



Erotic Curse Tablets from the Heroön of Opheltes at Nemea

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EROTIC CURSE TABLETS FROM THE HEROÖN OF OPHELTES AT NEMEA

ABSTRACT

Four inscribed lead curse tablets excavated from the Heroön of Opheltes at Nemea are edited and presented here with commentary. The texts of the tablets are erotic in nature, but closer analysis reveals a fundamental ambiguity in the rhetorical force of the anatomical lists and the operative verb *apostrephō* (ἀποστρέφω) in the curses. The choice of a hero shrine as the place of their deposition is unusual; a deciding factor for this location may have been the presence of the grave of Opheltes, who was believed to have died very young (*aōros*; ἄωρος) and through violence (*biaiothanatos*; βιαιοθάνατος), both of which being desirable qualities in the practice of ancient magic.

Located in the southwestern part of the Sanctuary of Zeus at Nemea (Fig. 1), the Heroön of Opheltes played an important role from the Archaic to the Early Hellenistic period, when the Nemean Games were held in the sanctuary.¹ Its importance lay in the fact that the Games were believed in antiquity to have originated as funeral games in honor of the dead baby hero Opheltes, a connection made explicit in numerous literary sources and artistic representations. The shrine thus marked the location of his grave and served as the focal point of his cult, which entailed burned animal

1. This article developed from a preliminary study of the curse tablets that I included as an appendix to my dissertation on the Heroön of Opheltes and the evidence for his myth and cult; see Bravo 2006, pp. 338–384. I would like to thank Stephen G. Miller, Ronald S. Stroud, and Andrew F. Stewart for their valuable comments on that work. I owe Stephen G. Miller a special debt of gratitude as well since it was he, as former Director of the Nemea Excavations, who gave me the richly rewarding opportunity to work on the Heroön

and its contents. I thank the present Director too, Kim Shelton, for continuing the support and for providing helpful comments on a draft of this article. I have had the opportunity to present parts of this work in lectures to various audiences, and I am grateful for the feedback that I have received on those occasions; I wish to single out Christopher Faraone, Joseph L. Rife, Eva Stehle, and Lillian Doherty for special thanks. I am grateful to Martin Sedaghat for providing the accompanying drawings of the tablets. Finally, I wish

to thank the editor of *Hesperia* and the two anonymous readers, who suggested many valuable improvements. I alone am responsible for the shortcomings that remain.

In addition to standard abbreviations, I use the following for the major corpora of curse tablets: *DTA* = Wunsch 1897; *DT* = Audollent 1904; *SGD* = Jordan 1985b; and *NGCT* = Jordan 2000a. Numbers following these abbreviations refer to tablets in the corpora unless otherwise specified.

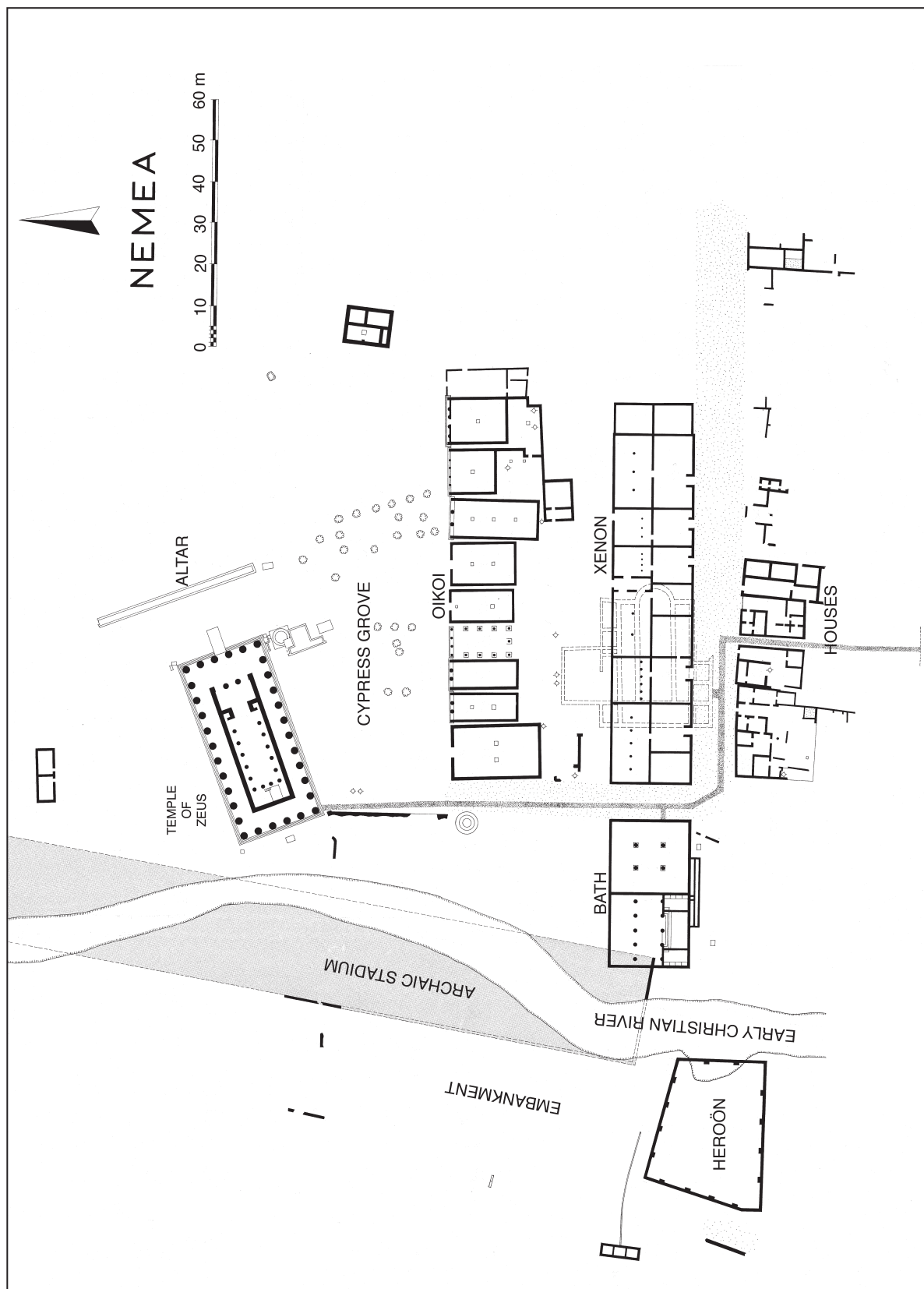


Figure 1. Restored plan of the Sanctuary of Zeus at Nemea. Courtesy University of California, Berkeley, Nemea Excavation Archives, no. PD 03.1 (with enhancements by J. J. Bravo)

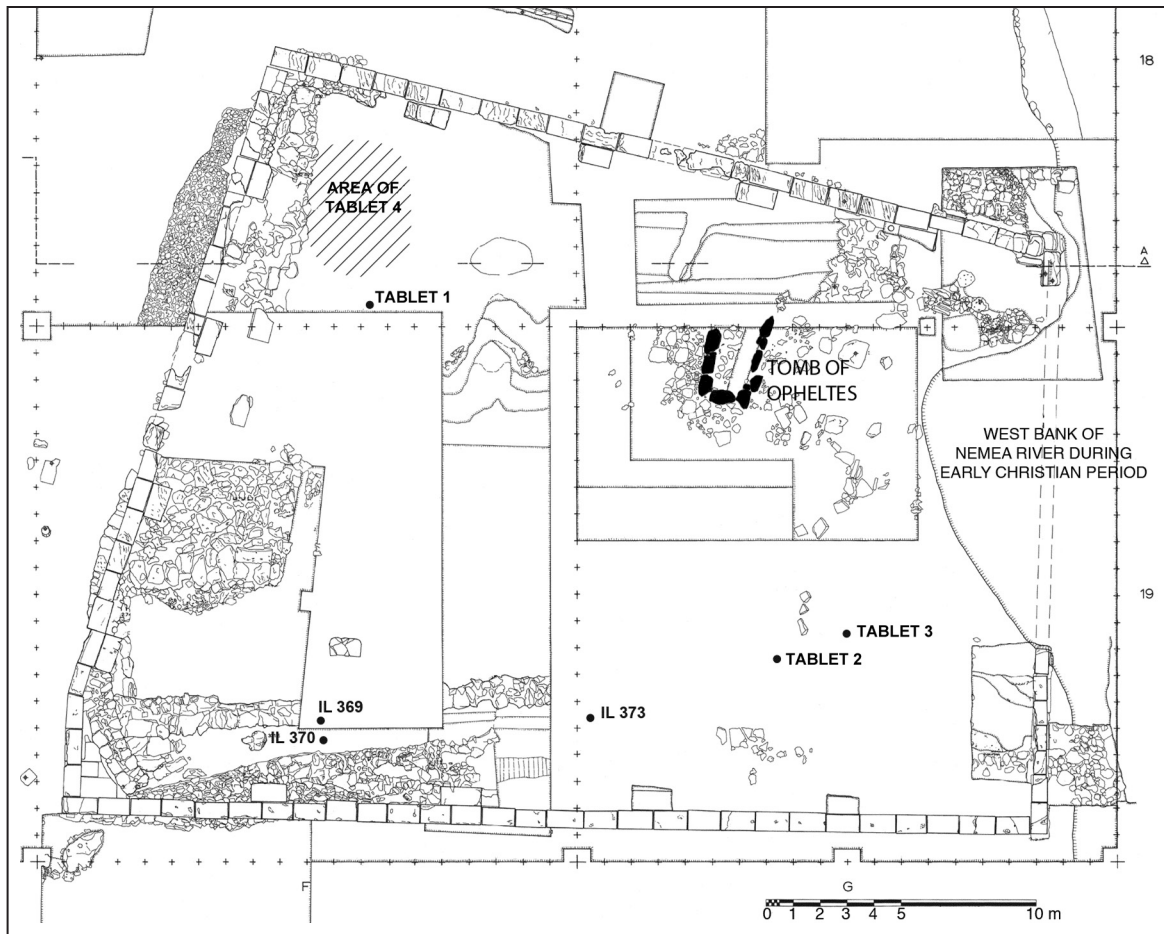


Figure 2. State plan of the Heroön with the Tomb of Opheltes and findspots of curse tablets indicated.

Courtesy University of California, Berkeley, Nemea Excavation Archives, no. PD 03.2 (with enhancements by J. J. Bravo)

2. For a study of the results of excavation of the hero shrine from 1979 through 2001, together with a study of the literary and artistic evidence for the hero Opheltes and his worship at Nemea, see Miller 1990, pp. 25–29, 104–110; 2004, pp. 34–38, 124–133; Pache 2004, pp. 95–134; Bravo 2006. The final publication of the excavation results is under preparation by the author.

sacrifice, libations, and small votive offerings, as excavation of the shrine since its discovery in 1979 has made abundantly clear.²

Constructed in the second quarter of the 6th century B.C., the shrine had the shape of a broad, low earthen mound elevated 1.5–2 m above the surrounding terrain, and it was attached to the south end of a long earthen embankment that in turn served as the viewing area on one side of the Archaic stadium track. Stone rubble lined much of the perimeter of the mound, and the principal feature on the surface of the mound was a rectangular construction of large unworked conglomerate stones (Fig. 2). It was in the vicinity of this feature, particularly to its south, that the greatest concentration of ash, burned bone, pottery, and other votive material was found, suggesting that it served as a focal point of the ritual activity in the shrine. This stone construction may thus be identified as the marker of the Tomb of Opheltes, a feature reported by Pausanias (2.15) when he visited Nemea. In the early 3rd century B.C., the shrine received a new enclosure wall built of poros foundation blocks and a superstructure of conglomerate blocks, a portion of which survives today (Fig. 3). By the middle of the 3rd century, however, the shrine fell into disuse, along with the rest of the Sanctuary of Zeus, when the Nemean Games were moved to the urban center of Argos, the polis that administered the festival.



Among the material recovered from within the hero shrine were seven folded lead tablets, four of which turned out to bear legibly inscribed curses (1–4).³ Produced from the late 6th century B.C. through late antiquity, curse tablets constitute one of the most archaeologically conspicuous forms of magic practiced in ancient times, and examples have come from all around the Mediterranean world.⁴ As indicated by two common ancient terms for them, Greek *κατάδεσμος* and Latin *defixio*, the great majority of the tablets contain binding spells or curses, by which an individual tries to constrain in some way one or more victims. The spells were written down on some medium and then deposited in a location considered efficacious for the execution of the magic.

By far the most common form of curse tablet is a sheet of lead, but the use of other media such as wax and papyrus is attested as well. The choice of lead can be explained in part by the fact that it was an ordinary writing medium used, for instance, for private letters, just as papyrus and

3. The other three (nos. IL 369, IL 370, and IL 373), whose findspots are indicated on Fig. 2, are probably curse tablets as well: Miller 1981, pp. 64–65. All of them have one to two nail holes (see discussion below), which lends support to this identification. When I examined them closely in 2003, I found faint but illegible traces

of letters on two (IL 370, IL 373), and two may not have been completely opened (IL 369, IL 373). Jordan had the opportunity to examine tablets 1–3 shortly after their discovery, and he lists them, with summary descriptions, in his catalogues of curse tablets: *SGD* 57; *NGCT* 28, 29. All of the tablets from the Heroön are currently housed

Figure 3. Aerial view of Heroön after excavation in 1980. Courtesy University of California, Berkeley, Nemea Excavation Archives, aerial no. 80.4

in the Nemea Museum, with 2 and 3 on display in the exhibition hall.

4. For a more extensive introduction to curse tablets, see Gager 1992, pp. 3–24; Graf 1997, pp. 118–174; Eidinow 2013, pp. 143–159. Gager counts over 1,500 known tablets, and the number grows as more are discovered through excavation.

wax were. Another association, which Graf maintains is a secondary and later development, is a metaphorical one between the physical properties of the metal and the ideas of cold, death, and immobility.⁵ Lead was widely available, and, in fact, the lead for the Nemea curse tablets may well have come from the Sanctuary of Zeus itself.⁶ After a curse was inscribed on a lead tablet, it was usually rolled or folded, as was done to tablets 1–4 here. What is more, many curse tablets, including tablets 1 and 2, preserve a distinct pattern of holes resulting from being punctured afterward with nails. Gager sees this act as deriving from another analogy, that between the use of nails for fastening and the binding force of the curses.⁷

The constraints upon victims that the curse tablets invoke pertain to a wide range of human affairs. On a fundamental level, however, they are usually agonistic in nature, as Faraone has observed; the one performing the curse, the *defigens*, always seeks to profit at the expense of one or more perceived opponents or rivals. The spheres in which this antagonistic magic was deployed include court cases, athletics, commerce, and love.⁸ The curse tablets from the Heroön are of the last variety. The texts of tablets 1 and 2 are explicit, calling on one person to be turned away from another, and the appearance of similar words on the more fragmentary tablets 3 and 4 suggests that they are erotic curses as well. The context of such curses can be likened to a typical love triangle, in which the individual who resorts to this kind of magic seeks to free or protect a love interest from the affections of a rival, either real or potential. In fact, the concern can be more wide ranging, and the ambiguity surrounding the erotic contexts of the Nemea tablets will be explored below.⁹

All four of the curse tablets from the Heroön originate from within the area of its Early Hellenistic enclosure wall (Fig. 2). One of them, tablet 2, was found in one of several layers of earth filled with sacrificial and other ritual debris—such as burned bone, ash, broken pottery, and votive remains—that had accumulated over the surface of the shrine.¹⁰ Based on the datable material within these debris layers, the accumulation was ongoing throughout the period when the shrine was in use, but, as the presence of a small amount of material of Hellenistic and Roman date

5. On the use of lead for correspondence, see Jordan 2000b and the thorough discussion by Eidinow and Taylor (2010). For the metaphorical associations of lead see Graf 1997, p. 133; cf. Faraone 1991, p. 7; Gager 1992, p. 3. Several texts, from the 4th century B.C. on, explicitly draw upon this metaphor; see, e.g., Graf 1997, pp. 130, 132–133; Faraone 2004, p. 37 (citing *DTA* 67); Eidinow 2013, p. 154 (citing *DTA* 105, 106, 107).

6. The metal was used as a building material for many of the structures there, and in the wake of demolition and rebuilding that took place beginning in the second half of the 4th century B.C., many scraps of lead were produced and discarded around the site.

Excavations to the north of the Heroön, e.g., recovered numerous scraps of the material.

7. Gager 1992, p. 18. In some instances the tablets are found with the nails still in them. See also Graf (1997, p. 135), who notes that the act of nailing can also appear in the text of a curse (e.g., *DT* 49). Eidinow (2013, p. 149) suggests that the nailing of the tablet was a “ritual reinforcement” of the idea of control expressed by the verb of binding.

8. Faraone 1991, pp. 10–17; Graf 1997, pp. 152–161. More recently, Eidinow has expressed unease with this characterization and the classification of the curses into different arenas of rivalry and competition; she proposes

seeing the curses instead as responding to various socially constructed forms of risk; see Eidinow 2013, pp. 11–25, 158–159, 229–241.

9. For love triangles, see Faraone 1991, p. 13; but see also Jordan 1985a; Gager 1992, pp. 79–80, on the variety of amatory situations. Spells to attract lovers also become more common in later periods. Eidinow (2013, pp. 210–216), discussing the difficulty with the classification of these curses in light of the widely varying and often ambiguous situations involved, prefers instead to call them “relationship curses.”

10. The three illegible/uninscribed tablets were also found in these layers.



indicates, the layers remained exposed on the surface for centuries thereafter. Subsequently, beginning in the late 5th century A.D., a community of Early Christian farmers settled in the area of the sanctuary and dug farming trenches over much of the site, including over the Heroön (Fig. 4). As a result, the fill of these trenches, which can be dated by the latest material in them to late antique times, contains much churned-up material of earlier date. Tablets 1, 3, and 4 were recovered from these disturbed layers. With regard to the date of the tablets, therefore, the archaeological context provides no stratigraphical basis for determining whether they were written and deposited in the shrine during the centuries when it supported an active cult or at some later time before late antiquity.¹¹

If we instead look to the internal evidence of the tablets themselves, we note that the letter forms on all four tablets are cursive, consistently featuring the lunate sigma, lunate epsilon, and lowercase omega. While these forms do appear already in the 4th century B.C., the complete absence from our texts of the earlier forms of these letters does suggest a more advanced date for the tablets, and thus it is much more likely that they were deposited after the Heroön went out of use.¹² On the other hand, the relatively straightforward syntax of the curses finds fewer parallels in imperial times.¹³ Thus a date in the Hellenistic period is more likely, but

Figure 4. Early Christian farming trenches in the area of the Heroön, from the south. Courtesy University of California, Berkeley, Nemea Excavation Archives, neg. no. 80-6-30

11. This understanding of the stratigraphy corrects what was stated in the preliminary excavation reports of the Heroön. In those publications the deposits were regarded as closed deposits associated with the construction of the Early Hellenistic enclosure wall, and the curse tablets were thus dated on stratigraphic grounds to the late 4th century B.C.; see Miller 1980, p. 196; Miller 1981, pp. 64–65. Tablet 4 was

discovered during the processing of the context pottery, and as a result, its exact findspot is unknown. The area indicated in Fig. 2 represents the area of the excavated layer from which the tablet came.

12. Jordan (*SGD*, p. 167) remarks that to his eyes the letter forms of tablet 1 suggest a date late in the 4th century B.C., whereas those of 2 and 3 suit a date much later in the

Hellenistic period (cf. *NGCT*, pp. 13, 32, where he describes them all as “Hellenistic-Roman” in date). Dating by letter forms is of course inexact. See Wilhelm 1904, p. 107; also *Nemea II*, pp. 88–89, for a discussion of the early appearance of the cursive forms in the context of the graffiti in the tunnel of the Early Hellenistic Stadium.

13. Gager 1992, pp. 5–6.

a later date is not impossible. It should also be observed that, although all four tablets are written in the Doric dialect and share basic similarities in their syntax, vocabulary, and theme, it is nevertheless apparent that different hands were at work in inscribing them. The larger, cruder letter forms on tablet 3 and its orthographic peculiarities set it apart from the other three. In comparison to tablet 2, tablet 1 has smaller letter forms that are more neatly inscribed; and those of tablet 4 show greater variation in size than the others. Hence, it is impossible to know how far apart in date the tablets are from one another.

A catalogue of the four tablets follows. The editions of the texts and epigraphic commentary presented here are based on a personal study of the tablets conducted in the summer of 2002. Although tablet 1 has already been published, it was done in the context of a preliminary excavation report and thus received only brief discussion. Some misreadings of the text have entered the scholarship since then and need correction. For these reasons, as well as in the interest of considering all the tablets from the Heroön together, I include it here.

CURSE TABLET 1

1 IL 327

Figs. 5, 6

Discovered June 25, 1979, in area F/13–18/20, at 332.82 masl.

Fragment A: max. p.L. 0.022; max. p.W. 0.034; Th. 0.001 m.

Fragment B: max. p.L. 0.018; max. p.W. 0.043; Th. 0.001 m.

Fragment C: max. p.L. 0.024; max. p.W. 0.057; Th. 0.001 m.

Fragment D: max. p.L. 0.038; max. p.W. 0.058; Th. 0.001 m.

Bibliography: *editio princeps* in Miller 1980, p. 196 (= *SEG* XXX 353 = *SGD* 57). Translations in Miller 1990, p. 28; 2004, p. 37; Gager 1992, p. 92, no. 25; Versnel 1998, p. 231, with n. 38; Eidinow 2013, pp. 421–422 (with Greek text as well).

The tablet is preserved in four fragments. Fragments A and B overlap side by side and contain the first two lines of text and part of line 3. The bottom edges of fragments A and B join with the top edge of fragment C along one of the horizontal folds of the tablet. Fragment C contains the rest of line 3 through most of line 7. The top edge of fragment D joins with the bottom of fragment C along another fold of the tablet and contains the remainder of the text.



Figure 5. Curse tablet 1, folded.
Scale 1:1. Courtesy University of California, Berkeley, Nemea Excavation Archives, neg. no. 79-11-18

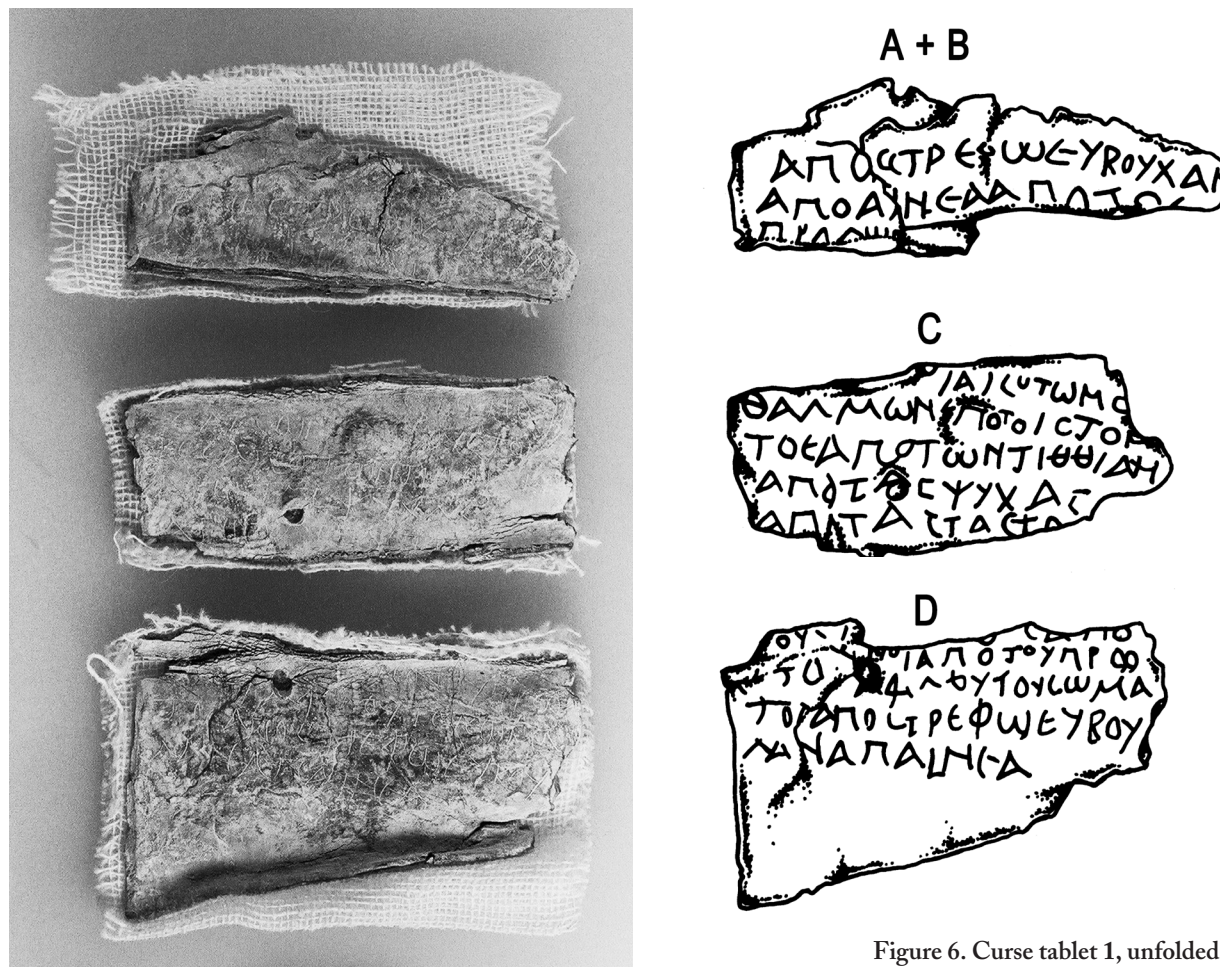


Figure 6. Curse tablet 1, unfolded (left), drawing (right). Scale 1:1. Courtesy University of California, Berkeley, Nemea Excavation Archives, neg. no. 90-38-21 (photo) and no. PD 02.9 (drawing; with enhancements by J. J. Bravo)

After inscription, the lead tablet was folded three times in the following manner: the top portion was folded downward and the bottom portion folded upward to meet near the center of the tablet; then the tablet was folded in half from top to bottom. Only part of the bottom portion of the tablet that was folded upward is preserved. It has not been unfolded; instead, it now adheres to the back of fragments A and B. A series of three holes, one each in fragments A, C, and D, marks the place where a nail pierced the folded tablet.

The left edge of the tablet is fairly well preserved. The right edge appears to be preserved in the areas of lines 1, 8, and 9. The original top and bottom edges of the tablet are not preserved. The text is written with a fairly even left margin, but line lengths vary. The letter spacing is variable as well, and the average letter height is 2–3 mm.

Close inspection of the tablet has resulted in the following text. It essentially agrees with the *editio princeps*, although minor differences regarding the legibility of letters are noted in the epigraphic commentary. The *editio princeps* also estimates blank letter spaces (^v) at the ends of lines 2, 5, and 6; however, since the text is not stoichedon, I have decided not to estimate blank spaces here.

- 1 ἀποσ{ς}τρέφω Εὐβούλαν
 ἀπὸ Αἰνέα, ἀπὸ τοῦ
 προσώπου, ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφ-
 θαλμῶν, ἀπὸ τοῦ στόμα-
 5 τος, ἀπὸ τῶν τιθί<ω>ν,
 ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς,
 ἀπὸ τῆς γαστρὸς, ἀπὸ
 τοῦ [ψ]ωλίου, ἀπὸ τοῦ πρω-
 κτοῦ, ἀφ' ὅλου τοῦ σώμα-
 10 τος. ἀποστρέφω Εὐβού-
 λαν ἀπ' Αἰνέα.

I turn Euboula away from Aineas: from his face, from his eyes, from his mouth, from his chest, from his soul, from his belly, from his erect penis, from his anus, from all his body. I turn Euboula away from Aineas.”

ΕΠΙΓΡΑΦΙΚΗ ΣΧΟΛΙΑ

Line 1: ἀποσ{ς}τρέφω: The sigma of ἀποστρέφω is mistakenly repeated, although the second sigma is less decisively inscribed. The *editio princeps* omits it. Parallels for this error of duplication exist in papyri.¹⁴ The phi of ἀποστρέφω is partly obscured by cracks in the tablet but remains legible.

Εὐβούλαν: The *editio princeps* accentuates the name as a proparoxytone here and in line 10, but the final alpha must be long.

Line 2: Of the final letter, only the upper right diagonal is visible.

Editio princeps: ἀπὸ Αἰνέα, ἀπὸ τοῦ

Line 3. A fold of the tablet runs across this line, consequently obscuring many of the letter strokes. The first six letters appear above the fold on fragment A; the remainder appear below the fold on fragment C. The drawing of the bottom edge of fragment A is a bit misleading in that enough of the first six letters is legible to make the reading certain. Of the seventh letter, the bottom half of a circular letter is preserved. The bottom half of a rising diagonal stroke is visible in the eighth letter position. On fragment A, two nicks in the same position may represent the top of the letter. The final omicron is only partially preserved.

Editio princeps: προσώπου, ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφ-

Line 4: A round impression distorts the surface of the tablet in the area of letters seven through 10. In the seventh letter position, the left diagonal and crossbar of an alpha can be made out. The next letter, a pi, occupies the center of the disturbed area. Of the tenth letter, the strokes of a tau are visible, but these are hardly different from the surrounding cracks in the tablet.

Editio princeps: θαλμῶν, [ἀπὸ] τοῦ στόμα-

Line 5: The third letter consists of two strokes: a lunate stroke and a slightly slanted stroke rising to the right from near the top of the lunate stroke. Sigma or epsilon could have been intended. The final three letters are iota, alpha, and nu, resulting in a problematic reading that will be discussed below.

Editio princeps: τος, ἀπὸ τῶν τιθίαν,

14. Mayser 1906, pp. 216–217; Gignac 1976, p. 159.

Line 7: Another fold of the tablet runs through this line. The third letter appears as a vertical stroke followed by a reverse lunate stroke joined at the top. Of the eleventh letter, only the top of a vertical stroke with a half-circle to the right is visible; the rest of the letter is broken away at the fold of the tablet. The rest of the letters of the line are found below the tablet fold, on fragment D. The bottom half of the twelfth letter is circular, and the bottom of a lunate stroke appears in the next position. Following the remains of the alpha in the 14th letter position are the lower parts of two vertical strokes, the left stroke curving inward slightly.

Editio princeps: ἀπὸ τᾶς γάστρου, ἀπὸ

Line 8: The fold of the tablet has damaged the beginning of this line too. The area of the first letter is broken away. The fourth letter position is illegible. There follows an omega that is partly obscured by the bent and cracked surface of the tablet. The right half of the letter appears to droop lower than the left half. Of the following letter, only a vertical or diagonal stroke is clear on the left side of the letter space. A vertical stroke is visible in the seventh letter position, but the top of the letter is broken away. The final letter of the line is curious: two curved strokes join at top and bottom like an omicron. Two curved strokes that join only at the bottom, like half of an omega, follow. Perhaps the author started spelling the word πρῶκτοῦ with an omicron, realized the mistake, and then added the remaining strokes to convert the letter to an omega.

Editio princeps: τ]οῦ. . . ., ἀπὸ τοῦ πρω-.

While the *editio princeps* prints five dotted letter spaces after the initial τ]οῦ in line 8, it also mentions Jordan's suggested reading of ψωλίου, with which I agree.¹⁵

Line 9: A tear in the tablet obscures the top of the first letter; visible are the bottoms of a left vertical stroke and a right descending diagonal stroke. An ascending diagonal stroke is visible in the fourth letter position. The next letter is partly interrupted by a nail hole, but enough is present to read an alpha. Of the seventh letter, only the bottom left quarter is clear.

Editio princeps: κτοῦ, ἀφ' ὅλου τοῦ κόμα-

Line 10: In the third letter position, the upper half of a lunate stroke is clear. Epsilon or sigma is possible. The *editio princeps* prints an undotted sigma here.

DISCUSSION

The curse expresses the wish of the *defigens* to drive apart two lovers, a woman named Euboula and a man named Aineas.¹⁶ The name Euboula is attested epigraphically in the Hellenistic period in Cyprus, Rhodes, Athens, Epiros, Macedonia, and Thrace; and in the Imperial period in Cyrenaica, Samos,

15. Miller 1980, p. 196, n. 41.

16. Gager (1992, p. 80) incorrectly reads the former as a male name and consequently refers to this tablet as an example of a man in pursuit of another man in a male same-sex love triangle. The situation is not inherently impos-

sible, of course, and is documented in other curse tablets, as Gager himself notes. Versnel (1998, p. 231, n. 38) points out the mistake and gives the correct reading, which is followed by Eidinow (2013, pp. 222–223).

Illyria, Sikyon, Thrace, and Ephesos.¹⁷ The name Aineas is widely attested in inscriptions of the Hellenistic period, but it is much scarcer in those of the Imperial period, with occurrences at Andros, Brundisium, Thessalian Hypata, and Larisa, a few cities of coastal Asia Minor, and perhaps Thera.¹⁸

The operative verb of the tablet, ἀποστρέφω, “turn away,” recurs in tablets 2 and 4, and its semantic range will be discussed in the general discussion that follows the catalogue. The curse continues, starting in line 2, with a list of the parts of Aineas’s body away from which the *defigens* wants to turn Euboula.¹⁹

In line 5, I propose reading τῶν τιθῶι<ω>v. The phrase must refer to Aineas’s chest or nipples. The regular word for breast, more often applied to a woman than a man, is ὁ τιθός.²⁰ The neuter diminutive is τιθίον or τιθίδιον, both of which are attested in comedy. There is also the feminine noun τιθή, which has the more common meaning of nurse, but can have the same meaning as τιθός. The word expected here must be one of these or something related.²¹ Either we must assume that the writer has misspelled the word, intending τιθίων, from τιθίον (τιθίον), which would bring the word into agreement with τῶν, or we must posit a feminine noun *τιθία, represented here in the Doric genitive plural, and explain τῶν rather than τῶν as the creeping influence of *koine*. The former explanation seems more likely.

Of particular note is ψωλίον (line 8), the neuter diminutive form of the more common ψωλή (Doric ψωλά), which LSJ⁹ defines as *membrum virile praeputio retracto*, an uncircumcised penis in a state of arousal. It is attested in the comedies of Aristophanes (*Lys.* 143; *Av.* 560), and it also appears in a 5th-century graffito from Pantikapaion (*SEG* III 596). A masculine form, ψωλός, is attested as an insult applied to men in Aristophanes, as well as in Diphilos.²² The feminine form appears in *DT* 77, where it is paired with a reference to a woman’s vagina in what appears to be another erotic curse. The neuter form, however, appears only at Nemea, not only on this tablet but also on tablets 2 and 3.²³

The curse concludes with a restatement of the opening wish in ring composition. The emphasis that this device creates through repetition, particularly of the operative verb, qualifies the ending of the text as an example of “emphatic summary” found in many curses.²⁴

17. *LGNP* I, p. 172; II, p. 164; IIIA, p. 160; IIIB, p. 150; IV, p. 129; VA, p. 174 (s.v. Εὐβούλα). At IIIA, pp. 18 (s.v. Αἰνέας) and 160 (s.v. Εὐβούλα), the individuals of this tablet appear, but their identification as father and daughter is unfounded and almost certainly wrong.

18. *LGNP* I, pp. 18–19; II, p. 14; IIIA, p. 18; IIIB, p. 17; VA, pp. 12–13 (s.v. Αἰνέας). The exceptions in the Hellenistic period seem to be Macedonia and Thrace, where the name is not attested (although the variant Αἰνείας is; see *LGNP* IV, p. 11, [s.v. Αἰνείας]).

19. Graf (1997, p. 154) mistakenly

translates the start of the curse as a list of the parts of Euboula’s body (the text is also wrongly called Attic).

20. LSJ⁹, s.v. τιθός.

21. The substitution of τιθῶ- for τιθῶ- is not unusual; on the interchange of voiceless stop and aspirate, see Buck 1955, p. 65.

22. LSJ⁹, s.v. ψωλός; Arist. *Av.* 507; *Eq.* 964; *Plut.* 267; Diphilos fr. 39. On the usage of these words in comedy, see Henderson 1991, pp. 110–111. The graffito from Pantikapaion was found inscribed on a vase recovered from a grave in 1883, and it reads Παρθενίῳ κύων τὴν ψωλὴν δάκοι,

“May Parthenios’s dog (bitch?) bite his erect penis.”

23. Another reference to the male genitals may appear in *SGD* 58 (Delos, Late Hellenistic or Imperial), a curse against a thief. A list of body parts on Side B may include τὰ αἰδοῖα, albeit misspelled. For the Greek text and translation, see Eidinow 2013, pp. 422–423. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to this text.

24. Graf 1997, p. 122. The inconsistent use of elision, as seen in lines 2 and 11, is not uncommon; see Mayser 1906, pp. 155–156.

CURSE TABLET 2

2 IL 372

Fig. 7

Discovered June 12, 1980, in area G/8–19/13, at 332.99 masl.

Max. p.L. 0.262; max. p.W. 0.069; Th. 0.001 m.

The text is inscribed as a column of short lines down a lengthy strip of lead. The strip was folded accordion-style at least four times, and nails (not preserved) were driven through the folded strip in at least three places, leaving 11 small puncture holes over its preserved surface.

The original left edge of the curse tablet is preserved at the top of the tablet and again at lines 32–35. That the original strip of lead was of varying widths is clear from the varying line lengths of the text: whereas the initial lines contain four to six letters, the line length expands to up to nine letters throughout the remainder of the text. The average letter height is 4–5 mm. The letter spacing is variable, and most of the lines droop toward the right edge of the tablet.

- 1 κατα-
 δίδεμι
 Διοδώρ-
 ου τὰν
 5 κεφαλὰ-
 ν ἀποστ-
 ραφήμ-
 εν ἀπ' Ἀ-
 ρτεμιδώ-
 ρας, τὸ μέ-
 10 τωπον,
 τοὺς ὀφθ-
 αλμούς,
 τ]ὰ <ῶ>τα, τὸ
 15 στόμα, τ-
 ὸ γένε<ι>ον,
 τὰ γυῖα.
 καταδίδε<ε>μ[ι
 τὰν ψυχ-
 20 ᾶν Διοδώ-
 ρ]ου ἀποστρ-
 αφήμεν ἀ-
 π' Ἀρτεμιδ-
 ώρας, τὰν
 25 γαστέρα, τὸ
 σ]ῶμα, τὸ ψ-
 ωλίον, τὰ
 κέλη, το-
 ῦς πόδας.
 30 καταδίδε-
 μι ΤΦΛΙΑ
 τὰν ἀγά-

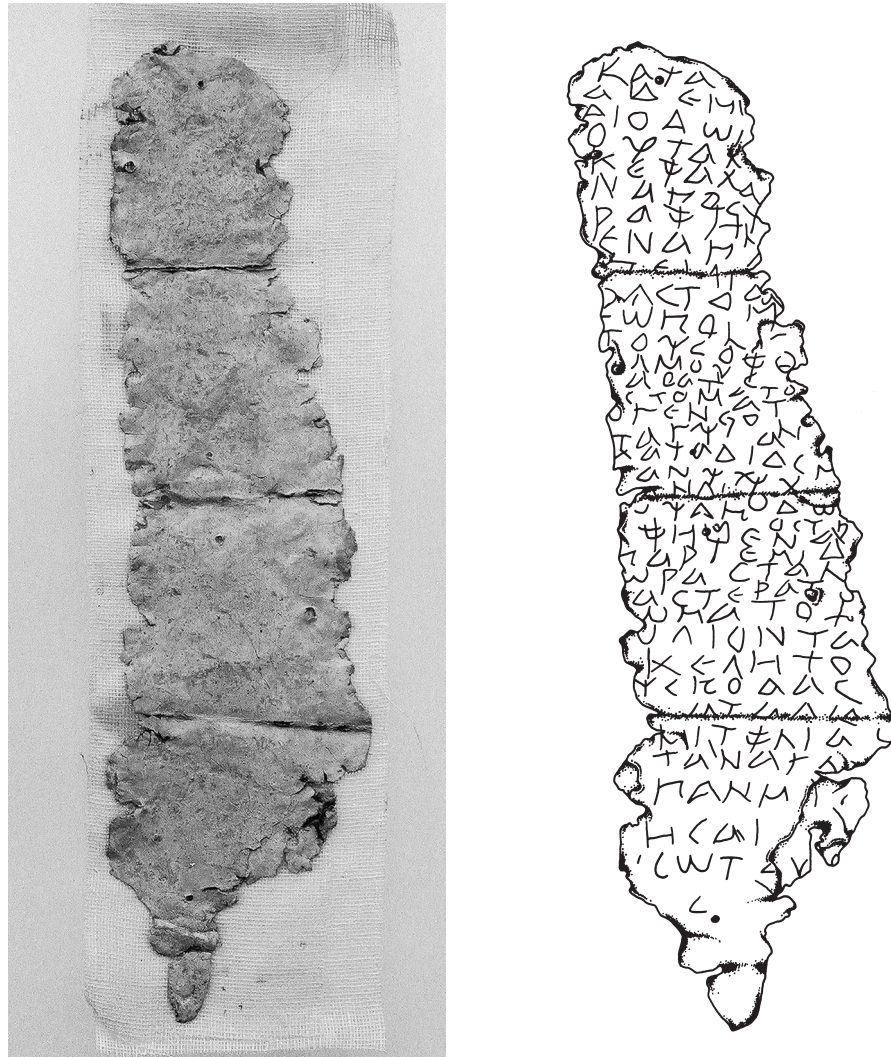


Figure 7. Curse tablet 2, unfolded (left), drawing (right). Scale 1:2. Courtesy University of California, Berkeley, Nemea Excavation Archives, neg. no. 80-23-33 (photo) and no. PD 02.9 (drawing; with enhancement by J. J. Bravo)

παν μις-
 ησαι . . [- - - -]
 35 . CQT . . . [- - - -]
 C C [- - - -]

I bind the head of Diodoros to be turned away from Artemidora, his forehead, his eyes, his ears, his mouth, his chin, his arms. I bind the soul of Diodoros to be turned away from Artemidora, his belly, his body, his erect penis, his legs, his feet. I bind [his affection?], his love to hate [her?]. . . .

EPIGRAPHIC COMMENTARY

Line 2: The final letter, iota, is faintly incised at the right edge of the tablet.

Line 3: The initial delta is badly damaged, yet parts of all three strokes of the letter are visible. In the last letter position, a vertical stroke is clear. Parts of a fainter curved stroke attached to the vertical can be seen at the very edge of the tablet.

Line 4: Of the final letter one sees a vertical stroke connected to a descending diagonal stroke before the tablet breaks off.

Line 7: Of the final letter can be seen a left vertical stroke and a curved stroke descending from the middle of the vertical stroke.

Line 8: Only the left diagonal stroke of the final letter is visible.

Line 9: A fold of the tablet runs through this line. Of the first letter can be seen a half-circle in the upper right of the letter space. The left edge of the tablet is broken away so that nothing else of the letter remains.

Line 10: Again the left edge of the tablet is broken away, and only a half-circle in the upper right of the letter space remains. The final letter of the line is partly broken away at the right edge of the tablet. Almost directly below the preceding mu can be seen the bottom part of another vertical stroke. From near the bottom of the vertical stroke runs a horizontal stroke. A shorter, fainter horizontal stroke lies just above this.

Line 11: At the left edge of the tablet is part of a horizontal stroke. It lies significantly low in the letter space, but the context suggests this is part of a tau. The final stroke of the last letter, nu, is partially damaged.

Line 13: The first letter, alpha, is partially broken away, but the letter is still legible.

Line 14: The first letter is missing because of the fraying of the left edge of the tablet and the presence of a nail hole. The third preserved letter is an alpha of an unusual form: the left diagonal and crossbar strokes are drawn in a single, rounded stroke, and the right diagonal stroke descends from the upper end of the crossbar. Similar renderings of the alpha appear in lines 27 and 31.

Line 18: Of the initial letter, kappa, part of the left vertical stroke is missing. The eighth letter is drawn as a sigma, lacking the central horizontal stroke to complete the letter epsilon. An iota should be restored at the end of the line to complete the verb *καταδίδειμι*. There is not enough space at the beginning of the next line to expect it there.

Line 19: The first letter space is partially broken away. In the upper right part of the space, a horizontal stroke is visible. A fold of the tablet runs through the end of this line and much of the next.

Line 20: Part of the first letter is broken away; only a descending diagonal stroke is visible.

Line 21: The first letter space is broken away. The missing letter belongs to the same name that occurs in lines 3 and 4, from which context we can supply a rho here. The second letter, omicron, is partly obscured by damage to the tablet. The last letter, rho, is written with a very large circular stroke almost as tall as the vertical stroke to its left.

Line 22: Of the first letter, only the lower part of a descending diagonal is clear in the bottom right part of the space. The prior occurrence of the verb *ἀποστραφῆμεν* in lines 4–6 secures an alpha here.

Line 23: The left vertical stroke of pi in the first position is missing.

Line 24: The final vertical stroke of the nu at the line's end is partially broken away.

Line 25: At the broken left edge of the tablet appears the right half of an upper horizontal stroke. A nail hole has removed the lower part of the tau in the eighth position, and the upper right quadrant of the following omicron is broken away.

Line 26: The fraying of the left edge of the tablet and the presence of a nail hole have removed the first letter. The final letter of the line is written as a vertical stroke crossed in the middle by a horizontal stroke. At the right end of the horizontal is a curved mark like a check mark.

Line 27: The left tip of the initial omega is broken away.

Line 28: Of the initial letter, only the upper and lower ends of a curved letter are preserved. Sigma or epsilon is possible.

Line 30: A fold of the tablet runs through this line. Of the initial letter, an ascending diagonal stroke is visible in the upper right of the letter space, and a descending diagonal stroke is clear in the lower right of the letter space. The final letter of the line, epsilon, is written lower than the rest, almost appearing in the following line.

Line 32: Of the final letter, left and right diagonals joining at top are visible. The rest of the letter space is damaged. The possibilities are alpha, delta, and lambda.

Line 33: At the right edge of the tablet, before a spot of corrosion, is part of a curved stroke. Sigma, epsilon, and phi are possibilities.

Line 34: The fifth letter position is badly corroded. A faint mark may represent a descending diagonal stroke. In the sixth letter position a strong descending diagonal stroke is clear. At the end of this stroke, just as the tablet breaks away, there may be the start of an ascending diagonal stroke. There may have been more letters in the line.

Line 35: Before the first clear letter, sigma, is a diagonal mark that may or may not be a letter stroke. The letter space after the tau is badly damaged, but two strokes are visible: a rising diagonal and a horizontal joined to it at the bottom end. Delta or alpha is possible. In the following letter space a heavy diagonal stroke descending to the right is clear, and an ascending diagonal stroke is joined to it just above the bottom of the stroke. At the broken edge of the tablet is an impression that may represent a stroke of another letter. There may have been more letters in the line after the break.

Line 36: Only one letter is visible, sigma, though it falls in about the third letter space. There may have been more letters in the line after the break.

DISCUSSION

The curse on this tablet likewise seeks to separate two lovers, in this instance Diodoros and Artemidora. The name Diodoros is very common and with ample attestation throughout the Greek world in the Hellenistic period and later times.²⁵ So too is the name Artemidora, which appears in Hellenistic inscriptions of Andros, Astypalaia, Delos, Samos, Athens, Argos, Sicily, Boiotia, Thessaly, Tauris, and coastal Asia Minor; and in imperial inscriptions from Cyprus, Lesbos, Thasos, Akarnania, Illyria, Campania, Macedonia, Scythia Minor, Thrace, and coastal Asia Minor.²⁶

The syntax of this tablet differs somewhat, however, from that of tablet 1. Here the operative verb is *καταδίδemi*, a variant spelling of *καταδίδημι*,

25. *LGPNI*, p. 134; II, pp. 118–119; IIIA, p. 127; IIIB, pp. 117–118; IV, p. 100; VA, pp. 133–135 (s.v. Διόδωρος).

26. *LGPNI*, p. 82; II, p. 65; IIIA, p. 72; IIIB, p. 67; IV, p. 49; VA, p. 70 (s.v. Ἀρτεμιδόρα).

which is an athematic form of Attic καταδῶ, “I bind.”²⁷ This is one of the principal verbs of the Greek binding spells of the Classical and Hellenistic periods, and it is the obvious root of the common ancient Greek term for binding spell, κατάδεσμος.²⁸ In most instances it is used in an absolute sense with the victim’s name, body parts, faculties, and/or activities as direct objects, but occasionally the syntax is expanded to include the expression of a desired outcome. For instance, in *NGCT* 3 (Athens, Kerameikos, 4th century B.C.), the predicate is followed by a purpose clause, and in *SGD* 124 (Metapontion, 3rd century B.C.), a natural result clause. In our text the verb and its objects are paired with an object infinitive to express purpose.²⁹ The infinitive is ἀποστραφήμεν, the Doric form of the aorist passive infinitive of ἀποστρέφω (Attic ἀποστραφήναι). A parallel for this syntax may be found in *DT* 68, a curse from Attica of the 4th century B.C., although the text is heavily restored.³⁰ As the operative verb of our tablet, καταδίδεμι is repeated two more times, with ἀποστραφήμεν again as object infinitive in lines 21–22 and μισῆσαι in lines 33–34.

The text continues with a list, beginning with Diodoros’s head, of the 13 parts of his body to be turned away from Artemidora.³¹ Again the list is organized from top to bottom of his person. In line 14, the text has OATA where the context suggests a word for ears; this is either a misspelling, a dialectal variant of ὠτα—other known variants being οὔατα and ὤατα³²—or both. The erroneous substitution of an omicron for either omega or the diphthong ou has been observed in papyri.³³ The same noun appears in a list of body parts in *SGD* 109;³⁴ in other curse tablets, for example, *DT* 41 (Megara, Imperial period), the word used for ears is ἀκοαί. In line 16, the substitution of ε for ει seen in γένε<ι>ον is a common phenomenon in both curse tablets and papyri.³⁵

The curse concludes, so far as can be read, with another kind of emphatic coda. The operative verb is once more paired with a complementary infinitive, but now the focus shifts from body parts to emotions. If I am right to see τ<ῆν> φ<ι>λία<ν> (“fondness, affection”)³⁶ in the letters ΤΦΛΙΑ in line 31, then Diodoros’s affection and love are being bound to hate Artemidora. Both φιλία and ἀγάπη are rare nouns in separation spells, being more at home in spells to attract love.³⁷ Likewise the verb μισῶ is

27. The interchange of eta and epsilon occurs in other curse tablets (see *DT*, Index VIII.A.1, s.v. *Litterae mutantur*) and frequently in papyri; see Mayser 1906, pp. 64–66; Gignac 1976, p. 242. The athematic form καταδίδεμι appears in *DTA* 42 and 55, as well as *DT* 69 (Attica); *DT* 81 and 84 (Boiotia); *SGD* 124 = Gager 1992, pp. 172–173, no. 81 (Metapontion); and *NGCT* 78 (Lilybaion). All of these tablets are dated to the 4th through 2nd centuries B.C. A Boiotian form, καδδίδεμι, is used in *DTA* 74 (Attica, date not specified).

28. Graf 1997, pp. 121, 125. A related verb is καταδεσμεύω, which

is used in *SGD* 64 = Gager 1992, p. 86, no. 19 (Karystos, Euboea, 4th century B.C.); *SGD* 161 = Gager 1992, pp. 108–110, no. 34 (Egypt, Imperial); *NGCT* 24 (Attica, 4th century B.C.) and 40 (Pydna, 4th century B.C.). For the last two, see also Jordan 1999, pp. 115–116. The verb is also attested on tablets found at Corinth; see *Corinth* XVIII.6, pp. 86–92, no. 118, with discussion of additional examples on p. 87.

29. Smyth 1956, p. 446, no. 2008.

30. *DTA* 109 (Attica, 3rd century B.C.) and possibly *DT* 67 (Attica, 4th century B.C.) also exhibit a comparable syntax.

31. One of the items in the list is “the body” itself, which may seem strange but is not without parallel.

32. See LSJ⁹, s.v. οὔς, ὠς.

33. Mayser 1906, pp. 98–99, 116–117; Gignac 1976, p. 211.

34. For the text of *SGD* 109, see Eidinow 2013, pp. 434–436. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to this text.

35. *DT*, Index VIII.A.1, s.v. *Syllabae corripuntur*; Mayser 1906, pp. 67–71; Gignac 1976, p. 257.

36. See LSJ⁹, s.v., φιλία, 3rd usage.

37. See, e.g., *DT* 271 (Hadrumetum, North Africa, 3rd century A.D.). For examples among the magical

rare among curses to separate lovers despite its relevance as an emotional response. It appears in *DT* 198 (Cumae, Imperial period), together with the noun $\mu\acute{\iota}\sigma\omicron\varsigma$, in a curse to separate Valeria Quadratilla and Vitruvius Felix; and it is also found in the compound form $\acute{\alpha}\rho\omicron\mu\iota\sigma\omega$ in a curse from Rome that seeks to make Eros and Felicissima hate one another.³⁸

CURSE TABLET 3

3 IL 367

Fig. 8

Discovered May 7, 1980, in area G/10,11–19/12, at 333.18 masl.

Max. p.L. 0.090; max. p.W. 0.113; Th. 0.001 m.

As preserved, the lead sheet upon which this text was inscribed is of irregular shape, resembling a thick crescent or fan. Traces of original edges are visible above and to the left of the first line of text, as well as to the left of lines 4 and 7. The bottom edge is preserved below the final three letters of line 8. Where preserved, these three edges are at right angles to one another and serve as the basis for the stated maximum length and width. No trace of the original right edge is visible. The tablet was folded twice in an odd fashion. First, it was folded over along a diagonal line from bottom left to upper right. It was then folded along a vertical line with respect to the bottom of the tablet. No holes are visible to indicate the use of nails with the folded tablet. The odd folding of the tablet and anomalies of the inscribing of the text (see the epigraphic commentary below) suggest that the original shape of the lead sheet may not have been completely rectangular.³⁹

The preserved letters of the first two lines are oriented at right angles to the preserved edges of the tablet. Beginning with line 3, however, the text takes on a different orientation, descending at a slight angle from left to right. Moreover, in line 4, the author has interrupted the text with a space of about four letters immediately below where the tablet is now broken away. It is possible that the author was dealing with a sheet that was already broken or damaged in the areas that are no longer preserved. Line lengths and letter spacing are variable. The average letter height is 6 mm. While lines 2 through 6 begin close to the left edge of the tablet, lines 1 and 7 are inset by one to two letter spaces. The only certain line length is that of line 5, with 12 letter positions; lines 4 and 6 may be complete as well.

1 ν ΚΕΦ [- - -]
 ΑΔΙΑ [. . .] Δ [- - -]
 . CTA . . [. . .] ν [- - -]
 ΑΝΨΥΧ $\nu\nu\nu$ ΡΟÇ

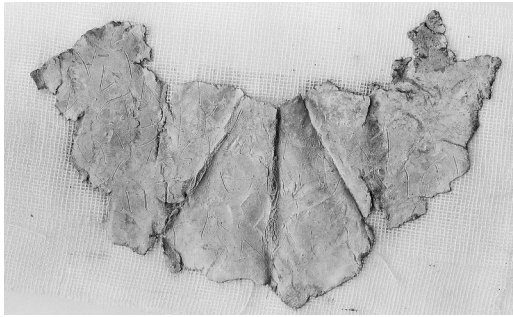
papyri, see Versnel 1998, pp. 248–249. Example *DT* 7 (Knidos, 2nd or 1st century B.C.) may preserve another instance of $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\acute{\alpha}\pi\eta$, but the conjecture is far from certain and the purpose of the curse is otherwise obscure.

38. The latter curse receives brief mention in *SGD* 129, where it is dated to the 3rd century A.D., and it is pub-

lished by Bevilacqua (1997), who also cites parallel examples of spells invoking hatred in the Greek magical papyri. The curse uses the term $\mu\acute{\iota}\sigma\eta\theta\rho\omicron\nu$, attested elsewhere, which appears to be a technical term for a spell to instill hatred; see Bevilacqua 1997, pp. 292–293. Hatred appears as a desired outcome also in a 2nd-century A.D. spell

from Egypt written on an ostrakon; see Gager 1992, pp. 110–112, no. 35.

39. One of the anonymous reviewers commented that the shape is reminiscent of circular curse tablets found in Sicily (e.g., *SGD* 99). Other published tablets have shapes that seem to imitate body parts; see Eidinow 2013, pp. 154–155.



5 . CAC καταδίδε-
 μι τὸ {c}ψωλίον
 τὰ {c}κέλη [- - -]
] ΛΟΝΑΠΙΟ [.] [- - -]

. . . . I bind his erect penis, his legs. . . .



Figure 8. Curse tablet 3, unfolded (left), drawing (right). Scale 1:2. Courtesy University of California, Berkeley, Nemea Excavation Archives, neg. no. 80-18-35 (photo) and no. PD 02.10 (drawing; with enhancement by J. J. Bravo)

EPIGRAPHIC COMMENTARY

Line 1: Of the third letter, a circular stroke on the left side and a vertical stroke to the right are clear before the tablet breaks away. The vertical stroke descends slightly below the curved stroke, suggesting phi, though a badly written omicron is also possible. The strokes could also represent two letters: a lunate letter like sigma, and the start of another letter.

Line 2: A left rising diagonal stroke is certain in the fourth position, as well as the start of a stroke from the bottom of the diagonal, before the break in the tablet. The letter may be delta or alpha. At the far right edge of the tablet appears a small, faintly inscribed letter: delta, or perhaps a poorly written omicron. Judging by the distance between the letter and the end of line 4 below it, I have placed this letter at the end of line 2. In light of the irregularities of the inscribing of the text, however, the end of line 3 is also possible. Moreover, given the question of the original shape of the lead tablet, it is uncertain whether the letter even belongs to a line of text from the left side of the tablet.

Line 3: In the first letter position appear traces of a diagonal stroke rising to the right. In the fourth position is the lower part of a stroke intended either as a vertical or a diagonal rising right. Tau, rho, iota, gamma, psi, and upsilon are possibilities. To the right of this stroke is part of a descending stroke that crosses over a vertical or rising diagonal stroke. Chi is possible, though the descending stroke does not carry far beyond the rising stroke, and upsilon is also possible. If all three strokes are considered together as one letter, nu is possible.

Line 4: The fourth letter seems to be a psi, though it was written in an odd fashion. Essentially the author has written an upsilon and then added a small vertical stroke rising from the left diagonal of the upsilon. As already noted, after the fifth letter there follows an area of uninscribed text of about four letter spaces. Traces of three letters follow, which I take to be the continuation of the line. Of these letters, the first seems to be a rho, though the vertical stroke is not completely clear. Of the final letter, only a small part of a curved stroke is visible before the tablet breaks off. Sigma, phi, and epsilon are possible readings.

Line 5: A descending diagonal stroke remains of the first letter. Of the final letter, the curve of a sigma or epsilon is clear. A faint mark is also visible, which I take to be the middle horizontal of an epsilon.

Line 6: The left vertical stroke of the initial mu is broken away. The sixth letter is a psi, though the central vertical stroke is obscured by a fold of the tablet. The next letter, omega, is poorly written, with a stray mark crossing from the central tip to the right tip of the letter. The final stroke of the nu in the final position is broken away.

Line 7: Context suggests that the first letter is tau, although the vertical stroke meets the upper horizontal stroke at its left end, making the letter resemble a gamma. Of the seventh letter, only the right descending stroke is clear. The tip of a vertical stroke is all that remains of the next letter, at which point the tablet breaks off.

Line 8: Of the fourth preserved letter, the left and right diagonal strokes are certain. A very faint mark may represent a crossbar, making the letter an alpha. After the sixth letter there is a small gap in the tablet, about one letter space. Two marks that may be the tips of a descending diagonal stroke and an ascending diagonal stroke follow at the edge of the tablet.

DISCUSSION

Although the text is more lacunose, the phrase *καταδίδεμι τὸ {c}ψωλίον* in lines 5–6 and the listing of at least one other part of the body suggest that we are dealing with another erotic curse, akin to tablet 2. It is tempting, furthermore, to see the letters *ΑΔΙΑ* in line 2 as part of another instance of the verb *καταδίδεμι*. As the operative word of the curse, it is likely to have been repeated, as indeed it is in tablet 2, and as *ἀποτρέφω* is repeated in tablets 1 and 4.

The writer of this tablet seems to have had a tendency to add an extra-neous sigma to the beginning of words that start with double consonants involving sigma. Thus in line 6, a sigma is added before psi (pi sigma); in line 7, if I am right in reading *κέλη*, then an extra sigma appears before sigma kappa.⁴⁰ Accordingly, I am tempted to take line 4 as another example, so that the first five letters may represent *τ]ὰν {c}ψυχ(άν)*, the soul,⁴¹ but the absence of any legible letter after the chi makes this reading uncertain.⁴¹

40. A parallel for this phenomenon is found in a Ptolemaic papyrus; see Mayser 1906, p. 217.

41. One of the anonymous reviewers suggests another possible reading, namely that these letters may represent the end of the name of a demon or divine being, and the following spaces may mark the end of one curse and the start of another on the tablet. Ending a curse with such a name finds parallel, the reviewer points out, on a curse tablet from Kenchreai (see Faraone and Rife 2007). The name *Κόρη ερεσχιγαλζαβαρβαθουχ*, which appears several times in a curse from Egypt (*DT* 38), offers a similar sounding ending, but I have been unable to find an attested name that ends in the exact letters here.

CURSE TABLET 4

4 IL 326

Figs. 9, 10

Discovered June 25, 1979, in area F/10,14–18/14,18, at 333.34–332.80 masl.

Max. p.L.: see following; max. p.W. 0.031; Th. 0.001 m.

Although it was found intact, the process of opening this brittle tablet unfortunately left it in numerous fragments, over 30 of which contain traces of letters. The original shape of the tablet seems to have been a long strip with tapering, rounded ends. Although I have been unable to reconstruct in its entirety the original sequence of the fragments, it is clear that the tablet was rolled a number of times from left to right or right to left with

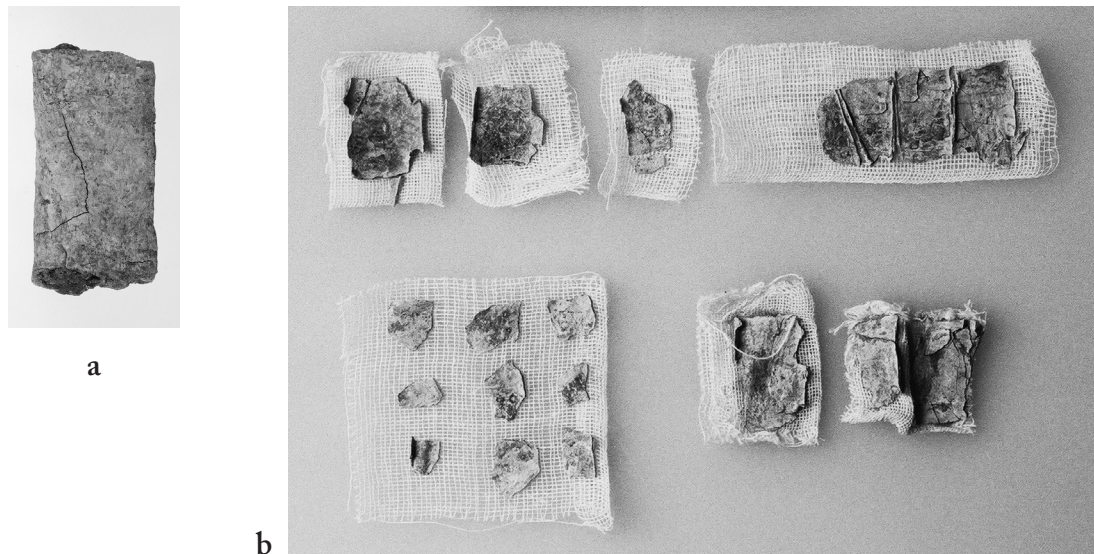


Figure 9. Curse tablet 4: (a) folded; (b) select unfolded fragments. Scale (a) 1:1; (b) 1:2. Courtesy University of California, Berkeley, Nemea Excavation Archives, neg. nos. 79-11-16, 92-7-8

respect to the text. Not only does the pattern of vertical folds indicate this, but there are also traces of horizontal impressions on some fragments that were created by the pressure of the rolling itself (see, e.g., the bottom of fragment P in Fig. 10). In a few instances, moreover, one roll of the tablet still adheres to the surface of another, so that one set of letters overlies another (see, e.g., fragments K and N in Fig. 10). There is no evidence that nails were driven through this tablet after it was rolled.

Twelve of the fragments together give evidence that the tablet had at least 15 folded sections. Based on the maximum preserved lengths of these fragments, a minimum estimate of the original length of the tablet is 0.221 m. The tablet may have been longer, but it is not clear how many other folded sections the remaining fragments represent. The maximum width of the tablet is preserved by fragment K, 0.031 m. By these calculations, the original lead strip was over seven times as long as it was wide.

The text is inscribed across the length of the tablet in at least five lines. The average letter height varies greatly among the fragments—ranging from 2 to 3 mm on some, to 5 mm on others—and the letter spacing is not consistent. Perhaps the challenge posed to the inscriber by the varying width of the original lead strip may account for these inconsistencies. The most legible and informative fragments of the tablet are edited here.

FRAGMENT C

Max. p.L. 0.054; max. p.W. 0.026 m.

Fragment C preserves the original, slightly rounded, left edge of the tablet, as well as the left margin of the text. It also preserves the original upper and lower edges of the tablet. From the left edge the tablet progressively widens.

- 1 ἀποστρέφω ΠΟΛΛΑ [
- ἀποστρέφω τα [
- χθένεος ἀποστ [
- χθένεος ἀπο [
- 5 Ο . Α . [. . .] . Θ . [



Figure 10. Drawing of legible fragments of curse tablet 4. Scale 1:1.
 Courtesy University of California, Berkeley,
 Nemea Excavation Archives, no. PD 02.11
 (with enhancement by J. J. Bravo)

EPIGRAPHIC COMMENTARY

Line 1: A fold of the tablet obscures the ninth letter, of which the left side of an omega can be made out. After the fold there is insufficient space for another letter before the pi.

Line 2: A fold in the tablet obscures the eighth letter, phi. Nevertheless, the left and right curves of the letter are visible on either side of the fold, and the bottom of the center vertical stroke is clear on the right side of the fold. The right diagonal stroke of the final alpha is broken away.

Line 4: The clearest part of the first letter is a diagonal stroke rising and touching the sigma above. Another stroke of what I take to be the letter sigma descends to the right from the first diagonal stroke. The eye is easily led astray here by surrounding cracks in the tablet. A fold of the tablet interrupts the second letter, which is clearly circular. Apart from theta, omicron or phi is possible.

Line 5: A fold in the tablet prevents reading the second letter. In the third letter position, two diagonals and a crossing stroke seem to form an alpha, though a poorly written delta is another possibility. Another fold breaks through the fourth letter, and the bottom of the letter space is broken away. All that remains are the right end of a horizontal stroke and, descending from it, the upper part of a vertical stroke. The letter may be pi or tau. The remainder of this folded section of the tablet is broken away, revealing another section of the tablet that still adheres to the back of fragment C. Approximately two letter spaces are missing. In the next folded section of fragment C, one more letter space is broken away. The next discernible marks are a pair of vertical strokes. The bottom part of the letter space and the area between the strokes are not preserved. Of the next letter, a left diagonal stroke with parts of lower and middle horizontal strokes projecting from it can be seen. After a slight break, there is a tiny fragment that once was part of fragment C but is now detached. It preserves a stroke that appears to close off the right side of the letter. If the fragment is positioned correctly, then the closed letter form with a middle horizontal must be theta. The tiny fragment preserves the left side of another rounded letter. At the right edge appears a vertical stroke. The letter is either phi or an angular omicron. At the bottom of the tiny fragment, two vertical strokes are visible. These strokes appear to be stray marks.

FRAGMENTS L + M + N (TOP) + O

Max. p.L. 0.029; max. p.W. 0.029 m.

Fragment N comprises two sections of the folded tablet that are still stuck together. A small fragment of one section, here designated N (top), is superimposed upon a larger fragment of another section, N (bottom). Both sections bear traces of letters, though the letters of the larger fragment underneath are very faint. The superimposed section, N (top), joins with two other fragments: fragment M, which preserves a fold along its left edge, and fragment O, which preserves a fold along its right edge. Fragments M, N (top), and O together yield the width of one of the folded sections of the tablet. The left folded edge of fragment M, moreover, clearly joins with the right folded edge of fragment L, yielding a bit of text across all four fragments. All four fragments preserve the original upper edge of the tablet.

1] . ΙΔΟ . CA [
] . ΕΦΟ . ΤΟ . [
] ACT [?] EPA . [
] A . [.] . O [
]

EPIGRAPHIC COMMENTARY

Line 1: Of the first letter, a curve open to the right is clear. The surface of the tablet is obscured in the center of the letter space, so it is not clear whether the letter has a central horizontal stroke. Sigma or epsilon is a possible reading of the letter. The fourth letter, omicron, falls on fragment M. On fragment N (top), the fifth letter is partly concealed by encrustation; nevertheless, a descending diagonal stroke joining the middle of a right vertical or diagonal stroke is clear. The letter may be upsilon or nu. The next letter, sigma, is split between fragments N (top) and O.

Line 2: In the first letter space, a diagonal stroke descends from the left edge of the fragment and joins the middle of a curved vertical or diagonal stroke. The letter may be upsilon, or, if an initial vertical stroke is broken away, nu. The fourth letter, omicron, falls on fragment M. In the next position, on fragment N (top), one can make out the left side of a curved letter. The rest of the letters fall on fragment O. Of the eighth letter, a vertical stroke and a stroke descending away from the top of it are clear before the fragment breaks off. Nu or mu is possible.

Line 3: The left diagonal of alpha is broken away at the left edge of the fragment. No trace of a letter is visible on the small bit of fragment M that extends into the area of line 3. The next trace of the line appears on fragment O. The upper, middle, and lower ends of epsilon appear at the left edge of fragment O. It is possible that another letter is missing between this epsilon and the preceding tau of fragment L. The final letter begins with a vertical stroke and a diagonal stroke descending from it. Nu or mu is possible.

Line 4: The left diagonal of alpha is broken away at the left edge of the fragment. In the second letter position there seems to be part of a circular letter rendered in a very angular fashion. Sigma, omicron, epsilon, and theta are possibilities. After a gap of about two letter spaces, the next letter trace appears on fragment O. All that is visible is an upper horizontal stroke with a vertical stroke descending from it. Tau or pi is possible.

FRAGMENTS S + T + U

Max. p.L. 0.028; max. p.W. 0.023 m.

The right edge of fragment S, the left and right edges of fragment T, and the left edge of fragment U break along folds of the tablet. From the broken edges it can be determined that the three fragments join in the sequence S, T, and U. Moreover, while the upper part of the right edge of fragment U is broken away, the bottom part seems to preserve the original, rounded right edge of the tablet, which is very similar to the rounded left edge of the tablet preserved on fragment C. The original lower edge of the tablet is partially preserved on fragments S and T. The tablet appears to contract in width toward its right end.

1] Δαμο[-
] . Δαμο-
] Θ . Ε . NH

EPIGRAPHIC COMMENTARY

Line 1: Fragment S preserves in the initial letter position the corner formed by a vertical or diagonal stroke and a lower horizontal stroke. The third letter, mu, falls on fragment T. The tops of the two peaks of this letter are lost. In the next letter space, there is a possible trace of the bottom of a circular letter such as sigma, theta, omicron, phi, epsilon, or omega. Nothing of this line is preserved on fragment U.

Line 2: At the left edge of fragment S appears a descending diagonal stroke that joins the middle of the diagonal or vertical stroke. Nu or upsilon is possible. The third and fourth letters fall on fragment T. The right vertical stroke of the mu in the fourth position is lost at the right edge of the fragment. On fragment U can be seen the fifth letter, omicron. Given the trace of the original edge of the tablet, there is no space for another letter.

Line 3: The first preserved letter of the line consists of a central horizontal stroke, a diagonal stroke rising from the left tip of the horizontal, and a reverse lunate stroke joined to the upper tip of the diagonal stroke and the right tip of the horizontal stroke. Delta or theta may have been intended. At the right edge of the fragment, the trace of a circular letter is visible. Encrustation on fragment T obscures the remainder of the letter. After the third letter, there still remains space enough on fragment T for another letter, but encrustation on the surface makes it unclear whether any letter was in fact inscribed. The fifth and sixth letters fall on fragment U. Of the sixth letter, two vertical strokes are clear. Less clear is a horizontal crossbar that seems to extend beyond the right vertical. The letter marks the end of this line of the tablet.

DISCUSSION

The nature of the curse on this tablet can be deduced from fragment C. The occurrences of ἀποστρέφω in the first and second lines, and possibly in the next two lines as well, recall the language of the erotic curse on tablet 1, by which the *defigens* seeks to turn one lover away from another. The apparent length of the original text would suggest that we may be dealing with another curse that lists the parts of the body. Unfortunately, the fragmentary nature of the tablet prevents us from recognizing any specific body parts, with one possible exception. If no letter is missing in the middle of line 3 of the combined fragments L + M + N (top) + O, then I may offer [γ]αστέρα, “belly,” as a possible restoration. This part of the body appears in both tablets 1 (line 7) and 2 (line 25).

The fortunate preservation of both ends of the tablet permits us to know the name of one of the lovers being cursed. The letters *θενης* at the beginning of lines 3 and 4 of fragment C look suspiciously like the end of a male name in the genitive. At the other end of the tablet, on fragments S + T + U, appears the same sequence of letters, *δαμο*, at the ends of two consecutive lines. Taken together, the ends of the tablet yield the name *Δαμοσθένης* in the genitive.⁴²

As for the name of the other lover, a trace of the name may be preserved in line 1 of fragment C, after the verb ἀποστρέφω, where, on the

42. This name is extremely common in the Hellenistic period, and less so in the Imperial period. See *LGPN* I, p. 117; *IIA*, pp. 113–114; *IIIB*, p. 102; *IV*, p. 86 (s.v. *Δαμοσθένης*). In Attica and coastal Asia Minor, only the Ionic spelling with eta, *Δημοσθένης*, is attested.

analogy of the formula of tablet 1, we might suppose the start of the name of the person to be turned away. The name Πόλα is attested in an inscription from Thasos of imperial date, but there otherwise is no parallel for a name beginning with these letters.⁴³ Alternatively, we may have a case of *aphaeresis* after ἀποστρέφω.⁴⁴ In that case, we could understand either (1) (ᾠ)πὸ Λα- -, where Λα- - starts a name in the genitive; or (2) the start of a name, in the accusative, that begins with a lost vowel, for example, (Α) πόλαξιν. The first of these two possibilities would admit many possible names attested in the Hellenistic period.

AMBIGUITY OF THE EROTIC CONTEXT

While it is clearly the case that tablets 1 and 2 (and, for the reasons discussed above, likely 3 and 4 as well) deal with matters of love and desire, there remains a good deal of ambiguity surrounding the context of each curse and the implicitly desired outcome. Assuming that the *defigens* is interested in more than just breaking up a pair of lovers (a case of *schadenfreude* that perhaps should not be wholly excluded) and also wants to secure the affections of one of them, can we identify who that is in each of the curses? Furthermore, is the *defigens* male or female, and is the intended outcome a product of opposite-sex or same-sex desire? As noted earlier in the discussion of tablet 1, Gager interpreted the context as a same-sex love triangle among men, but only because of an erroneous reading of Euboula as a male name.⁴⁵ Both Versnel and Faraone, without explicitly addressing these questions, appear to make Euboula the love interest and Aineas the rival of the *defigens*.⁴⁶ Eidinow, most recently, does confront such questions in regard to erotic curses in general, and she cautiously suggests that in this tablet the love interest may be Aineas.⁴⁷ As I will argue from a closer analysis of the more complete texts of tablets 1 and 2, however, there remains an ambiguity in these curses that prevents any certain answer; it hinges on both the rhetorical significance of the anatomical lists and the meaning of the operative verb ἀποστρέφω.

Let us first consider the rhetorical force of the listing of body parts. Although lists are a common structural device in curse tablets of all types, not just those of an erotic nature, Versnel has demonstrated that in regard to lists of body parts in particular, there is a significant distinction in aim and motivation between “instrumental curses” and “anatomical curses.”⁴⁸ The former list only those parts of the body that logically must be checked in order to accomplish the curse—for instance, binding a litigant’s mind and mouth or an athlete’s hands and feet. In anatomical curses, however, the list aims to be more comprehensive in describing the cursed individual; its

43. *LGPN* I, p. 375, s.v. Πόλα.

44. For instances of *aphaeresis* in Greek papyri, see Gignac 1976, pp. 319–321. The most common vowels to suffer this are alpha and epsilon.

45. See n. 16.

46. Versnel 1998, p. 231, n. 38;

Faraone 2004, p. 39.

47. Eidinow 2013, pp. 210–228. Her point on p. 213 that modern constructions of sexuality may color the interpretation of the ancient text is an important one. See pp. 223, 224, for her reading of this tablet.

48. Versnel 1998, pp. 219–232. Lists can serve a variety of functions in curse texts, as Gordon (1999) demonstrates. In the specific context of lists of body parts, Gordon’s view (1999, pp. 257–275) has much in common with Versnel’s.

effect is to register a heightened sense of emotional reaction to the named victim, and often the curse entails an expressed desire for the victim to suffer.⁴⁹ As to the situations that give rise to such a response, Versnel identifies two. First, in many instances the *defigens* has suffered a perceived injustice at the hands of the victim, and the curse therefore makes a justified call for revenge and retribution.⁵⁰ Second, in the context of love, the *defigens* has been rejected by a beloved and thus seeks to torment the beloved while at the same time seeking the beloved's return. As but one example, Versnel cites a curse from Oxyrhynchos in which a man named Theodoros wants to secure the affection of a woman named Matrona and instructs a demon to "drag her by her hair, by her guts, by her soul, by her heart." In this paradoxical language Versnel sees, on the one hand, a similarity to what he describes as the ecphrastic tradition of love poetry, in which the poet enumerates the various parts of the desired body of the lover; and on the other hand, it could be read as a desire to do harm in response to the injustice inflicted by unrequited love.⁵¹

Our tablets 1 and 2 both exhibit the characteristics of the anatomical curse. While several of the body parts listed in them can no doubt be regarded as instrumental to the erotic relationships that the *defigens* in each tablet seeks to interrupt—for example, the *ψωλίον*—the lists are more inclusive, and their total numbers of body parts, eight (or nine if we include "the whole body") in tablet 1 and 13 in tablet 2, set them apart from purely instrumental curses. Another measure of the desire for completeness in both lists is the logical organization of the parts of the body from head to feet, creating the sense of a comprehensive survey of the body.⁵² Moreover, the text of tablet 1 makes the claim of completeness explicit by concluding the list with the phrase "from all his body."⁵³

How then are we to understand the rhetorical force of these anatomical curses? If we follow Versnel's general explanation of the aim of the anatomical curse in the erotic context, then we would understand the person whose body parts are enumerated to be the beloved whom the *defigens* wishes both to torment and to attract. Thus, in tablet 1, we would take Aineas to be the love interest, and in tablet 2, Diodoros. The *defigens* could then be understood as a woman expressing an opposite-sex attraction, or a

49. Versnel (1998, p. 231, n. 38) cites the text of tablet 1 as an example of an anatomical curse, but admits that it lacks any reference to suffering as is usually seen. The text of tablet 2 is also exceptional in this respect. Gordon (1999, pp. 268–269) describes the effect of the anatomical list in these vivid words: "The enumeration of parts enables the practitioner imaginatively to dismember the victim so that the curse-moment, the period of projective fixation upon the victim (as opposed to the appeal to powers), can be given more weight. Moreover, breaking up the victim's body into its butcher-parts signals

the triumph of the objective gaze: the subjective coherence of the self is transformed into *dissecta membra* and laid out, as it were, for sale in a shambles."

50. Versnel 1998, pp. 223–246.

51. Versnel 1998, pp. 247–264. For the tablet cited there at p. 248, see *SGD* 156.

52. Versnel (1998, p. 227) cites an example in Latin, *DT* 190. See also Faraone and Rife 2007, p. 146, for a curse from Kenchreai of the Imperial period, with other examples adduced on p. 152. A more explicit approach is observed in *SGD* 58 (= Gager 1992, p. 188, no. 88), which features the

phrase ἀπὸ κεφαλῆς μέχρι ἄκρων ὀνύχων τ<ων> δακτ[ύλων], "from head to the tips of the toenails." See also Gordon 1999, pp. 267–274.

53. Similar expressions of "the whole body" occur at the ends of listed body parts in *DT* 42 (Megara, Imperial period); *SGD* 64 = Gager 1992, p. 86, no. 19 (Karystos, Euboia, 4th century B.C.); and on a curse tablet from the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Corinth: *Corinth* XVIII.6, pp. 86–92, no. 118. The phrasing of *DT* 42 is especially elaborate: "and if there is anything left of the parts of his whole body."

man expressing a same-sex one. In support of the latter interpretation for tablet 1, it should be pointed out that the references to the chest and the anus, like the reference to the erect penis in both tablets, could be seen as more than just aiming at completeness but in fact naming additional points of erotic fixation on the body of the beloved. As Richlin has discussed, both of these parts of the body are attested as a focus of erotic desire in the Hellenistic pederastic poetry preserved in the *Palatine Anthology*.⁵⁴ Accordingly, tablet 1 might be a curse made by a male interested in another male, Aineas, who is currently having relations with a female, Euboula.⁵⁵

As noted earlier, Versnel thinks that it is Euboula who is the object of the *defigens*' desire, not Aineas, and this indeed is a contradiction of his own argument about the function of anatomical lists in erotic curses that he does not explain. In defense of his interpretation, however, I believe it is also possible to read both tablets 1 and 2 in this opposite way if we expand upon Versnel's argument and recognize that the anatomical list can be deployed against the rival for the beloved's affection. On this reading, the *defigens* is interested in the woman of each tablet, Euboula and Artemidora, and uses the rhetorical force of the listing of body parts to tear apart or disable the current rival lover. The reference to Aineas's anus in tablet 1 can then be understood in the pejorative and humiliating sense in which it is often used, for instance, in the comedy of Aristophanes.⁵⁶ Directed against a rival for the beloved, the anatomical curse comes to have the same aim as when it is deployed in the nonerotic context of exacting revenge for a perceived wrong that has been committed against the *defigens*.⁵⁷

The ambiguity thus exposed in the anatomical lists of tablets 1 and 2 is paralleled by another ambiguity in the semantics of the principle verb of action in these curses, the verb ἀποστρέφω. Faraone, who in a recent study examines the verb's semantics in various magical texts, including curse tablets, papyri, and amulets, concludes that it is used in two distinct senses. In early curses, he notes, the verb is used with an absolute and physical sense of twisting back, and thus incapacitating, opponents or their body parts.⁵⁸ So, for instance, in each of two early 5th-century tablets from Selinous, the *defigens* asks that the tongue of his opponent be turned back, γλῶσσα ἀπεστραμμένα, in what seems to be a judicial context.⁵⁹ The meaning of the verb in these early curses is thus analogous, observes Faraone, to many lead magical figurines or dolls in which a figure's body parts are twisted back. Sometimes the figurines are also bound with lead strips and pierced by nails, all actions that metaphorically express the desire to incapacitate.⁶⁰

A second, later usage, which appears by the Roman period, sees the verb take on an avertive or apotropaic sense, which can often be translated as "turn away." On many magical amulets, for example, the verb is part of an incantation to turn away bad things from the possessor, such as a disease or a storm: "Turn away (ἀπόστρεψον) from this place all hail and snow," reads one of them.⁶¹ In respect to our tablet 1, however, Faraone understands the verb in a different "avertive" sense: the *defigens* seeks to turn the beloved Euboula *away* from her current lover and implicitly back *toward* the *defigens*. As parallels for this distinct usage in the erotic sphere he cites examples from the magical papyri in which related forms of the verb are used in spells to turn a beloved toward the one using the spell.⁶²

54. Richlin 1992, pp. 35–38. For the desire to fondle a boy's chest, see *Anth. Pal.* 12.95; for the anus, see, e.g., *Anth. Pal.* 12.6.

55. The situation would then resemble the inverse of the situation described in Sappho 31, where the speaker of the poem envies the access that a man has to the woman whom she desires. Since we are lacking comparable poetic evidence to know what parts of the male body might serve as erotic foci for a female lover, we should not rule out that the *defigens* in tablet 1 might still have been a woman.

56. Henderson 1991, pp. 150, 201, 209–213.

57. In fact, the only other certain reference to the πρῶκτός in a curse tablet comes in the context of cursing a rival in a financial transaction; see *DT* 42. Tablet *DT* 75 may contain another reference, but both the reading and the context are uncertain.

58. Faraone 2004, pp. 34–39.

59. Faraone 2004, p. 34. For the tablets, see López Jimeno 1991, pp. 68–79, nos. 9, 10.

60. Faraone 2004, pp. 35–37; see also Versnel 1998, p. 220, n. 10.

61. Faraone 2004, pp. 33–34.

62. Faraone 2004, pp. 39–40. The examples he cites are *PGM* IV, lines 1807–1809; *PGM* XIc, lines 3–5; and *PGM* XII, lines 59–63.

While Faraone's reading of tablet 1 is plausible, it should be observed that the parallels from the papyri are not exact, since the verbs used are στρέφω and ἐπιστρέφω, and in any case these are too few to have probative value for the usage of ἀποστρέφω in tablet 1. Hence, I would argue that it is just as plausible that the verb is being used in exactly the same way as in the magical amulets, where it is the bad thing—like the disease or the storm—that is being turned away, thus allowing the possibility that the *defigens* regards Euboula as a threat in the pursuit of Aineas. The syntax of tablet 2 is complicated by the additional verb καταδίδεμι ("I bind"), but once more the force of the verb ἀποστρέφω remains ambiguous. If, following Faraone's reasoning, we take the person being turned away as the person being redirected toward the *defigens*, then it is Diodoros with all his body parts who is being sought. But if the *defigens* instead considers that person to be a threat, to be turned away like a disease or storm, then the one being sought is Artemidora. This second reading, moreover, would allow the verb ἀποστρέφω to retain some of its earlier semantic force of incapacitation, for the curse thus could be understood as calling for all the various parts of Diodoros's body to be not simply turned away but in fact twisted back, just as one finds graphically represented in the lead dolls.

The ambiguity that we observe in the language of these two curses from Nemea is not surprising if we also consider, as Faraone, Versnel, and many others have, that matters of love in antiquity, just as today, often entailed a wide range of mixed emotions. Immersed in such emotions, the authors of these tablets, whether they were male or female, suffering from same-sex or opposite-sex desire, inscribed curses that in their own minds gave clear and fitting expression to what they wanted so badly to achieve, but which to other readers like ourselves, unfamiliar with the original situation, remain dark and opaque.

THE SHRINE OF OPHELTES AS A LOCATION FOR CURSE TABLETS

The presence of curse tablets in the Heroön of Opheltes requires comment, for the findspots of curse tablets, when documented, are not random. They are frequently found in or near graves, especially in the classical era.⁶³ The sanctuaries of chthonic divinities, Demeter especially, have also yielded a large number.⁶⁴ Finally, curse tablets of the Roman period have been found in springs or wells. All of these places, as Graf states, provide "contact with the subterranean world."⁶⁵

We might expect hero shrines to be a natural choice of location for depositing a curse tablet in light of the traditional categorization of heroes as chthonic powers, but in this regard it is important to note that the finding of curse tablets in a hero shrine is exceedingly rare. In fact, I know of only one other instance of this: a curse tablet from a sanctuary of the heroes Pankrates and Palaimon in Athens.⁶⁶ Consequently, the mere fact that the shrine at Nemea is devoted to a hero does not suffice to explain the provenience of the tablets.

Since graves are a common source of *defixiones*, the belief in the presence of a grave in the Heroön of Opheltes could have been part of its

63. Graf 1997, p. 134.

64. Graf 1997, p. 127, n. 26. Examples include the Sanctuary of Demeter, Kore, and Plouton at Knidos; the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Corinth; the Sanctuary of Demeter Malophoros at Selinous; the Sanctuary of Demeter at Mytilene; the Sanctuary of Minerva Sulis at Bath, England; and the Temple of Mercury at Uley, England.

65. Graf 1997, p. 127.

66. NGCT 14, dated to the later 4th century B.C. The curse addresses Palaimon directly, beseeching him to be a punisher of the listed victims. See Jordan 2008 for the text and commentary, as well as a brief discussion of the sanctuary.

appeal. Now, there are different opinions about the role of the deceased in this form of magic. On the one hand, Benedetto Bravo has argued that the original reason for placing curses in contact with the dead was strictly analogical; like the use of lead itself, and the piercing of the tablet with nails, the placement of a curse with a dead body extends the metaphor that the victim of the curse is to be rendered ineffective, incapacitated, isolated, or inert.⁶⁷ Adducing examples from the late Archaic and Classical periods, he notes that the deceased merely serves as a point of connection to the chthonic divinities, like Hermes, Persephone, Hekate, and Ge; it is they who are invoked in the early tablets, not the deceased.

Johnston, on the other hand, believes that the dead played a more active role from the time of the earliest tablets.⁶⁸ At the very least, the dead person was thought to convey the message to the underworld, a role that Graf evocatively describes as the “infernal postman who brings the text to the divine or demonic addressees.”⁶⁹ This view overlaps with Bravo’s idea of the dead as a point of contact with the powers below ground, but Johnston argues further for an early belief in the dead as the force that carries out the wishes of the *defigens* upon the named victim(s).⁷⁰

In the Hellenistic period, however, Bravo agrees that curses begin to regard the dead as playing this more active part. For example, a curse tablet of the 3rd century B.C. from Olbia, the starting point of his study, is addressed to an unnamed, dead individual, offering him a gift in exchange for incapacitating certain opponents who are threatening legal proceedings.⁷¹ The same conception is manifest in spells of the later magical papyri, which at times enlist the help of a *nekydaimon* (νεκυδαίμων), a spirit of a dead person able to bring about a desired outcome.⁷² To explain the change in how the curses relate to the dead, Bravo looks to the phenomenon of the heroization of the ordinary dead attested in Hellenistic times. This development, he reasons, gives rise to the idea of them as efficacious agents in magical spells.⁷³ His explanation, however, presumes *a priori* that the heroes had such power for magical spells, and yet again we are confronted with the rarity of finding curse tablets in hero shrines.

All dead are not alike, however, when it comes to their magical potency. Two classes of the dead are particularly desirable, to judge from the recipes of the ancient magical papyri as well as the texts of many curse tablets: the ἄωροι, those who have died an untimely death; and the βίαιοθάνατοι, those who have died a violent death.⁷⁴ Moreover, although the papyri and curse tablets are of imperial date, archaeological excavation has provided some confirmation that the preference for those who have died young existed even as early as the Classical period, for some of

67. Bravo 1987, pp. 198–203; see also Graf 1997, pp. 130–132, citing *DT* 68, side A; Eidinow 2013, pp. 152–154.

68. Johnston 1999, p. 85.

69. Graf 1997, p. 131; see also Johnston 1999, p. 85.

70. Johnston 1999, pp. 86–88.

71. Bravo 1987, p. 189 (= *SGD* 173), with five more examples discussed at pp. 204–205. Some scholars dispute

that the main tablet discussed by Bravo is a curse at all, but this still does not affect his overall argument, which is based on multiple texts. See Vinogradov 1994, p. 106, n. 7; cf. Jordan 1997, who considers it a curse. See also Gager 1992, pp. 118, 138; Johnston 1999, p. 86.

72. Bravo 1987, p. 196.

73. Bravo 1987, pp. 210–211.

74. Graf 1997, pp. 134 (citing *PGM*

V, lines 304–369f), 150 (citing *PGM* IV, lines 296–466 = Gager 1992, pp. 94–97, no. 27); López Jimeno 1999, pp. 38–41. Curse tablets with references to ἄωροι and βίαιοθάνατοι include *DT* 14, 15, 22, 24–26, 28–32, 35, 38, 188, 234, 235, 237–240, 242, and 249, as well as Gager 1992, pp. 97–100, no. 28, which appears to be based on the recipe in *PGM* IV, lines 296–466.



Figure 11. The death of Opheltes, portrayed on the short side of sarcophagus S 779, Corinth Museum.

Photo I. Ioannidou and L. Bartizioti.
Courtesy Corinth Excavations

the graves that yielded curse tablets contained the remains of verifiably young individuals.⁷⁵

Opheltes is a quintessential ἄωρος and βιαιοθάνατος: the story of his death is preserved for us in numerous literary sources, as well as in artistic representations from throughout antiquity, such as on a marble sarcophagus of the 2nd century A.D. from Corinth (Fig. 11).⁷⁶ The basic outline of what happened is that the nurse Hypsipyle was charged with holding and caring for Opheltes as an infant; in some accounts there was even an oracle specifically forbidding him to be placed on the ground. When the Seven against Thebes came with their troops into the Nemea Valley on their journey from Argos to Thebes, they came upon Hypsipyle and asked her for water. In her eagerness to fetch it for them, she placed the infant

75. Jordan 1988, pp. 273–275. Admittedly, the archaeological evidence is scant and needs further corroboration; see *SGD*, p. 152. There are, in addition, two exceptionally early curses that seem to appeal to the concept of the untimely dead; both are from Attica and date to the late 4th century B.C. One of the them, *DT* 52, binds several victims παρὰ τοῖς ἡθίοις, “before the deceased unmarried young men.” The other, *DT* 68, is restored as binding a woman

πρὸς [το(ὺ)ς] ἀτελ[έ]ς[το(υ)ς], perhaps meaning “in the presence of the unmarried dead.” For a discussion of these texts, see Eidinow 2013, pp. 153, 397–398, 400–401. Eidinow (2013, p. 154) questions whether a belief in the special magical efficacy of the untimely dead prevailed in the Classical and Hellenistic periods. What we may be witnessing in the Nemea tablets, then, is evidence for the development of the idea.

76. On the myth of Opheltes,

see *LIMC* II, 1984, pp. 472–475, no. 9, pl. 357, s.v. Archemoros (W. Pülhorn); Pache 2004, pp. 95–134; Bravo 2006, pp. 81–209. It should be noted that the other hero whose shrine has produced a curse tablet, Palaimon (see p. 148, above), also died an untimely death, although his grave was reckoned to be located at Isthmia. On the myth and cult of Melikertes-Palaimon, see Pache 2004, pp. 135–180.

Opheltes upon the ground, and in that moment of vulnerability, a monstrous snake appeared and killed him. While some details of the story vary, Opheltes is universally described as an infant or small child, and Plutarch specifically describes him as ἄγαν ἄωρος at the time of his death (Plut. *Mor.* 110f). As the victim of the snake's fatal attack, whether killed by its poisonous bite or its constrictive coils, he dies by violence. The Heroön of Opheltes at Nemea, therefore, was believed to contain not just a grave, but a grave with the kind of dead body that held great promise for procuring the desired effect spelled out in lead, and this may have been its appeal to the authors of our texts.

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