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“COUNTERFEIT IN CHARACTER BUT PERSUASIVE
IN APPEARANCE”: REVIEWING THE *AINIGMA*
OF THE *TABULA CEBETIS*

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THE *TABULA CEBETIS* (Πίναξ Κέβητος) is one of those texts that have dropped off the professional classicist’s radar.¹ Once—and not so long ago—this short early Imperial dialogue, acted out before a purported allegorical picture, was standard pedagogical fare. In his 1644 treatise “Of Education,” for example, John Milton recommended the work alongside Plutarch and “other Socratic discourses” as a way of making pupils “expert in the usefulest points of Grammar, and withall to season them, and win them early to the love of vertue and true labour”;² in similar vein, albeit within a rather different intellectual context, Gotthold Wilhelm Leibniz could cite this “popular” text as a shorthand example of using diagrams to elucidate philosophical thought.³ The nineteenth century witnessed a slow but sure reversal in critical perspective. By the time Rudolf Hirzel came to pass judgment in 1895 (some four hundred years after Lorenzo de Alopa’s Florentine *editio princeps* in c. 1494–96), he dismissed the *Tabula Cebetis* as “ein Erzeugniss der plattesten Popularphilosophie ohne Geist und ohne Empfindung.”⁴ Despite the run on Imperial Greek “Second Sophistic” literature over the last three decades, the pejorative tone has very much continued. Comparatively little has

The present article stems from a shared (and ongoing) conversation between the two authors at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin between 2012 and 2013. We are especially grateful to the editor and two anonymous readers at *CP* for their sharp-sighted critique and suggestions, as well as to Jaś Elsner, Jakob Lenz, and Michael Trapp for stimulating discussion. All translations are our own unless otherwise stated.

1. The three best modern editions of the text are Pesce 1982 (with facing Italian translation); Fitzgerald and White 1983 (with English translation); and Hirsch-Luipold 2005b (with German translation). Seddon 2005, 173–200 also provides a recent discussion and English edition.

2. = Ainsworth (ed.) 1928, 55–56. For the text’s English reception, see Orgel 1980 (reproducing five English responses between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries).

3. *Nouveaux Essais*, I.IV, chap. III §20; for discussion, see David 1961, along with Koch 2005, 196. “In the eighteenth century, the last period in which this work was intensively studied in the schools,” as Hagstrum (1958, 34) notes, “Cebeus was praised as the first who had achieved an alliance of philosophy and picture.” More generally on the literary-cum-artistic fates and fortunes of the text since the Renaissance, see Joly 1963, esp. 7–8; Schleier 1974, esp. 13–54; Sider 1979; Pesce 1982, 9–12; Trapp 1997; Tucker 2003, 109–51 (with a superlative discussion of Giovanni Battista Pio’s Latin verse paraphrase of 1496); Koch 2005.

4. Hirzel 1895, 259. Cf., e.g., Friedländer 1912, 77, discussing the *Tabula Cebetis* in terms of a “triviale Philosophie” imposed on “einem außerordentlichen umfangreichen Bilde”: “Bei Kebeus ist Geist und bildliche Anschaulichkeit gleichermaßen geschwunden und merkwürdig an diesem Buch für uns eigentlich nur die Wirkung, die es geübt hat.”

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been written about the work.⁵ Much of what has been written, moreover, has overlooked the text's complex narrative framework in order to focus solely on either its philosophical content or linguistic form: "what is important about *Cebes' Tablet* . . .," as one recent assessment expounds, "[is] its marvellous network of nettlesome forms and constructions: genitive absolutes, present contrary-to-facts, attracted relatives, perfect active participles, εἶχον with an adverb, past generals, supplementary participles."⁶

In this article, our aim is to advance a different argument for rehabilitating the *Tabula Cebetis*. As we shall see, the predominant scholarly concern has been an ethical one: to relate the text's moralistic "message" to a particular philosophical dogma. By contrast, our purpose is to draw attention to the text's embedded aesthetic interests. The pseudonymous author interweaves his ethical allegory with a set of aesthetic reflections, we suggest, demonstrating how interpretation can never be separated from the processual journey of interpreting. Rather than simply prefiguring a new, epistemological sort of "Christian" hermeneutics, the work is steeped in the same aesthetic tradition that gave rise to numerous other Hellenistic and Second Sophistic texts (not least the Elder Philostratus' *Imagines*), concerned above all with ideas of mimesis across different media. While appearing to elucidate a single allegorical message, the *Tabula Cebetis* performs something much more self-reflexive about the mediations involved. The true lesson of this text, we might say, lies in its meta-pedagogical sophistication: if the *Tabula Cebetis* delivers a lesson in allegory, it also (and simultaneously) acts out an allegory about allegorization itself.

There is much to say about the *Tabula Cebetis*, as well as about its ancient and modern reception. In this article we restrict our analysis to an argument in five interrelated stages. We begin with a brief introduction to the text, surveying the current state of scholarship. This leads, second, to one of the most insightful modern analyses—namely, Jaś Elsner's discussion of it in relation to contemporary Roman "ways of viewing." Elsner was the first to draw attention to the work's mimetic mise-en-abyme of visual and textual frames. But by setting the *Tabula Cebetis* against Second Sophistic texts such as Philostratus' *Imagines*, Elsner would seem to have underestimated its multileveled concern with the aesthetic immersions of both viewers and readers. In the third section, we then examine how the text establishes a tension between the poles of immersion on the one hand and reflection on the other: while pulling readers into its mimetic world, the text simultaneously draws them back, throwing into relief the deceit (*apatê*) and pseudo-pedagogy (*pseudo-paideia*) involved. From this perspective, the *Tabula Cebetis* emerges as a highly enigmatic work. But, as the fourth section examines, the text

5. As Bowersock (2003, 330) complains of an essay dedicated to "vision" in a landmark volume on the "Second Sophistic" (Goldhill 2001), "the *Tabula Cebetis* fails to elicit even a passing citation." The major exception is the highly stimulating analysis of Elsner 1995, 39–48 (to which we return below, pp. 292–301).

6. Schork 1995, 65–66. Schork is explicit in stating that "my case for *Cebes' Tablet* ignores the ramifications of its simplistic moral message" (66): "the plot—not to mention its blatantly homiletic message—is sure to seem hokey even to the straightest arrow in a contemporary collegiate class" (65). Cf. Trapp 1997, 159, arguing that the text "deserves to be better known, both for its distinctive contribution to ancient moralizing literature, and for its place in the story of the influence of classical forms on European culture."

draws explicit attention to the enigmas of its own exegesis, framing the act of pictorial interpretation in terms of the “enigma of the Sphinx” (τὸ τῆς Σφιγγῶς αἰνίγμα, 3.2); rather than offering a detached moralizing commentary on the tablet’s pictorial representations, the text renders itself part of the ethical problematic that it represents. Fifth and finally, a brief conclusion associates our own reading of the *Tabula Cebetis* with those reflected in ancient testimonia: Greek and Roman audiences appear to have been more attuned to the text’s combined ethical and aesthetic concerns than most modern scholars.

1. THE *TABULA CEBETIS*

Before elaborating what we mean here, it is necessary first to say something about the *Tabula Cebetis*’ authorship, date, and structure. In our view, the very question of attribution demonstrates the text’s underlying complexity. Already by the second century C.E., the work seems to have been widely known and cited in connection with an author named “Cebes”:⁷ although the title goes unmentioned, Lucian refers to the text in two separate places, associating it with “Cebes” specifically (ὁ Κέβης; *Merc. cond.* 42; *Rhet. praec.* 6; cf. *Jun. Pol.* 3.95);⁸ Tertullian provides an additional reference in the third century, this time naming both the work’s author and its Latin title (*Pinax Cebetis*), while also describing a kinsman who allegedly translated the work into hexameter verse (*De praescr. haeret.* 4).⁹

Much ink has been spilt trying to determine who this “Cebes” might have been. Given the philosophical subject matter, there seems little doubt that the attribution served to foster an allusion to antiquity’s most celebrated “Cebes”—namely, the Theban follower of Socrates (who most famously features in Plato’s *Phaedo*, and who offers to buy Socrates his freedom in the *Crito*).¹⁰ The text’s close association with that late fifth-century figure is well attested in antiquity:¹¹ Diogenes Laertius links the *Tabula Cebetis* with the Theban author of the “dialogues” on *The Seventh Day* and *Phrynichus* (Κέβης ὁ Θηβαῖος· καὶ τούτου φέρονται διάλογοι τρεῖς· Πίναξ, Ἐβδόμη, Φρύνιχος, 2.125);¹² the Byzantine *Suda* is still more explicit, not only listing all three “dialogues,” but also labeling Cebes a “Theban, philosopher, and pupil of

7. Cf. Praechter 1885, 10–11; Joly 1963, 79–86; Fitzgerald and White 1983, 7–8; Seddon 2005, 176–80; Nesselrath 2005, 43–48. On the text’s supposed Byzantine legacy (in the hands of Nicetas Acominatus), see Downey 1940; on Arabic and Latin translations, see Müller 1877, 76–79 and 71–75 respectively (along with the additional bibliography cited by Fitzgerald and White 1983, 47 n. 129). The earliest surviving manuscript seems to be Vat. Gr. 1823, dating to the thirteenth century: see Finch 1960 (responding in particular to Müller 1877, esp. 9–15), along with Fitzgerald and White 1983, 27–28.

8. On these (and other supposed but not explicit) allusions to the *Tabula Cebetis* in Lucian, see Nesselrath 2005, 43–45, along with Joly 1963, 80–81 and Seddon 2005, 177–80. We return to the text’s ancient reception in the conclusion below (p. 318).

9. The attribution continues in the medieval manuscript tradition, as well as in subsequent editorial references to the author as “Theban Cebes”: see Praechter 1885, 12–14; Finch 1954, 83; Nesselrath 2005, 48–59, 62–66. On Renaissance ideas about the text’s attribution, see Tucker 2003, 115–17.

10. Cf., e.g., Pl. *Criti.* 45b; Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.48; Ps.-Pl. *Ep.* 13, 14.7; Aul. Gell. 2.18.4. On the characterization of Plato’s Cebes, and its later reception in antiquity, see Nesselrath 2005, esp. 39–43.

11. For a well-referenced discussion of ancient views of “Cebes,” see Nesselrath 2005; the key testimonia are collected and discussed in Praechter 1885, 4–24.

12. Cf. Seddon 2005, 176–77: “From the company in which he places Cebes, alongside Phaedo, Crito, Glaucon and Simmias, this is obviously the Cebes of Socrates’ circle.”

Socrates.”¹³ Despite such authorial associations, the text cannot sustain a fifth- or fourth-century B.C.E. date: various aspects of language and syntax suggest a chronology in the first or possibly early second century C.E.,¹⁴ and details in the argument likewise militate against any “Socratic” timeframe.¹⁵ The point is beyond empirical proof.¹⁶ But it seems likely that the very attribution of the *Tabula Ceбетis* plays with a make-believe authorship, inviting audiences to read (and perhaps in turn to interrogate) the work in light of its supposed “Ceбетic” author.¹⁷ Questions of authenticity, no less than of “deceit,” we might say, are inscribed into the very fabric of this pseudonymous text.¹⁸

As for structural organization, the *Tabula Ceбетis* is arranged into three key parts.¹⁹ The first section of the text establishes a narratological frame (1–4.1). Our narrator opens the work by explaining how, along with an undisclosed number of companions, he had once “happened to be walking about in the sanctuary of Cronus” (ἐτυγχάνομεν περιπατοῦντες ἐν τῷ τοῦ Κρόνου ἱερῷ, 1.1). Among the many other votive offerings dedicated there (πολλὰ . . . καὶ ἄλλα ἀναθήματα), he encounters “a strange drawing [*graphē*] with peculiar stories” (γραφή ξένη τις καὶ μύθους ἔχουσα ἰδίου, 1.1). Perplexed by the depicted subject (τὸ γεγραμμένον, 1.2), the narrator recounts how he was unable to make out what the stories were (οὐκ ἠδυνάμεθα συμβαλεῖν, τίνες καὶ ποτε ἦσαν, 1.1). At this point, we hear of an old man standing nearby (πρεσβύτες τις παρεστῶς, 2.1): addressing the group, this elderly

13. Κέβης, Θηβαῖος, φιλόσοφος, Σωκράτους μαθητής. διάλογοι δὲ αὐτοῦ φέρονται τρεῖς, Ἐβδόμη, Φρόνιχος, Πίναξ, ἔστι δὲ τῶν ἐν Ἄδου διήγησις, καὶ ἄλλα τινά (with discussion by Joly 1963, 67 and Nesselrath 2005, 46–47 n. 23). For the suggestion that “the attribution to Ceбетis” is “more likely to have been deliberate than accidental,” compare also Trapp 1997, 160; cf. Fitzgerald and White 1983, 5–7 (with detailed bibliography); Nesselrath 2005, 59–61.

14. On the first-century lexicographic *terminus post quem*, see Drosihn 1871, 37–39; Praechter 1885, 117–30 (listing some seventy-odd *vocabula, quae apud scriptores Ceбетis Socratico aequales aut rarius aut omnino non inveniuntur*, 117); Joly 1963, 13–21; Fitzgerald and White 1983, 1–4; Hirsch-Luipold 2005a, 29–30. Like Albrecht (1964, 759), we are skeptical of the supposed allusion to the *Tabula Ceбетis* in Dio Chrys. 10.30–32 (as proposed by Joly 1963, 53–54; cf. *ibid.* 83–86, “imité par Dion Chrysostome, le Tableau doit dater au plus tard des environs de 70 après J.-C.,” 86); we would nonetheless propose an indirect relation between the two texts (see below, pp. 312–13).

15. Most explicit is the reference to the Peripatetics at 13.2 (cf. Fitzgerald and White 1983, 147–48 n. 48; Nesselrath 2005, 47–48 n. 26, 51–52), but note also the allusion to Pl. *Leg.* 7.808d–e at 33.3: for a thorough review of bibliography, see Nesselrath 2005, 48–59. Likewise, the supposed alignment of the *Tabula Ceбетis*’ author with a Cynic philosopher named “Ceбетis of Cyzicus,” as mentioned by Athen. 4.156d, cannot be sustained (cf., e.g., Sittl 1886, 276): Lucian testifies to the text’s existence already a generation or so earlier in the second century C.E. (cf. Fitzgerald and White 1983, 5–6; Nesselrath 2005, 38; Seddon 2005, 175).

16. Cf. Seddon 2005, 175: “We simply do not know whether the work was falsely ascribed to Socrates’ Ceбетis innocently or through a deliberate act of misattribution, or whether it was correctly assigned to a different Ceбетis.” It is nonetheless clear from Diogenes Laertes that ancient writers *did* attribute the work to the Socratic figure, at least by the third century C.E.

17. At the same time, the work’s title elicits the question whether it might be the tablet itself—and not the text responding to it—that belongs to “Ceбетis” (cf. 2.2–3); for the tentative suggestion that “possibly Ceбетis is not to be imagined as the author of the text, but of the tablet,” see Kaesser 2006, 319; for the visual-verbal ambiguities of *pinax* (at once a tablet for writing and for drawing), see below, pp. 317–18.

18. On “pseudonymity” as an ancient literary topos, see now Peirano 2012, along with the various essays in Marmodoro and Hill 2013, esp. Morrison 2013 (discussing the attribution, *inter alia*, of a “Socratic” letter to Ceбетis); cf. McGill 2012.

19. For the best schematic summary, see Hirsch-Luipold 2005a, 14–15. Fitzgerald and White 1983, 9–11 is somewhat more confusing, not least in its argument about the structure of the tablet’s three enclosures (cf. our Appendix at pp. 318–19).

exegete explains how, during his youth, both the sanctuary and tablet were dedicated by a wise stranger, and adds that he himself had often heard the man expounding its story (τότε δὴ καὶ περὶ ταύτης τῆς μυθολογίας πολλάκις αὐτοῦ ἠκηκόειν διεξιόντος, 2.3). Invited by the narrator in turn to narrate the story (διήγησαι, 3.1), the old man promises to explain the tablet. He does so, however, only after warning about the “element of danger that the exegesis possesses” (ὄτι ἐπικινδυνόν τι ἔχει ἢ ἐξήγησις, 3.1), comparing his own explanation to the riddle of the Sphinx (Σφιγγὸς αἰνίγματι, 3.2): those who pay attention and understand his words will be saved; those who do not are doomed to a life of unfulfilled misery (3.1–4).

This leads to the work’s second and most substantial section. With staff in hand, the old man is said to point at the picture and to explain its various details, embarking on a prolonged dialogue with the narrator of the text (4.2–33.1). In the first chapter, the narrator had introduced the image in terms of “a circular enclosure, having within it two other circular enclosures, one larger and one smaller” (περίβολος ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ ἔχων ἐτέρους περιβόλους δύο, τὸν μὲν μείζω, τὸν δὲ ἐλάττω, 1.2). In this second section, the old man talks us through each depicted *peribolos*, expounding a grand allegory about the life journeys figured within. Each of the enclosures features personifications of various existential conditions and ethical states (most of them female, echoing the “group of women” that the narrator had recognized at 1.3): the fate of those traveling through life is consequently said to depend on how they interact with the figures encountered.

What, then, was to be seen? Referring to the whole topography of the tablet as “life” (4.2), the speaker embarks on his own exegetic journey through the three rings in turn (further comment about the precise arrangement here—which has been much disputed—is reserved for the appendix at the end of this article, pp. 318–19). Outside the first ring, readers are told, stands the Daimon, and next to him Apatê (“Deceit,” 4.2–6.1): once inside the enclosure, travelers are said first to encounter Opinions, Desires, and Pleasures (6.2–3), next Tyche (“Fortune,” 7–8), and finally, still outside the second enclosure, a series of female personifications appearing like courtesans (among them, Incontinence, Profligacy, Covetousness, Flattery, and Retribution, 9–11). Making our figurative way on to the second gate, we next meet, in chapter 12, Pseudo-Paideia (“Pseudo-Education”) standing at the entrance, and inside the enclosure various human groups in her thrall (13–14). Only by proceeding through a small internal gateway within that second perimeter do we see the steep path to the figure of “True Education” (ἀληθινὴ Παιδεία), who stands beside a third gate alongside her daughters, Truth and Persuasion (18.1–2). Inside this last enclosure are Knowledge and other Virtues who guide the travelers on to Eudaimonia (“Happiness”): this final space is imagined at the top of the third precinct, thereby constituting “the acropolis of all the enclosures” (ἀκρόπολις τῶν περιβόλων πάντων, 21.2). After explaining the three enclosures that lead to Eudaimonia, the speaker elucidates how those who have reached her summit can proceed wherever they wish: practicing what his own exegesis preaches,

the enlightened exegete revisits all three enclosures in turn (22–29), before explaining the initial command of the Daimon at the first gate (30–32).

In its third and final part, the *Tabula Cebetis* shifts metaphorical gear to discuss two issues that have arisen from the previous interpretation of the picture (33–43). On the one hand, the narrator asks what travelers had been advised to take from Pseudo-Paideia in the second enclosure (33–35); on the other, he inquires about whether or not the gifts dispensed by Fortune in the first enclosure are intrinsically good or evil (36–43). The dialogue format employed in this third and final section differs from what has preceded, with the old man now asking direct questions of the narrator without detailed reference to the picture: “come now,” as the old man puts it, “try to answer with your views on what I ask you about” (ἄγε τοίνυν, ἔφη, πειρῶ ἀποκρίνασθαι τὸ φαινόμενον περὶ ὧν ἄν σε ἐρωτῶ, 36.2).²⁰ Although the text’s ending has again been much debated (one Latin translation hints at an additional coda that is not preserved in the extant Greek manuscripts), the work does not seem to have returned to its opening frame, but instead ends with the direct speech of our narrator: “‘you seem to me to speak adequately,’ I said” (ικανῶς μοι δοκεῖς λέγειν, ἔφην, 41.4).²¹

Scholarly analysis of the *Tabula Cebetis* has tended to revolve around two overriding issues. First and foremost has been that of its philosophical derivation: to what doctrinal “school” does our allegorical interpretation belong?²² While some scholars have read the ethical undercurrents—and not least the dialogue form—as deeply “Socratic” in orientation, associating this with the supposed “Cebetic” identity of the author,²³ others have instead championed its supposed Platonic credentials.²⁴ A separate trend has been to emphasize both/either the “Stoic”²⁵ and/or “Cynic”²⁶ elements, referring to parallels in other contemporary texts. In a similar methodological vein, an additional quest has been to uncover the work’s alleged “Pythagorean” (or perhaps better “Neopythagorean”) elements—an approach championed by Robert Joly

20. There is no evidence that this third part of the text was a later addition, *pace*, e.g., Smith 1901, 391. Indeed, the transition in form and subject is prefigured earlier in the text, when the old exegete promises to make the narrator’s question about the intrinsic goodness of wealth the subject of a deferred dialogue (διαλέγεσθαι, 8.4; for discussion, see below, pp. 306–8).

21. For further discussions about the ending of the text, see the bibliography cited in Fitzgerald and White 1983, 167–68 n. 120. As Hirsch-Luipold (2005b, 145 n. 168) observes, “die griechischen Handschriften bieten jedoch einen klaren und verständlichen Abschluss,” although conceding the possibility “dass die *Tabula*, wie ein Teil vor allem der jüdischen griechischen Literatur, in unterschiedlichen Rezensionen mit verschiedener Länge im Umlauf war.”

22. For a detailed review of bibliography, see Fitzgerald and White 1983, 20–27; cf. Pesce 1982, 9–37; Hirsch-Luipold 2005a, 23–29.

23. See especially Jerram 1878, xxvii–xxxiv. On the identity of “Cebes,” see above, pp. 287–88.

24. Important here is the explicit reference to Plato at 33.1: Fitzgerald and White (1983, 21) relate this “Platonic” interpretation to the possible second-century C.E. date of the text (cf. Sinko 1951), which “would then coincide with the renaissance of Platonism at that time.”

25. Most significant is Praechter 1885, 24–83, with particular emphasis on the closing maieutic dialogue (above all its ethical discussions of “good” and “evil”), as well as on the text’s earlier comments about both Tyche and Pseudo-Paideia; for summary and critique, see Joly 1963, 25–35. The “Stoic” interpretation has been championed most recently by Seddon (2005, esp. 183–84), arguing that “we have in the *Tablet* a fundamentally Stoic work.”

26. See especially Joël 1901, 2.322–32 and Armin 1921.

in a landmark book of 1963.²⁷ As Michael Trapp has convincingly argued, such attempts at straitjacketing the text into modern sectarian categories are methodologically problematic: “it might be worth trying to get away from the conviction that each and every document must be categorisable in terms of one or another of the major sects (or even an ‘eclectic’ blend of several), and allow instead for the existence of works to which such distinctions are largely irrelevant.”²⁸

A second scholarly focus has centered around the text’s generic orientation.²⁹ From a literary standpoint, what is perhaps most striking about the work is its fusion of different genres: “it blends together the various techniques and traditions on which it draws, presenting moral allegory in the form of a work of visual art, expounded in dialogue, and converting a static image into a branching plurality of alternative narratives.”³⁰ On the one hand, the whole work exhibits a clear debt to the mechanics of Platonic dialogue, and specifically to its interlocutory format;³¹ in this particular case, the dialogical form is centered around an allegorical image (a device with a long-standing pedigree in its own right),³² while also resonating against a set tradition of described ethical “journeys.”³³ On the other hand, the moralizing mode of the *Tabula Cebetis* pivots around the description and interpretation of a picture, in line with literary works dedicated to or arising from the “ekphrastic” description of works of art.³⁴ Numerous parallels can and have been cited for such

27. Joly 1963, esp. 36–78, developing Jaeger 1960, 1: 139–41; cf. also Carlini 1963 (discussing an interesting comparison with a “Pythagorean” funerary stele). It is worth noting here that both the tablet and sanctuary are said to have been decorated by “a sensible and exceptionally wise man who emulated in both his speech and his actions a certain Pythagorean and Parmenidean life” (ἄνθρωπος ἐμφορὸν καὶ δεῖνός περὶ σοφίαν, λόγῳ τε καὶ ἔργῳ Πυθαγόρειόν τινα καὶ Παρμενίδειον ἐζηλωτικὸς βίον, 2.2). Although Joly’s analysis of the text’s hidden and unspoken meanings prefigures certain aspects of our own reading (below, pp. 312–13), his exclusively Neopythagorean interpretation seems too ethically (and aesthetically) reductive: Luce 1964, 39; Albrecht 1964, 759; Pesce 1982, 16–21.

28. Trapp 1997, 168–71 (quotation from 171).

29. For guides to bibliography, see Fitzgerald and White 1983, 8–20; Trapp 1997, 162–68; Hirsch-Luipold 2005a, 23–29. Most recently see Hafner 2013, emphasizing the strongly rhetorical character of the *Tabula Cebetis*.

30. Trapp 1997, 167.

31. On the associated *eratopokriseis* context, see in particular Downey 1959, along with Fitzgerald and White 1983, 11–13. Trapp (1997, 167) discusses numerous Platonic parallels, including the supposed resonances between the work’s opening narrative frame and that of the Pseudo-Platonic *Eryxias*, as well as the exegete’s recourse to an older authority (comparing *Tht.* 183e and *Prm.* 127b–c); Trapp also argues that “the young man’s request . . . to explain the tablet, ‘unless you are terribly busy,’” recalls *Phd.* 58d (cf. also *Grg.* 458b–c, *Phdr.* 227b, and *Prt.* 335c).

32. Particularly important are the moralizing allegories of Hesiod (*Op.* 287–92) and Prodicus, as compared and discussed alongside each other at Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.20–34; see Fitzgerald and White 1983, 14–15 (with parallels listed at 37 n. 62) and Trapp 1997, 162–63. Such moralizing allegory has a distinguished Platonic pedigree, not least in the Myth of Er, which likewise features a Daimon (*Resp.* 617d–e) and a river Lethê (*Resp.* 620d–621a, arguably prefiguring the *Tabula Cebetis* at 4.2–6; see Hirsch-Luipold 2005a, 27–29). Perhaps the closest analogy, centered around a celebrated painting with related personifications, is Lucian’s *De calumnia* (cf. Hirsch 2005a, 171–73).

33. One particularly fascinating—and conspicuously understudied—parallel here comes in Dio’s discourse on kingship, which ends with the Cynic-spun story of a journey made by Heracles, likewise figured around ethical choice (Dio Chrys. 1.56–84; cf. also Dio Chrys. 4.114–15, among other parallels): the numerous detailed and generic echoes between Dio’s story and aspects of the *Tabula Cebetis* raise important issues about their interrelationship or else shared reliance on a common earlier text (cf. Joly 1963, 84–85; Nesselrath 2005, 45–46, n. 20; above, n. 14).

34. On the way in which “the Second Sophistic specialises not only in ekphrasis itself but also in fusing it with other literary possibilities,” see Anderson 1986, 259. The best generic and chronological survey

interest in rhetorical evocation, or ekphrasis.³⁵ Among the most important is the novelistic convention of employing an opening description of a picture to frame the ensuing narrative (most strikingly at the beginning of Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*);³⁶ Lucian's numerous skits, centered around the interpretive evocation of a painting or sculpture, offer additional parallels to the *Tabula Ceбетis*' generic project.³⁷ As we hope to show, the text fits firmly within both the literary and intellectual parameters of such Second Sophistic works; indeed, the following interpretation sets out to emphasize the strong semantic connections with Imperial Greek ekphrastic texts, and more generally with the literary archaeology of Hellenistic epigrams on artworks.

2. A TELEOLOGY IN CIRCLES

Our own attempt to tease out the aesthetic reflections of the *Tabula Ceбетis* takes its cue from the most stimulating study of the text to date: Elsner's groundbreaking analysis in relation to "ways of viewing in the Roman world."³⁸ Elsner was among the first to draw programmatic attention to the work's recession of narrative frames, all the while pitching the hermeneutic thrust of the *Tabula Ceбетis* against that of Philostratus' *Imagines*. Although we would agree with much in Elsner's argument, this section uses his analysis as a foil for elucidating two critical interpretive departures: first, we argue that the narrative recessions figured within the *Tabula Ceбетis* are even more marked than Elsner recognized; this leads us, second, to contextualize the *Tabula Ceбетis*' aesthetic and ekphrastic games not against, but rather alongside, the various conceits of Second Sophistic texts such as Philostratus' *Imagines* (despite all their apparent differences). The *Tabula Ceбетis* is considerably more complex than even the most insightful of modern exegetes have suggested, we argue, and it taps into literary traditions so far overlooked.

For Elsner, the significance of the *Tabula Ceбетis* lies in its demonstration of a certain allegorical mode of seeing. By showcasing the "alchemy of

of "Beschreibung von Kunstwerken in der antiken Literatur" remains Friedländer 1912, 1–103, discussing parallel uses of "das Bild als Ausdruck eines Gedankens" on 75–83. For ancient notions of ekphrasis, see the bibliographic guides of Elsner 2002 and Squire 2009, 139–50, along with Webb 2009, esp. 167–91 on the "poetics of ekphrasis" in Second Sophistic literature.

35. See especially Schissel von Fleschenberg 1913, comparing the formal structure of the *Tabula Ceбетis* with passages from Petronius, Lucian, Achilles Tatius, and Longus. On the *Tabula Ceбетis* as employing "ekphrasis not only in the literary fiction in which the work is set but also in the descriptive techniques used in personifying and allegorizing the vices and virtues," see Fitzgerald and White 1983, 12, with further comments in Trapp 1997, 163–65.

36. Longus' work expressly frames itself as an "exegesis" of its own opening picture (*ἀναζητησόμενος ἐξηγητὴν τῆς εἰκόνας*, *praef.* 3), arranged in four books: see, e.g., Hunter 1983, 38–52; Bartsch 1989, 40–79; Webb 2009, 178–85; cf. Morales 2004, 36–95 on the opening of Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*.

37. See Fitzgerald and White 1983, 12 (comparing Lucian's *Navigium*, *Toxaris*, and *Imagines*), with further comments in Trapp 1997, 164–65 (in relation to Lucian's *Icaromenippus*). For a discussion of the *Tabula Ceбетis* and its relationship with Lucian (especially his *Heracles*), see Bartsch 1989, 23–31, showing how both authors describe "a painting . . . that contains a hidden and allegorical meaning that neither is simple enough to be immediately apparent nor is decoded by the author in the course of his description of it" (28). On Lucian's descriptions of artworks, see Maffei 1994, xviii–lxxxvi (with reference to the *Tabula Ceбетis* at xliii); more generally on Second Sophistic modes of allegorical interpretation, see Rousselle 2001, esp. 392–402, along with Chatterjee 2013, esp. 211 (on the subsequent Byzantine reception).

38. See Elsner 1995, 17–20, 21–22, 39–48; cf. idem 2007a, 185–86, along more generally with 1–26 on the supposed Graeco-Roman polarity between "the visuality of naturalism" and "ritual-centred viewing" (24).

exegesis,” the text is said to exemplify and prefigure the sorts of Christian hermeneutics that came to the fore in ensuing centuries. Elsner consequently supposes an intellectual polarity between the metaphorical “yin” of the *Tabula Cebetis* and the “yang” of a text such as the Elder Philostratus’ *Imagines*: this polarity, he argues, “may be said to correspond broadly (but not precisely) to the ‘secular’ and ‘sacred’ as social or cultural definitions.”³⁹ Where Philostratean hermeneutics are grounded in ideas about mimesis and make-believe, the *Tabula Cebetis* is made to champion a different intellectual approach to visual imagery:⁴⁰

Behind both these texts there turns out to be a deep philosophical basis on which is predicated the kind of viewing that each advocates. The formalism of Philostratus’s paintings—their naturalistic verisimilitude—is grounded in a theory which sees “reality” as being constituted by the world of the viewer’s ordinary physical and psychological experience, a world of common sense and materialist expectations. By contrast, the abstract or schematic nature of the tablet described by Cebes (the content of which is consistently personified and allegorized) is rooted in an anti-materialist religious conception of “reality” which is defined as the transformation of the world of ordinary assumptions through initiation . . . In effect these two texts turn out to offer contrasting ways of relating art to life and of relating the viewer’s life to the art he or she looks at.

Despite the chronological discrepancy—the fact that the *Tabula Cebetis* was in fact written at least one century, and quite possibly two, before the *Imagines*—Elsner’s alleged polarity between these two texts is fundamental to his larger argument about “the transformation of art from the pagan world to Christianity.” The conceptual shift in “ways of viewing” from those championed by Philostratus to those of the *Tabula Cebetis* accordingly demonstrates a “general move towards initiate and exegetic modes of interpreting art (essentially religious modes) which gradually came to dominate, often eventually to exclude, the emphasis on seeing images as referring naturalistically to the material world.”⁴¹ As parable, the *Tabula Cebetis* enacts a salvific sort of transformation, whereby initiates are shown the hidden depths of significance that underlie the material world of sense perception; by doing so, the text anticipates Christian modes of visual exegesis, treating the iconic picture as an “empty” cipher for channeling the sacred significance that viewers themselves must upload.⁴² Just as we learn to see the trio of enclosures

39. Elsner 1995, 19.

40. Elsner 1995, 22.

41. Elsner 1995, 20; cf. 247–87, esp. 248. Earlier in the book, Elsner characterizes these as “two radically different conceptual frames within which viewing (and many other aspects of social life) took place in the Roman world” (9); “what changed” in the gradual transition from one paradigm to the other, he continues, “was the gradual elimination of the self-ironising (even ‘post-modernist’) elements in Roman imagery in favour of a different kind of religious frame” (10).

42. On the “specific Christian theology of ecphrasis, as a directive and moulding sermon on pictures which might otherwise involve mere pleasure,” see now Goldhill 2012, with reference to Paulinus of Nola: “Christian ecphrasis can echo Hellenistic language and the gestures of the Hellenistic viewer, but cannot be the same, because the act of viewing has developed a new moral and intellectual positioning.” Goldhill concludes (quotations from 93, 98). There have been numerous attempts to relate the *Tabula Cebetis* to the hermeneutics of Christian parable, and above all to Hermas’ eclectic *Shepherd*: particularly important was Taylor 1901 and 1903 (supposing the *Tabula Cebetis*’ chronological priority; cf. Joly 1963, 81–83, along with Fitzgerald and White 1983, 16–20 for a detailed bibliographic guide).

in the *Tabula Cebetis* as signifying more than the “city” or “camp” initially supposed (πόλις . . . στρατόπεδον, 1.2), or indeed the “group of women” (πληθός τι γυναικῶν, 1.3) in the first enclosure as a plethora of symbolically charged personified values, so too both viewers and readers proceed from the uncertainty of early chapters (ἀποροῦντες, ἀπορούτων, 2.1) to a state of privileged knowledge. By demonstrating a certain heuristics of looking, the text is said to enact its own metaphorical journey from earthly entrapment to enlightened salvation.⁴³

Our primary difficulty with this interpretation derives from another of Elsner’s observations, and one that, in our view, necessarily complicates his exegetic framework. Elsner, after all, was among the first to demonstrate the *Tabula Cebetis*’ self-conscious collapsing of moral message into narrative frame: “the picture is re-enacting the frame which has first introduced it.”⁴⁴ Just as the narrator tells how “we chanced to be wandering around in the sanctuary of Cronus” (ἐτυγχάνομεν περιπατοῦντες ἐν τῷ τοῦ Κρόνου ἱερῷ, 1.1), Elsner explains, the old exegete will tell how Tyche herself appears as personified form in the first enclosure at chapters 7–8.⁴⁵ Still more significantly, the text posits a carefully crafted parallelism between the interpreter of the picture and the figure of the Daimon standing outside the first precinct.⁴⁶ As an “old man” standing by (γέρων τις ἐστὼς ἔμφασιν, 1.3; γέρων . . . ἐστηκώς 4.3), this character within the picture anticipates the elderly gentleman who, standing in front of the tablet, proceeds to explain its details (πρεσβύτης τις παρεστώς, 2.1). Just as the old man begins by taking a staff and pointing to the picture (ἐκτείνας πρὸς τὴν γραφήν, 4.2),⁴⁷ moreover, so too is the Daimon said to appear “with a scroll in one hand and as if showing something with the other” within the picture described (ἔχων χάρτην τινα ἐν τῇ χειρὶ καὶ τῇ ἐτέρᾳ ὡσπερ δεικνύων τι, 4.3). The parallel is made even more explicit later in the narrative. When asked about the Daimon’s instruction to those entering

43. Elsner’s interpretation is echoed in Rousselle 2001, 390: “there is therefore a hidden meaning, a disguise, which requires initiation to take place through the act of decoding”; cf. most recently Heath 2013, 71–104, esp. 85 n. 43 citing the *Tabula Cebetis* in connection with “Stoic” archaeologies for early Christian visualities.

44. Elsner 1995, 42. Cf. Trapp 1997, 168 on the “community of experience not only between reader and internal audience, but also between the internal audience and the travellers depicted in the painting”; compare also (apparently independently from Elsner) Tucker 2003, 113 on the “implicit correspondence between the external elements of the narrative framework and those of the internal, fictional ‘picture’ itself”; and Hirsch-Luipold 2005a, 30–34 on the “Zusammenhang von Rahmenhandlung und Bildardarstellung in der *Tabula*.” For an earlier observation about the “noch kaum beachtete Analogie zwischen Rahmenerzählung und Bild,” see Albrecht 1964, 758.

45. Cf. Elsner 1995, 43–44: “The aimless state described in the image where Chance seduces man off the right path turns out to be precisely our state, the narrator’s and reader’s state, before the initiation by the *presbytes* into the meaning of this picture” (44). Likewise, the opening image of the narrator “happening to be wandering around” (ἐτυγχάνομεν περιπατοῦντες) foreshadows the description of those drinking from Deceit, who are likewise said to be “wandering about” (πλανῶνται) and “passing around wherever they chance” (ὡς περιάγονται ὅποι ἂν τύχη, 6.3). One might perhaps also compare the narrator’s initial request that the old exegete explain the picture—unless he *chances* to have some other pressing business (εἰ μή τις σοι μεγάλη ἀσχολία τυγχάνει οὔσα, 3.1).

46. By the same token, the wandering crowd that gathers before the temple precinct, inspecting this panel in front of it (πίνας τις ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ νεῶ, 1.1), might be thought to mirror the “large crowd standing at the gate” entering Life (καὶ ὁ ὄχλος ὁ πολὺς ὁ παρὰ τὴν πύλην ἐφροστώς, 4.2).

47. The detail is repeated when the exegete returns to the figure of the Daimon in the thirtieth chapter, “stretching out his hand once again” (ἐκτείνας οὖν τὴν χεῖρα πάλιν, 30.3).

life, the exegete at once evokes the Daimon's words and repeats them in the context of his own exegetic explanation of the picture: the Daimon's command, we are told, is "to be confident"—a sentiment that the speaker himself promptly appropriates within the context of his own dialogue to the boy ("and therefore you also be confident," *θαρρῆν, ἔφη, διὸ καὶ ὑμεῖς θαρρῆτε*, 30.2). In this very tangible sense, the exegete's direct speech within the narrative frame of the text directly aligns with the depicted Daimon's alleged indirect address to those entering Life.⁴⁸

In our view, such echoes between the pictorial world of the tablet and the narrative frame of the text are even more salient than Elsner recognized. As we shall see, the complex recession of frames generates a mimetic mise-en-abyme in which the representational world of the picture slips and slides into that of the narrative framework containing it: all this makes for a text that is highly self-reflexive about its own aesthetic mediations, as well as about the implicit involvements of both viewers and readers respectively.⁴⁹ Numerous details underscore this highly crafted correspondence between the pictorial frame of the tablet and the narrative frame of the text. When, for example, the narrator addresses the old exegete as ὦ δαιμόνιε in chapter 6.2, he exploits a standard dialogical formula to draw a conceptual parallel between the old man and the Daimon: if audiences were to have missed the enigmatic association between the two figures, the one inside the picture, the other within the dialogue, our shrewd author here flags it explicitly by means of a knowing wordplay.⁵⁰ A series of further echoes draws out this recession of circles, establishing additional connections between the ethical message of the picture and the aesthetics of experiencing it. The "Desires" (*Ἐπιθυμῖαι*) described along with Opinions and Pleasures as occupying the first enclosure at 6.2, for example, resonate with the narrator's own desire to hear about the depicted story (*πάνυ γὰρ ἐπιθυμοῦμεν ἀκοῦσαι*, 3.1; cf. *μεγάλην τινὰ ἐπιθυμίαν*, 4.1). Likewise, there is a compelling echo between those described as "handed over to retribution" in the first enclosure (*παραδίδονται τῇ Τιμωρίᾳ*, 9.4) and the old man's proleptic initial characterization of those destroyed by the Sphinx as "just like those who are handed over to retribution" (*καθάπερ οἱ ἐπὶ τιμωρίᾳ παραδιδόμενοι*, 3.3). In this particular passage, the speaker warns the narrator—and by extension the reader—about the dangers of (listening to an) interpretation even before embarking on his own exegesis (cf. below, pp. 308–9). Crucially, however, he does so figuratively, drawing an implicit comparison with the picture that is yet to be described and interpreted: the preliminary warning about the dangers of following a pictorial exegesis is introduced in the closely correlated terms of the depictions within it.

48. As Elsner (1995, 43) puts it, "the *gerôn* in the picture . . . himself becomes the mystical authority for what should be happening outside the picture to its viewers and to the readers of its ekphrasis."

49. Cf. Tucker 2003, 113–14 on the "giddy mise-en-abîme," whereby the "mirror effect" of pilgrim-visitors to the temple reflected in the image of the "newly arrived souls" before the Daimon "could be seen to extend even further backwards, to the external readers of the 'picture'-text itself": "these readers cannot but identify themselves . . . with both the fictional visitors to the temple, and the newly-arrived souls featuring in the 'picture' proper."

50. With the exception of the initial reference (*Δαίμων*, 4.3), the figure is subsequently labeled τὸ Δαιμόνιον throughout (24.3, 30.1, 31.3, 31.5, 32.5, 33.2).

The circular recession from pictorial exegesis to narrative frame is carefully and knowingly developed. If the text represents an act of pictorial interpretation, it seems never in fact to reach beyond the exegetic confines of the old man's initial warning. As we have said, the old man responds to the narrator's request to expound "what the story is" (τί ποτέ ἐστὶν ὁ μῦθος, 3.1) with a cautionary tale about the dangers of his own exegesis (ὅτι ἐπικίνδυνόν τι ἔχει ἢ ἐξήγησις, 3.1): to understand his words, we are told, is to be saved in life, while those not paying proper attention will suffer a slow and painful destruction. When proceeding to read the subsequent exegesis, however, we find that the old man's interpretation merely substantiates his opening warnings about exegesis: such is the contrived circle of the dialogue, that the old man's narrative about "what the story is" turns out to portray and extend his opening caution about proper interpretation. A plethora of verbal reminiscences once again underscores the connection. So it is, for example, that the exegete's opening talk about living's one's life (βιώσεσθε, 3.1; ἐν ὄλῳ τῷ βίῳ, 3.3; ἐν παντὶ τῷ βίῳ, 3.4) anticipates the topography of Life depicted within the painting (ὁ τόπος Βίος, 4.2); likewise, the opening explanation about the inherent danger involved in the exegesis (ἐπικίνδυνόν τι ἔχει ἢ ἐξήγησις, 3.1) foreshadows the "great danger" described in connection with False Opinion in the twelfth chapter (ὡς μέγας ὁ κίνδυνος, 12.1), as well as the other dangers faced during the ascent. Such verbal echoes between the narrative of the text and the moralizing exegesis of the picture embed each in terms of the other: the art of pictorial interpretation is rendered a figurative extension of the narrative frame, and the narrative frame a prefiguration of the text's pictorial interpretation.

Something similar can be said of the exegete's opening polarity between "being saved" on the one hand (ἐσώζετο, 3.2; σώζεται, 3.4), and "being destroyed" on the other (ἀπόλετο, 3.2; ἀπόλλυται, 3.3).⁵¹ Once again, this initial theme turns out to be precisely the one represented within the picture (cf., e.g., αἱ μὲν εἰς τὸ σώζεσθαι [ἀπάγουσιν] . . . αἱ δὲ εἰς τὸ ἀπόλλυσθαι, 6.2), with the same terms recurring throughout the ensuing dialogue (σώζεσθαι ἐν τῷ Βίῳ, 4.3; οἱ . . . σωζόμενοι, 12.3; σωθήσονται, 14.4; σωθῆναι, 24.3; σωθεῖεν, 35.5; οἱ σεσωσμένοι, 27.2; ἀπόλλυται, 32.5).⁵² As a tale that will make one either "wise and happy" (φρόνιμοι καὶ εὐδαίμονες) or else "foolish, unhappy, sullen, and stupid" (ἄφρονες καὶ κακοδαίμονες καὶ πικροὶ καὶ ἄμαθεῖς, 3.1), the old man's opening story about interpretation anticipates the various journeys within the subsequent explanation of the image (not least the figurative journey to the realm of Eudaimonia or "Happiness" herself, crowning the composition at the top of the inner enclosure, 21.3–22). As if to underscore the point, the author posits a crafted connection between the person who

51. The same language recurs later on: those who make a habit of doing what they hear about (ἐξὶν περιποιησθε ὃν ἀκούετε), the exegete declares, will be saved (σῳθήσεσθε, 20.4).

52. Additional reminiscences underscore the parallel—not least between the opening image of the sphinx "devouring" her prey (likened in turn to the person who does not understand the old man's exegesis), and the subsequent image of "Luxury" (Hedypatheia) consuming those who live luxuriously. The man who succumbs to Luxury, and then returns to his senses again, "notices that he has not eaten, but has been eaten [κατησθίετο] and manhandled by her" (9.3–4), we are told; strikingly, though, the imagery echoes the preliminary remark about the victim "who has been devoured by the Sphinx" (ὁ ὑπὸ τῆς Σφριγγὸς καταβρωθείς, 3.3).

“is saved and becomes blessed and happy in his whole life” by heeding his interpretation (αὐτὸς δὲ σώζεται καὶ μακάριος καὶ εὐδαίμων γίνεται ἐν παντὶ τῷ βίῳ, 3.4), and the portrayed individual who, reaching True Paideia in the third enclosure, is likewise “saved and becomes blessed and happy in his life” (σώζεται καὶ μακάριος καὶ εὐδαίμων γίνεται ἐν τῷ βίῳ, 11.2). In a recession of figurative frames, the one represented by the picture, the other through its narrative representation, the interpretation of the tablet self-referentially acts out the warnings of the text’s opening frame.

In our view, such collapsing of picture into narrative, and narrative into picture, is not accidental: time and time again, the text draws contrived attention to a conceptual association between the semantic journey of viewing the tablet (now mediated in turn through the act of reading this dialogue before it), and the literal journeys that the tablet itself portrays. One consequence of this device is to align the human travelers within the purported picture with both viewers of the tablet and readers of the text: the *Tabula Cebetis* strives to draw the reader into a world that is at once represented in the picture and mediated through the verbal engagement of the text.⁵³ This sense of immersion is tangible at numerous points within the narrative. Take, for example, the description of chapter 9, in which the old exegete collapses any distinction between the literal journeys figured within the picture and the figurative journeys of both viewing and reading: “when you pass beyond this gate . . .” (ὡς ἂν παρέλθῃς τὴν πύλιν ταύτην, 9.1).⁵⁴ While the second-person verb directly addresses the internal narrator listening to the exegete before the purported picture, it also speaks to the external reader of the text: the arts of both reading and viewing are assimilated to the act of literal movement, whereby the represented subjects advance from one gated enclosure within the picture to the next. This same sense of readerly reenactment also comes to the fore in chapter 15, when the narrator declares that the path leading to True Paideia is “certainly difficult to look upon” (καὶ μάλα γε χαλεπὴ προσιδεῖν, 15.4): the difficult appearance of the path—no less than our difficulty in beholding it—here mimics the difficulty of literally traversing this bridgeway, “with its deep precipices on each side” (κρημνοὺς ἔχουσα ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν βαθεῖς, 15.3); at the same time, the detail also points to an associated difficulty faced by the text’s external audience, who must now envision the picture from the words mediating it. Figuring out the image is predicated here upon an aesthetic immersion within the representation: readers have to navigate a path not only through the representational field of the image, but also through the representational lens of the text mediating it in cyclical turn.

The *Tabula Cebetis*’ intersplicing between the pictorial frame of the tablet and the narrative frame of the text has a critical interpretive importance. If the correspondences between visual stimulus and verbal exegesis are more extensive than have previously been observed, they also bestow a significance that, in our view, scholars have so far overlooked. For Elsner, the fusion

53. Cf. Hafner 2013, 75, arguing that the text creates an “Illusion von Räumlichkeit.”

54. As Fitzgerald and White (1983, 35 n. 50) write, “the use of παρέλθῃς tends to push the interlocutor (and the reader) into the role of the characters in the painted scene.”

between the world of the picture and the narrative frame of the text merely underscores a supposed ethical message: “the detailed and consistent collapsing of the themes of the picture into the narrative of the frame is an extremely effective device for highlighting the significance of the image and the exegesis that describes it.”⁵⁵ It is a conclusion shared by Michael Trapp, in another important contribution published in the immediate wake of Elsner’s analysis. “This is cunning writing, but not cunning for its own sake,” Trapp concludes: “its aim is to maximize the chances that the moral message contained in the exposition of the tablet will be taken seriously, as a programme for action in the reader’s own life.”⁵⁶

In contrast to Elsner and Trapp, we would suggest that this recession from picture to text (and back again) does not simply *emphasize* a moral message. In our view, the collapsing of frame into narrative simultaneously serves to *intertwine* the text’s moralizing viewpoint with a deep-set aesthetic concern. As text for reading, the *Tabula Ceбетis* is no mere vehicle, but is itself bound up with the ethical allegory that it acts out: to be reading the text is to be implicated within the ethical journey represented. Like the old exegete standing before the purported picture, the predominant mode of interpreting the text has been a teleological one: taking the work at face value, the concern has been to draw out and contextualize its straightforward ethical message (“open to no question,” as Elsner writes).⁵⁷ For all its concern with the literal and figurative end of Eudaimonia, however, the *Tabula Ceбетis* simultaneously figures a recession of representational circles: ethical interpretation is shown to be always and necessarily aesthetically framed. If the *Tabula Ceбетis* amounts to a “lesson in how to view,” as Elsner again argues, we would suggest that its pedagogical lesson lies not just in some moralistic end, but also in the processual journey of aesthetic experience. While immersing readers within the represented narrative, the *Tabula Ceбетis* foregrounds its exegesis within a carefully contrived *mise-en-abyme*; by doing so, the text invites critical reflection about the reader’s own exegesis of its represented exegetical perspective. Of course, the predominant focus of the text—especially when approached in quantitative terms—is a moralizing one, focused on the tablet’s significance for living an ethical life. And yet, in describing and interpreting the purported picture, the work goes out of its way to flag the aesthetic immersion involved; by doing so, as we shall see, the text stops readers in their tracks, inviting them to respin their aesthetic journey in the ethical terms of the evoked picture (and vice versa).

This leads to our second departure from Elsner’s interpretation. When approached in light of its carefully constructed narrative *mise-en-abyme*, the *Tabula Ceбетis* may in fact seem rather closer to the text with which Elsner

55. Elsner 1995, 44.

56. Trapp 1997, 168.

57. Cf. Elsner 1995, 45: “The authority for this reading . . . justifies the extraordinary tyranny of the exegete’s line which is final, open to no question and must be accepted (for the cost of doubt is misunderstanding and hence perdition). The viewing which is proffered as the path to enlightenment is radically different from that of Philostratus.”

contrasted it: the Elder Philostratus' *Imagines*.⁵⁸ Like the *Tabula*, Philostratus' *Imagines* showcases an older, master exegete explaining a set of pictures to a young boy and group of male youths—to a listening internal audience which again prefigures the external reader of the written text.⁵⁹ Although the interlocutions are mostly suppressed in the *Imagines* (with two notable exceptions at *Imag.* 1.13.1, 2.17.1), Philostratus' text grows out of a related generic frame, whereby those less experienced in “interpreting the tableaux” (ἐρμηνεύειν τὰς γραφάς, *praef.* 5) are encouraged “not only to agree, but also to ask questions, if I say something unclear” (μὴ ξυντιθέμενοι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐρωτῶντες, εἴ τι μὴ σαφῶς φράζοιμι, *praef.* 5).⁶⁰ In this connection, the narrator of the *Tabula Cebetis*' initial despondence at “inferring” an interpretation (οὐκ ἠδυνάμεθα συμβαλεῖν, τίνες καὶ ποτε ἦσαν, 1.1) resonates with the Philostratean narrator's opening exhortation, before the first tableau of Scamander, to “infer what it means” (συμβάλωμεν οὖν ὅ τι νοεῖ, *Imag.* 1.1).⁶¹ Time and again, both the exegete and the addressed boy of the *Imagines* lose themselves in the imaginary world of the paintings—themselves now mediated through the graphic written text that represents them—just as the internal audience in the *Tabula Cebetis* is made to reenact the journey depicted in the painting.

Needless to say, there are important differences between the *Tabula Cebetis* and the Elder Philostratus' *Imagines* (above all their distinctive takes on pictorial personification).⁶² While drawing attention to the shared frame and

58. Philostratus' *Imagines* is now attracting a substantial bibliography: for a recent guide, see Squire 2013. Primavesi and Giuliani (2012, 77 n. 153) also compare the framing of the two texts, although they suggest (somewhat problematically, in our view) that the *Tabula Cebetis* constitutes “eine vergleichbare, aber deutlich einfacher konzipierte Rahmenhandlung.”

59. Like the *Tabula Cebetis*, which derives from its narrator's professed desire to hear what the depicted myth means (πάνυ γὰρ ἐπιθυμοῦμεν ἀκοῦσαι, τί ποτέ ἐστιν ὁ μῦθος, 3.1), the *Imagines* showcases an older, master exegete addressing a younger boy (described as “eager to listen,” φιλήκοος, *praef.* 5, and with older youths standing by). The “youth” of the *Tabula Cebetis* narrator is implied at 23.4, when the exegete expressly addresses him as ὁ νεανίσκος: throughout the text, however, “there is an old-young dialectic at work” (Fitzgerald and White 1983, 38 n. 68). It is also worth comparing not only the two texts' related use of deictic pronouns and demonstrative adjectives (cf. Fitzgerald and White 1983, 8–9), but also their reiterative recourse to the language of seeing (ὄρᾱν, a verb that recurs some thirty times in relation to “looking at” aspects of the *Tabula Cebetis*): for the ekphrastic significance of the Philostratean exhortation to “look” (ὄρα), as “the moment of lift-off,” see Bryson 1994, esp. 266, 273.

60. By the same token, both authors frame their exegetic expertise in terms of former experience and training: just as the Elder Philostratus' narrator explains how he spent four years with a painter named Aristodemus of Caria (*Imag.* *praef.* 3), the old exegete of the *Tabula Cebetis* is said to have learned its meaning from the “stranger” who dedicated both the object and the sanctuary (2.3).

61. For related verbs in the *Imagines*, cf. *Imag.* 2.20.2 and 2.25.1 (συμβάλλεσθαι, συμβαλέσθαι), along with the detail in a tableau on the birth of Athena that “nobody would be able to guess” (οὐκ ἂν συμβάλου τις, *Imag.* 2.27.2).

62. Although the *Imagines* may not on first impression exhibit the same apparent concern with personification as the *Tabula Cebetis*, the work is nevertheless steeped in related questions about how pictures—no less than the words evoking them—can visually mediate ideas, stories, and narrative texts. In fact, Philostratus' gallery evokes many instances of pictorial personification: consider, for example, the personification of Truth (Ἀλήθεια) in the tableau of Amphiarus, as well as that of Dream (ὄνειρος), with his horn conveying how he delivers “truthful” dreams (1.27.3); one thinks, likewise, of the *Imagines*' second description with its embodied personification of “Revelry” (ὁ δαιμόνων ὁ Κῶμος, παρ' οὗ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὸ κωμάζειν, *Imag.* 1.2.1), not to mention the various personifications of landscape and geography encountered elsewhere (cf., e.g., Elsner and Squire forthcoming on Scamander at *Imag.* 1.1; compare too the description of the river Meles in the form of a youth at *Imag.* 2.8.1 [ὁ δ' ἐφήβῳ ἔοικε], or indeed the mountains and meadows that take on the respective form of “mourning women” and “beautiful youths” in the Hippolytus tableau [σκοπιὰ μὲν . . . ἐν εἶδει γυναικῶν, λειμώνες δ' ἐν ὄρα, *Imag.* 2.4.3]). Still more pertinent, perhaps, is *Imag.* 1.3, in which the tableau

intellectual backdrop, we should not lose sight of the divergent rhetorical, linguistic, and ideological tendencies of the two works, the one expressly concerned with *paideia* for its own sake, the other directed toward an ethical end-goal (the *Tabula Cebetis*' teleology of salvation). If the *Tabula Cebetis*' concern with the "good" and the "bad"—no less than the distinction between "True Paideia" and Pseudo-Paideia—marks one critical dissimilarity from the *Imagines*, another lies in the divergent linguistic registers. Where the *Imagines* goes out of its way to showcase its command of the Greek literary canon (emulating in its imagined gallery a whole host of different literary styles, all rhetorically staged for its make-believe audience),⁶³ the very form of the *Tabula Cebetis* is much humbler in appearance: its syntactical and lexical simplicity is a far cry from the elaborate vocabulary, rarified terminology, and Atticizing Greek so beloved by Philostratus (as indeed by other Second Sophistic writers).⁶⁴ But it is worth remembering here that simplicity of style need not betoken simplicity of thought. Among other (more or less) contemporary texts, we find certain authors strategically adopting such lexical and syntactical "plainness" as a deliberate stylistic choice. The clearest example comes in the *Diatribai* of Arrian, composed early in the second century C.E. In this particular work, the author seems knowingly to have appropriated a similarly "simple" register, so that Arrian's purported record of Epictetus' teachings features numerous *koinê* elements: the result is a text that patently departs from the diction of Arrian's other works (above all the *Anabasis* and *Indike*, with their clear stylistic, lexical, and dialectical imitations of Thucydides, Xenophon, and Herodotus).⁶⁵ In both cases, we seem to be dealing with a popular writerly style that strove to give the impression of orality; indeed, it is perhaps little wonder that a text such as the *Tabula Cebetis*—which purports to record an impromptu ethical conversation—deemed such a style particularly apt for its subject.⁶⁶

"philosophizes" through the bodies of Aesop's *Fables* (φιλοσοφεῖ δὲ ἡ γραφή καὶ τὰ τῶν Μύθων σόματα, 1.3.2), in turn mirroring how Aesop bestowed his animals with words for the sake of a moral message (καὶ λόγου τοῖς θηρίοις μεταδέδωκε λόγου ἕνεκεν, 1.3.1). In this passage (and numerous others might be cited), Philostratus concerns himself with personification in the sense of turning disembodied texts for reading into embodied pictures for viewing—albeit pictures which the represented exegete then turns back into the textual fabric of literary excursus. Philostratus' interest in pictorial personification—in giving body both to abstractions and to canonical works of literature—is coupled, in other words, with an opposite concern: if the speaker's pictures are said to transform ideas and words into images, his verbal exegesis is made to disembody them in turn, rendering them into speakable (and readable) language. When approached from this perspective, we suggest, the *Imagines* and the *Tabula Cebetis* exhibit a related aesthetic interest in pictorial and textual mediation, despite their very different outward presentations.

63. For some recent discussions, cf., e.g., Elsner 2009, 339–56; Elsner and Squire forthcoming.

64. On the "langue du Tableau" (discussing, e.g., vocabulary, preference for the perfect rather than aorist tense, use of optative, syntax, and particles), see especially Joly 1963, 13–21; the most important analysis of the lexical register remains Praechter 1885, 117–30.

65. On the stylistic artifice of Arrian's *Diatribai*, the classic discussion is Wirth 1967; Wirth responds to the standard (and deeply problematic) assumption of, e.g., Hartmann 1905 and Mücke 1924 that it is the *ipsisissima vox* of Epictetus himself which dictated the lexical, syntactical, and stylistic form of Arrian's text. For more recent discussions, see Klauch 2000, 346–50 (including a review of bibliography); Wehner 2000, esp. 27–53 (albeit without reference to the *Tabula Cebetis*' important parallel for such Imperial "Dialogstruktur"); and Yueh-Han Yieh 2004, 185–88. On Arrian's breadth of studied stylistic registers, see also Stadter 1980, esp. 23.

66. We are grateful to Michael Trapp and Lawrence Kim for their helpful guidance around some of these issues. On orality—and oral tropes—in Imperial Greek literature, see the discussions of Ruiz-Montero 2003a and 2003b, along most recently with Kim 2013, 309–11.

In our view, the outward discrepancies in register and form between the *Imagines* and the *Tabula Cebetis* should not occlude the conceptual similarities between them. Although the *Imagines* may prima facie seem a more sophisticated literary construction (not least in Philostratus' carefully stated allusions to both literary and art critical traditions), the interpretation represented in and through the *Tabula Cebetis* is no less demanding in its mimetic *mises-en-abyme*. Indeed, the *Tabula Cebetis* even frames its own narrative in relation to an earlier exegetic act that the text purports to re-perform: the "storytelling" of the narrator (περὶ τῆς μυθολογίας, 2.1) represents not only that of the old exegete (ἡ μυθολογία, 2.1; περὶ τὴν μυθολογίαν, 8.4), but also that of the stranger who originally dedicated the tablet and temple—the old man whose "storytelling" the old exegete had once heard (περὶ ταύτης τῆς μυθολογίας, 2.3).⁶⁷ With the text before us evoking a context that the present exegesis itself sets out to replicate in turn, the narrative frames of the *Tabula Cebetis* ripple and recede: in the *Tabula Cebetis*, as in the *Imagines*, the multiple acts of representation, cutting across the medial boundaries of text and image, throw into relief the mimetic mediations involved.

But the parallels between the *Imagines* and the *Tabula Cebetis* strike us as still more salient and intriguing. While playing with the immersion of internal and external audiences, after all, Philostratus relishes the different representational levels involved: in Zahra Newby's terms, the *Imagines* always counterbalances immersive "absorption" with reflective "erudition."⁶⁸ In the following section, we seek to develop a related argument in the context of the *Tabula Cebetis*: a similar tension between "absorption" and "reflection" prevails in this work, we suggest, albeit one that operates in a differently inflected way.

3. THE DECEITS OF PSEUDO-PAIDEIA

So far in this article, we have suggested that the *Tabula Cebetis* invites the reader to reenact the journey that is visually represented in the painting and verbally explained by the old man. We would now like to propose that the work simultaneously problematizes that seamless recession of representations, and that it does so as part of its intertwined meditation on aesthetics. Our argument here is founded upon a paradox at the heart of the *Tabula Cebetis*. On the one hand, the text entices the reader into the fictive world of

67. The recession of frames is flagged here in numerous ways: for one thing, the represented exegesis of the old man, addressed as an instruction to our young narrator, corresponds with that of the "very old" stranger who dedicated the tablet (πολυχρονώτατον, 2.3), and who is said in turn to have once addressed our exegete when he was young (νεώτερος ὢν, 2.3); likewise, it is the old man's story of listening to that stranger's narration (ἡκηκόειν διεξιόντος, 2.3) that sparks the young narrator's own request to hear the old man's narrative (διήγησαι ἡμῖν: πάνυ γὰρ ἐπιθυμοῦμεν ἀκοῦσαι. . . . 3.1). The only detail divulged about the old "stranger" who dedicated the temple and tablet is that, besides being a "prudent man and exceptional in his wisdom" (ἀνὴρ ἔμφορον καὶ δεινὸς περὶ σοφίαν), he "emulated in word and deed a Pythagorean and Parmenidean life" (λόγῳ τε καὶ ἔργῳ Πυθαγόρειον τινα καὶ Παρμενίδειον ἐζηλωκῶς βίον, 2.2): such talk of "life," of course, foreshadows the old exegete's warnings about being saved or destroyed in life (3.1–4), as well as the represented topography of the picture (4.2–3).

68. See Newby 2009, arguing that one "key feature" to Philostratus' "approach to art [in the *Imagines*]" is a continual movement between absorption in the world of the image and a detailed intellectual viewing which seeks to constrain the power of the visual through subjection to textual or verbal explanations" (323).

its picture and narrative frame. On the other, a series of pregnant references serves to pull the reader back, undermining the immersive appeal of the text through critical reflection. Instead of exploiting mimesis solely to underscore a moral agenda, the *Tabula Ceбетis* generates a tension between its ethical message and aesthetic form.

Two figures within the world of the picture are crucial for our argument here, simultaneously pertaining to the ethical realm of the image and to the aesthetic realm of the text: Apatê (“Deceit”/“Illusion”) and Pseudo-Paideia (“False Education”). Turning first to the personification of Apatê, we suggest that the *Tabula Ceбетis* knowingly exploits the figure not only to embody a moral idea, but also to refer to its own mode of aesthetic illusion. While a long tradition of critical thought had constructed *apatê* as a positive trait—indeed, as the ultimate goal of artistic mastery—the *Tabula Ceбетis* taints it negatively, associating this aesthetic quality with ethical error. In this sense, the figure of Apatê is closely aligned with that of Pseudo-Paideia. Against readers who succumb to the mimetic tug of *apatê*—and who assume that the very process of reading thereby reenacts the journey to Happiness—the *Tabula Ceбетis* draws attention to the text’s pedagogical capacity to deceive. Like Apatê herself, the subsequent appearance of Pseudo-Paideia therefore possesses a self-referential aesthetic significance. Just as, within the allegorical world of the picture, subjects must shake off the drug of Apatê and stir themselves from the world of Pseudo-Paideia, so too are viewers of the tablet (no less than readers of the text) prompted to resist total absorption, and thereby to see the text’s salutary ethical and aesthetic significance.

Apatê is a concept expressly figured within the picture explained through the text. Before our readerly journey through the tablet gets underway, the old exegete explains how, alongside the gate to the first enclosure, an enthroned woman appears who is holding a cup in her hand: “she is called Deceit,” he tells us, “the one who leads all men astray” (Ἀπάτη καλεῖται. . . , ἡ πάντας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους πλανᾶσα, 5.2); all those entering life (τοὺς εἰσπορευομένους εἰς τὸν Βίον, 5.2) must drink from her cup of “Error and Ignorance” (πλάνος . . . καὶ ἄγνοια, 5.3). The subsequent journey through the depicted enclosures is characterized in terms of either succumbing to or curing oneself of this preliminary potion: only True Paideia, we are told, can heal the traveler from Deceit (19.4–19.5), so that the cleansing or “catharsis” of this “disease” is likened to the treatment administered by a doctor (19.1–4).

What is remarkable about this opening discussion of *apatê* is its pertinence not only to the picture described within the text, but also to the mediations of the text itself. Within the confined pictorial frame of the painted *pinax*, such “deceit” describes the condition of all those entering life; within the self-reflexive frame of the words responding to this picture, though, the figure also draws attention to the mimetic mediations involved. If the depicted subjects must “drink” up this deceit, after all, so too must viewers of the pictorial scene portrayed. For the reader now witnessing that visual journey through the verbal representations of the text, the “deceit” proves still more complex. While the exegete is said to ask whether the youth “sees” the figure (ὄρᾷς,

5.1), and while the narrator even insists that he “sees” her (ὄρω, 5.2), the text appears well aware of its own illusive elisions: the underlying *apatê*, of course, is that readers, “seeing” this image by way of the reenacted dialogue performed in front of it (itself mediated through a written text), cannot in truth “see” anything at all.

No less important here is the specific way in which *Apatê* is introduced: the female figure, we are told, is “counterfeit in character” and yet “persuasive in appearance” (γυνὴ πεπλασμένη τῷ ἦθει καὶ πιθανῇ φαινομένη, 5.1). The choice of phrase is highly significant: both the verb πλάσσω and the adjective πιθανός are aesthetically loaded terms, pertinent at once to the mediations of language and to those of visual imagery. The basic meaning of πλάσσω is “to form” or “to mold,” signifying the activity of the artist working on soft materials (e.g., Hes. *Op.* 70). The derived denotation of “forming images,” and hence “imagining” (e.g., Pl. *Phdr.* 246c), serves as a bridge to the application of πλάσσω to explicit acts of forgery. In this connection, Plato had recourse to the verb in referring to the invention of words opposed to truth. In the *Republic*, for example, πλάσσω is used to describe fictional stories that have the capacity to deceive the young (*Resp.* 2.377b): “shall we, then, permit our children to listen to chance stories fashioned [πλασθέντας] by chance teachers,” as Socrates asks, “and thereby to take into their souls opinions for the most part contrary to those that we shall think they should have when they are grown up?”⁶⁹ In the ensuing discussion, Plato has Socrates criticize such stories which, because of their various reports of (*inter alia*) crimes committed by the gods, are ill-suited to the moral improvement of their audiences. Besides demonstrating that πλάσσω is used not only for the creation of visual art, but also for the composition of texts (and specifically fictional ones), the passage illustrates the negative connotations underlying the *Tabula Cebetis*’ own characterization of Deceit.⁷⁰

The second term, πιθανός, proves equally significant. According to Classical Greek usage, the word is primarily a rhetorical term that qualifies speech as “persuasive,” while also applicable to the “illusive” effects of other media. One of the most famous examples of this latter sense comes in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, again in the context of Socratic philosophy. Interrogating the sculptor Cleiton, Socrates is said to have pondered the idea that artists make statues lifelike by closely imitating their living models (*Xen. Mem.* 3.10.7):⁷¹ “is it not, then, by accurately representing what is drawn down or up from the poses of the bodies and what is compressed or outstretched, taut or loose, that you make them look more like real objects and more convincing

69. Ἄρ’ οὖν ῥαδίως οὕτω παρήσομεν τοὺς ἐπιτυχόντας ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπιτυχόντων μύθους πλασθέντας ἀκούειν τοὺς παῖδας καὶ λαμβάνειν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ ἐναντίας δόξας ἐκείναις ἅς, ἐπειδὴν τελεωθῶσιν, ἔχειν οἰησόμεθα δεῖν αὐτούς;

70. The connotation of fiction is even stronger in the use of *plasmata* at *Xen. frag.* 1.22. For more occurrences of πλάσσω and its derivatives in this sense, see Halliwell 2011, 11 n. 21. Cf. also Rispoli 1988, 142–69; Männlein-Robert 2007b, 90–92 (on πλάσσω in Hellenistic epigrams); Webb 2009, 169 (on πλάσσω and notions of fiction).

71. For guidance to the aesthetic reflections of *Xen. Mem.* 3.10, see esp. Preisshofen 1974; Rouveret 1989, 14–15; Goldhill 1998; Steiner 2001, 33–35.

[πιθανώτερα]?,” Socrates asks.⁷² While *πλάσσω* defines the ontological status of a speech or crafted object, *πιθανός* describes its effect on the recipient. Crucially, however, both terms belong to the same aesthetically-loaded semantic field; what is more, both words were used with concomitant reference to verbal and visual media alike.

In the *Tabula Cebetis*, a text that itself evokes an image, the deployment of the terms *πλάσσω* and *πιθανός* to characterize “Deceit” evokes this aesthetic register, calling to mind a long history of Greek literary and rhetorical criticism. According to Gorgias, for example, the aural and visual wonder of tragedy (θαυμαστόν ἀκρόαμα καὶ θέαμα) lies in the fact that “through its stories and sufferings, it provides a deception in which the one who succeeds in deceiving, rather than the one who fails to deceive, has right on his side, and in which the deceived is wiser than the undeceived” (ἢ τραγῳδία . . . παρασχούσα τοῖς μύθοις καὶ τοῖς πάθειν ἀπάτην . . . ἦν ὁ τ’ ἀπατήσας δικαιότερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατήσαντος καὶ ὁ ἀπατηθεὶς σοφότερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατηθέντος, B23 DK = Plut. *De glor. Ath.* 5.348c; cf. Plut. *De aud. poet.* 15d).⁷³ In Gorgias’ hands (and numerous other parallels could be cited besides),⁷⁴ *apatê* signifies the illusion that gives tragic audiences the feeling of following real, not represented action. And yet the same word could again also capture the subjective deceptions of visual art. In this closely associated sense, *apatê* leads viewers of a statue or painting to confuse representation with the thing represented.⁷⁵ The contest between the fourth-century painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius, as reported by the Elder Pliny, is just one of many anecdotes about visual art’s capacity to “deceive” (*fallere*, Plin. *HN* 35.65–66): whereas birds tried to peck at the grapes painted by Zeuxis, Parrhasius managed to fool a fellow artist; so persuasive was his painted curtain that Zeuxis himself mistook it for reality, asking Parrhasius to reveal the supposed painting beneath.⁷⁶

Particularly pertinent to the *Tabula Cebetis* is the role that *apatê* came to play in theorizing the rhetorical trope of ekphrasis, along with its associated qualities of *enargeia* (“vividness”) and *saphêneia* (“clarity”).⁷⁷ As Simon Goldhill reminds us of ancient critical discussions of ekphrasis, “rhetorical theory knows well that its descriptive power is a technique of illusion,

72. Οὐκοῦν τά τε ὑπὸ τῶν σχημάτων κατασπώμενα καὶ τὰνασπώμενα ἐν τοῖς σώμασι καὶ τὰ συμπεζόμενα καὶ τὰ διεκκόμενα καὶ τὰ ἐντεινόμενα καὶ τὰ ἀνέμενα ἀπεικάζων ὁμοιότερά τε τοῖς ἀληθινοῖς καὶ πιθανώτερα ποιεῖς φαίνεσθαι;

73. On Plutarch’s comments and their intellectual frame, see Hirsch-Luipold 2002, 55–72, esp. 65–69; cf. Halliwell 2011, 275–77.

74. See Halliwell 2002, 20–21 nn. 48–49 for parallels, along with Rosenmeyer 1955, esp. 232. One of the most pertinent parallels is *Dissoi Logoi* 3.10, where both the best painter and the best tragedian is deemed the one “who deceives the most by making things that seem like true things” (ὅστις πλεῖστα ἐξαπατῆ ὁμοία τοῖς ἀληθινοῖς ποιέων). On *apatê* in Gorgias and other Greek authors, see also Segal 1962, 112–15, 130–32 (with further literature cited at 114 n. 68).

75. Schuhl 1952, 31–37 is still useful as a basic discussion (and note too the appended discussion of the Gorgias passage at 82–85); cf. Pollitt 1974, 50–52.

76. For the anecdote, see, e.g., Squire 2009, 384–89, with further bibliography at 387 n. 80.

77. On the “as if-ness” of both ekphrasis and *enargeia*,” whereby the “audience both sees (metaphorically) and fails to see (literally) the subject matter,” see Webb 2009 (quotation from 10): “the language of illusion, approximation and semblance is deeply embedded in the discussions of ekphrasis” (ibid. 53); cf. eadem 1997, 244.

semblance, of making to appear.”⁷⁸ The *apatê* of both illusionistic art and ekphrastic description is something that comes to the fore in the Elder Philostratus’ *Imagines*—a text that, as we have suggested, shares many traits with the *Tabula Cebetis*. When, for example, the *Imagines*’ speaker breaks off his description of a painted tableau of hunters—complaining that his addressee is “unable to free himself from the deceit [*tês apatês*] and the slumber it involves” (οὐκ ἔχων ἀνείργεσθαι τῆς ἀπάτης καὶ τοῦ ἐν αὐτῇ ὕπνου, *Imag.* 1.28.2)—he sutures the “deception” of the naturalistic painting over that of the descriptive speech now mediating it. Here, as elsewhere, the “deceit” of ekphrasis is figured as a painted topos within the tableaux ekphrased: Philostratus delights in the mise-en-abyme of deceptive illusions, running the full gambit from graphic visual painting, through graphic verbal evocation, to performed speech mediated by written text.⁷⁹ Other ekphrastic writers toyed with similar games.⁸⁰ Perhaps most revealingly of all, the Younger Philostratus opens his *Imagines* with a related reflection about the *apatê* that ekphrasis involves (*Imag. praef.* 4):

ἦδεῖα δὲ καὶ ἡ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀπάτη καὶ οὐδὲν ὄνειδος φέρουσα· τὸ γὰρ τοῖς οὐκ οὔσιν ὡς οὔσι προσεσῆναι καὶ ἄγεσθαι ὑπ’ αὐτῶν, ὡς εἶναι νομίζουσιν, ἀφ’ οὗ βλάβος οὐδὲν, πῶς οὐ ψυχαγωγῆσαι ἱκανὸν καὶ αἰτίας ἐκτός;

And the deception [*apatê*] inherent in the work is pleurably sweet and without reproach. For to confront things that do not exist as though they did exist and to be influenced by them—to believe that they do exist: is this, from which there comes no harm, not a suitable and irrefragable form of entertainment?

78. Goldhill 2007, 3. One might cite here, *inter alia*, Quintilian’s discussion of Greek *phantasiai*: within an analysis of rhetorical visualization, Quintilian defines the trope as the “means by which images of absent things are represented to the mind in such a way that we seem to see them with our eyes and to be in their presence” (*per quas imagines rerum absentium ita repraesentantur animo, ut eas cernere oculis ac praesentis habere videamur* . . . , 6.2.29; for discussion, see Webb 2009, 86–107). Although focusing on the effectiveness of ekphrasis, Greek Imperial *Progymnasmata* nonetheless bear out the audience’s awareness of the illusion. “Ekphrasis is an interpretation that almost brings about seeing through hearing;” as Pseudo-Hermogenes puts it (τὴν ἐρμηνείαν διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς σχεδὸν τὴν ὄψιν μηχανᾶσθαι: Ps.-Hermog. *Prog.* 10.48 = Rabe 1913, 23); the elements of ekphrasis, in the words of Nicolaus, “bring the subjects of the speech before our eyes and *all but* make speakers into spectators” (ὕπ’ ὄψιν ἡμῶν ἄγοντα ταῦτα, περὶ ὧν εἰσιν οἱ λόγοι, καὶ μονονοῦ θεατὰς εἶναι παρασκευάζοντα, Felten 1913, 70; cf. *ibid.* 68, on how ekphrasis “tries to make listeners of its speakers,” ἢ δὲ πειρᾶται θεατὰς τοῦ ἀκούοντος ἐργάζεσθαι); similarly, Theon talks about the *saphêneia* and *enargeia* of ekphrasis in terms of their ability “to make one almost see those things that are being spoken about” (σαφήνεια μὲν μάλιστα καὶ ἐνάργεια τοῦ σχεδὸν ὀρᾶσθαι τὰ ἀπαγγελλόμενα, Patillon 1997, 119). Even more explicit is John of Sardis’ later commentary on Aiphthonius: while repeating the idea that ekphrasis “all but brings about seeing” (ταῦτα μονονοῦ βλέπειν ποιεῖ), John of Sardis adds that “even if the speech were ten thousand times vivid [*enargês*], it would be impossible to bring ‘the thing shown’ or ekphrased itself before the eyes” (κἂν γὰρ μυριάκις ἐναργῆς εἶη ὁ λόγος, ἀδύνατον αὐτὸ κατ’ ὄψιν ἀγαγεῖν τὸ δηλούμενον ἦτοι ἐκφραζόμενον: Rabe 1928, 216).

79. More generally on “ekphrasis, *apatê* and illusion” in the “fictional text” of the *Imagines*, see Webb 2006, along with Squire 2013, esp. 110–17.

80. Foremost among them, perhaps, is Callistratus, whose related descriptions of statues draw explicit attention to the *apatê* involved: regarding a statue of Orpheus, for example, Callistratus writes that “the bloom of his hair, and its semblance of life and animation, were such as to deceive the senses . . .” (κόμη δὲ οὕτως ἦν εὐανθῆς καὶ ζωτικὸν ἐπισημαίνουσα καὶ ἔμπνου, ὡς ἀπατᾶν τὴν αἴσθησιν . . . , 7.2); likewise, Callistratus declares of a statue of Eros that “although it was fixed stably to the pedestal, it deceived one into thinking that it possessed the power to fly” (εἰς μὲν γὰρ ἔδραν στάσιμον ἴδρυτο, ἥματα δὲ ὡς καὶ τῆς μετεώρου κυριεύον φορᾶς, 3.2). For the archaeology of this “deceitful” trope in Hellenistic ekphrastic epigram—whereby the simulations of naturalistic art double up as a metapoetic figure for the various simulations of epigram as genre—see Squire 2010a, esp. 600–616.

Fashioning his own *Imagines* after the model of the author's purported grandfather ("a certain ekphrasis of works of graphic depiction," τις γραφικῆς ἔργων ἔκφρασις, *Imag. praef.* 2), the Younger Philostratus knows full well that the "sweet *apatê*" of graphic painting mirrors that of its ekphrastic description, and vice versa.

In the *Tabula Ceбетis*, the introduction of personified "Deceit" as "counterfeit in character and yet persuasive in appearance" (γυνὴ πεπλασμένη τῷ ἦθει καὶ πιθανῇ φαινομένη, 5.1) brings to mind the various connotations of *apatê* as aesthetic term, not least in the context of ekphrasis. We have already said that the invitation "to confront things that do not exist as though they did exist and to be influenced by them" inheres in the very fabric of the *Tabula Ceбетis*: the artful nesting of representational levels leaves readers with the impression that they themselves have embarked on the journey painted on the tablet. But while authors such as the Elder and Younger Philostratus consider *apatê* a form of entertainment—and one that showcases the rhetorical brilliance of the author—its moral implications in the *Tabula Ceбетis* render it somewhat more problematic. Lurking beneath the ethics of *apatê* is a multilayered palimpsest of aesthetic ideas about illusion that are here tainted negatively. To anticipate our thesis: the *Tabula Ceбетis* suggests that whoever succumbs to aesthetic illusion also errs morally; more precisely, it implies that whoever believes the action of reading the text equates with the figurative ascent represented through it is necessarily mistaken about the ethics of right and wrong.

From this perspective, the aesthetics of *apatê* goes hand in hand with the semblances of Pseudo-Paideia. Although introduced as a concept in chapter 11, the first description of Pseudo-Paideia comes in the twelfth chapter: she stands at the gateway to the second enclosure within the picture and "appears to be altogether pure and well-ordered" (ἡ δοκεῖ πάνυ καθάριος καὶ εὐτακτος εἶναι, 12.2); whoever wishes to proceed to the realm of True Paideia in the third enclosure, we are told, must necessarily pass through her (12.3).

In the subsequent analysis, Pseudo-Paideia comes to play a decisive role—and nowhere more so than in the final coda. As we have said (above, p. 290), the third and final section of the *Tabula Ceбетis* is markedly different from what has preceded: the text shifts from the explanations of the exegete (directed by the questions of the narrator) to the traditional format of Socratic dialogue; by the same token, the wise exegete uses carefully orchestrated questions to steer his interlocutor toward new insights that may (at first sight) appear counterintuitive. The main portion of this final coda focuses on whether or not the gifts dispensed by Fortune are intrinsically good or evil (36–43)—a question prefigured earlier in the text, when the old exegete had promised to return to the narrator's question about the intrinsic goodness of wealth as a subject of a deferred dialogue (διαλέγεσθαι, 8.4). Before tackling this issue, though, the narrator asks about the purpose of Pseudo-Paideia: "what does the Daimon urge them to take from Pseudo-Paideia?" (ἀλλὰ τί κελεύει αὐτοὺς τὸ Δαιμόνιον λαβεῖν παρὰ τῆς Ψευδοπαίδειας; 33.2).

In tackling this question, the exegete forges an explicit connection between Pseudo-Paideia and *apatê*; at the same time, his specific response about the resources of Pseudo-Paideia (and what "travelers" can take from her) has

a self-reflexive significance for the text in hand. When it comes to “what to take” from Pseudo-Paideia, the old exegete replies that travelers within the picture—and by extension readers of the text—should equip themselves with “whatever seems to be useful” (ταῦτα ἃ δοκεῖ εὐχρηστα εἶναι, 33.2). These resources are not intrinsically necessary to proceed to the realm of True Paideia, we are told, but they are useful for the purpose of proceeding more quickly (ἀνάγκη μὲν οὐδεμία . . . χρήσιμα μέντοι ἐστὶ πρὸς τὸ συντομωτέρως ἐλθεῖν, 33.4). The essential point—and the one that establishes an express connection with *apatê*—is that the depicted subjects must repent, so that they “are persuaded that they do not have *paideia*, but only *pseudo-paideia* through which they are deceived [*apatôntai*]” (πεισθῶσιν, ὅτι οὐ παιδείαν ἔχουσιν, ἀλλὰ ψευδοπαιδείαν, δι’ ἣν ἀπατῶνται, 35.4). The whole discussion here at once qualifies and elaborates upon what had earlier been said about Pseudo-Paideia: asked “whether there is no other path leading to True Paideia” (πότερον οὖν ἄλλη ὁδὸς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπὶ τὴν ἀληθινὴν Παιδείαν ἄγουσα;), the exegete had responded “no, there is not” (οὐκ ἔστιν, 12.3).⁸¹ The discussion drives home both the nature and limits of “false education”: while not itself sufficient to make humans better, Pseudo-Paideia can accelerate the journey to True Paideia on which moral improvement hinges.

But why does the text end by returning to Pseudo-Paideia in the first place? In defining Pseudo-Paideia so carefully, we suggest, the *Tabula Cebetis* reflects upon its own aesthetic status. Explaining what is useful in Pseudo-Paideia, the exegete mentions “the *grammata* and those of other studies which even Plato said have the force of a bridle for the young, so that they are not diverted to different pursuits” (γράμματα, ἔφη, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων μαθημάτων ἃ καὶ Πλάτων φησὶν ὡσανεὶ χαλινοῦ τινος δύναμιν ἔχειν τοῖς νέοις, ἵνα μὴ εἰς ἕτερα περισπῶνται, 33.3). And yet, we might ask, what is the *Tabula Cebetis* if not itself an example of such *grammata*?⁸² The talk of *grammata* circles back to the beginning of the text, where the tablet—the very “painting/writing” from which the “text” before us derives—is labeled both as *graphê* (1.1, 2.1, 2.2, 4.2) and as something “painted/written” (τὸ γεγραμμένον, 1.2). The intermedial play—the Greek “graphic” pun that collapses the subjects of “drawing” into those of “writing”—is something to which we will return in our final conclusion.⁸³ For our immediate purposes, though, it is important to

81. The οὐκ of the exegete’s response to the narrator’s question is an editorial conjecture: it was introduced by Sauppe, and is supported by Arabic translations. It is obviously required from the context (the response to this “apparently hopeless confusion” suggested by Fitzgerald and White 1983, 145–46 n. 45—namely, that this is an “affirmation of the interlocutor’s deduction”—seems somewhat strained); without it, we would have a contradiction with the previous sentence, and one that the narrator would have been expected to pursue (cf. Fitzgerald and White 1983, 145–46 n. 45; Hirsch-Luipold 2005b, 127–28 n. 63). The objection of July 1963, 31–32 (followed by Pesce 1982, 60 ad loc. and Trapp 1997, 177–78 n. 53), namely that the sentiment contradicts that of 33.4 and 35.2, is unfounded: the discussion in chapter 33 is not about the necessity of passing through Pseudo-Paideia in order to arrive at True Paideia (which is a given), but rather about the requirement to take from her certain learned pursuits (πότερον δὲ ἀνάγκη ταῦτα λαβεῖν, εἰ μέλλει τις ἕξειν πρὸς τὴν ἀληθινὴν Παιδείαν; ἢ οὐ; 33.4; cf. Hirsch-Luipold 2005b, 127–28 n. 63).

82. Fitzgerald and White (1983, 113, 115) translate γράμματα as “literature” (a translation prefigured by “le lettere” of Pesce 1982, 89 and perpetuated by Seddon 2005, 196). Hirsch-Luipold (2005b, 101) opt for “Lesen und Schreiben” (citing Arnim 1921, 104).

83. See below, pp. 316–18.

emphasize how the very wording reinforces an association between the text of the *Tabula Cebetis* and the *grammata* mentioned at 33.3. The mimetic spell of the *Tabula Cebetis* has proven so strong that scholars, assuming that the text equates reading its representation with the ascent represented, unflinchingly identify its ethical moral with True Paideia. To do so, however, is to overlook the fact that the text explicitly qualifies all depictions/writings—its own included—in terms of Pseudo-Paideia. Of course, the qualification does not render *grammata* useless. While not itself making the reader virtuous and happy, the *Tabula Cebetis* can nonetheless aid us in our quest for salvation: it is not the journey that these *grammata* provide, but rather something approximating “provisions for the journey” (ὥσπερ ἐφοῦδιον, 32.4).

Those who—as the old exegete himself instructs⁸⁴—examine this passage carefully may find an additional clue as to the text’s own pseudo-pedagogical role here. For just as the Daimon is said to urge travelers to “dwell for some time” with Pseudo-Paideia (αὐτοῦ χρόνον τινὰ ἐνδιατρίψαι, 32.4), so too does the exegete instruct the narrator—and thereby the reader—to “dwell on my words, until you make them your habit” (ἐνδιατρίβετε τοῖς λεγομένοις, μέχρι ἂν ἔξιν λάβητε, 35.5). Once again, the marked repetition of the verb ἐνδιατρίβειν underscores the parallelism between the Daimon within the painting and the old exegete within the text (cf. above, pp. 294–95). At the same time, the verbal echo simultaneously drives home the idea that, instead of bestowing the reader with True Paideia, the *Tabula Cebetis* itself offers the metaphorical bridle of pseudo-pedagogical instruction. No less importantly, the text explains that cognition alone is not sufficient to establish virtue: virtue, we are told, is not constituted by knowledge, but needs instead to be incorporated as “habit,” or *hexis*. Such talk of *hexis* harks back to the passage at 20.4, where the exegete appealed to his audience to “make a habit of doing what you are hearing about” (καὶ ἔξιν περιποιήσησθε ὧν ἀκούετε), adding that “you will then be saved” (τοιγαροῦν . . . σωθήσεσθε).⁸⁵ Whether or not one supposes a reference to the heritage of Aristotle (whose *Nicomachean Ethics* had explicitly defined ethical virtue in terms of *hexis*, supposing it the basis on which we make right decisions),⁸⁶ the idea of “habit” is crucial for our interpretation. The old exegete makes it clear that true virtue requires more than passive looking, hearing, and reading: we must put the lessons of both picture and text into *action*.

So far in this section, we have examined the figures of Apatê and Pseudo-Paideia, leading us to the opening and closing sections of the text respectively. But an additional aspect of the exegete’s introductory frame helps to

84. The instruction to “pay attention” and to “listen carefully” is frequently repeated, framing the very opening of the text (εἰ . . . προσέξετε . . . καὶ συνήσετε τὰ λεγόμενα . . . , 3.1): one must attend (literally “look at”) the ethical message of the tablet, we are told, and not neglect it, considering all else peripheral (ἀλλὰ περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πολλῶν δεῖ ἐπισκοπεῖν καὶ μὴ διαλείπειν, τὰ δ’ ἄλλα πάρεργα ἡγήσασθαι, 35.5).

85. The narrator’s reply to the instruction (προσέξομεν, 20.4) perhaps delivers a hidden pun on this promise of ἔξιν. It is worth noting that a preserved Latin coda to the text recognized the importance of the idea, returning twice to the language of *habitus* (42.3): his words have been spoken, as the exegete puts it, “so that what I have said might be forged in your minds and that through this device it may become a habit for you” (*ut ea quae vobis diximus infigantur animis vestris eaque re vobis accedat habitus*, cited in Fitzgerald and White 1983, 130).

86. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1106b36–37. In *Eth. Nic.* 1103b21–22, Aristotle points out that *hexis* is acquired through the repetition of activities.

corroborate our argument. Before expounding his exegesis, the old man offers a preliminary word of caution: he tells “how the interpretation carries with it an element of danger” (ὄτι επικίνδυνόν τι ἔχει ἡ ἐξήγησις, 3.1). As we have already noted (p. 295), such preliminary talk of “danger” foreshadows the later “danger” of False Opinion, as portrayed within the picture (ὡς μέγας ὁ κίνδυνος, 12.1); it also foreshadows all the subsequent moments of loaded choice faced during the course of the ethical journeys depicted. But why should the exegesis *itself* be dangerous? The assertion makes little sense according to traditional readings of the text: those who fail to grasp the ethical significance of the text may remain in the metaphorical dark, but it is not clear how they are endangered by the act of explanation—nor indeed, in the speaker’s subsequent qualification, why they should be “destroyed” (ἀπόλλυται, 3.3, 3.4). Our interpretation permits a different understanding of the claim: the danger inherent in the text’s exegesis lies in the prospect that readers will be absorbed by its various aesthetic deceptions and compelled into thinking that the exegesis itself resembles “True Paideia.” It is a warning that has remained obscure among those taking the text at superficial value—stuck, as it were, in the second enclosure of Pseudo-Paideia. Once we heed the text’s metanarrative significance as epistemological allegory, however, the teaching takes on a rather more critical importance. Just as the peril of the picture lies in the absorption it induces (which if not properly interrogated, risks visual entrapment), so too is that danger replicated at the level of the text before us: immersion within the text may prevent us from seeing the self-referential significance that the text itself represents.⁸⁷

4. THE *AINIGMA* OF EXEGESIS

As our discussion has set out to show, the *Tabula Cebetis* acts out a critical pedagogical lesson: rather than simply delivering a detached commentary on a picture, the text becomes part of the ethical problematic that it represents. As with Pseudo-Paideia, and indeed with Apatê herself, it is all too easy to

87. One might compare here a later passage in the text, which explicitly reflects upon the work’s own hermeneutics. Discussing whether or not one can “become better” (βελτίους γενέσθαι, 33.5) through the provisions of Pseudo-Paideia, the exegete likens the skills learned from her to those of a translator: “for just as we sometimes surmise words that are spoken by way of a translator, it would nevertheless not be without use for us to know the voice itself, for we would then understand somewhat more accurately” (ὡς γὰρ δι’ ἑρμηνέως συμβάλλομεν τὰ λεγόμενά ποτε, ὅμως μέντοι γε οὐκ ἀχρηστον ἦν ἡμᾶς καὶ αὐτοὺς τὴν φωνὴν εἰδέναι, ἀκριβέστερον γὰρ ἂν τι συνήκαμεν . . . , 33.6). As Hirsch-Luipold (2005b, 142 n. 146) observes, “Der Vergleich mit dem Übersetzer (ἑρμηνεύς) erinnert daran, dass in der Rahmenhandlung (1–3) das Gemälde durch einen weisen alten Mann aufgeschlüsselt wird, der als *interpres* fungiert.” But the resonance with the opening frame is even stronger than has previously been recognized: the exegete’s talk of “surmising” (συμβάλλομεν) explicitly recalls our narrator’s opening inability to “surmise” the tablet’s significance (οὐκ ἤδυνάμεθα συμβάλλειν, 1.1); likewise, the talk of “understanding” (συνήκαμεν) directly parallels the exegete’s opening polarity between those who understand the interpretation so as to be saved on the one hand, and those who do not understand and who are therefore destroyed on the other (εἰ μὲν οὖν αὐτὸ συνίει τις, ἐσφύζετο, εἰ δὲ μὴ συνίει, ἀπόλετο . . . , 3.2; the same verb recurs throughout the ensuing exegesis: cf. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 19.2, 19.3, 20.4). As such, this passage might be thought to function as a knowing hermeneutic reflection on the usefulness of the text’s own mediated hermeneutics: the work’s use lies not, as it were, in a direct “translation” of an ethical message, but rather in the act of surmising, which is in turn likened to the gifts of Pseudo-Paideia. At the same time, the very terms in which the exegete frames his exegetic metaphor—likening it to “knowing,” certainly, but also (through the shared etymology) to “having seen” a voice (τὴν φωνὴν εἰδέναι)—has a direct relevance for this mediated representation not only of the picture, but also of the spoken dialogue enacted before it.

succumb to the deceits of the text. Once we entertain the suggestion that the *Tabula Ceбетis* belongs to the realm of Pseudo-Paideia, however, we see how its ethical explanation about life is mediated by way of aesthetic allegory. While *apatê* is primarily defined with regard to moral values, the very talk of “deceit” carries with it a range of aesthetic connotations that resonate with the self-declared “dangers” of the expounded exegesis. Since it belongs to the realm of Pseudo-Paideia, the *Tabula Ceбетis* provides “provisions” for the journey it describes, but it does not reenact the journey itself. Whoever succumbs to the mimetic tugs of the text—whoever believes that reading about the ascent is identical with ascending oneself—will not strive to advance further to True Paideia, and will therefore fail in the quest for true knowledge about good and evil.

This returns us to what we have called the “tension” at the core of the work. While the mimetic power of the *Tabula Ceбетis* draws readers into its representational world, leading them to think that they might thereby reenact the ethical journey represented through the picture and described by the ekphrasis, the text shows how readerly reenactment must necessarily fall short of engendering virtue and happiness. Where most interpretations start out from the assumption that the text “aims at dissolving the uncertainties inherent in the figurative representations on the codex [*sic*],”⁸⁸ we would instead suggest that the text explicitly flags this disjuncture between mimetic absorption and reflection. As already observed (p. 300), the linguistic simplicity makes the *Tabula Ceбетis* look *prima facie* rather different from a text such as the Elder Philostratus’ *Imagines*. On a conceptual level, however, the multifaceted engagement with mimesis suggests a closer alignment. Although it may lack the *Imagines*’ linguistic fireworks, the *Tabula Ceбетis* entwines its ethical concerns with a profoundly self-referential interest in its own aesthetic reception: to succumb to the aesthetic illusion staged in and by the text—to abandon oneself in its multiple recessions from pictures to words—is to lose sight of True Paideia, and thereby the end-goal of Happiness.

This brings us, finally, to one of the most poignant (and most poignantly overlooked) passages within the text, and one that again returns us to the intellectual world of the Second Sophistic. For the *Tabula Ceбетis* does not only frame its exegesis in terms of an alleged “danger,” but also figures itself as an allegorical enigma, or *αἰνιγμα*, explicitly. Directly after the old man’s talk of exegetic “danger,” the narrator asks the old man to elaborate what he means. In the explanation that follows, the text constructs an elaborate allegory for approaching its own subsequent allegorical explanation of the picture (3.1–3.4):

— οἷον τί; ἔφην ἐγώ.

— ὅτι εἰ μὲν προσέξετε, ἔφη, καὶ συνήσετε τὰ λεγόμενα, φρόνιμοι καὶ εὐδαίμονες ἔσεσθε, εἰ δὲ μή, ἄφρονες καὶ κακοδαίμονες καὶ πικροὶ καὶ ἄμαθεῖς γενόμενοι κακῶς βιώσεσθε. ἔστι

88. Kaesser 2002, 161, adding that “the exegesis in the *Tabula* is about defining a key by which the figurative representations on the painting can be decoded” (162). As we have argued (above, pp. 294–98), the framing of the text establishes a much more complex “hermeneutic gap” than the “simplistic” and “unsophisticated” one that Kaesser supposes: the opening narrative in which the exegesis is situated proves, *pace* Seddon 2005, 180, anything but a “simple framing story.”

γάρ ἡ ἐξήγησις ἐοικυῖα τῷ τῆς Σφιγγὸς αἰνίγματι, ὃ ἐκείνη προεβάλλετο τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, εἰ μὲν οὖν αὐτὸ συνίει τις, ἐσφύζετε, εἰ δὲ μὴ συνίει, ἀπώλετο ὑπὸ τῆς Σφιγγός, ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ἐξηγήσεως ἔχει ταύτης. ἡ γὰρ ἀφροσύνη τοῖς ἀνθρώποις Σφίγξ ἐστίν. αἰνίττεται δὲ τάδε, τί ἀγαθόν, τί κακόν, τί οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὔτε κακόν ἐστίν ἐν τῷ βίῳ. ταῦτ' οὖν ἐὰν μὲν τις μὴ συνίῃ, ἀπόλλυται ὑπ' αὐτῆς, οὐκ εἰσάπαξ, ὡσπερ ὁ ὑπὸ τῆς Σφιγγός καταβρωθεὶς ἀπέθνησκεν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ μικρὸν ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ βίῳ καταφθείρεται καθάπερ οἱ ἐπὶ τιμωρίᾳ παραδιδόμενοι. ἐὰν δὲ τις γνῶ, ἀνάπαυιν ἡ μὲν ἀφροσύνη ἀπόλλυται, αὐτὸς δὲ σφύζεται καὶ μακάριος καὶ εὐδαίμων γίνεται ἐν παντὶ τῷ βίῳ. ὑμεῖς οὖν προσέχετε καὶ μὴ παρακούετε.

— “What sort [of danger]?” I said.

— “That if you pay attention,” he said, “and understand what is said, you will be wise and happy; but if you do not, you will fare badly in life, becoming foolish, unhappy, sullen, and stupid. For the exegesis is like the enigma of the Sphinx—the one that she used to pose to mankind. If someone understood it, he was saved; but if he did not understand, he was destroyed by the Sphinx. The same holds true also for this exegesis. For mankind, foolishness is a Sphinx. It speaks in riddles of these things: of what is good, what is evil, and what is neither good nor evil in life. Thus if anyone were not to understand these things, he is destroyed by her, not all at once, as the person devoured by the Sphinx died, but he is destroyed little by little throughout his entire life, just like those who are handed over to retribution. But if one does understand, Foolishness is in turn destroyed, and he himself is saved and becomes blessed and happy in his whole life. So you then pay attention and do not mishear!”

The passage is remarkable for its recession of exegetic rings. The old man likens the interpretation that follows to the riddle of the Sphinx (ἔστι γὰρ ἡ ἐξήγησις ἐοικυῖα τῷ τῆς Σφιγγός αἰνίγματι, 3.2), who is in turn likened to the foolishness that plagues mankind (ἡ γὰρ ἀφροσύνη τοῖς ἀνθρώποις Σφίγξ ἐστίν, 3.2). But the exegetical warning applies equally both to the internal audience standing before the picture and to the external audience reading the text. Indeed, the use of the second-person plural verbs underscores the point (προσέξετε, συνήσετε, ἔσεσθε, βιώσεσθε, ὑμεῖς οὖν προσέχετε καὶ μὴ παρακούετε): addressing a collective audience, the old man directs his warning to a collective group of strangers (ὧ̃ ξένοι, 2.1, 3.1), only later shifting to the first-person singular (ὄρξ, 5.1).

Scholars have generally tended to gloss over this critical passage. Some have even erroneously supposed that the exegete likens the picture to the enigma of the Sphinx—that, as Christian Kaesser mistakenly supposes, “he compares the representations of the *pinax* to a riddle which needs to be solved.”⁸⁹ But it is not the image that is likened to the riddle of the Sphinx; rather, the enigma is said to inhere in the exegesis itself. It is also worth emphasizing that the exegesis is not compared with the Sphinx—which would tally with the alleged aspect of danger, as a literal issue of life and death—but more specifically with her *ainigma*. The self-referentiality of the passage is made all the clearer by its talk of “riddling” about what is good and bad in life (αἰνίττεται δὲ τάδε, τί ἀγαθόν, τί κακόν, τί οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὔτε κακόν ἐστίν ἐν τῷ βίῳ): this theme, after all, is precisely the one that dominates the work’s final section (36–41).

89. Kaesser 2002, 162. Hafner (2013, 67 n. 12) confuses things further when he claims that the *pinax* serves as a solution to the *ainigma* of the Sphinx.

How, then, should we interpret this enigmatic construction of the text's subsequent exegesis of the riddlesome picture? If, as previous interpretations have assumed, the portrayed exegesis were to serve as a direct ladder to Happiness, it is hard to understand why it should constitute a "riddle." In our view, Robert Joly was right to worry about these lines, even if (like others) we would disagree with Joly's own explanation—supposing that the "enigma" points to an esoteric Neopythagorean significance.⁹⁰ We would tender a rather different account. For us, the staged talk of *ainigma* captures precisely the tension between mimesis and reflection that we have proposed. The "riddle" of the text, we might say, can only be solved by looking beyond superficial appearances. As a form of pseudo-paideia, the *Tabula Cebeitis* delivers a readerly challenge to recognize the *apatê* that underlies its teaching: to think that reading alone leads to virtue and happiness is to remain deceived about good and evil, and thus forever condemned—just like those who fail to solve the Sphinx's riddle. The history of scholarship amply illustrates how easy it is to be trapped by the mimetic features of the text. Only by seeing through the *ainigma*, however, can readers solve the hermeneutic riddle of its presentation: fortified by the provisions, they can then continue their spiritual journey.

The riddling reference here is perhaps still more complex than it first appears. After all, ancient readers would have known only too well that the one person who did understand the Sphinx's riddle was far from saved.⁹¹ While Oedipus goes unmentioned in the *Tabula Cebeitis*, other contemporary texts seem to have dwelled precisely on the paradox whereby the same man who solved the Sphinx's riddle was nonetheless "destroyed." An important parallel can be found in Dio Chrysostom's tenth *Oration*, "On Servants" (10.30–32).⁹² At the close of the oration, Dio has the Cynic philosopher Diogenes refer to the opinion "that the Sphinx stands for stupidity" (ἐγὼ δὲ ἤκουσά του λέγοντος ὅτι ἡ Σφίγγξ ἡ ἀμαθία ἐστίν, 10.31); "while others had an inkling of their ignorance," Diogenes is made to add, "Oedipus, who thought that he was very wise and had escaped the Sphinx, and who had made the other Thebans believe all this, perished [*apolesthai*] most miserably" (τοὺς μὲν οὖν ἄλλους μᾶλλον τι αἰσθάνεσθαι τῆς αὐτῶν ἀνοίας, τὸν δὲ Οἰδίποδα, σοφάτατον ἡγησάμενον αὐτὸν εἶναι καὶ διαπεφευγῆναι τὴν Σφίγγα καὶ πείσαντα τοὺς ἄλλους Θεβαίους τοῦτο, κάκιστα ἀπολέσθαι, 10.32). Dio's talk of "solving the enigma of the Sphinx" (λύσαι τὸ αἶνιγμα τῆς Σφίγγος, 10.31), in the context of a discussion about both ignorance (*ἀμαθία*) and "destruction" (*ἀπολέσθαι*), tallies closely with the rhetoric of the *Tabula Cebeitis* (whatever the precise chronological relationship between the two). But it is the conclusion voiced by Dio's Diogenes that strikes us as important: "for any man who in spite of his ignorance deludes himself with the belief that he is wise is in a much sorrier plight than anyone else" (ὄσοι

90. Cf. Joly 1963, 53–55, rightly emphasizing that "c'est l'explication elle-même qui est une énigme" (54). For some (critical) responses to Joly's position, see above, n. 27.

91. For ancient references to the legend of the Sphinx, see Edmunds 1985, 47–57; cf. idem 1981.

92. On the relationship between Dio's tenth *Oration* and the *Tabula Cebeitis*, see Joly 1963, 54–55, 83–85, along with Fitzgerald and White 1983, 7–8, 136–37 n. 7 and Nesselrath 2005, 45–46 n. 20 (surveying the bibliography). Praechter (1885, 102) is probably right in supposing a common earlier source; cf. above, n. 14.

γὰρ ἂν ἀμαθεῖς ὄντες πεισθῶσι σοφοὶ εἶναι, οὗτοι πολὺ εἰσιν ἀθλιώτεροι τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων, 10.32). Dio Chrysostom seems here to draw out an inference that the *Tabula Cebetis* leaves unspoken. Although thinking that he had solved the riddle, after all, Oedipus nonetheless “perished most miserably” (κάκιστα ἀπολέσθαι). For original readers of the *Tabula Cebetis*, that mythological backdrop perhaps underlined the potential dangers of the text, stopping them in their figurative tracks: even—or rather, especially—those who think they have solved the enigma are liable to have been deceived.⁹³

The very rhetoric of *ainigma* also returns us to the *Tabula Cebetis*’ shared conceptual relations with other contemporary texts. Second Sophistic authors were fascinated with the idea of the enigmatic, not least in relation to visual stimuli: *ainigmata* recur as a theme within contemporary discussions of dreams, for example.⁹⁴ But the *Tabula Cebetis*’ talk of enigma may also lead us full circle back to the Elder Philostratus’ *Imagines*. Wandering around his make-believe gallery, Philostratus’ speaker has frequent recourse to the language of *ainigma* in the context of his own ekphrastic descriptions. So it is, for example, that the meaning of a pair of Cupids is presented as “a beautiful enigma” in one painting (καλὸν τὸ αἰνίγμα, *Imag.* 1.6.3)—and as an enigma that the speaker proceeds to guess (ξυνίημι) in terms of a parable about love and desire; similarly, a tableau of Midas is said to “hint purposefully at” the spread of the story of Midas (αἰνιττομένης σπουδῆ τῆς γραφῆς, *Imag.* 1.22.2), just as the painted singers’ smile at the beginning of the second book is likewise rendered an “enigma” in the tableau’s own enigmatic final words (τὸ μειδίαμα . . . ἐστὶν αἰνίγμα, *Imag.* 2.1.4).⁹⁵ Perhaps most significantly, the *Imagines* ends with the prospect of “telling a story” (μυθολογήσαι, *Imag.* 2.34.3) about the Horae depicted in the closing tableau: not only does the idea resonate with the promised μυθολογία expounded in the *Tabula Cebetis* (2.1, 2.3, 8.4), but the painter is said to have shown the goddesses perhaps “figuring an enigma” about the need to draw/write with grace (ἴσως αἰνιττομένων τῶν θεῶν, ὅτι χρῆ

93. Renaissance readers seem to have understood the hermeneutic stakes here, as is most clearly reflected in Giovanni Battista Pio’s Latin verse paraphrase of 1496, which survives in unpublished manuscript: cf. Tucker 2003, esp. 126–30 on Pio, “Cebetis tabulae interpretatio desultoria” (Rome, Bibl. Vittorio Emanuele 1072, ff. 5^{ro}–14^{ro}), ff. 5^{ro}, 5^{vo}–6^{ro}; Tucker astutely draws attention to Pio’s “trompe-l’oeil trick of double syntactic perspective” (129), which suggests a “reciprocal, symbiotic relation between the speaker and his hearers” (130).

94. Cf. Bartsch 1989, 32–36, comparing Second Sophistic ekphrastic descriptions of artworks with the self-declared allegories of dreams, said by Artemidorus to “show what is signified by way of their enigmas” (τοὺς τὰ σημαίνοντα δι’ αἰνιγμάτων ἐπιδεικνύοντας, *Artem.* 4.1).

95. On Philostratus’ *ainigmata*, see Bartsch 1989, 22–23. The idea of the “enigmatic” was further developed by Philostratus’ immediate successors (cf., e.g., *Phil. Min. Imag.* 10.7, αἰνιζομένου; 14.5, αἰνιτεται). Callistratus goes still further: not only is Lysippus’ statue of Kairos said to explicate things hinted at only obliquely (αἰνιττεσθαι, 6.4), for example, but Callistratus’ description of it knowingly plays with the conceit that an exegesis is preserved in the sculptor’s art (τὴν τοῦ καιροῦ δύναμιν ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ σφραζομένην ἐξηγουμένου, 6.4; cf. Bartsch 1989, 30–31). The idea of the ekphrased object containing its own interpretation within it recurs elsewhere in Callistratus (nowhere more so than when it comes to a described painting of Medea, in which “what is seen was an exegesis of her drama,” τοῦ περὶ αὐτὴν δράματος ἐξηγησις ἦν τὸ δρόμενον, 13.1). The underlying conceit, though, might be understood in relation to the exegetic talk found in the *Tabula Cebetis*: where the *Tabula Cebetis* portrays an external exegete imposing his interpretation onto the visual object (ἐξηγησις, 3.1, 3.2; ἐξηγήσομαι, 30.2; ἐξηγεσθαι, 30.1; ἐξηγήσαι, 36.1). Callistratus toys with the idea that the exegesis itself inheres within the statues described.

σὺν ὄρα γράφειν, *Imag.* 2.34.3). As Elsner has argued in a different context, the “riddlesome” looms large both in this passage and throughout the *Imagines*; indeed, the very gesture of ring-composing the text around the subject of the Seasons (*Horai*)—with all its nods to real-life, contemporary artistic framing practices—itself amounts to a “riddle set by the gods for the painter.”⁹⁶

This is not the place for a full discussion of Greek ideas about *ainigmata*, nor indeed of the linguistic distinction between the “enigmatic” and the “riddle” (γρίφος).⁹⁷ In the context of the *Tabula Cebetis*, however, it seems worth mentioning one final literary parallel for the figuring of image—no less than exegetic text—as *ainigma*: namely, epigram. On a conceptual level, epigrams on artworks have much in common with the *Tabula Cebetis*. Although inscribed on the monuments to which they refer, Archaic and Classical epigrams demonstrate a long history of framing visual-cum-readerly responses in terms of a dialogue between artefact and passerby.⁹⁸ Especially resonant with the *Tabula Cebetis* are the medial games of Hellenistic epigram, chiefly now composed for the literary anthology rather than for actual inscription, but playing with a similar mode of question and answer before a purported monument or artwork.⁹⁹ As Goldhill has argued, such epigrams flirted knowingly with the idea that responses to iconic symbols might prefigure the analogous act of reading: the rebus-like signs of monuments could spark a highly self-referential interest in the semantics of literary response.¹⁰⁰ In the *Tabula Cebetis*, the imagined questions and answers of epigram are themselves acted out in a carefully contrived narrative frame, with the boy now asking about the purported inscribed signs of the image, and the learned exegete responding to each question in turn.¹⁰¹ If the work’s interlocutory format finds a resonance in the dialogical ekphrasis of epigram, there is also

96. Elsner 2000, 255.

97. For some initial comments, see Luz 2010, 144–46 and eadem 2013, 94–98.

98. For discussion (and further bibliography), see Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 306–38, relating the innovations of Hellenistic epigram to an Archaic epigrammatic “dialogue form which dramatised the passage of information from the inscription to the passerby” (306), and comparing a later pastiche by Paulus Silentiarius (310–11 on *Anth. Pal.* 7.307). Cf. Tueller 2008, 42–46, also discussing the characterization of the passerby as “stranger” (ξένος) in Archaic and Classical epigram—a relationship that is arguably mirrored not only in the *Tabula Cebetis*’ characterization of the “strange depiction” (γραφή ξένη τις, 1.1), said to have been dedicated by “a stranger” (ξένος τις, 2.2), but also in the exegete’s own address to the gathered crowd (ὄ ξένοι: 2.1, 3.1, 33.1, 35.5).

99. See Tueller 2008, 194–202, also discussing the literary archaeology. Perhaps the most famous Hellenistic example is Posidippus’ poem on Kairos (*Anth. Plan.* 275 = 19 G-P) in which the “statue is queried by a viewer to gain information about how to appropriately ‘read’ the image” (Tueller 2008, 196; cf. Gutzwiller 2002, 95–96; Prauscello 2006 [“the pressing series of questions and answers [may] . . . be read as a direct enactment of the viewer/reader’s craving for interpretation while performing it,” 513]; Männlein-Robert 2007a, 260–63; Prioux 2007, 187–243; Squire 2010b, 74–75). The practice also finds parallels in numerous inscribed epigrams, among them the poem inscribed on the “Menophila relief” of the second century B.C.E., in which the inscribed analysis of the depicted “tokens” (μανύει, μάνυμα) is juxtaposed alongside the images themselves (cf. Prioux 2008, 286–90; Squire 2009, 161–65).

100. Goldhill 1994. Cf. Gutzwiller 2002, 86, on how ekphrastic epigrams “often represent the perceptual process of casting an eye over the various visual components of the object, struggling to understand their intended meaning, and then articulating an interpretation.”

101. Discussing the round rock on which Tyche stands at 7.2, for example, the exegete declares that the “sign aptly signifies her nature” (καὶ τὸ σημεῖον καλῶς μνήσει τὴν φύσιν αὐτῆς)—at which point the boy proceeds to ask what the round rock signifies (εἶτα τί τοῦτο σημαίνει; 7.3). Similarly, when in a subsequent passage clearly designed to recall that earlier motif, the boy asks why Happiness is portrayed standing on a

an associated interest in the challenges of interpreting the *ainigmata* figured. Consider, for example, Alcaeus' late third- or early second-century B.C.E. poem on an enigmatic funerary monument (*Anth. Pal.* 7.429):¹⁰²

δίζημαι κατὰ θυμὸν ὄτου χάριν ἅ παροδίτις
 δισάκι φεῖ μόνον γράμμα λέλογχε λίθος
 λαοτύποις σμίλαις κεκολαμμένον. ἦ ῥα γυναικί
 τᾷ χθονὶ κευθομένα Χιλιάς ἦν ὄνομα;
 τοῦτο γὰρ ἀγγέλλει κορυφούμενος εἰς ἓν ἀριθμός.
 ἦ τὸ μὲν εἰς ὄρθαν ἀτραπὸν οὐκ ἔμολεν,
 ἅ δ' οἰκτρὸν ναίουσα τόδ' ἠρίον ἔπλετο Φειδῖς;
 νῦν Σφιγγὸς γρίφους Οἰδίπους ἐφρασάμαν.
 αἰνετὸς οὐκ δισσοῖο καμὼν αἴνιγμα τύποιο,
 φέγγος μὲν ξυνετοῖς ἀξυνετοῖς δ' ἔρεβος.

I ask myself why this roadside stone has two phis as its only stroke [*gramma*] engraved by stone-carving chisels. Was the name of the woman buried here in the earth “Chilias”? For this is what the number summed up in one declares. Or was that wrong, and was the name of the woman who dwells in this mournful tomb called “Pheidis”? Now I am Oedipus who has pondered the riddles of the Sphinx. Praised be he who invented this enigma from the double carving, a light to the intelligent, but darkness to the unintelligent.

Alcaeus' epigram poses as a response to a graphically puzzling stimulus—a pair of alphabetical *phi*-characters inscribed on a roadside stone monument. Translating the double-form into a name (ὄνομα), the poet interrogates two possible interpretative responses: does the name betoken “Chilias” (literally “Thousand,” corresponding to the letters' numerical value), or does it rather pun on the name of “Phi-dis” (literally “*phi*-twice”)? As the poem figures its own metaphorical journey around that question, it simultaneously unpacks the “single stroke” (μοῦνον γράμμα) of the purported monument into another series of letters, self-consciously composing an *epi-gram* on the rebus-like *gramma* of the inscribed picture-cum-letter.¹⁰³ But what most interests us about this poetic response is its explicit framing around the theme of the enigmatic—so much so, in fact, that the epigram ends by relating its own exegesis to that of Oedipus pondering (and solving?) the riddles of the Sphinx (Σφιγγὸς γρίφους).¹⁰⁴ Whether or not the author of the *Tabula Cebetis* knew

square rock, the exegete explains the details in terms of its signifying (σημαῖον, 18.3) the security of her path and gifts.

102. For commentary, see Gow and Page 1965, 2: 20–21 (= Alcaeus 16 G-P). The best discussions are those of Gutzwiller 1998, 268–69; Bruss 2002; Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 332; Männlein-Robert 2007b, 130–32. For an analysis of the related “collection d'énigmes” in *Anth. Pal.* 7.421–9, see Prioux 2007, 244–90, arguing that such ekphrastic poems situate themselves “au confluent entre deux héritages—celui de la critique alexandrine et celui de la philosophie hellénistique” (251).

103. As Gutzwiller (1998, 269) argues, the puns of Alcaeus' poem playfully perpetuate the inscription's own imagined riddle: quite apart from the wordplay between αἰνετὸς and αἴνιγμα in line 9, are we to see the whole poem as a pun on the deceased's “thrifit” (φειδῶ) in being commemorated by so brief a “pheidic” rebus (cf. Gow and Page 1965, 2: 21)?

104. The irony, of course, lies in the fact that the “enigma of the double carving” (δισσοῖο . . . αἴνιγμα τύποιο) goes unsolved: the very duplicity of these two simultaneous answers, each posed as questions, corresponds to the (literally) double form of the single letter. “Mit der Formulierung in v.9: δισσοῖο αἴνιγμα τύποιο ist jedoch ein Hinweis darauf gegeben,” as Männlein-Robert (2007b, 131) puts it, “dass das Rätsel hier nicht

this poem (or others like it), his work seems to have situated itself against a related intellectual backdrop: if the text acts out the questions of such monologue—the “wondering with one’s mind” (δίζημα κατὰ θυμόν)—the explicit comparison of its exegesis to the “enigma of the Sphinx” (ἔστι γὰρ ἡ ἐξήγησις ἐοικυῖα τῷ τῆς Σφίγγος αἰνίγματι, 3.2) resonates against the traditions of Hellenistic epigram.

5. CONCLUSION: GRAPHIC MEDIATIONS

Our overarching aim in this article has been to demonstrate that there is more going on in the *Tabula Ceбетis* than first meets the eye. This is not a text that simply elucidates an ethical position, as so readily assumed. Rather, the work plays knowingly with its own pedagogical status, prompting audiences to see—no less than to reflect upon—the multiplex mediations involved. On the one hand, thanks to the recession of narrative frames, the act of reading the text is made to mirror the process of both viewing the represented object and journeying through life itself. On the other hand, the text draws self-conscious attention to the mimetic “deceit” (*apatê*) involved; in doing so, the *Tabula Ceбетis* qualifies its pedagogical status in terms of *pseudo*-paideia. Ultimately, the text’s ethical message cannot be distinguished from the act of aesthetically experiencing it.

The explicit moralizing of the text (not to mention its talk of True Paideia) has made it all too tempting to approach the *Tabula Ceбетis* as a straightforward antecedent to Christian parable. As we have argued, though, the multiple mimetic recessions enacted and undercut by the text also place it in a rather different intellectual tradition. From this perspective, the *Tabula Ceбетis* aligns closely with the cultural conventions of the Second Sophistic, pairing its ethical concerns about the life well led with a highly sophisticated interest in the aesthetics of both visual and verbal mimesis: to read the *Tabula Ceбетis*’ moral injunctions about the life well led is itself to be caught within the text’s aesthetic frame.

Our argument about self-reflexivity and Second Sophistic context is buttressed by an additional wordplay that we have so far mentioned only in passing: that of *graphê*. The pun that inheres in this noun (no less than in the word γράμματα or associated verb, γράφειν) has a long intellectual pedigree: in Greek, as opposed to English, the same word could describe both the acts and products at once of “drawing” and “writing.”¹⁰⁵ As is

nur in der Verdoppelung des identischen Schriftzeichens liegt, sondern dass Schriftzeichen generell mehrere (vgl. δισσοῖο) Bedeutungsebenen zulassen, die es herauszufinden gilt.”

105. On the history of the Greek pun, see Lissarrague 1992. Numerous ancient critics drew explicit attention to the underlying thinking. “Those who have understood *grammata*,” as a saying attributed to Menander has it, “see things twice over” (ὄπλῳς ὀρῶσιν οἱ μαθόντες γράμματα: see Pernigotti 2008, 294 no. 180, with discussion in Batezzato 2008, 1–2). Glossing the semantics of the verb *perlegere* at *Aen.* 6.34, Servius’ fourth-century commentary would likewise draw attention to the pun: the Vergilian word for “reading” is synonymous with that for “viewing” (*perspectare*). Servius explains, since the Greek aorist infinitive γράψαι may be said to mean both “to paint” and “to write” (. . . *cum Graece γράψαι et pingere dicatur et scribere*: Thilo and Hagen [eds.] 1923–27, 2.11).

well known, Hellenistic authors toyed with the pun with particular zeal;¹⁰⁶ we also find playful references to it in contemporary visual culture (not least on the *Tabulae Iliacae*—a series of knowingly intermedial objects that expressly demanded to be both seen and read).¹⁰⁷ Among Second Sophistic writers, the word's dual connotations proved a favorite means of framing the rhetorical exercise of ekphrasis, at once equating the arts of visual mimesis with those of verbal description, and simultaneously pitching the two against each other: the Elder Philostratus has recourse to the word some 130 times in the course of his *Imagines*, always aware of the simultaneous parallels and frictions between the acts of visually depicting a tableau and “painting” it through written language.¹⁰⁸

It seems appropriate to conclude this article by suggesting that a related game is at work in the *Tabula Cebetis*. As self-declared *Pinax Cebetis* (Πίναξ Κέβητος), the title of the work seems itself to have punned upon its combined status as text and image:¹⁰⁹ our “tablet” poses both as painted panel and as inscribed object for reading.¹¹⁰ Although the precise physical nature of the purported *pinax* is left knowingly ambiguous, it is explicitly introduced as a *graphê* (γραφῆ ξένη τις καὶ μύθους ἔχουσα ἰδίους, 1.1; περὶ τῆς γραφῆς, 2.1; τὴν γραφήν, 2.2; τὴν γραφήν, 4.2); indeed, at the very beginning of the work, we read how the narrator was unable to make head or tail of the object, deeming “the thing painted/written” to be neither a city nor a camp (οὔτε γὰρ πόλις ἐδόκει ἡμῖν εἶναι τὸ γεγραμμένον οὔτε στρατόπεδον . . . , 1.2). As we have already observed (pp. 307–8), the same language also recurs in the pivotal discussion of Pseudo-Paideia when, in the final section of the text, our exegete lists what resources are useful to derive from Pseudo-Paideia: “*grammata*,” comes the response (γράμματα, 33.3); likewise, in the following chapter, the old man argues that “nothing prevents one from knowing *grammata* and mastering all manner of studies and yet nevertheless being drunken, incontinent, avaricious, unjust, treacherous, and in short foolish” (οὐδὲν γὰρ κωλύει εἶδέναι μὲν γράμματα καὶ κατέχειν τὰ μαθήματα πάντα, ὁμοίως δὲ μέθυσον καὶ ἀκρατῆ εἶναι καὶ φιλάργυρον καὶ ἄδικον καὶ προδότην καὶ τὸ πέρασ ἀφρονα, 34.3). The very terminology employed here bears a metanarrative importance: in an additional recession of circles, the professed resources of Pseudo-Paideia

106. Cf. Männlein-Robert 2007a, 255–56; 2007b, 123–27; Tueller 2008, esp. 141–54. Among numerous other examples, one might cite the game of Theocritus’ fifteenth *Idyll*, in which Praxinoa exclaims “what painters have depicted such true *grammata*!” (ποιοὶ ζωογράφοι τὰκριβέα γράμματα ἔγραψαν, *Id.* 15.81; cf. Herod. 4.72–73, ἀληθινὰ, φίλη, γὰρ αἱ Ἐφεσίου χεῖρες / ἐς πάντα Ἀπελλέω γράμματα’, with discussion by Männlein-Robert 2006 and 2007b, 279–82).

107. See Squire 2011, esp. 235–43 on the hexameter prescription on the reverse of two *Tabulae Iliacae* (2NY, 3C) to “seize the middle *gramma* and glide whichever way you choose” (γράμμα μέσον καθ[ε]λὼν παρολίσθα]νε οὐ ποτε βούλει); cf. Petrain 2014, esp. 62–73.

108. For discussions, see, e.g., Boeder 1996, 149–65; Elsner 2004, 182 n. 10; Squire 2013.

109. The *pinax* is specifically introduced as such at 33.1 (ἐν τῷ πίνακι). On *pinax*-puns in ekphrastic epigram—demonstrating “dass nicht nur auf die Bild tragende Funktion eines Pinax angespielt wird, sondern auf seine—vertrautere—Funktion als Schriftmedium,” see Männlein-Robert 2007b, 48–51, on, e.g., *Anth. Pal.* 9.604.1 and 9.605.1 (quotation from 49); cf. *ibid.* 265 n. 24.

110. The game is further developed within the *Tabula Cebetis*. Not for nothing, for example, is the Daimon figure outside the first ring described as himself holding a scroll (ἔχων χάρτην, 4.3): our text evokes an image which itself contains within it unspoken written signs.

lead back to the pictorial *graphê*—the object from which the text in our hands (*graphê/grammata*) itself derives. At the same time, as we have also noted (p. 308), readers are explicitly told that such *grammata* belong not to the realm of True Paideia, but rather to that of *Pseudo*-Paideia: the text, like the picture from which it derives, provides a pedagogical vehicle rather than an educational end-goal.

Whatever else they took from the *Tabula Ceбетis*, ancient readers seem to have been highly attuned to such intermedial play. In his two explicit references to the text, Lucian pursued the *Tabula Ceбетis*' puns on writing/drawing: composing his own carefully crafted pastiches, Lucian tells how his word-painting, like that of Cebes, will "write/paint a picture through words" (ἐθέλω δέ σοι πρῶτον ὡσπερ ὁ Κέβης ἐκεῖνος εἰκόνα γραψάμενος τῷ λόγῳ . . . ἐπιδείξει, *Rhet. praec.* 6; cf. *Merc. cond.* 42: βούλομαι δ' ὅμως ἔγωγε ὡσπερ ὁ Κέβης ἐκεῖνος εἰκόνα τινὰ τοῦ τοιοῦτου βίου σοι γράψαι . . .). Where Lucian's pastiche perpetuates the written medium of the original—the lack of a good living artist, as Lucian puts it, necessitates "showing the image as best he can in prose" (ψιλὴν ὡς οἶόν τε σοι ἐπιδείξω τὴν εἰκόνα, *Merc. cond.* 42)—at least one ancient artist seems to have read the graphic riddle of the *Tabula Ceбетis* as an invitation for literal (which is to say pictorial) reconstruction: although the relief itself is lost, two Renaissance drawings attest to the existence of an ancient material object that was clearly modeled after the *Tabula Ceбетis*.¹¹¹ Here the circlings of word and image in which the *Tabula Ceбетis* indulged were given yet another spin. Ancient readers, it seems, appreciated the reflective play with mimesis that modern scholars have bypassed.

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APPENDIX: THREE RINGS OR FOUR?

The precise delineation of the *Tabula Ceбетis*' three enclosures has been much debated. Following the somewhat misleading commentary of Fitzgerald and White (1983, esp. 35 n. 51, 136 n. 3, 149 n. 57), Elsner (1995, 45) has suggested that the old man in fact distinguishes between four enclosures, not the three envisaged at 1.2 and 34–35 ("the very tablet itself changes as a result of exegesis . . . the three enclosures apparent to the uninitiated viewer become four enclosures by the time

111. On the two surviving drawings of the relief (which seems once to have belonged to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese), by Giulio Clovio and Giovanni Antonio Dosio respectively, see Müller and Robert 1884, concluding to have "das Relief nach den Worten des Kebes erklärt" (p. 126); cf. *JG* 14, 350 no. 1298; *IGUR* 4.98 no. 1634; *LIMC* 3.1, 116, s.v. "Bios" no. 4; Joly 1963, 67–69; Schleier 1974, 85–86 (with plates 31–32); Fitzgerald and White 1983, 44 n. 116; Trapp 1997, 172; Hirsch 2005a, 179–82; Squire 2011, 120–26 (with fig. 38 on p. 124). We find no grounds for Rainer Vollkommer's throwaway claim that this relief, "wenn es je wirklich existiert hat," was probably "ein in der Renaissance geschaffenes Werk" (*LIMC* 4.1, 471, s.v. "Hedone"). Mielsch has argued that another ancient image (a Roman funerary painting from the Viale Manzoni) also engaged with the surviving text (*LIMC* 7.1, 832, s.v. "*Tabula Ceбетis*").

the exegesis has reached 17.2”); likewise, Trapp (1997, 175–78) argues that the description “ought to give four circuits in all, starting with the outermost circuit of Life, and proceeding to the inner three” (176; cf. the reconstructions of Seddon [2005, 213–14, plans 1–3], who similarly labels “Enclosure A” as Life, supposing that it holds within it two separate enclosures—the self-contained “Enclosure B” of Luxury, and the detached “Enclosure C” and “Enclosure D” of “False Education” and “True Education” respectively).

Such confusion, we contend, belongs to modern interpreters rather than to the text itself. Three observations can put paid to the various misunderstandings. First, *pace* Trapp (1997, 176), the reference to “Life” at 4.2 pertains to the topography of the whole tablet (ὄτος ὁ τόπος), not to an outer ring (cf. Hirsch-Luipold 2005a, 16): the first enclosure is the one described at 6–11, with the Daimon and Apatê standing outside its gate. Second, *pace* Fitzgerald and White (1983, 149 n. 57), the realm of “Happiness” does not constitute a separate (“fifth”), inner ring, but rather an “acropolis” within the enclosure of True Paideia (21.2): the path leading up to that acropolis consequently parallels the one within the second enclosure leading to Self-Control and Perseverance, who in turn guide the traveler to True Paideia at 15.2–16.4. Third and most decisively, the reference to the “other enclosure” at 9.1 (ἄλλον περίβολον) refers proleptically forward to the second enclosure introduced at 12.1 (so that, in the same chapter, the reference to “that gate,” τὴν πύλιν ταύτην, refers back to the first gate, in front of which the Daimon and Apatê stand; cf. Pesce 1982, 60 ad loc. and Hirsch-Luipold 2005b, 123 n. 40 and 127 n. 61). In short, the text does not support the introduction of an additional enclosure here, *pace* Fitzgerald and White (1983, 149 n. 57); throughout the text, we are dealing with a literal and figurative ascent through the three interconnected enclosures. Although modern interpreters have had difficulty with the described layout of the purported picture, numerous sixteenth-century illustrators seem to have understood the rationale: despite some inevitable degree of artistic licence (its labeling of the first gate as “*Porta Vitae*,” for example), the frontispiece of Hieronymus Vietor’s 1519 Kraków edition (fig. 1) can still serve as a handy schematic guide (= British Museum E,8.4; for discussion, see Schleier 1973, 81–83, with Abb. 3).

Reconstructing the tablet’s topography is decidedly tricky, as evidenced by numerous post-Renaissance attempts to depict the image described (see Schleier 1973, 76–108, and the brief overviews of Trapp 1997, 175–78 and Hirsch 2005b). As we have argued, the text plays knowingly with both the promise and failure of mimesis: it at once invites readers to render verbal ekphrasis as visual picture, and challenges their attempts to do so. From an ethical perspective, however, the delineation of the three inner rings would appear perfectly consistent, and later confirmed by the subsequent references in chapters 24–33 and 35 (in which those entering the realm of Pseudo-Paideia are explicitly said to have come “from the first enclosure” of Incontinence and Vice—ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου περιβόλου—and to proceed onward “to the third enclosure and to True Paideia,” εἰς τὸν τρίτον περίβολον πρὸς τὴν Παιδείαν τὴν ἀληθινὴν, 35.2). For all the other “deceits” latent in the text, the layout of the purported object strikes us as relatively clear upon close and careful reading (cf. above, pp. 289–90): we would therefore part ways from the most influential and stimulating anglophone interpretation of its layout, namely that the tablet’s “form itself is transformed in the mysterious act of exegetic viewing” (Elsner 1995, 45).



Tabula Ceбетis ab Hieronymo Vietore impressa Cracconie

FIG. 1. Frontispiece of Hieronymus Vietor’s 1519 Kraków edition of the *Tabula Ceбетis* (British Museum E,8.4). © Trustees of the British Museum.

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