

# A SOCIOLOGY OF TEXTILE PRODUCTION IN HOMER

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**Summary:** The textiles produced by the Homeric household are a necessity in an economy in which trade and markets are almost unknown. The estate of which the household is a part must be self-sufficient. Weaving produces clothing and also a surplus that is stored for use in exchange. A sub-set of servants is organized for this purpose. The Homeric epics provide sufficient evidence for a sociological description of how they are organized. The freedom of Helen or of Andromache to choose the figures that she weaves has to be understood in the context of this larger necessity.

One of the main responsibilities of the women in the Homeric household is textile production, a sociology of which describes how they are organized for this purpose. The herds of the estate to which the household belongs produce the required wool.<sup>1</sup> The estate, whether in Troy, Sparta, or Ithaca or on Phaeacia, aims as a whole at self-sufficiency and does not aim to make money. The Homeric economy, with two exceptions to be noted, does not include markets and trade, even if eighth- and seventh-century audiences of Homer had experience of them.<sup>2</sup> The pre-market economy, Karl Polanyi said, is “embedded in social relations.”<sup>3</sup> Because

- 1 The word “household” is used here as a synonym for “house” or to refer to the house, its personnel and its possessions, whereas elsewhere in scholarship on Homer “household” sometimes refers inclusively to the house and the rest of the estate, its land and animals (as in Thalmann 2011d).
- 2 Tandy 2011: 227. The sociology undertaken in the present article is not discussed as the reflection of a particular historical period. For the question of the relation of the Homeric epics to the societies of eighth- and seventh-century audiences see Raaf-laub 2011: 810.
- 3 Polanyi 1957: 272. (The first ed. of Polanyi’s book was published in 1944.) Polanyi’s theory was based on anthropological and historical research but he did not cite the relevant work probably best known to classical scholars, Mauss 1923-1924. For the intellectual-historical context of the reception of Polanyi’s book, by Moses Finley

high-status women in Homer weave and spin and supervise the preparation of the wool by servants, a sociological description of textile production is possible that is not possible for women's other responsibilities, such as the storage and preparation of food. These, like much else, lie in the background of the heroic narrative.<sup>4</sup>

In Homer, the high-status woman has two responsibilities, articulated in Hector's admonition to Andromache:

ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε  
 ἰστόν τ' ἠλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε  
 ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι (*Il.* 6.490-93)

But go into the house and take care of your own work,  
 the loom and the spindle, and bid your servants  
 to go about their work.

The high-status woman's work is spinning and weaving and supervision of her servants. For the most part, servants neither spin nor weave. As for spinning, Alcinous' fifty slave women, some of whom spin (*Od.* 7.106), and some of the servants of Penelope (*Od.* 18.315), are exceptional. As for weaving, the Sidonian women brought by Paris to Troy as captives are skilled weavers (*Il.* 6.289-92) and presumably continue to weave in Troy. Some of Antinous' fifty slave women also weave (*Od.* 7.105).<sup>5</sup> When in the same context the narrator speaks of the Phaeacian men as superior sailors and the women as weavers skilled above all others, thanks to Athena (*Od.* 7.108-11), he can be assumed to be referring to Phaeacian society as

among others, see Wagner-Hasel 2011: 318-20 and 329-31 on the debate on the market orientation of the ancient economy. Finley 1985: 26 refers in passing to Polanyi among others who argued the "inapplicability of a market-centered analysis" in the study of ancient Greece.

4 Lateiner 2011c: 914: "... [E]pic poetry concerns cosmic, heroic, and historic events, not economic constants and the repetitious tedium of everyday life and its essential practices (eating, farming and herding ...)."

5 The word used of their weaving (ὑφάω) is a Homeric hapax.

a whole.<sup>6</sup> This division between male and female spheres corresponds to the one that Hector has in mind in the admonition to Andromache just quoted. Hector continues: πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει / πᾶσι (“war will be the care of men, all men,” *Il.* 6.493-94)

The word that Hector uses for servants (ἀμφίπολοι, “those busied about” something) is one of the two common words for slaves in Homer.<sup>7</sup> The other is δμωαί (fem. plural) and δμώς (masc.), related either to δάμνημι “to conquer” or δόμος “house.” Another, much less common word is οἰκεύς (“of the household”; in plur. of women).<sup>8</sup> Many slaves bear a close personal relation to their master or mistress. For this reason, the words for slave are usually here translated “servant,” as a way of referring to role as distinguished from status.<sup>9</sup>

When someone arrives unexpectedly in the presence of a high-status woman or a goddess, he finds her spinning or weaving.<sup>10</sup> When Hermes

6 Rood 2008 studies shipbuilding similes as the largest set of thirteen technological similes in the *Iliad*. Her criterion for this list is the requirement of the skills of a specialized craftsman. She includes the skills of spinning and weaving although she considers them an exception to her rule because “most women from slaves to noblewomen practiced these domestic crafts.” Rood wrongly assumes that the wide diffusion of these skills means that as such they were not really skills, requiring the same training as the others and leading to the same rankings of abilities in each of them. Nosch 2015, proceeding from the gendered interpretation of the loom and the ship by Bertolín 2008, discusses the morphological and technological relationship between the two and their shared terminologies. She suggests that the development of the ship may have been based on knowledge that came from weaving on the warp-weighted loom.

7 There is also the verb ἀμφιπολεύειν (*Od.* 5x, of which 4x with masc. subj.)

8 *Il.* 2x; *Od.* 5x. For other, less common words see the inclusive lists in Ndoye 2010: 310-15. There are a few words formed on δουλ- “slave”: δούλη (*Il.* 3.409; *Od.* 4.12); δουλός (Od. 22.423); δούλειος (*Od.* 24.252). There is also the formula δούλιον ἡμᾶρ (*Il.* 6.463; *Od.* 14.340; 17.323).

9 Thalmann 2011a: 808: “The terms used for slaves tend to emphasize relationships rather than status.” For a bibliography on slaves in Homer see *Lfgre* s.v. οἰκεύς L. For an extensive discussion of Homeric terminology for slaves see Ndoye 2010: 198-226 (3.1 “Le système lexical”).

10 The typology of Arend 1933 in his chapter on arrival scenes is keyed to the one who arrives and he does not analyze his third element (the one who arrives “findet den Gesuchten sitzend oder stehend oder mit etwas beschäftigt ...”, 28), although he does compare Helen’s weaving at *Il.* 3.125-28 with Andromache’s at 22.440-41 (53).

arrives at Ogygiē, he finds Calypso weaving (*Od.* 5.61-62). Nausicaa directs Odysseus to the palace of her father Alcinous, where he will find her mother Arētē spinning (*Od.* 6.303-307). When Odysseus' men arrive at the house of Circe they hear her inside singing as she works at her loom (*Od.* 10.221-23). Iris / Laodicē finds Helen weaving (*Il.* 3.125-28). The narrator points out that a messenger had *not* come to Andromache, as she worked at her loom, to tell her of the death of Hector (*Il.* 22.438-41). By contrast, there is no sign of spinning in the description of Penelope at the doorway to the hall (*Od.* 1.328-31), when she addresses Phemius, or when she enters the hall for the interview earlier proposed by the beggar (*Od.* 19.53-59).<sup>11</sup> The former example might be explained by the fact that Penelope has no intention of staying where she is.

At the opening of Book 4 of the *Odyssey*, the narrator, to satisfy the exigencies of his narrative, makes a compromise. *Men* do not find Helen weaving or spinning but she is ostensibly prepared to engage in spinning when *she* finds the men in the megaron of Menelaus' palace. Thus, in a situation in which a loom could not appropriately be set up, Helen enters with a golden spindle, described as lying on top of a basket (4.120-37).<sup>12</sup> A loom would be found in an inner room, as when Iris / Laodicē finds Helen weaving (*Il.* 3.142).<sup>13</sup> When Penelope appears at the door of the hall in which the suitors are listening to the song of Phemius, Telemachus

11 Canevaro 2018: 68-70 discusses the entrances of Helen and of Penelope separately from the type-scene of which they are instances and finds it "striking that both women are introduced through objects." One would rather say that it is striking that Penelope is not introduced through wool-working objects.

12 Pace Neri 2016, who translates ἡλακάτι, the object lying on top of Helen's basket of spun wool, "distaff." One cannot spin with a distaff. The spindle draws fiber from the distaff.

13 Cf. Krieter-Spiro 2009: 61 = Krieter-Spiro 2015: 63-64 on this line. Ferrari 2002: 42: it is striking that "Helen's epiphany has many remarkable points of comparison" with a series of vase paintings in which women are working wool in a forecourt or in another part of the house in which they are found by male visitors. Ferrari also makes the point that "in the imaginary world depicted on the vases, signs of wool-working are predominantly attached to pretty girls," who are unwed, and observes that Helen is one of the few exceptions (57).

tells her to go to her chamber and attend to her own tasks, weaving and spinning (*Od.* 1.356-59; cf. 21.350-53).<sup>14</sup>

The supervision of her servants enjoined upon Andromache by Hector would have included assigning them the tasks that prepare the raw wool for spinning and weaving.<sup>15</sup> These tasks constitute an “operational sequence” or “chaîne opératoire” or “taskscape.”<sup>16</sup> The head of the household as the supervisor of the servants in this sequence is the Eleatic visitor’s model of the statesman in Plato’s *Politicus*. The visitor says that genuine statesmanship will never try to combine good with bad characters in constructing the life of a community. Children judged to be good will be put in the hands of competent educators, who, however, will be directed by the statesman

καθάπερ ὕφαντικὴ τοῖς τε ξαίνουσι καὶ τοῖς τᾶλλα προπαρασκευάζουσιν ὅσα πρὸς τὴν πλέξιν αὐτῆς συμπαρακολουθοῦσα προστάττει καὶ ἐπιστατεῖ, τοιαῦτα ἐκάστοις ἐνδεικνῦσα τὰ ἔργα ἀποτελεῖν οἷα ἂν ἐπιτήδεια ἡγῆται πρὸς τὴν αὐτῆς εἶναι συμπλοκὴν. (*Pol.* 308d6-308e2)

just as the art of weaving has charge of and superintends the carders and those who prepare beforehand all that goes along with its weaving, directing each of them to complete such tasks as it considers serviceable to its own combining of threads.

Short lists of these tasks appear also in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* (567-86) and in the *Politicus* (281e7-283a8); neither is all-inclusive. In Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, Ischomachus explains that his wife, not yet fifteen years old when they were married, came to his house knowing nothing except how to weave and that she had also observed how the tasks of wool working

14 Telemachus’ speech is not an “imitation” of Hector’s. For a bibliography on Telemachus’ speech see Wagner-Hansel 2020: 161 n. 59. S. West 1988: 120 on lines 356-59 tends to agree with Aristarchus’ athetesis of these lines. But they are formulaic. Cf. Stoevesandt 2008: 154 = Stoevesandt 2016: 172-73. With *Od.* 1.358-59 (μῦθος) and *Od.* 21.352-53 (τόξον) cf. *Od.* 11.352-53 (πομπή) (Alcinous).

15 On the mistress and her servants: Wagner-Hasel 2019: 75-77.

16 Harlizius-Klück 2016: §3.

(ἔργα ταλάσια) are allotted to servants (*Oec.* 7.5-6). The fleece from the sheep was beaten with sticks to remove burrs, washed, carded or combed, and sometimes dyed. The manufacture of purple dye had its own chain of preparatory tasks.<sup>17</sup> Servants were also responsible for fitting out the loom and for finishing the cloth after it was removed from the loom. These final steps are called “fulling.”<sup>18</sup>

Eurynome gives a glimpse of the unideal life of some women who are engaged in one of the tasks of preparing the wool. In response to Odysseus’ question concerning the unfaithful women, she first says:

πεντήκοντά τοί εἰσιν ἐνὶ μεγάροισι γυναῖκες  
 δμωαί, τὰς μὲν τ’ ἔργα διδάξαμεν ἐργάζεσθαι,  
 εἴριά τε ξαίνειν καὶ δουλοσύνην ἀνέχεσθαι (*Od.* 22.421-23)

You have fifty women in your halls,  
 servants, whom we have taught to do their work,  
 to card wool and to endure their slavery.

The verb ξαίνειν occurs only here in Homer. Lysistrata uses this verb twice (once in a compound) at the beginning of her extended metaphor of wool working for political reform (*Ar. Lys.* 578-79). She clearly intends carding. In this process foreign matter is removed. Lysistrata adds the detail of plucking off the heads (i.e., the ends) of the wool. The wool is carded into a basket. Combing the wool, so that its fibers will lie parallel, which is omitted in Lysistrata’s metaphor, is a separate procedure.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from ξαίνειν the ancillary tasks are for the most part left unspecified in Homer. The only other verb is πέκειν “to comb” (*Od.* 18.316,

17 Purple dye was a perquisite of elite weavers. Its production was time-consuming and labor-intensive and had its own *chaîne opératoire*. See Marín-Aguilera, Iacono and Gleba 2018: 129-37 and Fig. 1. For Andromache’s purple web: *Il.* 22.441. For a historical survey of dyes and dyeing in antiquity: Forbes 1956: 98-141.

18 *OED* s.v. “full” v.2, 1: “To subject (cloth, esp. woollen <sic> cloth) to various mechanical processes in order to clean and thicken or felt it.” On Greek and, earlier, Mycenaean treatment of woven fabric with oil, which imparted a sheen, see Stoevesandt 2008: 102 = Stoevesandt 2016: 114 on *Il.* 6.295 (also on ancient Near Eastern parallels).

19 See Barber 1991: loc. cit. on the difference between carding and combing. *Lfgre* s.v. ξαίνειν confuses these two steps.

in the imperative form *πέικετε*). The only agent nouns are *εἰροκόμος* “wool-worker” (of Helen’s old servant, *Il.* 3.387; cf. below) and *χερνήτις* “hand-worker” (in a simile at *Il.* 12.434 of a woman engaged in wool-working of some kind). Somewhat paradoxically these lowly tasks bear laudatory epithets when they are referred to collectively. Odysseus, incognito, tells his father that he once entertained Odysseus and gave him gifts, including four women *ἀμύμονα ἔργα ἰδυίας* “having knowledge of” or “skilled in” “excellent works” (*Od.* 24.278).<sup>20</sup> The works of slave women are also called “splendid” (*ἀγλαὰ δῶρα*), as by Eumaeus of the Phoenician woman who abducted him when he was a child (*Od.* 15.418’).<sup>21</sup> Hector finds Helen assigning her servants their “very glorious” tasks (*περικλυτὰ ἔργα*, *Il.* 6.324). This epithet, not used elsewhere of these or of any other tasks, may have been prompted by its use as a standard epithet of Hephaestus (*Il.* 6x; *Od.* 5x).<sup>22</sup> The formula *ἀγλαὰ ἔργα* is used also of the weaving of Circe (*Od.* 10.233). At the time of the reconciliation of Achilles and Agamemnon, when Briseïs is finally returned to Achilles, she is distinguished from the seven women whom Agamemnon gives to him in addition to other gifts. Of the Achaeans who bring the gifts the narrator says:

ἐκ δ’ ἄγον αἶψα γυναῖκας ἀμύμονα ἔργα ἰδυίας  
ἔπτ’, ἀτὰρ ὀγδοάτην Βρισηΐδα καλλιπάρηον. (*Il.* 19.245-46)

quickly they led seven women skilled in excellent works  
and the eighth was fair-cheeked Briseïs.

20 This epithet is used also of the women offered to Achilles by Agamemnon, *Il.* 9.128, cf. 270, 19.245; of the woman set as a prize by Achilles in the chariot race, *Il.* 23.263. The word *ἔργα* sans epithet is used of the woman set as the second prize in the wrestling contest. The absence of an epithet does not mean that the woman was not valuable. They estimated that she was worth four oxen (*Il.* 23.705).

21 The line is formulaic and is twice used of Athena to describe the mortal woman whose form she has taken (*Od.* 13.288-89 = 16.157-58).

22 Athena taught the daughters of Pandareüs to perform “glorious tasks”: *ἔργα δ’ Ἀθηναίη δέδαε κλυτὰ ἔργάζεσθαι*, *Od.* 20.72.

The “works” (ἔργα) are likely to include the tasks of wool working.<sup>23</sup> But neither Briseis nor any other woman in the Achaean camp is referred to as a weaver or wool-worker. Agamemnon says that he will take Chryseis back to Argos, where he imagines her as weaving and sharing his bed (ἰστὸν ἐποιχομένην καὶ ἔμὸν λέχος ἀντιώσσαν, *Il.* 1.31).

The servants closest to the head of the household, like the named servants who carry Helen’s chair, rug and silver basket when she enters the megaron (*Od.* 4.123-26), are probably exempt from the preparation of the wool. Two named servants accompany Helen when she goes to the wall of Troy to witness the single combat of Paris and Menelaus (*Il.* 3.143-44). Helen’s favorite, however, is an old carder of wool, whom she brought from Sparta (*Il.* 3.386-88). Aphrodite, disguised as this old woman, summons Helen from the tower near Scaean Gates. When Helen returns with her to the house of Paris, the two servants, who have returned with her, go about their tasks without a word from their mistress (*Il.* 3.422). When, however, Hector finds Helen seated among her servants upon his entrance into the chamber of Paris (*Il.* 6.323-24), she is assigning their tasks. In reported speeches of Helen in the *Odyssey*, she gives orders to servants (*Od.* 4.233, 296).

The servants in the *Odyssey* with whom Penelope has close relationships, like Helen’s with the old wool worker, are Eurynome, the housekeeper (ταμίη *Od.* 17.495, 19.96), and Actoris, given to her by her father when she left home to marry Odysseus (*Od.* 23.227-29). They have the highest status amongst the servants. Penelope bids Eurynome to summon Autonoe and Hippodameia to come with her because she will not go alone amongst the suitors (*Od.* 18.142-45).

The sociology of the production of textiles that has been described here has its *raison d’être* in the self-sufficient economy of the estate. The raw wool has come, like foodstuffs and fuel, from the estate of which the household is the center.<sup>24</sup> The only alternatives to the estate’s self-sufficiency would be a market or trade. The *Iliad* has only two examples of the latter. The Achaeans trade bronze, iron, hides, cattle and slaves for wine brought from Lemnos (7.472-75), while the Atreids receive their wine as

23 *Lfgre* s.v. ἔργον B 3b.

24 Olive oil is not mentioned in Homer as a food but has other uses. See Lateiner 2011d.



a gift (7.470-71).<sup>25</sup> In his description of the lump of iron that he sets as a prize in the funeral games for Patroclus, Achilles says that it will last for five years, in which time his shepherd or ploughman will not have to go to the city for more (*Il.* 23.831-35). A city as a center of trade for this commodity is assumed only here in the narrative.<sup>26</sup> (The existence of a market is not a necessary inference.) The absence of further evidence for trade is consistent with a broader range of exclusions.<sup>27</sup>

In Karl Polanyi's conception, the three activities that characterize a pre-market economy are reciprocity, redistribution, and householding.<sup>28</sup> In the Homeric institution of guest-friendship, reciprocity takes the form of the exchange of goods and services between friends.<sup>29</sup> This kind of friendship may be inherited, as by Glaucus and Diomedes (*Il.* 6.212-231). Another form of reciprocity is the exchange of oaths and yet another is sacrifice and prayer.<sup>30</sup> The redistribution of booty by Agamemnon, or, rather, the crisis in redistribution when he takes Briseïs back from Achilles, is at the center of the *Iliad*. The suitors' prolonged consumption of the stores and cattle of Odysseus is another breakdown of reciprocity, well-articulated in Telemachus' rebuke (*Od.* 1.374-80).<sup>31</sup>

25 On peculiarities of diction in this passage and conclusions concerning its authenticity see Wesselmann 2020: 202 on 466-75. She does not take a side in the debate.

26 See Richardson 1993: 264 on 832-35.

27 Cf. Seaford 2011: 284: "The exclusion of trade between Greeks belongs to a whole series of absences or marginalities – e.g., of communal festivals, state organization, agriculture and the deities of agriculture – that express a heroic ideology, the glorification of a way of life based on the dominance of a class who acquire goods by inheritance, gift-exchange, and plunder ..."

28 Polanyi 1957: 47-55.

29 Thalmann 2011c.

30 Oaths: Lateiner 2011a. Sacrifice and prayer: Parker 1998: 104: "Almost the whole of Greek cultic practice is ... founded ... on the belief that reciprocity is a possibility." Lateiner 2011b: 689: "Homeric prayer is predicated on special forms of reciprocity, the *do ut des* relationship between men and gods ..." Cook 2016 argues that the plots of both Homeric epics are structured by reciprocity. On the question of reciprocity in Achilles' conduct toward Priam in *Il.* 24 see Postlethwaite 1998 and Zanker 1998, a reply to Postlethwaite.

31 Seaford 2011: 282 uses these two examples. See Tandy 2011: 227 for other examples of redistribution in Homer. Gill 2011: 200, however, speaks of Agamemnon's decision

Householding, Polanyi says, “consists in production for one’s own use.” Perceiving a rapid decline of the “world-wide market economy” at the time at which he was writing, he refers to Aristotle’s “prophetic” distinction in Book 1 of the *Politics* between householding (οἰκονομική) and chrematistics (χρηματιστική).<sup>32</sup> The wealth sought by the former is natural, whereas the goal of the latter is money-making through trade (*Pol.* 1257b19-22).<sup>33</sup> Further, householding has a limit; money-making has no limit (1258a14-18). Aristotle allows, however, in Polanyi’s words an “accessory production for the market.” One would rather say that, as for surplus and profit from agriculture, Aristotle is both opposed (programmatic statement at 1256b40-1257a5) and accommodative (1158b9-31). The contradiction remains unresolved.

The Homeric household aims to produce or acquire a surplus. The best woven textile is saved and stored to be used for guest-gifts, such as Helen’s parting gift to Telemachus (*Od.* 15.101-108, 125-28), or for a dedication to a goddess, such as the *peplos* presented by Hecuba to the priestess Theano for Athena (*Il.* 6.283-303). Both the gift and the dedication expect reciprocity. As for trade, in his speech to the Trojan’s feckless allies in Book 17, Hector says that, by giving them gifts and food, he wears out his own people (225-26). In the absence of markets, the Trojans presumably have relied on trade, about which the Homeric epics are silent, with the exception of wine imported by the Achaeans from Lemnos, for which they trade bronze, iron, hides, cattle and slaves (*Il.* 7.467-74). Where the food to which Hector refers has come from is unclear. As for Hector’s wearing out his own people, Achilles has referred to the depletion of the

as a “crisis in the ethics of reciprocity.” Both concepts, redistribution and reciprocity, are apt and the choice will depend upon the passage in Homer that one has in mind. At *Il.* 9.316b-17, for example, Achilles construes Agamemnon’s offense against him as a failure of χάρις, i.e., of reciprocity.

32 Polanyi 1957: 53. In fact, there was an economic boom following the Second World War. In the present generation, two crises of global capitalism are seen: class polarization and ecological unsustainability (Sklair 2015).

33 ἔστι γὰρ ἑτέρα ἢ χρηματιστική καὶ ὁ πλοῦτος ὁ κατὰ φύσιν, καὶ αὕτη μὲν οἰκονομική, ἢ δὲ καπηλικὴ ποιητικὴ χρημάτων οὐ πάντως, ἀλλὰ διὰ χρημάτων μεταβολῆς (*Ar. Pol.* 1257b19-22). “Money-making is different from wealth according to nature, which is household management. The other is retail trade, which is productive of money, not in all ways but through the exchange of goods.”

Trojans' formerly great wealth (9.401-403; cf. 24.543-46 to Priam on the extent of the territory that he once ruled). As for the Achaeans, they raided many cities in the Troad but these raids could hardly have supplied the army with food for ten years. They must then, Thucydides thought, have turned to farming as well as to raiding (πρὸς γεωργίαν τῆς Χερσονήσου τραπόμενοι καὶ ληστείαν τῆς τροφῆς ἀπορία, 1.11.1).<sup>34</sup>

A passage in Book 1 of the *Politics* to which Polanyi had no reason to refer is useful in completing the sociology of the household in a certain aspect, namely, the relation of husband to wife. Aristotle's account of the origin of the polis begins with the union of the two sexes for the purpose of procreation. For Aristotle there is also a union, which is natural and coeval with the union of male and female, of the ruled and the ruler, i.e., of the slave and the master (*Pol.* 1252a26-31). The natural result of Aristotle's two unions is the household (οἰκία, οἶκος, 1252b9-15). The association of several households "for needs not limited to those of a single day" is the village (κώμη), which is most natural (μάλιστα ... κατὰ φύσιν) when it is the offshoot of the household (1252b15-18). From the association of several villages comes ultimately the polis, which reaches complete self-sufficiency. In short, the household is the foundation of the polis.<sup>35</sup> Aristotle goes on to speak of the husband's "rule" (ἀρχή) over his wife. This rule is part of a larger structure of ruling and ruled, which begins in the soul and amounts to a general law (1260a1-9).<sup>36</sup> In general, "the relation of male to female is by nature that of superior to inferior and of ruler to ruled" (ἔτι δὲ τὸ ἄρρεν πρὸς τὸ θῆλυ φύσει τὸ μὲν κρεῖττον τὸ δὲ χεῖρον, καὶ τὸ μὲν ἄρχον τὸ δ' ἀρχόμενον, *Pol.* 1254b13-14).<sup>37</sup> The husband rules his wife, his slaves and his children, although by a different kind of rule in each case, which corresponds to differences in their capacity for deliberation (τὸ βουλευτικόν, 1260a9-14). The status of the

34 Tandy 2011: 227 speaks of the "economics of the raid."

35 Cf. the title of Nagle 2006.

36 Barker 1946: 35 n. 1: "Aristotle here appears to argue in a circle – first from the relations of persons to the relations of the elements in the soul, and then back from the relation of the elements in the soul to the relations of persons. But the centre of the circle is the general principle of rule and subordination ..." See further Pellegrin 2015: 31-33.

37 Cf. τὸ ... ἄρρεν φύσει τοῦ θήλεος ἡγεμονικώτερον ("the male is by nature fitter to command than the female, 1259b1-2).

wife in Aristotle's thought, especially with respect to her husband's "political" rule over her (1259b1) and her capacity for deliberation, is an unsettled question.<sup>38</sup> In the Homeric household, however, the husband, or in the case of Telemachus the son, is superior to the woman who is the head of the household. Telemachus tells his mother that he is the one who has authority in the house (τοῦ γὰρ κράτος ἔστ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ, *Od.* 1.359 = 21.353).<sup>39</sup> In the corresponding passage in the *Iliad*, Hector implicitly has the right to send Andromache back into their house (6.490-93, cited above), whatever the degree of kindness that accompanies his words.<sup>40</sup> Hector also has authority over his mother. Following the instructions given him by Helenus, he instructs her to gather the older women and go to the temple of Athena and place her best *peplos* on the knees of the goddess (6.77-101).<sup>41</sup>

The basis of the son's authority over his mother, as in the example of Telemachus, is his prospective ownership of the estate. Before the return of Odysseus and his assertion of his identity, the relation of Telemachus to Odysseus' estate is unsettled. Penelope tells Odysseus (still known to her only as her guest) of her sorrowful life and her indecision concerning marriage with one of the suitors (19.508-53). In the course of this speech she describes her dilemma in quasi-legal terms. She might remain with her son and "keep everything as it is—my property" (κτῆσιν ἐμήν), i.e., her slaves and her house.<sup>42</sup> As for Telemachus, when he was young, she

38 Aristotle qualifies this capacity in the wife as "unauthoritative" (ἄκυρον, 1260a13). On the meaning of the word in this context and on the larger question of the status of wife, see the opposing discussions of Deslauriers 2015 and Riesbeck 2015.

39 The word οἶκος occurs twice in Telemachus' speech. The first time (1.356 = 21.350) it refers to Penelope's room as distinguished from the rest of the house (*LfgRE* s.v. οἶκος 2: 568.8-9). The second time (1.359 = 21.353) it refers to the house as a whole (*LfgRE* s.v. οἶκος 2: 573.54-55).

40 Stoevesandt 2008: 154-55 on *Il.* 6.490-93 = Stoevesandt 2016: 172-73 on *Il.* 6.490-93: Hector's words are not "a mere expression of his authority as a male." Graziosi and Haubold 2010: 222 on 490-93: "This and the two other Odyssean passages [1.356-59; 21.350-53] conclude extensive scenes at the end of which the male speaker feels he needs to assert his authority and role."

41 See Stoevesandt 2008: 37-38 on 86-101 = Stoevesandt 2016: 41 on 86-101.

42 ἡ ἐ μὲνω παρὰ παιδὶ καὶ ἔμπεδα πάντα φυλάσσω, / κτῆσιν ἐμήν, δμῳάς τε καὶ ὑπερεφές μέγα δῶμα, 19.525-26).

could not marry one of the suitors and leave the house of her husband (πόσιος κατὰ δῶμα λιποῦσαν, 19.531). Now he would like to see her leave.

νῦν δ' ὅτε δὴ μέγας ἐστὶ καὶ ἥβης μέτρον ἰκάνει,  
καὶ δὴ μ' ἀρᾶται πάλιν ἐλθέμεν ἐκ μεγάροιο,  
κτήσιος ἀσχαλόων, τήν οἱ κατέδουσιν Ἀχαιοί. (*Od.* 19.532-34)

Now, when he has grown up and is reaching the bounds of youth,  
now indeed he prays that I go back from the house,  
vexed because of his property, which the Achaeans are devouring.

Penelope uses the same word both of the household as her property and of her son's property, implicitly referring to his land and livestock (κτῆσις, cf. 4.687). The house is hers in the sense that she is its mistress. In fact it is Odysseus' and would become Telemachus' if his mother married one of the suitors, as he well knows.<sup>43</sup>

The scene in which Helen chooses a *peplos* woven by her as a gift for the departing Telemachus is another example of male ownership.<sup>44</sup> Helen, her step-son Megapenthes, and Menelaus go to his storeroom, where this *peplos* and Menelaus' other treasures are kept.<sup>45</sup>

ἄλλ' ὅτε δὴ ῥ' ἴκαν', ὅθι οἱ κειμήλια κεῖτο,  
Ἄτρεΐδης μὲν ἔπειτα δέπας λάβεν ἀμφικύπελλον,  
υἷὸν δὲ κρητῆρα φέρειν Μεγαπένθε' ἄνωγεν  
ἀργύρεον· Ἐλένη δὲ παρίστατο φωριαμοῖσιν,

43 Steiner 2010: 25: "Should she marry, she must quit the home where she resides more as caretaker than owner..." For Penelope's expectation of the support of Odysseus, should he return, cf. 18.254-55 = 19.127-28.

44 For examples of bridegrooms' gifts to their brides: West 1963: 167. Cadmus gave Harmonia a peplos (Apollod. 3.4.2). On the gift in Homer: Tandy 2011: 228; Thalmann 2011b: 172; Seaford 2011: 281-82. Wagner-Hasel 2000: 105 = 2020: 113 calls gifts such as Menelaus' and Helen's to Telemachus "symbolic mementoes." They are referred to not by the word *xeinion* but by *dōron*. Menelaus promises Telemachus *dōra* (*Od.* 15.113). This distinction between *xeinion* and *dōron*, she shows, is maintained throughout the *Odyssey*.

45 A typical storeroom scene: see de Jong 2001: App. F ("The 'Storeroom' Type-Scene") and 368 on 99-110 for an analysis of this scene as such.

ἔνθ' ἔσαν οἱ πέπλοι παμποίκιοι, οὓς κάμεν αὐτή. (*Od.* 15.101-5)

But when they reached the place where his treasures were stored,  
the son of Atreus then took a two-handled cup  
and bade his son Megapenthes to bear a silver mixing-bowl.  
Helen stood beside the chests  
in which she kept very beautiful *peploi*, which she herself had made.

The storeroom and all its contents can be assumed to be the property of Menelaus (*Od.* 15.113; cf. his earlier words to Telemachus: 4.613-14).<sup>46</sup>

In the sociology that has been described, weaving is not a choice but in the first place an economic necessity. Weaving becomes a form of individual self-expression in one of two ways, either in the fineness of the weave or in the figures or patterns that the weaver chooses to weave. In principle, both could be achieved simultaneously but neither of the Homeric epics happens to refer to both of these kinds of self-expression in the same cloth. The fineness of Penelope's weaving is described by Odysseus when he returns to Ithaca. He pretends to be Aethon, the brother of Idomeneus, and to have entertained Odysseus on the island of Crete. Penelope tests him by asking three questions, one of which is what sort of clothes he was wearing (*Od.* 19.218). Aethon says that Odysseus was wearing a "double purple fleecy cloak" (χλαῖναν πορφυρέην οὔλην ἔχε δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς, / διπλῆν, *Od.* 19.225-26), the fineness of which he describes in detail (*Od.* 19.232-35). These were the clothes that Penelope gave Odysseus upon his departure (*Od.* 19.255).

Interpretation of weaving as expressive of the character of the weaver has typically proceeded from the figures or patterns that they weave. The figures that Helen is weaving when Iris, as Helen's sister-in-law, Laodice, summons her to the wall of Troy, are described as the "struggles of horse-taming Trojans and bronze-clad Achaeans" (*Il.* 3.126). The pat-

46 Cf. "the treasures of the master" (*Od.* 14.326; 21.9); "all the treasures in my house" (*Od.* 15.113); "the treasures stored in the halls of the master" (*Od.* 19.295). Priam's choice of gifts for Achilles is a telling example. In the storeroom (here called *thamos*, *Il.* 24.191), in the presence of Hecabe, who opposes his going to Achilles, he opens chests and takes twelve of each of five kinds of woven cloth (*Il.* 24.228-31).

terns that Andromache weaves are called  $\theta\rho\acute{o}\nu\alpha$  (*Il.* 22.441, perhaps “decorations”; cf. *Lfgre* s.v.). Besides figures and patterns the weaver has, at least notionally, a few other choices, which are for the most part left unmentioned: the color of the wool (only purple is mentioned); the width of the loom; the weave structure; and the fineness of the fiber. She could also make some decisions concerning the “fulling” or finishing of the cloth after it was removed from the loom. At this stage the cloth might be treated with oil.<sup>47</sup> But the characterological interpretation of Homeric weaving, including Penelope’s ruse, lies beyond the purview of the sociology that has been undertaken here.<sup>48</sup>

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47 On Greek and, earlier, Mycenaean treatment of woven fabric with oil, which imparted a sheen, see Stoevesandt 2008: 102-3 on *Il.* 6.295 = Stoevesandt 2016: 114 on *Il.* 6.295 (also on ancient Near Eastern parallels).

48 On Helen: Krieter-Spiro 2009: 55-56 on *Il.* 3.126 = Krieter-Spiro 2015: 58-59 on *Il.* 126. On Andromache: Richardson 1993: 154 on *Il.* 22.440-41 (with comparison with Helen); de Jong 2012: 175 on *Il.* 22.440-41 (also with comparison with Helen). On Penelope’s ruse: Levaniouk 2011: Ch. 15 (“Back to the Loom”).

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