1 Introduction: Poetry and Epistemic Shift

1.1 The Process of Epistemic Shift

Our starting point is the existence of an order of knowledge common to the Hellenistic and Imperial Roman worlds, a sum of knowledge paradigms accepted as authoritative by the elites, unified to some extent despite variations in different places and epochs, which can be considered as the end result of a process of change in epistemic structures. The chronological frame of this process cannot be precisely defined, but it corresponds roughly to the periods that we usually know as "Archaic" and "Classical Greece". Tragic plays belong to this epoch and reflect its problems and challenges, and at the same time prefigure patterns of thought that will not become clearly established until later on.

The process of epistemic change that led to the Hellenistic-Roman paradigms of knowledge can be seen as a consequence of the deep transformations experienced by the Greek world in its transition from an illiterate, non-monetary, agrarian, community-oriented society, to a new structure in which relevant knowledge resided in written texts (and in which, consequently, the elites were literate), a significant share of the total production was dependent upon established commercial practices, the still essentially agrarian economy ceased to be ruled at local level, and the predominant communicative structures were now on a broader scale.

It was an era of development of the material culture among the Hellenes, and of commercial exchange with Eastern Mediterranean civilizations and other surrounding areas[1]. It was, above everything else, the time of the appearance and consolidation of the *polis* as a social and political system[2], and, almost simultaneously, of the emergence of a common Panhellenic identity[3]. It was at the begin-

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1 Cf. BURKERT [1984] 1992 pp. 9-40. See also HUSSEY 2006.

2 For a sound and relatively recent synthesis, see LONIS 1994.

3 The emergence of a Panhellenic identity is by itself a matter of debate. The stages through which it comes to exist are not clear – nor even is its definition. CARTLEDGE 1993, 1995 contends that it did not really exist until the Persian Wars. HAR-

ning of this period that the Greeks re-discovered and re-invented writing. Even if its initial applications seem to have been very restrictive, they gradually expanded to an ever greater range[4].

The reality of this transition is beyond dispute, and logically implies the emergence of a new framework for the production and circulation of discourse. Due to its complexity, the process has been perceived and researched from very diverse points of view at different times and in different fields of study. There has been much talk of "the transition from *mythos* to *logos*"[5], "the transition from orality to writing"[6], "the Greek Enlightenment"[7], "forgetfulness of Being"[8], and so on. The validity of the various approaches cannot be assessed in absolute terms, because all of them respond to the intellectual needs of their specific contexts[9].

The result of this process, which came to an end near the beginning of the Hellenistic period, was the consolidation of a series of knowledge paradigms based upon the codification of the various disciplines in writing. These paradigms constituted neither a closed and invariable system, nor a systematization of academic disciplines comparable to the one that later took place in modern Europe. The real degree of specialization amongst the elite mem-

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TOG [1980]1988 shares his basic assumptions. The precariousness of our knowledge of Archaic Greece makes this question virtually unanswerable. NAGY, esp. in 1979, 1980, 1996a, 1996b, sees the evolution of Greek poetry as dependent upon the emergence of a form of Panhellenism previous to the Persian Wars. A relatively recent work on this subject with extensive bibliography is ROSS 2005, who defends the existence of a Panhellenic conception at the time of the Homeric poems. Cf. also SNODGRASS 1971, HALL 1989, 1997, GRAZIOSI 2002.

4 Cf. JOHNSON / PARKER Eds. 2009. See specially WERNER 2009 and THOMAS 2009.

5 NESTLE 1940. See the essays in BUXTON Ed. 1999. See also the excellent FOWLER 2011 for an attempt to recover the distinction *mythos / logos*.

6 The research into orality in Ancient Greece became established with the work of PARRY and LORD on the Homeric *epos*. The work of HAVELOCK has a foundational character with regard to the general understanding of the transition from orality to writing in Ancient Greece, though it has probably been superseded in some ways, cf. esp. 1963 and 1986. See also THOMAS 1992, WORTHINGTON Ed. 1996, YUNIS Ed. 2003, MACKIE Ed. 2004, COOPER Ed. 2007, JOHNSON / PARKER Eds. 2009.

7 Here we should once again mention NESTLE. His work on Euripides NESTLE 1901 made a decisive contribution to the diffusion of this view.

8 In the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, of course.

9 See HUMPHREYS 2004 pp. 51-75. Though we do not agree with his notion of a "secularization" of the Greek world between c. 550 and 300 BC, it is undoubtedly an excellent, and relatively recent analysis of this process.

bers was very limited, and the modality of knowledge which might have been its unifying element, Philosophy, would always remain a framework in which various discursive forms coincided[10]. Nonetheless the Hellenistic-Roman world presented a certain stability in the organization of knowledge, guaranteed by the existence of institutions such as libraries and schools which were based upon and preserved a canon of texts[11].

The spread of literacy in Archaic Greece and the subsequent constitution of forms of knowledge based on corpora of written texts present certain specific features which have a vital bearing on our understanding of other phenomena. To begin with, probably due to the political fragmentation of the Greek-speaking world, we find no centers of knowledge constituted immediately upon the arrival of writing. Though reading and writing skills were almost undoubtedly restricted to a small number of individuals, they belonged neither to an exclusive caste nor to circles that were isolated from mainstream society[12]. What is more, the process which led to the establishment of writing as *the* basic vehicle of knowledge (something that may also occur in societies where the majority is illiterate[13]) was slow, possibly because there was no political center of power to which writing was distinctly associated. Contexts for

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10 Cf. INWOOD 2010 p. 131 *et passim*.

11 BECK 1964, MORGAN 1998, 1999. For a compilation of sources on education in the Graeco-Roman world, see JOYAL / MCDOUGALL / YARDLEY Eds. 2009.

12 The scope of literacy in Athens and in the whole of Greece, and the social processes involved, are still under debate. Cf. HARRIS 1989, THOMAS 1989, BOWMAN / WOOLF Eds. 1994, MORGAN 1998, YUNIS Ed. 2003. Though the spread of literacy is not his theme, FORD 2002 sheds important light on many aspects of the formation of a literate culture.

13 A brief, but very interesting analysis in MACDONALD 2005. See p. 49: "I would define a 'literate society' as one in which reading and writing have become essential to its functioning, either throughout the society (as in the Modern West) or in certain vital aspects, such as the bureaucracy, economic and commercial activities, or religious life. Thus, in this sense, a society can be literate, because it uses the written word in some of its vital functions, even when the vast majority of its members cannot read or write […]. I would regard a non-literate, or oral, society as one in which literacy is not essential to any of its activities, and memory and oral communication perform the functions which reading and writing have within a literate society. […] it is possible to have many people who can read and/or write in an oral society, without this changing its fundamentally oral nature." THOMAS 1992 pp. 1-28 gives a broad, if not exhaustive, view of the different uses of writing. An interesting comparison of two very different cases in LLOYD 2003.

the oral production and diffusion of discourse are still documented at a much later date; in fact they remained highly relevant for the Greek *poleis*, and would remain so until the Hellenistic age and beyond[14].

So we can say that written discourse developed in interaction with oral modalities of discourse that were still alive. This development allowed the reproduction by means of writing of discursive models that were strongly rooted in oral tradition. Undoubtedly, those same discursive models experienced decisive transformations as a result, with modifications of their respective modes of production, reproduction and circulation. Texts – in the broadest sense of this word – could reach a wider geographical context either in written form, or in an oral form mediated through writing. The potential separation of knowledge from the person and occasion from which it stems opens up the possibility of modifying the guidelines upon which the system of knowledge itself is constituted. A certain degree of specialization emerges[15], and with it institutions that preserve the specific disciplines of knowledge as contained in writing. In the Archaic and Classical eras such institutions had not yet attained their full development, but they nonetheless existed[16].

The complexity of the process of epistemic shift itself is compounded by the interpretative bias of our written sources, mainly produced (or at least selected for transmission) in the time in which the ulterior organization of knowledge was already consolidated, and which (not without some hesitation) interpreted the past according to it. This is probably the main reason why it is very difficult for us to organize the texts surviving from Archaic and Classical Greece in a purely synchronous system. For instance: we do not really know the place of Heraclitus in the so-called "History of Philosophy"– that is, his real influence on Plato and the Stoics, the transmission of his texts, and so on – but it is even

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14 The question of performance and oral forms of communication during the Hellenistic period has not attracted as much attention in research. Cf. AUNE 1991. For oral structures in Roman literature: VOGT-SPIRA 1990.

15 AZOULAY 2007. According to the author there emerges a certain distinction between "*polis*-oriented" (poets, orators), and "non *polis*-oriented" intellectuals (the latter being basically philosophers).

16 Cf. HARRIS 1989, Ch. 3f., ROBB 1994, MORGAN 1999.

more difficult to explain the status of his work for his contemporaries, its intended audience, its relationship with organized and alternative forms of worship[17]. There are no traces of any terminology that can designate the different areas of knowledge in an unequivocal manner. The most ancient uses of terms like ἱστορία or φιλοσοφία speak volumes: we have to wait at least until the fourth century BC for their first use as names of specific disciplines rather than as designations of ways to approach general knowledge[18]. The researcher can access a variety of texts, but, as in the case of Heraclitus, it is impossible for us to assign them a definite place in structures and communication forms of which our knowledge is at best very defective[19]. Still in the fourth century BC, Plato could use Protagoras as a mouthpiece for a vision of the

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17 The problem can be treated in many different ways. See, for example, GRAHAM 2008 p. 169: "With Heraclitus a new type of thinker appears in archaic Greece. No longer satisfied with cosmological questions of the sort that drove the Milesians, he looks critically at the world, at society, and at how people know the world. He does not simply accept the framework of explanation developed by the Milesians, but questions it." Under the guise of a historical narration, the author constructs a narrative based upon one among many possible syntheses of testimonia and fragmenta that are very disperse. There is nothing wrong with this – it is one possible way of analyzing the structure of Heraclitean thinking, and it is not altogether clear that the alternatives are better – but in any case Heraclitus' actual practices remain unknown. See GIGON 1935, KIRK 1954, VLASTOS 1955, BABUT 1975, KAHN 1979, DE GENNARO 2001.

18 Cf. NIGHTINGALE 1995 p. 60. See AZOULAY 2007 about the sense of "Philosophy" in Isocrates. AZOULAY notes that Isoc. 7.45 places Philosophy on the same level with typically aristocratic pursuits like horsemanship, hunting and gymnastics, but 4.1-3 rather looks down upon physical exercise. Though of course there might be many reasons for both statements, they could point to the still indeterminate position of the discipline that Isocrates calls "Philosophy". See also the use of ἱστορία in Alcid. *Soph.* 1. See also WARREN 2007 pp. 1-6.

19 HARRIS 1989 pp. 63f.: "Anaximander and Anaximenes (not Thales) were the earliest philosophers whose ideas survived in writing, but it turns out to be most unclear what effects it had. No one before Aristotle refers to these men, still less to their writings. In fact the earliest philosopher whose writings are known to have had reverberations in and soon after his own time was Xenophanes of Colofon, who significantly wrote not in prose treatises but in accepted poetic forms. His chronology is disputed, but he is unlikely to have written much before the last quarter of the sixth century. That writing was still a quite subsidiary part of being a philosopher in the next generation (again there are chronological problems) is suggested by the fact that Heraclitus, whose book was in Aristotle's opinion very difficult to read, nonetheless obtained relatively extensive circulation for his ideas." Of course it might still be questioned if Heraclitus' book was truly difficult for its intended audience.

"Sophist" that corresponds to this generic idea of a wisdom which is to be found in various contexts (Pl. *Prt.* 316d-e)[20]:

> ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν σοφιστικὴν τέχνην φημὶ μὲν εἶναι παλαιάν, τοὺς δὲ μεταχειριζομένους αὐτὴν τῶν παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν, φοβουμένους τὸ ἐπαχθὲς αὐτῆς, πρόσχημα ποιεῖσθαι καὶ προκαλύπτεσθαι, τοὺς μὲν ποίησιν, οἷον Ὅμηρόν τε καὶ Ἡσίοδον καὶ Σιμωνίδην, τοὺς δὲ αὖ τελετάς τε καὶ χρησμῳδίας, τοὺς ἀμφί τε Ὀρφέα καὶ Μουσαῖον· ἐνίους δέ τινας ᾔσθημαι καὶ γυμναστικήν, οἷον Ἴκκος τε ὁ Ταραντῖνος καὶ ὁ νῦν ἔτι ὢν οὐδενὸς ἥττων σοφιστὴς Ἡρόδικος ὁ Σηλυμβριανός, τὸ δὲ ἀρχαῖον Μεγαρεύς· μουσικὴν δὲ Ἀγαθοκλῆς τε ὁ ὑμέτερος πρόσχημα ἐποιήσατο, μέγας ὢν σοφιστής, καὶ Πυθοκλείδης ὁ Κεῖος καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί.

Certainly, "Protagoras" makes a distinction between the "Sophists" of his time and the ancient ones who did not dare to display their own wisdom. But he establishes this distinction only to subsequently dismiss it: he tries to prove that poets like Homer, Hesiod and Simonides, and founders of τελεταί like Orpheus and Musaeus[21] were ultimately a previous form of the kind of wisdom that could be cultivated by men like Prodicus, Gorgias and Protagoras himself[22].

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20 After the edition of BURNET.

21 This is only one among many possible categorizations. It should be remembered that Orpheus and Musaeus are real poets for Ancient Greeks. In vindicating the poets' wisdom, Aristophanes' "Aeschylus" refers to Orpheus in *Ra.* 1030ff., without making any distinction between him and "recent" poets. Cf. KINGSLEY 1995, FORD 2002 pp. 46-66, BERNABÉ 2009. On the relationship between Orpheus and Homer, cf. NAGY 2001. Cf. also LONG 1999.

22 On the evolution of the term τελετή before the Hellenistic era and the progressive restriction of its meaning, cf. SCHUDDEBOOM 2009 pp. 7-37. On p. 21, SCHUDDEBOOM quotes Aristophanes, *Nu.* 258, where the vocabulary used could imply that the initiation in Socrates' Phrontisterion is also a τελετή. Perhaps this fact is not very relevant in itself: *Nubes* is a comic play, so the intention with which the terms are used is not always evident. Nonetheless it is also possible to understand it as a reference to the initiatory and para-religious character of some associations which in retrospect we call "philosophical".

We can list some of the traits of this period of epistemic shift, bearing in mind that a list of this kind will always remain tentative and should not be understood as an attempt at a systematic explanation:

a) A mixed[23], oral/written[24] system of communication. Even if it does not work in the same way in all times and places, there are some common traits which are shared by practically the whole of the Archaic and the Classical period. Written texts are important for the transmission and codification of knowledge, but coexist with authoritative forms of oral communication of a very diverse nature[25].

b) Social recognition of a variety of figures of wisdom that do not share a common object of knowledge, but are also not properly split into specific disciplines. They are designated by a variety of terms like σοφός and σοφιστής. The latter will be used *a posteriori* to designate a group of characters mainly from the second half of the fifth century BC who question very radically the possibility of

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[23] FOLEY 2004 makes a distinction between four different kinds of oral/written communication systems which should be considered "mixed". We prefer not to apply this classification to the whole of Archaic and Classical periods. First, because the systems of communication appear to be subjected to continuous transformation during this period of epistemic shift – but even more so because FOLEY only refers to the modes of production and reception of texts. This restriction is justified in its original context, but, at the same time, is inevitably one-sided. The modes of production and reception do not clarify by themselves the authority of a certain text in a certain social context, the value of truth attributed to it, and so on.

[24] There is no consensus on the distinction between the roles of oral and written channels of communication in different times, or about their interaction. Cf. HERINGTON 1985, in which the author contends that writing had had a very important role since ancient times. On p. 41 he says: "although its performances were universally oral, it rested on a firm sub-structure of carefully meditated written texts". On p. 45 he also argues in favor of the continuity of oral traditions in the areas in which writing had been consolidated as a means for communication. It is worth noting MORRISON 2004 pp. 110-5, where the author shows that Thucydides' prose simultaneously presents traits of a text conceived for reading and of a text conceived for recitation. In the same book: CURRIE 2004. Cf. also THOMAS 1992 pp. 61-5, 78-93, MELIA 2004, TEFFETELLER 2007, FINKELBERG 2007. We refer to YUNIS Ed. 2003 and the vision of alphabetization as a multiform phenomenon posited by its various authors. The Introduction by the Editor says on p. 13: "As a group, the chapters of this book demonstrate that reactions to writing differed from one context to another, and no single pattern or interpretation accounts for the variety of cultural change in ancient Greece."

[25] On the use of writing by rhapsodes: X. *Mem.* 4.2.10.

knowledge itself, of its communicability, and of finding guidance for human action[26]. But the term is much older, and its specific application to this group of thinkers is very probably retrospective. The terms σοφός and σοφία are applied in older texts to people with very diverse abilities, among them possessors of types of wisdom related to the use of spoken word like poets and seers[27]. They may have moral connotations, at least in some contexts[28]. As synthesized in KERFERD 1981 p. 24:

> From the fifth century B. C. onward the term 'sophistês' is applied to many of these early 'wise men' – to poets, including Homer and Hesiod, to musicians and rhapsodes, to diviners and seers, to the Seven Wise Men and other early wise men, to Presocratic philosophers, and to figures such as Prometheus with a suggestion of mysterious powers.

So we are confronted with something that in our context seems rather paradoxical, but would have made some sense in Archaic Greece. Notions such as σοφός and σοφιστής could refer to very different abilities: a man (or a woman) is σοφός (or σοφή) about something[29]. But this evident fact has its counterpoint in the non-existence of full-fledged autonomous discourses, and, even more importantly, in the recognition of what we could call a general notion of authority for the σοφός, or for a character designated through a more or less analogous term: he (or she) is not an au-

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26 Cf. LLOYD 1989 pp. 92-5, and also KERFERD 1981, RANKIN 1983, O'GRADY Ed. 2008. Anyway it is doubtful that they were a real "group". AZOULAY 2007 p. 177: *"[…] il ne s'agit nullement d'un groupe unifié, mais plutôt d'un assemblage hétéroclite dont la cohérence fut établie ex post , par un Platon en mal d'ennemis."*

27 Cf. MARTIN 1993 pp. 115f. σοφοί acquire this rank basically through recognition by the society to which they belong.

28 Cf. O'BRIEN 1967, p. 24: "The *sophia* of the Seven Wise Men is practical and moral. […] The word *sophia* keeps these ethical connotations in many passages of Pindar. Wise men, he says, bear nobly the power given by god; they praise moderation, and they do not aspire too high." The absence of a truly autonomous ethical sphere in the archaic world seems evident to us, even though it is not easy to give a sound characterization of this fact.

29 O'GRADY 2008, p 9f.

thoritative figure in a specific, well-defined field, but a generally authoritative figure, and different σοφοί might concur with each other in authority, even if their immediate object of knowledge is not the same[30]. This way of categorizing knowledge is still present even in an author like Plato, who, in theory at least, is already specifically "philosophical"[31]. So we could say that the characteristic that unifies the very diverse figures of σοφός or σοφιστής is the capacity (or legitimation) to utter an authoritative discourse[32], and only secondarily his (or her) specific achievements or competence in a specific field.

c) The existence, inside this mixed oral/written system, of a set of subsystems, some of them (though not all) of Panhellenic importance, for the production and circulation of poems[33] and also prose texts[34]. The tragic genre is obviously one such subsystem,

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30 A very interesting treatment in AKRITIDOU 2013. P. 90f.: "In examining the particular nature of the kind of authority affirmed by the Presocratics it is important to remark that, as André Laks argues, there are two possible ways of establishing an authoritative status in connection with differentiation: either the individual differentiates his expertise from other dissimilar authorities (*external differentiation*) or he differentiates *himself* from other similar authorities, who appear to belong to the same group (*inner-differentiation*). It then becomes apparent that the authoritativeness of an enterprise may not be affirmed only in connection with other similar enterprises, for it is equally possible to register a particular area of concern as authoritative by contrasting it to othe dissimilar topics of investigation. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to accept that these two stages of differentiation are successive, and that in order for the second to appear the first has to have been to some extent developed. In order for inner differentiation to appear, that is, both the individuals and the audience have to be able to identify the content of the knowledge presented as the primary concern of a specific group."

31 This should be nuanced. Cf. BURKERT 1960.

32 On the existence of a "sphere of wisdom" in which disciplines like those of the Hellenistic period are not yet separate, see DETIENNE 1967. Various studies have noted the impossibility of separating "Philosophy", "Poetry", etc., as clearly differentiated fields of discourse in Archaic Greece, from a variety of viewpoints: DODDS 1951, LLOYD-JONES 1971, VERNANT 1981, FORD 2002 pp. 46-66. The excellent FEENEY 1991 p. 48 says of the *theologia tripertita* that "it has its roots in the fracturing of the poets' monopoly on speaking about the divine which was begun by those such as Xenophanes". Here once again we meet the *a posteriori* construction of Xenophanes as a "Philosopher" and again refer to FORD 2002 pp. 46-66 and the rest of the authors we have mentioned in this note.

33 Cf. NAGY 1979, 1980.

34 Cf. THOMAS 1992 p. 107 on the relationship between orality and the texts that we consider prose.

and a relatively late one. They are not limited to poetry[35]. The aspiration to an authoritative position seems to be implicit also in the discourses framed by these subsystems, even though the scarcity of the materials preserved leaves us in the dark regarding the manner in which such an aspiration is articulated within each modality of discourse. In any case the competition for a rank like that which is designated by the word σοφός among figures belonging to these subsystems remains[36].

[35] The limitations of the material at hand prevent us from systematizing the spheres of discourse in which such stories could be found. For a brilliant analysis centered on the character of Polyphemus, see CALAME 2000 pp. 193-238.

[36] NIGHTINGALE 2007 p. 174 "Although, in this period, different kinds of wise men were seen to be practicing different activities, there was nonetheless a generalized competition among the different groups for the title of 'wise man'. It was not until the late fifth century that intellectuals began to construct boundaries between disciplines such as philosophy, history, medicine, rhetoric, and various other *technai*."