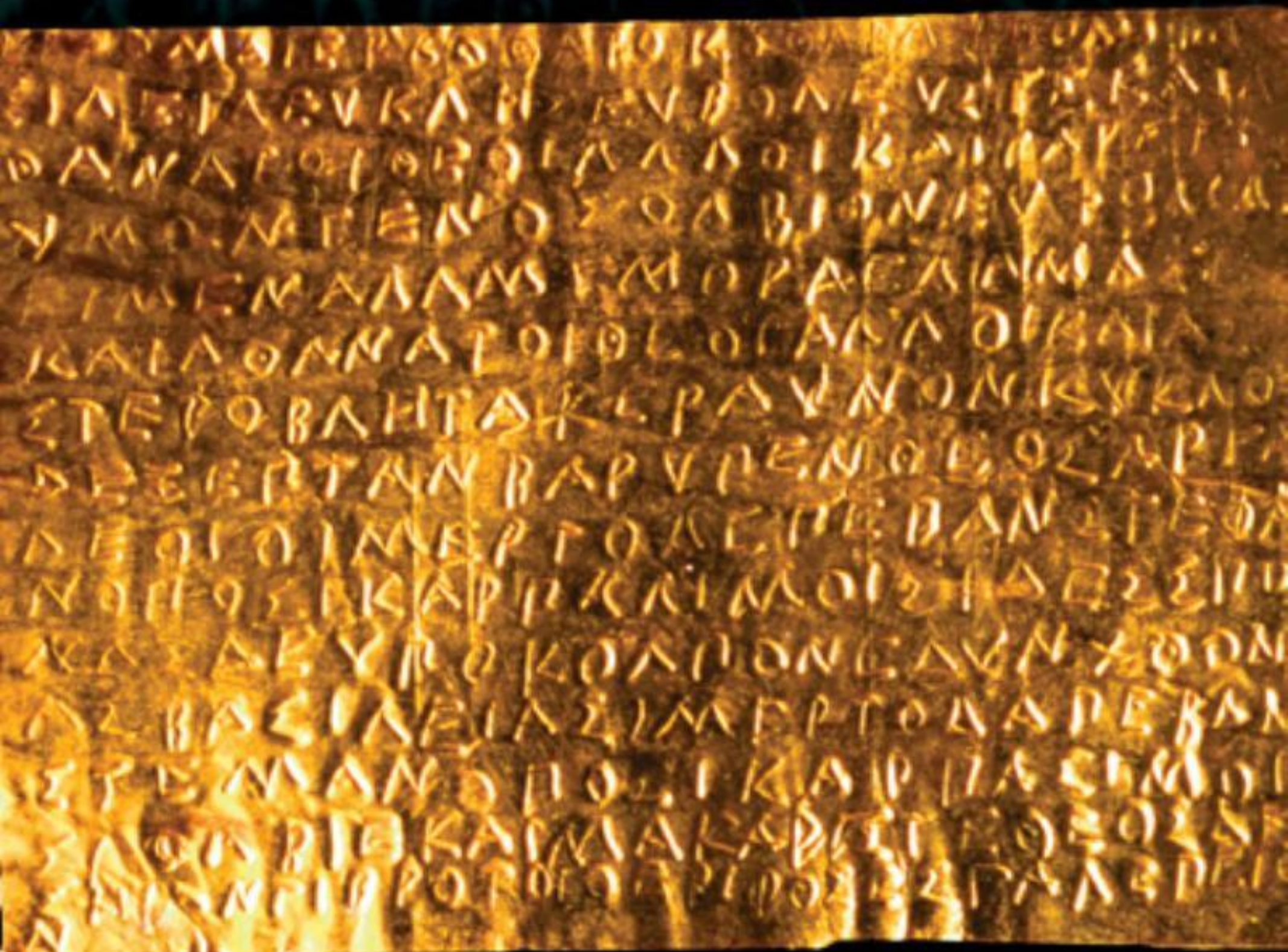


THE
“Orphic” Gold Tablets
and Greek Religion

FURTHER ALONG THE PATH



EDITED BY
RADCLIFFE G. EDMONDS III

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Acknowledgements

In some sense, this volume represents the thoughts that emerged, not from a single conference, but from a series of conferences. The first was a conference, “Roads Not Taken: Explorations of the ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets,” which, under the guidance of our mentor, Christopher Faraone, I put together with Sarah Cohen in 1997 at the Franke Institute for the Humanities at the University of Chicago while we were both graduate students. At that conference, Hans Dieter Betz presented an English version of the paper he was preparing for the festschrift for Walter Burkert that was published the subsequent year. Fritz Graf presented an overview of the tablets and their place within Orphic eschatological literature, ideas which were subsequently adapted and published in an Italian collection. Thomas Dousa, then a graduate student at the Oriental Institute at Chicago, presented a version of the paper he has expanded and revised for this volume. The second conference was the Vergilian Society’s Symposium Cumanum “The Cults of Magna Graecia,” in June 2002, where I first met Alberto Bernabé and Ana Jiménez and began our long, stimulating, and fruitful dialogue about the nature of Orphic materials. The third conference was “Orfeo y el orfismo: nuevas perspectivas,” organized by Bernabé and his colleague, Francesc Casadesús, in Mallorca, Spain, in February 2005. At this conference I met Christoph Riedweg and Miguel Herrero, and began to formulate the idea of putting together this volume, including the papers that Herrero and I presented at that conference.

Some additions have been made to the papers that grew out of these conferences, notably the seminal article of Claude Calame, which was so influential for subsequent scholarship, and the work of Yannis Tzifopoulos. Dirk Obbink’s paper had been presented at the APA in 1992, but was never published, although it was cited several times by members of that original audience. Christopher Faraone, whose essay also appears in this volume, was the one who suggested that I try to get it published, and I thank him

and Dirk Obbink for their efforts in bringing this nearly lost text back into the light.

None of these essays has appeared in quite the same form before, but some have been translated or otherwise adapted from previously published pieces. Fritz Graf's chapter, "Text and Ritual: The Corpus Eschatologicum of the Orphics" was originally published as "Text and Ritual: The Corpus Eschatologicum of the Orphics," in *La letteratura pseudepigrapha nella cultura greca e romana, Atti di un incontro di studi Napoli, 15–17 gennaio 1998*, ed. Giovanni Cerri, Naples, 2000, pp. 59–77. "Are the 'Orphic' Gold Leaves Orphic?" by Alberto Bernabé and Ana I. Jiménez San Cristóbal is an adapted translation from their 2001 volume, *Instrucciones para el más allá. Las laminillas órficas de oro*, now published in English as A. Bernabé and A. I. Jiménez San Cristóbal (2008) *Instructions for the Netherworld. The Orphic Gold Tablets*, Leiden, Boston, MA and Cologne. "A Child of Earth am I and of starry Heaven': Concerning the Anthropology of the Orphic Gold Tablets" by Hans Dieter Betz was originally published as "Der Erde Kind bin ich und des gestirnten Himmels': Zur Lehre vom Menschen in den orphischen Goldplättchen," from *Ansichten griechischer Rituale: Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert*, ed. Fritz Graf, B. G. Teubner: Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998, pp. 399–419, and has been translated for this volume by Maria Sturm. Claude Calame's "'Orphic' Invocations and Commentaries: Funerary Transpositions of Religious Discourse" was originally published as "Invocations et commentaires 'orphiques': Transpositions funéraires de discours religieux," from *Discours religieux dans l'antiquité*, ed. Marie-Madeleine Mactoux and Evelyne Geny, Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon, no. 578, Les Belles Lettres: Paris, 1995, pp. 11–30, and has been translated for this volume by Sarah Melker. Christoph Riedweg's "Initiation – Death – Underworld: Narrative and Ritual in the Gold Leaves" was originally published as "Initiation – Tod – Unterwelt: Beobachtungen zur Kommunikationssituation und narrativen Technik der orphisch-bakchischen Goldblättchen," from *Ansichten griechischer Rituale: Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert*, ed. Fritz Graf, B. G. Teubner: Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998, pp. 359–398, but has been adapted and translated for this volume by the author, with the assistance of Andreas Schatzmann, incorporating material from Riedweg's "Poésie orphique et rituel initiatique: Éléments d'un 'Discours sacré' dans les lamelles d'or," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 219: 459–481. My thanks to all of those involved in the laborious process of translation, adaptation, and editing of all these essays, and especially to Edward Whitehouse for his work on the indexes.



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PART I

The tablet texts



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To explain these odd texts, the excavators called in the eminent classicist Domenico Comparetti, and Comparetti's explanation set the terms of the debate for the next century and a quarter. In his article in the 1882 *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Comparetti linked the tablets from Thurii with another tablet, discovered in nearby Petelia nearly forty years earlier, in which the speaker claims to be the "child of Earth and starry Heaven."

You will find in the halls of Hades a spring on the left,
and standing by it, a glowing white cypress tree;
Do not approach this spring at all.
You will find the other, from the lake of Memory,
refreshing water flowing forth. But guardians are nearby.
Say: "I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven;
But my race is heavenly; and this you know yourselves.
But I am parched with thirst and I perish; but give me quickly
refreshing water flowing forth from the lake of Memory."
And then they will give you to drink from the divine spring,
And then you will celebrate? [the rites? with] the heroes.
This [is the ? . . . of Memory, when you are about] to die ..
?write this?].?? shadow covering around

The mention of the water of Memory had led the first editors to associate the tablet with the oracle of Trophonius described by Pausanias.¹ The child of Earth and starry Heaven they naturally read as Mnemosyne, goddess of Memory, since all the deities of the pre-Olympian generation had Gaia and Ouranos as parents. Comparetti, however, proposed a different reading. He understood the "child of Earth and starry Heaven" to refer to the Titans, and he took the references to lightning and unjust deeds in the Thurii tablets to refer to murder by the Titans of the infant Dionysos, for which they were blasted by Zeus' lightning.

Drawing on the account in the Neoplatonist Olympiodorus, Comparetti postulated an Orphic doctrine of original sin, founded on the shared guilt of mankind as descendants of the Titans. The tablets, he argued, provide evidence for "the main principles of the Orphic doctrine on psychogony and metempsychosis", since the Olympiodoran myth of anthropogony from the remains of the Titans furnishes mankind with a Titanic element, mixed in with the pure divinity of the soul. "This Titanic element is the original guilt for which the human soul is excluded from the community of the other gods and from her blessed abode, and is condemned to a succession of births and deaths."² The anthropogony, attested explicitly only in the sixth CE

¹ Goettling 1843: 8. The first publication of the Petelia tablet was in Franz 1836: 149–150.

² Comparetti 1882: 116.



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You have wine as your fortunate honor.

And you go beneath the earth, celebrating rites just like the other blessed ones.

These texts share one salient feature with the tablets from Thurii, the peculiar slogan of an animal going into milk, but they are otherwise different from the other types of tablet. However, the prominent role for Dionysos, under the name of Bacchios, renewed the question of the relation of the tablets, and Orphism in general, to Dionysiac cult, especially since the Hipponion tablet promised that the deceased would walk along the sacred road with the other *mystai* and *bacchoi*.

Two recent publications of tablets from Pherai in Thessaly present something different yet again, raising further questions about the tablets' relations to Bacchic or Metroac mysteries. One tablet contains a mystic password – *Andrikepaidothyrsou*, along with an invocation of the goddess Brimo, a figure often identified with Demeter or Hekate.

Passwords: Male child of the thyrsos, Male child of the thyrsos;
Brimo, Brimo;

Enter the sacred meadow. For the initiate is without penalty.

Another proclaims bearer's connection with the rites of Demeter and the Mountain Mother.

Send me to the thiasos of the initiates. I have [seen] the festivals,
the rites of Demeter Chthonia and of the Mountain Mother.

In recent years, a number of even shorter tablets have been discovered in tombs in Thessaly and Macedonia, many containing simply the name of the deceased or the title, *mystes* – initiate. Clearly, these tablets too were designed for initiates in some mystery, or at least for those claiming the privileges of the initiate. Other tablets convey a greeting to Plouton or Persephone from the deceased, but none of these shorter tablets shares the single uniting feature of all the other gold tablets, a narrative of the soul's journey to the underworld. Such brevity makes drawing the line between "Orphic" gold tablets and, for example, protective amulets on gold lamellae very difficult. While these shorter tablets may come from the same sort of religious context as the other tablets, only the tablets with a narrative lend themselves to the sort of semiotic analysis that has been one of the more fruitful tools for illuminating the enigmatic tablets in recent years.

The discovery of new types of tablets and the continued uncovering of new examples has once again sparked debate over the nature and contexts of these enigmatic documents. Despite the fact that the images of lightning and unjust deeds appear confined to the tablets of Timpone Piccolo at



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- 1 BJ, Z "Ἐρχομαι ἐκ κοθαρώων" κοθαρά, : PC "Ἐρχομαι ἐκ κοθαρώων", κοθαρά.
 4 BJ, Z ἀλλ' ἄ με Μοῖρ' {α} ἐδάμασσε {καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι} καὶ: GJ ἄλά με Μοῖρ' α ἐδάμασε καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι καὶ ἄσπεροβλῆ τα κ' ἐραυνῶι, Colli ἀλλ' ἄ με Μοῖρ' {α} ἐδάμασσε καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ καὶ; BJ, Z κ' ἐραυνῶι: lam. Comparetti, Kern, GJ κ' ἐραυνόν, TG, PC, Dieterich, O κ' ἐραυνῶν, Kaibel κ' ἐραυνός.
 8 BJ {ἡμερτοδαπεβανστεμανοποσικαρπασιμοισι}: GJ ἡμερτοῦ δ' ἐπέβαν στεφάνου ποσὶ καρπαλίμοισι, Kern, Colli, PC, TG ἡμερτοῦ δ' ἀπέβαν στεφάνου ποσὶ καρπαλίμοισι.

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A5 Rome, 2nd century CE (65 × 24 mm) OF 491

Pure she comes from the pure, Queen of those below the earth,
Eukles and Eubouleus, child of Zeus. But receive
this gift of Memory, famed in song among men.

“Caecilia Secundina, come, having become a goddess by the custom.”

Ἔρχεται ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρὰ, χθονίων βασίλεια,
Εὐκλεες Εὐβουλεῦ τε Διὸς τέκος· ἀλλὰ δέχεσθε
Μνημοσύνης τόδε δῶρον ἀοίδιμον ἀνθρώποισιν.
Καικιλία Σεκουνδεῖνα, νόμωι ἴθι δῖα γεγῶσα.

1 BJ, Z καθαρῶν καθαρὰ, : PC καθαρῶν, καθαρὰ .

2 BJ, GJ, West Διὸς τέκος· ἀλλὰ δέχεσθε: Z, PC, TG Διὸς τέκος ἀγλαά· ἔχω δὲ, Colli
Διὸς τέκος. ἀγλαά ἔχω δὴ, Murray ὅπλα δ' ἔχ' ὧδε Μνημοσύνης. = *hic recipe
Memoriae arma*.

4 BJ, Z, PC νόμωι ἴθι δῖα γεγῶσα: Colli νόμωι ἴθι θεῖα γεγῶσα, Murray νόμωι ἴθι
θῖα γεγῶσα.

ΕΡΧΕΤΑΙ ΕΚ ΚΑΘΑΡΩΝ ΚΑΘΑΡΑ
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ΙΘΙ ΔΙΑ ΓΕΓΩΣΑ



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B3 Eleutherna, 2nd–1st century BCE (56 × 10 mm) OF 478

I am parched with thirst and I perish. But give me to drink from the ever-flowing spring on the right, where the cypress is. “Who are you? From where are you?” I am the son of Earth and starry Heaven.

Δίψαι αὔρος ἐγὼ καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι· ἀλλὰ πιέ<ν> μοι
κράνας αἰειρόω ἐπὶ δεξιᾷ, τῇ<ι> κυφάρισσος.
τίς δ' ἐσσί; πῶ δ' ἐσσί; Γᾶς υἱός ἡμι καὶ ὤρανῶ ἀστερόεντος.

1 BJ: PC, Comp. πιέ<μ> μοι; O, Colli πιέ μοι.

2 BJ, Comp. τῇ<ι> : GJ, TG, Z τῇ; BJ, Colli κυφάρισσος; PC κυφάριζος, O κυφάρισος.

3 BJ, Colli τίς δ' ἐσσί; πῶ δ' ἐσσί; PC τίς δ' ἐζί; πῶ δ' ἐζί; O τίς δ' ἐσί; πῶ δ' ἐσί;

ΔΙΨΑΙΑΥΟΡΩΚΑΙΑΠΟΛΛΥΜΑΙΑΛΛΑΠΙΕΜΟΙ
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B9 Thessaly?, 4th century BCE (22 × 37 mm) OF 484

I am parched with thirst and I perish. But give me to drink from the ever-flowing spring. On the right is a white cypress. “Who are you? From where are you?” I am the son of Earth and starry Heaven. But my race is heavenly.

Δίψαι αὔρος ἐγὼ κ<αὶ> ἀπόλλυμαι· ἀλλὰ πίε μου
κράνας αἰειρόω. ἐπὶ δεξιὰ λευκὴ κυπάρισσος
τίς δ’ ἐσί; πῶ δ’ ἐσί; Γᾶς υἱός εἰμι καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος·
αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον.

1 BJ πίε μου: Cassio πίε<ν> μου.

2 BJ ἐπὶ δεξιὰ: Gallavotti ἐπιδεξιὰ.

ΔΙΨΑΙΑΥΟΣΕΓΩΚΑΠΟΛΛΥΜΑΙ
ΑΛΛΑΠΙΕΜΟΥΚΡΑΝΑΣΑΙΕΙΡΩ
ΕΠΙΔΕΞΙΑΛΕΥΚΗΚΥΠΑΡΙΣΣΟΣ
ΤΙΣΔΕΣΙΠΩΔΕΣΙΓΑΣΥΙΟΣΕΙΜΙ
ΚΑΙΟΥΡΑΝΟΥΑΣΤΕΡΟΕΝΤΟΣ
ΑΥΤΑΡΕΜΟΙΓΕΝΟΣΟΥΡΑΝΙΟΝ



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αὐτὰρ ἐ[μοὶ γένος οὐράνιον· τόδε δ' ἴστε καὶ αὐτοί.
καὶ τοὶ δὴ[ἐρέουσιν ὑποχθονίῳ βασιλῇ
καὶ τοτὲ τ[οὶ δώσωσιν τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης
καὶ τοτὲ δ[ὴ
σύμβολα φ[
καὶ φε[
σεν[

- 1 BJ ἐπεὶ ἄμ μέλ]λησι θανεῖσθαι: Frel ἐπεὶ ἄμ μέλ]ηνίον θανιεσθαι, Riedweg Μνημοσύνης τόδε ... ἐπεὶ ἄμ μέλ]λησι θανεῖσθαι.
- 2 Riedweg μ]εμνήμε<ν>ος ἥρως: Frel]εμνήμεος ἥρως.
- 3 Riedweg ἀμφικαλύψας: Frel ἀμφικαλύψαι
- 4 Riedweg εὐρήσεις δ' Αἶδαο δόμοις, ἐπὶ]δεξιὰ λίμνην: BJ ἐπὶ]δεξιὰ λίμνην, Frel ἐστ' ἐπὶ]δεξιὰ λίμνην.
- 5 Riedweg ἐστη]κῦαν: Frel ἐστη]κῦαι.
- 11 Riedweg σκότο]ς ὀρφ{ο}νήεντο<ς>: Frel σκότος?] μου φονηεντά.
- 13 Riedweg δότε μμοὶ: Frel δοτεμμοὶ.
- 15 Riedweg αὐτὰρ ἐ[μοὶ γένος οὐράνιον· τόδε δ' ἴστε καὶ αὐτοί.: Frel αὐτὰρ ἐ[μοὶ γένος οὐράνιον·
- 17 Riedweg καὶ τοτὲ τ[οὶ δώσωσιν τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης: Frel καὶ τοτὲ τ[οὶ πιεῖν ὕδωρ πρόρεον.
- 18 Riedweg: καὶ τοτὲ δ[ὴ: Frel καὶ τοτὲ τ[οὶ δώσωσιν τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης.



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D2 *Pelinna, ca. 275 BCE (35 × 30 mm) OF 486*

Now you have died and now you have been born,
thrice blessed one, on this very day.
Say to Persephone that Bacchios himself freed you.
A bull you rushed to milk.
A ram you fell into milk.
You have wine as your fortunate honor.

νῦν ἔθανε<ς> καὶ νῦν ἐγένου, τρισόλβιε, ἄματι <τῶι>δε.
<ε>ἵπ[ε]ῖν Φερσεφό<ναι σ> ὅτι Βά<κ>χιος αὐτὸς ἔλυσε.
ταῦρος ἐ<ς> γάλα ἔθορ<ε>ς.
κριὸς ἐς γάλα ἔπεσε<ς>.
οἶνον ἔχεις εὐδ<αί>μον<α> τιμήν.

ς BJ, GJ εὐδ<α>ίμονα τιμή<ν>: PC εὐδ<α>ίμον τιμή<ν>, TP εὐδ<α>ίμον, ἄτιμο<ν>.

NYNEΘANE
KAINYNE
ΓΕΝΟΥΤΡΙCΟΛ
ΒΙΕΑΜΑΤΙ
ΔΕΙΠΤΕΙΝΦΕΡ
CΕΦΟΟΤΙΒΑΧΙΟ
CΑΥΤΟCΕΛΥCΕ
ΤΑΥΡΟCΕΓΑΛΑΕ
ΘΟΡCΚΡΙΟCΕCΓΑΛΑ
ΕΠΕCΕΟΙΝΟΝΕ
ΧΕΙCΕΥΔ

ΜΟΝ
ΤΙΜ
ΗΝ

D3 *Pherai, 4th century BCE OF 493*

Passwords: Man-boy-thyrsos, Man-boy-thyrsos. Brimo, Brimo. Enter the
sacred meadow. For the initiate is without penalty.

σύμβολα· Ἀν<δ>ρικεπαιδόθυρσον. Ἀνδρικεπαιδόθυρσον. Βριμῶ.
Βριμῶ. εἴσιθ<ι> ἱερὸν λειμῶνα. ἄποινος γὰρ ὁ μύστης. ΓΑΠΕΔΟΝ

2 lam.: BJ ex Hordern 2000 ὑπέδυν.



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Table 2.2 *GROUP A – Lamellae with “Pure from the Pure” formula*

	Provenance	Date	Gender	Shape	Position in grave	Coin	Burial and grave-goods
<i>A1</i>	Thurii, Italy	IV c. BCE	not known	rectangular unfolded	close to hand	no	Inhumation. A tumulus of three strata: in the first more than ten persons carelessly interred; in the second fragments of pottery; in the third gravel mixed with sand and lime. In this lower third, three graves were found (<i>A1–A3</i>). In the four corners of the chamber of cist-grave 1 small hollows filled with ashes of bones and plants, indications of funeral sacrifice; no mention of a coffin; no other offerings
<i>A2</i>	Thurii, Italy	IV c. BCE	not known	rectangular folded once	close to hand	no	Inhumation. Under the tumulus (<i>A1</i> above) cist-grave 3: no mention of a coffin; no other offerings
<i>A3</i>	Thurii, Italy	IV c. BCE	not known	rectangular unfolded	close to hand	no	Inhumation. Under the tumulus (<i>A1</i> above) cist-grave 2: no mention of a coffin; no other offerings
<i>A4</i>	Thurii, Italy	IV c. BCE	male?	rectangular folded nine times and placed inside no. C1 (table 2.4) which was folded like an envelope	near the cranium	no	Inhumation (partial cremation). Above the grave: a tumulus of eight strata, each consisting of ashes and carbon and burnt pottery sherds topped by earth above, indication of rituals and sacrifices and worship of the dead inside as a hero. Outside the grave: a few small black vases. Inside: bronze locks of the coffin, two silver medallions on the chest decorated with female heads, similar to the ones of Persephone on Apulian vases, a few small pieces of gold from the dress's decoration, two small wooden boxes with inlaid palmettes. The cremation took place in situ and the remains were simply covered by a white sheet which disintegrated when touched by the excavators
<i>A5</i>	Rome, Italy	II c. CE	female	not known	not known	not known	not known



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<i>Br0</i>	Hipponion, Italy	ca. 400	female?	rectangular folded four times	on upper part of chest (hung by perishable material?)		Inhumation in tile-covered grave. Outside: a clay lamp and two skyphoi, one of them with a graffito. Inside: to the right of cranium a small clay jug and to the left bronze fragments of a ring with an incised representation; at the right elbow a hydria and a bronze semi-sphere with a hole of a bell(?); on the pelvis a skyphos; at the left hand a gold finger-ring, a clay lamp, a hydria and two clay lekythoi to the left and right of the left thighbone
<i>Br1</i>	Entella?, West Sicily	III c.?	not known	rectangular	not known	not known	not known
<i>Br2</i>	Sfakaki, Crete	II-I c.	not known	rectangular unfolded	not known	not known	Inhumation in looted tile-grave above no. B 10. Thirty-two clay unguentaria, fragments of glass, a bronze mirror, small bronze and gilt fragments

Table 2.4 *GROUP C Lamella with “Orphic” text*

	Provenance	Date	Gender	Shape	Position in grave	Coin	Burial and grave-goods
<i>Cr</i>	Thurii, Italy	iv c. BCE	male?	above no. A4 (table 2)	above no. A4 (table 2)	above no. A4 (table 2)	above no. A4 (table 2)

Table 2.5 *GROUP D Lamellae with Dionysos and Persephone (and/or Demeter) and other deities*

	Provenance	Date BCE	Gender	Shape	Position in grave	Coin	Burial and grave-goods
<i>D1/2</i>	Pelinna, Thessaly	ca. 275	female	ivy-leaves	two on chest	snake in mouth with gorgon; coin of Antigonos Gonatas	Inhumation in marble sarcophagus: in the cranium a wreath of lead stem, clay gilt berries and gilt bronze myrtle leaves with gold ornament; near the cranium: a clay aryter, a clay bowl, two gold spirals ending in snake-heads; near the feet clay aryter with a lamp inside, clay unguentarium, two bowls, a shallow skyphos; by the feet bronze lebes with bones of a neonate. On the cover slab of marble sarcophagus: two clay bowls and fragments of a third, clay feeder and clay figurine of comic actor sitting on an altar
<i>D3</i>	Pherai, Thessaly	ca. 300	not known	rectangular	on chest?	not known	not known
<i>D4</i>	Amphipolis, Macedonia	320–280	female	rectangular	folded on chest	silver coin Philip II	Inhumation in stone sarcophagus looted. Gold ring and finger-ring; stone-constructed exedra for funeral rituals
<i>D5</i>	Pherai, Thessaly	ca. 300	not known	rectangular	not known	not known	Cremation? in marble osteotheke cylindrical(?) with few bones and ashes

Table 2.6 *GROUP E Lamellae and epistomia with chaire-formula to Plouton and/or Persephone*

	Provenance	Date BCE	Gender	Shape	Position in grave	Coin	Burial and grave-goods
<i>E1</i>	Agios Athanasios, Macedonia	III c.	female	rectangular	not known	not known	Not known if Macedonian tomb looted. Trapezoid construction at the entrance for the funeral supper; gold earrings, Illyrian type pin, clay figurines
<i>E2</i>	Eleutherna, Crete not known	II–I c.	not	known	rectangular	not known	not known
<i>E3</i>	Aigai (Vergina), Macedonia	III–I c.	female	not known	not known	not known	Cremation under tumulus looted? Hellenistic pottery
<i>E4</i>	Pella, Macedonia	ca. 300	male	myrtle? (laurel)	on bench of the grave's W side	no	Many glass and bone fragments from the decoration of the wooden bier and its legs with incised representation of griffin tearing a deer; iron fragments from bier or small box; part of iron strigil, iron pin; gilt clay myrtle-berries from a wreath. On the bench of the grave's W side: forty-one gilt clay pebbles in the shape of acorn; forty-six bone astragaloi and a bone pebble; fragment of alabaster, and a clay fragment of female figurine
<i>E5</i>	Sfakaki, Crete	20 BCE– 40 CE	male(?)	'mouth'	mouth	bronze on chest	Inhumation in cist-grave. Clay and bronze prochous, clay unguentarium, lekythion, two glass phialae, a bronze strigil, obsidian flake



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Table 2.7 (*cont.*)

Provenance	Date BCE	Gender	Shape	Position in grave	Coin	Burial and grave-goods
<i>F8</i> Pydna, Pieria	336–300	female	gold coin of Philip II	in the mouth	gold coin of Philip II	bone fragments from a small wooden box in which bronze folding mirror, iron tweezers, iron scissors, clay unguentarium, clay pyxis Inhumation in cist-grave with pit-grave (<i>F9</i>) immediately to the S: ivory fragments from the bier, bronze ladle, bronze bell, a lead pyxis and seven clay vases
<i>F9</i> Pydna, Pieria	336–300	male	gold coin of Philip II	in the mouth	gold coin of Philip II	Inhumation in pit-grave immediately to the N of cist-grave (<i>F8</i>): ivory fragments from the bier, two bronze-gilt wreaths and four clay vessels
<i>F10</i> Europos	ca. 300	male	rectangular	not known	not known	Inhumation? in cist-grave looted. Glass eyes, bone fragments and bronze nails from bier's decoration; clay vases, alabasters, Phoenician vase, iron strigils, bronze gilt wreath with berries. Outside to the NE: trapezoid construction for funeral supper with pottery fragments and fragment of kantharos, bones, and shells; traces of enagismos in later times NW of the construction, bronze gilt wreath with clay gilt berries, bronze coin badly worn, red-figure pelike with amazon, griffin, and youths in gymnasium
<i>F11</i> Pella, Macedonia	ca. 300	small girl	leaf	not known	not known	Inhumation in cist-grave. Gold finger-ring with incised animal; gold earrings of Cupids
<i>F12</i> Dion	ca. 300?	male	small disc	not known	small disc?	Not known from Macedonian tomb V.
<i>F13</i> Daphniotissa, Elis	Late IV, early III c.	?	olive leaf	not known	not known	Inhumation in rectangular cist-grave, near a funerary monument, with gold ring, bronze mirror, several clay pots, one with pine resin and beeswax residue inside.



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PART II

Texts and contexts

CHAPTER 3

Text and ritual

The Corpus Eschatologicum of the Orphics

Fritz Graf

INTRODUCTION

The books ascribed to Orpheus must have been legion already in the fifth century. The Euripidean Hippolytus, whom his father regards as a vegetarian and an ecstatic, is said to have Orpheus as a Lord, “to rave and to follow the smoke of many writings”;¹ and Plato knows religious specialists who made use of “a hubbub of books by Orpheus and Musaeus.”² Much later, in the prologue of his own *Argonautika*, Orpheus gives an impressive list of what he is about to sing – a theogony, starting from Chaos, Nyx, and Phanes, followed by the narrations about Demeter and Persephone, her relationship to Zeus and her μέγα πένθος, about the myths and the cults of Cybele, the Corybants and the Cabiri, of Praxidice, Aphrodite and Adonis, Isis and Osiris, and the oracles of Nyx about Bacchus,³ but also about divination through dreams and signs, purification, “supplications of gods and gifts to the dead”;⁴ finally a report of what he himself had seen in his travels, his descent into Hades and his visit to Egyptian Memphis, which must mean eschatology on the one hand, magic or theurgy on the other.⁵ This sounds impressive, and in some respects enigmatic – and that is just Orpheus’ intention: all these, he says, are “frightful songs for mortal men, secrets without fear only to the initiates”:⁶ Orpheus is the Great Initiator. The list sketches what the Imperial Epoch knew as the most salient topics of Orpheus’ poems – mythology,

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¹ Eur. *Hipp.* 952–954; 953f. Ὀρφέα τ’ ἄνακτ’ ἔχων βάκχευε πόλλων γραμμάτων καπνούς.

² Pl. *Resp.* 364a βίβλων ὅμαδον παρέχονται Μουσαίου καὶ Ὀρφέως.

³ Orph. *Arg.* 12–35. See on the prooemium Luiselli 1993.

⁴ Orph. *Arg.* 35–40. ⁵ Orph. *Arg.* 40–46.

⁶ Orph. *Arg.* 10–11. φρικώδεα κῆλ’ ἐπίφασκον, θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισιν ἄκη, μεγάλ’ ὄργια μύσταις.



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Thus, the testimonies of several authors before Plato – Herodotus, Hippias of Elis, Critias, Ion – present a rather coherent picture of what Orpheus can stand for in the fifth and very early fourth century: poems of eschatological content which must have played a role in the mystery rites of the ecstatic Dionysos and whose doctrinal content was so close to Pythagorean doctrines that some authors assumed that Pythagoras or some early Pythagoreans were the real authors. If pressed to make a guess about these Pythagorean doctrines, the most plausible one is the doctrine of reincarnation. Titles are not mentioned at all – if again one might make a plausible guess, there must certainly have been a *Katabasis into Hades*. Orpheus' descent into Hades is attested in fifth century sources.²² Such an eyewitness account is the most natural vehicle for eschatological contents, as Orpheus explicitly says in the prologue of the *Argonautika*.²³

THE TESTIMONIES OF PLATO

Among the testimonies about Orpheus and his poems, Plato, as we all know, plays a crucial role: he is the first preserved author to openly and verbatim cite from them. In Kern's edition, there are nineteen fragments which come from the corpus Platonium;²⁴ Colli and Bernabé, whose editions make no distinction between testimonies and fragments, have considerably more,²⁵ underlining even more the crucial importance of Plato for our knowledge of Orpheus.²⁶

When we try to bring order into these texts, we can distinguish several topics. The list comes close to the much longer one at the beginning of the *Argonautika*:

- (1) One topic is theogony. Some items of information look rather traditional – in the *Cratylus*, Plato cites two hexameters which talk about Oceanus and Tethys as having performed the first marriage (ἥρξε γάμοιο): the couple is Homeric, new is the emphasis on the “first marriage.”²⁷ Other things are less current; according to another hexameter, the Orphic theogony ended with the sixth generation, which gives

²² See my “Orpheus: A Poet among Men” (Graf 1987). Bernabé, in his introduction to F 707–711, lists the sources, starting with Aeschylus' *Bassaridae*; see also West 1983: 12.

²³ See above n. 4. ²⁴ F 3–F 21.

²⁵ Colli 1977: 4 [A 10]–4 [A 52] (43 texts). [Bernabé, whose unpublished index I could use (for which I thank its author), has 44 references.]

²⁶ See the *mise au point* by Masaracchia 1993.

²⁷ *Cra.* 402bc = (OF 15 Kern = Colli 4 [A35] = F 22 Bernabé), cf. Hom. *Il.* 14.201.

two more than the Hesiodic account, from Gaia to Ouranos to Kronos to Zeus.²⁸ Plato is silent about the details while later authors offer diverging accounts, although they agree in putting Nyx “Night” somewhere before Ouranos and in adding Dionysos after Zeus.²⁹ And finally, when talking about Kronos swallowing his sons and castrating his father, Euthyphro hints at “much stranger things which the many do not know” – things clearly not in Hesiod, but in poems read only by a more or less closed group of people.³⁰

- (2) A second topic is eschatology. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates proposes different etymologies for σῶμα, “body” – from σῆμα “tomb” (“because soul is buried in it”) or from σῶζειν “imprison” (“because the soul is punished, and the body is its prison”).³¹ This latter etymology (and not the much-cited σῶμα σῆμα) is given by the people around Orpheus (οἱ ἄμφι Ὀρφέα) – either poets like him (that is Musaeus) or people using his poems. Plato’s expression allows both interpretations, though the plural seems rather to argue against the first one. But if we concentrate on the second one, Plato’s expression forbids the assumption that he read this etymology in a poem by Orpheus;³² it is given by the people using his poems. Which could mean that it is an interpretation of something read in Orpheus. Orpheus must have sung about the punishment of souls, but not necessarily that our life is such a punishment (which would presuppose reincarnation – as we all know, an Empedoclean doctrine). He might have sung only about the punishment awaiting our soul after death, in a prison in afterlife, and his allegorical expounders, οἱ ἄμφι Ὀρφέα, read this in the Pythagorean, allegorical way.

We have another instance of such allegorizing in Plato’s writings. In the *Gorgias*, he tells a myth “invented by a clever man from Italy or Sicily”: as a punishment after death, the souls would have to pour water into a bottomless barrel, using sieves; another man, a wise one, had explained this as an allegory of human stupidity.³³ This time, the eschatological doctrine is contained in the text to be allegorized which Plato cites in the context of a discussion that life really might be death and death life, and he ascribes the myth to people who are holding the σῶμα σῆμα doctrine: reincarnation thus seems present, and we are not dealing with Orpheus,

²⁸ *Philebus* 66c = (OF 14 Kern = Colli 4 [A45] = F 25 Bernabé).

²⁹ OF 101 and 107 Kern = F 168 and F 169 Bernabé. See also West 1983: 118.

³⁰ *Euthyphro* 5e–6b (OF 17 Kern = Colli 4 [A27] = F 26 Bernabé).

³¹ *Cra.* 400c (OF 8 Kern = Colli 4 [A34] = F 430 Bernabé).

³² See Linforth 1941: 147. ³³ *Grg.* 493ac.

but, given the Italian localization, with some sort of Pythagorean mythology. Thus, while the Pythagorean myth allegorized in the *Gorgias* contains reincarnation, the myth told by Orpheus does not necessarily do so.

Eschatology, stories about the life after death, is connected with Orpheus in the iconographic tradition as well. On the one hand, there are the well-known huge Italiote vessels representing the Netherworld and its inhabitants, among whom we sometimes perceive Orpheus as a visitor.³⁴ But more interesting than those attestations of a well-known myth are some less orthodox representations. On an Apulian crater in Basel, the singing Orpheus stands in front of a seated old man who holds a book scroll in his right hand.³⁵ Orpheus, the traveler to the Beyond, is a patron of the deceased, and his protection expresses itself in a text – presumably a *Katabasis* or an extract from one, like the texts on the gold tablets. Similarly, a terracotta group of Orpheus whose song overcomes the Sirens from an Apulian tomb must be read as expressing the same protection – this time, however, in an allegorical reading of an episode in the epic *Argonautika* where Orpheus must have been depicted as the poet whose song outdid the Sirens.³⁶ And finally, a recently published Apulian vase in the Art Museum of Toledo (Ohio) depicts Hades and Dionysos shaking each other's hand: the handshake presumably confirms an agreement which they concluded on behalf of the initiates of Dionysiac mysteries.³⁷

- (3) Eschatology leads to a third topic, ritual. Euthyphro's reference to "things which the many do not know" sounds like a reference to mystery cults and their ἱεροὶ λόγοι, their "sacred texts." For Plato, Orpheus is firmly connected with mystery cults. While "Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides" have to do with poetry, the followers of Orpheus and Musaeus are busy with initiations (literally: rituals, τελεταί) and oracular verses (χρησμοδίαι).³⁸ Since in all texts of the fifth century, Musaeus is firmly established as a chresmologue whose oracles, according to Herodotus, were collected by Onomacritus,³⁹ one might feel tempted to assign the rituals to Orpheus. And Aristophanes confirms this in his list of poetical

³⁴ See Schmidt 1991.

³⁵ Basel, Antikenmuseum S 40, see Schmidt, Trendall, and Cambitoglou 1976: 32–37.

³⁶ For the group, now in the J. Paul Getty Museum, see West 1983: 25 no. iii; for Orpheus and the Sirens see esp. Herodorus, *FGrH* 31 F 43a and Ap. Rhod. 4.891–911; Iacobacci 1993b; for a much earlier, though not undisputed iconographical attestation, see Groppengiesser 1977.

³⁷ Johnston and McNiven 1996; Schauenburg 1995: 35–37; Schmidt 2000: 86–101.

³⁸ Pl. *Prt.* 316d = (OT 92 Kern = Colli 4 [A30] = F 549 Bernabé). ³⁹ Graf 1974: 9.

culture heroes in the *Frogs*: “Orpheus showed us rituals (τελετάς) and to abstain from murder, Musaeus the healing of illness and oracles.”⁴⁰

Plato, however, blurs the picture. In a key passage, *Republic* 364b–365a, he claims that seers and beggar priests, ἀγύρται καὶ μάντεις come to the doors of the rich and persuade them that they possess a power given to them by the gods through sacrifices and incantations and which allows them to heal with much joy and festivity any unjust deed which was committed by him or an ancestor; and they also promise that they would have the power to harm any enemy with binding spells. Somewhat later, after having cited Hesiod and Homer as witnesses to the gods’ venality, Plato defines those practitioners: they rely on “a hubbub of books of Musaeus and Orpheus . . . according to which they perform their rites, and they persuade not only individuals, but entire towns that there are means of redemption and purification from [the consequences of] unjust deeds (λύσεις τε καὶ καθαρμοὶ ἀδικημάτων) through sacrifices and child’s play . . . which they call τελεταί, rites, and which free us from evil over there; but horrible things await us if we would not sacrifice.”

These ritual practitioners – wandering initiators as well as sorcerers – concern us here only in so far as they make use of books of Musaeus and Orpheus in order to perform their rites which Plato calls sacrifices, θυσίαι,⁴¹ but which they themselves simply call τελεταί “rites.” The aim of these rites is protection against the consequences of evil deeds which await us after death, and they persuade not only isolated individuals, but entire cities. Plato repeats this statement a little later when he emphasizes the power that, in the eyes of the greatest cities, “the τελεταί have and the absolving gods (λύσιοι θεοί), according to the poets, the sons of the gods” – Orpheus and Musaeus again (366ab).

The dichotomy is important. Those practitioners – and presumably the poems of Orpheus and Musaeus which they use – persuade not only rich Athenians who are afraid of what awaits them after death (which would point to private initiations, in Plato’s time especially to those of Dionysos), they have persuaded “the greatest cities,” Athens among them. Rituals of Orpheus that interest entire cities are either cathartic or eschatological; and since cathartic rituals do not have any effect in the beyond, he must mean mystery cults connected with cities. The consequence seems obvious: the

⁴⁰ *Ar. Ran.* 1023f. Ὀρφεὺς μὲν γὰρ τελετάς ἡμῖν κατέδειξεν φόνων τ’ ἀπέχεσθαι, Μουσαῖος δ’ ἐξακέσεις τε νόσων καὶ χρησμούς.

⁴¹ 364b8 (θυσίαις τε καὶ ἐπωδαῖς) 364e6 διὰ θυσιῶν; cf. 364e4 καθ’ ἃς θυπολοῦσι, 365a3 μὴ θύσαντας.

poems of Orpheus and Musaeus have also to do with the mysteries of Eleusis.⁴²

I shall not go into details of this Eleusinian connection; I tried to do so almost twenty-five years ago, isolating a specifically Athenian pseudographical poetry under the names of Musaeus and Orpheus with the aim of giving expression to Eleusinian mythology and eschatology.⁴³ Suffice it to point out that, in the light of this dichotomy, details about eschatology which Plato relates could refer either to Eleusis or to Bacchic mysteries. Let us follow instead the panhellenic thread which is indicated by the name of Dionysos and by the epic genre of theogony.

But before going into this, one detail of Plato's account, omitted until now on purpose, has to be cleared up. In his rendering of the practitioners' self-advertisement, Plato says "that there are means of redemption and purification from unjust deeds through sacrifices and child's play, on the one hand for those who still live, on the other hand for those who have died, which they call rites (τελεταί), which free us from the evil there."⁴⁴ This literal translation is open to different interpretations. It is obvious that Plato makes a pun: he derives τελεταί "rites", from τελευτάω "to die." Thus he might limit the use of τελεταί only to those rites which have to do with the afterlife, confronting us with two sets of rites: unspecified ones with an effect during this lifetime, and τελεταί with effect after our death. But this is not convincing, since the entire passage focuses solely on the afterlife. I would suggest that, despite the pun, τελεταί is the general name the practitioners give their rites, as do, much later, the theurgists.⁴⁵ Although the term τελεταί itself has still a very general meaning at this epoch, it must bear a special connotation in this context, like "initiations": after all, we have Τελεταί as title of a book by Orpheus.

There are still more possible readings of this text. The participles ζῶσιν and τελευτήσασιν could refer either to the same persons in two states, life and death, or to two groups of people. The first would translate as: "There are means for them, both when they are still alive and also after they have died." But this, I think, jars with the addressees of the advertisement, individuals and cities: individuals die and live on in the Netherworld, cities do not (nor

⁴² Seen already by Jowett and Campbell in their commentary on the passage. ⁴³ Graf 1974.

⁴⁴ *Resp.* 364d5–365a2: ὥς ἄρα λύσεις τε καὶ καθαρμοὶ ἀδικημάτων διὰ θυσιῶν καὶ παιδιᾶς ἡδονῶν εἰσι μὲν ἔτι ζῶσιν, εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ τελευτήσασιν, ἃς δὴ τελετάς καλοῦσιν, αἱ τῶν ἐκεῖ κακῶν ἀπολύουσιν ἡμᾶς. See Johnston 1999: 144–145.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *De trin.* 28 *pollicens etiam purgationem animae, per eas quas τελετάς appellant; CD 10.9 quasdam consecrationes theurgicas, quas teletas vocant.*



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a ἱερὸς λόγος – holy because it belongs to some cults.⁵² Plato alludes to this verse in the context of βακχεία (albeit transformed into philosophical βακχεία)⁵³ – again, we deal with Dionysiac, Bacchic mysteries with which the theogonic poem cited in the Derveni Papyrus has an intimate relationship.

Theogony and connection with mystery rites are characteristics of Orpheus' poems in Plato as well. The Derveni text of Orpheus, evidently pre-dating the Derveni burial of about 320 and perhaps as old as the later fifth century, fits into a pattern. Orphic theogonies cannot be separated from Dionysiac mystery rites; they belong together. It is less easy to see how that might have worked – was the theogony recited during the mystery rites? Reading from the sacred books was part of later mystery rites, and the fresco of the Villa of the Mysteries attests this for Bacchic rites;⁵⁴ but we cannot know what that boy on the left hand side of the fresco was reciting from his scroll. Reading of theogonies belonged to Near Eastern healing rites where the symbolical reconstruction of the cosmos brought healing, illness being a disruption of the cosmos – could initiation be viewed as a similar symbolical reconstruction of a new wholeness for the initiate, resulting in a better status after death? There is simply no evidence for such a hypothesis, tempting as it might be.

Equally vexing is something else. The new columns of the Derveni text which precede the poem of Orpheus deal not only with mystery rites which they expound, they also deal with eschatology – “the terrors of Hades, why don't they believe in them?”⁵⁵ Earlier, the text spoke about “the daimones who are under this mound,”⁵⁶ and more than once, it speaks about souls; it explains even the preliminary sacrifice of the initiates to the Erinyes by the theory that the Erinyes are souls; initiates thus sacrifice to souls – as do the *magoi*, who do so “just as if they were paying a penalty.”⁵⁷ The text does not make it clear how these concepts relate to the poem of Orpheus – is it just another riddle, like rituals and eschatological beliefs, or is there a more intimate connection? However that might be, the presence of eschatology, the third element of Orpheus' poetry in Plato, is very intriguing.⁵⁸

⁵² See Baumgarten 1998; Henrichs 2003a and Henrichs 2003b. [See now Henrichs 2004.]

⁵³ Pl. *Symp.* 218b = *OF* 13 Kern = F 1 xviii and F 19 Bernabé; West 1983: 34, 82.

⁵⁴ At least I still understand the boy reciting from a book scroll as pointing to a mystery context; see the reciting priest from the Iseum at Pompeii, pictured in *Alla Ricerca di Iside*, Naples (s.a.), 52 no. 1.46.

⁵⁵ col. v 6.

⁵⁶ col. III 7 [A problematical and much restored passage; the Greek edition has “the daimones under the earth.”]

⁵⁷ col. VI 5. ⁵⁸ See Johnston 1999: 274–279.

THE POEMS AND THE ORPHICS

Looking back at the evidence collected so far, two questions remain: can we find some clearer outline of the poems of Orpheus which we have to assume, and can we know more about the people behind them?

To repeat the obvious: the Derveni text refers to a theogonic poem in which Zeus and his way of establishing his power played a crucial role. There were several generations of kings before the accession of Zeus. He followed Kronos who followed Ouranos – Ouranos being explicitly called “who ruled first of all.”⁵⁹ He in turn is called *Euphronides*, son of Night. Thus, there was an earlier generation, dominated by Night, even though she was not a ruler. Orpheus talks also about “a reverend one, who first sprang forth into the aither” and whom Zeus swallowed as well;⁶⁰ and two columns further on, the commentator cites four hexameters:⁶¹

of the first born king, the reverend one. And onto him all
the immortals grew, blessed gods and goddesses,
and rivers and lovely springs and everything else
that had been born then . . .

The epithet αἰδοῖος connects the two passages: Orpheus just might talk about the same divine person. Some verses that Proclus cites from Orpheus can illustrate what is going on. According to Proclus, Zeus had swallowed the primary divinity Phanes, and:

with him, everything was formed anew inside of Zeus,
the splendid height of the broad aither and of sky,
the seats of the unfertile sea and of famous earth . . .
rivers and the immense sea and everything else
and all immortal and blessed gods and goddesses,
everything that had been born.⁶²

⁵⁹ col. xiv 6 Οὐρανὸς Εὐφρονίδης ὃς πρῶτιστος βασιλεύσεν.

⁶⁰ col. xiii 4 αἰδοῖος κατέπινεν ὃς αἶθερα ἔχθορε πρῶτος. There is a textual problem: *P. Derv.* reads αἶθερα ἔχθορε. R. Lambertson suggested αἶθερος in order to avoid hiatus, “out of the aither,” which would have as a consequence that this divinity originated from aither. I follow the translation given in Laks and Most 1997: 15 (but see 15 n. 28). [Both Betegh and the Greek edition of the papyrus adopt Lambertson’s conjecture; Burkert 2006: 102 argues both against this conjecture and against the general assumption that αἶθερα is an accusative of direction; he takes it as a regular object, “who first ejaculated the aether,” and connects it with Aesch. fr. 13 Radt and Egyptian cosmogony. I find this reading highly attractive, but it does not affect my argument in the text.]

⁶¹ col. xvi 3–6 πρωτογόνου βασιλέως αἰδοίου, τοῦ δ’ ἄρα πάντες | ἀθάνατοι προσέφυμ μάκαρες θεοὶ ἡδὲ | καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ κρήναι ἐπήρατοι ἄλλα τε πάντα | ὅσα τότε ἦγ γεγαῶτ’ . . .

⁶² OF 167 Kern = F 292 Bernabé.

The latter passage explains the former – which also can mean: the “reverend first-born king” might be different from “Ouranos who ruled first of all”. Thus, we arrive at a sequence “first (nameless) power” > Nyx > Ouranos > Kronos > Zeus; when we add Dionysos, for which we have no testimony in the text at all but which could be plausible in view of the mystery connection, we arrive at the same six generations of which Plato had spoken. The fact that the key verse “Zeus the head, Zeus the middle, and from Zeus all things are made” is alluded to in a passage in the *Laws* thus might be more than just a coincidence: Plato knew an Orphic text which seems very close to the Derveni theogony.⁶³

Do we have a title for this text? Among the four titles mentioned by Epigenes – *Katabasis into Hades*, *Hieros Logos*, *Peplos*, and *Physika* – the *Katabasis* is immediately excluded, as perhaps is the *Peplos* if the title refers to Kore’s weaving of a peplos. The *Physika* cannot be entirely excluded, given that the one fragment preserved from this poem gives the personal names of the Tritopatores and calls them “doormen of the winds” – such information might occur in a theogony.⁶⁴ However, I prefer *Hieros Logos* for two reasons: first, the so-called Rhapsodic Theogony bears in the Suda the title ἱεροὶ λόγοι ἐν ῥαψωδίαις εἴκοσι τέσσαρσι: at least this later theogony had such a title. And secondly, the Derveni commentator seems to allude to this title in the passage already cited, where he explains the first verse by “indeed, he is uttering a holy discourse”, ἱερ[ολογ]εῖται μὲν οὖν.⁶⁵ Epigenes ascribes this poem to the same Pythagorean Kerkops to whom he also ascribes the *Katabasis* – we have no idea what made Epigenes do this, but we might assume that he noted a doctrinal closeness between the two, which once again brings eschatology and theogony in close contact. (Herodotus, by the way, knows a ἱρὸς λόγος, a “Sacred Story” of the initiates of Dionysos which explains the taboo on wool in graves – it must be a different story, but the terminology is consistent.)⁶⁶

Do we know more about the people behind these texts? Plato vaguely talks about “seers and beggar priests” who made use of the poems of Musaeus and Orpheus for their rites; these specialists thus are the consumers, not the producers. The Derveni papyrus in turn presents private initiators and seers – “people who make sacred things into their profession” (οἱ τέχνην ποιούμενοι τὰ ἱερά)⁶⁷ – they too make use of Orpheus’

⁶³ Leg. 4 715e = OF 21 = Colli 4 [A 50] = F 31 iii Bernabé. ⁶⁴ OF 318 = 802 Bernabé.

⁶⁵ col. VII 7. ⁶⁶ Hdt. 2.81. On hieroi logoi above, n. 52.

⁶⁷ col. XX 3. See also Janko 1997.

poems by explaining them, presumably in the course of an initiation rite. In both cases, we meet professionals reading Orpheus. The only non-professional is a caricature – it is the Euripidean Hippolytus, the vegetarian and sectarian, in the distorted picture Theseus gives us;⁶⁸ but Plato too might be called a non-professional reader, were it not for the fact that he uses these texts in the course of his philosophy – all the other non-professional recipients, about whom we hear nothing, could have been at most passive listeners to such texts. No surprise then that the authors must have been professionals as well, skilled in ritual lore and in Pythagorean doctrines as well, remote and minor colleagues of the mighty Empedocles, “a god upon earth.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Eur. *Hipp.* 952–954. See above, n. 1.

⁶⁹ [See also our book on the Gold Tablets (Graf and Johnston 2007), where Sarah Iles Johnston argues that the producers of the Orphic mythology were professionals that worked as *bricoleurs* of mythology.]

CHAPTER 4

Are the “Orphic” gold leaves Orphic?

Alberto Bernabé and Ana I. Jiménez San Cristóbal

INTRODUCTION: THE DEBATE OVER THE RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF THE LEAVES

When the first of the gold leaves, that of Petelia, was published in 1836,¹ the studies on the history of religion considered the existence of Orphism a well-established fact, which led that leaf to be interpreted as Orphic, just as happened with the other gold leaves which appeared in subsequent years.²

The hypercritical skeptical reaction started by Wilamowitz³ questioned the Orphic character of these documents, and the authority of the illustrious German philologist meant that the issue was left aside for many years.⁴ However, not even in the most skeptical times have the leaves been convincingly assigned to another known religious movement, and it has become usual to call them “Orphic” with resigned inverted commas.

There has been one attempt, by Pugliese Carratelli,⁵ to distinguish two types of leaves which would come from two different religious contexts:

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¹ We will use the following abbreviations: *O(rphicorum)F(ragmenta)* (ed. A. Bernabé 2004–07 etc.), *O(rphicorum)H(ymni)* (ed. G. Ricciardelli Apicella 2000a), *O(rphicorum)A(rgonautica)* (ed. F. Vian 1987); for the leaves: Aeg(ae), Amph(ipolis) (*OF* 496n), Eleuth(erna), Ent(ella), Her(aclea), Hip(ponion), Mal(ibu), Meth(one), Myl(opotamos), Pel(inna), Pell(a), Pet(elia), Phars(alus), Pher(ae), Rom(a), Thur(ii). In case there is more than one leaf in the same place (like Eleuth. or Thur.) the abbreviation will be followed by the number of *OF*. The numeration corresponding to the Edmonds edition in this book is indicated in parentheses.

² Pet. (B1) in Franz 1836: 149–150. They were taken as Orphic by Dieterich 1893 and Harrison 1903, and so they were edited by Comparetti 1910 and Olivieri 1915. Comparetti 1910: 36, referring to the last line of Pet., thinks one should read “he (i.e. Orpheus) wrote this.”

³ Especially Wilamowitz 1931.

⁴ It is meaningful that Linforth 1941 does not even mention them, even though he analyzes thoroughly the Orphic evidence. Cf. also Dodds 1951 and Zuntz 1971. In the exhaustive book by West about the Orphic poems they do not deserve more than a couple of allusions and the comment “we have no warrant for calling the gold leaves themselves Orphic” (West 1983: 26).

⁵ Pugliese Carratelli 1993: 11–16, maintained in 2003: 10–20.



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Netherworld geography, but he is also capable of telling the deceased authoritatively what he must and must not do and what words he should pronounce. Such knowledge and authority could only be supposed either of an infernal deity or a visitor to Hades capable of revealing to mortals such precise information.

We should exclude the possibility that the author is an infernal deity, since the most important ones are mentioned in the leaves in the third person. If the speaker was Persephone, for instance, we should expect expressions like “tell me that Bacchus freed you” and not “tell Persephone that Bacchus freed you” (Pel. 2 (D1–D2.2)).

Concerning, on the other hand, the possibility that the speaker is a visitor to the Underworld, the most adequate frame to instructions such as those found in the leaves is a type of eschatological poetry, which usually assumes the form of a *Κατάβασις*, in which the subject-matter would be the geography of Hades, the liberation of the soul from the cycle of metempsychosis and a special destiny for initiates,¹⁸ coming from the lips of somebody who had descended to Hades. In the Greek mythical tradition there are various characters who risked a journey to the Underworld; the best known are Odysseus, Theseus, Pythagoras, Heracles, and Orpheus. But of all these, only Orpheus is acknowledged as having poetical skills, and only to him is poetry about the Afterlife assigned, especially a hexametrical poem called *Descent to Hades*.¹⁹

The fact that the name of Orpheus never appears in the leaves is not sufficient argument to deny that they are texts attributed to the mythical singer. To mention some better known parallels, neither Parmenides nor Empedocles mention their own names, in poems that have plenty of connecting points with the type of literature in which the leaves are sustained.

In these conditions, who would be, then, a better candidate for the authorship of the text of the leaves than Orpheus, the mythical Thracian singer, visitor of the Underworld, revealer of the Afterlife secrets, supposed

¹⁸ Cf. Riedweg 2002.

¹⁹ The author of *OA* 40–42 refers to a work of this kind attributed to Orpheus. Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.21.131.3 quoting Epigenes, questions the real authorship of Orpheus of a poem called *Descent to Hades*, which indicates that the attribution to Orpheus was the most common one. *Suda* s.v. Ὀρφεύς (III 565, 20 Adler) and Const. Lascaris Προλεγόμενα τοῦ σοφοῦ Ὀρφέως 103 (36 Martínez Manzano) take it to be by Orpheus of Camarina, which is but trying to reconcile the attribution to Orpheus with the post-Homeric aspect of the poems (cf. Bernabé 2002b about this matter). About the Orphic *katabasis*, cf. Lobeck 1829: 373–374, 810–818; Dieterich 1893: 72–83, 128 and *passim*; Gruppe 1897–1902: III 1. 1130–1132; Norden 1926: 5, 168–175; Guthrie 1935: 193; Ziegler 1942: 1391–1395; Turcan 1956: 137; Burkert 1972: 130; Schilling 1982: 369; West 1983: 6, 9–10, 12; Brisson 1990: 2915; Kingsley 1995: 115, 135–141, 282–283, 287.

author of a literary corpus about such subject-matters, and transmitter of the τελεταί in which useful information is given to confront death?

GEOGRAPHY OF THE LEAVES

A second argument concerns the geography of the leaves; they have appeared in very specific places: Southern Italy (Hip., Pet., Thur., Ent. in Sicily), Thessaly–Macedonia (Phars., Pel., Pher., Pell., Amph., Meth., Her.; Mal. seems to come also from Thessaly), Crete (Eleuth., Myl.), Achaia and Lesbos (though we do not yet know the contents of the latter). That from Rome is exceptional and its contents are quite different from the others.²⁰

Now the great majority of these places are connected with Orpheus or Orphism, either because some episode of the myth of Orpheus takes place in them, or because other documents with Orphic features have appeared in them. We will mention only the most relevant evidence:

In Southern Italy the Apulian pottery contains multiple representations of Orpheus in the Underworld (cf. below, section on Iconography).

Macedonia is related to Orpheus in different ways:²¹ the famous papyrus which constitutes one of the most important Orphic documents was found at Derveni;²² on the other hand, according to Conon, Orpheus forbade the access of women to the mysteries he had founded in Libethras, where he lived, according to the Orphic *Argonautica* among other sources. In that very city there was an image of Orpheus, and Dio claimed that it was where Orpheus' death took place.²³

The links of Orphism with Crete are as clear as they are numerous.²⁴ Thus, Diodorus maintains that Orphic τελεταί have their origin in the island²⁵ and an epigram of the second century BCE from a temple of the Magna Mater²⁶ has got a clear Orphic sound, as do some verses from Euripides' *Cretans* in which some priests appear with all the characteristic features of the Orphics.²⁷

²⁰ Cf. Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2001: 179–182; 2008: 133–135. ²¹ Cf. Hatzopoulos 2002.

²² Laks and Most 1997, Janko 2002, Jourdan 2003, Betegh 2004, Bernabé 2004b: 149–186.

²³ Cf. Conon *FGrHist* 26 F 1.45, *OA* 50–53, 1373–1376, Plut. *Alex.* 14.8, Diog. Laert. 1.5 (*OF* 1046 ii), Paus. 9.30.7 (*OF* 934 ii).

²⁴ Cf. Kern 1916; Linforth 1941: 215, 232; West 1983: 50, 95–96, 131–133, 153–154, 166–168, 172–174 (who points out that the authors of the Orphic theogonies took many themes from Cretan myths); Casadio 1990b: 284–285; Pugliese Carratelli 1993: 46–48 (= 2001: 86–93; 2003: 87–93).

²⁵ Diod. Sic. 5.77.3 and 5.75.4; *OF* 529–530 and Bernabé 2000b: 48–49.

²⁶ Guarducci 1935–50: I xxiii 3; Colli 4 [B 20]; Pugliese Carratelli 1993: 46 (= 2001: 87; 2003: 88); Tortorelli Ghidini 2000: 40–41; Tzifopoulos 2002: 164–167.

²⁷ Eur. *Cret.* fr. 472 Kannicht (*OF* 567), cf. Casadio 1990, Bernabé 2004a.

Regarding Lesbos, several authors who treat the myth of Orpheus from Hellenistic times onwards, like Phanocles, Vergil, Ovid, Conon, and Lucian,²⁸ relate that the head of Orpheus, which was thrown either into the Thracian river Hebrus or the sea, arrived at the island, where it was honored and went on dictating poems and oracles.²⁹ Besides, archaic poetry gives evidence for the relation between Lesbos and Thrace, the mythical fatherland of Orpheus: Alceus, in a fragment of a poem which perhaps dwelt on Orpheus,³⁰ praised the river Hebrus as the most beautiful of rivers and mentioned its mouth near Ainos. Since Ainos was a colony from Mytilene, it might possibly have been the vehicle to introduce Orpheus in the island.

Not only these coincidences are meaningful, but also the fact that there are constant thematic features in documents which are so far away from each other in space and time. This excludes the possibility that they are local traditions or religious movements. On the contrary, they suggest much more powerfully a coherent religious orientation which, though dispersed, is persistent through time and not integrated in the official religion. All these are features consistent with Orphism and not with any other movement known to us.

THE FRAME OF A MYSTERY

References to initiation

The religious movement to which the leaves belong is a mystery cult.³¹ In Hip. 16 (B10.16) we read that the initiates (μύσται) and the *bakkhoi* go forward in glory along the path which leads to Afterlife happiness. The knowledge of certain passwords (σύμβολα) allows the initiate of Pher. (D3) to reach a meadow which represents eternal joy. In the leaves of Pell. (E4) and Aeg. (496c–e) (F4, F5, F2) in addition to the name of the deceased, the term μύστης is engraved, with the probable intention that, when presenting himself before Persephone, he may be identified as an initiate. There are various Orphic texts³² in which μύστης or the middle-passive participles

²⁸ Phanocl. fr. 1.11–20 Powell (OF 1004, 1038 and 1054), Verg. *G.* 4.523–527, and Serv. *ad loc.* (OF 1054 iii and viii), Ov. *Met.* 11.50–60 (OF 1054 iv), Conon *FGrHist* 26 F 1.45.4–6 (OF 1039 and 1061), Lucian *Ind.* 11 (OF 1052), *P Berol.* 13426.16–19.

²⁹ We find the same topic in figurative representations; cf. Garezou 1994: nn. 68–70.

³⁰ Alc. fr. 45 Voigt.

³¹ Jiménez San Cristóbal 2002a: 127–133. Cf. Graf, Chapter 3 above and Graf and Johnston 2007: 137–164.

³² Heraclit. fr. 87 Marc. (OF 587), Eur. *Cret.* fr. 472.10–15 Kannicht (OF 567), *PDerv.* col. vi 8–9 (OF 471), *OH* 43.10, 84.3, Diod. Sic. 1.23.7 (OF 327 iv), 5.49.5 (OF 521), Harp. *Lex.* s.v. ἀπομάττων, Plut. fr. 178 Sandbach (OF 594), Clem. Al. *Prot.* 2.16.2 (OF 589 i).

μυόμενος, μυηθείς or μεμυημένος appear in a similar context, in which initiation is linked to a way of life subject to rigid prescriptions and to the fulfilling of rites which grant access to a happy existence after death. The fact that in some of these cases³³ the terms μύστης and βάκχος appear together, just as they do in Hip. 16 (B10.16), is also meaningful. In Orphism the term βάκχοι defines more precisely³⁴ the term μύσται: only those initiates who have made a continuous and constant effort in βακχεύειν will reach the true union with the divinity³⁵ and will go forward along the sacred way which leads to the paradise of the blessed.

The mention of the sacred way in Hip. 15–16 (B10.15–16) constitutes an indirect reference to initiation which supports the mysteric character of these texts, since the sacred way can be conceived as a reiteration of the initiation path in this world,³⁶ or perhaps as a projection of an earthly model.³⁷ Let us not forget that the Hip. (B10) path is reserved to the μύσται καὶ βάκχοι, since it is initiation that guarantees the promise of Afterlife blessing.

The importance of doctrinal knowledge

However, why should we ascribe the leaves to Orphism, when, though one of the most important ones, it is not the only mysteric movement in Greece? In contrast to the Eleusinian mysteries or Dionysiac cults, Orphism can be defined as a mysteriosophic religion.³⁸ In Dionysiac or Eleusinian cult, the initiate participates in an initiation rite which makes him familiar with the deity, but he does not gain a knowledge which transforms him. The concept of knowledge, on the contrary, is inherent to the nature of Orphic τελεταί, which are oriented to the acquisition of an eschatological wisdom which allows the initiates (and not only them) to know the nature of the soul, her situation in the world, and how to be freed from the mortal

³³ Heraclit. fr. 87 Marc. (OF 587); Eur. *Cret.* fr. 472.10–15 Kannicht (OF 567).

³⁴ Burkert 1975: 90–91 thinks that the μύσται καὶ βάκχοι are the initiates and especially those who got into real ecstasy. In this sense, καὶ would have the function of adding an expression which restricts or limits, cf. LSJ s.v. καί. About βάκχος and βακχεύειν, cf. Jiménez 2009.

³⁵ Vid. already Rohde 1898²: II 128 n. 6; Guthrie 1935: 194ff.; Dodds 1944: 79 (v. 115); Bernabé 1998d: 82 and n. 164.

³⁶ Feyerabend 1984. The relation between ritual practice and the itinerary of the souls of the initiates is witnessed also by Pl. *Phd.* 108a “He (Aeschylus) says that the way leading to Hades is straightforward, but I think it is neither straightforward nor single . . . but seems to have, on the contrary, plenty of branches and crossroads. My guess comes from the funeral rites and the usual funerary celebrations which take place there.”

³⁷ Cf. Pugliese Carratelli 1990: 412. On sacred ways in antiquity cf. Rosenberg 1920 and above all Caerols 1995.

³⁸ Bianchi 1965: 154–155, 167–168.

condition. This conception is condensed in the introductory verse to the Orphic *Hieroi logoi*, which we know in two variants:³⁹

- (a) I will sing to the understanding, close your doors, ye profane.
- (b) I will speak to those to whom it is right to speak; close your doors, ye profane.

Only the initiates know the necessary things to reach salvation and only they have the right to access to the knowledge that the poetry attributed to Orpheus provides.

In the leaves, emphasis on knowledge is attested by Mnemosyne's presence as the presiding deity, by the insistence on truth, by the questions of the guardians, whose mission is to prevent those who do not know the answers from having access to the place of blessing, and by the passwords (σύμβολα)⁴⁰ that they and Persephone must be told as a proof that one knows the truth.

The importance of Mnemosyne and the insistence on truth

In the realm of myth, the coincidences of Mnemosyne with Orpheus are clear. Mnemosyne is a relative of Orpheus, she is his grandmother, since her daughter, the Muse Calliope, is Orpheus' mother. Like him, Mnemosyne comes from Pieria and is related to poetry and music, since she is mother of the Muses. Now, apart from this mythical relationship, which is after all superficial, there is a deeper relationship on the level of religion which concerns a system of beliefs. The text of the leaves is "the work of Mnemosyne,"⁴¹ a goddess who is the personification of Memory and who ensures that the initiate remembers the instructions revealed to him when alive, thus becoming the protector of the souls and the guide of their journey. She prevents any undesired failing of memory when the initiate confronts the unavoidable questioning before the guardians. What is required of Mnemosyne is that she makes the initiates remember the ritual, probably the initiatic ritual. In the *Orphic Hymn* addressed precisely to Mnemosyne (*OH* 77.9–10) the function we suppose this goddess has in the leaves is made explicit:

Excite the initiates with the memory of the pious ritual
and send oblivion away from them.

Taking into account that in Greek the concept of truth (ἀλήθεια) means etymologically "lack of oblivion" (λήθη), to remember turns out to mean

³⁹ *OF* 1ab, cf. Bernabé 1996a. ⁴⁰ *Ent.* 19 (B11.19), *Pher.* (D3).

⁴¹ *Hip.* 1 (B10.1), *Pet.* 12 (B1.12), *Rom.* 3 (A5.3). There seems to be little ground for the idea of Gallavotti 1978–79: 339–340, who does not see the goddess in the leaves, but a mention of the substantive "memory."



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drunk from the other fountain) and he knows he must drink from Mnemosyne's fountain.

The declaration of purity

After having given the passwords correctly to the guardians, the initiate must present himself to the chthonian deities themselves and utter some other passwords. In the leaves from Thurii and, with some variants, in Rom.,⁵⁵ somebody declares solemnly in first person addressing Persephone, Eucles (Hades), and Eubuleus (Dionysus), and the other gods:

I come pure from the pure.

The phrase implies that the speaker or his soul is defined as belonging to a united group, characterized by having a similar ritual situation most probably a ritual purity coming from having experienced initiation and having observed all his life the precepts of his religious group, which makes him worthy of a new life in the Underworld. The uttering of this formula is necessary for the divinities to acknowledge the deceased as an initiate and to admit him to the house of the holy.⁵⁶ Plato, in a clearly Orphic context, opposes two groups: the “uninitiated and those not participating in the rites,” who are condemned to the mud once they are dead, and the purified (κεκαθαρμένος) and participants in the rites (τετελεσμένος), who will dwell with the gods.⁵⁷

The painful cycle

In Thur. 488.5 (A1.5) the deceased declares to the infernal deities:

I went out flying from the painful cycle of deep grief.

With that statement he makes clear that his soul has left behind the cycle of reincarnations in the mortal world; that is to say, he has managed to get rid of the mortal life to which he was condemned for the fault committed by his ancestors the Titans. In other Orphic fragments, transmitted in the texts of

⁵⁵ Thur. 488–490.1 (A1–A3.1), Rom. 1 (A5.1). Cf. Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2001: 137–143; 2008: 100–105. In Rom. (A5) it is not the dead who speaks, but a third person, who could be a guardian of Hades (Zuntz 1971: 334), or a “mediator from this world” or the leaf itself (Riedweg 1996: 479).

⁵⁶ As it is expressed in Thur. 489–490.7 (A2–A3.7) ἔδρας ἐς εὐαγέ(ι)ων, cf. Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2001: 155–156, 225–229; 2008: 115, 174–177. In Amph. (D4) the deceased declares εὐαγῆς ἱερὰ Διονύσου Βαχχίου εἰμι, cf. Hatzopoulos 2002: 25 n. 44, Jiménez San Cristóbal 2007.

⁵⁷ Pl. *Phd.* 69c (*OF* 434 iii). The Gurob Papyrus col. 11 22 has θεξεκκα[, a sequence for which Hordern 2000 proposes either, in comparison with Thur. 488–490.1 (A1–A3.1) -θ' (perhaps αὐτόθι?) ἐκ κα[θαρῶν or in comparison to col. 1 28 -θε ἐκ κα[λάθου. Kern (*OF* 31) reads θ' εἰκα.

neo-Platonist philosophers, we find the terms “cycle” (κύκλος) or “wheel” (τροχός) referring to the cycle of metempsychosis of the soul, in which it must reincarnate again and again until the guilt is expiated and she can enjoy being with the other blessed.⁵⁸

The eternal world which the soul longs to reach in the leaves is outside this “circle,” and escaping from this cycle, characterized as “painful” (ἀργαλέος),⁵⁹ is a liberation and a triumph. Besides, the expression of the leaf implies that the initiate conceives this life, or rather, the succession of lives the soul must go through, both as a cycle⁶⁰ and as a wheel, understood as a repeated and terrible punishment and as a metaphor of the wheel of fortune,⁶¹ as terrible as the prison or even the grave which we find in other allusions to the Orphics in Plato.⁶² All in all, it is a key expression within Orphic doctrines and fundamental for the fate of the deceased initiate. It seems logical that the initiates were taught these expressions in their ritual experiences, where they would have learned and repeated them.⁶³

The interpretation of the κύκλος of the Thurian leaf as the cycle of birth and death, not only has parallels in the Orphic fragments we have just quoted, but also helps to explain the phraseology of guilt and punishment which presents a consistent pattern in other leaves.⁶⁴

The primordial guilt and the punishment

According to the leaves, human beings bear a guilt which they must expiate to liberate themselves:

I have paid the punishment (ποινή) corresponding to impious actions (ἔργων ἔνεκα οὐτι δικαίω) (Thur. 490.4 (A3.4)).⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Procl. *In Ti.* 3.296.7 Diehl (OF 348 iii), *In Ti.* 3.297.7 (OF 348 i), *Simpl. in Cael.* 377.12 Heiberg (OF 348 ii).

⁵⁹ Cf. Emp. fr. 187.8 Wright (B 115 DK; OF 449) “interchanging the painful paths of life.” It is significant that Empedocles uses the same adjective ἀργαλέος in reference to the human life in a fragment in which he speaks precisely of a “Decree of Necessity” (Ἀνάγκη), who in Orphic texts (OF 77) is conceived as the principle which encircles and unites the world, companion of Time (Χρόνος), who also is seen as a winged and turning (ἐλικτός) snake, cf. Onians 1954²: 332.

⁶⁰ Procl. *In R.* 2.338 Kroll (OF 338 i) “Since human soul goes from one living being to another, interchanging according to the cycles of time.”

⁶¹ Cf. Harrison 1903: 592–593; Thomson 1945: 9.

⁶² The grave, in *Grg.* 493a (OF 430 ii); the prison, in *Phd.* 62b (OF 429 i); both images, in *Cra.* 400c (OF 430 i).

⁶³ Harrison 1903: 588–592 thinks even possible that κύκλος refers to a real cycle which was formed in an initiatic rite celebrated during the lifetime of the initiate. It could be a wheel, or a circle painted round the initiate who was to escape out of it. Cf. Psell. *τίνα περὶ δαιμόνων δοξάζουσιν* [Ἕλληνες p. 41 Boissonade, who recalls an old Bacchic rite in which daemons were expelled by jumping out of a fiery circle.

⁶⁴ Thur. 489–490.4. (A2–A3.4). ⁶⁵ Cf. Santamaría 2005.

Payment and liberation are achieved through the τελετή, since in Pher. (D3) it is specified that the μύστης is free from punishment (ἄποινος), which implies that the uninitiated will be punished. We must suppose it is a general punishment over all of mankind, which Thur. 488.5 (A1.5) defines as a terrible cycle which only the initiates can escape. The only known relation between guilt and punishment paid through the τελετή and the exit from a cycle is the one expressed in the Orphic τελετή, in which the guilt is Titanic, the punishment (among others) is the metempsychosis, and the cycle one must get free of is the cycle of rebirth. The phraseology of the leaves is similar to other Orphic texts:

Take my present as expiation (ποινάς) of the impious deeds of my parents (πατ[έρων ἀθεμίστων). (Gurob Papyrus col. 1 4 = OF 578).

In the same way that unjust men (ἄδικοι) condemned to death (θ[ανάτῳ ζημιούμε]νοι). (Derveni Papyrus col. III 8 = OF 472).⁶⁶

This is why the magi do the sacrifice, with the idea that they are expiating a punishment (ποινὴν ἀποδιδόντες). (Derveni Papyrus col. VI 4–5).

We can perfectly imagine that it is a rite like the one described in the Derveni Papyrus which allows the *mystes* to declare in the Afterlife:

I have paid the punishment corresponding to impious deeds.

A great number of texts insist again and again on the same conceptual system:

- (a) A fragment of the *Rhapsodies* (OF 350.3) talks about the λύσιν προγόνων ἀθεμίστων “liberation from his unjust ancestors.”
- (b) Pindar attributes to the τελεταί the liberation from toils, mentions the payment of a punishment and refers to the compensation which men owe to Persephone for an ancient grief.⁶⁷ It is obvious that men cannot have provoked Persephone’s grief. It must have been their ancestors, the Titans, who did that.
- (c) A famous text of Plato recalls that, according to the Orphics, the soul is in the body to pay a punishment which must be paid. In another it is recalled that only the initiate and pure will dwell with the gods (which coincides precisely with the declarations of apotheosis of the *mystes* which we find in the leaves), while the uninitiated will have as punishment to lie in the mud.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ We accept the reading proposed by West in Tsantsanoglou 1997: 96; Most 1997: 131–132 compares it with Thur. 489–490.4. (A2–A3.4).

⁶⁷ Cf. Pi. fr. 131a Maehl. (OF 441) λυσιπόνων τελετᾶν, Ol. 2.58 (OF 445) ποινὰς ἔτεισαν, fr. 133 Maehl. (OF 443) ποινὰν παλαιοῦ πένθεος, Cf. Bernabé 1999a and Santamaría 2000.

⁶⁸ Pl. *Cra.* 400c (OF 430 i), *Phd.* 69c (OF 434 iii).

- (d) Aristotle⁶⁹ refers to what “the oldest” proclaim about humans living to expiate the greatest crimes. It is evident that if we “live to expiate” (ζῆν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ κολάσει) we must expiate something preceding our own birth. “We” are the human beings, and this indicates that sin precedes our existence as a whole.

The crown

In Thur. 488. 6 (A1.6) the reference to the “cycle of deep grief” is followed by the declaration

I rushed with swift feet to the desired crown.

In the Greek world we find crowns in contexts related to the banquet, the funerary world, the triumph of athletic competition and a number of mystical symbols which serve as tokens for recognition of the initiates.⁷⁰ All these values find an echo in Orphic testimonies which provide a solid context for the coherent interpretation of the crown of the Thuri leaf.⁷¹ But perhaps the most interesting texts in relation to the use of crowns are those about the rites which the Orphics fulfill in the Afterlife. In Plato’s *Republic* the crown and the wine symbolize the eternal happiness promised to the initiates. The crown would be in relation to the banquet, since it is a perpetual banquet that is promised to a good *mystes*.⁷²

Musaeus and his son have a more excellent song than these of the blessings that the gods bestow on the righteous. For they conduct them to the House of Hades in their tale and arrange a symposium of the saints where, reclined on couches crowned with wreaths, they entertain the time henceforth with wine, as if the fairest meed of virtue were an everlasting drunk.

The same panorama is found in two passages of Aristophanes: a fragment⁷³ which refers to some crowned initiates taking part in a banquet in the Afterlife, and the parody of *Clouds*⁷⁴ in which Socrates, after alluding to a

⁶⁹ Iambl. *Protr.* 77.27 Des Places = Arist. fr. 60 Rose (OF 430 v).

⁷⁰ Cf. Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2001: 165–173, 2008: 121–128, with bibl.

⁷¹ Dem. 18.260 (OF 577 i); Harp. s.v. λεύκη (OF 577 viii); Plut. *Alex.* 2.9 (OF 579); Clem. Al. *Paed.* 2.8.73.1 “those who celebrate Bacchus do not fulfill the rites without crowns, but, as soon as they feel it on their temples, they feel inflamed when they see the τελετή.”

⁷² Pl. *Resp.* 363cd (OF 431 i).

⁷³ Ar. fr. 504.6ss KA (OF 432 i) “And we would not be crowned, nor anointed (?) / if we did not go to drink once we arrive down there. / That is why they are called ‘the blessed’. / For everybody says ‘He has left, blessed he.’ ‘He is asleep, happy he, since he will not suffer any more.’ / And we venerate them with sacrifices / like to gods, and we offer them libations, / we ask them to send goods to us up here.”

⁷⁴ Ar. *Nub.* 254–60.

ceremony of enthronement of an initiate, offers him a crown because among them such is the usual practice with initiates.⁷⁵ The crown reappears as a symbol of afterlife blessing in a passage of Plutarch which describes the experiences that the soul suffers after death, taking as references those experienced by the *mystes* during the τελετή.⁷⁶ The funerary and the initiatic appear again united in a poem of unknown authorship from the mid-third century BCE⁷⁷ which echoes the language and the ideology of the leaves. The addressee of this poem is the tragic poet Philicus, whose head, in the moment he left for the Isles of the Blessed, is crowned with ivy, probably as a sign of his initiation in the mysteries. The symbolism of the funerary crown has ritual echoes because the crown is a sign of identity of the initiated deceased, as it had been for the members of the thiasoi described by Demosthenes and Plutarch. To sum up, obtaining a crown after death meant the triumph of the initiated over the cycle of reincarnations, signalling a culminating point. Thus, in the Orphic evidence the rite, the realm of death, and the destiny of the soul are implied in the metaphor of the crown, mystical, triumphal and sympotic at the same time. Orphism offers, then, the most adequate context for the right interpretation of the crown in the leaf of Thurii.

The wine and Dionysus

At the end of the leaves of Pel. 6 (5) (D1.6 = D2.5) we read:

You have wine, happy privilege.⁷⁸

Wine may be alluded to either because it was part of an initiatic or funerary ritual, or as an expression of the otherworldly happiness that the deceased will enjoy. These three interpretations, which are not exclusive but may well be complementary,⁷⁹ agree with some pieces of evidence and beliefs within the scope of Orphism.⁸⁰ Demosthenes⁸¹ describes Aeschines helping his mother to officiate some rites in which wine is mixed. In the Gurob Papyrus

⁷⁵ Cf. Dieterich 1893 (who compares this ritual with the one described by Dem. 18.259), Méautis 1938, Burkert 1983: 268 n. 16, Freyburger-Galland 1992. See also the comments of Dover *ad loc.*, 187–188, as well as Guidorizzi's, 224–227, where references can be found to the rites he caricatures.

⁷⁶ Plut. fr. 178 Sandbach (OF 594). ⁷⁷ SHell 980. Cf. Dickie 1995: 84–86, 1998.

⁷⁸ The text presents some textual difficulties; see Bernabé *ad loc.* and Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2001: 267–268, 2008: 256–258 for the various proposals.

⁷⁹ Cf. Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2001: 117–125, 2008: 84–89 with discussion and bibliography. This triple interpretation also explains the curious metrical structure of the text, cf. Riedweg 1998: 367–368.

⁸⁰ Thus, an Italian vase (cf. M. Schmidt 1975: 134–135, fig. xvi), a relief from the Farnesina in Rome (cf. Graf 1991: 100), or one of the frescoes in the Villa dei Misteri in Pompeii (cf. Simon 1961, Sauron 1998, Ricciardelli Apicella 2000b: 279). On the ritual usages of wine, see Velasco López 1992: 216–220.

⁸¹ Dem. 18.259 (OF 577 i). Cf. Wankel *ad loc.*, 1135–1138.



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This thiasos is undoubtedly the reunion of initiates in the Underworld, and the *mystes* makes “a claim of membership.”⁹⁶

On the other hand, Santamaría Álvarez⁹⁷ proposes the following reading for A4.2:

δεξιὸν ἐς θίασ<ον> δεῖ {ξ} <σ’> ἰ<έ>ναι

You must go to the thiasos on the right,

according to which a thiasos appears also in the Thurii tablets.

Reconstruction of a hieros logos

In the following paragraphs we will briefly explain how the underlying structure of the text also reflects the importance of an initiatic knowledge. It cannot be accidental that from the text of the leaves as a whole it is possible to reconstruct a *hieros logos* along the same essential lines as the one reconstructed from other Orphic fragments.⁹⁸ In effect, Riedweg has argued that from certain expressions of the Orphic leaves it is possible to reconstruct the subject-matter of a ἱερὸς λόγος about the fate of the soul in the Underworld, which would be transmitted to the initiates during the ritual.⁹⁹ We know that in Orphic cult the importance of knowledge results in the existence of ritual books with the keys to interpret that knowledge.¹⁰⁰ After all, Orphism is defined as a “religion of the book”¹⁰¹ with constant references to stories which sanction the rites and which contain the keys to have access to that doctrinal knowledge. The Gurob Papyrus (OF 578) constitutes doubtlessly the clearest and most complete piece of evidence of what must have been a ritual text, written over a handy material and containing the indispensable instructions for what must be done and said in the different moments of the celebration. In a way, the leaves can be considered an equivalent of the books used by the initiates in the ritual: they are brief because they have only the minimal contents which are indispensable to help the dead believer to remember all that is fundamental to overcome the passage through Hades, and are golden because, in contrast to

⁹⁶ Graf and Johnston 2007: 95. ⁹⁷ Verbal communication.

⁹⁸ Cf. Bernabé 2003b. On Orphic *Hieroi logoi* cf. Baumgarten 1998, Henrichs 2003a and 2003b, Graf and Johnston 2007: 175–184.

⁹⁹ Riedweg 1998: 387–389, 2002 and Chapter 9 below. According to Graf 1991: 98–101 the lines of Pel. (D1–D2) would be employed in a ritual which dramatized the death and resurrection of the initiate, in imitation of that of the god, followed by a *makarismos* with instructions for life and the promise of future happiness.

¹⁰⁰ Jiménez San Cristóbal 2002b.

¹⁰¹ The definition comes from Bianchi 1974: 131 (= 1978: 189); cf. Bernabé 1996a: 18 n. 15; 1996b: 67.

the ritual texts in papyrus which can be replaced, the leaves must last for ever. In a system of beliefs in which the τελετή is conceived as a preparation for corporeal death, it is logical to suppose that it served to instruct the initiate on aspects like the infernal geography or the fate of the soul in the Underworld, and it is not impossible to think that initiates and initiators alike used in the rite texts similar to those contained in the leaves, though these must have been inscribed on cheaper (and unfortunately perishable) materials. In any case, the Gurob Papyrus and the Orphic leaves are two instances of absolutely functional texts, which are used in two transcendental moments for the initiate: the τελετή and death.

The relevance of knowledge and doctrinal teaching which is inferred from the leaves makes it difficult to accept the proposal to ascribe them to Dionysiac circles, precisely because the constant usage of a text constitutes one of the differentiating features between Orphism and Dionysism. As we have seen, the concept of knowledge is inherent to the nature of Orphic τελεταί. In Dionysiac cult, on the contrary, the initiate participates in rites which make him familiar to the god and his events, but he has no access to a knowledge which transforms him. A tight link between Dionysiac doctrines and rites does not seem to have ever existed.¹⁰²

PURITY AND JUSTICE

Candidates to dwell in the *locus amoenus* declare themselves to be in a special condition of purity.¹⁰³ The same purity is the condition for a better destiny in the Afterlife in texts which are undoubtedly Orphic such as the *Rhapsodies*, but this time in explicit opposition to the fate of those who lived unjustly:¹⁰⁴

Those who have been pure¹⁰⁵ under the rays of the sun,
reach, once they have died, a sweeter destiny
in the beautiful meadow, in the shores of deep-flowing Acheron . . .
Those who acted against justice under the rays of the sun,
evil-doers, are carried down to the field of Cocytus,
to the freezing Tartarus.

Clearly, the contrast between “those who have been pure” and “those who acted against justice” implies that the pure have acted according to justice and that to act against justice is an impurity. The same association and

¹⁰² See Festugière 1956; Dodds 1944: xi–xx; Daraki 1985: 63; Casadio 1994: 98 and n. 75, 119 and n. 12; Versnel 1990: 137–146.

¹⁰³ Thur. 488–490.1 (A1–A3.1) “I come pure from the pure.” ¹⁰⁴ *OF* 340.

¹⁰⁵ εὐαγέωσιν. The word εὐαγής is a term used in the leaves, cf. Thur. 489–490.7 (A2–A3.7) ἔδρας ἐς εὐαγέων, Amphip. (D4) εὐαγής ἱερὰ Διονύσου Βακχίου . . . εἰμί.

contrast of concepts is found much earlier in Plato,¹⁰⁶ who ironically states that Museus and his son (i.e. Orpheus) reward the just (δικαίοις) with a banquet of crowned and drunk pious folk (όσίων), the same prize which we have seen that awaits the initiates in Pel. (D1–D2). Instead, the impious and unjust (τοὺς δὲ ἄνοσίους αὖ καὶ ἄδίκους) are thrown into the mud and forced to carry water in a sieve.¹⁰⁷

Justice (Dike) is a well-known deity within Orphic scope. In an ancient Orphic theogony she appears as a goddess who accompanies Zeus in watching over the unjust deeds committed by men so that Zeus may punish them,¹⁰⁸ while in a passage from a legal discourse one of the litigants tries to move the vote of the jury by alluding to the vigilance of Justice over the unjust,¹⁰⁹ postulated, he says, by Orpheus.

The pattern of the leaves also reflects a link between ritual purity and justice (δίκη) which coincides with the idea of justice related to the religious ideas and cultic practices which we found clearly developed in Orphism.¹¹⁰ Being just is equivalent to being free from punishment, ἄποινος, as the initiate declares in Pher. (D3). Through other Orphic passages we know that to pay the punishment implies to be initiated and to live with purity and rectitude, because the uninitiate will not be able to get rid of his impious and unjust condition and will have to expiate his faults again.¹¹¹

THE GODS IN THE LEAVES AND IN OTHER ORPHIC TEXTS

Some features of the gods mentioned in the leaves put them into relationship with the image of the same gods in other Orphic texts.¹¹²

Primeval gods and elements

In the Great Leaf from Thurii (C) some divine names and some phrases of religious content can be read within a sea of senseless letters.¹¹³ In the first line three gods are mentioned:

¹⁰⁶ Pl. *Resp.* 363c–d. Cf. Plut. *Comp. Cim. et Luc.* 1.2.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Pl. *Resp.* 330d, *Phd.* 69c, *Grg.* 493a–c. Justice appears also in the Apulian infernal iconography, which on some occasions is associated with Victory (Nike), cf. below, “Nike and Dike”.

¹⁰⁸ Pl. *Leg.* 716a (*OF* 32). Burkert 1969: 11 n. 25 points out rightly that the Platonic passage seems to paraphrase a similar verse of another passage in the *Rhapsodies* (*OF* 233).

¹⁰⁹ Ps.-Dem. 25.11 (*OF* 33). ¹¹⁰ Jiménez San Cristóbal 2005.

¹¹¹ Pl. *Phd.* 69c, *Grg.* 493a, *Resp.* 364c, Julian. *Or.* 7.25, Plut. fr. 178 Sandbach.

¹¹² For Derveni, cf. Most 1997, Betegh 2004: esp. 331–338.

¹¹³ Cf. Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2001: 183–200; 2008: 137–150; Bernabé 2002a. Betegh 2004: 332–337 points out that the tablet shows undeniable points of contact with the Derveni text.

To the First-Born, to Mother Earth, to the Cybelean,
daughter of Demeter.

Since Phanes does not appear in Orphism till much later, it seems most probable to think that the First-Born is here, as in the theogony of the Derveni Papyrus, Heaven, first son of Night.¹¹⁴ This idea agrees with the password in one group of leaves:¹¹⁵

I am a son of Earth and starry Heaven.

Heaven and Earth form the primeval couple. In the Derveni theogony, Night did not have a partner, as is clearly indicated in the fact that Heaven is qualified with a matronymic “son of Night”¹¹⁶ and not with the usual patronymic. Following the triad of the Thurian leaf, the Maid daughter of Demeter is Persephone, usually called Κόρη. The epithet Cybelean, “daughter of Cybele” is a tautology which insists on the identification of Demeter and Cybele. The name of Demeter is interpreted in the Orphic texts as Γῆ μήτηρ,¹¹⁷ so Persephone is also daughter of Earth. The deceased addresses, then, his ultimate ancestors, Heaven and Earth, as well as Persephone, deity of the dead, who decides his fate in the other world.

In line 2 Zeus is identified with air, just as in the Derveni theogony.¹¹⁸ But it is even more curious that in line 5 of the same leaf four gods are identified with four elements (similarly, but not identically, to Empedocles). Thus, we read:

ἄερ | πῦρ | μᾶτερ | Νῆστι | νύξ | ἡμέρα

Air, in agreement with line 2, is Zeus, the fire is Dionysus (who has been identified with Sun in line 2); Mother is Earth, usually called “Mother Earth” in many texts, among others line 1 of this one, and is fused with Demeter as we have just seen. And the last element, which must be water (by process of elimination), appears with the same divine name Nestis, by which Empedocles used to call it.¹¹⁹ As fundamental deities two masculine gods are mentioned, both of the above world of light, of the realm of the living (Zeus and Dionysus), and two feminine goddesses, from the lower world of darkness, from the realm of the dead (Demeter and Persephone).

¹¹⁴ Burkert 1999, Bernabé 2002d, Betegh 2004, Janko 2002, against West 1983, Brisson 1990, Jourdan 2003.

¹¹⁵ Hip. 10 (B10.10) etc., cf. section on “Sons of Earth and Heaven” above.

¹¹⁶ OF 10.2 Οὐρανὸς Εὐφρονίδης.

¹¹⁷ Cf. e.g. Hymn to Demeter in *P. Derv.* saec. IV BCE col. xxii Δῆμητηρ [Ρ]έα Γῆ Μητὴρ <τε καὶ> Εστία Δηιοῖ.

¹¹⁸ *P. Derv.* col. xvii (OF 14 i), cf. OF 14.3 (= 31.5) Ζεὺς πνοιὴ πάντων. ¹¹⁹ Emp. fr. 31 B 6 DK.

The mention of the four gods-elements is followed by references to νύξ and ἡμέρα “night” and “day,” so the entire cosmic order is alluded to: the four elements, and identified with them the gods of above and the gods of below, of life and death, and in the last place, the basic elements of the temporal sequence, night and day, the first one being, besides, a primordial deity in Orphic traditions.¹²⁰

Very similar sequences appear in other works of Orphic literature. The most interesting parallel is two verses of a Hymn to Zeus inserted in the *Rhapsodies* in which, to tell us that Zeus has within himself the whole Universe, the poet mentions four elements and the elemental temporal sequence: night–day, that is, the same six elements mentioned in the aforementioned line (*OF* 243.7–8):

an only royal body, in which all things fulfill their cycle,
fire, water, earth and aither, night and day.

We do not believe possible that so close a coincidence could be the result of pure chance particularly since the same elements recur in the so called “Orphic Oath” (*OF* 619):

Indeed, for the parents of the immortals that exist for ever,
Fire, Water, Earth, Heaven, Moon,
Sun and great Phanes, and the dark Night as well.

Three elements reappear here called by their usual names: fire, water and earth. Then Heaven is mentioned (which substitutes for air as in Emped. fr. 25 Wright [22 DK] 2), then the two main heavenly bodies, Moon and Sun (which is another way of expressing the sequence day–night), and Phanes and Night, duplication in divine terms of the light of day and night. We find in this text fundamentally the same idea of the structure of the universe that we find in the leaf of Thurii.

The Moira

In three leaves from Thurii we find an almost identical verse:

But Moira overcame me and he who strikes from the stars with his
thunderbolt.
Either Moira overcame me or the thrower of thunderbolts.¹²¹

Traditionally, Moira is the divine personification of destiny and death.¹²² In Homer we find parallel expressions to those from the leaves, for instance:

¹²⁰ Cf. Bernabé 1998b. ¹²¹ *OF* 488.4, 489–490.5.

¹²² Cf. Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2001: 148–155; 2008: 109–114.



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