True lies of Athenian public epigrams

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> Take my advice, dear reader, don't talk epigrams even if you have the gift. I know, to those who have, the temptation is almost irresistible. But resist it. Epigram and truth are rarely commensurate. Truth has to be somewhat chiselled, as it were, before it will quite fit into an epigram. The corners have to be chipped off, the rough edges made smooth, the surface polished.
>
> Joseph Farrell

> Anyone can tell the truth, but only very few of us can make epigrams.
> W. Somerset Maugham

The blood of the Greeks had hardly been dry on the plain of Plataea for more than a few months when a Greek visitor to Delphi could read an epigram that would leave him with nothing but feelings of bitterness and anger. The Spartan regent Pausanias, who in the years following 479 BC became even more notorious for his exorbitant behaviour had the following verses inscribed upon the base of the Serpent-column, the thank-offering of all the allies to Delphian Apollo:

Ἑλλάνων ἀρχαγὸς ἐπεὶ στρατὸν ὤλεσε Μήδων,
Παυσανίας Φοίβῳ μνᾶμ᾿ ἀνέθηκε τόδε.[1]

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[1] For a text and a commentary see Petrovic 2007: 267–72; sources: Thuc. 1.132.2; Ps.-Demosth. *Or.* 59 (*in Naeram*), 97; *FGrH* (Aristodemus) 2a 104 F 1.108; Plut. *De mal. Herod.* 873 C 8 = ch.42; Paus. 3. 8. 2 c.a.n.; Suda s.v. Παυσανίας (p. 820); *AP* 6.197; Apostolius [Arsenius] Paroemiogr. *Apophthegmata* 7.9d.

> As chieftain of the Greeks, who demolished the army of Medes,
>   Pausanias dedicated this in remembrance to Phoebus.

Instead of honouring and evoking 'the new race of heroes', which emerged during the Persian Wars, the monument set up for this purpose acquired an inscription labelling Pausanias as not only the single-handed demolisher of the Persians, but also the ἀρχαγός, the chieftain of the Greeks, while the monument that should have been set up in the name of all the allies became Pausanias' private dedication. The epigram seems to have been erased from the monument in a matter of weeks; instead, a new inscription with the names of the allies was carved upon the column. It cannot be said with certainty exactly which *polis* started the avalanche of protests against the conduct of Pausanias,[2] but the story goes that not only was the epigram eradicated, but the Spartans were obliged by a decision of the Amphictiony to pay a (somewhat suspicious) fine of 1000 talents as well.[3]

   Probably at the same time as his *polis* was about to settle the matter with the allies, Pausanias was staying at Byzantium, where 'he gave himself completely to arrogance'.[4] Untroubled by his failure, although not seeking the glory of being the sole victor over the Persians any more, he had another epigram inscribed – still claiming for himself the role of the leader of Greece:

> μνᾶμ᾽ ἀρετᾶς ἀνέθηκε Ποσειδάωνι ἄνακτι
>   Παυσανίας ἄρχων Ἑλλάδος εὐρυχόρου
> πόντου ἐπ᾽ Εὐξείνου, Λακεδαιμόνιος γένος, υἱὸς
>   Κλεομβρότου, ἀρχαίας Ἡρακλέος γενεᾶς.[5]

> [This] memento of virtue he dedicated to Lord Poseidon,
>   Pausanias, ruler of wide Greece,
> at the Black Sea, he who is of Lacedaemon blood, son
>   of Cleombrotus, from the olden clan of Heracles.

This time, Pausanias did not assert his excellence upon a monument of his allies. Strictly speaking, however, he did not have it inscribed on a private dedication either, as one might perhaps infer judging from the wording of the epigram. As commander of Byzantium he opted for a less ordinary procedure: he pilfered an already dedicated bronze bowl from the temple, had his inscription carved upon it, and returned it as his own dedication.

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[2] On this cf. Gauer 1968: 92–5; Stichel 1997: 318–22; Steinhart 1997: 53. For the Plataeans filing a complaint with the Amphictiony cf. Ps.-Demosth. *Or.* 59 (*in Naeram*).

[3] Ps.-Demosth. *Or.* 59 (*in Naeram*), 97. On this cf. Steinhart 1997: 53–60.

[4] Ath. 536. Athenaeus quotes third-century BC historian Nymphis of Heraclea (*FGrH* III B 432 F 9). Pausanias' first stay at Byzantium (spring of 478) is meant.

[5] Ath. 536.

Even though one might assume that his demeanour stirred nothing but puzzlement and astonishment among the citizens of Byzantium – as is mirrored in the comments of the Greek historian Nymphis – this epigram was not erased, at least not before the early third century BC when Nymphis saw it.[6]

The purpose of this sketch is to investigate the relationship between archaic and classical public epigram and concepts of historical truth. Both terms require clarification, and I will start with the latter. The term truth should be understood in this paper as synonymous with the term 'intentional history',[7] an indicator of what a given *polis* accepts and hands down as true about its past. I am primarily interested in the ways in which the public epigram functioned within the socio-political context of the *polis*, i. e. in (1) how it mirrored the perception of history within a given community (the complex we might call the 'epigrammatic generation of historical truth'), as well as in (2) how the epigram shaped the understanding of an event for future citizens (the complex we might call the 'epigrammatic tradition of historical truth'), i. e. in epigram's truth as a rhetorical concept, and the persuasion strategy related to it.

To define the term 'public epigram' is not as easy a task as one might imagine at first glance. Even if one sets aside all the problems connected with the definition of 'public space', all epigrams set in public space are not public epigrams. The space where an epigram is set of course does matter, and it may be viewed as one of the criteria for the definition of the term 'public epigram.' Yet it does not suffice, especially as all through the archaic and classical periods we are well informed about private epigrams set in public space.[8] Hence, a further useful criterion is the identity of the founder of a particular epigram. Regardless of genres, one can make a general division of archaic and classical epigrams as those inscribed on the physical objects of individuals and those of groups which were set up in public space.

It is reasonable to assume that epigrams set up by groups reflect their intentions. As the example of Pausanias illustrates, his epigram on the

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[6] *FGrH* III B 432 F9: Παυσανίας (φησὶν) ὁ περὶ Πλαταιὰς νικήσας Μαρδόνιον, τὰ τῆς Σπάρτης ἐξελθὼν νόμιμα, καὶ εἰς ὑπερηφανίαν ἐπιδούς, περὶ Βυζάντιον διατρίβων, χαλκοῦν τὸν ἀνακείμενον κρατῆρα (5) τοῖς θεοῖς τοῖς ἐπὶ τοῦ στόματος ἱδρυμένοι, ὃν ἔτι καὶ νῦν εἶναι συμβαίνει, ἐτόλμησεν ἐπιγράψαι, ὡς αὐτὸς ἀναθείς, ὑποθεὶς τόδε τὸ ἐπίγραμμα, διὰ τὴν τρυφὴν καὶ ὑπερηφανίαν ἐπιλαθόμενος αὐτοῦ. On the reliability of Nymphis' report see Jacoby in *FGrH* III B, 263–4.

[7] This term was coined by Gehrke and is clarified in various papers, most notably in Gehrke 2001.

[8] Although areas of public space designated for public epigrams only seem to have existed; cf. the restrictive policy of the archaic and early classical Agora, Thompson/Wycherley 1972: 150.

Serpent-column was eradicated because it was not compatible (to say the least) with the views and intentions of the group which set up the monument. Pausanias himself did not possess the power to force his will upon the group, nor could he claim authority over the sacred space controlled by the Amphictiony. His almost identical dedicatory epigram from Byzantium survived; the answer to the question why is pretty obvious – as commander of Byzantium he had power over the group as well as authority over the space where the epigram was set.

From the story about Pausanias' epigrams we may infer that, when it comes to Greek public epigrams of the archaic and classical period, the discourse of their truth seems to be essentially a discourse of their founder's power.

EPIGRAMMATIC HABIT AND COMPETITIONS[9]

Inscriptions set up by groups were common in archaic and classical Athens. The frequency of inscriptions in single *poleis* depended on a number of factors, all of which seem to have had less to do with literacy or the assets of a *polis* and more to do with local epigraphic habit or even such prosaic matters as the availability of a supply of appropriate stone. As illustration, one might think of the numbers of surviving inscriptions from archaic and classical Athens as compared with, for example, inscriptions from Selinus over the same period. By the same token, the numbers of surviving verse-inscriptions vary greatly from *polis* to *polis*, and even a quick glance through the *CEG*s illustrates that significantly more than half of all surviving stone-epigrams come from Athens.

The public epigrams of Athens were set up by various groups and belong to different epigrammatic genera. For the most part they were set up on behalf of the *polis*, presumably at the instigation of the *boule* and *demos*, but in some cases one can show or assume that they were set up by political factions, or associations of a different nature.[10] The genera they belong to may vary from epitymbic and commemorative to epideictic and anathematic, but what is common to them all is their function in the public space: they all have demonstrativeness as their essential function. They all put the specific values and views of a given group of founders on display. Whatever

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[9] I have collected and analysed some of the relevant passages in Petrovic 2007a, and some of what follows on the epigrammatic competitions and poets and prizes is discussed in much more detail in Petrovic 2009: 195–216.

[10] Cf. e.g. for a political faction: *CEG* 430; for a *phyle* (Cecropis): *CEG* 890; *demos*: *CEG* 891; association of umpires: *CEG* 892.

the motive may be for setting an epigram in a public space, one could argue that public epigrams reflect less the motive and more the group.

Nothing can demonstrate this more clearly than the process by which epigrams for public monuments were selected. When we consider the most famous Athenian public epigrams of the archaic and classical periods, for example the epideictic epigram for the Tyrannoktonoi set on the agora (*CEG* 430), the dedicatory epigram following the victory over the Boeotians and Chalcideans set on the Acropolis (*CEG* 179), or the memorials for the fallen in the Persian Wars, what do we know about their authors? How did a group, a community decide which epigram should be carved upon a given object set up in the public space? For what reason did 'isonomic' Athens prefer Simonides over Pindar or Bacchylides, Simonides whose past work for and associations with the Pisistratids could hardly have served as a proper recommendation for the task? Obviously the past of a poet mattered less than the quality of his work. Actually, one can reconstruct to a certain extent the type of procedure through which the epigrams were chosen. There is an illuminative passage from *Vita Aeschyli* in this respect that demonstrates how the epigram for the commemorative monument for the fallen of Marathon was chosen.[11]

He [Aeschylus] went away to Hieron [. . .] since, as some say, he was defeated by Simonides in the epigram-contest for the fallen of Marathon. For it is customary for an epigram to provoke sympathy in a refined manner and this is alien to Aeschylus as already mentioned.

To whatever extent the biographer was inferring or excerpting data from the protagonists' own works, there is, as far as I can see, no reason to distrust his account of the procedure or his judgment about what mattered for the arbitrative group. The quoted passage allows for two arguments in regard to the procedure. Firstly, we are apparently dealing with an agonistic setting, which is perceptible in the term ἡσσηθείς, 'defeated'. Secondly, this competition seems to have been a public one, at least judging from the assumed reaction of Aeschylus.

POETS AND PRICES

Before I commence the discussion of where the committee's (that is, the community's) predilections lay when it came to public epigram, and what it was actually looking for in an epigrammatic agon, it would be reasonable to

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[11] *Vit. Aesch.* Page O.C.T. p. 332; *TGF* iii, 33–4 (= Campbell Testimonium 15, pp. 340–3).

pose the question of what gain the poets could have had from composing public epigrams and taking part in this type of contest. A quick and probably rather unsurprising answer would be money and fame.

The evidence of financial arrangements between communities and poets is notoriously meagre, yet there are some hints that composing a public epigram could have been a lucrative venture.[12]

Also informative are reports about epigram as a gift. In this regard there are two passages worthy of attention. In the already mentioned epigram of Symmachus for Arbinas of Xanthos it is stated that Symmachus 'mastered' (τεύχω) the epigram as a gift to the dynast (*CEG* 888.18–19):

> Σύμμαχος Εὐμήδεος Πελλανεὺς μάντις ἀ[μύμων]
>   δῶρον ἔτευξε ἐλεγῆια Ἀρβίναι εὐσυνέτως.

> Symmachus of Pellana, son of Eumedes, blameless (?) seer
>   fashioned comprehensible elegiac verses as a gift for Arbinas.

Epigram as a δῶρον is to be noted also in the famous passage of Herodotus as he delineates the funding for the memorial for the fallen at Thermopylae (7.228). Simonides is implied as author of the epitymbic epigram for the Acarnanian seer Megistias who waived his remuneration because of *xenia* to Megistias:

Except for the seer's epigram, the Amphictions are the ones who honoured them by setting the epigrams and pillars. Simonides son of Leoprepes had the epigram of the seer Megistias carved because of his tie of guest-friendship with the man.

The discussion about the exact meaning of the passage has ended in relative consensus that the Amphictiony covered the expenses of the epigrams and pillars, including the pillar for Megistias, whereas Simonides, who was the author of all the epigrams, waived his fee for the epigram for Megistias because of his closeness to the deceased.

The passages adduced seem to support the assumption that considerable sums were paid to authors of public epigrams (the victors of such agons), and also partly explain why prominent poets would have been interested in participating in such competitions. The other enticement would be fame, or more precisely, the process of fame-exchange which took place between a community and the poet.

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[12] I have discussed these issues more fully in Petrovic 2009: 209–12, and can only reiterate some of the arguments here: the verses on public monuments were usually cut by professional stone masons; copies of the incised verses were preserved so that the epigram could be republished if need be. A marble relief like the *stele* of Hegeso could cost as much as a simple house in fourth-century Attica. See also Petrovic 2007a: 236 and, especially, Bing/Bruss 2007: 16.

The question of why the names of the poets were not recorded on stone can be answered in more than one way. It can be argued, as some have, that it did not matter who the author of the epigram was. The scholars who opt for this solution make a case that nobody really cared about the authorship of an epigram, because of its supposed pariah-status among literary genres in the archaic and classical periods. Others argue that the voice of one was felt to be and was intended to be the voice of all. Yet a look at the number and chronology of the ascriptions of public epigrams, anachronistic and unreliable as they may be, makes it clear that it surely did matter who composed a public epigram. In those (numerous) instances when the name of the poet was not recorded on stone, the assumption must be that it was orally conveyed. This opened up a realm of possibilities for false attributions, and already in the works of fourth-century authors we find blatant suppositions.

All the attributions traceable through the fourth century BC indicate that the reputation of an epigram was connected to the reputation of its author and it is perhaps a reasonable assumption that public epigram's persuasiveness depended on its link to a certain author. It is hardly surprising that when the priest Helladius decided to (re?)publish an epigram for the Megarians fallen during the Persian wars, a millennium after the event itself, he decided to have the inscription accompanied by the name of Simonides.[13]

The financial arrangements for public epigrams and the fame of their authors are questions not easily dealt with, but they need to be considered as a preliminary to discussing the epigrammatic generation of the truth of the *polis*. It was necessary not only to present the protagonists, but also to attempt to clarify their motives and set their stage.

ONCE UPON A TIME, THESE YOUNGSTERS . . .
(SOME TRUE LIES OF PUBLIC EPIGRAMS)

When a community engages a poet it is probably never a sign solely of intentions to announce the truth about the past. On the other hand, it is not a sign of deceitfulness either. The relationship between poets and truth is notoriously complex, but engaging a poet can be of great benefit to a community: it may not result in plain factual truths, but it can certainly be a means of obtaining useful ones.

[13] *IG* VII 53.

Athens in the archaic and classical periods presents a case in point. Instances where the overlapping and interweaving of 'useful' and 'factual' can be observed are relatively frequent and by way of exemplification I shall outline some of the cases in which the usefulness of epigram within the social or political discourse of its founder is particularly marked.

Drifting truth

If we take a look at the famous verse inscription that accompanied the tyrant-slayers group(s)[14] of the Athenian agora and simultaneously think of the chronology of historical events, we can see how the useful truth of the community became its factual truth. Probably both on the statue base of the group of Antenor (510–508 BC?) and on that of the group of Critias and Nesiotes (*t.p.q.* 479 BC), the following epigram was chiselled:[15]

Indeed a great light was born for the Athenians when Aristogiton killed Hipparchus
   as did Harmodius
[one line missing]
Two of them bestowed [freedom] on their fatherland.

Whatever date between 510 and 500 BC we might accept for Antenor's composition, it will be obvious that this epigram did more at that point than simply announce the truth about the deeds of Harmodius and Aristogiton. It is hard to believe that the Athenians did not remember the actual consequences of the murder of Hipparchus any more – an assassination which took place a mere five to ten years before the first statue-group was set up on the agora. As many contemporaries would have been aware, hardly had a 'great light' (μέγ' Ἀθηναίοισι φόως) been born for the citizens of Athens (in whatever way one might be inclined to interpret the phrase). As is well attested, the assassination brought forth nothing but further repression. Further, an act which was an outcome of jealousy and humiliation is here styled as an act of deliverance (if, that is, one accepts the proposed supplement). Yet it is Thucydides who confirms how successful the persuasive power of this public epigram was[16] – a century after the event he feels the need to criticise the version of the event which the Athenians hold to be

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[14] *CEG* 430.
[15] Sources: 1. *IG* 1³ 502 vv. 2, 4; 2. Heph. *Ench.* 4.6 (p. 14–15 ed. Consbruch) vv. 1–2; 3. Eustathius ad Ξ 261–6 (p. 636 vol. III ed. Van der Valk) vv. 1–2. The literature on this epigram is immense: for an overview see Petrovic 2007: 113–31; as far as historical background and the epigram are concerned, Day 1985 is particularly illuminating.
[16] Certainly combined with the oral tradition of the popular version of the story.

true,[17] and it is the version which was at least partly generated by means of this epigram.

As the historian's report illustrates, community's understanding of its past drifted from the useful to the factual truth within just a few generations. The version of events which presented the tyrant-slayers as liberating the city from tyranny was certainly an inaccurate one in the years following 514, yet after 510 it was a very useful one. At a time of political vacuum and *stasis* brought about by Isagoras' and Cleisthenes' attempts to assume power in Athens, and when both groups could claim some merit for the downfall of the tyranny, it was a politically sound decision by both parties to let someone who could no longer come into power take credit for the deliverance: inventing a hero to encapsulate your values is better than claiming the same status for yourself, especially in a society tired of pretenders and saturated with claimants to the role of tyrant.

Therefore, from the perspective of a reader of this epigram, a drift in perception can be observed. What someone born around 480 BC might regard as unquestionably true, and hand down as such to his descendants, could have been accepted by his grandfather as a convenient consensus within the community, or even dismissed as mere propaganda.

Old truth

The famous assertion of Simonides that only an idiot could believe that placing a *stele* (with an inscription) was a guarantee of the immortality of a eulogy did not have much impact on fifth-century Athenians.[18] The belief remained that an epigram, i.e. a version of an event delineated in an epigram, presented an assurance that the deed or event commemorated would be preserved for posterity. Furthermore, not long after the epigram for the tyrant-slayers was composed, new elements began to emerge in public epigrams (not only Athenian), aiming at the enhancement of their persuasive powers, and voicing the intention that they should be read by countless generations.

The epigram on the tyrant-slayers demonstrated how in time the version of an event presented in an epigram became the truth about that event. Even when Athenians stumbled over the factual truth – i.e. in spite of Thucydides' remarks on the affair – they did not stop glorifying Harmodius and Aristogiton as the liberators of Athens from tyranny. One might almost go as far as to claim that time generated the truth: when criticism came, both

[17] Cf. Thuc. 6.54.   [18] Simonides 581 *PMG*; on this cf. Ford 2002: 107.

the monument and the epigram possessed the authority of vintage reports, and the lapse of time strengthened the persuasiveness of their statements.

From the first quarter of the fifth century a new type of epigram begins to emerge, one that claims the authority of time without actually possessing it. When one speaks of formulae within archaic and classical epigrams, the adverb ποτέ is usually mentioned as not much more than a filler, a phrase without much meaning designed to offer help to a clumsy poet in his efforts to preserve the metre.[19] This statement might be valid for some of the private epitymbic epigrams where the adverb appears, but in the case of public dedications, epitymbia or epideixes, it would be naïve to accept it without further ado.

It has also been argued that in the case of public epigrams, the adverb can be used as an indicator of how long the period was between the setting up of the monument and the inscribing of the epigram.[20] But this is not plausible. Should we examine the exact historical context of the public epigrams containing ποτέ, we would soon notice that in many cases, the phrase simply can *not* denote any definable distance between an event remembered in an epigram and the moment its physical bearer is set up, or its text written down.[21]

The adverb starts appearing frequently in public epigrams, and in prominent positions within public poems, composed or supposedly composed during and after the Persian Wars to commemorate the fallen.[22] Here I list just a few instances:

(a) μυριάσιν ποτὲ τῇδε τριακοσίαις ἐμάχοντο v. 1; commemoration of the Peloponnesians fallen at Thermopylae (Hdt. 7.228). Inscribed about 479/8 BC: 'Once on this place they fought against three million.'

(b) ὦ ξεῖν' εὔυδρ]όν ποκ' ἐναίομες ἄστυ Κορίνθου; *CEG* 131, 1, commemoration of the Corinthians fallen at Salamis. Inscribed about 479/8 BC: 'Stranger, once we inhabited well-watered Corinth.'

(c) ἄνδρες τοί ποτ' ἔναιον ὑπὸ κροτάφοις Ἑλικῶνος. Commemoration of the Opuntians fallen at Thermopylae (Strabo 9. 4. 2; *GVI* 6), inscribed after *c.* 450?: 'Men who once inhabited the slopes of Helicon.'

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[19] Cf. Wade-Gery 1933: 72–3.

[20] For the discussion see Lorenz 1976: 70. There were actually attempts to determine the exact time span determined by ποτέ: cf. Lorenz loc. cit., and Papantoniou 1948: 4: 'ποτέ refers to point of time 13–15 months previous.'

[21] For this opinion Wade-Gery 1933: 72–3; Skiadas 1967: 62–3; Lorenz 1976: 65.

[22] The adverb is used in private epitymbic epigrams of Attica as early as the middle of the sixth century BC, cf. *GVI* 1224, 2 (= *CEG* 27). Notably, the epigram deals with a heroic death.

(d) οἵ ποτε καλλιχόρου περὶ πατ]ρίδος ὠ[λέσαϑ᾽ ἥβαν, *CEG* 4.
    Commemoration of the Athenian dead in the battles of Tanagra and
    Oenophyta. Inscribed 457 BC?: 'you, who once lost your youth for your
    fatherland with fine dancing-grounds.'

In the case of these examples, the time span between the actual event the
epigrams have as their subject and the moment when the epigrams were
actually carved upon the stone was a relatively short one. In some cases, not
more than a couple of months may have passed between an event and its
commemoration in an epigram. The adverb can, perhaps, be seen as
denoting the time span between the event and the reception of the epigram,
thus transferring the event itself into an undistinguishable past, a past which
has an authority of its own when it comes to truth. The event X that took
place *once upon a time* is an important event not only because of the fact that
we remember it even now, but also because someone is supposed to have
honoured it with an epigram a considerable time after it took place. We are
dealing, therefore, with a cunning persuasive strategy. What the epigram
has to report is bound to be held true already in the moment of the
epigram's incision. The version of the story which presumably survived
for so long before the inscription is the one which a community is supposed
to have held for true. In order to illustrate this I shall take the example of the
Thermopylae-epigrams.

    For all we know, the Thermopylae Memorial, which included three
epigrams quoted firstly in Herodotus (7.228), was a venture of the
Delphic Amphictiony. Probably during the Amphictiony's session in the
autumn of 479 the decision was made to honour some but not all of the
fallen of Thermopylae.[23] During his visit to Thermopylae, Herodotus had
an opportunity to see the three epigrams, two of which were set up by the
Amphictiony, the third by Simonides because of his wish to honour his
fallen friend Megistias. The Amphictiony was in charge of this task for the
simple reason that the battlefield was a part of the territory it controlled and
therefore the Amphictiony possessed the authority to decide on the form of
the memorial. Of all the Greek warriors at Thermopylae, the only ones
honoured were the ἔϑνη of Peloponnesus. Not a single word was used in
order to remember the Thespians who lost 700 men, their entire army, at
Thermopylae; there was not a word on the Locrians, and certainly there was
no intention whatsoever to honour Thebes. As is well known, Thebans and
Locrians were put on the list of states accused of Medism, a list which was
very likely written down during the very same session of the Delphic

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[23] On this session see Petrovic 2004: 266–9.

Amphictiony on which the form of the honours for the fallen at Thermopylae was decided.

This memorial illustrates a situation which is in a sense the opposite of the case of Pausanias discussed earlier:[24] Pausanias' epigram contained too much of his personal truth, at least where a public monument is concerned, and was therefore eradicated. However, in the case of the Thermopylae Memorial, even though its epigrams contained too little of the factual truth, the founder's power over the public space made it possible for the epigram to survive and prefigure the version of the story that complied with Spartan intentions.

The epigrams the Spartans had chiselled to convey the truth about the battle of Thermopylae can illustrate how an event gains the authority of truth when it is set in an indeterminate past. At the moment when epigram (a) was composed and inscribed, certainly many *poleis* knew how narrow and self-centred the version to be propagated was, yet no one could have taken any effective action against it. By using ποτέ, the event itself was transferred into an undetermined past; the consequence is that the recipient is inclined to regard the epigram as representing tradition, when the version has in fact been established through the compromises of time-flow.

Should we agree that ποτέ was used to transfer a historical event to the realm of chronological uncertainty (as far as future recipients are concerned), we might also discern a further message in the use of the adverb, namely awareness of the event's historical significance (as far as the founder is concerned).

If one were to take for granted what public commemorations and honorific epigrams of the archaic and classical epoch say about the protagonists, one would be tempted to infer that a vast number of Athenian fallen or dignitaries were juveniles.[25] Out of all the public epigrams I have inspected where either παῖδες or κοῦροι were named as protagonists, in only one case is there some certainty that the term is not misleading, namely in the epigram on those who fell in the battles of Oenophyta and Tanagra.[26] In all the other cases, there were no clear signs that the protagonists were youngsters. Certainly one of the reasons for this kind of representation in the case of epitymbic epigrams might be that the sympathy of the reader would be greater if he were to learn that the deceased were young – something

[24] See pp. 202–5 above.
[25] Cf. *CEG* 10.12 (battle of Potidaea); 179 (Athenian war of 507/6 against Chalcideans and Boeotians); 469; 758. On this see also Page (*FGE*), p. 275.
[26] Cf. Bugh 1988: 45 and 32: '[. . .] the prevailing image of the Athenian cavalry in the Classical period is that of youth [. . .] in their twenties or perhaps early thirties.'

which would comply with the observation from *Vita Aeschyli*: τὸ γὰρ ἐλεγεῖον πολὺ τῆς περὶ τὸ συμπαθὲς λεπτότητος μετέχειν θέλει.[27] Another reason might be that this kind of address represents an aspect of Athenian propaganda, which perhaps already in the early fifth century was targeting young men in order to boost their enthusiasm and readiness for self-sacrifice in case of war.[28]

WHY (UN)TRUTHS?

If we accept that (1) the group that controls public space is in charge of public epigram as well, and that (2) they engage a poet to form an intentional conception of the celebrated event, what can we conclude about the ideal reader of public epigrams and the effect the group hoped to achieve by means of these texts?

It goes without saying that public epigrams were not written solely to make their recipients shed tears: since they stood at the most prominent places of an archaic and classical *polis* they were shaped as *exempla virtutis*, the texts displaying the system of values held by the *polis*. Furthermore, the analysed elements seem to suggest that the ideal reader was not an adult eyewitness, but that the text was aimed at descendants, perhaps even from a young age; the purpose of setting public epigrams at least in Athens was that later generations should be informed about and look up to the great deeds of their ancestors, and thus be inspired to pursue similar accomplishments, probably in the hope of obtaining the same rewards. Put in the simplest terms, the message of many a public epigram would be: *Once upon a time these young men did something you should look up to. Given the chance, you should do the same.*

This can be illustrated clearly by the example of the famous Eion-epigrams, incised on three herms set up in the Athenian agora. Besides using the elements discussed above (cf. *FGE* XL a, 1 and b, 1–2) they put their message in a manner clear to even the most casual reader (Aeschin. *In Ctes*. 183 = Page *EG* XL):

> ἡγεμόνεσσι δὲ μισθὸν Ἀθηναῖοι τάδ᾽ ἔδωκαν
>   ἀντ᾽ εὐεργεσίης καὶ μεγάλης ἀρετῆς.
> μᾶλλόν τις τάδ᾽ ἰδὼν καὶ ἐπεσσομένων ἐθελήσει
>   ἀμφὶ ξυνοῖσι πράγμασι δῆριν ἔχειν.

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[27] On this cf. Ecker 1990: 136; Derderian 2001: 97–102. In general cf. Griessmair 1966.
[28] On 'fighting young men' in the Hellenistic epoche see Chaniotis 2005: 44–56.

This, the reward of their labour, has Athens bestowed on her leaders;
    Token of duty well done, honour to valour supreme.
Who in years yet to be shall read these lines in the marble,
    Gladly will toil in his turn, giving his life for the state.

(tr. Charles Darwin Adams)

Public epigrams were not written to announce the truth about an event, to register what had happened, where and when. Neither to the Greeks nor to modern readers do public epigrams speak overtly about factual history; what they do is inform us about the views and uses of the past. In the late archaic and early classical period public epigrams seem to have addressed less the events and people they owed their existence to, and more the coming generations. The generation that witnessed an event shaped it in an epigram in such a manner as to form an exemplum for all generations to come.