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THE GOLD LEAF FROM HIPPONION REVISITED

In 1974, Giuseppe Foti published a small gold leaf found folded (14 x 16 mm) on the breast of a skeleton (probably of a young woman) from a tomb excavated in the ancient cemetery of Hipponion (today Vibo Valentia in Calabria). The tomb belongs to the end of the fifth century B.C. The gold leaf, when unfolded, measures only 49–59 x 32 mm¹. And nevertheless it contains a Greek inscription of no less than sixteen hexameters. This is the oldest Orphic *lamella aurea* among fifteen of them found so far². At the same time, it is the longest and the best one. There is a close correspondence between the contents of the gold leaf from Hipponion (= *H*) and those from Petelia (= *P*, ca. 350 B.C.) and Pharsalos (= *Ph*, ca. 330 B.C.).

H was first published by Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli (1974), then by Reinhold Merkelbach (1975), Martin L. West (1975), Miroslav Marcovich (1976), Günther Zuntz (1976), Margherita Guarducci (1977), Wolfgang Luppe (1978), H. W. Pleket and R. S. Stroud (in *S.E.G.* 26 [1979] Nr. 1139)³.

¹ See the photographs in *PP* 29 (1974) 107 and 110; in M. Guarducci, *Epigrafia Greca*, IV (Rome 1978) 262.

² Published by G. Zuntz, in *Persephone* (Oxford 1971) 275–393. The gold leaf from Malibu was published by J. Breslin, *A Greek Prayer*, Passadena. See R. Merkelbach, *ZPE* 25 (1977) 276.

³ Here is a select literature on *H*: G. Foti and G. Pugliese Carratelli, "Un sepolcro di Hipponion e un nuovo testo orfico", *PP* 29 (1974) 91–126; M. Guarducci, *Epigraphica* 37 (1975) 19–24; M. Gigante, *PP* 30 (1975) 223–25; H. Lloyd-Jones, *ibid.* 225–26; G. Pugliese Carratelli, *ibid.* 226–31; R. Merkelbach, *ZPE* 17 (1975) 8–9; M.L. West, *ZPE* 18 (1975) 229–36; M. Marcovich, *ZPE* 23 (1976) 221–24; G. Zuntz, *WS* 89 (1976) 129–51; G. Pugliese Carratelli, *PP* 31 (1976) 458–66; G. Namia, *Vichiana* 6 (1977) 288–89; O. Musso, *GIF* 29 (1977) 172–75; M. Guarducci, *Epigrafia Greca*, IV (Rome 1978) 258–70; J. Gil, *Cuadernos de Filol. Clás.* 14 (1978) 83 ff.; W. Luppe, *ZPE* 30 (1978) 23–26; F. Printera, *PP* 33 (1978) 48–58; M. Gigante, in *Storia e cultura del mezzogiorno: Studi in memoria di Umberto Caldora* (Cosenza 1978) 3–7; G. Sacco, *Epigraphica* 40 (1978) 40–52; H.W. Pleket and R.S. Stroud, in *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 26 (1978) Nr. 1139; C. Gallavotti, *Museum Criticum* 13–14 (1978–79) 337–59; S.G. Cole, *GRBS* 21 (1980) 223–38; R. Janko, *CQ N. S.* 34 (1984) 89–100; B. Feyerabend, *RhM* 127 (1984) 1–22; G. Scalera McClintock, *PP* 39 (1984) 132–35.

In my opinion, the text of the inscription is both lacunose and corrupt, presenting difficulties of interpretation. After fifteen years, I am offering here a slightly revised edition along with a few remarks.

T e x t

Μναμοσύνας τόδε σῆιον, ἐπεὶ ἄμ μέλλησι θανεῖσθαι.

Εἰς Ἄϊδαο δόμους εὐήρεας < e.g. ἠως ἀφικάνεις, ἠερῆσεις μελάνυδρον ἐκεῖθ' > {ἔστ'} ἐπὶ δ<ε>ξιὰ κρήνα<v>, πὰρ δ' αὐτᾶι λευκά<v> ἔστακν <ι>α <v> κυπάρισ<σ>ον· ἔνθα κατερχόμεναι ψυχ{κ}αὶ νεκυῶν ψύχονται.

Ταύτας τᾶς κρήνας μηδὲ σχεδὸν ἐγγύθεν ἔλθεις.

Πρόσθεν δ(ἐ) ἠερῆσεις τᾶς Μναμοσύνας ἀπὸ λίμνας ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον· φύλακες δ(ἐ) ἐπύπερθεν ἔασι<v>. [h]οὶ δέ σε εἰρήσονται ἐν<ι> φρασί πευκαλίμαιοι [h]ότ<τ>ι δὴ ἐξερέεις Ἄϊδος σκότος οὐλοέεντος.

Εἶπον· “Υῶς Βαρέας καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος, δῖψαι δ' εἰμ(ι) αἴσος καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι· ἄλ<λ>ὰ δότ' ὦ[κα] ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ π[ρο]ρέον τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμ[νης].”

Καὶ δὴ τοὶ ἔλεοῦσιν <h> υποχθονίω βασιλῆϊ, καὶ δὴ τοὶ δώσουσι πιεῖν <ταύτας ἀπὸ> {τας Μναμοσύνας} λίμνας, καὶ δὴ καὶ σὺ πῶν ἠοδὸν ἔρχεα<ι>, ἥν τε καὶ ἄλλοι μύσται καὶ βᾶχχοι ἠιεράν στείχουσι κλ<ε>εινοί.

1 σῆιον scripsi post M. West (<θ>ῆιον): EPION (i.e. ἠέριον) H □ 2 ΕΙΣ H: εἰς Pugliese: εἶσ' Zuntz □ 2-3 supplevi e.g. conlatis P et Ph □ 3 ΕΣΤ deleui ut dissographiam / κρήναν scripsi post M. West: ΚΡΕΝΑ H □ 4 ΠΑΡΔΑΥΤΑΝΕΣΤΑ-ΚΥΑΛΕΥΚΑΚΥΠΑΡΙΣΟΣ H, ex P et Ph corr. Merkelbach et West □ 9 ἐν<ι> Merkelbach □ 12 ὦ[κα] Pugliese (δότ' αἴψα P) □ 15 ταύτας (possis et Μνάμας et Μνείας) ἀπὸ addidi et τᾶς Μναμοσύνας deleui ut glossema : καθαράς ἀπὸ conl. Merkelbach : θεῖης ἀπὸ κρήνης P □ 16 ΣΥΠΙΟΝ H, ut vidit Luppe : συχὸν Pugliese : συχῶν Merkelbach.

Translation

“This is the leaf of Remembrance for the time when one shall die.

<When you reach> the well-fitted house of Hades, <you will find there> on the right hand a spring <with black water> and close to it a tall shining cypress. This is the place where the descending souls cool themselves. Take good care not to come close to this spring.

Further on you will find a cold stream flowing out of the lake of Remembrance. And there are guardians standing by the stream.

They will ask you with shrewd mind, what for are you searching through the darkness of the deadly Hades.

Answer to them: "I am a son of the Heavy (Earth) and the starry Sky. But I am drained dry with thirst and I am perishing. So give me quickly cold water flowing out of the lake of Remembrance."

And they will show mercy to you, a king of the Netherworld, and will give you to drink from that lake. And after drinking you will tread the holy path on which walk also other renowned initiates and worshippers."

Brief Commentary

It seems appropriate to bring here a combined text of the gold leaves from Petelia (in British Museum) and Pharsalos (at Athens). It reads as follows:

Εὐρήσεις Ἀΐδαο δόμοις ἐνδέξια κρήνην,
 παρ δ' αὐτῆι λευκῆν ἔστηκυῖαν κυπάρισσον·
 ταύτης τῆς κρήνης μηδὲ σχεδὸν ἐμπελάσειας.
 Πρόσω δ' εὐρήσεις τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης
 ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον· φύλακες δ' ἐπύπερθεν ἔασιν.
 Οἱ δὲ σ<ε> εἰρήσονται ὅ τι χρέος εἰσαφικάνεις.
 Τοῖς δὲ σὺ εὖ μάλα πᾶσαν ἀληθεῖην καταλέξειαι·

Εἰπεῖν· "Γῆς παῖς εἰμι καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος·
 αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον· τόδε δ' ἴστε καὶ αὐτοῖ·
 δίψῃ δ' εἰμ(ι) αὕη καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι· ἀλλὰ δότ' αἶψα
 ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης."
 Καὐτ[ο]ί <σοι> δώσουσι πιεῖν θείης ἀπ[ὸ] κρήνης,
 καὶ τότε ἔπειτ' ἄ[λλοισι μεθ'] ἠρώεσιν ἀνάξει[ς].

[Μνημοσύ]νης τόδε δ[ῶρον, ἐπὴν μέλλῃσι] θανεῖσθ[αι].

1 δόμοις ἐνδέξια Ph: δόμων ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ P□ 3 σχεδὸν ἐμπελάσειας P: σχεδόθεν
 πελάσηισθα Ph □ 4 πρόσω δ' εὐρήσεις Ph: εὐρήσεις δ' ἑτέραν P / τῆς P: τὸ Ph
 □ 5 ἐπύπερθεν Ph: ἐπίπροσθεν P □ 6-7 Ph, om. P □ 9-14 pro his habet Ph:
 Ἄστέρως ὄνομα· δίψῃ δ' εἰμ' αἶψα· ἀλλὰ δότε μοι πιεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς κρήνης □ 14
 [Μνημοσύ]νης Anonym. in Mus. Brit. Catal. Nr. 3155 / δ[ῶρον] temptavi conlata
 lamella Romana (ἔχω δὲ / Μνημοσύνης τόδε δῶρον αἰδῖμον ἀνθρώποισιν) : ν[ᾶμα]
 Anon. ibidem

Line 1. Pugliese Carratelli, Zuntz, Guarduci, and S.E.G. 26, Nr. 1139, print a full stop after the word ἠρίον. I think, however, that line 1 is a complete sentence and the title of the inscription. This seems to be supported by Petelia, line 14.

Lines 2-3. That one line is missing, I think is confirmed by the abridged version of the inscription, present in Petelia and Pharsalos,

line 1. With this line added the *lamella aurea* would have the magic number of seventeen lines.

Line 4. The text of *H* -- πὰρ δ' αὐτὰν ἔστακν<ι>α λευκὰ κυπάρισ<σ>ος -- is indefensible on metrical grounds. The correct text is indicated by Petelia and Pharsalos, line 2. There is no use of referring to the text of the gold leaf from Malibu (as, e.g., Luppe 23 n. 2, does), for there the phrase ἐπὶ δεξιὰ λευκὴ κυπάρισσος forms a complete sentence (an ἔστιν is understood), and besides Malibu belongs to the group of the gold leaves from Eleutherna (ἐπὶ δεξιὰ, τῇ κυπάρισος), as R. Janko had demonstrated (CQ N.S. 34 [1984] 93 and 100).

Line 5. The *figura etymologica* ψυχὰι νεκύων ψύχονται clearly hints at the Refrigerium and *la soif des morts* (on which see Zuntz, *Persephone* 370–76).

Line 11. We have to live with βαρέας implying Γῆς. For, first, ΓΑΙΑΣ is not visible in the inscription (*contra* Zuntz, *WS* 89 [1976] 142 f.). Second, βαρεῖα is employed as an attribute of γῆ by Cleidemos ap. Theophrast. *De causis plant.* 3.23.1, as Pugliese Carratelli (*PP* 29 [1974] 112) had pointed out (compare M. Gigante, *PP* 30 [1975] 224). Finally, against the reading of Zuntz (and Luppe 23 and 25) -- ὕδς Γαίας <τε> -- it suffices to say that Petelia, line 6, and Pharsalos, line 8, have Γῆς παῖς εἰμι instead, and the group from Eleutherna and Malibu, Γᾶς υἱός εἰμι.

Line 15. The text in *H* is due to a mechanical repetition of the formula in lines 7 and 13 -- τᾶς Μναμοσύνας ἀπὸ λίμνας -- on the part of the scribe (so also Janko 96 f.). My guess is that the original reading was ταύτας ἀπὸ λίμνας (compare line 6, ταύτας τᾶς κρήνας). I think *H* makes a clear distinction between *the destructive spring* (κρήνα in lines 3 and 6) and *the salvific lake of Remembrance* (λίμνα in lines 7, 13 and 15). If so, then κρήνης in Petelia, line 10, Pharsalos, line 10, Malibu, line 2, and the group from Eleutherna is a later change (*contra* Janko 97 and 99).

Line 19. Μύσται καὶ βᾶχχοι: A link between the Dionysiac mysteries and Orphics is provided by the recently published graffiti on bone tablets from Olbia (contemporary to our gold leaf), e.g., by the inscription *S.E.G.* 28 (1978) [1982] Nr. 659: Διό(νυσος or Διονύσῳ) Ὀρφικί⁴. On the relationship between Dionysos and the Orphics compare Susan Guettel Cole (1980)⁵ and Reinhold Merkelbach (1988)⁶.

⁴ See A. S. Rusjaeva, "Orfizn i kul't Dionisa v Ol'vii", *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 1978, 1, 87–104; F. Tinnefeld, *ZPE* 38 (1980) 67–71; M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford 1983) 17–19.

⁵ "New Evidence for the Mysteries of Dionysos", *GRBS* 21 (1980) 223–38.

⁶ *Die Hirten des Dionysos* (Stuttgart, B.G. Teubner, 1988) 130–34. For a Dionysiac Thiasos at Olbia compare Herodot. 4.78–80.

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We now come to the keyword of the inscription – – to the towering presence of the goddess Mnemosyne (mentioned three times, in lines 1, 7 and 13, and referred to in line 15). What is her role?

(1) It is common knowledge that the assistance of Memory is necessary for the initiates in mysteries enabling them to *remember* the mystic secrets and instructions⁷. Hence the presence of the water of Lethe and of the water of Mnemosyne (and even a chair of Mnemosyne) in the mystic shrine of Trophonius in Boetia (Pausanias 9.39.8 and 13). Hence also this prayer to Mnemosyne in a late Orphic hymn (77.9–10 Quandt) :

ἀλλά, μάκαιρα θεά, μύσταις μνήμην ἐπέγειρε
εὐιέρου τελετῆς, λήθην δ' ἀπὸ τῶν <δ'> ἀπόπεμπε⁸.

(2) But the role of Mnemosyne in our inscription goes beyond the traditional “water of Memory”. The gold leaf itself is a *gift* of the goddess Mnemosyne to the initiate (Μναμοσύνας τόδε οσίον, in *H*, line 1; Μνημοσύνης τόδε δῶρον, in the gold leaf from Rome, line 3, and maybe in that from Petelia, line 14). The gold leaf is a *golden passport* to Paradise, for it comprises the secret *pass-word* (line 11): “I am a child of the Heavy Earth and the Starry Sky”.

Now, it is not a coincidence that the Greek goddess Mnemosyne herself was a daughter of Earth (Gaia) and Sky (Ouranos): Hesiod *Theogony* 135. Every learned Greek knew Hesiod’s *Theogony*, including the educated Orphics. If so, then the goddess Mnemosyne and her devotee from *H* are *two sisters*. Thus, it is a sacred duty for Mnemosyne to assist her sisters and brothers in achieving life everlasting in Elysium. Hence the presence of Mnemosyne, along with the secret formula, “I am a child of Earth and Sky”, in the Orphic gold leaves.

To conclude, unless a departing soul *remembers* its heavenly origin, it will not achieve life everlasting. *Mutatis mutandis*, compare the later *Naassenerpredigt* in Hippolytus’ *Refutatio* 5.7. 30 (ed. Markovich, Berlin 1986): “Ἐρμῆς δὲ ψυχὰς Κυλλήνιος ἔξεκαλεῖτο / ἀνδρῶν μνηστήρων (*Odyssey* 24.1–2)· οὐ τῶν <δὲ> Πηνελόπης,

⁷ Or, as Miss Cole put it (o.c., 238): “The point of the appeal to Mnemosyne is to guarantee that the initiate remember to seek the benefits that initiation promised”.

⁸ Adduced by D. Comparetti, *Laminette orfiche* (Florence 1910) 46; M. P. Nilsson, *Eranos* 41 (1943) 1–7; Idem, *G.G.R.* II, 3rd ed. (1974) 238 f.; W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart 1977) 437.

φησίν, ὧ̄ κακοδαίμονες, μνηστήρων, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἐξυπνισμένων καὶ ἀνεμνησμένων “ἐξ οἴης τιμῆς <τε> καὶ ὄσ<σ>ου μήκεος ὄλβου” (Empedocles B 119 Diels–Kranz). In other words, the true etymology of the word μνηστήρ is not from μνάομαι, “to woo”, but from μνάομαι, “to remember”, says the anonymous Gnostic sage⁹.

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T N ⁹ One final remark. The right margin of *H*, facing lines 2 and 3, shows a clear A O. The meaning of these letters is puzzling. Back in 1976, I suggested that A O may be a formula for the universe (τὸ πᾶν); compare, e.g., Franz Dornseif, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (Leipzig, 2nd ed., 1925) 122–25; E. Lohmeyer, in *RLAC* 1 (1941) 1. But 400 B.C. seems to be too early a date for such a formula. As for the letters TN, I suggested that they may well be the number 350 (i.e., 5 x 70), a cosmic cycle of the soul. Seventy years is an ideal lifespan for man (to judge by Solon Fr. 27 West), and Pythagoras claimed to belong to a *fifth* generation of his soul — Aethalides, Euphorbus, Hermotimus, Pyrrhus, Pythagoras (Diog. Laert. 8.4–5).