

AN ATHENIAN MALEDICTORY INSCRIPTION ON LEAD

The discovery of forty-five lead tablets in a well in the Athenian Agora was announced by T. L. Shear in his general report on the excavations there in 1933.¹ The tablet here published is the first of the remarkable "hoard" to be unrolled and partly read. Since it is a curse inscription the others may be assumed to be of the same character. They promise to be a welcome addition to the *tabellae defixionum* which have been found in Attica and elsewhere.² Obviously the Athenians of the Roman period believed in the potency of the cryptic curse and used it extensively. The large number of the tablets may mean that the curse on lead originated in Attica, as Wunsch is inclined to believe.³ The place of discovery shows that the Athenians observed the prescription that such curses be thrown *εἰς φρέατα ἀχρημάτιστον*.⁴

As a result of long burial in the earth the tablet has partly disintegrated (Fig. 1). The missing parts contained among other items the name of the deity invoked and of the person cursed. In several places the surface of the tablet is so badly preserved that the letters cannot be made out with certainty. It is possible that what is missing may be restored with the help of the other tablets which were inscribed and thrown into the well at approximately the same time, because in curse inscriptions there was a tendency to repeat certain phrases and formulae. Of the eighteen lines of our inscription the last seven are quite intelligible while the general meaning of the rest may be safely inferred from the portions preserved. The writing is from left to right and is not *stoichedon*. The lines averaged forty letters. There were apparently no abbreviations and few ligatures. The forms of the letters resemble closely those of literary papyri of the third century after Christ.⁵ Such date for the tablet is confirmed by the coarse Roman pottery with which it was found. The most useful objects for dating the deposit to the third century were two lamps of Broneer's type XXVII⁶ which were discovered at depths of 7.50 m. and 9.05 m. Another significant object in the deposit was a water-jar with basket-handle which has been found in other contexts of late Roman date. Thirty-seven of the tablets including the one here published lay in the well at a depth varying from 9 m. to 9.50 m. Its inventory number is 1440—I L 72. The tablet measures 0.16 m. by 0.116 m. It was rolled from side to side, and was not transfixed with a nail.

¹ *A. J. A.*, XXXVII (1933), p. 546, fig. 7; p. 548; *Hesperia*, IV (1935), p. 325, fig. 12.

² R. Wunsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*; A. Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae*; E. Ziebarth, *Neue Verfluchungstafeln aus Attika, Boiotien und Euboia*.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. XXXIII.

⁴ C. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, I, p. 192.

⁵ Cf. E. M. Thompson, *Greek and Latin Palaeography*, p. 147.

⁶ O. Broneer, *Corinth, Lamps*, p. 96.

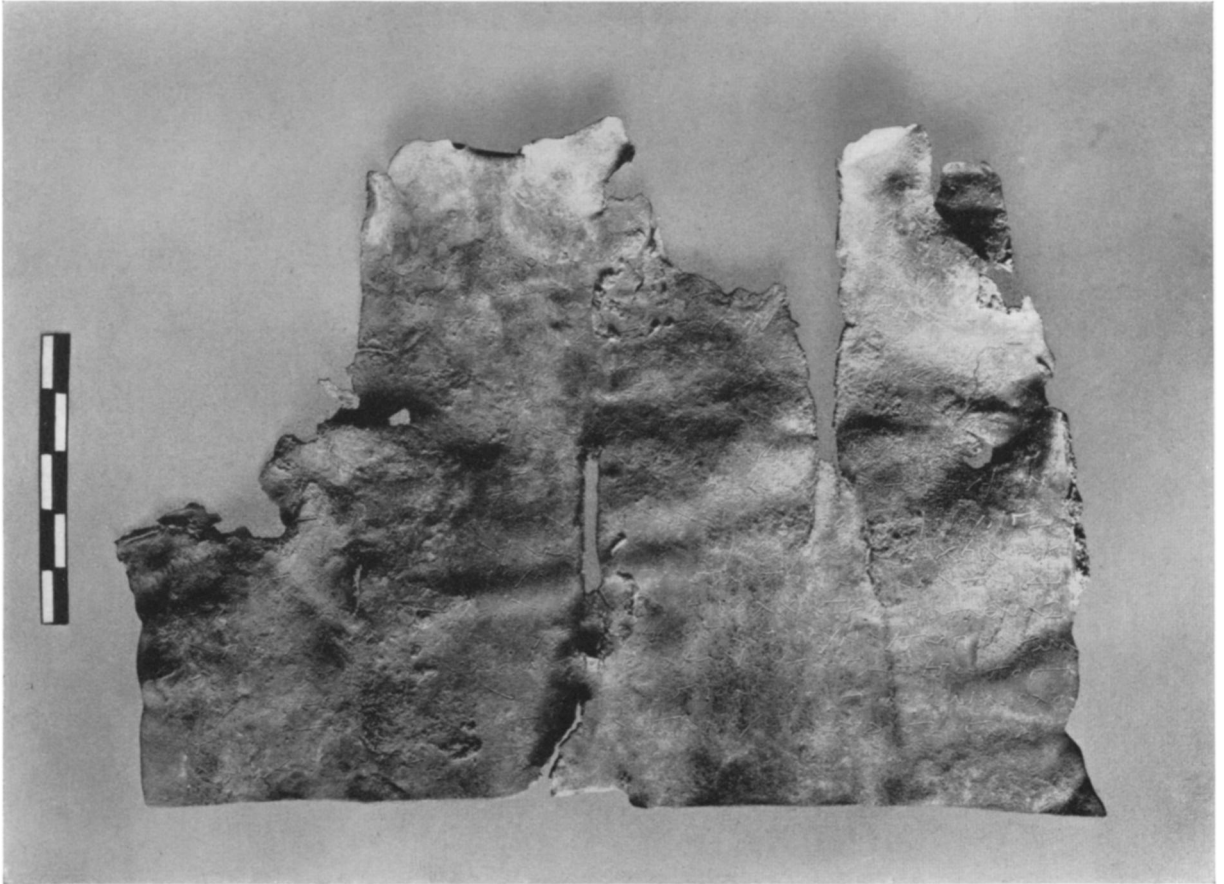


Fig. 1. Inscribed Lead Tablet

THE INSCRIPTION

..... βαβαρφορβοβαβορβ βορφαβαι .
 νπαραδιδωμι . . . ερ τεκενεισιγε
 τασπεψησαντ . . καιτηγγν . μηραντου
 ωδησοναερακα . τουσσυνατ . . . βουσειστον
 5 τιοσφωναίωνκαικαταψυξ . . . καιαπολε
 σασμελλειποιεινκατα . . . σκαιμη
 πραξαιεανδεκαιεπιβαλλη . . . ιτιπρα . . . ιν
 ηλορζουν . αλγεινητηροπεξαιω . . . αιαι
 δω ερωταονετε . . νεισιγενεακραταιευφων
 10 τοντ σθησαβαω . . εαγαν . . απομψφριουριγζ
 επιαφ . νισμωεπιαφανι . . ωκαιψυξ . . οκ . οιχειλωψ-
 ψυγητωερωσκαιαισναν . ωπραγματειαιναικραταιε

τυφωνιαωιακουβιαιωερβηθβολχοσηθπαταθναξ
 απωμψω . . ερρωψυγητ . ερωσκαιαισυνατωπραγμα
 15 τειαιωσταν . . τανοματαψυχεταιουτωσκαιερωτος
 ψυχεσθωτορομαηψυχηηοργηονουσηπροθυμιαολο
 γισμοσεσ χσαλαλοσανουσακαρδισωσμη
 δενακουωνπεριεργον

TRANSCRIPTION

. βαβαρφορβοβαβορβ βορφαβαι .
 ν παραδίδωμί[σοι] Ἔρωτα δν ἔτεκεν Εἰσιγέ-
 νεα] τὰς πέψις ἀντ[οῦ] καὶ τὴν γν[ώ]μην αὐτοῦ
 ὠδῆ σοῦ ἀέρα καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτ[ῷ] β[οι]ς εἰς τὸν
 5 τιρῶν αἰῶνα καὶ καταψύξ . . . καὶ ἀπολε-
 . . . τὰς πράξις ὀπόσας μέλλει ποιεῖν. κατὰ[σχέ]ς καὶ μὴ
 πράξει. Ἐὰν δὲ καὶ ἐπιβάλλῃ [τα]ί τι πρά[ττε]ιν
 ἡλροζουν . αλβεινηπκηρεξαιω . . αιαι
 παραδί[δωμί σοι] Ἔρωτα δν ἔτε[χε]ν Εἰσιγένεα, κραταιὲ Τυφῶν
 10 τοντ . . . Σηθ Σαβαω[θ] . εααν αυ . . απομψ φριουριγξ
 ἐπὶ ἀφ[α]νισμῶ ἐπὶ ἀφανι[σμ]ῶ καὶ ψύξ[ει] οχαοι Χειλωψ
 ψυγήτω Ἐρως καὶ αἰ σὺν αὐτ[ῷ] πραγματεῖται, καὶ κραταιὲ
 Τυφῶν Ἰαῶ Ἰακούβια Ἰω Ἐρβηθ Βολχοσηθ Παταθναξ
 Ἀπωμψω . . ερρω. Ψυγήτ[ω] Ἐρως καὶ αἰ σὺν αὐτῷ παραμα-
 15 τεῖται. Ὡς ταῦ[τα] τὰ ὀνόματα ψύχεται οὕτως καὶ Ἐρωτος
 ψυχέσθω τὸ ὄνομα ἢ ψυχὴ ἢ ὄργη ὃ τοῦς ἢ προθυμία ὃ λο-
 γισμός. Ἐσ[τω] ἄψυ[χος] ἄλαλος ἄνοις ἀκάρι(ο)ς ὡς μη-
 δὲν ἀκούων περιεργον.

TRANSLATION

. Babarphorbobaborb borphabai .
 I deliver over to you Eros whom Isigenia bare.
 . . . [May you bind with magic] his digestion(?) and his judgment
 beneath(?) thy mist, and those with him may you [receive?] into
 5 forever, and may you chill and bring to nought
 whatsoever deeds he is about to accomplish. Restrain and do not
 [permit him] to do [anything]. But if he even desires to do something
 (unintelligible line)
 I deliver over to you Eros whom Isigenia bare, mighty Typhon
 10 Seth Sabaoth eanau . . Apomps Phriourigz
 that he may disappear and become cold ochaoi cheilops.
 Let Eros become cold and his affairs with him, yes mighty

Typhon Iao Iakoubia io Erbeth Bolchoseth Patathnax

Apompsō . . erro. Let Eros become cold and his affairs with him.

15 As these names become cold, so also of Eros

let be chilled the name, the soul, the wrath, the mind, the zeal, the reason. Let him be without soul, without speech, without mind, without heart, as one who hears nothing curious.

COMMENTARY

Line 1. In the initial line the author of the curse invoked a deity whose name is now lost but whose magical appellatives survive and suggest Hecate. Thus in the great magical papyrus at Paris which is dated to the fourth century this goddess is addressed as *κυρία Ἐκάτη φορβαφορβωβαρ κ. τ. λ.*¹ Farther on in our tablet Typhon is invoked twice (lines 9, 13) but this does not imply an initial invocation of him. *Κυρία Ἐκάτη* is then a possible restoration for the very beginning of the inscription where approximately ten letters are missing. The rest of the initial line, with the exception of the last two letters perhaps, was occupied with the magical title or titles of the deity invoked. These cryptic names were supposed to compel the compliance of the chthonic deity with the demands of the curse.

Line 2. The first extant letter may be the final one of *νεκνδαίμων* which precedes *παρὰδίδωμι*, although not immediately, in a magical papyrus in the British Museum.² This verb is followed by the dative of the deity to whom the accursed is consigned.³ The pronoun *σοι* is a certain restoration in the small space available in our tablet. The name of the victim followed, and of it the letters *ερ* can be made out. Its recurrence in line 9 makes the restoration here of *Ἐρωτα* unquestioned. The name of the mother of Eros is given in the formula *ὄν ἔτεκεν Εἰσίγ[έρεα]* which recurs in line 9.⁴ There is no trace of an *ι* in the penult. The mother's name which means "daughter of Isis" shows that her family were devotees of the Egyptian goddess Isis whose cult had been established in Athens centuries before the date of our tablet. The name of Eros was apparently common in Egypt at this time, for it occurs in inscriptions and papyri. Three examples in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri are dated to the second or third century.⁵ Several others are listed by F. Preisigke.⁶ An inscription at Philae records the visit

¹ Preisendanz, I, p. 120, line 1433; cf. line 2959. Persephone is called in the same papyrus *βορφοροφορβα*.

² Preisendanz, I, p. 192, line 335: *νεκνδαίμων, ὅστις ποί' ὄν εἴ, παρὰδίδωμι σοι τὸν δεῖνα ὕπως μὴ ποιήσῃ τὸ δεῖνα πρᾶγμα.*

³ Cf. Preisendanz, II, p. 20: *παρὰδίδωμι σοι, δέσποτα Ὅσιρι.*

⁴ Further examples in Audollent, pp. 87, 208, 374; Nock, *Jour. Egypt. Arch.*, 1929, p. 234 (in Cairo). The formula is common in papyri.

⁵ VI, nos. 927, 930; XII, no. 1516.

⁶ *Namenbuch*, s. v. Eros.

of one Eros who came to worship Isis.¹ The names Isigenia and Eros thus make very appropriate the string of Egyptian magical titles with which Typhon is invoked in lines 13 and 14.

Line 3. The gap in this line must have contained a verb of cursing, possibly *καταδεῖν*, which governed the following accusatives. This verb is of common occurrence in Athenian *defixiones*.² If the first object of the curse is correctly read as *τὰς πέψης* for *τὰς πέψεις* then the victim's digestion is linked with his intelligence for impairment at the hands of the infernal deity.

Line 4. The digestive function and the intellectual faculty of Eros appear to be consigned to the terrifying gloom of Tartarus, if the gap in this line may be filled in part with *ἐπὶ τὸν φοικ]ώδη*. Another Attic curse combines in one imprecation murky Tartarus and Hecate:

*Ἀήσω ἐγὼ κείνην ἐπὶ Τάρταρον ἀερόεντα
δεσμοῖς ἀργαλείοις σὺν θ' Ἐκάτῃ χθονίαι.*³

The expression *καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτῷ* is found also in magical papyri.⁴

Line 5. The missing accusative after *εἰς* may have been *Τάρταρον*. It is possible also that the preposition should be construed with *αἰῶνα*. The two concluding verbs of the line are probably to be restored as aorist optatives of wish correlative with *[λα]βοῖς* in the preceding line. The optative of wish is found in a curse inscription from Patissia: *Ἐρμῆ [χθόνιε, λά]βοι ψυχῆν*.⁵

Line 6. For the restoration *[τὰς πράξεις δπό]σας* may be cited another Attic tablet which has *αἱ πράξεις δπό[σας καὶ] ἔργα μέλλει . . .*⁶ The word *πράξεις* is to be joined with the verb *καταψύξ[αις]* since in another tablet certain *πράξεις* are condemned to become cold: *[ψ]υχρὰ[ς] τὰς πράξεις*.⁷ The imperative *κατάσχες* which is here regarded as the first word of a sentence, is amplified with a prohibition. *Κατάσχες* is found in magical papyri with *πράγμα*.⁸

Line 8. This seems to be a jumble of letters conveniently described as "Ephesian."

Line 9. With the exception of the invocation of the "mighty Typhon" this line repeats the second. Such repetition is a feature of the curse inscription.⁹

¹ *C.I.G.*, III, p. 430, no. 4918.

² Wunsch, p. 48, *Devovendi Verba*.

³ Wunsch, p. 29, no. 108.

⁴ Preisendanz, I, p. 140, line 2215.

⁵ Wunsch, p. 22, no. 93, 1.

⁶ Wunsch, p. 12, no. 63.

⁷ Audollent, p. 95, no. 67, line 7.

⁸ Preisendanz, I, p. 192, lines 364, 369. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 82, line 333.

⁹ Wunsch, p. 27, no. 105; Audollent, pp. 40–68. For *καταιέ Τυφῶν* see Preisendanz, I, p. 76, line 180. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 36, line 87.

Line 10. Seth Sabaoth is here invoked and the invocation made more compelling by the addition of his cryptic titles. Seth was the Egyptian name of Typhon.¹ Hesychius tells us that Sabaoth was *παντοκράτωρ*. At the end of the line is the title *απομψ φριουριγζ* the first part of which is repeated in line 14 in slightly variant form while the second part is found in other cryptic appeals.²

Line 11. The prepositional phrase which is repeated for emphasis is dependent upon the verb in line 9 which is safely conjectured to have been *παραδίδωμι*. The phrase expresses purpose. The *ἀφανισμός*, "removal from the earth" i.e. death which is here demanded for Eros, appears in verbal form in another tablet found in Attica.³ The *καί* which follows seems to compel the restoration of *ψυξ-* as a dative. The last letters of the line seem again to be cryptic. *Χειλωψ* may perhaps be compared with *κομβάλιωψ* which is found in a magical papyrus.⁴

Lines 12–18. This passage is practically complete and develops the *ψῆξις* of line 11. Eros and his affairs are to become cold, a fate twice demanded just as his "removal" is twice demanded (line 11). The name of Typhon is reënforced with a series of Egyptian and Jewish titles. These occur for the first time in Athenian curse-inscriptions but are at home in the magical papyri. A papyrus in London has *ιω ερβιθ ιω βολχοσιθ, ιω παταθναξ*.⁵ Another offers closer similarity: *Ιακουβ ιαι ιω ερβιθ ιω βολχοσιθ παταθναξ, αποψο οσερω*.⁶ The fact that these titles occur in the same sequence in the papyri and in our tablet attests the wide propagation of this cryptic formula. A magical papyrus in Berlin contains a *προσευχή Ἰακώβ*.⁷ The pair *αποψο οσερω* favors the conjecture that the form *. . ερω* of our tablet may be restored as *οσερω*, a title suggesting the name Osiris. In the great magical papyrus in Paris the titles *Ιω ερβιθ* and *Ιω βολχοσιθ* are described as *ἀληθινὰ δνόματα* of Typhon.⁸ They are referred to in our tablet as *ταῦτα τὰ δνόματα*. In line 15 the author of the curse uses a conventional comparison, a variant of which is found in the Athenian tablets. With *ὡς . . οὔτως καί* compare *ὡς οὔτος ὁ μόλυβδος ψυχρός . . . οὔτως καί τὰ τῶν ἐνταῦθα γεγραμμένων ψυχρὰ ἔστω*. This comparison occurs regularly at the end of the curse as in our instance. The verbs *ψύχω* (*ψύγω*), *καταψύχω* and the adjective *ψυχρός* are well attested for the vocabulary of the maledictory inscription.⁹ A magical papyrus in the British

¹ Plut. *de Is. et Os.*, 371 b.

² For *φριουριγ* and *φριουριγει* see Audollent, p. 348, line 24; p. 509.

³ *ἀφανίζω*, Audollent, p. 84, line 17. *ἀφανῆ* also occurs in a tablet from the Peiraeus, Wünsch, p. 24, no. 97, line 31.

⁴ Audollent, p. 500; cf. *λαιλαιοψ*, *ibid.*, p. 503.

⁵ Preisendanz, II, p. 133.

⁶ Preisendanz, II, p. 82. Cf. pp. 29, 85, 163, 165, 186. With *Iao Iakoubia* cf. *Iao Iossef* in Audollent, p. 346 (from Carthage). Such titles are assembled by Audollent, pp. 509–510.

⁷ Preisendanz, II, p. 148.

⁸ Preisendanz, I, p. 80, lines 280–281.

⁹ Audollent, p. 209 B 11, p. 210, line 24; Wünsch, p. 49 D, e.

Museum prescribes that one inscribe a demand upon a lead tablet taken from a cold aqueduct.¹ Apparently it was desirable that the lead plaque be cold, as it would be if thrown into a well. In our instance the name of Eros was to become as cold as the names of the underworld gods. If his name was chilled, he would be too. In line 17 the restoration $\xi\sigma[\tau\omega]$ seems the only one possible. A Cypriote curse discovered at Curium has $\eta\tau\omega\sigma\alpha\nu$ (= $\xi\sigma\tau\omega\sigma\alpha\nu$) $\alpha\lambda\alpha\lambda\omicron\iota$, $\alpha\varphi\omega\nu\omicron\iota$, $\alpha\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\omicron\iota$.² Another of uncertain provenance in Attica contains the words $\psi\upsilon\chi\rho\acute{\alpha}$ $\xi\sigma\tau\omega$.³

¹ Preisendanz, II, p. 20, line 432. Cf. Wünsch, p. III.

² Audollent, p. 46, no. 25, line 18.

³ Wünsch, p. 28, no. 107, line 5.

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