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Golden Verses: Voice and Authority in the Tablets

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This paper attempts to read the gold “Orphic” tablets found in tombs from Thessaly to Sicily against the background of Homeric epic. It introduces the notion of “speech type-scene” and draws conclusions, from the deployment of formulae and pragmatic situations, about the “voice” one is supposed to hear behind the tablet texts. It was originally delivered as a paper at the Ohio State University conference *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife* (April 2006), organized by Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles-Johnston.

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While our understanding of the so-called “ Orphic” tablets continues to improve thanks to the scrutiny of many learned proponents of *Religionswissenschaft*, the appreciation of these texts from a literary standpoint has lagged somewhat behind. What follows, therefore, are some tentative thoughts on the poetic heritage and environment of the Gold Tablet texts. The broader study of Greek poetry will be seen to advance their explication; by the same token the tablets significantly increase the available stock of Greek poetic reality—whatever their religious functions may have been.¹

As the first rule of comparative studies is to know what to compare, we should begin by assuming that texts written in Greek hexameters of any time or place can and should be compared with one another.² As a matter of practice, one can extend this principle to cover as well medieval and modern Greek texts in the *dhekapendasyllavos* meter that became the inheritor of the hexameter.³ The second rule of comparative studies—that one proceeds from an internal analysis of any given text to external comparisons—will be invoked here to require that we discover the internal structures of the tablet texts and compare them with other structures; one-off, random word equivalences are not useful unless they lead to analysis of larger rhetorical and literary structures.

Thanks to the meticulous work of Alberto Bernabé, Richard Janko, and several others, the first desideratum for studying the tablets ---a thorough internal

¹ I am grateful to Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston for the generous invitation to their splendid Ohio State conference. For rigorous questioning and helpful comments I owe thanks to the conference attendees as also to the audience (of a Spanish version) at the *XIX Simposio nacional de estudios clásicos*, Universidad Nacional de Rosario (October 2006).

² This maxim, often cited by Calvert Watkins, guides the precise analyses in his masterwork (Watkins 1995) including its excellent chapter on the poetics of the tablets (pp. 277-91).

analysis—has been accomplished. Janko’s useful “archetype” of the longer texts offers us a hermeneutic tool for discussing those tablets, although I would insist that this archetype should *not* be reified into a datable, written ancestor of our lamellae.⁴ It could just as easily—and more likely—always have been a mental template underlying oral composition and transmission, one never itself textualized in the full “archetype” form. Furthermore, it represents the sum total of hexameter lines, in what we imagine as the full scenario underlying these tablets. Yet no one tablet has this entire set of lines, as can easily be seen. Instead, as is typical in oral tradition, only a portion is “recited” or “performed” on any one gold leaf.

So much for the state-of-play concerning *internal* analysis. The *external* comparison with the appropriate sphere of hexameter poetics remains to be carried out in detail. This can be done on several tiers. In what follows, the focus will be on two levels of detail. First, I shall look at type-scenes comprising a few dozen lines, especially from the *Odyssey*, in which instruction and direction are the ruling motifs. Second, I’ll explore formulaic diction at the level of individual hexameter lines or half-lines, tracing a series of resemblances, parallels and resonances between tablet texts and a wider range of Greek epic poetry. After a few illustrations of these levels at which the small and large poems interact, I shall narrow the focus to one tablet and then conclude by making some

³ On the history of this meter with recent bibliography see Letsios (2005). For a point of poetic diction in the tablets, on which medieval Greek verse can help, see below.

⁴ This key article (Janko 1984) has now been updated by his contribution to the present volume; the original article predated the publication of some important tablets, at least one of which gives a previously unattested line. His analysis here dovetails with my own in several ways and I am largely in agreement with his conclusions. For the “archetype” as now reconstructed see page 000 of this book.

suggestions about the authority of the narrative voice that we hear emanating from it and from its congeners.

Following Milman Parry's breakthrough work, the discussion of type-scenes in Homeric poetry burgeoned and flourished for several decades, as shown by the master-bibliography compiled by Mark Edwards, whose own work was central in this growth.⁵ The study of one sub-category of type-scenes, those involving speech, has not progressed so far. My own interest in this sort of study some years ago focused on the *Iliad*, but the present investigation will make use of its sister epic, the *Odyssey*, to analyze some comparanda.⁶ Speech type-scenes, as we may call them, differ from the usual runs of recurrent verses that describe arming, dining, getting up and going to bed—those comfortable Hemingwayesque topics that sink into the hearer's mind and embody "Homer." Speech-type scenes represent more flexible but recurrent modes of handling a situation. They occur in character-voice instead of narrator-voice, although there are interesting overlaps (for instance in the *Iliad*, Achilles talks like Homer and vice versa).⁷ We might think of these scenes as rhetorical *topoi*, but they are not necessarily or usually in the form of arguments or Aristotelian enthymemes. Their usefulness as a hermeneutic tool when it comes to the lamellae derives from their being a node or two higher up on the narratological tree. That is to say, instead of being constituted by content and its treatment (armor, chariots, food, drink or bed) at a particular point, the speech type-scenes are built on syntactical and pragmatic frameworks. In other words, instead of restricting us to hunting for comparable

⁵ Edwards (1992).

⁶ Full analysis in Martin (1989).

content between lamellae and epic---something that is almost by definition bound to fail given the genre differences—the employment of speech-type-scenes enables us to carry out a more fine-grained approach. Thanks to the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, we can easily pin down co-occurrences of adverbs, imperatives, deictics and other speech markers, so that one can compare types of speech (commands, giving directions, assertions) that are relevant to the types of speech contained in the lamellae.

How might the corpus of tablet texts look from the angle of speech-type-scenes? The neat A/B text typology that goes back to Zuntz in the 1970s broke down with the publication of more recent texts from Pelinna and elsewhere.⁸ The 2001 Spanish edition and commentary by Bernabé and Jiménez outlines a more flexible articulation of the corpus of the tablets. Using the divisions there established, one can label the shared content (according to the editors' analysis) that marks each group of lamellae.⁹ Their numbers shall be matched to the following shorthand phrases representing my own speech type-scene scheme:

- L1 through L6 (= Bernabé [2004] fr.474-84): “map and script”
- L7a-b (= Bernabé [2004] fr.485-86): “point of death”
- L8 (= Bernabé [2004] fr.487): “greeting”
- L9-11 (= Bernabé [2004] fr.488-91): “arrival and boast”

(Bernabé and Jiménez numbers #L12-16 are not included in my typological inventory since they are much closer to *sumbola* or magical formulae and do not

⁷ *Ibid.* 146-205.

⁸ On the evolving complexity of the corpus, see Bernabé (2000).

⁹ See the chart, with comparative numbering, at Bernabé & Jiménez (2001) 257-58.

seem to give us a foothold in terms of narrative or speech-act beyond the performative utterance.)

The first set (“map and script”) are those which deal with negotiating the intricate, dark landscape of the underworld. This is the most verbally rich type. It involves a set of instructions about topography concerned with finding the right spot for drinking of the Spring, and then a second strategy—what to say when you get there (hence my designator for it). We shall return to this major division later, after a brief survey and some comments on the others.

Tablets L7 a-b (“point of death” in my scheme), the famous gold leaves from Pelinna in the shape of ivy, certainly recall no specific scene in Homeric poetry.¹⁰ By the very nature of the sentiment on them—“now you have died (*ethanes*) and now you have been born (*egenou*)”—they are excluded from an epic art form that gains its power from a relentless focus on death and dying, instead of on regeneration. And as one might expect, a survey of the 91 poets listed in the *TLG* canon under the generic label “epic” reveals no co-occurrence of these verbs, or even an instance of the single second-singular *ethanes*. However, there is one curious scene of virtual rebirth in the *Iliad* that can lead us on to a speech-type that is relevant, I believe, to this second tablet group. In Book 21, before all heaven breaks loose in the battle of the gods, Achilles encounters a man named Lykaon, whom he had captured and sold into slavery on Lemnos, some twelve days before. He reacts with amazement (*Il.21.53-59*):

ὄχθήσας δ' ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς ὄν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν·

¹⁰ Tsantsanoglou and Parássoglou 1987.

ὦ πόποι ἦ μέγα θαῦμα τόδ' ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὀρώμαι·
ἦ μάλα δὴ Τρῶες μεγαλήτορες οὐς περ ἔπεφνον
αὐτίς ἀναστήσονται ὑπὸ ζόφου ἠερόεντος,
οἶον δὴ καὶ ὄδ' ἦλθε φυγῶν ὑπο νηλεῆς ἦμαρ
Λῆμνον ἐς ἠγαθήην πεπερημένος· οὐδέ μιν ἔσχε
πόντος ἄλος πολιῆς, ὃ πολέας ἀέκοντας ἐρύκει.

In anger, then, he addressed his braveheart spirit:
'Indeed, a great miracle here I see before my eyes:
Braveheart Trojans whom I slew
Get themselves back up from beneath the gloomy dusk.
Look how this one fled the pitiless day
Bound up and shipped to holy Lesbos. But the sea of grey
Did not detain him, though it hold many, spite their will.'¹¹

Undeterred by this *mega thauma*, the Achilles shifts into killer mode and although piteously supplicated by Lykaon, rejects his pleas with harsh words: before Patroklos died, the hero says, I would have spared you, but now no enemy can escape death at my hands (*Il.21.106-107*):

ἀλλὰ φλος θάνε καὶ σύ· τῆ ὀλοφύρεαι οὕτως;
κάτθανε καὶ Πάτροκλος, ὃ περ σέο πολλὸν ἀμενων.

¹¹ All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

But *philos*, die—you too. Why blubber this way?

Even Patroklos died---so much your better.

The tone is interesting: *philos* is like hard-bitten battle-field talk: “sorry, pal—you die.” Not ironic, it is instead indicative of the mix of pathos and horror that is the *Iliad*. For our purposes of comparison, the follow-up speech is equally important, for after Achilles proceeds to slay Lykaon, and toss him into the river, he then offers a vision of his enemy’s post-death experience (*Il.21.122-27*):

Lie there now with the fish to lick your wounds
and get the blood off, little do they care:
Your mother will not lay you on the bier and wail;
Scamander, in its whorls, will bear you to the sea’s broad gulf.
Leaping up (*thrôiskôn*) with a rush and rippling the black wave
Some fish will eat Lykaon’s shining flesh.

Compared with the tablet verses, this is obviously the reverse of that emblem of bliss, falling into the milk. Curiously, there are still some verbal parallels. Lykaon (“Wolfie”) who will lie with the fishes (their licking an anti-type of the ritual cleansing of the corpse), instead of finding a safe harbor or spring, will get plenty of salt water, in the wide gulf of the sea. The Pelinna tablets use *thrôiskô* for the leap of ram and bull into the milk; the leaping fish will nibble the deceased. As

well as counter-pointing the happy-death scenario detail by detail, this little speech is in effect an anti-lament: Achilles explicitly says that his victim's mother will *not* place him on the bier and weep over him. We should remember that the lamellae texts are also, after all, anti-laments. Rather than the frequent lament strategy about how the deceased has left his kin bereft (cf. the elaborate wake for Hector at *Iliad* 24.718-75) the "point of death" tablets in particular declare that everything gets *better* after one has died. The focus, as in Achilles speech, is on the experience of the deceased, not as in lament on the feelings of the bereaved.¹²

Turning more briefly to the other groupings, we might detect speech type-scenes even in these shorter *lamellae* texts. The "greeting" group actually comprises one tablet, Bernabé's #L8=fr.487 from Thurii. It begins in good hexameter fashion (with Doric coloration), "whenever the soul leaves the light of the sun" and after a line of somewhat obscured direction, breaks into direct address: "Hail, having suffered the experience (*pathêma*) that you had not before suffered. A god, out of a man, you have become." The single word *khairé*, at line-initial position, draws us into a speech-type that is familiar not just from many greeting scenes in Homeric poetry and later epic, but also, more relevant, from the tradition of hexameter hymns. This is a fairly obvious parallel. The implications, however, might bear further investigation. John Garcia has recently shown how the *khairé*-formula functions at the heart of kletic hymns as a way of pinpointing

¹² On the tropes of lament in Homeric epic, see Martin (2003) and Dué (2002). The speech type-scene of words directed to the dying in the *Iliad* recurs when Achilles kills Hector, but without the extended forecast about the treatment of Hector's corpse. Hector *himself* envisions that he will be eaten by dogs near the tents of the Achaeans, and Achilles does not relieve his mind of such terrors before dispatching him (Il.22.335-36) This becomes of course the primary suspense mechanism until the end of the poem. On the theme and its expressions in the *Iliad*, see Segal (1971).

the epiphany of a god amid the longer third-person narratives that surround the formula.¹³ I would add that in the context of the tablets, the word *khairē* cues us to the transformation of mortal into immortal even before we are explicitly told that *anthrōpos* has become *theos*. An audience or composer may well be drawing on Panhellenic or local hymnic traditions in the composition and reception of this tablet text.

My fourth group, labelled “arrival and boast,” may be seen as an amalgam of two speech types. In point of fact, a check of the *TLG* shows that nowhere in epic does one find the verb *eukhomai* (I pray or boast) attested within a few lines of the verb *erkhomai* (I arrive or go), despite the neat phonic figure made by the pairing of the two verbs, which, to use a linguistics term, form nearly a “minimal pair.” This independent poetic feature of the *lamella* when it comes to combinations of formulaic phrases is worth keeping in mind. We are never dealing with mere imitations of the poetic language of epic in reading the tablets. The tradition, passed down by whatever means, is *in touch* with epic or other techniques of hexameter composition, but is *not* subservient to them. As a sign of contact, observe the recurrent positioning of *erkhomai* outside the tablet texts: it is always line-initial in hexametric verse. As a sign of compositional independence, on the other hand, we should immediately notice that the verb in the tablets (Bernabé’s L9-11=fr.488-91) must in fact mean “I am *coming*” in the set phrase “*erkhomai ek katharôn kathara*” (“I come, clean from the clean”). By contrast, in the epic tradition the verb most often means “I am *going*”, as when Patroklos

¹³ Garcia (2002).

(*Il.*11.839) says to the wounded fighter Eurypylos “I am going to tell Achilles the *muthos* that Nestor commanded.” The same deictic positioning characterizes other prominent Homeric examples: a warrior *goes* out to get a lance (*Il.*13.256); Hera *goes* to see the edges of the earth (*Il.*14.301); and Eumaeus says he is not in the habit of *going* to town (*Od.*14.373). Within epic poetry, only in medieval Greek have I found a clear usage of the verb *erkhomai* to mean “I am *coming*” (as it does still in Modern Greek), in a 15-syllable verse from the Byzantine *Achilliad* (cod. napol. BN III.B27, line 1584):

“Take me in, Frangkos, take me in (*dhexou me*): it is to you I come (*erkhomai pros esena*).”¹⁴

The “arrival and boast” tablets of my fourth category follow the deceased person’s announcement “I am here” with a heroic-sounding phrase, “I assert that I am yours when it comes to my blessed heritage” (*kai gar egôn humôn genos eukhomai olbion einai*=L9.3, L10a.3). Of course, the line-final formula (without *olbion*) is the most frequent way for an *Iliadic* hero to establish his genealogy on the field of battle. Leonard Muellner’s monograph on Homeric *eukhomai* and its meanings provides a full explication of the bi-valence of this old semantic item.¹⁵ The formula is used in specific type-scenes of extended verbal combat (often designated *muthos*).¹⁶ What resonance, if any, does that provide when juxtaposing epic with “Orphic” texts? Perhaps we are meant to hear an authoritative utterance on the part of the newly–dead speaker who encounters Persephone, the *khthoniôn*

¹⁴ Note the co-occurrence of “come” (*erkhetai*) and “take” (*dekhesthe*, as restored by West) in tablet L.11.1-2 (=fr.491).

¹⁵ Muellner (1976).

¹⁶ See Martin (1989) 67-86.

Basileia prominent in this tablet group. The fuller scenario that we can imagine has the speaker implying, as it were that “The ritual has worked. I belong here.” This heroic proclamation is followed in the texts of the “arrival and boast” division by phrasings that clearly recall heroic death in the *Iliad*. For instance, we have *alla me Moir’ edamasse*.¹⁷ Finally, the boast that the deceased has made it successfully to the heart of the underworld is addressed to divinities with significant names: good counselor (Eubouleus) and good fame (Euklees). The latter name is especially pertinent in a context of heroic identify and self-presentation. After all, as we shall see a bit further, the dead who bore these tablets in the grave were in every technical religious sense *heroes*.¹⁸

Let us now return to the first category, mentioned briefly above, which deserves more attention: “map and script,” describing the topography of Hades and what to do there. The *Odyssey* is more fruitful for comparisons when it comes to this category. Two scenes in particular come to mind. As indicated earlier, this tablet group, the largest thus far, is complicated by the co-existence of two tropes, the pointing out of landmarks and then the instructions concerning what the deceased bearer of the gold tablet should say. Have we anything like this in epic?

The most obvious place to look for intertexts is the journey of Odysseus to the underworld. As I have argued elsewhere, the *Odyssey*, given the evolving elaboration and textualization of the Homeric poems, was most likely already aware of and responding to a long Orphic narrative of the *katabasis* type. In

¹⁷ Compare *Il.*16.849, the words of Patroklos at his death. See also Calame (2006) 264-65. In a complementary view, Miguel Herrero (in this volume) persuasively examines the boast-formula in its relation to epic type-scenes of supplication.

generic terms, in other words, *Odyssey* Book 11 and the *katabasis* traditions are roughly related.¹⁹ But let us look at the speech-type elements to explore what else might be parallel. It emerges that the *nekuia* of *Odyssey* Book 11 is actually less productive of parallels than other passages. We have to back up a bit, to the end of *Odyssey* Book 10, to see how the entire episode of the hero's descent features one set of instructions framing another, Circe's advice surrounding that of Teiresias, and in fact supplementing it in crucial ways.

After telling him he must find the blind prophet whose wits are still with him, even when dead, Circe directs Odysseus to the edge of the world and tells him what to do on arrival (*Od.*10.508-47). Some of the parallels to the tablet texts L1-6 are rather obvious. There is, first, the insistent use of *entha* in initial position to mark both temporal and spatial stages in the *Odyssey* passage:

10.513: **ἐνθα** μὲν εἰς Ἀχέροντα Πυριφλεγέθων τε ρέουσι
Κώκυτός θ', ὃς δὴ Στυγὸς ὕδατός ἐστιν ἀπορρώξ,
πέτρῃ τε ξύνεο ς τε δύω ποταμῶν ἐριδούπων·
ἐνθα δ' ἔπειθ', ἦρωϲ, χριμφθεῖς πέλας, ὡς σε κελεύω,
βόθρον ὀρύξαι ὅσον τε πυγούσιον **ἐνθα** καὶ **ἐνθα**,

There Puriphlegethon flows into Acheron
and Cocytos, which is an offshoot of Styx water--
and a rock and joining of two roaring rivers—

¹⁸ On heroic status of the deceased in terms of their positioning between sky and earth, see the analysis of Calame (2006) 246-48

¹⁹ Martin (2001).

In *that* spot, hero, after drawing close, as I command
Dig a pit a cubit square—this way and that.

10.526-30 αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν εὐχῆσι λήσῃ κλυτὰ ἔθνεα νεκρῶν,
ἔνθ' οἷν ἄρνειὸν ῥέζειν θῆλυν τε μέλαιναν
εἰς Ἔρεβος στρέψας, αὐτὸς δ' ἀπονόσφι τραπέσθαι
ἰέμενος ποταμοῖο ῥοάων· **ἔνθα** δὲ πολλαὶ
ψυχαὶ ἐλεύσονται νεκύων κατατεθνηώτων.

But once you beseech the famous races of the dead
Then sacrifice sheep: one male, one female; black;
twisting them toward Erebos, but yourself away
toward the river's streams. Then many souls
of those struck down with death will come.

10.538: **ἔνθα** τοι αὐτὸ κα μάντις ἐλεύσεται, ὄρχαμε λαῶν,

Then immediately will come the seer, o host-leader.

This resembles the pragmatic locating function of the “archetype” phrase *entha katerkhomenai* (L1.4,L2.6) although the tablet text uses *entha* only to mark place, rather than time. Interestingly, the *Odyssey* instructions that most resemble this part of the tablets' text come at lines 529-30 (**ἔνθα** δὲ πολλαὶ/ ψυχαὶ

ἐλεύσονται νεκῶν κατατεθνηώτων). But that is exactly where the *Odyssey* poet uses *entha* in a *non*-initial position and in the meaning “then” rather than “there.” Once again, it is clear that we are not dealing with a simple phenomenon of poetic models and copies. In both tablet and epic texts, the underlying formula can be identified as *psukhai nekuôn* “souls of the dead”. The *Odyssey*, on the one hand, expands this phrase (529-30) with two modifiers: *pollai* and *katatethneôtôn*. The anonymous poet who composed the verse on the tablets, however, chooses to make a pun with the verb for “be refreshed; become alive” : “There, coming down, souls (*psukhai*) of the dead take solace (*psukhontai*).” The tablet verse employs the preverb *kata*---in the *Odyssey* version attached to a different verb (10.530)-- by describing the souls “coming *down*” instead of “struck *down* dead.” Of course, in both the epic and tablet texts, we are dealing with trees, water, and drinking. Circe’s elaborate description does not mention the cypress tree that is so commonly featured in the tablets, but instead speaks of poplars and willows (*Od.*10.510). She also gives a vivid picture of a confluence of underworld rivers. The *entha* locating that spot, and the same word repeated to pinpoint where Odysseus should dig, are co-relative, framing *Odyssey* 10. 513-16: *there* where the waters flow, *there* dig the libation pit. In essence, the procedure parallels the tablet scenario, but in the tablet this initial refreshment stop that one encounters (like the pit Odysseus digs, both of them near trees (e.g. L1.3, L2.5) is the stop that one is told to *pass by*. It is as if the tablet poets have out-performed Circe or Homeric epic tradition by providing *two* stops rather than just one. I admit that there are distinctions in function within these proposed intertexts. The

epic hero of the *katabasis* is, after all, not dead, and is seeking directions home, rather than trying to make a name for himself in the underworld. But it is significant that we can see in both epic and tablets some shared formulas, shared rhetorical strategies (the *entha* trope) and shared motifs (drinking, inclusion and exclusion) even though these are applied to different narrative contexts.

If there is a certain predictability to finding tablet texts which are parallel to the *Odyssey's* underworld scene, resonances are less expected in one of the poem's more realistic episodes, the hero's meeting on the beach with the young girl Nausicaa. Just emerging from a near-death experience, Odysseus entertains the princess and is given a bath, clothes, and finally, directions (*Od.*6.255-315). Nausicaa is wonderfully talkative: she tells Odysseus that he will have to walk to town, lest people gossip about her involvement with a strange man. She says that they will pass a double *limên* (*Od.*6.263, a harbor, rather than the lake as in the *limnê* of Memory in the tablet). She also fears that one of the rough sailors might mock them asking who the "fine big stranger" is who accompanies the girl. If she did not get him off a boat, perhaps he is a god come down from heaven to answer her prayers (*Od.*6.276-80). The phrase *ouranothen katabas* tempts us to think at this point of the "arrival and boast" phrase concerning the deceased person's *genos ouranion*. It might not be so fanciful to think in terms of *katabasis* throughout this Phaeacian scene, especially when we hear from the royal princess a topographical excursus (*Od.*6.291-94). There is a grove of poplar trees (*alsos...aigeirôn*), with a spring (*krênê*). Odysseus is supposed to wait there. For the listening audience, the details about trees and water are pleasant enough, but

that is because we have not yet experienced the details of Books 10 and 11. In “real time”—considering the chronology of the journey rather than the re-telling—Odysseus has already been to the realm of Hades and has stopped at precisely such a grove, not of Athena but of Persephone (cf. *Od.*10.509-10: *alsea...aigeiroi*). He is perhaps a bit perturbed by all this *déjà vu* instruction. Afterwards, Odysseus is supposed to go to the city and make inquiries about the location of the palace (*Od.*10.298: *ereesthai*). We can compare the “map and script” tablet L1.9, on which the guardians are said to ask what the deceased is seeking (*hot<t>i de exereeis*). Further details seem to tally. When her father’s house “conceals” him (6.303 *kekuthôsi*), says Nausicaa, Odysseus is to proceed through the hall to her mother Arêthê, who is seated at the hearth. He is to beseech her to be assured of a homecoming. The framing verb is ominous, as it is often used in mention of Hades or earth “concealing” the dead (cf. *Il.*23.244, *Od.*3.16). Apart from this, the scenario might sound oddly familiar: To paraphrase Nausicaa’s directive more abstractly: “Go to a royal maiden; do not stop at the first place I shall tell you; go to the second place (and there pray to a female). Then you will be safe and sound.” At the risk of opening a contentious debate, I suggest that the *Odyssey* scene, while it is perfectly comprehensible by itself, would sound all the more intriguing and amusing if an audience already knew something associated with the dead and resembling our “map and script” texts. Of course, that would mean, in practical terms, some downdating of the epics and/or earlier projections of “Orphic” tablet materials. As it stands, not much more than a century separates a possible Peisistratean text and our earliest

tablet. In short, it is not impossible that the remarkable entry of Odysseus into the palace of Alcinoos has been fashioned on instructions for a trip to the dead.

It is time to turn for a few minutes to the larger picture that might help orient us in thinking about the interaction of poetic compositions going on in the archaic period and later. As mentioned earlier, it seems possible that Orphic saga material in poetic form was in fact available in the century that the Homeric poems were taking their near-final shape—the 6th century BC.²⁰ I would like to sketch out how that phenomenon—the availability of Orphic poetry in rhapsodic performances—might relate to other kinds of compositions. Then we can finish off with something smaller—in fact, with a single point of shared diction—for which the larger picture should prepare us and which might illuminate a context for the tablets.

How are we to imagine that the parallels originate between Homeric epic and the Orphic lamellae? As borrowings of well-known verses? Or is there something more complex going on here? The latter seems more likely. One interesting example of several can suffice to remind us once again of the independence of the tablet-text poetic tradition, when compared with the Homeric text. The “map and script” tablets consistently retain the archaism of uncontracted a-stem genitive in the noun *Aidao*, “of Hades,” at L1.2 (*Aidao domous*), L3.1 (*Aidao domôn*) and L4.1 (*Aidao domois*). The formula “house of Hades” using this archaic genitive occurs 17 times in Homeric verse; another 17 instances of the genitive occur in

²⁰ On the “crystallization” of Homeric epic in this period see Nagy (1996).

other phrases.²¹ But the *Odyssey* also has, twice, the “house of Hades” formula with the newer, contracted genitive *Aideô* (metrically trisyllabic: *Od.*10.512, 23.322).²² One of the instances comes in the passage already analyzed, Circe’s instructions (*Od.*10.511-12):

νηα μὲν αὐτοῦ κέλσαι ἐπ’ ὠκεανῶ βαθυδ νη,
αὐτὸς δ’ εἰς Ἄϊδεω ἰέναι δόμον εὐρώεντα.

The ship (μὲν) beach on the spot, at deep-whirling Ocean,
But yourself (δὲ) go into Hades’ moldering house

The modification of a traditional formula—in this case the replacement of the older genitive by the contracted form—can often be attributed to compositional pressures brought on by the rhetorical structure of a given passage. We might venture to think that the addition of line-initial *autos* in *Od.*10.512 has forced the composer to use the newer style phrasing. And if we further ask why the emphasis on *autos* was needed, part of the answer has to lie in the preposed-topic style of this couplet, contrasting Odysseus (*de*) and his ship (*men*), although it is admittedly a rather ordinary juxtaposition. This sort of compositional pressure, in turn, arises when a poet attempts more complex narratives while juggling a traditional stock of formulae. The tablet text, not needing a contrast device within

²¹ The Homeric instances of the formula cluster in a few books: *Il.*15.251; 22.52,482; 23.19,103,179; *Od.*4.834; 10.175,491,564; 11.69; 12.21; 14.208; 15.350; 20.208; 24.204, 264.

²² Two other times the newer genitive *Aideô* modifies another word: *Il.*8.16, *Od.*12.17.

its smaller narrative scope, can retain the older, longer formula with *Aidao* (the focus is on the deceased auditor; there is no boat nearby). The point is that the compositional practice of the tablet poems is, in at least some places, as old or older than that of the epics.

I would urge us to think of the lamellae, therefore, as participating in a rich synchronic and diachronic context of hexameter verse production, coupled with varied performance contexts. What I am suggesting might be pictured as a four-cornered cultural configuration. Let us think of a square with its top two corners representing “performance” genres and the lower corners representing what we may designate “performative” genres. The top line of the square connects two “long” forms, poetry that comes to us in connected texts of anywhere from 200 to 15,000 lines. Another name for these would be “rhapsodic” genres. In my suggested configuration, one corner would be occupied by poetry that we believe was subject to public performance by rhapsodes starting from at least the 6th century BC. This corner would include Homeric epic in the broadest sense (including compositions attributed to Homer besides the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*); the Hesiodic corpus—again with such things as the *Ornithomanteia* and the *Melampodia*; the so-called Homeric hymns; and the poems of the Epic Cycle. The other corner for “performance” poetry is allotted to Orphic “epic” or saga literature—essentially the *Argonautica* and *katabasis* traditions. This body of poetry of course is much harder to evaluate; we are forced to argue from testimonia of later date and from the much later existence of hexameter poems ascribed to Orpheus, such as the Orphic *Argonautica*, and the *Lithica*. Yet we can

characterize this body of compositions as “rhapsodic” in the sense of available for competitive and repeated public performance because it is clearly associated with rhapsoidia already in Plato’s *Ion* (533b-c):

Ἄλλὰ μὲν, ὥς γ’ ἐγὼ οἶμαι, οὐδ’ ἐν αὐλήσει γε οὐδὲ ἐν κιθαρ σσει οὐδὲ ἐν
κιθαρῶδ α οὐδὲ ἐν ῥαψῶδ α οὐδεπώποτ’ εἶδες ἄνδρα ὅστις περὶ μὲν
Ὀλύμπου δεινός ἐστιν ἐξηγεῖσθαι ἢ περὶ Θαμύρου ἢ περὶ Ὀρφέως ἢ
περὶ Φημ ου τοῦ Ἴθακησ ου **ῥαψῶδοῦ**, περὶ δὲ τοῦ Ἐφεσ ου ἀπορεῖ καὶ
οὐκ ἔχει συμβαλέσθαι ἅ τε εὖ ῥαψῶδεῖ καὶ ἅ μή.

“But surely, I think, you never saw a man, when it came to aulos-playing, kithara-playing, singing to the kithara or rhapsodizing who is clever at performing an explanation (*exêgeisthai*) about Olympos or Thamyris or Orpheus or Phemios the Ithacan rhapsode yet is clueless about Ion of Ephesos and cannot find anything to say concerning what he rhapsodizes well and what not.”

The simplest reading of this passage would see it as confirming the existence of two related discourse habits. First, it must have been a part of performance ideology and practice in the later 5th century BC for contemporary players, singers and reciters to attribute their materials to mythical founders of their medium.²³ Otherwise, why would an exegete be said to give an opinion on works by these long-dead men, just as one might do concerning the painter Polygnotos or sculptors, for whom one could still point to artifacts

²³ See Martin (2001) 24-25.

in naming the artist (cf. *Ion* 533a)? Of course, rhapsodes like Ion were doing the same sort of attribution in alleging that their materials descended from the Chian bard. In the absence of a publicly accessible text or score, however, the verbal and musical arts differ crucially from the visual arts, to which Socrates smoothly analogizes them in the *Ion*: they have existence only in performance, and so there is much greater leeway for creative attribution. Indeed, we could say that the discourse about Homeric or Orphic art (or Olympic or Thamyrian) transmitted by performers of those genres must have been a fruitful source of the varied and contradictory lore that later shows up in our “biographical” testimonia, as in pseudo-Plutarch *De musica*. Another sort of discourse, intersecting with such performer-based genealogizing, was clearly an exegetical tradition carried on by the very performers and itself a matter of implicit, if not explicit, competition. Ion prides himself on speaking better than Stesimbrotos or any other commentator about Homeric art; dramatic “interpretation”—how to perform Homer—thus led seamlessly into critical interpretation—*why* one recited what one did, what “Homer” meant.²⁴ If, as the *Ion* passage most likely indicates, Orphic poetry was recited or sung in public, the respective sequence of attributions in the passage indicates that its medium was probably *kitharoidia*. It is worth pointing out, however, that the “bard” Phemius, whom Socrates alludes to as a rhapsode at *Ion* 533c, is in fact presented in the *Odyssey* as singing while playing the *kitharis* (*Od.*1.153-55). In other words, he is typologically a kitharode. The further example of Terpander, inventor of “kitharodic nomes” in hexameter shows that material could easily jump the species divide, from song to

²⁴ For a detailed examination of this and related phenomena spurring the rise of Greek literary criticism, see Ford (2002), especially 68-72.

recitation, in either direction.²⁵ At any rate, whether sung or recited, it is not inconceivable that Orphic material and epic material traveled on the same public performance circuits, with bards and kitharodes performing at festivals from Chios to Delos to Epidauros—perhaps even at Eleusis.²⁶ This would have led to interaction between the two types of poetry at the upper “corners” of our performance square. It would also, naturally, have meant that performers of “Orpheus” were also Orphic interpreters. Consequently, it would not be far-fetched to imagine the composer of the exegesis of Orphic cosmogony found in the Derveni papyrus as a himself an Orphic bard.²⁷

Such interaction between brands of public poetry could have led to the parallels we have noted between the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, on the one hand, and specific tropes in the Orphic tablets. The imagined long-form, public Orphic compositions like the *Argonautica*, may have been the mediating locus. One possibility, for example, is that the short-form tablet texts fed into narrations of a *katabasis* type. One can imagine a katabatic poem in which Orpheus enacts (in the manner of Odysseus) the “directions” found in our tablet texts. By the same token, the tablet texts might echo formulas and content once found in an Orphic long-poem about an underworld visit. The key hypotheses are, first, that this exchange of ideas and phrases was most likely an oral, rather than script-based process; and, second, that it was not a one-way process. From

²⁵ Glaucus of Rhegium in his historical work *On Poets* apparently located Homer chronologically between Orpheus and Terpander, perhaps reflecting late 5th c. thought about the affiliations of the recited and sung hexametric modes: see Ford (2002) 139-42.

²⁶ Again, for details see Martin (2001). On the Orphic poetic heritage as it relates to Eleusis, see the fundamental work of Graf (1974). One could speculate that such traveling “Orphic” performers (artistic and/or religious figures), parallel to rhapsodes, provided to local communities or believers the poetic materials that appear on the widely dispersed tablets.

what we know of cultures where stylized, formulaic texts are used for both ritual and entertainment purposes (for example, in India and south Asia, with regional employments of “epic”), there is a constant and highly productive interplay among the various expressions of mythic material—short and long, poetry and song, ritual, lore, anecdote, monuments, festivals, and tomb-cult.²⁸

This brings us to the bottom line of the proposed square. Here I would place two short forms that were crafted, as far as we can tell, for a functional purpose. These are the gold tablets—to ensure a smooth transition into the afterlife-- and another form of hexameter poetry, unjustly neglected: the Delphic oracles. Despite the skepticism of Fontenrose and some others, there is no good reason to doubt that those who sought advice from Apollo could be given actual poetic responses.²⁹ At the same time, there is of course evidence that oracular responses were also made in short non-poetic forms, as short as a word or two. The lead tablets at Dodona come to mind. It is worth noting in this regard that a similar bifurcation marks the Orphic tablet tradition, some featuring poems that are about the length of oracular responses, others with single words. I would want to pull into this orbit, as well, the *astragaloi* found at Delphi and on display in the museum at the site. These bone dice are inscribed with a few letters or in some cases short words: *Gê* (earth); *Nux* (night), *Thetis*, and apparently *Akhilles*.³⁰ If one accepts a possible parallel to another laconically inscribed set of markers, the Olbian Orphic ivory tokens, we may want to push the analogy and think of games (sacred or profane) in both

²⁷ Ford (2002) 76 notes that the Orphic exegesis of the Derveni papyrus “replicated the esoterism of the songs themselves” but stops short of conjecturing that the author of the former was also a singer of the latter.

²⁸ Among the richest recent descriptions of such interactions is Hildebeitel (1999).

²⁹ For an argument in favor of original poetic oracles, see Maurizio (1997) with further bibliography

locales, or even funeral customs.³¹ But the main point is this: just as it has been shown that the hexameter *oracle* tradition forms a coherent corpus and, most importantly, one that is independent of Homeric verse in diction and technique, so the hexameter “Orphic” tablets might easily form a tradition independent from that of either Homeric epic or even long Orphic poems. This is not to say that there is no contact between the corners: the figure of the square should suggest four communicating corners, rather than random points in space.

The square as a hermeneutic device can also make us think about the parallels between Orphic tablet texts and hexameter oracle texts at the level of phrase and diction. This is a project for further investigation at length. Initial probing, however, turns up a few curious resemblances, one of which brings us back to the notion of the *hêros*. Consider Fontenrose Q69, a “quasi historical response” according to his typology, that was transmitted through Plutarch’s *Life of Solon* (9.1) and that, Fontenrose thinks, may have come from Hermippos or directly from Androtion.³² It gives authoritative directions for hero cult: specifically to propitiate the heroes of Salamis:

ajrchgou;" cwwra" qusivai" h{rwa" ejnoivkou"
 i{laso, tou;" kovlpoi" ΔAswpia;" ajmfikaluvptei,
 oi} fqivmenoi devrkontai ej" hjevlion duvnonta:

Leaders of the land, the resident heroes, with rites

³⁰ I have yet to find even an elementary publication of these items; their provenance (Corycian cave?) is not marked in the museum display. For the use of *astragaloï* in divination ritual, see the full study by Graf (2005).

³¹ On the tablets, see Zmud’ 1992.

³² Fontenrose (1978) 326.

Propitiate, whom the Asopian plain hides in its bosom,
those who, having perished, look toward the setting sun.

The Plutarch story presents Solon as proceeding to sacrifice to Periphemos and Kychreus, two local insular heroes, secretly at night, as a way of ensuring his success in eventually taking over the island. Compare the text of the tablet from Entella (L2=fr.475 Bernabé). The first partial lines from this tablet refer mysteriously to *m]emnême<n>os hêrôs*, a “mindful hero” and then mention “darkness to embrace.” The syntax is somewhat unclear. It is worth pointing out the occurrence, in the oracle response to Solon, of similar diction within two lines, with the verb *amphikalupsai* in the same metrical slot. In context, the tablet differs from the oracle inasmuch as one instructs the dead, and the other instructs the living about how to worship the dead. But going a bit further, we can say they both really deal with the same topic: the proper behavior associated with underworld divinities.

Here we can finally return from the big picture of the sociology of archaic performance to the smaller scale of poetic diction. It seems not to have been suggested in fact, that *memnêmos heros* is a direct address to the recipient of the Entella tablet: “Mindful of this, hero---you should do the following...before –or after--darkness or embraces (you).”³³ A modest proposal that we should, in fact, read the line in this way is based on two additional speech habits found in hexameter poetic traditions.

First, it is clear that the participle *memnêmenos* can function most often with a genitive or infinitive in a command to “be mindful” of some important fact or action:

³³ But see now Janko in this volume.

woodcutting, plowing and so forth (cf. Hesiod *Theogony* 562, *Erga* 422, 616, 623). The essence of Hesiod’s advice to his brother Perses is summed up with the participle in *Erga* 641-42:

τύνη δ', ὣ Πέρση, ἔργων μεμνημένος εἶναι
ώρα ων πάντων, περὶ ναυτιλῆς δὲ μάλιστα.

You must be mindful of all works in their season,
Perses—especially when it comes to sea-faring.

Note that in this and several other verses, *memnêmenos* is precisely in the metrical slot where Frel’s restoration puts the word on the Entella lamella.³⁴

Second, we can see from the Homeric examples that there are speech situations in epic where the word *hêros* functions as a vocative. At *Il.*11. 838, Patroklos asks his companion Eurypylos “how shall this be ? What shall we do?”

πῶς τὰρ ἔοι τάδε ἔργα; τ ῥέξομεν Εὐρύπυλ' ἦρωσ;

In most of its occurrences, the vocative *hêros* comes at line-final position, just as in the text from Entella (e.g. *Il.*10.416,11.819). Even more significant are the addresses of the god Apollo to the hero Aeneas (*Il.*20.104), given the relative status of the interlocutors; and that of Menelaus to Telemachus (*Od.*4.312), which like the Entella

³⁴ Frel (1994) 184. The word also occupies the slot before the final foot of the hexameter in Hesiod *Theogony* 562 and *Erga* 616.

tablet involves a question-and-answer structure, the older man asking “what need led you here?” followed by the vocative (τ πτε δέ σε χρειῶ δεῦρ’ ἤγαγε, Τηλέμαχ’ ἥρωσ). Compare, without the vocative, the question of the *phulakes* to the deceased in text L4.6 (=fr.477 Bernabé, lamella from Pharsalus): *ho ti khreos eisaphikaneis*. Nor should we forget that the vocative *hêros* is also used in at least one *Odyssey* directive passage already analyzed, (Circe to Odysseus at *Od.10.516*), and possibly another (Nausicaa to Odysseus at *Od.6.303*).³⁵ Apart from the Homeric tradition, it is interesting that the *Thebais*, a lost epic of the archaic period, combined instructions (apparently by the mantis Amphiaraos) with this vocative (fr.4):

πουλύποδός μοι, τέκνον, ἔχων νόον, Ἄμφ λοχ’ ἥρωσ,
 τοῖσιν ἐφάρμόζειν, τῶν κεν κατὰ δῆμον ἴκηαι

Child, adapt to those whose town you come to,
 having the disposition of the octopus, hero Amphilokhos.

The late poems attributed to Orpheus might have been considered a prime source of parallels for the diction and rhetoric of the tablet texts, but they turn out to provide fewer speech parallels than one wishes. The *Lithica* (line 404) uses the vocative *hêrôs* to introduce a new section of didactic material, while slightly later verses have the word at the line-end (Ἄλλὰ σύ γ’ ἥρωσ, 418) modified by and in close proximity to the

³⁵ Commentators attempt to read *hêrôs* in *Od.6.303* as genitive, with the preceding name *Alkinoos* although this would involve an unparalleled form. The situational parallel with the Circe episode, in which the undoubted vocative at 10.516 occurs, may well motivate a *vocative* at 6.303; the scholiasts *ad loc.* interpret *hêrôs* as vocative, to Hainsworth “a desperate expedient” (Heubeck et al. 1988) 312.

participle *pephulagmenos* “protected” (419). For this deployment, compare the tablet L8.2 from Thurii (fr.487 Bernabé) which has the same participle in the same position. The context is about directions to go out “well protected as to all things” in both the Orphic *Lithica* and the Thurii text, although the former is talking about snake-protection through the potency of siderite.

Where, then, do these parallels take us? What can we conclude on the level of cultural practice after working up the philological analysis? I have argued that a close reading by way of type-scenes and poetic diction produces interesting parallels. I have further constructed a hypothetical performance “square” to suggest how the longer poetic genres and the shorter sub-genres (including the tablets), the composers and their techniques can all fit together. Let me end with an observation about the “voice” behind these texts that we can begin to hear if we listen closely.

There has been some consensus that the “voice” speaking the tablet texts is none other than that of Orpheus. He was after all the heroic survivor of descent to the underworld and also was known as a poet of hexameters.³⁶ Who would be better placed to speak such wisdom? However, I would like to question this monophonic position somewhat, attractive as it may be. Looking back at the pragmatics of the speaking situations—who is using which words in what situations—when we compare epic and other hexameters, it seems that the evidence provides us with a series of speakers who can instruct their listeners not so much because they are divine authorities as because they are (or are *also*) close acquaintances: Nausicaa, for example, in the *Odyssey*, or Circe, the lover of Odysseus. Those who use the *memnêmos* or *hêrôs* formulas are Hesiod to his

³⁶ See Riedweg 1998.

brother Peres, Patroklos to his companion, and Amphiaraios to his young addressee. In sum, the speech exchange in these examples does depend on one person knowing more, but the knowledge is presented on a deeply human level, not from an unbending authority. We are hearing in the tablet texts the voice of intimate persuasion, that sort of talk which Homer calls *pukinon epos*.³⁷ This is the sort of talk whispered in the ear of a friend or spoken in a small intimate circle, the *epos* that Andromache had hoped in vain to hear from her husband before his death (*Il.*24.744). It is advice, not dogma. Orpheus could have been imagined as singing these tablet verses to his followers. But just as easily, I propose, Pythagoras could have spoken them. We do, after all have gnomic directions ascribed to the mysterious philosopher.³⁸ Nor should we forget that one ancient tradition dating back to Ion of Chios in the 5th century BCE claimed that Pythagoras made the poems that were attributed to Orpheus (Diog. Laert 8.8). If we believe Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.*1.131.4), a Pythagorean was actually responsible for the “Orphic” poem describing a descent to Hades. Given these hints about voices and texts, authorship and authority, is it unreasonable for us to conclude that the famous Golden Verses of Pythagoras were not simply a Golden Rule, in which the adjective is a dead metaphor, but Golden because they resembled—or were—these very verses from the tombs of the ancient dead, inscribed on fragile sheets of gold?

³⁷ On the semantics of this formula, see Martin (1989) 35-37.

³⁸ For a summary and further bibliography see Riedweg (2002) 120-23.

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