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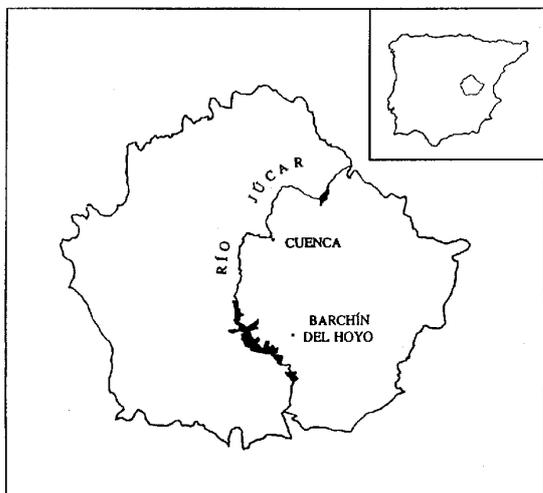
A BILINGUAL CURSE TABLET FROM BARCHÍN DEL HOYO (CUENCA, SPAIN)

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## A BILINGUAL CURSE TABLET FROM BARCHÍN DEL HOYO (CUENCA, SPAIN)\*



Since 1975 the regional government of Castilla-La Mancha (*Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha*, Dirección General de Bellas Artes) has been carrying out archaeological excavations at the Iberic site of Fuente de la Mota, near the present-day village of Barchín del Hoyo, at the top of a hill (1009 m) among the last spurs of the Sierra del Monje, in the province of Cuenca. From IV<sup>a</sup> to the last decade of III<sup>a</sup> this site, defended by strong walls (100 m long, 6.5 m deep and ca. 2 m high), was inhabited by a population culturally integrated into the Iberic world<sup>1</sup>. The village had abundant natural resources: water, clay, iron, timber. Both a pottery and iron industry seem to have been the prime economical activities. On the hillside,

seams of iron have been found, and geophysics (1984) have uncovered a smelting furnace that took advantage of the strong winds of the site. Because of all these riches and because of its strategic position, the village should have been an important center among the Olcades (?) and Lebetani (?) of the Iberic world on this part of the Peninsula. The town was destroyed and abandoned towards the end of III<sup>a</sup>, judging from a Carbon-14 analysis of the cereal contained in a vessel that has provided the latest identifiable artifact found in the site.

During the 1987 season a small lead disk inscribed on both sides (Fig. 2) was found near the SE gateway of the settlement. The object was a curse tablet (*defixio*) inscribed in Greek and Latin. Most curse tablets are roughly rectangular in shape, but there are also some circular examples (normally written in spiral), at least in Selinus (V<sup>a</sup>), Athens (III<sup>p</sup>) and England (II–III<sup>p</sup>)<sup>2</sup>. Magical handbooks from Egypt (III–V<sup>p</sup>) contain directions for making circular spells, like PGM VII 300 (with an ibis in the middle) or PGM V 305–6 (κρίκον σιδηροῦν). In all these cases the spiral writing was undoubtedly part of the magical rite. Bilingual curse tablets are less frequent. Audollent (*DTAud* p. cix) cited 31 cases of curse tablets written in Greek and Latin, but most of these examples are either Latin texts written with Greek letters (or vice versa) or Latin texts with *voces magicae* or isolated Greek expressions. There are only two other truly bilingual examples (249 and 252), both from Carthage and both much later than our tablet. (Audollent dated these inscriptions in I<sup>p</sup>, but their elaborate style points to III or IV<sup>p</sup>.)

Both sides of the disk are inscribed in spirals from the circumference inward (Fig. 1). The average height of the letters is 0.5 cm, but it gradually decreases, especially in the Latin part, as the spiral reaches the center. The writing has a cursive character, with no ligatures nor significant differences in

\* Our thanks to J. de Hoz Bravo (Madrid), D. R. Jordan (Athens) and H. S. Versnel (Leiden) for their suggestions. Abbreviations: *DTAud* = A. Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae quotquot innotuerunt* (Paris 1904); *Magika Hiera* = Chr. A. Faraone – D. Obbink (edd.), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York/Oxford 1991); *SupplMag.* = R. W. Daniel – F. Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum* I–II (Opladen 1990–1992); Tomlin = R. S. Tomlin, in B. Cunliffe (ed.), *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath, II: Finds from the Sacred Spring* (Oxford 1988) chap. IV (“The Curse Tablets”).

<sup>1</sup> Marta Sierra Delage, Fuente de la Mota, *Noticiario Arqueológico* 11 (1981) 209–306; Marta Sierra Delage – A. Kermovant, Prospecciones geofísicas aplicadas al estudio del yacimiento de Fuente de la Mota, *MCV* 24 (1988) 443–55.

<sup>2</sup> Respectively: L. Dubois, *Inscriptions grecques dialectales de Sicile* (Rome 1989) no. 37; Agora IL 74 (unpublished: Jordan *per litt.*); Tomlin no. 53. An example of unknown origin (perhaps from Boiotia) in E. Ziebarth, Verfluchungstafeln aus Attika, Boiotien und Euboia, *SBAW* 33 (1934) 1021–50, no. 23. A different case are the curses inscribed on dishes or circular recipients, e.g. L. Dubois, *Inscr. grecques dialectales d’Olbia du Pont* (Geneva 1996) no. 105 and Tomlin no. 30.

size among the letters. Both sides were inscribed by the same person, as one can see in the layout, shape and inclination of the letters. The use of Greek Δ in the Latin text corroborates this impression. As for the letter forms we may especially emphasize the lunate Ε, C and Ω, the A with an oblique bar and the K in the shape of V with a small stroke at the lower right. Papyri of I<sup>p</sup> present similar features<sup>3</sup>. In the Latin text we may note the open R, the S with a medial stroke, and the E and F formed by two parallel strokes. These last forms are common in I<sup>p</sup> documents, just as in the graffiti and wax tablets from Pompeii<sup>4</sup>. A linguistic feature points to the same date. In the Greek text εἰ is used for ἰ (Νεικίαν, Τειμήν), never for ἰ (παραδίδομι, δικάίως), an indication that, in the period when the text was written, εἰ (/ē/) had already the value of ι, but the language still distinguished between long and short vowels. This fact prohibits a date later than I<sup>p</sup>.

To find a curse tablet dating in the first century before or after Christ in a town destroyed and abandoned at the end of III<sup>a</sup> is striking. From the cases in which the find-spots can be identified, we know that *defixiones* used to be put in places in contact with the underworld, like tombs and cemeteries, sanctuaries of chthonic deities (Demeter, Core, Pluto), and underground bodies of water as wells, baths and cisterns<sup>5</sup>. It is tempting to think that the present tablet was deliberately put among ruins because these were considered a place in contact with the nether world, for there are testimonies that relate ruins and deserted houses or villas with ghostly visions and the netherworld<sup>6</sup>. But there is another possibility. In Roman times we know of cases of *defixiones* deposited simply in the proximity of the victims, like the lead curse tablets found in the house of Antiochia where Germanicus died<sup>7</sup> or the curse tablets against charioteers put in hippodromes<sup>8</sup>. The finding of this piece could indicate that, around I<sup>a</sup>–I<sup>p</sup>, the ruins of the Iberic town sheltered some kind of hut or workplace (related to the iron seams of the hillside?), where the persons cursed in the text lived or worked. Neither the hut nor the workplace, however, would have left archaeological remains.

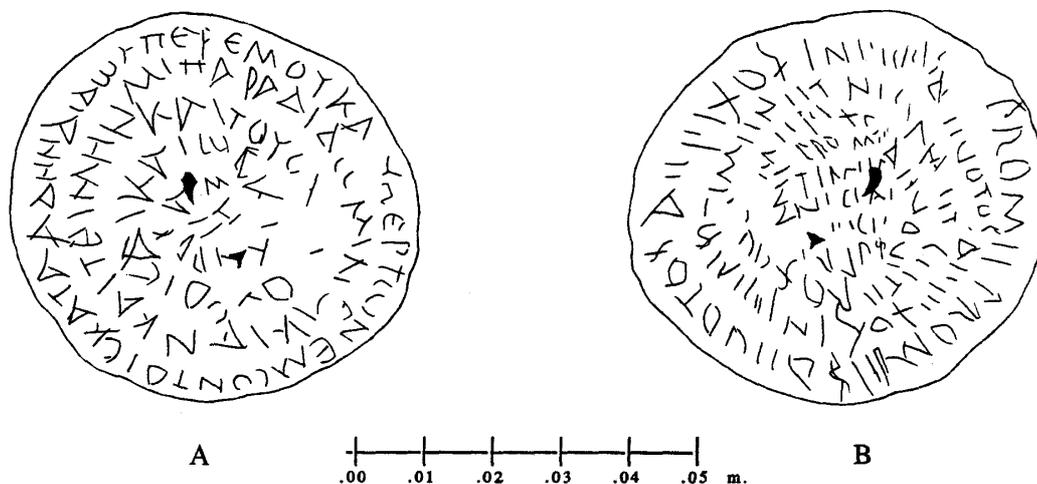


Fig. 1

<sup>3</sup> R. Seider, *Paläographie der griechischen Papyri* II (Stuttgart 1970) no. 35 (pl. XVII) = P.Heid. inv.no. 1740, I<sup>p</sup>; V. Mandilaras, *Πάπυροι καὶ παπυρολογία* (Athens 1980) 379 (= POxy 3250, 63<sup>p</sup>).

<sup>4</sup> J. Mallon, *Paléographie romaine* (Madrid 1957) 43, 71–72

<sup>5</sup> D. R. Jordan, *Hesperia* 54 (1985) 205–255, esp. 206–207.

<sup>6</sup> The tradition that spirits and ghosts haunt ruins goes back at least to Old Testament times, e.g. Isaiah 13.21, 34.14. Cf. also J. Percival, *Saints, Ghosts and the Afterlife of the Roman Villa*, *L'Antiquité Classique* 65 (1996) 161–173.

<sup>7</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2.69, Dio Cass. 58.18. See also H. Solin, *Eine neue Fluchtafel aus Ostia*, *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum* 42.3 (1968) 23 (no. 2) and 29 (no. 35).

<sup>8</sup> D. R. Jordan, *A Survey of Greek Defixiones not Included in the Special Corpora*, *GRBS* 26 (1985) 151–197, 187 (no. 149) and *New Defixiones from Carthage*, in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *The Circus and a Byzantine Cemetery at Carthage I* (Ann Arbor 1988) chap. 4, 117–34.

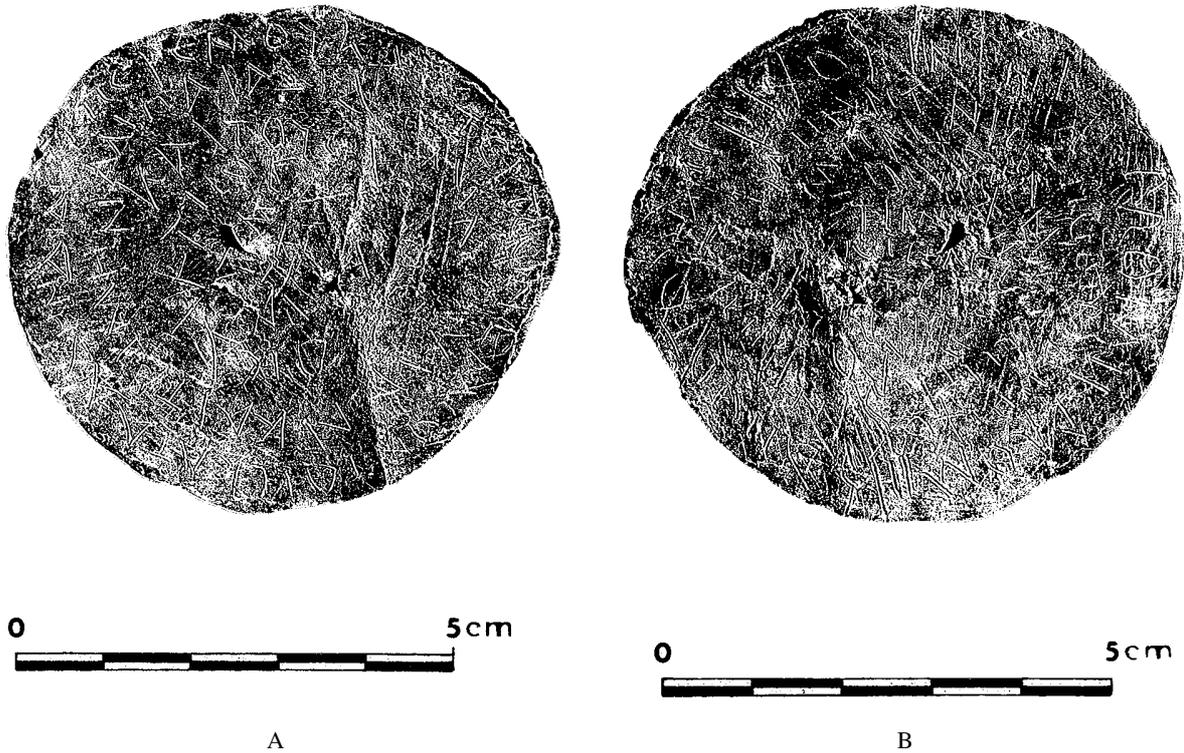


Fig. 2

Cuenca  
Museo Provincial (no inv. no.)

Ø 5.9–6.2 cm

I<sup>a</sup>–IP  
Barchín del Hoyo

## A

ὕπερ ἐμοῦ κα[ι] ὑπερ τῶν ἐμῶν τοῖς κατὰ Ἄδην δίδω-  
μι, παραδίδωμι Νεικίαν καὶ Τειμηὴν  
καὶ τοὺς ἄ[λ]λους οἷς δικ-  
4 αῖως κατηρασά-  
μηγ.

## B

pro me pro meis devotos defixos inferis,  
devotos defixos inferis, Timen et Nici-  
am et ceteros quos merito  
4 devoni supr[a. pro] me,  
pro mei[s],  
Timen,  
Nician,  
8 Νῖκια[n].

2: F of *inferis* formed with three strokes. 3: M of *Niciam* corrected from N.

The two texts are very similar. Both begin with the same formula, typical of the language of prayer (ὕπερ ἐμοῦ καὶ ὑπερ τῶν ἐμῶν, *pro me pro meis*)<sup>9</sup>. In both texts Nicias, Time and a group of persons

<sup>9</sup> On these formulae see H. S. Versnel, *Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer*, in H. S. Versnel (ed.), *Faith, Hope and Worship* (Leiden 1981) 9–64, esp. 17–21 (“Gebetsegoismus”).

whose names we do not know (ἄλλους, *ceteros*) are committed to the gods of the underworld (οἱ κατὰ Ἔδην, *inferi*), and in both texts the verb of the curse (κατηρασάμην, *devovi*) is modified by an adverb (δικαίως, *merito*) that justifies the curse. Note that both the prayer formula and the author's justification are elements alien to the language of proper curses: instead, they are characteristic of what H. S. Versnel has called “prayers for justice”, in which people asked for divine vengeance of an injustice suffered<sup>10</sup>. Prayers for justice, however, are basically unmagical and normally do not mention the underworld forces, while our text does use a magical device (the spiral writing) and does mention the underworld gods. Our tablet, then, is a hybrid between a curse and a prayer for justice (cf. Versnel *ibid.* 64–8: “The Border Area”).

Despite the general similarity noted above, there are significant differences between the Greek and the Latin parts. The Greek text is concise, clear, syntactically correct. The expression δίδωμι παραδίδωμι is an intensifying figure well documented in Greek and frequently used in magical texts: δῆσον κατάδησον (*SupplMag* 53.12, 57.34), δήσατε καταδήσατε (*TAPA* 68 [1937] 58, *DTAud* 18.55), δήσατε συνδήσατε (*DTAud* 15.19), λύσατε ἀναλύσατε (*DTAud* 14.4, 7, 9, 14), στρέψον κατάστρεψον (*DTAud* 15.42), etc. Authors of Latin *defixiones* occasionally translate or imitate these turns: *ligo obligo* (*DTAud* 219), *ligo coligo* (*DTAud* 303\*), *uratur Sucesa aduratur* (*DTAud* 227), etc. It has been observed that in these sequences the simple verb is used in the sense of the composite<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, the verb παραδίδωμι is frequently used in *defixiones* for “committing” or “entrusting” victims to the underworld forces<sup>12</sup>, while, unless we are mistaken, δίδωμι is not documented in *defixiones*: clearly, δίδωμι is here used in the sense of παραδίδωμι.

The Latin text presents a slightly different aspect. The accusatives in *-n Timen* (2.6) and *Nician* (7)<sup>13</sup> are not Latin, but Greek. Syntax is somewhat confused, for participles are apparently used instead of finite verbs (*devotos defixos* for *\*devoveo defigo*).

As a hypothesis, David Jordan (*per litt.*) suggests that *devotos* could be an informal phonetic spelling of *devoto hos*. Alternatively, we may have a predicative construction of the type *munitos facies* (= *munies*), *missum facias* (= *mittas*), *acceptum habeas Silvanum* (= *accipias S.* *DTAud* 300 B), etc.: J. Svennung, *Untersuchungen zu Palladius und zur lateinischen Fach- und Volkssprache* (Lund 1935) 459–60. In Greek *defixiones* there are similar constructions: F. K. Dörner, *JÖAI* 32 (1940) 65–6 (ποιήσατέ μου καταδίκους Μακρεῖνον, Μάριον . . . δικαζομένους / ποιήσατέ μοι κατάδικον Μακρεῖνον ἠττώμενον, νεικώμενον) or *DTAud* 155 A 30, B 4–6 (παραδίδωμι . . . Κάρδηλον ἐδεμένον, συνδεμένον, καταδεμένον). In our case, the finite verb (*commendo, trado* or *facio*) may have been omitted in order to preserve the parallelism with the Greek text or in order to make the text more concise.

Repetitions are frequent in the Latin text. Reiteration is well documented in the language of prayer and magic<sup>14</sup>, but in this case repetitions may have a different origin. In repeating the last words, the author probably wanted to avoid a blank in the middle (*horror vacui*). The repetition of *devotos defixos* may be an attempt to translate the Greek intensive expression δίδωμι παραδίδωμι, for *devoveo* and *defigo* are almost synonyms (cf. Ps.Apul. *de herb.* 7: *si quis devotatus defixusque fuerit*) and, just as δίδωμι παραδίδωμι, they are in *asyndeton*.

If the reading proposed is correct, only one word of the Latin text lacks a parallel in the Greek text: the adverb *supra*. This word seems to allude to a group of persons that have been cursed *before*. Expressions of this type, characteristic of a legal language, are well documented in magical texts:

<sup>10</sup> H. S. Versnel, Beyond Cursing: The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers, in *Magika Hiera* 60–104.

<sup>11</sup> E. Fraenkel, *Kleine Beiträge* I (Rome 1964) 440–2; C. Watkins, An Indo-European Construction in Greek and Latin, *CQ* 71 (1966) 115–19; R. Renehan, *Studies in Greek Texts* (Göttingen 1976) 11–27 (cf. J. Hasenour, *REG* 94 [1981] 251–2); I. Turcan, La dépréverbation dans les langues classiques, *BSL* 77/1 (1982) 273–84, etc.

<sup>12</sup> *DTAud* index pp. 475–6; D. R. Jordan, *Hesperia* 54 (1985) 241; H. S. Versnel, *Magika Hiera* 73.

<sup>13</sup> In l. 3 *Nician* has been corrected into *Niciam*.

<sup>14</sup> H. S. Versnel, Die Poetik der Zaubersprüche, in T. Schabert – R. Brague (edd.), *Die Macht des Wortes* (Munich 1996) 233–97, esp. 266–72. See also Tomlin p. 72.

προγεγραμμένος, ἐνταῦθα γεγραμμένος, ὑπογεγραμμένος, *infrascriptus, s(supra) dictus*<sup>15</sup>. The problem here is that the people cursed *supra* are not mentioned elsewhere. The act of making a curse consisted of an oral formula followed by its written reproduction, in a shorter and more concise manner<sup>16</sup>. Perhaps the “other” victims were in fact cursed *before*, but only orally.

We see, then, that the Greek part is better inscribed and expressed than the Latin one. The latter presents two clear Hellenisms (Δ for D, accusative in *-n*) and, except in the use of *supra*, tries to translate or to adapt the Greek text. Clearly, the author spoke and wrote better Greek than Latin. We have seen that he knew the jargon of magic (δίδωμι παραδίδωμι). The fact that he added a Latin translation is interesting. Perhaps he used Latin because he considered it necessary to address the local underworld forces not only in his own language, but also in that of the region<sup>17</sup>. Or perhaps he wrote the text for someone who did not know Greek but did know Latin, for it is possible, indeed, that the actual scribe of the text was not the enemy of Nicias and Time, but a professional of magic. In any case, the use of two different languages, like the spiral writing, was unusual and may have been part of the magic ritual<sup>18</sup>.

The proper names seem to indicate that the victims were from Greece or the Greek East<sup>19</sup>. As a hypothesis, we may think of a group of slaves, who were perhaps employed in the iron mines in the area<sup>20</sup>. As often happens with these documents, nothing in the text allows us to know the “right” motives that led to the writing of this curse.

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<sup>15</sup> R. Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets I* (Opladen 1994) ad no. 28 (προγεγραμμένος, ἐνταῦθα γεγραμμένος, ὑπογεγραμμένος); *DTAud* 111, Tomlin no. 8 (*infrascriptus*); *AE* 1979, 384 A–B (*ssdictus*).

<sup>16</sup> *DTAud* xlii and Chr. A. Faraone, The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells, in *Magika Hiera* 3–32, esp. 4–5.

<sup>17</sup> On the question of whether other indigenous languages were spoken in the area see A. García y Bellido, Die Latinsierung Hispaniens, *ANRW* 1 (1972) 462–91, esp. 489–91.

<sup>18</sup> For the magical use of different languages see D. R. Jordan – R. D. Kotansky, Two Phylacteries from Xanthos, *RA* 1996, 161–174, esp. 170, with references to magical papyri.

<sup>19</sup> This is the first example of *Time* in Hispania. There are two examples of *Nicias* (CIL II 5045 [Teba], *IRC* IV 185 [Barcelona]). Greek names are frequent in neighbouring Valeria: *Pomponia Melissa* (CIL II 3201), *Annia Foebas* (3186), *Eutyces Octaviae ser.* (3191), *Antonia Pithusa* (3187), *Caecilia Pyralis* (3188), the charioteer *Aelius Hermeros* and his slave *Hermias* (3181), *Publius Asmenus* (*AE* 1982, 600).

<sup>20</sup> We know of many Greek or oriental slaves who, in Roman times, worked in the mines of the Peninsula: C. Domergue, *Les mines de la Péninsule Ibérique dans l'Antiquité Romaine* (Rome 1990) 335–366 (“La main d’oeuvre”).