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MAURICE HALBWACHS, SOCIAL MEMORY, AND THE GREEK LYRIC POETS

ABSTRACT. Schade Gerson, *Maurice Halbwachs, social memory, and the Greek lyric poets* (Maurice Halbwachs, pamięć zbiorowa i lirycy greccy).

Literary texts may enable a much later reader to observe how collective memory interrelates with personal remembrance. This goes without saying for Jane Austen or George Eliot. What is new, however, is that passages from epinician poetry by Simonides, Pindar, and Bacchylides may inform on the same process, i.e. the invention of a society's collective remembrance, or social memory. The argument is inspired by Maurice Halbwachs, according to whom a society's cultural complexity is revealed by literature. Halbwachs read Balzac and Dickens, he often cited Stendhal and even Proust, but the practice of which he speaks obtained also in those groups in antiquity where Sappho and Alcaeus performed.

Keywords: Maurice Halbwachs, social memory, epinician poetry, Sappho & Alcaeus.

Mainly in two monographs Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945) developed his concept of social memory: first in 1925, in *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* and then in *La mémoire collective*, published posthumously in 1950, the title of which was to become synonymous with social memory[1].

Halbwachs distinguishes two steps, evoking his own experience. Reading Balzac's description of a household or Dickens' of a lawyer's office, Halbwachs was able to guess the social standing of those depicted[2]. The description of

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[1] Namer (2000) and Montigny (2005) introduce into Halbwachs' work; in his critical edition (1997: 7–18), Namer details the manuscripts Halbwachs left and gives the reasons for his rearrangement of the text. Halbwachs himself resumed his conclusions (1925: 273–96, 1950: 166sq., enlarged in Namer 1997: 232–6). Despite being much cited in other academic research, among classicists Halbwachs is only recently (and not often) referred to, as by, e.g., Minchin 2012, or by Hulsenboom 2013; his work, though, is by no means thoroughly embraced. This article, in part delivered as an open lecture at Adam Mickiewicz University, may provide a first, though rather limited, impression of the range of Halbwachs' ideas. I'm most grateful to the Director of the Institute for Classical Philology for her kind invitation, and to my colleagues Krystyna Bartol and Magdalena Stuligrosz for many a careful hint. Finally, the anonymous referee offered congenial advice.

[2] Halbwachs 1950: 131 (Namer 1997: 194sq.).

inanimate objects enabled him to visualise people and the society surrounding them. What is more, though, is a second observation. Visiting London for the first time, Halbwachs was overwhelmed by what he already knew, i.e. by the fact how many of his impressions reminded him of Dickens' novels which he read as a child[3]. In all these moments, he writes, he never felt alone, for he shared these remembrances with a large group of other readers. Moreover, he was sure that he understood something which he surely hadn't if Dickens were not so familiar to him. In the following the question is discussed how such and similar observations can be of any use to classicists.

Asserting that (1) social memory has to be constantly renewed, for being fragile and unstable, it would otherwise disappear, Halbwachs states a fact familiar to Homer's readers. By performing heroic poetry in Homer, a singer keeps alive the fundamental concept of 'ever-lasting glory' (glory being by no means ever-lasting, but rather perishable). An amateur as Achilles, for instance, does it in Iliad 9, to the delight of his great friend Patroclus. Later, it is a professional such as Demodocus in Odyssey 8, who performs heroic poetry at the Phaeacians' court.

Observing how (2) social memory unites a community, transforming it into a memory community, Halbwachs again evokes something familiar from Homer. In Homer, the so-called heroic code is constantly referred to. Throughout the Iliad, basic principles of conduct are brought back to mind, as, for instance, 'being always the bravest' (on both sides of the front, e.g., Iliad 6. 208 = 11. 784). The related topic of 'noblesse oblige' (Sarpedon to Glaucus, in Iliad 12) is also repeatedly alluded to, and a noble title such as 'guest-friend' prevails over that of 'enemy' (Iliad 6, Diomedes' encounter with Glaucus). They affirm common ground.

Private reminiscences are social memory's main source (3). Shared by a group, they create social memory's narrative. As an illustration Halbwachs discusses an example from Stendhal's autobiographic text Vie de Henry Brulard[4]. It turns out that Stendhal filled gaps in his recollection by literary imagination. From Homer, one may cite the speeches of the envoys in Iliad 9. Asked to return to battle, Achilles is in many ways reminded of how to behave as a hero; though being of no avail, heroic gamesmanship is heavily practiced. In particular Phoenix excels in such a filling of gaps by skilful imagination. From Iliad 6 and 22 one may recall Hector's discussions with his wife Andromache and with his parents; on both occasions, Hector's driving force is at the centre of the argument: that what makes him a hero, and what scares his infant son Astyanax (Iliad 6. 467–70).

All these Homeric situations enable a much later reader to observe how private reminiscence and collective memory interrelate with each other. Amalgamating private and public, Homer shows how personal reminiscence becomes

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[3] Halbwachs 1950: 3 (Namer 1997: 53).

[4] Halbwachs 1950: 62–4 (Namer 1997: 124sq.); on 'memory into art' cf. Warnock 1987: 75–102.

public memory: two observations of particular importance to Halbwachs. Among the Homeric just texts mentioned, a most striking example is Demodocus' performance of a piece of heroic poetry on the fall of Troy. When he sang of how the Greeks sacked the city, pouring out of the wooden horse, Odysseus broke into tears (Odyssey 8. 521sq.).

How can these observations help to understand Greek lyric poetry? What additional insight do they offer?

In Greek lyric poetry, social memory's narrative is established in two ways: the process depends on the fact whether the poets belonged to the community for which they worked or not. The outcome is much different.

Two archaic monodic poets, for instance, lived in the social environment for which they wrote their texts[5]. Once shared emotions are evoked, and the past returns in the form Sappho and Alcaeus give to it, establishing collective remembrances, i.e. social memory. Texts by them (as, for instance, Sappho 94 & 96, or Alcaeus 332 & 335) speak of such a past that is commonly shared by parts of their audiences respectively.

Belonging to the group to which they perform, Sappho and Alcaeus cannot transform their reminiscences too much[6]. Although expected to make collective remembrances more appealing and to embellish the narrative, not only by making them sound more dramatic but also by referring to other texts, both poets are not allowed to exceed certain limits. The imagery used by them should be within the audience's experience, or at least within their reach. This is advantageous to the poets because it gives them 'street credibility'. Such an appearance of acceptability among their respective groups, clubs, or hetairiai, may make their poetry popular, fashionable even.

If a poem, however, is commissioned from a poet, himself chosen by prominent and wealthy people who want themselves to be portrayed in a favourable light, the situation is different. Texts may become somehow abstract and slightly obscure, otherwise the poets may fear to offend someone's feelings. Quite necessarily, texts may begin to resemble each other, become generic and schematic, seemingly following a programme or template.

Thus, three archaic composers of choral lyric establish such a social memory of groups to which they never belonged: neither carrying out love affairs with members of their public nor getting drunk with members of their circle (as Sappho and Alcaeus may have done). Nevertheless, Simonides, Pindar, and Bacchylides had a precise idea of their audience's social memory. They were ever and ever asked again to perform, and their success proved them right. Their

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[5] On the ancient sources for Sappho's and Alcaeus' biographies, mostly drawn from very few of their poetic texts, cf. Lefkowitz 2012: 30–45. On memory in Sappho cf. Burnett 1983: 277–313, and Stehle 1997: 262–318; in Alcaeus, Rösler 1990.

[6] Cf. Halbwachs 1950: 78sq. (Namer 1997: 140sq.).

invention, i.e. an elegantly written and pompously performed victory ode, was much looked for.

Of the enormous poetic output of Simonides, Pindar, and Bacchylides only the victory odes allow to observe social memory in the making. Evoking, establishing, or revealing a group's social memory, however, while only being asked to compose poetry on the occasion of a fellow's victory at an athletic contest, is carrying things quite far. This apparent paradox, rather, suggests that composers of epinician poetry simply and successfully invented the social memory they needed for their epinician poetry. The odes' strikingly aristocratic imagery is the core of their effectiveness, giving them 'street credibility'.

Victory odes idealise the facts, not only enhancing the victor's prestige but also immortalising his city's achievements. Therefore, one may deduce that an ardent desire to be exuberantly praised by famous poets was a significant part of the social memory of those who paid for them. While deciding what myth would be appropriate and acceptable, and what would be the most successful way of presenting it in order to be publicly appreciated, the poet had to take this desire for praise into account. The poets had to have an eye on what they were expected to deliver. As the success of their artificially created 'worlds' proves, they did it carefully.

Victory odes are thoroughly imbued with the spirit of competitiveness, reflecting the fact that the Greeks were as fascinated by athletics as the modern world is drawn to this kind of craze. Competitors, however, not only hoped to win, but wanted to be known as victors[7]. Being composed for a knowledgeable and discerning audience, the texts appeal to sophisticated tastes of wealthy clients from locally influential families. The texts appear elitist: by evoking rather complex themes such as, e.g., 'what I'm going to say pleases not the million, but the addressee will understand'[8], the poets appeal openly to the addressee's connoisseurship[9]. It would be doubtless not pleasant for this snobbish-minded clientele to remember anything low, let alone be reminded of it during a public performance of poetry they paid for.

Considering the whole corpus of victory odes, one might not have expected the western Greeks to be so strongly represented. No fewer than seventeen of Pindar's forty-five odes are for western Greeks, among them seven for Syracusans and five for citizens of Agrigento; three of the fourteen Bacchylidean odes are for the Syra-

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[7]Cf. Kirkwood 1982: 9–12, Willcock 1995: 10sq., and Maehler 2004: 4–8. – Pindar's and Bacchylides' epinicians were preceded by Simonides', supposed to be the first poet to have composed for a fee (Stobaeus 3. 10. 61 = T 97 Poltera): a fact that implies that he did not belong to the group which commissioned poetry from him.

[8]Cf. Willcock 1995: 161sq., and Maehler 2004: 97sq., on Bacch. 5. 3–6 and Pindar O. 1. 103–5.

[9]Cf., e.g., the compliments paid to Theron (Pindar O. 2. 83–6) and to Hieron (Bacch. c. 3.85).

cusans, too[10]. One Simonidean epinician ode is for a person from either Crotone or Syracuse (506 PMG = F 10 Poltera) and another for a person from Reggio di Calabria (515 PMG = F 2 Poltera). The powerful tyrants of the two richest cities in Sicily, Hieron of Syracuse and Theron of Akragas, indeed gave opportunities to compose a work of great complexity and not immodest pretention[11].

Pindar's relations with powerful men as these are represented by him as personal, and, what is more, even on a level of equality. The victors were his 'guest-friends', i.e. his hosts. Pindar speaks specifically of Hieron as such (O. 1. 103, P. 3. 69). By doing so, however, Pindar does not only refer to a simple fact of life. He also alludes to the fictitious Homeric society and their half-mythical, half-fantastic rules of hospitality, thus ennobling not only his victorious address-ee but also himself.

Such a mixture of present and past was much enjoyed, probably wished for, by the public. Even more ingratiating himself with his public, Pindar speaks of himself as complementary to the athlete, i.e. the athletic patron. The poet's world is competitive, too, and there are similar difficulties to overcome (N. 4. 36–43), similar qualities needed for success in poetry as in athletics. Again a close parallel between the poet and his addressee is suggested: due to the generosity of his praise that puts the final glory on the victor's achievement, the poet feels free to compare himself with the victorious addressee (O. 1. 115sq., O. 11. 10, I. 5. 53sq.). Being not averse to paying his debt of honour, Pindar weaves crowns easily (N. 7. 76–9), for 'the Muse binds together gold and white ivory with the lily flower, which she has filched from the foam of the sea'.

Though there certainly were re-performances, early Greek poetry was primarily produced and intended for one occasion only[12]. This fact implies that if the poet were not to express ideas the audience could go along with, he could not be sure whether he would be asked to perform for a second time. Thus, he was

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[10] Cf. Morrison 2007. At home, the largest single block is for victors from the small island of Aegi-na: no fewer than eleven of the forty-five surviving epinician odes of Pindar, a quarter of the total, are for victors from this island (though nine of them are for victories at the relatively minor games of the Isthmus and Nemea); two of the surviving 14 Bacchylidean victory odes also praise Aeginetan victors (c. 12 & 13), and one epinician ode of Simonides, too (PMG 507 = F 16 Poltera).

[11] Each of the two tyrants won the highest prize of all, the chariot race at Olympia. The second Olympian is for Theron's success there in 476; in Hieron's case, we have his Pythian chariot victory celebrated in the first Pythian, together with the foundation of a new city on the slopes of Mount Etna; but when he won the chariot-race at Olympia in 468, it was Bacchylides who received the commission to write the celebratory poem (c. 3). In 476, Bacchylides' ode 5 celebrates the same success as does Pindar's Olympian one, and in 470 Bacchylides sent a short victory ode (c. 4), while Pindar composed his elaborate first Pythian ode for Hieron's victory celebration at Syracuse. On the most secure example of these mostly short poems, without a myth, which appear to have been produced on the spot, at the games, rather than for later performance in the victor's home city, cf. Willcock 1995: 55sq.

[12] Herington 1985: 207–210, and Carey 2007.

compelled to deliver a text with which his audience could agree, or to which it would at least not be opposed. He was expected to corroborate views, not to offend or contradict them.

Forced to anticipate what they were expected to deliver, Simonides, Pindar, and Bacchylides met with the expectations of their public. In the victory odes, three elements return regularly; they relate to each other, forming a consistent pattern of epinician poetry.

A first conspicuous element is constituted by passages illustrating how much life was considered as being dependent upon the gods' will. The gods constitute the frame, and it is in its limits only that memory is possible.

'The beginnings have been laid by the gods' (N. 1. 8) Pindar says; of the two races, mortal and divine, the one is nothing, 'whereas the heaven remains a secure abode forever' (N. 6. 1–4). Honour belongs to those mortals 'whose fair story a god exalts after they die'. Pindar can help to achieve that (N. 7. 31–4), though only 'when it is planted with a god's blessing, happiness lasts longer for men' (N. 8. 17). Gods are reliable, for 'truly the race of the gods is faithful' (N. 10. 54) Pindar declares: Apollo 'does not deal in falsehood' (P. 3. 28sq.), and 'fulfilment of all deeds lies with Zeus' (N. 10. 29sq.).

Simonides PMG 511. 6sq. (F 7 Poltera) speaks of Apollo as the one who 'points out' the victor; or, as he puts it in PMG 519 fr. 79. 11sq. (F 4 Poltera), 'for one man only does the goddess (i.e. Victory) make way into her great chariot'[13]. A poet can only wish to a mortal that he may 'know that he has received marvellous happiness from the gods' as Pindar says (N. 9. 45). Other forces are mentioned, too: 'inherited destiny decides the outcome of all deeds' (N. 5. 40sq., cf. N. 4. 41–3, P. 10. 17–22), and 'destiny leads our mortal race' (N. 11. 39–43), though 'fate controls the kindly destiny' (O. 2. 33–7).

In general, 'as the days roll by, one's life changes now this way now that, but the sons of the gods remain unwounded and invulnerable' (I. 3. 18a–b)[14]. In the end, though, 'men's valour is determined by the gods' (I. 5. 11).

'What better than to be dear to the gods and win a full share in all manner of blessings' Bacchylides asks (c. 4. 18–20); and answers, 'blessed the man to whom God has granted fine achievements [...]; for no mortal is fortunate in all things' (c. 5. 50–5); 'great achievements come to mortals from Zeus' (I. 3. 1–8), and it is Zeus who 'fulfils success' (O. 6. 77–81); 'may he willingly provide success upon success and ward off painful diseases' (O. 8. 84–8), Pindar wishes. For 'all the means for human achievements come from the gods' (P. 1. 41), 'no marvel, if the gods bring it about, ever seems beyond belief' (P. 10. 48–50); and 'the gods' power easily brings into being even what one would swear impossible and beyond hope' (O. 13. 83).

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[13] Cf. Lobel 1959: 89 & 69, on P. Oxy. 2431 fr. 1. 6sq. & P. Oxy. 2430 fr. 79. 11sq.
[14] Cf. O. 2. 35–47, P. 5. 54sq., P. 7. 19–21, N. 6. 1–7, I. 4. 4–21.

A god can 'exalt now one man, but throwing another beneath the hands' (P. 8. 76sq., cf. O. 7. 11sq.), he 'bows down many a haughty mortal, while to others he grants ageless glory' (P. 2. 51sq.). 'A god graciously brings his power to fulfilment' (P. 5. 107–124, in the poem's closure), and 'sweet becomes end and beginning of a man's work, when a god is prompting' (P. 10. 10)[15].

A second, equally important, element is formed by passages highlighting the poet's capacity to control social memory. The poet is the person who makes it possible that memory lasts.

Having left the divine sphere (being paradoxically trustworthy, though unpredictable, at the same time), one should turn to the poet: 'I sing of noble deeds' (N. 18–26), and 'a hymn of noble deeds makes a man equal in fortune to kings' (N. 4. 83–5).

It is simply because the 'word lives longer than deeds' (N. 4. 6–8) that, 'when men are dead and gone, songs and words preserve for them their noble deeds' (N. 6. 29sq.)[16]; 'great deeds of valour remain in deep darkness when they lack hymns' (N. 7. 12–6), and 'mortals forget what does not attain poetic wisdom's choice pinnacle, yoked to glorious streams of verses' (I. 7. 16–9). Father Zeus may grant 'that I may surpass many in honouring victory in words' (N. 9. 53–5) Pindar wishes, for 'if someone is devoted wholeheartedly to excellence' (I. 1. 41) or 'if someone has entered into the clear road of divinely granted deeds' (I. 5. 22sq.), then 'it is necessary to give those who achieve it a lordly boasting asserting, with no begrudging thoughts' (I. 1. 43–5)[17].

'For the sake of truth one must thrust envy aside with both hands and praise any mortal who is successful' says Bacchylides (c. 5. 187–200)[18], and 'with the help of truth any matter shines forth' (Bacch. c. 8. 20sq.). A victor's charioteer is called by Pindar 'blessed in having, though after great toil, a memorial of finest words of praise' (P. 5. 46–9)[19]; 'great achievements are always worthy of many

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[15] More elaborate are these: 'As for men's hopes, they often rise, while at other times they roll down [...]. No human has yet found a sure sign from the gods regarding an impending action; their plans for future events lie hidden from view. Many things happen to men counter to their judgment – at time the reverse of their delight, but then some who have encountered grievous storms exchange their pain for great good in a short space of time' (O. 12. 5–12a); therefore 'it is proper for a man to speak well of the gods, for less is the blame' (O. 1. 35), if not, 'impoverishment is often the lot of the slanderers' (O. 1. 53); for 'in company with the honoured gods, those who joyfully kept their oaths spend a tearless existence, whereas the others endure pain too terrible to behold' (O. 2. 65–7).

[16] In N. 8. 46sq. Pindar speaks of erecting a stone of the Muses, comparing his poem to a commemorative stele.

[17] I.e. one should 'not grudge to blend into a song a fitting vaunt in return for toils' (I. 5. 24sq.).

[18] In order to confirm this closing statement Bacchylides cites Hesiod: 'A man of Boeotia, Hesiod, minister of the (sweet) Muses, spoke thus: «He whom the immortals honour is attended also by the good report of men». I am easily persuaded to send Hieron speech to bring him glory, without (straying from) the path (of justice)'.

[19] On the poet's work as a building cf. O. 6. 3sq. and P. 6. 7–9 & 14–8.

words' (P. 76–9), and songs are 'the fairest memorial of the contests at Olympia' (O. 3. 15)[20].

The poet owes a debt to the victor and is obliged to praise him (P. 8. 32–4 & P. 9. 103–5)[21]; it is he who 'must awaken memory to announce the foremost victories' (O. 8. 74–80)[22]: 'I have noble things to tell' (O. 13. 11–3), says Pindar, 'may I find the right words and fittingly drive forward in the chariot of the Muses' (O. 9. 80–3).

Topical news supplies another, third, element, providing information on the victors' fathers and forefathers, their country, and their trainer. Such a noble heritage of heroic exploits is well worth being remembered[23].

Pindar calls a victor 'an adornment' for his hometown (N. 2. 6–8), and the place where he grew up is 'certainly capable of rearing a fighter', because a great Greek fighter at Troy was raised in the same place, i.e. Salamis. Amalgamating past and present, myth and history, Pindar speaks of the fact that 'at Troy Hector heard from Aias' (N. 2. 13–5) – a fact known to his audience then, as to us now, from a literary work, i.e. Homer's Iliad.

Given the same fantastic perspective, a winner 'has glorified the Aiakidai and his mother city', because he comes from Aegina where the sons of Aiakos were raised too (N. 5. 8sq.)[24]. The trainer should not be forgotten (N. 5. 48sq.), such 'a fashioner of athletes ought to be from Athens', and earlier victories of members of the same family are mentioned too[25]; a victor's father is regarded as 'blessed' and his son must 'be praised in townsmen's kindly words' (N. 11. 11sq. & 17).

Simonides, in fragments SLG 339a & 340 (F 54 Poltera) that may represent something of an epinician nature, also recalls, as precedent for the present victory, victories won in the past by, e.g., the victor's father[26]. A victor 'brings no disgrace upon the prowess inherited from his kinsmen' Pindar says (I. 3. 13sq.), and 'upon him (sc. the victor) the offspring of his father's noble brother casts no shame' either (I. 8. 65a–66)[27].

The fact that a victor brings fame to his home is also stated by Bacchylides (c. 6. 15sq., 10. 15–8)[28]: 'there will be delight in the words of the songs that proclaim

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[20] Cf. also O. 4. 6–10 where a revel is describe as 'longest-lasting light for achievements of great strength'.

[21] On the poet's twofold mission cf. O. 13. 49–52 & 96sq.

[22] Cf. also O. 6.87–92 (addressing Aineas, the trainer of the chorus, as the Muses' message-stick): 'now, Aineas, urge your companions [...] for you are a true messenger, a message-stick of the fair-haired Muses [...], tell them to remember Syracuse and Ortygia'.

[23] Cf. Halbwachs 1925: 286–8 on what he characterises as ancien régime.

[24] For other praises of Aegina and its offspring cf., e.g., N. 6. 45–7, N. 7. 50–2, I. 5. 44–8.

[25] N. 6. 15sq., 10. 37sq., I. 1. 34–40, I. 2. 30–2.

[26] Cf. Barrett 1978: 6, on fragments from P. Oxy. 2623, first published by Lobel in 1967, then as fr. 21a. 6–9 & 22. 2–5.

[27] More elaborate P. 8. 34–45.

[28] Cf. also, e.g., Pindar O. 4. 11–5 & O. 5. 4–8.

him to all the people' (Bacch. c. 13. 230sq., the final line). There is a certain 'give and take', because a winner brings fame to his hometown (P. 9. 1–4 & 73–5) of which 'the ancient prosperity [...] continues [...], as it bestows now this, now that', i.e. the victory of its citizen (P. 5. 54sq, in both cases Cyrene).

More often than not, the three topics of epinician poetry, i.e. the gods, the poet, and the victor, appear inextricably linked. On an intertextual level, Homeric atmosphere is beautifully evoked.

Family and god work hand in hand when Pindar says that 'he achieved this (i.e. he won), I believe, through your (i.e. Apollo's) designs, but by inherited ability he has trod in the footsteps of his father' (P. 10. 11sq.). Similarly, Apollo 'still loves the Syracusan city [...], since for the third time its ruler Hieron is hymned [...] as a Pythian victor' (Bacch. c. 4. 1–3).

The poet declares it as 'fitting that the son of' an earlier victor 'should meet with victory songs' (O. 2. 46sq.) and praises not only the victor but also his father as 'members of Herakles' mighty race' (O. 7. 15–7 & 19–24, also adding a supplementary praise of the family of the victor's mother). The poet's Muses are reassured that they 'will come to no people [...] inexperienced in beautiful things' whose 'inborn character' could not change (O. 11. 16–20, the poem's closure). In dealing with matters divine, however, the poet, otherwise so unashamedly conceited, assumes a humble pose: if a family's 'fortune should continue, we will leave it to Zeus and Ares to accomplish' (O. 13. 4–7).

'One with inborn glory carries great weight' (N. 3. 40–2), but for the victor 'through the favour of fair-throned Kleo and because of your (i.e. the victor's) determination for victory [...] has shone the light of glory' (N. 3. 83sq.); the victor's 'inherited nature' is seen as dependent on 'a fortune from Zeus' (N. 6. 8–12). In any case 'victory increases with new bloom to the accompaniment of gentle song' (N. 9. 46–9), and 'he who wins [...] glory in games [...] gains the highest profit, the finest words from tongues of citizens and foreigners' (I. 1. 50sq.); for 'a good man has the means to praise the victor' (I. 8. 69).

The 'greatest glory belongs to excellence' says Bacchylides (c. 1. 159–184), simultaneously touching upon excellence and piety in a long closure; 'and when the dark blue cloud of death covers men there is left behind undying fame for the deed well done' (Bacch. c. 13. 63–6); 'excellence endures in glorious songs for a long time, but few can win them easily' adds Pindar (P. 3. 114.sq., the last two lines)[29]. The victor is at the same time 'called glorious and much-envied among men' (Bacch. c. 7. 8–10): 'envy is better than pity', as Pindar put it (P. 1. 85sq.), for the 'posthumous acclaim of fame alone reveals the life of men who are dead' (P. 1. 90–4)[30].

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[29] On excellence cf. also P. 5. 1–8 & P. 10. 22–4.

[30] In the following, Pindar reminds his public of the fact that 'the kindly excellence of Croesus does not perish'; Bacchylides also speaks of Croesus as great benefactor of Greeks, especially of Apollo's shrine at Delphi (c. 3. 23–62).

Singling out four elements required for success[31], i.e. (i) training, (ii) natural ability, (iii) divine assistance, and (iv) effort, Pindar combines them majestically (O. 10. 91–6): '(i) by honing someone (ii) born for excellence a man may, (iii) with divine help, urge him on to prodigious fame; and (iv) few have won without effort that joy which is a light for life above all deed'. However, the 'best of possessions is the grace of a good name' (P. 11. 58)[32], and 'fortunate is the man who is held in good repute' (O. 7. 10), of which Simonides, Pindar, and Bacchylides certainly took care.

The victory odes of Simonides, Pindar, and Bacchylides show that (1) social memory was by no means ever-lasting. Instead, it belonged to a defined space in time and had to be renewed. The social memory expressed in epinician poetry (2) served the purpose of establishing and uniting a memory community; and (3) private reminiscences were heavily influenced by collective recollection, public and private amalgamated.

In antiquity, when the works were performed, they established the social memory of those who attended the performance. At least, the works were intended to do so. As idealised and, being half-mythic and half-real, as distorted they may appear, the victory odes were needed, for a society can exist only if a common past is established. As much as they may be artificially contrived, the victory odes show how one leading group made poets invent moments of collective memory[33]. It became significant only because of its invention by the poets. Were the victory odes not preserved, the social memory of those present when the poems were performed would be lost.

To a reader of Balzac and Dickens, the fact that social memory and literature may depend on each other, a concept so important to Halbwachs, comes as no surprise. It was, however, nothing new to Pindar either[34]. Nobody ever would have heard of Odysseus, he says, had it not been for Homer: 'because of Homer's sweet verse Odysseus' story has become greater than his actual suffering' (N. 7. 20sq.)[35].

Pindar even praises Homer's poetic craft which relies upon fictions: 'his skill deceives with misleading tales', Pindar continues. Indeed, nobody would be able to appreciate the fictitious social memory of the heroic age without Homer. But nobody would understand, and so highly estimate, the fictitious social memory of the aristocratic society either without Simonides', Pindar's, and Bacchylides' beautifully adorned and masterly designed 'misleading tales'.

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[31] Cf. Willink 1995: 16 & 19.

[32] On charis and her bewildering variety of meaning cf. Gianotti 1975: 75–7.

[33] Cf. Halbwachs 1925: 289.

[34] Referring to Homer, Simonides speaks of the same process in his Plataea-Elegy: cf. Boedeker/Sider 2001: 27–9.

[35] Cf. Currie 2005: 312–21.

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MAURICE HALBWACHS, SOCIAL MEMORY, AND THE GREEK LYRIC POETS

S u m m a r y

Literary texts inform on the collective remembrances of those who attend their performance, i.e. they reveal its audience's social memory. Characteristic of early Greek poetry (epic as well as lyric) is (1) that the audience's social memory is constantly renewed by such performances, which (2) serve the purpose of uniting a community, transforming it into a memory community; in order to achieve that (3) private reminiscences, not independent from collective recollection, are used by writers who create a new narrative in their poetic works.

These authors may belong to the circle of persons to whom their works were performed (as Sappho and Alcaeus did), or they may stand outside, their works having being commissioned. The only genre of early lyric poetry of which substantial portions have survived is epinician poetry; from the victory odes by Simonides, and much more from those by Pindar and Bacchylides, many examples illustrate the process.

Such a new reading of epinician poetry reveals how much it was indebted to the intentions, great expectations as well as serious aspirations, of those who commissioned it from the choral poets. The aristocratic society's social memory, though, is as fictitious as that of the heroic society, known to us from Homer – both, by no means, being 'ever-lasting', instead of which much relying on the performance poetry of the archaic age.