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**Yannis Tzifopoulos, *Paradise Earned: The Bacchic-Orphic Gold Lamellae of Crete*. Center for Hellenic Studies: Harvard University, 2010. Pp 384, £13.95 (Paperback), ISBN 978-0-6740-2379-6 (Pbk).**

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This monograph by Yannis Tzifopoulos is an in-depth study of the inscribed and uninscribed gold lamellae (epistomia), mostly of the Hellenistic period, that have been found in Eleutherna and Sfakaki in the Municipality of Rethymno in Crete and in Pydna and Methone in Pieria. The lamellae are dated as early as 5000 BC and they are no longer perceived as jewelry, thanks to the ingenious observation made by Pierre Amandry<sup>1</sup>; Amandry connected the gold plating with the gold Mycenaean masks – gold as the most precious metal guaranteed the posthumous eternity for the dead. The present study is an inter-disciplinary approach on the subject of death and burial for a specific category of dead accompanied by gold entaphic lamellae.

The book is structured into four chapters and includes two appendices and approximately one hundred photographs.

In chapter 1, the author publishes for the first time four new gold inscribed lamellae (one from Crete No. 9 and three from Pieria No. 13-15) and three uninscribed from Crete (No. 10-12). He also republishes another eight Cretan lamellae (No.1-8), combining them with nine similar primary sources from Greece (no. 16-24).

In chapter 2, he provides a commentary of the Cretan entaphic lamellae based on topography, writing, dialect, dictation, meter, chronology, shape and material. No matter where the epistomia were inscribed or cut, the author argues that they may have initially had a different function before finally being transformed into eternal gifts. This seems fairly convincing, especially considering the similar

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Amandry (1953) *Collection Hélène Stathatos*. Vol. 1: *Les bijoux antiques*. Strasbourg, p. 37.

dual use of coins - both as everyday tools of financial interchange and as symbols of repayment post-mortem.

In chapter 3, he embeds the Cretan lamellae into the corpus of forty-four previously published lamellae from the Peloponnese, Thessaly, Macedonia and Italy. The innovation is that the author here proposes a modified classification scheme for them, based on their texts (i.e. A1, B7, F8, G3). He also examines the ways in which the inscribed lamellae are connected with ritual, hieros logos, the rhapsodic divinatory performances and the mystery cults.

In chapter 4, the author focuses on the Cretan literary, archaeological and epigraphic context of the lamellae. He concludes that all the twelve gold lamellae from Eleutherna and Sfakaki, geographically situated to the north of the Idaean Cave are indeed evidence of a mystery cult and ritual in this region. Although, the island of Crete is in the periphery of Greece, the Cretan context, as successfully presented by Tzifopoulos, aligns with the Pan-Hellenic afterlife discourse.

In his afterword, the analogies identified with early Byzantine and Modern Greek practices are set forth. Parallels are traced with modern funeral songs, coins, crowns and lamellae, and even with the funeral service of the Orthodox Church<sup>2</sup>. These analogies converge on the conclusion that the similarities and differences, the historical continuities and discontinuities, and the performativity of ritual poetics reflect the imperative of people of all times to earn their own paradise<sup>3</sup>.

This human dimension in epigraphy was pointed-out by the French philologist and epigrapher Louis Robert (1904-1985), member of the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (from 1948 onwards) and professor at the Collège de France (1939-1974) whose oeuvre is underlined throughout this book. Louis Robert argued for the importance of reflection on the landscape (*la méditation du paysage*) in the study of history. In other words, Louis Robert emphasised the love and careful study of

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<sup>2</sup> A good example is the image of a modern lamella from the village Mantamados in the island of Lesbos; see Figure 23 (page 51).

<sup>3</sup> Paradise indeed was ascribed its modern meaning during the period of Late Antiquity; "Paradise" etymologically declares its Persian origin and it was first used by Xenophon in order to describe an enclosed peaceful garden at the palaces of Persian kings and nobles; see n.1 (page 1).

external space and environment, which is formulated by the human factor, as a medium of bringing the historical past towards *hic et nunc*.

As Pierre Hadot indicated in his obituary for Louis Robert:

La méthode incomparable de Louis Robert consistait à ne jamais séparer l'inscription de son contexte, de son support matériel, mais aussi de son support sociologique [...] Pour lui, il n'y avait pas des disciplines, mais des problèmes qu'il fallait savoir résoudre en usant de toutes les disciplines [...] Pour lui, le moindre texte, le moindre objet, la moindre monnaie avaient une profonde signification humaine.

The incomparable method of Louis Robert was that he never separated the inscription either from its context or from its material or its sociological context [...] For him, there were no separate disciplines, but problems seeking their solution by using all disciplines [...] For him, the smallest text, the smallest object and the smallest coins had a deep human value.<sup>4</sup>

The same approach, which makes human social institutions, such as religion, ritual and poetics, central, and overcomes the barriers of disciplines, is followed in the present study. In *Paradise Earned* archaeology, epigraphy, literature and anthropology are uniquely combined by a profound academic scholar and a charismatic teacher.

The author is professor of Classics and Greek epigraphy at the Classics Department (since 2007) and Head of the School of Philology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (since 2013). Before that he linked his academic career in Greece with the island of Crete, teaching at the University of Crete for nearly fifteen years (1993-2007). Following the human approach and loving deeply the Cretan land, in this work he has managed a great volume of ancient sources efficiently and has set them into their contextual and intertextual context.

This a well-written book addressed both to specialists and non-specialists. *Paradise Earned* is a landmark in classical scholarship, because it dares to open new promising paths for future researchers and academics.

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<sup>4</sup> Collège de France: Pierre Hadot, *Nécrologies* [http://www.college-de-france.fr/media/professeurs-disparus/UPL13944\\_necrorobert.pdf](http://www.college-de-france.fr/media/professeurs-disparus/UPL13944_necrorobert.pdf). The English translation is mine.