Two Curse Tablets from Lilybaeum

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Among the interesting lead curse tablets from Sicily published in the last years are two opisthographic examples, inscribed in a mixture of Doric and Koine, from a grave of the third century B.C. at Lilybaeum (present-day Marsala); we owe their edition to Professor Antonietta Brugnone of the University of Palermo.¹ To judge from their letter-forms, as shown in her drawings, the two texts are probably contemporary with one another and may well even be in the same hand, but this latter is difficult to say with any confidence, because the second text is written retrograde.² Not least among their interesting features are their personal names: the first curse is directed against a man (?) called Απιθωμις and the second, against a Ζωηπυρων τοις Μωμυπ, the two non-Greek names (no doubt Punic, as Brugnone suggests), being treated as inde-
Apithamb.al is about to bring a legal action (πρᾶξις), and Zopyrion is evidently also about to enter into a lawsuit, as the wording of the second inscription implies. The curse against Zopyrion is unusual also in its reference to the “chthonic Titans,” the “abominating dead,” and the “priestess of Demeter,” figures not elsewhere so named in any Greek curse; indeed this is the only recorded explicit mention, as far as I am aware, of the last two. Here, using as evidence Brugnone’s published drawings (Figs.1-4), I address the establishment of the texts.

1. (Fig. 1a-b)

A: 1 Τὰν πρᾶξιν τὰν Απιθαμβ.αλ ποτὶ Νυμήριον
   2 καταδίδημι παρὰ καταχθονίοις θεοῖς
   3 καὶ Δαμ[έ]λον, ὅπως μὴ δύναται ἀντία, ὁπως μηθiston δύναται λέγειν).
   4 ὁπως μηθiston δύναται λέγειν.
B: 5 ποτὶ πᾶ[σα] πρᾶξιν ἀντία λέγειν
   6 μηθiston μιοσὸν.

The text above is Brugnone’s, with my own punctuation and my πᾶ[σα] for her πα[ ] in line 5: the drawing suggests that the lacuna would probably admit two letters.

The position of Dameas’ name in line 3 is a problem. Is he a second intended victim, another of Numerius’ opponents? If so, the syntax is awkward, the object of καταδίδημι being τὰν πρᾶξιν τὰν Απιθαμβ.αλ (gen.), i.e. the legal action itself rather than the litigant in line 1, and we therefore expect some fuller phrase than the simple καὶ Δαμ[έ]λον in line 3; in addition, plural victims require plural verbs in lines 3 and 4. Obviously something has gone wrong: the first two lines have been interchanged, for the text should have run:

4 Brugnone (117) adduces several Punic names preserved in Greek characters at Lilybaeum. I share the hope of an anonymous referee of this article, who remarks that if Apithamb.al and Mymbryr are Punic “then someone should be able to shed light on them.” Brugnone notes (120) that in Ζομψτίονα τὰς Νυμβύρ, the substitution in the latter name of τὰς for τὸν + gen. could be the result of the indeclinability of the non-Greek feminine name. I have no evidence to cite from Punic sources, but as a traditional civic nomenclature maternal lineage as an alternative to the strictly paternal was available in certain parts of the ancient world, e.g. Macedonia (A. Tataki, “From the Prosopography of Ancient Macedonia: The Metronymics,” Ἰστορία Μακεδονία 5 [1993] 1453–71) and Egypt (R. Tanner, “Ehe- und Erbrecht im pharaonischen Ägypten,” Klio 49 [1967] 5–37, esp. 36).
Dameas is not a second target of the curse but rather a co-defendant in the litigation. It would have been he and Numerius who caused the tablet to be inscribed.

How could such a mistake in the text have occurred? As in many such curses, part of the text is formulaic, part 'bespoke' or personalized. What I suggest is that the professional responsible for the curse tablet probably jotted down the personalized details in the margin of the model,
and left the inscribing of the lead tablet to the assistant or apprentice, who evidently did not realize that all the 'bespoke' text was meant to follow line 1 of the model.

The rest is not 'bespoke' but formulaic. This part too has its awkwardnesses, for the second ὁποῖς μὴ δύναται is intrusive in line 4, and the infinitive in line 5 needs an auxiliary verb. Here too the error is no doubt the work of the scribe. I would suggest that after writing ὁποῖς μὴ δύναται ἀντία in line 3, he wrote λέγειν immediately beneath, at the end of the next line, to complete the phrase. Then, seeing that there was some space remaining at the left, he continued with what was in his formula: ὁποῖς μὴ δύναται ποτὶ πάσαν πρᾶξιν ἀντία λέγειν etc. But when he reached the λέγειν that he had written in line 4 beneath ἀντία, he was forced to turn the table over and to write the rest of his formula on Side B.

By way of illustration, I would print and translate the restored text as:

Museo "Baglio Anselmi," Marsala  H. 0.035, L. 0.12 m  Lilybaeum Inv. 1649

A: 1 (τὰν πρᾶξιν τὰν Ἀπιθαμβ.αλ ποτὶ Νυμήριον)
2 Καταδίδημι παρὰ καταχθονίσι θεοῖς (τὰν πρᾶξιν τὰν Ἀπιθαμβ.αλ ποτὶ Νυμήριον)
3 καὶ Δαμέαν, ὁποῖς μὴ δύναται ἀντία / λέγειν,
4 ὁποῖς μὴ δύναται

B: 5 ποτὶ πᾶσαν πρᾶξιν ἀντία λέγειν
6 μὴ δέ μισῆν.

5 πᾶσαν πρᾶξιν 6 μὴ δέ μισῆν

"I bind down before the chthonic gods the legal action of Apithamb.al against Numerius and Dameas, lest he be able to speak in opposition, lest be be able to speak in opposition to any legal action or to hate."

5 In other words, Apithamb.al is to be unable to speak either in his own πρᾶξις or in any πρᾶξις brought against him. The curse, this is to say, is meant to insure that its victim, whether plaintiff or defendant, shall be ineffective. Recently F. Costabile, "Defixiones da Locri Epizefiri: nuovi dati sui culti, sulla storia e sulle istituzioni," Minima epigraphica et papyrologica 2 (1999) 23–76, has published (his no. 3) a fourth-century judiciary defixio that has the same structure (see my "Three Texts from Lokroi Epizephyrioi," ZPE forthcoming):
The tablet is in six fragments, of which the largest two \((a, b)\) join; the rest are only chips. It is possible to place one of the chips \((c)\) in relation to the main fragments. No other chip preserves a whole letter, nor is it recorded whether any chip is inscribed on its Side \(B\).

The published text:

\[
\begin{align*}
A & 1 \text{ kataqew Zopyrion \tau\varsigma Mysb\varphi παρά Φερσε-} \\
 & 2 \text{ φόναι καὶ Ττάνεςς καταχθο\nu\iotaς καὶ παρά} \\
 & 3 \text{ π[ρ]χομένσηι νεκρώς \textit{πμκ.} \varepsilon τοὺς ἀπελέστους καὶ παρ-} \\
 & 4 \text{ ἀ \{καρίας Δάματος παρ’ ἀπενχομένη\} \varepsilonιν} \\
 & 5 \text{ καταδεὼ \varepsilon ν \varepsilonι βολιμωι, \alpha\varepsilon[ιθησιν \varepsilonι?]} \\
 & 6 \text{ αὐτῷ καὶ \psiυχήν αὐτῷ ὥς \μή \dύναται - - -ν} \\
 & 7 \text{ λαλιά\[ν\] καταδεὼ \varepsilon ν \varepsilonι βολι\[μ\]ωι \sigma[ωφρό-]} \\
 & 8 \text{ α[υ]ν(αν) \[α]ρτάν καὶ νοῦν καὶ \ψυχήν} \\
B & 9 \text{ \[καταδεὼ\] \varepsilon \οπως} \\
 & 10 \text{ \[μή \dύνανται\] \άντια} \\
 & 11 \text{ \[λέγειν\] \μή\[τη\] \πο\[iet\]ιν} \\
\end{align*}
\]

At right angles to and at the left of 9–11:

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & \text{ IUNIUS} \\
2 & \text{ SEPTUMIUS} \\
3 & \text{ C. ACIN<\varepsilon>US} \\
4 & \text{ M. A(N)NIUS} \\
5 & \text{ L. UMBONIUS} \\
6 & \text{ M. NAUTIUS} \\
7 & \text{ M. RUSTIUS} \\
8 & \text{ L. NAUTIUS} \\
9 & \text{ UMBONIA} \\
\end{align*}
\]

The Latin names would have been inscribed first, as I see it:\(^6\) otherwise the Greek on that side would no doubt have run the full width of the tablet. The Greek of Brugnone’s Side \(B\), however, seems to continue \((\delta\varepsilon)\) that of her \(A\). What initially strikes the eye is that the Greek text mentions none of the names in the Latin list. Were they merely accessories of the Zopyrion of \(A\) \(1\)? Is it to be ruled out that a scribe had written out a simple curse against them, consisting of names only, and then, before depositing the tablet in a grave, used its remaining surfaces for

\(^{6}\) For a good discussion of the names see Brugnone’s notes.
the curse against Zopyrion? the following notes concern A only.

Line 1. The texts of large numbers of Attic curse tablets, particularly of the fourth and third centuries, contain, often at their beginnings, the verb καταδώ (see DTWü, index ΒΑ; DTAud, index ΒΑ.1 s.v. Achaia); six show the form -δεω, three -διδημι. This last occurs also in two Boeotian curses, DTAud 81 and 84, and one from Metapontum, SEG XXX 1175 (3rd c.). So far, our two tablets from Lilybaeum provide the only instance of any form of the verb in Sicilian curses. That in the two tablets it has different forms is worthy of remark. Conceivably at Lilybaeum a handbook was available, with recipes in a variety of styles, but the answer may well lie elsewhere. We may instance the Attic DTAud 68 and 69 (4th c.), with formulae quite similar to one another; it is not known whether they are in the same hand, but in 68 the verb has the form καταδώ, in 69 καταδιδημι.

Line 2. There has been a simple oversight in the transcription: the letters ΝΑΠΑ stand between και and Τητάνεσσι. These last, older gods now relegated to the Underworld, we hear of at e.g. II. 14.279 (θεοὺς ... τοὺς ὑποταρτήρους, οἱ Τητάνες καλέονται) and Hymn. Hom. Ap. 335 (Τητήνες τε θεοί τοι υπὸ χθονί ναετάντες). They were popularly believed to be punishers of wrongdoers—cf. Hsch. s.v. Τητάνες: τιμαροί ... οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἀποτίσαι ἀττιτάνες ὑμομάζονται, οἱ δὲ ἔχοντες, τητάνες, the source for the word ἀττιτάνες probably being late comedy: see in general E. Wüst, “Titans,” RE Reihe 2, 6 (1937) 1491–1503, esp. 1492.

Line 3. π[ρ]χομένουσι, which Brugnone testatively understands as a deformation of a participle of φρίσσω, is awkward. In the drawing, the mark transcribed as Ji is compatible also with the second descender of v. It is better, then, to read παρ’ άθηνα-[ε]χομένουσι in lines 2f, a phrase that finds its feminine counterpart in the παρ’ ἀπευξομε[ν]αβιο σιμον of line 4. For the next word, νεκύοις instead of the expected νεκύ(ε)σι, Brugnone cites comparable irregular dative plurals in -ους of third-declension words in other Sicilian inscriptions, but we need not assume such irregularity here: for the ν of the printed text the drawing, as I interpret it, shows traces compatible with

7 F. Costabile, “La triplice defixio del Kerameikós di Atene,” MinEpPap 1 (1998) 9–54, has published a lead tablet inscribed in the fourth century, with three curses concerning lawsuits that have no evident connection. The editor makes a good case that the scribe was a professional.
p, which will yield the more normally spelled νεκροῖς. The formulaic phrases that refer to chthonians in lines 1f have metrical shapes, πάρα Φερσεφώναι and (καί?) πάρα Τίτανέσσι κατάχθονίοις (cf. κατάχθονίωτοι θεοῖς of Text 1 line 2), compatible with dactylic poetry, which may well have been their origin. They would be from the same stock as the phrases τάρταρον ἄνευντα (cf. II. 8.13; Hymn. Hom. Merc. 256, τ. ἄνευντα), Ἐκάτει χθόνια, and (καί) Ἐρινύσιν ἥλιθώναις of the Attic DTWii 108 (4th c.?), with its elegiac couplets, and the hexameter at the opening of DTAmd 81 (Tanagra, 2nd c.), Ἐ[ρ]ῆ[ν][κικλήσκῳ χθόνιον ... καὶ Φερσεφόνηαν.8 Metrical

8 Wünsch (DTWii p.viii) compares the καὶ νυχίαν Ἐκάτην καὶ ἔπαινην Περσεφόνειαν of the magician’s incantation at Luc. Menipp. 9. Such metrical ἐπαφαί (F. Pfister, “Epodai,” RE Supp. 4 [1924] 323–44) were clearly in circulation. For example, there is a set of dactylic apotropaic verses preserved on
considerations as well favor, then, νεκροῖς over νεκύοις: (καὶ?) πάρ’ ἄπῃχομένοισι νεκροῖς.

The ἄπευξομένοι νεκροὶ and the ἄπευξομένατ (sc. νεκραί), the "abominating dead," i.e., who send or enact curses, would be the equivalent, presumably, of the dead whom we meet with later in this line, the ἀτέλεστοι. These last, as I would interpret them, are dead persons whose forces are still active because of a lack of proper funeral rites; such dead were believed, as we see in the large fifth-century lex sacra from Selinus (SEG XLIII 630), to pollute the living with their miasma and indeed were invoked to afflict persons named on curse tablets.9 Here the occupants of the grave where our two tablets were deposited were no doubt known or assumed to be ἀτέλεστοι. The phrase ἐς τοὺς ἀτελέστους is very difficult, however. The blank before it seems to indicate the beginning of a new section, but there is no main verb. If this section is ordered like the others, a verb, presumably καταιδεῖων, is to be supplied at its beginning, along with δὲ υπίν as in lines 5 and 7. But the reason for the choice of the preposition ἐς is by no means obvious, and the article finds no parallel in the other phrases here that refer to chthonians. Have we a corruption from the formulary that was used? Traces of a gloss? Of instructions for depositing the tablets? Assuming an intrusion, I would bracket the phrase.

Line 4. Brugnone tentatively assumes a misspelling [ὁ]αρίταις for ἀωρίταις, which she understands as disturbances of the seasons, i.e., by Demeter. This is a difficulty, for we might expect deities corresponding to the Τιτάνεσσαι, and one would prefer, if possible, not to rescue the preserved text by assuming an anomaly in the lacuna. In the note immediately following,10 Jaime Curbera offers an attractive solution: [ἰ]αρίταις (for ἱαρίταις) Δάματρος, the Erinyes as "priestesses of Demeter," the

fourth-century lead tablets from Selinus (comm. ad SupplMag 49.64-73), Phalasarna (my "The Inscribed Lead Tablet from Phalasarna," ZPE 94 [1992] 191-94), Himera (my "Ephesia Grammata at Himera," ZPE forthcoming), and Locri Epizephyrii (Costabile [supra n.S] no. 2; see Jordan [supra n.S] for the verses). The Himerian and Locrian hexameters have been converted into Doric. In the magical papyri, which are of course mostly much later than the two curse tablets from Lilybaeum, there is an abundance of such dactylic verse, addressed to chthonians and other powers: see PGM vol. II 237-66.

9 See M. H. Jameson, D. R. Jordan, and R. D. Kotansky, A Lex Sacra from Selinouς (=GRBM 11 [Durham (NC) 1993]) esp. ch. VII, on the curse tablets from the Sanctuary of Malophoros.

10 "Chthonians in Sicily," at 404f.
Greek phrase incidentally having epic scansion. The final words of the second section (lines 3f) are no doubt meant to correspond to those of the first (lines 1-3); line 4 should end, then, \( \langle \text{καὶ} \rangle \ \piαρ^{' \ \varepsilonπευ\chiομεί[ν]} \alpha[ις] \nu \) (or even \( \langle \text{καὶ} \rangle \ \piαρ^{' \ \varepsilonπευ\chiομεί[ν]} \alpha[ις] \nu \varepsilonκραίς)\?), the \( \langle \text{καὶ} \rangle \) relieving the awkwardness of the two adjacent prepositional phrases. This solution reveals, then, an interesting structure in the text: the avenging Titans, on the one hand, with the male abominating dead, and, on the other, the avenging Erinyes with the female.

**Line 5.** Brugnone’s hesitant \( \alpha[ιοθησαι ?] \) is a little short for the lacuna, and, as I read the drawing, the \( \nu \) belongs to the end of this line, not of the next. Taking line 8 as a clue, we may restore \( \alpha[υτών καὶ νοῦν], \) which fills the space better.

**Lines 6-7.** In her commentary, Brugnone suggests \( \omegaς \muη \ δύναι[αταί σκείν] / \lambdaλιά[v]. \) In the drawing, the traces of what is printed as \( \alpha[ι] \) in line 7 appear to be compatible with \( \nu \) plus a blank space. We have such a blank before \( \epsilonς \ \tauους \ \alphaτελέστους \) in line 3, and there is another at the end of line 4, before the \( \kappa\alphaταδέω \) of line 5. I assume another here, before this repetition of \( \kappaαταδέω. \) If we read the infinitive \( \lambdaλίν \) (for \( \lambdaλείν: \) compare the spelling \( \muισίν \) of the contracted infinitive \( \muισείν \) at the end of Text 1), which is practically a synonym of \( \lambdaέγειν, \) we may easily restore \( \omegaς \muη \ δύναι[ταί \ \αντία] / \lambdaλίν. \)

**Lines 7-8.** In line 8, one is reluctant to assume an abbreviation, which would be an anomaly on this tablet, as an explanation of letters assumed for a lacuna. The solution no doubt lies in \( \alpha[υτών καὶ νοῦν καὶ ψυ[χήν αυτάς] \) \( \chiων \) \( \chiων \) \( \alphaυτάς, \) \"And I bind her down in lead, \( \Sigma[- \max. \ ca 5-][/ \ YN. \ [\alpha[υτών καὶ \ νο\'υν καὶ \ ψυ[χήν \ αυτάς], \"And I bind her down in lead, \( \Sigma[- \max. \ ca 5-][/ \ YN \) would be the woman’s name, accusative if declined. I have not found any likely Greek name to supply, but the occurrence of Apithamb.al and Mymbyr in our texts means that the name need not be Greek.

Museo “Baglio Anselmi”
Marsala, inv. 1647

1 ← \( \kappa\alphaταδέω \ \Sigmaωπυρίωνα \ τάς \ Μυμβύρ \ παρά \ Φερσε-\)
2 ← \( \phiοναι \ καὶ \ παρά \ Τιτάνεσσι \ κατακθονίοις \ καὶ \ παρ’ \ \alpha-\)
3 ← \( π[ε] \ \chiομένουισι \ νεκροῖσ. \ νας. \) (\( \kappaαταδέω \ \delta\ \ ον) \ (\( \epsilonς \ \tauους \ \ατελέστους) \) καὶ \( \piαρ-\)

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"I bind down Zopyrion son of Mymbyr before Persephone and before (the) underground Titans and before (the) abominating (male) dead. <And I bind him down> also before (the) priestesses of Demeter and before (the) abominating (sc. female dead). And I bind him down in lead, him and his mind and his soul, so that he will be unable to speak in opposition. And I bind her down in lead, (i.e.) S[—] yn, her and (her) mind and her soul."

ATHENS

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