

7

The Warp and Weft of Writing

*Rude rymes, the which a rustick Muse did weave
In salvage soyle, far from Parnasso mount,
And roughly wrought in an unlearned Loom*

Edmund Spenser (lines in a dedicatory verse to Lord Grey
of Wilton, from the front matter of the *Faerie Queene*)

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Much of the preceding chapter was devoted to an interpretation of line 16 of copper plaque MS 2-2:

(1) I(?) Δ Γ Β Α Η Ζ Φ Λ Ε Σ Ξ Λ Η Μ

The line consists of fourteen arbitrarily ordered graphemes (to include the denotation of the abecedarium) followed by, as it is preceded by (at the end of line 15), an unusual *iota*-like symbol – possibly a mark of “punctuation.” I have read the line as Μηλη σε λυζη αβγδ (*mêlê se luzdê abgd*) – ‘O abecedarium (αβγδ [i.e., *abcd*]), may the stylus (μηλη) interweave (λυζη) you (σε)’: a sentiment closely matched by the In-Law’s address to his plaque in Aristophanes *Women at the Thesmophoria* 778–779.

But what exactly is it that the copper-plaque scribe is invoking his alphabet to do in its proper behavior? To answer that question, we must first remind ourselves of two notions that we encountered in earlier chapters: (1) a common condition of literacy; and (2) a metaphoric expression of poetic composition.

7.1 CONFUSION OF LANGUAGE AND SCRIPT

First – language is fundamentally a biological phenomenon available to all human beings, a seemingly innate primitive expressed in each member of the species, with the exception of a few who are cognitively, socially, or physically deprived of the ability. A writing system on the other hand is a derived phenomenon: it is an arbitrary means of symbolically recording language. All people have language; not all people have a writing system. There are those who have language but who cannot write or read; no people can write and read but lack language.

Yet these two distinct systems – language and orthography – are commonly equated among literate peoples. This assimilation is well known and has been documented many times over. As we saw, for example, Saussure called attention explicitly to linguistic-graphemic confusion in his *Cours*:

But the written word is so intimately connected with the spoken word it represents that it manages to usurp the principal role. As much or even more importance is given to this representation of the vocal sign as to the vocal sign itself. It is rather as if people believed that in order to find out what a person looks like it is better to study his photograph than his face.¹

7.2 POETIC WEAVING

And second – in the preceding chapter, following the discussion of Scheid and Svenbro,² we took note of the metaphoric concept of literary composition as “poetic weaving,” expressed as such in the works of the lyric poets Pindar and Bacchylides.

7.2.1 PINDAR AND BACCHYLIDES

Beyond the examples compared in that earlier discussion – Pindar, *Olympian Odes* 6.86–87, and Bacchylides, *Victory Odes* 5.8–14 – Scheid and Svenbro note yet other usages of the same metaphor in the works of these two poets. Thus, in *Nemean Odes* 4.44–46, Pindar says:

Ἐξύφαινε, γλυκεῖα, καὶ τόδ’ αὐτίκα, φόρμιγξ,
 Λυδίᾳ σὺν ἀρμονίᾳ μέλος πεφιλημένον
 Οἰνῶνα τε καὶ Κύπρω, ἔνθα Τεῦκρος ἀπάρχει....

45

*Eksuphaine, glukeia, kai tod' autika, phormigks,
Ludia(i) sun harmonia(i) melos pephilêmenon* 45
Oinôna(i) te kai Kuprô(i), entha Teukros aparkhei...

Sweet lyre, quickly weave
this song in Lydian mode, beloved 45
of Oinona and Cyprus too, where Teucer reigns so far from home....

The poet addressing the lyre, calling on it to weave its song, is again reminiscent of the copper-plaque scribe calling on the alphabet, urging it to be woven by his stylus: the weaver and the woven, instrument and product, are alternately implored. Scheid and Svenbro remind their readers of Snyder's intriguing insight regarding the imagery of the invoked lyre:³ "Thus the lyre is transformed into a loom, whose vertical warp corresponds to the vertical strings."⁴

Scheid and Svenbro⁵ also call attention to *Nemean Odes* 8.15 in which Pindar refers to his poem as a "Lydian headband (μίτρα [mitra]) skillfully worked (πεποικιλμένα [pepoikilmena]) with resonance," and to a Pindaric fragment (179): "I weave (ύφαίνω [huphainô]) for the sons of Amythaon an elaborate (ποικίλον [poikilon]) headband (ἀνδήμα [andêma])," about which a scholiast writes: "He likens his poem to weaving."⁶ And, finally, Scheid and Svenbro take note of Bacchylides, *Dithyrambs* 19.8–11:

In a poem addressed to the Athenians, Bacchylides uses the same metaphor, calling on the "care for perfection" (*merimna*) characteristic of the poets from Ceos (his uncle Simonides and himself): "Weave [huphaine] something new in the rich beloved Athens, O famous perfectionism of Ceos!"⁷

To this set of texts demonstrating these lyric poets' conceptualization of poetic composition as weaving, one could add Pindar's closing lines (110–115) of the third Pythian ode:

Εἰ δέ μοι πλοῦτον θεὸς ἄβρὸν ὀρέξαι, 110
ἐλπίδ' ἔχω κλέος εὐρέσθαι κεν ὑψηλὸν πρόσω.
Νέστορα καὶ Λύκιον Σαρπηδόν', ἀνθρώπων φάτις,
ἐξ ἐπέων κελαδεννῶν, τέκτονες οἷα σοφοί
ἄρμωσαν, γινώσκομεν· ἅ δ' ἄρετὰ κλειναῖς ἀοιδαῖς
χρονία τελέθει· παύροις δὲ πράξασθ' εὐμαρές. 115

Ei de moi plouton theos habron oreksai, 110
elpid' ekhō kleos heuresthai ken hupsêlon prosô.

Nestora kai Lukion Sarpêdon', anthrôpôn phatis,
eks epeôn keladennôn, tektones hoia sophoi
harmosan, ginôskomen: ha d' areta kleinais aoidais
khronia telethei: paurois de praksasth' eumares. 115

And if a god should give me splendidous wealth,
 my hope's to find a lofty future fame. 110

Nestor and the Lycian Sarpedon, the talk of men,
 we know, from ringing **words** that clever **craftsmen**
 joined: distinction long endures through songs of fame:
 but for few 'tis easy to achieve. 115

With line 113 compare Pindar's *Nemean Odes* 3.4–5, where he writes of μελιγαρύων τέκτονες | κόμων (*meligaruôn tektones | kômôn*) 'craftsmen of sweet-voiced celebrations',⁸ referring to the chorus members who are awaiting the Muse, νεανῖαι σέθεν ὄππα μαϊόμενοι (*neaniai sethen opa maiomenoi*) 'young men desiring your voice'.

Τέκτονες (*tektones*) 'craftsmen' (singular τέκτων [*tektôn*]) is a word of primitive Indo-European extraction, synchronically sharing a root with τέχνη (*tekhne*) 'art, craft, skill', several spheres of which we encountered in the preceding discussion of νῆϊς (*nêis*). Together with its numerous cognates, τέκτονες (*tektones*) points to an Indo-European etymon **teks-* meaning 'to weave; to fabricate'. Among descendant forms are Latin *texō* 'to weave, to plait, to embroider; to fabricate'; *textor* 'weaver'; *textum* 'woven fabric; interlaced timbers; *textus* 'style of weaving; woven fabric; the product of joining words (to produce a *text*)'; Sanskrit *tákṣati* 'to hew; to fabricate'; Avestan *tašaiti* 'to frame; to cut with a knife or ax'; Old High German *dehsa* and Old Norse *þexla* 'mattock'; Middle High German *dehsen* 'to beat flax' and *dehse* 'spindle'.⁹ The common origin of terms denoting both acts of (1) weaving and plaiting on the one hand and (2) fabricating on the other may lie in the Neolithic practice of constructing the walls of houses with wicker and wattle.¹⁰ Pindar's τέκτονες (*tektones*) are poetic craftsmen who by their skillfully joined words bring enduring fame to heroes such as Nestor and Sarpedon. His syntagmatic clustering of τέκτονες (*tektones*) and ἔπεα (*epea*) in *Pythian Odes* 3.113 ("from ringing words that clever craftsmen joined") is itself of considerable import, as we shall soon see.

7.2.2 ARCHAIC GREECE

The metaphoric notion of the warp and weft of language must have been a fundamental one in archaic Greece, both before and after the acquisition of

alphabetic literacy. Verbal weaving is known to Homer, depicted, for example, in *Iliad* III 212, in the poet's description of how, before an assemblage of Trojans, Odysseus and Menelaus

μύθους καὶ ... μῆδεα ὕφαινον
muthous kai ... mêdea huphainon
 Wove words and ... counsels

In her study of weaving imagery in archaic poetry, Snyder notes that Homer extends the metaphor of weaving (lexically encoded in ὑφαίνειν [*huphainein*]) beyond the realm of verbal composition to additional cognitive activities (in her words, “as a description of an intellectual process”):

Odysseus, the suitors, Nestor, and others “weave” stratagems and wiles; Athena, the only female figure in Homer for whom her weaving is not a literal occupation, helps Odysseus “weave” wiles. Penelope, though she cannot achieve the status of the androgynous Athena, is nevertheless capable, through her literal weaving, of enjoying the “masculine” ability to weave stratagems.¹¹

Snyder notes too that, in addition to various metaphorical allusions to weaving, Homer draws weaving and singing together directly in his descriptions of Calypso's and Circe's weaving activities at *Odyssey* v 59–62; x 220–223, 226–228, and 254–255:

Thus, while Homer himself never actually describes poetic activity as analogous to weaving at the loom, his frequent references to metaphorical and literal weaving, as well as his juxtaposition of actual weaving and singing, lay the foundation for the lyric poets' descriptions of their own webs of song.¹²

With regard to her latter point (“lay the foundation for the lyric poets' descriptions of their own webs of song”), however, we should bear in mind that lyric is a genre no less archaic than epic; as Gregory Nagy has reminded us: “Lyric did not start in the archaic period. It is just as old as epic, which clearly predates the archaic period. And the traditions of lyric, like those of epic, were rooted in *oral poetry*, which is a matter of *performance* as well as *composition* (Lord 1995:22–68, ‘Oral Traditional Lyric Poetry’).”¹³

Snyder offers an interesting observation in light of the close association of women and weaving in Mycenaean and epic culture: “It is not surprising that a woman seems to have been the first among extant writers to apply the Homeric metaphor explicitly to her own art, the creation of song.”¹⁴ The woman is of course Sappho. Snyder references Sappho fragments 1.2 L-P, in which Aphrodite is addressed as παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε [*pai Dios doloploke*]

‘wile-weaving daughter of Zeus’ (she here “merely echoes Homer,” writes Snyder) and 188 L-P, preserving the epithet *μυθόπλοκος* (*muthoplokos*) ‘*muthos*-weaver’ for Eros.

Scheid and Svenbro take exception to certain observations that Snyder offers in her 1981 study. They view it significant that Homer, in contrast to the lyric poets Pindar and Bacchylides, never makes allusion to “poetic weaving” self-referentially – he does not explicitly refer to his own verse-crafting as poetic weaving,¹⁵ does not define “song as fabric, although he was familiar with the metaphor of language weaving,”¹⁶ as scenes such as that surrounding *Iliad* III 212, already described, clearly reveal. Concerning Snyder’s proposal, to which allusion was made, that Homer’s “frequent references to metaphorical and literal weaving, as well as his juxtaposition of actual weaving and singing, lay the foundation for the lyric poets’ descriptions of their own webs of song,”¹⁷ Scheid and Svenbro raise the following objection:

While it may have had a certain importance for the poets who metaphorically represented their own song as fabric, the simple juxtaposition of weaving and song in Homer is not enough to explain this development ... (in any case the same “juxtaposition” existed in the daily practice of weavers, for song has always accompanied work).¹⁸

Scheid and Svenbro envision that the “invention of ‘poetic weaving’ in the Greek language is due to choral poets – probably to Simonides, a pioneer in this domain.”¹⁹

7.2.3 COMMON INDO-EUROPEAN TRADITION

Perhaps it could be the case that Homer does not envision the epic bard’s composition in performance as a process of word weaving and deems the metaphor appropriate only for nonbardic, nonpoetic episodes of speaking; that, however, would seem quite improbable. The concept of *poetic composition* as weaving long precedes Homer – and long precedes the equally old lyric. Comparative Indo-European evidence reveals that metaphors of the weaving or crafting of poetic language are widespread among early Indo-European peoples. Indo-Iranian and Greek usages point to a reconstructable common ancestral denotation for poetic production: **wek^wos tek^{s-}*, ‘weaving’ or ‘crafting words’;²⁰ the poet is the **wek^wōm tek^sōn*, ‘weaver’ or ‘crafter of words’. This matches morpheme for morpheme Pindar’s own ἐπέων ...

τέκτονες (*epeôn ... tektones*) in *Pythian Odes* 3.113 that we just encountered;²¹ if the hierarchical syntactic structure of Pindar's line and that of the reconstructed phrase differ, the linear sequencing and the fundamental meaning they impart are equivalent. Compare Pindar's line and the reconstructed Indo-European phrase with Homer's previously cited μύθους καὶ ... μήδεα ὑφαίνων (*muthous kai ... mêdea huphainon*) 'They wove words and ... counsel' (*Il.* III 212): the lyric poets are no less heirs to Indo-European tradition than is Homer. Compare too the Old English poet Cynewulf's metaphoric phrasing from the closing lines of his *Elene*: "Thus I, wise and willing, ... / Wordcraft wove (*wordcræft wæf*) and wondrously gathered" (1236–1237).²² In Welsh the bards are called *seiri gwawd* or *seiri cerdd*, 'carpenters of song', as Williams points out, and

claimed as their own all the tools and technical terms of the craftsmen in word, e.g. the axe, knife, square. When a rival imitated their themes or methods they told him bluntly to take his axe to the forest and cut down his own timber.²³

Old Irish preserves the phrase *fāig ferb fithir* 'the master wove the word'.²⁴

7.3 WEAVING OF A WRITTEN TEXT

Is there then anything that does appear to be new within the conceptual realm of poetic weaving in the work of the lyric poets noted in the preceding section? In searching for an affirmative answer, one might point to a use of the metaphor of language weaving to characterize the composition of a *written text*, as opposed to an oral composition in performance. Perhaps this is implicit in Pindar's lines in *Pythian Odes* 3, but it is made quite explicit by Bacchylides in *Victory Odes* 5; Scheid and Svenbro draw their readers' attention to this latter point, if expressing it less absolutely than my question might seem to frame it (and the emphasis indicated is my own):

Bacchylides considers that he "wove" his "hymn." Not that this metaphorical usage is dependent upon the written nature of the poem; on the contrary. It is interesting to note, however, that it is a poem that the poet "sends" (*penpei*) to his recipient. The material and tangible nature of this epistolary ode in fact adds *a new dimension to language weaving* as we have studied it until now.²⁵

The relevant text occupies lines 9–16 of Bacchylides’ *Odes* 5, written to celebrate the chariot victory of Hiero of Syracuse at the Olympian games of 476 BC (to whom Pindar’s *Olympian Odes* 1 was also written, occasioned by the same victory):

Ἦ σὺν Χαρίτεσσι βαθυζώνοις ὑφάνας
 ὕμνον ἀπὸ ζαθέας 10
 νάσου ξένος ὑμετέραν
 ἔς κλυτὰν πέμπει πόλιν,
 χρυσάμπυκος Οὐρανίας
 κλεινὸς θεράπων· ἐθέλει δὲ
 γάρυν ἐκ στηθέων χέων 15
 αἰνεῖν Ἴέρωνα.

Ê sun Kharitessi bathuzdônois huphanas
humnon apo zdatheas 10
nasou ksenos humeteran
es klutan pempei polin,
khrusampukos Ouranias
kleinos therapôn; ethelei de
garun ek stêtheôn kheôn 15
ainein Hierôna.

With the deep-girded Graces a hymn
 has your *xenos* woven, 10
 and from the sacred isle
 he sends it to your city of renown,
 he, the famed servant of
 golden-filleted Urania; he wants
 to pour out speech from his heart 15
 in praise of Hiero.

The *woven hymn*, which equates to praise of *poured-out speech*, is being sent in written form from the Ionic island of Keos to Hiero’s Sicily. Bacchylides’ poetic weaving produces an orthographic fabric: but the choral poets, I suggest, did not inaugurate the weaving of the *written* word:

Μηλη σε λυζη αβγδ
mêlê se luzdê abgd
 O abecedary (αβγδ), may the stylus (μηλη) interweave (λυζη) you (σε)

7.3.1 WEAVING OF ALPHABETIC LETTERS

What we see in the copper-plaque abecedaria is an interweaving of letters. That weaving occurs along both a horizontal dimension and a vertical dimension – realized at the iterating intersections of an *associative* (or *paradigmatic*) structure and a *syntagmatic* structure in Saussurian terms – producing a fabric of *combination* and *selection* in Jakobsonian terms. The horizontal dimension – the *weft* or *woof* of the alphabetic fabric – is the continuous stringing together of the letters in their periodic, that is, alphabetic, order: from *alpha* to *tau*, from *alpha* to *tau*, from *alpha* to *tau*, and on and on. The vertical dimension – the *warp* of the alphabetic fabric – is realized by the constant interchanging of the morphological variants of the various letters at the individual letter positions within the alphabet – the substitution of one letter form for another. This process of alphabetic weaving results in the highly variegated fabric that we see on the six faces of the copper plaques, presented row by row and column by column – warp and weft – in the transcriptions of Chapter 4.

7.3.2 LATIN ALPHABETIC INTERWEAVING

Aside from the production of this alphabetic fabric in the copper plaques, there is, however, still another sense in which the alphabet is woven – or plaited. Much of the previously known evidence comes from a time long after the period in which the copper plaques were produced. As we saw in Chapter 2, the Greek alphabet would spread by way of Greek settlers in the south of Italy to the Etruscans, who would then pass it to the Romans and to speakers of other Italic languages (the conventionally imagined route). In the ruins of Pompeii, the Italian city on the Bay of Naples destroyed by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79, there are found instances of graffiti displaying the twenty-one-letter Latin abecedarium written in a peculiar way: the abecedarium of *CIL IV 5472*, for example, appears as

A X B V C T
 DSERFQGP
 OINKML

That of *CIL IV 9272* shows a similarly arranged alphabetic series, accompanied by a second sequence, comprised of three letters only:

AXBVCTDSERFQGP
 HO I N K ML
 AXB

Likewise, *CIL* IV 5499, following the coda of an abecedarium, RSTVX, shows an alphabetic series with the same order:

RSTVX
 AXBVCTDSERFQGPHOINKML

Abecedaria having the same letter sequence also occur in *CIL* IV 6905, 6907, as well as in the incomplete abecedarium of *CIL* IV 9268.

What is the alphabetic pattern displayed in these several abecedaria? The first half of the alphabet is written from left to right, in the normal fashion (2), but then the alphabet turns back on itself and the remainder of the abecedarium is written right to left (3), being interspersed with the letters of the first half:

(2) A B C D E F G H I K L ↘
 (3) X V T S R Q P O N M ↙

In other words, the following sequential order is generated, where the initial, left-to-right, portion is indicated with plain text, the remaining, right-to-left, portion with underlining:

(4) A X B V C T D S E R F Q G P H O I N K M L

In an article treating, in part, the origin of the Latin term *elementum* ‘letter of the alphabet’, Coogan draws attention in a footnote to Roman pedagogical practice vis-à-vis these intertwined – plaited – alphabets from the Bay of Naples, remarking: “These graffiti reflect a pedagogical practice described in Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.* I.1.25 and Jerome, *In Jerem.* 25 v. 26.”²⁶ The former passage is of particular relevance to the present investigation. Quintilian writes that he disapproves of the practice of teaching children the names and the order of the letters (*litterarum nomina et contextum* [on the latter term, see the subsequent discussion]) of the alphabet before the children have learned their graphic shapes – it makes it harder for them later to recognize visually the letters:

Quae causa est praecipientibus ut, etiam cum satis adfixisse eas pueris recto illo quo primum scribi solent contextu videntur, retro agant rursus et varia permutatione turbent, donec litteras qui instituuntur facie norint, non ordine: quapropter optime sicut hominum pariter et habitus et nomina edocebuntur.

It is for this reason that instructors, even when they believe that they have sufficiently fixed the letters within the children’s minds in that **linear sequencing**

in which they are conventionally first written, then reverse the direction and disarrange the order by various substitutions, until the children master the letters by their appearance, not by their **order**: and so it will be best for them to be instructed thoroughly in both the form and name of the letters side by side (just as with people).

Does Quintilian here have in mind the sort of plaiting of letters that is preserved in the graffiti from Pompeii? Possibly, but he has cast his net wide: his remarks on this pedagogical process provide a necessary but not sufficient description of the weaving in and out of letters as attested in the south of Italy.

On the other hand, in light of those Latin abecedaria, lexical choices in Quintilian's text demand our attention. To denote the "sequence" in which children conventionally first write the letters – that is, the periodic order of the symbols of the Latin alphabet – Quintilian uses the word *contextus*, a nominal derivative of the verb *contexō* 'to make or join by weaving', itself a compound form of *texō* 'to weave, to plait' and so a member of that set of Indo-European weaving and crafting terms to which τέκτων (*tektōn*) 'craftsman' and so forth belong (as we have discussed). The nominal *contextus* denotes most fundamentally the 'act of weaving; the act of constructing', and also, among other senses, 'fabric; structure'. In Quintilian's quoted lines, his use of *contextus* for the sequence of symbols suggestively denotes that *fabric of letters* which is the alphabet. And the letters of that alphabet are further characterized as conforming to a *rectus contextus*, which I translated as "linear sequencing." The adjective *rectus*, 'in a straight line', however, also has its own affiliation with weaving, and a seemingly quite archaic one.

Pliny (*HN* 8.194), citing Varro as his source, records that wool on the distaff (*colus*) and spindle (*fūsus*) of Tanaquil, wife of Tarquinius Priscus, first of the Etruscan monarchs to rule Rome, could be seen housed in the temple of Semo Sancus.²⁷ Furthermore, a toga (*toga regia undulata* 'wavy [billowing?] royal toga') that Tanaquil had made and that had been worn by Servius Tullius, Priscus's successor to the throne, was on display at the sanctuary of Fortuna. Pliny continues:

*Inde factum ut nubentes virgines comitaretur colus compta et fusus cum stamine. Ea prima texuit **rectam tunicam**, qualis cum toga pura tirones induuntur novaeque nuptae.*

And so it came about that a decorated distaff and a spindle with thread accompanied young women in their wedding ceremonies. She [Tanaquil] was the

first to weave a **tunica recta**, the sort that young men who have come of age and brides wear with a plain white toga.

According to Festus (p.277M), the *tunica recta* is referred to in this way (i.e., as *recta*) because *a stantibus et in altitudinem texuntur* ‘they are woven vertically by standing [weavers]’; Festus seems to equate the *tunica recta* with the *regilla tunica: regillis tunicis ... textis susum versum a stantibus* ‘woven upwards by standing [weavers]’ (p.286M).²⁸ The reference is apparently to weaving on the warp-weighted looms common in classical antiquity.²⁹

In the repeated reference to the “order” of the alphabet in the passage cited (*Inst. Orat.* I.1.25), Quintilian uses not *contextus* a second time but *ordō* to denote the conventional sequence of letters (“until the children master the letters by their appearance, not by their *order*”). But this lexeme also invokes the metaphor of weaving: the nominal *ordō* ‘a line of items, a row’ is related to the verb *ordior*, meaning ‘to lay the warp of (a web)’;³⁰ and then secondarily ‘to begin’ and ‘to begin to speak or write’. The fundamental notion of weaving recurs in related forms: *exordior* ‘to lay out the warp; to lay out strands for plaiting’; *exordium* ‘the warp laid out on a loom prior to interweaving the weft’ – both of which terms also carry notions of ‘beginning’; and *redordior* ‘to unweave, unravel’. The *ordō* of the alphabet is the sequence of letters – the alphabetic *fabric* – that one produces – *weaves* – setting out at the *beginning* and passing straight on to the end, and is thus equivalent to the *rectus contextus*.

Distinct from this is a variegated weave of the alphabet that is accomplished by reversal and ‘disarranging the order’. Quintilian denotes the latter action with the verb *turbō* (*retro agant rursus et varia permutatione turbent* [‘then reverse the direction and **disarrange** the order by various substitutions’]), ultimately traced to Proto-Indo-European *(s)twer- (with *s-mobile*), meaning ‘to turn, to whirl’.³¹ The related Latin noun *turbō*, *turbinis* designates whirling implements: in addition to ‘spinning top’ and a spinning object used in the practice of magic, another of its senses is ‘spindle whorl’. The verb *turbō* may not in itself be a dedicated member of the lexicon of spinning and weaving, but might its usage here be intentionally (metaphorically) suggestive of that realm of activity? Regardless, what we find preserved in Quintilian’s description of a particular Roman pedagogical technique, I suggest, is the traditional Latin vocabulary of a much older practice of the weaving of the abecedarium.

7.4 DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS: LITERARY, LINGUISTIC, AND ALPHABETIC WEAVING

Preceding the Spaniard Quintilian by a couple of generations was the Greek historian of Rome and literary critic Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who arrived in the eternal city circa 30 BC, bringing with him traditions of philosophy, rhetoric, and grammatical analysis from the East. In a remarkable document entitled *Περὶ συνθέσεως ὀνομάτων* (*Peri suntheseôs onomatôn*), or *De compositione verborum*, ‘On the Composition of Words’, Dionysius reveals himself not only to be familiar with that metaphor of *language weaving* as applied to the composition of *written* literature that we encountered in Bacchylides’ *Victory Odes* 5 but to be thoroughly steeped in it.³²

Influenced by Aristotle and, particularly, Theophrastus,³³ among others, Dionysius of Halicarnassus identifies in this work two fundamental aspects of literary production that anticipate the dual linguistic planes of Saussure and Jakobson. On the one hand, there is ἐκλογή (*eklogê*), the ‘selection’ of words out of the set of possible words that could be used in a given context: this is notionally comparable to Saussure’s vertical linguistic dimension – the paradigmatic or associative axis – and Jakobson’s mode of “selection.” On the other, Dionysius identifies σύνθεσις (*sunthesis*), the ‘composition, combination’ of sentences and other linear structural elements: this compares precisely to Saussure’s horizontal – that is syntagmatic – dimension and Jakobson’s mode of “combination.”³⁴ Much of Dionysius’s discussion in this treatise is given to demonstrating what is in his view the primacy of σύνθεσις (*sunthesis*) ‘combination’ over ἐκλογή (*eklogê*) ‘selection’: though literary σύνθεσις (*sunthesis*) ‘combination’ is naturally second order, he writes, ἐκλογή (*eklogê*) being a necessary first step (i.e., words must be selected before they can be combined), the former has far greater impact in the art of language (ἐν τοῖς λόγοις [*en tois logois*]) than does the latter; and in this way it is consistent with other τέχναι (*tekhnai*) ‘arts’ that involve the “building” of structure (*Comp.* 2):

... ἐνθυμούμενος ὅτι καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων **τεχνῶν**, ὅσαι διαφόρους ὕλας λαμβάνουσαι συμφορητὸν ἐκ τούτων ποιοῦσι τὸ τέλος, ὡς οἰκοδομικὴ τε καὶ τεκτονικὴ καὶ ποικιλτικὴ καὶ ὅσαι ταύταις εἰσὶν ὁμοιογενεῖς, αἱ **συνθετικά** δυνάμεις τῆ μὲν τάξει δεύτεραι τῶν **ἐκλεκτικῶν** εἰσι, τῆ δὲ δυνάμει πρότεραι· ὥστ’ εἰ καὶ τῷ λόγῳ τὸ αὐτὸ συμβέβηκεν, οὐκ ἄστοπον ἡγητέον.

... *enthumoumenos hoti kai epi tôn allôn tekhnôn, hosai diaphorous hulas lambanousai sumphorêton ek toutôn poiouei to telos, hôs oikodomikê te kai tektonikê kai poikiltikê kai hosai tautais eisin homoiogeneis, hai sunthetikai dunameis tê(i) men taksei deuterai tôn eklektikôn eisi, tê(i) de dunamei proterai; hôst' ei kai tô(i) logô(i) to auto sumbebêken, ouk atopon hêgêteon.*

... Consider that as with other **arts** that utilize varying raw materials and make from them an end product – such as architectural construction and carpentry and embroidery and others of a similar sort – the **constructional** capabilities occur second in order after the **selectional** ones, but are first in terms of productive power: thus if the same relationship should hold with the art of language, one must not think it odd.

As a first example of this relationship of selection and combination, Dionysius offers Homer's verses of *Odyssey* xvi 1–16, narrating Telemachus's arrival at the hut of Eumaeus, where he is welcomed warmly by the swineherd (and will see, and be seen by, his father, Odysseus, disguised as a beggar). Dionysius judges that these verses are unsurpassed among poetic lines. But why are they so? The answer comes (*Comp.* 3):

... πότερον διὰ τὴν ἐκλογὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἢ διὰ τὴν σύνθεσιν; οὐδεὶς ἂν εἴποι διὰ τὴν ἐκλογὴν, ὡς ἐγὼ πείθομαι· διὰ γὰρ τῶν εὐτελεστάτων καὶ ταπεινοτάτων ὀνομάτων πέπλεκται πᾶσα ἡ λέξις, οἷς ἂν καὶ γεωργὸς καὶ θαλαττουργὸς καὶ χειροτέχνης καὶ πᾶς ὁ μηδεμίαν ὥραν τοῦ λέγειν εὖ ποιούμενος ἐξ ἐτοίμου λαβὼν ἐχρήσατο. λυθέντος γοῦν τοῦ μέτρου φαῦλα φανήσεται τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἄζηλα ...

....

... τί οὖν λείπεται μὴ οὐχὶ τὴν σύνθεσιν τοῦ κάλλους τῆς ἐρμηνείας αἰτιᾶσθαι;

... *poteron dia tèn eklogên tôn onomatôn ê dia tèn sunthesin? oudeis an eipoi dia tèn eklogên, hôs egô peithomai; dia gar tôn eutelestatôn kai tapeinotatôn onomatôn peplektai pasa hê lexis, hois an kai geôrgos kai thalattourgos kai kheirotekhnês kai pas ho mêdemian ôran tou legein eu poioumenos eks hetoimou labôn ekhrêsato. luthentos goun tou metrou phaula phanêsetai ta auta tauta kai azdêla; ...*

....

... *ti oun leipetai mê oukhi tèn sunthesin tou kallous tês hermêneias aitiasthai?*

... Is it because of **selection of words** or because of **combination**? No one would say that it is because of **selection** – I am persuaded of that: for with

commonplace and lowly words is the entire text **plaited/woven** – words that a farmer and a sailor and an artisan and all who show no concern for speaking well would take up and use readily. For were the meter broken up, the very same text would seem paltry and unenviable; ...

....

... What else remains then but to credit *combination* with the beauty of expression?

To express the metaphor of poetic word weaving, Dionysius here (line 58) uses the verb πλέκω (*plekō*) that we encountered in Chapter 6: πλέκω (*plekō*) most fundamentally means ‘to plait’ but, as Nagy brought to our attention, is sometimes used instead of ὑφαίνω (*huphainō*) for ‘to weave’³⁵ – just as Dionysius is clearly using it here. We also met with the observation of Scheid and Svenbro, that “*plekein* is used instead of *huphainein* when one wishes to emphasize the aspect of interweaving.”³⁶ Dionysius is describing the Homeric text as the end product of a process of interweaving: the two strands that are being interwoven are those of ἐκλογή (*eklogē*) ‘selection’ and σύνθεσις (*sunthesis*) ‘combination’ – the vertical and horizontal dimensions of language production – the warp and the weft of the poetic fabric. The element of ἐκλογή (*eklogē*) ‘selection’ takes temporal priority in all those τέχναι (*tekhnai*) ‘arts’ that involve the production of an end product, writes Dionysius, including the language art – one form of which is the weaving of the Homeric “text.” Just so, in the production of fabric on a loom, it is the warp that is first laid out – the vertical strand (on the warp-weighted loom): in poetic weaving, ἐκλογή (*eklogē*) ‘selection’ is the *warp*. Second in order, but of chief priority in these τέχναι (*tekhnai*) ‘arts’, is σύνθεσις (*sunthesis*) ‘combination’. In the production of fabric on a loom, the strand of the weft – the horizontal strand – is secondarily interwoven into the previously placed warp:³⁷ in poetic weaving, σύνθεσις (*sunthesis*) ‘combination’ is the *weft*. In the weaving of fabric on a loom, the warp is “a pre-arranged and more-or-less fixed set”:³⁸ just so, in the weaving of a poetic fabric ἐκλογή (*eklogē*) ‘selection’ involves the more or less fixed (finite) set of a language’s lexemes. The weft, in contrast to the warp, is characterized by its “extreme length and flexibility”:³⁹ analogously, in the weaving of poetic fabric, σύνθεσις (*sunthesis*) ‘combination’ involves the syntactic component of language, capable of generating infinitely long sentence structures. These matters are made plain by Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

The metaphor of literary weaving recurs throughout *De compositione verborum*. Dionysius advises the literary artist ἐγκαταπλέκειν τε καὶ συνυφαίνειν (*egkataplekein te kai sunuphainein*) ‘to intertwine and weave together’

unpleasant and graceful words – or the latter type only (*Comp.* 12; see also *Comp.* 16. with regard to Homeric practice). He observes that the most accomplished composers of both poetry and prose, ποιητῶν τε καὶ συγγραφέων (*poiêtôn te kai suggrapheôn*), arrange their words συμπλέκοντες ἐπιτηδείως ἀλλήλοις (*sumplekontes epitêdeîôs allêlois*) ‘purposively weaving them together with one another’ (*Comp.* 15). The extension of the metaphor of word weaving from oral composition to written is here made explicit – perhaps even more strikingly so in *De compositione verborum* 25, where Dionysius, mixing his metaphors and drawing the ancient figure of poetic weaving into the metaphoric realm of hair care, writes that

... ὁ δὲ Πλάτων τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ διαλόγους κτενίζων καὶ βοστρυχίζων καὶ πάντα τρόπον ἀναπλέκων οὐ διέλειπεν ὀγδοήκοντα γεγονῶς ἔτη· πᾶσι γὰρ δήπου τοῖς φιλόλογοις γνώριμα τὰ περὶ τῆς φιλοπονίας τάνδρος ἱστορούμενα τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν δέλτον, ἣν τελευτήσαντος αὐτοῦ λέγουσιν εὐρεθῆναι ποικίλως μετακειμένην τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς Πολιτείας ἔχουσιν τήνδε “Κατέβην χθὲς εἰς Πειραιᾶ μετὰ Γλαύκωνος τοῦ Ἀρίστωνος.”

... *ho de Platôn tous heautou dialogous ktenizdôn kai bostrukhizdôn kai panta tropon anaplekôn ou dieleipen ogdoêkonta gegonôs etê; pasi gar dêpou tois philologois gnôrima ta peri tês philoponias tandros historoumena ta te alla kai dê kai ta peri tèn delton, hên teleutêsantos autou legousin heurethênai poikilôs metakeimenên tèn arkhên tês Politeias ekhousan tênde “Katebên khthes eis Peiraia meta Glaukônos tou Aristônos.”*

... And Plato, did not stop combing and curling his own dialogues and **weaving/plaiting** them in every way, even up to eighty years of age; for I suppose that the stories concerning the man’s love of work are well known to every scholar, especially that one about the writing tablet that they say was discovered after he had died, containing the opening words of the *Republic* transposed **in varied woven patterns**: “I went down yesterday to the Piraeus with Glaucon the son of Ariston.”

The adverb ποικίλως (*poikilôs*), which I have translated as ‘in varied woven patterns’, also holds membership in the Greek lexicon of weaving. It is a member of the family of Greek words at the head of which stands the nominal ποικίλος (*poikilos*) ‘wrought in various colors [of woven or embroidered stuffs]’;⁴⁰ it occurs already in the Mycenaean documents, with the spelling *po-ki-ro-nu-ka* (Knossos tablets Ld 579, 598 etc.), describing a type of *o-nu-ka*, a

part of a garment. The Greek word-set is of primitive Indo-European origin: linguistic relatives include Sanskrit *peśa-* ‘ornament’, *peśala-* ‘artfully fashioned’; Avestan *paēs-* ‘to color, decorate’; Old Persian *nipistanaiy* ‘to write’; Lithuanian *piėšas* ‘freckle’, *piėšti* ‘to write, draw’; Old Church Slavic *piřo* ‘to write’; Old Norse *fā* ‘to paint’, *fā rūnar* ‘to cut runes’; Tocharian *pik-* ‘to draw, write’; Latin *pingō* ‘to adorn with colors, to paint’.⁴¹ Plato himself of course knows and utilizes members of the lexical set, such as ποικίλματα (*poikilmata*) in *Euthyphro* 6c, describing the appearance and manufacture of the peplos presented to Athena at the Panathenaia, and tying its weaving to “things told by the poets.” Regarding this passage and the lexical form, Nagy observes:

I draw attention to the metaphor of *poikilia* ‘pattern-weaving’, which establishes a parallelism between poetry and fabric-work as prime media of mythmaking. Similarly in Plato *Republic* II 378c, the expression *muthologēteon* ‘to be mythologized’ is made parallel to *poikilteon* ‘to be pattern-woven’, and the subject of mythologization / pattern-weaving is none other than the battles of gods and giants, that is, the *gigantomakhiai* of the Great Panathenaia.⁴²

The relevance, and importance, of this observation for the present investigation will become clear later in this chapter.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus does not limit his application of the metaphor of literary weaving to the domain of words alone. For example, descriptions of the weaving of κῶλα (*kōla*) ‘clauses’ (*Comp.* 19 and 25)⁴³ and of the interweaving of rhythms (*Comp.* 18 and 25) both occur. The domain over which the metaphor holds can also be internal to the word: he writes of syllable weaving: ἡ τῶν συλλαβῶν πλοκή παντοδαπῶς σχηματιζομένη (*hē tōn sullabōn plokē pantodapōs skhēmatizdomenē*) ‘the weaving of syllables, being arranged in all kinds of ways’ (*Comp.* 12).

Most fascinating of all, Dionysius makes use of the metaphor of *weaving letters*, as in the following example – here in conjunction with the weaving of syllables. Addressing the matter of how to make the arrangement (ἁρμονία [*harmonia*]) of phrasing (λέξις [*leksis*]) – that is, of the combining of words – beautiful, he states (*Comp.* 13):

... αἰτία δὲ κἀνταῦθα ἧ τε τῶν γραμμάτων φύσις καὶ ἡ τῶν συλλαβῶν δύναμις, ἐξ ὧν πλέκεται τὰ ὀνόματα

... *aitia de kantautha hê te tôn **grammatôn** phusis kai hê tôn sullabôn dunamis, eks hôn **pleketai** ta onomata*

... it is here too a matter of the nature of the **letters**
and the quality of the syllables, from which
the words **are woven**

In Greek and Latin grammatical tradition, the unit of the “syllable” is treated as a kind of orthographic/phonological primitive; this strikes us as peculiar, especially given that the Greeks and Romans, who typically equate orthographic units with phonological units, were writing alphabetically.⁴⁴ Diodorus operates within this tradition, though he views and treats the syllable as a unit having component parts:⁴⁵ mentioning γράμματα (*grammata*) ‘letters of the alphabet’, he remarks that syllables are διὰ τούτων πλεκομένας (*dia toutôn plekomenas*) ‘woven out of them’⁴⁶ (*Comp.* 15; and hence, he states, syllables display the properties of their constituent letters).

Dionysius finds a parallelism in the weaving of letters, the weaving of syllables, and the weaving of words (*Comp.* 16):

Τί δὴ τὸ κεφάλαιόν ἐστὶ μοι τούτου τοῦ λόγου; ὅτι παρὰ μὲν τὰς τῶν **γραμμάτων συμπλοκάς** ἢ τῶν συλλαβῶν γίνεται δύνამις ποικίλη, παρὰ δὲ τὴν τῶν **συλλαβῶν σύνθεσιν** ἢ τῶν ὀνομάτων φύσις παντοδαπή, παρὰ δὲ τὰς τῶν **ὀνομάτων ἀρμονίας** πολύμορφος ὁ **λόγος**.

*Ti dê to kephalaion esti moi toutou tou logou? hoti para men tas tôn **grammatôn** **sumplokas** hê tôn sullabôn ginetai dunamis poikilê, para de tên tôn **sullabôn** **synthesin** hê tôn onomatôn phusis pantodapê, para de tas tôn **onomatôn harmonias** polumorphos ho **logos**...*

What is the main point of my assertion? That it is by the **interweaving of letters** that the variegated effect of syllables comes about, and by the **combination of syllables** arises the varied nature of words, and by the **arrangement of words** comes manifold **discourse**.

In these remarkable lines Dionysius reveals to his readers two interpretative mechanisms. First, the twin axes of selection (ἐκλογή [*eklogê*]) and combination (σύνθεσις [*synthesis*]) – the warp and weft of linguistic and literary fabric – are operative at the level of letters (γράμματα [*grammata*]); Dionysius conflates phonology and orthography, as would be fully anticipated), at the level of lexemes (ὀνόματα [*onomata*]), and at the level of

discourse (λόγος [*logos*]). Second, the weaving mechanisms operate iteratively to produce intricate variegated (ποικίλος [*poikilos*]) patterns: the interweaving (συμπλοκή [*sumplokê*]) of letters through selection and combination produces the pattern of syllables; the output of this operation produces syllabic units that are selected and combined to weave word patterns; the output of this operation, in turn, produces lexical units that are selected and combined to produce linguistic utterances, either oral or written, as the following chart illustrates.

LETTERS

selection



combination



SYLLABLES

selection



combination



WORDS

selection



combination → LINGUISTIC

UTTERANCE

We can see here a “logical” regression at work as a nascent tradition of linguistic analysis is applied to the deeply ancient Indo-European metaphor of poetic word weaving. As woven poetic words – lexemes – were subjected to analytic scrutiny, their component syllables were in a parallel fashion viewed as participating in a process of syllable weaving – and a syllable’s component sounds, understood and described as letters through phonic-graphic syncretism, were likewise cast as strands providing the raw material for letter weaving. This regression is only natural given that the dual axis of warp and weft is a linguistic primitive. The result is the realization of a woven pattern of greater variegated intricacy; in effect, what began as metaphor of poetic composition evolves into a metaphoric expression of a fundamental linguistic reality.

7.5 ST. JEROME AND ALPHABETIC INTERWEAVING

In the twenty-fifth chapter of the biblical book that bears his name, the seventh/sixth-century BC Hebrew prophet Jeremiah proclaims the “words of the Lord the God of Israel” that came to him (verses 8b–9a, 15b–27):⁴⁷

^{8b}Because you have not listened to my words, ^{9a}I will summon all the tribes of the north, says the Lord: I will send for my servant Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon. I will bring them against this land and all its inhabitants and all these nations round it; ...

^{15b}Take from my hand this cup of fiery wine and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. ¹⁶When they have drunk it they will vomit and go mad; such is the sword that I am sending among them. ¹⁷Then I took the cup from the Lord’s hand, gave it to all the nations to whom he sent me and made them drink it: ¹⁸to Jerusalem, the cities of Judah, its kings and officers, making them a scandal, a thing of horror and derision and an object of ridicule, as they still are: ¹⁹to Pharaoh king of Egypt, his courtiers, his officers, all his people, ²⁰and all his rabble of followers, all the kings of the land of Uz, all the kings of the Philistines: to Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod: ²¹also to Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites, all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coasts and islands: ²³to Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who roam the fringes of the desert, ²⁴all the kings of Arabia living in the wilderness, ²⁵all the kings of Zamri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes, ²⁶all the kings of the north, neighbors or far apart, and all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. Last of all the king of *Sheshak* shall drink. ²⁷You shall say to them, These are the words of the Lord of Hosts the God of Israel: Drink this, get drunk and be sick; fall to rise no more, before the sword that I am sending among you.

The lines of the dire prophecy cited here make mention twice of Babylon, ruled by Yahweh’s “servant Nebuchadrezzar,” presented at the outset of this pericope (verse 9) as an avenging agent and at the end (verse 26) as no less a victim than the other kings. In the case of the second mention, however, Babylon is identified by the name *Sheshakh* (ששח; cf. Jeremiah 51:41). It is at this point that Coogan’s previously quoted reference to Jerome vis-à-vis the alphabetic pedagogical practice described by Quintilian becomes pertinent.

In his commentary on Jeremiah 25:26, St. Jerome, the fourth/fifth century Croatian-born cleric, sets out an accounting of the “Sheshakh” denotation of Babylon:

Apud nos Graecum alfabetum usque ad novissimam litteram per ordinem legitur, hoc est, 'alfa, beta' et cetera usque ad 'o', rursumque propter memoriam parvulorum solemus lectionis ordinem vertere et primis extrema miscere, ut dicamus 'alfa o, beta psi', sic et apud Hebraeos primum est 'aleph', secundum 'beth', tertium 'gimel' usque ad vicesimam secundam et extremam litteram 'thau', cui paenultima est 'sin'. Legimus itaque 'aleph thau, beth sin', cumque venerimus ad medium, 'lamed' litterae occurrit 'chaph'; et ut, si recte legatur, legimus 'Babel', ita ordine commutato legimus 'Sesach'.

Among us, the Greek alphabet is recited all the way to the last letter in a **straight sequence**, that is *alpha, beta* and so on, all the way to *omega*; also, for the sake of children memorizing [the alphabet], we make it a practice to turn the **straight sequence** of recitation backwards and to **intertwine** the final elements with the initial, so that we say *alpha omega, beta psi*. In a corresponding way, among the Hebrews, the first letter is *aleph*, the second *beth*, the third *gimel*, all the way to the twenty-second and last letter, *taw*, before which is *shin*. Thus we recite *aleph taw, beth shin*, and when we make the turn in the middle, *lamed* comes face to face with the letter *kap*: thus if it [i.e., the alphabet] is read **straight**, we read *Babel* [i.e., Babylon], while with the alphabetic sequence rearranged, we read *Sheshach*.

The lexemes and concepts are familiar from the earlier discussion of Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 1.1.25: unmodified *ordō* denotes the conventional linear sequence of letters; Jerome writes of reading “straight,” *recte*, as Quintilian refers to *rectus contextus*, ‘linear sequencing’. The aforementioned are linked to the realm of weaving, as we have seen. Jerome’s selection of *miscere* to denote the intertwining of letters represents the appropriation of a term that shares semantic space with the Greek verb *λυγίζω* (*lugizdō*), the denominative formed from *λύγος* (*lugos*) ‘withé’, discussed in Chapter 6, comparable, I propose, to the copper-plaque verb *λυζή* (*luzdē*). Certainly Jerome must also be drawing on the standard vocabulary of alphabetic activity, a Latin vocabulary that has its roots in a far older Greek tradition of performative writing and alphabetic scholarship.

7.6 WEST SEMITIC ALPHABETIC INTERWEAVING

If Quintilian’s description of his envisioned pedagogical process allows for the possibility that it is one that may somehow differ in specifics from the process we see displayed in Pompeian graffiti, Jerome’s does not, *mutatis mutandis*.

Jerome describes the interweaving of the letters in terms of Greek alphabetic tradition, rather than Latin, and notes that a comparable phenomenon is practiced *apud Hebraeos* ‘among the Hebrews.’ The intertwining of the twenty-two letter Hebrew script that he describes takes the following form:

- (5) א ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט י כ ↘
 (6) ת ש ר ק צ פ ע ס נ מ ל ↙

Jerome writes that “when we make the turn in the middle [i.e., after the eleventh letter *kap* (כ); see (5)], *lamed* [ל] comes face to face with the letter *kap* [כ].” What he means by this can be seen clearly when we examine the back-and-forth segments in continuous (left-to-right) intertwined sequence (where the first half of the abecedarium is indicated by plain text, the second half by underlining):

- (7) א ב ת א ב ש ר ק צ פ ע ס נ מ ל

The only two letters that retain their contiguous placement are the middle letters *kap* (eleven of twenty-two) and *lamed* (twelve of twenty-two) – still situated “face-to-face” – but located at the coda of the intertwined abecedarium, rather than at the middle of the “straight” letter sequence. In the intertwined abecedarium, *bet* (ב) and *shin* (ש) occur face-to-face, as, of course, do *kap* (כ) and *lamed* (ל):

- (8) א ב ת א ב ש ר ק צ פ ע ס נ מ ל

Substituting for the consonants of *Babel* (בבל) [i.e., *Babylon*]), the respective face-to-face pairings in the intertwined abecedarium (*shin* [ש] for *bet* [ב] and *kap* [כ] for *lamed* [ל]) produces Jeremiah’s *Sheshakh* (ששך).⁴⁸

This substitution process is an otherwise known practice of Hebrew cipher spelling called *atbash*, named after the pairing of *alep* (א) with *taw* (ת) (hence *at-*) and *bet* (ב) with *shin* (ש) (hence *-bash*). Earlier scholars had been dubious about Jerome’s claim that *Sheshakh* is an *atbash* representation of *Babylon*, but “the traditional interpretation is generally accepted today, not only because all other suggestions have proved to be wrong, but also because ‘cryptographic writing of personal names ... is attested in Mesopotamia as early as the seventh century B. C. E.’” points out Steiner, quoting Tigay 1983.⁴⁹ Steiner continues, in this tightly argued study of the recensions of Jeremiah: “The *atbash* cipher can no longer be dismissed as a ‘fanciful practice’ [a reference to a characterization by George Rawlinson in the mid-nineteenth

century] and there is no good reason to doubt that it existed in Jeremiah's time."⁵⁰

Other Hebrew cipher spellings are also attested, such as the so-called *albam* system, involving an interlacing of letters by plaiting each half of the abecedarium from its starting point, rather than a weaving *back* of the second half; in other words:

(9) א ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט י כ
 (10) ל מ נ ס ע פ צ ק ר ש ת

Thus, *alep* (א) pairs with *lamed* (ל), *bet* (ב) with *mem* (מ) – providing the denotation *albam* – and so on.⁵¹

There is some evidence that the *atbash* and *albam* systems of abecedaric interlacing were in use in Syria-Palestine as early as circa 1200 BC. Among the numerous letters appearing in the first four lines inscribed on the ‘Izbet Şarṭah ostracon, Demsky has called attention to pairs that follow the linear (i.e., *alep* through *taw*) letter order and its reverse, others that appear to be pairs in *atbash* order, others pairs in *albam* order and its reverse.⁵² Line 5 consists of the entire abecedarium written left to right, though with certain “peculiarities,” as noted in Chapter 5 (see note 64).

7.7 ALPHABETIC INTERWEAVING AND DIVISION

Coogan has drawn attention to other evidence from Syria-Palestine, Greece, and southern Italy that suggests a common practice of dividing the alphabet at its midpoint, the basis for the interweaving of letters seen at Pompeii and implicit in Hebrew *atbash* pairings. Noting the attestation of three abecedaria at the later second-millennium BC Syrian city of Ugarit, Coogan observes that two of the three (*PRU* II, nos. 184 and 188B, lines 4–5) are divided at *l*: they are “written on three lines, and on both the first line contains the signs from *ʾa* to *lʾ*;⁵³ the division is made after the fourteenth of twenty-seven letters.⁵⁴ The third Ugaritic abecedarium seems to show a division required by the shape and size of the tablet on which it is inscribed. An ostracon from Qumran, circa 30 BC, apparently a student's practice text, bears four lines of letters, the middle two inscribing an abecedarium: the initial line of the abecedarium (line 3) ends in *ṭet* (ט), the ensuing line (line 2) begins with *lamed* (ל), thus the intervening *yod* (י) and *kap* (כ) are missing; Coogan remarks: “Although there is sufficient space for *y* and *k* either at the end of line 3 or at the beginning of line 2, they have been omitted, presumably because of a memory lapse.

But the student apparently remembered that the second half of the alphabet began with *l, m, n*, and so made a fresh start, as it were, with line 2.⁵⁵ In other words, regardless of whether the omission of “*y* and *k*” (*yod* and *kap*) were accidental or not, this student’s exercise stands as an alternative reflection of the practice described by Jerome as “the turn in the middle” of the interwoven abecedarium.

Coogan mentions three instances of divided abecedaria found in Greece and Magna Graeca. One is an abecedarium painted on a stamnos from the Akhaian colony of Metapontion in the south of Italy, circa the first half of the fifth century B.C.⁵⁶ Regarding its script, Jeffery writes:

Important evidence for the duration of the local alphabet at Metapontion should be given by the abecedarium which was painted round the shoulder of a stamnos of local type, found in a grave near the city.... *Gamma, delta, iota, san* are shown in their local forms; *vau* [digamma] and *qoppa* are still in place, but the unused sign *sigma* is not represented. Its place in the line is taken by *san*. The complementary [i.e., supplementary] letters run: *upsilon, phi*, ‘red’ *chi*, and ‘red’ *xi* written twice. The repetition of this sign at the end has been variously explained, as a means of filling the vacant space, or as an indication that the Metapontines were aware that a \times with the value of *chi* existed as well as the $\times = \xi$.⁵⁷

On one side of the rim twelve letters appear, running from *alpha* to *lambda*; on the other side are painted the remaining thirteen letters of this alphabet, with the pot’s handles separating the two alphabetic segments. That the dipinto preserves an expression of an archaic concept of the alphabet existing in two halves is in this instance unclear: one might suspect that the painter’s decision to divide the alphabet in the way that he does was simply dictated by the (approximately) symmetrical geometry of the available space, interrupted by the two opposing handles. On the other hand, the “repetition” of the final symbol (i.e., “red” *xi*) could be viewed as an indicator of the scribe’s unwillingness to divide the alphabet at some place other than between *lambda* and *mu* and thus as a reflection of a particular (local) form of the two-alphabets doctrine: had he made the division between *kappa* and *lambda*, as, *mutatis mutandis*, seen at Pompeii and in the abecedarium from Qumran, and as perhaps suggested by letter pairings on the ‘Izbet Şarṭah ostrakon, the result would have been a symmetrical arrangement of twelve letters on one side and twelve on the other without having to fill the latter space with a repeated “red” *xi*.

More interesting is a second Greek example that Coogan mentions – a double abecedarium painted on a cup from Boiotia, of uncertain provenance, dated to the second half of the fifth century BC.⁵⁸ The abecedaria again run around the rim of the pot, and the field in which they are painted is again bisected by opposing handles. In this case, however, a complete abecedarium appears on each side of the cup, divided into two horizontal rows showing an *albam*-sort of arrangement. On one side, the abecedarium consists of twenty-three letters, *alpha* through *upsilon* – without *san* or *qoppa* – plus “red” *xi* (with a *xi*-grapheme not occurring in its internal, that is Phoenician, position), *phi*, and *chi*; division is made after *lambda*, the twelfth letter, hence producing an initial line of twelve characters and an ensuing line of eleven. On the other side, the abecedarium consists of twenty-five characters: the sequence of letters is the same but with two additional characters appended, which Jeffery describes as “an attempt at the Ionic forms Ψ [psi] and Ω [omega] ... at the end of the *stoichos*.”⁵⁹ In this case, the division occurs after *mu*, the thirteenth letter, giving thirteen characters in line one and twelve in line two. The point of division thus in one case matches that of the dipinto from Metapontion (between *lambda* and *mu*); in the case of the other, however, the case of the abecedarium with extra supplementals, division is forwarded to the next possible position – between *mu* and *nu*. In so doing, the scribe has given the two abecedaria a parallel form in that the first line in each instance contains one more letter than the second. Again, it is unclear if an archaic concept of two alphabets, rather than considerations of decorative symmetry, may be principally responsible for the divisions observed.

Most important and crucial of Coogan’s examples – and much the earliest – for the archaic notion of “two alphabets,” I believe, is the Etruscan abecedarium on the brown impasto goblet from Narce, dated circa the second quarter of the seventh century BC, preserving the Euboian alphabet, which has been mentioned several times previously.⁶⁰ It is a partial abecedarium extending from *alpha* to *kappa* and attests the *xi*-symbol 𐌞 in the alphabetic position of *eta*, exactly as found in abecedaria of the copper plaques. The partial abecedarium is situated neatly on the face of the goblet, and it is clear that its half length is not the consequence of damage to the piece.

The practice of plaiting the two alphabetic strands in *atbash* fashion as attested at Pompeii and by Jerome and, likely, by Quintilian may also be bound up with the etymological origin of the Latin word for ‘letters,’ *elementa*. This is a central point in Coogan’s insightful article. Arguments have long been offered in favor of deriving the term from the first three letters of the second

half of the Latin alphabet – *l*, *m*, and *n*: “A great deal of ingenuity has been expended in the effort to find a derivation for *elementum*. It seems to me, however, that the old one from *el em en*, which has been rejected as too simple and natural for science, is really the only one which ought to be thought of,” wrote J. B. Greenough in the last decade of the nineteenth century.⁶¹ He continues: “In the first place, throughout Latin literature, from first to last the word means *A B C*’s, literally.” Greenough argues chiefly from the earliest attestation of the word, in Lucretius 1.196 (and in ensuing lines), and Cicero’s usage of the term in *Academica* 1.7.26, where he indicates that *elementa* is a translation from Greek (*ut e Graeco vertam*), and he undoubtedly has in mind στοιχεῖα ‘letters; components.’⁶² Greenough concludes:

Inasmuch, then, as *elementa* is distinctly a translation of στοιχεῖα, it seems almost certain that it had the meaning of *A B C*’s, and not any other more abstruse meaning. As to the form, it must, it seems to me, be for *el-em-ena*, a plural like *A B C*’s. As the tendency in the language increased to substitute the longer forms in *-mentum* for those in *-men* (as in *momen*, *momentum*), this word also went with the rest, and became *elementa* in the same meaning.⁶³

And Coogan’s modest conclusion on this point is that “in view of the conservative nature of alphabets the examples may reflect a Semitic pedagogical practice continued in the West which resulted in the second half of the alphabet being called *elementum*. The entire alphabet then could be called the *elementa*.”⁶⁴

7.8 GREEK ALPHABETIC INTERWEAVING AND THE COPPER PLAQUES

The alphabetic traditions evidenced in the copper plaques show unmistakable traces of also being subject to this particular form of interweaving, or plaiting, if the *atbash* sequence itself finds no full expression in the plaque abecedaria.

7.8.1 A GEOMETRIC SUBSET WITHIN THE INTERWOVEN ALPHABET

Like the Hebrew script, the alphabets of the copper plaques consist of twenty-two characters, matching the Hebrew system letter for letter – both being of Phoenician origin. A sketch of how a similar weaving of the twenty-two-letter copper-plaque alphabet would look is shown in (11) and (12):

practice was most likely taken over as a part of the process of the Greek adaptation of the Phoenician consonantal script, perhaps used for pedagogical purposes (or as a cipher?) from the outset of the Greek alphabet's creation.

Let us further consider the plaited (i.e., *atbash*) subset { \bigcirc \boxminus \boxplus \oplus }. These four symbols are actually related by two sets of binary oppositions. These oppositions can be identified using the features [\pm *round*] and [\pm *crossed*]. In the case of [\pm *round*], the + value denotes a rounded periphery and the – value a rectangular periphery. In the case of [\pm *crossed*], the + value denotes the presence of crossing strokes dividing the interior of the symbol into quadrants or quarter circles that are absent from the graphemes valued as –; the internal geometry would be the same were the free variant \otimes given preference in the analysis. On the basis of these binary oppositions, the four graphemes are characterized as follows:

(18)

<i>omicron</i>	<i>eta</i>	<i>xi</i>	<i>theta</i>
\bigcirc	\boxminus	\boxplus	\oplus
+ round	– round	– round	+ round
– crossed	– crossed	+ crossed	+ crossed

Jakobson reminded us earlier of Honoré de Balzac's dictum: "Tout est bilatéral dans le domaine de la pensée. Les idées sont binaires." The accidental co-occurrence of four such graphemes in interwoven sequence must certainly have provided an ineluctable cognitive invitation to automatic binary analysis; and the responsive scribal playfulness preserved in the copper-plaque abecedaria thus took the form of modifying the value of the *extra stroke* feature while keeping the *round* feature constant – giving *theta* the morphology of *omicron* and *omicron* that of *theta*, *eta* the morphology of *xi* and *xi* that of *eta*.

There is more to this matter, however. The binary opposition displayed in the interwoven subset { \bigcirc \boxminus \boxplus \oplus } is itself an innovation, whether the consequence of intentionality or of a cognitive predilection for local sameness. As we saw in Chapter 2, the archaic *xi*-symbol \boxplus represents a modification of its Phoenician precursor *samek* (𐤓) and is of limited, though interesting, distribution. Before the emergence of this symbol (\boxplus), the interwoven subset would have been of the form { \bigcirc \boxminus \boxplus \oplus }. It seems clear that the inherited *xi*-symbol \boxplus was assimilated to the peripheral shape of its *atbash* neighbor *eta* (\boxminus) and thereby acquired a symbol-internal quadrantal geometry like that of its *atbash* neighbor *theta* (\oplus) – both assimilations being accomplished by the addition of vertical lateral strokes, producing \boxplus : in this way the two rectilinear

symbols were brought into structural parallelism with the two curvilinear symbols that they abut; and, hence, the binary opposition of [\pm round] and [\pm crossed] was realized.

We also observed in Chapter 2 that the symbol \square occurs in the local alphabet of Naxos with the value /k + s/. The advent of this *xi*-symbol, I would argue, must – like the origin of the *xi*-symbol \boxplus – lie in an *atbash* plaiting of the alphabet, but one with an ultimately different expression of assimilation. Beginning with the subset $\{O \boxminus \boxplus \oplus\}$, the most likely – most natural – initial step would be the assimilatory shift to the subset $\{O \boxminus \boxplus \oplus\}$, producing the binary opposition of [\pm round] and [\pm crossed]. An additional assimilatory change must have been driven by the *asymmetry* of the graphic relationship that obtains between the two [$+$ round] members of the subset vis-à-vis that which holds between the two [$-$ round] members: *omicron* and *theta* ($\{O \oplus\}$) are distinguished by the presence or absence of an internal division – the former symbol produced with no internal linear strokes, the latter with a crossed internal linear strokes; *eta* and *xi* ($\{\boxminus \boxplus\}$), in contrast, both show internal division, but distinguished by the presence or absence of vertical bifurcation: the former symbol is produced with a single horizontal internal linear stroke, the latter with crossed internal linear strokes. Assimilation of the latter graphic opposition (that of $\{\boxminus \boxplus\}$) to the former graphic opposition (that of $\{O \oplus\}$) produces a further change in the form of *xi*, giving the symbol \square , which like *omicron* (O) lacks any internal bifurcation. The resulting subset, $\{O \boxminus \square \oplus\}$, is thus one in which the four members {A B C D} stand in an analogical relationship A : D :: C : B; stated differently, *xi* is in this process graphically assimilated to a symbol (*omicron*) with which it is contiguous in the periodic order of the alphabet, whereas in the former process *xi* is assimilated to a symbol (*theta*) with which it is contiguous in the plaited *atbash* order. This relationship imposes a binary opposition on the subset involving the feature [\pm round], as with the earlier subset; but in this instance the second feature is one that entails simple graphic internal division of the symbol – its presence or absence: we could call the feature [\pm divided]. On the basis of these binary oppositions, the four graphemes constituting the interwoven *atbash* subset $\{O \boxminus \square \oplus\}$ are thus characterized in this way:

(19)

<i>omicron</i>	<i>eta</i>	<i>xi</i>	<i>theta</i>
O	\boxminus	\square	\oplus
+ round	- round	- round	+ round
- divided	+ divided	- divided	+ divided

The two assimilated subsets, $\{\text{O} \boxplus \boxplus \oplus\}$ and $\{\text{O} \boxplus \square \oplus\}$, thus have slightly different feature matrices, $\{[+ -] [- -] [- +] [+ +]\}$ and $\{[+ -] [- +] [- -] [+ +]\}$, respectively. The graphic “simplification” of \boxplus to \square effectively reverses the feature matrices of the two middle (i.e., rectangular) members of the subset, creating two mirror-image contrastive sub-subsets $\{[+ -] [- +]\}$ and $\{[- -] [+ +]\}$, and thus *internalizing a binary opposition* within the subset relationship. This outcome very likely provides additional support for the interpretation of \square as a further graphic modification of \boxplus , whether or not it suggests intentionality, or an autonomic cognitive process.

The same sort of scribal weaving play that gave rise to the interchange of the two square symbols, *eta* (\boxplus) and *xi* (\boxplus), and of the two round symbols, *theta* (\oplus) and *omicron* (O), in copper-plaque abecedaria, and in various local alphabets as described in Chapter 2, must also be at work in the case of the further modified *xi*-symbol \square . Its position in the subset $\{\text{O} \boxplus \square \oplus\}$ of the plaited (i.e., *atbash*) abecedarium, situated adjacent to the structurally similar *eta*-symbol \boxplus , led to the use of \square itself as an *eta*-symbol, representing a long mid-vowel \bar{e} or the glottal fricative /h/ in alphabets of Aegean Naxos, Knidos, Kyme, and Sicilian Naxos.

7.8.2 THE NU-IOTA-MU SUBSET WITHIN THE WOVEN ALPHABET

The interweaving of the alphabet in *atbash* fashion, I would argue, also underlies at least three other phenomena that we have encountered in the preceding discussions – one that is attested within the abecedaria of the copper plaques, and two that are not. In Chapter 2, I drew attention to what I characterized as “an odd state of affairs”: some of the instances of *Iota-2* in the copper-plaque abecedaria are morphologically very close to forms of archaic Greek *nu*, as used, for example, on the Dipylon oinochoe or the Mantiklos statuette, and so provide close matches to the corresponding forms of Phoenician *nun*. Even more curious is that some instances of *Iota-1* are similar to somewhat different forms of Phoenician *nun*, such as the *nun* of the eighth-century Cypriot jug of *'ntš* and of the late-ninth century Kilamuwa inscription from Zenjirli. This state of affairs is made all the more odd by the fact that forms of *iota* in the copper-plaque abecedaria are distinctly different from the forms of *nu* that occur on the plaques. In that earlier discussion, I suggested that CP *Iota-3* may continue the form of earliest Greek *iota*, a bivalent symbol created to

spell both phonemic /i/ and nonphonemic [y] and arbitrarily assigned a morphology distinct from that of its Phoenician protoform *yod* – and in this way the character would provide a functional and structural parallel to the case of *digamma*. I went on to speculate that *Iota-1* and *Iota-2* perhaps evolved as the alphabet continued to take shape in a milieu of Greek-Phoenician interaction. There was a seeming fly in the ointment of this scenario, however: the evolving morphology of *Iota-1/2* bears only the grossest of similarity to Phoenician *yod* (spelling /y/) and is remarkably closer, as we have just reminded ourselves, to forms of Phoenician *nun* (spelling /n/). Is there any sense to be made of this?

There may in fact be a sensible solution, and this solution lies in the interwoven Greek alphabet of *atbash* form. As can be seen in (20), *iota* is plaited so as to fall between the *mu* and *nu* symbols of the strand that is the second half of the alphabet:

(20) A T B Σ Γ P Δ Ϛ E M F Π Z O □ ⊕ N I M K Λ

The several morphologies of CP *mu* and *nu* parallel one another, as discussed in Chapter 2. The *nu* of the copper plaques is, however, almost unique among forms of Greek *nu* in being produced with four (rather than three) strokes and, in this regard, has no Phoenician counterpart. The *nu*-like morphology of CP *Iota-1/2*, I would suggest, arose by graphic assimilation of the character to its neighboring graphemes in *atbash* sequence – its neighbors, *mu* and *nu*, being, again, morphologically parallel to one another, distinguished by the presence or absence of a fifth stroke. As *iota* assimilatorily encroached upon the graphic form of what must have been originally a three-stroke *nu*, given its Phoenician model and near ubiquity among Greek alphabets, the scribal response was to *dissimilate* that *nu* by the addition of a fourth stroke. This is of course a dissimilatory response within that alphabetic tradition that is preserved in the copper plaques – conceivably elsewhere, but not a general one: four-stroke *nu* appears to be otherwise limited to the Euboian-based Etruscan alphabet seen on the bucchero bottle from Caere (and not morphologically identical to CP *nu*). But, in contrast, the morphological melding of the earliest Greek *iota* to the two nasal threads with which it is interwoven in *atbash* sequence (*mu* and *nu*) is a broad one if I am right in seeing CP *Iota-1/2* as part of the well-attested crooked *iota* (as discussed in Chapter 2).

Scribal play is certainly at work in this process. Such playfulness reveals itself in the set of assimilatory and dissimilatory graphic changes occasioned by the interweaving of alphabetic strands. But beyond this, the formal similarity of at least some instances of *Iota-1* to particular forms of Phoenician *nun*

from Cyprus and Zenjirli, distinct from the typical Greek *nu* (that symbol that has been characterized as having “no marked local variations”),⁶⁵ suggests scribes were reaching outside of the Greek alphabet for a nasal graphemic model for their remade *iota*.

7.9 GREEK ALPHABETIC INTERWEAVING BEYOND THE COPPER PLAQUES

The second of these aforementioned phenomena that I would hold to be products of the *atbash* plaiting of the alphabet, is, as noted earlier, not one attested within the abecedaria of the copper plaques. It is one, however, that we have encountered in our examination of these letters.

7.9.1 DOTTED OMICRON

In the discussion of *theta* and *omicron* homography in Chapter 2, I drew attention to dotted *theta* and dotted *omicron* and their co-occurrence in Argive, Kyrenaean, and Theran inscriptions. Dotted *theta* occurs already on the early seventh-century BC Boiotian Mantiklos statuette. “When a cutting-compass has been used, it is possible to explain an early example of dotted *theta* as due only to the mason’s forgetting to add the cross; but obviously this cannot always be the reason. The dotted *theta* was probably first evolved by those writing rapid script with a brush,” writes Jeffery.⁶⁶ Concerning the view that dotted *theta* arose as a reduced version, Guarducci concurs, as does McCarter: “a very early simplification of the crossed-diameter types.”⁶⁷

Dotted *omicron* is a different matter, however. As noted in Chapter 2, Phoenician *ʾayin* is the ancestor of Greek *omicron*, and a dotted *ʾayin* (preserving the pupil of its ancestral, iconographic Canaanite eye-symbol) is found in Phoenician scripts before the tenth century BC, but not later. Thus the early (eighth and seventh century BC) attestation of dotted *omicron* at Thera⁶⁸ and in Etruria⁶⁹ has translated into a point of contention in the scholarly debate over the date of the Greek acquisition of the Phoenician script, creating an inelegance for what would seem to be an otherwise reasonable dating of the Greek adaptation to the ninth or eighth century BC. McCarter summarizes the awkwardness:

The dotted *omicron* is indeed one of the great surprises of the Greek scripts.... it is an unmistakable archaism, reminiscent of the old Canaanite pictorial

representation of an eye. The most numerous Semitic examples are in fact to be found in the period preceding the development of the national scripts, that is, in the twelfth and early eleventh centuries. Our reexamination of the early Phoenician scripts has shown that dotted *ʾayin* survived no later than the very early tenth century.... The gap between the dates of these inscriptions and the year 800 is considerable. It is difficult to suppose that dotted *ʾayin* survived for two centuries more without making a single appearance in surviving inscriptions.⁷⁰

In 1979, subsequent to the penning of these words, this span of silence was somewhat diminished by the discovery in northern Syria of the Tell Fakhariyeh inscription, a bilingual Akkadian-Aramaic document dated to the mid-ninth century BC.⁷¹ “The script of the Aramaic inscription is highly idiosyncratic,” judges Kaufman.⁷² The occurrence of dotted *ʾayin* in the Aramaic inscription places that symbol within striking distance of the time of origin of the Greek alphabet. The responses of those, such as Naveh and Bernal, advocating a second-millennium BC Greek acquisition of the Phoenician script, have countered by proposing that the Tell Fakhariyeh script is an archaizing one.⁷³ Even if that were the case, it would not obviate the fact that there was a living awareness of dotted *ʾayin* in the ninth century BC – though in an Aramaic context. Those who would place the acquisition in the second millennium BC would presumably respond by stating that although an awareness of the symbol existed in the ninth century, the distribution and frequency of occurrence of dotted *ʾayin* was certainly limited, given the uniqueness of this ninth-century attestation, and so less likely to have provided a model for Greek adapters in the ninth or eighth century. The retort would then likely be that there is a general dearth of Phoenician inscriptions from this period – we possess what must be only a tiny fraction of the inscripational output – and any single example of Phoenician or Phoenician-derived writing must then weigh heavily. And so on.

This debate may well be misplaced. The occurrence of dotted *omicron* in archaic Greek spelling quite likely has nothing to do with Phoenician or Canaanite dotted *ʾayin*. Given what we have seen in the foregoing discussion of the plaiting of the alphabet in *atbash* fashion, the crafting of an *omicron* with a dotted center is likely the product of scribal weaving play. Just as the *xi*-symbols \boxplus and \boxminus were shaped as a consequence of alphabetic interweaving and came ultimately to be used for *eta*-symbols in some local alphabetic systems, undoubtedly via playful substitution of the sort evidenced in the

copper plaques, so dotted *omicron* was shaped and entered the spelling system of certain epichoric alphabets. An interwoven archaic alphabet in which the *theta* symbol is dotted rather than crossed, as already in that evidenced on the Boiotian Mantiklos statue, perhaps dating as early as late eighth century, would have the following idealized form:

(21) A T B Σ Γ P Δ Ϙ E M F Π Z O ⊞ ⊚ N I M K Λ

The crucial interwoven subset {*omicron eta xi theta*} is now of the form {O ⊞ ⊚ ⊙}. Scribal manipulation of the lateral [+ round] members would, as one permutation of the play options, result in the utilization of a single [+ round] form for both *theta* and *omicron*. A fixed expression of this play is to be seen preserved in the mid-fifth-century Argive inscription recording a treaty between Knossos and Tyliisos, discussed in Chapter 2, in which dotted *theta* and dotted *omicron* routinely co-occur. The same co-occurrence of ⊙ with the value of both the *theta*-consonant and the *omicron*-vowel is evidenced, though less regularly, in the Cretan version of the treaty, as we saw, as well as in the archaic Thera script and in the alphabetic tradition of the Thera colony at Kyrene. This co-occurrence is paralleled, as noted in Chapter 2, by the use of the *theta*-symbol ⊕ to spell both *theta* and *omicron* (i.e., a “crossed *omicron*” paralleling dotted *omicron*) in the archaic rock graffiti from Thera, as well as in the early fifth-century inscription from the Argive Heraion in which *ιαρομνάμονες* (*iaromnamones*) is spelled as IAPOMNAMΘNEΣ. Recall that this inscription appears to be the work of that same engraver who produced the Tanagra inscription from Argos that attests the use – paralleling the practice of the copper plaques – of both ⊞ and ⊚ for *eta* (spelling /h/).

In sum, Greek dotted *omicron* is almost certainly the product of scribal interweaving. Its origins lie in those same scribal phenomena that produce other attested *theta* / *omicron* and *eta* / *xi* interchanges. The presence in the Greek alphabet of a dotted *omicron* very likely provides no evidence to support a second-millennium BC Greek acquisition of Semitic script.⁷⁴

7.9.2 SQUARE THETA AND OMICRON

The third phenomenon involves the square *theta* (⊞) and square *omicron* (⊚) symbols that were examined in Chapter 2. The discussion there focused on the occurrence of these symbols in the inscription found on the rim of a bronze lebes (ca. 600–550 BC) from Delphi and on their appearance in the recently discovered Barako abecedarium from Attica (ca. 550 BC); still other

examples were cited, including that of a seventh-century graffito from Mount Hymettos and a sixth-century Corinthian bronze helmet.

As I remarked in Chapter 2, square *theta* and square *omicron* are additional participants in a playful scribal homography. More generic interpretations of geometric reconfiguring (i.e., of the squaring of curvilinear characters under the influence of their rectilinear neighbors) could be formulated, given the interwoven *atbash* sequence of round and square characters that is crucially involved (*omicron*, *eta*, *xi*, *theta*), but let us again begin with the archaic subset {O ◻ ◻ ⊕} that we have already seen to be at work. The archaic symbol ◻ is pressed into service for representing not only *xi* but each of its *atbash* neighbors, *eta* (◻) on its left – as we already saw – and *theta* (⊕) on its right: with the former, the *xi*-symbol shares its peripheral geometry ([– round]); with the latter, the *xi*-symbol shares its internal geometry ([+ crossed]). The use of the symbol ◻ as a “square *theta*,” attested as early as the seventh century BC, is a conventionalized synchronic expression of alphabetic play anchored in diachrony – a synchronic instantiation of scribal play unfolding through the diachronic dimension.

The same state of affairs holds fundamentally for “square *omicron*.” If I am right in seeing the symbol ◻ as primarily a *xi*-symbol (i.e., occupying the *xi*-position in the archaic subset {O ◻ ◻ ⊕}), its conscription for use as an expression of *omicron* differs structurally, however, from that of the metaphoric application of the *xi*-grapheme ◻, which substitutes for its two *contiguous* neighbors – *eta* and *theta* – in *atbash* sequence, as described in the preceding paragraph. In the instance of ◻, the symbol is pressed into use for the curvilinear and the rectilinear characters that *precede* it in *atbash* sequence – that is, *omicron* and *eta*.

One might, however, imagine a stepwise process in which ◻ was reinterpreted synchronically as fundamentally an *eta*-symbol and its use as a *xi*-symbol was then correspondingly viewed as secondary: the extension of ◻ to *omicron* as well (as to *xi*) would then structurally recapitulate the use of ◻ for *eta* and *theta*. It is this parallel metaphoric relationship that arises from the interwoven alphabet that I anticipated when in Chapter 2 I wrote that “the *xi*-grapheme ◻ – a second-half-of-the-alphabet symbol – can serve not only in the *eta*-position, but in the *theta*-position as well – two *contiguous* letter-positions in the first half of the alphabet. Conversely ... the *eta*-grapheme ◻ – a first-half-of-the-alphabet symbol – can serve not only in the *xi*-position but in the *omicron*-position as well – two *contiguous* letter-positions in the second half of the alphabet.”

7.10 AT THE JUNCTURE OF THE ALPHABETIC SUBSTRINGS

It was noted in preceding sections that the broadly attested process of alphabetic interweaving subsumes a notion of internal alphabetic division and that Coogan cites evidence for such periodic subcategorization from Ugarit, Qumran, Boiotia, and Magna Graeca: the evidence suggests that there is one alphabetic substring that begins, of course, at the beginning, that is, with the A-symbol, and that there is a second that typically begins with the L-symbol. Coogan also suggests, as others had before him, that Latin *elementum* finds its etymological origin in the first three letters of the second of the periodic series within the alphabet: *l*, *m*, and *n*.

In Chapter 2, I called attention to the fact that within the abecedaria of the copper plaques, it is *kappa* – which can be viewed as the *last* letter in the *first* alphabetic periodic series – that is the most frequently omitted letter, left out of eleven of the abecedaria, and that no other letter comes close to this frequency of omission except for the ensuing letter, *lambda* – the *first* letter in the *last* (i.e., second) alphabetic periodic series – which is omitted ten times. Coogan's observation of the Qumran abecedarium that omits the sequential letters *yod* (י) and *kap* (כ) compares interestingly, as do the abecedaria from Metapontion and Boiotia that he mentions. As pointed out, the latter might, one could speculate, preserve variant local traditions in which the first periodic series terminated with *lambda* rather than *kappa*.

I also noted that various other anomalies in the copper-plaque abecedaria center around what we could now identify as the *kappa-lambda* juncture, the meeting point of the two periodic substrings. Specifically, the sequence *kappa-lambda* is absent five times (on MS 2), while *kappa* and *lambda* are inverted once (MS 1-1), and *lambda* and *mu* are inverted once in conjunction with an omission of *kappa* (also MS 1-2). Two of the five omissions of the *kappa-lambda* sequence occur within a larger anomaly: the omission of the string *kappa-lambda-mu-nu* (both on MS 2-1); and the sequence *kappa-lambda-mu* is also omitted once (on MS 2-1 as well).⁷⁵

These conspicuous omissions at and around the *kappa-lambda* juncture by the scribes of the copper plaques must be of some significance, perhaps a particular synchronic instantiation of a diachronically perpetuated alphabetic phenomenon that likewise shows itself in the student exercise from Qumran, in which case there is an absence of *yod* and *kap* despite the fact that there is ample writing space for containing the characters. Coogan imagines that

the omission is here the consequence of a memory lapse on the part of the writer, and perhaps such a processing error is indeed the consequence of the nonexpression of the two symbols with which the initial alphabetic substring terminates. But there must be something about the juncture of the two substrings of the alphabet – the turning point of the *abecedarium* and the *elementum* – that makes it conspicuous (processually or otherwise) – that makes it conspicuously available for scribal playfulness.

7.11 THE WOVEN ALPHABETIC TEXT

The alphabetic crafting of the scribes of the copper plaques reveals a metaphoric interpretation of producing alphabetic *text* – the *textus* ‘woven fabric; the product of joining words’. One of these scribes invokes his engraving tool (μηλή [mêlê]) to weave (λυζη [luzdê]) the alphabet (αβγδ [i.e., *abcd*]). The weaving of the alphabet through the production of the abecedaria of the copper plaques manifests itself in two different ways. Most conspicuously, the repeating lines of alphabetic text constitute the warp and weft of a highly variegated graphemic fabric: the weft, the horizontal weaving dimension – cognitively, the syntagmatic axis – of this multidimensional process of alphabetic fabrication, presents itself as the continuous sequencing of letters in their periodic order, running repeatedly side to side across the loom of the plaques; the warp, the vertical dimension – cognitively, the associative or the paradigmatic axis – presents itself as the ongoing substitution of allographic variations at the individual letter positions of the repeating abecedaria. But there is also represented in the fabric of the copper plaques the depth dimension of the weaving process – that of the passing in and out of threads as they are plaited over and under one another. This depth dimension of the fabrication of the alphabetic text is provided metaphorically by the *atbash* practice of interweaving the two halves of the alphabet that is *implicitly* assumed by the scribes as is revealed by their *explicit* playful substitution for one another of members of the geometrically salient *atbash* subset {*omicron, eta, xi, theta*} and by the assimilatory and dissimilatory relationships exhibited by the members of the {*nu, iota, mu*} subset, as well as by the omission of one or more characters at the turning point.

This last-named scribal process of a Greek plaiting of the dual alphabetic strands – a first half and a second half – almost surely had its origin in Semitic tradition and so would likely have been acquired by the Greek adapters of the Phoenician script as an accompanying graphemic accoutrement. Beyond this,

the Semitic practice may have served as a metaphorical catalyst, but *atbash* intertwining is only one dimension of the multidimensional process of alphabetic weaving – which leads one to ask: “Whence came the broader notion of weaving an alphabetic warp and weft?”

The metaphoric notion of the warp and weft of language was certainly a fundamental one in archaic Greece, both before and after the acquisition of alphabetic literacy. Verbal weaving is undeniably known to Homer, regardless of what sense one makes of the absence of an explicit self-reference to *poetic* weaving in the form of the Homeric epics in which we have them. The notion of poetic weaving is well attested in lyric, equally as old as epic, and preceded by a more ancient, broadly attested, ancestral Indo-European tradition of the weaving of poetic words.

This interweaving of alphabetic warp and weft is a metaphorical extension of that *weaving of poetic speech* which is *oral poetic composition and performance*. It is an appropriation of the Homeric metaphor of weaving “as a description of an intellectual process”⁷⁶ – to co-opt Snyder’s words rehearsed at the beginning of this chapter. But also, it is a *cognitive* extension of the structure of language itself. Language has both a horizontal and a vertical dimension. Its horizontal dimension is what, as we have examined in some detail, Saussure called its syntagmatic structure: in production, language unfolds according to a permissible linear sequencing of linguistic elements. The vertical dimension of language, in Saussurian terms, is its associative, or paradigmatic, structure: in production, variety of linguistic expression arises as linguistic elements are able to substitute for like linguistic elements – the phoneme /b/ substitutes for /t/ creating a distinction between *bar* and *tar*; *dog* substitutes for *cat*; *runs* substitutes for *jumps*; and so on.

7.12 THE PERFORMANCE OF THE ALPHABET

The notion of the weaving of the alphabet must have arisen as Greek speakers inevitably and almost immediately equated their *language* with their newly introduced alphabetic *writing system*, following the dictates of the human cognitive condition, as we have examined. The weaving of language was a phenomenon of composition in performance – the production of poetic speech. The weaving of the alphabet was a reflected image of the phenomenon of orality, of composition in performance – the production of written “speech” – even written *poetic* “speech.”

We have caught glimpses of the weaving of the alphabet and of the metaphorically associated phenomenon of writing as performance throughout this study, if they have passed mostly without remark. The graffiti from Mount Hymettos, ranging from circa 700 to early sixth century BC, offer a principal example of alphabetic performance. As noted in Chapter 2, a number of the inscribed sherds bear dedications to Zeus, or indicate that they belong to Zeus⁷⁷ – the Zeus of Mount Hymettos, who is distinguished by the epithet *Semios*, derived from σῆμα (*sêma*) ‘sign’; several of the offered vases bear abecedaria;⁷⁸ others are etched with a self-referential claim to the act of inscribing.⁷⁹ In their present state, sherds of the latter group attest, in the simplest case, only the single verb εγραψε (*egrapse*) ‘(s)he wrote’ or εγραψα (*egrapsa*) ‘I wrote’. Langdon’s inscription 29 is restored from three fragments to read [το Δι]ος εimi. [- - -]ας δε μ’ εγραφ[σε]ν ([*to Di*]os *eimi*. [- - -]as *de m’ egrap[se]n*) ‘I belong to Zeus. X wrote me.’⁸⁰ Another reads *hoσπερ εγραψεν* (*hosper egrapsen*) ‘as he wrote’,⁸¹ and yet another -αι ταδ’ αυτος εγ<ρ>αφ[σε - -] (*-ai tad’ autos eg<r>ap[se - -]*) ‘X wrote this himself’.⁸² Langdon surmises: “Writing must have been still so new that its accomplishment was being stressed.” He emphasizes the aspect of novelty with regard to the inscribing of abecedaria as well: “Another manner in which a votary could display his knowledge of writing was by scratching the alphabet.... But only at a time when writing itself was new would abecedaria have been considered appropriate dedications for a deity.”⁸³

In the absence of comparable practice in later periods, and at other locales, there would clearly be some sense in which the relevant nascent moment in the history of the Attic alphabet is tied to the alphabet’s cult use on Mount Hymettos.⁸⁴ But – simply because the alphabet is a *new thing*, does that make it a compelling offering for the deity? It is not the novelty of the alphabet in and of itself that makes it suitable for presentation to Zeus Semios.

Langdon notes that some of the inscriptions from Hymettos were produced after the pots on which they were etched had already been broken, calling particular attention to the second inscription in his catalog (H 232), scratched on an unglazed interior surface that would have been inaccessible while the pot was intact: Σημιοι Δι (*Sêmioi Di*), ‘to Zeus Semios’. “Now a single, broken potsherd would seem to be a quite unlikely gift to dedicate to a deity”: an apt observation. Thus Langdon surmises (emphases in italics are my own):

The worshipper would believe that a specimen of this new skill which allowed him to express in *visible* and permanent *form* that which not so long before he

could only *think* or *say verbally* was a most worthy gift. In the case of [inscription] 2 the fact that the dedication happened to be on a mere sherd mattered little: it was the writing itself that was the gift.⁸⁵

Langdon must certainly be correct. What is crucially important here is that writing is deemed to be the performance of a sacred act; as Henrichs observes, “there can be no doubt that in the shrine of Zeus on Mt. Hymettos the idiosyncratic emphasis on autography as a performance and the worship of the gods through gift giving were closely connected.”⁸⁶ What is “novel” about the seventh-century offerings of Mount Hymettos is not the alphabet per se, but that the act of producing alphabetic symbols is viewed to be a performance.

7.13 ZEUS OF THE SIGN

The Zeus to whom alphabetic performance is offered is *Zeus Semios*. The epithet Σημιος (*Sêmios*) is clearly derived from the noun σῆμα (*sêma*) ‘sign’. The nuances of adjectival derivatives in -ιος (-*io-*) are manifold,⁸⁷ so that, on the basis of linguistic considerations alone, little can be said of the semantics of Σημιος (*Sêmios*) other than that we are here dealing with Zeus ‘of the sign’. The noun that supplies the epithet is the term used on the sole occasion on which Homer makes reference to written symbols, the story of Bellerophon and the fatal letter that he delivered to the king of Lycia, inscribed within a πίναξ (*pinaks*), from the Argive king Proetus (*Il.* VI 168–169):

Πέμπε δέ μιν Λυκίηνδε, πόρεν δ’ ὄ γε σήματα λυγρά,
γράφας ἐν πίνακι πτυκτῶ θυμοφθόρα πολλά, ...

*Pempe de min Lukiênde, poren d’ ho ge sêmata lugra,
grapsas en pinaki ptuktô(i) thumophthora polla, ...*

He sent him to Lycia, and gave him baneful **signs**,
Written in a folding tablet – many and life-destroying, ...

Beyond σήματα, much of the vocabulary here is familiar to the reader: The verb that describes Proetus’s production of the σήματα (*sêmata*) is γράφω (*graphô*) ‘writes, etches’: the same verb used by worshipers of Zeus Semios on Mount Hymettos in announcing their personal production of an alphabetic offering; the same verb used by Euripides’ “In-Law” in Aristophanes’ *Women at the Thesmophoria* as he uses his σμίλη (*smilê*) ‘stylus’ to carve symbols into πίνακων ξεστῶν δέλτοι (*pinakôn ksestôn deltoi*) ‘tablets of smooth-polished

plaques.’ The noun there used for ‘plaque’ πίναξ (*pinaks*) is here employed by Homer for the ‘tablet’ – πίναξ πτυκτός (*pinaks ptuktos*) ‘folding tablet’⁸⁸ – in which Proetus’s signs are inscribed and concealed.

Langdon construes the sense of Zeus’s Hymettos epithet *Semios*, ‘of the sign’, as a reference to the god’s weather σήματα (*sēmata*).⁸⁹ For evidence he points, for example, to Mount Parnes in the north of Attica where there stood, as reported by Pausanias (1.32.2), both an altar of Zeus Σημαλέος (*Sēmaleos*) and an altar on which sacrifices were made to Zeus Ὀμβριος (*Ombrios*), that is, Zeus ‘of the rains’; Zeus Ombrios likewise had an altar on Mount Hymettos, notes Pausanias. Regarding the site called Harma on Mount Parnes, Langdon notes that “augurs looked to this place from Athens for the flash of lightning which was the sign for sending an offering to Delphi. Also, weather signs were read from clouds there.”⁹⁰ Concerning Mount Hymettos, he writes: “Throughout most of antiquity, and even in modern times, Hymettos was regarded as a natural weather indicator, especially for approaching rain.”⁹¹

AN EXCURSES ON ΣΗΜΑ (SĒMA), ΣΗΜΑΛΕΟΣ (SĒMALEOS), AND ΣΗΜΑΝΤΩΡ (SĒMANTŌR)

As intimated in the previous paragraph, Zeus’s epithet Σημαλέος (*Sēmaleos*) is, paralleling *Semios*, derived from σῆμα (*sēma*) ‘sign’. In this instance, the derivational formant is -αλέος (-aleos), a “peculiarly Greek conglutinate,” write Buck and Petersen: regarding the origin of the morphology, “it can only be said that it must have arisen in prehistoric times by the addition of -εο- [-eo-] to -αλο- [-alo-], but everything else is obscure.”⁹² The formant is well attested in Homer:⁹³

- (22) ἀργαλέος (*argaleos*) ‘painful, troublesome’; compare ἄλγος (*algos*) ‘pain, sufferings’
 ἀρπαλέος (*harpaleos*) ‘alluring’, and in adverbial form ἀρπαλέως (*harpaleôs*) ‘greedily’; compare ἀρπάζω (*harpazô*) ‘to snatch away’
 αὖσταλέος (*austaleos*) ‘dried up’; compare αὖω (*auô*) ‘to kindle a fire’
 θαρσαλέος (*tharsaleos*) ‘daring’; compare θάρσος (*tharsos*) ‘boldness’
 ἰσχαλέος (*iskhaleos*) ‘dried’; compare later attested ἰσχνός (*iskhnos*) ‘dry’
 καρφαλέος (*karpaleos*) ‘dried’; compare κάρφω (*karpô*) ‘to make dry and wrinkled’

- καρχαλέος (*karkhaleos*) ‘parched’ (of a dryness from thirst)
- κερδαλέος (*kerdaleos*) ‘cunning’; compare κέρδος (*kerdos*) ‘gain, advantage’; ‘cunning arts’
- λεπταλέος (*leptaleos*) ‘delicate’ (of the voice [φωνή (*phônê*)] of a young male singer); compare λεπτός (*leptos*) ‘having the husk removed; fine, delicate’ and λέπω (*lepô*) ‘to peel off’
- λευγαλέος (*leugaleos*) ‘experiencing wretchedness; sorry; bringing woe’; compare λυγρός (*lugros*) ‘wretched, sorry; bringing woe’
- μυδαλέος (*mudaleos*) ‘dripping’; compare μύδος (*mudos*) ‘decay’ in Nicander; Sanskrit *mudira*- ‘cloud’; Middle Irish *muad* ‘fog’; Lithuanian *máudyti* ‘to bathe’; English *smut*⁹⁴
- ὀπταλέος (*optaleos*) ‘roasted, broiled’; compare ὀπτός (*optos*) ‘roasted, broiled’; ὀπτᾶω (*optaô*) ‘to roast, to broil’
- ῥωγαλέος (*rhôgaleos*) ‘broken; torn, ragged’; compare ῥώξ (*rhôks*) denoting conduits within the palace of Odysseus;⁹⁵ ῥήγνυμι (*rhêgnumi*) ‘to break, to shatter’
- σμερδαλέος (*smerdaleos*) ‘terrifying to see or hear’; compare Old High German *smerzan*, Old English *smeortan* ‘to hurt’ (Modern English *smart*)

Other early examples of the formant can be found outside of Homeric epic:

- (23) αὐαλέος (*aualeos*) ‘dried, parched’, Hesiod; compare Homeric αὔος (*auos*) ‘dry, dried up’
- γηραλέος (*gêraleos*) ‘aged, old’, Anacreon; compare Homeric γῆρας (*gêras*) ‘old age’
- οἰδαλέος (*oidaleos*) ‘swollen’, Archilochus; compare Hippocratic οἶδος (*oidos*) ‘swelling’
- ταρβαλέος (*tarbaleos*) ‘fearful’, *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*; compare Homeric τάρβος (*tarbos*) ‘fear’

The semantics of the derived adjectives in -αλέος (-*aleos*) are again diverse, though among the archaic forms cited here, many are conspicuous in their lexical association with the notions expressing the outcome of a process of transformation: desiccation and its by-form cooking, dampening typical of putrefaction, aging, swelling, husking, fracturing. Most of the remainder of the set has an affiliation with cognitive and emotive phenomena: intellectual puzzling and the perception and experience of fear, misery, pain, and desire.⁹⁶

The Greek noun σῆμα (*sêma*) ‘sign’, from which the adjectives Σημιος (*Sêmios*) and Σημαλέος (*Sêmaleos*) are derived, is of Indo-European heritage and of common origin with Sanskrit *dhyāti* ‘to think’, *dhyāna-* ‘planning, reflection’, *dhī-h* ‘thought, conception, religious reflection’; Avestan *dā(y)-* ‘to see’, *dāθa-* ‘discerning, intelligent’, *daēman-* ‘eye’. Compare also Albanian *díturë*, *dítme* ‘wisdom, learning’ and Gothic *filu-deisi* ‘cunning’ (translating Greek πανουργία [*panourgia*] at 2 Corinthians 11.3 and Ephesians 4.14).⁹⁷ An exact formal equivalent of the nominal σῆμα (*sêma*) is provided by Sanskrit *dhyāman-* ‘thought’.

In an important examination of Greek σῆμα (*sêma*), Gregory Nagy,⁹⁸ building upon earlier work by Douglas Frame,⁹⁹ has shown that σῆμα (*sêma*) ‘sign’, like its Indo-Iranian (and other) lexical relatives (Sanskrit *dhyāman-* ‘thought’ etc.), is fundamentally bound to the notion of cognitive activity. He does so by examining the semantics of σῆμα (*sêma*) in conjunction with those of νόος (*noos*) ‘mind, sense, perception’ (and the derived verb νοέω ‘to notice’), finding σῆμα (*sêma*) to be “the key to a specific aspect of cognition, namely, *recognition*.”¹⁰⁰ Regarding σῆμα (*sêma*) in Homer, he observes: “In particular, Homeric diction deploys *sêma* as the conventional word for the signs that lead to the recognition of Odysseus by his *phíloi*, those who are ‘near and dear’ to him.... An appropriate word for the ‘recognition’ of this *sêma* is the verb *anagnînskô* [ἀναγιγνώσκω].”¹⁰¹ Ἀναγιγνώσκω (*anagnînskô*) is used in *Odyssey* xxiv 329 of Laertes’ *recognition* of that σῆμα (*sêma*) which is the scar that Odysseus carries from a boar-tusk laceration, and in *Odyssey* xxiii 206 of Penelope’s *recognition* of the σήματα (*sêmata*) ‘signs’ provided by the clothes that she had once given to Odysseus. Inherent in this notion of recognition is *interpretation*, an act often, though certainly not exclusively, linked with the prophetic function of the μάντις (*mantis*) ‘seer’.

In the poetry of Homer and Hesiod, Zeus is commonly linked with the notion of the *sign*, sending σήματα (*sêmata*) to be recognized and interpreted. Nagy points to the portent of a snake in *Iliad* II 308–319, whose swallowing of eight hatchlings and the mother bird is interpreted by the seer Calchas as sign of the coming destruction of Troy; and to Zeus’s frequent sending of lightning as a σῆμα (*sêma*) “– one might say as a *code* bearing distinct *messages* that are to be interpreted in context by both the witnesses and the narrative itself.”¹⁰²

The signs, σήματα (*sêmata*), those sent by Zeus and other signs as well, are seemingly arbitrary, Nagy points out. In order for one to recognize and interpret the signs properly, one must be able to recognize the position of the sign within an “internally coherent system of signals”:¹⁰³ the nexus of bird type and flight pattern provides to the augur one interpretation as opposed

to all others; the position of the Dog Star within an astral array determines the recognition of its meteorological signal (see *Iliad* XX 30–33); the σήματα (*sēmata*) that Proetus inscribed in the πίναξ πτυκτός (*pinaks ptuktos*) ‘folding tablet’ that Bellerophon carried to the king of Lycia can be read (i.e., recognized and interpreted) by the tablet’s recipient as graphic symbols that receive a phonetic value within a system of graphic symbols.

Nagy draws attention to Hesiod, *Works and Days* 267–269 (the translation is Nagy’s):¹⁰⁴

Πάντα ἰδὼν Διὸς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ πάντα νοήσας
καὶ νῦ τὰδ’ αἴ κ’ ἐθέλησ’ ἐπιδέρκεται, οὐδέ ἐ λήθει
οἴην δὴ καὶ τήνδε δίκην πόλις ἐντὸς ἐέργει.

*Panta idôn Dios ophthalmos kai panta noêsas
kai nu tad’ ai k’ ethelê(i)s’ epiderketai, oude he lêthei
hoiên dê kai tênde dikên polis entos eergei.*

The eye of Zeus sees everything and **recognizes** [**verb noeô**] everything.
If it so pleases him, he casts his glance downward upon these things as well,
and it does not escape his mind
what kind of **justice** [*dikê*] is this that the city keeps within it.

The phrase οὐδέ ἐ λήθει (*oude he lêthei*) ‘and it does not escape his mind’ in line 268 is one that occurs in Homeric epic on several occasions in conjunction with σῆμα (*sêma*) ‘sign’ – with regard to the giving and the recognizing of σήματα (*sēmata*) ‘signs’ – as in *Odyssey* xi 126 (the translation is again Nagy’s), spoken by the shade of the seer Teiresias whom Odysseus encounters during his visit to Hades’ realm:

Σῆμα δέ τοι ἐρέω μάλ’ ἀριφραδές, οὐδέ σε λήσει ...

Sêma de toi ereô mal’ ariphrades, oude se lêsei ...

I will tell you a *sêma*, a very distinct one, and it will not escape your mind ...

Of these two epic pericopes, Hesiodic and Homeric, Nagy observes, given other uses of the phrase οὐδέ ἐ λήθει (*oude he lêthei*) ‘and it does not escape his mind’, that “it is to be expected, in the first passage, that the cognition of Zeus is linked with the *sêma*; and, in the second passage, that getting the sign is linked with its recognition (noun *noos* or verb *noeô*).” Zeus sends his σήματα (*sēmata*) ‘signs’ – meteorological and otherwise; the requisite mortal

response is to read the deity's signs: "What humans must do is to *decode* the various signs *encoded* by Zeus."¹⁰⁵

What we find in the offerings to Zeus Semios on Mount Hymettos, I submit, appears to be the very opposite of this normal state of affairs. The respective cognitive roles of mortals and deity are reversed. Σήματα (*sēmata*) 'signs' are presented to Zeus Σημιος (*Sēmios*) 'of the signs', graphic symbols *encoding* either (1) linguistic messages that self-reference the performative act of encoding such signs, or (2) the abecedarium, with its σήματα (*sēmata*) in their periodic order. The σήματα (*sēmata*) belong to a closed system and the *decoding* of these cognitive offerings by Zeus Semios requires on the part of the deity a recognition and interpretation of the significance of each σῆμα (*sēma*) within that system. This is of course the structural dynamic elaborated by Saussure, examined in Chapter 3, and the same dynamic that Zeus utilizes when he encodes messages in the structured systems of bird flight, meteorological phenomena, and so on. If the epithet of Hymettian Zeus, Σημιος (*Sēmios*), antedated the advent of Attic literacy, it undoubtedly reflected this encoding cognitive activity of Zeus, as presumably does that of Zeus Σημαλέος (*Sēmaleos*) of Mount Parnes (with its peculiar morphology associated with notions of cognitive transformations). But with the monumental introduction of the structured system of graphic σήματα (*sēmata*), the γράμματα (*grammata*) 'letters of the alphabet', those signals that comprise Bellerophon's σήματα λυγρά (*sēmata lugra*), Zeus Semios, the encoder of messages, could be naturally enough linked to this symbolic system and become decoding recipient of its offerings.

The verbal notion expressing the cognitive response of Zeus Semios to such scriptic sacrifices is not attested on Mount Hymettos. As noted earlier and discussed by Gregory Nagy, the verb ἀναγιγνώσκω (*anagignōskō*) is appropriated for similar cognitive acts of recognition of σήματα (*sēmata*) depicted in Homeric epic. This archaic verb ἀναγιγνώσκω (*anagignōskō*) is in fact one of the principal verbs to which the once nonliterate Greeks would, upon the acquisition of the alphabet, assign the meaning 'to read'. Its earliest occurrence in this sense is found in Pindar's *Olympian Odes* 10.1–3:

Τὸν Ὀλυμπιονίκαν ἀνάγνωτέ μοι
Ἄρχεστράτου παῖδα, πόθι φρενός
ἐμᾶς γέγραπται·

Ton Olumpionikan anagnōte moi
Arkhestratou paida, pothi phrenos
emas gegraptai.

Read to me the name of the Olympic victor,
the son of Archestratos, where **it has been written**
in my mind.

The presentation of encoded σήματα (*sēmata*) ‘signs’ to Zeus Semios is the offering of a verbal performance. The offering is either the weaving of a linguistic phrase or the weaving of an alphabetic strand – it’s all the same; in either case the material of the weaving – σήματα (*sēmata*) ‘signs’ – is deemed to encode an expression of language (a graphic symbolic expression of orality [or oral performance]). These are σήματα (*sēmata*) that are presented to Zeus Semios for the decoding, just as the epic poetic language of an oral performance must be decoded by its viewers, mortal or immortal – just as the later written poetic performance of the choral poet would have to be decoded – “re-cognized” – by its readers.

Zeus is not only Σημιος (*Sēmios*) and Σημαλέος (*Sēmaleos*); he is also Σημάντωρ (*Sēmantôr*). The nominal σημάντωρ (*sēmantôr*) is deverbative, derived from σημαίνω (*sēmainô*) ‘to show by a sign, to give a sign or signal’ and so, ‘to give orders’; the verb σημαίνω is itself transparently derived from σῆμα (*sēma*) ‘sign’. The morphology of Σημάντωρ (*Sēmantôr*) is that of an agent noun, a word formation of primitive Indo-European origin – hence, literally, ‘one who gives a sign/signal’, or, bearing in mind the cognitive process implicit in σῆμα (*sēma*), ‘one who encodes his thoughts/will in a sign/signal’.¹⁰⁶ Homer uses the term σημάντωρ (*sēmantôr*) to denote those who control and herd animals: at *Iliad* VIII 127, σημάντωρ (*sēmantôr*) designates a chariot driver, at *Iliad* XV 325 a cattle herdsman or shepherd; with the latter, compare the related adjective with negative prefix, ἀσήμαντος (*asēmantos*), used of ‘unshepherded’ flocks at *Iliad* X 485. The epic nominal σημάντωρ (*sēmantôr*) may likewise identify one who exercises authority over – encodes his will in signals to – humans: Homer employs this agent noun for denoting commanders of troops at *Iliad* IV 431 and an agricultural foreman at *Odyssey* xvii 21, as of a household master at *Odyssey* xix 314, that is, persons who give the signal, agents of signaling.

In the epic poem *The Shield of Heracles*, attributed to Hesiod,¹⁰⁷ Zeus is called θεῶν σημάντωρ πάντων (*theôn sēmantôr pantôn*) ‘*sēmantôr* of all the gods’. The reference comes at line 56, within verses identifying the two fathers of Alcmena’s twin sons Heracles and Iphicles: the latter was fathered by a mortal, δορυσσοός (*dorussoos*) ‘spear-brandishing’ Amphitryon; in contrast, Zeus fathered Heracles. In these lines the poet makes parallel, conjoined references

to Zeus as Κρονίων (*Kroniôn*), ‘son of Cronus’: in the first instance the god is denoted as κελαινεφής Κρονίων (*kelainephês Kroniôn*) ‘black-clouded son of Cronus’ (line 53); in the second he is Κρονίων (*Kroniôn*), the ‘*sêmantôr* of all the gods’:

Τὸν μὲν ὑποδμηθεῖσα κελαινεφεῖ Κρονίῳνι,
αὐτὰρ Ἴφικλῆα δορυσσῶ Ἀμφιτρυῶνι
κεκριμένην γενεήν, τὸν μὲν βροτῶ ἄνδρι μιγεῖσα, 55
τὸν δὲ Διὶ Κρονίῳνι, θεῶν σημάντορι πάντων.

*Ton men hupodmêtheisa kelainephei Kroniôni,
autar Iphiklêa dorussoô(i) Amphitruôni;
kekrimenên geneên, ton men brotô(i) andri migeisa, 55
ton de Dii Kroniôni, theôn sêmantori pantôn.*

Him [i.e., Heracles] [she birthed] having been subdued by the
black-clouded son of Cronus,
but Iphicles [she birthed subdued] by spear-brandishing Amphitryon;
offspring who differed – the one from her mingling with mortal man, 55
the other with Zeus **the son of Cronus, *sêmantôr* of all the gods.**

The phrase κελαινεφής Κρονίων (*kelainephês Kroniôn*) ‘black-clouded son of Cronus’ constitutes a well-known Homeric formula. Regarding Homer’s use of the adjective κελαινεφής (*kelainephês*) and this formula, Heubeck and Hoekstra observe: “Usually the adj. is found in formulae such as κελαινεφεῖ Κρονίῳνι (e.g. *Il.* i 397) or when Zeus is addressed in his full majesty of (Indo-European) Sky-god, cf. e.g. Ζεῦ, κύδιστε, μέγιστε, κελαινεφές, αἰθήρι ναίων [*Zdeu, kudiste, megiste, kelainephes, aitheri naiôn*] (*Il.* ii 412)”¹⁰⁸ – that is, ‘O Zeus, most glorious, greatest, black-clouded, dwelling in the sky’, the opening words of a prayer offered by Agamemnon for victory in battle.

The parallel epithets of lines 53 and 56 of *The Shield*,

- (24) κελαινεφής Κρονίων (*kelainephês Kroniôn*) ‘black-clouded son of Cronus’
Κρονίων, θεῶν σημάντωρ πάντων (*Kroniôn theôn sêmantôr pantôn*)
‘son of Cronus, *sêmantôr* of all the gods’

suggest that for its poet – or, more carefully, in the poetic tradition from which the lines are drawn – the semantics of the agent noun σημάντωρ (*sêmantôr*) remained palpably within the cognitive dimension of the code of the sovereign

sky god Zeus, giver of signs (encoder of signs), especially that sign which is the lightning of the black storm cloud. Like the adjectives modifying Zeus on Hymettos and Parnes, Σημιος (*Sēmios*) and Σημαλέος (*Sēmaleos*), the agent noun σημάντωρ (*sēmantôr*) is fundamentally linked with the cognitive process of encoding messages in signs.

But this is only to state the obvious. The verb from which the agent noun is derived, σημαίνω (*sēmainô*), clearly preserves this sense. For example, Aeschylus places on Orestes' lips the redundant (and redundantly translated) proverbial sentiment that a man will speak frankly to another man, κάσήμενεν ἐμφανῆς τέκμαρ (*kasēmēnen emphanes tekmar*) 'and **signify** his **sign** openly' (*Choe.* 667). Of Apollo, and his Delphic oracle, Heraclitus offers the puzzle that οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει (*oute legei oute kruptei alla sēmainei*) 'he neither proclaims nor hides but instead **he gives a sign**' (fr. 93).¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Xenophon writes that he consulted the gods to determine if he should command (*An.* 6.1.31):

Καί μοι οἱ θεοὶ οὕτως ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς ἐσήμηναν ὡς καὶ ἰδιώτην ἂν γνῶναι ὅτι τῆς μοναρχίας ἀπέχεσθαι με δεῖ.

Kai moi hoi theoi houtôs en tois hierois esēmēnan hōs kai idiôtên an gnōnai hoti tēs monarkhias apekhesthai me dei.

And the gods **gave signs** to me in the sacrifices such that even a nonspecialist would know that it is requisite for me to abstain from taking supreme command.

And it will come as no surprise, given the practice of the worshipers of Zeus Semios on Hymettos, that σημαίνω (*sēmainô*) is also used to denote the signaling action of written symbols. We have seen this already, when, in Chapter 6, we observed that Plato has Socrates avow that 'writing', γραφή (*graphê*), is like painting, ζωγραφία (*zôgraphia*), a symbolic system (*Phaedrus* 275D–E):

Δεινὸν γάρ που, ὦ Φαίδρε, τοῦτ' ἔχει γραφή, καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ὁμοίον ζωγραφία. καὶ γὰρ τὰ ἐκείνης ἐκγονα ἔστηκε μὲν ὡς ζῶντα, ἐὰν δ' ἀνέρη τι, σεμνῶς πάνυ σιγᾷ. ταῦτόν δὲ καὶ οἱ λόγοι· δόξαις μὲν ἂν ὡς τι φρονούντας αὐτοὺς λέγειν, ἐὰν δέ τι ἔρη τῶν λεγομένων βουλόμενος μαθεῖν, ἐν τι σημαίνει μόνον ταῦτόν ἀεὶ.

Deinon gar pou, ô Phaidre, tout' ekhei graphê, kai hōs alêthōs homoion zôgraphia(i). kai gar ta ekeinês ekgona hestêke men hōs zdōnta, ean d' anerê(i) ti, semnōs panu siga(i). tauton de kai hoi logoi; doksais men an hōs ti phronountas

autous legein, ean de ti erê(i) tôn legomenôn boulomenos mathein, hen ti sêmai-nei monon tauton aei.

For, Phaedrus, writing has this peculiarity – it’s really like painting, the creations of which are like living beings; but if you should ask them something, they remain entirely solemnly silent. It’s the same with [written] words. You might suppose them to speak, as if they have understanding; but if you should ask them something, wanting to learn about what they are saying, they will always **signify** only one and the same thing.

And so we have returned to the realm of σῆμα (*sêma*) as graphic signal – but more must be said regarding σημάντωρ (*sêmantôr*) ‘one who gives a signal’.

Beyond line 56 of *The Shield of Heracles*, σημάντωρ (*sêmantôr*) is seen again as Jovian epithet, both within and without the Hesiodic corpus. In Hesiodic fragment (MW) 5, in which Zeus is said to have fathered Graecus, eponymous ancestor of the “Greeks,” by κόυρη Πανδώρη ‘a maiden Pandora,’¹¹⁰ the poet refers to the sovereign god as Ζεὺς πατήρ θεῶν σημάντωρ πάντων (*Zeus patêr theôn sêmantôr pantôn*) ‘Zeus the father, *sêmantôr* of all the gods.’¹¹¹ Similarly, in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, when Apollo and Hermes tell their conflicting tales of Apollo’s stolen cattle, Hermes, with the address Ζεῦ πάτερ (*Zdeu pater*) ‘O father Zeus’, speaks ἄλλος μῦθος (*allos muthos*) ‘another *muthos*’, pleading his case ἐς Κρονίωνα θεῶν σημάντορα πάντων (*es Kroniôna theôn sêmantora pantôn*) ‘to the son of Cronus, *sêmantôr* of all the gods’ (line 367).

With these archaic references to the sovereign sky god Zeus as ‘*sêmantôr* of all the gods’, compare the epithet πολυ-σημάντωρ (*polu-sêmantôr*) assigned to Hades, sovereign of the Netherworld, in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, line 31:

Τὴν δ’ ἀεκαζομένην ἤγεν Διὸς ἐννεσίησι 30
πατροκασίγνητος πολυσημάντωρ πολυδέγμων
ἵπποις ἀθανάτοισι, Κρόνου πολυώνυμος υἱός.

Tên d’ aekazdomenên êgen Dios ennesiê(i)si 30
patrokasignêtos polusêmantôr poludegmôn
hippois athanatoisi Kronou poliônumos huios.

And against her will, at Zeus’s suggestion, he carried her off, 30
her father’s brother, **polusêmantôr**, **receiving many**,
with his deathless horses, Cronus’s **many-named** son.

The abductee here referred to is Persephone, daughter of Zeus and Demeter; her abductor is of course Hades, her uncle, another son of Cronus. In addition to the compound agent noun πολυσημάντωρ (*polusēmantôr*), literally and componentially ‘one who gives many (πολυ- [*polu-*]) signs’, Hades is in this hymn also described by the adjectives πολυδέγμων (*poludegmôn*; line 31) and πολυώνυμος (*poluônumos*; line 32).

The latter, πολυώνυμος (*poluônumos*) ‘having many names’, is used attributively of various deities (at times assigned the sense ‘famed’ [i.e., ‘named many times’]): for example, of Styx (Hes., *Theog.* 785); of Apollo (*Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 81); of Theia (Pind., *Isthm.* 5.1); of Dionysus (Soph., *Ant.* 1115); of Nike (Bacchyl., *Epigr.* 1.1); of Artemis (Ar., *Thesm.* 320). The fifth-century BC comic poet Strattis (fr. 220.104) similarly uses it of the chthonic deity, coupling the adjective with the god’s alter-name *Pluto*.

The former adjective, πολυδέγμων (*poludegmôn*), like πολυδέκτης (*poludektês*) – both constructed with the root of the verb δέχομαι (*dekhomai*) ‘to receive’ – is used as a euphemistic name for Hades, ‘Receiver of Many’. Πολυδέγμων (*Poludegmôn*) occurs four times in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* in this way: lines 17, 31, 404 (restored), and 430; the referent of the adjective appears to be the same in *Orphic Hymns* 18.11–12 and other Orphic texts.¹¹² The Stoic philosopher L. Annaeus Cornutus (first century AD) lists it among the names of Hades (*Theol. Graec.* 74.15). For the Hellenistic poet Lycophron, πολυδέγμων (*poludegmôn*) is the name of a lofty mountain of Italy from which all rivers of the country flow (*Alexandra* 700), though a scholiast attempts to link the mountain to Hades (Schol. Lycoph. 700.6–7).

As we have understood with the Zeus Semios of Hymettos, in the epithets of lines 31–32 of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Hades is likewise depicted as participator in reciprocal action – specifically that of signaling.¹¹³ In line 31, the invoking of the god’s attribute πολυσημάντωρ (*polusēmantôr*) is followed immediately by the invocation πολυδέγμων (*poludegmôn*): he is Hades ‘giving many signs’, ‘receiving many’. That the rehearsed reciprocity can be primitively construed as a reciprocity of signifying is suggestively reinforced by the juxtaposition in line 32 of the epithet πολυώνυμος (*poluônumos*) ‘many-named’ – denoting one who is assigned many *designations*, many *significations*. Whatever array of nuances is eventually attached to Plutonian πολυδέγμων (*poludegmôn*), ‘receiving many’, at some appropriately early moment there must be a core sense that reflects in its application to the chthonic sovereign reciprocal notions of cognition such as those that attach themselves to Zeus: the giving of many signals and the receiving of many signals. The signal giving (communicativeness)

of Zeus itself finds expression in conjunction with these epithets as it is – in line 30 – an ἐννεσίη (*ennesiê*) ‘suggestion’¹¹⁴ of Zeus that is responsible for putting into Hades’ head the idea of seizing Persephone (as an ἐννεσίη [*ennesiê*] of Gaea caused Cronus to regurgitate the swallowed siblings of Zeus [Hesiod *Theog.* 494]; cf. *Iliad* V 894). Cognition and re-cognition are present.

The agent noun πολυσημάντωρ (*polusêmantôr*) occurs twice more in archaic usage – again in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Once (line 84), as Helios reveals to Demeter the fate that has befallen her daughter Persephone (lines 77b–81, 83b–87):

... οὐδέ τις ἄλλος
αἴτιος ἀθανάτων εἰ μὴ νεφεληγερέτα Ζεὺς,
ὅς μιν ἔδωκ’ Ἀΐδη θαλερὴν κεκλήσθαι ἀκοίτιν
αὐτοκασιγνήτω· ὃ δ’ ὑπὸ ζόφον ἠερόεντα
ἀρπάξας ἵπποισιν ἄγεν μεγάλα ἰάχουσαν.

80

....

... οὐ τοι αἰκίης
γαμβρὸς ἐν ἀθανάτοις πολυσημάντωρ Ἀϊδωνεύς
αὐτοκασίγνητος καὶ ὁμόσπορος· ἀμφὶ δὲ τιμὴν
ἔλλαχεν ὡς τὰ πρῶτα διάτριχα δασμὸς ἐτύχθη·
τοῖς μεταναιετᾶει τῶν ἔλλαχε κοίρανος εἶναι.

85

... *oude tis allos*

*aitios athanatôn ei mê nephelêgereta Zdeus,
hos min edôk’ Aîdê(i) thalerên keklêsthai akoitin
autokasignêtô(i); ho d’ hupo zdophon êeroenta
harpaksas hipposin agen megala iakhousan.*

80

....

... *ou toi aeikês*
*gambros en athanatois polusêmantôr Aîdôneus
autokasignêtos kai homosporos; amphi de timên
ellakhen hôs ta prôta diatrikha dasmos etukhthê;
tois metanaietaei tôn ellakhe koiranos einai.*

85

... there’s no other

of immortals to blame but Zeus, cloud-gatherer,
who’s given her to Hades to be known as his youthful mate –
his own brother; and down to the hazy gloom Hades took her,
snatching her – screaming her head off – with his steeds.

80

....

... he's not a shameful
 in-law among immortals, Aïdoneus [i.e., Hades], *polusêmantôr* –
 your own brother, shared sibling; and regarding honors, 85
 he got his part by lot when at the start the threefold division was made;
 he dwells with them whose ruler he was fated to be.

The mention of a meteorological attribute of Zeus (line 78) is echoed by a reference to Hades (line 80): Zeus manipulates the clouds, while Hades inhabits the mist-shrouded darkness of the nether realm. A further comparison of the two sovereign deities is invited by similarities between the two sets of verses cited here – structural framing provided by overt reference to the membership of each deity in the set of deathless beings (ἀθανάτων [*athanatôn*], line 78; ἐν ἀθανάτοις [*en athanatois*], line 84) and emphasis on sibling relationships (αὐτοκασίγνητος [*autokasignêtos*], lines 80 and 85), linking Zeus and Hades both directly and indirectly through their common sister Demeter. Set beside νεφεληγερέτα Ζεὺς (*nephelêgereta Zdeus*) ‘Zeus cloud-gatherer’ is πολυσημάντωρ Ἄιδωνεύς (*polusêmantôr Aïdôneus*) Hades *polusêmantôr*.

“And regarding honors” (line 85), Homer preserves the tale of how the three sons of Cronus and Rhea – Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon – obtained their respective realms of sky, netherworld, and sea by a casting of lots, and does so with language that is mirrored by the preceding lines from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Asserting his equality with Zeus, an irate Poseidon tells Zeus’s messenger Iris that (*Il.* XV 190–194)

Ἦτοι ἐγὼν ἔλαχον πολιὴν ἅλα ναιέμεν αἰεὶ 190
 παλλομένων, Ἄϊδης δ’ ἔλαχε ζόφον ἠερόεντα,
 Ζεὺς δ’ ἔλαχ’ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἐν αἰθέρι καὶ νεφέλησι·
 γαῖα δ’ ἔτι ξυνὴ πάντων καὶ μακρὸς Ὀλυμπος.

Êtoi egôn elakhon poliên hala naiemen aiei 190
pallomenôn, Aïdês d’ elakhe zdophon êeroenta,
Zdeus d’ elakh’ ouranon eurun en aitheri kai nephelê(i)si;
gaia d’ eti ksunê pantôn kai makros Olumpos.

And I indeed took the gray sea to live in forever 190
 when the lots were cast, and Hades won the hazy gloom,
 and Zeus took wide heaven in the air and clouds;
 but earth is common still to all, and towering Olympus too.

As others have noted,¹¹⁵ this theme of a three-way division of the cosmos by a trio of deities who cast lots for their portions is a Mesopotamian motif, preserved in various Akkadian versions of the *Atrahasis* tradition, the earliest attested of which is the Old Babylonian version of the seventeenth century BC.¹¹⁶

The third occurrence of πολυσημάντωρ (*polusêmantôr*) in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is found at line 376. As Hades prepares to return Persephone from his nether realm to Demeter, the poet sings:

Ἴππους δὲ προπάροιθεν ὑπὸ χρυσεόισιν ὄχρεσφιν 375
ἔντυεν ἀθανάτους πολυσημάντωρ Ἄϊδωνεύς.

Hippous de proparoithen hupo khruiseoisin okhesphin 375
entuen athanatous polusêmantôr Aïdôneus.

And his deathless steeds he hitched in front, beneath 375
the golden chariot, the *polusêmantôr* Aïdoneus.

The agent noun πολυσημάντωρ (*polusêmantôr*), in each of these passages, is commonly rendered by some term denoting ‘leader’: for example, West¹¹⁷ translates as “Major General,” and both Evelyn-White¹¹⁸ and Cashford¹¹⁹ as “Ruler of Many.” The notion of πολυ- (*polu-*) ‘many’ (combining form of the adjective πολὺς [*polus*], ‘much, many’) seems to be inherent to the character of Hades: we noted other nominals so compounded that are applied to the god of the netherworld: πολυώνυμος (*poluônumos*) ‘having many names’; and πολυδέγμων (*poludegmôn*) and πολυδέκτης (*poludektês*) ‘receiver of many’. Hades can also be called πολύαρχος (*poluarkhos*), ‘ruler of many’ (Cornutus, *Theol. Graec.* 74.15); and that other name by which he is commonly invoked, Πλούτων (Ploutôn), is semantically linked to the fundamental sense of πολυ- (*polu-*), if not etymologically related: the common noun πλούτος (*ploutos*), from which the divine name is derived, denotes ‘riches, abundance’.¹²⁰ For Hesiod (*Op.* 465), it is a chthonic god to whom the farmer should pray at the outset of the plowing season in order to enjoy an abundant grain harvest: εὐχέσθαι δὲ Διὶ χθονίῳ Δημήτερι θ’ ἀγνῆ (*eukhesthai de Dii khthoniô(i) Dêmêteri th’ hagnê(i)*) ‘pray to **chthonic Zeus** and holy Demeter’; elsewhere (*Theog.* 767), Hesiod identifies Hades (ἰφθιμος Ἄϊδης [*iphthimos Aidês*] ‘stalwart Hades’) as the θεὸς χθόνιος (*theos khthonios*) ‘chthonic god’, coupling his mention with reference to ἐπαινή Περσεφόνηια (*epainê Persephoneia*) ‘dreadful Persephone’.

References to “chthonic Zeus” occur beyond Hesiod’s poetry, and in instances the appellative clearly identifies Hades.¹²¹ Thus, Homer sings the tale of Phoenix and how he had slept with his father’s concubine, at his neglected mother’s behest, and how the father then sought his revenge on the son, calling on the Erinyes, that Phoenix would be made impotent: the curse (ἐπαρά [*epara*]) was fulfilled and vengeance meted out by the gods – Ζεὺς τε καταχθόνιος καὶ ἐπαινὴ Περσεφόνη (Zeus te katakthonios kai epainê Persephoneia) ‘Zeus beneath-the-earth and dreadful Persephone’ (*Il.* IX 457). Compare with this the poet’s words some hundred lines later when he tells of the anger of Althaea, Meleager’s mother, following Meleager’s slaying of her brother; she prays to the gods (*Il.* IX 569–572):

... κικλήσκουσ’ Αἴδην καὶ ἐπαινὴν Περσεφόνηαν,
 πρόχνηυ καθεζομένη, δεύοντο δὲ δάκρυσι κόλποι, 570
 παιδί δόμεν θάνατον· τῆς δ’ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς
 ἔκλυεν ἐξ Ἐρέβεσφιν, ἀμείλιχον ἦτορ ἔχουσα.

... *kiklêskous’ Aîdên kai epainên Persephoneian,*
prokhnu kathezdomenê, deuonto de dakrusi kolpoi, 570
paidi domen thanaton; tês d’ êerophoitis Erinus
ekluen eks Erebesphin, ameilikhon êtor ekhousa.

... summoning Hades and dreadful Persephone –
 sitting splayed, and drenching her bosom with tears – 570
 to give death to her son; and the Erinyes that walks in darkness
 heard her out of Erebus, that one whose heart is unbending.

And so Meleager will die, and the death of his uncle be avenged. The two lines (*Il.* IX 457 and 569), and the passages of which they are a part, provide a parallel. The alternation of “chthonic Zeus” and “Hades” within a formulaic reference to the nether god and his dread queen utilized within accounts that invoke the Erinyes and the avenging of crimes against family members strongly suggests an equation of the two deities so named.

From a much later period (fifth/sixth century AD), compare Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* 44.258–259:

Αἰ δὲ Διὸς χθονίοιο δυσάντει νεύματι κόρησ
 Εὐμενίδες Πενθῆος ἐπεστρατόωντο μελάθρω,

Hai de Dios khthonioio dusantei neumati korsês
Eumenides Penthêos epestratoônto melathró(i),

Kakei dikazdei tamplakêmath' hôs logos, 230
Zdeus allos en kamousin hustatos dikas.

There, so it's said, among the dead 230
another Zeus judges a final judgment of sins.¹²⁴

Among other references to chthonic Zeus, a particularly interesting one is provided by Sophocles in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Just prior to the aged Oedipus's death, Oedipus and his daughters recognize a *signal* of that death – φθόγγος ἐξαίφνης πικρός (*phthoggos eksaiphnês pikros*) 'a sudden bitter sound'. It is chthonic Zeus who gives this signal (1606–1607):

... κτύπησε μὲν Ζεὺς χθόνιος, αἱ δὲ παρθέναι
 ῥίγησαν ὡς ἤκουσαν ...

... *ktupêse men Zdeus khthonios, hai de parthenoi*
rhigêsan hôs êkousan ...

... chthonic Zeus thundered, and the maidens
 shivered when they heard it ...

The signal is typical of those meteorological signs that Zeus the sovereign deity of the sky gives, as we saw earlier; for Sophocles, chthonic Zeus can likewise be a σημάτων (*sêmantôr*) in the literal sense of the term.

We observed earlier that the agent noun σημάτων (*sêmantôr*) 'one who gives a sign/signal' is derived from the verb σημαίνω (*sêmainô*) 'to show by a sign, to give a sign or signal', which is in turn derived from σῆμα (*sêma*) 'sign'. There is a conspicuous sense of the noun σῆμα (*sêma*) with which the netherworld deity is intuitively connected: σῆμα (*sêma*) commonly denotes 'grave, tomb'. The referent may be a tumulus or cairn raised above a grave, as in the case of the mound described in *Iliad* II 811–815, a great barrow situated on the plain before Troy: ἀθάνατοι δὲ τε σῆμα πολυσκάρθμοιο Μυρίνης (*athanatoi de te sêma poluskarthmoio Murinês*) 'and the gods [call it] the **grave mound** of Myrine' (line 814). Or σῆμα (*sêma*) may denote some other funerary marker such as the wooden post with two stones inclined against it that serves as the turning post for the chariot race at the funeral games for Patroclus; Nestor describes its appearance at *Iliad* XXIII 327–330, and then surmises (lines 331–332):

Ἦ τευ σῆμα βροτοῖο πάλαι κατατεθνηῶτος,
 ἦ τό γε νύσσα τέτυκτο ἐπὶ προτέρων ἀνθρώπων ...

Ê teu *sêma* brotoio palai katatethnêôtos,
ê to ge nussa tetukto epi proterôn anthrôpôn

It's either a **tomb marker** of a man who died long ago,
or it's a turning post wrought in times of earlier men

Whatever the form of the marker, such a σῆμα (*sêma*) is a 'sign, signal' of the presence of a grave. Though the distinction may be subtle, by a slight semantic extension, σῆμα (*sêma*) can denote the 'tomb' itself, rather than, most immediately, a funerary monument serving as signal. This sense seems to be predominant, for example, in Plato's remarks on "body as tomb" at *Gorgias* 492E–493A (Socrates is speaking):

Ἄλλὰ μὲν δὴ καὶ ὡς γε σὺ λέγεις δεινὸς ὁ βίος. οὐ γὰρ τοι θαυμάζοιμ' ἄν, εἰ
Εὐριπίδης ἀληθῆ ἐν τοῖσδε λέγει, λέγων
τίς δ' οἶδεν, εἰ τὸ ζῆν μὲν ἐστι κατθανεῖν,
τὸ κατθανεῖν δὲ ζῆν;
καὶ ἡμεῖς τῷ ὄντι ἴσως τέθναμεν· ἤδη γὰρ του ἔγωγε καὶ ἤκουσα τῶν
σοφῶν, ὡς νῦν ἡμεῖς τέθναμεν καὶ τὸ μὲν σῶμά ἐστιν ἡμῖν **σῆμα**,

*Alla men dê kai hôs ge su legeis deinos ho bios. ou gar toi thaumazdoim' an, ei
Euripidês alêthê en toisde legei, legôn
tis d' oiden, ei to zdên men esti katthanein,
to katthanein de zdên?
kai hêmeis tô(i) onti isôs tethnamen; êdê gar tou egôge kai êkousa tôn sophôn,
hôs nun hêmeis tethnamen kai to men sôma estin hêmin **sêma**,*

But then, as you yourself tell it, life is strange. For I wouldn't be astonished if Euripides speaks the truth when he says,

Who knows if to live is to be dead,
and to be dead is to live?

And we may very well be dead; for I have actually heard a wise man say that we are ourselves now dead and that the body is our **tomb**,

Compare *Phaedrus* 250C: here Plato writes of pure souls "not being entombed within ... the body, locked up like an oyster," where the term expressing the notion 'not entombed' is ἀσήμαντος (*asêmantos*). This adjective, ἀσήμαντος (*asêmantos*), is derived from the previously discussed denominative verb σημαίνω (*sêmainô*) and commonly means 'unmarked', as in Herodotus 2.38, where the historian describes an Egyptian cultic practice: a priest must inspect a bull that is to be sacrificed for purity, and, if the bull is found to be

pure, the priest signals (σημαίνω [*sêmainô*]) the finding by wrapping papyrus around the bull's horns and stamping the papyrus with a seal; a bull that is *not marked* (ἀσήμαντος [*asêmantos*]) in this way as pure must not be sacrificed. The adjective can also carry the sense 'without a leader' – that is, 'without a σημαίντωρ (*sêmantôr*)' in the secondary sense of that agent noun; we have of course seen this already: it was pointed out in the previous discussion of σημαίντωρ (*sêmantôr*) that the adjective ἀσήμαντος (*asêmantos*) is used of 'unshepherded' flocks at *Iliad* X 485.

But for Plato this σῆμα (*sêma*) 'tomb' which the σῶμα (*sôma*) 'body' constitutes, and with which it forms a phonological minimal pair (*sêma* / *sôma*), is, to judge by Socrates' etymologizing at *Cratylus* 400B–C, not semantically far removed from the word's fundamental notion of 'sign/signal'. Regarding the "origin" of the word σῶμα (*sôma*), Socrates conjectures:

Καὶ γὰρ **σῆμα** τινές φασιν αὐτὸ εἶναι τῆς ψυχῆς, ὡς τεθαμμένης ἐν τῷ νῦν παρόντι.

Kai gar sêma tines phasin auto einai tês psukhês, hôs tethammenês en tô(i) nun paronti.

For some say that it [i.e., the body (σῶμα [*sôma*])] is the **tomb** (σῆμα [*sêma*]) of the spirit, as [the spirit] has been buried within our present being.

He continues with an added consideration:

Καὶ διότι αὖ τούτῳ **σημαίνει** ἃ ἂν **σημαίνῃ** ἡ ψυχὴ, καὶ ταύτῃ **σῆμα** ὀρθῶς καλεῖσθαι.

Kai dioti au toutô(i) sêmainei ha an sêmainê(i) hê psukhê, kai tautê(i) sêma orthôs kaleisthai.

And further because by this [body/tomb], the spirit **signals** whatever it would **signal**, and thus it is rightly called *sêma*.

In light of what we have observed in the preceding pages, an analogical equation relating the celestial sovereign and the nether sovereign (the "chthonic Zeus") suggests itself:

(25) Zeus : σημαίντωρ (*sêmantôr*) :: Hades : πολυ-σημαίντωρ (*polu-sêmantôr*).

In those ways in which sky god Zeus can be conceptualized as σημαίντωρ (*sêmantôr*) his netherworld equivalent can be as well, with the added, and contextually expected, and so (nearly) redundant, cognitive element of

πολυ- (*polu-*), in keeping with notions of ‘plenty’ and ‘multiplicity’ that are intrinsic to Pluto’s / Hades’ character. For Sophocles the chthonic god can even give that signal, that encoded message, with which Zeus the sign giver is conspicuously associated – thunder: a message that is all too easily decoded by Oedipus and his daughters as a signal of his impending death. Giving and the reciprocal receiving of signals is an act fundamental to the sovereign deity in both his celestial and chthonic forms. It is appropriate that the new signaling system – the alphabet – should be perceived as votive material appropriate to the signaling deity.

As sovereign god of the dead, Hades must also be readily linked to the conception of σῆμα (*sêma*) as ‘funerary signal’, a signal that encodes the presence of a burial or encodes the notion of the space within which the remains are entombed. Hades πολυ-σημάντωρ (*polu-sêmantôr*) could be easily construed as the agentive force behind ‘many’ such encoded messages. Celestial Zeus – Σημιος (*Sêmios*), Σημαλέος (*Sêmaleos*), σημάντωρ (*sêmantôr*) – is agent of the σῆμα (*sêma*) ‘sign’ and as such is deemed to be right recipient of the presentation of signs on Mount Hymettos; chthonic Zeus / Hades / Pluto is likewise agent of the σῆμα (*sêma*) ‘sign’ and, one might reasonably expect, would be deemed to be appropriately associated with the presentation of written symbols in a funerary context – within the physical space of the σῆμα (*sêma*) which is the grave.

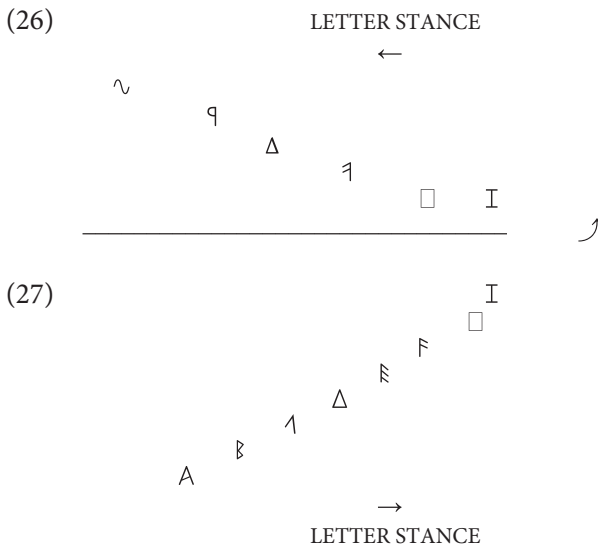
Such a funerary presentation, I would suggest, is to be found in the letters inscribed on the base of a Protocorinthian conical oinochoe from Kyme, dated circa 700 B.C.¹²⁵ The piece has already been mentioned several times in the present work: the first time in the discussion of CP *gamma* in Chapter 2, at which point I noted that perhaps the earliest example of a *gamma* like that of the copper plaques, though reversed in stance, is to be found in a partial abecedarium on this wine jug from the Euboian colony of Kyme. It was also noted that the jug attests the unusual morphology of the CP *epsilon* (also common to graffiti of Mount Hymettos) and the CP *digamma*. The oinochoe is inscribed on its base with two mirror-image partial abecedaria; as we saw in the discussion of the morphology of CP *eta* and *xi* in Chapter 2, both of these abecedaria preserve an *eta*-symbol of the shape □, a symbol that is also used as a *xi*-character on Aegean Naxos.

The two partial abecedaria are of interest both for their physical orientation relative to one another and for the variation in letter shape that they show. One of the abecedaria¹²⁶ is markedly curvilinear, sweeping counterclockwise in a half circle from its starting point to a roughly straight scored line that forms an axis dividing the two abecedaria. Its eight characters are inscribed from left to

right: the sequence of letters is *alpha, beta, gamma, delta, epsilon, digamma, eta, zeta*; in other words, the periodic order of the last two characters is reversed.¹²⁷ The direction of the letters is consistent with the dextroverse orientation of the line with the exception of *gamma*, the stance of which is reversed relative to the remainder of the line (i.e., it shows a sinistroverse orientation).

The second abecedarium is likewise dextroverse in terms of overall periodic order, but its six letters show a sinistroverse orientation. It is also curvilinear, though less so than the first, but also separated farther from the dividing axis at its starting point than at its end point. Both *alpha* and *epsilon* are missing and *eta* and *zeta* are again metathesized, giving the line a letter sequence *beta, gamma, delta, eta, zeta*. The first three letters of this abecedarium are distinctly different in shape from the corresponding letters in the other abecedarium: *beta* has the unique morphology of Corinthian *beta* – though rotated leftward, *gamma* has a *pi*-like curved crossbar, and *delta* has a decapitated apex, giving it a form similar to that of the box-shaped *eta* which occurs in both of the abecedaria.

The general physical impression that the two abecedaria give is thus that of a continuous curving line of letters running from *alpha* through *zeta* up to the dividing axis and continuing from that axis in reverse order from *zeta* to *beta*. The predominant alternating dextroverse and sinistroverse *stance* of the symbols of the two lines (not an alternating *directionality* of the two lines) could be viewed as comparable to a sort of meandering hybrid boustrophedon, looping at the point at which the two *zetas* meet; following is a schematic representation of the field of the abecedaria with conventionalized letter shapes:



The arrangement fundamentally produces an interlacing of symbols such as those that we saw in the interwoven abecedaria considered earlier in this chapter. In this instance, however, rather than making a turn at the middle of the alphabet and continuing the periodic order of the letter signs in the opposite direction, the inscriber makes the turn after (the reordered) *zeta* and repeats (most of) the symbols of the partial abecedarium with which he or she began, in such a way that both lines follow the same direction but display their symbols in reverse orientation. The result is a woven pattern of a different sort, with each individual grapheme paired, approximately, with an identical grapheme, though the pairs show mirror-image stances in the case of asymmetric characters and, in some instances (*beta* and *gamma*), variant morphology. The pattern is made more variegated still by the departure from regular periodic order and by character omissions.

There is more, however, to this funerary artifact. Another hand has inscribed a line in Euboian script, possibly metrical as Watkins has proposed,¹²⁸ around a portion of the rim of the base of the lekythos. The line reads *ἡισα μένει τιννύνα* (*hisamenetinnuna*). Cassio,¹²⁹ following upon Ribezzo,¹³⁰ interprets the line as follows:¹³¹

ἡῖσα μένει τιννύνα(ι)

hisa menei tinnuna(i)

È fatale pagare le stesse cose.

Watkins offers the English rendering ‘It remains to pay equal retribution’, invoking Alcman’s line (fr. 1.36) ἔστι τις σιῶν τίσις (*esti tis siōn tisis*) ‘there exists some vengeance of the gods’, and characterizing the sentiment as “a variant of the ‘golden rule’ or the judgment of Rhadamanthus”:¹³² “wholly appropriate,” he continues, “for an object destined, as this was, for the grave of a child or adolescent; as Cassio notes, adults were cremated.”¹³³

The alphabetic fabric woven on the base of the pot – one suspects it to be the handiwork of the deceased child or youth – consists of a string of plaited σήματα (*sēmata*). It seems a fitting grave good in light of the accompanying line. One is reminded again of the previously rehearsed tale of Phoenix in *Iliad* IX¹³⁴ – of how his father, Amyntor, στυγερός δ’ ἐπεκέκλετ’ Ἐρινύς (*stugeras d’ epekeklet’ Erinus*; line 454) ‘invoked the abominable Erinys’ after Phoenix had slept with Amyntor’s concubine to make Phoenix impotent – and of how ‘Zeus beneath-the-earth (καταχθόνιος [*katakththonios*]) and dreadful Persephone’ ἐτέλειον ἐπαρός (*eteleion eparas*; lines 456–457) ‘brought the curse to fulfillment’. Amyntor has his equal retribution, as the author of the line on this

oinochoe looks to have his or hers. The weaving of σήματα (*sēmata*) makes for an appropriate performance in the realm of chthonic Zeus, sign giver, in late eighth-century Kyme, no less so than such performances are properly offered to Zeus *Semios* on late eighth-century Mount Hymettos in Attica – and one may well suspect that the envisioned retribution would no less entail a σῆμα (*sêma*) ‘tomb’.

7.14 HOMER’S BANE

Over the years various scholars have called attention to the fact that a high number of the earliest known Greek inscriptions are written in verse, in a poetic meter. A few have even imagined that this signals that the Greek alphabet was created for the express purpose of writing down Homeric poetry. I believe that we can with some confidence now say that such a view is precisely opposite the actual state of affairs. Aside from the inherent unlikelihood of such a high-minded motivation for the creation of a system of writing, the copper plaques with their recording of the alphabetic strand, again and again, have brought to our attention that after the introduction of the alphabet to Greece and the advent of Greek literacy, letter weaving was placed on a par with word weaving. The outcome was the “democratization” of poetic performance. Not everyone could be an oral poet – not everyone could extemporaneously compose and perform poetic epic; but almost anyone who acquired the use of the alphabet could turn its use to linguistic composition of another sort: to creations inspired by an individual’s own private Muse – to the production of recorded speech, which, under the proper circumstances, would acquire a certain permanence and thus notoriety, if only modest notoriety, akin to that of the memorable compositions in performance of the bards. And it is for this reason, I would argue, that many of the earliest surviving examples of Greek writing are verse compositions – typically brief, but linguistic handiwork available to some audience, larger or smaller – a kind of “everyman’s hexameter.”

This performance response to the introduction of a new element of technology to the Greeks fully parallels responses in recent years to new elements of technology introduced to society globally. The bard disappeared from our ancestral cultures many centuries ago; in contemporary culture other performance phenomena hold sway – notable examples being the visual media of film and television. The performance activities of film and television are limited to a few. Many among us may possess certain basic skills and talents

that we share, to a lesser or greater degree, with those few who are sanctioned for participation in the performance phenomena of film and television. The many are not sanctioned to engage in visual performance by the studios of Hollywood, New York, London, and Bollywood, only the few; yet introduction of new technologies has in recent years greatly expanded the set of individuals capable of participating in visual performance phenomena before potentially vast audiences. The production of one's own video performance and the posting of such performances on the World Wide Web – viral video – has, in some sense, become, or is readily becoming, a mainstream alternative to studio film and television. Lacking the grandeur, cinematography, elaboration, and so forth of the latter, viral video compares chiefly as an individualistic expression of talent – or exhibitionism or existence or something – providing the creator with a means to participate in a performance phenomenon – performance that is offered to anyone who happens to be in a recipient position and is willing to watch – anyone with the hardware and software required to permit the prospect of constituting the audience.

In the same way, the alphabet arrived in Greece in a time in which extemporaneous oral poetic performance was the performance phenomenon par excellence – when it is the bard who holds a certain celebrity status in the entertainment world of archaic Greece. The bard is sanctioned to fulfill this highly exclusionary linguistic role within the archaic Greek community. There are many others who undoubtedly share with the bard a certain poetic creativity, and all share with the bard a common access to language, the medium of the oral poets' performance. With the arrival of what must be viewed as a breakthrough technological advance for any people – a writing system – and in this case an especially learnable writing system, the alphabet – Greek individuals found themselves in possession of the functional equivalent of a video recorder: a device for capturing the essence of performance – in this case linguistic performance. Into the rich oral poetic environment of archaic Greece an alternative for weaving language was thus introduced. The output of the recording device (the alphabet) is an image of language – but the image of language quickly – immediately perhaps – was awarded the status of language, so that the activity of graphically recording individual, unique expressions of language was equated with the activity of language weaving – the action of the poet. With this new recording device individuals could produce inscribed poetic expressions – brief, certainly in comparison with oral poetic composition as we know it, and perhaps often lacking in what we could

call real artistic merit – but the individual's own expression of creativity, the individual's own weaving of words, realized through a weaving of letters, even simply through the weaving of the abecedarium.

Once viral hexameter was born, once the individual expression of language via the alphabet grew and spread among the Greeks, there would be over time a resultative loss – a gradual disappearance of the phenomenon of oral composition of poetry in performance from Greek society. This was not a necessary outcome, one could argue, but it was the outcome. The alphabet, the woven σήματα (*sēmata*) – not the boys of Ios – would prove to be Homer's bane.