In Memory of Simonides:
Poetry and Mnemotechnics *chez* Nasidienus[*]

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SUMMARY: This paper investigates the presence in Hor. *Sat.* 2.8 of a cluster of images alluding to the traditional depiction of Simonides as the poetic originator of the art of memory. In particular, it connects Fundanius' and Simonides' ability to recite the guest-lists of dinner parties they attended by recalling the position each diner occupied at the table. It also connects the incident of the canopy collapse with the far more tragic collapse of the dining-room ceiling in the traditional account of the invention of mnemotechnics. Finally, it suggests that the evocation of Simonides has a metapoetic dimension connected with Horace's account of his poetic formation and choices.

THE FOCUS OF RECENT TREATMENTS OF SIMONIDES' INFLUENCE on Horace has mainly been his lyric poetry. In particular, discussions of the "new Simonides" by Barchiesi and Harrison have served as a starting point for exploring the intertextual connection of several Simonidean fragments with the *Odes*.[1] Barchiesi reads *Odes* 4.6–9 as a Simonidean block and stresses the importance of the cultural connection between the poet's legendary invention of mnemotechnics and his interest in asserting poetry's ability to preserve memory against time. Barchiesi's observations invite us to explore a larger area of influence that the "author and cultural icon" might have exerted on

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[1] See Barchiesi 1996 on the relevance of Simonides for the fourth book of the *Odes*, and 2001 with new material and a larger theoretical scope. Harrison 261–71 is useful for a detailed survey of the *status quaestionis* and some general remarks on the Roman tradition about Simonides.

Horace.[2] Harrison has studied the placement of Simonidean allusions in Horace's corpus, noting that they tend to occur at the end of the lyric books (*Carm.* 1.38, 2.20, 3.30, and *Epod.* 16).[3] Moving back from Horace's lyric poetry to the *Satires*, this paper develops the suggestions of both scholars by examining the presence of Simonides in *Satire* 2.8, the poem that rounds off Horace's *Satires*.

In its accidents and allusive language, the satire on Nasidienus' dinner-party can be shown to evoke the circumstances of the "founding myth" of mnemotechnics and, more precisely, its founding figure in two details that to my knowledge have been overlooked. First, when the canopy over the dinner table crashes down on the as yet untouched *secundae mensae*, midway through the meal, Horace's text activates the memory of the much deadlier collapse of the ceiling on the guests of the dinner at the Scopades'—the occasion on which Simonides was traditionally thought to have discovered the art of mnemotechnics. Second, the care with which Fundanius insists on naming, from memory, the guests in their arrangement around Nasidienus' table recalls Simonides' ability to do the same for the earlier party and thus to assign a name to each of the disfigured corpses of the Scopades' guests.

Although notoriously reticent when it comes to precepts and technical discussions of how to develop a systematic art of memory, the Latin sources relevant for our modern knowledge of ancient mnemotechnics all agree on a basic set of circumstances for the technique's discovery.[4] Simonides was the most likely candidate to have invented it, and the occasion was that evoked in Callimachus' *Aitia* (fr. 64.3–14):

καὶ γὰρ ἐμόν κοτε σῆμα, τό μοι πρὸ πόληος ἔχευαν
    Ζῆν' Ἀκραγαντῖνοι Ξείνιον ἁζόμενοι,
κατ' οὖν ἤρειψεν ἀνὴρ κακός, εἴ τιν' ἀκούεις
    Φοίνικα πτόλιος σχέτλιον ἡγεμόνα·
πύργῳ δ' ἐγκατέλεξεν ἐμὴν λίθον οὐδὲ τὸ γράμμα
    ᾐδέσθη τὸ λέγον τόν με Λεωπρέπεος

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[2] Barchiesi 2001: 255: "In the first century B.C.E. … [Simonides] is represented by texts but also by ideas and imaginings about his personality and life choices."

[3] Harrison 263–64 and 270. On "infratextual" and "supratextual" endings in collections of poetry see Fowler 82–83 and 97–98.

[4] See Cic. *de Orat.* 2.353, Quint. *Inst.* 11.2.11–13. It is most likely in a rhetorical milieu, keenly interested in the fourth part of oratory, that the legend took the rationalized narrative shape that Quintilian rather skeptically labels Simonides' *vulgata fabula*. For memory in antiquity see Blum 38–55, Yates 1–26, and, more recently, Farrell, who focuses on Simonides' story as ambiguous foundation myth (375–81).

κεῖσθαι Κήϊον ἄνδρα τὸν ἱερόν, ὃς τὰ περισσά
    καὶ μνήμην πρῶτος ὃς ἐφρασάμην,
οὐδ᾽ ὑμέας, Πολύδευκες, ὑπέτρεσεν, οἵ με μελάθρου
    μέλλοντος πίπτειν ἐκτὸς ἔθεσθέ κοτε
δαιτυμόνων ἄπο μοῦνον, ὅτε Κραννώνιος αἰαῖ
    ὤλισθεν μεγάλους οἶκος ἐπὶ Σκοπάδας.[5]

For indeed once an evil man destroyed my tomb, which the citizens of Acragas, in awe of Zeus the Hospitable, had built for me in front of their city. It was a certain Phoenix, you might have heard, the evil general of the city. And he re-used my tombstone for a tower, nor did he respect the epitaph, which read: "I, the sacred man of Ceos, son of Leoprepes, lie here, who (knew) rare things … (and) was the first to invent memory." Nor was he afraid of the two of you, Polydeuces, who once got me, alone among the banqueters, out of the room about to fall when, alas! the house of Crannon fell in ruins upon the great Scopadae.

The specific Roman contribution appears to be the development of the elements already featured in Callimachus' text into a coherent, if legendary, narrative. Cicero and Quintilian, for example, set the tragic dinner at the Scopades' and the invention of the *ars* in a causal relationship.

In the tradition closest to Horace, the nucleus of the legend is clear. Simonides attends a banquet in Thessaly as a guest of Scopas, for whom he has composed a celebratory poem. When asked to pay for it, Scopas gives Simonides only half the price they had agreed upon, claiming that the poet should get the rest from Castor and Pollux. After all, he suggests, Simonides had devoted half of the poem to praising them. Soon a servant summons the poet out of the room to meet two young men demanding to see him outside. Simonides leaves the banquet, only to find that no one is waiting for him at the door. At that very moment the ceiling of the dining hall collapses, burying the guests under the rubble. Their bodies are so disfigured that no one can identify the remains. The poet, however, is able to recall the position of each guest around the table and to assign a name to each corpse. In Cicero's account (*de Orat.* 2.353):

Quos cum humare vellent sui neque possent obtritos internoscere ullo modo, Simonides dicitur ex eo, quod meminisset quo eorum loco quisque cubuisset, demonstrator unius cuiusque sepeliendi fuisse; hac tum re admonitus invenisse fertur ordinem esse maxime, qui memoriae lumen adferret.

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[5] Callimachus' text is cited from Pfeiffer with brackets and most sublinear dots omitted. Translations are mine.

When their relatives wanted to bury [the guests] but were unable to distinguish them in any way, since they had been completely crushed, Simonides is said to have been the one who, since he remembered the place that each had occupied at table, identified them for separate burial. The story goes that, thanks to this incident, he understood that order is what especially brings clarity to memory.

Horace's oblique replay of the incident in *Satire* 2.8 alludes to the collapse of a ceiling, draws direct attention to the mnemonic feat of reconstructing a guest list, and may also contain a subtle vindication of the poet's eternalizing role in a cultured society. I consider these elements in greater detail below.

SIMONIDES *CHEZ* NASIDIENUS

The collapse interrupting Nasidienus' dinner is of a less dangerous nature and has less lethal consequences than the one at the Scopades', but it echoes the central motif of Simonides' legend. Introduced by epicizing diction (*interea*) and reinforced by a simile linking it to storms in Campania (*quantum non*), the toppling of the canopy onto the dinner table raises a mock-heroic cloud of dust (2.8.54–56):

> Interea suspensa gravis aulaea ruinas
> in patinam fecere, trahentia pulveris atri
> quantum non Aquilo Campanis excitat agris.

> In the meantime, the canopy hanging above came crashing down upon the platter, together with more black dust than the north wind raises on Campanian fields.

In itself, the trivial accident does not seem to justify the guests' fear that, literally, something worse might have happened (57 *nos maius veriti*). The guests' reaction to the accident might be merely mimetic and reflect their fear of an imminent architectural collapse. But the comparative *maius* may also evoke a prior and greater disaster. That is to say, Fundanius' language may signal that the narrator and his party have been captured in a repetition of the events connected with Simonides, with the collapse of the curtain alluding in a satirical, light-hearted manner to the tragic collapse of the ceiling in the banquet room at the Scopades' (2.8.57–58):

> Nos *maius* veriti, postquam nihil esse pericli
> sensimus, erigimur.

> We, who had feared a worse disaster, after realizing that there was no danger, recovered our composure.

If the accident evokes Simonides in the guests' minds and makes him the guest absent from the dinner, his uncanny presence will parallel Horace's own mediated presence/absence from Nasidienus' table.

Once the dinner is placed under the dangerous star of Simonides, other allusive elements of the text become visible. The scene works as a catalyst both for the intradiegetic narrator and for educated readers, inviting them to review retrospectively the premonitory signals throughout the poem. For example, the opening of the satire had already implicitly established a connection with the technique of memorization through the association of *loci certi* with *imagines agentes*, a system of discrete mental places each hosting a vivid image designed to trigger the orderly recollection of material entrusted to memory.[6] In lines 20–24, in what now amounts to a disquieting anticipation of the Simonidean threat contained in the fall of the canopy, Fundanius surveys the guests' placement around the dinner table:

"Summus ego et prope me Viscus Thurinus et infra,
si memini, Varius; cum Servilio Balatrone
Vibidius, quos Maecenas adduxerat umbras.
Nomentanus erat super ipsum, Porcius infra,
ridiculus totas semel absorbere placentas."

Myself at the top, then next to me Viscus of Thurii, and below, if I remember, Varius; then Vibidius and Servilius Balatro, the "shades" that Maecenas had brought with him; above our host was Nomentanus; below him was Porcius, ludicrous in his swallowing whole cakes in a single gulp.

The arrangement of guests at a refined Roman dinner was a cultural commonplace, a totally familiar organization of space that lent itself to mnemonic uses by offering a set of *loci certi*.[7] While the arrangement provides a clear map of the relative locations of guests, small details in the description of the lesser known characters gathered at the event bring the named individuals to life and turn them into *imagines agentes*.

Fundanius has Viscus and Varius beside him in a literary trio uniting three prominent figures in Maecenas' cultural circle.[8] Maecenas has his two *umbrae* on either side: Vibidius, a character linked to the livid marks of flogging by the Plautine noun *vibix*, and Servilius Balatro, a servile parasite, whose name expresses his nature (*balatro*—juggler/buffoon—is used as noun in Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.2). Reclining close to the *pater cenae*, Nomentanus comes next, tak-

[6] The clearest formulation of the technique is found at *Rhet. Her.* 3.16–26. The precise terminology comes from Cic. *de Orat.* 2.358. On buildings as the space best suited for organizing *loci* see Quint. *Inst.* 11.2.19–21. On the history of the principle see Yates 2–10.

[7] The order of the *triclinia* here breaks the norm of *bon ton* that would have Nasidienus reclining close to Maecenas: see Morris *ad loc.*

[8] On Fundanius' literary achievements see Muecke 232; for a survey of the literary careers of Viscus and Varius as reflected in Horace's *corpus* see Baker 220–21.

ing upon himself the duty of pointing out and naming those small touches in the course of the dinner that might otherwise pass unnoticed. His *praenomen*, *Nomen*tanus, corresponds to his performance.[9] Close to him, caught in the same etymological trap, we find Porcius, who is usually busy stuffing himself with stuffed food (Porcius < *porcus*, "hog"). With these characters vividly depicted as engaging in actions that are implied in their names, the memorial system of the dinner is complete.[10]

The rhetorical interruption in Fundanius' list at line 21 (*si memini* "if I remember") reinforces the impression that the roll-call is a mnemonic exercise. When Fundanius doubts he can remember the guests reclining closest to him, i.e., in the very place where his memory should be most reliable,[11] the phrase's apparent incongruity with the narrative situation is obvious and his reference to memory is probably both a gesture towards Plato's *Symposium*[12] and the earliest signal of Simonides' presence in the satire. The signal becomes more disturbing when Maecenas' companions are identified as *umbrae*, "shadows." In the literal context of the dinner-party the term *umbrae* means merely uninvited guests, "hangers-on." And yet the tag might be indirectly related to the funereal outcome of the banquet at the Scopades', since Maecenas's retinue is lexically associated with death and the underworld. If this is right, the satire offers a veiled but threatening allusion to the dangers that association with an unrefined host such as Nasidienus entails for Horace's patron and friends.[13]

[9] On Nomentanus as *nomenclator*, and more in general on "speaking names" in the *Satires*, see Rudd 132–59, Coccia 139, Freudenburg 1993: 48–50 and 2001: 119–21, Caston 243. The notion stems from antiquity (cf. Quint. *Inst*. 11.2.31).

[10] On etymology as able to bridge the gap between *memoria rerum* and *memoria verborum* see Yates 9–15.

[11] The awkwardness of the interruption is noted by Morris 248: "there is probably some little joke in *si memini*." Baker 221 insists on the binding effect achieved by the joke that is produced and performed inside the inner circle of Maecenas' literary friends (Horace included).

[12] Kirk Freundenburg reminded me that Fundanius' words are meant to recall the context of Plato's *Symposium* insofar as the whole dialogue was reported second-hand, from memory, by Apollodorus, as it had been told to him by Aristodemus. For the Platonic background of the companion piece of the present poem, *Satire* 2.4, which echoes at its outset the fictional openings of the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*, see Gowers 138–40 and 161–63, contra Rudd 208, who considers the initial allusion to Plato in 2.4 a general one.

[13] On the constantly increasing level of *parrhesia* in Horace's poetic allocution to Maecenas see Baker 221–28. Throughout his reading of 2.8, Baker strives to defend the

By recalling the Simonidean legend of a scorned poet avenged by the gods through disaster and by casting the author of the *Satires* in the role of the absent poet, the allusive subtext of the poem suggests that the new poetry has preserved the ancient power of ensuring its subjects a life beyond death. Horace's poem lessens the deadly menace of the Greek legend to the level of a comic incident (actually, farcical: *ludus* is the term Horace uses for the accident in line 79),[14] but the import of the message contained in the original episode is preserved in the new poetic context.

"THE ONE FROM CHIOS"

The collapse of the canopy and the guest-list are not the only elements of this poem involved in Horace's translation of the cultural context of the Greek archaic lyric into the modern Roman satire. The signature of Simonides may also be perceived in 2.8 in a twice-used tag with metapoetic significance.

In his study of the relationship of Horace's *Odes* 4 with the authentic, the legendary, and the "new Simonides," Barchiesi noted that one of the "autographic marks" by which Simonides, the poet from Ceos, was recognized throughout antiquity was his habit of referring to Homer as "the singer of Chios."[15] On this detail both the "new Simonides" and Theocritus' *Idyll* 16.44, for example, converge, transferring the form and spirit of the reference to Homer as "the one from Chios" to Simonides by calling him "the one of Ceos."[16] In *Satire* 2.8 the adjective *Chium*—"the one from Chios" (indicating wine from the island)—appears in the vicinity of the two principal Simonidean moments in the poem. At line 15 the appearance of Chian wine prompts the host to offer Maecenas local Italian wines, if he should prefer (14–17):

> procedit fuscus Hydaspes
> Caecuba vina ferens, Alcon *Chium* maris expers.
> hic erus "Albanum, Maecenas, sive Falernum
> te magis adpositis delectat, habemus utrumque."

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character of Nasidienus from the moralistic attacks of the majority of literary critics (he finds support on this issue in Rudd 216–20). While perhaps too generous with the clumsy host of the pompous dinner, Baker's reading helps to put into focus the satirical distance that the self-excluded poet allusively puts between himself and his friends gathered around Nasidienus' table.

[14] On the elements connecting Horace's treatment of food in the *Satires* and the genre of comedy see Caston 242–50. See also Oliensis 99–100.

[15] Barchiesi 1996: 26–27.

[16] The Homeric *Lives* further confirm the attribution to Simonides of the use of the tag (as in [Plu.] *Vit. Hom.* 2.1).

... there came forward the dark Hydaspes carrying Caecuban wine, and Alcon with Chian never touched by sea water. At this point the host said: "If to these you prefer Alban wine, Maecenas, or Falernian, we have both."

Three lines after *Chium maris expers* comes Horace's question about the guest list. While the question might be triggered by the reference to Maecenas and be unrelated to the mentioning of the wines, Fundanius' reply, as we have seen, contains the Simonidean review of the guests' placement on the *triclinia*.

When Nasidienus later parades his culinary knowledge and comments on a special sauce of his own devising, he again mentions the wine from Chios (47–49):

vino quinquenni, verum citra mare nato,
dum coquitur (cocto *Chium* sic convenit, ut non
hoc magis ullum aliud);

wine five years old, but produced this side of the sea, should be added while it is being cooked—thereafter, Chian fits so well that none other does it better.

His remark anticipates the second Simonidean incident: five lines later, the *auleum* falls on the as yet untouched main course.

Horace's play with wine onomastics perhaps allows further interpretation. In *Satire* 2.8, the praise of Chian wine is joined to an appreciation of the wine "from around here." In the first case, Falernian and Alban wines balance Caecuban and Chian; later, it is a generically non-Hellenic wine (*citra mare natum*) that is compared and contrasted to the Chian. That is, just as the Greek milieu of the founding myth of mnemotechnics is transported into a domestic realm in this poem, so too, via the text's enologic geography, is wine.

The metaphorical equivalence of poetry and wine was familiar to readers in the Alexandrian tradition, and the notion that Maecenas might prefer a homegrown Italian vintage to the Greek variety would not have surprised readers of Horace's first book of satires.[17] Horace's delicate play with wine labels in 2.8 is anticipated by a statement hinging on perhaps similar concerns at *Sat.* 1.10.31, where the poet describes himself as "born on this side of the pond" (*natus mare citra*) in the account of his juvenile efforts to compose Greek verses.[18] In the concluding poems of each book of satires wine is thus

[17] On the metapoetic significance of sympotic metaphors see La Penna 279–80 and 295–97, who emphasizes that Italian vintage is designed to accent the "Roman color" of a poetry whose Greek roots were all too clear (297).

[18] The connection between 2.8 and 1.10 is strengthened by the allusion to a mixture of Chian and Falernian wines in a recipe for linguistic mixture that is advanced by Horace's

the vehicle for a discussion of poetics. Nasidienus' combination of ingredients from Italy (oil from Venafrum and wine *citra mare natum*) and Greece (Chian wine and vinegar from Lesbos) in his recipe would have reminded readers of Horace's own poetic formation and choices.[19] The double mention of Chian wine in close connection with the legend of Simonides thus serves a double purpose in 2.8: it connects the workings of the dinner with the discovery of mnemotechnics and appropriately endows the concluding poem of the collection with a metapoetic dimension.

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fictional interlocutor at 1.10.23–24: *At sermo lingua concinnus utraque / suavior, ut Chio nota si commixta Falerni est* ("But a language in which both tongues are balanced is sweeter, as when you mix authentic Falernian with Chian"). The authorial voice contrasts this option with his choice of a more discriminating poetics by explicitly rejecting mechanical, pedantic imitation of Greek verse. In the words Horace attributes to a metapoetic dream (1.10.34–35): *In silvam non ligna feras insanius ac si / magnas Graecorum malis implere catervas* ("Wanting to increase the crowded ranks of the Greeks would be as crazy as carrying wood to a forest").

[19] The same metaphorical play associating wine and poetry will be prominent in *Carm.* 1.9, where, as Edmunds 60 suggested, "in the course of a fairly close imitation of Alcaeus," Horace introduces a Sabine jar and a local wine and proposes a Romanization of his Greek models.

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