The Classical Quarterly (2025) 75.2 527–545
doi:10.1017/S0009838825101006

THOUGHT FOR FOOD: ON NIOBE'S ETERNAL BROODING

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the Niobe allusion of Iliad *24 (599–620), providing solutions to grammatical, structural, and narratological problems therein. I show how attention to an often-overlooked and universally misinterpreted occurrence of* τε *in line 602 paves the way to a new understanding of the passage as a whole. In addition, a supposed problem with the ring structure of the passage is resolved without the need of editorial intervention.*

Keywords: Homer; Greek linguistics; Greek particles; tense-aspect; verbal semantics; *Iliad*

1. INTRODUCTION

This article argues for a reinterpretation of the Niobe allusion of *Iliad* 24 (599–620) based on the hitherto overlooked significance of the 'epic τε' + aorist indicative in line 602. General practice in commentaries and translations has been to read the line contrary to the ordinary rules of Homeric grammar, interpreting the verb as a single past event rather than a timeless or 'gnomic' aorist (the regular interpretation with τε). This approach has led some to puzzle over what the τε is doing here and to devise various implausible and *ad hoc* explanations for it. My solution is to take this τε at face value and read it in its regular generalizing sense. I establish by examining parallel passages that there is no basis for interpreting this τε in any other way, nor, as some have done, for simply ignoring it.

Reinterpreting the text in this way allows us to solve a problem in the passage noticed since antiquity. The allusion is plainly a ring composition, but its structure is thrown off by lines 614–17. Rejecting the lines as inauthentic brings down an unduly heavy editorial hand, but other suggestions fail to repair the ring structure. As I point out, however, these lines contain a present-tense verb in reference to the eternal existence of Niobe as a weeping rock—just the thing to answer the timeless aorist in line 602. The ring structure can thus be saved without any editorial intervention, and the lines may be regarded as genuine, all by reading epic τε as epic τε.

But this reinterpretation does more than remedy a minor grammatical quirk and save an otherwise out-of-balance ring structure. It reframes our understanding of the passage and Achilles' motivation for alluding to Niobe when he does and in the way that he does. By reading the introductory verb as a timeless aorist, the grieving of Niobe is presented, from the beginning, as an eternal consequence of a grieving process gone wrong—one that is out of step with established norms that typically allow people to move past their grief when they have lost a loved one. Being denied the ability to eat food—an essential step in the Homeric grieving process—has had devastating consequences for Niobe, as she can never move past her all-consuming grief at the loss of her children, and she is doomed to gnaw at her own sorrows instead. If Priam would like to avoid a similar outcome, Achilles suggests, he must eat, and he must do so right here and now, despite his reservations, behind enemy lines and in the company of Achilles himself.

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In this way, an innocent-looking particle turns out to hold the key to a better understanding of the entire passage, solving an age-old structural puzzle along the way. In what follows I provide the relevant passage (§1.1), then introduce its problems more fully and my proposed solutions (§1.2) and provide a road map for the rest of the paper (§1.3).

1.1. Passage containing the Niobe allusion

I give the passage in full in (1) below, to be referenced throughout the article. All translations are mine. The Greek text is West's, except that iotas adscript have been converted to iotas subscript.[1] I have offset certain portions of the text in (1) to visually reflect the structure of the passage as analysed below. Verbs in the aorist and imperfect indicative are emboldened, as is the particle τε. Verbs argued to have timeless ('gnomic') reference, translated by the present tense in English, are underlined. The verb of principal concern is the aorist indicative ἐμνήσατο, tentatively rendered as past tense 'thought', following the consensus interpretation of translations and commentaries up to now,[2] though I argue for a revised interpretation as presential 'thinks'. The verb ἐμνήσατο is accordingly underlined in (1), as well as emboldened.

(1) *Iliad* 24.599–620

υἱὸς μὲν δή τοι λέλυται, γέρον, ὡς ἐκέλευες,
κεῖται δ' ἐν λεχέεσσ'· ἅμα δ' ἠοῖ φαινομένηφιν
ὄψεαι αὐτὸς ἄγων.
νῦν δὲ μνησώμεθα δόρπου.

καὶ γάρ **τ'** ἠΰκομος Νιόβη **ἐμνήσατο** σίτου,

τῇ περ δώδεκα παῖδες ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν **ὄλοντο**,
ἓξ μὲν θυγατέρες, ἓξ δ' υἱέες ἡβώοντες.
τοὺς μὲν Ἀπόλλων **πέφνεν** ἀπ' ἀργυρέοιο βιοῖο
χωόμενος Νιόβῃ, τὰς δ' Ἄρτεμις ἰοχέαιρα,
οὕνεκ' ἄρα Λητοῖ **ἰσάσκετο** καλλιπαρήῳ·
φῆ δοιὼ τεκέειν, ἣ δ' αὐτὴ **γείνατο** πολλούς·
τὼ δ' ἄρα καὶ δοιὼ περ ἐόντ' **ἀπὸ** πάντας **ὄλεσσαν**.
οἳ μὲν ἄρ' ἐννῆμαρ **κέατ'** ἐν φόνῳ, οὐδέ τις **ἦεν**
κατθάψαι· λαοὺς δὲ λίθους **ποίησε** Κρονίων.
τοὺς δ' ἄρα τῇ δεκάτῃ **θάψαν** θεοὶ οὐρανίωνες,

ἣ δ' ἄρα σίτου **μνήσατ'**, ἐπεὶ **κάμε** δάκρυ χέουσα.

νῦν δέ που ἐν πέτρῃσιν, ἐν οὔρεσιν οἰοπόλοισιν,
ἐν Σιπύλῳ, ὅθι φασὶ θεάων ἔμμεναι εὐνάς
νυμφάων, αἵ **τ'** ἀμφ' Ἀκελήσιον **ἐρρώσαντο**,
ἔνθα λίθος περ ἐοῦσα θεῶν ἐκ κήδεα πέσσει.

ἀλλ' ἄγε δὴ καὶ νῶϊ μεδώμεθα, δῖε γεραιέ,
σίτου. ἔπειτά κεν αὖτε φίλον παῖδα κλαίοισθα,
Ἴλιον εἰσαγαγών· πολυδάκρυτος δέ τοι ἔσται.

[1] M.L. West, *Homeri Ilias*, vols. 1 and 2 (Leipzig, 1998–2000) and *Homerus: Odyssea* (Berlin, 2017).

[2] Or 'has eaten'. Thus 'hat gegessen' in C. Brügger, *Homers Ilias: Gesamtkommentar, Band VIII.2* (Berlin, 2009), 213.

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Your son is released to you, sir, as you requested,
and he lies on a bier; and at the emergence of dawn
you will see him and yourself carry him off.
But for now let us think of supper.

For even fair-haired Niobe **thought** of food,

though her twelve children **perished** in her halls:
six daughters and six strapping sons.
The sons Apollo **shot dead** from his silver bow
in his anger at Niobe; the daughters arrow-showering Artemis **killed**,
all because Niobe **went matching herself against** fair-cheeked Leto:
She **bragged** that, whereas Leto had borne two children, she herself **had given birth to** many.
Yet, in the event, those two **were enough to wipe out** all of Niobe's children.
It was they who **lay** for nine days in their own slaughter, as **there was** no one
to bury them; for the son of Cronus **had turned** the people to stone.
But, on the tenth day, the heavenly gods at last **buried** Niobe's children,

and she, for her part, **thought** of food, when she **had tired** of shedding tears.

Even now, somewhere among the cliffs, in the lonely mountains,
On Mount Sipylus, where they say the habitations of goddesses lie—
nymphs, who **lilt** around the river *Akelêsios*—
there, stone as she is, she broods on her sorrows from the gods.

But come, let us, you and I, do likewise, good sir, in taking thought
of food. Thereafter, you may lament your beloved son in due course,
having taken him back to Ilion. For he will be the source of abundant tears for you.

1.2. Problematization and proposed solutions

Of the numerous peculiarities in Achilles' recounting of the Niobe myth to Priam, lines 614–17 have stood out since antiquity as potentially spurious.[3] Among other difficulties, these lines interrupt the ring structure of the passage, which Richardson[4] lays out as in (2), here slightly modified for presentation.

(2) RING STRUCTURE OF (1) ACCORDING TO RICHARDSON[5]

A_1	599–601	Your son is free: you will see him tomorrow.
B_1	601	Now let us think of eating,
C_1	602	for even Niobe did so.
D	603–12	Niobe's story.
C_2	613	She ate, when she had tired of weeping,
??	**614–17**	**and now she still nurses her grief, even when turned to stone (cf. 619–20?).**
B_2	618–19	But come, let us also think of eating.
A_2	619–20	After that you can mourn your son, when you have brought him back to Troy. He will cost you many tears.

[3] Brügger (n. 2), 215.
[4] N. Richardson, *The* Iliad*: A Commentary, Volume VI: Books 21–24* (Cambridge, 1993), 339–40.
[5] Richardson (n. 4).

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Richardson explains the apparent intrusion of lines 614–17 as providing 'a parallel with the conclusion of Akhilleus' speech (lines 619–20), for just as Niobe continues to mourn her children, so will Priam lament his son on his return to Troy'.[6] While not implausible, this suggestion does nothing to remedy the ring structure, which would thus have three 'A' elements, with the second intruding between C_2 and B_2.

Brügger[7] follows Richardson's view fairly closely, though he assigns a numeral, rather than a letter, to each portion of the primary ring structure (his 1, 2, 3 = A_1, B_1, C_1 in [2] above), answered by those numerals prime (his 3′, 2′, 1′ = C_2, B_2, A_2 in [2] above). He makes Richardson's explanation more explicit by treating line 613 as the beginning of a secondary ring structure, assigned the letter value *A* (Niobe ate), followed by 614–17 as *B* (Niobe's continued weeping), and these are answered in turn by 618–19 as *A*′ (exhortation to eat) and 619–20 as *B*′ (Priam's continued weeping). Thus, in Brügger's representation, three of these passages are simultaneously lettered (A, A′, B′), referring to their role in the secondary ring structure, and numbered (3′, 2′, 1′), referring to their role in the primary ring structure (corresponding to C_2, B_2, A_2 in [2] above). But this still does not resolve the problem of 614–17, to which he assigns the letter *B* only, without an accompanying numeral-prime value. Despite the added layer of complexity, lines 614–17 are still left floating, with no explicit connection to what comes before (A_1, B_1, C_1), in which respect they differ from the other lettered portions of the passage (A, A′, B′ = 3′, 2′, 1′ = C_2, B_2, A_2).

While I agree with these commentaries that lines 614–17 are not spurious and can be sensibly understood in the context of the ring structure of the passage, my proposal differs in that it views lines 614–17 as answering specifically to line 602 (C_1), taking these together with the preceding line (613) under the umbrella of C_2 (see [4] below). This has the benefit of anchoring lines 614–17 to the first part of the passage, rather than having to suppose that they are introduced only in order to look ahead to the 'continued weeping' of lines 619–20. This view is justified by particular verbal parallels between the two portions of the text, as I will now describe.

My proposal for salvaging the ring structure of (1) comes about by making sense of another—this time grammatical—oddity which occurs earlier in the passage, in line 602, repeated in (3).

(3) καὶ γάρ **τ'** ἠΰκομος Νιόβη **ἐμνήσατο** σίτου (*Il.* 24.602).
For even fair-haired Niobe **thought** of food.

Scholars have been at pains to explain the apparently aberrant use of the particle τε here,[8] which typically has a generalizing function, often used in general relative clauses, as in line 616 in (1) above (see also [11] in Section 3), or co-occurring with the present or timeless aorist found in aphorisms or epic similes (hence the particle is often called 'epic τε'), as in (5) in Section 2 and (15), (18)–(19) in Section 3. But the context of (1) seems to call for a preterital interpretation of the aorist rather than a timeless or 'gnomic'

[6] Richardson (n. 4), 340. Similarly C. Schmitz, '"Denn Auch Niobe...": die Bedeutung der Niobe-Erzählung in Achills Rede (Ω 599–620)', *Hermes* 129 (2001), 145–57, at 151–2.

[7] Brügger (n. 2).

[8] This is distinct from 'connective τε', which means 'and'. I am here concerned only with the generalizing particle.

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interpretation, and scholars have unanimously interpreted it as such (Denniston,[9] Ruijgh,[10] Chantraine[11]).

As I will show, however, past-referring aorists in such contexts do not occur with τε elsewhere in Homer. Moreover, given that gnomic aorists are virtually always augmented in epic (Platt[12]), ἐμνήσατο is suited to timeless/gnomic interpretation (rendered by the English present tense), while the subsequent, augmentless preterites in the passage are past referring (rendered by the English past tense). I therefore read line 602 as a statement that still applies in the present: 'For even Niobe *thinks* of food', referring to her eternal sorrowing as a weeping rock.

The suspected lines 614–17 may then be understood in terms of the ring structure of the passage, taken together with line 613 in answer to line 602. While line 602 has an aorist with present reference (ἐμνήσατο σίτου 'she thinks of food'), lines 613–17 resolve the timeless aorist into a past-referring aorist, σίτου μνήσατο 'she thought of food' (line 613), and a verb in the present tense, νῦν δέ ... κήδεα πέσσει 'even now she broods on [or, more precisely, *stews on* or *chews on*] her sorrows'. The timeless aorist, looking both backward and forward, is duly answered by a past and a present tense, relating Niobe's episodic past to her eternal present. The food metaphor is carried through in the choice of πέσσει 'she broods' in line 617, as πέσσω means literally 'cook, digest, process food' and so metaphorically 'stew on, chew on, process emotions'.[13] It is a deliberate food related pun recalling σίτου in lines 602 and 613.

I give my revision of Richardson's schema in (4).

(4) Revised ring structure of (1)

A_1	599–601	Your son is free to take home tomorrow.
B_1	601	For now, let's think of food:
C_1	**602**	**for even Niobe does so.**
D	603–12	Niobe's story.
C_2	**613–17**	**Having tired of weeping, she thought of eating, as she continues to do even now, forever doomed to 'chew on' her sorrows as a living rock.**
B_2	618–19	So let's likewise think of food.
A_2	619–20	Then mourn your son with more tears back in Troy.

For my interpretation of πέσσω as 'process (food/emotions)' see the lexical study provided in the appendix at the end of this article.

1.3. Road map

The rest of this article is structured as follows: After exploring the narrative implications of my reinterpretation of the text (§2), I show how the grammatical facts of Homer support reading the aorist in line 602 as timeless (§3) in contrast to the other preterites of the passage, which are past referring (§4). I then summarize and conclude (§5).

[9] J.D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, 2nd edition, ed. K.J. Dover (Oxford, 1954), 531.
[10] C.J. Ruijgh, *Autour de "τε épique". Études sur la syntaxe grecque* (Amsterdam, 1971), 738.
[11] P. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique, Tome II: Syntaxe*, 2nd edition, ed. M. Casevitz (Paris, 1953 [2015]), 343.
[12] A. Platt, 'The augment in Homer', *Journal of Philology* 19 (1891), 211–37.
[13] Cf. similarly Brügger's 'Leiden verdauen' ('digesting suffering'): (n. 2), 215.

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2. WEEPING ROCKS (BUT FOOD IS BETTER)

The 'real-life' Niobe, as legend has it, can be seen to this day in the form of the Weeping Rock on Mount Sipylus. And she is still 'weeping': the natural formation of porous limestone appears to 'weep' after a rain as water seeps through it.



FIG. 1: Weeping Rock (Ağlayan Kaya), Mount Sipylus (Spil Dağı), Manisa Province, Turkey.[14]

The notion of a weeping rock even has precedent within the *Iliad* itself, in the epic simile in (5).

(5) δάκρυα θερμὰ χέων ὥς τε κρήνη μελάνυδρος,
ἥ τε κατ' αἰγίλιπος πέτρης δνοφερὸν χέει ὕδωρ (16.3–4).

(Patroclus) streaming hot tears like a black-water spring,
which down sheer rock streams dark water.

The same comparison is made in reference to Agamemnon's tears at *Il*. 9.14–15.

Sipylus is explicitly mentioned in line 615 of (1) above, part of the suspected lines 614–17. Aside from these lines' disruption of the ring structure of the passage, several objections were put forth against them in antiquity,[15] of which two are worth considering here, presented in (6).

(6) a. *If Niobe was turned to stone, how could she eat?*
b. *It is an absurd consolation to say 'eat, for Niobe ate and was petrified'.*

Against (6a) I argue that a rock's inability to eat is precisely the point of the passage; against (6b) that the passage is not so much a consolation as an admonition. Both points hinge on the fact that we are not actually told that Niobe eats, only that she '*thought* of food'.

[14] Photo credit: Carole Raddato, posted to flickr.com (https://www.flickr.com/photos/carolemage/18548112254/) on 26 June 2015 (taken on 2 April 2015).
[15] Richardson (n. 4), 341; Brügger (n. 2), 215.

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Homer's is the only extant version of the Niobe myth in which her thinking about food is mentioned, and Achilles clearly means for Priam to draw a parallel not only between Niobe's grief and his own but also between his own refusal of food and Niobe's failure to eat in her time of mourning. Richardson rightly notes that Niobe's petrification is not a punishment from Zeus but a necessary consequence of her unresolved grief.[16] The reason for this outcome, I suggest, is that she cannot properly process her sorrows.

As I will argue in what follows, the prescribed Homeric procedure for moving on from mourning includes: (i) eating after a grief-induced fast and (ii) conducting the proper funeral rites of the deceased.[17] But Niobe cannot carry out her children's funeral rites, and she cannot eat. She can therefore never move past the 'brooding' stage of grief, which Priam is himself currently in, according to his own declaration in line 639 (see discussion below and cf. [25] in the appendix).

It seems, therefore, that part of Achilles' point in relating this narrative to Priam is to explain why, in enemy territory, in the home of the most dangerous of all Greeks, the best thing for Priam to do is to sit down to a meal, rather than immediately depart as he had sensibly requested to do (24.552–7). Achilles himself has just eaten (24.475–6), so his invitation is not motivated by his own hunger but rather by his own advancement in his grieving for Patroclus.

An important step in the processing of grief in Homer, particularly after a prolonged fast, is the consumption of food. Achilles' relentless fasting in Book 19 (see especially lines 228–31, 303–21 and 340–55) has only lately concluded (24.475–6) after an exhortation by his mother to eat, sleep and lie with a woman, in (7).

(7) τέκνον ἐμόν, τέο μέχρις ὀδυρόμενος καὶ ἀχεύων
σὴν ἔδεαι κραδίην, **μεμνημένος οὔτε τι σίτου**
οὔτ' εὐνῆς; ἀγαθὸν δὲ γυναικί περ ἐν φιλότητι
μίσγεσθ[αι] (*Il.* 24.128–31).

My child, how long in lamenting and mourning
will you devour your heart, **thinking neither of food**
nor of bed? And it would be good to have intercourse
even with a woman.[18]

Achilles had made his own exhortation to feast during Patroclus' funeral, in (8).

(8) Ἀτρεΐδη (σοὶ γάρ τε μάλιστά γε λαὸς Ἀχαιῶν
πείσονται μύθοισι), **γόοιο μέν ἐστι καὶ ἅσαι**,
νῦν δ' ἀπὸ πυρκαϊῆς σκέδασον καὶ **δεῖπνον ἄνωχθι**
ὄπλεσθαι. τάδε δ' ἀμφὶ πονησόμεθ', οἷσι μάλιστα
κήδεός ἐστι νέκυς· παρὰ δ' οἵ τ' ἀγοὶ ἄμμι μενόντων (*Il.* 23.156–60).

Son of Atreus—seeing as the multitude of Achaeans are wont to obey your
words most of all—**it is possible to get full even of lamentation,**

[16] Richardson (n. 4), 341–2.

[17] On the fasting, abstinence and sleep deprivation of Achilles and Priam and their eventual reversal, see Brügger (n. 2), 13 on 3. On the important connection between grief and eating in the *Iliad* see Schmitz (n. 6), 147–9.

[18] The περ in line 130 is often ignored or given broad scope in translation: 'even to lie with a woman'. But the particle regularly modifies only the immediately preceding word and should therefore be understood with narrow scope over γυναικί alone: 'even a woman would be good to sleep with' (i.e. in the absence of Patroclus).

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> so now dismiss the men from the pyre and **bid them prepare their dinner**, whereas we shall attend to these matters to whom the dead man is of concern the most; but those who are leaders are to remain beside us.

While the rest of the Achaeans are eating their meal, the funeral pyre serves to 'eat up' the body of Patroclus (πῦρ ἐσθίει) along with the Trojan victims and other sacrificial offerings. Achilles explicitly denies this right to Hector's body, thereby also denying consolation to Priam, who is mentioned by name, in (9).[19]

(9) **ἐν** δὲ **πυρὸς** μένος ἧκε σιδήρεον, **ὄφρα νέμοιτο**.
...
"δώδεκα μὲν Τρώων μεγαθύμων υἱέας ἐσθλούς,
τοὺς ἅμα σοὶ πάντας **πῦρ ἐσθίει**· Ἕκτορα δ' οὔ τι
δώσω **Πριαμίδην πυρὶ δαπτέμεν**, ἀλλὰ κύνεσσιν" (*Il*. 23.177, 182–3).

(Achilles) let loose the unyielding fury **of the fire to feed upon them**
...
[Achilles speaks:]
'Here are twelve noble sons of the great-hearted Trojans
those whom **the fire is devouring** all together with you [= Patroclus]; but Hector **son of Priam** by no means will I give to the fire **to consume**, but rather to the dogs.'

In the *Odyssey*, norms of eating and lamentation are reinforced by the words of Pisistratus in the house of Menelaus. In response to the hosts and guests weeping over their supper for Odysseus, presumed dead (*Od*. 4.184–5), Pisistratus says that there is nothing wrong with lamenting the dead, as long as it is not simultaneous with supper, so their crying should be delayed until the next morning (4.193–5). Menelaus agrees and urges everyone to 'think again of supper' (δόρπου δ' ἐξαῦτις μνησώμεθα) and put aside weeping until the proper time (4.212–15).[20]

In light of these parallels, we may return to our scene in *Iliad* 24. After Achilles has yielded to Priam his right to consolation by returning Hector's body, Priam must observe due propriety in carrying out his mourning process, first by concluding his fast and taking food, and then by sleeping, before he can return home to complete Hector's funeral rites. Only Achilles is said to have 'taken his fill of lamentation' (γόοιο τετάρπετο δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς, 24.513) when the two of them weep together in Achilles' residence.

In this way, Priam's consumption of food serves to alleviate his mourning rather than perpetuate it. It is not Niobe's weeping, then, that is meant to be compared to Priam's, *pace* Richardson, who takes lines 614–17 of (1) in connection with lines 619–20.[21] And, *pace* Schmitz,[22] Niobe is not presented 'as a model for the grieving Priam to temporarily

[19] Other references to eating in relation to mourning in Homer include *Il*. 22.490–9, 24.802–3; *Od*. 4.105 and cf. next footnote.

[20] Book 15 of the *Odyssey* begins with Athena finding Telemachus lying beside Pisistratus on a subsequent morning. Like Priam in *Iliad* 24 (673–4), Telemachus has his bed ἐν προδόμῳ of his host's house (*Od*. 15.5), from which he is led back home by a divinity (Athena in the *Odyssey*, Hermes in the *Iliad*). This scene is effectively a reversal of that in the *Iliad*: in place of a father (Priam) we have a son (Telemachus), and rather than a burial (of Hector) we have a homecoming (of Odysseus). Both involve scenes of feasting before proceeding to lamentation.

[21] Richardson (n. 4), 340. Similarly Brügger (n. 2), though he notes further (page 215) that line 639 calls back to the 'Leiden verdauen' ('digesting suffering') of line 617, on which point see my discussion below.

[22] Schmitz (n. 6), 152: '[B]ot sich als Vorbild für den trauernden Priamos an, vorübergehend von seinem Schmerz abzulassen und sich dem Mahl zuzuwenden'. Similarly Brügger (n. 2): 'Da hat Niobe

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abandon his pain and turn to the meal'. Rather, Priam's ability to consume food (successfully) is meant to be contrasted with Niobe's lack of it, and by extension his proper mourning process is to be contrasted with her improper one. It is not that Niobe 'ate and was petrified' (per [6b] above) but that she did not eat and was petrified.

My interpretation is thus in direct opposition to the typical view of the passage, expressed most recently by Bierl[23] that 'Niobe ... remembered to eat (613)—unlike Priam as well as to some extent Achilles'. Niobe 'thought of food', it is true, but this does not mean she did any eating. Indeed, her suffering is coextensive with her frustrated desire for food—both unending—such that she can only 'chew on' her sorrows to this day (νῦν δέ ... κήδεα πέσσει). Priam in fact uses this same phrase himself in line 639 (κήδεα μυρία πέσσω, 'I have been brooding on my countless sorrows') in reference to his fasting and grieving up to now, which, he says, is alleviated in so far as he has now, at long last, taken food and drink (24.635–42, partially quoted in [25] in the appendix).

In his grief, Priam must take care not to suffer Niobe's fate. He may accomplish this, according to Achilles, by observing the correct mourning procedure in consuming food, as Niobe cannot (and never could). Unlike Niobe, Priam may now cease from his grief-induced madness in order to conduct a proper burial for his son. Achilles meanwhile completes his own grieving process, as outlined by his mother (7) above, in laying with Briseis (24.675–6). Only at this point, when sleep has overtaken everyone, does Hermes come in the night to lead Priam back to Troy.

It is therefore an essential, even ritual part of Priam's mourning process to take food. While his son will of course be 'much lamented' (πολυδάκρυτος), Priam's weeping does not continue endlessly 'even now' (νῦν δέ) as Niobe's does. Priam's meal is not meant to be a temporary distraction from suffering; it is a means by which he may begin to move on to the next stages of his grieving process (including more weeping, but not an endless amount). Achilles thus urges Priam to emulate Niobe in thinking of food in order to avoid her fate. Whereas she can only think of food, he can actually eat; whereas she can only gnaw on her sorrows, he can actually process them and move on. Achilles' allusion to Niobe is thus not merely a precedent for Priam's emulation but also a warning, along the following lines.

EMULATION: Even Niobe thought of food after the death of her children, and we should do likewise.
WARNING: But she, unlike you, has no choice but to consume her own grief eternally, which you may avoid by undertaking the proper grieving procedure (eating).

Mythological allusions are not uncommonly made as warnings in Homer, such as the Lycurgus narrative at *Il.* 6.128–41, partially quoted in (12) in Section 3.

Crucially, the eternal nature of Niobe's endless gnawing of her sorrows is anticipated, ring compositionally, by line 602 only if we read it (in accordance with the ordinary rules of Homeric grammar) as a timeless or 'gnomic' aorist. I turn now to this point.

gegessen und ihre Trauer *unterbrochen*' ('Then Niobe ate and *interrupted* her mourning', emphasis added).

[23] A. Bierl, 'Niobe: a mythic example and emblem of a human / non-human mother in mourning. A new reading of *Iliad* 24.599–620 and modern interpretations of the figure', in M. Christopoulos and M. Païzi-Apostolopoulou (edd.), *Human and Non-Human in Homeric and Archaic Epic: Proceedings of the 14th International Symposium on the* Odyssey (Ithaca, NY, 2024), 91–140, at 101.

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3. EPIC TE

Homeric commentaries and grammars are generally at a loss to explain the use of τε in line 602 of (1). Naively, one might read it as an instance of generalizing τε ('epic τε'), giving the aorist a timeless (presential) sense: 'even Niobe thinks of food'. But scholars have unanimously reasoned that the τε here cannot have a generalizing sense because Niobe's story is confined to the remote mythic past, not the eternal present. A couple of *ad hoc* explanations have been given. Denniston speculates, 'Here, perhaps, a historic precedent is taken as equivalent to a general proposition'.[24] Though noting the oddity, Brügger endorses this view: 'τε bei einer konkreten, quasi-historischen Schilderung ist auffällig und wird durch den mythologisch-generalisierenden Kontext erklärt' ('τε in a concrete, quasi-historical description is striking and is explained by the mythological-generalizing context').[25] But is τε really explained by the 'mythological-generalizing context'? If it were, we should expect to find parallel passages in Homer in which τε shows a similar function. But, as will be seen below, this is not the case.

It is true that the phrase καὶ γάρ (as we have in line 602) is fairly frequent as a means of introducing an exemplary precedent for what has been asserted,[26] especially a mythological one, as in (10).[27]

(10) κατὰ δ' οὖν ἕτερόν γ' ἐπέδησεν.
καὶ γὰρ δή νύ ποτε Ζεὺς **ἄσατο**, τόν περ ἄριστον
ἀνδρῶν ἠδὲ θεῶν φασ' ἔμμεναι· ἀλλ' ἄρα καὶ τόν
Ἥρη θῆλυς ἐοῦσα δολοφροσύνῃς ἀπάτησεν
ἥματι τῷ, ὅτ' ἔμελλε βίην Ἡρακληείην
Ἀλκμήνη τέξεσθαι ἐϋστεφάνῳ ἐνὶ Θήβῃ (*Il.* 19.94–9).

And so (Delusion) has ensnared others (before me).
For even Zeus **was** once **deluded**, whom they say is the best
of men and gods. But in the end
Hera, female that she is, deceived even him
with her craftiness on that day when Alcmene was set
to give birth to mighty Heracles in well-crowned Thebes.

Occasionally καί on its own is used to introduce such narratives, as in (11).[28]

(11) οἶνός σε τρώει μελιηδής, ὅς τε καὶ ἄλλους
βλάπτει ...
οἶνος **καὶ** Κένταυρον, ἀγακλυτὸν Εὐρυτίωνα,
ἄασ' ἐνὶ μεγάρῳ μεγαθύμου Πειριθόοιο (*Od.* 21.293–6).

The honey-sweet wine impedes you, the stuff known to harm
others as well...
Wine **impaired even** the Centaur, preeminent Eurytion,
in great-hearted Peirithous' hall.

But none of these examples seems '*equivalent* to a general proposition', as Denniston puts it (my italics), nor is it clear what the meaning of such an equivalence would be.

[24] Denniston (n. 9), 531. Similarly Ruijgh (n. 10).
[25] Brügger (n. 2), 216 on 602.
[26] So Brügger (n. 2), ibid.
[27] Similarly καὶ γάρ at *Il.* 9.533 (quoted in the discussion below) and οὐδὲ γάρ in (12) and (13) below.
[28] Less remote events may also be alluded to with καὶ γάρ, even recent ones, as at *Il.* 2.377: καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼν Ἀχιλεύς τε μαχεσσάμεθ' εἵνεκα κούρης, 'For Achilles and I fought over a girl'.

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Chantraine treats line 602 in (1) under his section on the particle chain γάρ τε, with a subgroup of examples qualified as having 'une valeur éventuelle et contingente' ('a potential and conditional value'),[29] comparing it to examples (16) and (17) discussed below, though neither of those examples contain an aorist indicative. He interprets the γάρ τε in line 602 with the following translation: 'Niobé, elle-même, un jour a songé à manger' ('Even Niobe thought someday of eating'). It is difficult to understand exactly how Chantraine was conceptualizing this, however.

These explanations raise empirical questions to be investigated. First, following on Denniston's explanation, we may ask whether there are any parallel passages in Homer in which τε is used where the mythic past is invoked as a historical precedent for the current situation. In particular, since such occasions are often introduced by καὶ γάρ, occurrences of the particle chain καὶ γάρ τε are predicted (if Denniston's assessment is correct) to provide good parallels for the meaning of 'a historic precedent ... taken as equivalent to a general proposition'. In connection with Chantraine's interpretation, we may ask whether the particle group γάρ τε is ever used in reference to a single (episodic) past event elsewhere in Homer, and so whether we have good parallels for a single-event reading in 602.

My investigation shows that neither Denniston's nor Chantraine's proposals are well founded, since there are no good parallels for their interpretations elsewhere in Homer. Whether alone or in conjunction with other particles, τε is not used in contexts where a concrete historical episode is invoked as a precedent (*paradeigma*) to be applied to a current situation.[30] All sentences containing καὶ γάρ τε are generic or gnomic (timeless) in meaning, never referring to a single, episodic event in the past. Those containing γάρ τε may be 'contingent' (with the conditional complementizer εἴ περ 'even if'), but more importantly all of them involve a notion of repeated action, whether generic, iterative-habitual or gnomic (see respectively [16], [17] and [18]–[19] below). Hence the occurrence of (καὶ) γάρ τε in line 602 of (1) should be interpreted likewise, with a multiple-event reading rather than a single-event reading, since the latter turns out not to be supported by any Homeric parallel.

Let us first address the absence of τε in mythic or historical allusions (*paradeigmata*) in Homer and then treat its occurrence in the two relevant particle chains, καὶ γάρ τε and γάρ τε, in turn. The first question posed above may be answered categorically no: *paradeigmata* referring to single past episodes do not employ (non-connective) τε. Consider, for example, (12) and (13), where we find the formula οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδέ. This formula is elsewhere used in existential perfect contexts, of the type 'no one has ever done this before', taking the lack of precedent as grounds for current unlikelihood.[31]

[29] Chantraine (n. 11), 343.

[30] True, absence of evidence should not, as a rule, be taken as evidence of absence. However, given the size of our corpus and the number of allusions to mythic precedents (*paradeigmata*) that occur in the epics, there is ample opportunity for one of them to show up with the particle τε if it were going to. So, while of course not absolutely conclusive, the absence of any such passage in Homer is strongly suggestive. Further, this negative evidence is reinforced by positive evidence: comparable passages containing τε in Homer uniformly support a generic (multiple-event) interpretation. All things being equal, it stands to reason that we should read line 602 in (1) in accordance with available parallels rather than against them. However much we might be surprised by the meaning of a passage, *ad hoc* interpretations should be avoided wherever possible, and we should trust grammar as our guide to proper interpretation unless there is a compelling reason not to do so.

[31] E.g. *Od*. 10.327 οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδέ τις ἄλλος ἀνὴρ τάδε φάρμακ' ἀνέτλη, 'For no other man has ever withstood these drugs'.

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(12) εἰ δέ τις ἀθανάτων γε κατ' οὐρανοῦ εἰλήλουθας,
οὐκ ἂν ἔγω γε θεοῖσιν ἐπουρανίοισι μαχοίμην.
οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδὲ Δρύαντος υἱός, κρατερὸς Λυκόοργος,
δὴν ἦν, ὅς ῥα θεοῖσιν ἐπουρανίοισιν ἔριζεν (*Il*. 6.128–31).

But if you are one of the immortals come down from heaven,
I would not dare to fight the heavenly gods.
For **not even** Lycurgus the mighty son of Dryas
lasted long when he contended with the heavenly gods.

(13) κῆρα δ' ἐγὼ τότε δέξομαι, ὁππότε κεν δή
Ζεὺς ἐθέλῃ τελέσαι ἠδ' ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι.
οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδὲ βίη Ἡρακλῆος **φύγε** κῆρα,
ὅς περ φίλτατος ἔσκε Διὶ Κρονίωνι ἄνακτι,
ἀλλά ἑ μοῖρ' ἐδάμασσε καὶ ἀργαλέος χόλος Ἥρης·
ὣς καὶ ἐγών, εἰ δή μοι ὁμοίη μοῖρα τέτυκται,
κείσομ' ἐπεί κε θάνω. νῦν δὲ κλέος ἐσθλὸν ἀροίμην (*Il*. 18.115–21).

And I will receive death at that time when
Zeus wishes to accomplish it, along with the other deathless gods.
For **not even** Heracles in his might **managed to escape**
death, though he was dearest to lord Zeus son of Cronus,
but doom subdued him, and the dire wrath of Hera.
So too I, if indeed the same doom is prepared for me,
will lie still when I die. But as for now may I win good renown.

In other cases we find the simile formula ὡς ὅτε 'as when' introducing a narrative about a single past occurrence with the (augmentless) aorist indicative, as in (14). Cf. similarly Nestor's allusions to his youth, cited in n. 33 below. Unlike the generic similes, however, τε is not used (contrast [5] above).

(14) Ἄρτεμι, πότνα θεά, θύγατερ Διός, αἴθε μοι ἤδη
ἰὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι βαλοῦσ' ἐκ θυμὸν ἕλοιο
αὐτίκα νῦν, ἢ ἔπειτα μ' ἀναρπάξασα θύελλα
οἴχοιτο προφέρουσα κατ' ἠερόεντα κέλευθα,
ἐν προχοῇς δὲ βάλοι ἀψορρόου Ὠκεανοῖο,
ὡς ὅτε Πανδαρέου κούρας **ἀνέλοντο** θύελλαι·
τῇσι τοκῆας μὲν φθεῖσαν θεοί, αἳ δ' ἐλίποντο
ὀρφαναὶ ἐν μεγάροισι. κόμισσε δὲ δῖ' Ἀφροδίτη (*Od*. 20.61–8).

Artemis, lady goddess, daughter of Zeus, if only
by shooting an arrow into my chest you would now take away my life
at this very moment, or, then again, may a windstorm having snatched me up
go bearing me forth down murky ways,
and cast me in outlets of back-flowing Ocean,
as when windstorms **snatched up** Pandareus' daughters:
The gods had destroyed their parents, and they had been left
as orphans in their palace. But divine Aphrodite took care of them.

In the negative we find οὐδ' ὅτε 'not even when', as at *Il*. 3.343–4, in which Paris refers to his abduction of Helen (the verb is ἔπλεον 'sailed', an imperfect indicative).

We may also consider the extended historical narratives of Phoenix and Nestor. The tale of Meleager at *Il*. 9.524–99 is held up by Phoenix as evidence that men of the past used to accept gifts and be appeased when they were angry (lines 525–6), so Achilles

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should now do likewise. Generalizing τε is not used.[32] Similarly, the speeches of Nestor, contrasting the days of his youth with the current time, make no use of generalizing τε.[33] The lack of generalizing τε is particularly striking given that the narratives of both men contain imperfects with a habitual meaning.

By contrast, the clitic chains containing τε uniformly show a generalizing or multiple-event interpretation. We find καὶ γάρ (τίς) τε five times, besides the occurrence in our passage in (1), namely: *Il.* 1.63, 2.292, 9.502; *Od.* 19.265, 23.118. All five are gnomic in meaning, referring to timeless truths, always with a verb in the present indicative, as in (15).

(15) **καὶ γάρ τ'** ὄναρ ἐκ Διός **ἐστιν** (*Il.* 1.63).
For even a dream **is** from Zeus.

Line 602 in (1) is the only instance of the aorist indicative with καὶ γάρ τε. This, coupled with the fact that all other instances of the particle chain involve presents with a gnomic interpretation, strongly supports a gnomic/timeless reading of ἐμνήσατο in (1).

The clitic chain γάρ τε occurs most often with verbs that have a multiple-event reading. In these cases, it 'introduces an explanation that is based on a fact that occurs frequently or on a general notion' ('introduit une explication qui repose sur un fait qui se produit souvent ou sur une notion générale'), often with an 'idea of repetition' ('idée de répétition').[34]

As mentioned above, however, τε occurs in a couple of passages whose context may, at first glance, be characterized as single-event, which Chaintraine describes as having 'une valeur éventuelle et contingente' ('a potential and conditional value').[35] These are given in (16) and (17), the former containing a future indicative and the latter a present subjunctive.[36]

(16) Ἀτρείδη (σοὶ **γάρ τε** μάλιστά γε λαὸς Ἀχαιῶν
πείσονται μύθοισι), ...
νῦν δ' ἀπὸ πυρκαϊῆς σκέδασον καὶ δεῖπνον ἄνωχθι
ὅπλεσθαι (*Il.* 23.156–9).

Son of Atreus, **seeing as** the multitude of the Achaeans
will (as is their wont) obey your words most of all, ...
now dismiss the men from the pyre and bid them prepare
their dinner.

[Achilles speaking to Agamemnon]

[32] The occurrences of τε in lines 526 and 529 are connective, not generalizing. In similes and general relative clauses, generalizing τε is common after a relative word (as in [5] above). There are, however, nine cases in which the formula ὅτε τ(ε) appears to refer to a single event: *Il.* 3.189, 5.803, 10.286, 14.203, 522, 15.18, 22.102; *Od.* 7.323, 18.257. Kirk notes that the τ(ε) in such cases 'cannot be the generalizing particle' and endorses the explanation that non-generalizing ὅτε τ(ε) is a formulaic extraction from its proper home 'in general expressions' (G.S. Kirk, *The* Iliad*: A Commentary, Volume I: Books 1–4* [Cambridge, 1985], 292 on 189).

[33] E.g. *Il.* 1.261 καὶ οὔ ποτέ μ' οἵ γ' ἀθέριζον, 'and they never disregarded me'; 7.133 ὡς ὅτ' ἐπ' ὠκυρόῳ Κελάδοντι μάχοντο, 'as when they did battle by swift-flowing Celadon'; 11.671–2 ὡς ὁπότ' Ἠλείοισι καὶ ἡμῖν νεῖκος ἐτύχθη | ἀμφὶ βοηλασίῃ, ὅτ' ἐγὼ κτάνον Ἰτυμονῆα, 'as when a fight broke out between the Eleians and us over the driving of oxen, when I myself slew Itymoneus'; 23.630 ὡς ὁπότε κρείοντ' Ἀμαρυγκέα θάπτον Ἐπειοί, 'as when the Epeians buried lord Amarynceus'.

[34] Chantraine (n. 11), 343.

[35] Chantraine (n. 11), ibid.

[36] A fuller version of (16) has been given in (8) above, slightly differently translated.

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(17) **εἴ περ γάρ τ'** ἄλλοί γε περὶ **κτεινώμεθα** πάντες
νηυσὶν ἐπ' Ἀργείων, σοὶ δ' οὐ δέος ἔστ' ἀπολέσθαι·
οὐ γάρ τοι κραδίη μενεδήϊος οὐδὲ μαχήμων (*Il.* 12.245–7).

For even if all the rest of us **keep on getting killed** around you
beside the ships of the Argives, for you there is no risk of dying,
since your heart neither withstands the enemy nor is suited to battle.
[Hector speaking to Polydamas]

Denniston calls the occurrence in (16) 'half-general'.[37] I am unsure what it means to be half-general and am content to say that it is fully general, with the future indicative expressing a predictable outcome, as in *If one puts food in a fish tank, the fish will eat it*—a general truth that is none the less expressed as a future, contingent on some antecedent event. Compare similarly (19) below, in which the future indicative τελεῖ 'will fulfill' is both future and gnomic, with generalizing τε. In (16), the future event is contingent on Agamemnon giving the command, but it is bound to happen if he does so. This example does not therefore differ in kind from the 'notion générale'[38] that is typically expressed by sentences with γάρ τε.

Similarly, (17) is not only conditional but also probably iterative in the sense 'if we keep on getting killed'. If so, Chantraine's 'idée de répétition' ('idea of repetition') is seen in this example as well, which therefore does not need to be considered as fundamentally dissimilar to the other instances of γάρ τε.

We do, in fact, find some cases of γάρ τε with the aorist indicative aside from line 602 in (1). As expected, these are consistently gnomic/timeless in meaning, as in (18).

(18) νύκτας δ' ὕπνος ἔχησιν· ὃ **γάρ τ' ἐπέλησεν** ἁπάντων (*Od.* 20.85).
But sleep holds the nights, **for** it **makes one forget** everything.

The occurrence in (19) is both contingent and gnomic (so Kirk[39]).

(19) **εἴ περ γάρ τε** καὶ αὐτίκ' Ὀλύμπιος **οὐκ ἐτέλεσσεν**,
ἔκ τε καὶ ὀψὲ τελεῖ, σύν τε μεγάλῳ ἀπέτεισαν (*Il.* 4.160–1).

For even if the Olympian **does not** immediately **fulfill** (our prayers)
he is bound to bring (them) to pass eventually, and (our enemies) pay a hefty price.

Cf. (28) in the appendix, where εἴ περ γάρ τε is followed by the aorist *subjunctive* in a similarly generalizing sense.

In light of this survey, our passage in (1) would be the only instance of γάρ τε + aorist indicative that refers to a concrete single event in the past, if it were so interpreted. But the parallels speak univocally against this, supporting instead an interpretation of line 602 as a general, timeless statement about the eternal reality of Niobe, rather than about her action in the remote past.

Moreover, the aorist in gnomes and similes is regularly augmented in Homer.[40] In (1), ἐμνήσατο is the only augmented aorist besides ἐρρώσαντο in 616, which is plainly timeless, occurring in a general relative clause with τε. There is thus morphological support for reading ἐμνήσατο as timeless as well (see further §4 below).

[37] Denniston (n. 9), 531.
[38] Chantraine (n. 11), 343.
[39] Kirk (n. 32), 348.
[40] Platt (n. 12).

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Perhaps, then, the naïve reading is not so naïve. Perhaps the τε in line 602 is a generalizing τε after all, and ἐμνήσατο should be understood to have a timeless (presential) interpretation. I thus suggest a reinterpretation of the passage as per (20).

(20) καὶ γάρ **τ'** ἠΰκομος Νιόβη **ἐμνήσατο** σίτου,
τῇ περ δώδεκα παῖδες ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ὄλοντο ... (*Il.* 24.602–3).

For even fair-haired Niobe **thinks** of food,
though her twelve children perished ... (etc.)

The idea is that Niobe thinks of food eternally, timelessly, even now. This notion, as I have said, is (ring-compositionally) expressed again in 614–17: νῦν δὲ ... κήδεα πέσσει 'even now she chews on her sorrows'.

Such a reading requires that the first—and *only* the first—of the aorists in the Niobe allusion be interpreted as timeless. All other aorists in the narrative portion of (1) must be understood as referring to the remote (mythic) past. The text in fact provides grammatical support for this interpretation, and I turn now to this final point.

4. AUGMENT AVOIDANCE IN SEQUENTIAL NARRATION

Most finite verbs in the mythic narrative of (1) are aorist and all are augmentless except for ἦεν, for which no securely augmentless counterpart exists.[41] Further, in all cases the lack of augment is metrically assured. The consistency of this lack of augmentation is unusual and conspicuous. Take πέφνεν 'killed', for instance, which is typically augmented (31x in Homer) in the sense '(has) killed'. It is augmentless only in (1) (line 605) and in five other places in Homer (16%). Augmentless preterites are known to be preferred in narratives[42] but seldom appear with such consistency and metrical security as we find in (1). Contrast the variability in augmentation found in the narratives of (10), (13) and (14) above.

I propose that the avoidance of augmented forms in the narrative portion of (1) maximizes contrast between these and the eternal/ongoing events of lines 602 (καὶ γάρ τ' ἠΰκομος Νιόβη ἐμνήσατο σίτου) and 614–17 (νῦν δέ ... κήδεα πέσσει). Most strikingly, augmentless μνήσατο in line 613 stands in contrast to the augmented ἐμνήσατο in line 602. And here form reflects function: ἐμνήσατο is 'she thinks', while μνήσατο is 'she thought'. Recall Platt's finding that gnomic/timeless aorists are virtually always augmented in Homer.[43] Whereas ἐμνήσατο introduces the allusion as a whole, which includes both the narrative portion (lines 603–13) and the νῦν δέ 'even now' portion (lines 614–17), μνήσατο falls within the narrative itself. The narrative ends by echoing

[41] Cf. K. Praust, 'A missing link of PIE reconstruction: the injunctive of *h_1es- "to be"', in K. Jones-Bley, M.E. Huld, A. Della Volpe and M. Robbins Dexter (edd.), *Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference* (Washington, DC, 2003), 112–44, at 126–7. ἰσάσκετο, with long iota, is in principle ambiguous, but -σκ- iteratives are regularly augmentless, so the default assumption here should be that ἰσάσκετο does not contain an augment. On the augmentless 'be' forms ἔσκε and perhaps ἔην see P. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique, Tome I: Phonétique et morphologie*, 2nd edition, ed. M. Casevitz (Paris, 1948 [2013]), 289–90. Neither of these has a particular augmentless 'function', however, and the augmented imperfect forms of 'be' (such as ἦεν and ἦν) are elsewhere common alongside augmentless forms of other verbs (e.g. in remote past narration) or where we would expect to find augmentless forms, as in single-event mythic allusions. For instance, (10), (11), (13) and (14) above all have augmentless verbs introducing their narratives, whereas (12) has the augmented form ἦν in the same context, surely not motivated by function.

[42] J.A.J. Drewitt, 'The augment in Homer', *CQ* 6 (1912), 44–59, 104–20.

[43] Platt (n. 12).

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the verb that introduced it, this time without the augment and referring to Niobe's thinking event as it first occurred in the remote past. In its position at the end of the narrative and immediately preceding line 614 (νῦν δέ), the verb μνήσατο serves to modulate between the events of the mythic past and those that still hold in the present, formally recalling to mind the timeless aorist that begins the passage (ἐμνήσατο) at the very moment of transition between the remote and the ongoing.

By contrast, in (10), (11), (13) and (14) above the verb introducing the narrative is augmentless, referring to single mythic events, such as the deception of Zeus, which happened 'once' (ποτε) in the past.[44] Further, the narratives of (10)–(14) contain a fair mixture of augmented and augmentless forms. This is because, unlike the Niobe allusion, these narratives do not involve eternally ongoing events, only a succession of events that lie firmly in the remote past. As a result, these narratives can afford, without confusion of time reference, considerable admixture of augmented and augmentless verb forms.[45]

But the Niobe allusion requires, as it were, a greater degree of grammatical care and precision than do these 'single-episode' type allusions, so as to avoid confusion of time reference and ensure that the remote narrative events are formally contrasted with the timeless ones. Scrupulous consistency of augmentation—no augment for verbs in sequential narration, augment only for gnomic/timeless aorists—serves to achieve this effect. The timeless (presential) value of the augmented aorist in line 602 of (1) is thus made clearer by the resolutely consistent avoidance of augmentation in the expression of the narrative events that follow.

Because line 602, corresponding to item C_1 in the ring structure scheme of (2) above (§1.2), is not, as Richardson has it, 'For even Niobe did so' (i.e. ate)[46] but rather 'For even Niobe *does* so' (i.e. thinks of food), it cannot be resolved by 613 alone, as this would only include its past reference and not its eternally ongoing signification. I propose, therefore, that line 602 is resolved by both 613 ('she thought of food') *and* 614–17 ('she continues to chew on her sorrows') taken together. Thus, in 613–17, the timeless aorist of 602 is decomposed into a past event (613) with eternal consequences (614–17), and the ring structure of the passage becomes unremarkable, as I have represented in (4) above.

5. CONCLUSION

Far from disrupting the ring structure of (1), lines 614–17 in fact make sense of the apparently exceptional use of generalizing τε and the aorist indicative in line 602. This aorist must be understood as having a timeless (presential) value, rather than a preterital one. This slight reinterpretation relieves the passage of a supposed structural difficulty as well as a grammatical one. In effect, we have arrived at a better understanding of the narrative function of Achilles' allusion to Niobe in terms of proper Homeric grieving procedure. Priam may proceed, having taken his meal, to carry out the funerary rites of his son, thereby concluding the *Iliad*, while Niobe is left to her eternal sorrow.

[44] On the exceptional case of (12) above, in which the introductory verb is augmented, see n. 41.

[45] The reasons for variability of this kind are not fully understood, but factors such as metrical convenience and avoiding short monosyllables are certainly involved: cf. A. Willi, *Origins of the Greek Verb* (Cambridge, 2018), 358–76.

[46] Richardson (n. 4), 339.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009838825101006 Published online by Cambridge University Press

APPENDIX: LEXICAL STUDY OF ΠΕΣΣΩ

πέσσω (πέπτω) is generally understood to mean basically 'cook, bake; ripen; digest' (PIE **pekʷ-* 'make ready for consumption, soften, process', cf. Skt. *pácati* 'cook, digest, ripen'; Lat. *coquō* 'cook, roast, prepare food, ripen'; OCS *pešti* 'bake; worry, care'; Rus. *peč′* 'bake, scorch'). Though once in the literal meaning 'ripen, soften' in the *Odyssey* (see [21] below), it is exclusively metaphorical in the *Iliad* (7x), always as a verb of ingestion/digestion in reference to things other than food, especially emotions. It thus corresponds well to various English idioms having to do with food preparation, digestion and cooking extended beyond actual food: 'grind, mull over', 'digest, chew on, chew over', 'choke on, be choked up about', 'stew on, seethe, be steamed about, brood on' and by extension 'nurse' (of a physical wound, see [26] below).[47]

The word's cognates in Anatolian have the sense 'grind, crush' (Hitt. *pakkuške-*), which may be represented (in a metaphorical sense) in the collocation χόλον θυμαλγέα πέσσω 'mull over one's heart-grieving rage', in (22) and (23) below. In reference to wounds or sorrows it always refers to those that are not yet—or can never be—healed or remedied, in (24)–(26) below. It refers not to successful digestion but to unsuccessful digestion, hence 'be choked up about, brood on' or 'choke on, brood over', in (27) below. The only time this verb refers to an accomplished act of (metaphorical) eating or swallowing is when it has the telicizing prefix κατα- 'down', in (28) below. Yet even in this case the swallowing down is only temporary, and a lasting grudge endures, as lines 82–3 make clear.

All these senses can be captured nicely (with deliberate vagueness) by the English word 'process', applicable to emotional processing as well as food processing—whether by cooking, grinding or other preparation, or else by chewing, digestion or (over-)ripening/softening. I therefore propose that 'process (food/emotions)' is the basic sense of the word in Greek and the one we should reconstruct for the PIE root **pekʷ-*.

I present below all the passages in Homer that contain a form of πέσσω. In the *Iliad* it occurs, interestingly, only in direct quotations. I name the speaker and addressee in each such case, enclosed in square brackets beneath the translation. The occurrence in the *Odyssey* (21) stands apart as being part of a narrative description, as well as being the only instance in Homer where the verb πέσσω means 'ripen' (or rather 'over-ripen') and refers to literal food.

(21) τάων οὔ ποτε καρπὸς ἀπόλλυται οὐδ' ἀπολείπει
χείματος οὐδὲ θέρεος, ἐπετήσιος· ἀλλὰ μάλ' αἰεί
Ζεφυρίη πνείουσα τὰ μὲν φύει, **ἄλλα δὲ πέσσει** (*Od*. 7.117–19).

Their [= the trees'] fruit does not ever entirely perish nor go away
in winter or summer, year-round, but at every moment
the West Wind blowing makes some sprout and grow, **while others ripen to shriveling**.[48]

[Description of the palace of the Phaeacian king Alcinous]

[47] Compositionally βέλος πέσσῃ resembles English 'bite the bullet' but with a different idiomatic meaning ('nurse a wound').

[48] This over-ripening is expanded upon in what follows: γηράσκει 'grows old' (line 120), τέρσεται ἠελίῳ 'is baked or dried in the sun' (line 124), ὑποπερκάζουσιν 'grow dark, start to turn' (line 126).

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(22) οὐ μὰν οὐδ' Ἀχιλεύς, Θέτιδος πάϊς ἠϋκόμοιο,
μάρναται, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ νηυσὶ **χόλον θυμαλγέα πέσσει** (*Il.* 4.512–13).

No, and Achilles, son of fair-haired Thetis, is not even
in the fight but **mulls over his heart-grieving rage** by the ships.
[Apollo to the Trojans]

(23) τῇ ὅ γε παρκατέλεκτο **χόλον θυμαλγέα πέσσων**,
ἐξ ἀρέων μητρὸς κεχολωμένος, ἥ ῥα θεοῖσιν
πόλλ' ἀχέουσ' ἠρᾶτο κασιγνήτοιο φόνοιο (*Il.* 9.565–7).

With her (Cleopatra) he (Meleager) lay down, **mulling over his heart-grieving rage**,
enraged at the imprecations of his mother (Althaea), who it was that
had prayed to the gods for many evils grieving her brother's death.
[Phoenix to Achilles]

(24) ἔνθα λίθος περ ἐοῦσα θεῶν ἔκ **κήδεα πέσσει** (*Il.* 24.617).
There, despite being stone, she **stews on her sorrows** from the gods.
[Achilles to Priam]

(25) οὐ γάρ πω μύσαν ὄσσε ὑπὸ βλεφάροισιν ἐμοῖσιν,
ἐξ οὗ σῆς ὑπὸ χερσὶν ἐμὸς πάϊς ὤλεσε θυμόν,
ἀλλ' αἰεὶ στενάχω καὶ **κήδεα μυρία πέσσω** (*Il.* 24.637–9).

For not yet have my eyes shut under my eyelids
since my son lost his life at your hands,
but continually I have been wailing and **stewing on my countless sorrows**.
[Priam to Achilles]

(26) μὴ μὰν ἀσπουδεί γε νεῶν ἐπιβαῖεν ἔκηλοι,
ἀλλ' ὥς τις τούτων γε **βέλος** καὶ οἴκοθι **πέσσῃ**,
βλήμενος ἢ ἰῷ ἢ ἔγχεϊ ὀξυόεντι
νηὸς ἐπιθρῴσκων, ἵνα τις στυγέησι καὶ ἄλλος
Τρωσὶν ἐφ' ἱπποδάμοισι φέρειν πολύδακρυν ἄρηα (*Il.* 8.512–16).

May they not climb aboard their ships at their leisure, without a struggle,
but rather in such a way that any man among them **may have to nurse a wound**,
even after reaching his home,
whether stricken by an arrow or a sharp-pointed spear
while leaping frantically aboard his ship, so that another hereafter may be loath
to bring war, source of many tears, upon the horse-taming Trojans.
[Hector to the Trojans]

(27) οἴκαδέ περ σὺν νηυσὶ νεώμεθα, τόνδε δ' ἐῶμεν
αὐτοῦ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ **γέρα πεσσέμεν**, ὄφρα ἴδηται
ἦ ῥά τί οἱ χἠμεῖς προσαμύνομεν, ἦε καὶ οὐκί (*Il.* 2.236–8).

Let us return home with our ships and leave this man (= Agamemnon)
here in Troy **to choke on his treasures** [or again 'brood over, covet them'], so that
he may see whether in the end we provide any help to him or not.
[Thersites to the Greeks]

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(28) κρείσσων γὰρ βασιλεύς, ὅτε χώσεται ἀνδρὶ χέρηϊ·
εἴ περ γάρ τε **χόλον** γε καὶ αὐτῆμαρ **καταπέψῃ**,
ἀλλά τε καὶ μετόπισθεν ἔχει κότον, ὄφρα τελέσσῃ,
ἐν στήθεσσιν ἑοῖσι (*Il.* 1.80–3).

For more threatening is a king when he grows angry at an inferior man:
For even if he **swallows down his anger** for that day,
yet he holds a grudge in his chest even afterwards, until he finishes it.
[Calchas to Achilles]

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009838825101006 Published online by Cambridge University Press