

Curses for All Occasions: Binding Spells and their Contexts

What – what is the nature of the evidence, what is the magical ritual or object

Where – where (and when) does the ritual take place? where is the object used?

Who – who is performing the ritual, using the magical thing?

Why – what is the motivation for the use of magic? what does the practitioner hope to achieve?

How – how does the effect work? what is the source of the power? by what means does it operate?
difference between perspective of practitioner and modern analyst?

What

Type of Evidence –

Active Magic: Recipe or Executed Example

Label/Description of Magic: Social Accusation or Literary Description

Material Form of Evidence: Lamellae and other tablets; Figurines & Other Materials

Where

Watery depths; Graves

Chthonic Sanctuaries

Who

Public curses and private curses

Professionals and their clients

Curses in their agonistic contexts

Competition in ancient Mediterranean culture

Envy and the Evil Eye

Economic; Judicial; Public performances

Why

Present Crisis vs. Future Contingency - Instrumental vs. Conditional

Performance for Vertical and Horizontal audiences

Restraining Rivals; Obtaining Justice; Symbolic Violence

How

Aid from a higher or lower power

chthonic deity – Hermes, Persephone, Hekate, Demeter

daimones or angels

spirits of the dead

Power of words and symbols

direct binding - performative utterance

binding down - *katadesmo/katadesmos* in Greek = *defigo/defixio* in Latin,

cp. *ligare, abligare, obligare*

holding down, restraining - *katexo, katoxos*

writing down – *engrapho, epigrapho*

dedicating - *anatithemi* and *anaiero* = *dedicare* and *demandare*

adjuring - *horkizo* = *adiurare*

similia similibus - persuasive analogy

manipulations of figurines or tablets - nails, etc.

the act of writing - fixed texts & reversals

Tradition and Innovation - the coefficients of weirdness and familiarity

TESTIMONIA

But the strangest of all these speeches are the things they say about the gods and virtue, how so it is that the gods themselves assign to many good men misfortunes and an evil life but to their opposites a contrary lot; and begging priests and soothsayers go to rich men's doors and make them believe that they by means of sacrifices and incantations have accumulated a treasure of power from the gods that can expiate and cure with pleasurable festivals any misdeed of a man or his ancestors, and that if a man wishes to harm an enemy, at slight cost he will be enabled to injure just and unjust alike, since they are masters of spells and enchantments that constrain the gods to serve their end. And for all these sayings they cite the poets as witnesses, with regard to the ease and plentifulness of vice, quoting:

"Evil-doing in plenty a man shall find for the seeking; Smooth is the way and it lies near at hand and is easy to enter; But on the pathway of virtue the gods put sweat from the first step, and a certain long and uphill road."

And others cite Homer as a witness to the beguiling of gods by men, since he too said:

"The gods themselves are moved by prayers, And men by sacrifice and soothing vows, And incense and libation turn their wills Praying, whenever they have sinned and made transgression." And they produce a hubbub of books of Musaeus and Orpheus, the offspring of the Moon and of the Muses, as they affirm, and these books they use in their ritual, and make not only ordinary men but states believe that there really are remissions of sins and purifications for deeds of injustice, by means of sacrifice and pleasant sport for the living, and that there are also special rites for the defunct, which they call functions, that deliver us from evils in that other world, while terrible things await those who have neglected to sacrifice.

What, Socrates, do we suppose is the effect of all such sayings about the esteem in which men and gods hold virtue and vice upon the souls that hear them, the souls of young men who are quick-witted and capable of flitting, as it were, from one expression of opinion to another and inferring from them all the character and the path whereby a man would lead the best life? (Plato, *Republic* 364b-365c)

No, neither Apollo nor Athena's strength can save you from perishing abandoned, not knowing where joy is in your heart--a bloodless victim of the gods below, a shadow. You do not answer, but scorn my words, you who are fattened and consecrated to me? Living, you will be my feast, not slain at an altar; now you will hear this hymn, a spell to bind you.

Come now, let us also join the dance, since we are resolved to display our hated song and to declare our allotted office, how our party directs the affairs of men. We claim to be just and upright. No wrath from us will come stealthily to the one who holds out clean hands, and he will go through life unharmed; but whoever sins, as this man has, and hides his blood-stained hands, as avengers of bloodshed we appear against him to the end, presenting ourselves as upright witnesses for the dead.

O mother Night, hear me, mother who gave birth to me as a retribution for the blind and the seeing. For Leto's son dishonors me by snatching away this cowering wretch, a proper expiation for his mother's blood. This is our song over the sacrificial victim--frenzied, maddened, destroying the mind, the Furies' hymn, a spell to bind the soul, not tuned to the lyre, withering the life of mortals.

For this is the office that relentless Fate spun for us to hold securely: when rash murders of kin come upon mortals, we pursue them until they go under the earth; and after death, they have no great freedom.

This is our song over the sacrificial victim--frenzied, maddened, destroying the mind, the Furies' hymn, a spell to bind the soul, not tuned to the lyre, withering the life of mortals. (Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 300ff.)

If anyone in office does not perform this curse at the statue of Dynamis when the games are convened at the Anthesteria or the festival of Heracles or that of Zeus, he is to be the object of the curse.

If anyone breaks the inscription on which this curse has been written, or chips off the letters, or rubs them smooth, he is to die, himself and his family with him. (*Dirae Teorum*)

Collecting a great force of the Amphictyons, they enslaved the men, destroyed their harbor and city, and dedicated their land, as the oracle had commanded. Moreover they swore a mighty oath, that they would not themselves till the sacred land nor let another till it, but that they would go to the aid of the god and the sacred land with hand and foot and voice, and all their might. They were not content with taking this oath, but they added an imprecation and a mighty curse concerning this; for it stands thus written in the curse : "If any one should violate this," it says, "whether city or private man, or tribe, let them be under the curse," it says, "of Apollo and Artemis and Leto and Athena Pronaea." The curse goes on: That their land bear no fruit; that their wives bear children not like those who begat them, but monsters; that their flocks yield not their natural increase; that defeat await them in camp and court and market-place, and that they perish utterly, themselves, their houses, their whole race; "And never," it says, "may they offer pure sacrifice unto Apollo, nor to Artemis, nor to Leto, nor to Athena Pronaea, and may the gods refuse to accept their offerings." (Aeschines 3.109-111)

On these conditions a sworn agreement was made by those who stayed there and by those who sailed to found the colony [of Cyrene], and they invoked curses against those transgressors who would not abide by it - whether those settling in Libya or those who remained. They made waxen images and burnt them, calling down the following curse, everyone assembled together, men, women, boys, girls: "The person who does not abide by this sworn agreement but transgresses it shall melt away and dissolve like these images - himself, his descendants and his property; but those who abide by the sworn agreement - those sailing to Libya and those staying in Thera - shall have an abundance of good things, both themselves and their descendants." (Marble Stele from Cyrene, dating from 4th century BC)

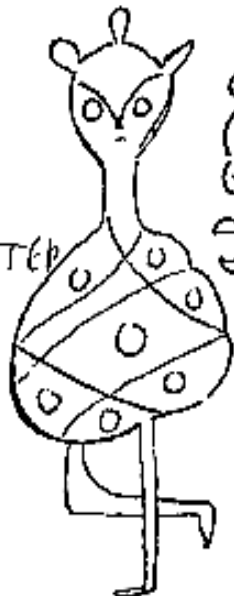
So, after all, there was not one kind of Strife alone, but all over the earth there are two. As for the one, a man would praise her when he came to understand her; but the other is blameworthy: and they are wholly different in nature. For one fosters evil war and battle, being cruel: her no man loves; but perforce, through the will of the deathless gods, men pay harsh Strife her honour due. But the other is the elder daughter of dark Night, and the son of Cronos who sits above and dwells in the aether, set her in the roots of the earth: and she is far kinder to men. She stirs up even the shiftless to toil; for a man grows eager to work when he considers his neighbour, a rich man who hastens to plough and plant and put his house in good order; and neighbour vies with his neighbour as he hurries after wealth. This Strife is wholesome for men. And potter is angry with potter, and craftsman with craftsman, and beggar is jealous of beggar, and minstrel of minstrel. (Hesiod, Works and Days, ll. 11-24)

And when he blossomed with the stature of fair youth, and down darkened his cheek, he turned his thoughts to an available marriage, to win glorious Hippodameia from her father, the lord of Pisa. He drew near to the gray sea, alone in the darkness, and called aloud on the deep-roaring god, skilled with the trident; and the god appeared to him, close at hand. Pelops said to the god, "If the loving gifts of Cyprian Aphrodite result in any gratitude, Poseidon, then restrain the bronze spear of Oenomaus, and speed me in the swiftest chariot to Elis, and bring me to victory. For he has killed thirteen suitors, and postpones the marriage of his daughter. Great danger does not take hold of a coward. Since all men are compelled to die, why should anyone sit stewing an inglorious old age in the darkness, with no share of any fine deeds? As for me, on this contest I will take my stand. May you grant a welcome achievement." So he spoke, and he did not touch on words that were unaccomplished. Honoring him, the god gave him a golden chariot, and horses with untiring wings.

He overcame the might of Oenomaus, and took the girl as his bride. She bore six sons, leaders of the people eager for excellence. Now he has a share in splendid blood-sacrifices, resting beside the ford of the Alpheus, where he has his attendant tomb beside the altar that is thronged with many visitors. The fame of Pelops shines from afar in the races of the Olympic festivals, where there are contests for swiftness of foot, and the bold heights of toiling strength. A victor throughout the rest of his life enjoys honeyed calm, so far as contests can bestow it. But at any given time the glory of the present day is the highest one that comes to every mortal man. I must crown that man with the horse-song in the Aeolian strain. I am convinced that there is no host in the world today who is both knowledgeable about fine things and more sovereign in power, whom we shall adorn with the glorious folds of song. A god is set over your ambitions as a guardian, Hieron, and he devises with this as his concern. If he does not desert you soon, I hope that I will celebrate an even greater sweetness, sped by a swift chariot, finding a helpful path of song when I come to the sunny hill of Cronus. For me the Muse tends her mightiest shaft of courage. Some men are great in one thing, others in another; but the peak of the farthest limit is for kings. Do not look beyond that! May it be yours to walk on high throughout your life, and mine to associate with victors as long as I live, distinguished for my skill among Greeks everywhere. (Pindar, Olympian 1)

For Restraining Horses and
Charioteers.

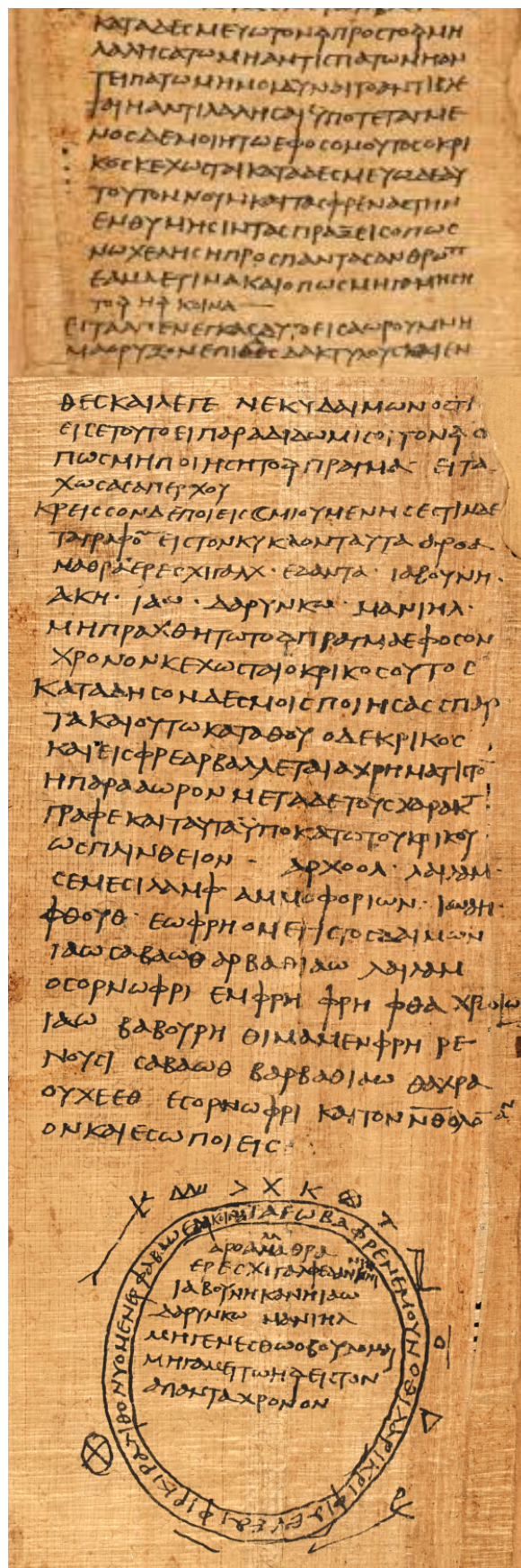
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PHRIX PHÔX BEIABOU
STÔKTA NEÔTER whether
above the earth or below
DAMNÔ DAMNA
LUKODAMNA MENIPPA
PURIPIGANUX
EULAMÔ
EULAM
EULA
[EUL]
[EU]
[E]

EULAMÔ
ULAMÔ
LAMÔ
AMÔ
MÔ
Ô

OREOBARZAGRA
AKRAMMACHARI
PHNOUKENTABAÔTH
ÔBARABAU, you holy angels,
ambush and restrain
LULATAU AUDÔNISTA
them. The spell –
OIAITTINOUNAMINTOU
MASKELLI MASKELLÔ
PHNOUKENTABAÔTH
OREOBARZA, now attack,
bind overturn, cut up, chop
into pieces the horses and the
charioteers of the Blue colors –
Numphikos, Thalophoros,
Aêtôtos, Mousotrophos,
Kalimorphos, Philoparthenos,
Pantomedon, Hupatos,
Philarmatos, Makaris,
Omphalios, Hêgemôn,
Ôkeianos, Turanos, Chôrikis,
Kalimorphos, Aurios,
Aktinobolos, Egdikos, Zabadês,
Chôrikis, Nomothetês,
Barbaros, Eieronikês Xaes,
Makaris, Dênatos, Antheretos,
Phôsphoros, Lukotramos,
Germanos, Obeliskos,
Astrophors, Anatolikos,
Antiochos – CHRAB, bind and
CHRAB, damage the hands,
the feet, sinews of the horses
and charioteers of the Blue
colors.



P. Lond. I. 46

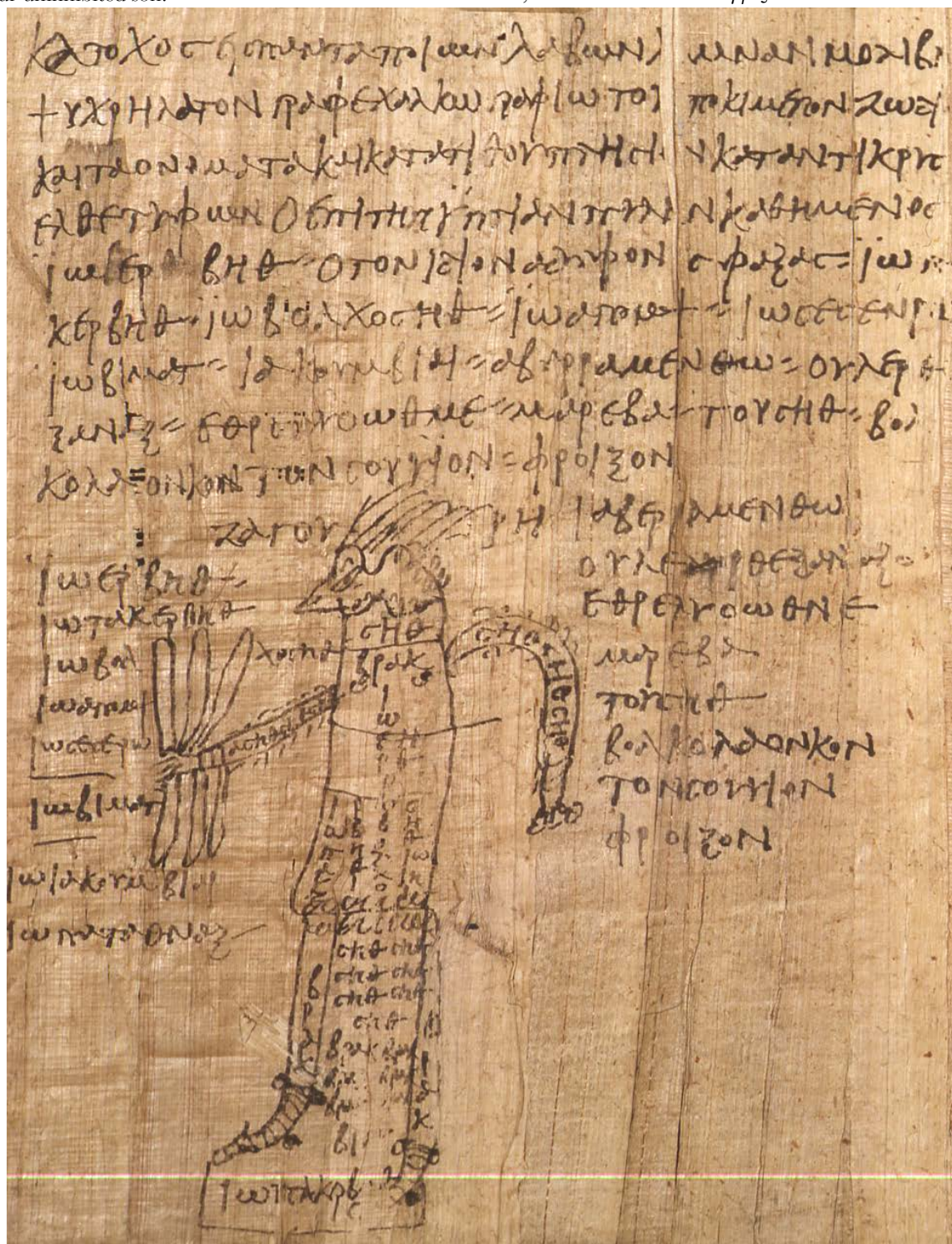
PGM V. 304-69

Taking hieratic papyrus or a lead lamella and iron ring, put the ring on the papyrus and with a pen draw the outlines of the ring, inside and outside, then tint the outlined area with myrrhed ink, then write on this outlined area of the ring, writing on the papyrus-the name, and write the characters outside [the area], then, [in the circle] inside it, what you want not to happen, and "Let so-and-so's thoughts be bound so that he may not do NN thing." Then putting the ring on its outline, which you made, and turning up the (areas of the papyrus) outside the outline, wrap up the ring until it is completely covered. Piercing [the package] through the characters with the pen and tying it, say, "I bind NN with regard to NN [thing]. Let him not speak, not be contrary, not oppose; let him not be able to look me in the face nor speak against me; let him be subjected to me, so long as this ring is buried. I bind his mind and his brains, his desire, his actions, so that he may be slow [in his dealings] with all men." And if it be a woman: "In order that she, NN, may not marry him, NN" (add the usual). Then, taking it [the package] away to the grave of someone untimely dead, dig [a hole] four fingers deep and put it in and say, "Spirit of the dead, who[ever] you are, I give over NN to you, so that he may not do NN thing." Then, when you have filled up the hole, go away. Better do it when the moon is waning. The things to be written inside the circle [bounded by the inner side of the ring's outline] are these: "AROA I MATHRA ERESCHIGALCH EDANTA IABOU NE AKE IAO DARYKNO MANIEL, let NN thing not be done so long as this ring is buried." Bind [the package] with ties, [using] cords you have made, and thus deposit it. The [wrapped] ring may also be thrown into an unused well, or [into the grave] of [anyone dead] untimely. After the characters, write also the following, under the [outline of the] ring, as a rectangle: "ARCHOOL LAILAM I SEMESILAMPH AMMOPHORION IOAE PHTHOUTH EO PHRE, the greatest daimon, IAO SABAOTH ARBATHIAO LAILAM OSORNOPHRI EM PHRE PHRE PHTHA CHRIO IAO BABOURE THIMAM EN PHRE RENOUSI SABAOTH BARBARTHIAO THACHRA OUCHEETH ESORNOPHRI" and the entire 59 [letter formula] above, which you also put inside [the circle bounded by the ring's outline]." [The same schedule can be written on a lead lamella; then, putting the ring in [the middle] and folding up [the lead] around it, cover [it] with plaster. After the rectangle underneath [write] also the IAEO formula" and the following: "BAKAXICHYCH MENEBAICHYCH ABRASAX AO, prevent NN thing," [or], as the names are found in the authentic [text]: I "ARPHOOL LALA.M SEMESILAM IAEO (formula) BAKAXICHYCH ABRASAX AO ARCH6MILAK MENESILAM IAEO OYO BAKAXICHYCH ABRASAX OII, prevent the NN thing."

PGM XXXVI. 1-34

*Charm to restrain. Works on everything: Taking a lead lamella, hammered out while cold, draw with a bronze stylus the creature below and the names, and deposit it nearby and in front [the person]: "Come Typhon, who sit on the under[world] gate; IO ERBETH, who killed his own brother, IO PAKERBETH IO BOLCHOSETH IO APOMPS IO SESENRO IO BIMAT IAKOYMBIAI ABERRAMENTHOORY LERTHEXANAX ETHRELYOOTH MEMAREBA, of Seth, BOLKOL, fear your uninhibited son.

Κάτοχος, εἰς πάντα ποιῶν. λαβὼν λάμναν μολιβήν
ψυχρήλατον γράφε χαλκῷ γραφίῳ τὸ ὑποκείμενον ζώδιον
καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα καὶ κατατίθου πλησίον καταντικρὺς·
ἔλθέ, Τυφῶν, ὁ ἐπὶ τὴν ὑπτίαν πύλην καθήμενος,
Ἰὼ Ἐρβήθ, ὁ τὸν ἴδιον ἀδελφὸν σφάξας, Ἰὼ Πα-
κερβήθ, Ἰὼ Βολχοσήθ, Ἰὼ Ἀπομψ, Ἰὼ σεσενρω (5)
Ἰὼ βιματ, ἱακουμβιαί, ἀβερραμενθουον λερθε-
ξαναξ, ἐθρελυοωθ μεμαρεβα, του Σήθ, βολ-
κολ, ἄοκνον τόν σου υἱὸν φρίζον.



Tablet from Anna Perenna fountain (475567)

The sacred and holy nymphs, through the infernal gods and the messengers, what I wish and demand from your great power: remove, utterly remove the eyes, the right or the left one, of Sura, who was born from a cursed womb. I wish and demand from your great power it shall happen: take the eyes, the right and the left one, in order that the power of Sura the judge may not persist, he who was born from a cursed womb.

*sacras santas a supteris et angilis quod | rogo et peto
magnum uirtutem uestram: | tollatis pertolla{e}tis |
oculus siue dextrum et | maledicta modo ets de uulua | fiat
rogo et peto | magnum uirtu- | tem uestra(m) | tollite
oculus | dextru sineteru, | ne possit dura- | re uirtus
arbitri | Surae, qui natu(s) | est de uulua | maledicta. |*



Defixio on selenite from Amathous, cp. Gager 45



Daimones under the earth and damones whoever you may be; fathers of fathers and mothers (who are a) match (for men), you who lie here and you who sit here, since you take men's grievous passion from their heart, take over the passion of Ariston which he has toward me, Soterianos also called Limbaros, and his anger; and take away from him his strength and power and make him cold and speechless and breathless, cold toward me, Soterianos also called Limbaros. I invoke you by the great gods, MASOMASIMABLABOIÔ MAMAXÔ EUMAZÔ ENDENEKOPTOURA MELOPHTHEMARAR AKOU RASRÔEEKAMADÔR MACHTHOUDOURAS KITHORASA KEPHOZON goddess ACHTHAMODOIRALAR AKOU RAENT AKOU RALAR hear ALAR OUECHEARMALAR KARAMEPHTHE SISOCHÔR ADONEIA of the earth CHOUCHMATHERPHES THERMÔMASMAR ASMACHOUCHIMANOU PHILAESÔSI gods of the underworld, take over from Ariston and his son the passion and anger they hold toward me, Soterianos also called Limbaros, and hand him over to the doorkeeper in Hades, MATHUREUPHRAMENOS, and (to/of?) the one who is appointed over the gate to Hades and the door bolts of heaven, STERXERX ERER[XA]" earthshaker ARDAMACHTHOUR PRISGEU LAMPADEU. And bury in this mournful (grave) the one whose name is written on this curse tablet which brings about silence. I invoke you the king of the deaf/voiceless daimones. Hear the great name, for the great sisochoR rules over you, the ruler of the gates to Hades. Of my opponent Ariston bind and put to sleep the tongue, the passion and the anger he holds toward me, Soterianos also called Limbaros, lest he oppose me in any (legal) matter. I invoke you daimones—buried in a single grave, violently slain, untimely dead, not properly buried—by her who bursts forth from the earth and carries down (into the grave) the limbs of *MELIOUCHOS and MELIOUCHOS himself.

I invoke you by ACHALEMORPHCPH who is the only god of the earth osous *oisÔRNOPHRis OUSRAPIÔ, do whatever is written herein. O much lamented tomb and gods of the underworld and Hekate of the underworld and Hermes of the underworld and Plouton and the infernal Erinues and you who lie here below, untimely dead and unnamed, EUMAZÔN, take away the voice (s) of Ariston who is opposing me, Soterianos also called Limbaros, MASÔMACHÔ. I deposit with you this charge/ spell to make Ariston silent, and (you) give over his name to the infernal gods. ALLA ALKE KE ALKEÔ LALATHANATÔ, three-named Kore. These shall always carry out (my wishes) for me and silence Ariston the opponent of me, Soterianos also called Limbaros. Awaken yourself for me, you who hold (?) the infernal kingdom of all the Erinues. I invoke you by the gods in Hades, OUCHITOU, the dispenser of tombs, AÔTH IOMOS TIÔIE IÔEGOÔEOIPHRI, who in heaven rule the upper kingdom, MIOTHLAMPS, in heaven, IAÔ, and the (kingdom) under the earth, SABLENIA IAÔ SABLEPHDAUBEN THANATOPOUTOER. I invoke you, BATHUMIA CHTHAORÔOKORBRA ADIANAKÔ KAKIABANE THENNANKRA. I invoke you gods who were exposed by Kronos, ABLANAIAANABLA SISIPETRON, take over Ariston the opponent of me, Soterianos also called Limbaros, EANTICHERECHER BEBALLOSALAKAMETHE, and you, earthshaker, who holds the keys of Hades. Carry out for me, you . . . Provide . . .