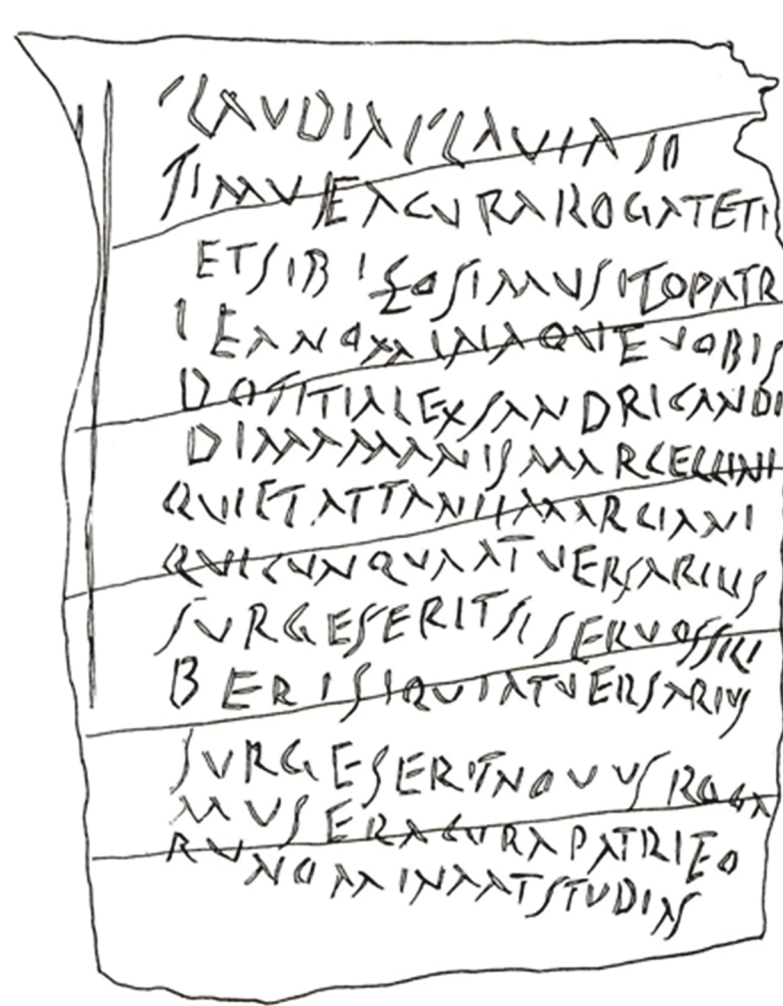


Underworld Deities on Curse Tablets from Aquincum

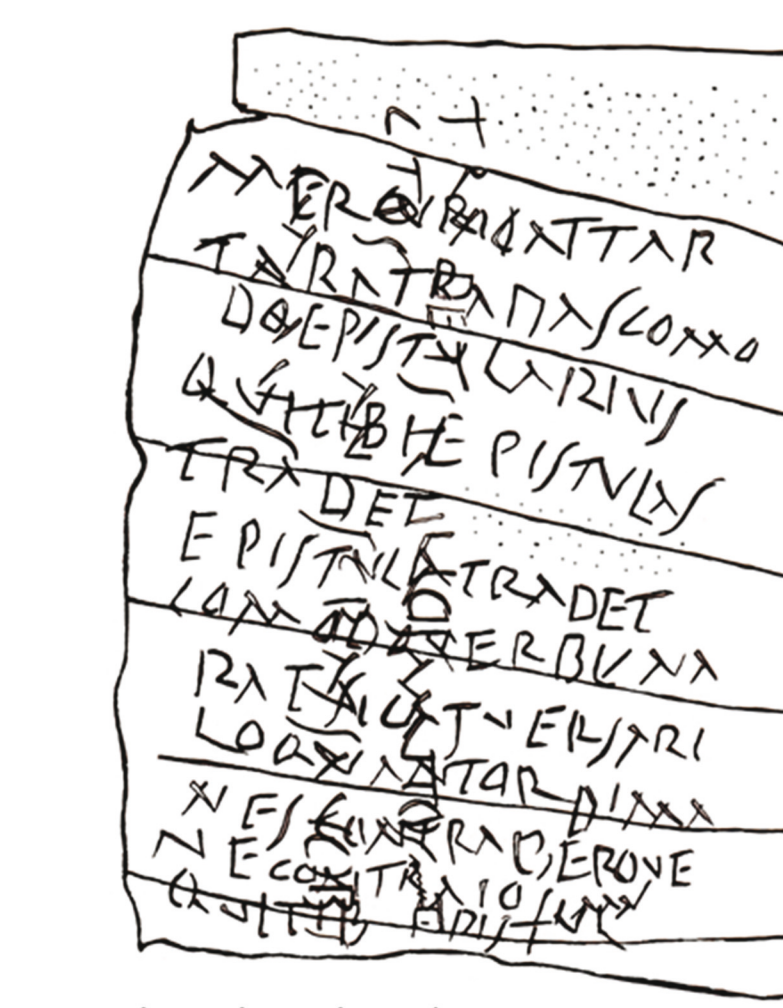
In 2015 two new curse tablets were found among gravegoods originally coming from the Eastern cemetery of Aquincum civil town. On the base of archaeological evidences they can be dated to 2nd or 3rd century AD. They came to light not far from the spot where the first Aquincum curse tablet (Aq-1) had been found in 2007.



1 Claudia, Flavia, 'Z-S'o-
2 simus <A>eracura<m> rogat et p[le]-
3 t'i-E't (?) sibi Zosimus <a> <D>it'e-o' Patr-
4 'e-I' ea nomina, qu<a>e vobis
5 do, Titi, Alex{s}andri, Candi-
6 di, Mamanis, Marcellini
7 qui et Attanii, Marciani,
8 quicumqu' e-A' a'd-T'versarius
9 sur' rex-GES'erit, si serv' u-O's, si li-
10 ber {i}, si qui a'd-T'versarius
11 sur' rex-GES'erit novus, roga-
12 mus <A>eracura<m>, Patr'em-l'i eo-
13 ru<m> nomina at (-ut?) stud'e-l'as.

Normalized version.
Claudia, Flavia, Zosimus Aeracuram rogat et petit sibi Zosimus a Dite Patre ea nomina, quae vobis do, Titi, Alexandri, Candidi, Mamanis, Marcellini qui et Attanii, Marciani, quicumque adversarius surrexerit, si servus, si liber, si qui adversarius surrexerit novus, rogamus Aeracuram, Patrem, eorum nomina at (ut?) studeas.

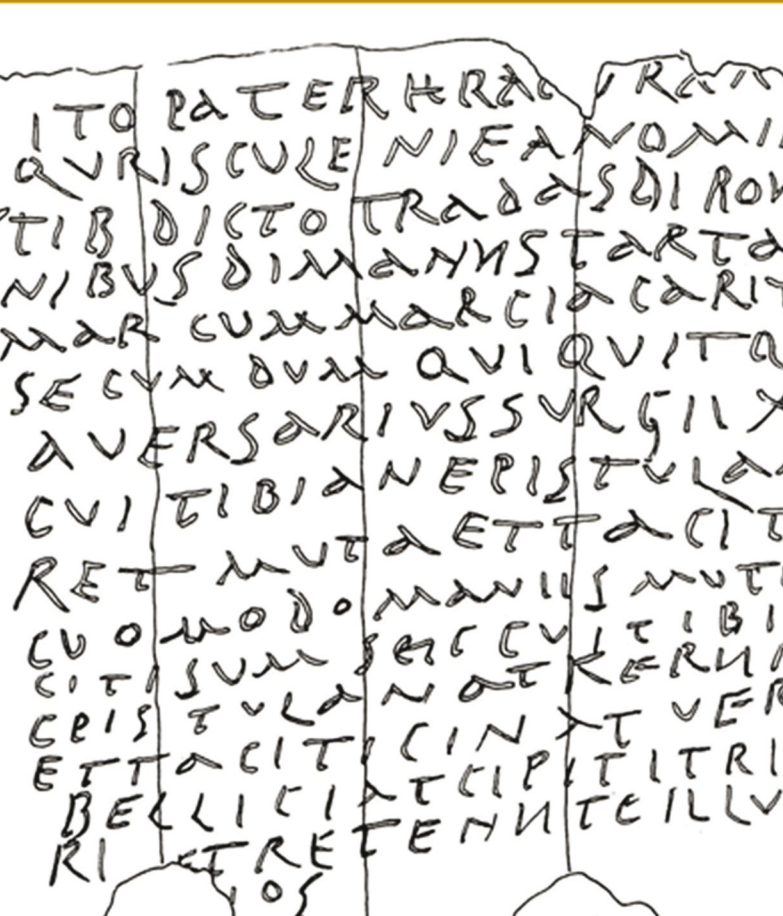
Aq-2 inner side: drawing, reading and normalized, classical standard version



1 [-----]
2 Mercurio a'd-T' Tar-
3 tara tradas 'qu-C'omo-
4 do epistularius,
5 qui tibi epistulas
6 tradet
7 epistula<m> tradet
8 'qu-C'omodo verbu<m> na<r>
9 rat, sic a'd-T'versari
10 loquant' u-O'r Di Ma-
11 nes contra Bero {v}e-
12 ne<m> contra 'Z-I'osimu<m>
13 qui tibi [i] epistula<m>
14 tradet, sic illos mutos [ta]-
15 c[il]tos [m]anes CRASSA, vobis
16 [ro]lgamus

Normalized version.
... Mercurio ad Tartara tradas quomodo epistularius, qui tibi epistulas tradet ... epistulam tradet, quomodo verbum narrat, sic adversarii loquantur, di manes, contra Beroen, contra Zosimum, qui tibi epistulam tradet, sic illos mutos tacitos manes ... vobis rogamus.

Aq-2 outer side: drawing, reading and normalized, classical standard version



1 'Dis-ITO' Pater, 'Ac-H'racura! [Mer]-
2 'c-Q'curi{s} C'y-V'<l>eni, ea nomin[a]
3 tibi [i] dicto, tradas dir'is-OV' ca-
4 nibus. Di manes Tartaris!
5 Marcum, Marcia<m>, C<h>ariton[em]
6 Secu'n-M' dum, qui' cum-QVIT' qu[e]
7 a<d>versarius sur'r-G'exe[rit]
8 'q-C'ui tibi an<t>epistulam ad[fe]-
9 ret. Muta et Tacita!
10 'Q-C'uomodo manes muti et ta-
11 citi su'nt-M', s{e}ic 'q-C'ui tibi ant-
12 'e-C'pistula'm-N' a'd-T'ferent, mu[t]i
13 et taciti 'S-C'in<l>. Adversa<rio>[s]
14 Bellici a'c-T'cipit'e-I', Trice[rbe]-
15 ri et ret'i-E'nef'e-C' illu[---] [---]jos
16 [---]jos

Normalized version.
Dis Pater, Aeracura! Mercuri Cylleni, ea nomina, quae tibi dicto, tradas diris canibus! Di Manes Tartaris! Marcum, Marciam, Charitonem, Secundum, quicumque adversarius surrexerit, qui tibi antepistulam adferet. Muta et Tacita! Quomodo manes muti et taciti sunt, sic qui tibi antepistulam adferent, muti et taciti sint. Adversarios Bellici accipite, Tricerberi, et retinete ill[---] [---]jos

Aq-3: drawing, reading and normalized, classical standard version

General information

The tablets and the letters too are well-preserved as they were protected inside the roll. On the basis of some unusual letterforms and meaningless series of letters it can be assumed that they were copied from a draft by a trained literate or scribe.

The Aquincum tablets are judicial binding curses written in order to silence opponents in court with the help of infernal deities.

The texts are formulaic, they consist of the typical elements of defixiones. Similarly to Aq-1, they contain not only the names of the *defixi* but of the *defigentes*, too. In Aq-2, *Claudia, Flavia, Zosimus* and *Beroe* curse their opponents, *Titus, Alexander, Mamanis* (gen.), *Marcellinus* (known also as *Attaninus*), *Marcianus* and every other person who may join this group later. In Aq-3 a certain Bellicus wanted his adversaries, *Marcus, Marcia* and *Charito* to become mute.

Deities invoked

C. Sanchez in her paper on the occult pantheon classifies the deities which were summoned in curses found in the Roman West: (1) Graeco-latin powers (*Dis Pater/ Pluto, Mercurius, Iuppiter, Manes, Mars, Muta Tacita, Neptunus, Nymphae, Proserpina*), (2) indigenous powers (*Ataecina - Proserpina, Sulis - Minerva, Nodens*, the river god *Savus*), (3) oriental powers (*Iao, Cybele, Attis, Isis, Seth, Iesus, Abraxas*). The curses usually invoked chthonic deities, most probably because these powers were seen to be suitably 'dark and uncanny'. In some instances, the place of deposit dictated which deity the tablets should be dedicated to. As J. Gager states „In general, two factors seem to have governed the selection of gods: first: local customs and beliefs: and second, the recipes available through the formularies owned and used by local experts.” In this sense we may use what we read on defixiones as reasonably accurate measure of prevailing beliefs at particular times and places.

In the Aquincum curse tablets those gods were invoked who they thought to reside in the underworld. These deities were portrayed in funerary relieves, too. In Aquincum one of this type of monument (according to other pieces from different part of the Empire, it was not a local invention,) was found, representing the same powers as in the curses.



Ubi erat Lupa Nr. 10483.

Dis Pater. In these tablets ITO can be read before *Pater*, without any more letter fragments. On the base of two inscriptions offered to DITO PATRI and four instances with the vocative DITE we may suppose that the classical adjective *dis* (*ditis*) used to have a variant in vulgar Latin. In contrast with the previous forms, on the Aquincum tablets a third version appeared (DITOPATER) which cannot be regarded as a simple misspelling. With reference to the O in the middle of the nominative form, it can be a weak form of a supposed **ditus* (**Ditus Pater*) supported by compounds like *mulomedicus*, and *vicomagister* - ('doctor of mules', 'master, guard of some streets' respectively). Based on these *Dis Pater* could have become **Ditopater* ('father of the *underworld*') in the Aquincum curses. The missing initial *d-* (*Ito*) cannot be explained on linguistic grounds, there must be another reason which is going to be examined in the course of further studies.

Aeracura. The spelling of this goddess name varies greatly: Aericura, Aerecura, Erecura, Eracura, Ericura and Herecura. Her name, the meaning of which remains obscure, is probably not Celtic but Germanic. Her worship was concentrated to Southern Germany and the North-West of the Balkans. She was usually represented seated beside the god *Dis Pater*, as an inscription engraved on a base indicates: *Aericur(ae) et Diti Pat(ri)*.

Mercurius. The epitheton *Cyllenius* which refers to his birth place was not often used, mainly 1st and 2nd-century authors resorted to it. In curses usually a deity's infernal or local aspects were named, classic epithetons were avoided in the reverse world of magic. The only instance where the word *Cyllenius* (instead of *Mercurius*, maybe with intention) occurs in the context of magic is a passage from the 14th book of Ovid' *Metamorphoses*: 'Peace-loving Cyllenian had given him (Ulixes) the white flower, the gods call moly, that springs from a black root, against Circe's magic'.

Muta Tacita. Beside the Aquincum curse tablets, *Muta Tacita* was invoked in three other curses. Her reference in Aquincum resembles Ovid's lines from *Fasti*. Ovidius tells the story of the nymph *Lara*. She was incapable of keeping secrets, and revealed to *Juno Iuppiter's* affair with *Juturna* (*Lara's* fellow nymph). „Jupiter was angered, and tearing that tongue from her mouth / That she had used so immoderately, called Mercury to him: Lead her to the shadows: That place is fitting for the silent...” Besides, on the road to the underworld, Mercury raped her. As M. Robinson states: „[Her] nightmarish inability to cry out heightens the drama and sends out a strong message of the impotence of being denied the right to speak in one's defence”. That is the reason why *Muta Tacita* the cruelly muted goddess filled with anger was summoned in cursing.

Tricerberi. A tablet from Carnuntum appeals to *Cerberus* right after *Dis Pater* and *Aeracura*.. Up to the present, *Tricerberus* has been thought to be a word first used in the Late Antiquity. It appears in for the first time in *Fulgentius'* works from the 5th-6th century. With respect to Greek, Johannes Malalas and Johannes Antiochenus in the 6th century are the first to use *Trikerberos*. Further examination is required to find the reason how this form can be explained on a tablet found among graves from the 2nd and 3rd century.

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