

TEXTS ON THE TABLES: THE *TABULAE ILIACAE* IN THEIR HELLENISTIC LITERARY CONTEXT

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Abstract: This article re-evaluates the 22 so-called *Tabulae Iliacae*. Where most scholars (especially in the English-speaking world) have tended to dismiss these objects as ‘trivial’ and ‘confused’, or as ‘rubbish’ intended for the Roman ‘nouveaux riches’, this article relates them to the literary poetics of the Hellenistic world, especially Greek epigrammatic epigram. Concentrating on the tablets’ verbal inscriptions, the article draws attention to three epigraphic features in particular. First, it explores the various literary allusivenesses of the two epigrammatic invocations inscribed on tablets 1A and 2NY; second, it examines the Alexandrian diagrammatic word-games on the reverse of seven *Tabulae* (2NY, 3C, 4N, 5O, 7Ti, 15Ber, 20Par), relating these to the pictorial-poetic games of the Greek *technopaegnia*; third, it discusses the possible hermeneutic significance of associating six tablets with ‘Theodorean *technē*’ (1A, 2NY, 3C, 4N, 5O, 20Par), comparing a newly discovered epigram by Posidippus (67 A-B). All of these allusions point to a much more erudite purpose and clientele: the tablets toyed with Hellenistic visual-verbal relations at large.

After many years of neglect, the 22 so-called *Tabulae Iliacae* are experiencing something of a resurgence of interest.¹ First, in 1997, there was Nikolai Kazansky’s commentary on the most famous ‘Capitoline tablet’ (1A: Figs 1–2).² Then, in 2004, Nina Valenzuela Montenegro published the most detailed and thorough catalogue to date, based on her Munich doctoral thesis.³ This work has been supplemented by Cristina Salimbene’s summary of research, along with David Petrain’s Harvard doctoral thesis of 2006.⁴ The field of scholarship on the *Tabulae* looks very different from that of 1873, when the first inventory of 12 tablets appeared (by Otto Jahn – but completed posthumously by Jahn’s nephew, Adolf Michaelis); it also looks very different from that of 1964, when Anna Sadurska published her own definitive catalogue of 19 tablets.⁵

Despite these various developments, a number of misunderstandings remain rife. This article attempts to put paid to some of these once and for all: in particular, it responds to Nicholas Horsfall, whose 1979 article on the tablets – published in this same journal – has assumed canonical status in the English-speaking world. Horsfall offered many new and important observations. But his dismissal of the tablets as lowbrow ‘vehicles for adult education’ seems to me wholly and irredeemably flawed:⁶ the *Tabulae* are better understood within a much more erudite culture of Hellenistic-cum-Roman, literary-cum-artistic production.

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¹ The 22 tablets are listed in the appendix: ten inscriptions are collected in *IG* 14 (328–47, nos 1284–93; cf. *IGUR* 4.93–98, nos 1612–33. I follow Sadurska (1964) in referring to the tablets both numerically and alphabetically.

² Kazansky (1997) especially 55–102.

³ Valenzuela Montenegro (2004); prefigured in Valenzuela Montenegro (2002).

⁴ Salimbene (2002); Petrain (2006). I am grateful to David Petrain for discussing ideas, and sharing the second and fifth chapters of his dissertation.

⁵ Jahn (1873); Sadurska (1964).

⁶ Horsfall (1979a) 35.

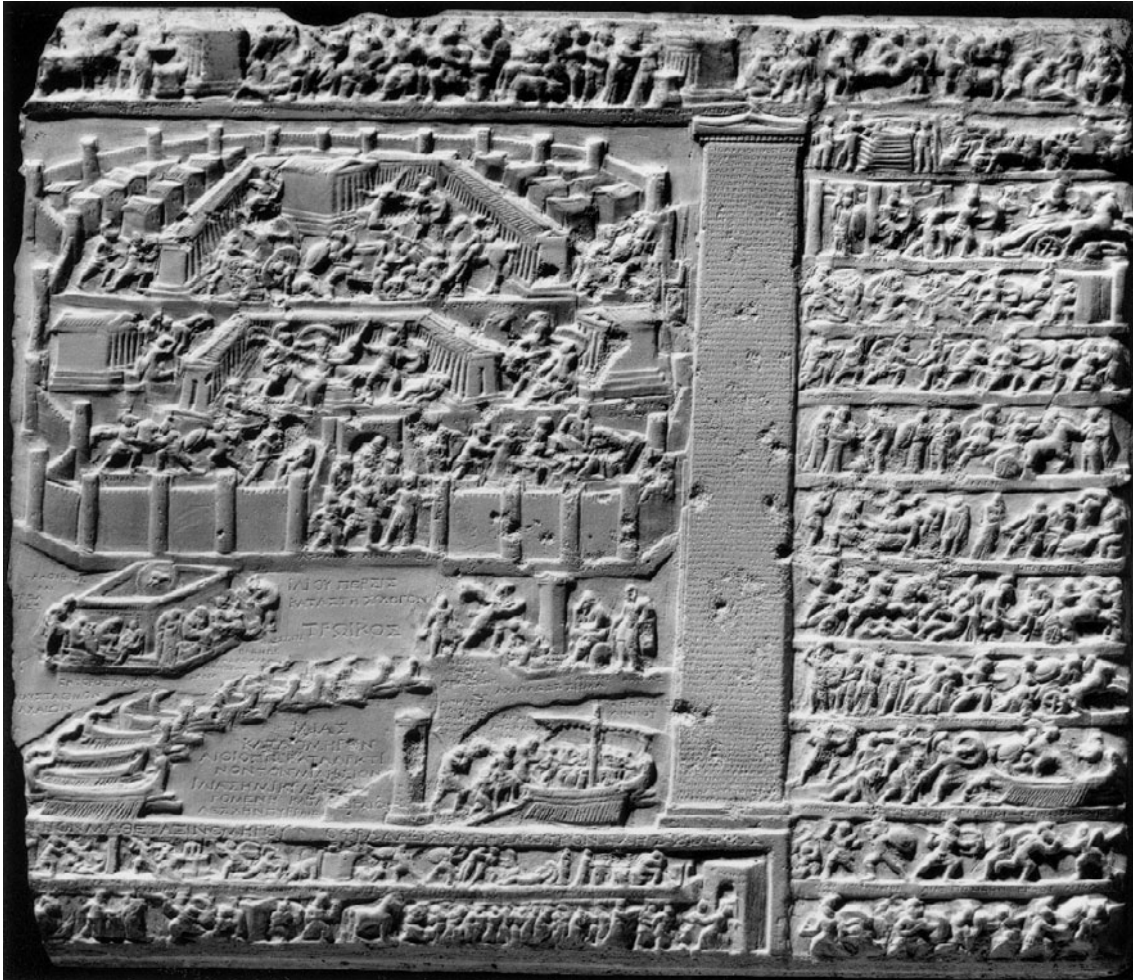


Fig. 1. Obverse of tablet 1A, *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* (reproduced by kind permission of the Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini)

My argument here forms part of a larger project on the playful ways in which the *Tabulae* pitch visual against verbal forms of representation.⁷ As such, it takes its lead from recent work on Hellenistic epigram, galvanized by the 2001 publication of the Milan Posidippus, many of them on artistic subjects (*P.Mil.Vogl.* 1295).⁸ Restricting myself to just some of the tablets' inscriptions, this article focuses on three features in particular: first, the literary allusiveness of two epigrammatic invocations (on 1A and 2NY); second, the Alexandrian diagrammatic word-games on the reverse of seven *Tabulae* (2NY, 3C, 4N, 5O, 7Ti, 15Ber, 20Par); and third, the possible hermeneutic significance of their artistic attribution – the way in which six tablets associate themselves with 'Theodorean *techne*' (1A, 2NY, 3C, 4N, 5O, 20Par). This study is by no means exhaustive. My hope, rather, is that these preliminary comments may arouse further curiosity among Classical philologists, and from a range of different literary, artistic and cultural-historical angles.

⁷ Squire (forthcoming a); cf. Squire (2009) 134–39; (2010a).

⁸ Bing and Bruss (2007) testify to this flourishing

field. For an excellent guide to the new Posidippus, see Prioux (2008) 159–252.

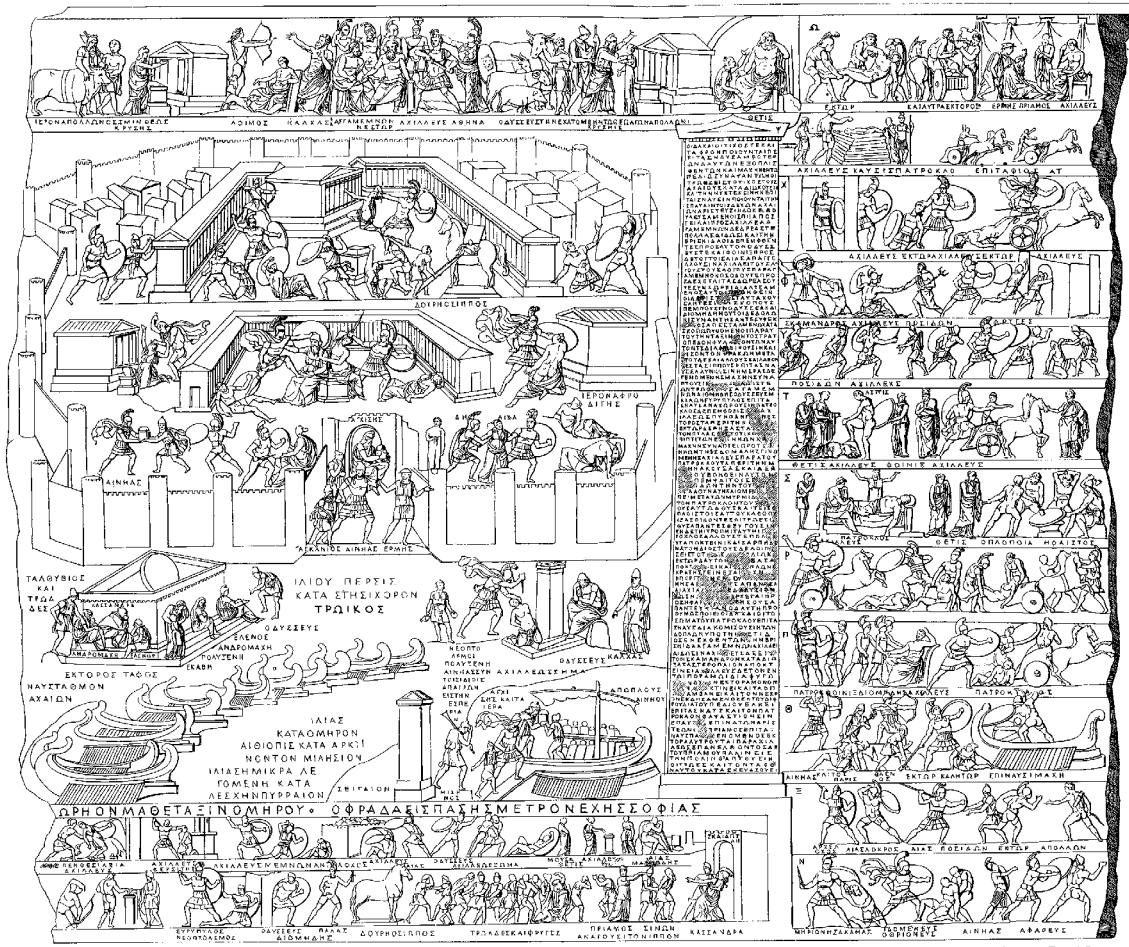


Fig. 2. Line drawing of the obverse of tablet 1A, *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* (by Feodor Ivanovich in the early 19th century, after Jahn (1873) pl.1)

I. *Tabulae illitteratae?*

Before proceeding, let me summarize some basics about provenance, materials, date and form. We have only limited information about find-spots: where archaeological provenances are known, they relate without exception to Rome or Roman Campania.⁹ Materials have not always been identified, but most tablets are made of light-coloured Palombino or Giallo Antico, and at least one (16Sa) reveals traces of red and gold paint.¹⁰ As for date, the most recent consensus places the *Tabulae* in the early first century AD, although at least one tablet (19J) is later – datable to the mid-second century AD.¹¹ Of the 22 reliefs, only two (17M, 19J) preserve all four original corners: the majority constitute broken fragments, many of them no larger than a few centimetres squared.

⁹ Cf. Sadurska (1964) 12–13; Salimbene (2002) 27–29; Petrain (2006) 139–47.

¹⁰ See Sadurska (1964) 13; Salimbene (2002) 18–19; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 297–98. Sadurska (1964) 72 mentions the gilded frame on tablet 16SA, but not the red paint: my thanks to Guido Cornini for inspecting the tablet with me.

¹¹ There are strong stylistic reasons for 19J’s Antonine date (Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 331–33), but not for dismissing 16Sa as ‘ein Imitat, da keine ikonographischen Verbindungen festzustellen waren’ (Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 415; much more circumspect is Sadurska (1964) 74).

We are on scarcely firmer ground when it comes to subjects, for even the generic title *Tabulae Iliacae* is misleading.¹² While some 13 tablets are very clearly associated with the *Iliad* (five depicting it alongside other Trojan poems – the *Little Iliad*, *Aithiopsis* and *Ilioupersis*),¹³ five *Tabulae* pertain to other epic poems.¹⁴ Others depict historical and mythological events: two represent chronicles of Graeco-Roman history (18L, 22Get); one relates to Alexander's victory at Arbela (17M); and one represents the deeds of Heracles (19J).¹⁵

So what, if anything, do the tablets have in common? Apart from the fact that all 22 tablets are inscribed in Greek, their most striking shared physical trait is their miniature size.¹⁶ One of the largest and most famous fragments, in the Musei Capitolini (1A), seems originally to have measured just 42cm by 25cm (Figs 1–2).¹⁷ Despite this, the surviving section of the relief (30cm by 25cm – marginally larger than a sheet of A4 paper) contains some 250 figures, many of them named in accompanying inscriptions. To the centre right of the tablet can be seen a monumental pilaster, inscribed with a 108-line summary of *Iliad* 7–24;¹⁸ a corresponding pilaster evidently occupied the other side of the tablet, framing the central *Ilioupersis* depiction and summarizing *Iliad* 1–7 (Fig. 3). The two halves of the *Iliad* were also laid out pictorially, to the side of each pilaster, in 12 lateral bands (each inscribed with the relevant book-letter, from *alpha* to *omega*). Below the central image of the *Ilioupersis* are two further friezes, relating to the *Aithiopsis* and *Little Iliad*. A series of inscriptions at the tablet's lower centre lists the various literary sources: not only the *Iliad* of Homer, but also the *Ilioupersis* of Stesichorus, the *Aithiopsis* of Arktinos, and the *Little Iliad* of Lesches.¹⁹ Another inscription, this time an elegiac couplet, appears above the two bands, associating the tablet with a certain 'Theodorean *techne*' – an attribution that we find on six tablets (1A, 2NY, 3C, 4N, 5O, 20Par), and to which we will return shortly.

Quite how typical the Capitoline tablet is of the 21 others is an issue that I explore elsewhere: space prevents me from detailing all the tablet inscriptions here, still less from inspecting their images.²⁰ Concentrating on just some of the features judged most 'trivial and bizarre',²¹ my aim is to reopen the question of cultural and intellectual register. The painstaking labour expended on the tablets clearly suggests that they were luxury items. But who used the tablets, and what level of literary and cultural sophistication do they assume?

In Anglophone scholarship, it is standard to associate the tablets with a particular type of owner: the *nouveaux riches*. In a series of commentaries on the *Tabulae* (especially their relation to Stesichorus' *Ilioupersis*), Nicholas Horsfall suggests that these 'treasure houses of misapplied ingenuity' appealed to semi-literate consumers – a new Imperial breed of *liberti* who simply

¹² Cf. Horsfall (1979a) 26: 'the common name conceals a bewildering artistic farrago'. Jahn (1873) consequently preferred the term 'griechische Bilderchroniken'.

¹³ Iliadic scenes are depicted on: 1A (*Il.* 1, 13–24, *Aithiopsis*, *Little Iliad*, *Ilioupersis*); 2NY (*Il.* 18–24, *Ilioupersis*); 3C (*Il.* 1–5, ?*Kyprien*, *Ilioupersis*); 4N (*Il.* 18.478–608); 5O (*Il.* 18.478–608); 6B (*Il.* 1–9, *Ilioupersis*, ?*Odyssey*); 9D (*Il.* 22–24, *Aithiopsis*, *Ilioupersis*); 12F (*Il.* 24); 13Ta (*Il.* 22); 15Ber (*Il.* 3); 20Par (*Il.* 17–20); 21Fro (*Il.* 23–24). 14G depicts Homer composing epic (surrounded by Iliadic *lemmata*): Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 252–56.

¹⁴ At least in their current state: 7Ti (*Aithiopsis*, *Ilioupersis*, *Little Iliad*); 8E (*Ilioupersis*); 11H (*Odyssey*); 16Sa (*Odyssey*); 10K (Theban cycle).

¹⁵ 18L: Sadurska (1964) 78–83; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 276–88; 22Get: Valenzuela

Montenegro (2004) 289–95; 17M: Sadurska (1964) 74–78; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 268–75; 19J: Sadurska (1964) 83–94; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 310–33.

¹⁶ See the helpful discussion in Sadurska (1964) 13–14.

¹⁷ The most detailed discussion is Mancuso (1909), supplemented by Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 26–149.

¹⁸ For text, German translation and discussion, see Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 28–32, 368–76; cf. *IG* 14.328–33, no. 1284.

¹⁹ Full discussion in Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 358–401. On the relation to Stesichorus, compare now Scafoglio (2005).

²⁰ Squire (forthcoming a) chapter 2 (for the relationship between the extant tablets) and chapter 4 (for the iconographic play).

²¹ Horsfall (1979a) 29, repeated on 32.

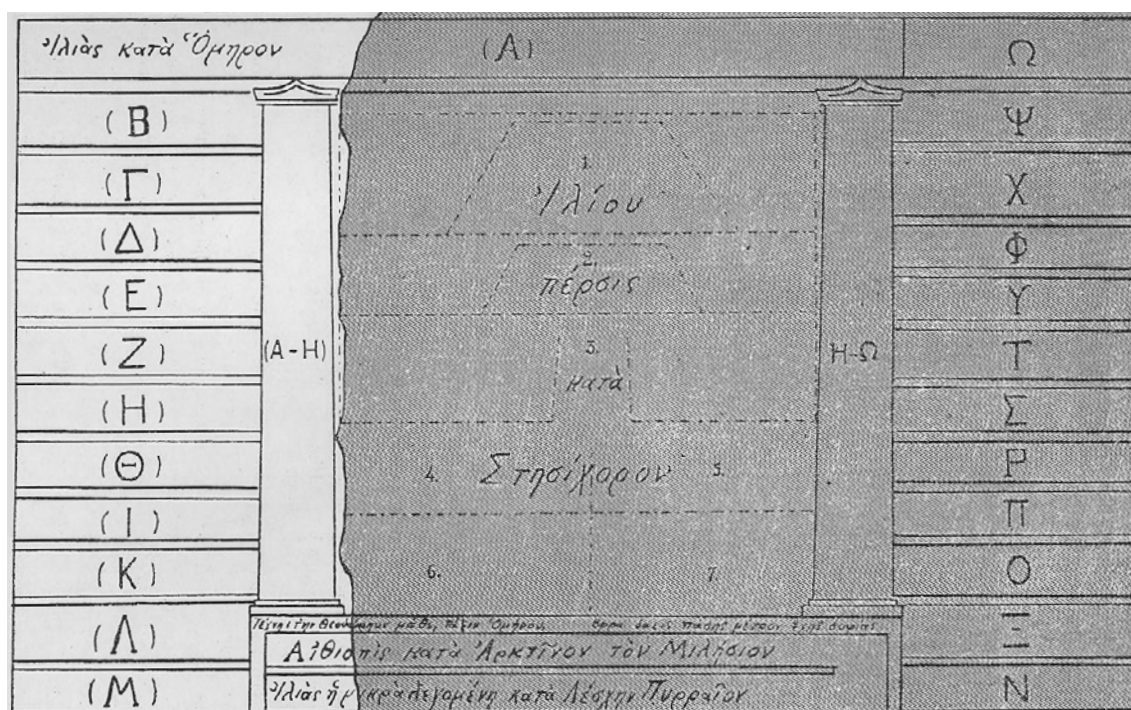


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the obverse of tablet 1A, *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* (after Mancuso (1909) 669)

knew no better.²² Noting detailed inconsistencies between the *Iliad* and the Capitoline tablet’s inscribed summaries and figurative reliefs, Horsfall concludes that ‘Theodorus was concerned not with concinnity but with convenience’:²³

The serious lover of Greek literature would have been appalled by such a combination of the obvious, the trivial and the false. This expensive rubbish belonged in the homes of the nouveaux riches... – of men such as Calvisius Sabinus, who forgot the names of Achilles, Priam and Ulysses and Trimalchio himself, whom Petronius portrays as having Homeric cups, Homeric scenes on the wall and reading Homer at dinner and yet as utterly ignorant of myth.²⁴

‘Trivial’, ‘faulty and jejune’, ‘confused’, ‘simple,’ ‘ignorant’, ‘scraps’, ‘rubbish’: there can be no doubting Horsfall’s overriding judgment. Because Nicholas Horsfall is one of the *only* contemporary scholars to have paid serious attention to the tablets, however, his dismissive verdict has taken on canonical status, especially in Britain and America. Despite the close iconographic and philological work by scholars like Nina Valenzuela Montenegro (unmentioned in Horsfall’s most recent analysis), this approach shows little sign of abating:²⁵ in 2008, Horsfall

²² Horsfall (1994) 67–82, quotation from 67; cf. (1979a); (1979b) 375–76; (2008) 587–91.

²³ Horsfall (1979a) 46.

²⁴ Horsfall (1994) 79–80.

²⁵ For the tablets’ ‘Einladung zum gelehrten Diskurs’, cf. Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 408–19: this article comes to a related conclusion, although reaching it through wholly different means. Compare (independently) Salimbene (2002) 29–33: ‘il carattere

più evidente delle Tabulae Iliacae è, dunque, il loro presentarsi come celebrazione di prodotti letterari’ ((2002) 29). For the suggestion that ‘les tables iliaques étaient commandées par des romains cultivés et instruits’, see Sadurska (1964) 9; still earlier are Jahn (1873) 79–86 on the ‘Zusammenhang der Tafeln mit der alexandrinischen Gelehrsamkeit’ and Brüning (1894) 164 (the tablets as ‘Werken der grossen Kunst’). I know of no comparable assessment in English.

again declares that ‘the cultural context of the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* was ... the exuberant pretensions of the semi-educated’.²⁶ My critique is by no means intended *ad hominem*: we find precisely the same assumption among other philologists and archaeologists alike – from W. McLeod’s dismissal of these ‘tawdry gewgaws intended to provide the illusion of sophistication for those who had none’, to Richard Brilliant’s characterization of a ‘a vulgar clientele that cared little for learning’.²⁷

This article is intended as a preliminary rejoinder to such rhetoric. By drawing attention to the sophistication of some *Tabulae* inscriptions, my aim is to situate these objects within a very different sort of intellectual *milieu*. I will then briefly return, in my conclusion, to the specific issues of social context and clientele.

II. Mastering Theodorean *techne*

Returning to the *Tabula Capitolina* (1A), let me begin with the elegiac couplet prominently inscribed beneath the central scene. The epigram occupies the upper border of the frame containing the two lower friezes, between the *Ilioupersis* and *Aithiopsis* depictions (Figs 1–3). The line division is marked by a circular dot at the centre of the inscription:²⁸

[τέχνην τὴν Θεοδ]ώρηον μάθε τάξιιν Ὀμήρου
ὄφρα δαεῖς πάσης μέτρον ἔχης σοφίας.

Understand the Theodorean *techne*, so that, knowing the order of Homer, you may have the measure of every wisdom.

Although the left-hand extremity of the hexameter is missing, Umberto Mancuso’s reconstruction is beyond reasonable doubt: the ‘Theod]orean’ adjective is unambiguous, and, as we shall see, four other tablets associate themselves with τέχνη ἢ Θεοδώρηος in precisely this manner (2NY, 3C, 5O, 20Par).²⁹ A manifestly related inscription, placed in an equally prominent position – this time at the very top of the relief (Fig. 4) – can be found on tablet 2NY in New York. Only 16 letters survive (EXNHN METPON EXHΣ ΣΟ), but the spacing of the inscription, together with its surviving pentameter fragment, confirms that it too originally comprised an elegiac couplet. Using the Capitoline tablet as his model, Kazimierz Bulas proposed the following reconstruction:³⁰

[τέχνην τὴν Θεοδώρηον μάθε τάξιιν Ὀμήρου
ὄφρα δαεῖς τ|τέχνην μέτρον ἔχης σο[φίας].

[Understand the Theodorean *techne*, so that, knowing the order of Homer, you may have the *techne* and measure of wisdom.

David Petrain is rightly cautious in judging Bulas’ reconstruction ‘highly uncertain’.³¹ But even if 2NY did not reproduce the 1A hexameter complete, we can be sure that it offered a variation on that verse, just as it did in its pentameter. The two inscriptions on the reverse side of the New York tablet are clearly related to those on the obverse of the *Tabula Capitolina*: as we shall see (below), a hexameter inscription directly addressed the viewer in imperative form, as on

²⁶ Horsfall (2008) 589.

²⁷ McLeod (1985) 164; Brilliant (1984) 57.

²⁸ For discussion, see Bulas (1950) 114; Sadurska (1964) 39; Horsfall (1979a) 27; Bua (1971) 5; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 28, 351–56. Petrain (2006) 43–59 notes further epigraphic parallels.

²⁹ Mancuso (1909) 729–30. Only Lippold (1932) 1893 resists the reconstruction (‘erscheint zu künstlich’) – writing before the subsequent publication of tablets 2NY and 20Par.

³⁰ Bulas (1950) 114.

³¹ Petrain (2006) 44, n.2.



Fig. 4. Obverse of tablet 2NY, *Tabula New York* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1924 (24.97.11); © The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

the Capitoline tablet, and a second inscription, this time in the form of a so-called ‘magic square’, likewise related the *Iliad* of Homer’ to the ‘Theodorean *techne*’ (Ἰλιάς Ὁμήρου Θεοδώρου ἡ(ί) τέχνη). Whatever else we make of them, the pentameter’s buzzwords – *techne*, *metron* and *sophia* – are connected to those of the Capitoline tablet.

Discussion of these two epigrams has tended to concentrate on the precise connotations of the noun *techne*, which I deliberately leave untranslated:³² the overriding issue has been whether the term refers to the artistic or grammatical workmanship of Theodorus – whether to Theodorus as the craftsman responsible for this carefully fashioned object (*techne* as artistry, perhaps even referring to

³² For discussion, see Horsfall (1979a) 27, 31 (responding to Sadurska (1964) 39); Kazansky (1997)

57; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 352–55 (with further references).

this artwork)³³ or to Theodorus as the author of an Homeric epitome (*techne* as a more literary form of craftsmanship, perhaps referring to this verbal epitome specifically).³⁴ To my mind, this has been a rather sterile debate. As I hope to show, the epigrams in fact play upon the *dual* register of the word, toying self-consciously with the shared critical vocabulary of artistic and literary production.

Fundamental here is the literary allusiveness of both texts.³⁵ A fragment of P.Oxy 2619, first published in 1969, now allows us to see that the Capitoline tablet, which explicitly parades its association with Stesichorus, also verbally alluded to his *Ilioupersis* in its programmatic inscription (S 89.6–8 Davies):³⁶

... ἀνήρ
θ]εᾶς ἰ[ό]τατι δαεῖς σεμν[ᾶς] Ἀθάνας
μέτ[ρα] τε καὶ σοφίαν τοῦ...

The man who learned by the will of the august goddess Athena the measures and wisdom...

There can be little doubt that both the Capitoline and New York pentameters were written with this passage in mind: this explains the collocation of the (relatively rare) aorist participle δαεῖς with the nouns σοφία and μέτρον.³⁷ Just as the Capitoline tablet claims pictorial derivation from the *Ilioupersis* – ‘the *Ilioupersis* after Stesichorus’ as a large central inscription reads – its epigram is literally mediated through the very language of the poem. If, as Nikolai Kazansky has argued, this Stesichorean fragment formed part of the opening strophe of the poem, the allusion would have been all the more arresting, imbuing these visual objects with the same Greek poetic force that gave rise to the *Ilioupersis* itself.³⁸

Still more significant is the specific context in which the Stesichorean passage appeared. Luigi Lehnus, who was the first to note the connection, has convincingly shown that the lines describe the craftsmanship of the Greek artist Epeius:³⁹ the ‘measures and wisdom’ that Stesichorus describes seem to refer to Epeius’ ruse of the wooden horse, aided by the goddess Athena (as we know from numerous other sources).⁴⁰ On the Capitoline tablet, then, the allusion establishes both an artistic and a literary paradigm for Theodorus’ project, within an epigram itself attached to a series of visual representations of this and other poems: on the one hand, it assimilates Theodorus to the craftsman responsible for the Trojan Horse, as represented directly above; on the other, it presents Theodorus as a modern-day Stesichorus – as not just resembling the artist Epeius, but also akin to the poet who describes Epeius’ craftsmanship in verse (forging his own craftsmanship, as it were, within this elegiac couplet).

³³ For example, Lippold (1932) 1893; Sadurska (1964) 9–10; Horsfall (1979a) 27; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 350–58; Petrain (2006) 44–45, n.3.

³⁴ For example, Jahn (1873) 91–92; Schefold (1975) 130; Rouveret (1988) 173.

³⁵ Petrain (2006) 45–59 provides an independent analysis of the epigram’s ‘elaborate diction and syntax’ ((2006) 45), focusing on the collocation ὄφρα δαεῖς: he suggests that the participle is usually associated with the mastery of knowledge and epic in diction (comparing, for example, *Il.* 10.425, 16.423; *Od.* 9.280).

³⁶ For text and *apparatus criticus*, see Davies (1991) 186 (indebted to West (1969) 140–41). Kazansky (1997) 36–43 and Schade (2003) 199–203 provide excellent commentaries.

³⁷ The allusion goes unmentioned in Valenzuela Montenegro (2004); Horsfall (1979a) overlooks P.Oxy

2619 and P.Oxy 2803 almost entirely (as conceded in Horsfall (2008) 588, n.7). As far as I can tell, only Lehnus ((1972) 54–55), Carlini ((1982) 632–33), Kazansky ((1997) 58–59) and Schade ((2003) 202) note the allusion, commenting on the Stesichorean text. More recent are Petrain (2006) 50–51 and Porter (forthcoming), although in what follows I emphasize the original context of the passage – describing Epeius’ *artistic* craftsmanship.

³⁸ Kazansky (1997) 36–43 (supposing a hymnic invocation in the first strophe).

³⁹ Lehnus (1972) 54–55; cf. Kazansky (1997) 36–37; Schade (2003) 199–200.

⁴⁰ Cf. Schade (2003) 199–200, discussing, for example, *Od.* 8.493; Quint. Smyrn. 12.80–83 (Epeius ‘whose lore Athena taught him’, δέδασεν δέ μιν ἔργον Ἀθήνη).

That these epigrams are punning on a shared language of artistic and poetic invention is confirmed by a second allusion, to a clearly related Archaic Greek poem attributed to Solon (13.49–52 West):⁴¹

ἄλλος Ἀθηναίης τε καὶ Ἡφαίστου πολυτέχνεω
 ἔργα δαεὶς χειροῖν ξυλλέγεται βίοτον,
 ἄλλος Ὀλυμπιάδων Μουσέων πάρα δῶρα διδαχθεὶς
 ἱμερτῆς σοφίης μέτρον ἐπιστάμενος.

One man, after he has learned the works of Athena and much-skilled Hephaestus, makes his living with his two hands; another does so, after having been taught his gifts from the Olympian Muses, by understanding the measure of desirable wisdom.

There are of course differences between this passage of Solon and the phrasing of our two tablet epigrams. Condensing two couplets into its single pentameter, the Capitoline epigram seems to make the ‘order of Homer’ (τάξις Ὀμήρου) the direct object of the participle δαεὶς, while nonetheless maintaining the integrity of the phrase σοφίης μέτρον (ὄφρα δαεὶς πάσης μέτρον ἔχης σοφίας). These were evidently famous lines. An epitaph on Hesiod, apparently ascribed to Pindar, clearly refers to them,⁴² as does a tradition of sympotic poetry, descended from a poem by Theognis (873–76 West). Once again, the context of the Solonic passage is significant. Where Solon characterizes two distinct livelihoods – artistic craftsmanship on the one hand and poetic mastery on the other – our epigrams collapse the two cultural spheres into one discrete entity. The *Tabulae* epigrams fuse artistic with poetic craftsmanship: Theodorus’ *techne* is a feat of manual craftsmanship, as learned from Athena and ‘much-skilled’ (πολυτέχνεω) Hephaestus; but it is also a literary project, the measure of *poetic* wisdom.⁴³

The distinct phrasing of the Capitoline epigram, with its promise of possessing the ‘measure of every wisdom’ (πάσης μέτρον... σοφίας), finds further parallels in epic evocations of both artistic and poetic craftsmanship. While in one sense it reminds us of the Homeric analogy of the warring Greeks and Trojans, compared to the *sophia* of ‘a workman skilled in his handiwork and who knows of his every wisdom through the counsels of Athena’ (τέκτονος ἐν παλάμῃσι δαήμενος, ὅς ῥά τε πάσης / εὖ εἰδῆ σοφίης ὑποθημοσύνησιν Ἀθήνης, *Il.* 15.411–12), it is also reminiscent of Pigres’ fifth-century BC alleged attempt to recast Homeric epic into a series of elegiac couplets. By inserting a pentameter after the opening hexameter of the *Iliad*, Pigres invoked ‘the Muse who possesses the limits of every wisdom’ (Μοῦσα· σὺ γὰρ πάσης πείρατ’ ἔχεις σοφίης, *EGF* 65).⁴⁴ Although we know next to nothing about this

⁴¹ The allusion was recognized by Guarducci (1974) 430 (independently by Kazansky (1997) 58, n.23); cf. Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 352; Petrain (2006) 48–49. On Solon’s relation to Stesichorus, see Schade (2003) 202.

⁴² The epitaph is preserved in the *Tzetzae Vita* (see Merkelbach and West (1970) 3) and discussed in Page (1981) 159–60 (χαῖρε δὲς ἠβήσας καὶ δὲς τάφου ἀντιβολήσας / Ἡσίοδ’, ἀνθρώποις μέτρον ἔχων σοφίης). For the connection with the Capitoline epigram, see Lehnus (1972) 54, n.15; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 352; Petrain (2006) 53; note too the participle ἔχων, which foreshadows the verb of both tablets 1A and 2NY.

⁴³ I respectfully part ways here with Petrain ((2006)

45), who instead argues that ‘the pentameter ... employs language traditionally associated with the acquisition of knowledge about *poetry*, so that we remain acutely aware of the epic narrative underlying the visual presentation’ (his emphasis). I am not convinced that δαεὶς ‘is reserved for the acquisition of the knowledge necessary to practice the art of poetry’ ((2006) 54): indeed, we find a related use of the verb in *Il.* 15.411–12, a passage which refers to *artistic* craftsmanship, and which has a direct relevance for our epigram (as Petrain (2006) 49–50 notes).

⁴⁴ On the parallel, see Lehnus (1972) 54, n.15; Petrain (2006) 56–57. On the line’s association with the aforementioned passage of Stesichorus (S 89.6–8 Davies), compare Schade (2003) 202.

Carian poet – supposedly the brother of Artemisia – Pigres may well have had the Solonic passage in mind; and it is at least possible that audiences in turn recognized Pigres' pentameter, preserved in the metrical structure of the Capitoline tablet's verse (πάσης μέτρον ἔχης σοφίας).

The overriding point is this: the allusive texture of these two epigrams establishes the inscribed objects as a *combined* feat of visual and verbal dexterity; better, they leave ambiguous the precise nature of 'Theodorean *techne*', pertaining both to objects for viewing and texts for reading. As such, the two epigrammatic invocations situate themselves within a long literary tradition of analogizing poetry to art (and *vice versa*). This tradition came to the fore of the Hellenistic aesthetic agenda in particular. Following Simon Goldhill's seminal article on ecphrasis and the 'culture of viewing in the Hellenistic world', numerous scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which the crafted products of visual art served as metapoetic figures for the literary creations of the poet.⁴⁵ The *locus classicus* is arguably Theocritus' 15th *Idyll*, in which two women respond not only to an embroidered tapestry displayed in Alexandria, but also to a set-piece hymn, a sung poem that is stage-managed, with characteristic self-reflexivity, within the poem's larger frame: not for nothing does Gorgo's praise of the female hymn-singer directly parallel Praxinoa's praise of those who wove the tapestry (τὸ χρῆμα σοφώτατον ἂ θήλεια, 'the woman is a creature of exceeding wisdom', *Id.* 15.145; σοφόν τι χρῆμ' ἄνθρωπος, 'mankind is a creature of wisdom', *Id.* 15.83).⁴⁶ Theocritus' analogous use of the adjective *sophos* ('wise'), in the related contexts of both the woven image and the sung poem, resonates with the dual register of the *sophia* ('wisdom') in the two *Tabulae* epigrams: on both tablets 1A and 2NY the word pertains simultaneously to the 'wisdom' of Theodorus' visual objects, the poems with which they engage and the epigrams that knowingly occupy both registers at once.

A still closer parallel for the tablets' epigrammatic concern with combined artistic-cum-poetic craftsmanship is to be found in Hellenistic epigram, especially in those epideictic epigrams that pose as make-believe inscriptions attached to artworks. Toying with their own ontological status between physical monument and collectible literary entity on the page, these poems explored what is at stake in translating an object designed for viewing into a miniature text now destined for reading; in verbally mediating the image, moreover, epigrammatists delighted in appropriating for their own (meta)poetic ends the standard language of artistic production.⁴⁷ As a single elegiac couplet detailing the name of the artist and purpose of the artwork, both the Capitoline and New York inscriptions might be compared with supposed 'artistic signature' epigrams surviving in the *Palatine* and *Planudean Anthologies*.⁴⁸ But their express concern with *techne* and *sophia* also bears comparison with the 36 extant poems on Myron's cow, gathered together in the ninth book of the *Palatine Anthology*, and now supplemented by Posidippus' own epigram on the subject (col. XI 6–11, 66 A–B). Within this surviving sequence of epigrams, spanning a period from the early Hellenistic to the late Byzantine world, there are some dozen references to the *techne* of Myron's make-believe creations;⁴⁹ in these

⁴⁵ Goldhill (1994); cf. Goldhill (1996) 21–24; (2001) 157–67; (2007) 1–3. Most important are now Rossi (2001) especially 15–27; Gutzwiller (2002a); Meyer (2007) (along with Meyer (2005) 125–26); Männlein-Robert (2007a); (2007b); Prioux (2007); (2008); Tueller (2008) especially 141–65.

⁴⁶ See especially Burton (1995) 118–19; cf. Manakidou (1993) 40–50; Goldhill (1994) 216–23; Hunter (1996) 116–23; Skinner (2001); Männlein-Robert (2007b) 283–303; DuBois (2007) 47–54.

⁴⁷ Squire (forthcoming b); cf. Squire (2009) 161–68;

(2010c) 148–52; (forthcoming d). On the classification of these epigrams as 'ecphrastic', see Squire (2010b).

⁴⁸ Cf. Lausberg (1982) 192–98.

⁴⁹ For example, *AP* 9.721.2, 9.729.2, 9.737.1, 9.738.1, 9.738.3, 9.741.3, 9.742.4, 9.793.2, 9.794.2, 9.798.2; cf. *AP* 9.740.3 (τεχνίτας), 9.727.2 (ἔτεχνάσατο). Other Hellenistic epigrammatic celebrations of artistic *techne* include *AP* 6.260.1, 6.260.3, 6.337.6, 9.709.5, 9.752.2, 9.756.1, 9.777.1, 9.777.8; *APL* 205.4, 205.6 (following the Hellenistic datings of Gow and Page (1965); (1968); Page (1981)).

poems, moreover, the description of the ‘wise Myron’ (Μύρων σοφός, *AP* 9.795.1), who has forged this ‘wise thing’ (σοφὸν χρέος, Posid. 66.3 A–B), is itself made to prefigure the carefully-wrought textual simulations of the clever poet, now herded within the literary confines of the epigrammatic anthology.⁵⁰

Where Hellenistic epigram explores the poetic *techne* involved in ecphrastically turning artistic *techne* into language, the *Tabulae* present viewer-readers, as it were, with *techne* squared – with a combined form of poetic and artistic craftsmanship. In verbally describing Theodorus’ intermedial feat, moreover, these epigrammatic inscriptions do not substitute the artwork that they evoke, but rather appear alongside – and indeed as part of – its visual imagery. The *Tabulae* stress their *techne* at every available opportunity. At the same time, they remain sensitive to the metapoetic significance of *shrinking* that *techne* into such virtuoso miniature form. The ideological debt seems clear. The most famous articulation comes in the *Aetia* prologue, with its programmatic instruction ‘henceforth to judge poetic-wisdom [*sophia*] by its craft [*techne*] and not by the Persian acre’ (αὔθι δὲ τέχνη / κρίνετε, μὴ σχοίνῳ Περσίδι τῆν σοφίην, fr. 1.17–18). According to this broader ‘Callimachean’ Hellenistic aesthetic, what matters are such qualities as *leptotes*, *akribeia* and *ponos*.⁵¹ The miniature *scale* of the *Tabulae* is surely comparable here: on a poetological level, Theodorus’ *techne* lies in encapsulating the grand themes of epic into something small, laboured and refined (the ‘*Iliad* in a nutshell’, as one artist was said to craft it – offering the ultimate in visual-verbal, grand-cum-small *leptotes*, Plin. *HN* 7.85). In this capacity, it is worth noting the additional pun in the word *metron*: on the one hand, the term refers to the poetic precisions of epic metre, as though Theodorus’ imagery grants access to the very hexameters of epic poetry; on the other, *metron* alludes to the literal scale of these objects – the way in which they at once celebrate Homer’s *sophia* and trump it through their miniature art.

To my mind, these two microscopic inscriptions therefore encapsulate some of the *Tabulae*’s most macroscopic complexities. We are clearly dealing with highly allusive texts, derived from a broad spectrum of different literary precedents. At the same time, these texts point to the intermediality of the tablets between image and text: they resonate against a Hellenistic aesthetic in particular, concerned with playing upon (and breaking down) boundaries between visual and verbal representation, and between the little and the large.

III. Poetic figures and figurative poems

So far I have concentrated on the texts inscribed on the obverse of just two tablets. Other recto inscriptions were no less sophisticated. One tablet (10K), for example, glossed not only the genealogy of Cadmus, but the line-lengths of the Theban poems depicted;⁵² another (8E) juxtaposed images of the *Ilioupersis* against a long and sustained scholarly account of the chronology of the first book of the *Iliad*.⁵³ Two further reliefs set their representations of Iliadic books against one-line verse inscriptions: both tablets 6B and 12F set a single catalectic anapaestic tetrameter

⁵⁰ On the metapoetic significance of Myron’s *techne*, which itself simulates and foreshadows the make-believe of ecphrastic epigram, see Squire (2010b). Earlier discussions include Fuà (1973); Speyer (1975); Lausberg (1982) 223–37; Laurens (1989) 83–85; Gutzwiller (1998) 245–50; Goldhill (2007) 15–19; Männlein-Robert (2007a) 265–69; (2007b) 83–103. On Posid. 66.3 A–B, see Gutzwiller (2002b) 54; Männlein-Robert (2007b) 70–71.

⁵¹ For some introductory comments, see Gutzwiller (2007) 29–36. On the metapoetics of the *Aetia*

prologue, see, for example, Acosta-Hughes and Stephens (2002); Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 66–76.

⁵² On 10K, see Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 264–67, 377–80; Petrain (2008) 83. Tablet 9D also lists the genealogy of Cadmus: Jahn (1873) 75–76; Sadurska (1964) 55–61; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 194.

⁵³ On 8A’s ‘Zenodotean’ inscription, see Sadurska (1964) 52–55; Valenzuela Montenegro (2002) 83–85; (2004) 204–07. On this debate between Zenodotus and Aristarchus, see Pfeiffer (1968) 105–17, especially 116–17.

beside the corresponding pictorial scenes, pithily summarizing events in Books 4–7 and 24 of the *Iliad* respectively.⁵⁴ A clear parallel for this is to be found in *AP* 9.385, where each book of the *Iliad* is summarized in a single verse, forming a 24-lined acrostic that stretches from *alpha* to *omega*.⁵⁵

Such academic, urbane and witty recto inscriptions – always in Greek, never in Latin – help to make sense of the texts inscribed on their verso. Of the 22 surviving tablets, 12 were in fact inscribed on both sides (2NY, 3C, 4N, 5O, 7Ti, 9D, 10K, 14G, 15Ber, 18L, 20Par, 22Get). My interest here lies in just one particular type of inscription, found on seven tablets, and in each case offering a verbal title for the scenes depicted on their obverse side:⁵⁶

2NY: [Ἰλι]ᾶς Ὀμήρου Θεοδώρηος ἡ(ι) τέχνη
The *Iliad* of Homer: the *technē* is Theodorean.⁵⁷

3C: [Ἰλι]ᾶς Ὀμήρου Θεοδώρηος ἡ(ι) τέχνη
The *Iliad* of Homer: the *technē* is Theodorean.

4N: ἄσπις Ἀχιλλῆος Θεοδώρηος καθ' Ὀμηρον
The shield of Achilles: Theodorean, after Homer.

5O: [ἄσπις] Ἀχιλλεῖος Θεοδώρηος ἡ τ[έχνη]
The shield of Achilles: the *technē* is Theodorean.

7Ti: [Ἰλίου Π]έρσις
The Sack of Troy.⁵⁸

15Ber: ἀνάκτων σύνθεσις
An epitome of the lords.⁵⁹

20Par: [Ἰλι]ᾶς Ὀμήρου Θεοδώρει[ος ἡ τέχνη]
The *Iliad* of Homer: the *technē* is Theodorean.⁶⁰

What is most remarkable about these inscriptions is their visual mode of presentation ('magic squares', 'Kreuzwortlabyrinth', *quadrati cubi*): in each case, the letters are laid out in a grid, inviting a dia-grammatic mode of reading, and in a variety of different directions – horizontally, vertically and (from the centre) diagonally, from left to right, as well as from right to left.⁶¹ Whichever way the reader proceeds, the sequence of letters make up the same words. Although none of the grids survive complete, their compositions were clearly related, as M.T.

⁵⁴ Cf. Valenzuela Montenegro (2002) 85–86; (2004) 372.

⁵⁵ See Kaibel (1878) 494–95, no. 1095. The poem (attributed to a grammarian named Stephanos) is doubtless representative of an earlier Alexandrian tradition.

⁵⁶ Bua (1971) especially 3–17 remains the best discussion of these inscriptions; cf. Rypson (1986) 71–73; Ernst (1991) 388–93; Salimbene (2002) 5–6; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 347–50; Petrain (2006) 59–65. The inscriptions are fundamental to Rouveret (1988); (1989) 359–69, associating the tablets' spatially-arranged compositions with topographical mnemonic systems (*technai*).

⁵⁷ On the superfluous *iota* here and on 3C, see Bua

(1971) 14 (restated by Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 169; Petrain (2006) 62): it was inserted to form an odd number of letters (i.e. 27), thereby forming a perfect square around the central *iota*. Tablets 5O and 20Par experiment with alternative solutions, turning a single η into the diphthong ει (Ἀχιλλεῖος, Θεοδώρειος).

⁵⁸ Following Rayet (1882) 23 (although the tablet is lost); cf. Bua (1971) 11–12; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 199–200.

⁵⁹ Following Sadurska (1964) 71; Bua (1971) 12–13: also possible is ἀνάκτων συνθεσία.

⁶⁰ For the reconstruction (using 2NY and 3C), see Horsfall (1983) 144; Squire (forthcoming a) chapter 4.

⁶¹ For comparanda, see Bua (1971) 23–35; Hatherly (1986); Rypson (1986); (1996).

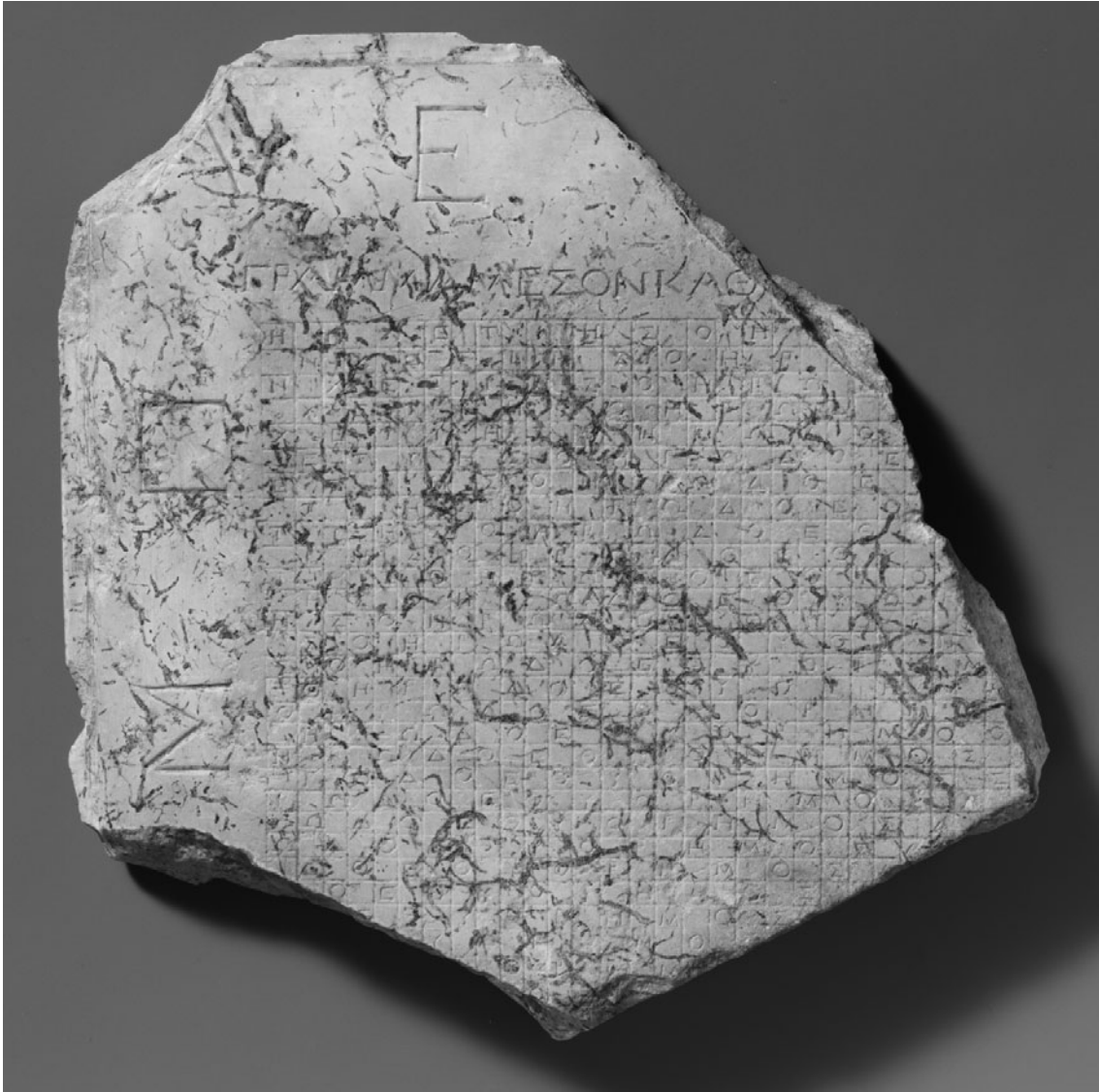


Fig. 5. Reverse of tablet 2NY, *Tabula New York* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1924 (24.97.11); © The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Bua demonstrated of tablets 2NY (Fig. 5) and 3C (Fig. 6), which reproduce the same pattern of letters (Fig. 7).⁶² Both tablets, moreover, preserve parts of a second inscription, this time a hexameter, written above the letter-grid, directly instructing the reader to ‘grasp the middle letter and glide whichever way you wish’ (γράμμα μέσον καθ[ελών, παρολίσθα]νε οὐ ποτε βούλει).⁶³

These inscriptions frequently go unmentioned in discussions of the tablets, especially in Anglophone scholarship.⁶⁴ When they are discussed, they are most often compared with

⁶² Bua (1971) 9–11.

⁶³ My supplement follows the most common reconstruction (Bua (1971) 9; cf. Guarducci (1974) 426); Gallavotti (1989) 49 instead suggests γράμμα μέσον

καθ[ορῶν, παραλάμβα]νε οὐ ποτε βούλει (‘Look at the middle letter and *continue* whichever way you wish’).

⁶⁴ For example, Brilliant (1984) 53–59; Pollitt (1986) 202–04; Small (2003) 93–96.

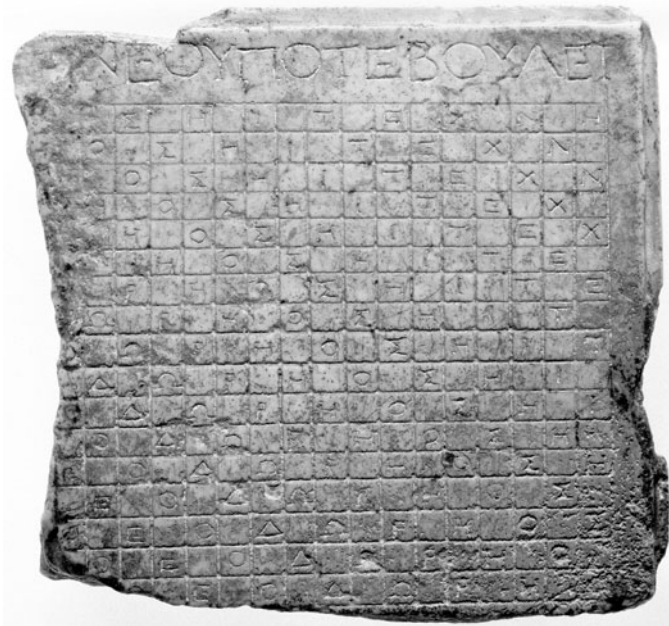


Fig. 6. Reverse of tablet 3C, *Tabula Veronensis I* (© La Bibliothèque nationale de France: Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques inv. 3318 (revers))

H	N	X	E	T	I	H	Σ	Ο	H	Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	Χ	Ν	H
N	X	E	T	I	H	Σ	Ο	H	Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	Χ	N	H	
X	E	T	I	H	Σ	Ο	H	Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H		
E	T	I	H	Σ	Ο	H	Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H			
T	I	H	Σ	Ο	H	Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H				
I	H	Σ	Ο	H	Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H					
H	Σ	Ο	H	Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H						
Σ	Ο	H	Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H							
Ο	H	Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H								
Ο	H	Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H								
Η	Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H									
Ρ	Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H										
Ω	Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H											
Δ	Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H												
Ο	Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H													
Ε	Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H														
Θ	Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H															
Υ	Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																
Θ	Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																	
Ε	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																		
Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																			
Δ	Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																				
Ω	Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																					
Ρ	Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																						
Η	Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																							
Ο	Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																								
Σ	Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																									
Η	Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																										
Ι	Τ	Ε	X	N	H																											
Τ	Ε	X	N	H																												
Ε	X	N	H																													
X	N	H																														
N	H																															
H																																

Fig. 7. Reconstruction of the ‘magic square’ inscribed on fragmentary tablets 2NY (top left) and 3C (top right) (after Bua (1971) 10, fig. 2)

Egyptian magical papyri and inscribed hieroglyphic puzzles; the standard *comparandum* is an early third-century AD *stèle* from Xoïs (modern-day Sakha, in the central Nile Delta), adorned with a similar ‘magic square’ inscription in both Greek and Egyptian hieroglyphs.⁶⁵ Scholars have therefore adduced the inscriptions as evidence of the tablets’ origins, of Theodorus’ supposed ‘Egyptian connections’.⁶⁶

But no ‘exotic’ foreign culture is needed to explain these word-games. As Margherita Guarducci has shown, such ‘giochi letterali’ were *de rigueur* by the first century AD, and paralleled in surviving graffiti from all corners of the Roman Empire.⁶⁷ Among the most famous examples are two palindromic ‘letter squares’, one from Pompeii (*CIL* 4.8297)⁶⁸ and the other found in numerous contexts, including Ostia, Dura Europos, Siena and Watermore (near Cirencester).⁶⁹ The texts could be read along both a horizontal and a vertical axis, from left to right as from right to left and from top to bottom as from bottom to top:

R O M A	S A T O R
O L I M	A R E P O
M I L O	T E N E T
A M O R	O P E R A
	R O T A S

Although the semantic ‘content’ of both texts remains unclear (‘Rome – once – Milo – love’; ‘Sower – Arepo – holds – (through?) his works – the wheels’), such inscriptions were clearly intended to draw self-conscious attention to the mediating *form* of language.⁷⁰ As such, these ‘letter squares’, like the *Tabulae* recto inscriptions, can be compared with the sorts of literary puns, anagrams and palindromes that reflect the ‘bookish self-consciousness of the [Hellenistic] age’.⁷¹ That we are dealing with a cultural trait common to *both* the literary and epigraphic records is suggested by the related poems collected in epigrammatic anthologies and scribbled as wall graffiti – so-called *karkinoi stichoi*, or *uersus recurrentes*. As with the *Tabulae* inscriptions, these verses could be read from left to right and from right to left.⁷² The first line of *APL* 387c.1, also known from a graffito from Pompeii (in Greek, as well as Latin transliteration), provides just one example: ἦδη μοι Διὸς ἄρα πηγὴ παρὰ σοι, Διομήδη (‘Here is the spring of Zeus, by your side, Diomedes’).⁷³ The *Tabulae*’s arrangement of letters shares a similar self-reflexivity

⁶⁵ On the *stèle*, dedicated to Osiris by a certain Moschion, see Bresciani (1980); Rouveret (1989) 363–69; Ernst (1991) 393–97; Squire (forthcoming a) chapter 5.

⁶⁶ Cf. Sadurska (1959) 122; (1964) 10 (although, puzzlingly, speculating a Lycian origin); Bua (1971) 23–26; Guarducci (1974) 433; (1978) 1741–42; Horsfall (1979a) 27–31; (1994) 79; (2008) 588; McLeod (1985) 154 (‘Theodore the Egyptian’); Rouveret (1988) 174; Rypson (1996) especially 10–11; Amedick (1999) 196; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 348–49, but note too 356–58). The ‘Egyptian’ interpretation has established itself as orthodoxy: cf., for example, *IGUR* 4.93.

⁶⁷ Guarducci (1965) especially 260: ‘Nel I secolo d. Cr. ... *carmina figurate*, gli acrostici, i palindromi, gli anagrammi, ed anche le parole incrociate, erano di gran moda’; cf. Guarducci (1978) 1736–749 (comparing the *Tabulae Iliacae* on 1741–42); Kazansky (1997) 65–75; Habinek (2009) especially 124–36.

⁶⁸ Cf. Guarducci (1965) 262–66; Ernst (1991) 429–59.

⁶⁹ Cf. Guarducci (1965) 266–70.

⁷⁰ Cf. Habinek (2009) 133: ‘It is hard to see what function the palindromes have other than that of calling attention to writing’s insistence on arbitrary patterns of visual perception’.

⁷¹ Gutzwiller (2007) 42–43. Vogt (1966); Courtney (1990) offer excellent guides to Greek and Roman acrostichs.

⁷² Guarducci (1965) 252; (1978) 1740–42; Gallavotti (1989) 49–54. The surviving Greek epigrammatic *karkinoi stichoi* are collected in *APL* 387b–d (Aubretton and Buffière (1980) 226–28); for discussion of later Byzantine variants, see Ernst (1991) 738–65.

⁷³ See Guarducci (1965) 254, 261, on *CIL* 4.2400a; the first eleven letters are also found as *CIL* 4.2400b. Cf. Guarducci (1965) 249–56 on a second-century AD inscription from Obuda, as well as the comparanda cited in Guarducci (1965) 261–62, nn.135–37.

about the spatiality of the written word. In negating the linear sequentiality of words, however, the tablets go still further in drawing images out of texts: they encourage us not just to *read* the inscription, but also simultaneously to *view* it.⁷⁴

As I have argued elsewhere, each recto ‘magic square’ inscription is best approached in terms of the pictorial games played out on its verso. Just as the tablets’ images invite viewers to ‘choose their own adventure’ in pictorial response, these inscriptions expressly (and verbally) legitimate the practice: their multidirectional mode of reading forms the flipside of the multidirectional viewing modes played out on their obverse.⁷⁵ If the inscriptions therefore offer the ultimate in Barthesian *jouissance* – ‘we read, we skip, we look up, we dip in again’⁷⁶ – they also return us to the objects’ knowing ambiguity between visual and verbal forms. Of course, both sides of the tablets were decorated with ‘letters’ (remember how individual friezes are frequently laid out from *alpha* to *omega*): the instruction to ‘seize the middle *gramma* and go wherever you like’ consequently pertains to both recto and verso. Still more important, though, are the recurrent literary puns on the *dual* sense of γράμμα, referring to the ‘strokes’ of both words *and* pictures.⁷⁷ When, in Theocritus’ 15th *Idyll*, Praxinoa exclaims ‘what painters have painted such true *grammata*!’ (ποῖοι ζωογράφοι τὰκριβέα γράμματ’ ἔγραψαν, Th. *Id.* 15.81), the self-reflexive reference is simultaneously to the tapestry that Praxinoa describes and to the virtual reality of the poet’s larger verbal description (‘what “writers of living beings” have written such true letters’).⁷⁸ This sort of pun is a mainstay of Hellenistic ephrastic epigrams, taking its lead from Erinna’s earlier poem on a painting of Agatharchis: the *grammata* are said to be the work of delicate hands, displaying a *sophia* that therefore matches Prometheus’ own (ἐξ ἀταλᾶν χειρῶν τάδε γράμματα· λῶστε Προμαθεῦ / ἔντι καὶ ἄνθρωποι τὴν ὁμαλοὶ σοφίαν, *AP* 6.352.1–2).⁷⁹ Within a larger meditation on the respective resources of words and images, Erinna’s epigram flirts with its icono-textual liminality between the two media: it offers *grammata* on *grammata* – both lines on lines and strokes on strokes.⁸⁰

Once again, the *Tabulae* ‘magic square’ inscriptions are best understood against this intellectual backdrop. But a still closer parallel can be found in six Greek epigrams that, in the absence of any ancient name, have come to be called *technopaegnia*, *carmina figurata* and picture-poems (*AP* 15.21–22, 15.24–27).⁸¹ Three of the epigrams are attributed to Simmias of Rhodes, probably dating to the early third century BC; a fourth is (wittily) ascribed to Theocritus and the two remaining poems are probably Imperial, attributed to Dosiadas and Besantinus respectively.⁸² All six poems share a common conceit, using their verse length to figure

⁷⁴ On these ‘magic squares’ as intermedial entities *between* words and pictures, see Elkins (1999) 243–44 (although omitting reference to the obverse decoration!).

⁷⁵ See Squire (2009) 137–39; (2010a); (forthcoming a) chapters 4 and 5.

⁷⁶ Barthes (1990) 11–12.

⁷⁷ Cf. Männlein-Robert (2007a) 255–56; (2007b) 123–27.

⁷⁸ For related puns, compare Her. *Mim.* 4.23–24, 72–73 (discussed in Männlein-Robert (2007b) 279–82).

⁷⁹ See Gutzwiller (2002a) 88–91; Männlein-Robert (2007b) 38–43.

⁸⁰ Cf. Männlein-Robert (2007a) 255–56: ‘Erinna uses this term [γράμματα] specifically because of its ambiguity and hints not only at the painting, but also at her own poem, a device found elsewhere in Hellenistic poetry’.

⁸¹ Cf. Simonini and Gualdoni (1978); Ernst (1991) 54–94; Männlein-Robert (2007b) 140–54; Luz (2008); Squire (2009) 165–69. On the generic name, see Guichard (2006) 83–84. Compare, in Latin, a first-century BC poem by Laevius (Morel (1963) 60–61, fr. 22; with further comments in Courtney (1993) 119, 136–37, fr. 22) and Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius’ fourth-century AD hexameter grid-poems (Polará (1973)): Optatian’s poems reveal both symbolic figurative patterns and hidden acrostich verbal messages (so called *uersus intexti*: Levitan (1985); Ernst (1986) 15–16; (1991) 95–142; Rühl (2006)).

⁸² Ernst (1991) 58–74; Strodel (2002) 158–271 provide useful commentaries on Simmias’ poems. On the ‘Theocritean’ epigram and its authorship, see Männlein-Robert (2007b) 150–54; Ernst (1991) 74–82. The two ‘altars’ are discussed in Ernst (1991) 83–90.

‘calligrammatically’ the visual appearance of the objects that they evoke – an egg, an axe, a statue of Eros, panpipes and two altars. The original manuscript presentation of these epigrams remains unclear:⁸³ two of the poems attributed to Simmias (*AP* 15.22, 15.27) seem to have made semantic sense only when readers physically *unscrambled* their sequence of increasing and decreasing choriambic verses. Readers, in other words, had to tackle first the opening line, then the last, and so on, thereby disfiguring the calligram even as they read it:⁸⁴ just as seeing the picture meant reordering the poem, reading the poem entailed collapsing the picture. Perhaps, as Christine Luz argues, the poems instead worked in reverse: the challenge was to ‘figure out’ (quite literally) the picture from the poetic clues; the prosaic appearance of the text served as a *griphos* for the image latent within.⁸⁵

Like the *Tabulae*, the *technopaegnia* delight in occupying a range of different ontological levels. ‘Gaze upon me’ (λεῦσέ με), reads the opening line of one of Simmias’ epigrams, arranged in the shape of the wings of Eros (15.24: αἰ πτέρυγες Ἔρωτος). This exhortation to *look* is of course commonplace in ephrastic epigram,⁸⁶ as is the use of the first-person pronoun, as though the poem were physically attached to a visual object imbued with voice.⁸⁷ In this poem, though, we really *can* see the image that the epigram ‘e phrasesises’: in a mise-en-abyme of replications, the speaking first person refers at once to Eros himself, his statue, its calligrammatic image, the attached dedicatory inscription and the papyrus scroll that represents all of these registers and still others.

Λεῦσέ με τὸν Γᾶς τε βαθυστέρνου ἄνακτ’ Ἀκμονίδαν τ’ ἄλλυδις ἐδράσαντα,
μηδὲ τρέσης εἰ τόσος ὢν δάσκια βέβριθα λάχνα γένεια.
τᾶμος ἐγὼ γὰρ γενόμεν ἀνίκ’ ἔκραιν’ Ἀνάγκα
πάντα δὲ τὰς εἶκε φραδαῖσι λυγραῖς
ἔρπετά, πάνθ’ ὅσ’ ἔρπει
δι’ αἶθρας.

5

Χάους δέ,
οὔτι γε Κύπριδος παῖς
ὠκυπέτας ἠδ’ Ἄρεος καλεῦμαι·
οὔτι γὰρ ἔκρανα βίβη, πραῦνός τε πειθοῖ,
εἶκε δέ μοι γαῖα θαλάσσης τε μυχοὶ χάλκεος οὐρανός τε·
τῶν δ’ ἐγὼ ἐκνοσφισάμαν ὠγύγιον σκάπτρον ἔκρινον δὲ θεοῖς θέμιστας.

10

Like the *Tabulae*, such picture-poems comment explicitly on their combined visual and verbal *technē*. Besantinus’ epigram on an altar, boasts the poet, is not composed of gold or silver, but crafted by the Muses to whose visual-verbal ‘*technē* the king of the gods granted immortality’ (τάων ἀείζωνον τέχνην / ἔνευσε πάλμυς ἀφθίτων, *AP* 15.25.16):

⁸³ Guichard (2006) especially 85–89 provides a good overview.

⁸⁴ Cf. Männlein-Robert (2007b) 142–50 on *AP* 15.27, along with Luz (2008) 22–27 on the poem’s punning *termini technici*.

⁸⁵ Luz (2008) 23: ‘Der Leser muss also, wenn er das Gedicht in der Figur lesen will, mit den Augen auf- und niederspringen, und kommt am Schluss der Lektüre in der Mitte des Textkörpers an’.

⁸⁶ Some examples in Rossi (2001) 17, n.13.

⁸⁷ For first-person pronouns and personal adjectives in the Myron’s cow poems, compare *AP* 9.713.2, 9.714.2, 79.719.2, 9.720.2, 9.721.1, 9.723.1, 9.723.1, 9.729.1, 9.730.1, 9.742.1, 9.743.3, 9.743.5, 9.794.1, 9.797.1 (Squire (2010b)). More generally on Greek ‘ventriloquist epigram’, see Burzachechi (1962); on Hellenistic appropriations, within literary epigrams circulating apart from their epideictic objects, cf. Petrovic (2005); Männlein-Robert (2007b) 157–67; Tueller (2008) especially 141–65.

Ὀλὸς οὖ με λιβρὸς ἱρῶν
 λιβάδεσσιν οἶα κάλχη
 Ὑποφοινίησι τέγγει·
 Μαύλιες δ' ὑπερθε πέτρης Ναξίης θοούμεναι
 Παμάτων φείδοντο Πανός· οὐ στροβίλω λιγυῖ
 Ἰξὸς εὐώδης μελαίνει τρεχνέων με Νυσίων.
 Ἐς γὰρ βωμὸν ὄρης με μήτε γλούρου
 Πλίνθοις μήτ' Ἀλύβης παγέντα βώλοισ,
 Οὐδ' ὄν Κυνθογενῆς ἔτευξε φύτλη
 Λαβόντε μηκάδων κέρα,
 Λισσαῖσιν ἀμφὶ δειράσιν
 Ὅσσα νέμονται Κυνθίαις,
 Ἰσόρροπος πέλοιτό μοι·
 Σὺν οὐρανοῦ γὰρ ἐγγόνιοις
 Εἰνάς μ' ἔτευξε γηγενῆς,
 Τάων ἀείζωον τέχνην
 Ἔνευσε πάλμυς ἀφθίτων.
 Σὺ δ', ὦ πῶν κρήνηθεν, ἦν
 Ἴνις κόλαψε Γοργόνος,
 Θύοις τ' ἐπισπένδοις τ' ἐμοὶ
 Ὑμηττιάδων πολὺ λαροτέρην
 Σπονδὴν ἄδην. ἴθι δὴ θαρσέων
 Ἐς ἐμὴν τεῦξιν· καθαρὸς γὰρ ἐγὼ
 Ἴὸν ἰέντων τεράων, οἶα κέκευθ' ἐκεῖνος,
 Ἀμφὶ Νεαῖς Θρηκίαις ὄν σχεδόθεν Μυρίνης
 Σοί, Τριπάτωρ, πορφυρέου φῶρ ἀνέθηκε κριοῦ.

As with the *Tabulae* 'magic square' inscriptions, Besantinus' epigram could simultaneously be read along a vertical as well as a horizontal axis, revealing an acrostic ('Ὀλύμπιε, πολλοῖς ἔτεσι θύσειας, 'Olympian, may you sacrifice for many years'). But the very image that the poem materializes also compares with the 'magic square' on tablet 4N (Fig. 8). Where the tablet's recto visualizes the Homeric description of the Shield of Achilles (the ultimate ephrastic representation of images in words), the 614 squares of its verso are arranged as a hexameter verbal title in visual altar form (ἀσπίς Ἀχιλλῆος Θεοδώρηος καθ' Ὀμηρον). The arrangement of letters not only allows the text to be read *like* a picture, in a multitude of directions; the letters are themselves here designed to be read *as* a picture, forming the silhouetted outline of an altar.⁸⁸

IV. Theorizing Theodorus

The various associations between the *Tabulae* and the *technopaegnia* argue against the 'low-brow' interpretation of the tablets' images and texts. Indeed, one of the few surviving literary references to the *technopaegnia* confirms their reputation as highly demanding poems: referring to Dosiadas' calligrammatic poem on an altar (*AP* 15.26), Lucian expressly compares such epigrams to the arcane and riddling glosses of Lycophron's *Alexandra* (*Lex.* 25).

⁸⁸ For full discussion of tablet 4N – its obverse imagery, the mind-bogglingly minuscule verbal inscription of *Il.* 18.483–608 around its rim and the significance of this altar shape – see Squire (forthcoming a) chapter 7. Of the seven 'magic square'

inscriptions, only three are 'square' (2NY, 3C, 20Par): apart from 4N, two were apparently arranged to form a lozenge (7Ti, 15B: Bua (1971) 12–13), while one was laid out as a 12-sided polygon (5O: Bua (1971) 11).

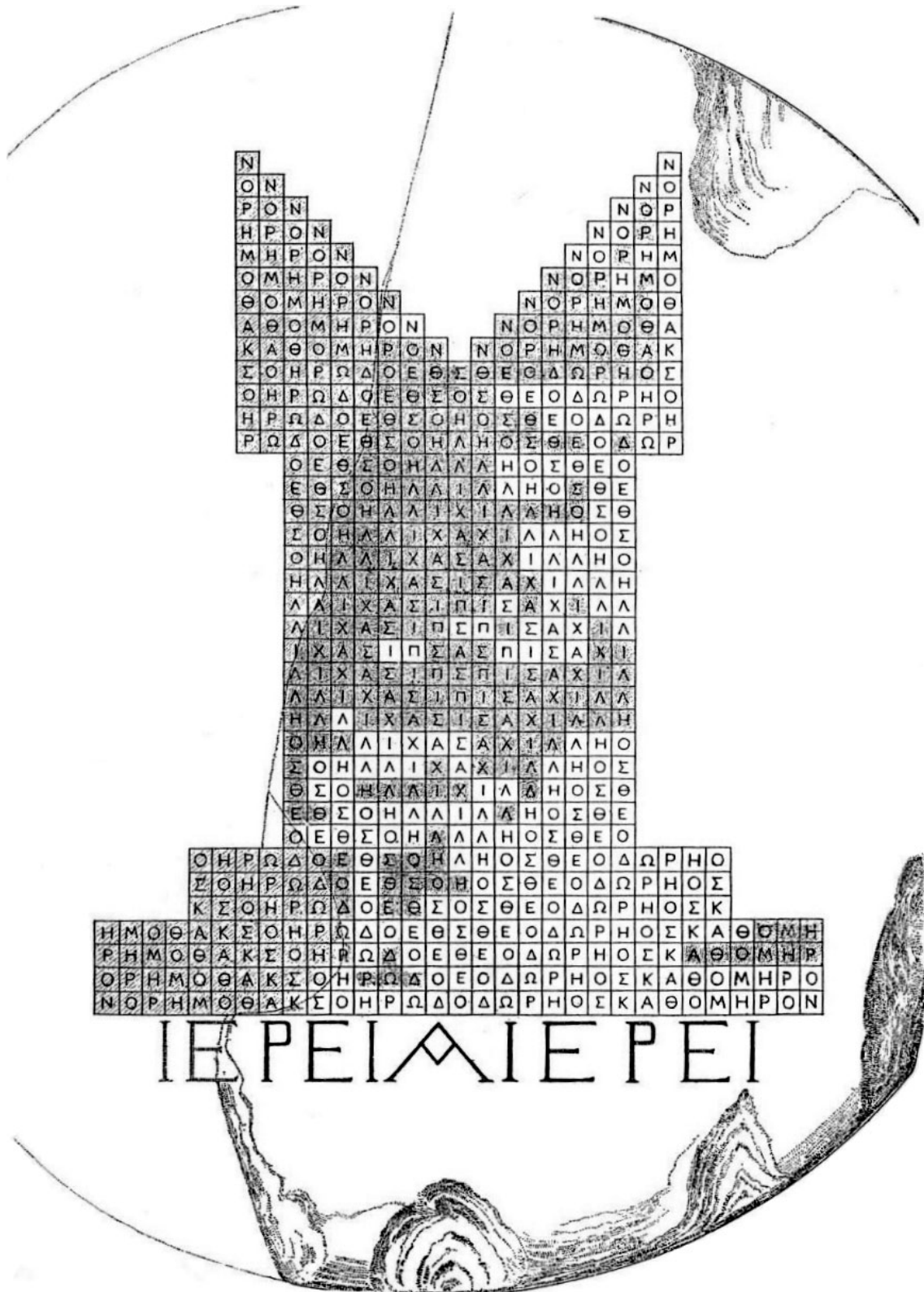


Fig. 8. Line drawing of the reverse of tablet 4N, *Shield of Achilles* (after Bienkowski (1891) tav. v)

It is in this connection that I want to make a third and final suggestion about the tablets, or rather about the ‘Theodorus’ to whom six of them ascribe their *technē*.⁸⁹ As we have now seen, six fragments claim to be the work of this artist, of which one (4N) undoubtedly paraded that name on both its obverse and reverse sides:

- 1A (recto) [τέχνην τὴν Θεοδ]ώρηον μάθε τάξιιν Ὀμήρου
ὄφρα δαεῖς πάσης μέτρον ἔχης σοφίας.
- 2NY (recto) [τέχνην τὴν Θεοδ]ώρηον μάθε τάξιιν Ὀμήρου
ὄφρα δαεῖς τ[έχνην μέτρον ἔχης σοφίας].
(verso) [Ἰλι]ᾶς Ὀμήρου Θεοδ]ώρηος ἡ[ι] τέχνη
- 3C (verso) [Ἰλι]ᾶς Ὀμήρου] Θεοδ]ώρηος ἡ[ι] τέχνη
- 4N (recto) ἄσπις Ἀχιλλῆος Θεοδ]ώρηος καθ’ Ὀμηρον⁹⁰
(verso) ἄσπις Ἀχιλλῆος Θεοδ]ώρηος καθ’ Ὀμηρον
- 5O (verso) [ἄσπις] Ἀχιλλεῖος Θεοδ]ώρηος ἡ τ[έχνη]
- 20Par (verso) [Ἰλι]ᾶς Ὀμ]ήρου Θεοδ]ώρει[ος ἡ τέχνη]⁹¹

Scholars have speculated about the identity of this Theodorus, but have failed to reach any consensus.⁹² Some have viewed Theodorus not as the artist of the tablets, but rather as the grammarian mythographer responsible for their epitomization of epic (see above); others have supposed a connection with Theorus, the painter of a series of Trojan War paintings displayed in the Portico of Philip in Rome (Plin. *HN* 35.144).⁹³ Others still have drawn attention to a certain Theodorus of Ilium, to whom the Suda attributes an independent *Troica*.⁹⁴ Nikolai Kazansky, on the other hand, has fancifully argued that the signature refers not to the maker of the tablets, but rather to the (unattested) name of an earlier artist, supposed to have been responsible for the Iliadic mosaics of Hieron II’s third-century floating palace (Athen. 5.207c).⁹⁵ By far the most common assessment, though, is that Theodorus hails from Egypt. This interpretation is premised on the supposedly ‘Egyptian’ formulation of the ‘magic squares’ already discussed: as I hope to have shown, it is wholly unfounded.⁹⁶

Of course, Theodorus is an exceedingly common name. Diogenes Laertius lists 20 persons of that name, including a Theban sculptor, three painters and (interestingly) an epigrammatist (2.103–04). But it is seems more than coincidental that, among the most celebrated ‘Theodori’, at least in the first century AD, there was an Archaic Greek sculptor from Samos. This Samian Theodorus is described by (among others) Pliny the Elder (*HN* 34.83):⁹⁷

⁸⁹ The following section has developed out of discussions and correspondences with Jim Porter: my sincere thanks.

⁹⁰ Following Bienkowski (1891) 185 (*contra* Sadurska (1964) 45).

⁹¹ On the Θεοδ]ώρειος spelling, see above, n.57.

⁹² For a concise review, see Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 350–58.

⁹³ Cf., for example, Sadurska (1959) 122; (1964) 9–10; Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 350–51.

⁹⁴ Cf. Sadurska (1959) 10; Horsfall (1979a) 27, n.6

(though concluding that ‘the name is exceedingly common’).

⁹⁵ Kazansky (1997) 74–79. This is, alas, pure fantasy, as Petrain (2006) 187, n.117 also notes.

⁹⁶ Cf., for example, Horsfall (1979a) 29: ‘It was perhaps to an Egyptian that such a “jeu de lettres” might most naturally occur’.

⁹⁷ For the literary sources, see Overbeck (1868) 50–53, nos 284–93; cf. Pollitt (1990) 27–28, 181–82; Stewart (1990) 1.244–46; Mattusch (2008) 423–24.

Theodorus, qui labyrinthum fecit Sami, ipse se aere fudit. praeter similitudinis mirabilem famam magna suptilitate celebratur: dextra limam tenet, laeua tribus digitis quadrigulam tenuit, tralatam Praeneste paruitatis ut miraculum: pictam eam currumque et aurigam integeret alis simul facta musca.

Theodorus, who made the labyrinth at Samos, cast himself in bronze. Besides its marvellous reputation as a likeness, it is celebrated for its great precision. In his right hand he holds a file, and with three fingers in his left hand he held a little chariot and team of four horses that was carried off to Praeneste as a marvel of miniaturization: a fly that was made at the same time would cover the painted object – chariot and charioteer alike – with its wings.

What is so interesting about this Theodorus is his aptitude for miniature artistic invention. Such was the sculptor's *magna suptilitas* that he rendered in the left hand of his self-portrait a tiny chariot and horses, something so small as to be held between three fingers; these figures were sufficiently esteemed as to be removed to Praeneste – a miniaturist wonder in their own right (*paruitatis ut miraculum*).⁹⁸ Indeed, so tiny is the chariot that, were it to be rendered in painting (*pictam*), the wings of a modelled fly would cover it.⁹⁹

Pliny's description is apparently corrupt, which is why some editors posit *factam* in the final clause ('the fly would cover the *moulded* quadriga'), while others prefer *totam* ('the fly would cover the *whole* quadriga'). Still, the general thrust of Pliny's evaluation is unambiguous. The reference might not have added up to much had it not been for the discovery of the new Posidippus: far from some Plinian curiosity, Posidippus' new-found reference to Theodorus reveals his workmanship to have been legendary, and over a much longer timespan (Posidippus, we recall, was writing in the early third century BC). Posidippus provides an independent reference to Theodorus' miniature chariot and charioteer, in the context of one of his nine poems on statues, or *Andriantopoiika* (col. X 38–XI 5, 67 A–B):

]. ἀντυγος ἐ<γ>γύθεν ἄθρει
τῆς Θεοδωρείης χειρὸς ὅσος κάματος·
ὄψει γὰρ ζυγόδεσμα καὶ ἡνία καὶ τροχὸν ἵππων
ἄξονά <θ> [ἡνιό]χου τ' ὄμμα καὶ ἄκρα χερῶν·
ὄψει δ' εὖ [μήκ]εος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῶδε
ἐξομέν[ην ἄν ἴσην ἄρματι] μύϊαν ἴδοις.

Observe from nearby... of the rim...
how great was the labour of the Theodorean hand.
For you will see bands, reins, the ring for the horses' bit,
the bit's axle, and the charioteer's face and finger-tips.
And you will see clearly... of its size, but you could see
a fly of the same size as the chariot sitting upon it.

There can be no doubt that Posidippus is referring to the same artist as Pliny: this explains not only the allusion to the 'Theodorean' miniature chariot and charioteer, but also the reference to the fly.¹⁰⁰ Like all the other images described in this sequence of poems, Theodorus' was evidently an iconic sculpture: the poet assumes his readers will know the image (and sculptor),

⁹⁸ On Pliny's description, and its derivation, see Metzler (1971) 175–79.

⁹⁹ For a related story about a sculpted 'fly that could cover with its wings a chariot drawn by four horses', see *HN* 36.45 (cf. Overbeck (1868) 51; with discussion in Bartman (1992) 170).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Bastianini and Gallazzi (2001) 193–94; d'Angiò (2001); Bernsdorff (2002) 38; Gutzwiller (2002b) 255–60; Kosmetatou (2004) 204–05; Sens (2005) 222–24; Prioux (2007) especially 40, n.62, 122–24; (2008) 208; Männlein-Robert (2007b) 71–73.

and so omits any contextual information (not least any suggestion of a self-portrait).¹⁰¹ What evidently interested Posidippus, rather, is the miniature scale of Theodorus' craft: as Evelyn Prioux puts it, 'Théodore... était cité parce qu'il préfigurait, par son *limae labor*, les qualités miniaturistes de la poésie alexandrine'.¹⁰² This sheds light on a second allusion to Theodorus in the same papyrus, this time in the *Lithika* (col. II 3–6, 9 A–B): describing the seal-ring of Polycrates (adorned with the insignia of the poet), Posidippus does not mention Theodorus by name; in a famous passage, though, Herodotus informs us that Theodorus was responsible for the ring (Hdt. 1.51).¹⁰³ Taken together, Posidippus' two petite poems on Theodorus, both celebrating an aesthetic of the well-crafted but little object, bring together some of the larger themes that structure the anthology: not only does Theodorus forge a mini-connection between the *Lithika* and *Andriantopoiika*, the reference to the tiny chariot and charioteer also foreshadows in miniature the various horse and rider statues of Posidippus' *Hippika* (described in poems 71–88 A–B).

For ancient readers, Posidippus' emphasis on Theodorus' *miniature* artistry must have been all the more striking. After all, Theodorus seems to have been more famous for his *grander* works – a giant silver crater (Hdt. 1.51, 3.41), a golden vine (Hdt. 7.27; Athen. 12.514) and a Samian temple to Hera (so large as to receive the nickname 'labyrinth': Plin. *HN* 34.83, 36.90).¹⁰⁴ What instead seems to have interested Posidippus, as later Pliny, is what Jim Porter calls a 'dynamic contrast of extremes'.¹⁰⁵ Posidippus emphasizes Theodorus' finely-wrought chariot group, a miniature, as it were, on the grandest scale: despite (or rather because of) its size, Posidippus presents Theodorus' quadriga as the result of *immense* labour (ὄσος κάματος). In this context, there was additional significance in positioning an epigram on Theodorus' *miniature* craftsmanship directly before one on Chares' *giant* statue of the colossus of Rhodes (col. XI 6–11, 68 A–B): in stark contrast to Theodorus' chariot, Chares' statue is so large that it matches the magnitude of earth (γᾶς μεγ[έθει παρ]ισ[ῶ]ν, 68.6 A–B).¹⁰⁶ The great labour and diminutive scale of Theocritean artifice is exploited to play out all-encompassing concerns about contrastive opposites, which themselves prefigure the metapoetic games of Posidippian epigram.¹⁰⁷

What, though, has all this to do with the *Tabulae Iliacae*? The evident celebrity of this Samian Theodorus means that we should at least consider the possibility that there is more to these six 'Theodorean' attributions than meets the eye. The name might be read as a deliberate and knowing allusion to the small-scale craftsmanship of the Archaic artist, celebrated for his *magna suptilitas*.¹⁰⁸ This helps to make sense of one of the most puzzling but overlooked aspects of all six inscribed signatures: their adjectival form.¹⁰⁹ Rather than associate themselves with some 'Theodorus', as so far supposed in this article, each and every inscription parades an archaizing possessive adjective, 'Theodorean':¹¹⁰ the reference is always to a *techne* or shield that *concerns*

¹⁰¹ See Bastianini and Gallazzi (2001) 193: 'Posidippo, senza descrivere la scultura nel suo complesso, si sofferma esclusivamente sulla perfezione dei dettagli visibili nella pur piccolissima quadriga'.

¹⁰² Prioux (2007) 40, n.62. Cf. Petrain (2005) on the metapoetics of Posidippus' *Lithika*.

¹⁰³ Cf. Kuttner (2005) 154–56, concluding that 'the story was widely proverbial, not just anecdotal' (2005) 155).

¹⁰⁴ On the Temple of Hera at Samos, see Pollitt (1990) 181–82. Cf. Kuttner (2005) 156: 'None could miss Posidippus' polemic for little poems like his own in AB 9 and 67, which choose to celebrate Theodorus' tiny things, not his colossal temple, images and vessels'.

¹⁰⁵ Porter (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁶ On the antithesis, see Gutzwiller (2002b) 56–57: 'This pair of epigrams thus provides a progression from

the miniaturization of Theodorus, to the human-sized statuary of Myron, to the colossal artistry of Chares' ((2002b) 57); Coleman (2006) 19–21 (ad Mart. *Spect.* 2.1); Prioux (2007) 122–23; (2008) 239–52; Männlein-Robert (2007b) 72–74.

¹⁰⁷ Fundamental is Prioux (2007) 108–13.

¹⁰⁸ Petrain (2006) 188 hints at a related association in a sentence towards the end of his doctoral thesis ('it seems at least possible that the use of the adjective on the *Tabulae* is meant to activate an association between our Theodorus and the more famous Samian...').

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Sadurska (1964) 9 on 'cette façon de signer, étrange et exceptionnelle'.

¹¹⁰ On this "'archaisierende" Tendenz', see Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 352, rightly noting parallels 'bei den Tragikern, Pindar und vor allem Homer'.

or *pertains* to Theodorus (Θεοδώρηος ἡ τέχνη: 1A, 2NY, 3C, 20Par; ἀσπίς Ἀχιλλῆος Θεοδώρηος: 4N, 5O). This is no simple signature, then, and as far as I can tell, there is no epigraphic parallel for such adjectival form rather than nominative or genitive substantive.¹¹¹ Posidippus, on the other hand, now supplies an unambiguous textual parallel for the adjective, describing the ‘great labour of the Theodorean hand’ (τῆς Θεοδωρείης χειρὸς ὅσος κάματος).¹¹²

Posidippus’ concern with the contrasting *extremities* of Theodorus’ labour perfectly captures the *Tabulae*’s larger aesthetic of miniaturizing the grand themes of epic. We have already noted the tablets’ size-games, not least in the punning references to *metron* on tablets 1A and 2NY, referring at once to the poetic precisions of metre and to the diminutive scale of these objects. But what greater paradigm for the labour involved than the *techne* of this artistic celebrity, famous, as Pliny puts it, for his *paruitatis miraculum* and *magna suptilitas*?

Needless to say, I am not suggesting that our ‘Theodorus’ was *literally* the same artist as the Archaic artist. Given the stories that evidently grew up around Theodorus, at least by the third century BC, my tentative suggestion is that the *Tabulae* allude to ‘a Theodorean *techne*’ that at least some viewers and readers could associate with the earlier artist. The tablets lay claim to a *techne* that is expressly descended from Theodorus’ own, celebrated in the intermedial medium of Posidippian ephrastic epigram.

Although archaeologists have a habit of taking names literally, there are in fact numerous comparanda for such artistic pseudonyms. We know of several ‘Myrons’ working in Imperial Italy, all removed from their fifth-century namesake,¹¹³ and at least one ‘Praxiteles’ was working in Imperial Athens.¹¹⁴ A certain ‘Phidias’ similarly signs a second-century statue in the Campus Martius in the second century AD, claiming descent, along with his purported ‘brother’ Ammonios, from yet another person of the same name.¹¹⁵ That artists might take on *false* identities is clear from Phaedrus’ *Fables*, which complains of numerous first-century forgeries by those impersonating ‘Praxiteles’, ‘Myron’ and ‘Zeuxis’ (5.pr.4–9).¹¹⁶

The harnessing of artistic celebrity for playful hermeneutic effect is even clearer in the context of Greek and Roman gems.¹¹⁷ Over 60 artistic inscriptions are preserved, but among them are some rather unlikely sounding names: ‘Sostratos’, ‘Pheidias’, ‘Skopas’, ‘Polykleitos’, ‘Pamphilos’;¹¹⁸ in one case, we even find a semi-mythical ‘Daidalos’, which lays claim, as it

¹¹¹ No parallels in, for example, Loewy (1885); Guarducci (1974) 377–561; Calabi Limentani (1958) 151–80; *IGUR* 4.1491–651.

¹¹² On the adjective, see Bastianini and Gallazzi (2001) 193, who compare 70.3–4 A–B (χειρῶν / ... Λυσίππε[ῶν]).

¹¹³ See Stewart (2008) 22–23. ‘Myron’ from Verona: *AE* (1998) 591; Buonopane (1998); a ‘Myron’ attributed with an early Imperial marble bust (from ?Palestrina): *CIL* 6.29796; Loewy (1885) 319, no. 488a; ‘Myron’ as painter in Anzio: *CIL* 10.6638; Calabi Limentani (1958) 156, no. 34. Others claimed to be ‘sons of Myron’: cf. Loewy (1885) 183–85, nos 252–55 (from Delos); Loewy (1885) 284, no. 417 (from Athens).

¹¹⁴ Loewy (1885) 228–29, nos 318, 319, 319a. Compare references to the ‘sons of Praxiteles’ in surviving inscriptions (Loewy (1885) 379–80, nos 555–56) and texts (Her. *Mim* 4.23–24).

¹¹⁵ *CIL* 6.857; Loewy (1885) 267–68, no. 382; Stewart (2008) 22. The Egyptian subject (Thoth) emphasizes the anomaly.

¹¹⁶ Cited by Loewy (1885) 319, no. 488a (comparing Zenobius 5.82). Stewart ((1979) 101–14) rightly notes that there were family dynasties of craftsmen; but such name-games should also be understood against the Hellenistic ‘cultural rationalisation’ of the visual arts (Tanner (2006) especially 205–76). On Roman artistic signatures more generally, see Squire (forthcoming c).

¹¹⁷ For an excellent survey, see Richter (1956) XXXI–XLI (identifying six Archaic, seven Classical, 16 Hellenistic and 39 Roman engravers); cf. Richter (1968) 14–19 (on ‘Greek’ gems); (1971) 129–35 (on ‘Roman’ gems). Zazoff (1983) 439–40 provides a referenced index of names.

¹¹⁸ ‘Sostratos’: Richter (1971) 149–50, nos 700–04; ‘Pheidias’: Richter (1968) 139–40, no. 531; Plantzos (1999) 120, no. 197; ‘Skopas’: Vollenweider (1966) 26–27; Richter (1968) no. 676; Plantzos (1999) 133, no. 618; ‘Polykleitos’: Richter (1971) 147, no. 688; ‘Pamphilos’: Vollenweider (1966) 27; Richter (1971) 146–47, nos 686–87; Plantzos (1999) 129, no. 470.

were, to the ultimate in artistic invention.¹¹⁹ Such ‘pen-names’ should make us suspicious of engravers who sign themselves as (or rather after?) famous practitioners in their art: whether or not the surviving gems signed by ‘Dioskourides’ have anything to do with the famous artist responsible for Augustus’ seal-ring (Pl. *HN* 37.38; Suet. *Aug.* 50; Dio Cassius 51.3.6–7), it is surely significant that three subsequent gem-cutters claimed Dioskourides as their ‘father’.¹²⁰ As on the *Tabulae*, these gem inscriptions stage not only a claim about authorship, but also a boast of ‘grand master’ *techne*.

This mode of reading the ‘Theodorean’ attribution of the tablets has much to recommend it. Quite apart from explaining the adjectival form ‘Theodorean’, the celebrity of Theodoros helps to account for why some inscriptions should pitch ‘Theodoros’ against ‘Homer’ (1A, 2NY, 3C, 20Par; cf. 4N, 5O). On a more mundane level, the association also explains the stylistic diversity of the inscriptions and images, often attributed to a single artist: while Anne Sadurska has taken the inscriptions literally, assigning all of the ‘Theodorean’-inscribed tablets to one master artist or workshop, Nina Valenzuela Montenegro has persuasively shown that even those signed as ‘Theodorean’ were in fact crafted by *different* hands.¹²¹ We can be absolutely sure that, while parading a single ‘Theodorean’ banner, numerous individuals were working behind the (pseudo-) name.

V. Conclusion: ‘The serious lover of Greek literature’?

If I am right in this final ‘Theodorean’ manoeuvre, there can be no room for thinking the tablets ‘profoundly trivial’, as so often maintained.¹²² Whatever we conclude of the tablets’ makers, the various literary resonances leave little doubt about their erudite viewer-readers. The three preceding arguments – about the two programmatic epigrams (1A, 2NY), the ‘magic square’ inscriptions (2NY, 3C, 4N, 5O, 7Ti, 15Ber, 20Par) and the ‘Theodorean’ attributions (1A, 2NY, 3C, 4N, 5O, 20Par) – serve to demonstrate that overarching point.

What might this mean for the original function and purpose of the *Tabulae*? The question returns us to our opening debates about clientele, and above all to Nicholas Horsfall’s influential ‘Trimalchio thesis’. The ultimate difficulty with Horsfall’s position – as indeed my own – is its *argumentum ex silentio*. Although the archaeological provenances of tablets 1A, 7Ti and 17M evidently point to rich aristocratic villas, we have very little *concrete* information about context.¹²³ Whatever their intended markets, it is not impossible that the tablets (or at least some of them) could have ended up in the ‘utterly ignorant’ hands of a ‘Trimalchio’.

By looking at the formal qualities of some of the tablets, this article has attempted a different approach: to my mind, the erudition of the *Tabulae* texts points to a much more sophisticated social milieu. Like Margherita Guarducci, I would therefore see them as catering to an ‘ambiente di cultura e di ricchezza’ – part of the ‘Bildungslandschaft’ of the aristocratic Roman villa.¹²⁴ Passed around a room during the Roman *cena*, they could serve as entertaining *amuse-bouches*, prompting innovative and creative displays of learning and erudition: these are tablets for *high* tables. How else to understand the literary complexities that I have explored? To move from the

¹¹⁹ Richter (1968) 168, no. 675.

¹²⁰ On the ‘Dioskourides’ gems, see Vollenweider (1966) 56–64; Richter (1971) 142–44, nos 664–73, 162, no. 758; Plantzos (1999) 96–97, with inventory on 96, n.238. On the gems inscribed by his ‘sons’ Herophilos, Eutyches and Hyllos, see Vollenweider (1966) 65–73; Plantzos (1999) 96, n.238. Such playful pen-names might make us equally wary of attributing a sardonyx cameo signed by Tryphon to the celebrated gem-cutter of *AP* 9.544 (Gow and Page *Adaeus IX*): Vollenweider (1966) 36–37; Richter (1971) 150, no. 706.

¹²¹ Valenzuela Montenegro (2004) 298–304 (responding to Sadurska (1964) 10–15): ‘Deshalb ist anzunehmen, dass in der Werkstatt des Theodoros verschiedene, mehr oder minder befähigte Künstler arbeiteten’ ((2004) 302).

¹²² Horsfall (1994) 79.

¹²³ The evidence is discussed in Squire (forthcoming a) chapter 2.

¹²⁴ Guarducci (1974) 502; for the Roman villa as ‘Bildungslandschaft’, see Mielsch (1989); Zanker (1995) especially 194–201.

tiny to the gigantic, one might compare the Imperial sculptures at Sperlonga, which similarly challenged viewers to chart their own epic stories and adventures (reflected in Faustinus' highly ambitious ecphrastic epigram, set up alongside the statues in later antiquity).¹²⁵ The *Tabulae* epitomize an élite Greek and Roman tradition of pitching images against texts: the objective, as I have said, was to choose your own adventure.

The ramifications of these tiny tablets consequently prove very substantial indeed. If, rather than cater to the gauche 'lower' classes, the tablets reflect some cultured and refined 'high' culture, they necessitate some long and hard thinking about those categorizations in the first place. At issue here are much larger ideologies about 'good' vs. 'bad' 'art', invested in modern currencies of 'élite' vs. 'popular' culture. Modern scholars have condemned the tablets, declaring that they would have outraged the 'serious lover of Greek literature' in antiquity, as indeed the 'serious lover of art'.¹²⁶ Because they do not subscribe to modern ideals of good 'literature' and 'art', argues Nicholas Horsfall, the tablets must reflect some downmarket (ie. *non-serious*) 'pop culture'. But there are dangers in this mode of argument. Yes, odd citations can be found to support the position. And yet one cannot help but wonder: are these 'serious lovers' ancient characters or modern bogeymen? Do they not in fact derive from our rather different concepts of 'art' and 'literature'? Have we not ended up imposing our own anachronistic notions onto antiquity – with all their class, gender and political associations?

The *Tabulae Iliacae*, I would suggest, force us to rethink some of our most fundamental cultural assumptions. What modern scholarship deems the 'infidelities' and 'deviations' of the tablets could actually have made them all the more erudite. In the final analysis, it is not the tablets that prove 'faulty and jejune', but rather our logocentric modes of interpreting them: to understand these objects in ancient context means revising modern assumptions about *verbatim* visual and verbal reproduction. Above all, it means challenging post-Enlightenment notions of 'illustration', whereby to engage with a text is to follow it to the letter.¹²⁷ But that is a story – and a critique – best left for elsewhere.

Appendix: inventory of surviving *Tabulae Iliacae*

1A *Tabula Capitolina*. Rome, Museo Capitolino, Sale delle Colombe, inv. 316.

2NY *Tabula New York*. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 24.97.11.

3C *Tabula Veronensis I*. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles (Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale de France), inv. 3318.

4N *Shield of Achilles*. Rome, Museo Capitolino, Sale delle Colombe, inv. 83a.

5O *Shield of Achilles*. Rome, Museo Capitolino, Sale delle Colombe, inv. 83b.

6B *Tabula Sarti*. Lost (known from a 19th-century drawing).

7Ti *Tabula Thierry*. Lost (known from a single 19th-century photograph).

8E *Tabula Zenodotea*. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles (Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale de France), inv. 3321.

9D *Tabula Veronensis II*. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles (Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale de France), inv. 3319.

10K *Tabula Borgiana*. Naples, Museo Nazionale, inv. 2408.

11H *Tabula Rondanini*. Warsaw, Muzeum Narodowe, inv. 147975 MN.

¹²⁵ Cf. Squire (2007); (2009) 202–38. Compare too second-century BC 'Homeric' drinking bowls (Sinn (1979); Rotroff (1982); with Giuliani (2003) 263–80: 'je vielfältiger die Bilder und je rätselhafter die Zitate, desto reizvoller das Spiel', (2003) 277); for a survey of further parallels, see now Simon (2008).

¹²⁶ Horsfall (1994) 79.

¹²⁷ The 'faulty and jejune' dismissal comes in Horsfall 1979a: 33. But the images are only 'faulty' when treated as 'illustrations' (following most notably Weitzmann 1947: 36–44; 1959: 31–6). On the larger ideological stakes, and some preliminary correctives, see Squire 2009: 1–193, esp. 122–139.

- 12F** *Tabula Parensis*. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles (Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale de France), inv. 3320.
- 13Ta** *Tabula Tarentina*. London, British Museum, inv. 2192.
- 14G** *Tabula Homerica*. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antike Sammlungen, inv. 1755.
- 15Ber** *Tabula Dressel*. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antike Sammlungen, inv. 1813.
- 16Sa** *Tabula Tomassetti*. Rome, Museo Sacro del Vaticano, inv. 0066.
- 17M** *Tabula Chigi*. Rome, Palazzo Chigi, no inventory number.
- 18L** *Chronicum Romanum*. Rome, Museo Capitolino, Sale delle Colombe, inv. 82.
- 19J** *Tabula Albani*. Rome, Villa Albani, inv. 957.
- 20Par** *Tabula Froehner I*. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles (Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale de France) Froehner, inv. VIII 148.
- 21Fro** *Tabula Froehner II*. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles (Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale de France) Froehner, inv. VIII 146.
- 22Get** *Tabula John-Paulina*. Malibu, Getty Museum, inv. 81.AA.113.

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