as an embodiment of the esteem of his peer group and his well-merited status in the community, or whether it is just an amoral financial resource. Occasionally, therefore, Homer feels it necessary to draw attention to anomalous episodes, like the exchange between Glaucus and Diomede, to remind us that this is not so, and that even if there are moments when the acquisition of property may be viewed in the light of a commercial transaction, this is only a trick of focalization to make it clearer that all properly heroic material transactions are ultimately directed towards an intangible end.[47]

But such comfortable conclusions should not obscure the strangeness of the talents. While the broad social and political structures in Homer are similar to those with which his audience was familiar, the details of material culture, often culled from memories of a much earlier period, serve as a reminder that the events he narrates belong to a distant past, where men were stronger, richer, and more passionate.[48] Yet while Homer's references to crafted objects like gold sceptres and cups, which must still have had some of their original, purely symbolic force for the audience,[49] suggest a degree of continuity between the heroic past and contemporary kingship, the position of bullion is different. The frequently-mentioned and hitherto neglected talents of gold are substantial weights, showing how very wealthy the heroes are. The contexts in which talents are exchanged evoke the distance between the heroes' honorific system and the more commercial contemporary economy. Yet in another sense bullion weights actually belong to that economy, and can bring the heroic world closer to everyday materialism, by reminding us how fine the distinctions are between valuing something for the higher qualities it embodies and valuing it for what it can buy–between *timē* in the Homeric sense of 'honour' and *timē* in its later sense of 'price'.

The ideology of gift exchange, and the honorific economy, do not exist simply among the heroes of Homer. They continued to shape much of the discourse of archaic poetry on wealth.[50] Nor were gifts of bullion, or even coin, unknown among the gifts exchanged between historical figures of the Archaic period.[51] Gold did not lose its symbolic force when it became more integrated into the Greek economy (following the goldrushes around Mt. Pangaeus and increased contact with Lydia)–as the Homeric references to talents of gold might have suggested it would not. But the rise of coinage (a facilitator of commerce and a levelling scale of wealth applicable to all classes), accompanied by both the upward social mobility of those of non-aristocratic birth and the aristocracy's accommodation to commercial practices, meant that the mere accumulation of wealth was no longer so commendable in itself–in contexts of mere acquisitiveness, gold still highlighted the undesirability of financial greed.[52] Increasingly, the highest worth was claimed by those who spent their wealth in sympotic and athletic pursuits–being 'above wealth' did not mean neglecting one's material resources, but using them unstintingly in socially acceptable ways and presenting oneself as not motivated by the prospect of short-term gain.[53] In this climate, gold came to represent manifest personal excellence not just as a possession, but through a double analogy with its aesthetic qualities and financial power, characteristically expressed through the conceit of the *basanos*.[54] At a later stage, Pindar built on the honorific exchanges of gold

[47] J. Griffin, 'Heroic and unheroic ideas in Homer', in J. Boardman and C.E. Vaphopoulou-Richardson (eds.), *Chios* (Oxford 1986) 3-13, 8; *cf.* more generally H. Strasburger, 'Der soziologische Aspekt der homerischen Epen', *Gymnasium* 60 (1953) 97-114.

[48] Homeric wealth depends on a genuine historical tradition, rather than pure fantasy: Gray (n.8). Really splendid items, like Agamemnon's corselet (*Il.* 11.19-31), are few and far between, and generally introduced for more reasons than simply to indicate an individual's wealth: *cf.* G.S. Kirk, 'Dark age and oral poet', *PCPS* 7 (1961) 34-48; L.A. Stella, *Tradizione micenea e poesia dell'Iliade* (Rome 1978) 38 ff; Griffin (n.39) Ch. 1.

[49] Gernet (n.4).

[50] Kurke (n.24).

[51] Hdts. 6.130.2, 7.28 f.

[52] Arch 19W; Pind. *Nem.* 8.37-9, *fr.* 221; Bacchyl *fr.* 21; Kurke (n.20).

[53] W. Donlan, *The Aristocratic Ideal in Ancient Greece* (Kansas 1980); O. Murray, *Early Greece* (London 1980) 197-203; Kurke (n.24).

[54] *Theogn.* 119-26, 415-8, 447-52, 499-502, 1105 f.; cf. *PMG* 541, 901, 988; Hdts. 7.10a; D.L.1.71.

gifts in Homer in images designed to reinforce both the merits of his patrons and the claims of his own art to complete and make permanent their achievements.[55]

It is to some extent a misconception, born of our own cultural prejudice, that sees the coming of coinage as a focus for aristocratic discontent during the socio-economic upheavals of the Archaic period. What mattered most was not the form wealth took, but the attitudes of those who possessed it, and the uses to which it was put.[56] Homeric talents are not coinage—they lack the stamp of the polis—but well before the first Lydian staters were struck, we can see in them with hindsight, a blueprint for the aristocratic assimilation of money, because the closest things the epics have to it are emphatically shown to be of essentially symbolic rather than substantial value. Gold and the talents focus attention on anomalies in the workings of the honorific system only as a way of emphasizing the centrality of honour and esteem in themselves; for without them, even gold itself loses its worth to the hero.

My conclusions, then, are these. The closest thing the Homeric epics have to money can be shown to be regarded by the heroes as of essentially symbolic rather than substantial value. In order to make this plain to an audience accustomed to the purchasing power of gold, which was for them an extremely scarce resource, the poet ascribed to the heroes gold that was (in substantial terms) out of proportion to the level of wealth he generally depicts them as possessing, which is (by the standards of some other epic traditions at least)[57] relatively modest. Therefore the Homeric socio-economy, although it is a coherent system that can profitably be analyzed by anthropologists, can at least as validly be regarded as owing that coherence to literary design as to an effort simply to reflect historical reality, whether that of the past or that of the time of composition. Finally, I would suggest that Homer's presentation of the talents offers yet another reason why the Greeks, although they did not invent coinage, were the first fully to exploit it: because they were the first to arrive at an awareness of the problems of value it was capable of articulating.

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[55] *Olymp.* 7.1 ff., *Nem.* 7.77 ff.; cf. *Pyth.* 6.5-18, *Isth.* 5.1-10, *Olymp.* 1.1-7, 3.42-4.

[56] Von Reden (n.19); *cf.* Bloch and Parry (n.29) 12-16.

[57] Contrast the profusion of gold in Irish epic, for instance: J. Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (Harmondsworth 1981) 41, 47 f., 52, 79, 85, 87-90, 148, 204, 235 ff.

Egyptian bronze jugs from Crete and Lefkandi

John Boardman has pointed to the squat bronze jugs with lotus handles from early Iron Age contexts in Crete and at Lefkandi on Euboia as Egyptian imports 'certainly straight from Egypt itself with no eastern intermediaries'.[1] On close inspection, however, the Egyptian antecedents of these jugs pose a chronological, and even a philosophical, puzzle; whatever the solution, the jugs found in Crete and at Lefkandi surely do not furnish convincing evidence for early direct connections between Egypt and the Aegean.

After illicit digging in the Idaean Cave by shepherds in 1884, the Syllogos of Candia invited Federico Halbherr to conduct excavations in the cave. Halbherr did so in August of 1885 and was rewarded with remarkable finds including Syro-Phoenician ivories, bronze statuettes, and the famous bronze shields. His publication of this excavation mentions, in addition to his own finds, objects retrieved by the Syllogos of Candia from the Idaean shepherds. Among the objects in the Syllogos collection, according to Halbherr, were five bronze jugs with handles in the form of a lotus blossom; a drawing of one of these jugs is illustrated in the folio atlas that accompanied his excavation report (PLATE. I*a*).[2] The National Archaeological Museum in Athens has a display case containing ivories and other objects found in the Idaean Cave by Halbherr. There is no lotus-handled jug in the case, but there is a bronze handle (PLATE I*b*) that is decorated with a lotus blossom and appears to have belonged to a jug of the type illustrated in the atlas.[3] Hartmut Matthäus has now identified fifteen examples of lotus-handled jugs from the Idaean Cave, as well as additional examples from Thera and Tegea.[4]

Two such squat bronze jugs were found among the multiple burials in Tomb P at Fortetsa near Knossos, the richest tomb in the cemetery there. They lay between a Late Protogeometric krater (*c.* 900-850 BC) and a Late Geometric pithos (*c.* 770-735 BC), but they could have been deposited as late as the latest burials in the tomb (*c.* 680-630 BC).[5] At Amnisos on Crete, Marinatos found a bronze handle decorated with a lotus blossom; from the same black and oily stratum, Marinatos recovered Egyptian or Egyptianizing faience objects.[6] All together, then, there are three published examples of bronze, lotus-handled jugs of a distinctive squat shape from Crete (one

[1] J. Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas*³ (London 1980) 113. I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of this article for their helpful comments.

[2] F. Halbherr, 'Scavi e trovamenti nell'antro di Zeus', *Museo Italiano di antichità classica* 2 (1888) 725 and *Atlante* pl. 12, 9.

[3] Inv. no. 18221. Unless this handle belonged to one of the five jugs in the Syllogos collection, Halbherr does not mention the handle in his report.

[4] H. Matthäus, 'Crete and the Near East during the ninth and eighth Centuries BC—new investigations on the finds from the Idaean Cave of Zeus', paper delivered at the Colloquium on Post-Minoan Crete, Institute of Archaeology, London, Nov. 10-11, 1995.

[5] J.K. Brock, *Fortetsa*, BSA suppl. 2 (Cambridge 1957) 136, 200-1, nos. 1571-2, pl. 113. The dates are those given by Brock.

[6] S. Marinatos, ''Ανασκαφὴ 'Αμνίσου Κρήτης', *Praktiká* (1933) 99 (ἡ λαβὴ ἐνὸς χαλκοῦ σκεύους, καταλήγουσα ἄνω εἰς λωτοειδὲς ἄνθος, not illustrated), 99-100 and figs. 4-5 (faience objects).