

A CURSE TABLET FROM THE “INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT” NEAR THE ATHENIAN AGORA

(PLATE 32)

RODNEY S. YOUNG, in his article “An Industrial District of Ancient Athens” (1951), included the *editio princeps* (p. 223, pl. 74:a) of a lead curse tablet (*defixio*) of the earlier 4th century B.C., found just outside the southwest corner of the Agora proper in remains of the mudbrick wall of a house on what Young called, after numerous pieces of worked but unfinished marble excavated in the vicinity, the “Street of the Marbleworkers.” That edition presents several difficulties. We offer here what we believe is a better reading of the text.¹

Four persons are cursed “before chthonians,” *πρὸς τὸς κάτω*. Of them, the first two are identified, in the accusative, as ΧΛΑΚΕΑ (line 1) and ΧΑΛΚΕΙΑ (line 2; ΧΑΛΚΕΑ *ed. pr.*), respectively; Young’s interpretation, that we have here a professional identification, χαλκία, is obvious enough.² The tablet was found near the floor level of the second phase of House D, in which the main operation, as Young (1951, pp. 222–223) concluded from the “many shapeless slugs of iron and some of bronze,” “was metalworking; and very apropos was the inscription on a lead *defixio* found in Room 5. The *defixio* lay in the lowest layer of dissolved mud brick which overlay the house; the sherds in this layer were as late as the middle of the third century. But the ruins of the house had been picked over for building material after its abandonment, and it is entirely probable that the little lead curse had been tucked into the foundations or under the floor of the house somewhere (as such things should be underground) and that it was thrown up from its original position by the ransackers for building material.”

Several scholars have cited the tablet as evidence for activity in House D;³ the phrase *πρὸς τὸς κάτω*, however, makes it doubtful that the curse was *in situ* when found. We have counted twenty-six other Attic curse tablets, all probably of the 4th century, with *πρὸς* or *παρά* followed by names of chthonians⁴ or, as here, by collective terms for them.⁵ One of them (Jordan forthcoming a, no. 1) has a phrase *εἴ τις ἐμὲ κατέδεσεν πρὸς τὸν Ἑρμῆν τὸν ἐριόνιον ἢ πρὸς τὸν κάτοχον ἢ πρὸς τὸν δόλιον ἢ ἄλλοθι πο*, “whoever bound me down before Hermes *erionios* or before (Hermes) *katochos* or before (Hermes) *dolios* or anywhere else,” in which the last three words of the Greek show that its prepositional phrases were conceived of as indicating places of deposit. It is notorious that most early curse tablets from Athens are without recorded provenience (*DTWü*, pp. ii–iii), but of the twenty-six with the prepositional phrase, we know the findspots of five, and these are without exception from chthonic contexts: one (Jordan forthcoming b) was found in the shrine of a hero, three (*DTWü* 101; Peek 1941, no. 3; Willemsen 1990, pp. 145–147) were found in

¹ We would like to thank John McK. Camp II for reading this article in manuscript and an anonymous referee for suggestions.

² Young followed the etymology of χαλκεύς and translated “bronze-worker,” but the word can have a wider range of meanings; cf. Hesychios, χαλκεύς· πᾶς τεχνίτης, καὶ ὁ ἀργυροκόπος, καὶ ὁ χρυσοχός.

³ E.g., Burford 1972, pp. 163–164; Mattusch 1977, p. 341; Bettalli 1985, p. 29; Camp 1986, p. 141. In the plan of the Agora at Burford 1972, p. 83, House D is called “Aristaichmos’ smithy” *tout court*, after the Aristaichmos named in line 1 of the curse.

⁴ E.g., *πρὸς τὸν Ἑρμῆν* (*DTWü* 80; Strýd 1903, no. 5), *πρὸς τ[ὸν Π]αλαίμονα* (Jordan forthcoming b), *παρὰ Φερσεφόνοι καὶ Ἑρμῆι* (Peek 1941, no. 3).

⁵ *Πρὸς τοὺς χθονίους* (Willemsen 1990, pp. 145–147), *παρὰ τοῖς ἡϊθέοις* (*DTAud* 59), *παρὰ θεῶν καὶ πα(ρὰ) ἡρώων* (72).

graves, and one (Willemssen 1990, pp. 143–145), excavated in the fill within a grave circle in the Kerameikos, no doubt originally came from a grave. By putting a tablet into a shrine or a grave, one in effect “bound down” one’s intended victim “before” the hero or the chthonian(s) in charge of the deceased.⁶ Presumably, if our curse tablet follows this rule, it was initially deposited in a shrine or a grave and later found its way into the mudbrick wall of House D by chance. Might the clay for the wall have come from a shrine? In no event need one assume that the tablet was in any sense *in situ* in the house.

The lead tablet, intact except for chips at the edges and cracks, was folded nine times vertically, from left to right, and the resultant packet was pierced with a nail at the level of line 7. The nail holes have not affected the text.

Agora Inv. IL 997; Pl. 32

H. 0.075, W. 0.166 m; earlier 4th century B.C.

- 1 Καταδῶ Ἀρίσταιχομν τὸ(ν) χλακέα
- 2 πρὸς τὸς κάτω καὶ Πυρρίαν τὸν χαλκεία
- 3 καὶ τὴν ἐργασίαν αὐτὸ καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς
- 4 αὐτῶν καὶ Σωσία(ν) τὸν Λάμιον
- 5 καὶ τὴν ἐργασία(ν) καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτὸ
- 6 καὶ ἃ λήγουσι καὶ ἃ δρῶσ(ι) {καὶ ἃ δρῶσ(ι)}
- 7 καὶ Ἀγησι(ν) τὴν Βοιωτία(ν).

1 καταδέω *ed. pr.* Ἀρίσται[χ]μ(ο)ν *ed. pr.* 2 χαλκέα *ed. pr.* 6 καὶ ΑΛΗΓΟΣΙ καὶ ἄδρῶς καὶ ἄδρῶς *ed. pr.*, without explanation. 7 ΑΓΗΣΙ, “Hagesion,” *ed. pr.*, in commentary.

As is normal in the early 4th century, both the short /o/ and the long /ō/ resulting from contraction (e.g., αὐτὸ [lines 3, 5]) and compensatory lengthening (e.g., τός [line 2], λήγουσι [line 6]) are written with a simple o.⁷ Confusion between η and ε (e.g., λήγουσι = λέγουσι), also well documented for the period, may have resulted from unfamiliarity with the new Ionic alphabet:⁸ cf. τὴν ψυχὴν (line 5), where the writer, evidently hesitating between η and ε, seems to have begun to spell τέν. The spelling elsewhere is faulty, in any case: the writer no doubt slurred liquids and nasals in pronunciation (Ἀρίσταιχομν for -χμον, χλακέα for χαλ- [line 1]); and there is also a mobility of liquids in Πυρρίαν for Πυρρίαν (line 2), a phenomenon that may be compared with στλήλη for στήλη (*IG* II² 302, line 1) or Χραιρέδημος for Χαιρ- (*IG* II² 13029).⁹ Other minor features are the omission of the final -ν, common on curse tablets of the period,¹⁰ and the doubling of [ς] before τ (πρὸς τός [line 2]).¹¹

In δρῶσ(ι) (line 6) the omission of the final -ι, a letter here morphologically significant, is hard to explain linguistically, and in fact there is no instance of it in Threatte 1980. In any case, καὶ ἃ λέγουσι καὶ ἃ δρῶσι, “and what they say and what they do” (line 6), though not attested elsewhere in this precise wording, is merely an expanded paraphrase of καὶ τὰ ἔπη καὶ τὰ ἔργα (αὐτῶν), an expression frequent on Attic curse tablets of the 4th century (e.g., *DTWü* 105.b, line 2);

⁶ An instructive parallel, while not Attic, is an earlier 5th-century curse tablet from the sanctuary of Demeter Malophoros at Selinous (Dubois 1989, no. 38) with the phrase *πᾶρ τῶν ἡαγνῶν θεῶν*. Our anonymous referee asks us to cite the famous examples of curse tablets found in the wall of the house where Germanicus lay dying (Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.69; Dio Cassius 58.18), but the exact text of the curses is not recorded by the ancient authors, with the result that we cannot know whether the curses were addressed to chthonians. In addition, it is not yet clear that this practice of depositing tablets near their intended victims (as, e.g., in circuses to harm charioteers) was not a later development.

⁷ Threatte 1980, pp. 238–242.

⁸ Rabehl 1906, p. 10; Threatte 1980, pp. 159–164.

⁹ Threatte 1980, pp. 478–479.

¹⁰ Rabehl 1906, p. 26; Threatte 1980, p. 637.

¹¹ Threatte 1980, pp. 527–529.

cf. the expansions καὶ ἔπη καὶ | ἔργα τὰ τούτων καὶ εἴ τι βουλευόνται καὶ εἴ τι πράττουσιν (98, lines 2–3), καὶ ε[ῖ] τι μέλ|λει ὑπὲρ Φίλωνος φθέγγεσθαι | ῥῆμα πονηρόν (96, lines 8–11), etc. Does the repetition καὶ ἄ δρῶσ(ι) καὶ ἄ δρῶσ(ι) imply that the writer was copying from a model?¹²

The men's names are quite ordinary in Attika and elsewhere. The woman's (line 7) is found, in the form Ἀγείσις or Ἀγησίς, four times in her native Boiotia (*IG* VII 735, 1811, 2883, 2904); the one instance of the name in an oblique case (Ἀγείσιδι [2883]), which suggests that the accusative should be Ἀγησίδα on our tablet, does not disallow an alternative form Ἀγησι(ν) here, however it is to be accented:¹³ cf. the alternative accusatives Ἀρτέμιδα and Ἄρτεμιν (e.g., *DTWü* 75 has both forms). Young assumed a syncopation, conventionally accented Ἀγήσι(ν), of the diminutive Ἀγήσιον, a rarer name attested on Kos (Pugliese Carratelli 1963–1964, p. 200, no. XXVI B VII, lines 22, 53) that finds a congener in the Attic Ἡγήσιον (*IG* II² 2332, line 54). We remain agnostic: no certain example of the syncopation of the ending -ιος/-ιον to -ις/-ιν is recorded in Attic inscriptions before the 2nd century B.C.,¹⁴ but we cannot rule out the possibility of Ἀγήσι(ν) as a very early Attic instance.¹⁵

We close with a speculation. Young's interpretation of ΧΛΑΚΕΑ and ΧΛΑΚΕΙΑ, mentioned above, is certainly the most obvious possibility. Because of the identification of the Lamian and the Boiotian by their ethnics, however, we cannot rule out ethnics here.¹⁶ Our writer's Λάμιον is an idiosyncratic formation, for that ethnic is elsewhere attested only as Λαμιεύς.¹⁷ ΧΛΑΚΕΑ and ΧΑΛΚΕΙΑ (for Χαλκέα, Χαλκιά?) may then be the writer's own attempts at the ethnic of the Euboeian Χαλκίς, epigraphically attested elsewhere only as Χαλκιδεύς;¹⁸ there may have been influence from ethnics of the type Φωκεύς from Φωκίς, -ίδος. Alternatively, but less probably, the writer may have intended an ethnic, otherwise unattested, of the town Χάλκη or Χάλκαι near Larisa, known only from Theopompos of Chios (*FGH* 115 F 34 = 48; cf. Swoboda 1903, p. 205, note 27); if so, all three men cursed were Thessalians.

Translation:

"I bind down Aristaichmos the smith before those below and Pyrrhias the smith and his work and their souls and Sosias of Lamia and his work and soul and what they say and what they do {and what they do} and Hagesis of Boiotia."

¹² The letters δεσμευ{δέσω/ον}σον on another 4th-century Attic curse tablet (Jordan forthcoming b), which seem to include the alternative synonyms δέσμευσον and δῆσον, suggest that its writer was using notes.

¹³ Wilhelm Schulze (1893, pp. 252–254) assumes the possibility of third-declension oxytone accusatives, but the examples that he adduces, Ὀμολώ(ο)ν, Σωτήρι(ο)ν, may both be syncopations: Ὀμολώ(ο)ν, Σωτήρι(ο)ν; cf. Oliver Masson's rejection of *Ἀριστίν as an unsyncopated accusative (1984, p. 183). On the accent of Ἀρτέμιδα and Ἄρτεμιν, see Masson 1986.

¹⁴ Threatte 1980, pp. 400–404.

¹⁵ Ziebarth 1934, no. 1, an Attic curse tablet of probably the 320s B.C., has a masculine name Φιλωτίς (A 46), wrongly reported by Osborne and Byrne (1994 s.v.) as feminine. The masculine name is unattested elsewhere. Is it an early syncopation of Φιλώτιος, a name that is rare but attested in Attika?

¹⁶ Osborne and Byrne (1994) may have anticipated us here, for they list both the Aristaichmos and the Pyrrhias of our tablet as being only questionably Athenian. Other Attic curse tablets directed against persons with non-Attic ethnics include *DTWü* 11 (against a Cretan), 55 (against a Troizenian), 72 (against a Phrygian), 73 (against a Corinthian); Münsterberg 1907, no. 3 (against an Egyptian); and Ziebarth 1934, no. 22 (against an Eretrian); they are all probably of the 4th century.

¹⁷ We in fact know of cases in which ethnics occur in more than one form, e.g., Τελμεσεύς and Τελμέσσιος, both attested at Athens (*RE* VA, col. 410, s.v. *Telmessos* 2 [W. Ruge]); Μασσαλεύς for the usual Μασσαλωτής in a dedicant's signature (Hyères, 1st century B.C.: Couprie and Giffault 1982, p. 362); and the alternatives Φιλαδελφεύς/Φιλαδεληφνός, Εὐμενεύς/Εὐμενεάτης (Robert 1973, pp. 437–438). See in general Robert 1946, esp. pp. 71–74.

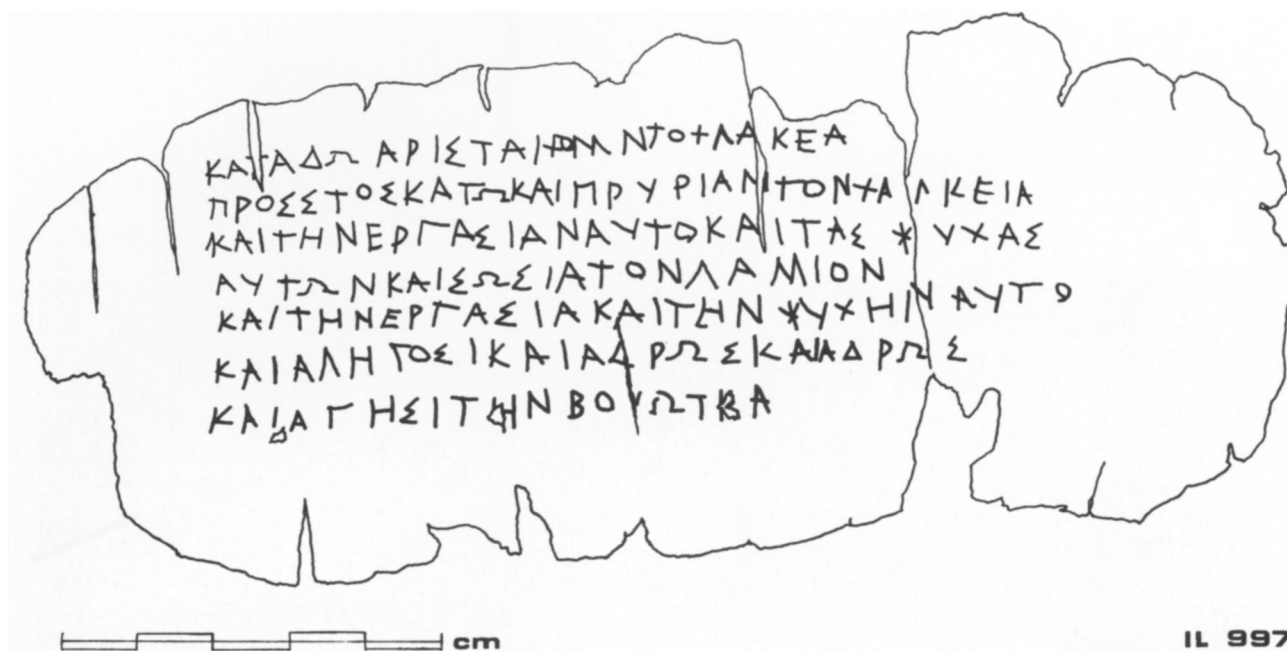
¹⁸ In the case of Chalkis, Stephanos of Byzantion, in his example Χάλκις, Χάλκιος, Χαλκιεύς of nominative, genitive, and ethnic (8.16), recognizes an alternative pronunciation and treatment; cf. Konstantinos Porphyrogenitos, *De them.* 51.19–20 Bekker, cited by August Meineke in his 1849 edition of Stephanos: συναριθμεῖ δὲ ταύταις καὶ νῆσον τὴν Εὐβοίαν, ἣν τινας Χάλκιν [*Χάλιν codd.*] ἢ Χαλκίδα ἐπονομάζουσιν.

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