

# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Not least among their interesting features are their personal names: the first curse is directed against a man (?) called  $\text{Απιθαμβ.αλ}^3$  and the second, against a  $\text{Ζωπυρίων τᾶς Μυμβυρ}$ , the two non-Greek names (no doubt Punic, as Brugnone suggests), being treated as inde-

<sup>1</sup> B. Bechtold and A. Brugnone, "Novità epigrafiche da Lilibeo. La tomba 186 della Via Berta," *Seconde Giornate Internazionali di Studi sull' area Elima (Gibellina, 22-26 ottobre 1994)*, *Atti* (Pisa 1997) 111-40. I am grateful to Professor Brugnone for a reprint of this article. All ancient dates below are B.C.

The two basic corpora of curse tablets are R. WONSCH, *Defixionum tabellae* (=IG III.3 [Berlin 1897; repr. Chicago 1976; hereafter 'DTWü']) and A. Audolent, *Defixionum tabellae quotquot innotuerunt ...* (Paris 1904; repr. Frankfurt a.M. 1967: 'DTAud'); for a list of Greek examples appearing subsequently see D. R. Jordan, "A Survey of Greek Defixiones not included in the Special Corpora," *GRBS* 26 (1985) 151-97. The standard introduction is †K. Preisendanz, "Fluchtafel (Defixio)," *RAC* 8 (1972) 1-24; M. A. López Jimeno, *Las tabellae defixionis de la Sicilia griega* (Amsterdam 1991), has assembled the Greeks texts from Sicily; most appear also in L. Dubois, *Inscriptions grecques dialectales de Sicile* (=ColLEFR 119 [Rome 1989]).

<sup>2</sup> Brugnone contrasts the looseness and the careless flow of the lettering of Text 1 with the neatness of 2. My assumption is that the retrograde writing of the latter would have caused the writer more trouble and thought and that this explains its more ordered appearance.

<sup>3</sup> The dot between  $\beta$  and  $\alpha$  stands on the tablet and was conceivably considered part of the spelling.

clinable.<sup>4</sup> 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.

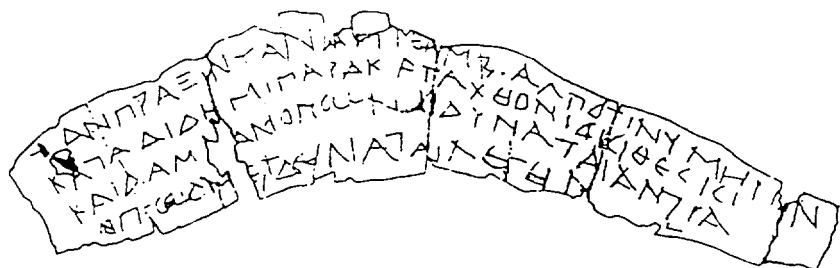
1. (Fig. 1a–b)

- A: 1 Τὰν πρᾶξιν τὰν Απιθαμβ.αλ ποτὶ Νυμήριον  
 2 καταδίδημι παρὰ καταχθονίοισι θεοῖσι  
 3 καὶ Δαμ[έ]αν, ὅπως [μ]ῆ δύναται ἀντία,  
 4 ὅπως μ[ῆ] δύναται λέγειν,  
 B: 5 ποτὶ πᾶ[σα] πρᾶξι ἀντία λέγειν  
 6 μ[ῆ]δδὲ μισίν.  
 5 πᾶσαν πρᾶξιν 6 μῆδὲ μισεῖν

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]αν 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:

<sup>4</sup> 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 Mymbyr are Punic “then someone should be able to shed light on them.” Brugnone notes (120) that in Ζωπυρίωνα τᾶς Μυμβυρ, the substitution in the latter name of τᾶς for τόν + 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. Tatakis, “From the Prosopography of Ancient Macedonia: The Metronymics,” *Αρχαία Μακεδονία* 5 [1993] 1453–71) and Egypt (R. Tanner, “Ehe- und Erbrecht im pharaonischen Ägypten,” *Klio* 49 [1967] 5–37, esp. 36).



a: Tablet 1, Side A



b: Tablet 1, Side B

Figure 1.

- 2 Καταδίδημι παρὰ καταχθονίοισι θεοῖσι
- 1 τὰν πράξιν τὰν Απιθαμβ.αλ ποτὶ Νυμήριον
- 3 καὶ Δαμέαν.

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,

Καταδίδημι παρὰ καταχθονίοισι θεοῖσι  
ὅπως μὴ δύναται ἀντία *etc.*

τὰν πρᾶξιν  
τὰν Απιθαμβ.αλ  
ποτὶ Νυμήριον  
καὶ Δαμέαν

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 ὅπως 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 ὅπως 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: ὅπως μὴ δύναται ποτὶ πᾶσαν 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 Late III<sup>a</sup>

A: 1 {τὰν πρᾶξιν τὰν Απιθαμβ.αλ ποτὶ Νυμήριον}  
2 Καταδίδημι παρὰ καταχθονίοισι θεοῖσι (τὰν πρᾶξιν τὰν  
Απιθαμβ.αλ ποτὶ Νυμήριον)  
3 καὶ Δαμ[έ]αν, ὅπως [μ]ὴ δύναται ἀντία / λέγειν,  
4 ὅπως μ[ῆ] δύναται  
B: 5 ποτὶ πᾶ[σα] πρᾶξι ἀντία λέγειν  
6 μ[ῆ]{δ}δὲ μισίν.

5 πᾶσαν πρᾶξιν 6 μῆδὲ μισεῖν

"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 he be able to speak in opposition to any legal action or to hate."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> 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):

## 2. (Fig. 2a-b)

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:

- A* 1 καταδέω Ζωπυρίωνα τᾶς Μυμβυρ παρὰ Φερσε-  
 2 φόνοι καὶ Τιτάνεσσι καταχθονίοις καὶ παρὰ  
 3 π[ρ]ιχομένοισι νεκύοις <sup>vac.</sup> ἐς τοὺς ἀτελέστους καὶ παρ-  
 4 ᾶ [ ]αρίαις Δάματρος παρ' ἀπενχομέ[ν]α[ισ]ιν  
 5 καταδέω δέ νιν ἐμ βολίμωι, α[ἴ]σθησιν ?]  
 6 αὐτοῦ καὶ ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ὡς μὴ δύνα[ται - - -]ν  
 7 λαλιά[ν] καταδέω δέ νιν ἐμ βολί[μ]ωι σ[ω]φρο-]  
 8 [σ]ύν(αν) [α]ὐτὰν καὶ νοῦν καὶ ψυ[χ]ήν  
*B* 9 [καταδέω] δέ ὅπως  
 10 [μὴ δύνανται] ἀντία  
 11 [λέγειν] μ(ή)τε πο[ι]εῖν]

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

- 1 IUNIUS
- 2 SEPTIMIUS
- 3 C. ACIN<I>US
- 4 M. A(N)NIUS
- 5 L. UMBONIUS
- 6 M. NAUTIUS
- 7 M. RUSTIUS
- 8 L. NAUTIUS
- 9 UMBONIA

The Latin names would have been inscribed first, as I see it:<sup>6</sup> 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 (δέ) 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

its text consists of a list of three men's names (nom.) plus "the others who are opposed (by us) and anyone who opposes us," *i.e.*, the defendants and the plaintiffs.

<sup>6</sup> For a good discussion of the names see Brugnone's notes.

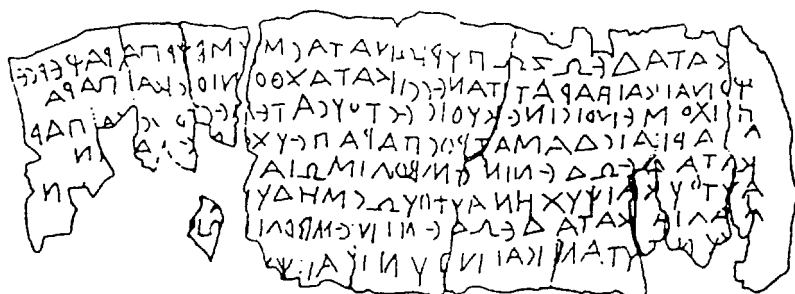
the curse against Zopyrion?<sup>7</sup> the following notes concern A only.

*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 *καταδῶ* (see *DTWü*, index VA; *DTAud*, index VIA.1 *s.v.* *Achaia*); six show the form *-δέω*, three *-δίδημι*. This last occurs also in two Boeotian curses, *DTAud* 81 and 84, and one from Metapontum, *SEG XXX* 1175 (3<sup>rd</sup> 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 (4<sup>th</sup> 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 *καταδῶ*, in 69 *καταδίδημι*.

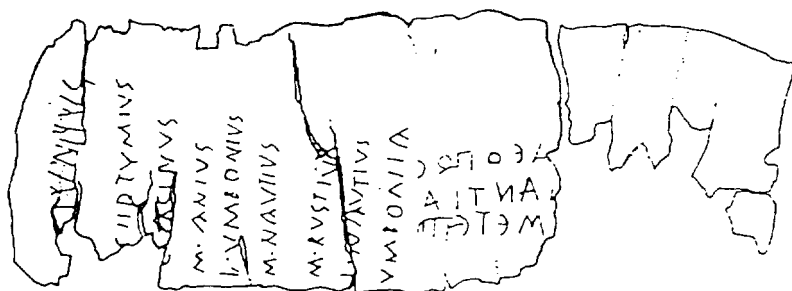
*Line 2.* There has been a simple oversight in the transcription: the letters ΠΑΡΑ stand between *καὶ* and *Τιτάνεσσι*. These last, older gods now relegated to the Underworld, we hear of at *e.g.* *Il.* 14.279 (*θεοὺς ... τοὺς ὑποταρταρίους, οἱ Τιτᾶνες καλέονται*) and *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 335 (*Τιτῆνές τε θεοὶ τοὶ ὑπὸ χθονὶ ναϊετάνοντες*). They were popularly believed to be punishers of wrongdoers—*cf.* *Hsch. s.v.* *Τιτᾶνες: τιμωροὶ ... οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἀποτίσαι ἀτιτᾶνες ὠνομάζονται, οἱ δὲ ἔχοντες, τιτᾶνες*, the source for the word *ἀτιτᾶνες* probably being late comedy: see in general E. Wüst, "Titanes," *RE* Reihe 2, 6 (1937) 1491–1503, esp. 1492.

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

<sup>7</sup> 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.



a: Tablet 2, Side A



b: Tablet 2, Side B

Figure 2.

ρ, which will yield the more normally spelled νεκροῖς. The formulaic phrases that refer to chthonians in lines 1f have metrical shapes, πᾶρᾶ Φερσεφόναι and (καὶ?) πᾶρᾶ Τιτᾶνᾶσσι κατᾶχθόνιοις (cf. κατᾶχθόνιοῖσι θεοῖσι 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 ἀερόεντα (cf. *Il.* 8.13; *Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 256, τ. ἠερόεντα), Ἐκάτει χθόνιαί, and (καὶ) Ἐρινύσιν ἠλιθιώναις of the Attic *DTWü* 108 (4<sup>th</sup> c.?), with its elegiac couplets, and the hexameter at the opening of *DTAud* 81 (Tanagra, 2<sup>nd</sup> c.), Ἐ[ρμ]ῆν [κι]κλήσκω χθόνιον ... καὶ Φερσεφόνηαν.<sup>8</sup> Metrical

<sup>8</sup> Wunsch (*DTWü* p.viii) compares the καὶ νοχίαν Ἐκάτην καὶ ἐπαινήν Περσεφόνειαν of the magician's incantation at Luc. *Menipp.* 9. Such metrical ἐπῳδαί (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?) πᾶρ' ἀπ[ε]ϋχόμενοισι νεκροῖς.

The ἀπευχόμενοι νεκροί and the ἀπευχόμεναι (*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.<sup>9</sup> 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 καταδέω, is to be supplied at its beginning, along with δέ νιν 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 [ὠ]αρίαις for ὠρίαις, which she understands as disturbances of the seasons, *i.e.*, by Demeter. This is a difficulty, for we might expect divinities corresponding to the Τιτάνεσσι, and one would prefer, if possible, not to rescue the preserved text by assuming an anomaly in the lacuna. In the note immediately following,<sup>10</sup> Jaime Curbera offers an attractive solution: [ι]αρίαις (for ἰαρείαις) 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.5] no. 2; see Jordan [*supra* n.5] 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.

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

<sup>10</sup> “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, <καὶ> παρ' ἀπευχομέ[ν]α[ισ]ιν (or even <καὶ> παρ' ἀπευχομέ[ν]α[ισ]ι ν(εκραίς)?), the <καὶ> 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 α[ῖσθησιν ?] is a little short for the lacuna, and, as I read the drawing, the ν belongs to the end of this line, not of the next. Taking line 8 as a clue, we may restore α[ὐτὸν καὶ νοῦ]ν, which fills the space better.

*Lines 6-7.* In her commentary, Brugnone suggests ὡς μὴ δύν[αται ἀσκειῖ]ν / λαλιά[ν]. In the drawing, the traces of what is printed as α[ in line 7 appear to be compatible with ν plus a blank space. We have such a blank before ἐς τοὺς ἀτελέστους in line 3, and there is another at the end of line 4, before the καταδέω of line 5. I assume another here, before this repetition of καταδέω. If we read the infinitive λαλῖν (for λαλεῖν: compare the spelling μισῖν of the contracted infinitive μισεῖν at the end of Text 1), which is practically a synonym of λέγειν, we may easily restore ὡς μὴ δύνα[ται ἀντία] / λαλῖν.

*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 [α]ὐτάν, which seems inescapable as a reading, even though the intended victim named in line 1 is male. We must have a second target here, a woman, who will need a name. I should read: Καταδέω δέ νιν ἐμ βολίμωι, Σ[-max. ca 5-]/[ ] YN, [α]ὐτάν καὶ νοῦν καὶ ψυ[χὴν αὐτᾶς], "And I bind her down in lead, S[—]yn, her and (her) mind and her soul." Σ[-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 Apithambal and Mymbyr in our texts means that the name need not be Greek.

Museo "Baglio Anselmi"  
Marsala, inv. 1647

H. 0.038, L. 0.109 m Lilybaeum  
Late III

- 1 ← καταδέω Ζωπυρίωνα τᾶς Μυμβυρ παρὰ Φερσε-
- 2 ← φόνοι καὶ παρὰ Τιτάνεσσι καταχθονίοις καὶ παρ' ἄ-
- 3 ← π[ε]υχομένοισι νεκροῖς. <sup>vac.</sup> (Καταδέω δέ νιν) {ἐς τοὺς  
ἀτελέστους} καὶ παρ-

- 4 ← ἃ [ι]αρίαις Δάματρος (καὶ) παρ' ἀπευχομέ[ν]α[ισ]ιν. *vac.*  
 5 ← Καταδέω δέ νιν ἐμ βολίμωι, α[ὐ]τὸν καὶ νοῦ]ν  
 6 ← αὐτοῦ καὶ ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ὡς μὴ δύν[αται ἀντία]  
 7 ← λαλῖν. *vac.* Καταδέω δέ νιν ἐμ βολίμωι, Σ[-max. ca 5-]  
 8 ← [.] ὐΝ, [α]ὐτὰν καὶ νοῦν καὶ ψυ[χ]ὴν αὐτῶς]

2 καὶ Τιτάνεσσι Brugnone 2/3 παρὰ / π[ρ]ιχομένοισι νεκύοις Br.

4 [ῶ]αρίοις (for ἄωρίαις) Br in comm.; [ι]αρίαις (for ἱαρείαις) Curbera

5 α[ῖ]σθησιν?] Br. 6 δύν[αται ---]ν Br. 7 λαλῖν (for λαλεῖν). *vac.* Καταδέω: λαλιὰ[ν] καταδέω Br. 7/8 βολί[μ]ωι σ[ω]φορ[ο] / [σ]ύν(αν) Br.

"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

June, 1999