

Studying Greek History through Inscriptions

Curse tablets

Latin: *tabella defixionis, defixio*; **Greek:** κατάδεσμος

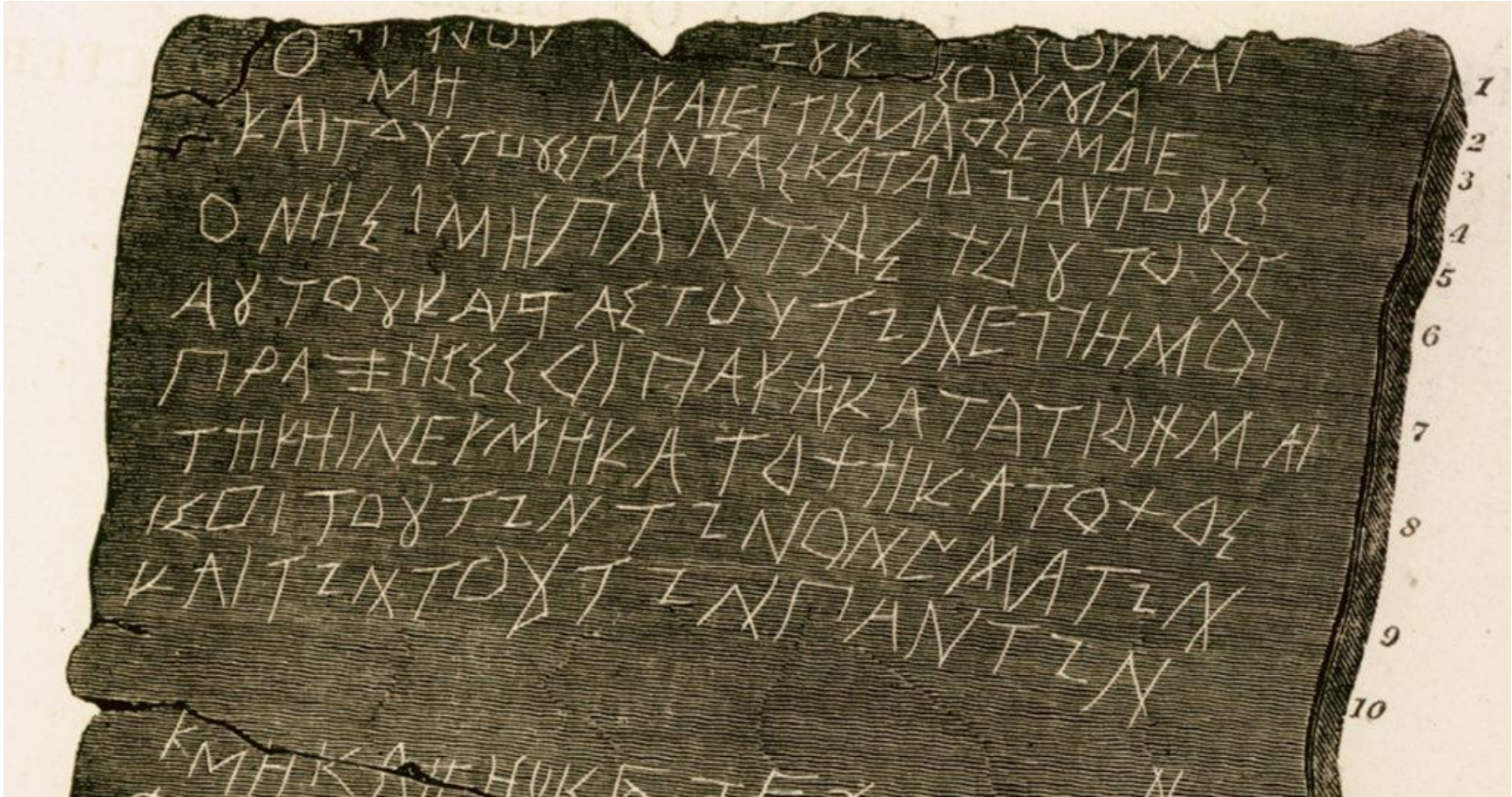
Thin **sheets of lead** with the text scratched letters. They are sometimes discovered along with small dolls or figurines (sometimes inaccurately referred to as, «Voodoo dolls» which may also be pierced by nails.

The texts written on them ask the **gods of the underworld** (Pluto, Charon, Hecate, and Persephone), **demons or deceased persons** to perform (via mediation) an action on a person or object.

Frequently, such curse tablets are also inscribed with additional, otherwise meaningless words that are not recognizable as belonging to any known language (*vocae mysticae*).

Some examples: *Mozouni, Perpertharona, Iaia, Friourix*. Such words lend to the tablets and the texts on them a kind of supernatural efficacy.





Ο ΤΙ ΤΟΥΝ ΤΕΚ ΤΟΥΝΗΤ
ΜΗ ΝΚΑΙΕΙ ΤΙΣ ΑΛΛΟ ΓΕΜΜΑ
ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥΤΟΥΣ ΠΑΝΤΑ ΚΑΤΑ ΔΕΛΑΥΤΟΥΣ
Ο ΝΗΣΙ ΜΗ ΠΑΝΤΑ Ε ΤΩ ΤΟΥ ΧΙ
ΑΥΤΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΑΣΤΟΥ ΤΖ ΝΕΤΗ ΜΟΙ
ΠΡΑΞΗΣ ΟΙ ΠΑΥΚΑ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΙΣ ΜΑΙ
ΤΗ Η ΝΕΥ ΜΗ ΚΑ ΤΟΥΤΗ ΚΑΤΟΧΟΣ
ΚΟΙ ΤΟΥΤΩ ΤΖ ΝΟΝ ΜΑΤΕΝ
ΚΑΙ ΤΩ ΤΟΥΤΩ ΠΑΝΤΩΝ
ΚΜΗ ΚΑΤΗ ΝΟΚ Ε ΤΕ

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

SUGGESTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Curbera, J., "Five Curse Tablets from the Athenian Kerameikos", *ZPE* 199 (2016) 109–118
- Del Amor López Jimeno, M., *Los Textos griegos de maleficio* (Madrid 2001)
- Daniel, R. W. / Franco Maltomini, Fr., *Supplementum magicum*, 2 vols, Κολωνία 1990-1992
- Faraone, Chr. A. / Obbink, D. (επιμ.), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York–Oxford 1991)
- Gager, J. G., *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York–Oxford 1992)
- Jordan D. R., «A Survey of Greek defixiones Not Included in the Special Corpora», *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26 (1985) 151-197
- Jordan D. R., «New Greek Curse Tablets (1985-2000)», *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 41 (2000) 5-46
- Kotansky, R., *Greek Magical Amulets. The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper And Bronze Lamellae I. Published Texts of Known Provenance. Papyrologica Coloniensia* 22.1 (Opladen 1994)
- Preisendanz, K., *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, 2 τόμοι (Stuttgart 1931)
- Strubbe, J. H. M., *Ἀραὶ ἐπιτόμβιοι: Imprecations against Desecrators of the Grave in the Greek Epitaphs of Asia Minor. IGSK* 52 (Bonn 1997)
- Tremel, J., *Magica Agonistica. Fluchtafeln im antiken Sport. Nikephoros Beihefte* 10 (Hildesheim 2004)

The curses concerned

court cases: the one who addresses the curse asks that the opposing litigant ("May he...") botches his performance in court or forget his words.

erotic cases: a man or woman wants to punish a lover or secure the love of a desired person.

rivals in the theater, amphitheater and circus or rivals in business. The pattern is the same as in the court cases: the one who addresses the curse asks that his rival botches his performance or his business.

thieves or other criminals.

Curse in lead, Athens, 4th c. BC



- The curses were placed in wells, tombs, springs, generally in dark and underground places, where the gods and demons of the underworld could hear better.
- Curse tablets targeted at thieves or other criminals may have been more public, and more acceptable; some scholars even refuse to apply the word "curse" to such "positive" texts, preferring expressions such as "**judicial prayers**".

Public curses

*Syll.*³ 37-38, Teos, 469-459 BC

ὅστις : φάρμακα : δηλητή-
ρια : ποιοῖ : ἐπὶ Τηϊοισι-
ν : τὸ ξυνὸν : ἢ ἐπ' ἰδιώτηι, : κ-
εῖνον : ἀπόλλυσθαι : καὶ α-
5 ὑτὸν : καὶ γένος : τὸ κένο :
ὅστις : ἐς γῆν : τὴν Τηϊήν : κ-
ωλύοι : σῖτον : ἐσάγεσθαι :
ἢ τέχνηι : ἢ μηχανῆι : ἢ κατ-
ὰ θάλασσαν : ἢ κατ' ἥπειρο-
10 ν : ἢ ἐσαχθέντα : ἀνωθεοίη, :
ἀπόλλυσθαι : καὶ αὐτ-
ὸν : καὶ γένος : τὸ κένο.

- Who ever should make deadly drugs for the Teian community or for an individual, destroy him and his family. Whoever stops the importation of grain into the Teian land or repels it as it is being imported either with skill or device and on sea or on land, destroy him and his family.

- [ΘΕΤΙ]ΜΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΦΩΝΤΟΣ ΤΟ ΤΕΛΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΝ ΓΑΜΟΝ
ΚΑΤΑΓΡΑΦΩ ΚΑΙ ΤΑΝ ΑΛΛΑΝ ΠΑΣΑΝ ΓΥ[ΝΑΙΚ]ΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΧΗΡΑΝ
ΚΑΙ ΠΑΡΘΕΝΩΝ ΜΑΛΙΣΤΑ ΔΕ ΘΕΤΙΜΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΡΚΑΤΤΙΘΕΜΑΙ
ΜΑΚΡΩΝΙ ΚΑΙ [ΤΟΙΣ] ΔΑΙΜΟΣΙ ΚΑΙ ΟΠΟΚΑ ΕΓΟ ΤΑΥΤΑ
ΔΙΕΛΕΞΑΙΜΙ ΚΑΙ ΑΝΑΓΝΟΙΗΝ ΠΑΛΛΙΝ ΑΝΟΡΟΞΑΣΑ. [ΤΟΚΑ]
ΓΑΜΑΙ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΦΩΝΤΑ ΠΡΟΤΕΡΟΝ ΔΕ ΜΗ. ΜΗ ΓΑΡ ΛΑΒΟΙ
ΑΛΛΑΝ ΓΥΝΑΙΚΑ ΑΛΛ Η ΕΜΕ. [ΕΜΕ Δ]Ε ΣΥΝΚΑΤΑΓΗΡΑΣΑΙ
ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΦΩΝΤΙ

I bind the solemn marriage of Thetima and Dionysophon with a spell written, and the marriage of all other women who are widows or virgins, but especially of Thetima; and I cast the spell on Macron and the demons. And if I ever dig up and unroll and read these words, then let Dionysophon be married, and not before; for I will not have another wife taken from me, but I will grow old with Dionysophon and no other.

**Curse tablets in the Museum of Archeology
and History of Art**

Fragment of a papyrus scroll with Greek text, showing several lines of writing in a cursive hand. The text is partially obscured by damage and the fragment's irregular shape.

Line 1: ΝΑΥΣΤΕΡΑΤΑΙΝΑΙΠΛΗ
Line 2: ΝΑΥΚΡΗΜΑΝΑΥΑΙΔ
Line 3: ΠΑΤΟΜΙΚΥΟΕΤΑΥΚΕΝ
Line 4: ΥΟΡΗΝΕΙΝΕΣΑΤΑΙΝΑ
Line 5: ΑΝΑΝΚΕΤΑΙΝΑΙΝ
Line 6: ΚΑΝΕΣΤΡΑΤΗΝΑΙΝ
Line 7: ΕΕΗΜΑΡΗΝΑΙΝΑΙΝ



**M.-Th. Le Dinahet-Couilloud, «Deux tablettes
d'imprécation», *BCH* 91, 1967, 513-515**

Ναυσίστρατος Αίγλι,

- 2 Νικώνυμος Ναυσιστ-
ράτο, Σμίκυθος Αίγλιεύς, Σμικ-
4 υθίων Αίγλιεύς, Ἀρίσταιχος
Ἀναφλύστιος, Εὐκτήμων,
6 Κλεοστράτη Ναυσιστράτο Αἴγι,
Ξενοκρίτη Σμικύθο Ὀῆθεν.



**M.-Th. Le Dinahet-Couilloud, «Deux tablettes
d'imprécation», *BCH* 91, 1967, 515-517**

A

Μυτίς,
τὴν γλώ-
ταν (sic) αὐτῆς
4 καὶ τὴν
ψυχὴν
καὶ τὰ
ἔργα· ἐναν[τία]
[γ]ένοιτο
ἅπαντα ·

B

Τελησίας,
Μοσχίνη,
[Σ]ωσίας,
Ἀρμένιος,
Γ[λ]αυκέτης,
Δημόστρατος
Ἄμφ[ί]νικος, Γλαύ(κ)ιππος,
Παμφίλη·