

Draco tauri pater. A new gold lamella from a private collection in Hungary

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

In 2019 a tiny gold tablet, once folded several times, turned up in a private collection in Hungary. Due to its physical appearance and the layout of the text, the tablet originally had been identified as a ‘foil with a Greek magical inscription’ in an auction catalogue. At first glance, however, it becomes obvious that the text was written with Latin letters. Although parts of the text recall Greek and Latin Christian apologists’ works, the pagan apotropaic language of the amulet is evident throughout. The text itself proposes a major impact of Greek. This paper offers a preliminary report on establishing the text and gives approaches for interpreting the gold lamella.

KEYWORDS

gold lamella, inscription, Greek, vulgar Latin, mystery cults, ancient magic

INTRODUCTION

In 2019, Hungarian art collector Viktor Kiss acquired a small, thin gold plate, which, according to the official documentation, had previously been put up for auctions in the UK and Germany in 2014 and 2017, respectively. The exact location of the discovery, as well as the archaeological context, are unknown to us. In the auction catalogue, the *lamella* is dated to the 2nd–3rd c. AD, while the text on its surface is identified as Greek. All the external features might lead to a

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catalogue description as apotropaic pendulum: „Roman gold foil with Greek curse/magical inscription (...) such foils have been stored in small tubes.” (Figs. 1 and 2)

At first glance, indeed, it becomes immediately apparent that the whole text is written in Latin letters, and some expressions are clearly constructed in accordance with the rules of Latin grammar, but in some other elements, undeniable Greek influence can be recognized.

EXTERNAL FEATURES

The tablet is rectangular: 5.6 cm in height and 3.6 cm in width. Once it was folded roughly 12 times. There are no damages on the surface. Thus, the tablet is fully legible with 12 and a half

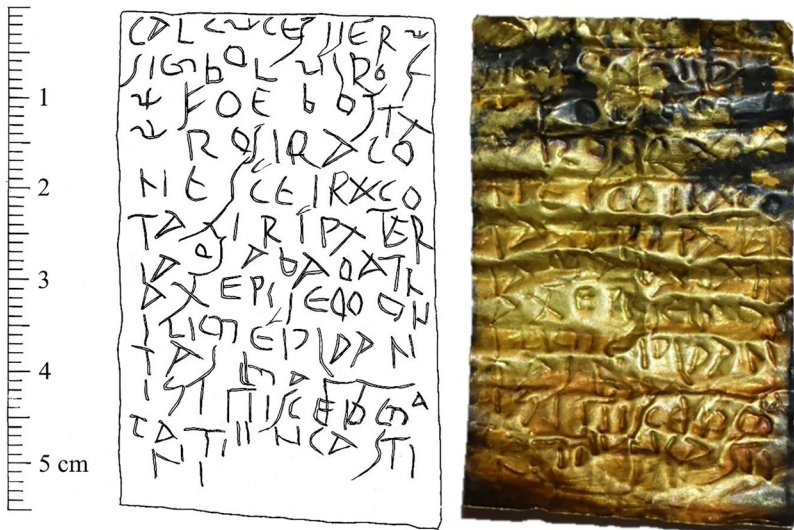


Fig. 1. Drawing and photo of the tablet (by A. Barta)

A	ΔΔΔΧ	H	Η (7)	P	Π Π
B	bb	I	Ι Ι	R	Ρ Ρ Ρ Ρ
C	cc	L	Λ Λ	S	Σ Σ Σ Σ
D	Δ Δ Δ	M	Μ Μ Δ Δ	T	Τ Τ Τ
E	Ε Ε Ε Ε Ι Ι (7)	N	Ν Ν Η Η	V	ϒ ϒ ϒ ϒ
F	Ϝ	O	Ο Ο Ο Ο	X	Χ
G	Ϛ (7)				

Fig. 2. The letters of the tablet



lines which cover almost the whole surface. Since it is a very fine and thin lamella, the text completely shows through the verso.

Two scientific examinations were conducted in order to describe the tablet as exactly as possible. Firstly, the sticky spots on the surface were analysed by FTIR spectroscopy,¹ by which a certain type of resin, most possibly myrrh was identified. Myrrh was a common part of everyday life in antiquity, had a spiritual significance in the religious sphere and was applied as medicine.² In addition, sticky residuals may refer to modern restoration procedure, since restorers use similar materials when working with precious metal objects.³

During the second scientific examination two measurements were carried out with the intention of assessing the main materials.⁴ It has been found that the tablet was made of gold alloy, namely 85% of gold, 10% of silver, while most of the remainder is copper. The second measurement was carried out from the dark spot at the upper part of the tablet. It showed a slightly higher ratio of silver, therefore the dark spot can be considered as a result of oxidation. In the absence of written sources, it is not yet possible to determine whether it is a natural alloy or it was produced intentionally (i.e., following instructions) as an alloy.

PALAEOGRAPHY

Although the faint hope of assessing the production date, location, or the archaeological context through scientific analyses failed, still, palaeography may provide some results since the letter-forms seem very characteristic. As opposed to what the catalogue claims, they are clearly not Greek. Generally, gold lamellae from antiquity are expected to bear rather Greek text than Latin, but for certain reasons the latter could be adopted. At this moment, the reason is not obvious, but the lamella seems to have been written in Latin script.

The text is a combination of various scripts: cursive and capitalis of epigraphic evidences and extraordinarily, bookhand uncial and semi-uncial: the left side of the **A** forms a sharp angle and it resembles a Greek alpha; **B** was written with only a lower bow to the right, which is a characteristic of new cursive and minuscule scripts;⁵ **D** has a straight shaft and a sharp bow to the left, tending below the baseline; **E** was applied in three versions, a *capitalis*, a C-shaped cursive with one horizontal articulus, and a rounded uncial which resembles a Greek epsilon; **F**'s vertical articulus descends slightly to the left, while the two horizontal shafts tend firmly

¹Made by Judith Mihály PhD, Institute of Materials and Environmental Chemistry, Biological Nanochemistry Research Group, Budapest, Hungary (26-08-2020).

²VAN BEEK, G. W.: Frankincense and Myrrh. *The Biblical Archaeologist* 23.3 (1960) 69–95, esp. 83–86. Furthermore, magical papyri often prescribe the use of myrrh as an ingredient of ink: PGM I 9 = GEMF 31: λαβῶν χαρτίου βασιλείον ἐπίγραφε τὰ ὑποκείμενα ζύρρη Take [royal papyrus] and write what is below in myrrh ink. BETZ, H. D.: *The Greek Magical papyri in translation including the demotic spells*. Chicago–London 1986; FARAONE, C. A.–TORALLAS TOVAR, S.: *Greek and Egyptian Magical Formularies: Text and Translation*. Berkeley 2022.

³I thank Gabriella Delbó PhD (Klapka György Museum, Komárom) for this comment.

⁴Made by Viktória Mozgai PhD, Institute for Geological and Geochemical Research, Research Centre for Astronomy and Earth Sciences (20-12-2020).

⁵PIAZZONI, A. M.: *Latin Paleography. From Antiquity to the Renaissance*. Online: Vatican Library 2022. URL: <https://spotlight.vatlib.it/latin-paleography>.



upwards; the second character in line 11 resembles a carelessly written, curly **G** with an elongated tail, or it can even be considered a kind of negligent transliteration of a Greek zeta; if the interpretation is correct, the letter **H** appears twice, and both letters suggest an unskilled hand: at the end of line 7 it was written with uncertain strokes (and it might as well recall a letter **R** with a very small upper bow), and in line 9, it simply falls into pieces; the **M** is a roundish letter, resembling the double arch of the bookhand uncial **M**. In the early version of this letter, two equal arches were added to the initial vertical shaft.⁶ Here, it was written with three strokes, but the initial shaft is a curve bending inwards. In line 8 probably a mistakenly written letter was corrected into an **M**, that is why it looks different. **N**, **P** and **R** have roughly the same form as in capital script, and the latter was corrected from an **O** in line 4; **S** takes a cursive form with a short oblique stroke on the upper part; the letter occupies both the upper and lower space; the vertical line of the **T** is straight; **V** represents a minuscule form, with a shaft that curves to the left, and with a vertical shaft that in some cases runs through the middle of the letter.

As it is usually the case with this type of textual evidence (probable inscription that was produced to do harm or to protect, aiming as precisely as possible, giving no room for misunderstanding), ligature was employed only once, at the end of line 2: in **SE** the **E** was marked by only the middle vertical stroke and it was attached to the **S** in this manner.

The tablet shows an inconsistent overall picture. At first glance, the last three lines do not give any meaningful text, with the words failing to come together. Letters are falling apart already in the previous line 9, but that line is still readable. This inconsistency could be attributed to negligence or lack of skill. The text may have been copied from a draft or formulary book which was not entirely comprehended by the copyist.

On palaeographic grounds, it is almost certain that the original text was created after the 3rd century AD, since uncial letters evolved at that time at earliest. However, some firm, definite letterforms suggest later dating.

DIPLOMATIC TRANSCRIPTION

CALCVCESIDERV
 SIMBOLVSROSE
 VFOEBOS TA
 VROSDRACO
 NESCEDRACO
 TAVRIPATER
 IAOSABAOATH
 AXEPIDEMON
 IVMEPHAAN
 TASMATA
 IGITESCEIOMA
 CATIINCISTI
 NI

⁶BISCHOFF, B.: *Latin Palaeography. Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. Cambridge 1990, 68.



STANDARDIZED READING/INTERPRETATION

Χαλκοῦς καὶ σιδήρους σύμβολος Or Χαλκοῦ καὶ σιδήρου σύμβολος/-ον
 Roseus Phoebus
 Taurus draconis καὶ draco tauri pater
 Iao Sabaoth
 AXEPI daemonium (κ)αι/ e(t) phantasmata
 IGITESCEIOMA
 CATIIN Casti
 ni

COMMENTARY

1 CALCVCESIDERV: Despite the Latin letters, a Greek interpretation is much more likely, which may refer to the two metals χαλκός – σίδηρος, copper/bronze and iron,⁷ separated by CE. *Ke* is a common spelling mistake reflecting the monophthongisation of *αι*, already from the classical period.⁸ It is well attested in epigraphy, like in Greek defixiones⁹ or presumably also in a Latin defixio, as well, produced among Greek-named slaves.¹⁰ In addition, *καί* was transcribed as CE in Greek codices written in Latin script.¹¹ It is not only the Greek *κ* that was rendered as Latin C: the evidence of the transliteration Greek *χ* as C can be clearly seen in the case of CALCV.¹² The ending might be a *genitivus materiae* preceding SIMBOLVS in the following line. In standard Greek it could be either Χαλκοῦ καὶ σιδήρου σύμβολος (rather σύμβολον), or Χαλκοῦ<ς> καὶ σιδήρου<ς> σύμβολος, where the two adjectives χάλκεος and σιδήρεος are meant to be interpreted with a contracted *εο*, and with a not indicated final *-ς*.

On the other hand, there is some evidence to suggest that Latin interpretation should not be rejected entirely, yet it is much less probable. Looking for a Latin interpretation for CALCV, the

⁷The two metals were mentioned commonly together, e.g. on the architecture of Tartarus II. VIII 15 ἐνθα σιδήρειαί τε πύλαι καὶ χάλκεος οὐδός ‘iron gates and bronze threshold’.

⁸HORROCKS, G.: *Greek: a history of the language and its speakers*. Chichester 2010, 160–163.

⁹SEG 30, 326 Καταγράφω κέ (= καί) κατατίθεμε Πλούτωνι κέ (= καί) Μοίρες κέ (= καί) Περσιφόνη Περσεφόνη κέ (= καί) Ἐρεινῶσι κέ (= καί) παντι κακῶ ... (Athens 1st c. AD).

¹⁰dfx 1.4.4/15: *Inimicos meos commendo (...) Time, Ce, Philaia ...* (Rome 1st c. AD) *Ce* is taken as the Greek personal name *Ge* by the editor (PANCIERA, S.: *Due novità epigrafiche romane. Atti della Accademia nazionale dei Lincei. Rendiconti. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* XXIII [1968] 332–340). It was non interpreted by KROPP, A.: *Defixiones: ein aktuelles corpus lateinischer Fluchtafeln* : dfx. Speyer 2008, but most plausibly rendering the Greek καί: ‘*Time and Philaia*’.

¹¹*Psalterium duplex cum canticis ...* by Giuseppe Bianchini from 1740 is a good example. This print version of a 5th-century manuscript with uncial letters from Verona provides a two-page long facsimile of Psalm 142 both in Greek and Latin, each of which is written in Latin script: e.g., *2 ce me iseltes is crisin meta tu dulu su – et ne intras in iudicio cum servo tuo* (<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10326493?page=2>) “Do not bring your servant into judgement”.

¹²A further example from a different epigraphic evidence: CALCEDONIVS pro *Chalcedonius* (LLDB-128419: LLDB = ADAMIK, B. et al.: *Computerized Historical Linguistic Database of Latin Inscriptions of the Imperial Age* (<http://lldb.elte.hu/>).



most plausible solution could be *cāligō*, either with a G that has become voiceless or marked simply by a C, and an *o/u* fusion¹³ in the very same word, – although it is quite unusual to see a syncope in a stressed syllable. But the *Appendix Probi* points out (124. *Caligo non calligo* with an L gemination) that in the late imperial period the pronunciation of the word changed: the stress was shifted from the second to the first syllable, so the syncope in CALCV could have taken place.¹⁴ A possible explanation for SIDERV is that it is a genitive plural of *sidus* ‘a heavenly body, star, planet’ where the final *-m* was not indicated again. While the two words *caligo* and *sidus* occur together in several authors,¹⁵ the interpretation of CE as a Latin word is more problematic, for there is only one dubious record of such a spelling mistake in the most probable reading, in the relative pronoun.¹⁶ In standard Latin it could be: *Caligo quae siderum (symbolus)*.

2 SIMBOLVS: A word of Greek origin. According to the text on the tablet, here it means ‘objects used in the ritual (such as signs, tokens)’¹⁷ and ‘passwords among initiates’.¹⁸ In Christian context it means ‘creed’ (e.g., *Symbolum Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*, *Σύμβολον τῆς Νικαίας* Nicene Creed). As regards the *-us* ending, this spelling was likely meant to be a Latinised one,¹⁹ although the preceding line can be interpreted much better in Greek. The transcription of the Greek Y is in line with the general trend in imperial inscriptions for the 1st to 5th centuries.²⁰

2–3 ROSEV FOEBOS: The present spelling of *Φοῖβος/Phoebus* is attested several times in epigraphic evidence.²¹ The *-os* ending is a common feature in words of Greek origin and in areas of Greek substratum, adstratum. However, inconsistently, the previous word *symbolus* was provided with a Latin ending. Classical authors, both Greek and Roman, use the epithet *Φοῖβος/*

¹³DIE BONV pro die bono (LLDB-112614) o: > V

¹⁴I thank Béla Adamik for this comment. On syncope in inscriptions, see ADAMIK, B.: The frequency of syncope in the Latin of the Empire: A statistical and dialectological study based on the analysis of inscriptions. In POCCETTI, P.: *Latinitatis rationes: Descriptive and Historical Accounts for the Latin Language*. Berlin–Boston 2016, 3–21.

¹⁵Manilius, *Astronomicum* IV 528–532: *At, niger obscura Cancer cum nube feretur, / qua velut exustus Phoebus ignibus ignis / deficit et multa fuscatur caligine sidus, / lumina deficient partus geminamque creatis / mortem fata dabunt*. But when that part of the Crab rises which is dimmed by a sombre cloud, where his own fire fails, as though burnt out by the Sun’s, and darkens the signs with impenetrable fog, the sight of those born then will fail, and fate will condemn them to death twice over (transl. by G. P. Goold). Ovidius, *Met.* I 69–71. *Vix ita limitibus dissaepserat omnia certis, / cum, quae pressa diu fuerant caligine caeca, / sidera coeperunt toto effervescente caelo*. He had barely separated out everything within fixed limits when the constellations that had been hidden for a long time in dark fog began to blaze out throughout the whole sky (transl. by A. S. Kline).

¹⁶C pro *qu* and E pro *ae* are common mistakes, but they are never attested in *quae* nor in any relative pronouns, with the dubious exception of *CIL* VI 18532 (Roma, 1st–3rd c. AD) *D<i=E>s Manibus / fecit Fortis / filiae bene / meren(ti) Fl(aviae) Rinan <q=C>(ua)e / vi(xit) // annis XXIII me(n)ses X*

¹⁷Clem. 2. 16: *Σαβαζίων γούν μυστηρίων σύμβολον τοῖς μουμένοις ὁ διὰ κόλπου θεός*. “The symbol of the Sabazian mysteries for those who are initiated into them is ‘the god through the lap’.”

¹⁸For a reference for the consolatory benefits of knowing the *symbola*, see Plut. *Cons. ux.* 611d *τὰ μυστικά σύμβολα τῶν περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον ὀργιασμῶν* (cited by EDMONDS, R. G.: *Redefining ancient Orphism*. Cambridge 2013, 274).

¹⁹The word has been part of the Latin vocabulary since Plautus (*Bac.* 265), in the masculine form, instead of the neutral form of the Greek *σύμβολον* (ADAMS, J. N.: *Social Variation and the Latin Language*. Cambridge 2013, 414).

²⁰TANTIMONACO, S.: Upsilon in the Latin inscriptions of Hispania (present issue of *Acta Antiqua*), n. 10.

²¹In the LLDB database (see n. 12) 8 instances are registered so far from various dates and locations of the Roman Empire: FOEBIAN (LLDB-136773), FOEBVS (LLDB-9509, 79673 and 118036), FOEBO (LLDB-453 and 79917), FOEBAE (LLDB-77221), FOEBE (LLDB-49851).



Phoebus resp. when they refer to Apollo, in his capacity of God of the Sun. On the other hand, it should be mentioned that, in the official iconography with the exception of the classical Latin authors who go back to Hellenistic patterns, the identification of Apollo with the sun god begins only during the reign of Augustus.²² *Phoebus'* epithet *roseus*²³ originates also in classical authors. One question that needs to be asked, however, is what the reason for this word choice was, why *Phoebus* (or *Apollo*) was invoked with an epithet referring to dawn or sunset.²⁴ As for the spelling, a frequent vulgar Latin phenomenon, the loss of the final *-s*²⁵ is distinctly visible in *ROSEV*, which form here might have been supported by the words ending in *-u* in line 1. Moreover, the only ligature of the text occurs in this word, affecting the letters *S* and *E*.

3–6 TAVROS DRACONES CE DRACO TAVRI PATER: A saying preserved and transmitted by three church fathers in slightly different forms in their tracts against Greek paganisms and mystery cults:

1. *ταῦρος δράκοντος καὶ πατήρ ταύρου δράκων*: Clem. Al., *Protr.* 2. 16 p. 14 P (around 200 AD),
2. *ταῦρος δράκοντος καὶ ταύρου δράκων πατήρ*: Firm. *Err.* 26. 1 (300–350 AD),
3. *taurus draconem genuit et taurum draco*: Arnob. *Nat.* 5. 21 (225–330 AD).

When we compare the expression at issue with the above *loci*, the most plausible interpretation, instead of the more obvious Latin version (**tauros draconesque, draco tauri pater*) runs as follows: *taurus draconis kai (=et) draco tauri pater*. Greek and Latin linguistic elements are mixed: *taurus* is a Greek loanword in Latin, but the present form *TAVROS* must represent a Grecised nominative singular, in contrast to *SIMBOLVS*, but similarly to *FOEBOS*. *DRACONES* pro *draconis* is a genitive singular of another loanword *draco* already built in the classical Latin vocabulary. Writing *ES* instead of the genitive *-is* proves the most common vocalic fusion, namely that *E* is written where *i* is expected.²⁶ The *καί* of the Greek originals by Clement of Alexandria and Firmicus Maternus was written here again as *CE* like in line 1. The second part of the expression is of Latin morphology.

²²BOLLÓK, J.: A carmen saeculare és a Ludi saeculares [The carmen saeculare and the Ludi saeculares]. *Antik Tanulmányok* XLV (2001) 63–73, here 69. He cites: SIMON, E.: *Kunst und Leben im Rom um die Zeitwende*. München 1986, 21, 31, 54. MANNSPERGER, D.: Apollo gegen Dionysos. *Gymnasium* 80 (1973) 381–404.

²³Verg. *Aen.* 11. 911–914: *continuoque ineant pugnas et proelia temptent, / ni roseus fessos iam gurgite Phoebus Hiberno / tinguat equos noctemque die labente reducat*. Soon had they sped to dreadful shock of arms, hazard of war to try; but *Phoebus* now, glowing rose-red, had dipped his wearied wheel deep in Iberian seas, and brought back night above the fading day. (transl. by Th. C. Williams).

²⁴The legend of Augustus' conception (Suet. *Aug* 94) which applies similar vocabulary, must be approached here with some caution, since it was a story approved (or even supported) by the imperial power in contrast to the possible context of our tablet, the secret mystery cults or even magic. However, it is of special interest in the view of the following expression on snakes: before the conception of Augustus (who increased the god's importance in the Roman religion), a snake crawled into the *lectica* of his mother (ob hoc *Apollinis filium existimatum*), his father then had a dream that the sun rose from Atia's womb (*Somniavit et pater Octavius utero Atiae iubar solis exortum*.) Augustus' cult of *Apollo* is generally considered a counterpart to Antonius' cult of *Dionysus*, to whom the following lines of the tablet refer (cf. n. 22).

²⁵On the loss of the final *-s*, see lately: ADAMIK, B.: The Problem of the Omission of Word-final *-s* as Evidenced in Latin Inscriptions. *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 22 (2017) 5–21.

²⁶HERMAN, J.: *Vulgar Latin*. Pennsylvania 2000, 34. Many examples, such as: *TRIBVNICIE POTESTATES II pro tribuniciae potestatis II* (LLDB-80225), *EX OFFICINA FELICES pro ex officina Felicis* (LLDB-86749), on a defixio: *MALCIO NICONES pro Malchio Niconis (filius)* (LLDB-122842).



Since the works by Clement, Firmicus Maternus, and Arnobius were read throughout the following centuries of Christianity, their treatises on contemptible mystery cults have gone down to posterity. Quite a few further authors make references to them or simply cite paragraphs. One of these works is the *Lexicon Universale* published in Geneva, in 1677²⁷ which mentions the Greek saying, and provides its Latin translation, both in a word order which is in line with the one on this tablet: „*Apud utrumque, ταῦρος δράκοντος καὶ δράκων τάυρου πατήρ Taurus draconis et draco tauri pater.*”²⁸

7 IAO SABAOATH | (or SABAOATR): It is not clear yet which spelling of the great god of Jews was meant to be employed here, and where the words can be separated from each other. The most common form is *Iao Sabaoth*, but further instances also attest the *Sabao* spelling variation.²⁹ In both cases, after the letter O, a superfluous A is assumed. At the end of the line, the letter H may be explained as R, too, since a small bow is discernible at the top of the vertical articulus.

8 |AXEPI: Without postulating any spelling mistakes, these letters are difficult to interpret on their own. Due to the words *daemonium* and *phantasmata*, a possible explanation might be a corrupt form of *Acheron*, if the numerous inconsistencies do not raise serious objections:³⁰ in this way, the letters X and P should probably be explained as Greek *chi* and *rho*, while the final *-i* must be a Latin substandard genitive.³¹ When summoning deities in magical papyri, requests are made with the words *τάχος ἐπι (γαῖαν)*.³² If we accept this as a possible reading, unexpectedly the loss of the final syllable *-ος* is clearly presumable; moreover, the last two letters of the previous lines representing a [t] are needed, as well.³³ Further corrupt solutions, spelling mistakes displaying phonetic changes, or simply the negligence of the scribe, could be revealed.³⁴ But in lack of direct parallels, no convincing interpretation can be offered.

²⁷See the entry *Mysterium* in HOFMANN, J. J.: *Lexicon Universale, Historiam sacram et profanam omnis aevi, omniumque Gentium [...]*. Tomus tertius. Leiden 1698, 262.

²⁸*Ibid.* Furthermore, Giglio Gregorio Giraldis in book 6 of *Historia de deis gentium* (1548) mentions the words of Arnobius: *Taurus draconem genuit & taurum draco*. Conrad Gesner in his book 5 of *Historiae animalium* (1587) refers to Giraldis's work, but his words differ from Giraldis's words: *Taurus pater draconis & pater tauri draco*. Another example is a paragraph title on the margin in a work some decades earlier: *Taurus draconis pater & draco rursus Tauri pater*. In MAIER, M.: *Arcana Arcanissima hoc est Hieroglyphica Aegyptio-Graeca*. London 1616, 188-189.

²⁹dfx 11.2.1/2 *Iao Sabaoθ Victoria quem(!) peperit sua vulva* (dfx, see n. 10); CBd-4419: 'Iάω Σαβαω (CBd = The Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database, <http://cbd.mfab.hu/>)

³⁰In general, abbreviations are avoided in these kinds of genres.

³¹For *Acheron*, the Latin genitive *-i* is never attested. In Latin inscriptions both standard Greek and Latin genitives were written: *ego non dubitem tacitis Acherontis in umbris* (CIL VIII 00212, p. 925, 2353), *in tenebris Acherontis labitur undis* (CIL X 08131).

³²PGM II 84 = GEMF 30. 130: *ἐλθὲ τάχος δ' ἐπι γαῖαν ἅπ' οὐρανόθεν* quickly come to earth from heaven; and line 99: *δεῦρο τάχος δ' ἐπι γαῖαν* come quickly to earth.

³³For the form *Sabao*, see n. 29.

³⁴For example, even the hapax epithet of Demeter in Samothrace, *Axieros* could be explained (*i + voc > voc*, and P as *rho*) (*Scholia in Apollonium Rhodium*: ed. C. WENDEL, Berlin 1935, I 1917, and GRAF, F.: Kabeiroi. In *Der Neue Pauly* 6, c. 127). Further possible readings could be *ἀκήριος* 'immortal, lifeless' ($\kappa \sim \chi$, E pro η, I pro οι) *ἄκαιρος* 'inappropriate, unjustified, destructive'. In the same manner, vulgar Latin phenomena may suggest Latin interpretation, too, such as *acchepi* corrupted by aspiratio vitiosa, written with χ (cf. Cat. 84. 1 *Chommoda dicebat, si quando commoda vellet/dicere* "[Arrius] would always say 'khonvenience' when he meant to say 'convenience'"; and in an inscription FLACCIVS pro *Flaccus* (LLDB-117883). One more solution to consider is *Abrasax*, in a form *Iao Sabao Abr<as>|ax epi* (etc.) as these names are also invoked together in a gem (CBd-2624, see n. 30). Furthermore, the demon *Iεχρη* summoned in a curse tablet from Carthage (dfx 11.1.1/25) requests further consideration.



8–10 DEMONIVM E PHANTASMATA: Greek has several all-purpose words for apparition or ghost, such as *δαίμων*, *δαιμόνιον*, *φάσμα*, *φάντασμα* and so on, generally without any specific denotations.³⁵ A magical papyrus preserved the instructions how to make a protective amulet against these kinds of ghosts.³⁶ As regards spelling here, while the Greek *φ* is rendered by a Latin F in *Φοῖβος*, the Greek plural of *φάντασμα* is transliterated with PH in Latin; however, the word itself is hardly recognizable. In DEMONIVM, E stands for the Greek *αι* or the Latin *ae*, representing the monophthongisation of the diphthong, whereas the ending *-ium* clearly proves a Latinised form such as SIMBOLVS above. The E between the two words must be the remainders of a conjunction stemming from either the Greek *καί* > CE > <C>E, or the Latin *et* > E<t>.

11–12 IGITESCEOMA|CARIIN: The letters in the last three lines have failed to offer a convincing meaningful reading so far. The second character at the beginning of line 11, possibly a G, may be a letter of ἡγέτης/ ἡγητής, an attribute of gods leading various groups.³⁷ However, caution must be applied, as Greek Z could be written with similar strokes, and presuming it in this place, further words must be considered.³⁸ There is a corrected letter between E and M: maybe O is the final one. At the end of the line, the A was added later, in a smaller form (probably should be read as *καὶ ὄμμα?*). The character at the beginning of line 12 looks more like a C than T written by an unskilled hand because of the lower curve bending to the right. The next character is clearly an A, but the following letters have fallen apart which raise difficulties in the interpretation.

12–13 CASTINI: Made up of well readable letters, the last word of the text evokes ritual purity in Latin. Still, the above lines based on Greek originals may give rise to doubts whether the obvious Latin name of the owner was meant here; or rather it needs to be interpreted as a Latin version of *καθαρός*, a term in the context of mystery cults and magic.

INTERPRETATION

The present gold lamella is of much interest since it represents characteristics of various kinds (let us say, genres) of textual evidence from antiquity. Gold tablets were usually produced in order to serve as protective amulets for those alive or *Totenpässe* for the dead. Although outer and inner features – such as the use of magical *kharakteres* and vocabulary – may help classify these texts, in the case of the lamella at issue, these features have failed to offer clear clues so far.

³⁵FELTON, D.: *Haunted Greece and Rome: ghost stories from classical antiquity*. Texas 1999, 32.

³⁶PGM VII 579: *φυλακτήριον σωματοφύλαξ πρὸς δαίμονας, πρὸς φαντάσματα* “A phylactery, a bodyguard against daimons, against phantasms”.

³⁷Orphic Hymn 52. 7 *ἡγέτα κάμων* “leader of processions” (= Dionysos); Orphic Hymn furthermore: 73. 1 *Δαίμονα κικλήσκω, μέγαν εὐηγήτορα, φρικτόν* “I call upon Daimon (=Zeus), the grand and the dreaded leader” (transl. by Athanassakis); Orphic Hymn 76. 6 *καὶ νόου εὐδυνάτοιο καθηγήτειραι ἄνασσαί* (=Muses) “guiding teachers of the mind’s power”. Orphic Hymn 78. 6 *ἔργων ἡγήτειρα, βίου πρόπολε θνητοῖσιν* “mortal men you lead to work” (=Dawn, transl. by Athanassakis).

³⁸E.g., it might be a form of the verb *ἴζω* ‘sit, be located’, as PDM XIV 550 “Bring in a table for the gods so that they may sit down”.



As for external features, the letterform resembles bookhand uncial in contrast to the cursive, capitalis and minuscule scripts of other tablets. Although metal amulets span a large period of classical antiquity,³⁹ the letterform of this lamella suggests a later date.

The language of the tablet might also indicate a later date: the text is clearly inscribed in Latin letters, and certain parts can definitely be interpreted in Latin. However, Grecisms suggest that it was originated in a Greek “draft” or formulary book. Most precious metal tablets, even in the Latin part of the Roman Empire, were written in Greek, possibly mixed with nonsense *voces magicae*.⁴⁰ Magical papyri (considered as sources for *phylacteria*) are mainly in Greek, rarely Old Coptic and Demotic – partly due to the provenance. This source can be dated roughly to the same period.⁴¹ At the end of antiquity, magical beliefs and religious beliefs other than Christianity had not disappeared entirely, but the practice had changed in many respects. The most important of these for us is the language: Latin became prevalent in the western part of the former Roman Empire.

From the very beginning of the tablet, the reader cannot help noticing that it probably comes from a Greek original, which seems to have been forcibly and inconsistently inscribed in Latin and in Latin letters. The reason for this is not yet clear to us. Certain words and expressions of the tablet can be explained either in Greek (such as CALCVCESIDERV from *χαλκοῦ καὶ σιδήρου*) or in Latin (*draco tauri pater*). Yet, the peculiar use of CE raises the possibility that the tablet may have been made from an original in which the Greek text was written in Latin letters, and that the author of the tablet, when copying the text onto the tablet, Latinised the words he figured out (or rather, we may say, he adjusted it to Latin), but left the rest in their original Greek language form. The hypothesis works well for SIMBOLVS, DEMONIVM, DRACO TAVRI PATER, and even TAVROSDRACONESCE, where he may have “resolved” the TAVROSDRACONTOS form of the supposed original as plural accusatives in Latin and thought they might have been joined by the *-que* particle, written as CE.

Thus, the generally accepted reason for code-switching in magic, that is the concept “magical texts are written in more than one language presumably to increase the obscurity and enhance the power of the magic”⁴² appears to fail here. This plate seem to have been produced by an otherwise skilled person with incomplete knowledge of language and traditions of the genres that gold tablets represent.⁴³

Nevertheless, there are still some interesting and relevant problems to be addressed.

³⁹Magical amulets date from the 2nd c. BC to 6th c. AD (KOTANSKY, R.: *Greek Magical Amulets: The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper, and Bronze Lamellae Part I Published Texts of Known Provenance*. Opladen 1994, XVII–XIX, while the so-called orphic gold leaves date from 400 BC to 260 AD (BERNABÉ, A. - JIMÉNEZ SAN CRISTÓBAL, A. I.: *Instructions for the Netherworld: The Orphic Gold Tablets*. Boston 2008, 2).

⁴⁰KOTANSKY (n. 39). However, Latin-language amulets were also produced, such as AE 2002, 565.

⁴¹Between the 1st c. BC and the 5th c. AD. BETZ (n. 2) xli.

⁴²MARCO SIMÓN, F.: Power and evocation of the exotic: Bilingual magical texts in the Latin West. In PIRANOMONTE, M. – MARCO SIMÓN, F. (eds): *Contesti Magici/ Contextos Mágicos. Atti del Convegno Internazionale Contesti Magici/ Contextos Mágicos, Roma, Palazzo Massimo 4–6 Novembre 2009*. Roma 2013, 135–145.

⁴³Perhaps Mommsen’s comment is also applicable here (he wanted to provide a description of an amulet, the authenticity of which he was not convinced of): “Vide ne lusus magis quam fraus subsit huic Cabirorum enumerationi; certe auctor est certus et doctus, quo sane opus est in tam singulari monumento, nullus nobis citatur.” MOMMSEN, TH.: *Inscriptiones Confoederationis helveticae latinae*. Zürich 1854, 115.



As mentioned above, the purpose of the tablet cannot be defined clearly at this moment. Perhaps future research on the last three lines will help.

The text most probably begins with the names of two metals, bronze and iron, which can be taken as the attributes to the *symbolus* in the next line. In some later authors (like Clement) *σύμβολον* designates the objects used in the ritual. However, Firmicus Maternus speaks of the use of such passwords for mutual recognition among initiates, and so they may be given access to places where the profane cannot enter.⁴⁴ The word *symbola* is also mentioned in Orphic gold leaves, usually its meaning is ‘passwords’ to accede the meadow of the blessed, and they synthesize aspects of the initiate’s doctrine. The structure of the first part of gold leaf L13 seems to be very similar to our tablet: *Σύμβολα: Ανδρικεπαιδόθυρσον, Ανδρικεπαιδόθυρσον, βριμώ, βριμώ. εἴσθι ιερὸν λειμῶνα ἄπεινος γὰρ ὁ μύστης.*⁴⁵ The password refers to Dionysus, generally interpreted as a composite of *ἀνήρ* ‘adult male’ and *παῖς* ‘child’ connected by *καί/κε*,⁴⁶ just like in the first expression in our tablet.

Bronze and iron often occur together in any kind of text, but it is still open to answer what they denote here.⁴⁷ An inscription even refers to writing in bronze and iron.⁴⁸ A magical papyrus gives instructions on how to write on a bronze object.⁴⁹ Our tablet, on the other hand, is an alloy of gold and silver; however, bronze and iron may shine similarly to gold and silver.⁵⁰

Not only the word *symbolus*, but the widely known saying *draco tauri pater* recalls Dionysus, a central god of various mystery cults of which Clement of Alexandria and other Christian authors provide a thorough account with the intention of advising people against pagan gods. Roseus Phoebus, as Orphic hymns attest, is the one who brings light into the night at dawn, may also bring light and knowledge to the initiates of mystery cults (still, this literary epithet is unexpected in this context, but perhaps it is to emphasize the act of bringing light).

Up to this point, the evidence of the first six lines suggests that the text can be linked to mystery cults. The following lines, however, raise doubts, which can be dispelled only if the last three lines become fully readable. Although souls and spirits are essential elements in Orphic context, still, words like *δαιμόνιον* and *φάντασμα* are more likely to be applied in magical

⁴⁴BERNABÉ–JIMÉNEZ (n. 39) 152.

⁴⁵Passwords: Andricepaedothysus. Andricepaedothysus Brimo, Brimo./Enter into the sacred meadow, since the initiate is free from punishment. BERNABÉ–JIMÉNEZ (n. 39) 151.

⁴⁶BERNABÉ–JIMÉNEZ (n. 39) 154.

⁴⁷One possibility “Both bronze and iron were superior to supernatural forces”, which were used to repel unwanted ghosts. OGDEN, D.: *Greek and Roman Necromancy*. Princeton 2001, 180.

⁴⁸IG II² 1631, 404–405 ὄσοι τῶν τριηράρχων χαλκᾶ καὶ σιδηρᾶ γεγραμμένοι εἰσίν.

⁴⁹PGM IV = GEMF 57.3247: λαβὼν ποτήριον χάλκεον γράψον διὰ ζμυρνομέλανος τὴν προγεγραμμένην στήλην ἐπικαλουμένην Ἀφροδίτην “Take a bronze drinking cup, and write with myrrh ink the previously inscribed stele which calls upon Aphrodite” (transl. BETZ [n. 2] 100). In PGM, other objects may serve as medium for writing: linen cloth (PGM I = GEMF 31.292), censer (PGM IV 1320), wax or clay figurine (PGM IV 304), sea-shell (PGM IV 2218), skin of animals (PGM IV 814), square of natron (PGM XIII 61), eggs (PGM VII 521 = GEMF 74), bat wing (PGM XII 375 = GEMF 15.425), leaf of plants (e.g. laurel PGM I 265 = GEMF 31). Therefore, possibly iron could have been a medium, too, even if it is not attested in these sources.

⁵⁰Precious metal (gold and silver) was favored over the baser forms (copper and bronze), but there is not usually a discernible reason for the choice of one metal over another. KOTANSKY (n. 39) xvi.



papyri, as demonstrated above. The instructions of *PGM VII 579*⁵¹ are clearly in line with this tablet. On the one hand, it prescribes to write either on a leaf of gold, silver, tin, or hieratic papyrus. On the other, it works with the name of the great god (ἔστιν γὰρ δυνάμεως ὄνομα τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ; Iao Sabaoth from line 7 of our tablet, or perhaps the god hidden in the saying *draco tauri pater* and his supplemental counterpart, Phoebus, as well?) In addition, Iao Sabaoth (with this form of his name) is more related to the context of magic. Nonetheless, in various sources he was identified with Dionysos/Zeus Sabazios.⁵²

CONCLUSION

While this study does not offer a comprehensive description and interpretation of this newly discovered gold tablet, it does give approaches. From the research that has been carried out, it is possible to conclude that the tablet must have been produced after the 3rd century AD, perhaps much later, in a Latin language ambience with Greek backgrounds. To determine whether the text was created in a context with roots to mystery cults or protective magic, further investigation is needed.

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⁵¹“A phylactery, a bodyguard against daimons, against phantasms, against every sickness and suffering, to be written on a leaf of gold or silver or tin or on hieratic papyrus. When worn it works mightily for it is the name of power of the great god and [his] seal, and it is as follows: (*voces magicae*) These [are] the names; the figure is like this: let the Snake be biting its tail, the names being written inside [the circle made by] the snake, and the characters thus, as follows: (*kharakteres*) The whole figure is [drawn] thus, as given below, with [the spell], ‘Protect my body, [and] the I entire soul of me, NN’. And when you have consecrated [it], wear [it].” BETZ (n. 2) 134.

⁵²Lyd. *Mens.* 4. 53. TAKACS, S. A.: Sabazios. In *Der Neue Pauly* 10, c. 1182.

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