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UNVEILING FEMALE FEELINGS FOR OBJECTS:

DEIANEIRA AND HER ὄργανα IN SOPHOCLES'S *TRACHINIAI*

ANNE-SOPHIE NOEL

"Comme on aime ce que l'on quitte!"

—*H. Caïn*[1]

In *Objects of the Dead* sociologist Margaret Gibson investigates how modern Australians utilize material culture in dealing with the death of loved ones. "Death reconstructs our experience of personal and household objects in particular ways," she notes. It also confronts us with "the strangeness of realizing that things have outlived persons"; hence, "the materiality of things is shown to be more permanent than the materiality of the body" (Gibson 2008.1).

Inspired by these insights, I wish to bring into focus some objects featured in the narrative of the death of Deianeira, the wife of Heracles, in Sophocles's *Trachiniai*, a tragedy produced in Athens in 450-440 B.C.E. These objects are mundane domestic instruments (*organa*); nevertheless they provoke the tears of Deianeira when she grabs them just before committing suicide. What are these *organa,* defined as familiar tools that she frequently used, and how should her emotional last

[1] "How we love what we leave," a refrain sung by Cinderella in an opera by Jules Massenet (French libretto by Henry Caïn). I address my warmest thanks to Lauren Petersen and Mireille Lee for putting together a very stimulating panel at the SCS annual meeting in Boston (2018) and for their continuous support throughout the different stages of the publication. I also benefitted from the insightful comments of the anonymous readers.

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encounter with them be understood? Although these material objects have not drawn a lot of attention in the recent scholarship on theatrical props (Chaston 2010; Mueller 2016; Telò and Mueller 2018), they have been discussed by commentators as early as the Hellenistic period. The Alexandrine scholiasts proposed several hypotheses to elucidate the identity of these *organa* but, remarkably, they also clearly engaged with the question of the affective relationship between a woman and her tools. From the perspective of the history of emotions, this is a rare literary testimony attesting the gendered experience of material artifacts.

In a first section, I discuss the identification of Deianeira's *organa* as her weaving tools, a hypothesis made by the scholiasts, which is well supported by internal textual clues and external proofs in the historical and cultural contexts of fifth-century Greek drama. In a second section, I evaluate the pertinence of the Alexandrine scholiasts' affective interpretations of Deianeira's special relationship with her tools. Combining textual and material testimonies, I challenge their emphasis on the connection of Deianeira's instruments to her relationship with her husband, Heracles. I argue that her last physical contact with her tools is also charged with emotions related to her own experience as a female weaver and her own female agency.

I. IDENTIFYING DEIANEIRA'S INSTRUMENTS

Sophocles' *Trachiniai* dramatizes the devastation of Heracles and Deianeira's *oikos* through a complex chain of causality. The posthumous revenge of the Centaur Nessus—killed decades ago by Heracles (l.565-569)—is brought to completion through Deianeira's attempt to regain the love of her husband. Persuaded (sincerely or not) that the blood that had dripped from the deadly wound of Nessus could act as a love charm, she has anointed a fine white *peplos* with it. She deceives Heracles in sending him a gift supposedly meant to enhance the purity of the sacrifice he is about to fulfill on Mount Œta. While performing the ritual Heracles is almost instantly consumed by the

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poisonous robe. A widow-to-be resented by all—including her son Hyllos—Deianeira rushes into her bedroom to commit suicide.

The account of her death is offered by the old nurse who delivers a virtuoso messenger speech (l.870-946). One could apply the enactive reframing of *enargeia* (vividness of style) recently proposed by Jonas Grethlein and Luuk Huitink to this gripping narrative.[2] Deianeira is first described secretly observing Hyllos preparing a litter for his dying father (901–903). She then runs into the *thalamos* (the bridal chamber), finding on her way both people and objects that greatly affect her emotionally (904–910). There she arranges the bed and climbs onto it to voice her *ultima verba*, quoted in a direct speech addressed to the bed itself (912–922). She lastly detaches her gold pin, loosens her *peplos* and plunges a sword into her left side (923–926). Through these numerous mentions of simple bodily actions, the nurse's speech encourages the spectators' embodied responses. Her story not only prompts visualization but also triggers all kinds of sensory stimuli that allow the audience to enact "a quasi-perceptual experience of the narrated world" (Grethlein and Huitink 2017.3).

This vividness certainly enhanced the impact of the narrative on spectators. In her essay *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, Nicole Loraux eloquently showed how all the actions performed by Deianeira on the verge of dying are significant.[3] These sometimes involve objects encoding the meaning of her death: her suicide with a phallic sword on her nuptial bed is a tragic substitute for a sexual union with her lost husband; at the same time, by killing herself with a masculine weapon Deianeira emulates the male heroic ideal of *la belle mort* (Loraux 1985.90–91; Vernant 1990). Her

[2]Surprisingly, Grethlein and Huitink (2017) envisage only "readers" responses to an *enactive* style, though epics like drama were performative. I suggest we could go further and extend this enactive approach to the spectators' reception of a narrative in performance.

[3] Loraux 1985.90-91; see also Easterling 1982.190 and Winnington-Ingram 1980.81n.28.

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death is thus a dramatic climax that radically shatters the traditional set of expectations associated with feminine gender.

This invites us, I suggest, to consider other objects that Deianeira encounters just before entering the *thalamos*. Little attention has been paid to their presence; yet they are important enough to feature in the riveting story of her last moments.

> Βρυχᾶτο μὲν βωμοῖσι προσπίπτουσ᾽ ὅτι
> γένοιτ᾽ ἐρήμη, κλαῖε δ᾽ὀργάνων ὅτου
> ψαύσειεν οἷς ἐχρῆτο δειλαία πάρος. (904-906)

> Falling upon the altars, she cried out that
> she has become isolated and she wept whenever she touched
> any household thing she, poor woman, had used before. (trans. adapted from Lloyd-Jones, Loeb 1994)[4]

The substantive ὀργάνων points towards domestic instruments rather than objects of wealth or prestige. This passage interestingly precedes a farewell to her close servants:

> ἄλλῃ δὲ κἄλλῃ δωμάτων στρωφωμένη,
> εἴ του φίλων βλέψειεν οἰκετῶν δέμας,

[4] γένοιτ᾽ ἐρήμη (905) is the text of the manuscript. Nauck corrected it (γένοιντ᾽ ἐρῆμοι, "that they [the altars] would become desolate"), but Davies (1991) *ad loc*. rejects this correction for linguistic reasons. I therefore follow the latter in the text I adopt.

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ἔκλαιεν ἡ δύστηνος είσορωμένη,

αύτὴ τὸν αύτῆς δαίμον΄ άνακαλουμένη. (907-910)

She moved this way and that way in the house,

And if she saw the face of any of her dear attendants,

she wept, poor woman, as she looked upon them,

herself lamenting for her fate. (trans. Lloyd-Jones, Loeb 1994)

Several thematic and syntaxic echoes connect the two moments: the emphasis on Deianeira's desperate wandering inside the house, the use of the optative, expressing repeated action in the past. Both people and objects bring tears to her eyes—the adjective φίλων ("dear") in the second passage makes explicit the affective relationship at stake. Ἡ δύστηνος ("poor woman," 909) parallels δειλαία (906): seeing her familiar objects and seeing her dear servants triggers the same distress. However strange it may seem, going around to her familiar objects precedes and seems to prefigure her *adieu* to the servants.[5] If one accepts this parallel between relationships with living and non-living beings, the self-centered and self-reflexive character of her grief over the former (910, "herself lamenting for her fate") should perhaps inform our interpretation of the farewell to objects. I will return to this idea later.

[5] One may think here of Aristotle's equivalence between servants and tools (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1161a34-1162b9). Aristotle aims to define the specificity of friendship (φιλία) as an affection based on reciprocity, from which he similarly excludes inanimate objects and slaves. The latter are said to be "living tools" (ἔμψυχον ὄργανον) while the former are "non-living slaves" (ἄψυχος δοῦλος). Both can benefit their owners, but "there can be no friendship, nor justice" towards them as there is no reciprocity. In showing affection for slaves and, possibly, objects, Deianeira's attitude interestingly contradicts this philosophical exclusion.

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The identification of these implements already raised questions among the Alexandrine scholiasts annotating the play in the Hellenistic period. The preserved *scholia* weigh in favor of textile tools:

> *Schol. ad* 905–906: καὶ <εἰ> ἥπτετό τινος ἐργαλείου ὧν εἰώθει μεταχειρίζεσθαι συνόντος αὐτῇ τοῦ Ἡρακλέους, οἷον ἱστοῦ ἢ τινος τοιούτου, ὠδύρετο ὡς λοιπὸν καταλιμπάνουσα αὐτά. (Xenis 2010.207)
>
> *And whenever she touched an instrument that she was used to handling when Heracles was with her, like a loom or such a thing, she lamented that she would leave them behind hereafter*.[6]
>
> *Schol. ad* 905b[1] (*ὀργάνων*): ἱστοῦ [δὲ] ἴσως ἐφήπτετο διὰ τὸν κατασκευασθέντα πέπλον ἐπὶ ταῖς συμφοραῖς. (Xenis 2010.207)
>
> *ὀργάνων: Maybe she touched the loom with which she had fashioned the peplos involved in the events.*
>
> *Schol. ad* 905b[2] *ὀργάνων*: ἢ τῶν ἱστουργικῶν ἢ τῶν ἐργαλείων οἷς τὸν πέπλον ἔχρισεν. (Xenis 2010. 207)
>
> *ὀργάνων: the weaving tools or the instruments with which she anointed the peplos*.
>
> *Schol. ad* 905b[2]+905—6 *ὀργάνων*: ἢ τῶν ἱστουργικῶν ἢ μεθ' ὧν τὸν χιτῶνα ἔχρισεν. ἢ ἁπλῶς πᾶν ὄργανον ὃ συνόντος τοῦ

[6] Translations of these *scholia* are my own.

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Ἡρακλέους μετεχειρίζετο. (Xenis 2010.29)

ὀργάνων: *either the weaving tools with which she anointed. Or simply any instrument she handled when Heracles lived with her*.

All these commentaries except the last come from the Laurentian manuscript (39.2), the oldest extant witness that preserves the Hellenistic *vetera scholia* to Sophocles (Xenis, 2010a.17); the last one was found in a later version deriving from the Laurentian manuscript: its medieval scribe interestingly abridged and synthesized the *vetera scholia*, adding another layer of interpretation (Xenis, 2010b.25-32).

In the first *scholion* the gloss τινος ἐργαλείου ("some tool") is appropriate for the functional nature of objects designated as *organa*. The scribe then glosses ὅργανα with ἱστός, which commonly designates the standing loom from the archaic period.[7] The alternative ἢ τινος τοιούτου ("or such a thing"), betrays his uncertainty but at the same time τοιούτου is used when one refers to things that belong to the same category: so, arguably, other kinds of textile tools. The later *scholia* do not question this identification: on the contrary, they add two explanations to back up the textile tools hypothesis (which the latest, medieval, *scholion* summarized).

The scholiasts' guess, one can assume, is partly based on the historical and cultural background of Sophocles' play. Textual, iconographic and archaeological evidence attest that in archaic and classical Greece (and well beyond) textile work was mostly an activity associated with

[7] Cf. *Il*. 6.491: ἰστόν τ' ἠλακάτην τε ("the loom and the weaving pin"); *Il*. 3.125, ἰστὸν ὕφαινε; "she wove the web" (ἱστός here designates the warp fixed to the beam; by extension, the web itself). For the parts of the ancient warp-weighted loom with the Greek terms, see Barber 1991.270, fig. 12.3; Spantidaki 2016.48-54.

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women, a cornerstone in the definition of their identity and agency.[8] Like epics, ancient Greek drama frequently asserted this connection. At a second level, the scholiasts' inference is also based on the plot of *Trachiniae*. Deianeira has been represented in the play precisely as a woman engaged in textile-related activity: she has fashioned and anointed the *peplos* intended for her husband, before storing it in a small chest that she closes and seals with her ring (611–615). In all these actions, the personal and physical implication of Deianeira is emphasized through the repeated references to her acting hands (Fletcher 2001).[9] Given the allusiveness of the reference to *organa* in lines 904–906, it is fair to assume, like the scholiasts, that the wording directs the audience towards instruments that have already been mentioned in the play—otherwise, the poet could have used a more specific term.

II. INTERPRETING FEMALE FEELINGS FOR PERSONAL TOOLS

Beyond their reasonable identification of Deianeira's *organa*, these *scholia* offer insights into the affective experience of a tragic female character regarding her household objects.[10] To my

[8] Ferrari 2002.35-60; Lewis 2002.62; Lee 2004, 2015; Barber 2007; Bergren 2008; Bundrick 2008; Gleba 2008a.24-37; Foxhall 2012; 2014; Psychas 2018.

[9] On hands, touch, and affective investment of objects, see also Noel 2016.

[10] In a paper presented at the conference on "How to Do the Psychology of the Ancient World?" (Leiden University, December 13-15, 2018), Evert von Boas discussed the use of *scholia* to document the psychology and emotions of ancient Greeks ("Individuals or types? Ancient criticism and modern socio-cognitive psychology on characterization in Greek tragedy"). One important methodological problem, he noted, is to know whether a scholiast comments on a psychological aspect according to his knowledge of the socio-cognitive psychology of his time (and for 'real' people), or according to the conventional ones he attributes to past literary works. In this specific case, the scholiasts clearly took into account the *internal* and *external* context to explain Deianeira's emotional state; their glosses do not seem to

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knowledge, these are some of the earliest scholarly attempts to understand objects, not only as *vehicles* for emotions, but also as their *recipients*.[11] Interestingly enough, while they unanimously recognize weaving tools behind the general denomination *organa*, the scholiasts suggest three different explanations for Deianeira's affective response to the sight of her familiar tools:

1) She bursts into tears at the sight of instruments that recall her past life with Heracles (*Schol. ad* 905-906 ; *schol. ad* 905b^2+905—6).
2) She bursts into tears (out of despair, repulsion?) at the sight of instruments that have caused the death of Heracles (*Schol. ad* 905b^1, *Schol. ad* 905b^2, and *Schol. ad* 905b^2+905—6).
3) She bursts into tears at the sight of objects that she will abandon owing to her impending death (*Schol. ad* 905–906).

Two glosses link Deianeira's affective response to her relationship with her husband, although in different ways. The first *scholion* suggests that the tools moved her to tears as material reminders of her past life with Heracles in general ("when Heracles was with her," *Schol. ad* 905–906). The other comments frame her emotional reaction in a much more specific context (as if to restrain the openness of the first *scholion*); Deianeira laments over the tools that she has recently handled when fashioning the "deadly *peplos*," either the ones she used for weaving the robe or anointing it with the poisonous blood of Nessus. In both cases, she cries over the instruments of her husband's death.

reduce Deianeira's attitude to a purely conventional female one. Their hesitations and multiple hypotheses rather suggest the singularity of an unusual narrative detail.

[11] Even in the ground-breaking volumes of Chaniotis 2012 and Chaniotis and Ducrey 2014, objects tend to be limited to the *media* through which emotions are expressed rather than the potential recipients of the emotions under study.

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In the first *scholion*, however, a third hypothesis is made in passing, as a possible alternative. Deianeira is lamenting that she must leave behind her objects (ὡς λοιπὸν καταλιμπάνουσα αὐτά, "leaving them behind hereafter" or "leaving them behind forever"). The scholiast seems to admit that she could mourn her familiar tools *per se* as she thinks of her upcoming death.

A few modern commentators have tried to pick up where the Hellenistic scholiasts left off. Notably, they prefer the explanation that Deianeira laments her familiar tools rather than those emphasizing the connection with Heracles. "Even inanimate objects move her tears at the thought of parting," states Alfred Jebb (*com. ad. loc*., 135), thus implicitly acknowledging the relevance of such an affective explanation in the context of the tragic play, but also for readers in 1908. More recently, Patricia Easterling noted:

> The Nurse's account of Deianeira's death is one of the play's high points, and I believe its intensity is partly due to its restatement of themes that have been dominant earlier in the play. Partly, of course, the greatness of the speech rests on Sophocles's superb narrative skill and eye for significant detail: the woman going round to each of her familiar domestic objects is brilliantly observed. (1968.65)

Like Jebb, while also relying on the Hellenistic *scholia*, Easterling downplays the "Heracles factor" in explaining Deianeira's affects. It is true, though, that she appreciates Sophocles's masterful techniques more than she tries to elucidate the character's emotional response to her familiar tools. In fact, her comments seem to imply that Deianeira's reaction is self-explanatory and, even more, a genuine *effet de réel* skillfully added by Sophocles. When she admires his "eye for significant detail," she also suggests that the elite, male dramatist transposed to the stage everyday feelings

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and real-life gestures that could be observed in his time. This experience would be relatable both for Sophocles's audience and for us today since we are still able to appreciate the evocative power of this "significant detail."

Easterling's intuition points in the right direction, but so far, it has not been supported by any research based on literary or archaeological evidence. The scarcity of ancient texts exploring the affective life of women makes it far from self-evident to assume that Sophocles could possibly refer to a gendered experience common among women of his time. And which women? For which objects? How can our current knowledge of gendered material artifacts in ancient societies illuminate the reading of the theatrical texts, and *vice versa*? To answer these questions, I propose to re-evaluate the meaning of Deianeira's death narrative in light of the *archaeology* of emotion and affect (Tarlow 2012; Masséglia 2012), specifically, recent attempts by archaeologists to interpret in affective terms excavated textile tools found in votive contexts. Drawing on this combination of literary and material data, I argue for the profound ambivalence of the Sophoclean text, which gives way to various, potentially contradictory, feelings: Deianeira's last contact with her familiar tools may well trigger mixed feelings of grief over her husband but also more personal emotions over her own life and female condition.

III. GOING BEYOND THE HELLENISTIC SCHOLIASTS' INTERPRETATION

*She wept whenever she touched (*ψαύσειεν)
any household thing she, poor woman, had used before.

In these rich lines from the Sophoclean text, the poetic verb ψαύσειεν ("to touch," "to grasp") is loaded with affective value. ψαύειν emphasizes a haptic contact. In contrast, when

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Deianeira sees her servants for the last time she is not said to touch them: the stress is put on the sense of sight (l.908-909). In Sophocles' extant plays, ψαύειν is more often applied to human, physical and interpersonal relationships such as contacts between kin. In *Œdipus at Colonus*, the verb is used of Œdipus embracing his daughters.[12] In *Trachiniai* it is employed twice about the physical interactions occurring between Heracles and Hyllos, when the latter takes care of his dying father (1007, 1020). When applied to familiar tools one may wonder how this affective meaning is activated: does it mean that Deianeira's farewell is a last embrace with objects where they stand *for themselves* or do they operate as surrogates? Deianeira's last physical interaction would be one with inanimate objects, an ironic outcome for a wife who hoped to regain her husband's love. While she is more isolated than ever, all that she can touch are her instruments (and a bit later, her marital bed), in lieu of her lost loved ones (her husband, but also her son).

But another reading is possible. Just before touching the tools, Deianeira kneels down in front of the gods' altars (βώμοισι, 904). In Greek tragedy, domestic altars were strongly connected with female religion:[13] both altars and tools may also be understood as material objects playing a part in Deianeira's assertion of her femininity. The sense of touch, emphasized in the use of ψαύειν, may also convey the particular intimacy between the woman and the tools that were extensions for her hands when she was spinning and weaving.

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[12] Sophocles *Œdipus Rex*, 1467; *Œdipus at Colonus*, 329, 856, 1131, 1544, 1639 (about the physical embraces of Œdipus and his daughters).

[13] Euripides *Phoinissae*, 1433, *Alc*. 170-171; Sophocles *Œdipus at Colonus*, 1157; *See also* Plato *Laws* 910a. However, ancient textual sources are not really matched by archaeological excavations, see Morgan 2007,297. Segal (1999.86-87) interestingly comments on this passage, too, emphasizing the similarity between Heracles and Deianeira's fates: "She reenacts emotionally and inside those roars of physical pain that wracked Heracles at his altars outside (805)." But again, the altars can point towards her female identity rather than her relationship with her husband.

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In the field of anthropology, some stimulating research adopting a gender-specific approach has shown how women across time and civilizations can take control over their life through an embodied engagement with materiality. Studying the female weavers of the Sirwa in contemporary Southern Morocco, Miriam Naji analyzes the ambivalent construction of female subjects through carpet making. Female weavers can feel both exploited as workers under pressure to conform to the patriarchal norm prevailing in their society, and at the same time empowered by technical skills which go with "moral value and social recognition"—in other words, which enhance their agency (Naji 2009a, 2009b).[14] This parallel resonates greatly with current interpretations of female agency through weaving in ancient Greek societies.

Material investigations of ancient Mediterranean looms and textile tools have been recently revived through research programs focusing on textile history and archaeology (for instance, in the Danish National Research Foundation's Centre for Textile Research, at the University of Copenhagen). Most pieces of the Greek warp-weighted looms were made of organic material. Their loss cruelly limits archaeological study. Nevertheless, the combination of textual evidence, comparative studies of textile techniques from the Bronze Age to modernity (Hoffmann 1964), and experimental archaeology (Mårtensson, Nosch, Strand 2009, Nosch 2016) has allowed reliable reconstructions (figure 1).

[14] Naji explores, in particular, how the constraining technical system of the Moroccan weaving-loom (Astta) "can be a source of agency for weavers" (2009b.51) and concludes that "the paradox of subjectivation is that processes and conditions that secure subject subordination are also the means by which she gains agency or self-realization" (65).

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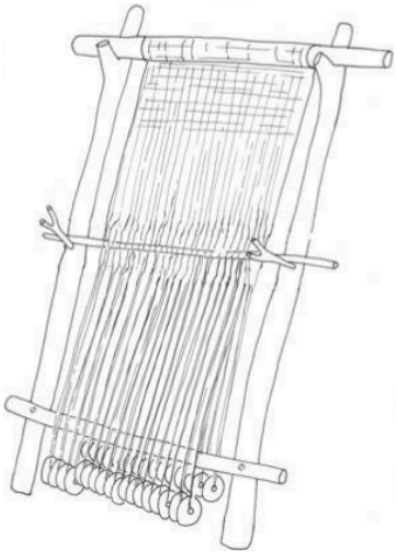

Figure 1: the warp-weighted loom, drawing by Annika Jeppsson. By courtesy of Martensson, Nosch, Anderson Strand 2009.374.

Moreover, at least one component of the warp-weighted loom has been preserved in large quantities in archaeological contexts: the loom-weights made of baked clay or sometimes of lead (Mårtensson, Nosch, Anderson Strand 2009.374; Edmunds 2012.§ 13 and 39; Spantidaki 2016.65). Loom-weights were used to obtain tension on warp threads in the weaving of fabric on looms, and a few vases, including an Attic black-figure lekythos (figure 2), help to reconstitute the ways in which they were used.

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Figure 2: Attic black-figure lekythos attributed to the Amasis Painter depicting a group of women working wool, mid-sixth century B.C.E.. Fletcher Fund, 1931, 31.11.10, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photography by E. S. V. Leigh, public domain via Wikimedia Commons: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a1/Amasis_Ptr_cat_48_lekythos_MMA_31.11.10_weaving.JPG

Recent scholarship on loom-weights has improved greatly: first on the technical side (their size and weight have been shown to be indicative of the type of textile woven) (Mårtensson, Nosch, Strand 2009; Spantidaki 2016); second, on their symbolic and affective value. I am interested in

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the latter aspect and rely here mainly on the publications of Gleba (2008a, 2008b), Sofroniew (2011), Foxhall (2012) Quercia and Foxhall (2014), which focus on loom-weights found in domestic or ritual settings in pre-Roman South Italy.[15] While no comparable interpretative work has been done on the loom-weights found in mainland Greece, the most recent inventories of Athenian sites include archaic and classical loom-weights with various signs, decorations, letters or words, for which the hypothesis of personalization by their female owners is accepted (Davidson, Thompson, Talcott 1943.65–94; Spantidaki 2016.189, 65–66).

The loom-weights show abundant signs of personalization, which have been interpreted as traces of an affective investment by their female owners. These decorations are made by impressing into the clay, before firing, personal objects such as carved gems, fibulae or finger rings. A number of loom-weights from Taranto also bear female names, interpreted as the names of their owners (Sofroniew 2011.200). On the fifth-century B.C.E. loom-weights found on the Pnyx, incised letters or decorations engraved after the firing by the owners are also visible, which indicates that personalization could have occurred at a late stage of production (figure 3). Quercia and Foxhall suggest that "specific loom-weights may thus have become material manifestations of personal identity" (2014.70), and the possible involvement of women in the manufacture of these objects might have enhanced their embodied and cognitive bond with them.[16]

[15] Gleba offers a global overview of Italian votive contexts; Sofroniew focuses on the Samnite sanctuary of Valle d'Ansanto; Foxhall 2012, Quercia and Foxhall 2014 on the chora of Metaponto.

[16] Quercia and Foxhall 2014.70; Davidson *et al*. (1943.72-74) note that most loom-weights from the Pnyx were handmade by a manufacturer, who could then give "the purchaser the choice of a set bearing her initial or a device she fancied".

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Figure 3: Cretan terracotta loom-weight with inscriptions, sixth century B.C.E. or later, n° 53.5.45, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Dimensions: 4 3/4 in. x 2 1/2 in. (12 cm × 6.3 cm). Public domain via Wikimedia commons: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c4/Terracotta_loom_weight_MET_DP114739.jpg

Loom-weights are thus interpreted as typical gendered objects closely associated with women: not only did they carry women's personal marks, they also reflect the affection and strong physical, haptic affordance that could exist between a woman and her tools (Foxhall 2012.194–196). Loom-weights also solidified the emotionally charged relationships that women working together at the loom developed with each other. Hence, according to Gleba and Sofroniew, this highly symbolic and affective value explains why a number of them are found as votive offerings in South Italian sanctuaries. The practice of dedicating loom-weights allowed women to represent themselves in a way that emphasized "production and personal skill, as opposed to, or alongside, other dedications that might instead highlight motherhood, marriage, or feminine beauty" (Sofroniew 2011.103). If the loom-weights were marked with a signet, they also advertised the identity of the owner in a more concrete way than other types of (unmarked) dedications.

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Loom-weights were not the only weaving implements offered in sanctuaries: women dedicated their shuttles, spindles, spindle whorls or other textile tools (Cole 1998.36; Dillon 2002.14), a practice that is mirrored in classical and Hellenistic votive epigrams from the *Anthology.*[17]

These votive epigrams may well have been real stone inscriptions accompanying the effective dedication of female textile tools (Livingstone and Nisbet 2010.60). They vividly evoke women dedicating these objects to Athena, Artemis or Aphrodite as a rite of passage in moments of life transition. A thorough study of these epigrams is still needed. Due to the limits of this article, I will mention only a few aspects which resonate both with Deianeira's attitude towards her tools and the affective interpretation of archaeologically excavated loom-weights. First, representing themselves in the act of dedicating their weaving equipment, the female voices exalt *both* their own fine technical skills and their instruments' friendly and responsive agency.[18] Often described in a context of a collective dedication made by several women at the same time, these offerings seem to reflect a tight community of "working-women-with-objects." These epigrams often adopt a joyful tone: they eloquently illustrate the idea of a harmonious *continuum* between humans and *non-human* agents (Malafouris 2008.20, 22). Livingstone and Nisbet interestingly suggest the "ambivalent effect" of the personification of tools (2010.60). They wonder whether the instruments' agency conjures up "an image of security and familiarity, with the friendly tools as

[17] *AP*, VI.39, 47, 48, 160, 174, 247, 285, and 288, 289; Gleba (2009.74) and Foxhall (2013.150) allude to them. For a modern Japanese parallel of ritual disposal of needles, see Guth 2014.

[18] In *AP*, VI.288, the spindle, weaving pin, bobbins and loom-weights are affectionately designated as appropriate offerings for the goddess. In *AP*, VI.289, the poem is not addressed to the god who receives the votive offerings but to a stranger who is supposed to witness the dedication, which Livingstone and Nisbet interpret in these terms: "this is a scene we are meant to see. The women can properly take pride in this (imagined) public monument to their improved circumstances" (2010.61).

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constant companions," or "an image of loneliness and monotony, with the tools as their *only* companions?" Such ambiguity strikingly echoes the range of potentially contradictory feelings of the isolated Deianeira when, on the verge of killing herself, she comes across her familiar tools. No less meaningful is the funereal color of some "retirement" epigrams also found in this collection: when old age is the cause of giving away the textile tools, "[t]he dedication comes to function like an epitaph by marking the closure of a person's professional, if not physical, lifetime" (Gutzwiller 1998.93). The normal order of things for aging Greek women may have been to undertake these "rituals of dispossession" (Gibson 2008.15), which symbolically enacted the death of their familiar tools, before encountering death themselves.

Lin Foxhall laments that ancient texts transmitted to us barely touched upon the topic of "the complex affective networks of female relationships [that] the tools of weaving and textile production recovered through archaeology can reveal" (2012.199). I believe that this passage from *Trachiniai* (904-906), however elliptical, provides textual evidence that hints at this very thing. Moreover, the tragic play text comes with an equally interesting critical apparatus from the Hellenistic period. Fascinatingly, the scholiasts did not shy away from trying to make sense of feelings entangled with objects with the mental categories of their time. Their comments implicitly acknowledged that relationships with mundane textile instruments could constitute a relevant prism through which to explain a woman's life experience.

The connection between a dramatic text and excavated artifacts is methodologically challenging and, in the current state of our knowledge and discoveries, speculative. The loss of most parts of Greek women's warp-weighted looms drastically limits the scope of a material investigation. But it seems quite remarkable that the loom-weights, the only remnant parts of the

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loom, carry with them material signs of personalization indicative of a strong female affective investment.

Therefore, the subordination of the affective impact of the *organa* to Deianeira's marriage with Heracles, suggested by most Hellenistic *scholia*, can be questioned. The Sophoclean text makes space for multiple interpretations. In contrast to the bed placed in the *thalamos*, an explicit material surrogate for her husband, Deianeira's *organa*, most plausibly her textile tools, are her own personal objects, which can reflect her "production and personal skill," to borrow Sofroniew's phrasing. "Objects have life roles that are multiple and fluid," sociologist Sherry Turkle writes in a collection of articles about affective and cognitive relationships between humans and objects (2007.6). In Deianeira's case, the *organa* may be both a material reminder of her disastrous failure—the killing of her husband through a misunderstood product of her skill—and companion objects that arouse a more self-centered outpouring of affection. When the nurse comes on stage to tell the story of Deianeira's last moments, the dominant emotion she shared with the diverse and partly female audience of the fifth-century production[19] was maybe the sadness felt at the thought of leaving behind objects that were parts of herself. These lines would add another layer to Deianeira's tragedy: leaving the world without being able to give to her beloved familiar tools, the satisfying farewell of "rituals of dispossession."

Finally, another explanation may also be put forward, which is more provocative for the predominantly male fifth-century audience. Before she grasps and touches her tools with her hands (ψαύσειεν), Deianeira has been grasped herself as an object before, as is emphasized earlier in the painful story of her married life. Courted by the river-god Achelôos who came to her in the

[19] Women's attendance at the Great Dionysia is now predominantly accepted by the scholars (see Bers 2015.175, with bibliography).

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changing shape of a monstrous snake, a bull, or a hybrid bull-man, she wished to die before being dragged to his marriage bed (l.9-17). Eventually saved by Heracles, she is attacked by another monster in the early days of their marriage (562–565): the centaur Nessus "touches (ψαύει, 565) her with lustful hands", a wording that strikingly echoes Deianeira's touching of her objects. Once settled in Trachis, Deianeira leads a life of sorrow as her husband is continually away: she suggestively compares herself to a remote sowing field which Heracles visits only once a year for seeding (31–35). *Trachiniai* thus casts a crude light on the institution of marriage in which women are assaulted and objectified. Deianeira's last encounter with objects reminiscent of her female identity might therefore be all the more arresting because she can also see in them the ultimate mirror of her own objectified condition. The tools will survive her, as she has outlasted her owner, namely Heracles—a fact that nevertheless reiterates ambiguous emotions rather than reducing them. Tragedy is the place where mixed feelings of affection and rejection, harbored in modest objects, cannot be easily disentangled.

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