

Two Christian Prayers from Southeastern Sicily

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For P.A.C. and his vines at Κύπας Βρύση

THE AREA between Comiso and Noto in southeastern Sicily has yielded several Christian inscriptions of interest to the student of rural religious expression in the early Byzantine period. They are a group of prayers, most concerning vineyards, and they have magical overtones.¹ Some are quite difficult to read, and few are adequately edited. In 1959 M. Burzachechi published two of them, each inscribed on a tufa tablet; they had been found by a farmer in his field in an area near Comiso known as Crucidda and are now housed in the Antiquarium at Ragusa.² The two tablets have similar magical signs; both prayers were inscribed on behalf of a man named Paul; and the lettering and ligatures in both (see *Figures 1 and 2*) are clearly, as Burzachechi has noted, the work of one inscriber. Using Burzachechi's excellent photographs of the two texts, I offer suggestions for improved transcriptions, in the hope that they will encourage scholars to restudy, from autopsy where possible, the whole group from the area.

1. Burzachechi no. I with Tav. I. The left- and right-hand edges and possibly the bottom edge as well are preserved. Maximum preserved height 0.225 m, width 0.255. *Figure 1*.

¹ For a summary and the bibliography and for an introduction to inscribed Christian agricultural prayers in general see G. Manganaro, "Nuovi documenti magici della Sicilia orientale," *RendLinc* VIII.18 (1963) 57–74. The texts from between Comiso and Noto include an exorcism (?) from near Ragusa (*SEG* 18.415) and five prayers for vineyards, one on terracotta, from near Palazzolo Acreide (*SEG* 18.408), two on limestone, from near Noto (ed. Manganaro) and from an unrecorded spot near Comiso (*SEG* 18.414, *infra* n.11), and two on tufa, from Crucidda near Comiso (discussed here). On palaeographical grounds Manganaro would assign the prayer from near Noto to the end of the fifth or the first half of the sixth century and those from near Comiso to the fifth century. All six prayers are roughly contemporary, as inspection of the published photographs makes obvious, whatever the precise absolute chronology may be.

² M. Burzachechi, "Nuove iscrizioni greche cristiane di Comiso," *RendLinc* VIII.14 (1959) 403–10, a paper presented to the Lincei in their session of 1 June 1950. Cf. J. and L. Robert, *Bull.ép.* 1961, 865, and Manganaro (*supra* n.1) 63. The tracings shown below were made from the photographs that Burzachechi published.

Burzachechi's text:

Ἀμήν. πα- - - - -
 Χρ(ιστ)έ, ὁ πλοῖθύνα[ς] ἀ[στέ-
 ρας 'ς τ]-
 ὄν οὐρανὸν κάρτου δορεὰς 'ς
 τὴν
 θαλάσσην, πλοῖθνον κέ
 τὺς καρπὺς ἰς τὸν ἀμπελ-
 ὄναν Παύλου.

O Cristo, tu che hai moltiplicato le stelle (?) nel cielo e i doni del cibo (?) del mare, moltiplica anche i frutti nella vigna di Paolo.

Revision:

 1 Ἀμηλ. Γα[βριηλ (?) -^{ca}12-]
 2 Χρ(ιστ)έ ὁ πλοῖθύνας ἀσ[τέρας
 ἰς τ]-
 3 ὄν οὐρανὸν κα(ι) τὸ ὕδωρ εἰς
 τὴν
 4 θαλάσσην, πλοῖθνον κέ
 5 τὺς καρπὺς ἰς τὸν ἀμπελ-
 6 ὄναν Παύλου.
 7 Magical signs
 8 Magical signs

2, 4 l. πληθυν-

3 KAP lapis 1. ὕδωρ

4/5 l. καὶ τοὺς καρποὺς³ εἰς

5/6 l. ἀμπελώνα

Amel. Ga[briel (?) - - -]. Christ, who hast multiplied stars in the sky and the water in the sea, multiply also the fruits in the vineyard of Paul.

Line 1 is set off from the rest of the text by a horizontal line beneath it, and at the left there is a vertical; the stone is broken away just above the letters, but there was probably another horizontal there. We may compare the treatment in 2.4–5 below, where words are enclosed in boxes arranged side by side (see *Figure 2*). There the words seem to be mostly names of angels. The first word Burzachechi transcribes AMHN; but in inscribed prayers, ἀμήν is usually found not at the beginnings but at the ends.⁴ Because *nu* is normally written N rather than **Ν** in both texts⁵ and because angels' names frequently end in -ηλ, I transcribe the word not AMHN but AMHΛ and assume a hitherto (as far as I know) unattested name of an angel.⁶ The ver-

³ For *ou* → *u* see F. T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods I* (Testi e documenti 55 [Milan 1976]) 214.

⁴ On the use of the word see P. Glaue, *RAC* 1 (1950) 378–80 s.v., and F. Cabrol, *DACL* 1.1 (1924) 1554–73, esp. “L’*Amen* dans l’épigraphie et dans les papyrus,” 1563–71. Several of the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels and in other early Christian literature begin ἀμήν, but the parallelism may be deceptive, for there the word is invariably part of the phrase ἀμήν (γὰρ) λέγω ὑμῖν (or σοι); for the expression see J. Strugnell, “‘Amen, I say unto you’ in the Sayings of Jesus and in Early Christian Literature,” *HThR* 67 (1974) 177–82, with the bibliography cited there.

⁵ The one clear exception is the **Ν** in AMΠΕΑΟΜΟC at 2.3.

⁶ On angels in general see J. Michl, *RAC* 5 (1962) 53–258 s.v. “Engel,” esp. “Katalog der Engelnamen” 200–39, for examples of angelic names ending -ηλ. More recent lists:

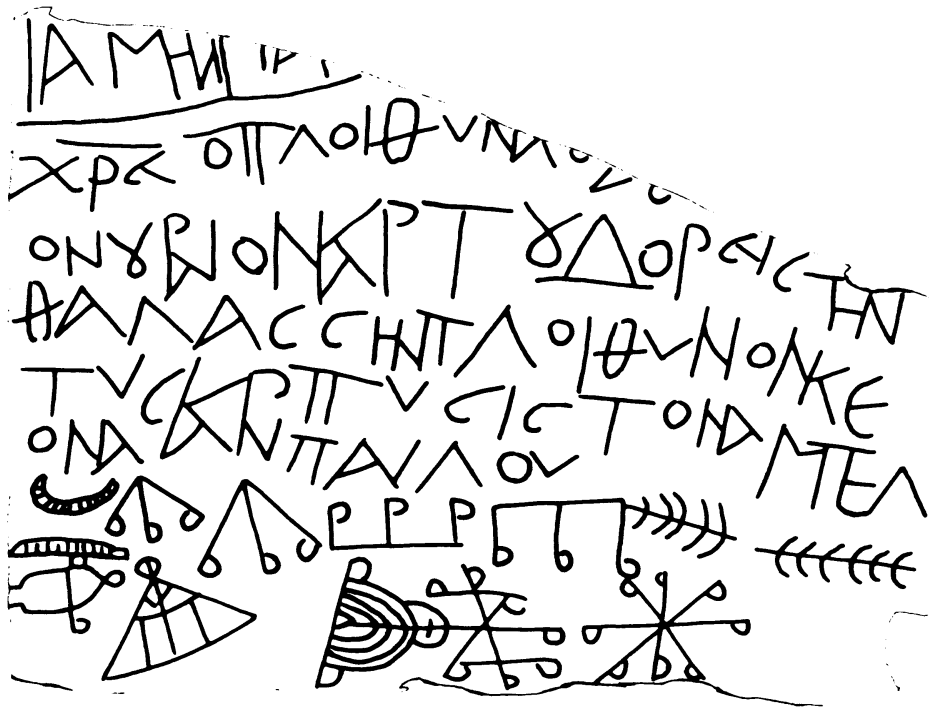


Figure 1

tical that follows I interpret as the common boundary of two adjacent boxes like those in 2. What is left is compatible with the letters ΓΑ, ΙΑ, ΡΑ, ΤΑ, and ΦΑ. Γα[βριηλ is an obvious possibility;⁷ I restore it simply *exempli gratia*, for the name here, like some of those in 2, may be unattested outside these texts.

Burzachechi notes that the phrase κάρτου δореάς 'ς (for καὶ ἄρτου δωρεάς εἰς) τὴν θαλάσσην as he reads it in line 3 seems somewhat strange, but he suggests that “gifts of bread in the sea” may mean simply ‘fish’ and that, in a spot as close to the sea as Comiso (ca 16 km), ‘fish’ may have come to mean, by extension, ‘food’ in general. Such a meaning is not, as far as I know, attested elsewhere. There is no second *sigma* in line 3;⁸ Burzachechi’s text should have been printed δореά<ς> 'ς. In reading the line as I do, I assume three

G. Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels, Including the Fallen Angels* (New York/London 1967), and J.-H. Niggemeyer, *Beschwörungsformel aus dem “Buch der Geheimnisse” (Sefār ha-Razim): Zur Topologie der magischen Rede* [Judaistische Texte u. Studien 3 (1975)] 225–38. We may compare the name Αμηλ here with Αμαηλ at 2.5 (see *infra* n.12).

⁷ We may compare the invocation of Gabriel in the inscribed prayer from near Palazzolo Acreide (*supra* n.1: SEG 18.408) for a vineyard not far from Comiso.

⁸ Noted by Manganaro (*supra* n.1) 63 n.35, who reads δореάς, τὴν but follows Burzachechi otherwise.

anomalies: an inconsistency in the spellings *καί* and *εἰς* here but *κέ* and *ἰς* in the next lines, an inconcinnity in the presence of an article before ‘water’ and its absence before ‘stars’ in the parallel phrases in lines 2–3, and a mistake on the stone, *KAP* for *KAI*. The assumptions are fewer and make a smoother text than those that Burzachechi’s reading requires: unidiomatic crasis in *κάρτου*, awkwardness in the phrase *ἄρτου δωρεὰς εἰς τὴν θαλάσσην* = ‘fish’ = ‘food’, haplography, and the late simplification *εἰς* → ‘ς.

The structure of the resulting prayer may be compared to that of another agricultural prayer, which shows the same general formula. It is a prayer for silkworms that is preserved in a sixteenth-century manuscript (*Marc.gr.app.* II 163) but is itself no doubt considerably older: *κύριε ὁ θεός . . . , πλήθυνον τοὺς σκόληκας τούτους, ὡς ἐπλήθυνας τὰς ἀστέρας τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τὸν ἄμμον παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τῆς θαλάσσης.*⁹

2. Burzachechi no. III with Tav. III and IV. Part of right-hand edge preserved. Maximum preserved height 0.12 m, maximum preserved width 0.31. *Figure 2*. The back shows traces of magical signs.

Burzachechi’s text:

--- [κ]αρπ-----
 --- ΡΑΚΚΕΑ μετάδουλος
 Παύλου ἰδ
 --- ΣΠΑΤΟΝ τὸν κοίτου
 αὐτῶν †
 Ἄβιμηλ. Λασθήν. Ἄμμαήλ.
 --- Ἐάο, Ἄζαήρ.

Revision:

 1 [-^{ca}11- (e.g.) πλοίθυνον κέ]
 2 [τὺς] καρπ[ὺς κέ -^{ca}8- τῆς]
 3 [χό]ρας κέ ἀμπε(λ)ῶνος Παύ-
 λου. Ἰδ-
 4 [ε] ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ τοῦ κοίτου αὐ-
 το(ῦ). †
 5 Ἀβιμηλ. Λασθηλ. Ἀμμαηλ.
 6 -^{ca}5- Ἐαο. Ἀζαηρ.

3 l. [χό]ρας καὶ ΑΜΠΕΑΟ ΟC la-
 pis: l. ἀμπελῶνος

4 l. αὐτοῦ ΑΥΤΟ lapis

[Multiply also the] fruits [and the
 . . .] of the land and the vineyard of
 Paul. Look upon this pen (?) of his.

The supplements that I offer for 2 are simply *exempli gratia*.

In line 3, the unattested *μετάδουλος*, which Burzachechi offers without comment, arouses doubt about the transcription. If the word

⁹ Edited by F. Pradel, *Griechische und süditalienische Beschwörungen, Gebete und Rezepte des Mittelalters* (RGVV 3.3 [Giessen 1907]) 16; Pradel cites (39–40) several biblical passages with similar expressions of analogy.

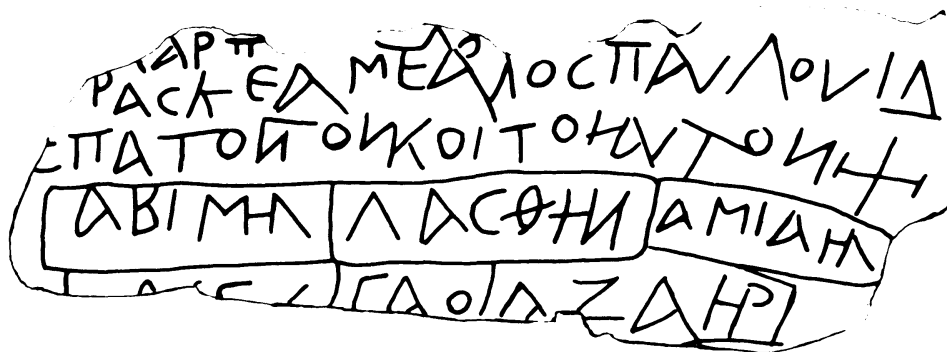


Figure 2

begins instead with the final *alpha* of his ΠΑΣΚΕΑ and if, as the same configuration at the end of 1.5 suggests, the next letters represent ΜΠΕ, then some form of ἀμπελών is surely expected, and with this clue we may untangle the ligature. However, there seems to be an extra diagonal stroke in the configuration **Α** that forces a transcription ΑΜΠΕΑΟΙΟΣ. The stroke and perhaps also the rendering of *nu* as **Η** may be the result of the inscriber's difficulty with the awkward ligature.

The spelling *α* for *αν*, as assumed in one instance in line 4, is frequently attested.¹⁰ Since line 3 concerns Paul's land (?) and vineyard, the text is obviously another prayer, like 1 and most other inscribed prayers from this part of Sicily,¹¹ for increase in harvest. We

¹⁰ For *αν* → *α*, particularly in forms of *αὐτός*, see Gignac (*supra* n.3) 226–27.

¹¹ The limestone inscription SEG 18.414 (now Burzachechi [*supra* n.2] 405–07 no. II) is now in such a badly damaged state that our knowledge of its text depends largely on a drawing published in 1757, which Burzachechi reproduces. The text has phrases in common with 1 and 2 and magical signs like those in 1, and Burzachechi considers the vineyard concerned to be in fact that of the Paul of 1 and 2. However, according to the drawing at least, the ligatures in the limestone prayer are less thick and frequent than in those two; its writing seems somewhat more formal; and in any case Paul is not named in it. I assume, therefore, a different inscriber and a different vineyard but a common origin, perhaps a handbook somewhat like the manuscript edited by Pradel (*supra* n.9). For an example of two virtually identical magico-religious agricultural prayers meant to affect two different farms, cf. IG XIV 2481 and 2494, from widely distant findspots, in the Départements of Drôme and of Vaucluse, respectively, in southern France.

may expect, then, some such reference in the request in lines 3–4. Apparently the only agricultural meaning of *κοῖτος* that would be at all appropriate here is ‘pen’—*i.e.* a pen for animals. In KOITΟΥ we may, however, have a mistake for KOIΠΟΥ—*i.e.* κήπου—the inscriber having omitted the second vertical of *pi*. I assume that the last letter of AYTOY simply has an extra stroke and that the resulting Ψ is inadvertent.

The *nomina sacra* in line 5 are very much like those in another Christian prayer for a vineyard, a limestone inscription said also to come from near Comiso and now housed in the Museo Civico at Catania (SEG 18.414). There they read Αβιμηλ Λασφειλ Αμαηλ Ελοελ.¹² The broken letters that begin line 6 of our text do not seem compatible, however, with the fourth word of that sequence. As for the other names, Εαο (Ε or Γ) may be a variant of Ιαω ‘Yahweh’, and Αζαηρ is apparently a variant of the name of the fallen angel Αζαηλ.¹³

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¹² Λασφεν Burzachechi; Ελοελ or Ελοελμ. Λασθηλ and Λασφειλ (ΙΑ or Ν) look like mere scribal variants of the same name, whatever its origin; it is not a normal angelic name of the type composed of a Semitic root plus -ηλ, for Λασθ- or Λασφ-, as the anonymous referee has kindly pointed out, cannot be Semitic; he suggests simply a “word of power” rather than an angel’s name. I leave the matter to specialists. Αμαηλ he suggests may contain the element Ιαω (Yahweh: *infra* n.13) in its third and fourth letters; it would then be an expansion of the angelic name Αμηλ read at 1.1. He compares the name Ammiel (see Davidson [*supra* n.6] 61).

¹³ Ιαω: W. Fauth, *KIPauly* 2 (1967) 1314–19 s.v. Αζαηλ: Michl (*supra* n.6) 206 no. 26, Davidson (*supra* n.6) 63; this angel does not seem to appear elsewhere as a protector of vineyards.