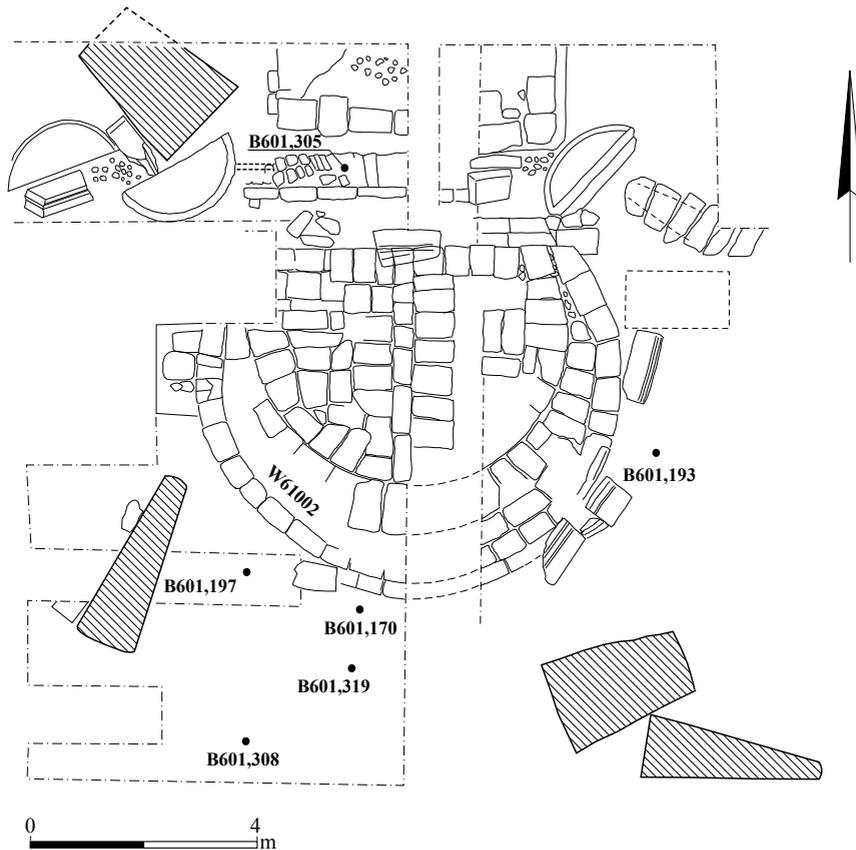


## A GREEK CURSE TABLET FROM THE EASTERN CIRCUS AT CAESAREA MARITIMA

ROBERT DANIEL AND YOSEF PORATH

The IAA excavations along the *spina* of the Eastern Circus at Caesarea (see Porath, this volume) revealed six folded lead tablets: Five were found in the vicinity of the *meta prima* (Basket Nos. 601,305; 601,308; 601,319; 601,193 and 601,197; Plan 1; Figs. 1–3), one near the fallen obelisk (Basket No. 600,112), and one was uncovered west of the *meta prima*, nailed down to the arena surface by a long iron nail (Basket No. 601,170; Plan 1; Fig. 4; see



Plan. 1. Location of the lead tablets around the *meta prima*.



Fig. 1. Folded lead Tablet 1 (B601,305).



a



b



Fig. 2. Folded lead Tablet 2 (B601,308).



Fig. 3. Folded lead Tablet 3 (B601,319).



Fig. 4. Lead strip (B601,170) nailed to the *arena* surface (L61075).



Fig. 5. Unfolded lead Tablet 1 (B601,305).

Porath, this volume: Fig. 18). Three of the folded tablets (Nos. 1–3; Figs. 5–7) were opened at the IAA laboratory.<sup>1</sup> All of them bear writing, incised prior to their folding. No indications of writing were observed on the nailed lead strip (B601,170).

<sup>1</sup> We wish to thank the former and the present directors of the IAA Artifacts Treatment and Conservation Department, Pnina Shor and Zvi Greenhut; the conservators, Ella Altmark, Raya Vinitsky and Lena Kupersmidt of the IAA metals laboratory; the photographer, Clara Amit; and the editor, Shoshana Israeli.

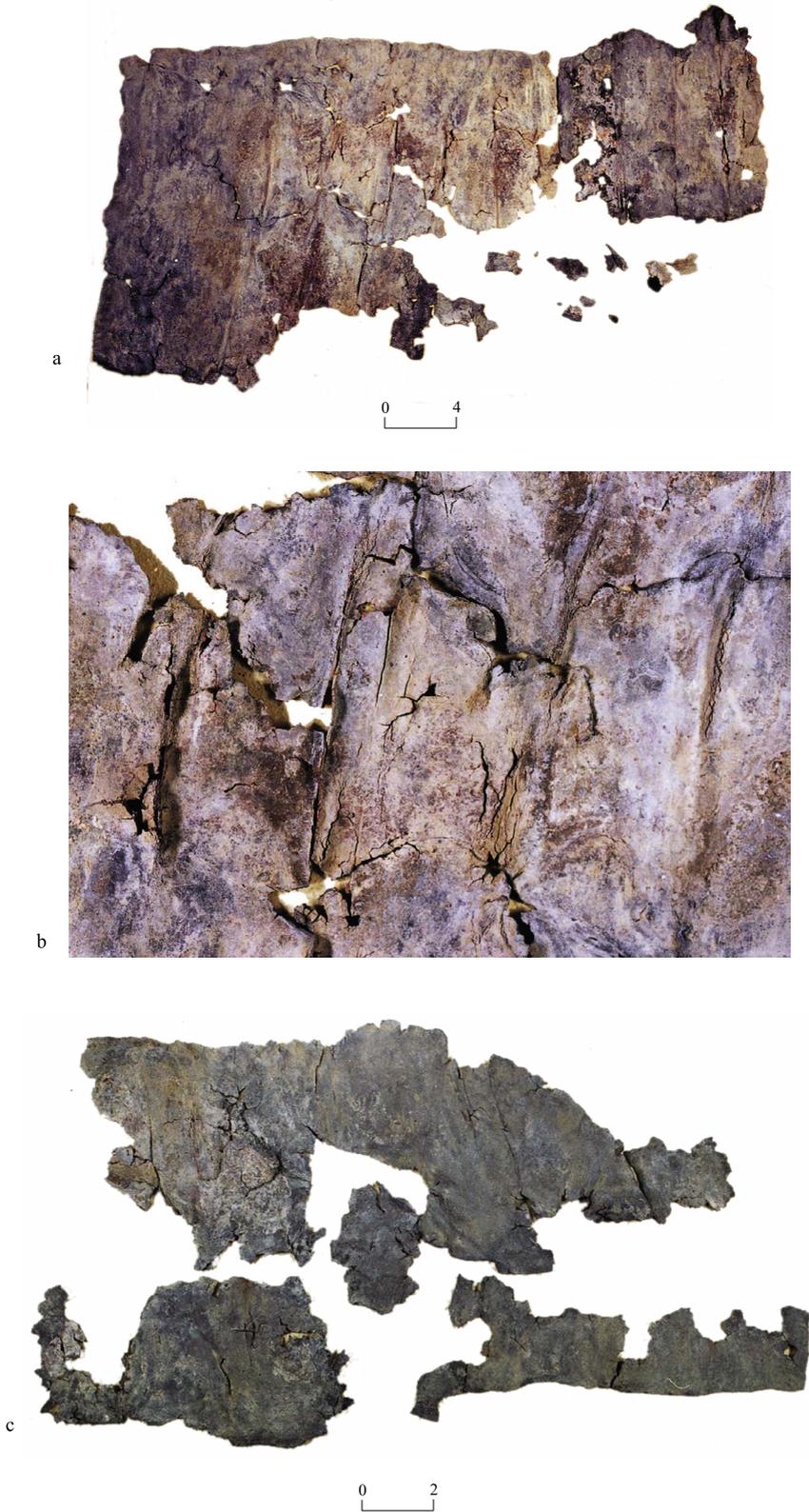


Fig. 6. Unfolded lead Tablet 2 (B601,308).



Fig. 7. Unfolded lead Tablet 3 (B601,319).

### THE CURSE TABLET

Tablet No. 3 (B601,319) is the focus of this article, as it bears the best preserved and clearest inscription (Fig. 8). It was found about 2.8 m south of W61002 (the latest and largest *meta prima* of the facility; see Plan 1), folded and tucked into the lower part of a cooking pot, dated to the Byzantine period (fourth–sixth centuries CE; see Gendelman, this volume: Fig. 5:5). The pot was placed in a shallow pit in the the second of three surfaces observed near the *meta prima* (L61075; Phase IIIb).

The tablet was folded twice vertically, first face to face and then once again. The opened tablet measures maximum 15.5 cm in width and maximum 11.5 cm in height. It bears 14 lines written in Greek. The letters were incised with a sharp writing tool. The thickness of the incisions is about 0.5 mm. Letter height ranges from 2.9 to 8.2 mm, most letters being close to 5 mm high. The *voces magicae* are usually separated by a colon. The forms of the capital letters are difficult to date, but they should probably be assigned to the earlier part of the date range of the cooking pot, i.e., to the fourth or fifth century CE.

The following transcription is based on a photograph and on the first transcription of the original (by David Jordan). The drawing was accomplished with the assistance of Sophie Geiseler (Cologne). The text was fully published in 2011 (*CIIP* II: No. 1679).

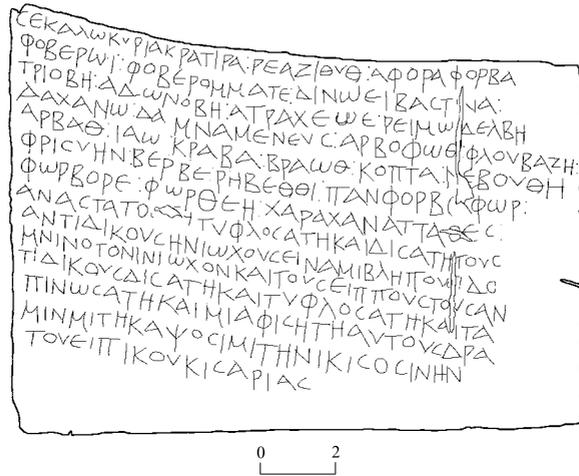


Fig. 8. Facsimile of the inscription on lead Tablet 3 (B601,319).

### Transcription

- 1 Cè καλῶ, κυρία κρατιρά : ρεαζιθυθ : αφοραφορβα
- 2 φοβερωῖ : φοβερόμματα : δινωειβαστινα :
- 3 τριοβη : αδωνοβη : ατραχεωε : ρειμωδελβη
- 4 δαχανω : Δαμναμενεύς : αρβοφωθ : φλουβαζη :
- 5 Αρβαθ : Ιαω : κραβα : βραωθ : κοπτα : νεβουθη
- 6 φρισυην : βερβε : ρηβεθθι : πανφορβεαφωρ :
- 7 φωρβορε : φωρθη : χαραχανατταθεσ :
- 8 ἀναστατός[α]τη, τυφλόατη και δίκατη τοὺς
- 9 ἀντιδίκους ἡνιώχους, εἶνα μι βλήπουσι Δο-
- 10 μνίνο<v> τὸν ἰνίωχον, και τοὺς εἴππους τοὺς ἀν-
- 11 τιδίκους. Δίκατη και τυφλόατη και τα-
- 12 πινώατη και μι ἀφίσητη αὐτοὺς δρα-
- 13 μῖν μίτη κά<μ>ψοσι μίτη νικίσοσιν ἦν
- 14 τοῦ εἰπικοῦ Κισαρίασ.

1 κρατερὰ 8 ἀναστατώατε, τυφλώατε και δήατε 9 ἡνιόχους ἵνα μὴ βλέπωσι  
10 ἡνιόχον ἵππους 11 δήατε και τυφλώατε 11–12 ταπεινώατε και μὴ ἀφήσητε  
12–14 δραμεῖν μήτε κάμψοσι μήτε νικήσωσι ἐν τῷ ἵππικῷ Καισαρείασ

### Translation

I summon you, mighty mistress, *reazithyth aphoraphorba phoberoi* grim-eyed *dinôeibastina triobê adônobê atraxeôe reimôdelbê daxanô Damnameneus arbophôth phloubazê Arbath Iaô kraba braôth kopta nebouthê phrisyên berbe rêbeththi panphorbeaphôr phôrbore*

*phôrtheê charachanattathes*. Unsettle, blind and bind the opposing charioteers, so that they not see Domninos the charioteer and the opposing horses. Bind and blind and abase (them) and do not allow them to run, and may they not make the turn and may they not win in the hippodrome of Caesarea.

## DISCUSSION

The text preserves a curse directed against unnamed charioteers who would compete against a charioteer named Domninus and his horses. Whether or not this Domninus is identical with one of the charioteers of the same name attested at Rome and Carthage, is a matter of speculation.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the curse tablet from Caesarea was found close to one of the circus's turning-posts is significant as the magical curse that it bears, for curses were thought to become more efficacious when deposited in the proximity of their targets. A number of other curses have indeed been found inside or in the vicinity of ancient circuses (Heintz 1998:336–342). As Heintz points out, these curses often turn up at either the starting-gates or the turning-posts, those parts of the race course that put the chariot teams at greatest risk.<sup>3</sup> It would have been with an eye to this danger that the practitioner deposited the present curse close to a turning-post, thus adding force to his invocation that the charioteers competing against Domninus 'not make the turn'.

A single mighty goddess (perhaps Ananke) is invoked in the beginning of the charm, but plural imperatives addressed to many gods are used in lines 8, 11 and 12.

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<sup>2</sup> At least two different charioteers named Domninus are mentioned in curse tablets from Rome (see Audollent 1904:441). Contorniate medallions and a mosaic from Carthage mention a charioteer of the same name. This documentation is contemporary with the present curse tablet. For a further discussion on of charioteers named Domninus known to date and the difficulty of determining whether the same Domninus is referred to on artifacts from two different provinces, see Alföldi A. and Alföldi E. 1990:187–188, 200–201; Horsmann 1998:199–200, Nos. 41–44.

<sup>3</sup> The turning posts being especially dangerous, cf. Audollent 1904: No. 234, ll. 72–76 *κυρόμενοι, μάλιστα δὲ ἐν τοῖς καμπτήρσι*.

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