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Chapter Sixteen

**The Bright Cypress of the “Orphic”
Gold Tablets**

*Direction and Illumination
in Myths of the Underworld*

Radcliffe G. Edmonds

*You will find in the halls of Hades a spring on the left, and standing by it,
a glowing white cypress tree.¹*

This memorable image of the soul’s vision of a bright tree glowing in the gloom of the underworld appears on a number of the so-called Orphic gold tablets, tiny scraps of gold foil found buried in graves in Magna Grecia, Thessaly and Crete with instructions for the deceased in the afterlife. In both the long and short versions of these so-called B tablets (there are several other types, but the B text is the most common), the deceased must proclaim her identity to the unnamed guardians in the Halls of Hades. While there are a number of individual variations among the 12 tablets of the B type, the most significant division is between the long tablets (B1, B10, & B11 from Magna Grecia and B2 from Thessaly) and the short tablets (B3-8a from Eleutherna in Crete and B9 from Thessaly). The short tablets contain only the essential details of the longer text in the other tablets—the proclamation of identity and the reference to the cypress by the spring.

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.²

These enigmatic tablets present many puzzles to the interpreter, since there is no mention of them anywhere in the literary record and their fragmentary texts barely sketch the narrative of the soul’s journey to the underworld. Interpreters have therefore sought to elucidate the meaning of every feature of these tablets with recourse to parallels and conjectures, at times ignoring the

text and context of the tablets for plausible hypotheses. I have argued elsewhere that a careful analysis of the way the tablets' narrative works shows the central importance in these texts of marking the deceased as extraordinary and helps us understand the social and theological context of these texts.³ Here I want to focus on one element of these tablets relevant to the theme of this volume, the bright cypress tree in the dark underworld.

The apparent contrast between the light of the white cypress tree and the dark of the shadowy Halls of Hades seems to set up a clear distinction between positive light and negative darkness. However, such expectations are in fact confounded by the text. The light that shines in the darkness does not, in fact, betoken salvation or even relief from the perils of the underworld. The white cypress is merely a recognizable point in the darkness; the expected valuation of light over dark is not operative here. In these tablet texts, the tree serves as a marker of the important choice of paths in the underworld—the actual choice (right or left) is less important than the fact that knowing the correct path is the key. The unexpected meaning of the bright tree in the underworld illustrates the importance of the principle of the arbitrariness of the sign in interpreting Greek mythological materials. The significance of a traditional mythological element is determined by its deployment within the structure of the narrative, and we must be cautious about importing meaning from our limited selection of other examples of the element.

The white cypress of the gold tablets, glowing brightly perhaps in the shadowy gloom of the Halls of Hades, would seem to be a straightforward case of the familiar contrast between light and darkness, in which light is good, associated with life, divinity, and salvation, and darkness is bad, associated with death, mortality, and destruction. Numerous parallels in the Greek mythological tradition attest to this contrast and this significance. The underworld to which souls go after death is nearly always dark and gloomy.⁴ So familiar is this absence of light from the underworld that Lucian can sarcastically comment that, although the underworld is traditionally dark, none of the visitors in myth ever seem to have any trouble seeing their way around; there must be enough light for them to see by.⁵

The contrast of light and dark marks not only the difference between life and death, but between the fates of the dead in the afterlife. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* warns that those who are uninitiate in the Eleusinian mysteries will never have good things when they go down into the dark gloom, whereas the chorus of initiates in Aristophanes *Frogs* boasts that they alone have light in the realm of the dead.⁶ The imagery of a bright and beautiful realm for the specially privileged dead appears also in Pindar, whose blessed souls enjoy the sunshine perpetually.⁷ Plato develops the contrast even further in his myth of the afterlife in the *Phaedo*, contrasting the dark places of pun-

ishment for ordinary folk with the clear and bright divine realms for those who have lived philosophic lives, and Virgil too contrasts the afterlife of light for the blessed with the gloomy realm in which the others dwell.

To associate darkness with death and light with life and happiness in the tablets thus seems obvious. The underworld to which the soul travels in the tablets is certainly dark and gloomy in all the tablets that include any description. The Petelia tablet, B1, has a fragmentary line on the margin that refers to the darkness covering around as it describes what the deceased will find in the Halls of Hades.⁸ In the Hipponion tablet, B10, the guardians of the water of Memory ask the deceased what she is seeking in the shadowy gloom of Hades.⁹ The afterlife of all of the so-called Orphic gold tablets, not only those with the spring and the cypress but also the other types from Thurii and Pelinna, seems to be the familiar dark and shadowy realm of the dead beneath the earth.¹⁰ Despite the fragmentary nature of these texts, then, it is clear that the realm of the dead is one of darkness, even for the privileged, not of blessed light.

What then of the bright cypress that glows in the shadowy gloom? Various interpreters have taken for granted that its whiteness and brightness must represent light, life, and hope in contrast to its surrounding darkness. In her discussion of the whiteness of the cypress, for example, Guarducci refers to laws in various states that prescribe white burial garments to provide the deceased with a symbol of light as they cross over into the dark place. For similar reasons, things sacrificed to underworld powers are often white, such as the white poppies and white sacrificial animals for Despoina at Lykosura.¹¹ Whiteness is often associated, naturally enough, with purity and thus sanctity. The white-clad chorus of Euripides' *Cretans*, who proclaim the purity of their life, can serve as a parallel, while those who want to associate the tablets' imagery with the supposedly Orphic story of the Titans' murder of Dionysos Zagreus can adduce the white gypsum (*titanos*) used to whiten the faces of certain participants in rituals.¹² Whiteness, the argument goes, is not just simply associated with light and life in the realm of death, but this association is a particularly Orphic thing and thus especially appropriate for these gold tablets that are considered Orphic.

Zuntz, who vehemently denies any Orphic associations with these tablets, sees the brightness of the tree in the underworld as parallel to the radiance of the underworld tree of life in the Mesopotamian tradition.¹³ He reads the λευκή of the tablets as referring to this kind of dark radiance rather than a bright whiteness, but the nature of the contrast is still basically the same; the bright tree represents light and life shining in the midst of darkness and death. Giangrande has pointed to other places in which the term λευκή means, not white, but the bright green of flourishing plant growth, but the contrast is still the same—a sign of life in the midst of death.¹⁴

Zuntz also brings up parallels to the white cypress in the Egyptian tradition of the so-called Book of the Dead, a topic treated more recently by Merkelbach. In various spells of the Egyptian mortuary texts of “Coming Forth by Day,” there is a scene of the deceased near a tree and/or a pool, being refreshed with food or water, and the similarity to the scene in the B tablets has been noted since the end of the 19th century.¹⁵ Some of the scenes involve a goddess providing liquid refreshment for the deceased from within the tree, pouring out a stream of water into the hands of the deceased, while others have an arm coming from the tree that performs this service. The motif of the thirst of the dead, while apparently a human universal, is nevertheless strongly marked in the Egyptian mortuary texts, and the various Books of Coming Forth by Day provide a number of spells for obtaining water in this fashion, often accompanied by illustrations. In the Egyptian texts, the tree, usually a sycamore or dom-palm rather than a cypress, is directly responsible for providing this life-giving substance in the afterlife. The tree is either a deity itself or the agent of divine power that provides the substance of life—again, a power of life in the realm of death.

Interpreters have pointed to the idea of the Tree of Life that is found in a variety of cultural traditions to explain the white cypress of the gold tablets. Lopez-Ruiz points to the pairing of tree and rock in a number of Near Eastern traditions (from Mesopotamia and Ugarit to Hesiod and Homer) in which the tree seems to represent a primordial power of life and fertility, like the *asherah* against whose worship the Biblical prophets fulminated.¹⁶ In one of his earlier works, Lincoln looks to the Indo-European tradition of the tree of life, coupled with the water of life, as a way of understanding the imagery of the cypress and the spring in the gold tablets. The world tree Yggdrasil in the Norse tradition, grows over the waters of Mimir’s spring. Mimir is a divine entity connected with wisdom and memory, whose name may even be related etymologically to the Mnemosyne whose waters the deceased in the tablet desires so ardently. The spring from which he drinks flows near the gates of Hel, the Norse underworld, at the point where the roots of the world-tree Yggdrasil reach down to that netherworld.¹⁷ Clearly, the world-tree Yggdrasil represents life in a different way than does the Near Eastern *asherah* or the Egyptian sycamore; it is the force that sustains the whole cosmos, rather than a fertility symbol or the provider of life-giving refreshment. In all of these comparisons, however, the tree that parallels the white cypress of the tablet symbolizes the powers of life and light, of wisdom and refreshment in the realm of the dead.

As specious as all these comparisons may be, however, in making the bright cypress the symbol of light and life, they neglect a crucial element of the text of the tablets. For the deceased is explicitly instructed in the longer

versions of the B tablets to avoid the white cypress, not even to go near it: “Do not approach this spring at all.”¹⁸ The white tree that glows in the murky gloom of the underworld is not here a beacon of life and hope, but rather a sign of danger to be avoided. The spring that flows from it does indeed provide refreshing water to the thirsty dead, but the properly instructed soul must go farther along the path to find the spring associated with Mnemosyne. The spring marked by the cypress is where the souls of the ignorant go: “there the descending souls of the dead refresh themselves.”¹⁹ The tablet text plays off the word for souls (*ψυχαί*) and for refreshment (*ψύχονται*), suggesting that the animas are reanimated by the waters of the cypress-marked spring, but, in these long tablets, this refreshment is not actually what is desirable; only the water from the lake of Memory will do.

The issue is confused by the differences between the long versions of the B text, found in Magna Grecia and Thessaly, and the shorter version, found mostly in Crete. In the short versions, the cypress does mark the correct spring: “But give me to drink from the ever-flowing spring on the right, where the cypress is.”²⁰ This cypress is not, peculiarly enough, described as bright white, except for the single example of the short text from outside of the cluster from Eleutherna in Crete. So, the strange brightness and whiteness of the cypress only characterizes the tree in the longer tablets, where it marks the tree to be avoided.

To further complicate matters, different tablets put the tree on different sides. While most have the tree to the right, a few have it on the left. However, we can’t conclude that the tree on the sinister left side is the one to be shunned while the tree on the positive right side should be sought, because the examples of left and right are both equally divided between whether that tree should be avoided or sought.

Table 16.1

B1 ἐπ’ ἀριστερά -	B5 ἐπὶ δεξιά +	B8a ἐπ’ ἀριστερά +
B2 ἐνδέξια -	B6 ἐπὶ δεξιά +	B9 ἐπὶ δεξιά +
B3 ἐπὶ δεξιά +	B7 ἐπὶ δεξιά +	B10 ἐπὶ δεξιά -
B4 ἐπὶ δεξιά +	B8 ἐπὶ δεξιά +	B11 ἐπὶ δεξιά -

The assumption that the white tree must always indicate life or salvation has led some interpreters to postulate a shift or even a schism, with a later group rejecting the instructions of the earlier and imagining a second spring that is for the real initiates (in contrast to the spring for every thirsty soul). Such conjectures, however, fly in the face of the fact that the longer versions (which instruct the deceased to avoid the spring by the cypress) are all older, by at least a century, than the short ones from Crete. In contrast to the straightforward instruction in tablet A4 to go to the right, the cypress and spring are not unequivocally and necessarily the marker of the path to life and salvation in the afterlife.²¹

What then *is* the significance of the white cypress, if its glow does not betoken the light of life and hope in the gloomy afterlife? As Zuntz, always one of the most careful readers of the tablet texts themselves, concluded: “The Greek cypress seems to have no other function than to serve as a landmark.”²² The white cypress serves to mark the place where the action happens in the narrative of the gold tablets, where the deceased needs to perform the action crucial to her enjoyment of a happy afterlife. Rather than looking for special significance in the light color of the tree in order to understand the function of the cypress in the text, we should look instead, as Wilamowitz long ago suggested, to the common motif in epigrams of describing a special place, especially a spring, by reference to the tree that grows there.²³ Cypressess, which thrive in water, often appear in pastoral poetry marking springs, which often have the same poetic epithet that appears in the tablets, ever-flowing—ἀέναον or αἰερόον.²⁴ The cypress tree serves to distinguish the special place for the passerby, whether in this world or the underworld.

In the dark underworld, however, notable objects must be somehow visible in the gloom, since only a satirist like Lucian assumes that there will be enough light to see one’s way. As Guarducci notes, many prominent features of underworld geography are white (λευκή), sufficiently bright that they stand out in the gloom. The famous White Rock of the *Odyssey* seems, like the tablets’ cypress, to serve only as a marker of place in the underworld, and Hesiod describes the silvery shining columns of the palace of Styx, a detail that can only function to mark their visibility, not to associate the dread goddess with life or light.²⁵ The whiteness of the cypress, then, need not have any special meaning beyond its function within the narrative to direct the traveler to the right (or wrong) place; it is the X that marks the spot, not the beacon of life and hope that shines in the darkness of death.

The meaning of the cypress, then, to use the jargon of linguistics, comes primarily from its use in the syntagmatic structure of the text, not from an inherent meaning of the symbol but from where and how it fits. Within the structure of these texts, the cypress cannot signify life and hope; it serves

instead to alert the journeying soul that she has reached the place where she must demonstrate her special qualifications. Similarly, the choice of this particular element instead of other possible paradigmatic substitutions within the structure also has significance; that is, the very fact that the glowing white cypress is the means of finding one's way in the underworld instead of something else is meaningful, especially when considered in contrast to the other possibilities found within the mythic tradition.²⁶ In Plato's *Phaedo*, for example, no soul can find its way without the guidance of its guardian daimon. For Plato, every soul has its own personal divine guide assigned at birth, who tries to direct properly the individual's choices of path, in life and after. Vergil's Aeneas does not have a personal daimon, but the sibyl guides his steps through the underworld, providing commentary on the various regions and their significance as they go. Plutarch's Timarchus is guided by an disembodied voice that gives a good middle Platonic exegesis of the various regions of the world beyond.²⁷ Even Aristophanes' Dionysos in the *Frogs* needs to turn to guides, asking the chorus of Eleusinian initiates where the gates of Hades might be (that they respond, "It's right over there, you can't miss it" is a typically Aristophanic joke). The soul in the tablets, by contrast, follows no mystagogue or personal guiding spirit; she is alone on her journey. This traveler to the underworld must rely on a recognizable landmark instead of a local guide or experienced fellow-traveler, so the religious context of the tablets, we may deduce, did not include such a guide in its worldview, an important consideration when we try to reconstruct a ritual context for the creation and use of these tablets. Their vision of the afterlife is a solo journey, in which the deceased must find her own way by recognizing the luminescent tree that shines in the underworld darkness.

Of course, the significance of the tree itself does differ between the short texts, in which it marks the right spot, and the long texts, in which it marks the wrong spot. In the longer texts, the cypress marks the place where most souls give in to their terrible, parching thirst and seek refreshment—and no doubt find oblivion. The contrast set up by the white cypress is between those who can endure their thirst until they reach the spring flowing from the lake of Memory farther down the path and those who cannot. Whether the exceptional endurance in the tablets comes about through ascetic training or simply through special knowledge is unclear, but Plato uses the same sort of distinction in his myth at the end of the *Republic*.²⁸ There the souls headed for reincarnation must march across a dusty plain, after which they come to the river of Ameles (forgetfulness). The heedless souls drink deeply to quench the thirst raised by the dusty journey and forget everything about the afterlife, while those who have trained themselves philosophically to moderate their desires can drink with restraint and enter their new lives with the ability to

recollect something of the true nature of existence. It is unlikely that philosophic living is also the solution to the problem in the tablets, but the bright cypress and the two springs mark some contrast between ordinary folk and the special deceased who enter the underworld with the tablet's instructions, just as other features of the tablets' narratives serve to highlight the exceptional nature of the deceased.

A cypress, then, would be an appropriate tree to mark a significant place in the underworld, and a bright version of this normally dark tree would stand out all the better in the underworld gloom. But the bright cypress of the underworld, as it is described in the gold tablets, confounds the expectation that its brightness will carry with it the expected meanings of life and light. On the contrary, this bright object that stands out in the gloom of Hades is a tree linked with death, that often marks a place of danger and destruction.²⁹ If even the contrast of light and dark has no fixed meaning or valence in a mythic narrative, we need to take all the more seriously the idea that such traditional elements of the myths are, like phonemes in structural linguistics, arbitrary signs whose meaning can only be determined by its position in the structure of the syntactic unit.

The principle of the arbitrariness of the sign, although central to Saussurean linguistics, has always been difficult to apply in the study of Greek myth, despite the many interpreters who draw on Saussure and his followers for inspiration. Applied at the level of sounds or syllables, the principle is clear; despite the games Plato plays in the *Cratylus*, most people would agree that the meaning of a word resides not in the particular sounds that make it up, but rather in the word as a whole, the way the sounds are put together. Even at the level of words and sentences, it is clear that the mere presence of a similar set of words in several sentences does not indicate that those sentences will share similar meanings. If one takes the words "boy," "girl," "gave" and "rose," for example, the order and function of those words is crucial to determining the meaning; the mere collection of words will not suffice. "The boy gave the rose to the girl" differs not only from "the girl gave the rose to the boy" but also from "the rose gave off a lovely smell for the boy and girl" or even "the girl rose up and gave the boy a slap." In these four sentences, the fact that they all share four words does not necessitate that the sentences are variant expressions of the same idea, have the same meaning, or come from the same source. However, when it comes to the significance of traditional names or patterns of action within a mythic narrative, interpreters are more reluctant to give up the idea that myths that share traditional elements may also share a common meaning or origin beyond the whole Greek mythological tradition.

The example of the cypress in the gold tablets shows, however, that such traditional mythic elements are inherently multivalent and that their meaning

can only be adequately determined by their function within the individual text. Not only does the meaning of the white cypress shining in the darkness of the underworld differ from other things that present similar contrasts between light and darkness, but the meaning differs from text to text in each individual tablet—in the long texts, the cypress marks the spring to avoid; in the short, the one to find. A recently discovered short B text from the same region of Eleutherna in Crete that the others have been found suggests that the variations in meaning may even go beyond the long-short distinction. Tzifopoulos reads in this tablet a reference to the spring of Saoros near the Idaean cave, a site associated with Eleutherna, the town from which the Cretan tablets all seem to come. “But give me to drink from the spring of Sauros on the left of the cypress.”³⁰ Saoros was the nymph of the spring who provided the older name of Eleutherna.³¹ This spring of Saoros, Theophrastus tells us, was ringed with black poplars, and one of the other Cretan tablets may indeed refer to the spring of the black poplars, *κράνας αἰγείρων*, instead of *κράνας αἰερόω*, the ever-flowing spring found on the other examples from this area.³² This kind of minor variation, tied to the specific locale in which the tablets were produced, shows the continual process of readaptation and dynamic shifts of meaning as the traditional mythic elements are given new meaning in their particular texts.

The water of memory provides another example of the arbitrariness of the sign, the way that its meaning is not fixed but dependent on the way it is used in the text. In the tablets, of course, the water of memory is what the deceased is seeking, either at the spring by the cypress or at the further spring. Why the deceased wants this water, apart from quenching her thirst, is never made clear in the tablet texts, but interpreters have often drawn the parallel with Plato’s imagery of the plain of Lethe and the river of Ameles in his myth in the *Republic*, which prevent the unphilosophic from recollecting the true nature of reality after they are once again incarnated. However, in Pausanias’ description of the oracle of Trophonius at Lebedea, the water from the spring of memory (and from the accompanying spring of Lethe) has a different function. Anyone who seeks to consult the oracle, Pausanias tells us, must drink first of Lethe to forget all of his current concerns and then of Mnemosyne to be able to recall all that he experiences during his consultation.³³ Zuntz waxes sarcastic about what he sees as a perversion of the concept found in the tablets, “How lucky that the waters had so specific an effect! ... This is not myth, but allegory materialized and exploited; a device by smart priests aiming to refurbish the waning lustre of their patrimony.”³⁴ Zuntz interprets the difference in the meaning of the traditional mythic element in these three contexts as an indication that one meaning must be invalid or inauthentic, but there is no reason to treat one or the other as illegitimate; Plato, the tablets and the

tradition of the oracle all make use of the image in a way that has meaning in that particular context.

The same principle holds, not just for one single mythic element, but even for a cluster of elements. Just as the collection *boy, girl, rose, and gave* doesn't always imply the same sense, so too a collection such as *shepherd, mountain, and divine epiphany* may signify very different things, depending on how the elements are strung together. The judgement of Paris, Anchises' encounter with Aphrodite, and Hesiod's acquisition of poetic inspiration from the Muses all have the same pieces, but very different significances. Sticking to this principle is more difficult, however, when the evidence provides only fragmentary or allusive texts that attest to the myth, instead of full narratives in which the meaning of the pieces can be clearly seen. The constellation of Dionysos, the Titans, and killing, which appears mostly in allusions, rather than complete tellings, provides an example of a grouping whose meaning has often been presumed to be the same, regardless of the way the elements are put together in the context. On the contrary, depending on the way the story was told, those elements could combine to create a tale whose message was a rejection of sacrifice or even meat-eating altogether (as Detienne has suggested) or a tale about the grape harvest and the making of wine (as Cornutus, Diodorus, and other ancient sources suggest) or even about the cosmic procession of One to Many (as the Neoplatonists told it).³⁵ It was not always about wine-making, nor always about sacrifice (and it was almost never about the creation of humanity); the meaning of the tale varied as the elements were given different significance in each telling.

Just as the bright cypress of the gold tablets confounds our expectation, based on the familiar dichotomy of light and darkness, that it will represent life and salvation in the realm of death, so too other elements familiar in the Greek mythic tradition may confound our expectations and presuppositions about their meanings if we ignore the texts and contexts in which they are found. We may never fully grasp the import of some of these traditional elements, especially those like the cypress that appear only in enigmatic and fragmentary texts like the gold tablets. Nevertheless, by putting aside our presuppositions about their meaning and analyzing the significance of these symbols within their particular textual context, we can begin to shed light on some of these dark mysteries.

NOTES

1. B1.1-2 = OF 476. Εὐρήσ{σ}εις δ' Αἶδαο δόμων ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ κρήνην, πὰρ δ' αὐτῆι λευκὴν ἔστηκυῖαν κυπάρισσον· Texts and translations of the tablets come from

R. Edmonds, ed., *The Orphic Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, (Cambridge, forthcoming). OF refers to the numbering in A. Bernabé, *Poetae Epici Graeci II: Orphicorum Graecorum testimonia et fragmenta*, (fasc I 2004; fasc. II 2005).

2. B3 = OF478. Δίψαι αἶδος ἐγὼ καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι· ἀλλὰ πέεν᾽ μοι κράνας αἰερώω ἐπὶ δεξιά, τῆν κυφάρισσος. τίς δ' ἔσσι; πῶ δ' ἔσσι; Γᾶς υἱός ἡμι καὶ Ὠρανῶ ἄστερόεντος.

3. See R. Edmonds, *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes, and the 'Orphic' Gold Tablets* (Cambridge 2004), as well as several forthcoming papers.

4. When Odysseus asks his companion Elpenor how he died and reached the underworld before them, he asks “Elpenor, how did you travel down to the world of darkness?” (Ἐλπήνορ, πῶς ἦλθες ὑπὸ ζόφον ἠερόεντα; xi.57) When an Iliadic hero dies, he leaves the light of the sun for the darkness of death (λείπειν φάος Ἥελίοιο *Iliad* XVIII.11 ≈ Hesiod *W&D* 155). Homer’s famous description of the realm of the dead indeed explicitly removes the light of the sun even from the Cimmerians who live in the vicinity (Od. xi.15–19).

5. *de luctu* 2. In one of his own descriptions of the underworld, Lucian plays off this familiar theme by having the way out of the shadowy underworld be marked by a clearly visible beam of light shining down from the upper world at the Trophonius shrine (*Menippus* 22).

6. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 480–3; Aristophanes *Frogs* 455–9.

7. Pindar *Olympian* II.61–3.

8. σκότος ἀμφικαλύψας B1.margin, cp. B11.3.

9. ὄττι δὴ ἐξερέεις Ἄϊδος σκότος ὀρφνῶήεντος B10.9, cp. B11.11.

10. One of the Pelinna tablets refers to the other blessed dead beneath the earth (καὶ σὺ μὲν εἰς ὑπὸ γῆν τελέσας ἄπερ ὄλβιοι ἄλλοι. D1.7), while the tablets from the smaller tumulus in Thuri greet Persephone as Queen of those below the earth (χθονίων βασιλεία A1.1 = A2.1 = A3.1). The tablet from the larger tumulus starts the deceased’s journey to the underworld with the familiar line, when the soul has left the light of the sun (A4.1 Ἄλλ’ ὀπότεν ψυχή προλίπη φάος ἀελίοιο).

11. “L’ansioso desiderio di luce e di candore oltre le soglie del l’al di là si manifesta anche in certe disposizioni rituali circa il colore delle vesti e delle vittime.” M. Guarducci, ‘Il cipresso dell’ oltretomba,’ *Rivista di filologia* 100 (1972), p. 327. She cites IG XII 5.593 Sokolowski 97a for 5th c. for a Kean law prescribing white himatia for the dead, cp. Sokolowski 77c6 for Labiadi at Delphi; Pausanias 4.13.3 for Messenian leaders buried in white garments; Sokolowski 68 3rd c. Arcadian temple to Despoina at Lykosura.

12. Euripides *Cretans* fr. 472=Porphyry *De Abst.* 4.56. cp., Harpocration *Lexicon in decem oratores Atticos* 48 Ἀπομάττων.

13. G. Zuntz, *Persephone: Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia*, (Oxford, 1971), pp. 387–8, citing Cuneiform Texts in the British Mus. xvi. Pl. 46, p. 183ff.

14. G. Giangrande, ‘La lamina orfica di Hipponion,’ *Orfeo e l’orfismo: Atti del Seminario Nazionale*, ed. A. Masaracchia (Roma, 1993), p. 238.

15. Zuntz (n.13), pp. 370–6, who cites U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Der glaube der Hellenen*, (Berlin, 1931–32), p. 200 and E. Rohde, *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen*, (Leipzig 1894) p. 391, n. 1. R. Merkelbach,

‘Die Goldenen Totenpässe: Ägyptisch, Orphisch, Bakchisch,’ *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 128 (1999) 1–13, has recently used this parallel, along with Herodotus’ claim (II.81) that certain things labeled Orphic were in reality Egyptian, to argue for an Egyptian origin of the Orphic motifs. For a more nuanced explanation of the sources, see now Dousa 2010.

16. C. Lopez-Ruiz, *Greek Cosmogonies and their Northwest Semitic Background* (unpublished dissertation), p. 60.

17. Gylfaginning 15 And under that root [of the world-tree Yggdrasil] which turns toward the frost giants is Mimir’s Spring, in which knowledge and understanding are hidden. He who owns that spring is called Mimir, and he is full of wisdom, because he drinks from that spring out of the Gjallarhorn. B. Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice*, (Chicago, 1991), p. 54.

18. B1.3 ταύτης τῆς κρήνης μηδὲ σχεδὸν ἐμπελάσειας. Cp. B2.3, B11.7; B10.5 ταύτας τὰς κράνας μηδὲ σχεδὸν ἐγγύθεν ἔλθῃς.

19. B10.4 ἔνθα κατερχόμεναι ψυχὰι νεκῶν ψύχονται.

20. B3.1–2 ἀλλὰ πιέ(ν) μοι κράνας αἰειρόω ἐπὶ δεξιᾷ, τῆ(ν) κυφάρισσος.

21. A4.1–2 = OF 487 Ἄλλ’ ὅπταν ψυχὴ προλίπη φάος ἀελίοιο, δεξιὸν Ε.ΘΙΑΣ δ’ ἐξιέναι πεφυλαγμένον εὖ μάλα πάντα. But when the soul leaves the light of the sun, go straight to the right, having kept watch on all things very well. This instruction cannot be combined with the geography of the B tablets to produce a choice of paths before the cypress, as F. Graf and S. I. Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*, (Routledge, 2007), pp. 99–114, suggest.

22. Zuntz (n. 13), p. 372. C. Calame, *Pratiques poétiques de la mémoire*, (Paris, 2006), p. 240, also understands the cypress as a landmark, dismissing other fantastic explanations.

23. “Tell the stranger, O citizen, who founded this gymnasium here, and the ever-flowing spring and the tall-tipped tree.” (Τῶι ξένῳ εἰπέ πολῖτα, τίς ἔκτισε γυμνάδα τάνδε | κράναν τ’ ἀέναον δένδρεα θ’ ὑψίκομα IG XII 3,203.1–2. Willamowitz (n. 25) ii, 200, where Willamowitz cites *Hellenistische Dichtung* ii. 102–3. There he quotes Planudea 254; A.P. IX 324; Leonidas Planud. 230, Geffken 56.

24. Cp. Theocritus Idyll 22. 37–41; Geoponica 11.5.5 and Theophrastus History of Plants 2.7.1.

25. Homer *Odyssey* xxiv.11–14; Hesiod *Theog.* 775–80.

26. “A linguistic unit sustains a paradigmatic relationship with all other units that could be conceivably substituted for it in the same context.” J. Peradotto, ‘Oedipus and Erichthonius: some observations of paradigmatic and syntagmatic order’ in *Oedipus: a folklore casebook*, ed. Dundes & Edmunds (New York, 1984), p. 181.

27. Plato, *Phaedo* 107d–108b. cp. Virgil, *Aeneid* 6; Plutarch *de genio* 22.

28. Plato, *Republic* 621a.

29. contra Zuntz (n. 13). Cp. Pliny NH XVI 60, Servius Aen. iii. 681, Paus. iv.33.4, Thucydides 2.34.3.

30. “from the spring of Sauros on the left of the cypress” κράνας <Σ>αύρου ἐπ’ {α} ἀρισ(τερὰ τὰς κυφα{σ}ρίσσω. B8a = OF 484a. See Y. Tzifopoulos, ‘Centre, Periphery, or Peripheral Centre: a Cretan Connection for the Gold Lamellae of Crete,’ in *The Orphic Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, ed. Edmonds (Cambridge, forthcoming).

31. cp., Stephanos Byzantios, *Ethnica* s.v. Σάτρα and s.v. Ἐλευθεραί; Herodianos s.v. Ἐλευθεραί; s.v. Ἄωρος; and s.v. Ἄωρα.
32. Tzifopoulos (n.30). B6 = OF 481 κράνας αειρώω ἐπὶ δεξιὰ, τῆκω κυπάρισσος. For αειρώω, the lamella has αἰγιδῶω, which Tzifopoulos reads as αἰγείρων. B8a = OF 484a κράνας <Σ>αύρου ἐπ' {α} ἀρικσ>τερὰ τᾶς κυφα{σ}ρίσσω. Cp., Theophrastus, *Historia plantarum* 3.3.4.
33. Pausanias IX.39.7–8, 13.
34. Zuntz (n. 13), p. 379.
35. M. Detienne, *Dionysos Slain* (Baltimore, 1979); Cornutus 30 = OF 59iv, Diodorus 3.62.3–8. For NeoPlatonists, see I. Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* (Berkeley 1941), pp. 315–24, and particularly R. Edmonds, 'A Curious Concoction: Tradition and Innovation in Olympiodorus' Creation of Mankind,' *American Journal of Philology* (forthcoming).

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Part V

CULT

