

Economies of Memory in Greek Tragedy

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*In memory of Lucio Ceccarelli***I Introduction**

Memory is central to Greek tragedy. The earliest instance of audience reaction we are aware of, the story of the disastrous reception by the Athenians of Phrynichus' play *The Sack of Miletus*, foregrounds memory. Here is how Herodotus narrates the affair: 'The Athenians made clear their deep grief for the capture of Miletus in various ways, and in particular, when Phrynichus composed a play entitled "The Fall of Miletus" and produced it, the whole theater fell to weeping; they fined Phrynichus a thousand drachmas *for reminding them of their own evils* (ἀναμνήσαντα οἰκήρια κακά), and forbade anybody ever to make use of that play again.'¹ In discussing this play, Herodotus emphasizes tragedy's power of 'recalling', in this case sufferings that were too close for comfort to the Athenians as a community. But the fine imposed on the playwright also focuses on memory, inasmuch as it corresponds to a *damnatio memoriae*: the play was not allowed to be re-staged and left no further trace in performance history.²

Tragic plays brought events of the past onto the stage. Whether these stories came from the epic past or the more recent one, they were important to the Athenian audience and their cultural identity as a civic community.³

¹ Hdt. 6.21. On the story, see e.g. Loraux 1998: 84–6; Rosenbloom 1993, esp. 163–5 on how tragedy moved from this recalling of 'one's own sufferings' to using the sufferings of others to comment on one's own condition, thus making the more general (and fundamental) point that tragedy involves the spectator's sense of identity; Munn 2000: 22–3, 30–3; Kottman 2003, who focuses on the collective tears of the Athenians over 'their own catastrophe': 'the polis emerges here as a kind of organized remembrance', 87; Uhlig and Hunter 2017: 5–7.

² For the paradox of a cancellation that ensures a 'negative' memory, see Flower 2006: 17–23, and the Introduction to this volume, p. 24.

³ Re-performances will have functioned in different ways (see for instance the fascinating discussions by Nervegna 2014 and Hartwig 2014, the former focusing on tragedy, the latter on comedy; Uhlig and Hunter 2017, and specifically on theatre as a 'memory machine', Hanink 2017. It is worth noting that the known instances of fifth-century first performances outside Athens (*Aetnaian Women*, *Andromache*, *Archelaus*) focus on myths pertinent to the place of first performance.

These stories, repeated and represented in various contexts, from the tales told to children by their nurses to the tragic and dithyrambic performances that revolved around myths and legends, from the funeral orations over the war-dead to the monuments and paintings that adorned the city, formed part of the cultural memory shared by all Athenians; each play brought these shared memories afresh to the attention of the audience.⁴ The comic poet Antiphanes could state, in comparing comedy and tragedy, that the life of tragic poets is easy, since they can rely on existing plots, of which they only need to 'remind' (ὑπομνησαι) the audience; by contrast, comic poets must each time invent everything anew.⁵ Put differently, tragic playwrights could rely on the fact that the mention of a specific hero or place would inevitably conjure images and stories in the minds of the spectators – an important difference to comedy, which of course also operated according to a set of generic conventions but did not in the same way deliberately redeploy familiar material.

At the same time, it is crucial to emphasize that the common stock of stories on which tragedians drew in fashioning their plays formed the background against which they invented their own versions of the stories: each tragic play offered specific, subtle variations of the same set of well-known stories. Much of the interest for the spectator would have resided in remembering other versions, and wondering about the variations: meaning would arise out of the differences.⁶ We are here looking at another kind of memory: not any longer cultural memory of a shared mythical past, but specific recollection by individual spectators of earlier particular narratives and performances referring to that common and culturally shared past. Even though variation was limited by the necessity of conforming to the main lines of the traditional plot, tragedy presented the spectators with potential variation in the narrative recall and dramatic interpretation of a distant past.⁷ And some of the departures could be stark and shocking (and

⁴ Nurses' stories: Buxton 1994: 18–23, and more generally 9–16 on the plurality of voices and narrators. Funeral oration: Thomas 1989: 196–237 (the 'official tradition'). On the interface between tragedy and funeral oration (and more largely orators' speeches), see the important discussion by Hanink 2013. For a survey of the different 'carriers' of Athenian social memory, see Steinbock 2013b: 48–98.

⁵ Antiphanes F 189, 1–5 and 17–18, with Burian 1997 (and specifically 183 for the passage of Antiphanes); Taplin 2010.

⁶ That specific versions, and not a generic plot only, were remembered is clear from Aristophanic paratragedy: the parodies of Euripides' plays *Telephus* or *Palamedes*, to take only two examples, in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazousae* respectively, make sense only if we assume that the public remembered these specific plays, and not just the overall story. See Milanezi's chapter in this volume.

⁷ Aristotle *Poetics*, 1451b17–21. This does not apply to the few plays with a 'historical' subject: here, at least in the case of the first performance, the play is plotted directly against the personal, direct experience of a near past. I discuss the implications of this below.

then themselves become canonical): it makes a difference to the story of Medea whether the Corinthians or Medea herself murdered her children. Even more important to the Athenians would have been variations on myths that were part of the story of early Athens, such as the war against Eumolpos or the city's intervention in securing the burial of the Seven.⁸

Thus, while it is certainly true that tragedy relied on – and further reinforced – a common shared heritage of collective and cultural memory, tragic performances also must have conveyed a (potentially destabilizing) sense that this shared past could be presented and viewed in different ways, and that new versions, taking their place besides old ones, could potentially alter or even obliterate older variants.⁹

Furthermore, tragic plays were performed in a ritual festival context that spoke of the present, and to the present. Contemporary events, and the collective and individual memory of such events, formed the background for the understanding of what happened on stage – a process facilitated, in the specific case of Greek tragedy, by the festival context of its performance, with its multiple connections to contemporary events: the display of the tribute of the allies, the parade of the children of the Athenians who had died in war, the presence of the generals, the proclamation of honours for benefactors.¹⁰ As a result, tragic performances in Athens had the potential to play simultaneously on multiple 'memorial' registers: on a shared memory central to the common identity of the community of spectators, whether cultural or collective, whether concerning the mythical or the recent past;¹¹ and on the specific remembrance of previous performances, which brought with itself an awareness of the fact that cultural memories (the memories of the mythical past) might be presented and shaped in different ways – an awareness that might further have led to questions as to whether also collective memory of recent events might be thus (re)shaped.

⁸ Variations on the Medea story: see Dunn 2000: 15–16, who emphasizes the pointed way in which Euripides alludes to other versions; Mastronarde 2002: 44–53; war against Eumolpos and burial of the Seven: Hanink 2013; Steinbock 2013b: 155–210; and below.

⁹ One might compare the development that led to Hecataeus' statement about the diversity, and consequently ridiculousness, of Greek myths, in the proem to his *Genealogies* (*FGrHist* I F 1): cf. Fowler 2001.

¹⁰ Goldhill 1987 and 2000; Rhodes 2003; Steinbock 2013b: 59–60. List and discussion of the 'preplay' events in Pickard-Cambridge 1988: 58–63; for the proclamation of honours at the moment of the tragic contest, see Wilson 2009; Ceccarelli 2010.

¹¹ I here follow Chaniotis 2009: 255–9 in distinguishing between cultural and collective memory: the first refers to shared memories of a past time, mythical, or simply going back in time beyond the experience of the living community; the second, to shared memories of something that is still within the experience of the community.

The plays themselves are thus interventions in social memory, as Ruth Scodel has brilliantly shown for the *Eumenides*.¹² But this tension between memory and construction (or oblivion) of the past plays itself out also on stage: memory and remembrance, and their counterpart, oblivion, are often discussed and problematized within the plays themselves. Individuals, collectivities and divinities (forces beyond the control of man) remember or forget in various ways.¹³

2 Marked and Unmarked Remembering, by Individuals and Groups

Memories appear on stage most obviously and frequently in an unmarked way, when characters (as individuals, or as a chorus) relate past events, whether having heard about them from the elders of the community or having witnessed the events in person, as in messenger reports. Thus, the chorus of Theban women remember the story of the house of Laios, and the chorus of old men in Argos remember the departure of the Atreidai for Troy.¹⁴ Similarly, the chorus of old Persians at the opening of Aeschylus' *Persians* remember those who left, listing them in a catalogue, and continue with a description of the passing of the Hellespont (something the Persian Elders may or may not have seen themselves), as the memory of the warriors who left merges with vague predictions and fears about the future.¹⁵ In such reminiscences there is often a certain indeterminacy, which reflects the fact that these may be mediated, as well as collective, memories; in line with the indeterminacy of these memories, the text usually does not foreground memory itself as a mental faculty.

If the text of a choral ode explicitly reflects on memory, through the use of terms of remembering or oblivion for instance, it does so for a

¹² Scodel 2008: 119, 133–8.

¹³ This manipulation of memory often takes place with reference to writing, whether metaphorical or real: besides Scodel 2008, see Agócs' chapter in this volume; Ceccarelli 2013: 66–87, 187–91, 257–63. For a discussion of memory in tragedy, organized according to the headings of 'human memory', 'divine memory' and 'conscience of destiny', see Simondon 1982: 193–256. Schlesier 2010 focuses on memories associated with Dionysos; Popescu 2014 offers a brief survey.

¹⁴ Respectively, Aesch. *Sept.* 766–91; Aesch. *Ag.* 40–83 and 104–257. In the latter passage, the chorus points out that the source of their authority is their age (104–6), which inspires them with the power of singing persuasively; it is thus not 'autoptic' vision (which they could also have claimed) that gives them authority. Cf. Fraenkel 1950 II 59–65, who at 63–4 proposes a comparison with Eur. *Her.* 678 ἔτι τοι γέρων ἀοιδὸς κελαδῶ Μναμοσύναν, 'Old singer that I am, I sing the praise of Mnemosyne'.

¹⁵ Aesch. *Pers.* 1–64 and 65–139. The repetition of πτόθος, at 133 and 138, is worth noting: the Elders remember, and because they remember they miss the departed warriors.

particular reason, as in the chorus of the *Agamemnon*. In this play memory appears early on as one of the driving forces of the plot, but not in the words of the chorus. Rather, the chorus quotes someone else – the seer Calchas: ‘for there awaits, to arise hereafter, a fearsome, guileful keeper of the house, a Wrath that remembers and will avenge a child’ (μίμνει ... μνάμων Μῆνις τεκνόποιος).¹⁶ Here, it is the very ability of the chorus to remember the words of Calchas (rather than simply summarize them) that gives the theme of the ‘remembering wrath’ such strength: not only does the chorus remember words about remembering (without focusing on this fact), in a ‘box in the box’ effect that is significant, not least from an illocutionary point of view; it is also the verbatim recall (as opposed to a vague recollection) of the seer’s utterance that generates the desired atmosphere of preordained doom.¹⁷

When specific individuals (as opposed to the chorus) remember, such as messengers who report on events that happened offstage, the assumption seems to be that their memory is reliable;¹⁸ and in most such cases, no vocabulary specific to memory and remembrance, or conversely forgetting, is used. When references to remembering appear, they are mostly self-reflections by the individual narrating, meant to explicate his personal relationship to the narrative. A good example of this pointed reference to remembering occurs in Aeschylus’ *Persians*. The messenger opens his narrative of the events at Salamis by stressing that his account is based on what he saw, and not on the reports of others (266); he continues by emphasizing the pain that recalling the events causes him (285: φεῦ, τῶν Ἀθηναίων ὡς στένω μεμνημένος). At this point the chorus intervenes, encouraging him (and, by extension, everyone) to remember Athens (μεμνησθαί τοι πάρα) and, more specifically, how many Persian women have lost their husbands.¹⁹ Following these words and those of the queen,

¹⁶ Aesch. *Ag.* 155, a very marked alliteration emphasizing the connection (possibly also etymological: cf. Mueller 1996: 177–95) between persistent memory and wrath/vengeance/retribution. On this prophecy, see Goldhill 2004: 74–8. Zeitlin and Goldhill both emphasize how the memory of the sacrifice of Iphigenia pervades the play, both as cause of its development, and as a model for the other murders.

¹⁷ Precision here implies reliability. Like prophecy, curses and oaths derive much of their power from being performed with precision, in the appropriate performative context: see Fletcher 2012.

¹⁸ On messenger speeches in tragedy, cf. Barrett 2002; for cases that go against the norm (emphasizing a self-reflexive element and attention to memory), see 194–8, and my discussion below. Scodel 2008 offers an insightful discussion of the herald’s report in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, which reveals it as a self-conscious attempt at controlling memory.

¹⁹ On ‘memory’ as one of the important themes of *Persians*, see Hall 1996: 1, who does however not elaborate. Herodotus narrates that after the destruction of Sardis, Darius asked Zeus to grant him vengeance over the Athenians, and charged a servant to repeat three times, whenever dinner was served, ‘Master, remember the Athenians’ (δέσποτα, μέμνεο τῶν Ἀθηναίων, Hdt. 5.105.2), a

the messenger indeed launches into an enumeration of the noble Persians who died, an enumeration which he closes again with a 'selective memory' statement: 'That much I mention about the commanders (τοσόνδε ταγῶν νῦν ὑπεμνήσθην πέρι, 329); but of our many evil losses I report but few.'²⁰ In his second, extended three-part narrative (353–432, 447–71, and 480–514), a narrative which answers direct requests for information by the queen, the messenger simply recounts events; he again concludes with a self-reflexive statement, stating that what has been told is true (ταῦτ' ἔστ' ἀληθῆ), but that he has omitted many of the evils inflicted by the god upon the Persians (513–14). The references to recollection made by the messenger emphasize the authority and correctness of the account given, highlight the effect of remembering on himself, and underscore the distance between his narrative (based on his memory of the events) and the events themselves. What the audiences (internal and external) hear is an explicitly selective account, which therefore leaves open to contemporaries and eyewitnesses (the external audience) the possibility to activate their own memories of the events to fill in the gaps.

This is how most messenger reports in tragedy function; but there are instances where a wedge presents itself, explicitly, between the events and their recalling and retelling by the messenger. This is what happens for instance at the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The messenger who informs the chorus of Jocasta's death and Oedipus' own blinding begins by stating that the chorus (and the spectators) will be spared the worst of the suffering, because they do not see the events (literally, 'because the spectacle is absent', ἡ γὰρ ὄψις οὐ πάρα, 1238); 'but equally, so far as my memory serves (ὅσον γε κὰν ἔμοι μνήμης ἔνι, 1239), you will learn the sufferings of that unhappy woman'. Memory and the words of the messenger are what allows a knowledge of the events; but at the same time, the messenger's words make clear how much the events are mediated by his memory, and so how selective his report will, by necessity, be.²¹

story that is referred back to in the sixth book, as a prelude to Marathon: 'The Persian was going about his own business, for his servant was constantly reminding him to remember the Athenians' (ἀναμνησκοντός τε αἰεὶ τοῦ θεράποντος μεμνησθαί μιν τῶν Ἀθηναίων, Hdt. 6. 94). We may have in this story an early instance of reception of the 'memory theme' of the *Persians*.

²⁰ Of course the ultimate model for any report in which the messenger, on the verge of starting on a catalogue, states that he will mention 'but a few' is the epic singer's invocation to the Muses, Hom. *Il.* 2.484–93.

²¹ Barrett 2002: 196–7 points out that 'in emphasizing his own mediating function in the constitution of his narrative, the *exangelos* marks his report as selective, flawed, and unconventional'. See also Segal 1995: 156: 'The emphasis on memory is striking when one considers how much memory in the play has distorted the recollection of the past. Jocasta, Oedipus, and the Old Herdsman have all shown highly selective memories' (1057, 1131; cf. 870–1).

Most of the remaining explicit references to memory involve requests to remember some past events, thus setting up the space for a narrative development, or orders to bear in mind instructions in the future.²² But designating something in the past as explicitly ‘worthy of memory’ may also have the pointed, specific purpose to remove it from the dynamics of memorial flux. This happens to be the case when some form of temporally deferred reciprocity is at stake. For if a debt for services rendered is not paid off instantly, the two parties inevitably rely on some kind of memory of the initially extended favour. A system of either interpersonal or generalized reciprocities relies for its proper functioning not just on trust, accountability and a commitment to a sense of distributive justice, but also on a remembrance of things past, which underwrites both the ‘credit’ of the benefactor, who (we may assume) is strongly invested in a precise and authentic recollection of his deeds, and the ‘debt’ of the beneficiary, who may (for obvious reasons) be less inclined to keep an accurate account of services received fresh and foremost in mind. The maintenance – or, conversely, unavailability – of a consensual memory of specific events thus has significant socio-political implications, and in what follows I want to explore with reference to a particularly striking example each from Sophocles and Euripides what can happen when the latent tension between the investment in reliable remembrance and the forces of flux or indeed oblivion explodes on stage. I will conclude by briefly mapping tragedy’s negotiation of this issue (and the trajectory that can arguably be traced from Sophocles to Euripides) against more general developments in fifth-century Athenian culture.

3 Memory and Failed Reciprocities in Sophocles’ *Ajax*

The play opens with a conversation between Odysseus and Athena, concerning very recent events: the identity of the person who has slaughtered the cattle of the Achaean army and the reason why this has been done. What has happened is worked out without any explicit references to memory. This turns out to be programmatic: throughout the play, there is a sharp division between Ajax and his circle on the one hand and the Argive commanders on the other, a division only marginally mediated by

²² Remembrance as trigger for action: much of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* functions in this way. Instructions: for instance Aesch. *Cho.* 680–2, the (invented) instructions of Strophios to Orestes, delivered by Orestes himself: ‘Stranger, since in any case you are bound for Argos, keep my message in mind most faithfully (πανδίκως μεμνημένος) and tell his parents Orestes is dead.’ Remembrance of a painful past: Soph. *Philo.* 1169. See Simondon 1982, *passim*.

Odysseus at the end; and, as it turns out, most references to the past (and pointedly, all references to memory except one) are made by Ajax and his circle. Thus, when Ajax comes to himself and realises what he has done, he obsessively contrasts his recent actions with his earlier deeds during the war and those of his father, also at Troy; Tecmessa similarly contrasts Ajax's present situation with the past.²³ In contrast to this investment in the past, their adversaries, the Atreidae, seem to live entirely in the present – a present in which, Ajax states, there is no place left for him.

The first to play the memory card is Tecmessa. In her attempt to convince Ajax that death is not the only choice left to him, she retells her own story, mentions Ajax's father, mother and young son, and eventually comes back to herself and her utter dependence on Ajax (485–524).²⁴ At this point, at the end of her speech, she explicitly foregrounds remembrance, linking it to reciprocity (*charis*) and nobility (*eugeneia*):

ἀλλ' ἴσχε κάμοῦ μνήστιν· ἀνδρί τοι χρεῶν
μνήμην προσεῖναι, τερπνὸν εἶ τί που πάθοι.
χάρις χάριν γάρ ἐστιν ἡ τίκτουσ' ἀεί-
θτου δ' ἀπορρεῖ μνήστις εὖ πεπονθότος,
οὐκ ἄν γένοιτ' ἔθ' οὗτος εὐγενῆς ἀνὴρ.

Think of me also; a man should keep it in his memory, should some pleasure come his way; for it is always a kindness that begets a kindness; and if a man allows the memory of a kindness to slip away, he can no longer be accounted a noble man. (vv. 520–4)

Tecmessa's speech here is highly wrought – and places memory (and reciprocities dependent on memory) left, right and centre. The rare term *mnēstis* appears twice, in the same position, yet with antithetical force, at the beginning and at the end of Tecmessa's appeal:²⁵ in 520, she

²³ At vv. 364–6, 372–6, 405–7, 414–17, Ajax contrasts the past and present situation; in his first great speech, vv. 430–80, he adds the comparison with his own father's deeds. Tecmessa emphasizes the changed behaviour of Ajax (he cries, something he would not have done before: 317–22; he speaks words that in time past he would never have spoken, 410–11). For the *Ajax*, I follow the text and translation (with occasional modification) of Lloyd-Jones in the Loeb Classical Library.

²⁴ In a scene and with words that are closely modelled on the encounter and conversation between Hector and Andromache in *Iliad* 6, and that thus set up Ajax as an anti-Hector (and eventually an anti-Achilles): splendid discussion in Winnington-Ingram 1980: 15–19.

²⁵ μνήστις appears in one of Odysseus' deceitful speeches, in a formulation typical of the Homeric 'behavioural memory', as the hero asserts that 'we did not have any thought of supper' (οὐδέ τις ἡμῖν δόρπου μνήστις ἔη, *Od.* 13.280); in Alcman, fr. 118 *PMGF*/175 Calame (a fragment deprived of context: ἐστι παρέντων μνάστιν † ἐπιθέσθαι, 'we may (preserve?) the memory of those who were present'); in Simonides' epigram for the Fallen at the Thermopylae (531 *PMG*); in Herodotus 7.158 (in Gelon's speech, in a context of disregarded reciprocity); note also Soph. *Trach.* 108: εὐμναστον

admonishes Ajax to keep his *mnēstis* of her intact; in 523, she reflects on the dire consequences that ensue for someone unwilling or unable to cultivate *mnēstis* – and specifically *mnēstis* of services received – properly. The repetition and emphatic positioning ensure that the audience will recall this particular passage when the noun recurs later on in the play. The two uses of *mnēstis* frame references to memory (521: μνήμην) and gratitude (522, in pointed polyptoton: χάρις χάρις), which, exactly like memory, creates links between people.²⁶ This is an appeal particularly appropriate to someone like Ajax, who is angry at what he perceives to be the ingratitude of the Greeks.²⁷

Furthermore, the passage itself is closely linked to other parts of the play, by both content and terminological allusions. Tecmessa is here deftly reusing what had been Ajax's own conclusion: just a few verses earlier, after examining his options, Ajax had concluded that 'a noble man can only either live with honour or die a honourable death' (479–80: ἀλλ' ἢ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι | τὸν εὐγενῆ χροί). Tecmessa picks up on the notion of 'noble man' (εὐγενῆς ἀνὴρ) but tries to redefine it: for her, a noble man is someone implicated in a network of reciprocities who does not allow the memory of a received kindness to slip away. The play itself enacts such a network of reciprocities through allusive echoes between this passage and other parts of the play. The chorus had introduced Tecmessa's speech by emphasizing the importance of listening to friends (δὸς ἀνδράσι φίλοις | γνώμης κρατῆσαι, 'allow your friends to rule your judgment', vv. 483–4). But the emphasis on the bonds of φιλία, friendship, between the members of Ajax's circle (the chorus, Tecmessa, Teucer and Eurysaces, Ajax himself, who does initially address the chorus as φίλοι, although in the course of the play Ajax retires more and more into himself) runs throughout the play;²⁸ it is highlighted *e contrario* by Ajax's liminal death in a secluded space, alone.

ἀνδρὸς δεῖμα. After the fifth century, it is found mostly in epic poetry (four times in Apollonius Rhodius, twice in Nicander, once in Quintus of Smyrne, seventeen times in Nonnius); once in Theocritus 28.23; and in some poems of the *Anthologia Graeca*.

²⁶ The fact that the *charis* alluded to by Tecmessa here has an 'erotic edge' (Finglass 2011: 289, with parallels) does not make her reflection less universal.

²⁷ The connection between *charis* and memory is traditional, and already attested in Hesiod, *Theog.* 503 (ἀπειμνήσαντο χάριν εὐεργεσιδίων) and Theognis 101–12: see Finglass 2011: 288, with further references, and the Introduction to this volume, pp. 30–2. Within Sophocles' plays, one may compare *OC* 779; extensive discussion in Simondon 1982: 193–222, who notes how the verb ἀπορρεῖ, literally 'flows away', conveys the image of time passing.

²⁸ The contrast between friends and enemies (φίλος vs ἐχθρός) and the frequent reference to the relationship between father and sons are important themes of the play (see Finglass 2011: 55–6). They can both be subsumed in the larger topic of *charis*, reciprocity. The notion is mooted by the chorus

Tecmessa's words work only in part: they do not suffice to deter Ajax from his chosen path, but they remind him of his closest kin: he calls for his son, and while holding him he entrusts him to the protection of his own brother Teucer and of the warriors that accompanied him to Troy from Salamis. Even while he proposes to sever the bonds that connected him to his family (χωρίς ὄντ' ἔμοῦ, 'even though you are without me', 561), Ajax ensures that the chorus will relay his command to Teucer, to bring the boy home, to their father Telamon and Ajax's mother Eriboea, in what he explicitly calls a 'charge of gratitude' that he lays on them (κοινήν ... χάριν, 566).²⁹ This reflection on the bonds created by friendship informs also the following words by the chorus: faced with Ajax's determination, the chorus lament the hero's sufferings, but also the further sufferings that he will cause, emphasizing first the grief that Ajax's madness is giving 'his friends' (φίλοις, 615), and then the grief it will cause his mother and father (624–35). Between the mention of their own grief and that of the parents, the chorus manage to squeeze in a pointed remark on those who are mindless of Ajax's services, the Atreidai:

the deeds of greatest valour done earlier by his hands have been let drop, having won no friendship from men incapable of friendship (τὰ πρὶν δ' ἔργα χεροῖν | μεγίστας ἀρετᾶς | ἄφιλα παρ' ἀφίλοις ἔπεσ' ἔπεσε, 616–19).³⁰

The second time memory features prominently and explicitly in the play is in the chorus' song after Ajax's second speech, the deceitful speech in which the hero pretends to reconsider. In this speech, Ajax pretends to have changed his views, in light of the fact that nothing is beyond expectation in the long and countless time:

I have lately (ἀρτίως) learned that our enemy (ἔχθρὸς) must be hated as one who will sometime become a friend (ὡς καὶ φιλήσων αὖθις), and in helping a friend (φίλον) I shall aim to assist him as one assists a man who will not remain a friend forever (ὡς αἰὲν οὐ μενοῦντα), since for most mortals the harbour of friendship cannot be trusted (ἄπιστός ἔσθ' ἑταιρείας λιμῆν). (678–83).

early on, in their statement that 'little men are best supported by the great, and the great by smaller men' (vv. 160–1). In-depth treatment of φιλία and enmity in the *Ajax* in Blundell 1989: 60–105.

²⁹ Indeed, when Teucer gives orders for the rescue of Eurysaces, at vv. 990–1, the chorus will remember Ajax's request, just as it is being taken care of.

³⁰ Finglass 2011: 320 draws attention to the polyptoton ἄφιλα παρ' ἀφίλοις, which recalls (and might have done so for the audience) an earlier one by Tecmessa, also emphasizing commonality and reciprocity, at 265–7: 'would you prefer, if given a choice, to grieve your friends (φίλους) but enjoy happiness yourself, or to join in sorrow with your companions (κοινὸς ἐν κοινῶσι λυπέσθαι)?'.

Ajax here presents traditional notions on the changeability of life; the chorus is overjoyed at this sudden change of attitude, a change that clashes with all they (and tradition) knew about the hero.³¹ And so, the chorus sings,

Now it is my wish to dance! ... Ah, now once more, now, o Zeus, can the bright light of day shine upon the swift ships that glide over the sea, now that Ajax once more forgets his pain (ὄτ'Αἴας λαθίπρονος πάλιν), and has fulfilled the ordinances of the gods with all their sacrifices, doing them reverence with all obedience. All things are withered by mighty time (πανθ'ὁ μέγας χρόνος μαραινει); and I would say that nothing was unpredictable, now that Ajax, beyond our hopes, has repented (μετανεγνώσθη) of his anger against the son of Atreus and his great quarrel. (701–18)

The perceived change in Ajax's disposition is emphasized in multiple ways: by the use of the rare term λαθίπρονος, joined with πάλιν (once again: but here, it means that Ajax is back to what he was before); by the declaration that Ajax has repented; and possibly by the fact that the chorus ends their song with a reference to all-consuming time, the very topic with which Ajax had opened his own speech (ἄπανθ' ὁ μακρὸς κἀναριθμητὸς χρόνος | φύει τ'ἄδηλα καὶ φανέντα κρύπτεται, 645–6), reinforcing the message of fluidity and changeability that seems to pervade this part of the play.³²

As it turns out, Ajax has not forgotten – the first inkling of the trouble to come emerges in the following scene, which involves the arrival of a messenger, announcing the arrival of Teucer, and the chorus. When he hears that Ajax has left, the messenger, answering to the chorus, reports the words exchanged between Teucer and Calchas. This is a case of normal, unmarked recalling, where the messenger derives his authority from the fact that he was present at the scene, as in numerous messenger speeches.³³ And yet, this normal recalling shifts very quickly

³¹ In *Odyssey* II. 543–6 Ajax is described as staying alone, full of wrath, even in Hades, for having lost the contest for the weapons of Hector. For parallels to the image of friendship as a harbour, see Finglass 2011: 339 (Theognis 113–14 is particularly relevant here).

³² The mention of the grievous anger of the goddess (μῆνιν βαρεῖαν, 656), and even more Ajax's decision to bury Hector's sword in the ground so that no one may ever see it again (657–63) are however pointers in the other direction. Knox 1961: 3–4 and n. 11 highlights the similarities between Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Oedipus at Colonus* for what concerns the status of men, gods and the passing of time. Memory and remembrance indeed play a central role in that play as well. To the passages listed by Knox, one can add the striking way in which Theseus discusses Oedipus' request of being buried in Athens: 'You ask for life's last service; but for all between you have no memory, or no care' (τὰ δ' ἐν μέσῳ ἢ λήστικιν ἴσχεις ἢ δι' οὐδενὸς ποιῆ, Soph. *OC* 583–4); in his further reply, Theseus will point out that Oedipus asks for a *charis*.

³³ v. 748: τοσοῦτον οἶδα καὶ παρῶν ἐνέτυχον. Cf. Barrett (2002) 74–5, and discussion above.

into something else, when, through the words of Calchas, the messenger reports words pronounced by Ajax even before leaving for Troy, and then again when at Troy – arrogant words, the cause of his downfall, twice cited verbatim – but words that Calchas himself cannot have heard by being present. Indeed, the messenger quickly restates that the authority for this part rests with Calchas ('so much the prophet said', 780). The information that this is the critical day, and that if Ajax is kept indoors he may survive, comes, however, too late: the next part of the drama focuses on Ajax's suicide on a solitary beach, and on the search by Tecmessa and the chorus.

At this point the members of Ajax's circle – Tecmessa, the chorus, Teucer – cannot but realize that Ajax has voided his obligations towards them. Tecmessa says so explicitly, using the same term she had employed in her appeal, *χάρις*:

ἔγνωκα γὰρ δὴ φῶτός ἠπατημένη
καὶ τῆς παλαιᾶς χάριτος ἐκβεβλημένη

For I see that he has deceived me and cast me out from
the favour (*charis*) I once enjoyed. (807–8)

As for the chorus, they feel that Ajax's death is their own: 'Alas my lord, you have killed me your fellow sailor!' (901–2);³⁴ and yet they can spare a thought for Tecmessa (903: 'O poor lady!'). Finally, although Teucer laments his own fate at length, now that Ajax is no more, he too feels that he failed to help his brother (992–1039). Yet interestingly, they all maintain alive their own obligations towards him: and this entails remembering, in various ways. Tecmessa remembers him almost 'inadvertently', when at 904, in dialogue with the chorus, she says:

ὡς ὧδε τοῦδ' ἔχοντος αἰάζειν πάρα.

it is so with him, and we can only lament.

She is in fact here quoting Ajax's own words: the hero had opened his first speech with a reflection on his name:

αἰᾶ· τίς ἂν ποτ' ᾤεθ' ὧδ' ἐπώνυμον
τοῦμόν ξυνοίσειν ὄνομα τοῖς ἐμοῖς κακοῖς;
νῦν γὰρ πάρεστι καὶ δις αἰάζειν ἐμοί

³⁴ Finglass 2011: 401 on the particular bond shared by the chorus and Ajax as sailors, a bond mentioned already in 348–9.

Alas! Who ever would have thought that my name would come to harmonise with my sorrows? For now I can say 'Alas' a second time ... (v. 430–2)

After the first *agon* between Menelaus and Teucer, the chorus worry over the boy, and about the body of Ajax; they dwell on a physical – if bleak – memorial,³⁵ with words recalling another memorial:

Come as quickly as you can, Teucer, hasten to find a hollow trench for this man, where he shall occupy the dank tomb, a memorial forever for mortals (σπεῦσον κοίλην κάπετον τιν' ἰδεῖν | τῷδ', ἔνθα βροτοῖς τὸν ἀείμνηστον | τάφον εὐρώεντα καθέξει, 1164–7).

The phrase 'hollow trench' used here for the tomb of Ajax recalls the deposition of Hector's bones in a tomb in the *Iliad* (ἔς κοίλην κάπετον θέσαν, Hom. *Il.* 24.797). This allusion would have been all the more easy to perceive, as a connection between the two heroes appears more than once in the play: they are linked by Hector's sword, on which Ajax kills himself. Thus, 'the Chorus' hope that Ajax's grave will be an "always-remembered tomb" (ἀείμνηστος τάφος, 1166–7) is enacted by the play itself, just as the *Iliad* had constructed an "always-remembered tomb" for Hector'.³⁶

More poignantly, the idea of gratitude being either honoured in memory or slipping away into oblivion reappears with force in the speech that Teucer delivers to rebut Agamemnon's insults and his attempt to deny Ajax a proper burial:

Alas, how quickly gratitude to the dead flows away (χάρις διαρρεῖ) from men and is found to have turned to betrayal, if this man no longer, even for a brief mention, remembers you (ἔτ' ἴσχει μνηστικῶν),³⁷ Ajax, even though it was for his sake you toiled so often in battle, offering your own life to the spear! No, your assistance is dead and gone, all flung aside (ἐρριμμένα)! Fool and foolish talker, do you no longer remember anything (οὐ μνημονεύεις οὐκέτ' οὐδέεν) of the time when you were trapped inside your defences ... (Soph. *Ai.* 1269–73)

³⁵ Henrichs 1993: 170 comments: 'the tomb of Ajax is both ἀείμνηστος (1166) and εὐρώεις (1167), a place where memory (μνήμη) coexists precariously with mold (εὐρώς)'. This is the turning point towards the construction of a hero cult for Ajax.

³⁶ Easterling 1988: 96–7; Barker 2009: 314, who points out that starting from this moment (once deprived of Ajax) the chorus begins to actively take charge. On the tomb of Ajax and the aetiology of cult, which looks into the future from the past perspective of the tragic choruses, see Henrichs 1993.

³⁷ Διαρρεῖ here corresponds to ἀπορρεῖ in Tecmessa's earlier speech (952–3); here as earlier in Tecmessa's speech, μνηστικῶν ἴσχειν implies a positive recollection.

Teucer proceeds to remind Agamemnon of the help Ajax gave the Achaeans, when the Trojans led by Hector were already at the ships, and of the time when Ajax met Hector in duel – but it is only the arrival of Odysseus that will resolve the conflict: Agamemnon seems to hold no memory of what (the Homeric) Ajax has done for him. Any notion of (deferred) reciprocity between Ajax and the sons of Atreus breaks down since the latter refuse to acknowledge – or have simply become oblivious to – the services previously rendered by the former. The Atreidae seem to possess only short-term memory, a pragmatic sort of memory, as the only explicit reference to memory they make in all of the play shows:

Ο. παῦσαι: κρατεῖς τοι τῶν φίλων νικώμενος.
 Α. μέμνησ' ὅποιῳ φωτὶ τὴν χάριν δίδως.

Od. Enough! You win, when you give in to your friends.
Ag. Remember to what sort of man you show this kindness!
 (Soph. *Ai.* 1353–54)

In Agamemnon's view, Ajax has failed to show the *charis* which would merit *charis* in return. But Odysseus, who does remember, and who realises the value of friendship, can juxtapose the past and the present: 'This man was an enemy, but he was once noble' (ὄδ' ἐχθρὸς ἀνὴρ, ἀλλὰ γενναῖός ποτ' ἦν, 1356). Ultimately, Odysseus prevails, even if he does not convince Agamemnon; he also fails to persuade Teucer that it is appropriate to let him help bury Ajax: as Teucer points out, this might displease the dead.³⁸ The *philoï* of Ajax take up positions close to those that were Ajax's; and to counterbalance the failure of reciprocal fairness in the human sphere, Teucer invests in the superior memory of the gods, more specifically the divinities responsible for retributive justice (Soph. *Ai.* 1389–92, Teucer speaking):

For that, may the father who is first on Olympus and the unforgetting Erinys (μνήμων τ' Ἐρινύς) and Justice who accomplishes her ends (*telesphoros*) destroy them [the Atridae] cruelly, as they are cruel, they who wished to cast this man out outrageously in unworthy fashion.

Sophocles' meditation on the failure of memory in the *Ajax*, which entailed a failure of reciprocity grounded in gratitude (*charis*), and

³⁸ An evident pointer to the epic tradition, specifically to the encounter between Odysseus and Ajax in Hades, narrated in *Od.* 11. 543–64: Odysseus asks whether Ajax won't forgive him even in death (οὐκ ἄρ' ἔμελλες | οὐδὲ θανὼν λήσεσθαι ἐμοὶ χόλου εἴνεκα τευχέων); the hero does not answer and goes his way. Indeed, Teucer says, Ajax's 'black blood' (but the Greek has *μένος*, 1413, a term that is linked with the root *μην* – of memory: see the Introduction, p. 4) continues to flow.

ultimately of justice, provides a useful foil for how the same cluster of ideas gets negotiated in Euripides' *Suppliants*.

4 Euripides on How to Ensure Proper Remembrance of Things Past

One of the most striking reflections on collective memory and its strengths and values appears in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, a play probably performed in the 420s.³⁹ The scene is set at Eleusis: the mothers of the Argive warriors who died attacking Thebes have come to Athens, with their king Adrastus, to ask Theseus' help in retrieving the bodies of their sons, which the Thebans refuse to give back for burial.⁴⁰ Theseus eventually agrees to their request, even though this implies a battle against the Thebans, and recovers the bodies. With this, the main strand of the action is over, and the rest of the play focuses on the performance of the funeral rites: the burning of the bodies, the funeral speech of Adrastus (857–917), and the lamentations of the Argive wives, mothers and children. With the end of the lamentations (1164), the action appears to have come to an end and the play is seemingly over – but for a surprising, fascinating coda. Theseus reappears on stage and addresses Adrastus and the Argive women; his words make clear that what he is going to say concerns the two cities, Athens and Argos.⁴¹ After stating that he and the city are giving

³⁹ Collard 2007. The play has been extensively discussed; the most important studies are listed in Steinbock 2013b: 155–6 n. 1, to which should be added at least Kavoulaki 2008, Storey 2008, Hanink 2013, Wohl 2015: 89–109. For *Suppliant Women* I follow the text and translation (with occasional modification) of D. Kovacs in the Loeb Classical Library.

⁴⁰ Whether or not the play alludes to the events that followed the Athenian defeat at Delion in 424 BC, as narrated by Thucydides, is disputed: see e.g. Bowie 1997 (for) and Zuntz 1955: 4 (against), with Collard 2007. In any case it was a burning contemporary issue for a play performed in wartime. Hanink 2013 and Steinbock 2013b: 155–210 compare the versions of the story in Aeschylus' *Eleusinians* (which featured a peaceful, diplomatic resolution of the issue), Euripides' *Suppliant Women* (in which the Athenians accepted to fight the Thebans to retrieve the bodies of the Argives), and the speeches of the orators (funeral orations, but also Isocrates), showing how each chose to draw on a version appropriate to the actual historical context. For an overall interpretation of the play not as an encomium of Athens, but rather as a play concerned with the forging of correct relations between Greek communities (also an issue of burning actuality in the Athenian empire), see Kavoulaki 2008. Athens, Argos and Thebes are the *poleis* primarily involved in the play, but the chance of a side dig at other communities is not passed over: Adrastus pointedly asks for Theseus' help, because 'Sparta is savage and devious in its ways, and the other states are small and weak'; only Athens can help (Eur. *Suppl.* 186–9).

⁴¹ See Collard 1975: nn. 1165–8, as well as Morwood 2007: 234 and Wohl 2015: 106, for the importance at v. 1165 of the word 'race' (γυναικες Ἀργεῖαι γένος): this is no longer a personal, humanitarian affair, but a political one; the Argive orphans are reflected in the orphans sitting in the theatre, the Argive mothers in the Athenian citizens.

back to the Argives the bones of the Seven as a present (δωρούμεθα), he adds (1169–75):

ὑμᾶς δὲ τῶνδε χρή χάριν μεμνημένους
 σώζειν, ὄρωντας ὦν ἐκύρσατ' ἐξ ἑμοῦ,
 παισὶν θ' ὑπείπειν τοῦσδε τοὺς αὐτοὺς λόγους,
 τιμᾶν πόλιν τήνδ', ἐκ τέκνων ἀεὶ τέκνοις
 μνήμην παραγγέλλοντας ὦν ἐκύρσατε.
 Ζεὺς δὲ ξυνίστωρ οἶ τ' ἐν οὐρανῷ θεοὶ
 οἴων ὑφ' ἡμῶν στείχετ' ἡξιωμένοι.

You must remember these things and maintain your gratitude for them, as you look upon what you have won from me, and you must suggest to these boys here these very words, to honour this city, always handing down from one generation of children to another the memory of what you have won. And let Zeus and the gods in heaven be witnesses of what treatment you have been thought worthy by us as you go on your way.

Theseus here calls for the establishment of an oral tradition as a means of preserving the expected gratitude (and ensuing obligations) or, to use an economic idiom, the credit and debt that link benefactor and beneficiary: the mothers are to hand down the memory of the good deeds of Athens to their children, and the children in turn will take care to pass this memory on to the next generation. Theseus is extremely precise in his instructions: the mothers and children must repeat a set of specific words, the very words pronounced by Theseus, 'to honour this *polis*': the demonstrative τήνδε would have had its full effect on stage; if projected into the future, in the words of the mothers and children as they pass them on, it would have the effect of making the past present over and over again. Theseus closes his instruction by invoking the gods as witnesses (all-seeing, from their position in the sky, and συνίστωρες): they are to be his only guarantee.

Adrastos agrees, and in his answer echoes some of the very terms used by Theseus:⁴²

Θησεῦ, ξύνισμεν πάνθ' ὅσ' Ἀργεῖαν χθόνα
 δέδρακας ἔσθλα δεομένην εὐεργετῶν,
 χάριν τ' ἀγήρων ἔξομεν: γενναῖα γὰρ
 παθόντες ὑμᾶς ἀντιδρᾶν ὀφείλομεν.

⁴² 1176: ξύνισμεν, cf. 1174: ξυνίστωρ '(Zeus) witness'; 1178: χάριν τ' ἀγήρων ἔξομεν = 1169: χάριν.

Theseus, we are conscious of all the good you have done to the land of Argos when it needed a benefactor, and our gratitude will never grow old. Since we have received such noble treatment, we must treat you nobly in turn. (1176–9)

Everything seems in order, and the Argives are already leaving when Athena appears and stops the proceedings. She goes on to argue that Theseus should not give away the bodies so lightly: he must first require a sworn oath from the Argives that they will never attack Attica. The wording of the oath is set out in extraordinary detail, ‘the most detailed prescription for an oath in Greek literature’:⁴³

Do not give these bones to these children to carry away to the land of Argos, letting them go so lightly, but in return for your labours and those of your city first exact an oath. This man here, Adrastus, must swear: he has the authority to take an oath on behalf of the whole land of Danaus’ sons since he is the king. This is the oath: that the Argives will never move a hostile army against this land, and that, if others do so, they will use their own might to stop them. They must pray that the land of Argos may perish miserably if they violate the oath and march against the city. (1185–95)

This is already quite specific – but it is not enough for Athena: the oath must be accompanied by sacrifices, performed over a bronze tripod which Heracles, coming back from having destroyed Troy, once ordered Theseus to set up at the Pythian shrine, as he was leaving for another mission (1196–200).⁴⁴ Over this tripod, Athena orders, the sacrifice must be accomplished:

ἐν τῷδε λαίμους τρεῖς τριῶν μῆλων τεμῶν
ἔγγραψον ὄρκους τρίποδος ἐν κοίλῳ κύτει,
κάπειτα σῶζειν θεῶ δὸς ᾧ Δελφῶν μέλει,
μνημεῖά θ’ ὄρκων μαρτύρημά θ’ Ἑλλάδι. (1201–4)

Having cut over this tripod the throats of three sheep inscribe the oaths on its curved hollow, and then give it for safekeeping to the god who rules Delphi, a memorial of the oath and a witness to it in the eyes of Hellas.

⁴³ Fletcher 2012: 18.

⁴⁴ On oath sacrifices, see Torrance 2014: 138–40; on the political meaning of this oath and on its connection with the alliance with Argos in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, Torrance 2014: 149–51. More generally on interstate relations and oaths, Bayliss in Sommerstein and Bayliss 2013: 147–304. On the historical background in the 420s, see Storey 2008: 24–6; Bowie 1997: 45–7. A treaty with Argos was ratified in July 420: cf. *IG I³* 83 and Thuc. 5.47, 82.5 (discussed below, n. 52). The terms presented here (a one-sided obligation) differ radically from those of the agreement of 420 BC; but as Bowie 1997: 55 n. 128 points out, tragic treaties emphasize benefits to Athens (he compares Aesch. *Eum.* 767–74; Soph. *OC* 1518–34; Eur. *Heracl.* 1030–44).

Furthermore, in a quasi-magical ritual, the sacrificial knife with which Theseus will cut the throats must be buried in the depths of the earth (ἔς γαίης μυχούς), right next to the pyre of the Seven dead: 'For if the Argives ever return to the city, this knife, when displayed, will make them afraid and cause them an evil journey home' (*Suppl.* 1208–9). Only then may Theseus escort the Argive bodies out of the country.

The oral memory of the great deed accomplished by the Athenians, an oral memory handed over to the Argives to preserve, and with which Theseus had been content, is here, under Athena's directions, modified into a ritual (oaths, sacrifice) of which the inscription on bronze forms an important part.⁴⁵ Moreover, the goddess orders that the inscribed vase, which at this point symbolizes that memory, be located in a Panhellenic centre, Delphi, following a procedure that was commonly practised by the Greek cities. This instruction serves the purpose of removing the memory of the deed from its initially exclusive Argive-Athenian context and entrusting it to the god (Apollo) of a Panhellenic sanctuary, placing it under the protection of a divinity honoured across the Greek world.⁴⁶ Here it is important to note that the main purpose of the writing does not seem to be publicity, for the oaths are incised inside the vase: the writing on the bronze of this very special, 'historical' tripod (once given to Theseus by Heracles, and thus reflecting the earlier connections between the two cities) has a fundamentally sacred, ritual value.

To say that a written memory here replaces oral memory would be going too far. But clearly, the elaborate finale of the *Suppliant Women* displays awareness of the power of ritual to 'embody' remembrance. Furthermore, public writing is now, and in a very positive sense, the guardian of common memory and oaths, in contradistinction to the practice of simply 'remembering'. This public writing receives a peculiar 'added value' from the support on which it is engraved, from the ritual that accompanies both the taking of the oath and its engraving, and from the status of the location where the tripod and the text it bears are finally located, Delphi.⁴⁷ But the

⁴⁵ Cf. Day 2010: 106: writing a treaty on a special tripod 'appears as one in a series of ritualized acts (besides oath taking etc.) and becomes an integral part of the monument that preserves the relationship between Argos and Athens'.

⁴⁶ Numerous treaties have survived from Olympia: cf. e.g. the alliance of Sybaris and its allies with the Serdaioi, ca. 550–525 BC, or the treaty between Eleans and Heraeans of the early fifth century BC, Meiggs and Lewis 1988 nos. 10 and 17, both inscribed on bronze tablets. This latter document includes an explicit warning that 'if anyone injures this writing, whether private man or magistrate or community, he shall be liable to the sacred fine herein written': this is powerful writing (compare the inscription from Teos discussed in the introduction to this volume, pp. 32–3); see Bayliss in Sommerstein and Bayliss 2013: 158–60.

⁴⁷ Bowie 1997: 55–6 follows Krummy in suggesting that the (presumed) continued existence of the tripod in Delphi stands as a reminder of the splendour of Athens' military and moral leadership (but

most fascinating aspect of this epilogue is not so much the endorsement of this complex way of preserving a memory: after all, writing and its public exposure are normal in the last quarter of the fifth century. Rather, it is the way in which Athena explicitly disowns alternative forms of remembering, and in particular (oral) transmission of gratitude from elders to future generations. Her striking dismissal of this practice as insufficient has telling parallels elsewhere in the tragic corpus as well as other contemporary sources, and clearly points to a deep worry about traditional procedures of remembrance and the reciprocity grounded in and by memory. A passage in Thucydides illustrates the point. Before the outbreak of the war, in 433 BC, the Corinthians try to convince the Athenians not to back Corcyra by calling on favours (*charis*) Athens owed, sufficient 'according to the laws of the Greeks': namely, the support that the Corinthians gave to Athens in the war against Aegina, which took place before the Persian invasions (an affair mentioned in Herodotus 6.89), and the fact that Corinth prevented the Spartans from aiding Samos against Athens. They close this part of their speech with the exhortation to 'bear these facts in mind, and let every young man learn of them by one who is older, and let them determine to render us like for like'.⁴⁸ *Charis* is one of the buzzwords in the speech of the Corinthians, but their speech fails to convince the Athenians. Part of the issue in Thucydides' passage is surely the contrast between young and old men, a contrast that appears more than once in his work; but there is also here an appeal to an oral tradition, which should have preserved the memory of a service, a *charis*, but fails. In this context, it is worth noting that there is a marked increase in inscribed honorific decrees in Athens around 430 BC, in particular proxeny decrees: the good deeds accomplished by foreigners for the Athenians tend to be now commemorated in stone.⁴⁹

Furthermore, *Suppliant Women* is one of the few plays in which the positive side of written law is explicitly stressed, in Theseus' answer to the Theban herald, who affirms proudly to come from a city ruled by one man and not by the rabble, a city where no man can fool the others with slick, flattering words. In his reply, Theseus stresses that in a city held by a tyrant

see further below on the tripod). There is also possibly here an allusion to the (oral only) alliance concluded between Athens and Argos at the end of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (*Eum.* 762–74): see e.g. Torrance 2013: 172; a specific intertextual memory could thus also have been activated.

⁴⁸ Thuc. 1. 41–2. The contrast between young and old is relatively frequent, but here it is developed in a very specific way, in connection with remembering past benefactions. For Thucydides' take on the (very scarce) reliability of human memory, see 2.54.3, and Darbo-Peschanski's chapter in this volume.

⁴⁹ See Meyer 2013, esp. 458 and 467 for honorific decrees, 471–2 for treaties and regulations; Ferrario 2006 emphasizes the increase in written (monumental) commemoration at Athens in the last quarter of the fifth century, whether through honorific decrees or individual funerary monuments.

there are no common laws (νόμοι/κοινοί, 430–1), for one person only has power, holding the law by himself – and this is unjust (καὶ τόδ'οὐκέτ' ἔστ' ἴσον, 432). By contrast, written laws in particular enable comprehensive protection against willful injustice (Eur. *Suppl.* 433–44):

γεγραμμένων δὲ τῶν νόμων ὁ τ' ἀσθενής/ὁ πλούσιός τε τὴν δίκην
ἴσῃν ἔχει

When the laws are written, both the weak and the rich have justice equally.

As pointed out by Stinton, this is the only passage in all of fifth-century Greek literature that states explicitly that written laws are a guarantee of equality, which is not in itself a self-evident notion: 'statutory laws in states where they were not written down, e.g. Sparta, were not thought any the less binding, or less *nomoi*, on that account'.⁵⁰ However, the decision to move the written laws from the acropolis to the agora, the appearance of formulae of disclosure (such as σκοπεῖν τῷ βουλομένῳ, 'so that anyone who desires may see', attested in five Athenian inscriptions all dated to the 430s/420s) and, more generally, the emphasis that inscriptions place on the importance of publication on stone, as well as other historical developments, show that the idea that written laws help enforce equality (and democracy) must have found increasingly broad circulation.⁵¹ The idea that writing down the laws was a central element of the *polis*' identity may thus have been widely shared in Athens. In the context of international diplomacy, publication of written agreements was also commonplace in the fifth century: the alliances between Sybaris and her allies and the Serdaioi, for instance, or that between the Eleans and the Heraeans, written on bronze plates dedicated at Olympia, go back to the sixth century.⁵² In 420,

⁵⁰ Stinton (in Collard 1975: 441–2). The distinction between *agraphoi nomoi* (divine, natural, universal, international laws) and man-made, positive laws of particular cities is different from the point at issue here. On written and unwritten laws, and their authority, see Harris 2006: 41–61 (unwritten esp. at 45; relationship between unwritten and written, 53–7).

⁵¹ For the report that the decision to move the laws was taken by Ephialtes, cf. Anaximenes of Lampsacus, *FGrHist* 72 F 13 (although note Wilamowitz' sceptical position on this, with Jacoby's comments, ad loc.; see Loraux 2002: 72 or Sickinger 1999: 30, who accept the account, and Meyer 2013: 478 n. 114, who does not); for analysis of disclosure formulae, cf. Hedrick 1999: 410–11 (list in his appendix 2), with Meyer 2013. One does not have to believe that this notion is true (and for instance the issue of the authority ordering the writing down of the laws is not addressed; yet it is crucial), nor that it was shared over all of Greece (it emphatically was not). The law cited by Andoc. *Myst.* 83–6 (86: ἀγράφῳ νόμῳ τὰς ἀρχὰς μὴ χρῆσθαι) shows the centrality of written laws; later political theory connected the development of law with the beginnings of writing, cf. Plato *Leg.* 680a, and the detailed discussion in Harris 2006.

⁵² Respectively, Meiggs and Lewis 1988 nos. 10 and 17; see also the agreement between Argos, Cnossus and Tylissus, Osborne and Rhodes 2017 no. 126, or the treaty between Sparta and the Erxadiæis, Osborne and Rhodes 2017 no. 128, both dated to ca. 450 BC.

Athens made a treaty with Argos, Mantinea and Elis, whose text is quoted in its entirety by Thucydides; an inscribed, incomplete copy of the treaty has survived, corresponding to the first part of Thucydides' text (5.47.1–8), but sufficient to show that Thucydides' text is entirely reliable.⁵³ A clause of this treaty, preserved only in Thucydides, stated that copies of the treaty should be erected at Athens on the Acropolis, in Argos at the temple of Apollo in the agora, in Mantinea at the temple of Zeus in the agora, and at Olympia on a bronze stele. It further prescribed renewal of the oaths by all allies every two years, in Elis 30 days before the Olympic games, and in Athens 10 days before the Panathenaic games. The parallels with Athena's intervention on behalf of the Athenians in the *Suppliant Women*, to ensure that the future expectations of good, reciprocal behaviour on the part of the Argives be soundly and permanently enshrined in Panhellenic memory, are obvious, irrespective of whether the play post- or predates the treaty.

In light of all this, it is remarkable that the writing of laws and agreements should have surfaced, and so forcefully, in this tragedy only. It is probably not an accident that the play is *Suppliant Women*, a play in which persuasion and writing are presented in an optimistic perspective; and it is certainly not an accident that these words on the positive value of written laws are put in the mouth of the 'democratic' Theseus, even as those on the positive value of written treaties are in the mouth of Athena. In Sophocles' oeuvre, we can still detect resistance of the tragic genre to integrate writing (and its memorial powers) into the world of the plays, in a conscious avoidance of what would have been an anachronistic presence in the heroic age in which the plays are set; Euripides, by contrast, does not wish to bypass reflection on the power of the written word, not least as a guarantor of 'contractual memories'.⁵⁴ References to the complex interface of writing, memory and (sustained) reciprocity begin to register more insistently in at least some of his plays, overriding the generic conventions he inherited. And yet, the issues raised by the 'novel' way of enshrining memory suggested by Athena will not have been lost, on at least some members of the audience: the contrived, if not entirely 'fabricated', status

⁵³ Treaty: *IG I³ 83* = Osborne and Rhodes 2017 no. 165, from Athens; cf. Thucydides 5.47 (5.47.10 for the renewal of the oaths; 5.47.11 for the clause on inscription), and Bolmarcich 2007; Hornblower 2008: 109–20.

⁵⁴ It is well known that while Aeschylus and Sophocles (just as Pindar) exploit the metaphor of writing as memory, Euripides does not. Detailed discussion of the appearances of writing (real and metaphorical) in tragedy in Torrance 2013, esp. 135–82; Ceccarelli 2013: 183–235 and 258–64; see also Agócs' chapter in this volume.

of tripod and knife (the first conveniently dedicated away from Athens, the second buried underground, so as to make examination impossible), and the change in the place of burial of the Seven (here sent back to Argos: the shrine will simply indicate the location of cremation) undermine the claim to a direct tradition.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Dunn 2000: 12–15.