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Curse tablets provide an important piece of epigraphical evidence for ritual practices based on sympathetic magic in the ancient Mediterranean world. Our contribution focuses on the use of the simile-formula in Greek and Latin *defixiones*, attested in about 80 tablets, spanning from the 5th cent. BCE up to the 5th cent. CE. While the use of the simile-formula in literature from Homeric epics onwards is both *epistemic*, i.e. the unknown or unfamiliar properties and relations are explained through comparison with those more familiar ones, and *aesthetic*, the simile-formula in magical tradition is peculiar due to its performative force. Similarity is not simply observed and stated – writers of the ancient curses wish to transfer, by magical means, properties of certain objects and actions to their adversaries or objects of desire. In Greek, this performative function of the simile is realized on the syntactic level as a complex sentence introduced by $\acute{\omega}\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho + \textit{comparatum} + \text{indicative}$, followed by the $\omicron\upsilon\tau\omega(\zeta)$ clause containing the target of the curse + future indicative, dynamic infinitive, subjunctive or optative. In Latin, the comparative clauses with *quomodo – sic* or *ut/ita – sic* are used with a wish-formula containing volitive/prohibitive subjunctive in the main clause, which is unattested in literary texts and very rare in other epigraphic documents. In what follows we offer an overview of the most commonly found *comparata* in the extant Greek and Latin *defixiones* containing one or several simile-formulae.

Despite the fact that a handful of scholars (e.g., Kagarow) argued for the importance of magical and symbolic factors of selecting lead as a material of choice for curse tablets, the *communis opinio* (e.g., Faraone, Gager, Graf, Kropp, Baratta) suggests that the primary reason for the use of lead has been its availability as a by-product of silver mining. The presence of lead as a *comparatum* in the simile-formulae shows, however, that specific physical properties of the material were selected to be transferred to the target of a curse. In three Greek tablets from Attica, dated to the 4th – 3rd cent. BCE, lead is described as “worthless” (ἄτιμος), “passionless” (ἄ[θ]υμος), “useless” (ἄχρηστος), and “cold” (ψυχρός), whereas the adversaries of the curse-writers should become the same (TDM 120, 976, 977). In Latin curses, lead as a *comparatum* appears in five tablets from Germania, Gallia, and Pannonia (1st – 2nd cent. CE); however, these refer to different properties of the material from those accentuated in Greek tablets. The lead is described as “heavy” and *quomodo(o) il(l)e plu(m)bus po(n)dus h(a)bet, sic et (E)ud(e)mus h(a)beat v(o)s iratos* (TDM 265); it “sinks into water” (*plumbum decidat*, TDM 753; *plumbum subsidet*, TDM 744), while the adversaries are supposed to sink into the underworld likewise; tablets from Mainz also mention the melting of lead: *sic illorum membra liquescant quatenus hoc plumbum liquescet* (TDM 740).

Since tombs and graveyards belong to the most common depositories of curse tablets, it is not surprising that human corpses serve as *comparata* in several simile-formulae. It is worth noting that curse-writers scarcely wish to kill their adversaries and, even in the similes mentioning corpses, the properties that are supposed to be magically transferred to their victims are of restrictive and paralyzing nature. In a tablet from Attica, dated to the 4th cent. BCE (TDM 104), the corpse lying in the grave is described as “useless” (ἀτελής); thus, the words and deeds of certain Theodora, clearly a writer’s object of desire, should

In three curse tablets, animals, manipulated in various ways during the accompanying ritual (bound, killed, or mutilated), make the *comparatum* of simile-formula. The restrictive action performed on an animal was supposed to be transferred to the target of the curse. In an agonistic curse tablet from Carthage (TDM 60, 1st – 3rd cent. CE), a rooster's wings, feet, and head are bound and the same fate should befall certain Victoricus, causing him to lose a chariot race: Ὡς οὗτος ὁ ἀλέκτωρ καταδέδεται τοῖς ποσὶ καὶ ταῖς χερσὶ καὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ, οὕτως καταδήσат[ε] τὰ σκέλη καὶ τὰς χίρας καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ τὴν καρδίαν Βικτωρικοῦ ... Two Latin tablets written in a legal context use animals as *comparata*, as well. One of these, found in Carthage (TDM 795, 2nd – 3rd cent. CE), mentions a rooster whose tongue is being mutilated to make the adversaries in the court equally mute: (*Quomodo*)...*huic gallo...lingua(m) vivo extorsi et defixi, sic inimicorum meorum linguas adversus me ommutescant*. Another curse from Gaul (TDM 190, 2nd cent. CE) indicates that a puppy was killed during the deposition of the tablet: *Quomodi hic catellus aversus est nec surgere potest, sic nec illi. Sic tra(n)specti (=transfixi) sin(t) quomodi ille*.

Several curse tablets allude to mythological themes with a simile-formula that contains a *comparatum* concerning deities and cults of ancient religions. The oldest preserved example is a damaged curse from Aegina (TDM 423, 5th – 4th cent. BCE), which touches upon the story of Hephaestus binding Hera (*Paus.* 1.20.3): ὥς ᾽Ηφαιστος ἐδήσατο ματέρα τὰν αὐτοῦ δεσμοῖς κρατεροῖς ... (new reading by Curbera, second part of the formula is illegible). There are two later Greek curses, both dated between the 3rd – 4th cent. CE, one of it being a love spell, another a non-specific curse. The love spell (TDM 111, Oxyrrhynchus) alludes to the love of Isis and Osiris (ὥς ἡ Ἴσις τὸν Ὀσίριν ἐφίλησεν, οὕτως φιλεῖτω ἡ Ματρῶνα τὸν] Θεοῦ[ω]ρον ...), whereas the non-specific curse from Antiochia (TDM 376) is written against a greengrocer named Babylas. The victim of the latter is supposed to be struck down, just like Yao or Yahweh struck down the chariot of the Pharaoh (*Ex.* 14.23–38): ὥς ἐβάλες τὸν ἄρμα τοῦ Φαραῶνος, οὕτως βάλλη τὴν δύσ[ω]λην τὸν αὐτοῦ ... As for the Latin curse texts, five tablets with *historiolae* are attested from Italy, Raetia, and Germania; all dated to the 1st – 2nd cent. CE. They make reference to various mythological entities, see e.g. *Virga, deum inferum...efficias illas Caeciliae Primae, quem admodum tu domas, caedis uris [per]juris ad Inferos eos, qui ad superos omnia mala se[ce]leraque fecerunt, sic tu Cacciliam Primam [ill]am, Virga, uras peruras caedas, domes...* (TDM 517, Circe and the Sirens are also mentioned). In the prayer for justice, the

Another widely attested *comparatum* in simile-formulae is a non-standard orientation of the text of the curse itself in various ways (retrograde, upside down, etc.). Greek epigraphical evidence offers provides us with curses dated between the 5th – 3rd cent. BCE (all from Attica), which make use of a distortion of the text to induce a similar “distortion” of the victim. In the oldest one, words, deeds, hands, feet, knees, and soul of certain Kallias should become “twisted” or “distorted”, just like the text of the tablet is: ὥσπερ ταῦτ' ἀνέπαιλιν, οὕτως γένοιτο Καλλιῖα ἀνέπαιλιν καὶ <ἀνέμπαλι[v]> ἔργα καὶ πάντα [ἐπ]η καὶ χεῖρας καὶ πόδας καὶ [γ]όνα[τ]α καὶ ψυχὴν (TDM 416). The other two curses use the adjectives ἀνα(ν)τί[α] (TDM 673) and ἐπαρίστερα (TDM 955) to characterize their non-standard writing, the purpose being that the business of the opponents should become “reversed” and “left-handed” likewise. In Latin curses, the *aversus* formula is connected with an unusual way of writing (mostly right-to left) in four tablets from Raetia and Germania, which are dated to the 1st – 2nd cent. CE; see e.g. ...perve(r)se agas, comodo hoc perverse scriptu(m) est (TDM 258); Sic Silvia inversu(m) maritu(m) ceernis, quommodi nomen il(l)i(us) scriptum est (TDM 768). In other Latin curses (TDM 765, 768, 878, 1106), the *comparatum* is not the unusual writing *per se* but *graphium aversum*, “twisted” or “distorted” stylus which was used to write the curse: *Eo modo hoc ego averso graphio scribo, sic linguas illorum aversas nepos(s)int facere contra (h)os...* (TDM 1106, Barta, distorted stylus was found near the curse tablet).

At least 14 Greek curse tablets contain the simile-formula including “names”, ὀνόματα, as *comparatum*. They exhibit almost identical formulae, all have been found in Athens (3rd cent. CE), and most of them seem to originate from the same magical workshop. The simile-formula invariably alludes to “names” that should “cool off”, while this “cooling off”, a kind of paralysis, should afflict the targets of the curse, as well: ὥς ταῦτα τὰ ὀνόματα ψύχεται, οὕτως καὶ Ἐρώτος ψυχθεῖσθω τὸ ὄνομα, ἢ ψυχῇ, ἢ ὀργῇ, ὁ νοῦς, ἢ προθυμία, ὁ λογισμός (TDM 404). It is likely that these ὀνόματα do not refer to the names of the cursed persons but to *nomina sacra* or *voces magicae* occurring in each tablet. Although some tablets aim at a single individual, ὀνόματα are always kept in plural form; in PGM, the term ὀνόματα refers exclusively to *nomina sacra*. One of the magical instruction (PGM 10.36-50) even details the creation of a small lead tablet featuring ὀνόματα (here: *voces magicae* + angels and divine names of Jewish origin), to be put into a shoe. The action of the owner (trampling on the ὀνόματα inscribed on the tablet) should then be magically transferred to the target of the curse, referenced here with the term ὁ δεῖνα: ὥς ταῦτα τὰ ἅγια ὀνόματα πατεῖται, οὕτως καὶ ὁ δεῖνα (κοινόν), ὁ ἐπέχων.

Some Greek curse tablets feature demons and ghosts of the dead as *comparata* of the simile-formulae (TDM 442, 142, 189). The most interesting Greek example of this comes from Olbia (TDM 232, 3rd – 1st cent. BCE) – the ghost is explicitly offered a recompense, if he

Two Greek curses contain a simile-formula with a stone as *comparatum*. A unique curse written on papyrus (TDM 291, 3rd to 4th cent. CE, Oxyrrhynchus) mentions a “Hermes-stone of the mill”; thus, the curse should grind brain and heart of certain Zetous, just like the stone turns and grinds wheat: ὥσπερ στρέφεται ὁ ἔρμης τοῦ μυλαίου καὶ ἀλγίηται τοῦτο τὸ πιττάκιον, οὕτως στρέψον τὸν ἐγκέφαλον καὶ τὴν καρδίαν καὶ πᾶσαν διάνοιαν Ζητοῦν τῆς ἐπικαλουμένης Καλημέρας. It is inconclusive whether this tablet features a binding love spell (Griffiths) or a curse of a master against her slave (Daniel & Maltomini). A simpler simile featuring a stone is attested on an ostrakon (TDM 310, 4th – 5th cent. CE, Egyptian Thebes) containing a legal curse. The stone is described as “voiceless” and “speechless” and the victim should become the same – paralyzed and powerless in court: ὥς ὁ λίθος οὗτος ἄφωνος καὶ ἄλαλος, οὕτω καὶ πάντες οἱ κατὰ μὲν ἄφονοι καὶ ἄλαλοι καὶ ἐπὶ κώῳ μοι γένωνται. Regarding the Latin prayers for justice from Mainz, two tablets dated to the 1st – 2nd cent. CE refer to salt dissolving in water: *et a(d)qu)em modum sal in (aqua liques)cet, sic et illi membra m(ed)ullae extabescant* (TDM 763); another one from Mainz mentions withering of a tree: *Ita uti arbor siccabit se in sancto, sic et illi siccet fama, fides, fortuna, faculitas* (TDM 765).

Simile-formulae are attested from the earliest documented stages of both Greek (5th cent. BCE) and Latin (2nd cent. BCE) magical practices involving *defixiones*. Latin simile-formulae are evidently influenced by the Greek tradition. On the syntactic level, Latin construction of *quomodo* – *sic* + subjunctive seems to emulate the Greek ὅσ(περ) – οὕτω(ς) clause + subjunctive or optative, since it is otherwise unattested in Latin literary texts. Both Greek and Latin simile-formulae share a significant number of *comparata* (lead, corpse, animal, *historiolae*, *aversus* formulae, as well as gods and demons), whereas the ones mentioning corpses and animals are the most similar in structure and subject-matter. There are, however, some differences: Latin simile-formulae are more dynamic, often using the *comparatum* as a subject of intransitive verbs (*plumbum liquescat, subsidet, decadet*), while Greek curses transfer rather the adjectival properties (μόλυσδος ψυχρός, ἄθυμος, ἄχρηστος). Some categories are attested either exclusively in Greek (e.g., ὄνοματᾶ, stone) or in Latin (e.g., *graphium aversum, galli, sal et thesauros*). All *defixiones* are cited according to the *Athens Defixionum Magdeburgensis*, abbreviated here TDM (<http://www-e.uni-magdeburg.de/defigo/thedema.php>).

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