‘Memory and Ancient Greece’

Simon Price

(to appear in A. Holm Rasmussen et al. (eds.), *Rituals, Resources and Identity in the Ancient Graeco-Roman World. The BOMOS–Conferences 2002–2005* (Analecta Romana Instituti Danici, Supplementum), Rome 2008)

All history is an act of remembrance, an attempt by the historian to preserve the memory of the past by putting it on record (as Herodotus says in his opening sentence). There are many other possible rationales for the study of history (intellectual gymnastics; learning lessons for the future), but this one is surely basic, our moral duty to recall the past, and to oppose those who rewrite the past for unsavoury ends.[1]

But one should not set up the historian as the simple guardian of objective truth (in opposition to dubious cultural memories). The last generation’s work on the writing of history has emphasized the extent to which history is a constructed artifact, the product of intellectual, social and political pressures. This post-modern view of history makes a difference to how we think of memory.[2] Both memory and history now look like heavily constructed narratives, both weave their stories of the past, both are products of their own time. This is not to suggest (in extreme post-modern mode) that memory and history are the same thing: it is certainly possible for history to make truth claims. Such truth claims are defensible because of the disciplines and self-reflexivity of history. The narratives of history are differently constructed from those of memory. But there are also similarities between memory and history, and it is interesting to explore the productive relationship between them. One way of doing this is through a historical study of memory, which does not draw a simple line between the ‘true’ and the ‘false’ memory claims of the past.

The interest in studying memory in the past is that it places centre stage the self-understandings of particular peoples, and so gets us closer to understanding their world. As has been well said by the art historian Marius Kwint, ‘For a truer

---

1 Vidal-Naquet 2002.

2 On ‘postmodernity and the crisis in memory’ see Climo and Cattell 2002: 5-7.

understanding of the significance and causality of the past we should reckon more with memory, embracing all its subjective viewpoints, since awareness of the past depends on it.' (Kwint in Kwint et al. 1999: 1) Study of memory will place us closer to the mind-sets of particular peoples, it will help to prevent us from creating anachronistic interpretations of the period, and will make it possible for us to see how the choices they make relate to their own understandings of the past.

One implication of this point concerns periodisation. Historians of Greece generally start with the Rise of the Polis (in some sense), the emergence of Greece out of the Dark Age that followed the fall of Mycenaean civilization. Even Robin Osborne's fine book *Greece in the Making: 1200-479 BC* follows essentially that periodisation, beginning with the collapse of Mycenae and 'the onset of the Dark Age'. Of course, all histories have to start somewhere, and this particular starting point of course has many merits, but the costs of our modern periodisation are perhaps not always sufficiently clear. As will become clear in what follows, Greeks of the classical and later periods had a very different sense of the past. They did not know of a Dark Age (let alone Geometric and Orientalising periods). Instead, they believed in a continuous link between the present day and the remote past. As Lucia Nixon (2004) puts it, the common Greek 'chronology of desire' sought 'to encompass the whole of history in one chronological system'.

The sort of memory just mentioned is of course not individual, but social memory, which has its roots in the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1925). Obviously, social memory is an aspect of social and political power, one of the ways that the dominant order is sustained. But before one can think about the relationship of social memory and political power one needs to understand how social memory actually works. The workings of memory have been the subject of much recent work. The key issue with social memory is to think about how it operates, how it is constructed and transmitted, and by which social groups.[3] For example, the work by the Mediaevalist Mary Carruthers has explored the ways that memory was articulated through monastic education (itself rooted in the rhetorical education of antiquity). (1990; 1998) She suggests that places in memory should be conceived not as references to literal places, 'but to *location within a network*, "memory" *distributed* through a web of associations, some of which may involve

---

[3] This is the question underlying the excellent book, Connerton 1989.

physical space…, many of which are socially constructed and maintained conventions…, and all of which only become active in the minds of people making such webs of association.' (1998: 54). The formation and transmission of a memory network is not something that is crucially affected by whether the society is 'literate' or 'non-literate'. The debates of the previous generation about the importance (and indeed definition) of literacy are not really relevant here. What matters is the context. This article will therefore sidestep the oral/literate distinction and instead think about different contexts and different categories of evidence of memory.[4]

There are four crucial contexts in which networks of memories were constructed: first, objects and representations; second, places; third, ritual behaviour (and associated myths); and fourth, textual narratives. This article will illustrate with a few brief examples the ways that memory was constructed through each of those contexts. The four contexts involve both what one might call Inscribed Memory (objects and texts), and also performative Embodied Memory (ritual and other formalised behaviour). They are of course somewhat overlapping. Ancient objects may be known to us through texts that form a sort of narrative; rituals and myths are also generally attested via texts. The article will then proceed to some consideration also of the contexts of forgetting.

First, objects. The best example is the inscription put up in 99 BC at Lindos in the sanctuary of Lindian Athena.[5] This inscription, known as 'The Lindian Chronicle', illustrates wonderfully the main theme of this article. The man behind the creation of the text claimed in his speech to the assembly (Text A) that the sanctuary of Lindian Athena, 'the most ancient and the most venerable in existence', used to be 'adorned with many beautiful offerings dating to the earliest of times on account of the visible presence of the goddess'. Unfortunately, 'most of the offerings together with their inscriptions have been destroyed in the passage of time'. Therefore, a committee of two men should be appointed to draw up a record 'from the letters, from the public records and from other testimonies whatever may be fitting about the offerings and the visible presence of the goddess'.

---

4 'It seems more interesting to show how these different modes of cultural transmission fit with different forms of legitimation and political strategies and with different forms of religious life' (Rowlands 1993: 150).

5 Higbie 2003 includes a text, and commentary. I have drawn on, but modified her translation. Cf. in general on such dedications Boardman 2002.

There follows a list of 42 objects dedicated to Athena. The list cites in each case the evidence for the object: the letters of priests; public records (in the case of the later dedications); and local scholarly treatises (in the case of the earlier dedications). As John Boardman showed (2002: 115-17), the descriptions of all of the objects in the Chronicle are plausible in relation to their alleged antiquity, and none need be mere scholarly fictions. What is particularly interesting is that the list is arranged very carefully in chronological order of the donation, and that the time covered encompasses the whole of the past. The first dedication recorded was by Lindos himself (Lindos being the grandson of Helios and the founder of the city). This is followed by a dedication by the Telchines, by Kadmos, by Minos, and by Herakles. We then get down to the period of the Trojan wars with a cluster of dedications: by Tlapolemos, by Rhesos, by Telephos, by the nine who fought with Tlapolemos against Ilion, by Menelaos, and by Helen, by Kanopos (helmsman of Menelaos), by Meriones, and by Teucer. A new period is marked by dedications by each of the three tribes, by Aretakritos, by the co-colonisers of Cyrene, by those who fought with Kleoboulos against Lycia, by the Phaselitai, by the Geloians, by Amphinomos from Sybaris, by Phalaris, by Deinomenes, by Amasis of Egypt, by the Akragantines, by the uncle of Hippokrates tyrant in Gela, by a Persian general (perhaps Artaphernes), and so on down to King Philip V of Macedon.

The most recent study of this text comments ‘The Lindians do not distinguish between mythical and real history as we might...’ (Higbie 2003: 163). This is obviously true. Indeed, as Higbie subsequently notes (pp. 206-8), the whole interest of the text is precisely that they do not, that there is as far as the text is concerned a seamless list of dedications. There are differences in the types of evidence adduced for the objects of different dates, but that is only to be expected. The compilers of the document had a very strong sense of chronology and evidence. It is completely unhelpful to raise, let along impose on this text, the ordinary modern distinction between myth and real history, between the dedications by Lindos, Menelaos or Helen on the one hand, and those by Artaphernes or Philip V of Macedon on the other.

One might wonder whether the perspective and evidence of this particular document is peculiar, perhaps a product of a relatively late stage in the evolution of Greek attitudes to the past. In fact it is not. Of course, that the text can cite so many

works of antiquarian scholarship shows that the text dates to at least the late Hellenistic period. But from rather earlier, other Greek sanctuaries displayed comparable donations of extreme antiquity. For example, according to a Delian temple inventory there was displayed from at least the third century BC the quiver and bow of Herakles.[6] This is exactly comparable to the two shields dedicated by Herakles at Lindos, even if the Lindian Chronicle is different in the way that it meticulously lists scholarly sources for the offerings.

The existence of such objects goes back much further than the Hellenistic period. Herodotus already saw in the temple of Ismenian Apollo at Thebes three cauldrons inscribed with ancient Kadmean letters (which Herodotus takes to be evidence for the derivation via Kadmos of the alphabet from Phoenicia) (5.58-61). The first cauldron was dedicated by Amphitryo, and is dated by Herodotus to the time of Laius, great-grandson of Kadmos; the second he thinks may be dedicated by the Scaeos who was contemporary with Laios' son Oidipous; the third was dedicated by Laodamas, son of Eteocles, and so grandson of Oidipous. These three cauldrons are not evidence of Herodotus' credulity (let alone deceptiveness), but of a long-standing Greek desire to link the present to the remote past. Such objects were just the sort of items that the Lindians claimed with great regret to have lost: 'Kadmos, a bronze cauldron. Inscribed in Phoenician letters, as Polyzalos reports in the Fourth Book of his *Investigations*' (Lindian Chronicle B, iii, 15-17).[7]

In addition to individual dedications, we might also consider under this heading individual monuments. The actual sanctuary of Athena at Lindos is the obvious first case to examine. According to tradition, the sanctuary was founded by Danaos, who was fleeing with his daughters from Aigyptos.[8] Modern scholars are happy to point out that there is no evidence in support of the claim, the first archaeological evidence from the area being some Geometric period votive offerings.

---

6 *IG* 11.2.287B.71, 250 BC: φαρέτρα ἡρακλεωτικὴ χρυσοποίκιλτος τόξον ἔχουσα καὶ ταινίδιον χρυσοῦν ἔχουσα ἐφ᾽οἷς ἐπιγραφή (this is to assume that ἡρακλεωτική refers to Herakles and not Herakleia). Arms of Herakles at Thebes (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.7); Boardman 2002: 83. The other very full list of dedications by Trojan War and other heroes comes in Ampelius, *Liber Memorialis* 8.5 (Sicyon); Paus. 2.7.8-9 also refers to some of these offerings, though noting that they had been destroyed by fire. Cf. Higbie 2003: 75 for other examples.

7 However, the Athenians, if they ever had such items, lost them in 480 BC; they are not recorded in the later inventories: Harris 1995.

8 Diog. Laert. 1.89.

In the sixth century, a new tetrastyle temple was built on the site; according to tradition, it was by Kleoboulos, the local 'tyrant', also regarded as one of the Seven Wise men.[9] It may have been decorated on the front and rear epistyle with the eight shields later listed in the Lindian Chronicle as dedicated by associates of Kleoboulos. Sadly, the temple was badly damaged by fire, probably in 392/1 BC; according to the Lindian Chronicle, 'most of the dedications were destroyed by fire' in the same event (lines D 41-2). A hundred years later, ca 300 BC, a new, and more elaborate, temple was built on the foundations of the older temple. The history of the building goes to amplify the picture from the text of the way that the sanctuary embodied markers of the whole history of the community.

A different type of link to the past was expressed through the iconography of the decoration of public buildings. Imagery could offer not a single chain linking present and past, but pointers that claimed privileged ties between the monument and the past. One might think here of familiar monuments like the sculptural group on the east pediment of the temple at Olympia showing the contest between Oenomaos and Pelops, the founder of the Olympic games. This representation of the myth, often seen simply as a masterpiece of classical art (which it no doubt is), can also be seen as the local representation of a tale, for obvious local reasons.[10] Or there is the pedimental sculpture on the west end of the Parthenon at Athens, which depicted the contest between Athena and Poseidon for the control of Attika. In this case, the contest and its outcome left numerous traces on the Akropolis. The unique design of the Erekhtheion was due to the need to preserve, and highlight, those traces. It included both the mark that Poseidon's trident made and the salt spring that he created, and the olive tree that Athena planted.[11]

In later periods, when pedimental sculpture was out of fashion, the sculpture in theatres performed the same function. A good example of a local story that a famous event happened right *here* comes from the theatrical frieze of Severan date and also the coins of the small town of Nysa in western Asia Minor.[12] The city's foundation dates to the Seleucid period, and it was probably named after a daughter of Antiochus IV. But it was sited 5 km east of an earlier sanctuary marking the entry

---

9 Diog. Laert. 1.89.
10 Cf. now Barringer 2005.
11 Price 1999: 19-20.
12 Lindner 1994 for the altar. See in general Price 2005.

to the underworld. Even if the name of the city was chosen for dynastic reasons, joining a dozen and more other Nysas in the Greek world, the city certainly came to capitalise on the mythological associations of the name. We all 'know' that the Rape of Persephone, which occurred in the Nysian plain according to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (l. 17), happened at Eleusis. But this claim was contested, and we should not denigrate competing claims. The Sicilians had long claimed that the Rape happened on Sicily.[13] Why shouldn't it have happened at our Nysa? As it happens, Nysa was also famous in another mythic cycle, that of Dionysus. According to the common story, the baby Dionysus was rescued from mortal danger and placed in the care of the Nymphs of mount Nysa, who duly reared him. The city made much of both of these associations (both cycles appear on the theatrical frieze). Nysa, competing with places like the neighbouring Hierapolis, embodied the memory of the occurrence of these great events at Nysa in monuments (and also festivals). The articulation of local identity through the iconography of local mythologies is a form of memory, linking the community to privileged moments of the past.

This reference to local identity leads on to our second category of evidence, places. Here one might think of the ways that individual places were reused in later periods, but reused in order to articulate some ties of memory with the past. For example, there was the offering of cult at Bronze Age tholos tombs in parts of the Greek mainland, especially in the eighth century BC. It was surely designed to express links between the present and the past, to embody memories of past glories. In the Argolid and Messenia, where there were complex struggles for social and ethnic supremacy, the cult may have served to legitimate problematic authority, while in Attika, known for its stability, the cult may have helped to define the relationship of a whole community to the past.[14]

Crete was different in some respects. There was no such cult at Bronze Age tombs (despite their ubiquity and visibility). Instead, sanctuaries were placed in significant relation to the visible remains of Minoan settlements.[15] It was quite common for early Greek sanctuaries to be built on or in Minoan remains: there are

---

13 Diod. Sic. 5.3-4 (probably from Timaeus of Tauromenium: *FGrH* 566F164). Cf. Cic. *Verr*. 4.107; Ov. *Met*. 5.346-571.

14 Cf. Osborne 1996: 103-4. See further Antonaccio 1995.

15 Nixon 1991; cf. Prent 2003.

secure examples from eight places Amnisos; Axos; Gortyn; Knossos; Kommos; Palaikastro; Phaistos; and Prinias (with possible examples from another four places). For example, at Kommos, the first temple was built ca 1000 BC, close to the then visible remains of the massive ashlar complex and palatial court, and incorporated part of the ashlar walls of a ruined Bronze Age building; visitors to the temple were able to reuse some of the galleries of the ashlar complex (whose roof may have survived to this time). Or at Palaikastro, where house and street walls of the Bronze Age were still standing in the Early Iron Age, a sanctuary for Diktaian Zeus was built on part of the site. What is striking is that the visible (and very grand) ruins of the Bronze Age were not used for later settlement. Instead, sanctuaries were located on or near them. Their building seems to be making a claim to a relationship with the past, presumably as part of the emerging civic identities of the Iron Age. For example, the Kommos temples must be the responsibility of the polis of Phaistos to the east, laying claim to the harbour (with its important overseas connections). The location of such temples is thus not evidence for 'religious continuity' (an inappropriate category), but for imagined links to the past.

Links to the past were also articulated in the third of our contexts, rituals and their associated stories. To take a familiar example, on the 16th of Hekatombaion (the first month of the Athenian year) the Athenians celebrated the festival of the Synoikia. This was organised through the four Ionic (i.e. pre-Kleisthenic) tribes, and so was of considerable antiquity. Indeed the festival was deemed to be extremely ancient. According to Thucydides, 'Ever since the time of Theseus, even today the Athenians still hold the Synoikia as a publicly funded festival for the goddess.'[16] That is, Theseus, who was believed to have synoecised Attika, was also believed to have founded the festival which commemorated this great event.

This is a good example of a local story which roots the community in stories about the wider Greek world. Theseus was an Athenian hero, who intersects with the wider world in some elements of his life, for example in his killing of the Cretan Minotaur and rescuing of Ariadne. Studies of Greek mythology tend to operate much too much on the Panhellenic level. Handbooks of the subject have at best a short

[16] Thuc. 2.15.2. Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* wonders if this is a commentator's gloss, but see Parker 2005: 480-1.

chapter on local myths.[17] But in fact the interplay between Panhellenic and local myths is absolutely basic (as was noted briefly above).

We need to think about the telling of local versions of myths, which situate a community in common narratives of the past. There were two main ways of so situating a community: 1. By asserting that particular events of common Greek mythology happened right *here*, and not somewhere else. We all 'know' that Apollo and Artemis were born on Delos, but that claim was strongly contested by the Ephesians, who believed that the birth happened at Ephesos, the precise place being marked by the great sanctuary of Artemis. At a lower level, we might recall that the Attic deme of Thorikos made the most of the claim that the story of Kephalos and Procris happened right *here* at Thorikos).[18] All such stories are competitive (*our* city was founded by Theseus), but the claim that a particular, famous event happened right *here* is particularly strong (a zero-sum claim). These variants on Panhellenic myths in some cases, as Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood showed in 1978 in relation to Locri, can also express sets of values of particular local importance. 2. By claiming that the place was founded by a figure known to general Greek mythology (e.g. Corinth was founded by Sisyphus); we should perhaps distinguish between founders who are merely eponyms and founders who are also ancestors, though this distinction is often blurred by the Greeks themselves; a variant of this is when wandering figures made their way to a particular place, and in some cases founded it (e.g. Perseus and Tarsos; Herakles at the site of Rome).[19]

The *first* type of claim (to local events) we have already seen in relation to the decoration of the theatre at Nysa. I am therefore now going to illustrate the *second* type of local myth, the founding of the community by a figure known to general Greek mythology, from Pindar's *Seventh Olympian*. The poem, in praise of Diagoras of Rhodes, who had won the boxing competition at Olympia in 464 BC, after an account of the victor, offers three local myths, in reverse chronological order. Pindar talks first of Tlepolemos, who founded the land of Rhodes. Tlepolemos was already in the *Iliad* known as a son of Herakles, who founded the three cities on Rhodes and

---

17 E.g. Rose 1953: 254-85; Morford and Lenardon 1999: 480-99.

18 Price 1999: 29. Cf. Humphreys 2004: 140, 155-6, 158, 162-4, 188. Not that all such claims fitted easily into the civic context: the Dekeleians helped Spartan invaders, because of Theseus' *hybris* (Hdt. 9.73).

19 Beard, North and Price 1998: i. 173-4.

led their forces to Troy, where he was killed by Sarpedon (2.653-70, 5.628-59). Pindar then goes back in time to a particular local story about the origin of the fireless sacrifices to Athena (presumably in her temple at Lindos), and then back again to the raising of the island from the deep as a gift to Helios, whose grandchildren Kamiros, Ialysos and Lindos founded the three cities on the island. It was this Lindos who was listed in the Lindian Chronicle as the first donor to the sanctuary of Athena. It is also fitting that the poem was, according to Gorgon a local chronicler much cited in the Lindian Chronicle, inscribed in gold letters in the sanctuary of Athena.[20]

The founding of cities, or the relocation of myths from Eleusis to Nysa, raises the question of the limits of the possible in mythological elaborations. The answer will vary, depending on the logic of the particular myth. Wandering heroes could be associated with almost anywhere, and claims to association with Perseus or Herakles were not zero-sum claims. But there were limits: Perseus could not be claimed to have gone to Spain, while Herakles' return journey from Spain could not be said to have been via North Africa. Claims like the claim to be the birthplace of Dionysos or Artemis, however, were zero-sum claims (if it was true for Nysa it could not also be true for Eleusis). Here the constraints were the need to offer evidence in support of the claim: the name of the place (Nysa); the nature of the place (the Plutonium at Hierapolis); the antiquity of the cult (Ephesos, with her special image of Artemis that had fallen from heaven); surviving evidence (the skin of Marsyas; the lithic form of Niobe; the fertility of the soil, for Demeter and Persephone).[21] Competing claims had to be plausible within the logic of the myths (otherwise they would carry no weight with other Greek communities), and they had to rest on evidence (such as physical remains, old oracles, decrees and the writings of poets and historians), but there was no external authority (oracular or other) that could adjudicate between such claims.[22]

---

[20] Gorgon, *FGrH* 515F18. On *Ol.* 7, see commentary by Willcock 1995.

[21] Marsyas: Hdt. 7.26; Xen. *Anab*. 1.2.8; cf. Paus. 10.30.9. Niobe: Paus. 1.21.3; cf. Quint. Smyrn, 1.291-306.

[22] Pausanias includes many examples of the transfer of the bones of heroes (e.g. 8.9.3, 8.36.8 (Arcas); 2.22.2-3 (Tantalus, a contested claim between Argos and Mount Sipylus, which Pausanias reconciles in terms of two Tantaluses). Cf. in general Pfister 1909-12.

Only under Roman rule were claims like that to ancestral possession of proper asylum rights adjudicated centrally (in Rome), with the full parade of testimonies.[23]

The stories of the founding of particular places were also told in Panhellenic narratives (our fourth and last context). One thinks here particularly of genealogies as the key mode that offered a framework for memories of the past. Genealogies, discussed by some in relation to oral traditions and by others in relation to ethnic identity, have their force only because of their success as articulations of memory.[24] There are two sorts of genealogy, collective and familial. Collective genealogies explained the origins of particular peoples: the Peloponnesians from Pelops, or the population of the Troad from Dardanos. Hesiod's *Theogony* gives the first stage in the story: the creation of the world and the human race (it is strikingly untied to particular places: even Mekone, where gods and mortals were first divided, was not a recognizable toponym, though the Sicyonians claimed that it was the previous name of their city).[25] Hesiod alludes to the next stages in the narrative, and seems to have composed something on heroic genealogies, but it was only in the sixth century that a successor wrote the first comprehensive account of heroic genealogies (the *Catalogue of Women*, ascribed, not surprisingly, to Hesiod himself).[26] This work ran from the descendants of Deukalion down to the suitors of Helen, the Trojan War and the ending of the age of heroes.

Prose authors of the fifth century onwards continued to develop such genealogies. Acusilaos of Argos and Pherekydes of Athens, like the author of the *Catalogue of Women*, seem to treat the Trojan War and the Nostoi, the Return of the Heroes to their homelands, as their terminal points, each with particular local slants.[27] The chroniclers of Athens, the Atthidographers, of the fifth and fourth centuries, are rather different in their chronological perspectives. Their accounts begin with the genealogy of the kings of Athens, starting with the first king Kekrops and including

---

23 Tac. *Ann.* 3.60-3. Cf. Dignas 2002: 288-99.

24 Thomas 1989: 155-95; Hall 1997; Fowler 1998; Cameron 2004: 224-8. Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 141 argues that mythologically-constructed ancestry was not *the* defining criterion of ethnicity.

25 *Theog*. 536, with West ad loc.

26 West 1985; cf. Fowler 1998; Hunter 2005.

27 Acusilaos: *FGrH* 2 = Fowler 2000: 1-28; Pherekydes: *FGrH* 3 = Fowler 2000: 272-364.

Theseus, but turned this into a text linking past and present in a continuous narrative.[28] The outcome of this sort of scholarship is visible in the Parian Chronicle. Its heading runs: 'From all sorts of records and general histories I have recorded the times from the beginning, starting with Kekrops, the first king of Athens, down to the archonship in Paros of […]yanax, and at Athens of Diognetos' (the year we call 264/3 BC).[29] The first entry, immediately following the preamble, reads: 'From the time when Kekrops was king of Athens, and the land previously called Aktike (from the indigenous Aktaios) was called Kekropia, 1318 years' (i.e. 1581/0 BC!).

It is often said that communal genealogies do not link to the present, but rather float uncomfortably (or perhaps comfortably) in a remote void.[30] While it may be true that the earlier works (*Catalogue of Women*, Hecataeus) do not link to the present, such links were always implicit (and they certainly had an implicit relevance to the present). By the end of the fifth century, some scholars had made them explicit. Memory of the past was continuous.

Interlocking with these collective genealogies were the genealogies of individual families. Those in Homer do not explicitly link down to the present, though it is striking that within his world Aeneas proudly lists his genealogy, in seven generations from Zeus (*Il.* 20.213-41). The linking back to this period is most fully attested in the genealogy of the Philaids (as recorded in Pherekydes of Athens, mid-fifth century): this went back in 14 generations from the Miltiades who colonised the Chersonnese to Philais, son of Ajax, who settled in Athens.[31] Mostly,

---

[28] Jacoby 1949: 105-7, 111-17; e.g., Androtion, *FGrH* 324, with Harding 1994.

[29] *IG* 12.5.444 and p. 315 with 12 Supp. p. 110; *FGrH* 239. The portion of the text quoted above is partially restored.

[30] Despite Herodotus' point about Hecataeus' claim to divine descent in 16 generations (2.143), Hecataeus' *Genealogies* does not seem to give generations down to the present (Jacoby, *FGrH* Ia, p. 317, on T4). Cf. West 1985: 9 on the genealogical poets.

[31] *FGrH* 3F2 (= Fowler 2000: F2). For similar lists see Pherekydes, 3F59 = Fowler 2000: F59 (Hippokrates), 3F167 = Fowler 2000: F167 (Homer from Musaeus; cf. Hellanikos, 4F5 = Fowler 2000: F5, Damastes, 5F11 = Fowler 2000: F11); Hellanikos 4F22 = Fowler 2000: F22 (Philaids again); Hellanikos, 323aF24 (Andocides from Odysseus). Cf. Thomas 1989: 161-73. Pl. *Tht*. 175a gives 25 generations back to Herakles as a specious claim made for tyrants. The 14 generations of Heropythus of Chios (H. Collitz, F. Bechtel et al. (eds), *Sammlung der griechischen Dialekt-Inschriften* (Göttingen, 1884-1915), 5657, 5th cent. BC) are often said to go back only to the 8th century, but this calculation is based on a modern, false

of course, genealogies telescoped the generations between the heroic ancestor and the more immediate past. The creation of such genealogies was presumably the product of competition between aristocratic families in the Archaic period.

Analysis of the process of constructing memories needs to be accompanied by analysis of its counterpart, forgetting. Sometimes historians get so hooked on memory that they forget to think also about forgetting. Paul Ricoeur's 600-page work *Memory, History, Forgetting* is promising in its title, but 'forgetting' is the subject only of the last, short, chapter. That chapter considers forgetting as 'the disturbing threat that lurks in the background of the phenomenology of memory and of the epistemology of history' (2004: 412), and goes on to consider forgetting mostly from the point of the view of the historian, which means in relation to forgiveness. But before we think about forgetting in relation to the modern historian, we need first to think about forgetting in relation to social memory.

Every individual needs to forget. Otherwise, we face the onset of paralysis, even madness. Societies too need to forget. Forgetting prevents social paralysis. It also serves pressing social needs. As the anthropologist Evans-Pritchard showed long ago, forgetting can have benign social functions.[32] Among the Nuer, rights to inheritance were justified in terms of claims to descent from remote ancestors. With the passage of time, the remote ancestors remained fixed, but intervening generations were elided, on a rolling basis. If this had not happened, the entire system of inheritance would have collapsed with increasing layers of complexity.

Forgetting also serves other social needs. It permits the negotiation of political or religious change. What we think about such processes of oblivion will depend on our own points of view. We might be sympathetic to a social refusal to rake over the ashes after civil strife, while we might be horrified about the Taliban destruction of Buddhists monuments in Afghanistan in the interests of purifying the past of non-Islamic religions.[33] There are also lower-level and less dramatic processes of changes in social memories, which entail modifications to claims about the past.

---

measure of time. The Philaid family genealogy showed that it was possible to claim links to the Trojan War in 14 generations. This was surely true also for Heropythus.

[32] Evans-Pritchard 1940: 199.

[33] The subject of Nixon 2004.

Forgetting has its own contexts and dynamics. First there is the issue of 'generosity' on the part of the restored Athenian democracy in 403 BC: the agreement not to permit prosecutions for participation in the previous narrow oligarchy (excepting certain specified oligarchic officials, and even they were exempt if they gave satisfactory *euthynai*, that is submitted to an investigation, before a jury which was designed to be favourable to them). This decision to draw an instant line under the changed constitution, later represented as an act of unilateral generosity by the democracy, was probably part of the settlement brought about by the Spartan negotiators.[34] But the decision certainly helped to strengthen the new regime, by not permitting personal enmities to be played out in the guise of political correctness.[35] This episode stands out in the ancient world, but is nonetheless interesting.[36] The converse of this amnesty is the deliberate erasure of names or of images. Such erasure is often called *damnatio memoriae*, even though this phrase is never found in antiquity, and falsely implies that there was a single social practice.[37] In the Greek world erasure of names of emperors or ill-fated members of the imperial family is found quite widely, as cities sought to keep in step with political changes in Rome. But erasure of this sort is a poor means of creating oblivion: the vacant gap in the inscription or the damaged head on a frieze stands out as a memorial to the person that should have been forgotten.

Communal forgetting is better done (in the words of Mary Carruthers) by applying 'the mnemotechnical principles of blocking one pattern of memories by another, through "crowding" or overlay, and by intentional mnemonic replacement.'[38] One of the major cultural processes of the ancient world is the fate of local cultures in the western parts of the Roman empire: Spain, Gaul, Germany and Britain. It is very striking that (in contrast to the fate of local cultures in the eastern half of the empire, and to some extent in north Africa) in the west there is no institutionalised memory of the pre-Roman past (no local genealogies tied local elites to pre-Roman figures), and local cultures (and languages) were consigned to cultural

---

34 Krentz 1982: 102-8; cf. Rhodes 1981: 462-72.

35 Cf. Loraux 2002, which consists of reflections on strife and forgetting.

36 For some parallels see Plut. *Sol.* 19; Ptolemy VIII (118 BC), *P Teb.* 5.1-9 (= A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, *Select Papyri* (Cambridge, Mass.), no. 210.1-9).

37 Cf. Price 1984: 194 for this point.

38 Carruthers 1998: 54.

oblivion through the process of "crowding" or overlay.[39] Even when a local Spanish author, Pomponius Mela, made Spain central to his description of the world, and talked quite often of its Phoenician heritage, his central mythological figure was the familiar figure of Hercules.[40] In general, local gods were reinterpreted in relation to the Roman pantheon, and gained validity through association with that pantheon.[41] Here the process may not have intentional, but it was sometimes so.

Conflicts between Christians and pagans in the fourth-century Greek world were certainly on this plane. For example, the temple and oracle of Apollo at Daphne outside Syrian Antioch was a major locus of contention.[42] In AD 353 the emperor Gallus (then living at Antioch) had transferred the remains of Saint Babylas (a local martyr who had died a hundred years previously) from a cemetery at Antioch to Daphne. Here he built a mausoleum for Babylas, which became a centre for Christian worship. A decade later, Julian restored the temple and statue of Apollo at Daphne, and attempted to cleanse the sacred spring, which had long since ceased to flow. The spring did not restart. When he was told that this was because of pollution caused by the presence of the body of Babylas, he had the remains taken back to their original burial spot in the city. However, as soon as the body re-entered the city, the temple roof caught fire, and the statue of Apollo was destroyed. We cannot go into further details here, but we should note that the story was contested between pagans and Christians: the pagan Libanius and the Christian John Chrysostom of course have very different takes on it. John Chrysostom took the burning of the temple as divine retribution on Julian and his pro-pagan policies, but also talks about the effect of seeing the saint on worshippers, it 'restores the failing memory'. In particular the presence of Babylas at Daphne improved the moral climate of the place, the dissolute and depraved becoming restrained, as under the gaze of their paidagogos. The case of Babylas and Daphne is a wonderful example of conflicting attempts to memorialise religious places, of 'intentional mnemonic replacement'.

In conclusion, this article has looked at the contexts in which memories of the past were articulated: not just the ones familiar to historians (genealogies and histories),

---

39 Millar 1968; Price 1984: 91-2; Woolf 1996.

40 Cf. Batty 2000 for local emphases of Pomponius Mela.

41 Beard, North and Price 1998: i. 344-7; Van Andringa 2002: 131-58.

42 Cf. Carruthers 1998: 46-54.

but also objects, places, and rituals along with local myths. It has alluded occasionally to the advantages for individual families and for communities of claiming illustrious descent or privileged location (the socio-political function of memory mentioned in the opening remarks). One of the implications of this article is that such functional commentary is best done after analysis of the modes in which memory was shaped.

Various considerations complicate the picture a little. There were some questions about the past that were not (could not be?) pursued. The belief in continuity with Heroic times might be thought to entail belief that forms of life had been more or less unchanged since those times. Homer, after all, had held that the past was very different (his heroes could lift rocks, or drinking-cups, that no one man of his day could lift: *Il.* 11.628-37, 20.285-7), but he had also recorded (as normal) a temple and cult statue to Athena in Troy (*Il.* 6.297-304). People might have asked why there were not more surviving early temples (as against olive trees or trident marks). One answer, perhaps, was that things had changed, and that early temples had simply been rebuilt. For example, a fifth-century story recounted the sequence of temples at Delphi: laurel; wax and feathers (built by bees); bronze (built by Hephaistos and Athena); stone (built by the heroes Trophonios and Agamedes), burnt down in 548 BC.[43] Equally, everyone knew that the Panhellenic games were innovations, of various dates from 776 BC onwards. We take them as evidence for our picture of the emergence of Greece from the Dark Ages. The ancient Greeks just saw them as evidence for enhanced religious activity in an essentially continuous narrative. *We* might want to emphasise the role of the East in the development of Greece. They took things differently, giving 'foreigners' good Greek genealogies. Already in the continuation of Hesiod's *Theogony*, Latinos appears as the son of Odysseus and Circe (ll. 1011-13), and fifth-century authors make Andromedes, the founder of the Persian race, a son of Perseus.[44] The practice, of course, continued for centuries.

There were some dissenters to the picture just presented. Herodotus, very oddly, privileges Egypt in the development of Greek religious thought and practice, and claims (as do others) that Kadmos was a Phoenician who migrated to Thebes

---

43 Cf. Price 1999: 9-10.

44 Hdt. 6.54, 7.61, Hellanikos *FGrH* 4F59-60. Cf. Bickerman 1952.

(hence the 'Phoenician letters' there).[45] In addition, the possibility of a continuous narrative, from stories about the gods and heroes down to the present was debated, from the fifth century onwards. Herodotus mentions Minos as a precedent for the sea-power of Polykrates, but contrasts him to the 'human' history that forms the bulk of his work (3.122). Thucydides, on the other hand, in his excursus explaining why the Peloponnesian War was necessarily the greatest war to date, has no problem with the historicity of Minos (1.4, 8), he treats Homer as straightforward evidence for the Trojan War, and displays no sense of a 'Dark Age' following that war. Subsequently, the debates about the limits of history continued. In the first century BC, Diodorus Siculus, writing his *Universal History*, noted that earlier historians had excluded mythology on the grounds that it contained self-contradictions and confusions (so on evidential, not ontological grounds); he himself proposed to include the deeds of gods and heroes, such as Dionysus and Herakles, who were benefactors of the human race.[46] Such inclusiveness, however, was controversial: Polybius had treated genealogies as a form of mere entertainment (9.1.4-6), and Dionysius of Halicarnassus commended Thucydides' exclusion of the mythical from his narrative, while noting that local historians did not live up to Thucydidean standards.[47] Scholars tend to privilege such ancient critics of 'mythology' (welcoming their sharp distinction between myth and history), but it is quite wrong to do so (or to assume that their distinction maps onto our historical periodisation). The normal view was that historical memories could extend back to the most remote periods.

Lady Margaret Hall
Oxford OX2 6QA
simon.price@lmh.ox.ac.uk

---

45 Hdt. 2.58, 2.123, 5.57. Kadmos also founded a Phoenician settlement on Rhodes (Diod. Sic. 5.58.2), hence the dedication recorded in the Lindian Chronicle (and Diod. Sic.).

46 1.3.2, 4.8.5. Cf. in general Graf 1993: 121-41.

47 *Thuc*. 6-7. Cf. Thomas 1989: 173-5.

Antonaccio, C. M. 2005, *An Archaeology of Ancestors: Tomb Cult and Hero Cult in Early Greece*, Lanham Maryland and London.

Barringer, J. M. 2005, "The temple of Zeus at Olympia, heroes, and athletes", *Hesperia* 74.2: 211-41.

Batty, R. 2000, "Mela's Phoenician geography", *JRS* 90: 70-94.

Beard, M., J. North and S. Price 1998, *Religions of Rome*, 2 vols, Cambridge.

Bickerman, E. J. 1952, "Origines gentium", *CPh* 47: 65-81, repr. 401-17 in his *Religions and Politics in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, Como,

Boardman, J. 2002, *The Archaeology of Nostalgia: How the Greeks Re-created their Mythical Past*, London.

Cameron, Alan 2004, *Greek Mythography in the Roman World*, New York.

Carruthers, M. 1990, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge.

– 1998, *The Craft of Thought. Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200*, Cambridge.

Climo, J. J. and M. G. Cattell (eds) 2002, *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, Walnut Creek CA and Oxford.

Connerton, P. 1989, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge.

Dignas, B. 2002, *Economy of the Sacred in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor*, Oxford.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1940, *The Nuer*, Oxford.

Fowler, R. L. 1998, "Genealogical thinking, Hesiod's *Catalogue*, and the creation of the Hellenes", *PCPhS* 44: 1-19.

– 2000, *Early Greek Mythography. I. Texts*, Oxford.

Graf, F. 1993, *Greek Mythology: An Introduction*, Baltimore and London.

Halbwachs, M. 1925, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris. Trans. 1992, *On Collective Memory*, Chicago.

Hall, J. M. 1997, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, Cambridge.

Harding, P. 1994, *Androtion and the Atthis: The Fragments*, Oxford.

Harris, D. 1995, *The Treasures of the Parthenon and Erechtheion*, Oxford.

Higbie, C. 2003, *The Lindian Chronicle and the Greek Creation of their Past*, Oxford.

Humphreys, S. C. 2004, *The Strangeness of Gods. Historical Perspectives on the Interpretation of Athenian Religion*, Oxford.

Hunter, R. L. (ed.) 2005, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women: Constructions and Reconstructions*, Cambridge.

Jacoby, F. 1949, *Atthis. The Local Chronicles of Ancient Athens*, Oxford.

Krentz, P. 1982, *The Thirty at Athens*, Ithaca and London.

Kwint, M., C. Breward and J. Aynsley (eds) 1999, *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, Oxford and New York.

Lindner, R. 1994, *Mythos und Identität. Studien zur Selbstdarstellung kleinasiatischer Städte in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Stuttgart.

Loraux, N. 2002, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, New York.

Millar, F. 1968, "Local cultures in the Roman empire: Libyan, Punic and Latin in Roman Africa", *JRS* 58: 125-51, repr. in his *Government, Society and Culture in the Roman Empire* (Chapel Hill and London, 2004), 249-64.

Morford, M. P. O. and Lenardon, R. J. 1999, *Classical Mythology*, 6th edn., New York.

Nixon, L. F. 1991, "Minoan settlements and Greek sanctuaries", in *Pepragmena tou 6. Diethnous Kritologikou Synedriou,* vol. A2, 59-67, Khania.

– 2004, "Chronologies of desire and the uses of monuments: Eflatunpınar to Çatalhöyük and beyond", 429-52 in D. Shankland (ed.), *Anthropology, Archaeology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: The Life and Times of F. W. Hasluck, 1878-1920*, Vol. 2, Istanbul.

Osborne, R. 1996, *Greece in the Making 1200-479 BC*, London.

Parker, R. 2005, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, Oxford.

Pfister, E. F. 1909-12, *Der Reliquienkult im Altertum*, 2 vols, Giessen.

Prent, M. 2003, "Glories of the past in the past: Ritual activities at palatial ruins in Early Iron Age Crete", 81-103 in Van Dyke, R. M. and S. E. Alcock (eds), *Archaeologies of Memory*, Oxford.

Price, S. R. F. 1984, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*, Cambridge.

– 1999, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks*, Cambridge.

– 2005, "Local mythologies in the Greek East", 115-24 in C. Howgego, V. Heuchert and A. Burnett (eds), *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces*, Oxford.

Rhodes, P. J. 1981, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia*, Oxford.

Ricoeur, P. 2000, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris, Trans. 2004, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago.

Rose, H. J. 1953, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology.* 5th edn, London.

Rowlands, M. 1993, "The role of memory in the transmission of culture", *World Archaeology* 25: 141-51.

Sourvinou-Inwood, C. 1978, "Persephone and Aphrodite at Locri: A model for personality definitions in Greek religion", *JHS* 98: 101-21, reprinted in her *'Reading' Greek Culture: Texts and Images, Rituals and Myths*, Oxford, 1991: 147-88.

– 2003, "Herodotus (and others) on Pelasgians: Some perceptions of ethnicity", 103-44 in P. Derow and R. Parker (eds), *Herodotus and his World: Essays from a Conference in Memory of George Forrest*, Oxford.

Thomas, R. 1989, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens*, Cambridge.

– 1992, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge.

Van Andringa, W. 2002, *La religion en Gaule romaine: Piété et politique (I^er^-III^e^ siècle apr. J.-C.)*, Paris.

Vidal-Naquet, P. 2002, *Assassins of Memory: Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust*, New York and Oxford.

West, M. L. 1985, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women: Its Nature, Structure, and Origins*, Oxford.

Willcock, M. M. 1995, *Pindar: Victory Odes*, Cambridge.

Woolf, G. 1996, "The uses of forgetfulness in Roman Gaul", 361-81 in H.-J. Gehrke and A. Möller (eds), *Vergangenheit und Lebenswelt: Soziale Kommunikation, Traditionsbildung und historisches Bewusstsein*, Tübingen.