

SPEAKING OBJECTS AND THE EARLY GREEK CONCEPTION OF WRITING*

ABSTRACT

One of the most remarkable features of the language of early Greek writing is a pervasive rhetorical strategy which consists in personifying objects for the purpose of identifying humans closely associated with them. Such ‘speaking objects’ have no Semitic parallel; how, then, is their conventional status in the Archaic Age to be explained? This article first considers the formulaic language of speaking objects, which is no straightforward transcription of speech, and seeks to explain where it comes from. It then turns to the question of why writers employed the curious strategy of personification by setting it in the broader context of early Greek writing and literature. Various analogues to herms, slaves and skytalai, speaking objects are shown to have been conceived as messengers acting on behalf of their senders by not speaking in their name.

Keywords: speaking objects; orality; writing; epistolography; seals; herms; slaves; *skytalē*

The Greek alphabet was apparently created only once, but the culture of writing it spawned was characterized by variety: local alphabets—green, red, shades of blue—fashions of writing on pots, and epigraphic habits more broadly.¹ It is therefore striking that the language of early Greek writing shows, as we shall see, a notable degree of uniformity. Particularly remarkable is a pervasive rhetorical strategy which, somewhat paradoxically, consists in personifying objects for the purpose of identifying humans closely associated with them: ‘I am the kylix of Korax’ (ϕορᾶϕ ἡμὶ φυλιχς), declares a late eighth-century wine-drinking cup from Rhodes; ‘Mantiklos dedicated me’ (Μαντικλος μ’ ἀνεθεκε), announces an early seventh-century bronze statue from Thebes; ‘I am the remembrance of Glaucus’ (Γλαυρὸς εἰμι μνημα), avers a late seventh-century marble block from Thasos.² Such ‘speaking objects’, as they are called,

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¹ N. Luraghi, ‘The local scripts from nature to culture’, *ClAnt* 29 (2010), 68–91, at 68: ‘perhaps the most characteristic aspect of early Greek alphabetic writing is its diversity’. See Luraghi (this note) for orthographic variety; R. Osborne and A. Pappas, ‘Writing on archaic Greek pottery’, in Z. Newby and R. Leader-Newby (edd.), *Art and Inscriptions in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 2007), 131–55 compare writing on Corinthian, Boeotian and Attic pots; for epigraphic habits, see J. Whitley, ‘The material entanglements of writing things down’, in L. Nevett (ed.), *Theoretical Approaches to the Archaeology of Ancient Greece* (Ann Arbor, 2017), 71–103. Regarding the monogenesis of the Greek alphabet, see N. Luraghi, ‘Sounds, signs, and boundaries: perspectives on early Greek alphabetic writing’, in R. Parker and P.M. Steele (edd.), *The Early Greek Alphabets* (Oxford, 2021), 32–57.

² A. Stähli, ‘Sprechende Gegenstände’, in R. Bielfeldt (ed.), *Ding und Mensch in der Antike* (Heidelberg, 2015), 113–41, at 120: ‘eine dominierende epigraphische Gattung’; J. Whitley, ‘Why

also include bottles, gems, coins, boundary markers, signs, etc.³ So deeply ingrained was this practice that it appears to have been taken over by other cultures which learned writing from the Greeks.⁴

The Greeks themselves developed their alphabet on the basis of a Semitic model, but there is no Semitic parallel for such ‘speaking objects’. There were first-person Semitic epitaphs, but there is a difference between a first-person inscription on an object and a first-person inscription which identifies itself as the object, as a ‘speaking object’.⁵ Even if Greek speaking objects in the strict sense were inspired by Semitic objects with first-person inscriptions, we would still need to account for the apparent ease of their reception as a widespread Greek epigraphic convention in the Archaic Age.⁶

Burzachechi gave *oggetti parlanti* their name, but his interpretation of them as an expression of animistic views was not well received.⁷ Svenbro’s proposal—namely, that personification served as a way of attracting attention to an object which in itself was devoid of life—has met a mixed reception; it in any event cannot explain the uniformity of this practice.⁸ Recently, capitalizing on the ‘material turn’ and in particular on the work of Gell, Whitley has argued—in what might be seen as a nuanced revival of Burzachechi’s views—that the use of the first person derives from the perception of

με? Personhood and agency in the earliest Greek inscriptions (800–550 BC)’, in P.J. Boyes, P.M. Steele, N.E. Astoreca (edd.), *The Social and Cultural Contexts of Historic Writing Practices* (Oxford and Philadelphia, 2021), 269–87, at 276: ‘a widespread, persistent and long-lasting feature of the uses of the alphabet throughout the Archaic period’ (see also 278). Korax’s kylix: *LSAG* 356(1); Mantiklos: *CEG* 326; Glaucus: *LSAG* 307(61).

³ E.g. M. Burzachechi, ‘Oggetti parlanti nelle epigrafi greche’, *Epigraphica* 24 (1962), 3–54, at 3; J. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, 1993), 38 n. 55; Stähli (n. 2), 117: ‘Inschriften dieses Typs finden sich ... auf allen möglichen Objekten’.

⁴ Burzachechi (n. 3), 45–7; H. Häusle, ‘Ζωοποιεῖν–ὁφιστάσθαι. Eine Studie der frühgriechischen inschriftlichen Ich-Rede der Gegenstände’, in R. Muth and G. Pfohl (edd.), *Serta Philologica Aenipontana* (Innsbruck, 1979), 23–139, at 59, 68–9; L. Agostiniani, *Le “iscrizioni parlanti” dell’Italia antica* (Firenze, 1982); G. Colonna, ‘Identità come appartenenza nelle iscrizioni di possesso dell’Italia preromana’, *Epigraphica* 45 (1983), 49–64; R.E. Wallace, *Zikh Rasna: A Manual of the Etruscan Language and Inscriptions* (Ann Arbor, 2008), 156–64.

⁵ G. Pfohl, ‘Die ältesten Inschriften der Griechen’, *QUCC* 7 (1969), 7–25, at 10; Colonna (n. 4), 50–1; R. Wachter, ‘The origin of epigrams on “speaking objects”’, in M. Baumbach, A. Petrovic, I. Petrovic (edd.), *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram* (Cambridge, 2010), 250–60, at 252; T. Christian, *Gebildete Steine* (Göttingen, 2015), 31, with more detailed discussion at 41–2. Discussion can also be found in Burzachechi (n. 3), 47–9 and in Häusle (n. 4), 72–8 and 127–8, which is not about ‘speaking objects’ in a strict sense (similarly Whitley [n. 2], 274). For Semitic first-person epitaphs, see H. Donner and W. Röllig (edd.), *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1962–1964), §§24, 26 in Phoenician, and the famous Mesha stele in Moabite. Cf. Wachter (this note), 254–6 on the extension of this category.

⁶ Similarly, Whitley (n. 2), 274.

⁷ Burzachechi (n. 3), 49–54 (along similar lines, for Italic speaking objects, Colonna [n. 4], 61); they were treated earlier by E. Flinck, *De singulari quadam epigrammatum antiquorum forma* (Helsingfors, 1922). For criticism, see A.E. Raubitschek, ‘Das Denkmal-Epigramm’, in A. Dihle (ed.), *L’épigramme grecque* (Geneva, 1968), 1–26, at 11–12; Svenbro (n. 3), 41; C. Sourvinou-Inwood, ‘Reading’ Greek Death (Oxford, 1995), 164–7 with regard to epitaphs; D. Meyer, *Inszeniertes Lesevergnügen* (Stuttgart, 2005), 52, 71–2; Christian (n. 5), 32–6 more broadly; and Stähli (n. 2), 121–5.

⁸ Svenbro (n. 3), 41–3. Approved by D. Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought* (Princeton, 2001), 256–7; Meyer (n. 7), 8, 72–6; Christian (n. 5), 37–45 with a wide-ranging discussion; Stähli (n. 2), 125–9. Criticized among others by L. Porciani, *La forma proemiale: storiografia e pubblico nel mondo antico* (Pisa, 1997), 160–2; Wachter (n. 5); E.J. Bakker, ‘Archaic epigram and the seal of Theognis’, in E. Sistakou and A. Rengakos (edd.), *Dialect, Diction, and Style in Greek Literary and Inscribed Epigram* (Berlin, 2016), 195–214, at 199–202; and see also Whitley (n. 1), 75.

such objects as agents.⁹ Though he forcefully objects to ‘reading’ speaking objects, rejecting approaches indebted to the superseded ‘linguistic turn’ and insisting on writing as a primarily material practice, Whitley cannot but rely on their language in his argument.¹⁰ This language repays more sustained attention.

I begin by building on the work of Wachter, who has suggested that the speech of speaking objects—votive epigrams in particular—is rooted in ritual oral language.¹¹ In the first part of this article, in an attempt to explain where the standardized speech of speaking objects comes from, I extend the discussion to other genres and seek to provide some evidence for his hypothesis. I then turn in the second part to the question why writers employed the strategy of personification, setting it in the broader context of early Greek writing and literature.

1. ORALITY

Speaking objects present themselves as engaging in speech, but their language does not represent a straightforward transcription: it is not easy to imagine a situation in which one would have exclaimed, for instance, ‘I am the kylix of Korax’.¹² Where, then, does it come from?

To Korax’s kylix, Mantiklos’ statue and Glaucus’ memorial let us add as a representative sample another statue, an aryballos, a lekythos and a shelf of rock, respectively:

Νικανδρῇ μ’ ἀνεθεκεν ἡεκηβολοῖ ἰοχεαίρηι (Naxos, c.650)¹³

Nikandrê dedicated me to the far-shooting goddess who rains arrows

Πυρρὸς μ’ ἐπιόξεν Ἀγασίλειο (Eretria?, c.650)¹⁴

Pyrros the son of Agasileos made me.

ταταῖς ἐμὶ λερυθὸς ἥος δ’ ἀν μὲ κλεψέει θυφλὸς ἐστὶ (Cumae, 675–650)¹⁵

I am the lekythos of Tataie; whosoever steals me will go blind.

Εργοτιμῷ ἐμὶ μνῆμα¹⁶ (Attica, sixth century)

I am the remembrance of Ergotimos.

The language of these objects was not composed *ad hoc*. Their speech is evidently governed by rules: a first-person enclitic occupies the second place in the sentence, conforming to Wackernagel’s Law; the first-person accusative pronoun is preceded by the nominative and is followed by a verb (NOM. μὲ V.), while the first-person singular

⁹ Whitley (n. 1), 73 goes so far as to argue that writing was developed in order to allow objects to speak (Whitley [n. 2], 280: ‘the alphabet was invented to personify *things*, to endow them with agency’, italics original).

¹⁰ E.g. Whitley (n. 1), 84: ‘if a pot—a humble *lekythos*—can invoke divine agency, it must also possess agency itself.’ The linguistic and literary analysis presented here is by no means necessarily incompatible with materialist approaches. See n. 67 below.

¹¹ Wachter (n. 5). See Christian (n. 5), 39 n. 49 for some criticism.

¹² Noted by e.g. Svenbro (n. 3), 28, 30; Wachter (n. 5), 251.

¹³ The first verse of three at CEG 403.

¹⁴ LSAG 88(22).

¹⁵ IG xiv 865; LSAG 240(3).

¹⁶ M.K. Langdon, ‘Herders’ graffiti’, in A.P. Matthaiou and N. Papazarkadas (edd.), *ΑΞΙΩΝ: Studies in Honor of Ronald S. Stroud* (Athens, 2015), 49–58, §3.

present of εἶναι is preceded by the genitive and is followed by the nominative (GEN. εἰμί NOM.). The first formula is frequently used to identify the object's donor, or the artisan who crafted it.¹⁷ The second (sometimes [GEN. εἰμί]) is typical of inscriptions concerned with ownership, which can include epitaphs, and also votives.¹⁸ Other formulas employed by speaking objects, such as [NOM. εἰμί GEN.] or with a prepositional phrase replacing the initial genitive, are manifestly related to them.¹⁹ Set against the geographic spread and orthographic variety of these objects so early in the Archaic period, their standardized diction—in verse as well as in prose, on sympotic objects as well as on herders' graffiti²⁰—requires explanation, no less than the formulaic language of hexameter verse. Greeks had at their disposal ample resources to announce a donation or claim ownership in a variety of lexical, syntactic and other ways.²¹ How are we to explain these formulas?

It has been argued that the language of early Greek writings, particularly epitaphs and votives, was indebted to the formulas of Phoenician inscriptions.²² But it is enough to consider the Mantiklos and Nikandrê inscriptions to realize that the debt is at best limited. While the syntax of the openings ([donor] ἀνέθηκε [god]) may be originally

¹⁷ See M.L. Lazzarini, 'Le formule delle dediche votive nella Grecia arcaica', *Atti della Accademia nazionale dei Lincei* 19 (1976), 47–354, §§1–345, for this formula in votives; J.W. Day, 'Interactive offerings: early Greek dedicatory epigrams and ritual', *HSPH* 96 (1994), 37–74, at 40 n. 13 estimates that 75 per cent of the votives in Lazzarini's corpus consist of this formula. For artisan signatures, see J.M. Hurwit, *Artists and Signatures in Ancient Greece* (New York, 2015).

¹⁸ E.g. *LSAG* 76(4), 77(10f, h), 131(23), 132(35), 174(6), 224(7), 240(3, 9, 11, 13), 260(8, 14), 275–8(12?, 26, 31–2, 50–1, 58), 283(1), 288(1), 304–7(10, 17, 61), 316(20, 29a), 323–4(9, 19), 341–5(8?, 40, 61, 69), 356(1–2, 8, 15, 17–19, 23, 27), 371–3(43, 61, 63), 457(H), 461(L), 480(T); P. Friedländer, *Epigrammata: Greek Inscriptions in Verse from the Beginning to the Persian Wars* (Berkeley, 1948), §§96, 159–60, 167–8, 178 and see also some listed under §177; *EG* 1.263; *SEG* 17.441a, 40.301; W. Peek, *Griechische Vers-Inschriften* (Berlin, 1955; henceforth, *GVI*), §65; Lazzarini (n. 17), §§418, 537–58; M.K. Langdon, *A Sanctuary of Zeus on Mount Hymettos* (Princeton, 1976), §§6, 29c; Langdon (n. 16), §§1–5, 7, 10; E. Csapo, D. Geagan, A.W. Johnston, 'The Iron Age inscriptions', in J.W. Shaw, M.C. Shaw (edd.), *Kommos IV: The Greek Sanctuary* (Princeton, 2000), 101–34, §§17, 27; A. Kenzelmann Pfyffer, T. Theurillat, S. Verdan, 'Graffiti d'époque géométrique provenant du sanctuaire d'Apollon Daphnéphoros à Érétrie', *ZPE* 151 (2005), 51–83, §§1, 44(?); M. Besios, I.Z. Tzifopoulos, A. Kotsonas, *Μεθώνη Περίας I: Επιγραφές, χαράγματα και εμπορικά σύμβολα στη γεωμετρική και αρχαϊκή κεραμική από το "Υπόγειο" της Μεθώνης Περίας στη Μακεδονία* (Thessaloniki, 2012), §§1, 2, 3(?), 7. For the phiale of Epiorvos, in the Cypriot syllabary, see O. Masson, 'Kypriaka', *BCH* 104 (1980), 225–35. The reconstruction of Nestor's Cup as a speaking object is controversial (Wachter [n. 5], 252–3). On the relation between votives and ownership inscriptions, see P. Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing: A Cultural History* (Oxford, 2013), 29 with references; R. Scodel, 'Inscription, absence and memory: epic and early epitaph', *SIFC* 10 (1992), 57–76, at 58 (Colonna [n. 4], 62–3, on which see below, is suggestive in this context). For the formulaic taxonomy, see also Stähli (n. 2), 120; for an alternative taxonomy, Häusle (n. 4), 48–70 (with the reservation in n. 6 above).

¹⁹ Genitive replaced by prepositional phrase: *LSAG* 88(13), 444(H); Burzachechi (n. 3), 37. [NOM. εἰμί GEN.]: Friedländer (n. 18), §159, *GVI* §69. [NOM. GEN. εἰμί]: *LSAG* 234(13), *GVI* §76. [GEN. NOM. εἰμί]: Burzachechi (n. 3), 45. [GEN. NOM. εἰμί]: Friedländer (n. 18), §170, *GVI* §115. [NOM. ἐγώ]: *LSAG* 131(17), 288(3), 343(29).

²⁰ Such as Ergotimos' memorial; see Langdon (n. 16).

²¹ For expressing possession, e.g. M.C. Benvenuto, 'Possession', in G.K. Giannakis (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics* (Leiden, 2013), consulted online 21 February 2022.

²² Suggested in E. Norden, *Aus altrömischen Priesterbüchern* (Lund, 1939), 292–3 and Friedländer (n. 18), 7 n. 1; also J.W. Day, *Archaic Greek Epigram and Dedication: Representation and Reperformance* (Cambridge, 2010), 7 n. 24 for votives; argued in greater detail in Pfohl (n. 5), 9–10 (also Pfohl in Raubitschek [n. 7], 27), and again Häusle (n. 4), 72–8.

Semitic, their metre and diction (the epithets ἐκηβόλος and ἀργυρότοξος) are firmly rooted in the traditional language of Greek hexameter verse.²³

Like hexameter verse, the language of votives is grounded in oral practices. Though they did not necessarily feature transcriptions of actual *Kultsprache* ('language of cult'), they nevertheless represented a *Kunstsprache* ('artificial language') which evoked the occasion of the original dedication by drawing on ritual language, in particular divine epithets, prayers, as well as the proclamation of the donor's name.²⁴ Indeed, they were performative utterances.²⁵ Wachter has attempted to reconstruct the actual *Kultsprache*, suggesting a number of possible hexametric verses which the donor would have uttered, referring to him- or herself in the third person, and perhaps using the second in reference to the object.²⁶ In Wachter's reconstruction, writing will have led to the standardization of such formulas as well as to the use of the first person for the object.

While Wachter's reconstruction is hypothetical, evidence for the transformation of an oral formula into the personified written formula can be found, I submit, when we turn to the ownership formula [GEN. εἰμί NOM.]. It too is paralleled in hexameter poetry. In *Iliad* Book 6, Hector imagines the speech of a passer-by who, long after the Greeks have captured Troy, comes upon his wife Andromache, now enslaved (459–62):

καί ποτέ τις εἴπῃσιν ἰδὼν κατὰ δάκρυ χέουσας
 “Ἑκτορος ἦδε γυναῖκα, ὃς ἀριστεύεσκε μάχεσθαι
 Τρώων ἵπποδάμων, ὅτε Ἴλιον ἀμφεμάχοντο.”
 ὥς ποτέ τις ἐρέει ...

And someone will say, seeing you shedding tears: 'This is the wife of Hector, who was superior in war to all Trojan horse-tamers, when they fought around Ilios.' So someone will say ...

The same construction, with the possessor's name in the genitive, followed by a proximal demonstrative pronoun and the nominative possessee, can be found in *Iliad* Book 7.²⁷ It is again Hector, yet again imagining what has been called *tis*-speech (86–91):²⁸

²³ See also Wachter (n. 5), 258–9; and Day (n. 22), 40–1 for Mantiklos.

²⁴ Raubitschek (n. 7); Day (n. 17), especially 40–3, and 46 n. 38, as well as Day (n. 22) on 'epigram as a fossil of performance' (at 17); W. Furlley, 'Life in a line: a reading of dedicatory epigrams from the Archaic and Classical period', in M. Baumbach, A. Petrovic, I. Petrovic (edd.), *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram* (Cambridge, 2010), 151–66, at 153–5; C. Trümper, 'Observations on the dedicatory and sepulchral epigrams, and their early history', in M. Baumbach, A. Petrovic, I. Petrovic (edd.), *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram* (Cambridge, 2010), 167–80 in relation to choral lyric; Wachter (n. 5), 258–9.

²⁵ On the performative force of the aorist in such inscriptions, E.J. Bakker, 'Time, tense, and Thucydides', *CW* 100 (2007), 113–22, at 115–17.

²⁶ Wachter (n. 5), 206. Pace Stähli (n. 2), 125–8, the fact that the language of these inscriptions was designed for writing does not preclude the possibility of their derivation from oral language.

²⁷ It is also possible to analyse the demonstrative here and below not as the subject, with the following noun serving as predicate modified in turn by an initial genitive ('this is the wife of Hector'), but as an attribute of the following noun, with the genitive construed as predicate ('this woman is Hector's'). The latter can be found in Thgn. 22–3, quoted below, and because it seems to differ slightly from the constructions in the *Iliad*, I have opted for the former, but it makes no real difference for our purposes. For the relation between predicative and adnominal constructions, Benvenuto (n. 21).

²⁸ For *tis*-speech, see I. de Jong, 'The voice of anonymity: *tis*-speeches in the *Iliad*', *Eranos* 85 (1987), 69–84, and for Hector's propensity for such rhetoric, de Jong (this note), 76–9 (cf. Scodel [n. 18], 61).

καί ποτέ τις εἴπησι καὶ ὀπιγόνων ἀνθρώπων,
 νηὶ πολυκλήιδι πλέων ἐπὶ οἴνοπα πόντον·
 “ἀνδρὸς μὲν τὸδε σῆμα πάλαι κατατεθνηῶτος,
 ὃν ποτ’ ἀριστεύοντα κατέκτανε φραϊδῖμος Ἑκτωρ.”
 ὥς ποτέ τις ἐρέει· τὸ δ’ ἐμὸν κλέος οὐ ποτ’ ὀλείται.

And someone to be born later, as he sails over the wine-dark sea in a many-benched ship, will say: ‘This is the mound of a man who died long ago, whom glorious Hector slew though he was once excellent.’ So someone will say, and my fame will not perish.

The use of this construction in *tis*-speech is not limited to Hector, nor to epic. A particularly famous variation of it is used by Theognis, who shortly after announcing the sealing of his verses with the proximal demonstrative (τοῖσδ’ ἔπεισιν) boasts (22–3):²⁹

ὦδε δὲ πᾶς τις ἐρεῖ· “Θεόγνιδός ἐστιν ἔπη
 τοῦ Μεγαρέως· πάντας δὲ κατ’ ἀνθρώπους ὀνομαστός”

So everyone will say: ‘The verses are Theognis of Megara’s, and he is famous among all people.’

These utterances were not composed lackadaisically either. They are marked by hyperbaton as well as by ring composition.³⁰ Indeed, Hector expects his rival’s supposed epitaph to earn him undying *kleos*, which is also what Theognis promises Cynrus (245).³¹ Scholiasts accordingly characterized Hector’s *tis*-speeches as ‘epigrammatic’, and modern scholars have associated them—and recently Theognis’ *tis*-speech too—with epitaphs, some even claiming that they attest to Homer’s awareness of writing.³²

As with votives, the language of epitaphs was not a transcription of ritual funerary language, but it was none the less related to it, and its formulaic diction suggests an affinity with oral traditions.³³ The use of this construction, moreover, as we can see,

²⁹ Note that in the seals of Phocylides (1–5 Diehl), Demodocus (2 *IEG*²) and also Hipparchus ([Pl.] *Hipparch*. 229a–b)—discussed below—the nominative precedes the genitive.

³⁰ Ring composition: Θεόγνιδός ... τοῦ Μεγαρέως; ἀνδρὸς ... κατατεθνηῶτος; Ἑκτορος ... ὃς (as in Pyrrhos and Glaucus’ inscriptions above, also Langdon [n. 16], §§4–6, 10, etc.). For the hyperbaton, see again the syntactic analysis presented in note 29 above. If we prefer to construe all three possessive constructions as predicative rather than adnominal, there will be no hyperbaton, but they will be marked by initial focus, which in ancient Greek typically follows the topic. See M.C. Benvenuto and F. Pompeo, ‘Verbal semantics in ancient Greek possessive constructions with *eînai*’, *Journal of Greek Linguistics* 15 (2015), 3–33, at 22–30, on the information structure of the predicative construction.

³¹ Bakker (n. 8), 210–11 suggests that πάντας δὲ κατ’ ἀνθρώπους ὀνομαστός is an intertext of Achilles’ πάντας ἐπ’ ἀνθρώπους κλέος (*Od.* 24.94).

³² Scodel (n. 18), especially 59 and 64–5; J.S. Clay, ‘Homer’s epigraph: *Iliad* 7.87–91’, *Philologus* 160 (2016), 185–96; cf. de Jong (n. 28), 77–8 on ‘oral epitaphs’. On the scholiasts’ judgement, see D. Elmer, ‘Helen epigrammatopoiios’, *ClAnt* 24 (2005), 1–39 and also A. Petrovic, ‘Archaic funerary epigram and Hector’s imagined epitombia’, in A. Efstathiou and I. Karamanou (edd.), *Homeric Receptions: Literature and the Performing Arts* (Berlin, 2016), 45–58 with discussion of possibly related epigrams. Sourvinou-Inwood (n. 7), 140 n. 100 criticizes the association of *Il.* 7.84–91 with an inscribed grave monument; see also A. Ford, *Homer: The Poetry of the Past* (Ithaca, 1992), 143–4. For Theognis, Bakker (n. 8), 207–12. For epitaphs using this construction, see e.g. *GVI* §§53, 55, 58, 63. Perhaps another connection between these instances of *tis*-speech and archaic epigram is the passer-by motif, on which see M.A. Tueller, ‘The passer-by in archaic and classical epigram’, in M. Baumbach, A. Petrovic, I. Petrovic (edd.), *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram* (Cambridge, 2010), 42–60.

³³ Scodel (n. 18), 57–8; K. Derderian, *Leaving Words to Remember: Greek Mourning and the*

was not restricted to epitaphs, and would appear to have been appropriated by their authors rather than to have originated with them. But it is not necessary to argue that the third-person ownership formula was originally oral, for the three *tis*-speeches present it being used orally, and independently of written texts. In all three cases the hypothetical speakers are indeed speaking (εἴπῃσι or ἐρέει, or both), and though their speech is inextricably connected to material bodies—sealed *epê*, a mound, a perhaps statuesque woman—it is only as a metaphor that they can be said to be ‘reading’.³⁴

There is a close, rich relationship between the literary material bodies and the inscribed speaking objects. Whereas the literary bodies are mute but provoke speech in the form of third-person ownership statements,³⁵ speaking objects prompt first-person ownership statements by third parties. We can thus say that it is only when objects are literally read that they speak; when they bear no written message others speak for them, but when they are inscribed they appropriate the speech of their readers as their own.³⁶ The literary bodies and speaking objects are also related with regard to their function. In the third-person epigrams ownership is declared not by the owner but precisely in and because of his absence: Theognis seals his song in anticipation of its flight, not to mention the threat of theft (238, 19–20, respectively), and for Hector and his rival their respective *tis*-utterances function as quasi-epitaphs. It is no coincidence that a variation on this construction served speaking objects in identifying their own absent owners; it would appear that it was for this purpose that it prominently served. In fact, the lone difference between the first-person and third-person formulas attests to their kinship: like *eimi*, the proximal demonstrative also expresses the speaker’s perspective, and in verse can even refer to the speaker, accompanying *egô*.³⁷

Advent of Literacy (Leiden, 2001), ch. 2, on their diction at 86–91; and J.W. Day, ‘Rituals in stone: early Greek grave epigrams and monuments’, *JHS* 109 (1989), 16–28, especially 22–8, on their mimetic relation to funerary rites more broadly. Epitaphs are catalogued according to formulas in *GVI*. R.F. Thomas, ‘Melodious tears: sepulchral epigram and generic mobility’, in M.A. Harder, R.F. Regtuit, G.C. Wakker (edd.), *Genre in Hellenistic Poetry* (Groningen, 1998), 205–23, at 207: ‘before the Hellenistic period metrical, sepulchral inscriptions have the look more of quotation and excerptation’.

³⁴ Obviously, in the case of Andromache (for Andromache as monument, Scodel [n. 18], 64–5). With regard to the mound of Hector’s victim, Scodel (n. 18), 59: ‘this fantasy can only be other than completely ridiculous because although writing may be evoked, it is not actually there’ (cf. Clay [n. 32], 192–4). Theognis’ *epê* are conceived orally, as song (see 4, 13, 28–39, etc.), and most scholars take *sphrêgis* as a metaphor (e.g. E.J. Bakker, ‘Trust and fame: the seal of Theognis’, in E.J. Bakker [ed.], *Authorship and Greek Song: Authority, Authenticity and Performance* [Leiden, 2017], 99–121, at 105–7 with references). Cf. also its use as an oral formula to denote ‘ownership’ of incantations (C.A. Faraone, ‘Taking the “Nestor’s cup inscription” seriously: erotic magic and conditional curses in the earliest inscribed hexameters’, *ClAnt* 15 [1996], 77–112, at 98–105, 111).

³⁵ Theognis’ *epê* could be said to speak, but in this case, like Andromache, they do not; others speak about them. Compare the Homeric ‘entextualized’ objects discussed in J.L. Ready, ‘Performance, oral texts, and entextualization in Homeric epic’, in J.L. Ready and C. Tsagalis (edd.), *Homer in Performance* (Austin, 2018), 320–50, at 345–6; and in Herodotus, H.I. Flower, ‘Herodotus and Delphic traditions about Croesus’, in M.A. Flower and M. Toher (edd.), *Georgica: Greek Studies presented to G.L. Cawkwell* (London, 1991), 57–77, at 68–70 with more general references.

³⁶ Cf. Svenbro (n. 3), ch. 3. See the analogy with herms below.

³⁷ E.g. *Il.* 19.140, *Od.* 16.205, and see E.J. Bakker, ‘Homeric ΟΥΤΟΣ and the poetics of deixis’, *CPh* 94 (1999), 1–19, at 6. This is not equivalent to Svenbro’s argument that the demonstrative is equivalent to *egô*, criticized in e.g. Wachter (n. 5), 253–6, also Bakker (n. 8), 200–1; cf. M.A. Tueller, *Look Who’s Talking: Innovations in Voice and Identity in Hellenistic Epigram* (Leuven, 2008), 23–7, who suggests that *eimi* rather than *esti* underlies nominal constructions.

I therefore propose that Hector and Theognis' imaginary epigrams provide evidence for an oral formula used to declare ownership, which in some cases was transcribed, but in others underwent personification in the process of being written down.³⁸ This formula could have been of use in a range of ritual contexts, as the curse immediately following it on Tataie's lekythos suggests.³⁹ One particularly attractive context for some of these objects—following Giovanni Colonna's intriguing interpretation of speaking objects in pre-Roman Italy—is exchange, or the presentation of gifts, which in Homer typically involves formulaic narratives regarding the history of their ownership.⁴⁰

This reconstruction of the oral origins of the personified ownership formula has three advantages to recommend it. First, tracing the origins of the written formula to an established oral formula accounts for the linguistic uniformity of so many speaking objects throughout the Greek world. Second, its derivation from such an oral formula explains the motivation to make use of it: the claim to ownership would acquire authority by virtue of being expressed in an already-established idiom of ownership. Third, it fits well with the broader continuity between orality and literacy and the tendency to make use of early writing within pre-existing semiotic systems, not as a means of breaking out of them but rather as a supplement to current practices: with the advent of writing, the oral texts which material bodies provoked could be inscribed on them in adapted form.⁴¹

What remains to be explained is this peculiar adaptation, namely the strategy of personification. Why not stick with the third-person 'this is Korax's kylix'? Or why did Korax not inscribe 'Korax says this is his kylix', or in direct speech 'Korax declares: this is my kylix'? Given its diffusion, it is hard to believe that personification was simply an experiment that went well. For it to flourish throughout the Greek world, it had to sprout from fertile soil. We therefore turn to the broader context of early Greek writing.

³⁸ E.g. *LSAG* 226(1), 229(8), 372(52), 461(J) and again *GVI* §§53, 55, 58, 63, etc.; cf. Whitley (n. 1), 94, on the case of *LSAG* 468(8a), though it has been read differently (E. Wirbelauer, 'Eine Frage von Telekommunikation? Die Griechen und ihre Schrift im 9.–7. Jahrhundert v. Chr.', in R. Rollinger and C. Ulf [edd.], *Griechische Archais: Interne Entwicklungen—Externe Impulse* [Berlin, 2004], 187–206, at 194). Friedländer (n. 18) notes with regard to §159 that 'the stonecutter started to write ΕΞΤΙ and changed to ΕΙΜΙ'. It is also possible that humans would have used the first-person formula orally, as Wachter (n. 5), 252 suggests, but this is, again, entirely hypothetical. It is not crucial for the purpose of this argument that the third-person oral formula necessarily preceded the first-person version.

³⁹ Faraoane (n. 34), 111 has argued that the formula's use in the 'Philinna Papyrus' and related texts attests to 'an oral tradition of mnemonic devices designed to organize large bodies of information and to help recall types of oral incantations'. M. Węcowski, *The Rise of the Greek Aristocratic Banquet* (Oxford, 2014), 135–6 argues for sympotic use. As noted above, Wachter (n. 5), 252 suggests that it would have been employed by a slave, or even a freeborn, to introduce themselves via their owner or father (compare the formula of introduction found in other Iliadic epigrams—*houtos* + patronymic + epithet + proper name + expansion—described in Elmer [n. 32], 7).

⁴⁰ Colonna (n. 4), 62–4, with D.F. Maras, 'Storie di dono: l'oggetto parlante si racconta', in M.L. Haack (ed.), *L'écriture et l'espace de la mort* (Rome, 2015), who also adduces the Homeric parallel. For narratives of ownership on the occasion of gift-exchange, see e.g. *Od.* 4.615–19; note the emphasis on these gifts as *mnēmata*, as remembrances of the donor, at *Il.* 23.741–9; *Od.* 4.592, 15.123–8, 21.40. This interpretation would appear to work well with Theognidean verse as a present to Cymus.

⁴¹ Writing as supplement: R. Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 1992), ch. 4; D.T. Steiner, *The Tyrant's Writ* (Princeton, 1994), chs. 1–2; Whitley (n. 1). For objects bound up with oral texts in Homer and Herodotus, see n. 35 above.

2. WRITING

Among discussions of early Greek conceptions of writing, Svenbro's stands out for his attention to speaking objects. On the basis of their 'egocentrism', he argued that 'Greek writing was first and foremost a machine for producing sounds.'⁴² Bakker has well criticized this view, observing that such inscriptions are not 'egocentric' but 'reader-oriented', that rather than engaging in monologue they are in fact involved in dialogue, answering questions which are frequently—but not always—implicit, as in the following fifth-century inscription (*CEG* 286):⁴³

πᾶσιν ἴσ' ἀνθρώποις ὑποκρίνομαι ὅστις ἐ[ροτ]ῶι
 ὁς μ' ἀνέθεκ' ἀνδρῶν· Ἀντιφάνες δεκάτεν

To all people I answer the same, whoever asks
 which man dedicated me: Antiphanes, as a tithe.

It would therefore seem that the purpose of speaking objects was not so much to attract the reader's attention to the object as to bridge the distance between author and reader and facilitate communication between them, on the most basic model of communication in an oral society, that of conversation.⁴⁴ This should not be taken for granted: though a long line of thinkers, starting with Plato (*Phdr.* 276a8–9) and Aristotle (*Int.* 16a) and extending through Rousseau and de Saussure, saw writing as speech transcribed, in effect as a copy of speech, a comparative perspective undermines the immediate association of writing with speech.⁴⁵ In the case of archaic Greek culture, however, speaking objects—especially in the light of their widespread distribution—indeed suggest the conception of writing as a means of representing speech.⁴⁶

Yet, as we have seen, the speech which speaking objects represent is not a transcript, and the communication they facilitate does not consist of ordinary language but rather of marked language which is at home, for instance, in the *Kunstssprache* of hexameter verse. The Romanist Oesterreicher has stressed the importance of distinguishing

⁴² Svenbro (n. 3), 29 and 2, respectively. Thomas (n. 41), 63–5 briefly discusses speaking objects, and see now also Whitley (n. 1) and (n. 2). For other discussions of early conceptions of writing, see e.g. Ford (n. 32), ch. 4; Steiner (n. 41); E.J. Bakker, *Poetry in Speech: Orality and Homeric Discourse* (Ithaca, 1997), ch. 2.

⁴³ Bakker (n. 8), 201–2. On conversation in graffiti, P. Bing, 'The un-read muse? Inscribed epigram and its readers in antiquity', in P. Bing (ed.), *The Scroll and the Marble: Studies in Reading and Reception in Hellenistic Poetry* (Ann Arbor, 2009), 116–46, at 121; on dialogue in epigrams, Meyer (n. 7), 83–8 and Tueller (n. 32), 54–7; on conversation between neighbouring epigrams, J.W. Day, 'The 'spatial dynamics' of archaic and classical Greek epigram: conversations among locations, monuments, texts, and viewer-readers', in A. Petrovic, I. Petrovic, E. Thomas (edd.), *The Materiality of Text – Placement, Perception, and Presence of Inscribed Texts in Classical Antiquity* (Leiden, 2019), 73–104. For the modern idea that discourse is generally structured by such questions, implicit or explicit, see D.M. Goldstein, *Classical Greek Syntax: Wackernagel's Law in Herodotus* (Leiden, 2016), 29–35.

⁴⁴ Pace Svenbro (n. 3), 42. Cf. E. Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, 1971), 220 on first- and second-person pronouns: 'their role is to provide the instrument of a conversion that one could call the conversion of language into discourse'.

⁴⁵ See G. Woolf, 'Ancient illiteracy', *BICS* 58.2 (2015), 31–42 with references. Cf. F. de Saussure, *Course de linguistique générale* (Paris, 1922), 44–55; for Rousseau, see the analysis of Steiner (n. 41), 242–51.

⁴⁶ Cf. Bakker (n. 42), 30 on the Homeric text: 'to read such a text is not to receive the information transmitted but to restore the medium of the original message, to convert it to a format with which the user is familiar, or rather, which is understandable to the user at all.'

between orality as a medium, opposed to writing, and orality as a conception, an informal style contrasted with a more formal one. This distinction allows us to recognize more complicated linguistic forms such as written informal language, as one finds in personal written communication, as well as oral formal language of the kind one hears in a lecture. While the medial distinction is dichotomous, the conceptual distinction lies on a continuum: Oesterreicher characterizes its informal pole as a language of immediacy, most appropriate for personal contact, in contrast with a language of distance which is better suited to impersonal interaction.⁴⁷ Building on Oesterreicher's work, we can say that early Greek writing typically draws on language which was oral in terms of its medium but not in terms of its conception.

Such language of distance was, for example, the vehicle of the epic tradition, which employed a *Kunstsprache* not spoken by any Greek, and whose practitioners presented their authority as deriving not from themselves but from the Muses. The most famous among them, Homer, was a man almost without qualities, allowing numerous Greek *poleis* to claim him as their own.⁴⁸ Just as Homer was constructed as a distant figure who gains in authority by virtue of his impartiality, the oral ownership formula was designed to avoid the appearance of prejudice: it was not the owner who laid claim to an object out of self-interest, the claim was rather made impersonally.⁴⁹ In this it shares an affinity with the language of early Greek law, whose formulaic constitution necessarily points to oral precursors.⁵⁰ Early Greek legal language consistently introduces the *polis* as its source, as in the following law inscribed during the second half of the seventh century on the eastern wall of the temple of Apollo Delphinios in Dreros, Crete:

ἄδ' ἔφαδε πόλι ἐπεὶ κα κοσμήσει δέκα Φετίον τὸν ἄ-
 Φτὸν μὴ κόμμεν αἱ δὲ κοσμησίε ὁ[π]ε δίκασσιε ἄΦτὸν ὀπῆλεν διπλεῖ ...⁵¹

The following has been decided by the *polis*: when one has been *kosmos* for ten years, the same man shall not be *kosmos*. If he does become *kosmos*, whatever judgements he gives, he shall owe double ...

⁴⁷ W. Oesterreicher, 'Types of orality in text', in E.J. Bakker and A. Kahane (edd.), *Written Voices, Spoken Signs: Tradition, Performance, and the Epic Text* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 190–214.

⁴⁸ C. Calame, *The Craft of Poetic Speech in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, 1995), 77: 'in the whole of archaic Greek literature, from Homeric poetry to Pindar, the utterance of the enunciation is characterized ... by the projection of the *I* of the narrator onto a higher authority'. For Homer's Panhellenic appeal, B. Graziosi, *Inventing Homer: The Early Reception of Epic* (Cambridge, 2002), ch. 2.

⁴⁹ Cf. G. Vestrheim, 'Voice in sepulchral epigrams: some remarks on the use of first and second person in sepulchral epigrams, and a comparison with lyric poetry', in M. Baumbach, A. Petrovic, I. Petrovic (edd.), *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram* (Cambridge, 2010), 61–78, at 66–9, also 72–3 on the 'featureless voice' of epitaphs; also T.A. Schmitz, 'Speaker and addressee in early Greek epigram and lyric', in M. Baumbach, A. Petrovic, I. Petrovic (edd.), *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram* (Cambridge, 2010), 25–41, at 33–4. Sourvinou-Inwood (n. 7), 282: 'it was the community that was perceived to be the speaking voice in these epitaphs ... this lent authority to the statement'. Also Scodel (n. 18), 70.

⁵⁰ The vexed question regarding 'oral law' need not detain us. Its formulaic nature is readily apparent in its casuistic structure; column iv.23 of the Gortyn 'Code' (ML 41), for instance, can be represented as follows: If o or o', and if c or c' or c'', then p. But if not c or c' or c'', rather b or b' or b'', then p. But if not b or b' or b'', rather s or s' or s'', then p. But if not s or s' or s'', then ... (with o standing for the death of a property owner, p for taking hold of the property, c for the existence of the owners' children and their descendants, b for relatives on the side of the parents' brothers, s for relatives on the side of the parents' sisters, etc.).

⁵¹ SEG xxvii 620=M. Gagarin and P. Perlman, *The Laws of Ancient Crete c.650–400 BCE* (Oxford, 2016), Dreros 1.

Here, as elsewhere, the verbs used to attribute legal language to the *polis* are impersonal (ἔφαδε, ἔδοξε); it does not speak as a person, or as a collective of people, though it easily could—far more naturally than a kylix. There is also no use of the first or second person, nor any third-person references to specific individuals. As it represented itself through the language it used, the *polis* was not composed of individuals and did not interact with individuals. Early Greek laws were in fact attributed to various legendary figures, but these legendary *nomothetai* came from afar—notionally (from outside the establishment), if not geographically—and the survival of their *nomoi* depended on their distancing themselves from their compositions. In Svenbro's words, *nomos* had to be autonomous.⁵²

The authority of written language in archaic and classical Greek societies was a real concern, and the language of distance offered one way to overcome the difficulties stemming from the separation of the enunciation from its enunciator.⁵³ Establishing abstract distance thus curiously partnered with the attempt to overcome concrete distance in forming the early Greek conception of writing as an instrument for enacting oral communication at a distance.⁵⁴ Epistolography, exceptionally, had little use for the language of abstract distance—intended for a limited and specified group of addressees rather than for an indeterminate audience, it typically was not concerned with establishing authority⁵⁵—but early letters serve as a paradigm for the way in which archaic Greek writing sought to bridge concrete distance.

The earliest extant Greek letter is a lead sheet from Berezan on the Black Sea, dating from the second half of the sixth century. Its rolled-up outside surface makes use of the traditional ownership formula:

Ἀχιλλοδώρῳ τὸ μολί-
βδιον παρὰ τὸν παῖδα
κάνναξαγόρην.

Achillodoros' piece of lead, to his son and Anaxagoras.

⁵² Svenbro (n. 3), 135. Solon, for instance, had to go into exile, Charondas and Lycurgus had to die in order to secure their laws, and Draco also met a bizarre death abroad. Their premature deaths ensured that they could not abuse the power they had won, or compromise their laws. Cf. A. Szegedy-Maszak, 'Legends of the Greek lawgivers', *GRBS* 19 (1978), 199–209, at 208, noting that the lawgiver's departure is an integral part of the lawgiver's legend: 'the hidden hero of the legends is codified law itself; once the code is self-sustaining, the legislator becomes superfluous'. On lawgivers as outsiders, see M. Gagarin, *Early Greek Law* (Berkeley, 1986), 58–60.

⁵³ For the lack of authority in law, R. Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 1989), 35–6; Steiner (n. 41), 171; M. Gagarin, *Writing Greek Law* (Cambridge, 2008), 197–205. For the suspicion of writing in Athenian oratory, J. Schloemann, 'Entertainment and democratic distrust: the audience's attitude toward oral and written oratory in classical Athens', in I. Worthington and J.M. Foley (edd.), *Epea and Grammata: Oral and Written Communication in Ancient Greece* (Leiden, 2002), 133–46, at 134–41. Symptomatic of the anxiety over the dependence of written texts was their representation as helpless children in Ar. *Nub.* 528–32 and Pl. *Phdr.* 275e; for the written text as defenceless, see Isocr. *To Philip* 25–7, *Panath.* 247, *Epistle* 1.3 (with Y.L. Too, *The Rhetoric of Identity in Isocrates: Text, Power, Pedagogy* [Cambridge, 1995], 119–21). For the authority of inscriptions, and speaking objects in particular, see n. 71 below on Herodotus.

⁵⁴ Cf. Meyer (n. 7), chs. 1–2. Wirbelauer (n. 38) argues that Greek writing was originally intended to traverse spatial rather than temporal distance; for our purposes the distinction is immaterial.

⁵⁵ Ceccarelli (n. 18), 99, also 265–6 with references, considers epistolography in the Archaic period 'marginal'. At 265–7, she is sceptical of how much official correspondence there would have been, in which one would expect more abstract distance, before the fourth century. See Ceccarelli (n. 18), ch. 1 for a survey of the remains of archaic and classical epistolography.

In spelling the accusative singular article with a partially assimilating *mu* instead of *nu*, in addition to the crasis of *καί*, the writer is evidently transcribing what he would usually hear.⁵⁶ The beginning of the message, however, inscribed inside the rolled-up sheet, is manifestly not a transcription of Achillodorus' own words:⁵⁷

ὦ Πρωταγόρη, ὁ πατήρ τοι ἐπιστέλλει. ἀδικεῖται
 ὑπὸ Ματασσοῦ. δουλοῦται γάρ μιν καὶ τοῦ
 φορτηγεσίου ἀπεστέρεσεν. ἐλθὼμ παρ' Ἀναξαγό(⟨->)ρην
 ἀπήγησαι· φησι γὰρ αὐτὸν Ἀναξαγόρεω
 5 δοῦλον εἶναι μυθεόμενος· “τῷμ' Ἀνα<ξ>αγόρης ἔχει
 καὶ δούλους καὶ δούλας κοικίας” ...

Protagoras, your father sends instructions to you. He is being wronged by Matasys, for he is enslaving him and has deprived him of his cargo-carrier [or: of his position as a carrier; or: of the shipment]. Go to Anaxagoras and tell him the story, for he [Matasys] asserts that he [Achillodorus] is the slave of Anaxagoras, claiming: ‘Anaxagoras has my property, slaves, both female and male, and houses.’ ... (transl. Ceccarelli)

Achillodorus' letter is not simulating communication between himself and his addressees, but rather between a messenger and an addressee, with direct speech converted to indirect.⁵⁸

Other letters adopt a different model, shifting to the first person after a third-person introduction, as in Apatourius' early letter from Olbia:⁵⁹

Λήνακτι Ἀπατούριος· τὰ χρήματα σισύλημαι ὑπ' Ἡρακλείδεω ...

To Leanax, Apatourius: my goods have been seized by Herakleides ...

The third-person introduction facilitates the transition to the first person, framing the message as direct speech of which he is the source. What both letters conversely share is the use of the second person. Early Greek letters are thus based on one of two models: Achillodorus' letter represents a message delivered by a messenger, while Apatourius' is delivered in person.

Both models underlie much of early Greek literature. The latter model is familiar from the monumental poems of early historians.⁶⁰ Hecataeus writes (fr. 1 *EGM*):

Ἐκαταῖος Μιλήσιος ὧδε μυθεῖται· τάδε γράφω, ὥς μοι δοκεῖ ἀληθέα εἶναι· οἱ γὰρ Ἕλληνων λόγοι πολλοὶ τε καὶ γελοῖοι, ὥς ἐμοὶ φαίνονται, εἰσίν.

⁵⁶ It is thus striking that the final *nu* in *μολίβδιον* is retained, indicating the syntactic independence of the ownership formula (cf. M. Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters: An Anthology with Translation* [Cambridge, 2003], 198). Regarding the identity of the actual writer, as opposed to the addresser, see Ceccarelli (n. 18), 47.

⁵⁷ Owing to technical difficulties involved in representing the original orthography (for which, see Ceccarelli [n. 18], 335), long epsilons and omicrons have been normalized.

⁵⁸ This was a conscious choice: in lines 5–6 Achillodorus quotes Matasys.

⁵⁹ Ceccarelli (n. 18), 338; see *ibid.* for the original orthography. See also letters 23, 39 and 41 in Ceccarelli (n. 18) with pages 42–3.

⁶⁰ Also Thuc. 1.1. Noted by Svenbro (n. 3), 149–50, who also refers to Bacchyl. 5.11; see J. Moles, “Ἀνάθημα καὶ κτήμα: the inscriptional inheritance of ancient historiography”, *Histos* 3 (1999), 27–69 in detail, and cf. Calame (n. 48), ch. 3. Hes. *Theog.* 22–4 also moves from the third person to the first (discussed in Calame [n. 48], ch. 2).

Hecataeus the Milesian speaks thus: I write what follows as seems to me to be true; for the tales of the Greeks, as they seem to me, are many and laughable.

Similarly Herodotus, whose opening inverts the demonstrative and the nominative noun phrase of the traditional ownership formula:⁶¹

Ἡροδότου Ἀλικαρνησσοῦς ἱστορίης ἀπόδεξις ἦδε ... (1.1)

This is the display of the investigation of Herodotus from Halicarnassus ...

... ἐγὼ δὲ περὶ μὲν τούτων οὐκ ἔρχομαι ἐρέων ὡς οὕτω ἢ ἄλλως κῶς ταῦτα ἐγένετο ... (1.5)

... of these things I am not going to say whether they happened in this manner or in some other way ...

The former model, of a messenger speech, was used, according to Strabo (13.1.38), by Alcaeus:

λέγει δὲ πρὸς τινα κήρυκα, κελεύσας ἀγγεῖλαι τοῖς ἐν οἴκῳ
 Ἄλκαος σάος ἦδ' ἄροι ἐνθαδ' οὐκυτὸν ἀληκτορίνῃ
 ἐς Γλαυκώπιον ἱρον ὀνεκρέμασαν Ἄττικοι. (401B Voigt)

He [Alcaeus] says to a messenger, instructing him to announce to those at home:

Alcaeus is safe; the Athenians hung his shield (?)
 in the temple of Grey-eyed Athena.

The two models could also mix, with a messenger speaking in the first person, embedding the epistolary introduction in the text. Archaic song was, in fact—as noted above—typically presented as speech conveyed by intermediaries.⁶² At times poets explicitly identified as messengers: Theognis presents himself as an attendant and messenger of the Muses (*therapōn kai angelos*, 769), Pindar as their herald (*kêrux*, *Dith.* 2.23–5) or interpreter (*prophētês*, *Pae.* 6.6), or simply a messenger (*angelos*, *Nem.* 6.57).⁶³ Solon adopts the pose of a herald from Salamis (1.1 *IEG*²), but the act of assuming a persona—rendering the performer an intermediary—was itself characteristic of archaic song.⁶⁴

⁶¹ But Aristotle quotes the opening with the demonstrative preceding the nominative noun phrase (Ἡροδότου Θουρίου ἦδ' ἱστορίης ἀπόδειξις, *Rhet.* 1409a28): J. Dillery, 'Herodotus' proem and Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1409a', *CQ* 42 (1992), 525–8.

⁶² Again, Calame (n. 48), 77; cf. D.T. Steiner, 'Pindar's "oggetti parlanti"', *HSPH* 95 (1993), 159–80, at 179–80 on objects which speak—in the weak sense—in Pindar, and E. Stehle, *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece* (Princeton, 1997), 311–18, comparing the rhetoric of distance in Sappho with that of inscriptions, including some speaking objects. For the comparison between lyric poetry and epigrams, see also Vestrheim (n. 49), 75–8; Schmitz (n. 49), 40–1; Christian (n. 5), 40.

⁶³ For the poet as *prophētês*, see also Pind. fr. 150 S–M; Bacchyl. 9.3; Pl. *Phdr.* 262d; as *hermêneus*, Pl. *Ion* 534e; as *angelos*, Pind. *Ol.* 6.90 differently (and cf. Thgn. 543–6 and 805–10) and see also *Pyth.* 4.279. The poet as messenger is implicit in invocations, or descriptions of song as a gift from the Muses which is to be shared with the audience (Hes. *Theog.* 93–103, also 31–2; Archil. 1 *IEG*² with Thgn. 772 on the obligation of sharing; Solon 13.51–2 *IEG*²; Pind. *Ol.* 7.7). R.J. Mondi, 'The function and social position of the *kêrux* in early Greece' (Diss., Harvard University, 1978) considers the *kêrux* to originally be 'the embodiment of verbal skill' (14). J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization* (New York, 2011), 7: 'the original setting of the text is the institution of the messenger'.

⁶⁴ The persona could be legendary as in the case of the carpenter Charon (Archil. 19 *IEG*², with Arist. *Rhet.* 1418b26–30); or it could be that of a poet, as in the case of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (and cf. Pl. *Ion* 535e–536 on *rhapsoidoi* as intermediaries for *poiêtai* who are intermediaries

This is precisely the model which speaking objects follow, as messengers speaking in the first person. Their role as intermediaries is attested by the use of the ownership formula to introduce speech, as in Theognis' seal, the 'Philinna Papyrus' and on Hipparchus' herms.⁶⁵ We might indeed compare speaking objects with herms, inscribed bodies which are personified as messengers by iconographic rather than linguistic means; just as herms turned their arrested viewers into statues,⁶⁶ speaking objects transformed their readers into objects. This shift, from the personification of inanimate belongings to the objectification of persons as property, further suggests the slave in his role as messenger as an analogue: like speaking objects, wavering between personality and impersonality, subjectivity and objectivity, slaves were perceived as bodies of liminal status.⁶⁷ In Herodotus one such slave, sent from Susa to Miletus with a message branded onto his head (τὸν ἐστιγμένον τὴν κεφαλὴν, 5.35), is in fact rendered a walking inscription.

One more analogue for speaking objects as messengers: the inscrutable *skytalē* ('message stick'). If taken in Archilochus 185 *IEG*² as nominative, the stick delivering the fable of the monkey and the fox is a speaking object in the strict sense:

ἐρέω τιν' ὕμιν αἶνον, ὦ Κηρυκίδη,
ἀγνυμένη σκυτάλη ...

A grieving/speaking message stick, I will tell you a fable, Kerukides ...

Even if construed as vocative or dative, Archilochus' audience may still have recognized it as an object personified through its speech on the basis of the secondary meaning of ἄχέω [ἄ], 'speak' or 'utter'.⁶⁸ In *Ol.* 6.90–1, Pindar, in calling upon Aeneas to 'urge' his companions to praise Hera, addresses him as a *skytala* of the Muses.⁶⁹ Far from their later cryptographic use, these *skytalai* are not objects randomly portrayed as speaking; their function is rather to authorize the speech of a messenger in the absence of its author: Aeneas is a 'straight messenger' (ἄγγελος ὁρθός, 90), while Archilochus' speaker is in competition with Kerykides, literally 'the son of a messenger'.⁷⁰

of the Muses). On the archaic author as persona, see F. Budelmann, 'Lyric minds', in F. Budelmann and T. Phillips (edd.), *Textual Events. Performance & the Lyric in Early Greece* (Oxford, 2018), 235–56.

⁶⁵ In a variant form: μνήμα τόδ' Ἱππάρχου ('this is the remembrance of Hipparchus'), [Pl.] *Hipparch.* 229a–b.

⁶⁶ See R. Osborne, 'The erection and mutilation of the Hermai', *PCPhS* 31 (1985), 47–73, at 53–7.

⁶⁷ For the slave as messenger, see e.g. Ceccarelli (n. 18), 11. The liminality of the slaves is captured in their infamous characterization as an 'animate tool' or 'possession' in Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1161b4, *Pol.* 1253b32), and as a 'talking tool' in Varro (*Rust.* 1.17; see M. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* [New York, 1980], ch. 3 on the 'ambiguity of slavery'). Aristotle's conceptualization of the slave at *Pol.* 1255b11–12 as 'a part of the master, a part of the body, as it were, animate and separate' is especially striking in the context of Gell's theorization of 'distributed personhood'. Cf. M. Gaifman and V. Platt, 'Introduction: from Grecian urn to embodied object', *Art History* 41 (2018), 402–19, at 414–15, correlating the objectification of slaves with the 'corporealization' of objects.

⁶⁸ Thus A. Pappas, 'An iambic scepter? The *akhnymenē skytalē* of Archilochus', *Arethusa* 47 (2014), 19–38; cf. L. Swift, *Archilochus: The Poems* (Oxford, 2019), 348–9.

⁶⁹ Cf. T. Hubbard, 'The dissemination of epinician lyric: pan-Hellenism, reperformance, written texts', in C.J. Mackie (ed.), *Oral Performance and its Context* (Leiden, 2004), 71–93, at 89–91, following Steiner (n. 62).

⁷⁰ On the oral origins of the *skytalē*, which was 'part of an official messenger's equipment', see S. West, 'Archilochus' message-stick', *CQ* 38 (1988), 42–8, with her remarks at 47 on Archilochus' 'distancing' himself from the message (cf. Swift [n. 68], 347–8). On the rich heraldic context in Archilochus, D.T. Steiner, 'Fables and frames: the poetics of animal fables in Hesiod,

As the *skytalê* authorized the speech of an absent author, so speaking objects were uniquely qualified to speak for their owners. The difference is that speaking objects, in contrast with the archaic singer, do not identify their senders as such. The reason for this is not far to seek, for, as we recall, the identity of the author of the ownership formula was opaque by design. Because impersonality was integral to its authority, Korax could not follow Achillodorus' model and inscribe 'Korax says: this is his kylix', or even that of Apatourius, 'Korax says: this is my kylix'.⁷¹ This is true for speaking objects generally. Appending authorial prefaces would not only undermine their impersonal authority but also hinder their efficacy as speech acts. This is particularly clear in the case of votive inscriptions: 'Mantiklos says that he dedicated this ...' would no longer be performative.

But because speaking objects were concerned with performing speech acts, the author also could not simply be dispensed with. Speech acts require authority and, if in archaic culture it was customary for performers to 'project' their "I" onto a higher authority,⁷² some such authority was needed. Speaking objects, by providing a foil onto which readers *qua* performers would project their 'I', thus had an advantage over the third-person formulation 'this is Korax's kylix'. This role was not thrust upon them by default; they were superbly suited to it. By virtue of their im-personality, or object-ivity, they augmented the authority inherent in the oral language of distance which they committed to writing. Unlike Achillodorus' lead letter, which was merely the medium of his message, they were truly its subject (or object), and thus an author-ity on it. Moreover, as Plato would famously complain (*Phdr.* 275d–e), they could, or

Archilochus, and the Aesopica', *Arethusa* 45 (2012), 1–41, at 19–22; Pappas (n. 68), 26–7. On the relation between Archilochus and Pindar's *skytalai*, differently, K. Philippides, 'The fox and the wolf: Archilochus 81 D/185 W and Pindar's *Olympian* 6, 87–91 (with reference to *Pythian* 2)', *QUCC* 91 (2009), 11–21, at 18–20 and D.T. Steiner, 'Making monkeys: Archilochus fr. 185–187 W. in performance', in V. Cazzato and A. Lardinois (edd.), *The Look of Lyric: Greek Song and the Visual: Studies in Archaic and Classical Greek Song* (Leiden, 2016), 108–45, at 115. Like Aeneas, a scholium to Thucydides (1.53.1 Hude) defines the herald's baton, the *kêrukeion*, as 'straight', or 'erect' (*orthos*). On the sexual connotations, see E.L. Bowie, 'Sex and politics in Archilochus' poetry', in D. Katsonopoulou, I. Petropoulos, S. Katsarou (edd.), *Archilochos and his Age* (Athens, 2008), 133–41, at 134–6; and Steiner (this note), 112–14, noting at n. 19 the association of messengers with masculinity (cf. Osborne [n. 66], 54 with regard to the erect phalluses of the herms).

⁷¹ A curious exception is Langdon (n. 16), §6: μελανθυρο ινα φῆμι ταδι μνῆμα χαίπολδντος εἶργε. αιαι ο παι ἡδῃ μ' ετεῖρες ('I myself declare that this is the remembrance of Melanthyros the goatherd; oh, you boy who wore me out'); the inscription is exceptional for its emphatic use of the pronoun, and Langdon notes the speaker's 'vexation' at the boy. Consider also the cases of some inscriptions in Herodotus, who refused to believe the votive inscription on a golden vessel in Delphi which attributed its dedication to the Lacedaemonians: τῷ χρυσέῳ ἐπιγέγραπται Λακεδαιμονίων φορέμενον εἶναι ἀνάθημα, οὐκ ὁρθῶς λέγοντες (1.51 'on the golden one it was inscribed that it is the dedication of the Lacedaemonians, as they say[?]; but they do not tell the truth'). J. Haywood, 'The use(s) of inscriptions in Herodotus' *Histories*', *AJPh* 142 (2021), 217–57, at 223 notes that Herodotus does not quote the inscription; it is however interesting that Herodotus' paraphrase features the syntax of the ownership formula [GEN. εἶναι NOM.]. φορέμενον is a source of great difficulty (radically emended by Madvig, also N.G. Wilson, *Herodoti Historiae* [Oxford, 2015]), but difficult as the genitive is syntactically, might it imply that the Lacedaemonians were presented as the authors of their claim? Might this play a part in Herodotus' disbelief? Contrast the speaking votives he quotes at 5.58–61, whose authority he accepts, whereas modern scholars overwhelmingly reject them (Haywood [this note], 241 n. 89, 241–5).

⁷² Yet again Calame (n. 48), 77. For speech acts and authority, M. Green, 'Speech acts', in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020 Edition), 2.2.

perhaps would, not answer,⁷³ which—in the manner of the legal language discussed above—discouraged their addressees from answering them. Their impersonality thus served to enhance their distance. They were not compensating for the author's absence but rather taking advantage of it.⁷⁴

The result is most remarkable: personified beings whose authority lies in their impersonality, material bodies which profess their subjectivity while stressing their objectivity, messengers disavowing their senders. Extraordinary as they are, however, this broader perspective of early Greek writing shows that they can be understood in relation to its conception as enacting oral communication at a distance, concrete but also abstract.

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⁷³ The effect was all the more potent because they were personified, as if one might expect them to respond. And, indeed, some inscriptions staged conversations (see n. 43 above).

⁷⁴ Cf. Stehle (n. 62), 261, 316.