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A GOLD LAMELLA FOR ‘BLESSED’ ABALALA

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Abstract: This article examines a previously unpublished gold *lamella* of unknown provenance, datable on palaeographical grounds to the 1st century BCE, give-or-take a half century, either side. The tablet preserves three words written in Greek letters that may contain a Greco-Persian formula of protection in the afterlife for its bearer, Abalala, a name of pre-Islamic extraction. The study compares the formula with those on a number of shorter ‘Orphic’ gold *lamellae* to show that the tiny piece represents a ‘*Totenpaß*’ for the beneficent dead, rather than a protective charm (phylactery) with the usual *voces magicae*, although the distinction between magic words and meaningful text is not always clear in such instances.

Keywords: Gold amulet, Orphic gold *lamellae*, *Totenpaß*, Greco-Persian afterlife beliefs, Abalala.

The small gold tablet, whose *editio princeps* is presented here in honour of Németh György on the occasion of his 60th birthday, belongs to a private collection in Los Angeles, California. Its provenance is unknown, but it may have come from unsupervised excavations in Turkey (Asia Minor), or Syria. It is an unusually small slip of thin gold foil, measuring only L. 3.0 cm. x H. 1.2 cm., with two ‘puncture’ holes at the top, left-of-centre, and two smaller ones near the right side, in the middle. The upper left hole has caused a rip, running about two-thirds the way down the foil.¹ The corners are rounded, with those of the right side considerably more so.² The surface was engraved horizontally across the inner face of the tablet with three lines of upright Greek majuscules, datable on palaeographic grounds from the late 2nd century BCE to the early 1st cen-

¹ The larger holes may have already existed on the tablet before it was engraved, because at least the second of the two has caused the scribe to write his letter around the hole (between the A / O).

² For examples of early *lamellae* with similarly rounded edges, cf. Kotansky 1994, 113-117 (= no. 28 an Augustan-era gold *lamella*, similarly written across the width of the tablet); Kotansky 1994, 265-269 (= no. 51, a 1st cent. BCE - 1 cent. CE exorcism of the womb; and further, Kotansky 1994, 107-112 (= no. 27, a 2nd-3rd cent. gold, ‘Orphic’ tablet used as an amulet). See also the description, below, of earlier ‘Orphic’ tablets with rounded edges.

ture CE.³ The *alpha*'s are squarish, with both high and low horizontal cross-bars, leaving some looking closer to *delta*'s; the *rho*'s have long tails, curving backwards; and the *upsilon*'s are 'Y'-shaped, written with two strokes. The surface of the foil has a 'crumbled' look, yielding numerous vertical creases, but it does not appear to have been methodically folded. There is no capsule or carrying-case associated with the piece.

The tablet preserves what appear to be three names, or words, one of which shows a Greek root (χρυσο-):

ΑΡΤΑΟΥΝ
ΑΒΑΛΑΛΑ
ΧΡΥΣΟΧΕΧ

At first glance, one might assume that we have nothing here other than the usual magical amulet (φυλακτήριον) written on a gold sheet,⁴ preserving magical names for protection: αρταουν, αβαλαλα, χρυσοχεχ, sc. "(O) *Artaoun*, *Abalala*, *Chrysochech* (sc., protect me!)." Such arcane magical words are common on the magical *lamellae*, gemstones, and papyri, so that it probably might be most judicious to see here nothing other than the usual *voces magicae*, whose exact purpose, however, would remain unstated and unknown. On the other hand, there are formidable reasons for reading more into these words than the usual magical names. First, the words hardly belong to the known repertoire of later magical names such as 'Ιάω, Σαβαώθ, 'Αδωνάι, 'Αβρασαξ, Σεσεγγενβαρφαραγγης, etc.; nothing on this tablet is readily recognizable from the lexicon of known magical nomenclature. The names remain, for the most part, unattested.⁵ Secondly, there are no verbal imperatives (e.g., διαφυ-

³ The tablet and hand are reminiscent of the so-called 'ΘΑΡΚΙ'-gold *lamellae* dated from roughly the 2nd century BCE to the 1st century CE. See Blumell 2011, 167f.; Kotansky, 1991a, 115f., 131 (notes 56-57), with additional references. Blumell 2011, 166, seems ambivalent in dating his example from "between the first and third centuries A.D" and in referring to it as an "amulet" with comparison to amulets of later date, while concurring that previously published pieces are as early as the 2nd cent. BCE. It is not an amulet, at least not in the traditional sense. Graf – Johnston 2013, 208 are incorrect in dating these to the 2nd or 3rd cent. CE. The hand is similar to, but perhaps slightly later than the Cretan 'Orphic' gold *lamellae*: Tzifopoulos 2010: 3rd (or 2nd) cent. BCE to the 1st cent. BCE. The hand of our tablet is certainly older than the Brigham Young gold *lamella* published by Blumell.

⁴ Kotansky 1991a; Kotansky 1994.

⁵ In *PGM* III. 433 permutations of a divine name with the elements χρυσσ and χρυσσ-, occur in company with an invocation of the Egyptian sun-god, Amoun. In fact, all the spells and rites of *PGM* III (= Paris, Musée du Louvre, no. 2396, P. Mimaout, frgs. 1-4) seem explicitly related to the Sun, and offer prayers or references to Helios, Helios-Mithras, Amun, or the solar bark of Re; cf. also *PGM* IV. 458 (and context); hence, the 'golden'-elements throughout *PGM*

λάξον, σῶσον, etc.) that identify the formula as specifically magical. Further, we find no symbols or vowel-series associated with such names, as is often the case with phylacteries that preserve short formulas.⁶ Nor do the words contain the usual angel-names.⁷ Finally, the gold leaf lies outside the usual date for the *floruit* of the gold (or silver) *phylaktēria*, just as its tiny size (and shape) seems untypical for these protective amulets.

The findspots of most of the magical *lamellae*, even if not known, are usually ancient tombs, the most profitable sites for professional archaeologists (and illegal treasure-hunters) to excavate. Graves yield the most accessible finds. The working hypothesis for the discovery of magical *lamellae* in tombs has always been that the owner wore the amulet in life for protection and then had the piece deposited as a personal grave-good. It has also been suggested that the lifetime amulet could have served the dual function of protection in the afterlife, as well. What has not been carefully addressed is the possibility that some of the non-specific, or ambiguously worded, Roman-period gold leaves thought to be simple φυλακτήρια for the living, may in fact have been specifically designed as post-mortem talismans, and nothing more. We know this to be the case with the exceptional Caecilia Secundina phylactery from Rome, of late date (2nd-3rd date CE), that preserves a variant of the famous A-group of ‘Orphic’ gold leaves from centuries earlier (see above, n. 2). But here we can also speak of other ‘magical’ examples where no specific protective prayer is found in the text of the ‘amulet,’ such as the gold *lamella* written for Maria, wife of the emperor Honorius.⁸ Its being engraved with nothing other than the names of the four archangels prevents us from knowing its immediate purpose. Since it was discovered in the grave of the Roman Empress, it could well have been written as a post-mortem talisman, that is, as a *Totenpaß* for the deceased, much in the manner of the Orphic gold *lamellae*.

This, in fact, is how we choose to interpret the unusual gold *lamella* presented here. It preserves a formula that was written specifically for its owner as a post-mortem ‘spell’ to assist the soul’s ascent into the next world, that is, the gold leaf is a talisman for crossing over into the afterlife. Our interpretation hinges on the reading of the arcane elements of the text as foreign words whose

III, and elsewhere, are all specifically related to aspects of the solar god (see discussion to follow).

⁶ Cf., e.g., Kotansky 1994, 1f. (= no. 1: magical symbols + Φνεβενοουθ = Egy., *p3 nb (n) n3 ntr.w*, “The Lord of the Gods”).

⁷ Cf., e.g., Kotansky 1994, 104-106 (= no. 26, “Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Ouriel”), written on a gold leaf from Rome, found in the tomb of Maria, wife of the Roman emperor Honorius.

⁸ Cf. Kotansky 1994, 104-106 (= no. 26 [prev. note]); see also Kotansky 1994, 3-23 (esp. 10-12 = no. 2); 73-75 (= no. 15); 211-215 (no. 39), etc.

decipherment points to a specific reference to afterworld beliefs, especially those circulating among the ancient Persians and their neighboring Greeks. The words of the gold leaf, for the most part, may not be meaningless syllables at all, but words whose sense would have been known to the maker, and conceivably to the ‘initiated’ wearer, as well; yet, since they prove to be foreign words written in Greek (just as *voces magicae* ultimately are), the syllables themselves become secret formulas, or powerful ‘mantras’, whose interpretation remains unknown to the masses. To the informed ‘insider’ they are recognizable words of power; to the ‘outsider’ they remain mysterious and arcane syllables. The distinction between ‘meaningful’ text and ‘secret’ formulas becomes subtly blurred, perhaps even intentionally so, when it comes to texts such as this. We do not, in point of fact, know whether the words of the gold leaf were understood as meaningful or merely viewed as esoteric passwords for the deceased.

A key to the interpretation of our text as meaningful and decipherable rests in the first two words, the second of which we observe is probably not a ‘magical’ word at all, but a personal name, Abalala. Ἀβαλαλα is the Greek spelling of a name of probable Arabic (or at least Semitic) derivation, its sense being that of * *ʾAb* + *ʾal-ʾAllāh* > *Abalala* = “(My) father is *the* (god) Allah,” the supreme deity of Islam, who, though, in pre-Islamic times was considered a pagan god “originating in polytheism.”⁹ One could compare, e.g., in Persian **Baga-pitā* = “God is my father,” hypothesized from late Babylonian **Ba-ga-pi-du** (cf. Mitra-abū’a = “Miθra is my father”).¹⁰ We suggest here, therefore, that *Abalala* would be equivalent to “(My) Father is the God (of gods),” that is, *the* God among the pantheon of all known deities. For parallel examples in Hebrew onomastics, note *ʾAbiyyāh(ū)*, “My father is Yah(u),” *ʾAbīʾēl*, “My father is God,” *ʾĀbīhū* / *ʾbyhw*, “My (divine) father is (the god),” etc.¹¹ The Arabic name for “God” is cognate in the Semitic languages, of course; cf. Syriac *ʾAlāhā*, Qatabian / Sabaeen, *ʾlh*, etc.¹² Although *ʾAb(i)*- names are common in the non-

⁹ Robin 2012, 304. Or, we could have simply *Ab*, “father” + **al-ilāh*, “the God” (> *Allāh*). It is hypothesized that Allah derives originally from the Arabic for “*the* god” (sc., of all gods). See, further, the end of note 13, below.

¹⁰ Zadok 2004, 3, 9.

¹¹ Zadok 1988, 45, 49, 53, 54. On the presence of the pronoun, “my”, or its absence, note Zadok 1988, 45: “[There] seems to be a strong reason to regard the *-i-* as a connective vowel and not as a suffixed possessive pronoun 1st pers. sg.” (with comments on p. 46).

¹² Cf. Ricks 1989, 11, s.v. On the use of the term Old Arabic for pre-Islamic Arabic, see Macdonald 2009b, 307-319. We cannot know from the name where the Abalala gold leaf comes from, since those who identified themselves as ‘Arab’, as Macdonald 2009b, 280-284 notes, are found throughout the Greco-Roman East, from Egypt to Mesopotamia; from Yemen to Syria, and elsewhere; cf. also Kotansky 1991b, for the gold tablet from the environs of Bostra, in Arabia.

Arabic Semitic languages, one might expect, rather, *'Ab<d>alala*, “Servant of the God,” for Arabic, were it not for the fact that Abalala appears to be attested on a handful of ancient Safaitic rock inscriptions, as well as in modern Arabic.¹³ Our Abalala would supposedly be the ‘owner’ of the charm. By identifying a probable personal name here, we can then look to the rest of the series of arcane syllables for other possible identifications that might yield sense.

For example, our gold tablet’s first word, Ἄρταου, seems to give us an important word of Old Persian derivation. The Greek diphthong -ου-, especially if followed by a vowel, such as *alpha* (although this is not always necessary), corresponds to /w-/ or /v-/ in foreign names (e. g., Σεουερα = Lat. Severa, etc.). Thus, here we have Ἄρταου(α)ν = OPers. *artāvan-*, adj. “righteous, blessed”; see Kent 1953, 171 (s.v.): “adj. ‘righteous, blessed’, denoting the blissful state of the true religionists after death: identical with Av. *ašāvan-* ‘characterized by Arta or Asha, righteous’, Skt. *Ṛtāvan-* ‘true to sacred law’ ... from **Rta*, OP *arta-*, with lengthened final vowel, + adj. suffix *-van-* (§30, §155.IV). *artāvā* nsm. (§124.5, §187) XPh 48, 55.” The word would presumably be identical, or similar to, that found in Middle Iranian (esp. Arsacid Pahlavi, sc. Parthian) which directly descended from OPers., although it is not attested in the scant linguistic record.

Kent’s reference to the X(erxes) P(ersepolis) H. tablet is the trilingual Daeva Inscription (Persian / Elamite / Akkadian) that declares the extent of Xerxes’ empire and his accomplishments. It ends with the promise that if Ahuramazda and Arta are properly worshipped they will provide benefits for the living and

¹³ In the Safaitic script used by the nomads of the Syro-Arabian desert, Abalala may be attested in the name *'bll*, information I owe to the kindness of Professor Michael C. A. Macdonald, who writes (*per litteras*): “After a quick look at various onomastica, the only possible parallel I can find is in Safaitic (one of the scripts used by the nomads of the Syro-Arabian desert between the mid-first millennium BCE and the fourth century CE). The script is purely consonantal without any *matres lectiones*, and the name *'bll* occurs [five] times which might represent Abalala, though it is more likely to come from a root B-L-L.” I give the examples from the OCIANA website provided by Prof. Macdonald (<http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd#ociana>): (1) *l {s'} bn 'bll bn Wrs²* = “By {s'} son of *'bll* son of *Wrs²*” (LP 848: al Ḥifna Syria); (2) *l S¹wd bn mrrn bn 'bll* = “By S¹wd son of Mrn son of *'bll*” (LP 859: al Ḥifna, Syria); (3) *l 'bll* = “By *'bll*” (CSNS 905: Jordan); (4) *l 'bll bn 'ly bnbr----rh-hl* = “By {*'bll*} son of *'ly* son of Br----r---” (CEDS 36: Site: EDS 80-1); (5) *l ml bn 'bll* = “By Ml son of Bll” (Aba NS 1064: Site 1). As for the modern Arabic name, a random Internet search brought up several males surnamed Abalala, especially among Saudis: Badr Abalala, Faisal Abalala, Khalid Abalala, Mohamed Abalala, Mohammed Abalala, Sultan Abalala, Turki Shjaan Abalala, etc. Abalala is also the name of a village in the Ondo province of Nigeria. For a magic gold *lamella* for victory mentioning the Arabic name Ἀβ(α)δανχα (among others), cf. Kotansky 1991b, 50f., on lines 24, 28 (= Kotansky 1994, 331-346, esp. 341), with reference to Αβδαλλας = “servant of Allah” on an inscription from Il-Umta’iyeh, Syria, published by Littmann.

the dead. The relevant lines (48, 55) read as follows: “Thou who (shalt be) hereafter, if thou shalt think, ‘Happy may I be when living, *and when dead may I be blessed,*’ (utā : marta : artāvā : ahaniy) have respect for the law which Ahuramazda has established ...” etc. + “... he both becomes happy while living, *and becomes blessed when dead* (utā : marta : artāvā : bavatiy) ...” etc.¹⁴ With this interpretation, then, the phrase Ἀρταουαν Ἀβαλαλα would mean, “Blessed (or, justified) is Abalala ...”, and have in mind his beatific state in the afterlife as an individual who is “blessed” or “righteous”; cf. also Kent 1953, 170, s.v., “*arta-* sb. ‘Law, Justice, an archangel attending Ahuramazda: ptc. to *ar-* as sb., Av. *aša-* and *arəta-*, Skt. *ṛtá-* ‘cosmic order,’” etc. + the names *Artaxšaça* (= Artaxerxes, from *arta-* ‘justice’ + *xšaça*, ‘kingdom,’ ‘Having a kingdom of justice’).¹⁵ The sense, then, is that the bearer of the charm, Abalala, had this inscribed gold leaf buried with him in death as a secret token, or protective device, to help carry him over into the next world and to identify him before his divine interlocutor(s) as a person who has been judged ‘blessed’ or ‘justified.’ Such post-mortem beliefs were widespread among the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Persians, and later Gnostics and Neo-Platonists, not to speak of numerous other religious groups, worldwide.¹⁶

This leaves us with the final element, Χρυσοχεχ, a name that, at first glance, defies easy analysis, despite the patently Greek element, χρυσο-, “gold”. A tentative working solution suggests that this is a *Beiname* of the dei-

¹⁴ Kent 1953: 150f. Although this text was written on stone tablets, others were also written on gold (or silver) tablets: **AmH**, **AsH** (Kent 1953, 107, 116); **DPh** (two gold; two silver: Kent 1953, 109, 136f.); **DH** (gold + silver: Kent 1953: 111f., 147); **A²Hc** (Kent 1953, 114, 155). These, remarkably, contain standardized formulas for protection of the early, or pre-Achaemenid, rulers, on (e.g., Ariaramnes, Arsames, Darius, Artaxerxes II), from the 7th-4th century BCE. The formula ends, e.g., in a sentence such as, “Me may Ahuramazda protect (*pātuv*), and the kingdom which he bestowed upon me, and my royal house.” (*Pātuv* is the 3rd sg. impv. of *pā-* “protect” [Kent 1953, 71, 194]; it recalls the protective formulas of many of the later period gold magical *lamellae*).

¹⁵ Kent 1953, 171, with reference to Artaxerxes I (r. 465-424 BCE), son of Xerxes; Artaxerxes II (404-358 BCE), son of Darius; and Artaxerxes III (359-338 BCE), son of Artaxerxes II. Remarkably, similarly formed Sanskrit names are already attested among the Akkadian syllabic texts of the Tell El-Amarna tablets, in the 14th cent. BCE: **ar-ta-ma-an-ya** (= Sanskrit, *Ṛta* + *mānyate*, ‘remembering the divine law’); **ar-ta-aš-šu-ma-ra** (= Sanskrit, *Ṛta* + *smārati*, ‘thinking of the divine law’); and **ar-ta-ta-a-maš** (= Sanskrit, *Rta* = *dhāma*, ‘whose abode is the divine law’); see Hess, 1993, 37-39. It should be noted that the adjective *artāvān* (*arta* + the adjectival suffix *-van-*) is *artāvā* in the nominative singular masculine (as in the examples given above); but one need not expect exact transliteration into Greek, which tends to Hellenize orthography (cf. *Dārayava^hu* = Δαρεῖος, etc.) and to close open syllables at the end of words (hence, αρταουν not, e.g., αρταου, as with Δαρεῖος, above), or to leave foreign words uninflected.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Culianu 1983.

ty, magical or otherwise, before whom Abalala has been judged righteous in the world to come. Its “golden” prefixal element suggests a solar deity, and this is exactly what we propose to have: Chrysochech is an epithet of the supreme Sun-God, with an unexplained suffixal element -χεχ, (-*chech*), which morphologically may serve nothing other than to identify the word as a proper name: sc., “the Golden-One.” Another possibility, again, would be to read the suffix as a Persian word. If the suffixal element can be identified, e. g., with Persian *taχt*, we could posit the more specific meaning, “the Golden-Throned One”.¹⁷ In any case, the most likely candidate for our figure, based on the supposed Persian background for our *lamella* and its formula, would be either Mithra-Helios,¹⁸ or Vohu Manah¹⁹ (or, possibly, even Ahura Mazda, himself).²⁰

Thus we propose that the best way to interpret our unusual little gold leaf is to see it as carrying a formula for the deceased, as one identified as being among the beneficent dead, sc.: “Abalala is blessed (or, justified) before

¹⁷ If χεχ < Persian **taχt*, with dissimilation; cf. Pahlavi *taχt* = “throne” (< Avestan *θvaχšta*, “throne”) in e.g., Modi 1917, 242 (*takht* < *thwakshata*). See further on note 19, below.

¹⁸ On Helios-Mithra and Apollo-Mithra, esp. during the reign of the Antiochus I (Theos) of Commagene (r. 70-38 BCE), who effected a wide-ranging Zoroastrian-Greek syncretism, see Boyce – Grenet 1991, 321-337, with emphasis, too, that the leading *magi* of Commagene in the 1st cent. BCE would have spoken Greek (p. 329). Cf. further, Boyce – Grenet 1991, 479: “Mithra’s association with the sun appears to have been another major factor in his popularity and conspicuousness in the Hellenistic age ...”, and further 479-483, esp. 480: “In Vedic India the sun was spoken of as the ‘eye’ of Mithra and Varuṇa, as a pair, and is said to have reported to them daily the sinless among men” (R̥g Veda 7.60.1); and, further, 481, on Strabo’s (15.3.13) reference to the Persians of Cappodocia calling Helios Mithra, with additional references to the Sun as a Judge over the earth.

¹⁹ On Vohu Manah, see Boyce – Genet (1991), 33, n. 121, esp. in reference to Antiochus’ statement that his own blessed soul (*psychē*) would ascend to the throne of Zeus – Oromasdes: “According to V[endidat] XIX.31, A[rdā] V[irāz] N[āmag] XI.1, it is Vohu Manah who rising from a *golden throne*, receives the soul at the entry into Paradise ...”. Vohu Manah (Omanus) is equated with the “Good Spirit” said to have given Zoroaster his laws; see Diodorus Siculus 1.94.2; cf. Boyce – Grenet 1991, 158, n. 26; further, Plutarch 369E-370C = *De Iside et Osiride*, 46-47, where Vohu Manah, Aša, and Khšathra Vairya are each equated with Εὐνοία, Ἀλήθεια, and Εὐνομία, respectively; see Boyce – Grenet 1991, 458f. For the fuller context of Vendidad 19, 31f., note Boyce 1982, 80: “(31) Vohu Manah rises from his golden throne. Vohu Manah exclaims: ‘How have you come here, O just one (*ašāvan*), from the perilous world to the world without peril.’ (32) Contented, the souls of the just proceed to the golden thrones of Ahura Mazda and the Amesha Spentas, to the House of Song, the dwelling-place of Ahura Mazda, the dwelling-place of the Amesha Spentas, the dwelling-place of the just.” The scenario is remarkably close to that which we find in the Orphic tablets (discussed below), with the dialogue between the deceased soul and the guardians, ending in the soul’s eventual journey to the seats and realms of the blessed.

²⁰ For Ahura Mazda as the Sun-God, cf. Boyce – Grenet 1991, 479f.

Chrysochech.”²¹ Although our gold tablet may have some ‘magical’ aspects in recording foreign names and elements, at least to outsiders, its closest parallels come from classical and Hellenistic post-mortem beliefs, especially those found among the adherents of the so-called ‘Orphic’ gold *lamellae*.

Remarkably, a number of formulas on some shorter ‘Orphic’ texts offer some insightful parallels to the formula of our gold tablet. Many of these newly discovered *lamellae*, from the Peloponessus and the vicinity of Macedonia, contain nothing other than a single personal name (in the nominative) engraved into the middle of the small gold leaf: e.g., Εὐξένη (Euxena),²² Φιλημήνα (Philemena),²³ Πάλαθα (Palatha),²⁴ Φιλόξενα (Philoxena),²⁵ Ἐπιγένης (Epi- genes),²⁶ Ἡγησίσκα (Hegesiska),²⁷ Φυλομάγα (Phylomaga),²⁸ Βόττακος (Bottakos),²⁹ Ξεναρίστη (Xenariste),³⁰ and Ἄνδρων (Andron).³¹ It is worth-

²¹ Understanding the foreign name as indeclinable, and hence in the dative case, as in the examples, below, in respect of Φερσεφόνη on the Pella/Dion tablet.

²² Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (F1 496i) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 32: no. 23, Elis 1: “From a pithos-shaped grave of a woman (rich jewelry, including a diadem); a small rectangular piece of gold foil, with rounded short sides; early 3rd cent. BCE.” In the quoted material to follow, the names found in parentheses refer to the *Ed. princ.*, as cited *ad locc.* in Graf – Johnston 2013. This and the following texts are also alpha-numerically assigned **L16a-n** in Bernabé – San Cristóbal 2008, 268f., with translation, discussion, and additional biography, 161-166.

²³ Edmonds 2011, 39 (F1 496j) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 32: no. 24, Elis 2: “From a 3rd-cent. BCE grave of a young woman: a piece of gold foil like a ‘myrtle leaf(?)’ (Themelis), found under the cranium, i.e., probably placed in the mouth of the deceased.”

²⁴ Edmonds 2011, 39 (F13) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 32: no. 24a, Elis 3: “From a cist-grave of a woman (mirror) in Daphiotissa near Elis (chance find); ‘a small olive leaf’ (Lazarides), end of 4th/early 3rd cent. BCE.”

²⁵ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (F6 496a) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 42: no. 32, Pella/Dion 2: “From a girl’s grave (T3, with female jewelry) close by, similar to and contemporary with no. 31 [see note, below]; an almost identical leaf, the inscription scratched lengthwise in the bottom half.”

²⁶ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (F12) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 42: no. 33, Pella/Dion 3: “From a Hellenistic grave; gold disk.”

²⁷ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (F11 496f) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 44: no. 34, Pella/Dion 4: “From the cist-grave of a girl of late 4th cent. BCE; a small gold leaf.”

²⁸ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (F3 496h) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 44: no. 35, Methone: “From a 4th cent. BCE cist-grave; placed inside the skull (i.e., in the mouth) of the deceased; presumably rectangular piece of gold foil; the grave couch with Dionysiac ornaments.”

²⁹ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (F10 496g) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 44: no. 36, Europos: “From tumulus β in modern Toumba Paionias, north of Europos (= ancient Gortynia, Hatzopoulos, *BE* 1996, no. 261?); a rectangular piece of gold foil; late 4th/early 3rd cent. BCE.”

³⁰ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39, 47: “F8 / Pydna, Pieria / 336-300 [BCE] / female / gold coin of Philip II / in the mouth / Inhumation in cist-grave with pit-grave immediately to the south S: ivory fragments from the bier, bronze ladle, bronze bell, a lead pyxis and seven clay vases.”

while to note, too, moreover, that several of these names are non-Greek, suggesting resident aliens from beyond the pale of the Hellenistic world: Palatha, Hegesiska, Phylamaga, and Bottakos, for example. Indeed, the name of Xenariste itself means “excellent foreigner.” It is exotic, non-Greek names such as these, found singularly on small sheets of gold, that provide the most telling evidence that ‘foreign-sounding’ words may indeed preserve personal names, like that suggested for our ‘Abalala’, which, although of different ethnicity, deviates little in the strangeness of a Phylamaga, Palatha, or Bottakos. Slightly longer versions of the same kinds of texts suggest that these names are meant to identify persons who are *initiated*, *pious*, *redeemed*, or otherwise *justified* in the afterlife, sc. “Euxene (is justified)”, or “Philomena (is an initiate).” For example, a group of gold leaves from cist-graves, of Hellenistic date, at Aigion in Achaea contain texts that state in very simple terms that the named person is an “initiate”: sc., Δεξίλαος μύστας, “Dexilaos (is) an initiate”,³² Φίλων μύστας, “Philo (is) an initiate”,³³ or simply, μύστης, “an initiate”,³⁴ (that is, with no personal name added at all). Longer texts begin to ‘expand’ the simple formulas to include different words for the status of the redeemed, or to add words stating *before* whom, or *in respect to* which deity, the pious are seen to stand in good stead. The most basic of these, though, just adds some kind of ‘greeting’ formula, sometimes without the owner’s name, and where the recipient of the greeting is the welcoming god or goddess, without mention of any status in respect of righteousness or blessedness: sc. Πλούτωνι / Φερσεφόνη[ι], “To Plouton, to Persephone”,³⁵ [Πλού]τωνι καὶ Φ/[ερσ]οπόνει χάρειν, “To Plouton and Persephone: greetings!”³⁶ Φιλίστη Φερσεφόνη χάρειν, “Philiste

³¹ Edmonds 2011 [2104], 39, 48: F9, same circumstances as above (prev. note): “Inhumation in pit-grave immediately to the N of cist-grave (F8): ivory fragments from the bier, two bronze-gilt wreaths and four clay vessels.”

³² Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (F4 496c) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 30: no. 21, Aigion 2: “From a Hellenistic cist-grave; small piece of gold foil, leaf-shaped.”

³³ Edmonds 2013 [2014], 39 (F5 496d) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 30: no. 22, Aigion 3: “From a Hellenistic cist-grave; small piece of gold foil, ‘almond-shaped.’”

³⁴ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (F2 496e) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 30: no. 20, Aigion 1: “From a Hellenistic cist-grave of a woman (ear-rings); small piece of gold foil, a ‘laurel leaf’ (in reality in the shape of a lens or almond); the inscription with a lunar sigma.”

³⁵ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (E5 494) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 26f.: no. 17, Rethymnon 1 [Crete]: “From a grave of early Imperial times (between 25 BCE and 40 CE) in Sfakaki; Museum Rethymno. An ellipsoid piece of gold foil, unfolded; found at the base of the skull and quite probably originally covering the mouth.”

³⁶ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (E2 495) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 24f.: no. 15, Eleutherna [Crete] 6: “From the same cemetery as Eleutherna 1, 2, and 3; National Museum, Athens; 2nd/1st cent. BCE. Rectangular gold tablet, left part missing (broken over the fold?).”

to Persephone: greetings!”³⁷ Or, Φιλωτέρα / τῶι Δεσπό/τει χέρε(ιν), “Philolera to the lord: greetings!”³⁸

Each of these offers, in their own way, cumulative evidence that the text of our small gold leaf may preserve, in a remarkably similar way, a formula naming an individual who is blessed in the afterlife because of his, or her, justified standing before a specific deity. Just like the ‘Orphic’ comparanda, the Abalala-text is engraved on a small sheet of gold with rounded corners, is not ritually folded, and is then buried with the deceased. But it is the somewhat fuller texts of the newer ‘Orphic’ *lamellae* that offer the most intriguing parallels with the formula of our text, in that these include the all-important element of *justification* or *blessedness*, a feature that provides a more certain comparison between the ‘Orphic’ leaves and the text of our Abalala gold *lamella*. One of the closest of these texts to the format of our gold *lamella* is that found in a well-built cist-grave at Pella/Dion, dated ca. 300 BCE. Its text gives, in three lines, the same elements suggested for our *lamella*, albeit in reverse order:

Φερσεφόνηι
Ποσειδίππος μύστης
εὐσεβής.

To Persephone
Poseidippos
(is) a pious initiate.³⁹

This is no different than our text saying, e.g.,

To Chrysochech
Abalala
(is) justified.

Both formulas are engraved on small sheets of gold, both are written in three lines, and both share the elements of justifying deity + person’s name + adjective of justification. Another gold *lamella*, from Amphipolis in Macedo-

³⁷ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (E3 496k) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 46f.: no. 37, Vergina (Aigai) [Macedonia]: “From a Hellenistic grave.”

³⁸ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (E4 496b) = Graf – Johnston, 2013, 46 (no. 38): Hagios Athanasios (near Thessalonica) [Macedonia]: “A carelessly inscribed gold table from a looted grave; Hellenistic.”

³⁹ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 39 (E4 496b) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 42f. (no. 31), Pella/Dion 1: “From a well-built cist-grave in the immediate vicinity of a temple-like building; end of the 4th cent. BCE. Shaped like a leaf; laurel or, more likely, myrtle.”

nia, offers a remarkably similar formula, but this time in a word-order closer to that of the Abalala *lamella*:

Εὐαγής, ἱερὰ Διονύ-
σου Βαχχίου εἰμί,
'Αρχεβού[λι]η
'Αντιδώρου.

Purified, sacred
To Dionysos Bacchios am I,
Archeboule
(daughter) of Antidoros.⁴⁰

Here the words for justification are slightly stronger, and the identifier takes on the first-person (the writer could just as easily omitted the εἰμί, to read “Purified, sacred, ... is Archeboule before Dionysos”). The ‘foreign’ exotic deity of Chrysochech is matched by the ‘foreign’ deity of Dionysios Bacchios.

Another tablet, a gold rectangular foil from Pherae in Thessaly, reads in part, “... Brimo, Brimo. Enter the sacred meadow, for the initiate is redeemed. Gapedon” (... Βριμῶ, Βριμῶ. Εἰσιθίῃ / ἱερὸν λειμῶνα· ἄποινος γὰρ ὁ μύστης. ΓΑΠΕΔΟΝ).⁴¹ Whereas the ‘magical’ deity appears to be Brimo, with the word of redemption being ἄποινος, what is unusual about this text is that the strange word ΓΑΠΕΔΟΝ is written upside down, just below ὁ μύστης, and has been described as “apparently a nonsense word.”⁴² If truly a “nonsense word”, then it might represent the very early use of a *vox magica*, which would be difficult for scholars to admit on a 4th century BCE ‘religious’ text, such as an Orphic tablet.⁴³ If so, it would perhaps suggest an early blending of the Orphic gold leaves with ‘magic’-sounding passwords and slogans that are exotic, or of foreign derivation, justifying once more the similarity of the Orphic gold

⁴⁰ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 38 (D4 496n) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 40: no. 30, Amphipolis: “From a grave in the Eastern Cemetery; found in a sarcophagus (T 45), folded on the chest of the deceased woman. Late 4th to early 3rd cent. BCE.”

⁴¹ Edmonds 2011 [2014], 37 (D3 493) = Graf – Johnston 2013, 38f.: no. 27, Pherae 1: “From the south cemetery of Pherae, now in the Museum of Volos; 350-300 BCE. Rectangular gold band, originally rolled in the form of a cylinder.”

⁴² So, Graf – Johnston 2013, 39.

⁴³ But this is exactly what we find in the curious “C”-tablet of the Orphic group: a 4th century BCE text from Thurii that mixes understandable Greek with mysterious-sounding ‘magic’ words. See Graf – Johnston 2013, 10f.; Bernabé – Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 137-150; Kotansky 1991a, 114f.

leaves with the later gold *lamellae* of the magical tradition, used as protective amulets. In point of fact, however, ‘Gapedon’ is probably nothing other than the Doric noun γάπεδον, sc. for γήπεδον, “a plot of land.”⁴⁴ To the adherent, the foreign deity, Brimo, would still serve as a kind of exotic god on a par with the Chysochech of our text.

The gold *lamella* under study here, as we have argued, derives from a late Hellenistic milieu the formula of which reflects an enduring Greco-Persian post-mortem world-view. Its words, whether understood in the common parlance of the workaday Greek or Parthian, may have contained a text that had proved entirely meaningful to the initiated believer for whom it was written. In this respect, this precious token can be seen to belong foremost to the realm of the priestly mage and his sacred utterance (*mathra*), rather than to the exclusive world of the magician and his traditional healing spells (*phylakteria*). Although the two arenas of ‘Orphic’ gold leaves and ‘Magian’ gold *lamellae* need not be mutually exclusive, it seems best to situate our golden tablet within the context of a kind of meld between Greek and Persian beliefs about the afterlife. Ours seems to bridge two worlds in reflecting the other-worldly mindset of the ‘Orphic’ tablets while at the same time paying homage to the tradition of the Persian *maguš* (Gk. μάγος), whose sacred rites and age-old incantations could enable the soul of the deceased to fly safely from the terrestrial plane over to a heavenly place, “as if the soul of the just man were amid meadows and breathing in sweet scents ... more fragrant than any other wind,” to cite the sacred Persian traditions themselves.⁴⁵ In this manner our blessed Abalala is truly justified with the Golden-(Throned) One, just as his earlier counterparts in the Orphic gold leaves were deemed blessed, sacred, or pious before Persephone, Dionysus, Plouton, and other exotic gods of the underworld.

⁴⁴ LSJ, s.v. It would supposedly be a gloss on the λειμών, the sacred meadow of Persephone where the initiate goes; cf. δάπεδον, “ground” (LSJ, s.v.), where in Aristophanes, *Frogs* 360, δάπεδον is just so equated with the λειμών (344) of Kore – Persephone herself (337).

⁴⁵ *Hadhokhti Nask*, ch. 2, 18-20 in Boyce 1984, 81. On the possible influence of Persian Zoroastrianism on Orphism (and other, early Ionian philosophers), see Boyce 1982, 161f., 232, 246; West 1983, 103-105, 190, 192, 198-200, 208f. More specifically, for the gold tablets in relation to Zoroastrianism, see Bernabé – San Cristóbal 2008, 221-224 (with special reference to Álvarez-Pedrosa 2008, whose work deserves more careful study than afforded here). On the concept of a ‘Greco-Persian’ meld, especially in reference to specific cultural by-products (ancient gems and other artifacts), see Boardman 2015, 29-52, esp. 34-36, and 77-80, 154.

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ΧΡΥΣΟΧΡΕ

