DOI: 10.14232/suc.2024.5.53-72

Teresa Sissy De Blasio
Roma Tre University

The Use of Lists in Curse Practice. Focusing on Greek *Defixiones* on Terracotta

The aim of this paper is to present an overview of the use of lists in Greek defixiones, a term used in epigraphy to indicate curses of a private nature, usually inscribed on lead tablets, that consist in invoking deities to cause harm to one or more enemies. Many of these documents include lists of personal names to be cursed whether in the nominative or accusative, often without any further information. This practice proves to be long-lasting, from the 6th century BC to the 1st century BC, which is attested to by numerous documents found throughout the Greek world. This paper aims to discuss the variegated framework of these documents by means of an updated collection. Attention is also paid to the material used for these texts, which were not only inscribed on lead but also on terracotta.

Keywords: *Defixiones*, magic, lists, lead, pottery, Greece, Magna Graecia.

An overview of *defixiones*

Curse tablets were referred to in Greek as κατάδεσμοι,[1] which is derived from the verb καταδεῖν ("to bind down"), that often appears in the tablets. However, the standard technical term to define these documents in the literature is *defixiones*, a modern word derived from the Latin verb *defigere*,[2] which is found in some British curse tablets.[3] The

[1] Pl. *Resp.* 364e; *Leg*. 11, 993a.
[2] It is only found in a bilingual *glossa* of the 6th cent. AD attributed to Philoxenus (*CGL* 2, 40).
[3] Sánchez Natalías (2022: 331–332, nrr. 338–339).

Oxford Latin Dictionary translates this verb with "to attach", "to fix",[4] and it seems to refer either to the implicit action of binding the victim or to the action of piercing of the curse tablets with nails, as was common, or to both. These documents were widespread in many areas of the Greek-Roman world. The oldest Greek curse tablets date back to the end of the 6th century BC and are from Selinous and Himera, in Sicily, while the most recent are dated to the late imperial age.

The most widely accepted definition for *defixiones* is provided by David Jordan:

> *Defixiones*, more commonly known as curse tablets, are inscribed pieces of lead, usually in the form of small, thin sheets, intended to influence, by supernatural means, the actions or the welfare of persons or animals against their will.[5]

This term is used in epigraphy to indicate curses of a private nature that consist in invoking gods to cause harm to one or more enemies. These documents were generally inscribed on lead because it was cheap, easily available and easy to roll. This material was widely used for writing, as shown by the many private lead letters that have survived.[6] Having become widely used for magic, the material itself acquired ritual significance and was believed to have magical properties.[7] Its cold heavy qualities were associated with disease or death.[8] For example, some curse tablets request that their victims become as cold and useless as the

[4] *OLD* (1968: 500–501).
[5] Jordan (1985: 151).
[6] For further details see Dana (2021).
[7] Graf (1995: 129–130).
[8] According to Aristotle, the life of someone who had a leaden hue would be short (Plin. *HN* 11, 114, 274).

lead upon which the curse is written,[9] or they wish their victim's tongue should become lead.[10]

Defixiones were written for many reasons; among the most common were judicial issues in a trial (*defixiones iudiciariae*), jealousy in love or the desire to arouse a mutual love in the beloved (*defixiones amatoriae*), rivalry against competitors such as other athletes or playwrights (*defixiones agonisticae*), but also against artisans, tavern keepers or tradesmen (commercial curses).[11]

These documents were intended to be long-lasting and have an enduring impact. Once the spell was cast during a ritual, they were believed to establish a lasting bond between the spell and the victim. The purpose was to paralyze the *defixi* in every aspect of their lives, for example to render them incapable of thought or movement. As might be expected, the author of the curse, who was not necessarily the person who actually inscribed the text, largely remains anonymous usually to avoid any danger of the curse turning against him or her.

Since the message of the texts had to reach the gods, it was most important to choose the best place in which to lay the *defixiones*. For this reason, curse tablets are generally found in tombs, in chthonic sanctuaries, or by underground bodies of water since these places were believed to be directly related to the underworld.[12]

Magic lists

In some *defixiones* there is much information and elements with which to understand the purpose of the text, such as an appeal to the gods, the presence of a performativeverb (*e.g.* καταδέω, "I bind"; καταδεσμεύω,

[9] Wünsch (1897: 27–28, nrr. 105–107).
[10] Wünsch (1897: 24, nrr. 96–97).
[11] Faraone (1991: 10–11); Gager (1992: 42–174); Graf (1994: 141–142); Ogden (1999: 31–44).
[12] Guarducci (1978: 242); Ogden (1999: 15–25).

"I bind up"; κατέχω, "I immobilize or restrain"), the names of the victims (with patronymics and/or demotics) or other elements that suggest the reason for the curse.

However, there are many other curse tablets with only a few elements which might aid understanding of their specific purpose, such as some that comprise solely lists of personal names to be cursed, both nominative and accusative.

One of the most significant features of these documents, which are named 'magic lists', is the fact that they rarely include a performative verb. Its absence signifies that it would have been implied and probably pronounced at the moment of the curse. This assumption leads to consider the existence of a relationship between orality and writing in *defixiones*, that has given rise to many debates over the years. In fact, the magical papyri include spells consisting of an operative part (*praxis*) and a recitative part (*logos*); the latter causing the effects sought by the spell to be actually carried out.[13] Some scholars have argued that a *defixio* was originally a purely verbal curse consisting only of the reading aloud of the inscribed text.[14] They therefore believe that the practice of writing curses developed from pre-existing oral traditions. In the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, for example, there seems to be the first known verbal curse, a ὕμνος δέσμιος ("binding song"), pronounced by the Erinyes in hope to bind the verbal and mental faculties of Orestes before his murder trial: ὕμνον δ' ἀκούσηι τόνδε δέσμιον σέθεν ("you will hear this hymn of ours that will bind you").[15]

Christopher Faraone has argued that the spoken formula was pronounced at the same time as the writing and the attendant gesture (*e.g.* distortion of lead or some other pliable material).[16] This hypothesis arises from the singular finding of a group of about 40 blank, lead tablets,

[13] Vallarino (2010: 91).
[14] Wünsch (1897: II–III); Audollent (1904: XLII).
[15] Aesch. *Eum*. 306. Cf. Faraone (1985: 150–154).
[16] Faraone (1991: 4–5).

rolled up and pierced with nails, which might well suggest that the name of the victim and the cursing formulas were originally pronounced (but not written) at the same time as the act of piercing the tablet.[17]

It may be concluded that simply inscribing lists of personal names had *per se* no cursing power. Consequently, oral recitation was the essential requirement for the performance and efficacy of the magic rite. Writing, however, was part of the magical practice because it accompanied the act of reciting the spell. Another clue to the need for oral recitation is the presence of abbreviated names in some *defixiones*.[18] Since the most important factor in a spell is clarity, the use of an abbreviation alone would be insufficient for its efficacy, which would suggest that writing was used to keep a note of the names to be cursed and the clarity would be given by oral means.

Magic lists often do not include elements to better identify the victims, such as patronymics, or demotics. Their omission does not imply that the *defixi* were not citizens, as it has been suggested, but rather that the relationship between the *defigens* and the *defixi* was of greater importance,[19] since the act of cursing usually arose in relation to personal, family, or judicial matters. Hence, it is to be expected that no other elements would be necessary to identify the victims. Moreover, it was certainly not in the *defigens*' interest to emphasise that the *defixus* had a high social status. Helpful in this regard is a *defixio* from Tarentum (*IG* XIV, 668), on which a long columnar list of anthroponyms in the nominative is inscribed. The only acronyms in the text, probably patronymics, are used to distinguish the only two homonymous victims in the text and not to distinguish citizens from non-citizens.[20]

---

[17] Listed together in Audollent (1904: 164–165, nr. 109). Cf. Wünsch (1900: 268–269). These tablets are now missing, cf. Faraone (1991: 24, note 19).
[18] *E.g.* a columnar list of 13 abbreviated names in Bettarini (2005: 138–142, nr. 27).
[19] Gordon (1999: 257).
[20] Vallarino (2017: 191).

The use of lists in magic was carefully studied in 1999 by Richard Gordon, who proposed a classification of the two main types of lists, which he defined as 'natural' and 'columnar'.[21]

On the one hand, natural lists are characterized by a continuous sequence of names from left to right that occupy the entire available space. This type of list may present some additional elements that enrich the text, such as a conjunction between each name in the list, the indication of the patronymic/demotic or the activity carried out by the victim, the presence of a performative verb.

On the other hand, columnar lists contain a list of personal names written vertically that rarely include other information apart from the names. This type, in which each item is separated from the next, was the most used in magical texts and, compared to natural lists, has a strong visual impact since it facilitates reading, comprehension and clarity.

As Gordon points out, lists were used because they contain formal features that made them particularly suited to the communication of magic. For example, the schematic and paratactic layout was intended to catch the eye, and the impersonal style and fragmented language conveyed transparency and anonymity.[22]

In order to determine how widespread the phenomenon of Greek magic lists was, it was deemed necessary to collect them from the existing corpora of *defixiones*[23] and the annual epigraphic update volumes,[24] since no such collection has been published to date. What follows is the fruit of this research.

[21] Gordon (1999: 252–257).
[22] Gordon (1999: 252–257); Centrone (2010: 95–100).
[23] Wünsch (1897); Audollent (1904); Jordan (1985); Jordan (2000); Bettarini (2005) for Selinus; Belousov (2021) for Olbia Pontica; Sánchez Natalías (2022) for the Roman West; *IG* II/III^3 8.1 for Attica. It is also worth consulting online the *Thesaurus Defixionum*, a database that aims to collect the *defixiones* of the ancient world.
[24] *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (*SEG*); *Bulletin Épigraphique* (*BE*).

In geographical terms, Greek magic lists are attested over many areas of the Greek-Roman world, the majority originating from Attica, especially Athens.[25] In Greece a small group have also been found in Argolis (Nemea, Kleonai),[26] Macedonia (Pydna, Akanthos)[27] and the islands (Samothrace and Lesbos)[28]. Other magic lists are attested in Illyricum (Histria, Siscia)[29] and Spain[30] and an important group are from Olbia Pontica.[31] A significant number are from Sicily (Selinus, Kamarina, Himera, Gela, Phintias, Grammichele),[32] and a few also come from Magna Graecia (Calabria, Tarentum).[33]

---

[25] In the recent collection of *defixiones* from Attica made by Curbera in *IG* II/III^3 8.1 about 145 magic lists out of 485 *defixiones* can be identified. From Attica (4th–3rd/2nd cent. BC): *IG* II/III^3 8.1, 1–19; 42; 46–48; 53–54; 56; 58; 61; 64–67; 69–72; 78; 83–86; 88-95; 97–106; 108–115; 117–122; 124–132; 134–146; 149–155; 157–164; 166–170; 173–177; 179–183; 185; 189–201; 274–280; 289; 310; 321; 323; 326–327; 329–330; 332; 340; 369; 371–375; 378; 485.

[26] From Nemea (undated): Jordan (1985: 167, nr. 56). From Kleonai (4th–3rd cent. BC): Jordan (2000: 13, nr. 30).

[27] From Pydna (4th cent. BC): Jordan (2000, 14, nrr. 36–37); Curbera–Jordan (2003: 109–127, nrr. 1–6). From Akanthos (300 BC): Jordan (2000: 15, nr. 43).

[28] From Samothrace (late 4th cent. BC): Jordan (2000: 16, nr. 47). From Lesbos (4th–3rd cent. BC): Jordan (2000: 16, nrr. 48–50).

[29] From Histria (4th cent. BC): Avram–Chiriac–Matei (2007: 400–411, nrr. 2-4). From Siscia (undated): Jordan (1985: 172, nr. 82).

[30] From Emporion (undated): Jordan (1985: 184, nr. 135).

[31] From Olbia Pontica (5th–2nd cent. BC): Belousov (2021: 8–10, nr. 2; 10–13, nr. 3; 16–21, nr. 5; 21–24, nr. 6; 25–27, nr. 7; 27–29, nr. 8; 30–31, nr. 9; 31–34, nr. 10; 34–38, nr. 11; 38–42, nr. 12; 48–52, nr. 14; 52–56, nr. 15; 56–60, nr. 16; 60–65, nr. 17; 73–82, nr. 19; 101–104, nr. 22). From Nikonion in the Black Sea (4th cent. BC): Belousov (2017: 55–64).

[32] From Selinus (late 6th/early 5th–late 5th cent. BC): Bettarini (2005: 15–20, nr. 2; 25–27, nr. 4; 91–92, nr. 18; 125–129, nr. 24; 131–134, nr. 25; 135–137, nr. 26; 138–142, nr. 27; 151–152, nr. 30); *I.dial. Sicile* II, nr. 35; Rocca (2007: 9–12); Rocca (2009: 8–11, nr. 2; 18–22, nr. 5); Bettarini (2009: 137–146). From Kamarina (mid-5th–3rd cent. BC): Jordan (1985: 172–173, nr. 85); Jordan (2000: 18, nrr. 55–58); *I.dial. Sicile* I, nrr. 118–121; *I.dial. Sicile* II, nrr. 62–63*a-b*. From Himera (late 6th–early 5th cent. BC): Brugnone–Calascibetta–Vassallo (2020: 71–91). From Gela (5th cent. BC): Jordan (1985: 173, nr. 90). From Phintias (2nd–1st cent. BC): Jordan (1985: 174, nr. 92). From Grammichele (5th cent. BC): *I.dial. Sicile* II, nr. 98. From Sicily (Selinus?) (mid-5th cent. BC): Bettarini (2005: 43–45, nr. 10; 46–49, nr. 11; 50–58, nr. 12; 68–73, nr. 14).

[33] From Calabria (4th–3rd cent. BC): Lazzarini–Poccetti (2017: 237–240, nrr. 5–6). From Tarentum (4th–3rd cent. BC): *IG* XIV, 668.

Selinus and Himera, in Sicily, are among the places in which the oldest magic list in the Greek world have been discovered, which are dated to the late 6th and early 5th century BC. Although becoming more common from the mid-5th century BC onwards, in Selinus magic lists have been found from the late 6th and early 5th century BC together with other curse tablets characterised by a more discursive style and stereotypical language.[34] Recently, 54 new curse tablets have been discovered in the western necropolis of Buonfornello in Himera, which to date is the biggest nucleus of Sicilian *defixiones*.[35] The only two published documents from this group are examples of magic lists dated to the late sixth and early 5th century BC.[36]

The other major Sicilian *polis* in which *defixiones* are attested is Kamarina, where have been found inscriptions characterised by an almost exclusive use of nominal lists among the oldest texts.[37] However, these documents date back to a later period than the earliest texts from Selinus and Himera (mid-5th century BC).

Overall, the majority of Greek magic lists are dated to between the fourth and the 3rd century BC, while just a few date to the 2nd – 1st cent.

[34] Among the oldest examples in the form of magic lists see Bettarini (2005: 91–92, nr. 18; 131–134, nr. 25; 135–137, nr. 26; 138–142, nr. 27) and Rocca (2009: 18–22, nr. 5). Among the oldest examples of *defixiones* in a more discursive style, see Bettarini (2005: 59–68, nr. 13; 75–80, nr. 15; 81–86, nr. 16; 87–90, nr. 17; 95–103, nr. 20; 104–108, nr. 21; 109–111, nr. 22; 112–124, nr. 23) and Kotansky–Curbera (2004: 684–690, nr. III) in which the formula καταγράφω τὸν δεῖνα καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ τὰν ἀτέλειαν is repeated 28 times with some slight variations. Another example of a formula that occurs in Bettarini (2005: 95–108, nrr. 20 e 21) is τὰς γλώσσας ἀπεστραμμένας ἐγγράφω.

[35] Brugnone–Calascibetta–Vassallo (2020: 47–108).

[36] Brugnone–Calascibetta–Vassallo (2020: 55–91): an opisthographic tablet (5th cent. BC) which contains a columnar list of personal names; Brugnone–Calascibetta–Vassallo (2020: 71–85): another opisthographic tablet (late 6th/early 5th cent. BC), which depicts a male and a female figure identified by anthroponyms engraved along the upper margin.

[37] Among the oldest texts from Kamarina are *e.g. I.dial. Sicile* I, nr. 118 (mid-5th cent. BC), nr. 120 (mid-5th cent. BC), nr. 121 (mid-5th cent. BC). Cf. Curbera (1999: 165–166).

BC.[38] In Athens, where the majority of the magic lists originate, they date from the 4th to the 3rd / 2nd cent. BC.[39]

The collection of magic lists presented here attests that the most common type of magic text is the columnar list. This aspect is highlighted by Gordon, who recorded numerous curse tablets with columnar lists in Attica dating from up to around 300 BC, compared to a much smaller number (9) from Magna Graecia and Sicily.[40] However, although the majority of the known magic lists originate from Attica, it is worth noting that the several findings in Sicily over the last two decades bring the number of the latter to around 25 magic columnar lists.

According to Gordon, the plethora of columnar lists in Attica could depend upon a tradition of "democratic literacy".[41] These were among the most important and typical documents of the democracy, which included public documents comprising inventories, lists of magistrates, winners of sport competitions, deme-lists, lists of public benefactors, and lists of shame against deserters, public debtors or those convicted of murder. Gordon considers columnar lists in *defixiones* as being very similar to the lists of shame since both had enemies as targets, private in the former case and public in the latter.[42] If one accepts this hypothesis, it may be assumed that in Classical and Hellenistic times private documents, such as *defixiones*, would have been made so that they resembled

[38] From Olbia Pontica (2nd cent. BC): Belousov (2021: 38–42, nr. 12); from Phintias (2nd/1st cent. BC): Jordan (1985: 174, nr. 92).
[39] The collection of *defixiones* from Attica in *IG* II/III^3 8.1 shows that most of the magic lists are dated to the 4th cent. BC; a few are dated to the 3rd / 2nd cent. BC.
[40] Gordon (1999: 255) had estimated that columnar lists were present in 40 of the 135 texts (30%) collected in Wünsch (1897) and in 15 of the 34 texts (44%) collected in Jordan (1985). Gordon (1999: 255, note 26) had collected just nine columnar lists from Magna Graecia and Sicily.
[41] Gordon (1999: 256).
[42] Gordon (1999: 256–257).

impressive public documents in order to bestow upon them the same characteristics of efficacy, authority and power.[43]

However, it might be suggested that one of the principal reasons for the diffusion and popularity of columnar list in *defixiones* is that of clarity. The clear organisation of the columnar list of *defixi* was vital for the person who would need to pronounce each name clearly while casting the spell. Clarity was also paramount for the gods of the underworld to understand exactly who their targets were.

Type of medium: the case of magic lists on terracotta

As indicated above, *defixiones* were generally inscribed on lead tablets, but it is worth noting that alternative materials were also used, such as other metals (gold, silver, copper, bronze), stone, terracotta, selenite, papyrus, wood, linen and parchment.[44] With regard to magic lists in *defixiones*, although the majority were inscribed on lead, there are also some examples on terracotta, which will be discussed below.

Most of the terracotta inscriptions come from Athens, which has brought to light three terracotta inscriptions identified as magic lists: a black-glazed lamp (mid-4th century BC) on which a list of names in the nominative is inscribed backwards on top of the nozzle and rim;[45] a *chytra* (early 3rd century BC) on which 55 names in the nominative are inscribed on its exterior and which was pierced with a large iron nail;[46] and a vessel (late 4th century BC), currently unpublished, on which 40

[43] Gordon (1999: 257).
[44] Bevilacqua (2010: 21–82) analysed the relationship between writing, media and magic in antiquity considering a wide range of objects (including some curses). Sánchez-Natalías (2022: 7–14) made a distinction between objects intentionally created for the purpose of writing ('specific media') and those that had originally been made for a different purpose ('non-specific media').
[45] Lang (1976: 15, nr. C32).
[46] Lamont (2021: 87–96).

names alongside their professions are engraved.[47] Moreover, from the ancient Olbian necropolis comes a black-glazed cup (4th century BC), on whose inner side a list of personal names in the nominative is inscribed in a circle.[48] From Olbia Pontica two doubtful cases on *ostraka* are also known, which are included in the collection of *defixiones* made by Alexey Belousov, although their identification is uncertain.[49]

These examples attest that the use of inscribing magic lists on pottery was not an isolated practice, especially between the 4th and 3rd century BC.

3.1 A "new" terracotta tile from Tarentum

Another document inscribed on terracotta was recently found in the storerooms of the National Archaeological Museum of Tarentum, in southern Italy, during an epigraphic survey carried out by Roma Tre University related to the new edition of the 14th volume of *Inscriptiones Graecae*[50]. The inscription[51] (see Figures 1-2) was brought to light in 1988 in Via Leonida 52 (Tarentum), although unfortunately this is the only information available regarding its finding. However, an excavation campaign carried out at the time attested that this site was an artisan area which was active from the end of the 5th to around the 4th century BC[52]. In addition to a furnace, some basins and a tomb were also found.

The document is a terracotta tile with some inscribed lines on the two longest sides. The text is as follows:

a Εὔμναστος

[47] *IG* II/III^3 8.1, 196.
[48] Belousov (2021: 21–24, nr. 6).
[49] Belousov (2021: 3–7, nr. 1; 13–15, nr. 4).
[50] This work was made possible by Roberta Fabiani's systematic examination of the inscriptions in the catalogues of the National Archaeological Museum of Tarentum.
[51] De Blasio (2023: 1–22).
[52] Dell'Aglio–Russo (1988: 129–130).

Ταυρίσκος
Δαμόστρατος
Ζώπυρος
5. Εὔμαχος
b [Φ]ιλώτας
Μοσχᾶς

On one side (*a*) there is a columnar list of five names, while on the other

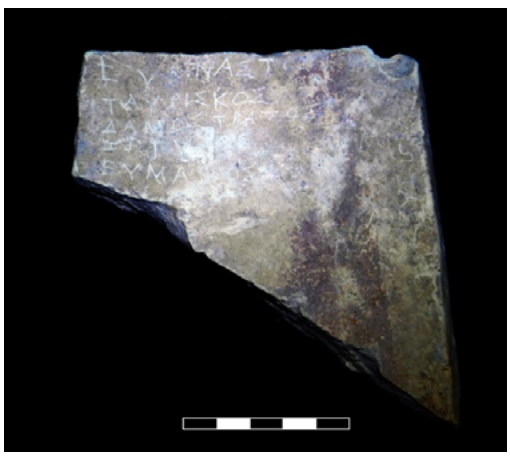

Figure 1. National Archaeological Museum of Tarentum (nr. 220167), terracotta tile.

Figure 2. Apograph of the inscription

side (*b*) there is a list of only two names. The tile is broken at the bottom, but the text is fully preserved because the inscriptions on side *a* break off where the piece is damaged, suggesting that the tile was engraved on a piece which had been damaged before the engraving took place. It is worth noting that the text is very clear in its structure and that the author wanted to preserve the columnar structure of the list. Rather than continue to add other names after Εὔμαχος which have required starting a new column, he decided to add the other two names, Φιλώτας and Μοσχᾶς, by turning the tile and inscribing them on the other side.

On paleographic grounds the text can be dated to the early Hellenistic period, perhaps between the late 4th and early 3rd century BC. This is confirmed by the shapes of the letters, which are almost identical to

those found on a curse tablet on lead, which was also from Tarentum and from the same period (*IG* XIV, 668). Besides the shape of the letters, this second *defixio* has other elements in common with the new document. Both of them are columnar lists of names dated to the same period and have two personal names in common, Φιλώτας and Ζώπυρος.[53] However, it is not possible to claim that they are the same people as those in our text since the two names were very common in Tarentum at that time.[54]

The identity of the people named in the list remains uncertain, but a survey in the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* and in other corpora has shown that three of the names mentioned on our document appear on some stamps from Tarentum dated to the 4th century BC: Ζώπυρος, Εὔμαχος, and Μοσχᾶς which could be related to another artisan, Μοσχίδας.[55] The area where the inscription was found was, in fact, an active artisan area in the 4th century BC, hence these people may have been artisans who worked there.

Although the structure of the text seems to refer to magic lists, the

[53] According to Burkert (1972: 105), Gasperini (1980: 371) and Zhmud (1989: 273–274) the names mentioned in the lead tablet as members belonging to a Pythagorean association. This hypothesis is based on the homonymy of five names with the characters mentioned in the appendix to Iambl. *VP* 36, 267.

[54] Φιλώτας was found in Tarentum five times between the 4th and 3rd cent. BC.: Daux (1944–1945: 98, nr. 5); *IG* XIV, 668; Drago (1940: 322, nr. 194); Ravel (1947: nr. 708); Brunetti (1960: 49); Evans (1889: 177, nr. VIII A.5). Ζώπυρος was found six times in Bousquet (1946: 38–9); *F.Delphes* III.1, nr. 109; Iambl., *VP* 36.267; *IG* XIV, 668; Evans (1889: 159, nr. VII C.8; 176 nr. VIII A.2–3).

[55] Ferrandini Troisi (2012: 86–88, nrr. 29-30): on the two stamps, Ζώπυρος appears abbreviated in ΖΩ and ΖΩΠ (the name Ζωπυρίων is not credible since it was found in Tarentum on a coin dated to 235–228 BC, see Evans (1889: 194 nr. IX B). Ferrandini Troisi (2012: 82, nr. 25; 185, nr. 51): on two stamps Εὔμαχος appears abbreviated in ΕΥΜΑ and ΕΥΜΑΧ; on the name Εὔμαχος found in Tarentum as an artisan cf. Rosamilia (2017a: 469, nr. 9); *Id.* (2017b: 326). Μοσχίδας is a very rare name that appears in Tarentum in the Doric genitive Μοσχίδα only on two stamps: Ferrandini Troisi (1992: nrr. 90–91); the rarity of the name suggests that it is somehow related to the anthroponym Μοσχᾶς, of which many attestations are known in the Greek world (about 50), although not in Tarentum.

type of medium, a terracotta tile, is uncommon for this type of document. As mentioned above, terracotta was used for *defixiones*, but as yet no reference has been made to tiles in this paper.

The most interesting comparison, albeit from Roman times, is a terracotta tile from the necropolis of El Jem, in Tunisia, on which three Latin inscriptions are engraved.[56] The middle inscription, although not a magic list, is an amatory curse: *ho(c) opera retine mihi Patelaria(m) Minor(em) amor piger n(obis).*

3.2 A terracotta tile from Antium

Another document on a terracotta tile comes from Antium, a town near Rome, and it is dated to the Imperial age.[57] The text of the inscription is as follows:

[- - -] Ζ Η Θ Ι Κ Λ Μ Ν Ξ Ο Π [- - -]
[- - -] Φ Χ Ψ Ω
[- - -]ης
[- - -]άνης
5. [Ἀ]νόπτης
Μέτρης
Φλάκος
vertically, from below to above:
ΠḘΛΟΜΟΣΟ [- - -] (?)
vertically, from above to below:
ΠΕΛΑΚ

The first two lines contain part of an alphabetical sequence with some missing letters (*alpha* to *epsilon* and *rho* to *hypsilon*) due to the fragmen-

[56] Foucher (2000: 57–61).
[57] Solin (2019: 148–149, nr. 114).

tary nature of the medium. From line 3 to line 7 there are a few terms, written in a column, which can be reconstructed as four personal names in the nominative. On the other hand, the lines written along the right side remain uncertain.

The editor of this text considers the inscription to be a 'magic or scholastic exercise'.[58] This paper would argue that it is in fact a magic text, since there is a clear parallel between the columnar list of names in the nominative inscribed on a terracotta tile this inscription and the one from Tarentum. While writing out letters of the alphabet (ll. 1-2) might suggest a scholastic exercise, it is worth noting that these may also have magical efficacy. Indeed, the alphabet or parts of it are found on some other curse tablets.[59] For this reason and in the light of the inscription from Tarentum, it seems preferable to consider this tile as a magic text. If this is the case, then it should also be considered a magic list rather than a scholastic exercise.

3.3 Final note regarding the terracotta tile from Tarentum

In conclusion, it might be argued that given the clear structure of the text from Tarentum, one is reminded of the lists of names used in *defixiones*. Although the type of medium may seem uncommon, there are several examples of magic lists on pottery from the 4th century BC. However, the lack of precise information regarding the original whereabouts of the tile, prevents making this claim with any certainty. Were this document a *defixio*, it would probably have been found in one of the basins or in the tomb of the artisan area, and the names inscribed to be cursed might be those of artisans who worked there.

---

[58] Solin (2019: 148).

[59] Cf. Dornseiff (1925: 69 ss.); Ogden (1999: 48–49); Velaza (2019: 123–138); Bevilacqua (2020: 25–30). *E.g.* Sánchez Natalías (2022: 251–252, nr. 173): an amatory curse from Maar (Belgic Gaul, 2nd cent. AD), engraved on a clay pot, contains a complete alphabetical sequence.

Conclusions

It may be concluded that the use of magic lists must have been a widespread magic-ritual practice, especially in the Hellenistic era especially between the 4th and 3rd century BC in many areas of the Greek world. This particular way of writing a *defixio*, comprising a list of personal names to be cursed confirms that simply inscribing lists had no cursing power and that an oral recitation was an integral part of the curse. Moreover, lists were used because they have features suited to the communication of magic, such as a clear, simple layout and an impersonal style.

These documents were inscribed not only on lead tablets, but also on pottery, especially between the 4th and 3rd cent. BC. In this regard, both the text from Tarentum and the one from Antium are inscribed on a terracotta tile and include all of the features found in magic lists. The comparison of the terracotta text from Tarentum with the lead magic list from the same place (*IG* XIV, 668), both dated to the 4th and 3rd century BC., is very significant, because they share many common elements, the most notable being that they contain nominal lists, and have the same clear, columnar layout.

Abbreviations

F.Delphes III.1	É. Bourguet: *Fouilles de Delphes III. Épigraphie. Fasc. 1, Inscriptions de l'entrée du sanctuaire au trésor des Athéniens*. Paris 1929.
I.dial. Sicile I	L. Dubois: *Inscriptions grecques dialectales de Sicile I. Contribution à l'étude du vocabulaire grec colonial*. Paris 1989.
I.dial. Sicile II	L. Dubois: *Inscriptions grecques dialectales de Sicile II*. Genève 2008.
IG II/III^3 8.1	J. Curbera: *Inscriptiones Graecae. Vol. II/III3, fasc. 8.1, Defixiones Atticae*. Berlin 2024.
IG XIV	G. Kaibel: *Inscriptiones Graecae. Vol. XIV, Inscriptiones Siciliae et Italiae, additis Galliae, Hispaniae, Britanniae, Germaniae inscriptionibus*. Berlin 1890.

Bibliography

Audollent 1904 — A. Audollent: *Defixionum tabellae quotquot innotuerunt: tam in Graecis Orientis quam in totius Occidentis partibus praeter Atticas in Corpore inscriptionum atticarum editas*. Paris 1904.

Avram–Chiriac–Matei 2007 — A. Avram – C. Chiriac – I. Matei: *Defixiones d'Istros*. BCH 131 (2007), 383–420.

Belousov 2017 — A.V. Belousov: *A New Greek Curse from Ancient Nikonion*. Aristeas. Philologia classica et historia antiqua 16 (2017) 55–64.

Belousov 2021 — A.V. Belousov: *Defixiones Olbiae Ponticae* (Colloquia Antiqua 30). Leuven 2021.

Bettarini 2005 — L. Bettarini: *Corpus delle defixiones di Selinunte: edizione e commento*. Alessandria 2005.

Bettarini 2009 — L. Bettarini: *Defixio selinuntina inedita da Manuzza*. PP 64 (2009) 137–146.

Bevilacqua 2010 — G. Bevilacqua: *Scrittura e magia: un repertorio di oggetti iscritti della magia greco-romana* (Opuscula Epigraphica 12). Roma 2010.

Bousquet 1946 — J. Bousquet: *Inscriptions de Delphes*. BCH 70 (1946) 32–41.

Brugnone–Calascibetta–Vassallo 2020 — A. Brugnone – A.M.G. Calascibetta – S. Vassallo: *Laminette plumbee iscritte da Himera*. Aristonothos 16 (2020) 47–108.

Brunetti 1960 — L. Brunetti: *Nuovi orientamenti sulla zecca di Taranto*. RIN 62 (1960) 5–132.

Burkert 1972 — W. Burkert: *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*. Cambridge 1972.

Centrone 2010 — M. Centrone: *L'impaginazione del testo e gli espedienti grafici*. In: G. Bevilacqua (ed.): Scrittura e magia: un repertorio di oggetti iscritti della magia greco-romana (Opuscula Epigraphica 12). Roma 2010, 95–117.

Curbera 1999 — J.B. Curbera: *Defixiones*. In: M.I.P. Gulletta (ed.): Sicilia epigraphica. Atti del convegno di studi: Erice, 15–18 ottobre 1998, Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia. Quaderni 7–8. Pisa 1999, 159–186.

Curbera–Jordan 2003 — J. Curbera – D. Jordan: *Curse Tablets from Pydna*. GRBS 43 (2003) 109–127.

Dana 2021 — M. Dana: *La correspondance grecque privée sur plomb et sur tesson. Corpus épigraphique et commentaire historique* (Vestigia 73). München 2021.

Daux 1944–1945 — G. Daux: *Inscriptions de Delphes*. BCH 68–69 (1944–1945) 94–128.

De Blasio 2023 T.S. De Blasio: *Una probabile defixio su tegola da Taranto*. Axon 7.2 (2023) 1–22.

Dell'Aglio–Russo 1989 A. Dell'Aglio – G. Russo: *Soprintendenza archeologica della Puglia. Notiziario delle attività di tutela: settembre 1988–giugno 1989 (Taranto, Via Leonida 52)*. Taras 9 (1989) 212–213.

Dornseiff 1925 F. Dornseiff: *Das Alphabet in Mystic und Magie*. Berlin 1925.

Drago 1940 C. Drago: *Regione II (Apulia)*. NSA 18 (1940) 314–354.

Eidinow 2007 E. Eidinow: *Oracles, curses, and risk among the ancient Greeks*. Oxford 2007.

Evans 1889 A. J. Evans: *The 'Horsemen' of Tarentum*. London 1889, 1–228.

Faraone 1985 C. A. Faraone: *Aeschylus (Eum. 306) and Attic judicial curse tablets*. JHS 105 (1985) 150–154.

Faraone 1991 C.A. Faraone: *The agonistic context of early Greek binding spells*. In: C.A. Faraone – D.D. Obbink (eds.): Magika Hiera. Ancient Greek magic and religion. New York 1991, 3–32.

Ferrandini Troisi 1992 F. Ferrandini Troisi: *Epigrafi «mobili» del Museo Archeologico di Bari*. Bari 1992.

Ferrandini Troisi 2012 F. Ferrandini Troisi: *Coroplastica tarantina. Le matrici iscritte*. Bari 2012.

Foucher 2000 L. Foucher: *Une inscription magique d'El Jem*. AntAfr 36 (2000), 57–61.

Gager 1992 J.G. Gager: *Curse tablets and binding spells from the ancient world*. Oxford 1992.

Gasperini 1980 L. Gasperini: *Tarentina Epigraphica*. Miscellanea Greca e Romana 7 (1980) 365–384.

Guarducci 1978 M. Guarducci: *Epigrafia Greca. Vol. IV, Epigrafi sacre pagane e cristiane*. Roma 1978.

Gordon 1999 R.L. Gordon: *«What›s in a list?»: listing in Greek and Graeco-Roman malign magical texts*. In: D.R. Jordan – H. Montgomery – E. Thomassen (eds.): The world of ancient magic. Papers from the first International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, 4–8 May 1997. Bergen 1999, 239–277.

Graf 1994 F. Graf: *La magie dans l'Antiquité gréco-romaine. Idéologie et pratique*. Paris 1994.

Graf 1995 F. Graf: *La magia nel mondo antico*. Roma 1995.

Jordan 1985 D.R. Jordan: *A survey of Greek defixiones not included in the special corpora*. GRBS 26 (1985) 151–197.

Jordan 2000 D.R. Jordan: *New Greek curse tablets (1985-2000)*. GRBS 41.1 (2000) 5–46.

Kotansky–Curbera 2004 R. Kotansky – J. Curbera: *Unpublished Lead Tablets in the Getty Museum*. MediterrAnt 7 (2004) 681–691.

Lamont 2021 J.J. Lamont: *Cursing in Context: Athenian Pyre Curses*. In: C. Faraone – I. Polinskaya (eds.): Curses in Contexts III: The Greek curse Tablets of Classical and Hellenistic Periods. Athens 2021, 75–103.

Lang 1976 M.L. Lang: *The Athenian Agora. Results of excavations conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, XXI: Graffiti and dipinti*. Princeton 1976.

Lazzarini–Poccetti 2017 M.L. Lazzarini – P. Poccetti: *Le tabellae defixionis della Calabria tra IV e III sec. a.C.: una considerazione d'insieme*. In: G. De Sensi Sestito – S. Mancuso (eds.): Enotri e Bretii in Magna Grecia. Modi e forme di interazione culturale. Soveria Mannelli 2017, 221–280.

Ogden 1999 D. Ogden: *Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. In: B. Ankarloo – S. Clark (eds.): Witchcraft and magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome. Philadelphia 1999, 1–90.

Ravel 1947 O.E. Ravel: *Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of Tarentine coins formed by M.P. Vlasto*. London 1947.

Rocca 2007 G. Rocca: *Una iscrizione inedita dalla Sicilia e l'epigrafe Ve 192*. MEP 12 (2007) 9–12.

Rocca 2009 G. Rocca: *Nuove iscrizioni da Selinunte*. Alessandria 2009.

Rosamilia 2017a E. Rosamilia: *Firmare matrici a Taranto: il coroplasta Pantaleon e i suoi colleghi*. ArchClass 68 (2017) 453–473.

Rosamilia 2017b E. Rosamilia: *Coroplasti e onomastica a Taranto fra IV e III secolo a.C.* Historika 7 (2017) 319–344.

Sánchez Natalías 2022 C. Sánchez Natalías: *Sylloge of Defixiones from the Roman West. A comprehensive collection of curse tablets from the fourth century BCE to the fifth century CE*. Oxford 2022.

Solin 2019 H. Solin: *Contributi sull'epigrafia anziate*. In: Studi storico-epigrafici sul Lazio Antico II (Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 137). Helsinki 2019, 89–160.

Vallarino 2010 G. Vallarino: *Parole invisibili*. In: G. Bevilacqua (ed.): Scrittura e magia: un repertorio di oggetti iscritti della magia greco-romana (Opuscula Epigraphica 12). Roma 2010, 87–94.

Vallarino 2017 G. Vallarino: *Abbreviazioni, liste nominali e pratica magica: rilettura di una laminetta tarantina (IG XIV 668 A-B)*. In: P. Lombardi (ed.):

Come aurora lieve, preziosa. Ergastai e philoi a Gabriella Bevilacqua. Giornata di studio – Roma 6 giugno 2012 (Opuscula Epigraphica 17). Roma 2017, 187–192.

Velaza 2019 J. Velaza: *Non solo lettere: l'alfabeto come elemento rituale nel mondo antico.* In: G. Baratta (ed.): L'ABC di un impero: iniziare a scrivere a Roma. Roma 2019, 123–138.

Wünsch 1897 R. Wünsch: *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*. Berlin 1897.

Zhmud 1989 L. Zhmud: *All is Number? Basic Doctrine of Pythagoreanism reconsidered*. Phronesis 34 (1989) 270–292.