

PETER WILSON – FEDERICO FAVI

CHORAGIC SPELLS IN GELA: A TEXTUAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTE
ON APELLIS' *DEFIXIO*, *SEG* LVII 905B

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1. We reproduce here (with slight modifications) the most recent edition (*SEG* LVII 905b) of a *defixio* that has attracted considerable interest² for the light it throws on the festival culture of a Greek community in mid-fifth-century Sicily, almost certainly that of the flourishing city-state of Gela at its height³. It gives evidence of a festival there that had choral – perhaps even theatrical – contests, of some scale, and hints at the mechanics of their operation.

- 1 Εὐχά. Ἀπέλλης ἐπὶ φιλότατι τῷ Εὐνίφο (-) μεδέν' [Ε]ὐνίφο σπευ-
δ[αι]ότερον ἔμεν μεδὲ φιντίονα, ἀλλ' ἐπαινέ(ν) καὶ ἐφόντα κᾶέρ-
οντα καὶ φιλετᾶν. ἐπὶ φιλότατι τῷ Εὐνίφο ἀπογαράφο τὸ-
ς χοραγὸς πάντας ἐπ' ἀτελεία(ι) κέπεον καὶ ἔργον καὶ τ-
5 ὅς παῖδ(ι)ας ἀπὸ τένον καὶ τὸς πατέρας κᾶπρακτίαι κέν ἀγῶ-
νι κέχθῃς ἀγόνων οἵτινες μὲ παρ' ἐμ' ἀπολείποιεν. Καλεδίαν
[ἀπογ]αράφο ἀπ' Ἀπέλλιος καὶ τὸς(ς) τενεὶ πάντας ἐπὶ μεσοτερ-
[ο ca. 3] ἐντάδα. Σοσίαν ἀπογράφω ἀπὸ τῷ καπελείῳ Ἀλκιάδαν ἐπὶ τῷ
[ι Μελ?]ανθίῳ φιλότατι. Πυρία(μ)>, Μύσσκελον, Δαμόφαντον καὶ τὸν
10 [χοραγ]ὸν ἀπογράφω ἀπὸ τῷ παίδον καὶ τῷ πατέρον καὶ τὸς ἄλλ-
[ος πᾶ]ντας οἵτινες ἐντάδε ἀφικνοῖατο, μεδέν' Εὐνίκο σπευδαιό-
[τερο]ν γενέσθαι μέτ' ἄνδρεσι μέτε γυναικέσσι. ὅς οὗτος (ὁ) βόλιμος, τὸς TE-
[ca. 5]ΟΔΙΑΙΤΙΜΑΝ ἐρύσαιντο. Εὐνίκοι ἀνὲ νικᾶν παντέ. ἐμ βολύμοι ἐπ-
[ι φιλ]ότατι τῷ Εὐνίκο γάρφο.⁴

1 Εὐχά Miller, Dubois, Arena Τύχα or Εὐχά Jordan 1–2 σπευδότερον Miller 2 Φίντονα Miller, Dubois
3 Φιλέταν Miller, Dubois 5 {ἀπὸ} Jordan 6 οἵτινές με Dubois 8 καπελείῳ Ἀλκιάδαν Miller, Dubois
10 [χοραγ]ὸν Jordan 12 τοσοῦτος Miller τοσοῦτος Dubois 12–13 βόλιμος, τὸς τε[...], ο Διοτίμαν Miller
βόλιμος τὸς τε[νέι, β]ολίμο τιμάν Dubois 13 ἐμ βολύμοι: εμοαυγσον Miller PMOAY... Dubois

¹ This paper is the product of collaborative research undertaken while Federico Favi was a Visiting Apollo Fellow at the Centre for Classical and Near Eastern Studies at the University of Sydney, Australia. Peter Wilson is responsible for part 1, Federico Favi for part 2.

² All relevant bibliographical items to 2010 are collected in *SEG* LVII. Note in addition E. Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks*, Oxford 2007, 157–64; O. Taplin, How was Athenian Tragedy Played in the Greek West?, in K. Boshier (ed.), *Theater Outside Athens. Drama in Greek Sicily and South Italy*, Cambridge 2012, 228.

³ Secure information about the provenance of the lead tablet is unavailable. The dealer from whom it was purchased indicated a grave in south-east Sicily (D. Jordan, An Opisthographic Lead Tablet from Sicily with a Financial Document and a Curse Concerning *Choregoi*, in P. Wilson (ed.), *The Greek Theatre and Festivals. Documentary Studies*, Oxford 2007, 336) but the best indications – dialect, letter-forms and onomastics – suggest Gela as most likely. R. Arena, *Iscrizioni greche arcaiche di Sicilia e Magna Grecia. Iscrizioni di Sicilia*. Volume I. *Iscrizioni di Megara Iblea e Selinunte*, Pisa 1994², 81 describes it as ‘rinvenuta nei pressi di Gela’.

⁴ For clarity, we present a translation of the *defixio* that reflects the proposed new reading of ll. 12–13: ‘Prayer (or Fortune): Apellis, for love of Eunikos <sc. prays> that no-one be taken more seriously or be more popular than [E]unikos, but <all> should praise and admire (him) both willingly and unwillingly. For love of Eunikos I mark down all the choragoi so that they be ineffectual both in word and in deed, along with ⁵their sons and fathers, and so that they fail both in the contest and outside the contests – whoever does not leave him (sc. Eunikos) with me. Kaledias I mark [down] (?) to separate him from Apellis, along with all those (??) in betw[een] there and here (or perhaps all those there against the arbiters here). Sosias I mark down, from the shop of the Alkiadai, for his love of [Mel]anthios. Pyria<s>, Mysskelos, Damophantos and the[ir ¹⁰(?) chorag]os I mark down, along with their sons and fathers, and [a]ll the other[s] who arrive here. May none be taken [mor]e seriously than Eunikos either among men or women. As this lead (sc. does), so may [my sp]ells against tho[se men] draw away their honour. For Eunikos may there be victory always, completely. I write on the lead for [l]ove of Eunikos.’ Further discussion in P. Wilson and E. Csapo, *Historical Documents for the Greek Theatre down to 300 BC*, Cambridge forthcoming.

Our limited aim here is to offer a new reading and interpretation of one of this intriguing document's most puzzling passages, lines 12–13:

ὅς οὗτος <ὁ> βόλιμος, τὸς TE-l[- ca. 5 letters]ΘΔΙΑΙΤΙΜΑΝ ἐρύσαιντο.

One thing about this sentence is immediately clear: its two clauses are constructed on the coordination between ὅς and τὸς, 'as ..., so ...'. And this coordination evidently extends to the demonstratives that follow, οὗτος after ὅς suggesting that the TE-l following τὸς ought to be a form of τῆνος⁵.

This has led many to believe that the sentence involves 'an act of sympathetic magic'⁶ in which some qualities or powers of the lead tablet (βόλιμος) are hoped to be shared by something else, hidden by the lacuna. But while there is general agreement as to the structure of the sentence and its likely evocation of sympathetic magic, the remaining textual difficulties have not been convincingly solved by previous scholarship, and the content of these lines remains largely obscure.

The only attempt to date to restore the text of lines 12–13 was my own in 2007⁷, where I proposed as follows:

ὅς οὗτος <ὁ> βόλιμος, τὸς τέλ[νον ? Ἐν]οδιαὶ τιμὰν ἐρύσαιντο.

The sense would be: 'Just as this lead tablet (*sc.* effectively drew the τιμὰ of the guarantee that was inscribed on the other side of the tablet)⁸, so may the Enodiai draw out the τιμὰ of those men (*sc.* the rival choragoi and their supporters listed in the *defixio*).'

I tend now to withdraw from this suggestion. There are two significant problems with it. The first concerns the use of the verb ἐρύσαιντο. On any interpretation of the co-ordinated ὅς ~ τὸς clauses, this must be understood in the first clause (in ellipsis) from the second. My interpretation however required the verb to change its contextual meaning in the process, from a positive one in the first clause – 'it effectively drew the τιμὰ of the guarantee', thereby assuring Apellis' financial safety – to a negative one in the second – 'may they draw out the τιμὰ of those men', so damaging any chance of their success in the contest. Such a shift would present formidable challenges of construal, even granted that the text was not imagined as having any future (mortal) readers. I further suggested that in the second clause the verb might have had the sense LSJ s.v. ἐρύω B4 'thwart', which was in a sense a tacit recognition that my interpretation did not permit the ellipsis to function as it should.

The second problem concerns the Enodiai. Although there is good testimony for Enodia as an epithet of Persephone and of Hekate in particular – and in addition to the parallels I cited, we may now compare [E]νιοδία{ι} Ἐκάτε{ι} at line 13 of the Getty Hexameters, almost certainly from Selinus⁹ – the fact that the plural Enodiai, which I suggested may have been applied to Demeter and Kore, is not attested tells strongly against this line of interpretation.

I suggest instead the following as a new possibility for reconstructing the text of lines 12–13:

ὅς οὗτος <ὁ> βόλιμος, τὸς τέλ[νον ? ἐπ]ο(ι)δ(ι)αὶ τιμὰν ἐρύσαιντο.

The restored text perfectly fits the lacuna of approximately five letters. The inversion of *iota* in ἐπ[ο(ι)δ(ι)αὶ] could be explained as the result (1) of the drop of the semi-vocalic element in the long diphthong before consonant: compare ἐπ' ἀτελεία(ι) in line 4, although here it occurs at word-end, while in lines 13 it would take place within the word¹⁰; and (2) of the wrong placement of *iota* after *delta*: compare line 5 παῖδ(ι)ας, although in this case the phenomenon is eased by the preceding *iota*.

⁵ P. Wilson, Sicilian Choruses, in Wilson, *The Greek Theatre and Festivals* [see n. 3], 376.

⁶ Jordan, An Opisthographic Lead Tablet from Sicily [see n. 3], 349.

⁷ See n. 5, 375–7.

⁸ On side A of the lead tablet the author of the *defixio*, Apellis, had earlier inscribed the record of a financial transaction. Its precise nature is obscure, but it involved some form of guarantee on the part of Apellis, and the τιμὰ – in the sense of 'value' – of some cattle (line 5) is the essential matter at stake in the record. Whatever the precise nature of the interaction between Apellis and the others named – Myskon, Demokritos and Empedokles – it seems that Apellis had successfully relied on this material record of his having handed over that τιμὰ (as a monetary sum) in order to draw it back again. See *SEG* LVII 905a.

⁹ R. Kotansky and D. Jordan, Ritual Hexameters in the Getty Museum: Preliminary Edition, *ZPE* 178 (2011) 54–62; C. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds.), *The Getty Hexameters. Poetry, Magic, and Mystery in Ancient Selinus*, Oxford 2013, 10, 49; *SEG* LXI, 755.

¹⁰ For this process, see L. Threaght, *Grammar of Attic Inscriptions. Volume One. Phonology*, Berlin–New York 1980, 260–70.

2. On this new reading, it is Apellis' hope that 'as this lead tablet' (ὅς οὗτος ὁ βόλιμος, the *defixio*)¹¹, 'so' (τός) the spells (ἐπωδαί, see below) against 'those men'¹² – Apellis' competitors, named with great precision in the preceeding lines of the *defixio* – will *both* have the effect of making Apellis' opponents fail in their ambition of succeeding within the ἀγών: *both* lead and spells, because the verb ἐρύσαιντο from the second clause must clearly be understood (in ellipsis) in the first. This verb describes the hoped-for failure of Apellis' opponents as the 'drawing off' or 'drawing away' (for this sense of ἐρύομαι see LSJ s.v. ἐρύω B) of τιμή. In this context τιμή is readily understood as the honour of victory in the ἀγών (lines 5–6) that lies behind the creation of this *defixio*. For the key objective of Apellis, the author of the curse, was to affect the outcome of a choragic contest on behalf of his friend Eunikos, a competitor in it.

If one accepts this new interpretation, the *defixio* does not quite involve an 'act of sympathetic magic' as previously proposed, i.e. an equation between the power of the lead tablet – already proven in the financial transaction in which Apellis was also involved on its other side – and the hope that the second element of the ὅς ... τός coordination will do the same. On the contrary, Apellis is more likely wishing that both the *defixio* he wrote and the spells he delivered in addition will contribute together to the desired result.

The ἐπωδαί¹³ in question are most probably spells pronounced by Apellis (while writing or burying the lead tablet) as an act of orally delivered magic, a *pendant* to the written *defixio*¹⁴. While the primary aim of the *defixio* is to explain (with remarkable detail and precision) what the curser desires to be accomplished and above all to specify those against whom it is directed, the spells contextually pronounced secured the magical power of the curse¹⁵. In other words, the details provided by the content of this (and any other) *defixio* are different from case to case, while the spells were probably formulaic expressions, usually in verse and mostly fixed in form (although not necessarily in all their constituents)¹⁶, employed in magical actions pertaining to the same sphere (maledictions, healings, *et cet.*).

A further and final consequence of this new interpretation of ἐπωδαί at line 13 concerns the very first word of the *defixio*, which is currently disputed between Εὐχά 'Prayer' and Τύχᾶ 'Fortune'. If our new reconstruction and interpretation of lines 12–13 is accepted, Εὐχά becomes the more likely candidate, for this word would define the nature of the *defixio* as a whole, and there are literary parallels for the close association between prayers and contextual spells¹⁷.

Peter Wilson, The University of Sydney
peter.wilson@sydney.edu.au

Federico Favi, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa
federico.favi@sns.it

¹¹ The referent of οὗτος (ὁ) βόλιμος is certainly this side of the tablet, for βόλιμος is paralleled immediately after (with this meaning) in lines 13–14 ἐμ βολύμοι ἐπ[ι] φίλ[ο]τάτῃ Εὐνίκο γ(ρά)φα. The inconsistent vocalism in βόλιμος and βόλυμος (probably due to the influence of the sounds [m] and [b], compare the *sonus medius* in Latin) is paralleled in μόλυβ(δ)-μόλιβ(δ)-.

¹² For the expression ἐπωδή τινος 'spell against someone' see LSJ s.v. ἐπωδή. The position of the genitive before the substantive on which it depends can be easily explained in pragmatic terms.

¹³ General treatments of ἐπωδαί are F. G. Welcker, Epoden oder das Besprechen, in F. G. Welcker, *Kleine Schriften* III, Bonn 1850, 64–88 and F. Pfister, Epode, *RE Suppl.* IV, Stuttgart 1924, coll. 323,45–344,55.

¹⁴ For this relationship between (written) *defixiones* and (oral) spells see in particular C. A. Faraone, Aeschylus' ὕμνος δέσμιος (*Eum.* 306) and Attic Judicial Curse Tablets, *JHS* 105 (1985) 153 n. 21 (with previous bibliography) and P. Poccetti, Forma e tradizioni dell'inno magico nel mondo classico, *AION* 13 (1991) 197.

¹⁵ ἐπωδαί often accompany actions of various kind, e.g. medical procedures (see Soph. *Ai.* 581–2 οὐ πρὸς ἱατροῦ σοφοῦ ἰθρηνεῖν ἐπωδὰς πρὸς τομῶντι πήματι with P. J. Finglass, *Sophocles. Ajax*, Cambridge 2011, 308).

¹⁶ See for instance the discussion of the Ἐφέσια γράμματα provided by L. Bettarini, Testo e lingua nei documenti con Ἐφέσια γράμματα, *ZPE* 183 (2012) 124–5.

¹⁷ See Pind. *P.* 4.217 πρῶτον ἀνθρώποισι λιτάς τ' ἐπαοιδὰς ἐκδιδάσκειν σοφὸν Αἰσονίδα (on whose syntax and interpretation see B. K. Braswell, *A Commentary on the Fourth Pythian Ode of Pindar*, Berlin 1988, 300–1 and P. Giannini, in B. Gentili (ed.), *Pindaro. Le Pitiche*, Milano 1993, 486) and Plat. *Leg.* 909b 4 ὥς θυσίαις τε καὶ εὐχαῖς καὶ ἐπωδαῖς γοητεύοντες.