

Ritual Texts for the Afterlife

Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold
Tablets

Second Edition

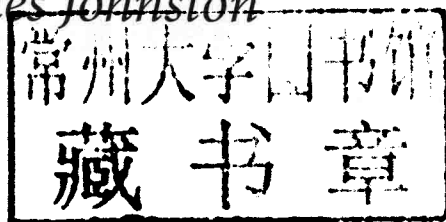
Fritz Graf and
Sarah Iles Johnston

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RITUAL TEXTS FOR THE AFTERLIFE

Fascinating texts written on small gold tablets and deposited in graves provide a unique source of information about what the Greeks and Romans believed regarding the afterlife, and how they could influence it. These texts, which stretch from the fifth century BCE to the second century CE, have provoked debate for almost a century and a half. The tablets belonged to those who had been initiated into the mysteries of Dionysus; the words the tablets carried drew upon poems ascribed to the extraordinary singer and sage Orpheus.

In this new edition of *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, Graf and Johnston present additional finds and engage with recent interpretations. After providing the Greek text and a translation of all the known tablets, the authors analyze their role in the mysteries of Dionysus, and present an outline of the myths concerning the origins of humanity and of the sacred texts that the Greeks ascribed to Orpheus. In addition to their earlier appendix of related ancient texts in translation, the authors offer appendices on similar gold tablets from Roman Palestine, the tablets from Pherae and their mythic context, and a fresh look at the contested category of “Orphism.” Providing the first book-length coverage of these enigmatic texts in English, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife* will remain essential to the study of ancient Greek religion.

Fritz Graf is Distinguished University Professor at The Ohio State University, where he teaches in the Department of Classics and directs the Epigraphy Section of the Center for Epigraphical and Palaeographical Studies.

Sarah Iles Johnston is Arts and Humanities Distinguished Professor of Religion and Professor of Classics at The Ohio State University.



Walter Burkert, Fritz Graf, and Sarah Iles Johnston (courtesy Martin L. West).

**For Walter Burkert,
teacher and friend**

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

In the past, scholarship on the so-called Orphic Gold Tablets has had a checkered career. For a short while, at the beginning of the last century, the tablets were at the center of attention, to the extent that one scholar, Alexander Olivieri, even produced an edition for academic seminars. They soon relinquished that position, however, and for many years since have barely been visible to most scholars of ancient religion: they were epigraphical curiosities, read only by a few specialists. Günther Zuntz's 1971 edition of these texts, in the context of his research into the religion and philosophy of Southern Italy, did not help much. Neither Martin Nilsson nor Walter Burkert devoted much space to them in their authoritative accounts of Greek religion, and only Margherita Guarducci valued them highly enough to include them in her manual of Greek epigraphy.

A steadily growing number of additions to Zuntz's small corpus, from excavations all over the Greek world, has considerably enhanced our understanding of these texts, however, even if their religious affiliation has become hazy again in recent years. This body of texts calls for a new, collective publication and interpretation that make them accessible both to students of ancient religions and to others who are interested in Greek beliefs in the afterlife. (Although Pugliese Carratelli has recently produced several editions and translations into Italian and French, and Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal have presented the tablets in Spanish, nothing has been recently produced for the English-language reader.) The present book attempts to fill this gap. The edition we offer aims to present the texts in a form that is not too far from their actual appearance; the translation and the five interpretative chapters will introduce the reader to the beliefs and rituals that we can see, or more often guess, lay behind these fragile texts.

This book is a joint undertaking, and it has kept its two authors busy for several years. We thank each other for elucidation and patience, and we thank many friends – more than can be mentioned here – for their

help and advice. Paramount are four scholars who shared their materials with us well before their publication – Alberto Bernabé, who gave us the indexes of his splendid Teubner edition of the *Orphica* long before they were published; Robert Parker and Maria Stamatopoulou, who made their exciting new text accessible to us; and Yannis Tzifopoulos for sharing with us his Cretan texts. Jan Bremmer read the entire manuscript and contributed many suggestions. Our students Anna Peterson and Agapi Stefanidou helped with the proofreading; Wendy Watkins, Curator of Epigraphy at the Center for Epigraphical and Palaeographical Studies at The Ohio State University, created the map of find-spots.

We dedicate this book to the scholar whose work has been our source of continuing inspiration on this and other topics for many years, Walter Burkert.

Abbreviations

Our abbreviations and mode of spelling ancient names usually follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn.; note the following:

ABV	J. D. Beazley, <i>Attic Black-Figure Vase Painters</i> , 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971 [1956])
DK	Hermann Diels, <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> , 6th edn. by Walther Kranz (Berlin: Weidmann, 1951 [and reprints])
Inscr. Cret.	<i>Inscriptiones Creticae, opera et consilio Friderici Halbherr collectae</i> , ed. Marguerita Guarducci. 4 vols. (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1935–50)
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> . 8 vols. (Zurich and Munich: Artemis, 1981–2004)
OF	Alberto Bernabé, ed. <i>Poetae Epici Graeci. II Orphicorum et Orphicis similium testimonia et fragmenta</i> . Fasc. 1/2 (Munich and Leipzig: Sauer, 2004, 2005)
OF . . . Kern	Otto Kern, ed. <i>Orphicorum Fragmenta</i> (Berlin: Weidmann, 1922 [repr. 1963])
SGOst	Reinhold Merkelbach and Josef Stauber, eds. <i>Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Osten</i> , 5 vols. (Stuttgart and Leipzig: Teubner and Munich: Saur 1998–2004)

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

After five years, a new edition of this book gives us the opportunity to bring our edition and discussions into line with recent scholarship. This period has seen the publication of Yannis Tzifopoulos' important book on the Cretan texts (2010), which offers a comprehensive edition and interpretation of the *epistomia*, or "mouth cover" tablets; the translation into English (and updating) of Alberto Bernabé and Ana Isabel Jiménez San Cristóbal's *Instrucciones para el más allá* (2008); and Radcliffe G. Edmonds III's edited volume of essays on the tablets (with its own edition of the texts [2011]), as well as many shorter treatments of individual tablets or topics related to the tablets.

Our discussions now reflect these new developments, and especially take into fuller consideration the consequences of the newest tablet from Pherae (our no. 28), which had become available to us only at the very moment that we were finishing the first edition. We have also reflected upon yet another document that appeared very recently, the Dionysiac papyrus from the Green Family Collection, which Dirk Obbink made available in a preliminary edition in 2012. Some of these recent developments necessitated changes in our six original chapters. Others are reflected in our new Appendix 2, on the Pherae tablets, and in our new Appendix 3, we present and discuss some intriguing parallel documents from Roman Palestine. Finally, in a discussion that is now called Appendix 1 (the former Appendix 1 taking a new place as Appendix 4) we stand back and reconsider, in the face of new evidence and recent discussions, the question of how "Orphism" might best be defined, drawing in particular on late antique evidence.

Given that Bernabé's *Orphicorum Fragmenta* offers a very thorough critical edition of all the tablets, including (in the supplements to vol. 3 of 2007) the new ones, we saw no need to change our policy of offering a readable but not fully critical text.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Although this new edition, like the original book, is the result of intensive discussion between the two authors, we have continued our practice of indicating which of us took the main responsibility for shaping and writing each chapter or appendix. We thank Katrina Väänänen, graduate student in the Department of Classics at OSU, for her great help with the indexes.

Columbus, Ohio, September 1, 2012

CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	viii
<i>Preface to the first edition</i>	ix
<i>Preface to the second edition</i>	xi
1 The tablets: An edition and translation	1
<i>Concordance</i>	48
2 A history of scholarship on the tablets	50
3 The myth of Dionysus	66
4 The eschatology behind the tablets	94
5 Dionysiac mystery cults and the Gold Tablets	137
6 Orpheus, his poetry, and sacred texts	167
<i>Appendix 1: Orphism in the twenty-first century</i>	187
<i>Appendix 2: The tablets from Pherae</i>	195
<i>Appendix 3: The tablets from Roman Palestine</i>	208
<i>Appendix 4: Additional Bacchic texts</i>	214
1 The Olbia bone tablets	214
2 Bacchic inscriptions from Olbia	216
3 The Gurôb Papyrus	217
4 The Edict of Ptolemy IV Philopator	218
<i>Notes</i>	221
<i>Bibliography</i>	257
<i>Subject index</i>	273
<i>Index of ancient texts</i>	278

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

<i>Frontispiece</i>	Walter Burkert, Fritz Graf, and Sarah Iles Johnston	iv
1	Gold Tablet from Thessaly. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California	51
2	Cavallari's drawings of the Timpone Grande	53
3	Apulian amphora by the Ganymede Painter. Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig	63
4	Apulian volute crater by the Darius Painter. Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH	64
5	Ivory pyxis with Dionysiac scenes. Museo Archeologico Civico di Bologna	153
6	Drawings of the Olbia tablets. Museum of the Hermitage, St Petersburg	215

Map

Map of find-spots	2
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THE TABLETS

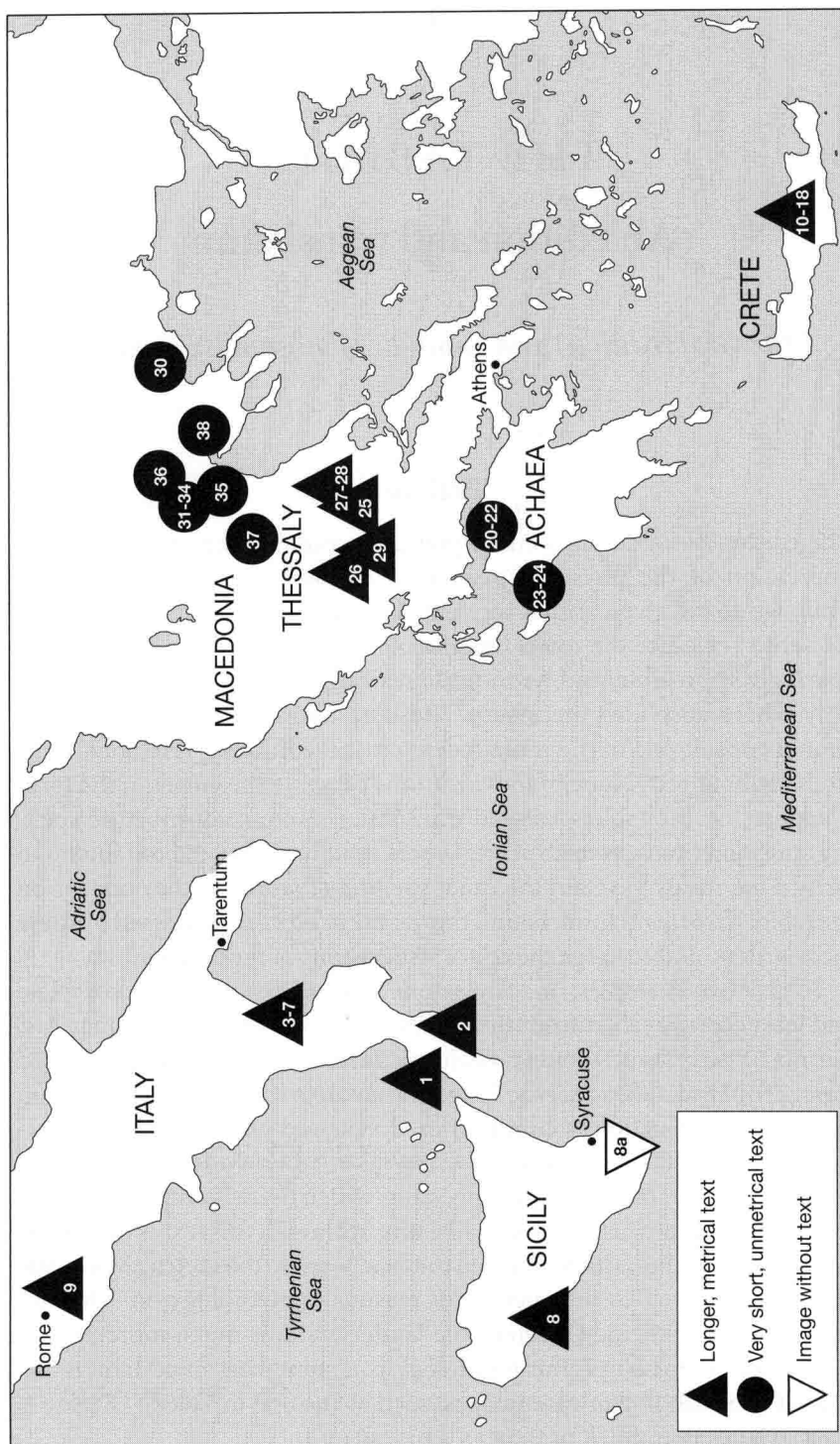
An edition and translation

Fritz Graf (edition) and Sarah Iles Johnston (translation)

Preface

The edition has a double aim: to present a readable text, and to give an impression of the physical appearance of each individual document. Thus, we do not give a critical text, either in a philological or an epigraphical sense – we use the often threatening panoply of such an edition as sparingly as possible, and we indicate readings and scholarly conjectures only where absolutely necessary.¹ Readers interested in these matters should consult one of the more recent critical editions, preferably Bernabé's Teubner text. None of these editions preserve the Greek in the form it appears on the tablets, instead translating it into uniform Attic spelling and sometimes reconstructing words that the writer did not intend to write. One needs to retain the exact spelling of words as they appear on the tablets in order to understand the degree of literacy possessed by these local writers, and to judge the editorial decisions of modern editors.

To give two examples, one trivial, one less so. First, the most complete and least corrupt tablet from the Timpone Piccolo in Thurii (Zuntz A 1, our no. 5) twice writes double-s before a hard consonant inside of a word (ἄσπεροβλήτα 4, δεσσποίνας 7; against μακάριστε in 9): the gemination of -σ- in this position is common in Greek, and no editor should normalize it.² Second, line 14 of the Hipponion tablet ends with the word ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙ, i.e., βασιλεῖ, "to the king," after which there is ample space: the writer thus wanted his line to end like this. Although this text is metrically correct, many editors have changed the final word to the metrically equally correct βασιλείαι, "to the queen," for reasons of mythology: in "Orphic" myth, Persephone, the Queen of the Underworld, is much more prominent than her husband. But mythology is a somewhat uncertain guide: at least in South Italian vase images, such as the one in Toledo (Figure 4, p. 64), Hades is as much present as is his queen.



Unlike in any other edition, the arrangement of the texts here follows geographical criteria. To group them in A and B texts, following Zuntz's arrangement, is impossible because some of the more recent texts clearly override such a neat dichotomy; to group them according to a reconstructed narrative, as Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal do, begs the question of how they belong together. A geographically determined arrangement not only avoids these problems, but also makes manifest the local groupings and idiosyncracies of these texts: after all, they sometimes belonged to local groups and always attest to the activities of a local *orpheotelestēs*.³

We use quotation marks to indicate portions of the texts that either are phrases to be repeated by the addressee, i.e., by the soul of the deceased, or are spoken by someone other than the main voice of the tablet in question.

The bibliographical data we have provided list the most important first editions and refer, in an abbreviated form, to the most recent critical editions:

G. Zuntz, *Persephone. Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

C. Riedweg, "Anhang: Übersicht und Texte der bisher publizierten Goldblättchen," in: Riedweg 1998, 389–98 [uses the expanded classification of Zuntz].

G. Pugliese Carratelli, *Le lamine d'oro orfiche. Istruzioni per il viaggio oltremondano degli iniziati Greci* (Milan: Adelphi, 2001) (with an important correction in *La Parola del Passato* 53, 2002, 228–30).⁴

Alberto Bernabé, *Poetae Epici Graeci. II Orphicorum et Orphicis similia testimonia et fragmenta*, fasc. 2 (Munich: Saur, 2004); the numbers with the prefix L refer to the edition in Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 245–71.

Robert Parker and Maria Stamatopoulou, "A new funerary gold leaf from Pherai," *Arkhaiologike Ephemeris* 143 (2004 [2007]), 1–32.

Marisa Tortorelli-Ghidini, *Figli della terra e del cielo stellato. Testi Orfici con traduzione e commento* (Naples: D'Auria Editore, 2006) [only the long texts; abbreviated MTG].

Yannis Tzifopoulos, "Paradise" Earned. *The Bacchic-Orphic Gold Lamellae of Crete*. Hellenic Studies 23 (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2010), 255–80 [uses an expanded classification of Zuntz/Riedweg].

Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, ed., *The "Orphic" Gold Tablets and Greek Religion. Further Along the Path* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 16–48 [uses the same expanded classification of Zuntz/Riedweg as Tzifopoulos].

Magna Graecia

Calabria

1 Hipponion

From the cist-grave of a woman, around 400 BCE; now in the Museo Archeologico Statale di Vibo. The rectangular gold tablet, folded several times, was found lying on the upper chest of the skeleton and was perhaps attached to its neck by a tiny string.

Ed. princ.: Pugliese Carratelli and Foti 1974; new readings Russo 1996.

Coll.: Riedweg/Tzifopoulos/Edmonds B 10 [not in Zuntz]; Pugliese Carratelli 2001, I A 1; Bernabé, *OF* 474 (= L 1); MTG 1.

Μναμοσύνας τόδε ἔργον, ἐπεὶ ἂν μέλλῃσι θανέσθαι
 εἰς Ἀΐδαο δόμοδς εὐέρεας. ἔστ' ἐπὶ δ<ε>ξιά κρένα,
 παρ δ' αὐτὰν ἐστακῦα λευκὰ κυπάρισος·
 ἔνθα κατερχόμεναι ψυκαὶ νεκῶν ψύχονται. 4
 ταύτας τὰς κράνας μεδὲ σχεδὸν ἐνγύθεν ἔλθεις.
 πρόσθεν δὲ ἡευρέσεις τὰς Μναμοσύνας ἀπὸ λίμνας
 ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον· φύλακες δὲ ἐπύπερθεν ἔασι.
 τοὶ δὲ σε εἰρέσσονται ἐν φρασὶ πευκαλίμαισι 8
 ὃ τι δὲ ἐξερέεις Ἀΐδος σκότος ὀρφέεντος.
 εἶπον· ὕος Γᾶς ἔμι καὶ Ὀρανὸ ἀστερόεντος.
 δίψαι δ' ἔμ' αἶος καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι· ἀλὰ δότ' ὀ[κα
 ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ πιέναι τῆς Μνεμοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμν[α]ς. 12
 καὶ δὴ τοι ἐρέδσιν ἡυποχθονίδι βασιλεῖ·
 καὶ δὲ τοι δόσδσι πιέν τῆς Μναμοσύνας ἀπὸ λίμνα[ς].
 καὶ δὲ καὶ σὺ πιδὼν ὁδὸν ἔρχεα<ι>, ἡάν τε καὶ ἄλλοι
 μύσται καὶ βᾶχχοι ἡερὰν στείχῃσι κλεινοί. 16

1 ἔργον Burkert; EPION tablet.

9 ὀρφ<ν>ήεντος Ebert, in Luppe, *ZPE* 30 (1978), 25; OPOEENTOS tablet.

10 IOΣI API MI tablet, Sacco, *ZPE* 137 (2001), 27; <η>ιὸς Βαρέας καὶ Pugliese Carratelli, *ed. princ.*; YΟΣΓΑΣΕMI, i.e., ὕος Γᾶς ἔμι Russo 1996 (Γᾶς or Γαίας earlier editors).

13 ΕΡΕΟΣI Lazzarini, *Annali Pisa* 17 (1982), 331; ΕΛΕΟΣI Pugliese Carratelli, *ed. princ.*; ΗΥΠΟΧΘΟΝΙΟΙΒΑΣΙΛΕI tablet; some editors prefer βασιλεί<αι>.

I

- 1 This is the work of Memory, when you are about to die
- 2 down to the well-built house of Hades. There is a spring at the
right side,
- 3 and standing by it a white cypress.
- 4 Descending to it, the souls of the dead refresh themselves.
- 5 Do not even go near this spring!
- 6 Ahead you will find from the Lake of Memory,
- 7 cold water pouring forth; there are guards before it.
- 8 They will ask you, with astute wisdom,
- 9 what you are seeking in the darkness of murky Hades.
- 10 Say, "I am a son of Earth and starry Sky,
- 11 I (masculine) am parched with thirst and am dying; but quickly
grant me
- 12 cold water from the Lake of Memory to drink."
- 13 And they will announce you to the Chthonian King,
- 14 and they will grant you to drink from the Lake of Memory.
- 15 And you, too, having drunk, will go along the sacred road on
which other
- 16 glorious initiates and *bacchoi* travel.