This paper seeks to bridge some gaps between the well-known description of Nestor’s Cup in the *Iliad* and the astonishing skyphos found at Pithekoussai which is taken here to presuppose knowledge of it; the Hellenistic reception of the Cup richly documented by Athenaeus; and intermittent references to it in literature of the Roman period. Further evocations of the Cup in archaic, classical and Roman times are proposed to be discernable in the archaeological record, including a version likely made for Alexander the Great. As to what the poet of *Iliad* xi had in mind when describing the Cup, it is noted here that several elements are encountered on bronze cauldrons from the ancient Near East.

Book Eleven of the *Iliad* describes a day of intense and bitter fighting. In the course of this, Machaon, son of the healer Asklepios, is wounded in the right shoulder from an arrow shot by Paris (lines 504–507), prompting Idomeneus to urge Nestor to take him back to the Greek camp in his chariot (lines 510–515). Nestor agrees to this suggestion (lines 516–520); and, upon arrival, Eurymedon unharnesses the horses while the two men clean themselves up before entering Nestor’s dwelling (lines 617–622). The servant girl, Hekamede, brings out a special table (τράπεζαν καλὴν κυανόπεζαν ἐὕξοον: lines 628–629), on which she sets a bronze basket, an onion for mixing into the drink, and barley bread. Next she fetches a drinking vessel, δέπας, which is the point of departure for this paper. Into it, she pours Pramneian wine, grated goats’ milk cheese and white barley, thus preparing a refreshing drink (lines 630–631, 638–640).

The Cup itself is described as follows:

... δέπας περικαλλές, ὃ οἴκοθεν ἦγ’ ὁ γεραιός, χρυσείοις ἥλοισι πεπαρμένον· οὔατα δ’ αὐτοῦ τέσσαρ’ ἔσαν, δοιαὶ δὲ πελειάδες ἅμφις ἕκαστον

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χρύσειαι νεμέθοντο, δύω δ’ ὑπὸ πυθμένες ἦσαν.
ἄλλος μὲν μογέων ἀποκινήσασκε τραπέζης
πλείον ἐόν, Νέστωρ δ’ ὁ γέρων ἀμογητεί ἄειρεν.

... a beautifully wrought cup which the old man brought with him from home. It was set with golden nails, the eared handles upon it were four, and on either side there were fashioned two doves of gold, feeding, and there were double bases beneath it. Another man with great effort could lift it full from the table, But Nestor, aged as he was, lifted it without strain.

Nestor’s Cup is one of several instances of what Jasper Griffin once called “significant objects” singled out from time to time by the poet for special attention. The most famous of these is, of course, the Shield of Achilles that is described in a monumental ekphrasis lasting over a hundred lines. To borrow a term from Jan Paul Crielaard and Jonas Grethlein, these “significant objects” are, simply by virtue of being described, thereby accorded a “biography”: a life, therefore, and thence a locus for memory. It is surely not co-incidental that, of all the Greek heroes, it should be Nestor who was the owner of a special cup. His long speeches recalling the heroic feats of his youth are in many ways so much better suited to the symposium. Akin to the even more expansive autobiographical tales told by Odysseus in the palace of Alkinos, these lengthy recitations have sometimes seemed misplaced on the dusty blood-soaked battlefield of Troy. Despite the notable brevity of the description, a mere six lines and an important consideration to which we will return, the Cup of Nestor is remarkable for the degree of attention it attracted in antiquity. As Athenaeus would remark almost a thousand years after the Cup had been integrated into antiquity’s primary literary epic, ever so many people—πλεῖστοι—had had something to say about it.

Athenaeus, while describing the Cup’s Hellenistic reception, could scarcely have dreamed that in October 1954 Giorgio Buchner would find a second “Cup

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1 Il. xi 631–636. For the Greek text, see West (M) (1998 a). This translation is that of Lattimore (1951). For a commentary, see Hainsworth (1993: 291–294). For the grated cheese, see West (M) (1998 b); Ridgway (2009); compare also McGovern (2000).
3 Il. xviii 478–607.
4 Crielaard (2003); Grethlein (2008: 35–43).
5 On Nestor’s speeches, see Pedrick (1983).
6 Ath. xi 781. For text and translation, see Olson (2009).