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# The Children of Earth and Starry Heaven: The Meaning and Function of the Formula in the 'Orphic' Gold Tablets

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THE CHILDREN OF EARTH AND STARRY HEAVEN: THE  
 MEANING AND FUNCTION OF THE FORMULA IN THE  
 'ORPHIC' GOLD TABLETS

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The most striking aspect of the tiny gold tablets often known as the Orphic gold leaves is undoubtedly the enigmatic declaration: "I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven". All of the tablets which, following Zuntz's classification, have been labelled B tablets, contain this mysterious formula, whether the scenario of the deceased's journey through the underworld is described in greater or lesser detail<sup>1</sup>. The statement captures the imagination with its imagery and its simplicity, but also with its mysterious nature. What does it mean to be the child of Earth and starry Heaven? Why should the deceased respond with this identification when asked who she is by the guardians of the spring of Memory? In this essay, I argue that this formula provides insight into the religious context in which these tablets were produced, a context best understood, not as an exclusive cult founded on a doctrine of original sin and redemption, but rather as the dynamics of marginal religious experts and their clientele operating within the dominant system of social values.

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<sup>1</sup> The tablets under discussion here are B1 from Petelia in southern Italy (*OF* 476); B2 from Pharsalos (*OF* 477), B3-8 from Eleutherna in Crete (*OF* 478-483), B9 from somewhere in Thessaly (*OF* 484), B10 from Hipponion in southern Italy (*OF* 474), B11 from Entella in Sicily (*OF* 475), and B12 from Eleutherna in Crete (*OF* 484a). B1, B2, B10, and B11 present a longer version, while the others seem an abbreviation. The tablets from Thurii A1-4 and C (*OF* 488-490, 487, & 492), the later tablet from Rome A5 (*OF* 491), and the two P tablets found in a grave in Pelinna in Thessaly (*OF* 485 & 486) do not contain the formula, and their exact relation to the B tablets remains obscure. I provide both the sigla from Zuntz 1971 and the recent edition of Bernabé 2005d, which has surpassed that of Kern 1922. Riedweg 1998, 2002, and (forthcoming) argues that they can all be combined into a single archetype containing all the verses on all the tablets, but I have argued (Edmonds 2004) that each type comes from a different source and presents a different scenario with different emphases and meanings.

The gold tablet, found in a woman's otherwise undistinguished grave in a large necropolis near Hipponion in southern Italy, provides the most extensive version of the text with the formula:

This is the [?] of Memory. When you are about to die...  
you will go to the spacious halls of Hades; a spring is on the right,  
and by it stands a bright cypress tree;  
there the descending souls of the dead refresh themselves.  
Do not go near to this spring at all.  
Further on you will find, from the lake of Memory,  
refreshing water flowing forth. But guardians are nearby.  
They will ask you, with sharp minds,  
what you seek in the misty shadow of Hades.  
Say: "I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven;  
and I am parched with thirst and I perish; but give me quickly  
refreshing water to drink from the lake of Memory."  
And then they will speak to the underworld king,  
and then they will give you to drink from the lake of Memory,  
and you, having drunk, will go along the sacred road that the  
other famed initiates and bacchics travel<sup>2</sup>.

Other versions of the text contain only the essentials of the encounter, the guardians' questions and the deceased's response:

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<sup>2</sup> Μναμοσύνας τόδε ΕΡΙΟΝ· ἐπεὶ ἄμ μέλλησι θανεῖσθαι  
εἰς Αἴδαο δόμους εὐηρέας, ἔστ' ἐπὶ δεξιὰ κρήνα,  
παρ δ' αὐτὰν ἔστακῦα λευκὰ κυπάρισσος·  
ἔνθα κατερχόμεναι ψυχαὶ νεκύων ψύχονται.  
ταύτας τὰς κράνας μεδὲ σχεδὸν ἐνγύθεν ἔλθῃς.  
πρόσθεν δὲ εὐρήσεις τὰς Μναμοσύνας ἀπὸ λίμνης  
ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον· φύλακες δ' ἐπύπερθεν ἔασι.  
οἱ δὲ σε εἰρήσονται ἐνὶ φρασὶ πευκαλίμασι  
ὅττι δὲ ἐξερέεις Αἴδος σκότος ἠερόεντος  
εἶπον· Γῆς παῖς ἡμὶ καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος.  
δίψαι δ' ἡμὶ αὖος καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι· ἀλλὰ δότ' ὄκα  
ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ πιέναι τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης.  
καὶ δὴ τοὶ ἐρέουσιν ὑποχθονίῳ βασιλῆϊ  
καὶ δὴ τοὶ δώσουσι πιεῖν τὰς Μναμοσύνας ἀπὸ λίμνας,  
καὶ δὴ καὶ σὺ πιὼν ὁδὸν ἔρχεαι ἄν τε καὶ ἄλλοι  
μύσται καὶ βᾶκχοι ἱερὰν στείχουσι κλεινοί.

I am parched with thirst and I perish.

But give me to drink from the ever-flowing spring on the right, by the cypress.

"Who are you? Where are you from?"

I am the son of Earth and starry Heaven.

In both the long and the short versions, the key line is clearly the formula of self-identification, since it is included even when the description of the desired result is not. The texts themselves, however, provide no indication of why being the child of Earth and starry Heaven should produce favorable results.

Most often in the last hundred and twenty years since the discovery of the tablets, the answer has been sought outside the texts, in the context of the religious current known as Orphism. Comparetti proposed that the children of Earth and Heaven must be the Titans who had murdered the infant Dionysos and that the deceased was therefore claiming to be a descendant of those Titans, stained with their guilt but hoping for reconciliation with the Queen of the Underworld. The Earth and starry Heaven formula was taken as confirmation of an Orphic anthropogony that made mankind the descendants of the Titans, a myth that provided the basis for an Orphic doctrine of original sin. On this theory, then, this Orphic anthropogony, in contrast to the anthropogonies found in Hesiod or other localized myths of human origins, provides a vision of creation that is both universal and teleological. Hesiod has a universal vision, but does not really explain where humans came from and certainly does not make the creation of mankind the final and decisive chapter in the formation of the known cosmos. The local tales of human origins do have as their aim to explain where people came from, but they are, by their nature, limited rather than universal in scope. The gold tablets thus provide the crucial evidence for the construction of Orphism as a religious movement centered on the doctrines founded upon this anthropogony, a religion that, like Christianity and the most

admired currents of Greek philosophy, puts the nature and destiny of the human soul at the center of its teachings<sup>3</sup>.

I would suggest here, as I have argued elsewhere, that this understanding of Orphism is fundamentally flawed and based on misinterpretations of the texts that are used for evidence. I propose that the Child of Earth and starry Heaven formula does indeed provide evidence for understanding the religious context in which these tablets were produced, but only if examined in the wider context of the Greek mythological tradition. Comparetti, in assuming that the Titans were the only possibilities for the children of Earth and Heaven, unduly limited the possible mythic referents of the formula and paid no heed to the variety of ways in which the claim to this lineage might function. In this essay, I will survey the range of possible referents for the child of Earth and starry Heaven and show how the formula is used in the tablets, not to claim a share in Titanic original sin, but rather to subvert to some degree the dominant value system of the community by making a claim to kinship with the gods that trumps the ordinary hierarchies of social status based on aristocratic lineage.

In each of the B tablets, the claim to identity is central. Who then are the children of Earth and starry Heaven, among whose number the deceased buried with the gold leaf is claiming to be? The line, with its lovely epithet for Ouranos, is an adaptation of a familiar formula from Hesiod, Γῆς καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος, which appears a number of times in the *Theogony*. However, the

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<sup>3</sup> "There is no Chronos in Hesiod, none of the curious second beginning of all things within the body of Zeus, above all none of the story of Dionysos and the Titans. From this it follows that the human interest with which the Orphic poem ends is entirely lacking in Hesiod, and his theogony is divorced from ideas of good and evil... In short, the fundamental difference between the two systems lies here: the one could never be made the doctrinal basis of a religious life; the other both could be and in fact was". Guthrie 1952, 84. "Beginning with Chaos and ending with the creation of man the cosmogony is rounded off into a systematic whole which has *not only a mythical but also a religious meaning*. Its final aim is not to relate tales of the world and of the gods, but to explain the composite nature of man and his fate." Nilsson 1935, 225. (My emphasis). A more recent and nuanced expression of this picture of Orphism in Bernabé 2002a, 207-208. cp. my critique in Edmonds 1999a and forthcoming, founded upon ideas of Linforth 1941 and Smith 1990.

children of Earth and starry Heaven in Hesiod are not only the Titans, but the entire holy race of immortals who live for ever, ἀθανάτων ἰερόν γένος αἰὲν ἐόντων<sup>4</sup>. Even in Hesiod's genealogical reckoning, the Titans are only one group of the first generation from Earth and Heaven; Ocean, the hundred-handed monsters and the Cyclopes are all offspring of this union before the separation of Earth and Heaven. The descendants of this generation, especially the gods born of Ocean and the Titans, all belong to this family line, this *genos*.

Earth and Heaven, however, also have descendants born after their separation, other members of this *genos* of Earth and Heaven. In Hesiod, of course, Aphrodite is famously born from the foam that spatters from the castrated Heaven, but the violent separation also produces blood that falls from Heaven onto the ever fertile Earth, who produces several more sets of offspring. In this way, the Gigantes are born, along with the Meliai and the Furies<sup>5</sup>.

The Earthborn Giants are best known for their revolt against the gods, and the scenes of the battles provide the material for epic treatment in both literature and art. In some versions of the Gigantomachy myth, however, human beings are born from remains of these rebels. Although the tale of humans generated from the blood of the enemies of the gods defeated in battle seems to go back even to Mesopotamian sources, Ovid's version is undoubtedly the best known, in which humans are born from the blood of the Giants seeping down into the Earth after their battle against the gods<sup>6</sup>. The Orphic *Argonautica* makes a passing allusion to the same story, to "the destructive deeds of the Earthborn, who dripped painfully as gore from Heaven, the seed of a generation of old, out of which arose the race of mortals, who exist forever throughout the boundless earth"<sup>7</sup>. The race of Giants, children of Earth from the

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<sup>4</sup> Hes. *Th.* 105-106. cp. 45, 154, 421.

<sup>5</sup> *Th.* 183-187. Apollod. *Bib.* 1.1.4 recounts the same story, but focuses only on the Furies.

<sup>6</sup> For the Mesopotamian tales, cp., *Atrahasis* I.212-217 and *Enuma elis* VI.1. *Ov. Met.* 1.157-62.

<sup>7</sup> OA 17-20 (*OF* 320): ἡδ' ἔργ' ἀΐδηλα / Γιγάντων, οἱ λυγρόν ἀπ' Οὐρανοῦ ἐστάξαντο, / σπέσμα γονῆς τὸ πρόσθεν, ὅθεν γένος ἐξεγένοντο / θνητῶν, οἱ κατὰ γαῖαν ἀπείριτον αἰὲν

blood of starry Heaven, produces the current race of mortal men even as they perish in their revolt against the gods.

As Vian has shown, the myths of the Gigantomachy and the Titanomachy were intertwined at an early stage, and, in other versions, the same tale is told of the Titans and the Titanomachy; a race of violent, primordial people rises up against the authority of the gods and a bloody battle ensues<sup>8</sup>. From this variant of the myth come the testimonies to human descent from the Titans. Oppian presents the birth of humans from the blood of the Titans as one alternative for the origin of humans, the other being their creation by Prometheus<sup>9</sup>. The scholiast makes the etymology explicit, mortal human beings (βροτοί) are born from the gore (βρότος) of the defeated Titans<sup>10</sup>. Dio too knows of such a variant, although he attributes the tale of human descent from blood of the Titans to a morose man who must have suffered much in life, since he blames the miseries of human existence in this foul world on the hatred of the gods for the

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ἔασι. This text follows Vian 1987. Dottin 1930, whose text appears in the TLG, reads Γηγενέων for Γιγάντων, and both forms appear in the manuscripts. Bernabé 2002b & 2003b misreads this passage as an allusion to the Titans' murder of Dionysos, but see Edmonds (forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> Vian 1952, 169ff. Although Vian argues that the Gigantomachy and Titanomachy were originally separate stories, he shows that authors interchanged them from at least the classical period onward.

<sup>9</sup> Opp. *Hal.* 5.1-10 (OF 320 XIV) ἀλλά τις ἀτρεκέως ἰκέλην μακάρεσσι γενέθλην / ἀνθρώπους ἀνέφυσε, χερσίονα δ' ὤπασεν ἀλκήν, / εἴτ' οὖν Ἰαπετοῖο γένος, πολυμήτα Προμηθεύς, / ἀντωπὸν μακάρεσσι κάμεν γένος, ὕδατι γαῖαν / ξυνώσας, κραδίην δὲ θεῶν ἔχρισεν ἀλοιφῇ, / εἴτ' ἄρα καὶ λύθροιο θεορρύτου ἐκγενόμεσθα / Τιτήνων. "But truly, someone created men to be a race like the blessed gods, but he gave lesser strength to them, whether the child of Iapetus, cunning Prometheus, made the race in the likeness of the blessed ones, mingling earth with water, and anointed his heart with the balm of the gods, or indeed we are born from the gore that divinely gushed from the Titans". It is worth noting that the story of Prometheus' creation of mankind is paralleled not only in Plato's *Protagoras* (320-321), but, as Proclus (*In Remp.* 53.3-12) tells us, Orpheus represented the descent of the soul into matter (i.e., the formation of human beings) by the myth of Prometheus's theft of fire.

<sup>10</sup> Sch. Opp. *Hal.* 5.1-10) τινὲς δὲ φασιν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν Τιτάνων πολεμούντων μετὰ τῶν οὐρανίων θεῶν, μάλιστα δὲ μετὰ τοῦ Διὸς, καὶ ἠττηθέντων, ὅθεν καὶ φασι βροτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος λέγεται, ὡς ἀπὸ τοῦ βρότου ἢ τοῦ αἱματηροῦ μολυσμοῦ τῶν Τιτάνων. "Some say that it was from the blood of the Titans warring against the Heavenly gods, particularly Zeus, and being beaten; whence, they say, man is called mortal (βροτός) from the gore (βρότος) or bloody defilement of the Titans". A scholiast to Pindar (*O.* 3.28c) quotes an unknown poet Pherenikos, who claims that the Hyperboreans sprang up from the blood of the Titans.

descendants of their enemies, who fought a war against them.<sup>11</sup> Whether the enemies are named as the Giants or the Titans, the pattern is the same, human beings come out of a generation of children of Earth and Heaven, rivals of the gods who rose up against them.

Traces remain of tales of other humans generated from the blood spilled in Ouranos' castration; both Akousilaos and Alkaios claim that the Phaiakians (another primordial people, kin to the savage Cyclopes as well as the Giants in Homer) were actually born from the blood of Ouranos<sup>12</sup>. The *Etymologicum Magnum* preserves two lines of Orpheus, from the eighth book of the *Hieros Logos*, which explain the name of the Giants as the Earthborn, since they come from the blood of Heaven spilled on the earth<sup>13</sup>. In all these accounts, the castration of Ouranos leads to another set of offspring of Earth and Heaven, a race who are not Titans, but the progenitors of human beings.

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<sup>11</sup> D. Chr. 30.10 (OF 320 VII) ὅτι τοῦ τῶν Τιτάνων αἵματός ἐσμεν ἡμεῖς ἅπαντες οἱ ἄνθρωποι. ὡς οὖν ἐκείνων ἐχθρῶν ὄντων τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ πολεμησάντων οὐδὲ ἡμεῖς φίλοι ἐσμέν, ἀλλὰ κολαζόμεθά τε ὑπ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τιμωρία γεγόναμεν, ἐν φρουρᾷ δὴ ὄντες ἐν τῷ βίῳ τοσοῦτον χρόνον ὅσον ἕκαστοι ζῶμεν. τοὺς δὲ ἀποθνήσκοντας ἡμῶν κεκολασμένους ἤδη ἱκανῶς λύεσθαί τε καὶ ἀπαλλάττεσθαι. εἶναι δὲ τὸν μὲν τόπον τοῦτον, ὃν κόσμον ὀνομάζομεν, δεσποτήριον ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν κατεσκευασμένον χαλεπὸν τε καὶ δυσάερον. Note that later in the oration (30.26), Dio proposes a better story (ἕτερος δὲ βελτίων ἐστὶ τοῦδε λόγος), that mankind descends not from the Titans or Giants but from the gods, who love us as their kin: ἔλεγε δὲ ὑμῶν τὸν τε Δία καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους θεοὺς ὡς ἀγαθοὶ τε εἶεν καὶ φιλοῖεν ἡμᾶς, ἅτε δὴ ξυγγε νεῖς ὄντας αὐτῶν. ἀπὸ γὰρ τῶν θεῶν ἔφη τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἶναι γένος, οὐκ ἀπὸ Τιτάνων οὐδ' ἀπὸ Γιγάντων. (See further below) Dio's use of Titans or Giants here reinforces the idea that the war against the gods, whether by Titans or Giants, was the context of the previous story. cp. D. Chr. Or. 33.2 for another dismissive reference to the story of descent from the Titans.

<sup>12</sup> Sch. L Apoll. Rhod. 982-92a Ἀκουσίλαος (2 fr 4 J.= fr. 4 Fowler) ἐν τῇ γ φησίν, ὅτι ἐκ τῆς ἐκτομῆς τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ ῥανίδας ἐνεχθῆναι συνέπεσεν, τουτέστι σταγόνας, κατὰ τῆς γῆς, ἐξ ὧν γεννηθῆναι τοὺς Φαίακας· οἱ δὲ τοὺς Γίγαντας. καὶ Ἀλκαῖος (fr. 206 Lobel = 441 Voigt) δὲ λέγει τοὺς Φαίακας ἔχειν τὸ γένος ἐκ τῶν σταγόνων τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ. Hom. *Od.* 7.58-60, 205-206.

<sup>13</sup> *Et.M.* 231.21 s. v. 'Γίγας' (OF 188): Παρὰ τὸ γῶ, τὸ χωρῶ, γίνεται γάς· καὶ κατὰ ἀναδιπλασιασμόν, γίγας· ἢ παρὰ τὸ ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἰέναι· οἶον, οὐς καλέουσι γίγαντας ἐπώνυμον ἐν μακάρεσσιν,

οὐνεκα γῆς ἐγένοντο, καὶ αἵματος οὐρανόιο.

Οὕτως Ὀρφεὺς ἐν τῷ ὀγδόῳ τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Λόγου. The passage is one of the few citations of the *Rhapsodies* (the *Hieros Logos* in 24 *Rhapsodies*) by book or rhapsody.

The Melian nymphs or ash tree people, who also arose from the drops of Ouranos' blood in Hesiod (*Op.* 143-145), are connected in some sources with Hesiod's Bronze race, who spring from the ash trees (ἐκ μελιᾶν) that are used to make the spears for this warlike group. Scholia on the Hesiodic passage identify these ash trees with the nymphs sprung from the blood of Ouranos and the bronze race themselves with the Giants<sup>14</sup>. Sometimes, however, the people who come from the ash are not linked to the race of Giants at all, but nevertheless explicitly labelled the progenitors of the human race, a variation on the myths of autochthony that appear in other sources. Just as some humans spring from ground or the stones dropped by Deucalion after the Flood, so some humans are produced from the ash tree<sup>15</sup>. In all these cases, the human race springs up from the Earth, the first men coming from the trees or stones of a particular locale<sup>16</sup>. The Athenian myths of autochthony are perhaps the best known, but evidence for other local tales of the human race born from the Earth can be found scattered in the sources<sup>17</sup>. Triptolemos, the favored recipient of Demeter's gifts at Eleusis, is in some sources called the child of Earth and Heaven, and the inhabitants of Eleusis at the time of Persephone's abduction are called earthborn<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Sch. Hes. *Op.* 144bis EK ΜΕΛΙΑΝ. Τρίτον φησὶ γενέσθαι γένος παρὰ τῆς Εἴμαρμένης, τὸ Γιγαντικὸν ἐκεῖνο, τὸ μάχιμον. Οἱ περὶ Πρόκλον τὸ EK ΜΕΛΙΑΝ, Δωρικῶς περισπῶσιν, ἐκ τῶν μελιῶν λέγοντες γενέσθαι τοὺς γίγαντας.

<sup>15</sup> Cp. Hesychius: μελίας καρπός· τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος. See also Sch. *T II.* 22.127 ἢ ἐπεὶ μελιηγεῖς λέγονται οἱ πρόων ἄνδρες καὶ λαοὶ ἀπὸ τῶν λίθων Δευκαλίωνος. Clay (2003, 96-99) sees this anthropogony from the blood of Ouranos as the *Theogony's* version of the origin of the human race, in contrast to the myth of the metal races in the *W&D*.

<sup>16</sup> López-Ruiz (2005, 41-62) notes the proverbial uses of the idea of descent from stone or tree and connects them with Near Eastern antecedents. Although Lopez-Ruiz emphasizes the connections with oracular power in many of these passages, the usage in *Od.* 19.162-3 is particularly noteworthy for its connection to anthropogonic ideas.

<sup>17</sup> cp. the studies of Peradotto 1977 and Parker 1986. Luginbühl (1992) and Loraux (2000) examine not only the Athenian autochthony stories, but also the evidence for other areas. Hippolytus preserves a remarkable fragment of Pindaric poetry that lists the first autochthons from various areas of Greece (Hippol. *Haer.* 5.2.17 ≈ fr. 67b Lyr. Adesp. PMG).

<sup>18</sup> Henrichs 1987, 250 & nn. 30-31. Henrichs argues that a mythographic papyrus fragment with several genealogies of heroes connected with the mysteries should provoke reconsideration of the neglected manuscript readings of Apollodorus' *Library* 1.5.2, which give

Not only are primordial inhabitants of Attica like the Eleusinians or the autochthons of the royal house born from the Earth, but the mysterious entities known as the Tritopatores also seem to have been considered the children of Earth and Heaven. The Tritopatores, although also known in later sources as wind spirits, generally play a role in cult as spirits of the forefathers, or rather the thrice-fathers, since the ancient lexicographers gloss the name as coming from their role as the fathers of the fathers' fathers, going back through the generations<sup>19</sup>. Sources as early as the fourth century identify these progenitors of the human race, to whom offerings were made in various rituals connected with purity, death, and birth, as the offspring of Earth and Heaven<sup>20</sup>. Gagné argues that many of these testimonies may derive from an early Orphic poem, referred to in the sources as the *Physika*, that identified these ancestral Tritopatores with the fecundating winds that bring souls into bodies<sup>21</sup>. These children of Earth and Heaven, therefore, are not only ultimately responsible for the generation of the human race, but also directly connected with the birth of each new generation.

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Ge and Ouranos as the parents of Triptolemos according to Pherekydes, instead of Ge and Okeanos. cp. Pausanias 1.14.3, who rather dubiously cites Musaios for a parentage of Ge and Okeanos, which as Henrichs, n. 31, remarks is an unparalleled pair within extant Orphic genealogies. For the γηγενεῖς of Eleusis, see Clement *Protr.* 2.20.1-21.1 = Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 2.3.30-35 (cp. Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 5.25-27, *OF* 391 II). cp. Luginbühl 1992, 136-143.

<sup>19</sup> See Gagné 2007. For the role of Tritopatores as ancestors, cp. Hesychius s. v. 'Τριτοπάτορας'· ανέμους ἐξ Οὐρανοῦ καὶ Γῆς γενομένους, καὶ γενέσεως ἀρχηγούς. οἱ δὲ τοὺς προπατέρας. *Λέξεις ῥητορικαί* (*Anecd. Bekk.* 307, 16) s. v. 'Τριτοπάτορες'· οἱ μὲν τοὺς πρώτους ἀρχηγέτας, οἱ δὲ τρίτους ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρός, ὅπερ ἐστὶ προπάππους. Poll. 3.17: ὁ δὲ πάππου ἢ τήθης πατήρ προπάππος, ὡς Ἰσοκράτης (om. Sauppe)· τάχα δ' ἂν τοῦτον τριτοπάτορα Ἀριστοτέλης (fr. 415 Rose) καλοῖ. Heroes and city founders: *LSCG* 18 D 41-46 (ca. 375-350); *LSCG* 20 B 30-33 and 51-54 (ca. 375-350); *LSSupp.* 115 A 21-25; *Lex sacra* from Selinous A.

<sup>20</sup> Harpocr. s. v. 'Τριτοπάτορες' (253 Keaney, *OF* 802 I) ὁ δὲ τὸ Ἐξηγητικὸν ποιήσας (*FGrHist* 352 F 1) Οὐρανοῦ καὶ Γῆς φησὶν αὐτοὺς εἶναι, ὀνόματα δὲ αὐτῶν Κόττον, Βριάρεων, καὶ Γύγην. (Note that the names here given for the Tritopatores are the same as those of the Hundred-handed monsters in Hesiod, *Theogony* 149, another group of the children of Earth and Heaven). Phot. s. v. 'Τριτοπάτωρ' (II 226 Naber, *OF* 802III)· ... Φιλόχορος δὲ τοὺς πρώτους ἐκ γῆς καὶ οὐρανοῦ· ἄρξαντας δὲ γενέσεως· ἐν δὲ τοῖς Ὀρφικοῖς, ἀνέμων παιδᾶς. Other sources have the parentage of Earth and Helios, but Helios was identified in some cosmogonies (such as the Orphic Derveni papyrus) with Ouranos. See further Gagné 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Gagné 2007.

The child of Earth and starry Heaven, therefore, could be any one of a number of different types of beings who trace their descent to the primordial parents, from the Titans and Hundred-handed monsters, who are born of their union, to the Olympian gods, who are descendants of Kronos and Rhea, to the Tritopatores, to the race of mortal men, who come from the bloody separation of Earth and Heaven, either springing up directly from Ouranian gore or rising out of the Earth when the blood of those direct offspring fell back into the fertile lap of Earth. Even if the hexameter lines used in the tablets are applied in Hesiod only to the divine family of gods, the composers of the tablets could have used them in a number of different ways in their mythic *bricolage*.

But why? To what use might these *bricoleurs* have put this material? What does the claim to be the child of Earth and starry Heaven mean within the context of the tablets? Some of the early commentators suggested that, as children of Earth and Heaven like Mnemosyne, the deceased with the tablets might simply be laying claim to the water of Mnemosyne<sup>22</sup>. Such a simple connection, however, neglects the ramifications of a claim to the same genealogy as Mnemosyne. If the primary sense of the children of Earth and starry Heaven is the whole race of immortal gods, then is not the claim to be one of those children a claim to divinity? Such a suggestion might find support in the claim in the two of the tablets from Thurii that the deceased will become a god instead of a mortal, θεὸς δ' ἔσῃ ἀντὶ βροτοῖο<sup>23</sup>. However, no such promise is found in any of the tablets with the Earth and starry Heaven formula, and, even in the Thurii tablets, apotheosis appears to be an end result of the successful confrontation with the powers of the Underworld, not the key to winning their favor<sup>24</sup>.

The favored explanation since Comparetti has been, of course, that the deceased is here claiming to be a Titan, one of the murderers of the infant

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<sup>22</sup> Goettling 1843, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Tablet A1 (OF 488.9), cp. A4 (OF 487.4) θεὸς ἐγένου ἐξ ἀνθρώπου.

<sup>24</sup> Edmonds 2004.

Dionysos Zagreus<sup>25</sup>. I have commented elsewhere on the problems with Comparetti's reconstruction of the Zagreus anthropogony, which misinterprets a variant of the myth recounted only by the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE Neoplatonist Olympiodorus and retrojects it into the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE as the basis for the imagined crucial Orphic doctrine of original sin<sup>26</sup>. Even setting aside such problems, however, the Titanic explanation makes little sense in the context of the tablets in which the claim appears. Why should the password, the claim of identity that allows the deceased to win a favorable reception from the guardians in the underworld, be precisely a claim to criminality? The deceased makes no further claim of having atoned for the crimes of the Titans, the simple claim of Titan identity is all that is offered, not only on the abbreviated versions, but even on the longest versions from Petelia and Hipponion<sup>27</sup>. If all humans were stained with the taint of Titanic guilt, then the claim for preferential treatment in the underworld would have to be, not to the shared Titanic heritage, but to some feature of the deceased that distinguished her from the others. The further claim, in a few of the tablets, to a heavenly *genos*, would serve no purpose in alleviating the guilt borne by the Titans, who could all claim the same descent from Ouranos<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> "The Titanic origin of the soul is here explicitly confirmed; it is well known that the Titans were the sons of Uranos and Gaea". (Comparetti 1882, 116).

<sup>26</sup> See Edmonds 1999a, 2004, and forthcoming. cp. also Brisson 1992.

<sup>27</sup> To be sure, a claim to have paid the penalty for unjust deeds (ποινὰν δ' ἀνταπέτεισ' ἔργων ἔνεκ' οὐτι δικαίων), does appear on two of the tablets from Thurii (A2 & A3 = OF 489 & 490). However, these two tablets, one of which appears an inferior and indeed nearly illegible copy of the other, were found in the same tumulus, and no parallel appears in any of the tablets with the Earth and starry Heaven formula. The other tablet found in the same tumulus (A1 = OF 488), although it has a similar text to the other two, does not include the claim to have paid the penalty, nor does any such claim appear in the tablet found in the nearby tomb (A4 = 487). The claim that Bacchios has set the deceased free, in the Pelinna tablets may have the same resonance, but in those tablets (P1 & P2 = OF 485 & 486 - again from the same grave) it is the intervention of Dionysos, not the genealogical identity of the deceased, that is the key to a successful reception by Persephone. See Edmonds 2004.

<sup>28</sup> αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον, B 1.7 (OF 476). cp. B 11.15 (OF 475); B 9.5 (OF 484); B2.9 (OF 477) has a line that may perhaps have the same meaning, Ἀστέριος ὄνομα.

For the same reasons, the Earth and starry Heaven formula is unlikely to refer to the myths of human descent from the Giants (or even the Titans) who fought against the gods in the Gigantomachy (or Titanomachy). Dio, as we have seen, puts forth that story as an explanation of all the miseries humans suffer in this life from the inimical gods, not as an explanation of how those miseries may be alleviated by penance and reconciliation with the gods. If the gods hate the human race because of their descent from the violent rebels, simply claiming to be one of those rebels does not seem like the best strategy for winning the favor of the gods. Thus, while the formula of identity in these tablets could possibly, when one surveys the whole range of mythic possibilities, refer to the Titans or Giants, in the context of the tablets in which the formula occurs, such a possibility seems improbable, especially when other possibilities exist.

Dio, indeed, mentions another such myth later in the same oration, one he terms a better story (ἕτερος δὲ βελτίων ἐστὶ τοῦδε λόγος). According to this tale, mankind descends not from the Titans or Giants but from the gods, who love us as their kin (ξυγγενεῖς).<sup>29</sup> Such a bond between the gods and humans might very well serve to allow the deceased to bypass the infernal guardians, since it presumes that the gods will look with love and favor upon their kin<sup>30</sup>. The kindred of men and gods have been estranged, in various ways in various myths, and the gods no longer come down to earth and feast with mortals<sup>31</sup>. Nevertheless, by claiming this bond of kinship, the deceased appeals to the idea of that primordial unity that once existed, the family of gods and men. Burkert

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<sup>29</sup> 30.26: ἔλεγε δὲ ὑμῶν τόν τε Δία καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους θεοὺς ὡς ἀγαθοὶ τε εἶεν καὶ φιλοῖεν ἡμᾶς, ἅτε δὴ ξυγγενεῖς ὄντας αὐτῶν. ἀπὸ γὰρ τῶν θεῶν ἔφη τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἶναι γένος, οὐκ ἀπὸ Τιτάνων οὐδ' ἀπὸ Γιγάντων.

<sup>30</sup> cp. the claim in the Thurii tablets (A1.3 = OF 487, cp. A2.3 = A3.3 = OF 489 & 490) to be of the same *genos* as Persephone, καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼν ὑμῶν γένος ὄλβιον εὐχομαι εἶμεν.

<sup>31</sup> The Prometheus story as it appears in Hesiod (*Op.* 45-105 and *Th.* 535-616) is of course the best known of these separation myths, but other references to the former union or current separation appear. cp. Hesiod, *Eoiaē*, fr. 1.6-7 Merkelbach-West; Hes. *Op.* 108 ὡς ὁμόθεν γεγάασι θεοὶ θνητοὶ τ' ἀνθρώποι.

indeed sees the claim to a paired Earth and Heaven as an appeal to the originary unity, before any of the divisions between the generations of the children of Earth and Heaven, before the separation of Earth and Heaven itself<sup>32</sup>. Such a utopian vision might then reflect the ideals of the deceased and the religious context that produced the tablets.

While the reference to the idea of primordial unity could be important to the recipients of the tablets, the positive aspects of mankind's kinship with the gods could also be emphasized in a claim to be one of the children of Earth and starry Heaven that came later in the cosmogonic sequence. The various offspring who arose from the Earth out of tree and stone are all kin to the gods who might lay claim to the privileges of such a relationship. The offspring of the Melian nymphs who sprang from the blood of Ouranos were not always imagined as the violent and rebellious Giants, just as the primordial earthborn inhabitants of various areas often had a special closeness with the gods. Not only do the Eleusinian Dysaules and Triptolemus attest to this closeness, but the Kouretes and Korybantes, the special attendants of the Mother of the Gods and the infant Zeus, are listed among the first humans, with the Korybantes even said to be growing like trees, just as the Meliai did. Hippolytus preserves a prose version of what might have been verses of Pindar that catalog the first humans of many different myths<sup>33</sup>.

"It is difficult," he says, "to discover whether for the Boeotians Alalcomeneus rose up over Lake Kephisos as the first of men; or whether the first were the Idaian

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<sup>32</sup> "Colui che si chiama 'figlio del cielo e della terra' si rappresenta non nella sua dualità, ma nella sua unità originaria. Matrimonio tra il cielo e la terra esisteva soltanto in tempi primordiali, prima delle separazioni e dei limiti del nostro mondo. Il morto iniziato ha una posizione primordiale e cosmica". Burkert 1975, 89.

<sup>33</sup> Hippol. *Haer.* 5.2.17 ≈ fr. 67b *Lyrica Adespota* PMG: χαλεπὸν δέ, φησίν, ἔξευρεῖν εἴτε Βοιωτοῖς Αλαλκομενεὺς ὑπὲρ λίμνης Κηφισίδος ἀνέσχε πρῶτος ἀνθρώπων· εἴτε Κουρήτες ἦσαν Ἰδαῖοι, θεῖον γένος, ἢ Φρύγιο(ι) Κορύβαντες, οὓς πρῶτους ἥλιος ἐπέιδε δενδροφυεῖς ἀναβλαστώνοντας· εἴτε προσεληναῖον Ἀρκαδία Πελασγόν, ἢ Παρίας οἰκήτορα Δυσαύλην Ἐλευσίν, ἢ Λῆμνος καλλίπαιδα Κάβριον ἀρρήτω ἐτέκνωσεν ὀργιασμῶ· εἴτε Πελλήνη Φλεγραῖον Αλκυονέα, πρεσβύτατον Γιγάντων. Λίβυες δὲ Ἰάβραντά φασι πρωτόγονον αὐχμηρῶν ἀναδύντα πεδίω<ν> γλυκείας ἀπάρξασθαι Διὸς βαλάνου.

Kouretes, a divine race; or the Phrygian Korybantes, whom first the sun looked upon as they sprung up, growing as trees do; or whether Arcadia brought forth Pelasgus, more ancient than the moon; or Eleusis produced Dysaules, dweller in Raria; or Lemnos of fair children begot Kabiros in unspeakable rites; or Pallene produced the Phlegraean Alcyoneus, oldest of the Giants. But the Libyans affirm that Iarbas, first born, on emerging from arid plains, commenced eating the sweet acorn of Jupiter."

Such primordial peoples are all the children of Earth, the forefathers of the people who live in the land out of which they arose. The Tritopatores likewise are the forefathers par excellence, either with names that link them to the first generation of beings produced by Earth and Heaven or nameless and generic, representing the sum total of the fathers gone by. To claim, like these figures, to be a child of Earth and starry Heaven is thus to identify oneself with the ancestral heroes, the founders of the race who lived in closer conjunction with the gods than the ordinary folk today. Such a claim is not quite as grand as the claim to be one of the same generation of gods as the divinities before the Olympians, but it nevertheless emphasizes the kinship of humanity with the gods. It seems most reasonable to interpret the claim in the tablets to be referring to such primordial forefathers of humanity, since these figures have a better chance at winning favor with the gods than their traditional enemies, the Titans and the Giants.

Having explored the possible referents of the claim to be a child of Earth and starry Heaven, it is worth examining the ways in which such a claim might function and the implications of such a claim for the reconstruction of the religious context from which these tablets come. Such boasts of identity do not merely convey information about the person to the hearers; they orient the addressees within the network of relationships that constitute the social world.<sup>34</sup> To claim a certain identity is also to lay claim to certain kinds of

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<sup>34</sup> As Depew (1997, 232) notes of εὐχομαι: "The verb denotes an interactive process of guiding another in assessing one's status and thus one's due. The purpose is not to 'boast' or 'declare' something about one's past, but to make a claim on someone in the present, whether in

privileges and responsibilities, obligations within the reciprocal networks of kinship, guest friendship, or even feud. Thus, to claim to be a descendant of an enemy of the addressee is to challenge the addressee to exact the revenge owed for the last injury received or to pay for the last injury inflicted. Likewise, to claim to be linked by kinship or guest-friendship is implicitly to request the favorable treatment or privileges owed to a kinsman or guestfriend. Herrero has explored the ways in which the claims in the gold tablets, whether to be the child of Earth and starry Heaven or simply to be of the *genos* of the gods, pick up on the Homeric tradition of heroes' declarations of identity in their duels.<sup>35</sup> One point Herrero stresses is the importance of the *genos* to all of these claims; the identity of even the greatest hero is inextricably bound up with the identity of his *genos*, of the family line of which he is a part. Thus, the deeds of the individual hero bring glory or shame not simply to him but to his entire *genos*, living and dead, just as the deeds of his ancestors, glorious or criminal, are part of his identity, which he must live up to or pay for.

The importance of the *genos* or family association was obviously not only for the epic hero, but the status of every member of a community was linked to such associations. Of course, in most communities, only certain aristocratic families could trace their genetic lineage back to the heroes; most of the community had to make do with lesser associations with the significant figures of the community. Everyone in a city might claim some connection with the founding hero, but special glory and privilege accrued to those whose connection with the hero was by *genos*. In the competitions for power and influence in the community, then, such people started with an advantage that was sure to be envied by those without it. One might think of the cachet, not to

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terms of an actual request or of recognition and acknowledgement of status. ... When Homeric heroes εὔχονται, what they are doing is asserting their identity and their value in the society they inhabit, and by means of this assertion creating a context in which the claim they are making on another member of that society will be appropriate and compelling".

<sup>35</sup> Herrero de Jáuregui (forthcoming).

mention real power and influence, of the Heraclids in the various communities of the Peloponnesus, of families that could trace their line back to the sons of Heracles who had conquered and divided up the territory of the Peloponnesus. In Athens, by contrast, the Cleisthenic democratic reforms derived some of their power from the assignment of an eponymous hero to each of the ten tribes, giving every citizen a connection to the heroic past previously reserved for the aristocratic *gene*.

In such a context, then, we can see the appeal of the claim in the gold tablets to be child of Earth and starry Heaven, whatever the precise mythic referent might have been imagined to be.<sup>36</sup> Such a claim would trump the most illustrious pedigree of a local aristocrat, replacing the hierarchies of local *gene* that trace their lineage back to founding heroes with a cosmic scale. The claim to be a child of Earth and starry Heaven derives its force, not so much from the fact that Earth and Heaven are more illustrious and powerful than any hero, even one born from Zeus himself, as from the whole displacement of hierarchies, from the local arena of competition to the universal. Such a claim rejects the hierarchy of status embedded in the local context, where different families boast of their heroic lineage, in favor of another genealogy, one in which all such claims are dwarfed by the central importance of humanity's relation to the divine family.

We can only imagine precisely to whom and why such a move might have been appealing, since the tablets themselves provide so little evidence of the identities of those buried with them. In contrast to the standard formulae of identification in epitaphs, the tablets provide no information about the individual's name, parentage, family, relations, occupation or position in society<sup>37</sup>. Indeed, this very lack of identification underscores the way the tablets

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<sup>36</sup> Of course, given the scope of the mythic tradition, the precise referent might well have been imagined differently by different people who made and used the tablets.

<sup>37</sup> The one tablet, B2, does include an identification by name, Ἀστέριος ὄνομα, but the claim to be named Starry seems less of a personal identification than an elaboration of the Earth

replace the conventional marks of identification with the claim to divine genealogy, subverting the conventional system of values with an appeal to a primordial link between gods and men.

The concentration of tablets found in the vicinity of Eleutherna in Crete offers a concrete example of how the tablets might have functioned within a particular local context. Starting with the publication of tablets in 1903, seven tablets (B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, B8 and B12) with nearly identical inscriptions have been found in the area, all of which have the Earth and starry Heaven formula<sup>38</sup>. Although the precise find-spots of most of these tablets is uncertain, it is most probable that all these tablets come from the necropolis near the ancient Cretan city of Eleutherna<sup>39</sup>. The elite at Eleutherna seem to have traced their descent from the Kouretes of nearby Mount Ida, particularly one named Eleuther, who married a local nymph Saora or Aora, after whom the city was originally named<sup>40</sup>. If the prestige of aristocratic *gene* in Eleutherna was thus linked to descent from the Idaian Kouretes, the claim to be descended directly from Earth and Heaven might well have appealed to someone whose personal genealogy did not fare so well in the competition for prestige. By claiming that being the child of Earth and starry Heaven was the key to a favorable reception

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and starry Heaven formula, like the claim to be of heavenly *genos*, ἀὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον, in B1 and B9. Other types of gold tablets do contain name identifications, but most of these are the type with no verses or other extended text that simply state the personal name. The late tablet A5 from Rome, which includes the name of Caecilia Secoundina in addition to some verses that resemble the verses from Thurii, seems anomalous in many regards.

<sup>38</sup> See Tzifopoulos (forthcoming) for an extended analysis of these tablets.

<sup>39</sup> Only B12 has a certain context confirmed by modern archaeology. The others come from private collections and were reported to have been found in a grave in the area. While it is possible that the graves from which they were taken might not have been part of the same necropolis complex, Tzifopoulos rightly concludes that they all may be treated as coming from the same context.

<sup>40</sup> cp. Herod. *s. vv.* 'Ἐλευθεραί' and 'Ἄωρος'; St. Byz. *Ethnica*, *s. vv.* 'Σάτρα' and 'Ἐλευθεραί'. The excavator of the necropolis concludes from the finds of shield-bearing Kouretes statues that the necropolis may have started as a private aristocratic burial area, but later expanded to be used by other members of the community. cp. Tzifopoulos (forthcoming). As Tzifopoulos argues, B12 may even contain a reference to the local spring of Saoros as the spring from which the deceased in the tablets desires to drink, thus appropriating the local cult places into the underworld topography of cypress tree and spring found in all the B tablets.

in the underworld, the deceased could subvert the local hierarchies of prestige, placing himself or herself on a par with or even superior to those who claimed descent from the Kouretes.

How subversive and counter-cultural is such a claim? Detienne refers to Orphism, Pythagoreanism, and Dionysiac cult as various *chemins de déviance*, modes of registering a protest against the existing social order<sup>41</sup>. The tablets' appeal to the primordial unity of men and gods might reflect a life lived in accordance with such ideals, a religious context in which they were celebrated, in the face perhaps of the community's religious norms. Such a religious context is suggested by the testimonies to the Orphic life, as Plato calls it, of purity and bloodless sacrifices<sup>42</sup>. Such an ideal seems a marked rejection of the violence and bloodshed involved in the succession of dynasties that occurs in myths like Hesiod's as well as in the practice of bloody sacrifice. Such sacrifice itself, according to Hesiod, arises from the strife between Prometheus and Zeus, and the invention of sacrifice marks the separation of men and gods<sup>43</sup>. The Chorus of Euripides' *Cretans* seems composed of folk who hold to these ideals of purity, as they claim:

Having all-white garments, I flee the birth of mortals and, not nearing the place of corpses, I guard myself against the eating of ensouled flesh.

This Chorus identifies themselves as *mystai* of Idaean Zeus and Zagreus Nyctipolos, and they celebrate rituals that involve the Mountain Mother and the Kouretes<sup>44</sup>. Those who identify themselves as the Children of Earth and

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<sup>41</sup> Detienne 1975.

<sup>42</sup> Pl. *Leg.* 782c 1: καὶ τούναντίον ἀκούομεν ἐν ἄλλοις, ὅτε οὐδὲ βοὸς ἐτόλμων μὲν γεύεσθαι, θύματά τε οὐκ ἦν τοῖς θεοῖσι ζῶα, πέλανοι δὲ καὶ μέλιτι καρποὶ δεδευμένοι καὶ τοιαῦτα ἄλλα ἀγνὰ θύματα, σαρκῶν δ' ἀπείχοντο ὡς οὐχ ὄσιον ὄν ἐσθίειν οὐδὲ τοῦς τῶν θεῶν βωμοῦς αἵματι μιαίνειν, ἀλλὰ Ὅρφικοὶ τινες λεγόμενοι βίοι ἐγίγνοντο ἡμῶν τοῖς τότε, ἀψύχων μὲν ἐχόμενοι πάντων, ἐμψύχων δὲ τούναντίον πάντων ἀπεχόμενοι.

<sup>43</sup> Hes. *Op.* 45-105 and *Th.* 535-616; cp., the analyses by Vernant 1990a, 183-201, and Detienne - Vernant 1989, 21-86.

<sup>44</sup> Eur. *Cret.* fr. 472 Kannicht = Porphyr. *De Abst.* 4.56:

Φοινικογενοὺς παῖ τῆς Τυρίας  
τέκνον Εὐρώπας καὶ τοῦ μεγάλου

starry Heaven might therefore be of this same type, life-long adherents to a strict code of purity that prohibits bloodshed, avoids all death and birth, and dresses exclusively in white, marking themselves as initiates in special mysteries who are therefore separate from and superior to the common herd of mankind.

Such a figure is certainly attested in the Greek *imaginaire*, the mythic imagination of authors such as Euripides and Plato, who are setting forth models of extreme purity. Other testimonies, however, provide evidence for less extreme deviation, for people who may have cherished such ideals of purity and primordial unity, but whose lives were conducted in a fashion less noticeably different from the mainstream. Even Theophrastus' caricature of a superstitious man only takes his family to the Orpheotelest once a month, renewing his connection with the ideals of purity by means of some ritual (τελετή) without necessarily having adhered strictly to them in every aspect of life<sup>45</sup>. The clientele of the itinerant religious specialists mentioned in Plato's *Republic* seem a similar lot; they pay these beggar priests and diviners (ἀγύρται δὲ καὶ μάντις), as Plato calls them, to perform ceremonies that will provide

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Ζανός, ἀνάσσω  
Κρήτης ἑκατομπτολιέθρου·  
ἦκω ζαθέους ναοὺς προλιπών,  
οὐς αὐθιγενῆς τμηθεῖσα δοκὸς  
στεγανοὺς παρέχει Χαλύβω πελέκει  
καὶ ταυροδέτω κόλλη κραθεῖσ'  
ἀτρεκεῖς ἄρμους κυπαρίσσου.  
ἀγνὸν δὲ βίον τείνων ἐξ οὗ  
Διὸς Ἰδαίου μύστης γενόμην,  
καὶ νυκτιπόλου Ζαγρέως βροντὰς  
τοὺς τ' ὠμοφάγους δαίτας τελέσας  
μητρί τ' ὀρεῖω δᾶδας ἀνασχών  
καὶ Κουρήτων  
βάκχος ἐκλήθην ὀσιωθείς.  
πάλλευκα δ' ἔχων εἴματα φεύγω  
γένεσίν τε βροτῶν καὶ νεκροθήκης  
οὐ χριμπτόμενος τήν τ' ἐμφύχων  
βρῶσιν ἐδεστῶν πεφύλαγμαι.

<sup>45</sup> Theophr. *Char.* 16: καὶ τελεσθησόμενος πρὸς τοὺς Ὀρφεοτελεστάς κατὰ μῆνα πορεύεσθαι μετὰ τῆς γυναικὸς —ἐὰν δὲ μὴ σχολάζῃ ἢ γυνή, μετὰ τῆς τίτθης— καὶ τῶν παιδίων.

relief from divine retribution for any injustice committed by themselves or their ancestors<sup>46</sup>. Such persons, I would suggest, are the most likely candidates for the type of people who were buried with the gold tablets in their graves, the clientele of the Orpheotelest or diviner who purchased a special amulet, rather than the life-long religious extremist pictured in Euripides' *Cretans* (even if such a figure cannot be entirely ruled out as a possibility). Such a person would not have been divorced from the mainstream life of the community, would not have been someone who held aloof from the social interactions of the community, the struggles over power and status. Indeed, it may have precisely to obtain an advantage in these competitions that such a client might have sought the services of a religious expert who promised him something special that went beyond the normal run of options.

This lesser degree of counter-cultural subversion, of *déviance*, in the claims of the Earth and starry Heaven formula in the B tablets can perhaps be compared with the far greater *déviance* implied in the myth of the underworld judgement that Socrates recounts in Plato's *Gorgias*<sup>47</sup>. In both the scenario of the tablets and the judgement in the myth, the deceased faces the powers of the underworld after death and tries to claim preferential treatment, but, whereas in the *Gorgias* the deceased must have lived a philosophic life in order to keep his soul free from the scars of vice, the deceased in the tablets need only to declare his identity as a child of Earth and starry Heaven. In both cases, however, these features distinguish the deceased from other souls, who value the conventional marks of privilege, which are worthless in the afterlife. The souls in the *Gorgias* (523e) are confounded when they are stripped of all their

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<sup>46</sup> Pl. *Rep.* 364bc: ἀγύρται δὲ καὶ μάντις ἐπὶ πλουσίων θύρας ἰόντες πείθουσιν ὡς ἔστι παρὰ σφίσι δύναμις ἐκ θεῶν ποριζομένη θυσίαις τε καὶ ἐπωδαῖς, εἴτε τι ἀδίκημά του γέγονεν αὐτοῦ ἢ προγόνων, ἀκεῖσθαι μεθ' ἡδονῶν τε καὶ ἐορτῶν. Burkert's model of such religious specialists and their clients remains the most plausible reconstruction of "Orfism" (Burkert 1982), while the comments of Redfield (1991) on the counter-cultural nature of such practitioners and clients remain important. Cp. Parker 1995.

<sup>47</sup> For an extended treatment of the *Gorgias* myth, see Edmonds 1999b.

wealth and friends and names as they are brought before the judges of the underworld; all of the qualifications on which they had relied in life are proved worthless. Likewise, in the B tablets, most souls have nothing meaningful to say to the guardians who ask "Who are you? Where are you from?". Indeed, most souls will have nothing whatsoever to say, since all sense of identity has been stripped from them by the waters of oblivion. Perhaps they are doomed to wander mindlessly, like the shades in Homer, until some bold Odysseus ventures in with blood sacrifices to restore their sense of self, or perhaps they are being prepared for a new incarnation, like the souls in the Platonic myth of Er. In any case, the soul of the deceased equipped with a gold leaf will not suffer such a fate, such a one is marked for preferential treatment and will drink from the spring of Memory. Likewise, the souls of the philosophic in Plato's myth are sent to the Isles of the Blessed, where they enjoy all the privileges of the heroes of myth.

Plato's myth, however, implies that such a fate can be earned only by completely overturning the values on which ordinary life is based, by living a philosophic life like that of the peculiar Socrates. Indeed, Socrates' interlocutor, Callicles, is notoriously unconvinced by Socrates' radical suggestions, complaining,

For if you're in earnest, and all these things you say are really true, then wouldn't the life of us men be upside down? And don't we apparently do everything that's the opposite of what we should do?<sup>48</sup>

The tablets provide no evidence that those who were buried with them needed to turn their whole lives upside down; nothing in the burials of any of the B tablets suggests that those who claimed to be the children of Earth and starry Heaven lived a life marked by permanent subversion of the dominant cultural values. Indeed, the archaeological analysis of the burials of B2, B10, and

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<sup>48</sup> 481c1-4: εἰ μὲν γὰρ σπουδάξεις τε καὶ τυγχάνει ταῦτα ἀληθῆ ὄντα ἃ λέγεις, ἄλλο τι ἢ ἡμῶν ὁ βίος ἀνατετραμμένος ἂν εἴη τῶν ἂν θρώπων καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐναντία πράττομεν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἢ ἃ δεῖ;

B12 (the only B tablets with recorded burial contexts) shows them to be remarkably ordinary. B10 and B12 are both from large necropoleis with many other burials nearly identical to the grave with the tablet, with the only difference being the presence of the tablet itself.<sup>49</sup> While they might have all lived an *Orphikos bios*, pure and aloof, the evidence suggests that their *déviance* was less extreme, that they might have done no more than availed themselves of the services of a religious expert who promised them extra-ordinary results from the ceremonies involved with the gold tablet that marked their claim to be the children of Earth and starry Heaven.

The Child of Earth and starry Heaven formula, then, does indeed evoke an anthropogonic myth that underlies the claim to preferential treatment in the afterlife. However, rather than basing that claim on the stain of the misdeeds of Titanic ancestors that has now (presumably) been wiped out, the formula appeals to the kinship bond between the *gene* of gods and men – a positive bond rather than the absence of a negative one. The self-identification of the formula recalls the epic convention of heroes' meetings, where the claims to identity serve most importantly to guide the addressee's response. Should the addresser turn out to be from the *genos* of friends or relations, the addressee must treat him with the reciprocal honors established in the relations between their respective *gene*. Should the *gene* have a history of enmity, the proper response is to inflict damage, again reciprocating for the wrongs done in the past. In an ambiguous situation, as in the case where the mythic tradition provides tales of both loving kinship and enmity between the races of gods and men, one hoping for a favorable reaction would naturally put forth the positive claim of kinship.

This kinship is not the product of a ritual process; genealogy is not something one can acquire by ritual, even if one could learn of the genealogy in

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<sup>49</sup> cp. Foti 1974 and Tzifopoulos (forthcoming).

the course of a ritual. To be told that human beings are descended from Earth and Heaven is not a privileged secret only passed down in a certain mystery; it is, on the contrary, fairly common knowledge from traditional myth, whether local stories of autochthony or panHellenic myths of the origin of humanity. Moreover, if a mystery were about the revelation of this genealogy as a secret, it would immediately undercut the privileged position of the new initiates – they would have just found out they are like everyone else. Such a problem is particularly pointed if the revelation includes the idea of original sin. Why should the knowledge that you are, like every other member of the human race, tainted with the murder of Dionysos be the key to getting past the guardians of the underworld?

Like the special attention to purification that is found in a number of the sources for ancient Orphism, the claim to descent from Earth and Heaven does not rely on some newly acquired secret knowledge but rather on a re-valuation of something already known. The importance of purification from the stains accumulated from the crimes of oneself or one's ancestors was a standard part of Greek religious thinking, but the emphasis on purification above all other actions or qualifications, as found in Euripides' chorus of Cretans or Hippolytus, is unusual. In the same way, privileging the descent from Earth and Heaven over the lines of descent embedded in the local social structures gives unusual emphasis to a familiar mythic tradition. The whole point of the claim is not the particular genealogy but rather the displacement of the value scale, the very fact that what is important is not the conventional marks of privilege – *genos*, family, wealth, or even epic *kleos*. Thus, the knowledge that one is, like everyone else, a child of Earth and Heaven becomes important because the deceased recognizes that this genealogy is more important than any other claim to special treatment, that the conventional marks of privilege are insignificant.

This claim represents a subversion of the dominant value system, rather than a complete revolution or rejection, but this slight degree of *déviance* would be perhaps more appealing to a wider selection of people than a complete *bios Orphikos*. The claim to be a child of Earth and starry Heaven seems thus to have caught the imagination and attention of certain of the ancient Greeks, in Cretan Eleutherna as well as in Southern Italy and Thessaly, who found its enigmatic formulation of identity appealing. So too, modern scholars continue to be intrigued by the ramifications of its meaning, some of which I hope to have elucidated here.

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# ORFEO Y EL ORFISMO

## NUEVAS PERSPECTIVAS



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