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Khronos-Kronos on a newly deciphered curse tablet from Antioch

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A recently opened but still unpublished *defixio* (late 5th or early 6th century C.E.) from the hippodrome in Antioch contains a curse aimed at the horses of the Green and White factions. The tablet exhibits several noteworthy features, one of which concerns the deity chiefly called upon to bring about the defeat of the horses: Kronos. This Kronos is to be understood simultaneously as the god Khronos (Time), a primal deity in Orphic theogonies, and as the god Kronos who cuts off his father's genitals in both Hesiodic and Orphic theogonies. I will show that the physical description of the god closely matches sculptures of a god found in connection with the cult of Mithras. The tablet also seems to contain a cosmogony which describes a god who both creates and names the kosmos. Kronos is described in the opening lines of the tablet as *agêratos*: this links him to the figure of Khronos in Orphic theogonies, where he is described as *agêraos* (Kern fr. 54 and 66). He is further called *drakontokephalos* and *leontoprosôpos*, which accords with how Khronos-Herakles is described in Kern fr. 57 and 54, where the god is a serpent with the heads of a bull and a lion attached to it. The closest parallel however can be found in several sculptures associated with not with Orphism but with the worship of Mithras. Several images of a lion-faced figure in the coils of a snake, whose head emerges above the head of the figure, have been found in mithraea between the second and fourth centuries C.E. (Merkelbach, *Mithras*, abb. 40 [Ostia], 65 [Rome], 51 [Rome]). These Mithraic depictions make it clear how the god can be described as *drakontokephalos* and *leontoprosôpos* at the same time. Cumont (1896-1898) suggested that the figure represented was Chronos-Saturnus: the description attached to the Kronos of the tablet confirms that his identification was correct. Since the negative reception of Dieterich's *Eine Mithrasliturgie* (1903) there has been a cautious approach to the identification of Mithraic elements in magical texts: what this text at least shows is how Orphic and Mithraic traditions are intertwined. Other lines in the tablet may refer to the confinement of Kronos by Zeus and Kronos' crime against Ouranos and Kronos' expulsion by his own son in turn, using language closely paralleled in the invocation of Kronos in the Paris magical papyrus. Lastly, lines 13f. contain an account of formation and naming in which the verb forms *eplasen*, *ekalêsen*, *proêgorasen*, *ônomasen* occur in close succession. The extensive oxidation of the surface makes reading this area of the tablet difficult, so that it is not clear who the subject of these verbs is. But there are parallels for Khronos and Kronos as creator in an invocation of Kronos in the Paris magic papyrus (*PGM* IV.3099f.).