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A CURSE TABLET FROM EMPORIAE (IRC III 175)


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In 1946 a lead tablet (11.7 x 9 cm.) containing a list of names was found on the beach of the ancient Emporiae, modern Empuries or Ampurias. The letter forms suggested a date not later than 1st cent. B.C. After the editio princeps of 1947 it has been republished several times, but even so there are still some obscure points. The last and best edition of this text is that of G. Fabre, M. Mayer and I. Rodà, Inscriptions Romaines de Catalogne. III Gerone (Paris 1991) nr. 175, which will be the basis for the present paper. Their text (in capital letters and without punctuation marks) runs as follows:

VERANIO
PVPILIVS STABILION[IS]
POLINIDORVS
PHILARGVRVS SCAPI
5 SVRISCA ALEXAE
PAPVS
AMPHIO PARNACI[S]
ZODIA

13 See L. Robert, Hellenica II (1946) p. 66; Études anatoliennes, Paris 1937, p. 556; OMS I pp. 560–561, etc.
15 M. Almagro, “Plomos con inscripción del museo de Ampurias”, Memorias de los museos arqueológicos provinciales 8, 1947, 123.
The structure of this curse is among the most common in this kind of documents: a list of names followed by a formule which extends the curse to other persons not mentioned by name. Fabre, Mayer and Roda consider the first name to be a dative, either of an unknown infernal deity or of the Latin family-name Veranius. In both cases the structure of the curse would be anomalous. In the first line we expect a nominative, and that is what we have, in this case the nominative of the Latin surname Veranio, -onis.

The only textual problem lies in the second and third lines, the anomalies of which are only to be explained as the result of an erroneous reading. In fact, in the 1st cent. B.C. a name formed like Pupilius Stabilion would have been very strange. Clearly we should read Pupilius Stabilio, a correctly formed Latin name (a nomen followed by a cognomen). Only the final Ν (not read by previous editors) causes some difficulty, but it can help us to interpret the awkward name Polinidorus found in the next line. The ending -dorus tells us that we are dealing with a theophoric name, something which limits the possibilities of interpretation. The Latin transcriptions of Greek theophoric names from Απόλλων may be formed with the stem Apol(l)in-, as we see in Apollinius for Ἀπόλλωνιος (CIL II 2859) or in Apollinides for Ἀπόλλωνίδης (CIL VI 29665). The Latinized form of Ἀπόλλωνιος, in consequence, should have been Apollinidorus, which is the form written in our tablet. Since there are no traces of other letters at the beginning of the line, the most simple solution is to interpret as an Α the troublesome last letter of the second line. In consequence, I propose to read the following text:

Veranio, Pupilius Stabilio, Apolinidorus, Philargurus Scapi, Surisca Alexaç, Papus, Amphio Parnaci[s], Zodia-na, omnes quei inimeici Senecae.

16 See for example E. Kagarow, “Form und Stil der Texte der griechischen Fluchtafeln”, Arch. für Religionswissenschaft 21, 1922, 494–497.
17 Up to now only documented in an inscription from Remagen (CIL XIII 7803) known by a copy of the 16th century. Gómez Moreno (apud M. Almagro, Las inscripciones amparitanas griegas, ibéricas y latinas, Barcelona 1952, nr. 113), read in our text He[rm]io instead of Veranio.
18 Fabre, Mayer and Roda translate “Pupillus esclave de Stabilio” and think Pupillus to be a variant of Pupillus.
19 The explanation proposed (“déformation de Polydorus?”) is unlikely.
The most striking name in this list is Zodiana (8–9), which is not Latin and could hardly be Greek. According to the editors it is a “hapax absolu”, and it is certainly a difficult name. However, we can try to explain it. It is known that in late Latin the spellings -z- and -di- represented a very similar sound (something like [z] or [dz]), as we see in their interchangeable use: oze or Azabenicus (for hodie and Adiabenicus), baptidio, exorcidio (for βαπτιζω, εξορκίζω), Sodion (for Σόζων, ICUR I 633), etc. We can suppose, in consequence, that a name written Zodiana was pronounced [zozana] or [dzodzana]. This form can be interpreted as the Semitic name Sosana or Susanna (“Lily”), in which z and di transcribe the sh-sound, unknown in Latin, of the original name shoshan. The forms Sosana and Susanna are the product of a fixed and learned rule of transcription which mechanically transliterated the shin with an s, although these signs did not represent the same sound. According to this interpretation, Zodiana is an attempt of phonetic transcription made by an illiterate person who did not know about the traditional orthography of this foreign name. One may object that the first certain cases of confusion between z and di are seen in the 2nd cent. A.D., but it should not be surprising to find an early example of the phenomenon in this kind of document.

The social status of the people listed cannot be established with certainty. If my position is correct, both the name as well the phonetics show that Zodiana was a Semitic woman. The easiest way of explaining her presence in Emporiae is to suppose that she was a Jewish or Syrian slave. Pupilius Stabilio may have been a freeman. The rest of the people could have been slaves, as Fabre, Mayer and Roda think, and the genitives would correspond to the owners. The names Papus, Phylargurus, Surisca and Amphio can support this view, for within the Roman world they may have been good slave names. But the same thing could be said about the names of the supposed owners: Scapus, Alexa and Parnaces. Thus, it is also possible that some of these people were simply peregrini and not slaves, and that the genitives corresponded to the fathers.

21 See V. Väänänen, Introduction au latin vulgaire, Paris 1967, 54; M. Leumann “Griechische Verben auf -¤zein im Latein”, Kleine Schriften, Zürich 1959, esp. 166–168, etc. Also in late Greek there is a similar phenomenon (cf. Ζόδιος for Δόδιος), see F. Th. Gignac, A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods I, Milan 1976, 75, etc. Examples from Greek Christian inscriptions collected by D. Feissel in BCH 105, 1981, 490.

22 Cf. Σουσαν (E. Littmann, Greek and Latin Inscriptions, Southern Syria, Leyden 1907, nr. 268), Σουζανη (CIJ I 637), Σοζανα (CIJ I 627), Σουζανες (ICUR IV 11044), Σουζανας (ICUR II 6333), etc. The forms Σουζανα and Σουζανα (used in the Greek Septuaginta and in the Latin Vulgata) are more frequent.

23 Perhaps there is a similar case in a Greek Christian inscription from Jerusalem, ZDPV 44, 1921, 101 (nr. 148); Σουζανα.


25 It is a Greek name of the family of Σκόριας and Σκόρων, see F. Bechtel, Die historischen Personennamen der Griechen, Halle 1917, 602. The unaspirated form is also documented in Greek: Σκάπων (SEG VI 325).

26 Of course, Alexae is the genitive of the masculin Alexa, Greek Ἀλεξάς, a shortened form of Ἀλέξανδρος.