

## 1. Speaking in the Wax Tablets of Memory

Peter Agócs

The relationship between memory and writing is an important theme in classical Greek culture. Poets and thinkers imagined writing as a sort of externalised memory, and memory as a kind of writing on the ‘wax’ of the soul — a dominant metaphor drawn from poetic language which still seems to inform and shapes Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophical discussions of memory and recollection.<sup>1</sup> This essay aims to tease out some of the implications of the pervasive metaphor of the ‘wax tablets of the mind’, focusing on the earliest occurrences of the metaphor in Pindar and the Attic tragedians. In particular, it argues that the ‘wax tablets’ metaphor is not only a way of imagining how living human memory works; rather, it also reciprocally helped to define the culture’s attitude to the written text, whether poetry or prose, as a novel-new kind of aesthetic object — a voice distinct from any particular performance or context of performance. It also helped people — ~~and to~~ to grapple with the problems that the technology of writing posed for a culture which still defined its most powerful and authoritative forms of literary speech as living, performed voice. The argument that follows falls into three sections, each of which describe one element in this nexus of ideas: the idea, familiar already in Homer’s songs, of the poem as a kind of memory; memory as a kind of writing on the soul; and the written text, conversely, as the fixed and objectified ‘memory’ of a living voice. Section one briefly examines how writing, as a theme, emerged in the early fifth-century song culture, at a time when the dominant poetics of song was still powerfully shaped by the idea of *kleos* and externalised memory. Section two examines the various occurrences of the ‘wax tablets’ (‘memory as writing’) metaphor in Attic tragedy, before studying how Pindar, in the proem of *Olympian* 10, uses it to define his own lyric utterance as an act of reminding, assimilating the technology of literacy to the older, (but still present), discourse of *kleos*. Section three broadens the focus to examine how fifth-century authors of song and prose negotiated the tensions created by the introduction of writing: a new kind of inscribed ‘*logos*’ or voice that, as Socrates’ myth so memorably puts it in the *Phaedrus*

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<sup>1</sup> On the tendency of philosophical discussions to treat Plato’s use of the ‘wax block’ analogy in *Theaetetus* 191a5-196c9 (on which see pp. 47-48 below) in isolation from its wider cultural context and place in the earlier poetic tradition, see Zuckerman 2015: 2-3 and Sansone 1975: 59.

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(274d5-275e), cannot, in the absence of its 'father', talk back or defend itself when questioned.

### 1. Song as memory

At the turn of the sixth century BCE, writing gave Greek culture a new metaphor with which to imagine the act of remembering. It was also, however, integrated into existing traditions of oral performance. The poetic text, in particular, was still (at least at the level of its overt poetics) defined by its vocality and its role in a wider 'culture of memory' based primarily on notions of tradition and the spoken word. Pindar and the tragedians appropriate and continue ~~and appropriate~~ the ancient ideology of song as commemoration and memorialisation — the most powerful single medium of oral memory in the culture. In this tradition, expressed most succinctly in the Hesiodic genealogy which makes the Muses the daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus,<sup>2</sup> song is valued for its ability to preserve a true account of the past and to grant a kind of immortality, in cultural memory, to individuals and their deeds.<sup>3</sup> As 'praise' and 'memory', song challenges the omnipresent power of λήθη. It 'awakens Mnemosyne' by reviving the memory of old traditions or creating new *kleos*, strengthening the 'mindfulness' and care (χάρις) which binds society to its individual and collective histories, its heroes, and its gods.<sup>4</sup> Pindar's epinicians, in particular, emphasise reciprocal exchange between victor, poet and community, and their gods and ancestors.<sup>5</sup>

But late archaic song modifies the picture of a continuous tradition of *kleos* guaranteed by the Muse in subtle ways. Most strikingly, perhaps, we find a tendency, evident in both Theognis and Pindar, as well as in the poetry of Simonides, to invest the memorialising properties of song in objects, or, alternatively, to dispute the value of such metaphorical investment. Theognis (19-37) uses the analogy of a sealed tablet or amphora to mark his songs (τοῖσδ' ἔπεσιν, 20) as an authorial possession immune to

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<sup>2</sup> Hes. *Th.* 53-55, 915-17 with Detienne 1967: 9-14 and Simondon 1982: 103-12.

<sup>3</sup> On 'cultural memory' as a concept, see Assmann 1992.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Pind. O. 8.76; P. 9.104; I. 4.19-24; I. 7.10-21. On *charis* see Simondon 1982: 47-65; Goldhill 1991: 132; Maclachlan 1993; Day 2010: 232-80.

<sup>5</sup> On this idea of χάρις or reciprocal exchange (with bibliography) see Agócs 2009; [for its connection with memory see also Ceccarelli's chapter below.](#)

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tampering.<sup>6</sup> In *Nemean* 7, Pindar says (12-16) that ‘great acts of courage, lacking songs, are trapped in great darkness; we know of a mirror for fair deeds in one way only: if by the grace of Mnemosyne of the radiant headband they find ransom for labours in famous songs of words’.<sup>7</sup> Simonides, Pindar’s older colleague and rival, is likewise supposed to have called poetry ‘speaking painting’.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the proem to Pindar’s *Nemean* 5 famously rejects the analogy between poetry and ‘statue-making’, extolling the power of song, as a form of oral *kleos*, to travel the world untrammelled by the monument’s ties to a particular place.

This new emphasis on the song as an aesthetic object and a spatial form, as something permanent and lasting beyond the frame of any single communicative or performative act, coincides with a tendency, in Pindar and other poets, to emphasise the role of the poet’s learned craft (τέχνη) alongside the divinely-given knowledge, insight and vocality vouchsafed him by Homeric and Hesiodic tradition. The τέχνη-language that comes to the fore in their poetry (Pindar’s song can be a portico with golden columns, a Delphic treasury, a funeral stele of Parian marble, or a finely worked fillet such as Grecian goldsmiths make)<sup>9</sup> expresses the power of song to act as a ‘sign’ or ‘reminder’ (σημα/μνήμα<sup>10</sup>) of something absent. Like the monuments with which it now contrasts itself, song *externalizes* memory: it is an *Erinnerungsfigur* or *lieu de mémoire*.<sup>11</sup> Although this objectification of the song has certain clear precedents in Homer (the warrior’s tomb, the Achaean Wall, Achilles’ Shield), the pervasiveness and explicitness of these poetological metaphors in early fifth-century song must be in some way connected to the increasing prevalence of literacy in the culture. The magic of performance was now underwritten by the permanence of fixed written texts, which ~~itself themselves~~ became the ‘sign’ of an absent performance and a vocality that could,

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<sup>6</sup> Ford 1985: 85 (‘The seal is significant not because it names an author or a singer but because it identifies a “text”’).

<sup>7</sup> Frontisi-Ducroux and Vernant 1997: 51-250 (on N. 7.14-16: 117-18).

<sup>8</sup> Plut. *De glor. ath.* 3. 346f (= T 101 Poltera) and M. Psellus fr. 821 PG, with Carson 1992.

<sup>9</sup> The mentioned passages are O.6. init., P.6.5-14, N.4.79-82 (cf. N.8.46-7, I. 8.61-2) and N.7.77-9 (cf. N.8.15). On these object-analogies: Goldhill 1991:30-31; Steiner 1993, 1994: 91-99 and 2001: 251-94; Ford 1992: 138-71 and especially 2002: 93-130; also Porter 2010: 453-523.

<sup>10</sup> In Homer, a σημα is a mark, sign or token, or (e.g. *Il.*7.419) a barrow; on μνήμα, see *LSJ* sv. Both words are common in funerary epigram; *mnema* also occurs on dedications (*agalmata*). On ‘signs’ in early song, see Nagy 1983; Ford 1992: 137-45; Steiner 1994: 10-60 and Scodel 2002: esp. 99-105.

<sup>11</sup> *Erinnerungsfigur*: Assmann 1992: 37-8; cf. Nora 1985-1992. Halbwachs 1994 spoke, in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, of ‘memory images’.

as it were, be re-animated through reference to the fixed sign. The ‘memory for story’ typical of *epos* is supplemented by a ‘memory for words’ based on the entextualised transcript, but the social function is identical.

The emphasis on songs as permanent objects coincides in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century with a new explicitness and boldness in the texts about the technology of writing itself. Although literacy was by no means ‘new’, it nevertheless #constituted a new theme in the conservative repertory of song and poetry. The emergence of writing as a theme for song is paralleled by an unprecedented burst of images of writers and readers (usually but not exclusively boys or youths and their teachers) on Attic red-figure symposium-vases of the 480s.<sup>12</sup> A little later, Aeschylus and Pindar make the earliest explicit literary references in the Greek tradition to writing and reading alphabetic script.<sup>13</sup> In the speech from *Prometheus Bound* where the Titan describes how the τεχναί he invented saved humanity from savagery, he defines writing (459-61) as ‘the combination of letters, the memory of all things, a craft-skilled woman, mother of the Muse (μνήμην ἀπάντων, μουσομήτορ’ ἐργάνην)’. Here then, in a play probably composed around the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>14</sup> writing is Memory. She is also, in a nod to Hesiod and the traditional metonymy ‘Muse’ for ‘song’, the mother of verbal art itself.<sup>15</sup> In Euripides’ *Palamedes* (F578, 1-2 Kannicht) the hero described writing as ‘a medicine (*pharmakon*) against forgetting (*lethe*) | voiceless and yet speaking’ encoded in syllables and letters.<sup>16</sup> When Socrates in *Phaedrus* (274c5-275b2) dissects the myth of *grammata* as a ‘*pharmakon* of wisdom and memory’, or when in *Laws* (5.741c) the Athenian Stranger describes writing tablets as ‘cypresswood memories covered in letters’, Plato is thus responding to a nexus of associations established in earlier poetry. It is this nexus of associations that the next section will explore.

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<sup>12</sup> Pfeiffer 1968:25-8; Immerwahr 1964 and 1973; Lissarrague 1987: 119-33; Harris 1989: 97.

<sup>13</sup> The earliest allusion to writing (γράφειν) in Greek literature is the πίναξ of Proitos at *Il.* 6.168-70 (σήματα λυγρά... θυμοφθόρα πολλά). The earliest dateable and unambiguous use of γράφειν to mean ‘alphabetic writing’ are Pind. O.10.3 (p. 9 below) and O.3.3.

<sup>14</sup> Griffith 1977: 252-4.

<sup>15</sup> Note that most MSS (Griffith 1983: 169-70) have μνήμην θ’ ἀπάντων, giving us ‘number, writing, and memory’. ‘Muse’: Detienne 1967: 10-11 n.7. ἐργάνη (Stobaeus: the codd. have meretricious ἐργάτην for ἐργάτην) also evokes the Attic cult of Athena Ergane: Deubner 1932: 35-6, Parke 1977: 92-3, Simon 2002: 38-9; Parker 2005: 409, 464-5.

<sup>16</sup> Translation after Collard and Cropp 2008. ἄφωνα καὶ φωνούντα (Collard, Cropp and Gilbert 2004: 98-9) may refer to ‘consonants and vowels’: the correction τε θεῖς deserves consideration. cf. Gorgias 82 F11a, 30 (ii: 301, 25-6 DK).

## 2. The Mind as Writing-tablet

The notion of memory as a kind of writing that externalises its contents in the inscribed sign appears first in Pindar and the tragedians. We will begin with the latter. Later in *Prometheus Bound*, when asked to tell Io about her future wanderings, the Titan frames his prophecy with two formulaic speech-tags. Beginning the tale, he says (705-6):

σύ τ' Ἰνάχειον σπέρμα, τοὺς ἐμοὺς λόγους  
θυμῷ βάλ', ὡς ἂν τέρματ' ἐκμάθῃς ὁδοῦ.

And you, seed of Inachus, **thrust my words into your *thumos***,  
so that you may learn how your journey will end.

But when he begins the second half of the account (788-9), the injunction takes a different form:

σοὶ πρῶτον, Ἰοῖ, πολύδονον πλάνην φράσω,  
ἦν ἐγγράφου σὺ μνήμοσιν δέλτοις φρενῶν.

First, Io, I shall tell you about the wanderings on which  
you will be driven: **inscribe them on the memorious tablets of your *phrenes***.

The first phrase echoes a familiar Homeric formula

ἄλλο δέ τοι ἐρέω, σὺ δ' ἐνὶ φρεσὶ βάλλεο σῆσιν,<sup>17</sup>

I'll tell you something else: **thrust it into your *phrenes***

which is used to introduce a set of instructions, or to contradict an interlocutor. Recurring in Hesiod and parainetic elegy, where it underscores the distance between

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<sup>17</sup> *Il.* 1.297; 4.39; 5.259, etc. cf. *HAp.* 261 with Nieddu 1984: 214.

‘teacher’ and ‘pupil’,<sup>18</sup> it calls attention to the message (ἔπος) the speaker is about to impart, suggesting his words are worth full attention. The phraseology is that with which Homeric Greek describes any emotion, mental impression, plan, thought or vital force arriving or stoked from ‘outside’ the person, or indeed any act of giving something to someone.<sup>19</sup> Remembering (like perceiving, knowing and feeling) is never really a ‘mental event’ in Homer. What for Aristotle would become the functions of the soul are distributed across a range of (often overlapping) ‘organs’ or ‘places’ (φρήν/φρένες, πραπίδες, θυμός) that, like the active and passive work (thinking, feeling, remembering) which they perform, are basically somatic.<sup>20</sup> At least with respect to memory, *phrenes* and *thumos* function as an empty space where experience, thought, and utterance are internalised for later use and rumination.<sup>21</sup> The sense of a definite place is clearer with the *phrenes* than with *thumos*; but the terms must refer to the same sense of inner experience.<sup>22</sup> The *phrenes*, at least, extend both sideways and down.<sup>23</sup> How consciousness’ receptacle works is left unexplained; but since the language tends to equate memory and attention, ‘knowing’ (οἶδα) and ‘seeing’ (ἰδεῖν), *phrenes* and *thumos* may be a place where objects, once retained, present themselves to recognition by the inner sight (*noos*).<sup>24</sup> Post-Homeric texts are more explicit about recollection as visualisation. For Empedocles, it is the *πράπιδες* that, when trained as Pythagoras’ were in wisdom and recollection, can reach beyond a man’s lifetime by a span of ten or

<sup>18</sup> See e.g. Theogn. 1049-54 and Hes. *Op.* 107, 274, 491, 688, 797.

<sup>19</sup> Sansone 1975: 54-8. Homer normally uses βάλλειν, ἐσβάλλειν (cf. *LSJ* sv. I.6). In memory-contexts, the implied object is normally an *epos* (but cf. *Il.* 9.434-5; *Od.* 2. 79, 11.428 where the corresponding phrase refers to emotion or intention).

<sup>20</sup> One hesitates to speak of ‘faculties’ in connection with these concepts. Of the other Homeric ‘organs’ of life and consciousness, ψυχή, κραδίη/κῆρ/ῆτορ, and νόος, only the last seems to have no somatic existence. The literature on Homeric concepts of mind is vast: see Snell 1953: 8-22 and 1977; Fränkel 1975: 74-85; Ireland and Steel 1975; Jahn 1987; Darcus Sullivan 1989 and 1990 (on Pindar and Bacchylides) and 1994, 36-41 (esp. n.48) and 54-60 (esp. n. 82), 1995; Padel 1992: 12-48; Clarke 1999 (esp. 61-126).

<sup>21</sup> This applies also to learning skills: e.g. *Od.* 22.347-8.

<sup>22</sup> Sansone 1975: 54-8 posits a difference. The *phrenes* are sometimes identified with the lungs (cf. esp. *Il.* 16. 503-4 with Onians 1951: 13-83; Clarke 1999: 74-89); *thumos* seems less confined to a zone of the body. But they occur in hendiadys (cf. e.g. *Il.* 1.193; Theogn. 1050).

<sup>23</sup> In Homer (*Il.* 19.125) emotion ‘strikes deep into the *phren*’. Pindar associates the ‘deep *phren*’ with emotion (e.g. the victor’s μέριμνα or the poet’s χρέος) and poetic inspiration (e.g. N. 4.6-8). ‘Good counsel’ and ‘wise thought’ are also traditionally ‘deep’: see Silk 1974: 121n.13.

<sup>24</sup> On *noos* as intentionality, see Clarke 1999: 120-6. Alcman probably (fr. 133 *PMGF* = 191 Calame) punned on ‘seeing’ memory.

twenty generations, ‘seeing’ past and future lives.<sup>25</sup> In Pindar, if you’ve forgotten something, your *phrenes* have ‘missed’ it.<sup>26</sup>

Spatial metaphors are basic to how humans, as corporeal beings, imagine consciousness. But Prometheus’ image of ‘memorious’ or ‘mindful’ tablets in the *phrenes* pushes the idea of the receptacle of consciousness in new directions. The act of fixing something in the mind is conceived as inscription. The language is strongly poeticized – μνήμων, transferred from the person to the passive surface of remembering, merges the subject of remembering with the vehicle and tenor (expressed in the defining genitive φρενῶν) of the metaphor – but also literal.<sup>27</sup> *Deltoi* are *tablets*:<sup>28</sup> thin boards (πίνακες)<sup>29</sup> with a hollow centre filled with wax. When applied to the mind, the tablet-metaphor involves a transference: even as the tablets are an image of the remembering mind, they have a memory of their own — the ‘memory’ of the wax.

The tablets are in fact the tragedians’ only metaphor for memory, even as memory is the only context in tragedy where writing figures as the vehicle of a metaphor. The metaphor was certainly conventional and clichéd (if hardly dead)<sup>30</sup> by the time it is first attested in extant poetry. This is clear from the naturalness with which the *Prometheus* poet deploys it. Aeschylus uses it six times (first in *Supplikes*); Sophocles thrice; it is missing in extant Euripides. It can hardly have been invented by Aeschylus:<sup>31</sup> indeed, it must have migrated to poetry from the metaphorical repertory of everyday discourse. Often, it appears (as in the *Prometheus Bound*) as a substitute for the older metaphor of ‘fixing in the mind’, with the same idea of memory motivating action. In a *kommos* of *Choephoroi*, Electra tells her brother to remember their father’s sufferings. ‘Such’, she says, is the tale you hear: write it down in your mind’.<sup>32</sup> ‘Yes, write it down’, sings the chorus: ‘let the words pierce right through your ears to the calm abyss of the mind (δι’ ὧτων δὲ συν-|τέτραψε μῦθον ἡσύχῳ φρενῶν βάθει)’.<sup>33</sup> The

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<sup>25</sup> fr. 129 DK.

<sup>26</sup> P. 4.42: τῶν δ’ ἐλάθοντο φρένες.

<sup>27</sup> *LSJ* s.v.; Steiner 1994: 25.

<sup>28</sup> A Semitic loan-word: Masson 1967: 61-5.

<sup>29</sup> *Pinax* in Homer means a ‘board’ or ‘plank’, but also a writing tablet (n. 11 above).

<sup>30</sup> For the distinction: Silk 1974: 27-8.

<sup>31</sup> Sansone 1975: 59-60.

<sup>32</sup> l. 450 (Garvie 1986: 166; Untersteiner 2002: 114 and 309 *ad loc.*) is insecure and certainly lacunose.

<sup>33</sup> See Garvie 1986: 166-67 *ad loc.*, reading βάθει with Sommerstein 2008 for cod. M’s difficult βάσει (‘step’) of (Untersteiner 2002: *ad loc.*) the movement of the revenge plot.

story and its memory, once internalised, must stir Orestes to revenge. In *Suppliants* (179) Danaos, preparing to meet the Argive host, tells his daughters:

αἰνῶ φυλάξαι τᾶμι ἔπι δελτομένους

I advise you: guard my words, **writing them on the wax tablet**.<sup>34</sup>

The image recurs at 991-2.<sup>35</sup> Sophocles uses it in *Triptolemus*, one of his earliest plays, and in the *Philoctetes*, one of his last.<sup>36</sup> In *Trachiniae* (682-3), Deianeira, preparing the poison that will kill her husband, declares that she forgot none of the dying centaur's instructions, 'but held them safe like writing unwashable from a tablet (δέλτος) of bronze'.<sup>37</sup>

Some instances of writing tablets in drama (two strictly *non*-metaphorical, the third a development of the metaphor) pertain to a discourse of *eschatological memory*. The notion that the gods 'watch' human actions appears already in Homer and Hesiod. There are the 'Prayers' of the *Iliad* (9.502-4), Hesiod's 'thrice countless immortal watchers, φύλακες, of mortal men... who wander over the earth cloaked in fog' (*Op.* 252-4) and Dike herself (*Op.* 259-60), who sits by her father telling him of the evil *noos* of unjust men. An Aeschylean fragment (fr. 281a Radt = *P.Oxy.* 2256 fr. 9a) of uncertain genre takes up the Hesiodic image of Justice at the throne of Zeus (l.10), re-imagining her as a writer. Dike speaks: her τιμή as the god's emissary is to make the lives of *dikaios* men easy and to change the lives of the bad not by charms or force, but by recording their sins 'on the tablet of Zeus' (21, γράφουσα τὰπλακῆματ' ἐν δέλτῳ δέλτῳ ΑἰέεΔιός).<sup>38</sup> 'When', her interlocutor<sup>39</sup> asks, 'will you open the tablet?' 'When for them [the bad people] the day brings the appointed reckoning.'<sup>40</sup> The divine record

**Commented [PA2]:** We have lunate sigmas here, while elsewhere we use the Byzantine forms: I don't mind – we can use either – but I wonder if it shouldn't be made consistent? Still, this is a papyrus fragment, and the conventions of those editions differ. I leave it to your judgement, Paola!

<sup>34</sup> *Deltoumenas* is a *hapax*: Σ *ad loc* paraphrases with ἀπογραφομένους ('transcribing').

<sup>35</sup> See Sansone 1975: 61.

<sup>36</sup> fr. 597 Radt; *Phil.* 1325.

<sup>37</sup> Jebb *ad loc*. While we have examples of δέλτοι made from materials other than wood – the usual material was boxwood (hence πύξιον: Pollux IV.18) while E. *IA* 39 speaks of pine – it is not the material of the support that Sophocles is thinking of, but the writing-surface itself. The metal's hardness and monumentality, and the force needed to inscribe it, show Deianeira's ironic reverence for the monster's words.

<sup>38</sup> I follow the interpretation and supplements of Sommerstein 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the chorus.

<sup>40</sup> εὗτ' ἂν τέλ]η σφιν ἡμέρα τὸ κύριον, *vel sim*.



is stored away until it is consulted: the inscrutable slowness of Zeus' justice,<sup>41</sup> subjected to the discipline of script, becomes an infallible and methodical archiving of sins. In *Eumenides* (272-275), the Erinyes, singing of the punishment which awaits awaiting Orestes in the Underworld, describe a 'great assessor of mortals, Hades, beneath the earth' who 'watches everything with tablet-writing mind' (δελοτογράφω δὲ πάντ' ἐποπῆ φρενί). Every action is archived for future use when as εὔθυνος he prepares the audit of our actions.

The underworld judge may attest Orphic/Pythagorean influence; but the fact he is a writer and an *euthynos* (word which may allude to a legal procedure well-attested in the Classical city)<sup>42</sup> foreshadows the world of Athenian legality which plays such an important part in the drama's denouement. In 458, their city, on the cusp of its radical democracy, had begun to deploy writing, particularly on stone, on a scale unparalleled in any earlier Greek state. It was increasingly identified with equality, the rule of law, and democratic Athens herself.<sup>43</sup> While it is unlikely that Athenian legal procedure kept records of judgements as early as the 450s, or that forensic evidence (witness statements, for example) was presented in written form as it is in the fourth-century orators,<sup>44</sup> writing's real-world uses are less important than the conceptual leap that identifies the perfect memory with the archive.<sup>45</sup> Memory-writing assumes the implicit authority of real written text. Euripides pillories the conceit in one of his *Melanippe* plays (fr. 506 Kannicht, probably *the Wise*<sup>46</sup>) where the speaker, likely the heroine, voicing advanced sophistic ideas, says that Justice is not an anthropomorphic, spiritualised force, but something 'close by': manifested, perhaps, in everyday human relations. She denies that human crimes 'leap up' to the gods and that Zeus could have

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<sup>41</sup> See e.g. Solon fr. 13 W. cf. also *com. adesp.* fr. 921 K-A; Hesych. sv. σκυτάλαι (van Looy 1965: 229-30).

<sup>42</sup> While εὔθυνος (the inquisitor who examines the conduct of retiring officials) and εὔθυνοι are not attested this early, the language implies such a procedure (Solmsen 1944: 28-9; Sommerstein 1989: 130 *ad loc.*; Steiner 1994: 109-10). As described by Arist. *AP* 48.4, *euthynai* involve written denunciations. εὔθυνοι of Zeus: *Pers.* 828 (with Garvie 2009: 316-7).

<sup>43</sup> E. *Suppl.* 433-6 is the classic fifth-century statement.

<sup>44</sup> On written documents' 4<sup>th</sup>-century use in law and business: Thomas 1992: 148-9; Gagarin 2008: 176-205. γραφή, a form of public indictment, is attested at Athens c. 440-20 (*id.* *ibid.*: 111-14 traces it back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century).

<sup>45</sup> Solmsen 1944: 28.

<sup>46</sup> See van Looy 1964: 225-32, 322-26; Collard, Cropp and Lee 1995: 278.

a tablet: were the whole sky a writing-surface, it ~~would never~~ accommodate the tale of human crime.

There is another side to tablet-memory, connected to the ephemeral nature of the medium. Wax tablets were used for jottings and ‘notes to self’,<sup>47</sup> for letters, and, as the Hellenistic poets show, for drafts of works that, when finished, might be copied to papyrus.<sup>48</sup> The metaphor ~~thus~~ describes not only recording and preservation, but also forgetting. Aeschylus speaks of a man’s image ‘drawn’ (γεγραμμένος) in the mind: just so, the fading of memory is a wiping out, sudden or gradual, of the inscribed ‘sketch’ or ‘text’.<sup>49</sup> The term for ‘rubbing’ out letters is ἐξλείφω, the word used for scrubbing someone from a register or list, or of the cancellation of debts.<sup>50</sup> This gives rise to some striking metaphors. Eteokles, gearing up for war, can speak of the ‘erasure’ that threatens the city’s shrines (*Sept.* 15);<sup>51</sup> the chorus of the *Prometheus* (535-6) wishes that their good intentions might ‘abide ... and never melt away’ (ἀλλά μοι τόδ’ ἐμμένοι | καὶ μή ποτ’ ἐτκακείη). To scrape the old wax off a writing-tablet is ἐκκνίζω; new wax is ‘melted on’ (ἐπιτήκειν);<sup>52</sup> but the same wax, as in a joke in *Clouds* (771-2) that turns on the destruction of documents, can melt and take the writing with it. Critias (fr. 6 W, 10-12), describing the effects of drunkenness, says that ‘forgetfulness melts away memory from the mind (λήστις δ’ ἐκτῆκει μνημοσύνην πραπίδων)’.

In the ‘wax tablets’, it is not (as in Homer) the experience that is internalised or forgotten, but rather the ‘writing’ — a graphic *symbol* for the remembered word, experience or concept. Quite apart from the unique symbolism, often complex and pertaining for example to what is ‘inscribed’ and how, that animates particular poetic use of the trope, they all share a simple semantics in which the content of memory is replaced with a written ‘sign’ (σημα), which itself refers us to whatever is no longer present to lived experience. Memories, as mental representations, are thus transformed

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<sup>47</sup> For an interesting reference to such ‘notes’ in the Hippocratic corpus, see van der Eijk 1997: 97.

<sup>48</sup> For some instances, see n.123 below. As a medium *deltoi* arguably imply the relative impermanence of the poetic text.

<sup>49</sup> cf. A. *Ag.* 1327-9, referring either to the palimpsesting of papyrus by washing, a process attested later, or (Frankel 1950 iii: 621-2 *ad loc.*) to erasure of a wet ink sketch from a whitened board (λευκόμα): cf. S. *Trach.* 685; E. fr. 618 Kannicht (both ‘tablets’).

<sup>50</sup> See *DGE* sv. ἐξλείφω, 1.1-2. The verb ἀλείφω is also attested in Cypriote texts as a term for inscribing with brush and ink: see Heubeck 1979: 157.

<sup>51</sup> cf. A. *Cho.* 503 (Garvie 1986: 182-3 *ad loc.*).

<sup>52</sup> See Hdt. 7. 239 and Suda ε 2094 sv. ἐξετηξε with ε 1608 sv. ἐξέκτισεν.

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into referential signs.<sup>53</sup> Writing and image-making (both senses of γράφειν) constitute the final link in a chain of Greek thought about signs (σήματα/μνήματα), that draws together Homeric poetics – the heard performance of the *aidos* as a living ‘sign’ of an absent world; the tomb (also σῆμα) as a ‘sign’ of the absent man – with the language of seeing and interpreting ‘signs’ (σήματα, κληδόνες) expressed in chance words and occurrences, the organs of a sacrificial animal, or the flight of birds, all of which established an extensive hermeneutics in the Greek culture’s earliest phases. To put it another way, the Greeks had a theory of ‘reading’ before they discovered *grammata*.<sup>54</sup>

This semantics presents the older language of internalised experience with a transparent explanatory mechanism. As noted in numerous studies by Geoffrey Lloyd, the distinction between image/analogy and literal description is not strictly realized in the fifth century, even in philosophical or scientific prose, appearing only with Aristotle's division of statements into 'strict' (κυρίως) and 'transferred' (κατὰ μεταφορᾶν) usages.<sup>55</sup> The Hippocratic texts, for example, often invoke analogies from crafts or everyday life to explain changes in the body.<sup>56</sup> There is no easy leap from our own interpretative categories to these fifth-century descriptive metaphors or even those of fourth-century philosophy. Mental contents as inscribed in a book (*Phileb.* 38c-39a)<sup>57</sup> or impressed like the image on a signet ring in the receiving ‘wax’ of the mind (*Theaet.* 191d-196e)<sup>58</sup> form the basis of famous descriptions of memory in Plato.<sup>58</sup> In one model for memory presented and rejected in *Theaetetus*, the ease with which we remember something, like the durability of the ‘inscription’, depends on the consistency of the wax.<sup>59</sup> The wax and signet-ring recur in Aristotle’s impression-model of sense-perception (*De An.* 2.12 424a17-26) and in the *De memoria*’s analysis of memory

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<sup>53</sup> These passages belong to the period when it becomes possible for Greek poets to speak of mental ‘images’: e.g. *A. Ag.* 799-804 (Fraenkel 1950 ii: 363).

<sup>54</sup> See e.g. *E. Suppl.* 212, with Svenbro 1993: 8-25; Padel 1992: 16-18 and Steiner 1994: 10-60.

<sup>55</sup> Lloyd 1990: 20-38 and Zuckerman 2015: 7.

<sup>56</sup> Padel 1992: 10n.19 and 33-40 (the quotation comes from 34); Lloyd 1966: 357-8; 1987: 172-214; 1990: 23-4. Although some 5<sup>th</sup>-century texts (e.g. *Ar. Thesm.* 55 ἀντρονομάζει) refer to troped language, a theory of metaphor emerges only in Aristotle.

<sup>57</sup> See King’s chapter in this volume.

<sup>58</sup> Recollection is compared (197c-199e) to finding and catching birds in an aviary. Carruthers 2005: 16-45; Coleman 1992: 1-38.

<sup>59</sup> Appeal to somatic properties to explain differences in mental functioning is a feature in Homeric (Clarke 1999: 88-9, 97-106) and Presocratic thought (e.g. Heraclitus: Padel 1992: 41).

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(450a28-451a14).<sup>60</sup> His treatment of memories as belonging to a larger class of mental traces or representations (φαντάσματα; εικόνες), and his statement that cognition (voeiv) is ‘impossible’ without such ‘pictures’,<sup>61</sup> shows how natural recourse to graphic imagery became as a way of imagining the invisible processes of mental representation and memory. Aristotle too sees the ‘consistency’ of memory in material terms (450a32-450b11). In Plato, and particularly in Aristotle, many difficult problems depend on how the ‘wax block’, an inheritance of the poets’ folk-psychology, is intended.<sup>62</sup> Is it a serious model of how embodied consciousness works, or a ‘mere’ analogy? The idea of memory as an image ‘inscribed’ in mental space receives its developed form in the late fifth century with the *ars memoriae*, ascribed in the tradition to the poet Simonides — a system that influenced Aristotle’s theorizing here.<sup>63</sup> Many scientific explanations develop from ordinary language, and no science, however much it mistrusts them, can do without metaphors.

Perhaps the most interesting use of the ‘wax tablets’ metaphor in early Classical poetry occurs, however, in Pindar, where it shapes the poet’s representation of his song as text and commemorative object, and thus opens the way to our next theme: written song as a form of externalised memory. ~~A~~After the famous σήματα λυγρά with which Proitos deceives the hero Bellerophon in *Iliad* 6 (169), Pindar is the first poet in the tradition to use the verb γράφειν in the sense ‘to write’.<sup>64</sup> A marginal scholion to *pae.* viib, 24 (fr. 52h Maehler = C2 Rutherford) tells us that he mentioned a wax tablet (δέλτου) immediately after a passage of great poetological interest; the context, however, is uncertain.<sup>65</sup> But the poem of his tenth Olympian, where we also find the

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<sup>60</sup> See Castagnoli’s chapter in this volume; [see also \(on Plato\) Lang 1980, Penner 2013 and Zuckerman 2015.](#)

<sup>61</sup> *De mem.* 449b31-2 with Sorabji 2004. At 450a28-32 Aristotle compares the affection (πάθος) caused by perception in the soul – of which memory (μνήμη) is the lasting ‘possession’ (ἔξις) – to ζωγράφημα τι, ‘a kind of painted picture’ (another sense of γράφειν). The simile is repeated at 450b21-451a2, again *apropos* of mental error.

<sup>62</sup> See Sorabji 2004, and compare Nussbaum 1978; Schofield 1978; Annas 1992; Caston 1996 and 2005; Labarrière 2000.

<sup>63</sup> Simonides: fr. 510 *PMG* = T80 Poltera. Discussing how mental representations (φαντάσματα) can be called up on demand, *De an.* 3.3 427b19-21 compares this to how practitioners of the *ars memoriae* create and call up mnemonic images (cf. Sorabji 2004: ix-x, 2-8, 22-34); Coleman 1992: 39-59 with Carruthers 2005 and Yates 1966. For some qualifications on Aristotle’s interest in mnemotechniques cf. Sassi’s chapter in this volume.

<sup>64</sup> n. 12-00 above.

<sup>65</sup> Rutherford 2001: 250.

earliest dated use of the verb ‘to read’ (ἀναγιγνώσκειν) in any Greek text, is a place where we can examine Pindar’s use of the metaphor more closely:<sup>66</sup>

str. 1, 1 τὸν Ὀλυμπιονίκαν ἀνάγνωτέ μοι  
Ἀρχεστράτου παῖδα, πόθι φρενός  
ἐμᾶς γέγραπται· γλυκὺ γὰρ μέλος ὀφείλων  
ἐπιλέλαθ’· ὦ Μοῖσ, ἀλλὰ σὺ καὶ θυγάτηρ  
5 Ἀλάθεια Διός, ὀρθᾶ χερί  
ἐρύκετον ψεύδεων 5  
ἐνιπᾶν ἀλιτόξενον.

ant. 1, 1 ἔκα-θεν γὰρ ἐπελθὼν ὁ μέλλων χρονός  
ἐμὸν καταίσχυνε βαθὺ χρέος.  
ὅμως δὲ λῦσαι δυνατὸς ὄξειαν ἐπιμομφᾶν  
τόκος ἴθνατων<sup>67</sup> νῦν ψᾶφον ἐλισσομένην  
ὀπᾶ κῶμα κατακλύσσει βέρον, 10  
5 ὀπᾶ τε κοινὸν λόγον  
φίλαν τείσομεν ἐς χάριν.

Read out for me the name of the Olympic victor, the son of Arcestratos: where is it inscribed upon my *phren*? For I owe to him a sweet song, and have forgotten. O Muse, let you and the daughter of Zeus, Truth, ward off from me the charge of harming my guest friend with broken promises.

For what was then the future has approached from afar and brought shame in passing upon my deep debt. Still, the interest is able to free a man from sharp reproach. Let him see now: just as the flowing wave swamps the pebble rolled along, so shall we pay back the debt of all [or ‘a theme of general concern’] to the satisfaction of reciprocity.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> I have learned much from Hubbard 1985: 67-9; see also Lomiento in Gentili, Catenacci, Giannini and Lomiento 2013: esp. 250-51 and 555-59 and now Budelmann 2017: 54-59.-

<sup>67</sup> ὀνάτωρ Hermann: ὀράτ’ ὦν νυν Schneidewin: ὀράτω νῦν Fennell (the reading translated here *exempli gratia*).

<sup>68</sup> Translation after Race 1987.

The tone is hard to parse, but the preponderance of what for Pindar's own standards are fairly earthy commercial metaphors suggests humour.<sup>69</sup> The speaker asks someone (the 'you' he addresses is plural and undefined) to 'read out' the victor's name. *πῶθι* introduces an indirect question: he is rummaging in the archive.<sup>70</sup> 'Read out' in the first instance means 'remind'. 'Pindar' owed a song to Agesidamos, a child boxer from Western Locri, but has forgotten the debt. He calls upon the Muse and 'Truth, daughter of Zeus' (ll.3-6) to defend him from the reproach of having harmed a friend. 'Future time, coming from afar, has approached and shamed my deep debt.'<sup>71</sup> The song is late:<sup>72</sup> Time, who remembers everything, has caught the speaker out.<sup>73</sup> In calling the Muse and Truth as witnesses who will 'ward off' the charges against him, the speaker vaguely associates the 'wax tablets' image with the idea of forensic *evidence* (nothing is forgotten: look! the name has been there all along!).<sup>74</sup> Debt and repayment, a standard motivation for praise, through reciprocity, as a response to the event that it commemorates,<sup>75</sup> are then enacted through the metaphor of 'repayment with interest'<sup>76</sup> and the simile of the wave that overflows the pebble on the shore.<sup>77</sup> The currency of repayment is the ode itself, which like the sea will overwhelm any possible 'debt'.<sup>78</sup> The simile ends with the assurance of mutual satisfaction at the restoration of balanced reciprocity (*χάρις*), which is also friendship and love.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Gildersleeve 1885: 214. 'Song for money' in Pindar is often accompanied by a lightening of tone: e.g. I.2 init. and P.11.38-45.

<sup>70</sup> In Gildersleeve 1885, but largely neglected by later commentators.

<sup>71</sup> Why is the debt 'deep'? Most likely because the *phrenes* are 'deep' (n.41 above) and the poet's 'debt' is also his 'inspiration'.

<sup>72</sup> O.10 and 11 commemorate a victory won in 476 BCE, the year of O.1 and O.2.-3.

<sup>73</sup> cf. with e.g. O. 10, 55 and O.1, 33.

<sup>74</sup> We might compare Aristotle and Plato on error in recollection.

<sup>75</sup> On this 'χρέος motif': Bundy 1986: 10-11.

<sup>76</sup> Here there is uncertainty in the text: see n.6386 above. I will not discuss the scholiasts' influential theory (cf. Σ 1b i: 308 and Σ O.11 inscr. i: 342) that the 'interest' refers to a different poem (O.11): see Bundy 1986.

<sup>77</sup> Another mnemonic image, this time from the sphere of accuracy in counting (Verdenius 1988: 60 *ad loc.*, sees an allusion to Athenian dikastic voting and a metaphorical 'condemnation').

<sup>78</sup> Song as flowing water: Nünlist 1998: ch.8; Verdenius 1988: *ad loc.* κοινὸν λόγον ... τεῖσμεν is a problem. The identity of *logos* and song was recognised by Aristarchus (S 15a [1: 313 Dr.]): other scholiasts (15b) explain it as something 'won by many' (ie. victors: *logos* would mean 'praise': a sense attested in Pindar), or 'performed by many voices' (ie. by a chorus). For the moderns, it is: 1) a debt 'known to all' (Farnell 1930, Nassen 1975); 2) an account addressed to the community (Verdenius 1988: 61 *ad loc.*); or 3) a narrative of Panhellenic importance (Eckerman 2008). The first translation is closest to the spirit of the surrounding metaphor. The ambiguity is intrinsic and hence intended: the song is at once 'debt', 'praise' (of individual and community) and 'myth' (a vehicle of 'praise').

<sup>79</sup> Note the mention following (I.13) of Atrekeia ('Exactness': Kromer 1976: 421), which accomplishes the transition from the opening theme of debt to the praise of the Locrians.

This *quasi*-narrative of debt, recollection and repayment is assembled by the reader from cues Pindar lets drop. But let us return to the opening. The speaker asks his addressees to ‘read’ a name from the place where it is written in his own mind. ἀναγγνώσκειν, which refers to the mental and vocal effort of ‘recognising’ words and sentences, translating them from graphic representation into syllabic sounds and combining those sounds into phrases, is of the Greek words for ‘to read’ the one most strongly associated in later times with public acts of ‘reading-out’.<sup>80</sup> The evidence concealed in the speaker’s mind requires a voice to transpose it from the space of graphic representation into the space of sonority. Who is the ‘reader’? The scholiasts think of the Muses or the chorus.<sup>81</sup> One might indeed read the imperative as directed toward performers and audience, or any potential singer, reciter, or reader.<sup>82</sup> Without wanting to force the issue (for Pindar here is definitely not directly addressing the performance of poetic texts), there is at least an *implication* of self-reference, for the voice whose utterance constitutes for us the text of the ode is inviting us (or the Muse and Truth) to ‘read out’. Pindar alludes to another level of enactment on which the object of reading (and, implicitly, the acts of voicing and reminding) is the text itself — the verbal object that begins with this demand to ‘read’ and remind. It is the voice of someone absent, restored to presence with each act of ‘reading out’. Writing literally ‘re-minds’: the name of the boy from Locri will ‘speak out’ as long as the text survives. This passage thus forms a link between the two ‘sides’ of the tablets image — ‘memory as text’ and ‘writing as memory’. It is to the latter theme that we will turn in the final section of the essay.

### 3. The written text as a form of memory

Prometheus’ confident assimilation of memory to writing is one side of a pervasive cultural theme. Pindar’s ode represents the other. It attests the ease with which fifth-century thought assimilated literacy to a still-vibrantpowerful tradition of *kleos*-theory.

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<sup>80</sup> Chaintraine 1950; Svenbro 1993:4-5; Gavrillov 1997:73. Pindar’s phrase resembles formulae in the 4<sup>th</sup>-century oratory: e.g. Andoc. 1.47; Dem. 18.118.

<sup>81</sup> cf. Σ 1a, d (i:308.13-14 Dr.) ὁ λόγος πρὸς τὰς Μούσας, ἢ πρὸς τοὺς τοῦ χοροῦ. with 1d (i:308-9: Muses), 1h (i.309: Muses). Note however that the scholiasts’ paraphrase is not careful enough: it refers to plural Muses, while Pindar mentions only one.

<sup>82</sup> Verdenius 1988: 56.

The semantics of memory as internalised writing are relevant to the cultural construction of text as an authoritative form of ‘memory’: a way of creating permanent ‘memory-objects’. Euripides associates texts with the transmission of mythological knowledge;<sup>83</sup> in the closing scene of *Supplices*, he makes Athena emphasise the role of script as monument and witness (μνημεῖα/μαρτύρημα, 1204).<sup>84</sup> In some cases, the persuasiveness of a text is entirely bound up with the idea of long transmission in writing. Collectors of oracles (χρησμόλογοι) appealed to such authority;<sup>85</sup> the practitioners of Orphic/Bacchic religion made similar claims about their sacred books.<sup>86</sup> On an Attic red-figure cup in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the severed head of Orpheus is shown dictating to an amanuensis with tablet and stylus.<sup>87</sup> In this image (the only one from Antiquity, so far as I am aware, to show the making of an ‘oral dictated text’ of the kind made famous by Lord’s *Singer of Tales*) the painter articulates a claim of precedence: the evolving canon of ‘Orphic’ texts (poems by the greatest of singers, the mortal son of a Muse and grandson of Mnemosyne) surpasses other traditions in the purity of its descent from the source. Acusilaos of Argos, Pindar’s close contemporary, also claimed that his three books of *Genealogies* (to judge from surviving fragments an Ionian-dialect prose paraphrase of the Hesiodic tradition) came from bronze tablets recovered by his father from the foundations of the family house.<sup>88</sup> But for ‘Orphic’ initiates, their texts were not only the authoritative truth but also protective talismans (‘the work [or ‘gift’] of Memory’) to be carried to the other side by the departed.<sup>89</sup> It is hardly by chance that writing, in these cases, reinforces claims of timeless sacred authority, of a kind more familiar from Abrahamic religions, but largely absent in the ‘official’ religious practice of the polis. Writing’s claims of authenticity fed back into the psychology of memory, creating demands of accuracy

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<sup>83</sup> E. *Hipp.* 451-2 (with Barrett 1964: 241-2 *ad loc*); cf. *IA* 798.

<sup>84</sup> Steiner 1994: 63-71; [Ceccarelli, this volume](#).

<sup>85</sup> For χρησμόλογοι as performers of written oracles, see Flower 2008. The most famous, Onomacritus (Hdt. 7.6), fell short of his employer’s ideal of textual authority. These assumptions are parodied in the oracle-scene of *Birds* (959-91).

<sup>86</sup> e.g. E. *Hipp.* 953-4.

<sup>87</sup> P. of Ruvo 1346 (Corpus Christi College) = *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1401,1 (ill. Guthrie 1952: pl.7); cf. the hydria in Dunedin (E 48.266 = *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1174,1 (no scribe).

<sup>88</sup> 1a 2T1 *FGrHist*.

<sup>89</sup> cf. the ‘gold tablets’ F474, F476, 12 and F491, 3 Bernabé (*PEG* ii.2).



realisable only in the *ars memoriae*, where memory, through disciplined visualisation, makes itself more like a space of mental writing.

The semantics of writing can, however, be turned against textual authority. Written communication is fraught with uncertainties. In Aeschylus' *Supplikes* (946-9), Pelasgus invokes the superiority of honest democratic speech over the written and sealed proclamations of Eastern kings, in a way that prefigures Plato's critique of the inscrutability of a written text in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>90</sup> and Lévi-Strauss' *assimilation of writing to practices of state control in Tristes Tropiques*.<sup>91</sup> In Plato, writing deceives by its sheer interpretability. According to Socrates (275e1) texts, mere εἰδωλα of living speech, 'wander' (κυλινδεῖται ... πανταχοῦ): one cannot predict whose hands they will land in, or what they will become in the absence of an author to control their interpretation.<sup>92</sup> The authority invested in written *logos* can deceive, as Theseus learns at his own cost in *Hippolytus*. In tragedy, writing is often gendered female and associated with forgery, concealment and intrigue;<sup>93</sup> for Herodotus, it is used primarily by tyrants and barbarian empires.<sup>94</sup> The proof of Palamedes' treason in Euripides' play was a *pinax* containing a forged letter written in 'Phrygian characters': the naive *protos heuretes* undone by his own 'invention'.<sup>95</sup> In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Alcidas and Isocrates, Gorgias' most famous pupils, grapple with the value of writing in composing speeches and training the orator.<sup>96</sup> Alcidas (*On Sophists*, 29) writes that written speeches are not *logoi* at all, but εἰδωλα καὶ σχήματα καὶ μιμήματα λόγων ('images and forms and imitations of *logoi*')-of no use in the cut-and-thrust of real oratory.<sup>97</sup>

This definition of text as a representation of living *logos* brings out what James Porter calls 'the paradox of the voice that lies buried in written language'.<sup>98</sup> The Greeks,

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<sup>90</sup> See Friis Johansen and Whittle 1980 iii: 250-2 *ad loc* and Steiner 1996: 168-9.

<sup>91</sup> See Friis Johansen and Whittle 1980 iii: 250-2 *ad loc* and Steiner 1996: 168-9.

<sup>92</sup> For Plato's lack of faith in written communication as a means of transmitting knowledge and his association of it with 'play' see Yunis 2011: 225.

<sup>93</sup> Steiner 1994: 40 n.97.

<sup>94</sup> Thomas 1992: 130; Ceccarelli 2013: 127-8.

<sup>95</sup> Collard, Cropp and Gilbert 2004: 92-7.

<sup>96</sup> Muir 2001: xiii-xv; cf. Porter 2010: 335-47. van der Eijk 1997: 95-6 discusses Hippocratic suspicion of writing.

<sup>97</sup> The comparison of written speech, as an εἰκὼν λόγου, to a statue is made already in §28; at §32, he compares written text to a 'mirror' of the writer's thought.

<sup>98</sup> Porter 2010: 338.

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as we do, would ask about a text ‘what does it *say*?’,<sup>99</sup> and the recipient of text is often positioned as a ‘listener’ (ὁ ἀκούων), a habit<sub>5</sub> persistent in authors of the Imperial period, which points to long-institutionalised practices of voiced reading.<sup>100</sup> Fifth-century drama often invokes the vocality of text. In *Seven Against Thebes*, the mottoes on the Argive shields ‘speak’. Theseus in *Hippolytus* ‘hears’ the **screamsvoice** of Phaedra’s silent letter: βοᾷ βοᾷ δέλτος ἄλαστα.<sup>101</sup> When Iphigenia (*IT* 759-65) gives the δέλτος containing her letter to Pylades for transportation to Argos, she adds: ‘if you keep the tablet unharmed, all by herself she’ll silently communicate her contents (τάγγραμμένα); but if the *grammata* are lost at sea, saving yourself you’ll save my *logoi* too’. A famous early fifth-century dedication from Halicarnassus enacts a dialogue between the reader’s voice and the ‘artful voice of the stone’.<sup>102</sup>

As Svenbro describes them, early dedications are ‘machines’ designed to ensure *kleos* (in his memorable phrase ‘*renom sonore*’).<sup>103</sup> Especially before the mid-sixth century, the inscribed object often addresses the reader as ‘I’. The Mantiklos kouros (326 *CEG*) ‘says’:

Μάντικλός μ’ ἀνέθηκε **ρεκαβόλωι ἀργυροτόξωι**  
 τᾶς δεκάτας· τὸ δὲ, Φοῖβε, δίδοι χαρίετταν ἀμοιβ[ά]ν

Mantiklos dedicated me to the far-striking [god] of the silver bow  
 as a tenth: you, Phoebus, give pleasing reciprocation.

The epigram sets itself in the moment of its own reception when Mantiklos, (mentioned only in the third person) is absent. This is a fictional voice. The part after the caesura in the second hexameter is the most interesting: the reader, having heard herself assert Mantiklos’ piety in a narrative statement, is now committed to reproducing an efficacious prayer for χάρις.<sup>104</sup> These so-called *oggetti parlanti* remain within the usual framework of oral communication: they require the addressee to adopt the position of

<sup>99</sup> See e.g. Hdt. 1.124.

<sup>100</sup> Svenbro 1993: 160-86; Schenkeveld 1992; Gavrilo 1997: 70-73; Johnson 2010: 17-31.

<sup>101</sup> 1.877, cf. 858, 865, 877, 879-80, 1056.

<sup>102</sup> 429 *CEG*, with Tueller 2010 (esp. 54-57); cf. Svenbro 1993: 56-63.

<sup>103</sup> Svenbro 1993: 26-63 (‘machine’: 62, 164); on inscriptional voice now see Vestheim 2010.

<sup>104</sup> On the statuette and its inscription: Day 2010: 33-48.

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Commented [PA3]: Two letters were corrupted in this line: as well, the spelling looks modernized; I don't know what you want to do. If you like, I can copy the original in from *CEG*.

the speaking subject — in this case, the voice of the dedication. This is arguably true of later, less ‘egocentric’ inscriptions as well. Early letters – whether Herodotus’ invented literary versions or real ones on folded strips of lead – embed the message in a third-person quotation formula, identifying the absent speaker and mediating the shift from the voice of the reader to that of the text.<sup>105</sup>

As utterances composed by one person for others to perform, choral odes grapple with the same situation of deferred reception.<sup>106</sup> Theirs is an exciting pragmatic situation that brings the problems of fictional voice to the fore with unremitting clarity. In choral song, the authorial ‘I’ is often marked by its absence or distance from the communicative present. This is part of its wider tendency to distinguish time of composition from time of reception, using either moment as the temporal *origo* from which to describe the unfolding utterance.<sup>107</sup> In the poetic *sphragis*, the voice of the poem describes its author in the third person. As Calame notes, this sets up an effect of double framing (a ‘*dédoublement du je*’) in which the singer ascribes her utterance to the absent author.<sup>108</sup> Another trope frequent in the praise-poetry of Bacchylides and Pindar, but largely missing in other genres, is the *sending* of songs.<sup>109</sup> The lyric speaker stands in the moment of composition looking forward to a future instance of performance from which he will be absent.<sup>110</sup> Two odes of Pindar address the messenger responsible for conveying the song to the victor’s city, referring obliquely to the existence of a text.<sup>111</sup> These allusions, like those of ‘*techne*-language’, remain subtle hints in a poetic discourse that is overwhelmingly occasional and performative. In general, references to writing on any medium are rare in early fifth-century ‘high’

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<sup>105</sup> e.g. Hdt. 3.40.1 Ἄμασις Πολυκράτει ὄδε λέγει· ἦδὸ μὲν πυνθάνεσθαι ἄνδρα φίλον καὶ εὖ πρήσσοντα... For real early letters: Harris 1989: 111; [Ceccarelli 2013: 36-47, 335-356](#).

<sup>106</sup> On differences in how epigram and lyric monody ‘address’ a recipient: Schmitz 2010.

<sup>107</sup> D’Alessio 2004.

<sup>108</sup> cf. Alc. fr. 39 *PMGF* = 91 Calame, with Calame 1995: 20-4.

<sup>109</sup> See Tedeschi 1985. Examples: Pind. O.6; O.7.7-9; O.9.25ff; P.2.67ff; P.3; N.3.76ff; I.2; fr.14ab2.4; Bacch. 5.1-16; fr.20B, C.

<sup>110</sup> e.g. N.3.1-14, 63-84: 10-12 (ἐγὼ ... κείνων) the composing ‘I’ is clearly distinguished from the *komos* that will perform.

<sup>111</sup> cf. O.6.87-96 and I.2.47-8. In the former, the proxy is a Laconian ‘message-stick’; while the latter tells him to ἀπόνειμον (a word which can, as Svenbro 1993: 19n.54 and Catenacci 1999 show, mean ‘read’) ταῦτα, ‘what I have just said’: in fact a set of instructions in the preceding lines on how to use and re-use the corpus of Pindaric odes composed for the family of Theron (τούσδ’ ὕμνους, 45: on this passage see Athanassaki 2012: 155-56). As the lyric speaker says, ‘I did not labour on [these] in order for them to stand around killing time’ (ἐπεὶ τοι οὐκ ἐλάνυσοντας ἐργασάμαν, 45-6).

poetry, and mention of papyrus rolls ~~are~~is unknown in ‘high’ lyric and tragedy. This is interesting, given that it was the book roll which assured the text’s survival.<sup>112</sup>

By the late sixth century, Greek prose was emerging as a literary form with its own artistry and diction. Early prose writers – Hippocratic doctors, philosophers and historiographers alike – are conscious of the novelty of the enterprise. Prose defines itself first of all as λόγος (‘speech’), but has a more comfortable relationship to writtenness.<sup>113</sup> Whatever the real mechanism of composition, and despite the occurrence of public ‘readings’,<sup>114</sup> prose unlike poetry was *written*, and its tradition was a competitive dialogue between ‘writers’.<sup>115</sup> Apart from Herodotus’, all early historiographical proems make reference to writing. In Thucydides and his Sicilian precursor Antiochus of Syracuse it comes in the aorist tense of the whole *opus*.<sup>116</sup>

Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to find even Thucydides responding to the problems of entextualised voice. In all fields, the explosive emergence of prose literature is driven by a spirit of competition in which traditions are questioned, predecessors rejected, and new standards of truth proposed.<sup>117</sup> The authority invoked is that of the authorial voice. The ‘egotism’ of prose engenders a preponderance of ‘I-statements’ and self reference, asserting both the importance of the writer’s topic and his superior discretion.<sup>118</sup> Proems are instructive. Philosophers sometimes begin *in medias res*;<sup>119</sup> this is also the rule in the Hippocratic corpus.<sup>120</sup> But the historiographical proem from the beginning insists on a telling shift from third- to first-person enunciation:

Ἐκαταῖος Μιλήσιος ὧδε μυθεῖται· τάδε γράφω,  
ὧς μοι δοκεῖ ἀληθεῖα εἶναι...

<sup>112</sup> On comic poets’ books: Harvey 1966: 601-2; on their absence in tragedy: Easterling 1985: 5-6. Note that A. *Pers.* 333 (Dumortier 1975: 208) uses a book-roll metaphor of narrating.

<sup>113</sup> In Attic, σύγγραμμα comes to mean ‘prose treatise’; ὑπόμνημα, obviously interesting for its connection to ‘reminding’, emerges in 4<sup>th</sup>-century prose where it refers to ‘jottings’ or ‘memoranda’.

<sup>114</sup> Lucian, *Herodotus*, 1-2; Thomas 1992: 4, 123-27 and 2000 on the performativity of prose.

<sup>115</sup> We must separate prose from oratory, where writtenness becomes an issue only after 400.

<sup>116</sup> Antiochus 555 F 2 *FGrHist*. In Thucydides’ case, the work is unfinished.

<sup>117</sup> Lloyd 1987: 56-78; 1990; 1999; Fowler 1996: 69; Goldhill 2002.

<sup>118</sup> Lloyd 1987: 56-70; Fowler 1996: 69n.61 for a list of fifth-century prose proems.

<sup>119</sup> Philolaus of Croton: 44B1 DK (no trace of ‘egocentrism’) vs. Heraclitus of Ephesus 22B1; Diogenes of Apollonia 64B1; Ion of Chios fr. 74 Leurini and Critias 88B32 (all ‘egocentric’). Alcmaeon of Croton (24B1) presents his book as a record of oral teaching.

<sup>120</sup> On Hippocratic anonymity, see van der Eijk 2007: 98-99; on proems: 113-115; on the egocentric voice: 115-19.

Thus speaks Hecataeus of Miletus: I write these things here as they seem to me to be true...

The embedding again bridges the gap between the text's impersonal physicality and the speaker who narrates and describes, argues and judges.<sup>121</sup> In Hecataeus the shift from third-person frame to first-person narration is instantaneous. In Thucydides, the egocentric narrator appears with little fanfare halfway through the proem (1.3). In Herodotus, it happens well inside the text (1.5.3), when the authorial voice emerges to mark the limits of history as he sees them, and to begin the authorial narrative.<sup>122</sup> So despite the real differences between the approaches to writtenness of historiographical prose and poetry, the prose author's voice is also entextualised.

It has long been clear that we need to move away from a view that stresses the *effects* of literacy on consciousness, to one that emphasises rhetorical contexts and modes of use. Styles of allusion to writing are deployed for specific aims within different regimes of textuality. The structured use of writing-terms persists, for example in Hellenistic poetry, where different genres evince different protocols of allusion to the text *as text*. *Deltoi*, for example, are found in 'light' poetry where the text, treating itself ironically as a 'draft' and emphasising its own place in a tradition of written literature, underplays its own permanence. In epic and didactic, genres that aspire to the traditional elevation of hexameter song, such references are unknown.<sup>123</sup> Reference to writtenness and writing-media has a rhetorical purpose. In classical Greece, the historiographer is a writer; the poet cannot be so direct; both, however, respond to conditions in which reading is a form of vocalisation. The 'tablets of memory' ~~both-contained~~ both thought and conceal it:<sup>124</sup> their contents had to be re-activated and converted back into sound.

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<sup>121</sup> Svenbro 1993: 148-50 ('transcript': p.150). [On the historian as judge. see Darbo-Peschanski, this volume.](#)

<sup>122</sup> Asheri et al. 2007: 78 *ad loc*; Evans 1991: 105-6; Fowler 1996: 83; Goldhill 2002: 11-15.

<sup>123</sup> For δέλτοι in Hellenistic 'light' verse: cf. Call. *Aet.* fr. 1, 21 Pf. with fr. 75. 66 Pf. = 174 Massimilla (the 'tablets' of a learned source); Strato *AP* 12.2; Asclepiades *AP* 12.162, 3; *Batrachomyomachia*, 3. Epic is never 'written'; on its speciously 'oral' source-citations: Norden 1916: 123-4; Hunter 1989: 187-8; Hinds 1998: 1-2.

<sup>124</sup> The word for 'opening' a tablet is ἀναπτύσσω: cf. e.g. A. fr. 281a Radt, 22 and E. *Tro.* 663 (with Bagnall 2000 and van Minnen 2001).

As we have seen, this is true *par excellence* of poetic texts. There is a vogue among red-figure vase-painters in the first quarter of the fifth century for writing snippets of text on represented book-rolls: these, where legible, are always in ‘poetic’ diction. ‘Homeric hymns’, ‘wisdom’ themes, and *melos* are represented.<sup>125</sup> From about 440 BC, book-rolls [in vase-painting](#) become common props of the Muses, and Sappho is shown reading aloud.<sup>126</sup> For vase-painters, often illiterate, book rolls were associated particularly with the memorization and re-performance of [poetrysong](#). In the ‘education’ scenes of the fifth century’s first quarter, they appear together with musical instruments. Their main mode of use seems to have been in recitation and memorization. Performing rhapsodes memorized texts, but so did ordinary learners. In two early ‘school’ scenes the book roll is in the hands of an older man; the boy stands in front of him reciting; the text seems to be there as a means to control accuracy. Music teaching too was done face-to-face, with the teacher singing or demonstrating and the student repeating until the song was learned.<sup>127</sup> Late anecdotes suggest that Pindar and Euripides trained their choruses in this way.<sup>128</sup>

The need to internalise text [before it can be restored to life](#) is reflected in the ideology that drives Athenian education. In a song from Euripides’ *Erechtheus* the chorus of old men, while listing the symposium as one of the blessings of peace (ἡσυχία), sings of ‘opening the voice of wax tablets in which wise poets win fame’ — a metaphorical description of performance from memory of learning acquired from tablets.<sup>129</sup> The earliest third-party description of epinician in performance is the frustrated singing of a Simonidean song at the symposium in *Clouds* (1355-5 = fr. 507 PMG and F16 Poltera). Schoolroom and symposium are linked: in the first, a man acquires a mind well stocked with morally improving thoughts and songs that he will use in the second, and which, as the century progresses, also contribute to the foundation of a sound

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<sup>125</sup> Beazley 1948; Immerwahr 1964 and 1973; Sider 2010.

<sup>126</sup> Athens NM 1260 = *ARI*<sup>2</sup> 1060, 145.

<sup>127</sup> e.g. Beck 1975 nos. 100, 105, 106, 109, 114.

<sup>128</sup> The term for memorisation by dictation seems to have been ὑπολέγειν (Plut. *De Audiend.* 46b). Ar. *Ran* 151-3 (Ford 2003: 27n.43) distinguishes lyrics learned ‘by ear’ from ῥῆσεις copied for memorization.

<sup>129</sup> fr.369, 6 Kannicht (Collard, Cropp and Lee 1995: 184-5; Ford 2003: 31-2). Lissarague 1987: 130, 132 notes the presence of drinking cups on the Douris ‘school-cup’ (see n.1 above).

literary style.<sup>130</sup> The ubiquitous mode of literary reception was still performance: reading, as a kind of reduced performance, facilitated the interaction of listeners with the entextualised poem. Most vase-paintings showing ‘private’ reading incorporate a listener.<sup>131</sup> Although silent reading was common enough that scenes in tragedy and comedy turn on characters’ ability to perform it,<sup>132</sup> the texts thus read are letters or oracles rather than poems. As Johnson (2000 and 2010) has shown, voiced reading was how poetic texts were consumed even down to the developed book-culture of the Roman Empire. Hellenistic and Roman sources show the importance attached to impeccable vocal delivery (ὕποκρισις) in reading.<sup>133</sup> The practice of silent reading did not, therefore, affect the underlying idea that written text is transcribed utterance enacted by the reader. Fifth-century poetry-texts thus expect to be memorized, internalised, and reperformed *as voice*.

This helps to explain how it was that in a society so saturated with verse texts (inscribed on stone or bronze, copied on papyrus, or kept in the more tenuous medium of wax tablets), the ideal shape of poetry remains vocal, and also the lack of [references to](#) book-rolls in fifth-century non-comic poetry. Like a modern musical score, the aesthetic fullness of a Greek poem ~~could only~~ in its indigenous context ~~only~~ be experienced in *interpretation*. In a culture where [the](#) poetic text was a machine that guaranteed reperformance, it was not autonomous, but rather locked into a system of use that subordinated text to voice.<sup>134</sup> Poetry’s powers and dignity were bound up with its cultural role and proclaimed effects, all of which foreground its ability to leap off the page and attain real enactment in performance;<sup>135</sup> it grew out of and ~~sunk~~ back into a still vibrant oral tradition, and indeed sought to modify that tradition with new κλέος. At least in ideological terms, written poetry *reinforced* performance.<sup>136</sup> Returning for a moment to Pindar, the praise-singer’s main aim is not the production of a physical text

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<sup>130</sup> Pl. *Prot.* 325e-6b and 392 F6 *FGrHist* with Ford 2003: 20-31, 34-5. For similar practices of internalising text in the Middle Ages: Carruthers 2005: 169-79.

<sup>131</sup> On ancient reading as a group practice: Johnson 2000: 615-25; use of *lectores*: Harris 1989: 30-6; Starr 1990-91; Schenkeveld 1992.

<sup>132</sup> Knox 1968 and Johnson 2000: 593-600.

<sup>133</sup> e.g. Dion. Thrac. §2 (i.1: 6 *GG*). The theme appears as early as Aristotle (Porter 2010: 315-19) and is treated by Quintilian (Johnson 2010: 27-30).

<sup>134</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 1450b18-19, 1460a11-18 is the first to claim the autonomy of the poetic text.

<sup>135</sup> cf. (with respect to tragedy) Easterling 1985: 5-6.

<sup>136</sup> cf. Thomas 1992: 62-3.

– although that may be one (for us, important) result of his activity – but rather a vocal act that preserves the *kleos* ('what is heard') of the man, and the occasion it enacts, in the living tradition of song and in the collective memory. This emphasis on oral fame may look like a feint, but the claims of immortality it grounds are a necessary part of song's mystique. If these texts are a kind of written memory, they bear the imprint of a voice 'set upon a golden bough to sing ... of what is past, or passing, or to come'.

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