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Dialogues with the Dead: Macedonian Tablets and the Written Word in Macedon

Ancient curse tablets- commonly called *defixiones* in scholarship- have often been studied as a means to understand the vibrant life of "magic" in antiquity. Certain lengthy Macedonian curse tablets survive from antiquity, and serve as some of the only written evidence produced by Macedonians. These curse tablets tell a story about Macedon and her people. However, these curse tablets are always grouped in with the larger corpus of Greek curse tablets and read as a product of Greek people, which can be problematic.[1] Beyond this improper grouping, there are many issues with attempting to define ancient "magic"- which stem from our own modern perceptions to the methodological issues with studying a field so speculative. Therefore, it is more beneficial to study curse tablets from a different methodology and approach them as epigraphic sources.

Before examining curse tablets, one must first analyze the study of "magic," as curse tablets are exclusively studied as a subfield of "magic." Throughout these scholarly discourses, the theme runs through of how to study magic in antiquity. Einar Thomassen's article "Magic as

[1] Macedon's place as a Greek polis is uncertain and highly debated. For more on this issue, see E.N.Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus: The Emergence of Macedon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 77-97. E. Badian, "Greeks and Macedonians," in E. N. Borza and B. Barr- Sharrar (eds.), *Macedonia and Greece in Late Classical and Early Hellenistic Times, Studies in the History of Art 10* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1982), 33-51. J. Engels, "Macedonians and Greeks." In J. Roisman and I. Worthington (eds.), *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010), 81-98. J. Hall, "Contested Ethnicities: Perception of Macedonia within Evolving Definitions of Greek Identity." In Irad Malkin (ed.), *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 159-86.

a Subclass of Ritual" exemplifies both the common themes and pitfalls of the traditional scholarly debate.[2] Thomassen's work is more theoretical and focuses on the methodology of studying "magic."[3] Thomassen calls attention to how it has become fashionable to dissect "magic" and try to define it, and attempts to discuss the problems with the taxonomy of "magic" and its study within the field of historical religion.[4] The common question: How is "magic" studied in relation to religion? Religion contains a communal aspect, the relationship with the practitioner's community is as important as the relationship with the deity. "Magic," however, is an individual practice solely for personal gain and therefore lacks the necessary social element necessary to qualify as a ritual.[5]

Thomassen's work is symptomatic of larger issues with studying "magic." Scholars have become obsessed with attempting to define and qualify "magic."[6] However, as Daniel Ogden points out, "magic" was a fluid term in antiquity which could mean various different things, and the openness of the term means that any modern attempt to define magic is futile.[7] Furthermore, Thomassen utilizes curse tablets as an example of magical practices, without distinguishing any of the specifics. Neither the society which produced the curse tablet nor the period within which it was created is paid any head in this analysis. Again, Thomassen is merely following the

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[2] E. Thomassen, "Is Magic a Subclass of Rituals?" in D. R. Jordan et al. (eds), *The World of Ancient Magic: Papers from the First International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens* (Bergen: Norwegian Institute at Athens, 1997) 55-66.
[3] *Ibid.*, 55.
[4] *Ibid.*, 56-57.
[5] *Ibid.*, 63-65.
[6] Thomassen is in good company with this approach to studying "magic." See also D. Collins, "Introduction," in *Magic in the Ancient Greek World* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 1-24. F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). B.C. Otto, "Towards Historicising 'Magic' in Antiquity," *Numen* 60 (2013): 308-347. All of these authors do address, however, the difficulties with defining "magic" which result from our modern perspective, and Otto even discusses how there is no one set generally agreed upon definition.
[7] D. Ogden, "Introduction," in *Night's Black Agents: Witches, Wizards and the Dead in the Ancient World* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2008), 1-6.

fashion of the discipline. Curse tablets are studied primarily with the goal of learning more about the practice of "magic" and not the people who produced them. It is rare to find a source studying curse tablets which is not attempting to further understand "magic" practices, Gager is one of the few sources which attempts to study the practitioner.

In his chapter "Sex, Love, and Marriage," John Gager fixes some of these issues.[8] Granted, his work still treats curse tablets as a cohesive entity, constant over place and time, nevertheless he combats the general use of curse tablets to study "magic." Gager utilizes the curse tablets to learn more about the people who produced them. These curse tablets provide insight into more personal matters. The many erotic curse tablets which comprise a quarter of all known curse tablets illustrate realities of ancient practitioners, such as the sexual appetite, anxieties, and fantasies.[9] Gager continues on to recount the story of Sosipatra, a well known philosopher, and her appeal to a prominent theurgist, Maximus, to release her from the love spell.[10] This story provides evidence for the practice of love "magic" by people in higher positions in society, at least by the fourth century CE. Furthermore, Gager concludes that the practice of creating erotic defixiones must not have been entirely indivudalistic, as Maximus was able to discover the curse which was afflicting Sosipatra.[11] Gager's analysis serves as a good template for analyzing magical texts in order to study their wider meaning, not merely what the

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[8] J. Gager, "Sex, Love, and Marriage," in *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 78- 115.
[9] *Ibid.*, 80.
[10] *Ibid*., 83. In this story, Sosipatra is a well known philosopher, often called the "divine philosopher." Her cousin, Philometor, falls in love with Sosipatra and creates an erotic binding curse tablet in an attempt to induce reciporial feelings. Sosipatra feels the effects of Philometor's binding curse and confines in her friend, the well known theurgist Maximus. Maximus discovers the cause of Sosipatra's feelings is Philometor's curse and is able to create an antidote to release Sosipatra.
[11] *Ibid*., 83.

actual practices were but what they say about the individual who created them and how they impacted society.

Despite Gager's more focused way of reading curse tablets and "magic" sources, his work illustrates another set of issues with studying curse tablets- how purely speculative the field is. Gager does support his evidence from the texts of the curse tablets and "magic" sources, as seen in his useful analysis of the Sosipatra story. However, when discussing the harsh language common to curse tablets, his analyses tend more towards what the practitioner was thinking, feeling, and intending.[12] While these are interesting concepts to consider, there is not nearly enough evidence from the formulaic curse tablets to speculate as to why exactly the practitioner had chosen to create the *defixio*. Perhaps it was some sort of cathartic release, as Gager suggests, but to speculate so boldly about past people and intentions is a dangerous game to play. We have no way of knowing for certain the intention behind an action, we can only discuss the actual outcome which we have evidence for. Even though Gager is not attempting to define "magic," his scholarship is still rife with deeply-rooted methodological flaws which stem from the field of studying "magic."

Debora Moretti further calls attention to the deeply entrenched flaws with studying curse tablets in the context of "magic" in her chapter "Binding Spells and Curse Tablets through Time."[13] The purpose of Moretti's chapter is to map out the common element of curse tablets and track their changes throughout time and space.[14] However, the true merit of her work lies in her discussion of the issues surrounding the discipline of "magic." Moretti first reminds the audience

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[12] *Ibid.,* 80-84.
[13] D. Moretti, "Binding Spells and Curse Tablets through Time," in C. Houlbrook and N. Armitage (eds.) T*he Materiality of Magic: An Artifactual Investigation into Ritual Practices and Popular Beliefs* (Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2015), 103-121.
[14] *Ibid*., 103.

of the issues surrounding a definition of "magic." Moretti eloquently states; "magic is an intellectual invention to identify actions, people or concepts that do not fit within the boundaries of a specific society because the perception of magic has changed and shifted throughout time."[15] Magic is difficult to pin down in the present and was just as fluid in antiquity. Archaeological evidence and interpretation provide similar problems. As modern historians, we always study the past from our understanding of the present.[16] Again, this provides great difficulties with studying ancient "magic" due to our convoluted modern perception of "magic." "Magic" itself is an immeasurable process and neither the actual act of the binding nor the relationship with the deity is able to be fully reconstructed from material remains.[17] These issues illustrate the challenges attempting to study "magic," a concept which cannot even be defined. Our own biases and perceptions, combined with the ambiguous nature of the topic and the difficulty with interpreting material evidence, means not much can be said with certainty about "magic."

So where does this leave the study of curse tablets? Bernd-Christian Otto, in his article "Towards Historicising 'Magic' in Antiquity," discusses this query within the context of the current scholarly discourse and proposes that "magic," and curse tablets, should be studied within the field of religion.[18] Since the 1950s, scholars have recognized the need to abandon the term "magic," but this decision has left a vacuum which needs to be filled.[19] In response, Otto argues that "magic" and magical texts should be studied as religious texts, since they fall under Edward B. Tylor's definition of "religion": "belief in spiritual beings."[20] Magical materials, such

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[15] *Ibid*., 104.
[16] *Ibid.*, 105.
[17] *Ibid.*, 105.
[18] B.C. Otto, "Towards Historicising 'Magic' in Antiquity," *Numen* 60 (2013): 308-347.
[19] *Ibid.*, 316-318.
[20] *Ibid.*, 319; E.D. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1871), 383.

as curse tablets, rely on the *daimones* to complete the task, as the deities are the ones who hold all of the power and "magic" is merely an attempt to request specific outcomes from them. Therefore, if one does not believe in these deities and their abilities, then they would not believe that their own magical acts and rituals would work.[21] Otto further notes that the concept of sacrifices has a similar basis of humans seeking personal gain from the divine beings, the *do ut des* mindset, which is prevalent in "magic" rituals, further illustrating the necessity to include "magic" in religious studies.[22] Otto's proposal differs from previous attempts to study "magic" and offers a possible solution of how to move beyond the current scholarly stalemate. The bigger premise of Otto's essay illustrates a need within scholarship to take new and different approach to studying curse tablets.

Otto's suggestion is valid, and a good solution to the problem of how curse tablets, and "magic," should be studied and analyzed. However, Otto has kept curse tablets grouped with "magic." In order to reach a new understanding of the content and context of the curse tablets, a different methodological approach is necessary, one unclouded by the difficulties and ambiguity of "magic." While it is truly impossible to study curse tablets apart from their magical context, they are also epigraphic evidence, and can offer new insights into their ancient practitioners when studied as such.[23] Therefore, an epigraphic methodological framework, should be employed to curse tablets. The preliminary qualification concerning the diverse nature of epigraphy, which diverges not just within the Roman and Greek traditions but also within

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[21] Otto, "Historicising 'Magic'" 319-322, 333-335.
[22] *Ibid*., 337.
[23] J. Bodel, "Epigraphy and the Ancient Historian," in J. Bodel (ed.) *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History from Inscriptions* (London: Routledge, 2001), 1-56. Bodel cites the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of an epigraphy as "the science concerned with the classification and interpretation of inscriptions." Bodel further defines inscriptions, with the same definition employed in this paper; "a piece of writing or lettering engraved, etched, incised, traced, stamped, or otherwise imprinted onto a durable surface."

individual city states within Greece, dictates the need to study Macedonian curse tablets as a product of Macedonian society and not as part of a bigger, uniform Greek *corpus*. The combination of the external, material evidence with the internal, textual evidence employed in the methodology of epigraphy is crucial to the study of curse tablets. Their find spot can aid in the analysis to create a more complete picture of the practitioner. Most significantly, though, the combination of all of these analyses creates conclusions about aspects of the society which produced them, conclusions which go beyond the explicit statements in the inscriptions. This sort of critical analysis should be employed when looking at curse tablets to fully read them as products of Macedonian society.

This different, epigraphic approach is necessary to progress the study of curse tablets. What else is left? If it is indeed "vain" to attempt a definition of "magic" then study of curse tablets is tied up in a discipline difficult to learn about and rife with speculation.[24] The conversation of curse tablets in the conversation of "magic" is well-worn and problematic. A stalemate has been reached. Otto is correct in his proposition that more can be discerned through applying the lense of another discipline. As curse tablets qualify as a type of epigraphy, an epigraphic approach provides a plethora of new research opportunities. Furthermore, for too long Orphic gold-tablets have been studied apart from curse tablets, despite their similarities. However, as these tablets are also an important form of epigraphic evidence, they should be considered as a part of the conversation on Macedonian tablets. The tablets themselves, as a form of writing, provide insight into literacy in Macedon. There is still more work to be done, and a

[24] Ogden, N*ight's Black Agents*, 3.

different methodological approach is called for in order to glean more information from the defixiones and further aid in our understanding of Macedonians.

## The Tablets

As is typical of Macedonian scholarship, there are not many extant Macedonian curse tablets to study. The curse tablets we do have come from Pella, Akanthos, and Pydna. Four curse tablets were discovered in the cemetery in Pella, but the text of only one of these curse tablets has been published (SEG 43:434, Figure 1).[25] Four curse tablets were also discovered in the cemeteries at Akanthos, and again only the text of one has been published (SEG 47:871, Figure 2). However, at least one other defixio contains writing, comprising a list of names.[26] The six curse tablets recovered from Pydna all contain writing, mostly lists of names.[27] The sixth curse tablet contains more content, including an explicit verb of cursing (SEG 52:617 VI, Figure 3). From these three sites, there are in total at least fourteen Macedonian curse tablets, which can provide important information about writing in Macedon, due to their find locations and conditions.

The main textual curse tablets, one from each location, vary in content. The tablets from Pella and Akanthos are both erotic curses.[28] Erotic curses aim to impact romantic relationships, and can either attempt to bind the victim to the practitioner (attraction), or keep romantic rivals away from the practitioner's love interest (seperation). The curse tablet from Pella (SEG 43:434, Figure 1) is a separation curse. The practitioner, identified as Phila, desires to disband the

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[25] D. R. Jordan, "New Greek Curse Tablets (1985-2000)," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 41 (2000) 5-46.
[26] *Ibid*., 15.
[27] J Curbera and D.R. Jordan, "Curse Tablets from Pydna," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 43 (2002/3) 109-127.
[28] Ogden, "Night's Black Agents," 139. Ogden describes the five main classifications for curse tablets: litigation, sport and choral, trade, erotic, and prayers for justice.

marriage of Thetima and Dionysophon, and any other similar relationship Dionysophon may enter into, unless it is with Phila. The curse tablet from Akanthos (SEG 47:871, Figure 2) contains two attraction curses. The practitioner, Pausanias, has two seperate attraction curses on the same tablet, in an attempt to bewitch two different romantic interests. The tablet from Pydna (SEG 52:617 VI, Figure 3) differs from the other two in that it is a litigation curse, attempting to silence a list of men who might speak in opposition in a court case. The range of topics and names covered in these curse tablets lead to interesting conclusions about their practitioners, however they are still small in number.

Therefore, another type of ritual tablet found in Macedonian cemeteries should be brought into this discussion – the Orphic gold-tablets. Previously, the scholarship about the Orphic gold-tablets has remained separate from curse tablets, serving as evidence of religious and cult activities. Indeed there are some noteworthy differences between these two types of tablets, which are worth acknowledging. All of the Orphic Gold tablets found in Macedonian cemeteries, numbering at least seven, are classified as proxy tablets, meaning they represent the deceased and convey a message to Persephone that this person was an initiate.[29] The gold-tablets then aid in communication with the gods of the underworld, in an attempt to gain their favor and secure a better afterlife. Curse tablets, however, while still a form of communication with the deities of the dead, are an attempt by someone still living to enhance their current life. Additionally, curse tablets do not represent the occupant they were found with. Rather, the deceased is used as a sort of messenger, carrying the message on behalf of the practitioner, who

[29] F. Graf and S.I. Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets* (New York: Routledge, 2007). The exact number of Orphic Gold Tablets found in Macedonian cemeteries is unknown, as there are a number of undisclosed Orphic Gold-tablets from fifteen cist-graves in Pella and Dion. Each of these gold-tablets had a personal name inscribed, and were placed in the mouth of the occupant.

is still living.[30] Furthermore, the people producing the tablets also differ, at least in scholarship's perception of them. The Orphic gold-tablets indicated that the deceased was in initiate in the cult of Dionysus, a well-attested cult in antiquity. The initiates in the Orphic cult included elites, such as Adea, the daughter of Cassander and Cynnana.[31] The creators of the curse tablets, however, are believed to have belonged to lower classes. The curse tablets are considered a ritual practice in the field of "magic," meaning that their practitioners were also participating in "magic" practices, which were commonly practiced among the non-elites of society.[32]

However, most of these differences are mere nuances, and mostly trivial considering the significant similarities between these two types of tablets. The primary similarity, especially for the purposes of this paper, is that they are both inscribed tablets, meaning they fall under the category of epigraphy and may be studied with an epigraphic methodology. Additionally, both tablets are found in cemeteries or in relation to temples, and are remnants of ritual activity. These ritual activities rely on communication with the deities of the dead, albeit with different nuances, as previously discussed. In their communications with the dead, both the initiates of the Cult of Dionysus and the practitioners of "magic" attempt to alter reality in some way. The initiates of the Cult of Dionysus wish to secure a better after-life for themselves, by using the Orphic gold-tablets as a means to convey their devotion to Persephone, Hades, and Dionysus. The

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[30] At the time this paper was written, nothing had been published discerning the relationship of the deceased to the living practitioner. There is simply too little evidence to make any sort of conclusion as to the requirements for a curse tablet to be left with a corpse. Did the practitioner need to have some sort of relation to the deceased? However, due to the nature of the curse tablets, as well as the one from Pella which addresses the ghost of the corpse the curse tablet is placed with, we can surmise that, unlike with orphic gold-tablets, the curse tablets were not representative of the people they were buried with.

[31] O. Palagia, "The Grave Relief of Adea, Daughter of Cassander and Cynnana," in T. Howe and J. Reames (eds.) *Macedonian Legacies: Studies in Ancient Macedonian History and Culture in Honor of Eugene N. Borza* (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 2008), 195-214.

[32] P. Christesen and S.C. Murray, "Macedonian Religion" in J. Roisman and I. Worthington (eds.) *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010), 428-445.

"magic" practitioners desire a better outcome in their current life, whether in relationships or court cases. They convey similar intentions, and therefore they should be studied as a body of evidence for Macedonian epigraphic culture.

These two types of tablets have not yet been studied together due to the trivial separation in discipline between magic and religion. However, as previously discussed, there are serious issues with attempting to study "magic" in general, and a new approach is necessary to further research on these topics. Additionally, as Otto points out, the curse tablets do depend significantly on a religious belief. The practitioner appeals to the deity, or spirit, and relies upon them to complete the desired action.[33] The divide between these two very similar disciplines has become frivolous, and it should not hinder these tablets from being studied as a corpus of Macedonian epigraphic evidence. Nevertheless, the subtle distinctions of the tablets should, and will, be considered in the evaluation of the texts.

## The Written Word in Macedon

The survival of texts can provide integral information in and of themselves. These tablets are vital evidence to studying the people of Macedon, especially considering that most of what is known about Macedon begins and ends with the Argead family. However, these tablets present an important opportunity to study Macedonians, as they exist apart from the royal family. Together these tables provide insight into a wide array of people. The Orphic initiates included elites, a group of which little is known outside the Royal family. The curse tablets especially aid in investigating the lives of common Macedonians, as it is generally believed that these sorts of "magic" rituals were practiced primarily by non-elites, a group silent in Macedonian history.

[33] Otto, "Historicising 'Magic,'" 319-322, 333-335.

Their role as a form of writing presents an interesting subject of analysis, potentially providing more insight into literacy in the Macedonian world.[34] Especially considering the primary evidence for literacy in this region is Athens- centered, the Macedonian tablets provide a necessary new body of evidence.[35]

As these tablets are the main extant written works from Macedon, most of what is known about Macedonian literacy must be surmised from this evidence. The mere existence of these tablets is indicative of at least some level of literacy among the Macedonians. Literacy works on a sliding scale, it is not an all or nothing situation. This outlook on literacy has created what is called the "craftsman's level" of literacy.[36] With a worksman level of literacy, the author is able to read and write certain words and phrases pertinent to their job, such as "wine" or "oil" found on shipping amphorae which the craftsmen would need to read in order to properly ship and handle the goods. Due to the formulaic nature of curse tablets, including the three major ones found in the Macedonian world, the author may have operated at a craftsman's level of literacy. Professional magicians, or *magoi,* created these curse tablets, from whom the practitioner could commission a defixio.[37] If the *magos* was familiar with the spell of the curse tablets, they would need only know how to write the names of their clients, and fill in the rest with a set of memorized phrases. Thus, these magicians, non-elite Macedonians, would at least have had a craftsman's level of literacy.

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[34] Significant research has already been conducted analyzing these tablets for onomastic and linguistic purposes. See Curbera and Jordan, "Pydna Curse Tablets," 109- 127; Engels, "Macedonians and Greeks," 95.
[35] For more on literacy in antiquity and its heavy bias towards Athens, see W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).
[36] *Ibid.,* 7-8.
[37] R. C. Edmonds III, "Orphic Purity: Piety or Superstition," in Redefining Ancient Orphism: A Study in Greek Religion, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 195-244.

However, the curse tablet from Pella breaks the formula, indicating the possibility of a more advanced level of literacy.[38] The tablet begins with the same formulaic aspects: the names of the victims, the request to keep the romantic interest apart from romantic rivals, an appeal to some sort of deity, and a statement ensuring only the practitioner can undo the curse. However, the practitioner, possibly named Phila, continues on to provide more personal details, specifically that she is alone in the world and therefore entreats the *daimones* to take pity on her. The conclusion to the curse feels very personal and intimate, not at all standard of curse tablets. This ending therefore is not typical of curse tablets, and is not something which could have been easily memorized as part of the spell's formula. Rather, the person who created the curse tablet from Pella must have had a better understanding of the written language, enough so to improvise and add this unusual sentiment.

Furthermore, tablet II from Pydna (SEG 52:617 II, Figure 4) features larger handwriting than is characteristic of curse tablets.[39] Also, upon inspection of Jordan's line drawing, the fourth name on the first column, Θράσων ὁ Νικύλλας, appears to run into the fifth name on the second column. This curse tablet illustrates a lack of familiarity with standard spacing: the name from the first column continues into the second column, and the names on the columns to not match up due to asymmetrical lines. While most of the curse tablets do not exhibit the clear and clean writing characteristic of a professional scribe, the spatial errors on Pynda tablet II appear especially novice.[40] These qualities leave the impression that this tablet was not created by a professional, someone who created many curse tablets as part of their job; rather, the author was

[38] Ogden, "Night's Black Agents," 140-142.
[39] Curbera and Jordan, "Pydna Curse Tablets," 11.
[40] For example, in tablet IV from Pydna, SEG 52:617 VI and Image 3, the first line in the first column takes up the entire top part of the tablet. However, this is the opening line of the curse tablet and, in this instance, the most important as it contains the word for "binding" and contains the main appeal of the curse.

someone unaccustomed to scribal writing. This assertion creates a couple of possible explanations, all of which have interesting implications for the understanding of literacy in Macedon. First, the tablet could have been created very early on in the *magos's* career, when they were still perfecting their writing abilities. However, due to the little information available on the educational and training process of *magoi* in ancient Macedon, it is difficult to prove this as the solution. Another option is that the practitioner themself created this tablet, without going to a professional. The tablet solely consists of lists of names, content simple enough to write down if one knows letter forms. This possibility opens up the question of a more literate population than originally believed. If a common practitioner, not just the *magos*, was able to create this curse tablet, they must have been able to at least write out names. Building upon the assumption that most practitioners of "magic" were non-elites, this tablet is evidence for at least a low level of literacy among the common people of Macedon.

The Orphic gold-tablets similarly convey a level of literacy within Macedonian society. However, due to the lack of evidence and explicit knowledge about the Cult of Dionysus, it is difficult to ascertain with any certainty exactly what level of literacy the Orphic tablets indicate. The initiates included elites, but there is no evidence indicating that the cult was exclusively elites.[41] Similar to the curse tablets, there were *magoi* operating within the Cult of Dionysus, often called Orpheotelests due to their association with the Orphic cult. These Orpheotelests would offer their services, for a price, to the initiates. Services would include the creation of

[41] O. Palagia, "Grave of Adea," 199-201. Palagia discusses the way in which the iconography of the grave frieze of Adea, daughter of Cassander and Cynnana, indicates that she was an initiate into the Cult of Dionysus. Edmonds, "Redefining Ancient Orphism," 200-203 analyzes the role of the "ritual experts" in the Orphic Cult. Since these "ritual experts" would charge for their services, they would often work for wealthy clients, indicating a significant member base of elites. Furthermore, the Orphic tablets found in the tombs were all made of gold, an expensive material indicative of at least some sort of wealth for the initiate.

defixiones and other charmed objects.[42] Logic would follow that the Orpheotelests were the creators of the Orphic gold-tablets. If the Orpheotelests were, in fact, the creators, then again the evidence supports a craftsman's level of literacy among the common people, as an Orpheotelest was not a respected member of society and most likely did not come from the elites.[43] However there is no evidence clearly stating that the Orpheotelest were the authors of the Orphic gold-tablets.[44] Here one encounters both a lack of extant evidence as well as the issues resulting from the politics of publication. Evidence is so sparse and fragmentary that not much is known with complete certainty. Furthermore, what evidence does exist, such as the Orphic gold-tablets, is not thoroughly published. Without access to photographs or line drawings of these tablets, one cannot adequately study these sources. Hopefully in the future these texts will become more readily available for scholars, and deeper research can be conducted on these tablets. For now, even though what is published of the tablets provides little information as to their author, one must be content to accept that some level of literacy was necessary.

The curse and Orphic gold- tablets can also provide insight into Macedonian views towards writing. The tablets are the main examples of extant writing produced in Macedon, and they are all related to some sort of ritual action. These two types of tablets represent the interests and desires of both elites and non-elites in Macedon, and they are still focused on a spiritual communication with the netherworld deities. The mere fact that the significant extant literature

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[42] Edmonds, "Orphic Purity," 201-205.
[43] *Ibid.*, 205.
[44] The limited physical descriptions provided in the published materials provide some evidence for questioning the authorship of the Orphic gold-tablets. Graf and Johnston describe SEG 52:626 as "carelessly inscribed," leading one to wonder whether this tablet was in fact the work of a professional Orpheotelest who was paid to create it. Graf and Johnson, *Ritual Texts,* 46.

encompassing a wide array of Macedonian people is all ritualistically significant may indicate a numinous outlook towards writing.

While the exact components and actions of these rituals may never be known, the final deposition of the tablet indicates a connection to the netherworld spirits. Archaeologists recovered all of these tablets in cemeteries.[45] While a few, such as the Akanthos tablet, were chance surface finds and decontextualized from their find location, a significant portion were recovered *in situ*. The undisturbed tablets were all in the vicinity of a corpse.[46] The relation to the occupant of the tomb does likely stem from the very purpose of these tablets – to communicate with the deities of the dead. This very purpose, along with their placement within the tomb, indicates that these tablets were spiritually important. Three of the tablets from Akanthos, whose texts remain unpublished, were all found in close relation to a skeleton. One is actually described as "under the left hand" of the corpse.[47] The curse tablet from Pella similarly was recovered in a tomb with an intact skeleton.[48] Likewise, the Orphic gold-tablets have generally been found closer to the occupant, such as folded on their chest or, commonly, placed in the mouths of the corpse.[49] The deposit placement of these tablets indicates that it was the physical writing itself which was an important aspect of the desired communication with the gods. The curses were not just said aloud, they were written down, and the writing itself must have been carried and delivered directly to the deities. The initiates into the Cult of Dionysus created the Orphic-gold tablets to insure a better afterlife; they did not merely rely on their actions and initiation into the

[45] Jordan, "New Curse Tablets," 13-16; Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts,* 41-47.
[46] Jordan, "New Curse Tablets," 13-16; Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts,* 41-47.
[47] Jordan, "New Curse Tablets," 15.
[48] *Ibid*., 13.
[49] Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts,* 41-47.

cult during their lifetime. Writing was therefore an acceptable form of communication between human and divine, the sort of relationship which often requires sacrifices and prayers.

Even further, both sorts of tablets contain appeals to deities or spirits, illustrating an attempt at creating some form of spiritual relevance. With the Pella curse tablet (SEG 43:434, Figure 1), Phila entrusts the spell to the *daimones* in lines 2-3, and then later in line 6 she calls out to the *daimones* in the vocative, calling them "φίλοι."[50] Pausanias, the practitioner responsible for the tablet from Akanthos, beseeches deities, naming Athena and Aphrodite explicitly.[51] Likewise, many of the Orphic gold-tablets mention Dionysus, Hades, or Persephone. SEG 51:788 highlights the initiate's connection to Dionysus stating; "εὐαγής, ἱερὰ Διονύσου Βαχχίου εἰμὶ."[52] Two more of the Orphic gold-tablets explicitly name Persephone, dedicating the tablet to her in the dative case.[53] Finally, one difficult-to-read orphic tablet bears the name "Ἄιδος."[54] Of the few tablets available from Macedon, these few comprise a significant proportion, and they all directly address deities. The tablets which do not explicitly name deities are mostly lists of names, with an implied understanding of some sort of interaction between the names and the netherworld beings addressed. Even the Orphic gold-tablets with only a name illustrate divine communication, they serve as a proxy to convey the message to Persephone that the deceased was an initiate of the Orphic cult.[55]

Therefore, Macedonian writing culture all directly relates to deities, indicating the possibility of a numinous consideration of writing. The lack of secular writing may indicate the

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[50] Jordan, "New Curse Tablets," 13-14.
[51] Jordan, "Three Curse Tablets," 122-123. SEG 47:817. Side A, lines 4-5.
[52] Graf and Johnston, *Ritual Texts*, 40. SEG 51:788. "I am a pure priestess of Dionysus, a Bacchius." Translation my own.
[53] In greek: φερσεφόνηι. *Ibid.*, 42,46. SEG 45:782 and 45:649.
[54] *Ibid*., 46. SEG 52:626.
[55] *Ibid*., 134-135.

belief that writing and words had power in Macedonian society. The precedent for such a belief exists in many ancient Near Eastern societies.[56] Writing was a gift from the gods, and closely guarded by the political and religious elites. In fact, the very word "hieroglyphics" means "sacred writing."[57] The Egyptians had their god, Thoth, and the Mesopotamians had their goddess Nisaba (later the the god Nabû). Each of these gods served a similar purpose – to bless humanity with writing.[58] Through these deities and their gift of writing, humans gained a divine connection to the gods. Furthermore, the writing itself aids in ritual processes as what is written becomes real. Writing the name of the person intended to be influenced by the action, whether they are the victim or practitioner, is a vital step in carrying out ritual practices, as the words themselves have power.[59] In these societies, writing had a clear and strong connection to the divine. Due to the nature of the extant writing from Macedon, all of which directly deals with the divine, a similar mindset may have been prevalent. No writing pertaining to mundane occurrences survives, suggesting that the most common use for writing was divine communication.

However, one must be cognizant when evaluating these tablets of the fragmentary nature of evidence from ancient Macedon. Just because the curse and Orphic gold- tablets are the only extant writings written by Macedonians, does not mean that other forms of writing did not exist in antiquity. To claim that all writing must have been concerned with some aspect of the divine exclusively because no secular writing survived would be an *argumentum ex silentio*.

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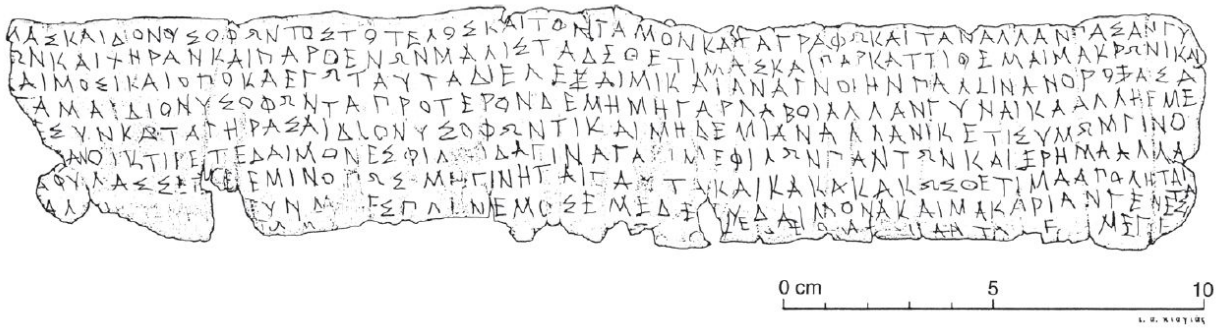
[56] W. M Schniedewind, "Writing and Book Production in the ancient Near East," in J.C. Paget and J Schaper (eds.) in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 46-62.
[57] *Ibid*., 46.
[58] *Ibid*., 49. Schniedewind also analyzes attitude towards writing in the Hebrew Bible, concluding a similar attitude towards writing within the Isrealites.
[59] *Ibid*., 48.

Conversely, the mere fact that so many tablets still exist when so few other pieces of writing do from Macedon does indicate their prevalence and popularity in Macedonian society. While religious purposes may not be the sole reason for writing, we are still able to conclude that writing was a significant part of these religious and "magic" practices.

This discussion of literacy and perception of writing in Macedon is just the beginning. When these tablets are studied as epigraphy,much more can be gleaned about the society and people who produced them, beyond merely the constraints of "magic" and cultic ritual. The tablets contain various topics and themes related to everyday life which deserve further exploration. The curse tablet from Pella, for example, provides new insight into the Macedonian construct of marriage. Due to its unusual personal voice and break from the standard spell, one is able to read Phila's thoughts and desires towards Dionysophon, perhaps indicating some sort of romantic aspect of marriage. Hopefully, in the future more information about these texts will become available to scholars, which will greatly improve the scholarship on these tablets. For now, we must be content to work with the information available, and be thankful for this small glimpse into the personal lives of the elusive Macedonians.

Appendix 1

Figure 1

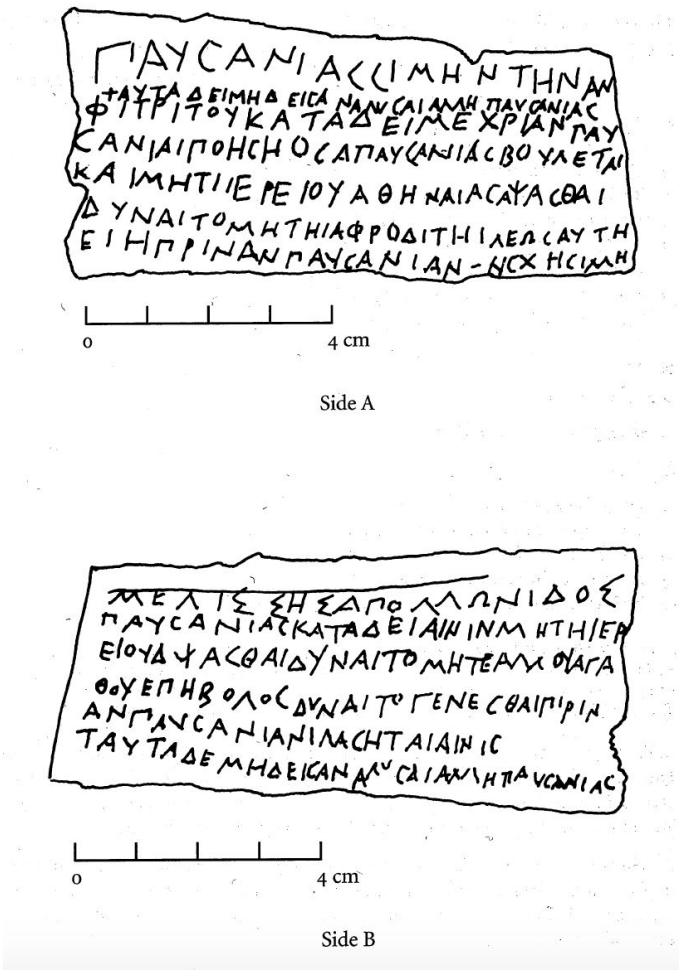



SEG 43:434
Find Location: Pella, Eastern Cemetery
Description: Lead curse tablet containing an erotic, seperation curse
Bibliography: Transcription from PHI Greek Inscriptions- Makedonia (Bottiaia) — Pella — ca. 380-350 BC — Hellenike Dialektologia 3 (1992/1993) 43-48 — REG 108 (1995) 190-197 — cf. SEG 49.757. Line drawing from Christesen and Murray, "Macedonian Religion," 2010.

Transcription:

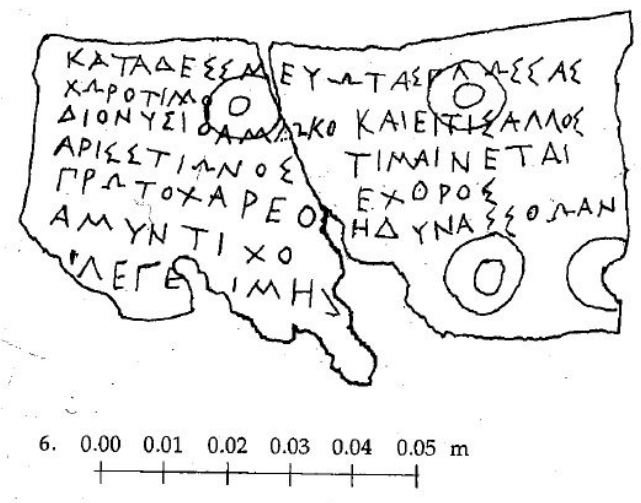
[Θετί]μας καὶ Διονυσοφῶντος τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸν γάμον καταγράφω καὶ τᾶν ἀλλᾶν πασᾶν γυ-
[ναικ]ῶν καὶ χηρᾶν καὶ παρθένων, μάλιστα δὲ Θετίμας, καὶ παρκαττίθεμαι Μάκρωνι καὶ
[τοῖς] δαίμοσι· καὶ ὀπόκα ἐγὼ ταῦτα διελέξαιμι καὶ ἀναγνοίην πάλιν ἀνορόξασα
[τόκα] γᾶμαι Διονυσοφῶντα, πρότερον δὲ μή· μὴ γὰρ λάβοι ἄλλαν γυναῖκα ἀλλ' ἢ ἐμέ
[ἐμὲ δ]ὲ συνκαταγηρᾶσαι Διονυσοφῶντι καὶ μηδεμίαν ἄλλαν· ἱκέτις ὑμῶ<ν> γίνο-
[μαι· . . . ]αν οἰκτίρετε δαίμονες φίλ[ο]ι, ΔΑΓΙΝΑΓΑΡΙΜΕ δαπ(ε)ινὰ γάρ ἰμε φίλων
πάντων καὶ ἐρήμα· ἀλλὰ
[ταῦτ]α φυλάσσετε ἐμὶν ὅπως μὴ γίνηται ταῦτα καὶ κακὰ κακῶς Θετίμα ἀπόληται·
[. . . . ]. ΑΛ[— — —]. ΥΝΜ. . ΕΣΠΛΗΝ ἐμός, ἐμὲ δὲ ἐὐδαίμονα καὶ μακαρίαν γενέσται·
[— — —]ΤΟ. [— — —]. . . Ε. Ε. ΩΑ. . ΜΕΤΕ[— — —]

Figure 2




SEG 47:871
Find Location: Akanthos cemetery, chance surface find
Description: two-sided lead curse tablet, containing an erotic, attraction curse.
Bibliography: Line drawing and transcription from Jordan, "Three New Curse Tablets," 1997.
Side I:
Παυσανίας Σίμην τὴν Ἀν-
ʽταῦτα δεὶ μηδεὶς ἀναλύσαι ἀλλ' ἢ Παυσανίας.′
φιτρίτου καταδεῖ, μέχρι ἂν Παυσανίαι ποήσῃ ὅσα Παυσανίας βούλεται· καὶ μήτι ἱερείου Ἀθηναίας ἅψασθαι δύναιτο, μήτηι Ἀφροδίτη ἱλέως αὕτη εἴη, πρὶν ἂν Παυσανίαν ἐνσχῇ Σίμη·
Side 2:
Μελίσσης Ἀπολλωνίδος
Παυσανίας καταδεῖ Αἶνιν· μήτι ἱερεου ἅψασθαι δύναιτο μήτε ἄλλου ἀγαθοῦ ἐπήβολος δύναιτο γενέσθαι, πιρὶν ἂν Παυσανίαν ἱλάσηται Αἶνις· *vacat*
ταῦτα δε[ὶ] μηδεὶς ἀναλύσαι ἀλλ' ἢ Παυσανίας.

Figure 3




SEG 52:617 VI
Find Location: Pydna Cemetery, North of Tomb 224
Description: lead curse tablet containing a litigation curse accompanied by a list of names.

Bibliography: Line drawing and transcription from Curbera and Jordan, “Pydna Curse Tablets,” 2003.

Transcription:

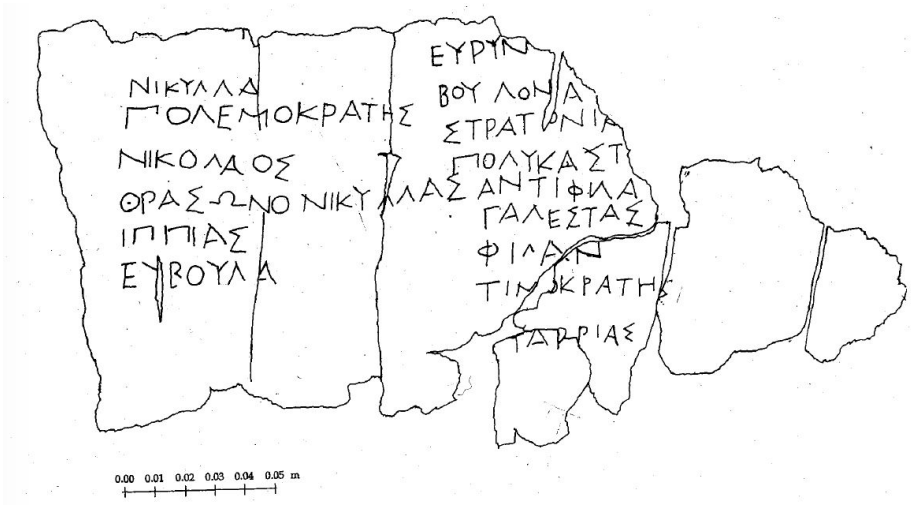
Column I

1 καταδεσσμεύω τὰς γλώσσας
2 Χωροτίμο,
3 Διονυσίο, Ἀμ̣ῴκο
4 Ἀρισστίωνος,
5 Πρωτοχάρεος,
6 Ἀμυντίχο,
11 [τ]ι̣λέ̣γε[ι]ν μήδ[ε — — —]

Column II

7 καὶ εἴ τις ἄλλος
8 τι μαίνεται
9 ἐχθρὸς
10 [μ]ὴ δυνάσσθω ἀν-

Figure 4




SEG 52:617 II
Find Location: Pydna Cemetery, Tomb 187
Description: lead curse tablet containing a list of names.
Bibliography: Line drawing and transcription from Curbera and Jordan, “Pydna Curse Tablets,” 2003.

Column I

1. Νίκυλλα
2. Πολεμοκράτης
3. Νικόλαος
4. Θράσων ὁ Νικύλλας
5. Ἱππίας
6. Εὔβουλα

Column II

7.Ευρυν[--]
8. Βουλόνα
9. Στρατονίκ[a?]
10. Πολυκάστ[a?]
11. Ἀντιφίλα
12. Γαλέστας
13. Φιλάν
14. Τιμοκράτης
15. Ταρρίας

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