

***Leukos* in Homeric Epics**

Abstract

This essay investigates the adjective leukos in the Homeric epics, often reduced to the color “white,” but in fact denoting complex layers of radiance and symbolic meaning.

Setting aside modern color assumptions and earlier lexical biases discussed in the introduction, the study adopts a contextual, scene-based method to interpret leukos directly within its narratives. By closely examining each instance in its specific context, the essay uncovers four interwoven dimensions of meaning: brilliant visibility; sacrality; ritualized transition tied to mortality and vulnerability; ideals of purity, beauty, and glory, revealing the multi-sensory and symbolic connotations the term evoked for Archaic audiences.

Introduction

Interpreting ancient Greek color vocabulary can be surprisingly challenging for modern readers. In the Archaic period, exemplified by Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, we encounter color descriptions that defy today’s expectations. The sea is never described as “blue,” and the rainbow is called “purple.” Early attempts to explain these peculiar color usages often ventured into lexical deficiency or even physiological defects. Notably, British scholar Gladstone in the 19th century, speculated that the ancient Greeks lacked basic color terms or even suffered from a form of color-blindness. Although this bold theory gained popular traction for a time, it ultimately proves untenable. Looking across ancient civilizations, the Greeks were not unique in avoiding the word “blue” for the sea or sky. For example, the ancient Egyptians referred to the Mediterranean Sea as the “Great

Green” (Wadj-our). In Turkish, the sea in south of Anatolia is called the “White Sea” (Akdeniz), contrasted with the “Black Sea” (Karadeniz) in the north of Anatolia. These examples demonstrate how ancient Mediterranean peoples conceptualized the color of the sea, often drawing on symbolic or environmental associations rather than our contemporary spectral categories. The Greeks’ eyes were not physically different from ours; rather, it is our understanding of their color language that needs adjustment.

Indeed, a critical factor is the shifting meaning of color words over time and the difficulty of mapping them to modern terms. It seems that Ancient Greek color terms rarely correspond to a single hue as we define it. The term πορφύρεος used by Homer for rainbow, sea and other things, which we translate as “purple”, likely did not denote a narrow band of the spectrum (the violet-purple range) as “purple” does today. The word for blue in the Classical period—κυάνεος—derives from the material kyanos, and as Irwin suggests, when Homer uses this adjective, it likely means either “made of kyanos” or simply “dark,” with an element of “blueness” only appearing in later poets (Irwin 1974: 79–81). A parallel can be found in Classical Chinese, where the term for “blue” (蓝) originally referred to the indigo plant, while the resulting color, qing (青), could encompass a wide range of shades, from black to green to blue. These instances illustrate that ancient color terms were often rooted in material associations and symbolic references, rather than corresponding to fixed hues in the way modern color terminology does.

Increasingly, modern research suggests that in antiquity color was not perceived as a purely visual property but as a multi-sensory experience. From Goethe's work on color perception onward, scholars have emphasized the subjective, multidimensional character of color. Goethe's *Theory of Colors* (1810) first highlighted color as an event shaped by perception rather than an external essence, a view that opened the way for phenomenological approaches. He even contrasted the Greek intuitive approach to color with Newton's analytic one, praising the Greeks for capturing the "subjective side" of color perception. Louis Gernet (1957) then discussed ancient sensitivity to luminosity rather than color tones, referencing the Hanunóo people, whose color vocabulary centers on brightness and texture more than hue. Ignace Meyerson (1957) further pointed out that color terms in different cultures often carry affective, moral, religious, and social content. More recently, John Lyons (2001) and Maria Michela Sassi (2003) have stressed the cultural and social dimensions of color vocabularies, while Michel Pastoureau (2005) developed a methodological framework for studying color as a social phenomenon. In this line, Adeline Grand-Clément's research (2011) on Archaic Greek treats color not as isolated visual information but as part of a "sensory landscape (*paysage sensible*)," reconstructing the semantic and emotional networks that surrounded color symbols in Greek collective imagination.

Within this framework, so-called "shiny" adjectives in Greek partially intersect with color terminology, especially across the spectrum between white and grey, and often are translated today as color terms. As Kober notes (Kober 1932: 15), black and white in Greek, as in other languages, are used for natural and artificial objects, but often with

slight inaccuracy (for instance "white" or "black" skins), and their uses are less about hues than about the presence or absence of light. Surly under the intense Mediterranean light, it may have been the degree of an object's shading that mattered as much, or perhaps even more, than its specific hue. Yet the symbolic system involving shiny adjectives, like color terms, is much more complex than a simple opposition between light and darkness. Drawing on the theoretical discussions summarized above, it becomes clear that for the Greeks, color was experienced as a fusion of sensory impressions that modern perception tends to isolate: light, radiance, shimmer; movement and vibration; material and texture; even scent or sound. Chromatic sensitivity was primarily mediated through material objects, where color could not be detached from the substance carrying it—whether metals, textiles, or painted surfaces—and from the social and ritual functions these objects held. Thus, the semantic richness of shiny adjectives, like color words, captured not only visual impressions but sensations, values, and symbolic representations embedded in the social imagination.

This essay begins its examination of shiny adjectives in the Homeric epics with a focused analysis of λευκός, ἢ, ὅν (hereafter leukos), a term often translated as 'white,' but whose meaning and usage reveal a more complex interplay of brightness, visibility, and symbolic resonance. It will systematically analyze all instances of leukos in the Iliad and the Odyssey, including usages that may seem perplexing to modern readers. Some appearances of leukos in these texts describe things that are not obviously "white" at all in the modern sense, yet they made sense within the Ancient Greek sensory framework. By considering each context, I aim to reconstruct the multifaceted meaning of leukos –

not merely as a visual descriptor but as a multi-sensory experience deeply entangled with the cultural and emotional world of the Archaic period.

This perspective is bolstered by modern neuroscience (Gabrielle Starr G. 2013), which suggests that language can evoke multi-dimensional imagery in the mind. Descriptive words in poetry can activate a whole suite of sensory regions in the brain, meaning that an ancient listener hearing the epithet leukos might simultaneously visualize a kind of brightness, feel a certain sense, and experience an emotional tone. I strive to look at the term afresh, setting aside modern assumptions about vision in order to approach the poems on their own terms, seeing the world anew as the first time as Paul Cézanne suggested ⁱ (Bernard 1904: 289), to better approximate how an archaic Greek audience experienced the word leukos across the senses.

Inventory

Among all terms denoting luminosity, leukos possesses the broadest scope of application. It describes naturally white substances: ivory, snow, milk, barley, lambs, flowers, and stones, as well as physical parts of humans and animals: teeth, bones, women's arms, men's skin. It extends to luminous objects such as tin ornaments, unfinished cauldrons, the sun, the moon, and glimmering water. The term frequently qualifies textiles like sails and cloth, while also appearing in two geographic references: the peaks of Titanos and the city of Oloósson. In one simile, the dust-covered Achaeans are likened to "white chaff"; in another instance, leukos describing a calm surface, evokes tranquility of the seawater.

Things described by leukosⁱⁱ

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Textile, Sunlight

What kind of color and shininess does leukos denote? The etymology of leukos belongs to a lexical family associated with “light,” linked to λεύσσω, λύχνος, λοῦσσον, and the Indo-European root *leuq-/*louq- (Chantraine 1977: 632–633). This connection to brightness is evident in its usage related to the sun, sunlight, and the moon. In terms of hue, leukos unequivocally denotes whiteness and is frequently translated as “white,” often describing naturally pure white substances such as snow and milk. The term is also well attested in Mycenaean Greek, where it appears as an epithet for textiles, oxen, and a specific variety of saffron (Chadwick & Baumbach 1963: 217). Later in medieval Greek, when the authors of the Gospels wrote of Christ’s white robes at the Transfiguration, they used leukos, and it was coupled with “dazzling” and “glistening” and “white as light”.ⁱⁱⁱ In general, leukos conveys a sense of bright whiteness—the effect of a white object shining under sunlight.

This luminous quality of leukos explains its application to sails (ἱστίον). Given that Homeric epics emerged within a maritime cultural context, they contain numerous descriptions of ships and their various parts. The word ἱστίον appears 31 times in the Iliad and Odyssey, with leukos used as its descriptor in eight instances. Notably, no other adjective is used to describe sails. Moreover, while sails and ships are often mentioned together, the formulas “white sail” and “black ship” never co-occur together in a single context. A comparison of instances where leukos is used versus where it is absent reveals a striking pattern: whenever leukos describes a sail, it is in the context of a ship about to set sail, with its sails freshly unfurled^{iv}. In contrast, when leukos is absent, the ship is either docking or lowering its sails, which are then stored within the

“black ship.”^v This consistent contrast provides valuable insight into the specific quality of visual effect that leukos conveys. Given its frequent occurrence and the lack of exceptions to this pattern, we can infer that leukos describes the brilliant whiteness of a sail catching the Mediterranean sunlight—a translucent, radiant brightness which could be seen from afar.

Returning to the use of leukos in relation to sunlight, we observe two applications that illuminate its semantic range. In the first instance, Olympus is described as a realm eternally illuminated by leukos sunlight “ever clear, without rain or snow, where radiance shimmers upon outspread clouds” (OD.6.41-45). Though Homer elsewhere characterizes Olympus as “snow-capped” (IL.1.420, 18.186) or “snowy” (IL.18.616), we can imagine here leukos evokes an impression of dazzling splendor reminiscent of modern aerial view of an endless white sea of clouds beneath the sun: a divine, immaculate luminosity. In the second case, Hera’s seduction of Zeus culminates in her donning a veil that “glimmered like the white sunlight” (κρηδέμνω...καλῶ νηγατέω: λευκὸν δ’ ἦν ἡέλιος ὥς, IL. 14.184-185). The second half of the phrase reappears in the Odyssey, where the adjective lampros replaces leukos in the description of Odysseus’ khiton in Book 19.^{vi} As will later be discussed in the section on metal objects, heroes are frequently portrayed as beings of light, and their possessions similarly exhibit luminous qualities. In contrast, veils in the Odyssey are consistently described using the term λιπαρός (“shiny, oily”) (OD. 1.334, 13.388, 16.416). In this context, the use of leukos carries the shininess associated with lampros, and the comparison to leukos sunlight transforms the veil’s solar whiteness into a symbolic reflection of Hera’s

divine radiance. In doing so, the text aligns Hera's power with the celestial order, rendering her allure inseparable from the very light that defines the eternal realm of Olympus.

The application of leukos to the other textile *phâpos* (a large rectangular piece of fabric or shroud) reveals another dimension of its sensory and symbolic potency. While the *Odyssey* employs *âργυρος* (silver-white) to describe divine garments worn by Calypso and Circe (OD.5.230, 10.543), leukos *phâpos* in the *Iliad* is reserved for mortals in contexts charged with mortality and ritual solemnity. In Book 18, Patroclus' corpse is shrouded first in a thin linen sheet, then covered with a leukos *phâpos* during the prothesis (laying-out of the body) of the funeral (IL.18.353-354). The second instance is found in the final book of the *Iliad*, where Priam employs many gifts, including "many great white clothes" (τόσσα δὲ φάρεα λευκά, IL.24.231), to ransom Hector's body.

Although these examples are limited, they suggest that leukos often used in ritual and eschatological contexts, it functions not simply as a descriptive term for bright whiteness, but as a symbolic medium maybe evoke the luminous threshold between life and death, a transaction across realms. Parallels persist in modern film and media, where heaven or the moment to enter afterlife is often imagined as an overwhelming field of white light, an image dissolves boundaries, where the self dissolves into something vast and unknowable.

Natural elements

To further find out the connotations of leukos, let us first examine the naturally white elements described by leukos. Beyond the quintessential examples of evident whiteness—milk (IL.4.434, 5.902; OD.9.246), snow (IL.10.437), and ivory (IL.5.583, 18.196)—the term also applies to objects not inherently white, such as barley, lambs, flowers, and stones. An analysis of these contexts reveals a nuanced semantic resonance embedded in the adjective.

Stone

The applications of leukos to stones are both distinctive and intriguing. Since except marble, naturally white or shiny stones are relatively rare in the physical world, the deliberate use of leukos to describe them in Homeric poetry imbues these stones with heightened symbolic significance. It appears in three instances, each paired with a different Greek noun for stone: λᾶας (IL.23.329), λίθος (OD.3.408), and the proper noun White Rock (Λευκάδα πέτρην, OD.24.11). The last one, employing the feminine form of leukos (Chantraine 1977: 633), holds profound symbolic significance within the broader narrative of Odyssey 24.1-14. Here, the spirits of Penelope's slain suitors, freshly killed by Odysseus, traverse the White Rock—a liminal boundary between consciousness and the unconscious—to enter the realm of the dead. As Nagy argues (Nagy 1990: 364-376), this rock demarcates the threshold to the "District of Dreams", beyond which lies the land of the dead. This use of leukos parallels other eschatological landscapes, such as the island of Leuke—the "White Island" where Achilles dwells after death, reinforces the earlier argument that leukos, while applying to fabrics, embodies a symbolic transaction between realms.

In book 3 of *Odyssey*, the stone in question is in front of Nestor's palace: a polished, gleaming structure anointed with oil, where the king sits in authority. This stone, once occupied by his divine-like ancestor Neleus, carries connotations of regal sanctity. In the *Iliad*, the stone marked by leukos (IL.23.329), which is repurposed by Achilles as a "turning-post", lacks the vivid symbolic resonance of the previous two examples. Yet even here, the poet endows it with two potential roles—either "the grave-marker of someone long deceased" or "a racing goal set by men of a bygone era". Though its immediate context is less overtly ritualized, this stone still aligns with a recurring symbolic thread: While stones inherently function as boundaries or thresholds in antiquity, the application of leukos elevates their symbolic weight, framing them not merely as physical markers but as sacred, status-laden, or ritually charged entities. This ritualized dimension of leukos, its capacity to evoke sanctity or themes of life and death, could be further reinforced by the ancient practice of anointing stones to signify divine connection.^{vii} There is also a compelling visual corroboration in the iconography of vase painting on the Boston Hydria, which visually compresses episodes from *Iliad* book 22 to 24. This vase depicts Achilles dragging Hector's corpse, a chariot race evoking the funeral games for Patroclus, and the winged figure of Iris foreshadowing the divine intervention that will return Hector's body. On the right of the image stands a monumental white mound with a serpent coiled at its base, representing the tomb of Patroclus. Above it hovers a small, armed, winged figure—his shade, ascending to the heavens following the completion of the funeral rites. The tomb's bright white surface is visually arresting and imbued with symbolic weight. Its brightness conveys not only

visibility but sacrality, invoking associations with purity, memory, and the threshold between mortality and immortality. The leukos of the stone in text and the white brightness of the stone in image both operate as a ritual code, evoking the reverence accorded to heroic dead and the sacred space of the σῆμα, the tomb that both memorializes and monumentalizes the boundary between life and death.

Barley, Chaff simile and Lamb

The ritual dimension of leukos is most evident in its association with grains and sacrificial lambs. While leukos modifies two terms for barley—κρῖ and ἄλφιτα—the former appears exclusively in secular contexts. Watkins, in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Grains* (1978), suggests this Homeric formula κρῖ λευκόν (“white barley”) likely originated in pre-Mycenaean traditions, predating Homer by centuries. Another formula conveys almost same meaning cannot be considered apart: λευκ’ ἄλφιτα (also ἄλφιτα λευκά), is a formulaic phrase invariably used in a sacral, ritual context, and always as the object of the verb παλύνειν “sprinkle.” And the word ἄλφιτα itself owes its origin to a transferred epithet, cognates with Latin albus “white,” Greek ἄλφος “leprosy,” and the further epithet λευκά replaced *ἄλφο- “white” itself. Watkins further traces this connection to Indo-European roots, noting parallels in Vedic and Avestan traditions where white grains, like barley, hold central roles in sacrificial rites. These cross-cultural echoes reflect a shared heritage where grains bridged agricultural sustenance and religious practice.

This connection may be also applicable to the chaff simile where leukos is used to describe Achaians under the dust:

IL.5.499	ὥς δ' ἄνεμος ἄχνας φορέει ἱερὰς κατ' ἁλῶας
IL.5.499	As when along the hallowed threshing floors the wind scatters
IL.5.500	ἀνδρῶν λικμώντων, ὅτε τε ξανθὴ Δημήτηρ
IL.5.500	chaff, among men winnowing, and fair-haired Demeter
IL.5.501	κρίνη ἐπειγομένων ἀνέμων καρπὸν τε καὶ ἄχνας,
IL.5.501	in the leaning wind discriminates the chaff and the true grain
IL.5.502	αἱ δ' ὑπολευκαίνονται ἀχυρμαίῃ: ὥς τότ' Ἀχαιοὶ
IL.5.502	and the piling chaff whitens beneath it, so now the Achaians
IL.5.503	λευκοὶ ὑπερθε γέγοντο κονισάλῳ, ὃν ῥα δι' αὐτῶν
IL.5.503	turned white underneath the dust the feet of the horses
IL.5.504	οὐρανὸν ἐς πολύχαλκον ἐπέπληγον πόδες ἵππων
IL.5.504	drove far into the brazen sky across their faces
IL.5.505	ἄψ ἐπιμισγομένων: ὑπὸ δ' ἔστρεφον ἡνιοχῆες.
IL.5.505	as they rapidly closed and the charioteers wheeled back again.

When the dust that covers the Achaians under the stir of their horses, as the soldiers are white as chaff that piles up under Demeter's winnowing, because of the likeness of two powdery substances - dust and chaff. A.Cook in *Visual Aspects of the Homeric Simile in Indo-European Context* (Cook 1984: 51) suggests this simile may associate this late, decisive moment in the war with a moment of harvest as well as contrasting the world of peace with the world of war. Building on the Cook's cross-cultural framework, I argue that the chaff-dust simile carries a deeper symbolic resonance: by likening the Achaians' battle-stirred dust to Demeter's winnowed grain, the imagery implicitly frames their martial struggle as a form of sacrificial offering. Just as leukos barley sanctifies ritual communion with the divine, the leukos dust transforms the warriors into quasi-sacrificial offerings to Zeus' plan.

The ritual significance of leukos is exemplified in its exclusive application to a sacrificial lamb during the oath-sacrifice preceding the duel between Menelaus and Paris in the Iliad (IL.3.103-104). In this ritual, three lambs are offered: a black lamb dedicated to

Earth, a leukos lamb consecrated to the Sun God, and a third for Zeus, whose offering lacks a specified color. This practice aligns with a broader symbolic pattern in Greek religion: dark-colored animals are typically assigned to chthonic deities, while light-colored ones are reserved for celestial powers, reflecting a binary opposition between the subterranean and heavenly realms.

However, this dichotomy is not universally prescriptive. The absence of color specifications for Zeus's sacrifice underscores the flexibility of such conventions. Grand-Clément (2011: 379-386) provided several examples to demonstrate that while many rituals adhere to the light-dark paradigm, it remains a contextual framework rather than a rigid system. Sacrificial color symbolism was neither fixed nor universally applied across cults, locations, or historical periods. Instead, ritual requirements were shaped by the specific cultic epithets of the deity invoked, the geographical and cultural context of the ceremony, and the communal intentions behind the offering.

Crucially, the unblemished quality of the sacrificial animal held greater importance than its chromatic attributes. The integrity of the animal's color—its uniformity and purity—served as a marker of ritual suitability, transcending the symbolic associations of individual hues. Color functioned not as an absolute symbol but as a communicative tool, a medium through which worshippers articulated reverence and tailored their appeals to the divine. In this context, leukos transcends mere visual description of color; it embodies an idealized state of ritual purity (καθαρός) and inviolability (ἀκέραιος). Thus, the term's usage is embedded within a deeper cultural and linguistic continuity, framing leukos as a fundamentally ritualistic concept.

Water and Tranquil Sea

In general, in archaic Greek texts, leukos water (ῥῥωρ) symbolizes purity, often linked to sacred springs and ritual cleansing, where it purifies both individuals and spaces of miasma, carrying both physical and metaphysical significance (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 737-739^{viii}; Theognis I.447-448^{ix}). However, in Homeric epics, the adjective ἀγλαός (“radiant”) more frequently describes sacred waters, while leukos is only rarely applied to water. Generally, leukos seems to be used for water in the sunlight, or, at least, of water not shaded. Drinking water drawn from a spring or a well is described by μέλας (“dark”) (Kober 1932: 10).

Homer’s use of leukos for water appears twice, both times evoking ethereal clarity. One is at Patroclus’ funeral, Achilles recalls his companion washing divine horses in leukos water (IL.23.282). Another instance the leukos springs surround Capypso’s cave(OD.5.70), of which the crystalline flows enhancing the quasi-paradise vibes of the environment, mirroring the goddess’s immortality. While these instances are also tied to funerary rites and divine presence, leukos here seems to emphasize the transparent, see-through quality of water, its ability to be penetrated by light—in contrast to dark, wine-colored depths. Ancient scholia reinforce this interpretation: one commentator^x observed that colorless water, when deep, appears wine-dark, but when shallow, it shows leukos. Notably, later prose writers would adopt leukos metaphorically to signify stylistic limpidity, solidifying its connection to perceptual and intellectual clarity.^{xi}

Leukos is employed in a singular instance to depict the tranquil sea, contrasting with πολιός, a term frequently used for the sea that evokes a frothy, turbulent surface tinged

with a dull, grayish-white hue. While *πολιός* suggests churning agitation, *leukos* delivers a different scene of the sea, a bright calmness:

OD.10.92 αἱ μὲν ἄρ' ἔντοσθεν λιμένος κοίλοιο δέδεντο
OD.10.92 They were moored close together inside the hollow harbor,
OD.10.93 πλησίαι: οὐ μὲν γάρ ποτ' ἀέξετο κύμα γ' ἐν αὐτῷ,
OD.10.93 for waves never grew in it, neither great nor small,
OD.10.94 οὔτε μέγ' οὔτ' ὀλίγον, λευκὴ δ' ἦν ἀμφὶ γαλήνῃ:
OD.10.94 but there was a white calm about it.
OD.10.95 αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν οἶος σχέθον ἔξω νῆα μέλαιναν,
OD.10.95 But I alone kept my black ship outside,
OD.10.96 αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἐσχατιῇ, πέτρης ἐκ πείσματα δῆσας:
OD.10.96 at its edge, tied the cables to the rock,
OD.10.97 ἔστην δὲ σκοπιὴν ἐς παιπαλόεσσας ἀνελθών.
OD.10.97 climbed to a rugged lookout, and stood.

This expression *λευκὴ γαλήνῃ* are also found in Simon.42.I, Anacreon 57.13-14, reinforcing the conventional association of *λευκός* with the tranquil water surface. A scholion^{xii} attempts to link *γαλήνῃ* (calm) to *γάλα* (milk) based on ancient etymology, arguing that calm, like milk, is “shadowless” and thus explains the *leukos*’s usage. While this connection seems tenuous and difficult to substantiate, the imagery itself holds merit: a *leukos* calm sea evokes a sea without shadow, its surface luminous and glassy, suffused with light that permeates its tranquil plane.

This radiant imagery recalls Homer’s portrayal of Olympus mentioned previously (IL.14.344-346), a realm untouched by storms or snow, where light spills over celestial clouds. The “peaceful haven” reappears now, where Odysseus’ ships rest in the hollow harbor with no great or small waves. Here, *leukos* links the earthly luminosity of a calm seascape to the ethereal brilliance of the divine.

However, the verb λευκαίνω, derived from the same root, appears in a distinct context: it describes seawater churned by the polished pines (oars) of Odysseus' ship (OD.12.172). This usage may imply a dynamic whitening effect—the agitation of the water by the oars' gleam rendering it brighter or whiter.

Flower

The only-once instance of leukos modifying a flower occurs in a simile in book 17 of Iliad, when Euphorbos, a warrior of full vigor, who died without being able to leave an heir to his lineage, was compared to an olive tree. The portrayal of Euphorbos's death especially intertwines the brutality of battle with the delicate imagery of youth and beauty. The simile juxtaposes the tree's tender care—nurtured in isolation, drenched in water, and bursting into “white blossoming” (ἄνθεϊ λευκῷ 17.56)—with its abrupt destruction by a tempest. Levaniouk argues in her recent conference talk (2024) that this violent scene is overlaid with motifs drawn from weddings, like a bride in her father's house, this tree is very young and beautiful and playful and but secluded and well-protected, creating a poignant fusion of war and aesthetic grace. Euphorbos is slain in combat, yet he is described in almost tender, bridal terms – the point of Menelaus's spear passes “clean out through the tender neck,” and as he falls his hair (similar to myrtle flower, luxuriantly adorned with gold and silver) is drenched in blood. Levaniouk also points out here “Luxurious hair of young people in general is also described as a flower, as when Anacreon blames his beloved, an unnamed boy, for cutting off ‘the blameless flower of your soft hair’ (ἀπαλῆς κόμης ἄμωμον ἄνθος, PMG 414). Luxurious hair compared to flowers is arguably the main characteristic of the groom. An

example of that is Odysseus, whose hair is compared to the flowers of hyacinth in *Odyssey* 6, when he meets Nausikaa and in *Odyssey* 23, when, with wedding songs performed in the background, Athena rejuvenates him for Penelope.” Then the simile of the tree blossom is more striking, Euphorbos here dies like a bridegroom in its slender youth and its burgeoning vigor, and his hair doused with blood, with this simile created an image of whiteness splashed with red, evoking wedding associations in a context of death, highlights how the passage merges themes of battle and beauty.

The result is a scene rich in paradoxical symbolism: Euphorbos’s violent end is imbued with the fleeting splendor of a wedding or a sacrificial rite, the lines between martial heroism and delicate, almost sacred beauty belongs to nuptials are deliberately blurred. Leukos, describing the blossom of olive tree here, evokes both vitality and mortality, contribute to this paradox imagery of martial violent and ephemeral vulnerability, related again to the theme of life and death, ritual and beauty.

Human and animal anatomy

Bone

The interplay of vitality and mortality evoked by leukos extends further into depictions of human and animal anatomy. Across all seven Homeric instances where leukos modifies human bones,^{xiii} they all related to the death. This association aligns with near-universal cultural motifs linking bones to mortality, a connection amplified in Homeric epic, where bones most frequently appear in fatal fighting or funeral contexts. This formula “white bones” (ὀστέα λευκά or λεύκ’ ὀστέα) naturally evokes the spectral presence of the

dead, with bleached bones serving as visceral reminders of life's dissolution and the fragility of flesh.

Teeth

When describing teeth, leukos carries a nuanced distinction. While various animals' teeth (hounds, boar, swine) are typically marked by ἀργός (another term for "white/shiny") emphasizing their piercing capability and swift movement, leukos is reserved only once for human teeth, where a spear pierces the teeth of the mortal Pandarus (IL.5.291). Meanwhile, leukos appears seven times in reference to boars' tusks, all tied to Odysseus' narrative. Five of these occur in the *Odyssey* during the famous scar episode – the wound on Odysseus's leg inflicted by a boar's "white tusk" on Mount Parnassus, which later serves to prove his identity^{xiv}. One instance comes from the *Iliad*'s description of the helmet Odysseus wears, inlaid with "white tusks" of a boar as its chief adornment (IL.10.263). A final case appears in a simile comparing Odysseus, when he stands encircled by attacking Trojans, to a cornered boar "whetting its white tusks" against a pack of hunters (IL.11.416). These recurring images link leukos to pivotal milestones in Odysseus's life, especially his youthful coming-of-age trial and the lasting mark of his heroism, thereby imbuing the leukos tusk with a quasi-ritual symbolism.

The ritual subtext of Odysseus's boar-hunt episode has been increasingly emphasized. Jan Bremmer (1978: 15-16) for example, observes that the entire flashback of Odysseus's youth in *Odyssey* 19 is packed with initiatory motifs, from his naming by his grandfather Autolykos (a classic rite-of-passage element) to the boar-hunt that scars

him – effectively merging multiple coming-of-age events into one narrative. In Greek tradition, the hunt indeed operates as both a heroic ordeal and a social rite of passage, preparing youths for warfare and instilling virtues valued in the polis. The boar-hunting in particular was a standard test of manhood: even in later historical custom, a Macedonian youth was not considered a true adult (permitted to recline at banquets) until he had slain a boar on his own. Pausanias (3.14.10) even describes ritualized boar-fights staged by Spartan ephebes, with each boar representing a group of youths. Artistic depictions on fifth-century vases of the Calydonian Boar Hunt typically show beardless boys in the garb of adolescents – a visual cue that such hunts “exalt them to manhood”. Odysseus’s mastery over the boar – an emblem of untamed nature or primal chaos – mirrors these initiation rituals, wherein overcoming a wild beast signals the entrant’s passage into adulthood. The scar left by the boar’s tusk, central to his recognition scene in *Odyssey* 19, thus becomes a permanent inscription of that transformative ordeal and of Odysseus’s heroic identity, the narrated scar story complete sequence of events that made Odysseus into Odysseus in the first place, from birth to naming to entry into manhood (Levaniouk 2011).

By describing the boar’s gleaming tusk with leukos in this narrated scar story, the ritualized aura of the hunt scene heightens. This leukos gleam resonates in someway with the sacred whiteness of those sacrificial things, barley or lamb, not only underscores the hero’s symbolic transformation, but also aligns with the broader Homeric associations of leukos with vulnerability and mortality.

Skin of women and men

The epithet leukos is prominently applied to the arms of goddesses and mortal women, potentially since women's dress in ancient Greece was arranged to leave the arms bare, it appearing 39 times in compound forms (λευκώλενος "white-armed") and twice modifying πῆχυς ("forearm"). Its most iconic usage—the formulaic phrase "white-armed goddess Hera" ("Ἥρη λευκώλενος)—exemplifies its association with idealized feminine beauty, extended to loyal heroines like Andromache, Helen, Arete, and Nausicaa, as well as their attendants. As thoroughly discussed by Irwin (1974: 112–116) and Grand-Clément (2011: 242–245), the "white" color of matrons may be associated with their calm, domestic lives spent weaving and spinning within the house. However, its application to Nausicaa and her maidens, who spend a day outdoors in the sun, washing clothes and playing ball, does not seem to refer exclusively to skin color. In *Odyssey* 18.195–196, the connection between leukos and female beauty is made explicit when Athena enhances Penelope's appearance : "she made her taller and fuller to behold, and whiter than sawn ivory"^{xv}. Conversely, when Athena transforms Odysseus from a beggar back to his heroic form, she restores his "darkened skin". This contrast is also applied to the artistic convention^{xvi} in Mycenaean wall paintings and archaic vase paintings, where women are often depicted in white and men in reddish-brown or black. Even Penthesilea and her Amazons, who engage in warlike activities, are also consistently portrayed with white skin on vases.

Color operates here within a network of symbolic contrasts, arranged in opposition.

When male strength is juxtaposed with female softness, poets frequently employ the white (leukos) and dark (melas) binary, though they often omit the latter (Grand-Clément

2011: 263). This gendered use of leukos is further emphasized by its rarity and semantical charge when applied to male skin. The two instances occur in the Iliad (11.753, 15.316), both describing warriors in moments of vulnerability, being unarmored and exposed to weapons. Here, leukos does not denote cowardice (a later Classical trope) but emphasizes the softness of unprotected flesh, amplifying the inherent vulnerability of the word χρώς (“skin”) itself (Irwin 1974: 115).

The association between leukos and femininity is therefore profound, not merely a matter of color, but one that implies fair texture and softness of skin, idealized beauty, furthermore grace and radiance of divine luminosity—as seen in the previous imagery of Hera’s veil shimmering like the brilliance of sunlight that belongs to Olympus.

Metal objects

When leukos is not used on the male skin to convey the ideology, but applied to luminous objects associated with masculinity, does its symbolic splendor persist?

Previous analysis reveals that male-linked objects described as leukos, such as Φάρος, the similes compare soldiers to chaff and flowers, and body parts like bones and teeth, are steeped in ritual, their brilliance entangled with themes of mortality and sacred transition. Now let’s examine instances which emerge in the realm of metal: weapons and prizes forged from gleaming alloys.

In Grand-Clément’s section (2011: 297-306) “heroes, beings of light”, she demonstrates that in Iliad a radiant warrior (ἀγλαός) or a luminous one (φαίδιμος) demonstrate their worth on the battlefield, fighting not only for survival but to “illustrate” themselves, to shine and thereby conquer kleos. Milman Parry’s analysis (1928) of 71 Homeric hero

epithets reveals five key qualities—valor, martial prowess, renown, royalty, and a vaguely defined divinity—illustrating how the Greeks merged these traits into a unified, luminous ideal. Warriors are described as “like the flame (φλογὶ ἴσος)” or “blazing fire (δέμας πύρος αἰθομένοιο),” with their brilliance paralleling the various forms of light, including the gleam of their bronze panoply, an extension of their luminous presence.

Numerous epithets describe the gleam of bronze weaponry, many of these are verbal adjectives such as φαεινός (from Φαίνω), αἶθοψ (from αἶθω), and others adj. like ποικίλος and αἰολός. Yet leukos appears in only three specific instances. First, the metal knobs of tin on the shield of Agamemnon (IL.11.33–35). In this arming scene, Agamemnon’s splendid shield is described as having twenty white-hot tin bosses:

- IL.11.33 καλήν, ἣν πέρι μὲν κύκλοι δέκα χάλκεοι ἦσαν,
IL.11.33 a thing of splendour. There were ten circles of bronze upon it,
IL.11.34 ἐν δὲ οἱ ὀμφαλοὶ ἦσαν [ἑξείκοσι κασσιτέροιο
IL.11.34 and set about it were twenty knobs of tin, pale-shining,
IL.11.35 λευκοί, ἐν δὲ μέσοισιν ἔην μέλανος κυάνοιο.
IL.11.35 and in the very centre another knob of dark cobalt.

Here leukos denotes the bright, silvery sheen of tin metal on the war-shield. The shining white metal adornment is a mark of fine craftsmanship and formidable visual impact, contributes to the imposing, gleaming aspect of the king’s armor. The detailed attention to Agamemnon’s armor is part of a broader Homeric tradition of arming scenes (kosmos scenes), which serve a dual narrative and symbolic purpose (Armstrong 1958). On one level, they build suspense before battle and emphasize the hero’s preparedness and status; on another, they elevate the warrior through ritual-like depiction, almost like a priest adorning sacred vestments before a sacrifice.

Second, an unfired cauldron is awarded as the prize in a chariot race during Patroclus' funeral (IL.23.267–268), a prize linked to fatal solemnity and could be transformed into a relic of collective remembrance. And the last, the epithet “white-shielded” (λευκάσπιδος) uniquely applied to Deiphobos at the moment Hector realizes, in the final throes of battle (IL.22.294–295), that his charioteer is actually absent and his own doom is imminent. In all three instances, leukos does not merely describe luster but binds the material brilliance of metal to the radiance of heroic honor and the existential threshold where mortality confronts transcendence. These metal objects, though rare in their explicit association with leukos, crystallize the term's dual resonance—its radiance inseparable from the heroic glory, and again the theme of life and death.

Two cities

The application of the term leukos to two geographical locations may reflect material realities, as Kober suggests (1932: 7), likely due to the presence of chalk deposits or similar substances in the area. This connection is reinforced by two scholia: one states that “the land of Titanos is white (leukos),” while another describes houses in Titanos as being anointed with titanos powder, possibly referring to tin powder.

For the Thessalian city of Oloösson, the Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography (Smith, 1854: 474) explains that the epithet leukos is tied to its white argillaceous soil. Later sources, such as Procopius, preserve the name in its corrupted form L'ossounus (de Aedificiis 4.14), while modern scholars identify it with present-day Ellassóna, a town that held strategic importance (Leake, Northern Greece III.345), as it occupied a liminal space: positioned at the edge of a fertile plain near the Vale of Tempe, its citadel

crowned a hill flanked by protective ravines. Archaeological remains, including fragmentary walls and foundational remnants near a later Byzantine monastery, attest to its ancient significance

Beyond the color of the land, I speculate that elevation may also have influenced the use of leukos. Both Titanos, with its peak, and Oloösson, with its hilltop citadel, occupy elevated positions. Under the intense Mediterranean sunlight, these high points would have stood out in stark brilliance, the visual effect of which perhaps akin to the gleaming white sails mentioned at the beginning of this essay.

Conclusion

The study of leukos in the Homeric epics reveals it as a complex, multi-layered term the meaning of which far surpasses the simple color term "white." Although leukos certainly overlaps with whiteness, denoting naturally white substances such as milk, snow, and ivory, its primary associations lie with radiance and brightness, marking objects and beings as vividly visible and alive with light. Whether in the dazzling sails catching the Mediterranean sun, the gleaming peaks of Titanos, or the luminous shields and cauldrons, leukos denotes a brilliance that could be seen from afar, emphasizing visibility and prominence.

This vivid radiance is deeply intertwined with sacredness. Leukos regularly appears in divine or sanctified contexts: the ever-clear skies of Olympus, Hera's solar-shimmering veil, and the water used to wash divine horses or that surrounds Calypso's cave. The brightness of leukos thus signals divine presence and celestial order. Even earthly

objects—such as stones, sacrificial lambs, and ritual barley—when endowed with leukos, reflect a broader sacred landscape where brightness and holiness converge. This sacred connotation extends leukos into the sphere of ritualized transition, carrying profound associations with mortality and vulnerability. It shrouds the bodies of Patroclus and Hector, coats the dust-covered Achaeans likened to chaff at harvest, marks bones stripped of life, and highlights the ritual significance of the boar's tusk in Odysseus' coming-of-age narrative. When applied to human skin, its rare usage for men underscores unarmored exposure to death, while its appearance in Euphorbos's blossoming death simile fuses youthful beauty with fatal fragility. In each case, leukos is not merely a color descriptor but a signal of the transition between the living and the dead, the mortal and the divine.

Finally, leukos encapsulates ideals of beauty, glory, purity, and clarity. It marks the idealized feminine beauty of Hera and other aristocratic women described as "white-armed," embodying radiance, grace, and distinction. The brilliance of leukos armor similarly reflect not only the trials of life and death, but a radiant kleos for the heroes. The sense of purity also appears in sacred contexts, where leukos characterizes sacrificial items such as barley and lambs, underscoring ritual cleanliness and sanctity. In natural scenes, leukos water and leukos calm sea-surface evoke transparency, limpidity, and the serene beauty of sacred landscapes.

In sum, these four layers of meaning do not exist independently, but are deeply interwoven, shaping a coherent symbolic network within the Homeric imagination: the brilliance of radiance and visibility; the sacrality of divine connection; the ritualized confrontation

with life, death, and vulnerability; and the aspiration toward beauty, glory and transcendent purity and clarity. It does not merely describe how things look but articulates how they exist in the world—how they are marked, distinguished, and woven into the sensational and emotional fabric of experience. In the Homeric imagination, brightness is never neutral: it signifies belonging, transformation, and remembrance.

Leukos invites us to glimpse the Archaic Greek world not through static categories of color, but through a fluid, vibrant interplay of sensation, symbolism, and collective memory—a world where radiance was both seen and profoundly lived.

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Appendix : Textual Instances of Leukos in the Homeric Epics

1. Sail ἱστῖον

IL.1.480 οἱ δ' ἱστὸν στήσαντ' ἀνά θ' ἱστία λευκὰ πέτασαν,

IL.1.480 They set up the mast again and spread on it the white sails

OD.2.426 ἔλκον δ' ἱστία λευκὰ ἐυστρέπτοισι βοεῦσιν.

OD.2.426 and hoisted the white sail with the well-twisted ox-leather halyards.

OD.4.783 πάντα κατὰ μοῖραν, ἀνά θ' ἱστία λευκὰ πέτασαν:

OD.4.783 all in good order, and hoisted the white sail

OD.8.54 πάντα κατὰ μοῖραν, παρὰ δ' ἱστία λευκὰ τάνυσσαν.

OD.8.54 all in good order, and hoisted the white sail.

OD.9.77 ἱστοὺς στησάμενοι ἀνά θ' ἱστία λεύκ' ἐρύσαντες

OD.9.77 we set up the masts, hoisted the white sails,

OD.10.506 ἱστὸν δὲ στήσας, ἀνά θ' ἱστία λευκὰ πετάσας

OD.10.506 but set up the mast, spread the white sails,

OD.12.402 ἱστὸν στησάμενοι ἀνά θ' ἱστία λεύκ' ἐρύσαντες.

OD.12.402 setting up the mast and hoisting the white sail

OD.15.291 ἔλκον δ' ἱστία λευκὰ ἐϋστρέπτοισι βοεῦσι.

OD.15.291 and hoisted the white sail with the well-twisted ox-leather halyards.

2. Cloth φᾶρος

IL.18.353 ἐς πόδας ἐκ κεφαλῆς, καθύπερθε δὲ φάρει λευκῷ. (Patroclus)

IL.18.353 from head to foot, and covered that over with a white mantle.

IL.24.231 τόσσα δὲ φάρεα λευκά, τόσους δ' ἐπὶ τοῖσι χιτῶνας.

IL.24.231 as many great white cloaks, also the same number of tunics.

3. Sunlight ἡέλιος, αἶγλη

IL.14.185 καλῷ νηγατέῳ λευκὸν δ' ἦν ἡέλιος ὥς

IL.14.185 with a sweet fresh veil that glimmered pale like the sunlight.

OD.6.41 ἡ μὲν ἄρ' ὥς εἰποῦσ' ἀπέβη γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη

OD.6.41 So saying, bright-eyed Athena departed

OD.6.42 Οὐλυμπόνδ', ὅθι φασὶ θεῶν ἔδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ

OD.6.42 for Olympus, where they say the gods' abode is firm forever.

OD.6.43 ἔμμεναι. οὔτ' ἀνέμοισι τινάσσεται οὔτε ποτ' ὄμβρῳ

OD.6.43 It is not shaken by winds or ever wet by rain,

OD.6.44 δέυεται οὔτε χιὼν ἐπιπίλνεται, ἀλλὰ μάλ' αἴθρη
OD.6.44 and snow does not come near it, rather, cloudless clear air
OD.6.45 πέπταται ἀννέφελος, λευκὴ δ' ἐπιδέδρομεν αἴγλη·
OD.6.45 spreads, and white sunlight plays, upon it.

4. A round mark like moon περίτροχος

IL.23.455 λευκὸν σῆμ' ἐτέτυκτο περίτροχον ἥύτε μῆνη.
IL.23.455 there was a white mark, round, like the full moon.

5. Stone λᾶας, λίθος, Λευκάδα

IL.23.329 λᾶε δὲ τοῦ ἐκάτερθεν ἐρηρέδεται δύο λευκῶ
IL.23.329 and two white stones are leaned against it, one on either side,
IL.23.330 ἐν ξυνοχῇσιν ὁδοῦ, λείος δ' ἵπποδρομος ἀμφὶς
IL.23.330 at the joining place of the ways, and there is smooth driving around it.
IL.23.331 ἢ τευ σῆμα βροτοῖο πάλοι κατατεθνηῶτος,
IL.23.331 Either it is the grave-mark of someone who died long ago,
IL.23.332 ἢ τό γε νύσσα τέτυκτο ἐπὶ [ἑποτέρων ἀνθρώπων,
IL.23.332 or was set as a racing goal by men who lived before our time.
IL.23.333 καὶ νῦν τέρματ' ἔθηκε ποδάρκης [ἑοῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.
IL.23.333 Now swift-footed brilliant Achilles has made it the turning-post.

OD.3.406 ἐκ δ' ἐλθὼν κατ' ἄρ' ἔζετ' ἐπὶ ξεστοῖσι λίθοισιν,
OD.3.406 went out and sat down upon the smooth stones
OD.3.407 οἷ οἱ ἔσαν προπάροιθε θυράων ὑψηλῶν,
OD.3.407 that he had in front of the lofty doors,
OD.3.408 λευκοί, ἀποστίλβοντες ἀλείφατος· οἷς ἔπι μὲν πρὶν
OD.3.408 white stones, that glistened with oil, on which Neleus,

OD.24.11 παρ δ' ἴσαν Ὠκεανοῦ τε ῥοὰς καὶ Λευκάδα πέτρην,
OD.24.11 They went, past the streams of Ocean, and the White Rock

6. Barley κρῖ, ἄλφιτον

IL.5.196 ἐστᾶσι κρῖ λευκὸν ἐρεπτόμενοι καὶ ὀλύρας.
IL.5.196 stand there, champing their white barley and oats.

IL.8.564 ἵπποι δὲ κρῖ λευκὸν ἐρεπτόμενοι καὶ ὀλύρας
IL.8.564 And standing each beside his chariot, champing white barley

IL.20.496 τριβέμεναι κρῖ λευκὸν ἐϋκτιμένη ἐν ἁλῶνι,
IL.20.496 to crush white barley on a strong-laid threshing floor, and rapidly

OD.4.41 παρ δ' ἔβαλον ζειάς, ἀνὰ δὲ κρῖ λευκὸν ἔμιξαν,
OD.4.41 threw grain before them, mixed white barley in it,

OD.4.604 πυροὶ τε ζειαὶ τε ἰδ' εὐρυφυῆς κρῖ λευκόν.
OD.4.604 and wheat and spelt and broad-eared white barley.

OD.12.358 οὐ γὰρ ἔχον κρὶ λευκὸν ἐϋσσέλμου ἐπὶ νηός.
OD.12.358 since they had no white barley on our well-benched ship

IL.11.640 κνήστι χαλκείῃ, ἐπὶ δ' ἄλφιστα λευκὰ πάλυνε,
IL.11.640 with a bronze grater, and scattered with her hand white barley into it.

IL.18.560 δεῖπνον ἐρίθοισιν λεύκ' ἄλφιστα πολλὰ πάλυνον.
IL.18.560 scattered, for the workmen to eat, abundant white barley.

OD.10.520 τὸ τρίτον αὖθ' ὕδατι: ἐπὶ δ' ἄλφιστα λευκὰ παλύνειν.
OD.10.520 a third time with water, then sprinkle white barley groats upon it.

OD.11.28 τὸ τρίτον αὖθ' ὕδατι: ἐπὶ δ' ἄλφιστα λευκὰ πάλυνον.
OD.11.28 a third time with water, then sprinkled white barley groats upon it.

OD.14.77 θέρμ' αὐτοῖς ὀβελοῖσιν: ὁ δ' ἄλφιστα λευκὰ πάλυνεν:
OD.14.77 hot on the spits themselves. He then sprinkled white barley groats.

7. Chaff simile : Achaians underneath the dust

IL.5.499 ὥς δ' ἄνεμος ἄχνας φορέει ἱερὰς κατ' ἁλῶας
IL.5.499 As when along the hallowed threshing floors the wind scatters
IL.5.500 ἀνδρῶν λικμώντων, ὅτε τε ξανθὴ Δημήτηρ²
IL.5.500 chaff, among men winnowing, and fair-haired Demeter
IL.5.501 κρίνη [ἔπειγομένων ἀνέμων καρπὸν τε καὶ ἄχνας,
IL.5.501 in the leaning wind discriminates the chaff and the true grain
IL.5.502 αἱ δ' ὑπολευκαίνονται ἀχυρμαί: ὥς τότ' Ἀχαιοὶ
IL.5.502 and the piling chaff whitens beneath it, so now the Achaians
IL.5.503 λευκοὶ ὑπερθε γέγοντο κονισάλῳ, ὃν ῥα δι' αὐτῶν
IL.5.503 turned white underneath the dust the feet of the horses
IL.5.504 οὐρανὸν ἐς πολύχαλκον ἐπέπληγον πόδες ἵππων
IL.5.504 drove far into the brazen sky across their faces
IL.5.505 ἄψ ἐπιμισγομένων: ὑπὸ δ' ἔστρεφον ἡνιοχῆες.
IL.5.505 as they rapidly closed and the charioteers wheeled back again

8. Lamb ἀρήν

IL.3.103 οἷσσετε δ' ἄρν', ἕτερον λευκόν, ἐτέρην δὲ μέλαιναν,
IL.3.103 Bring two lambs: let one be white and the other black for
IL.3.104 Γῇ τε καὶ Ἡελίῳ: Διὶ δ' ἡμεῖς οἴσομεν ἄλλον:
IL.3.104 Earth and the Sun God, and for Zeus we will bring yet another.

9. Water ὕδωρ

IL.23.282 χαϊτάων κατέχευε λοέσσας ὕδατι λευκῷ.
IL.23.282 soft olive oil, after he had washed them in shining water.

OD.5.70 κρήναι δ' ἐξείης πίσυρες ῥέον ὕδατι λευκῷ,
OD.5.70 Four fountains in a row flowed with white water

Verb λευκαίνω

OD.12.171 καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐν νηὶ γλαφυρῇ θέσαν, οἱ δ' ἐπ' ἔρετμα
OD.12.171 stowed it in the hollow ship, then sat down at the oars
OD.12.172 ἐζόμενοι λεύκαινον ὕδωρ ξεστῆς ἐλάτῃσιν.
OD.12.172 and made the water white with polished pines.

10. Tranquil sea, calm γαλήνη

OD.10.92 αἱ μὲν ἄρ' ἔντοσθεν λιμένος κοίλοιο δέδεντο
OD.10.92 They were moored close together inside the hollow harbor,
OD.10.93 πλησίαι· οὐ μὲν γάρ ποτ' ἀέξετο κύμα γ' ἐν αὐτῷ,
OD.10.93 for waves never grew in it, neither great nor small,
OD.10.94 οὔτε μέγ' οὔτ' ὀλίγον, λευκὴ δ' ἦν ἀμφὶ γαλήνη·
OD.10.94 but there was a white calm about it.
OD.10.95 αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν οἶος σχέθον ἔξω νῆα μέλαιναν,
OD.10.95 But I alone kept my black ship outside,
OD.10.96 αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἐσχατιῇ, πέτρης ἐκ πείσματα δήσας·
OD.10.96 at its edge, tied the cables to the rock,
OD.10.97 ἔστην δὲ σκοπιὴν ἐς παιπαλόεσσιν ἀνελθὼν.
OD.10.97 climbed to a rugged lookout, and stood.

11. Flower ἄνθος

IL.17.50 δούπησεν δὲ πεσὼν, ἀράβησε δὲ τεύχε' ἐπ' αὐτῷ.
IL.17.50 He fell, thunderously, and his armour clattered upon him,
IL.17.51 αἵματί οἱ δεύοντο κόμαι Χαρίτεσσιν ὁμοῖαι
IL.17.51 and his hair, lovely as the Graces, was splattered with blood, those
IL.17.52 πλοχμοὶ θ', οἳ χρυσῷ τε καὶ ἀργύρῳ ἐσφήκωντο.
IL.17.52 braided locks caught waspwise in gold and silver. As some
IL.17.53 οἶον δὲ τρέφει ἔρνος ἀνὴρ ἐριθηλὲς ἐλαίης
IL.17.53 slip of an olive tree strong-growing that a man raises
IL.17.54 χώρῳ ἐν οἰοπόλῳ, ὅθ' ἄλιν ἀναβέβρυχεν ὕδωρ,
IL.17.54 in a lonely place, and drenched it with generous water, so that
IL.17.55 καλὸν τηλεθάον· τὸ δὲ τε πνοιαί δονέουσι
IL.17.55 it blossoms into beauty, and the blasts of winds from all quarters
IL.17.56 παντοίων ἀνέμων, καὶ τε βρύει ἄνθεϊ λευκῷ·
IL.17.56 tremble it, and it bursts into pale blossoming. But then
IL.17.57 ἐλθὼν δ' ἐξαπίνης ἄνεμος σὺν λαίλαπι πολλῇ
IL.17.57 a wind suddenly in a great tempest descending upon it
IL.17.58 βόθρου τ' ἐξέστρεψε καὶ ἐξετάνουσ' ἐπὶ γαίῃ·
IL.17.58 wrenches it out of its stand and lays it at length on the ground; such

12. Bone ὀστέον

IL.16.347 νέρθεν ὑπ' ἐγκεφάλῳ, κέασσε δ' ἄρ' ὀστέα λευκά·
IL.16.347 below the brain in an upward stroke, and the white bones splintered,

- IL.23.252 κλαίοντες δ' ἐτάριοι ἐνήεος ὀστέα λευκὰ (patrocles)
 IL.23.252 Then they gathered up the white bones of their gentle companion,
- IL.24.793 ὀστέα λευκὰ λέγοντο κασίγνητοί θ' ἑταροί τε (Hector)
 IL.24.793 the brothers and companions of Hektor gathered the white bones
- OD.1.161 ἀνέρος, οὗ δὴ που λεύκ' ὀστέα πύθεται ὄμβρῳ
 OD.1.161 of a man whose white bones rot somewhere in a storm,
- OD.11.221 δαμνῶ, ἐπεὶ κε πρῶτα λίπη λεύκ' ὀστέα θυμός,
 OD.11.221 as soon as life leaves the white bones,
- OD.24.72 ἠῶθεν δὴ τοι λέγομεν λεύκ' ὀστέ', Ἀχιλλεῦ,
 OD.24.72 at dawn, we lay your white bones, Achilles
- OD.24.76 ἐν τῷ τοι κεῖται λεύκ' ὀστέα, φαίδιμ' Ἀχιλλεῦ,
 OD.24.76 In this your white bones lie, brilliant Achilles,
13. Teeth ὀδοὺς
- IL.5.291 ῥίνα παρ' ὀφθαλμόν, λευκοὺς δ' ἐπέρησεν ὀδόντας.
 IL.5.291 to the nose next to the eye, and it cut on through the white teeth
 IL.5.292 τοῦ δ' ἀπὸ μὲν γλῶσσαν πρυμνὴν τάμε χαλκὸς ἀτειρής,
 IL.5.292 and the bronze weariless shore all the way through the tongue's base
- IL.10.263 ἐντέτατο στερεῶς· ἔκτοσθε δὲ λευκοὶ ὀδόντες
 IL.10.263 with thongs of leather, and on the outer side the white teeth
- IL.11.416 θήγων λευκὸν ὀδόντα μετὰ γναμπῆσι γένυσσιν,
 IL.11.416 grinding to an edge the white fangs in the crook of the jawbones,
- OD.19.393 οὐλήν, τὴν ποτέ μιν σὺς ἤλασε λευκῷ ὀδόντι
 OD.19.393 the scar, that a pig inflicted on him with its white tooth
- OD.19.465 ὥς μιν θηρεύοντ' ἔλασεν σὺς λευκῷ ὀδόντι,
 OD.19.465 how a pig had struck him with his white tooth as he hunted,
- OD.21.219 οὐλήν, τὴν ποτέ με σὺς ἤλασε λευκῷ ὀδόντι
 OD.21.219 a scar, the one a pig once inflicted on me with a white tooth
- OD.23.74 οὐλήν, τὴν ποτέ μιν σὺς ἤλασε λευκῷ ὀδόντι.
 OD.23.74 a scar, that a pig inflicted on him with its white tooth, once upon a time,
- OD.24.332 τὴν ἐν Παρνησῷ μ' ἔλασεν σὺς λευκῷ ὀδόντι
 OD.24.332 that a pig inflicted on me with a white tooth in Parnassus

14. Women's arms and forearm πήχυς, λευκώλενος
IL.5.314 ἀμφὶ δ' ἐὼν φίλον υἷὸν ἐχεύατο πήχεε λευκῶ,
IL.5.314 and about her beloved son came streaming her white arms,
IL.5.315 πρόσθε δέ οἱ πέπλοιο φαεινοῦ ππύγμ' ἐκάλυψε
IL.5.315 and with her white robe thrown in a fold in front she shielded him, (Aphodite)

OD.23.240 δειρῆς δ' οὐ πω πάμπαν ἀφίετο πήχεε λευκῶ.
OD.23.240 and she'd wouldn't at all free her white arms from his neck. (Penelope)

λευκώλενος (48times) Hera, Andromache, Helen, Naussicaa, Arete, handmaids of Nausicaa, Arete,

IL.1.55 τῷ γὰρ ἐπὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη:
IL.1.55 a thing put into his mind by the goddess of the white arms, Hera,

IL.1.195 οὐρανόθεν: πρὸ γὰρ ἦκε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη
IL.1.195 from the sky. For Hera the goddess of the white arms sent her,

IL.1.208 οὐρανόθεν: πρὸ δέ μ' ἦκε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη
IL.1.208 from the sky; and the goddess of the white arms Hera sent me,

IL.1.572 μητρὶ φίλῃ ἐπήρα φέρων λευκωλένῳ Ἥρη:
IL.1.572 to bring comfort to his beloved mother, Hera of the white arms:

IL.1.595 ὣς φάτο, μείδῃσεν δὲ θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,
IL.1.595 He spoke, and the goddess of the white arms Hera smiled at him,

IL.3.121 Ἴρις δ' αὖθ' Ἑλένη λευκωλένῳ ἄγγελος ἦλθεν
IL.3.121 Now to Helen of the white arms came a messenger, Iris,

IL.5.711 τοὺς δ' ὥς οὖν ἐνόησε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη
IL.5.711 Now as the goddess Hera of the white arms perceived how

IL.5.755 ἐνθ' ἵππους στήσασα θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη
IL.5.755 There the goddess of the white arms, Hera, stopping her horses,

IL.5.767 ὥς ἔφατ', οὐδ' ἀπίθησε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,
IL.5.767 So he spoke, nor did the goddess of the white arms, Hera,

IL.5.775 ἐνθ' ἵππους ἔστησε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη
IL.5.775 there the goddess of the white arms, Hera, stayed her horses,

IL.5.784 ἐνθα στᾶσ' ἤϋσε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη
IL.5.784 there standing the goddess of the white arms, Hera, shouted,

IL.6.371 οὐδ' εὗρ' Ἀνδρομάχην λευκώλενον ἐν μεγάροισιν,
IL.6.371 but failed to find in the house Andromache of the white arms;

IL.6.377 πῇ ἔβη Ἀνδρομάχη λευκώλενος ἐκ μεγάροιο;
IL.6.377 where has Andromache of the white arms gone? Is she

IL.8.350 τοὺς δὲ ἰδοῦσ' ἐλέησε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,
IL.8.350 Now seeing them the goddess of the white arms, Hera, took pity

IL.8.381 ὣς ἔφατ', οὐδ' ἀπίθησε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη.
IL.8.381 She spoke, nor failed to persuade the goddess Hera of the white arms.

IL.8.484 ὣς φάτο, τὸν δ' οὐ τι προσέφη λευκώλενος Ἥρη.
IL.8.484 So he spoke, and Hera of the white arms gave him no answer.

IL.14.277 ὣς ἔφατ', οὐδ' ἀπίθησε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,
IL.14.277 He spoke, nor failed to persuade the goddess Hera of the white arms,

IL.15.78 ὣς ἔφατ', οὐδ' ἀπίθησε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,
IL.15.78 He spoke, and the goddess of the white arms Hera did not disobey him

IL.15.92 τὴν δ' ἡμείβετ' ἔπειτα θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη:
IL.15.92 In turn the goddess Hera of the white arms answered her:

IL.15.130 οὐκ αἶεις ἃ τέ φησι θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη
IL.15.130 Do you not hear what the goddess Hera of the white arms tells us,

IL.19.407 αὐδῆεντα δ' ἔθηκε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη:
IL.19.407 the goddess of the white arms, Hera, had put a voice in him:

IL.20.112 οὐδ' ἔλαθ' Ἀγχίσαιο πάϊς λευκώλενον Ἥρην
IL.20.112 nor did Hera of the white arms fail to see the son of Anchises

IL.21.377 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ τό γ' ἄκουσε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,
IL.21.377 Now when the goddess of the white arms, Hera, had heard this

IL.21.418 τὴν δ' ὥς οὖν ἐνόησε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,
IL.21.418 But now, as the goddess of the white arms, Hera, noticed her

IL.21.434 ὣς ἔφαθ', ἣ δ' ἐγέλασσε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη.
IL.21.434 She spoke, and the goddess of the white arms, Hera, smiled on her.

IL.21.512 σὴ μ' ἄλοχος στυφέλιξε πάτερ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,
IL.21.512 'It was your wife, Hera of the white arms, who hit me,

IL.24.55 τὸν δὲ χολωσαμένη προσέφη λευκώλενος Ἥρη:

IL.24.55 Then bitterly Hera of the white arms answered him, saying:

IL.24.723 τῇσιν δ' Ἀνδρομάχη λευκώλενος ἦρχε γόοιο
IL.24.723 Andromache of the white arms led the lamentation

OD.6.101 τῇσι δὲ Ναυσικάα λευκώλενος ἦρχετο μολπῆς.
OD.6.101 and white-armed Nausicaa led them in the sport.

OD.6.186 τὸν δ' αὖ Ναυσικάα λευκώλενος ἀντίον ἠΰδα:
OD.6.186 White-armed Nausicaa said back to him in turn:

OD.6.239 κλῦτέ μοι, ἀμφίπολοι λευκώλενοι, ὄφρα τι εἴπω.
OD.6.239 "Hear me, white-armed handmaids, so I can say something.

OD.6.251 αὐτὰρ Ναυσικάα λευκώλενος ἄλλ' ἐνόησεν:
OD.6.251 Then white-armed Nausicaa thought of other things.

OD.7.12 ἣ τρέφε Ναυσικάαν λευκώλενον ἐν μεγάροισιν.
OD.7.12 This one had nursed white-armed Nausicaa in the palace.

OD.7.233 τοῖσιν δ' Ἀρήτη λευκώλενος ἦρχετο μύθων:
OD.7.233 White-armed Arete was the first of them to speak,

OD.7.335 κέκλετο δ' Ἀρήτη λευκώλενος ἀμφιπόλοισι
OD.7.335 white-armed Arete bid her handmaids

OD.11.335 τοῖσιν δ' Ἀρήτη λευκώλενος ἦρχετο μύθων.
OD.11.335 White-armed Arete was the first of them to speak:

OD.18.198 ἦλθον δ' ἀμφίπολοι λευκώλενοι ἐκ μεγάροιο
OD.18.198 and the white-armed handmaids came out of the hall

OD.19.60 ἦλθον δὲ δμῳαὶ λευκώλενοι ἐκ μεγάροιο.
OD.19.60 White-armed women slaves came out of the hall,

OD.22.227 οἷη ὅτ' ἀμφ' Ἑλένη λευκωλένῳ εὐπατερεῖῃ,
OD.22.227 such as when, for white-armed Helen, daughter of a noble father,

15. Men's skin χρώς

IL.11.571 ἱστάμενος: τὰ δὲ δοῦρα θρασειᾶν ἀπὸ χειρῶν
IL.11.571 and Trojans, and of the spears thrown by the daring hands of the fighters
IL.11.572 ἄλλα μὲν ἐν σάκεϊ μεγάλῳ πάγεν ὄρμενα πρόσσω,
IL.11.572 some that were driven forward stuck fast in the great shield, others
IL.11.573 πολλὰ δὲ καὶ μεσσηγύ, πάρος χροῖα λευκὸν ἐπαυρεῖν,
IL.11.573 and many in the mid space before they had got to his white skin

IL.15.314 θρωσκον: πολλὰ δὲ δοῦρα θρασειάων ἀπὸ χειρῶν
 IL.15.314 jumping, while from violent hands the numerous thrown spears
 IL.15.315 ἄλλα μὲν ἐν χροῖ πῆγνυτ' ἀρηϊθῶν αἰζήων,
 IL.15.315 were driven, some deep in the bodies of quick-stirring young men,
 IL.15.316 πολλὰ δὲ καὶ μεσσηγὺ πάρος χροῖα λευκὸν ἐπαυρεῖν
 IL.15.316 while many in the space between before they had got to the white skin

16. Metal objects: Knob of tin ὀμφαλός; unfired cauldron λέβης; shield λεύκασπις

IL.11.34 ἐν δὲ οἱ ὀμφαλοὶ ἦσαν ἐείκοσι κασσιτέριοι
 IL.11.34 and set about it were twenty knobs of tin, pale-shining,
 IL.11.35 λευκοί, ἐν δὲ μέσοισιν ἔην μέλανος κυάνοιο.
 IL.11.35 and in the very centre another knob of dark cobalt.

IL.23.267 αὐτὰρ τῷ τριτάτῳ ἄπυρον κατέθηκε λέβητα
 IL.23.267 Then for the third prize he set forth a splendid unfired
 IL.23.268 καλὸν τέσσαρα μέτρα κεχανδότα λευκὸν ἔτ' αὐτῶς:
 IL.23.268 cauldron, which held four measures, with its natural gloss still upon it.

IL.22.294 Δηϊφῶβον δ' ἐκάλει λευκάσπιδα μακρὸν αὔσας:
 IL.22.294 his voice he called aloud on Deïphobos of the pale shield,
 IL.22.295 ἦτεέ μιν δόρυ μακρόν: ὃ δ' οὐ τί οἱ ἐγγύθεν ἦεν.
 IL.22.295 and asked him for a long spear, but Deïphobos was not near him

17. Two cities : κάρηνον of Titanos, Oloosson

IL.2.735 οἳ τ' ἔχον Ἀστέριον Τιτάνοιό τε λευκὰ κάρηνα,
 IL.2.735 they who held Asterion and the pale peaks of Titanos

IL.2.739 Ὀρθην Ἠλώνην τε πόλιν τ' Ὀλοοσσόνα λευκὴν,
 IL.2.739 Orthe and Elone and the white city Oloösson,

18. Ivory ἐλέφας

IL.5.583 ἡνία λεύκ' ἐλέφαντι χαμαὶ πέσον ἐν κονίῃσιν.
 IL.5.583 hands the reins pale with ivory dropped in the dust groundling.

OD.18.196 λευκοτέρην δ' ἄρα μιν θῆκε πριστοῦ ἐλέφαντος.
 OD.18.196 then made her whiter than sawn ivory.

19. Snow χιών

IL.10.437 λευκότεροι χιόνος, θείειν δ' ἀνέμοισιν ὅμοιοι:
 IL.10.437 they are whiter than snow, and their speed of foot is the winds' speed;

20. Milk γάλα

IL.4.434 μυρίαί ἐστήκασιν ἀμελγόμεναι γάλα λευκὸν
 IL.4.434 stand in their myriads waiting to be drained of their white milk

IL.5.902 ὥς δ' ὅτ' ὁπὸς γάλα λευκὸν ἐπειγόμενος συνέπηξεν
IL.5.902 As when the juice of the fig in white milk rapidly fixes

OD.9.246 αὐτίκα δ' ἥμισυ μὲν θρέψας λευκοῖο γάλακτος
OD.9.246 Soon he curdled half the white milk,

Endnotes

ⁱ “You have to create a perspective of your own, to see nature as though no one had ever seen it before.” From *A Conversation with Cézanne* by Emile Bernard, 1904, in Kendall R. ed., 1988.

ⁱⁱ The number in parentheses corresponds to the table of Appendix

ⁱⁱⁱ “Dazzling” is from Luke 9:29, “glistening” from Mark 9:3, and “white as light” from Matthew 17:2. Liz James, 2024: 103-104.

^{iv} IL.1.480; OD.2.426, 4.783, 8.54, 9.77, 10.506, 12.402, 15.291

^v IL.1.433; OD.4.781, 8.52, 11.3

^{vi} τὸν δὲ χιτῶν' ἐνόησα περὶ χροῖ σιγαλόεντα,
οἷόν τε κρομύοιο λοπὸν κατά ἰσχαλίοιο·
τῶς μὲν ἔην μαλακός, λαμπρὸς δ' ἦν ἡέλιος ὥς·

^{vii} James Diggle commentaries on Theophrastus *Characters* : e.g. Paus. 10.24.6 (the Delphians daily anoint the stone which Cronos swallowed by mistake for Zeus), Apul. Flor. 1 (among sights which detain superstitious travellers) lapis unguine delibutus. Similarly, statues: Callim., AP 5.146.1–2 (HE 1121–2), Cic. Verr. 2.4.77 (cited on §10 O 48/=96). Alexander anointed the grave stone of Achilles (Plut. Alex. 15.8). Crossroads, in many cultures, are places of superstition and ritual (Johnston 1991; cf. §14); for worship of stones at crossroads, cf. Tib. 1.1.11–12.

^{viii} μηδέ ποτ' αἰενάων ποταμῶν καλλίρροον ὕδωρ, ποσσὶ περὰν πρίν γ' εὔξη ἰδὼν ἐς καλὰ
ῥέεθρα, χεῖρας νιψάμενος πολυηράτῳ ὕδατι λευκῷ·
And do not cross on foot the fair-pouring water of ever-flowing rivers before you have prayed,
looking into the beautiful stream, and washed your hands with lovely, clear water.

^{ix} εἴ μ' ἐθέλεις πλύνειν, κεφαλῆς ἀμίαντον ἀπ' ἄκρης, αἰεὶ λευκὸν ὕδωρ ῥεύσεται ἡμετέρης
If you want to rinse me, the water will always flow unpolluted and clear from the top of my head

^x A. leukosudwich, Scholia in Homeri Odysseae α 1-309 auctiora et emendatiora, Königsberg: Hartung, 1888-1890 (repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1966): 4-27, 31-36, 47-70, 73-93, 98-120

^{xi} e.g. Heliodorus, Aethiopica VII, 20.1, ἀναγκάζεται καὶ λευκότερον διαλεχθῆναι τῷ Θεαγένει

^{xii} SCHOLIA IN HOMERUM, Scholia in Odysseam (scholia vetera). {5026.007}
W. Dindorf, Scholia Graeca in Homeri Odysseam, 2 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1855 (repr. Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1962): 1:7-402; 2:403-732.

^{xiii} IL.16.347, 23.252, 24.793; OD.1.161, 11.221, 24.72, 24.76

^{xiv} OD.19.393, 19.465, 21.219, 23.74, 24.332

^{xv} καί μιν μακροτέρην καὶ πάσσονα θῆκεν ἰδέσθαι, λευκοτέρην δ' ἄρα μιν θῆκε πριστοῦ
ἐλέφαντος.
Cf. Stanford calls attention to the epithet πριστοῦ “sawn”. Ivory is white when first cut. But yellows with age and exposure, may be implied here to woman’s beauty.

^{xvi} originally an Egyptian convention, Wallace 1927: 33.