Research Master Thesis

Cursing Athenians

An enquiry into the position and role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian religion and society from the perspectives of the Underworld and gender

Author: Nienke Roefs
Student number: S1037999
Supervisor: Floris Overduin
Second reader: Olivier Hekster
Date of submission: 15-06-2024
Wordcount: 27,464
Signature author:

Abstract

Magical practices are oftentimes left out of academic research due to stigma, while they still have much to offer. By omitting evidence of magical practices from our corpus we miss out on a multitude of data and information which we, in the field of ancient history, do not have an abundance of to begin with. This research will show how magical practices can enhance our understanding of the past. In order to do this, I have chosen a particular type of magical object and its ritualised use as my case study, namely: curse tablets. Curse tablets usually take the form of a thin sheet of lead that is inscribed with a binding spell and subsequently folded or rolled, ritually pierced with a nail, and deposited underground, often in graves, tombs, or wells. A binding spell is meant to bind or restrain a rival in order to disadvantage them in a number of possible situations, the most common of which are: in legal proceedings, in matters of love, in business rivalries, and in competitions in theatre and sport. Through the binding spells engraved onto these tablets we can get a sense of a wide range of conflicts and rivalries that existed at the time of their writing, providing a small glimpse into the lives of their creators and their targets.

This research concerns Classical Athens, because this is where the practice really started to flourish, develop, and take on new forms in the fourth century BC. Curse tablets will be analysed not only based on the texts that are inscribed upon them, but also their material and the archaeological context of their findspot will be taken into account. Curse tablets are not the only primary source under investigation. Ancient Greek literature will be analysed to explore the ritual surrounding the creation and deposition of curse tablets, as well as their usage and function in their contemporary religion and society. This research aims to show how these tablets were not a niche of society or a wastebasket of religion. They were an integral part of Athenian society, and everyone knew of their existence. They were used by people from all layers of society and by both men and women.

This thesis explores two themes in the field that have not received the necessary attention. The first of these two topics are the close relations between the functioning and usage of curse tablets and the Underworld, the domain of Hades and the place where the spirits of the dead normally go after their burial. The second is the theme of gender, which explores the relation between gender and the use of magic and curse tablets, in particular. By employing these two topics as perspectives, this research aims to answer the following research question: what were the position and role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian religion and society?

Contents

Section 1: An Introduction to Classical Athenian Curse Tablets

Introduction

‘Magic differs from religion
as weeds differ from flowers,
merely by negative social evaluation.’
– Robert Parker[1]

It has long been the case that magical practices and superstitions have been regarded negatively, not just in our wider modern world, but also within academia. Sources which describe or are a product of magical practices are often neglected or even avoided in research, generally due to stigma. Perhaps fear also plays a role in this, fear to be judged or deemed unprofessional when exploring such topics. Moreover, the uncertainty of how to approach such a topic could scare away researchers. The reality is, however, that these neglected sources can tell us much more about a society and its history than we may often realise. By omitting evidence of magical practices from our corpus we miss out on a multitude of data and information which we, in the field of ancient history, do not have an abundance of to begin with. It is therefore imperative to include magical practices and their literary and material sources as proper subjects of research to explore not only their development and utilisation, but also their position and role in society. This research will attempt to show the importance of including magical practices in our research by selecting a specific type of magical object and its ritualised usage and investigating their position and role in society.

The specific magical practice chosen for this study is the ritualised creation and use of curse tablets in Classical Athens. Curse tablets are a perfect example of magical objects that have not received the proper attention in historical research, even though they are able to provide small snapshots into the lives of many different people of the past, including the underrepresented in the historical narrative. Curse tablets are generally leaden tablets that contain a curse, also known as a binding spell. These curses aim to bind a rival in order to disadvantage them in a number of varying situations, the most common of which are: in the litigation process, in matters of love, in business rivalries, and in competitions of theatre and sport. Through the binding spells inscribed on these tablets we can get a sense of a wide range of conflicts and rivalries that existed at the time of their writing, providing a small glimpse into the lives of their creators and their targets. A more detailed analysis of what curse tablets are and how they function will be provided in chapter 1. The spatial and temporal constraints that have been set for this research have been chosen based on the start of the practice of creating and using curse tablets towards the end of the fifth century BC and its flourishing and great development, specifically in Athens, during the fourth century BC.

Status Quaestionis

While curse tablets lack the proper attention in the wider historical field, they have been studied quite extensively in their own small separate field. A state of the art on curse tablets must always start with the works of Richard Wünsch and Auguste Audollent. They published, in 1897 and 1904 respectively, a large amount of curse tablets with their transcription and commentary.[2] The works themselves were written in Latin, while the curse tablets are published in their original language Ancient Greek, without translation. One issue arises with these early sources, however, specifically in the work by Wünsch, as he often misdated the tablets. It has been posited he dated them later than they should have been, whether consciously or not, as

[1] R. Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* (Oxford 2005) 122.
[2] R. Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae* (Berlin 1897); A. Audollent, *Defixiones Tabellae* (Paris 1904).

such negatively viewed magical objects could not be linked with the 'great' Classical Athens, a culture widely associated at the time with grand concepts like democracy and philosophy.[3] At the time of their publishing this topic and others concerning magical practices were riddled with embarrassment in the academic world.

It was only in the1980s that scholars began to see the value that these and similar magical objects held to the fields of history and linguistics. Many different works from a wide range of authors have since contributed to the field, each in their own way with a different enlightening perspective. Some of them take a linguistic angle, investigating the language used on the tablets. Others employ prosopography, investigating the names found on curse tablets and connecting them to figures familiar to us from other sources. Others still dive into the situation in which curse tablets are utilised, socially or ritually. Prominent names in the field include David Jordan, Jaime Curbera, Christopher Faraone, John Gager, Esther Eidinow, and Daniel Ogden. While there are many publications that form this field, I will give an overview of the more influential ones.

The first of the most notable works is Faraone & Obbink's *Magika Hiera*, a collection of chapters that discusses different kinds of magic in varying places and times in the ancient world. Several chapters investigate curse tablets, the most striking of which is Faraone's own chapter on the agonistic contexts of the binding spells used on curse tablets. He discusses language and the use of formulae in curses, as well as the use of early Greek curse tablets in a rivalry or what he terms an "agonistic context".[4] Both his formulae and the term he coined are still employed and referred to in the field today. These will be discussed in chapter 1.

Another useful compendium of curse tablets is John Gager's *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*. He provides translations of a wide range of curse tablets from all over the ancient world and from a long time span, from early Greek to Roman examples. He presents the curses divided in themes of their situational usage, with commentary and bibliography. Unfortunately, the original Ancient Greek transcriptions are not included, but they can often be found through the bibliography.[5]

Daniel Ogden has written a monograph and a sourcebook on witchcraft and the dead in the ancient world, both of which include a section on curse tablets. His sourcebook is a compendium of many magical sources which provides insightful commentary on each one. Moreover, he provides a useful overview of the varying types of restless spirits of the dead, which, as we will see in chapter 3, is vital to understanding curse tablets and their functioning.[6]

A more recent collection of chapters by various authors is Faraone & Polinskaya's *Curses in Context III*. This specific volume of the series details investigations into curse tablets of the Classical and Hellenistic Periods. Jutta Stroszeck's contribution is especially valuable, as she describes in detail the archaeological contexts of the finding of a large number of curse

[3] J. L. Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes: Curse Tablets and Binding Spells in Ancient Greece* (New York 2023) 13.
[4] C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink eds., *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York and Oxford 1991); C. A. Faraone, 'The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells' in: idem and D. Obbink eds., *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York and Oxford 1991) 3-32.
[5] J. G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York and Oxford 1992).
[6] D. Ogden, *Night's Black Agents: Witches, Wizards, and the Dead in the Ancient World* (London and New York 2008); D. Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Source Book* (Oxford and New York 2002).

tablets in the Athenian necropolis Kerameikos.[7] The value of her contribution will be made clear in chapter 2.

The most recent contribution to the field is Jessica Lamont's *In Blood and Ashes*, a work that expertly explains the beginnings of curse practice in Sicily and their spread to Athens, where the practice subsequently develops and thrives in the fourth century BC. This development will be discussed in chapter 1. Furthermore, Lamont discusses the relations between oral cursing practices and text, posing that oral cursing preceded curse writing and had a substantial influence upon it.[8]

It is important to note that some possibly influential works are still forthcoming. A significant issue in the field has been that not all curse tablets have been published, and those that have been, are often spread across multiple different publications. While the aforementioned works of Wünsch and Audollent do provide a large number, these works are rather outdated. Newer contributions have provided more and better commentary, as well as translations. They have also published new tablets that were not part of these early compendia. The need for a central location for all published curse tablets has not yet been met. While a database has been created, not all of its functions work optimally, specifically when it comes to searching on location.[9] Not only are we still awaiting the publication of around 30 tablets recently found in a well in the Athenian necropolis of Kerameikos by Martin Dreher and Sara Chiarini, we must also be patient to finally see a full compendium of all published Athenian curse tablets. A vital new edition, which updates all the older corpora and includes all the Attic tablets found since then, is forthcoming as a supplement of the *Inscriptiones Graecae* and authored by Jaime Curbera.[10]

Research Question

What has become clear through my exploration of the field is twofold. First of all, while extensive research has been done into curse tablets in their own specific field, or even the field of ancient magic, their influence in the wider field of the history of the ancient world is still lacking. It is apparent that many ancient historians either are not aware of the existence of the objects at all, or they do know of them but have never engaged with them or used them in their research. The aim of this research is to investigate the position and role of these objects and their usage in Classical Athens and to show that these objects are not a niche of society or a wastebasket of religion. These objects, their creation, their functioning, and their utilisation are an integral part of their contemporary society, and as such they provide a perspective into ancient societies that should not be ignored. Through its investigation this thesis promotes their consideration and attention in the wider field of ancient history.

Secondly, I have found that there are certain elements concerning the placement and usage of curse tablets in Classical Athenian religion and society that, while having been hinted at or mentioned briefly in multiple works, never received the attention they deserve. This thesis aims to fill these research gaps by using these unexplored themes as a perspective to approach the position and role of curse tablets in their contemporary society. The first of these two themes is the close relations between the functioning and usage of curse tablets and the

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[7] C. A. Faraone and I. Polinskaya eds., *Curses in Context III: Greek Curse Tablets of the Classical and Hellenistic Periods* (Athens 2021); J. Stroszeck, 'The Archaeological Contexts of the Curse Tablets in the Athenian Kerameikos' in: C. A. Faraone and I. Polinskaya eds., *Curses in Context III: Greek Curse Tablets of the Classical and Hellenistic Periods* (Athens 2021) 21-48.

[8] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*.

[9] Thesaurus Defixionum, www.thedefix.uni-hamburg.de (consulted 11/06/2024).

[10] J. Curbera, *Inscriptiones Graecae* II/III^3 8 (forthcoming).

Underworld, the domain of Hades and the place where the spirits of the dead were normally thought to go after burial. The second is the theme of gender, which explores the relation between gender and the use of magic and curse tablets. This thesis thus explores these themes and uses them as perspectives to answer the following research question: what were the position and role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian religion and society?

Methodology

As this question asks for the position and role of curse tablets in their contemporary society, the methodology and sources selected must suit this aim. Therefore, this research will not employ a quantitative data analysis. Rather, it concerns a qualitative analysis, but not just of the curse tablets themselves as this would not be able to grasp the wider context in which the curses are used. Instead, this thesis provides a broader view of the creation, usage, and ritual concerning curse tablets in order to place them within their religious and societal context. The sources considered in this study are of three types and are analysed using an interdisciplinary set of methodologies, from historical to archaeological ones. First, the curse tablets themselves will be analysed. Discourse analysis will be used to determine the relationship between entities mentioned on the tablets and their functioning and usage within Classical Athenian religion and society. This concerns not only the creator and target of the curse, but also the religious beings invoked upon them, whether gods or spirits of the dead. Material and archaeological analysis will be used to investigate the relevance of the tablets' material, as well as the circumstance of their findspot to their functioning and specifically their ritualised usage. As will be made clear in section 2 the deposition of curse tablets is of vital importance to how they were believed to work.

The second source type analysed in this thesis is ancient literature. There is a range of works from different ancient authors and genres that can provide insight into the use of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society. For these ancient sources discourse analysis will be used to explore what these texts can tell us about the context of the creation and usage of curse tablets and therefore their position and role in religion and society. In some cases, specific Ancient Greek words and their meanings are explored, while in other cases reading against the grain is utilised to dive deeper into the passages selected and investigate what they can tell us about the religious and societal context of the usage of curse tablets. Ancient literature is also employed to explore relevant religious and mythological figures that show connections to magic and curse tablets, specifically in chapter 3 and 4.

The last source type that is vital to any research, but specifically to this one, is secondary literature. The progress that has already been made in this field is quite substantial, even if it does have its shortcomings in some topics. It is essential to build upon the work that has been done and fill in the gaps. That is why this research brings many concepts and ideas from previous works to attention to aid in answering the questions posed. Some statements from other works are supported by our findings, others are disputed. In this manner, this research places itself in and contributes to the debates that are ongoing in this small field. All things considered, secondary literature is an important part of this research, in order to substantiate or refute our findings and include as many perspectives as possible on the questions at hand.

Theory and Concepts

The theoretical approaches and concepts that this research employs and builds upon are as follows. The most prominent theoretical approach utilised in this research is that of 'lived religion'. This approach mainly focuses on religious practices in the everyday life of ordinary

people and specifically the lived experiences that accompany them. The original modern approach often relies on anthropological analysis and investigation, which generally includes a form of direct access to the lived religion under consideration, as it investigates the present rather than the past. When applied to enquiries into ancient religion, however, the approach becomes more challenging to apply as we lack this direct access to the religion and civilisation under study. We must rely on the sources available to study a religion and its believers when both of these are no longer living. For this reason, ancient historians that employ a lived religion approach investigate already lived experiences and events in the past, which calls for different methodologies than those used by modern anthropologists. A significant and valuable compendium edited by Gasparini et al. provides useful examples of methods that suit a study of ancient lived religion. It highlights the pitfalls and challenges of the approach, as well as posing ways to overcome and deal with them. Furthermore, this work and its editors propose that 'the paradigm of "lived ancient religion" provides the stimulus to integrate "the" evidence on a new basis, invoke new types of evidence, challenge existing classifications of material, and focus on neglected types of religious action.'[11] This statement makes clear that this approach is perfect for neglected types of religious action, such as the creation and use of curse tablets. Moreover, it fits the aim of this thesis to challenge the existing classification of source materials. This concept and approach will be applied, not only by means of the fitting methodology described above, but also by approaching curse writing practice as a ritual practice which could hold a meaning and place in the everyday lives of the inhabitants of Classical Athens and through this, investigating what exactly this meaning and place, in other words, the position and role of curse writing practice is in Classical Athenian religion and society.

Another approach that suits curse tablets but has a less prominent role in this research is the 'history from below' approach, originating from the cultural anthropology of Lucien Febvre and the Annales school. This approach goes against previous conceptions that history is made up of the actions and military feats of 'great white men' or the political elite. It focusses instead on 'ordinary' citizens or what has been deemed 'the subaltern' by Gayatri Chakravotry Spivak, referring to those who are usually left out of the grand narrative.[12] The subaltern can therefore be any group of people that do not usually get a say in society and therefore often do not leave behind sources for us to consider. Whether they are slaves, women, or the poor, the subaltern are often excluded from the historical narrative, and a 'history from below' approach aims to give them a voice and a place in history. Curse tablets are the perfect source for this, because they provide snapshots into the lives and rivalries of 'ordinary folk'. While the 'history from below' approach is employed in this research when investigating who makes use of the tablets and in what layers of society their usage is prominent, this remains only a part of its enquiries. Therefore, this approach remains more in the background of this research.

Additionally, this research makes use of two concepts that have to be explained and discussed, as they could be deemed problematic. The first of these concepts is magic. Magic is a convoluted term of which some scholars have said it should not be used in research because of its loaded and complex nature.[13] However, I disagree. While the term is charged with many negative associations and a clear definition is not achievable, I do not believe it is useless. It is

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[11] V. Gasparini et al., *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World. Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History and Classics* (Berlin and Boston 2020), q.v. 3.
[12] C. Courrier & J. C. Magalhães de Oliveira, *Ancient History from Below: Subaltern Experiences and Actions in Context* (Abingdon and New York 2022); G. C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in: C. Nelson and L. Grossberg eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London 1988).
[13] W. J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge 2012).

certainly a challenge to engage with the term, but that does not mean it is impossible. As long as one is aware of the pitfalls that come with such a vague and convoluted concept and remains transparent about one's usage of the term, reflecting on their treatment of the concept throughout their research, it can still be a valuable and vital concept to work with. Magic is category that includes many different practices and ideas and exactly what fits within the category is different in each culture, time, and place. It is even different depending on who you ask within such a culture. It has been described as a busy intersection, indicating that it is impossible to understand all magic across all instances, even for one culture at one historical moment.[14] What can be done, however, is an investigation into one specific practice that can fit in the category of magic, namely that of curse tablets. It is important to consider, however, that when we speak of magic, an emic perspective of magic is often very difficult to explore due to the many associations we, as etic viewers, have with the term.[15] From Harry Potter to Supernatural, from The Witcher to Baldur's Gate III, from Pathfinder to Dungeons and Dragons, our modern culture is full of a variety of ideas concerning magic, negative and positive. Our history is filled to the brim with them as well, from medieval Christian ideas of demons and satanism to the witch hunts of the Early Modern period. We must be aware of how clouded and biased our understanding of the term is and be cautious to not place or project these associations into the ancient world.

The other concept that requires discussion is gender. This study employs gender as a more inclusive term of enquiry, as opposed the term sex. It builds upon the field of gender studies and explores the usage of curse tablets and magic and their relations with gender, the female gender in particular, as will become clear in section 3. While this study aims to be as inclusive as possible when it comes to discussing the possible genders that were present in the culture of its enquiry, the reality remains that there are certain limitations when it comes to ancient research. Specifically in this case, the only manners in which we can determine gender is by the name of either a target of a curse tablet or a person mentioned in ancient literature, or by the grammar used when describing these people in a text. This means that we are often restricted to the female and male dichotomy and unable to include any other possible genders into our research, simply because our sources do not allow us to.

Source Selection

The selected sources have been chosen based on accessibility and scope. It must be made clear that the field has certain limitations when it comes to the accessibility of the sources. As explained before, a central place for published curse tablets is still lacking and not all curse tablets that have been found have also been published. This places a lot of restrictions on which tablets can be analysed. In this research, I have made use of compendia like Gager's and Ogden's and additional publications like Faraone's and Lamont's to find English translations of curse tablets. The compendia by Wünsch and Audollent have often been used for the Greek original when it was not present in the previously consulted works. It is also important to make clear that this research largely made use of English translations when analysing the tablets, using the Greek originals to explore the specific words used when necessary. The limitation of primarily using English translations has been managed as best as possible, by often and where it was realisable finding multiple translations of the same tablet and passages of ancient

[14] D. Collins, *Magic in the Ancient Greek World* (Malden MA etc. 2008) 2.
[15] D. Frankfurter, 'Ancient Magic in a New Key: Refining an Exotic Discipline in the History of Religions' in: idem ed., *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*. Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, Volume 189 (Leiden and Boston 2019) 3-4.

literature and subsequently exploring and comparing these in order to best understand the text being studied. Where commentary was available, it has been explored and utilised as well.

Concerning the scope of this research, while the period and place of study mainly concerns Classical Athens, this study does not shy away from crossing the borders of the delineated scope in order to supply a fuller broader picture when possible. While we as modern scholars tend to see a period as a strong shift from its previous or subsequent occurrences, I do not believe that the people of the past, living in their historical reality, experienced these shifts as prominently as we often make it seem. Thus, in order to provide a complete picture of the flourishing practice of curse writing in the fourth century BC, this research does not follow the strict time restrictions of 510 to 323 BC. It will sometimes include outliers from around 300 BC, for example. While the regional delineation is more strict, an example from a different area in Greece is sometimes included to compare regionally and put the practice into perspective. Subsequently, when this study refers to Athens as its scope, this includes the *chora* or hinterland of the city-state. Thus, Attica is included in its considerations.

Layout and Sub-questions

The main research question is divided into multiple sub-questions which will be answered in a dedicated section. Each section, except the first, will answer its main questions divided into two chapters, each again answering their own further divided sub-questions. The first section is an introductory one and as such it only includes this introduction and the first chapter, which explains the what, why, and how of these objects and their usage and development in Classical Athens. This chapter provides the information that is necessary to understand the subsequent enquiries. The following chapters, therefore, build upon the knowledge provided by the first.

Section 2 explores the connections between the Underworld and the ritual usage and functioning of curse tablets, investigating the placement of these objects in their contemporary religion. It asks the questions: What is the connection between the Underworld and Classical Athenian curse tablets? And what can this connection tell us about the position of curse tablets within Classical Athenian religion as a whole? Chapter 2 dives into the connections with the Underworld as seen by the tablets' common places of deposition, answering the questions: What are the common places of deposition of Classical Athenian curse tablets and why might this be the case? And what can the common places of deposition tell us about the connection between Classical Athenian curse tablets and the Underworld? Subsequently, chapter 3 investigates the connections between the spirits of the dead and gods of Underworld with the enactment and functioning of the tablets. It considers the questions: What are *daimones* and why were they employed to transport curse tablets to the Underworld? And which gods are invoked on curse tablets and what is their relation to the Underworld?

Section 3 explores the theme of gender and its relation to magical practices in Classical Athens. It asks the questions: What are the connections between curse tablets and gender in Classical Athens? And what can these connections tell us about the position of curse tablets in the wider society of Classical Athens? Chapter 4 specifically focuses on the female gender and its connotations with magical practices, discussing a number of prominent female religious and mythological figures with magical powers as attested by ancient literature. Furthermore, it discusses accusations of magic use made against women in the lawcourts of Athens. It answers the questions: What female figures with strong magical prowess existed in Greek religion and mythology? And what associations between women and magic were present in Classical Athens? The following chapter, number 5, discusses the relations between gender and curse practice specifically, building upon the previous chapter's findings. It investigates the questions: What associations between women and cursing practices were present in Classical

Athens? And what can curse tablets tell us about the relations between gender and curse practices?

Finally, section 4 investigates the position and role of curse tablets and their usage in Classical Athenian society at large, asking the questions: what was the position of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society? And what was the role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society? Chapter 6 focuses on the commonality of curse tablets and their usage being common knowledge in society. It subsequently discusses the negative connotations present with their usage at the time. It answers the questions: How can we observe that curse tablets and their usage were common knowledge in Classical Athens? And what were the negative associations with the creation and use of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society? Chapter 7 then moves on to consider whether curse tablets worked in any sense, exploring their consequences and effects. It answers the questions: Did curse tablets work? What were the consequences of their use? And what was the role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society? The thesis will then end with a conclusion that summarises its findings, answers the main research question, and gives suggestions for further research.

Chapter 1: Classical Athenian Curse Tablets

Curse tablets are often regarded as mysterious objects, but upon closer inspection they are quite telling. This chapter will discuss the what, why and how of these objects, from their functions to their functioning, and show examples of the different variants. It will provide the introductory information necessary to understand the enquiries of the next sections.

Curse Tablets

As preluded in the introduction, curse tablets are usually tablets made out of a thin sheet of lead and inscribed with a curse. Their shapes and sizes vary. They range from smaller examples measuring 6 x 4 cm to longer examples of 41 x 4 cm and from near square or rectangular variants to long thin strips or bands often resembling shackles. As part of the ritual of their creation and/or deposition they are often folded or rolled, which was possible due to their thin pliable material, and nailed through with one or multiple nails. See figure 1 for an example of a curse tablet. The folding lines are visible in this example.

Figure 1 Curse tablet, fourth century BC, Kerameikos Museum, IB 43. Found in Kerameikos, Athens. Photo by author.

While connections have been made between the physical nailing through the tablets and the symbolic binding of the subject of the curse, occasionally the reason for this elaborate sealing method is seen as a way of resembling a letter, or making sure prying eyes would not be able to read its contents. However, since curse tablets were virtually always deposited underground, in graves or in wells, but certainly in spaces where it would be difficult for people to find them, it is unlikely that this would be the sole purpose of their sealing.[16] See chapter 2 on the deposition of curse tablets. Gager mentions that perchance tablets were simply nailed to be held in place, as this was found to be the case for one tablet found in Carthage. However, he does add that this was done with a longer nail.[17] So it seems unlikely that this was the primary and common function for the nailing of tablets, specifically not for the Athenian examples that this study focusses on.

The significance of the ritual nailing of the tablets becomes more apparent when one considers that the curses that are inscribed on these tablets usually concern binding spells that seek to disadvantage a rival in a variety of situations. A binding spell is a spell that, as the name suggests, specifically seeks to bind its subject or often specific body parts of the intended subject of the curse. For example, when one wants to render their subject unable to speak, they would bind the victim's tongue and or mouth. An additional important detail concerns the verb

[16] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 18.
[17] Ibidem.

that is often used in Athenian curses: καταδέω or δέω, which translates to 'to bind'. This is also what curse tablets are named after in Greek: κατάδεσμοι. It is Plato's *Republic* which holds one of the first attestations of the noun 'καταδέσμοις' and one of the few examples we have from Classical Greek literature.[18]

Curses and Formulae

The curses that we find on Athenian curse tablets display a wide variety of forms and formulae. The simplest example is solely the name of the intended target or a list of names when it concerns multiple targets, often arranged in columns. However, the curses that include full sentences are a little more diverse. From the classical period onwards, the simple curses that only list names begin to decrease until they totally disappear in the first century AD, while the more complex examples start to become more popular.[19]

When it comes to the formulae used in the curses Faraone discerns four different variants. The first is the 'direct binding formula', which uses a first-person singular verb that directly acts upon a target or a specific body part of that target. So this usually takes the form of 'I bind *target*' or 'I bind the *body part* of *target*'. Sometimes multiple body parts and/or targets are listed. Formula two, the 'prayer formula', concerns gods or spirits of the dead that are invoked to bind the target. This is done in second-person imperative. For example, by writing 'restrain *target*'. The third formula, which is called the 'wish formula', uses a third person optative, saying 'may *target* be unsuccessful', for example. The fourth and last formula, named the 'similia similibus formula', concerns a persuasive analogy, which often takes the form of comparing the material of the tablet to the intended state of the target. For example, 'as this tablet is cold and useless, so may *target* become cold and useless'.[20] Faraone then goes on to differentiate three styles of binding spells, which roughly follow the discerning formulae but combine number three and four into one category. So he now specifies the three styles as: the 'direct binding formula', where the creator of the curse aims to affect their target in a direct way; the 'prayer formula', in which a prayer is made to chthonic beings to have them enact the curse; and the 'similia similibus formula', by wishing that the target will resemble either the material of the tablet or the place/circumstance in which it is buried.[21] It is important to note, however, that all these formulae were used side by side, even oftentimes on the same tablets. So combinations were possible.

Another point that is not to be forgotten is that oftentimes the letters of the texts on the tablets are scrambled or written in reverse. Sometimes this happens only to words or names, other times to full sentences. It has often been noted that this may have a symbolic meaning, connecting the tablets' contents to what one wishes their target to be.[22] For instance, the scrambling of the letters of a name would be a way of enacting how one wants one's target, their thoughts, mind, and their actions to be scrambled and muddled. This is reminiscent of the parallels drawn between tablet and target when the 'similia similibus formula' is employed.

Oral Cursing

What becomes clear from multiple sources is that there was an existing oral cursing practice in Athens predating the emergence of written curses on curse tablets. These also took the form of binding spells. One instance where we can observe this is through the binding hymn sung to

[18] Plat. Rep. 364c.
[19] Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 5.
[20] Ibidem.
[21] Idem, 10.
[22] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 47.

bind Orestes in Aeschylus's tragedy *Eumenides*, which was written in the fifth century BC.[23] In the hymn, the Furies (also called Eumenides or Erinyes) repeat their will to bind the mind of Orestes in order to undermine his defence in the upcoming murder trial in which the Furies are litigants on the opposing side. Not only is the context of this binding very similar to the way curses are employed a century later, namely to bind the wits of an opponent in a legal procedure, but Faraone also highlights some similarities in the use of language and manner of calling upon gods.[24] The involvement of the Furies, as chthonic beings of vengeance, also shows the connection between curses or binding spells and their close associations with the Underworld. This connection will be discussed further in section 2.

Another parallel can be found in the binding of Prometheus in the play *Prometheus Bound*, which has also been attributed to Aeschylus and has a fifth century BC dating.[25] When the titan Prometheus is physically bound to a rock as a punishment from Zeus, Hephaestus is ordered to bind him, as the god of craftsmanship. He does so with shackles, but afterwards is told to 'drive the remorseless bite of the adamantine wedge with all your power right through his chest.'[26] This physical but also ritual nailing of Prometheus strongly resembles the act of nailing a curse tablet. It has been suggested that a Greek audience would interpret the binding of Prometheus as a binding spell and therefore a ritual cursing alongside the physical binding and punishment performed in this play.[27]

Another aspect that is reminiscent of cursing practice is the repetition of certain parts of the text. This is a common occurrence on curse tablets, were the words 'I bind' and the names of targets are frequently repeated. In *Prometheus Bound* this repetition is noticeable in the constant orders of Kratos, Zeus' representative in this case and the mythological representation of strength. He keeps ordering Hephaestus to bind and shackle Prometheus in multiple ways and Hephaestus keeps reluctantly confirming that he is doing what he is being ordered.[28] This repetition could be to enhance and bolster the strength of the spell and be certain of its targets. At least it becomes clear that certain parallels exist between binding practices in ancient Greek drama and those on curse tablets. Which leads us to believe that an oral cursing practice consisting of binding spells was present in fifth century BC Athens, before the proven existence of the written curse practice.

Curse Effigies

Sometimes curse tablets can be found in combination with a figurine, which resemble what is known as a voodoo doll. They are sometimes referred to by the German term 'Rachepuppe' or the Greek term 'κολοσσός', but in English they are called effigies.[29] These effigies often have their hands bound behind their back with metal shackles and can also be nailed through like a tablet. They can hold an inscription upon their surface as well, usually the name of the cursed. It

[23] Aesch. Eum. 306, 328-333; see also commentaries by A. J. Podlecki and R. Mitchell-Boyask; for a detailed discussion of the hymn, see C. A. Faraone, 'Aeschylus' ὕμνος δέσμιος (*Eum*. 306) and Attic Judicial Curse Tablets,' *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 105:1 (1985) 150-154; Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 185, 320, n. 141.

[24] Faraone, 'Aeschylus' ὕμνος δέσμιος', 152-153.

[25] Aesch. PB, 64-65, 113; cf. commentary by A. J. Podlecki; J. M. Marston, 'Language of Ritual Cursing in the Binding of Prometheus,' *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 47:2 (2007) 121-133, q.v. 125-129. See also Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 186, 320, n. 142-143.

[26] Aesch. PB, 64-65, transl. Loeb Classical Library.

[27] Marston, 'Language of Ritual Cursing,' 125-126.

[28] Aesch. PB, 52-81. See also idem, 124-125; cf. commentary by A. J. Podlecki.

[29] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 8.

appears the figurines are supposed to act as a substitute for or representation of the cursed subject.

Figure 2 Curse effigy in a lead case, the lid is inscribed with a curse, 420-410 BC, Kerameikos Museum, IB 12. Found in Enclosure of Aristion, Kerameikos, Athens. Photo by author.

Curse effigies have been found both with and without the addition of an accompanying curse tablet and seem to employ the same function as curse tablets, only in a more visual manner. Some examples have been found that were deposited in a leaden box that resembles a coffin, within which the curse is inscribed. However, similarly to how curse effigies could carry texts, curse tablets could carry imagery as well. This has not been found to be the case in Classical Athens but appears in earlier Sicilian examples. Additionally, curse effigies do not predate the use of curse tablets in Athens but occur in combination with tablets in around 400 BC around the time of emergence of the earliest Attic tablets.[30]

While many of the found curse effigies were made out of lead, there is evidence for multiple different materials as well, including wood and clay, but most noticeably wax.[31] Indeed, in a passage about sorcery, incantations and spells, Plato mentions images of moulded wax found at doorways, crossroads, or tombs.[32] He hints here at the fact that people apparently did fear these wax figurines or at least were made uneasy by them. If what he is referring to here are indeed curse effigies, this fear would certainly make sense. The fact that he mentions tombs as a site of deposition also matches this theory. Interestingly, doorways and crossroads are also mentioned here as places where effigies could be found. The significance of these places will be made clear in chapter 4.

[30] Idem, 8-13.
[31] Idem, 8-9; see also J. Stroszeck, 'Unterweltsvorstellungen und die Fundorte von Fluchtafeln im Kerameikos' in: H. Fielinghaus, J. Stroszeck and P. Valavanis eds., *Griechische Nekropolen: Neue Forschungen und Funden* (Mohnesee 2019) 337-376, q.v. 370, fig. 104.2, IB 53; Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 142.
[32] Plat. Laws 933b.

While this study takes into account the existence of curse effigies, its main focus remains curse tablets. This is not only because there are many more curse tablets found and published than curse effigies, allowing for a more expansive study and easier accessibility of the material, but also because curse tablets and the curses they contain are able to shed more light on Classical Athenian society than the textually limited effigies probably could.

Material

When it comes to the material used for curse tablets, the most common material is lead. The use of lead for curse writing might have originated from the accessibility of the material due to its cheapness. Additionally, lead was already a common writing material at the time, and the manner in which curse tablets are rolled or folded resembles the way this was done for letters. In some cases, a name is even inscribed on the outside of the curse tablet as if they are the recipient of a letter. This name is often a god or spirit of the dead that would be able to enact the curse. Additionally, in some examples the curse itself is even written as a letter would be by beginning with 'I sent this letter to …'.[33] Lastly, it has been posed that while lead might have started to be used for its cheapness and commonality, it might have taken on a symbolic meaning over time, specifically, when one looks at the 'similia similibus formula' posed by Faraone mentioned earlier in this chapter. In this formula, the material of the tablet is often compared to the state that the maker of the curse wishes upon the target, referring for example to the coldness, uselessness, or lifelessness of the lead and wishing the same quality upon the target.[34]

While the majority has been made from lead, they have been known to be made out of other materials as well. Some curses have been found inscribed on pottery, like those in the saucer-pyre deposits found in the Agora in Athens. An example of which is a *chytra* found in Room 6 of the Classical Commercial Building. This ceramic vessel was inscribed with the names of the intended cursed. It once held over 55 names, while unfortunately only about 30 are now visible. Inside the vessel the head and legbones of a chicken were found. The pot was also pierced with a nail.[35]

[33] Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 4.
[34] Idem, 7.
[35] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 173-177.

Figure 3 Small chytra *with an inscribed curse, including the chicken bones, nail, and coin found alongside, c. 300 BC, Athenian Agora Inv. P35446. Found in Room 6, Classical Commercial Building, Agora, Athens. Picture from Lamont,* In Blood and Ashes*, 175.*[36]

While we have no concrete evidence for it, it has long been suspected that tablets were made from wax and other organic materials as well. However, these materials have since then wasted away.[37] There are references on curse tablets to binding 'in lead and wax'.[38] Additionally, materials resembling wax have been found in relation to some curse tablets and wax has been mentioned as a material for curse effigies in multiple accounts.[39] Even wood might have been a material used for cursing, as there has been evidence found of a wooden effigy.[40]

Origins of Curse Tablets

In her book *In Blood and Ashes*, Jessica Lamont suggests that the cursing practice most likely made its way to Athens during the late fifth century BC from Sicily. While she also hints at a few other areas that might have influenced Athens and its cursing habits, she sees Sicily as the main place of origin.[41] Lamont points out that while oral cursing practices might have been present in Athens during the mid-fifth century, there is no evidence for physical curse tablets until 415-400 BC.[42] Additionally, her reasoning on their dissemination from Sicily to Athens is sound. She speaks of a period of increased relations between Athens and Sicily. This includes Athenian involvement in Sicily's affairs in the 430s and 420s BC as accounted by Thucydides

[36] For a more detailed discussion, see idem, 173-177; J. L. Lamont, 'The Curious Case of the Cursed Chicken: A New Binding Ritual from the Athenian Agora,' *Hesperia* 90:1 (2021) 79-113.
[37] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 318, n. 118; see also Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 7.
[38] Lamont, *In Blood and* Ashes, 318, n. 113; Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, 10, tablet number 55; see also Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 7.
[39] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 269, n. 25-26, 270, n. 35; see also Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 7. For more information, see C. A. Faraone, 'Molten Wax, Spilt Wine and Mutilated Animals: Sympathetic Magic in Early Greek and Near Eastern Oath Ceremonies,' *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113:1 (1993) 60-80, q.v. 64; D. R. Jordan, 'Notes from Carthage,' *Zeitschrift fur Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 111:1 (1996) 115-123, q.v. 122; D. R. Jordan, 'Defixiones from a Well near the Southwest Corner of the Athenian Agora,' *Hesperia* 54:3 (1985) 205-255; A. J. Graham, 'The Authenticity of the Opkion ΤΩΝ ΟΙΚΙΣΤΗΡΩΝ of Cyrene,' *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 80:1 (1960) 94-111.
[40] Stroszeck, 'Unterweltsvorstellungen,' 370, fig. 104.2, IB 53.
[41] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 142.
[42] Idem, 152.

and Diodorus.[43] Adding to this the dissemination of products as well as skills between Athens and the Sicilian cities during these years, Lamont sees this period as one wherein 'the historical circumstances were ripe' for the transference of curse writing practices.[44]

While Athenian curse practice seems to have mainly originated from Sicily and therefore greatly resembles Sicilian examples, Athenian curse practices also developed and grew on their own to create a typical Athenian manner of cursing. The similarities that Lamont mentions in her book between Sicilian and Athenian tablets are many. She speaks of a similar use of language, as the practice of scrambling or reversing words or sentences occurs in both cases. Some of the Sicilian and early Athenian tablets are shaped as thin long bands of lead that are said to resemble shackles. The ritual nailing and burying of the tablets are present in both practices. Lastly, the context of use is similar as in both cases they are prominently used in legal proceedings.[45]

The differences, however, are not to be forgotten. In Athenian curses, it became common practice to invoke or call upon chthonic gods to enact the curse on its intended victim.[46] See chapter 3 for more on the chthonic gods. Additionally, the use of the verb καταδέω or simply δέω, which means 'to bind', seems to mainly be an Athenian practice. None of the Sicilian examples that are currently known make use of these words. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that they were never used on Sicilian curse tablets. We simply have no evidence of the contrary.[47] Athenian curse tablets also show a new manner of relating the curse to the tablets' material. They speak of the coldness, inertness, or uselessness of the lead and then relate this to how the intended cursed should be rendered.[48] Additionally, more violent erotic terms are used in love curses; examples appear of framing the target as morally 'bad'; formulae start to be used; formatting often mimics civic decrees or other writing genres like letters.[49] All these aspects of Athenian curse writing have not been found in Sicilian examples.

As the fourth century BC progressed, Athenian curse practices reached new heights. Curse tablets became more diverse and expansive. They appeared in new forms and contexts as well as a wider geographical range, as they spread beyond the urban centre. More varying materials were used, and they show a wider range of deposition spots. Deposition will be discussed in chapter 2. Lamont poses multiple plausible causes for this boom in curse writing. First of all, she speaks of an interesting parallel between the growing practice of Athenian curse writing and the development of Athenian speechwriting during the late-fifth and fourth centuries BC.[50] Both logographers and curse-writers were profiting from the many legal trials that occurred in this tumultuous period.

Additionally, the development of Athenian curse writing is also said to mimic the epigraphic habit. Not only was there a boom in public inscriptions in stone during the late fifth and fourth century BC, including civic decrees, laws, inventories, receipts, and the documentation of legal trials, but commercial and private inscriptions also became more

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[43] Thuc. 3.103; Diod. 12.9–11.
[44] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 141.
[45] Idem, 144.
[46] Idem, 140; on the commonality of the gods referred to on curse tablets, see Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 6.
[47] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 184.
[48] Idem, 181; on the analogy between the material and the target, see the 'similia similibus' formula in Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 5-7.
[49] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 182-184; on the mimicking of letters, see Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 4; on use of formulae, see Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 5.
[50] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 179.

common.[51] In the case of amphorae meant for transport, their contents, recipients, and vendors were inscribed on their exterior.[52] Writing and specifically inscribing simply became more common. This trend was connected to another prominent reason for the expansion of Athenian curse writing, namely the spread of literacy which was facilitated by the wider use of the Ionic alphabet. This alphabet made reading and writing easier to master and it clearly influenced curse writing practices, as the great majority of Athenian curse tablets are written in the Ionic script.[53]

Another aspect that is important in this discussion is the abundance of lead that Athens had available in this period, which made it possible for such a vast amount of leaden curse tablets to be constructed. Athens' bountiful silver-mining operation in Laurion provided a steady supply, as lead is a common byproduct of silver-mining. It also appears that many Attic curse tablets and even more remotely found ones were made from Laurion lead.[54] Thus, the Athenian silver mine certainly enabled the boom in curse writing on lead during the fourth century BC.

Curse Variants

The curses that we find on Classical Athenian curse tablets can be divided into multiple categories. They are often used in similar scenarios, mostly in situations that concern a serious rivalry between curser and cursed. The thematic categories dealt with below are legal, love, business, and theatre and sports. Of course, these categories exclude the tablets that only list names or otherwise do not give away the social context in which they were employed. They also exclude tablets that were used in a circumstance that cannot be categorized with others, simply because they are an exception to the more common reasons for cursing.

Legal

One of the most common reasons for creating curses in Classical Athens was during judicial proceedings like legal trials. While it was previously believed that curses in legal situations would happen after the trials were finished as a form of revenge upon one's opponent, it has since been made clear that these curses were used as pre-emptive measures to disadvantage the opponent during the trial.[55] These legal curses acted similarly to the situation in the previously discussed Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, where the Furies cursed and bound Orestes' mind in order to undermine his defence in the upcoming murder trial.[56] Legal curse tablets oftentimes have the mind and tongue of the opponent, whether defendant or prosecutor, bound so that the opponent would not be able to think clearly or talk properly when pleading or defending their case. The following tablet is a prime example of this:

> Column 1:
> 'I bind down Athenodoros before Hermes Eriounios and before Persephone and before Lethe, both his mind and tongue and soul and the deeds which he is plotting against us, and the *dikē blabēs* of Athenodoros which he brings to court against us.'

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[51] Ibidem.
[52] M. L. Lawall, 'Graffiti, Wine Selling, and the Reuse of Amphoras in the Athenian Agora, CA. 430 to 400 B.C.,' *Hesperia* 69:1 (2000) 3.
[53] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 179-180.
[54] Idem, 180; Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 7.
[55] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 117.
[56] Aesch. Eum. 306, 328-333; see also commentaries by A. J. Podlecki and R. Mitchell-Boyask.

Column 2:
‘I bind down Smindyrides before Hermes Eriounios and before Persephone and before Lethe, both his mind and tongue and his soul and the deeds that he is plotting against us, and the *dikē blabēs* which Smindyrides brings against us.’

Column 3:
‘I bind down Eirene before Hermes Eriounios and before Persephone and before Lethe, both her mind and soul and tongue and deeds, the ones that, concerning the lawsuit, she says with respect to us: I bind down everything of hers! And I bind down all of their witnesses, and the polemarch and the court of the polemarch before Hermes Eriounios and before Persephone and before Lethe, and I bind down all the supporters with them and all… .’[57]

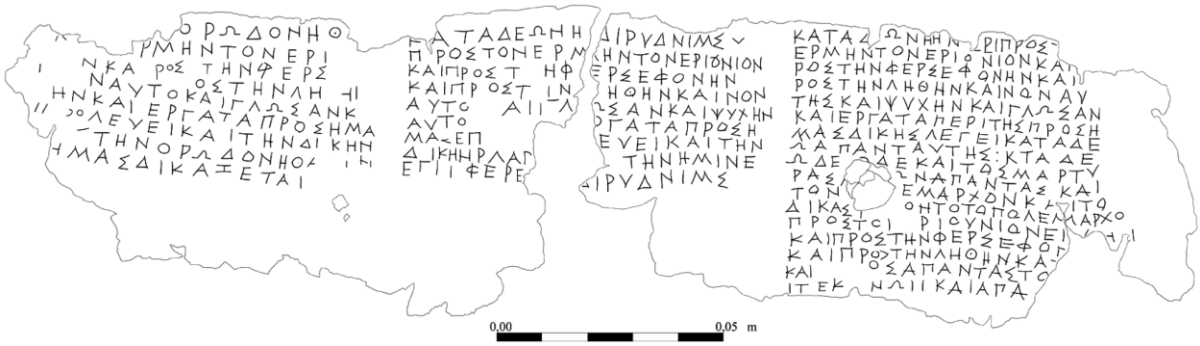

Figure 4 Curse tablet, early fourth century BC, Kerameikos Archaeological Museum, Inv. IB 24– 42. Found in Kerameikos, precinct south of the Sacred Way, Grave SA 40. Drawing by J. Curbera.[58]

As seen above, in all columns of the tablet the words ‘I bind’ (κατάδεω) are present and the subjects of binding include the mind, tongue, soul, and deeds of the targets. Additionally, the tablet has multiple targets. Specifically in legal cases aside from the initial target, the witnesses and supporters of the target are also mentioned in the binding spell. In this case, even the polemarch and his court are included.

What makes this tablet even more interesting is the name of the target, Smindyrides. As explained by multiple scholars, this is an uncommon name that matches the name of a person said to have been accused of profaning the Mysteries and damaging herms in 415 BC. While Andocides says that Smindyrides fled the city soon after his name was fed to the Council, this tablet and another found in Kerameikos which also carries his name, hint at the possibility of his return to Athens at a later stage and his initiation of a lawsuit for damages (the *dikē blabēs* referred to in Lamont’s translation).[59] This is one of many ways in which curse tablets can tell us more about ancient Greek society and its history.

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[57] Translation from Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 157-158, tablet number 4.6, also see figure 4.7.
[58] J. Curbera and Z. Papakonstantinou, ‘Six Legal Curse Tablets from Athens’ in: W. Riess ed., *Colloquia attica: Neuere Forschungen zur Archaik, zur athenischen Recht und zur Magie* (Stuttgart 2018) 211-224; see also Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 157-158.
[59] Andoc. 1.15-1.16; F. Costabile, ‘La triplice defixio del Kerameikos di Atene, il processo polemarchico ed un logografo attico del IV sec. A.C.,’ *Minima Epigraphica et Papyrologica* 1:1 (1998) 9-54, q. v. 36-37; D. R. Jordan, ‘New Archaeological Evidence for the Practice of Magic in Classical Athens,’ *Πρακτικὰ τοῦ XII διεθνοῦς Συνεδρίου Κλασικῆς Ἀρχαιολογίας* (1988) 273-277, q.v. 276-277; see also Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 158.

Love

When it comes to love spells, it must be made clear that 'love' can mean a manner of different things. Curses range from romantic to sexual variants of love and their aims vary a great amount. There are plenty of examples where binding spells are used to restrain targets from pursuing someone, dubbed separation spells, however attraction spells are also present, which can include binding someone's attraction to oneself. In short, there is a great variety of differing situations and reasons for creating a love spell. Indeed, there is evidence for pursuits in love for all combinations of genders. While it is often not clear what the gender of the person creating the curse is, in some tablets this has been visible. Gager shows examples of each of these categories: men in pursuit of women (apparently the majority at his time of writing), women in pursuit of men, women in pursuit of women, men in pursuit of men.[60]

In the following tablet we see an example of someone binding Theodora, specifically willing her to be unmarried and restrain her from talking to both Kallias and Charias. The theme of forgetting is present here as well. Gager poses that memory is 'the locus of social ties' and therefore love tablets often wish for their targets to forget all others or the specific subjects of their love.[61] This tablet also targets Charias and binds him to forget Theodora as well as sexual intercourse with her. On side B of the tablet, we can see this wish repeated. Additionally, this side shows an analogy between the corpse that this tablet was buried with and Theodora's words and deeds, wishing the corpse's useless quality upon the words and deeds of the target. However, it is remarkable that both Charias and Theodora seem to be targets of the love curse, both being bound to stay away from the other.

> Side A:
> 'I bind Theodora in the presence of the one (female) at Persephone's
> side and in the presence of those who are unmarried. May she be unmarried
> and whenever she is about to chat with Kallias and with Charias—
> whenever she is about to discuss deeds and words and business . . . words,
> whatever he indeed says. I bind Theodora to remain unmarried to Charias
> and (I bind) Charias to forget Theodora, and (I bind) Charias to forget . . .
> Theodora and sex with Theodora.'
>
> Side B:
> '[And just as] this corpse lies useless, [so] may all the words and
> deeds of Theodora be useless with regard to Charias and to the other people.
> I bind Theodora before Hermes of the Underworld and before the unmarried
> and before Tethys. (I bind) everything, both (her) words and deeds toward
> Charias and toward other people, and (her) sex with Charias. And may
> Charias forget sex. May Charias forget the girl, Theodora, the very one
> whom he loves.'[62]

Business

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[60] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 79-80; Gager further refers to J. J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York 1990) 71-98.
[61] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 79.
[62] Translation by idem, 90, tablet number 22. Gager gives additional references: Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae*, 95, tablet number 68; J. C. B. Petropoulos, 'The Erotic Magical Papyri,' in: B. G. Mandilaras ed., *Proceedings of the XVIII International Congress of Papyrology, vol. 2* (Athens 1988) 219-220.

The category of business mostly includes curses in commercial settings, in which the curse creator curses rivalling taverns, shops, or workshops. In most cases, the target is a specific person who owns a business, after which their business, their work, and/or their possessions are bound. Sometimes employees and even slaves are also cursed alongside the owner. Additionally, in some occasions it is unclear whether the target is the owner of a business or simply an employee. There are also examples of tablets where it is unclear if the reason for cursing was because of a business rivalry, but the occupation of the target is named. However, it is entirely possible in these cases that the profession of the target is named solely to help identify the target for the gods or spirits that would enact the curse.[63]

Side A:
'I bind Kallias, the shop/tavern keeper who is one of my neighbours
and his wife, Thraitta; and the shop/tavern of the bald man and the shop/
tavern of Anthemion near (?) and Philon the shop/tavern keeper. Of all of
these I bind the soul, the work, the hands, and the feet; and their shops/
taverns. I bind Sosimenes, his (?) brother; and Karpos his servant, who is the
fabric seller and also Glukanthis, who is called Malthake, and also Agathon
the shop/tavern keeper the servant of Sosimenes: of all-of these I bind the
soul, the work, the life, the hands, and the feet.
I bind Kittos my neighbour, the maker of wooden
frames—Kittos's skill and work and soul and mind
and the tongue of Kittos.
I bind Mania (feminine) the shop/tavern keeper who is (located)
near the spring and the tavern of Aristandros of
Eleusis
and their work and mind.
The soul, hands, tongue, feet, and mind: all of these I
bind to Hermes the Restrainer in the unsealed
graves'

Side B:
'the servants of Aristandros.'[64]

In the above tablet, multiple owners of taverns or shops are bound, specifically their soul, work, life, hands, and feet, and their respective businesses. Hands are logically more common targets when it comes to this theme, as these are often necessary to complete work. In some parts, the mind and tongue are also bound. Additionally, it is apparent that the wife of one of the targets is also mentioned, as well as multiple servants. It seems the one who wrote this curse wanted to deal with a lot of their competition in one fell swoop. The remarkable tavern/shop of the bald man can be better interpreted as referring to the name of the business, something akin to Baldy's Tavern, according to Gager. We call also see that Hermes the Restrainer is the god called upon to enact the curse.

[63] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 152.
[64] Translation by idem, 156-157, tablet number 62; further references given by Gager: Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, 20, tablet number 87; F. Bomer, *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven in Griechenland und Rom* (Wiesbaden 1963) 984-985.

Additionally, Gager notes that through curse tablets we can see that men as well as women were proprietors of businesses. Women are especially common as tavernkeepers. This again hints at the many different aspects of society that are brought to light through these objects.[65] Both Gager and Faraone discuss the possibility that in some trades it was more common to curse rivals, specifically workshops were there was high possibility for mistake or failure, like in trades of pottery and bronze working.[66]

Theatre and Sports

The last main theme we can discern is that of competitions. While this theme is more common in later Roman examples (defixiones), specifically in athletic competitions and horse racing, some examples also exist from Classical Athens.[67] The Classical examples mainly concern competitions in the sphere of theatre. Only later, in the third century AD, do we find examples of Athenian tablets against specific wrestlers in a competition and one that seems to indicate a footrace.[68]

> 'All the choral directors and assistant choral directors with Theagenes, both the directors and the assistant choral directors.'[69]

This short curse simply targets Theagenes and all the choral directors (διδάσκαλοι) and assistant choral directors (ὑποδιδάσκαλοι) that are associated with him. It is unclear whether Theagenes was also a choral director or whether he was, as Faraone suggests, a χορηγός, the one responsible for the expenses of training and maintaining the chorus, a sponsor of sorts.[70] Public contests between choruses, including their leaders or directors, were apparently a common occurrence in Athens.[71] It would certainly make sense if this curse was written in such a context.

The following curse tablet holds the aforementioned issues that while the profession of the target is mentioned, we have no way of telling whether the reason for creating the curse had anything to do with his occupation. While Euandros is dubbed 'the actor' multiple times, this does not mean that this curse had anything to do with his work in the theatre. It might simply have been a manner of identification. Additionally, since his son Asteas is mentioned as a secondary target, it is less likely that the objective of the curse has to do with Euandros' work, unless, of course, Asteas was involved in the theatre as well. However, this all remains speculation.

> Side A:
> 'I bind Euandros with a leaden bond and . . . Euandros the actor'
>
> Side B:

[65] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 153.
[66] Ibidem; Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 11.
[67] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 44.
[68] Ibidem; Jordan, 'Defixiones from a Well,' 214, 221-222.
[69] Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 12; translation by Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 49, tablet number 1; Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, 5, tablet number 33-34.
[70] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 49, note 4; Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 12.
[71] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 49. Gager further refers to E. Reisch, 'Chorikoi agones,' *Paulys Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft* 3 (1899) cols. 2431-2438.

‘and all the . . . of Euandros . . . Asteas, son of Euandros the actor.’[72]

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has shown what Classical Athenian curse tablets are. It has discussed what they look like, their material, what formulae are used in their binding spells, and their origins from Sicily. Additionally, closely related practices like oral cursing and the use of curse effigies have been discussed. Lastly, this chapter has provided examples from the different situational and thematic categories that can be distinguished. The information presented in this chapter will form the background that the rest of the sections of this thesis will build upon.

[72] Faraone, ‘Agonistic Context,’ 12; translation by Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 50, tablet number 2; Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, 8, tablet number 45.

Section 2: The Underworld

While some topics in this section have been studied in regards to curse tablets, like the places of deposition and the spirits of the dead, a perspective that focuses on the importance of the Underworld for the fulfilment of curse tablets is lacking in the field. That is why this section investigates curse tablets with a close focus on their connection to the Underworld. This connection is visible not only in the deposition spots of the tablets, but also in the importance of spirits of the dead and gods of the Underworld to the enactment of the tablets' curses. Through this, the section answers the questions: What is the connection between the Underworld and Classical Athenian curse tablets? And what can this connection tell us about the position of curse tablets within Classical Athenian religion as a whole?

Chapter 2: Places of Deposition

This chapter focusses on the places of deposition of curse tablets. While there has been research done on these deposition spots, not all scholars are in agreement over each type of deposition spot and their reasons for being a common place of deposition for curse tablets. This chapter will explain some of the varying stances on the debate and provide its own arguments in light of their relationship to the Underworld. Therefore, this chapter will answer the questions: What are the common places of deposition of Classical Athenian curse tablets and why might this be the case? And what can the common places of deposition tell us about the connection between Classical Athenian curse tablets and the Underworld?

Graves and Tombs

The initial places of deposition of Athenian curse tablets were mainly graves and tombs. This is why many of the Athenian curse tablets we currently have were found in prominent Athenian cemeteries like the necropolis of Kerameikos and the cemetery of Kynosarges. The reason why curse tablets were deposited in these places is closely related to how people thought they worked. The idea is that the spirits of the dead, referred to as *daimones* in Greek, would bring the curses to the Underworld to be brought to completion there by the chthonic gods. Specifically restless spirits were chosen for this undertaking. Be aware that these spirits are not what we would refer to as demons. *Daimones* are simply the souls or ghosts of people who have passed away. For more on the specific spirits and the reason for choosing their graves as burial spots, see chapter 3.

Stroszeck writes about the deposition practices concerning curse tablets found in Kerameikos. She describes the archaeological context of the finds and explains that there are a few distinct areas in Kerameikos where a concentration of curse tablets was found and how these are specifically related to the people buried in that area, but more on that will be discussed later in the next chapter. What is additionally interesting is her reference to the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, a collection of magical papyri found in Egypt, which are dated between the second century BC and the fifth century AD. These papyri contain instructions on where and how to deposit curse tablets ritually, stating the proper time of day, what to say, what materials are necessary, and what magical actions are to be performed. For example, speaking a formula, taking a black thread, knotting it 365 times, and binding it around the tablet.[73]

As these sources are certainly from a later period and a different place than the focus of this study, I do not think we can assume these instructions match the ones that were common in Classical Athens. However, some similarities could be present. As Gager has stated, not only the gods and spirits invoked on curse tablets but also the way of cursing including the place of deposition reflect the place and time of their use. They are changed and adapted to the culture in which they are employed.[74] So while these papyri refer to specific places of deposition, including wells, the earth, the sea, a waterpipe, or a coffin,[75] not all of these match the places of deposition in Classical Athens, but they are similar. What is interesting about these papyri, moreover, is that they clearly show the ritualized nature of the deposition of curse tablets, which is also apparent in the rolling or folding and nailing of Classical Athenian examples.

Another important aspect of the deposition in graves and tombs is the question of how they got there, specifically, if we look at the example of two curse tablets found in the hands of two buried corpses in Kerameikos. Two adult skeletons dating to the mid-fifth century BC had

[73] Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 23.
[74] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 13.
[75] Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 23.

curse tablets at their fingertips, one in the right hand and the other in the left. Both tablets seem to have been deposited before the tomb was covered with earth and it appears that both deceased received a proper burial.[76] So how and when were these tablets put into the hands of these corpses?

Firstly, there is an issue with their dating and Lamont provides an interesting perspective by stating that the burials were dated to the fifth century BC due to a *lekythos* found inside one of the graves which matches that dating. However, she clearly explains that the tablet itself follows clear Attic writing features from a century later. It has been argued that the *lekythos* could have been used for decades before it was interred as a grave good, making it an improper object for dating the graves. However, the text of the tablets suggests a dating around the mid-fourth century BC, which matches the dating of other graves in the same district.[77] The fact that one of the graves was also topped with a tombstone, a practice that was not common in Athenian necropoleis before 430 BC, only supports this dating.[78]

However, this does not get us closer to how these tablets were deposited and unfortunately it seems we can only speculate. Either the family allowed the deposition of the tablets, which is unlikely due to the negative notions attached to them, or somehow someone was able to place them there before the grave was covered without anyone noticing. Maybe professional magicians had their connections in Kerameikos in order to do their job properly. Stroszeck mentions that most patterns seen in the deposition of curse tablets in Kerameikos do follow the idea that Athenians did not approve of curse tablets being left with their relatives, as she states they were only found in special tombs and precincts and mostly absent in family tombs and areas where children were buried. She offers the explanation that perhaps these places had more supervision.[79] The negative notions discussed here are explored more in chapter 6.

Lastly, Stroszeck makes another interesting point that cannot be forgotten. There is a clear shift, as mentioned in chapter 1, where during the fourth century BC new places of deposition became more prominent for curse tablets, besides the usual burial in tombs and graves. Stroszeck adds to this by saying that the deposition of curse tablets in graves in Kerameikos decreased rapidly and ended around 317-307 BC. She poses that this was the case because of a funerary law instated in Athens by Demetrios of Phaleron, which restricted the amount of luxury used in tombs and funerary monuments. Additionally, a new administrative task force was created to make sure the law was followed. This could have led to more supervision concerning burial practices in Kerameikos and may well have made it very difficult for magic practitioners to deposit their curse tablets in graves and tombs.[80]

Wells

Perhaps developed as an alternative to the deposition in graves, but likely not solely due to the law of Demetrios of Phaleron, wells became a spot for the deposition of curse tablets as the cursing practice flourished during the fourth century BC. While Stroszeck proposes that the

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[76] Idem, 27.
[77] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 151-152.
[78] Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 27.
[79] Idem, 44.
[80] Idem, 42-43, referring to: Cic. Leg. 2.65-66; J. Engels, *Funerum sepulcrorumque magnficentia: Begräbnis- und Grabluxusgesetze in der griechisch-römischen Welt mit einigen Ausblicken auf Einschränkungen des funeralen und sepulkralen Luxus im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit*, Hermes Supplement 78 (Stuttgart 1998) 121-154; F. Eckstein, 'Die attischen Grabmälergesetze,' *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 73 (1958) 18-29, q.v. 27; and Plat. Laws 11.933d-e.

possibility of placing small, easily concealed curses in wells must have been a welcome alternative for people trying to hide their practices from the public and continue the practice of cursing after graves and tombs became less accessible, I cannot say I entirely agree.[81] While it is certainly possible that this was a welcome alternative at the time, it does not seem likely that this is the sole reason for the development of wells as a deposition spot, as it seems wells were already used as a deposition spot before the issuing of this law.[82]

Lamont poses that Athenian curse tablets emerged in bodies of waters as early as circa 350-300 BC. She specifically mentions three wells in the region between Kerameikos and the Agora.[83] However, she poses another issue, that is whether or not these depositions were intentional or not. She explains that there is a possibility that these depositions were simply part of the dumping of a variety of materials. She gives the Crossroads Well located in the northwest corner of the Athenian Agora as an example. Both the Crossroads Well and the Crossroads Enclosure close to it still await their full publication. They consist of a well and a small enclosure wall built in a square pattern, but their precise function remains unclear. Lamont does share some findings from their excavation in 1971-1972. There was a suggestion that perhaps both structures were sacred to a female deity, due to objects found that hint at a feminine recipient.[84] However, this might have well been a water nymph, a Naiad, as correlations between a water nymph of a well and the curse tablets found within them have been found before.[85] Simply because the deposits hint at a female recipient this does not mean she has to be a deity. Additionally, Lamont only mentions in a footnote that there have been scholars that found the structures to have a chthonic aspect, one associated with the Underworld. White ground *lekythoi* with funerary imagery have been found there, and these are quite unusual to find outside of funerary or mortuary contexts.[86] This chthonic context makes it an ideal spot for depositing curse tablets, as they had to be fulfilled in the Underworld. Lamont's suggestion certainly becomes questionable, if we add Stroszeck's observation of a depiction of Hermes Eriounios, who usually accompanies the souls of the deceased into the Underworld, on a white ground *lekythos* created by the Tymbos painter around 460 BC. This image shows the god directing the souls of the dead down into a Classical wellhead, insinuating that a well could be entrance or exit to the Underworld.[87]

Another one of Lamont's arguments concerns deposits made around the mid-fourth century BC and again in the mid-third century of documentary materials, many inscribed on lead, which possibly come from a nearly public office. Mixed in with these objects were 22 lead curse tablets, most of which date from the mid-fourth century BC. Lamont suggests that both the curse tablets and the other documents were dumped in the well together, as there is no reference to a divinity and no obvious relationship to the neighbouring precincts. She adds to that the fact that many of the curse tablets were reused. They held an older inscription and were

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[81] Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 43.
[82] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 166; Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 42.
[83] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 166.
[84] T. L. Shear Jr., 'The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1971,' *Hesperia* 42 (1973) 121-179, q.v. 128, 131; S. I. Rotroff and K. Lynch, 'The Crossroads Enclosure in the Athenian Agora: A Preliminary Report' in: J. Neils and O. Palagia eds., *From Kallias to Kritias: Art in Athens in the Second Half of the Fifth Century B.C. Proceedings from the Conference, at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, June 8, 2019* (Berlin 2022).
[85] Stroszeck, 'Unterweltsvorstellungen,' 355-356; J. Stroszeck, 'Athen, Griechenland: Kerameikos. Archaologischer Kontext von Fluchtafeln: Brunnen B 34,' *e-Forschungsberichte des DAI* 2 (2019) 97-102, q.v. 97-99; Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 169-170.
[86] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 316, n. 87; Rotroff and Lynch, 'Crossroads Enclosure'.
[87] Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 36-37.

reinscribed. However, just because a deity or a deposition place is not mentioned on the tablets does not mean they were dumped as refuse. There are plenty of tablets where these aspects are also missing. It is specifically unconvincing, since we have other evidence of wells being used as a deposition spot for cursing in Greece.[88] Additionally, Stroszeck gives a clear argument concerning how it seems to have been thought that communication with the Underworld was possible through the medium of water and with the help of the water nymphs who inhabited and protected the wells.[89]

When we take all of this information together and add that in later centuries wells and other underground bodies of water continued to be used as deposition spots for curse tablets,[90] it seems that we can conclude that the deposition of curse tablets in wells was deliberate and became common practice in Athens during the fourth century BC.

Saucer-pyre Deposits

Saucer-pyre deposits are ritual deposits in shallow pits found usually under the floor of or underground near a variety of buildings in and around the Athenian Agora. As their name suggests, they usually consist of miniature ceramic vessels, like saucers, and burnt materials (pyres) and have been found in clusters in the industrial, and residential districts, while smaller concentrations have been found in houses south of the square, in shop buildings to the east, and more sporadically in various other locations throughout the entire Agora. A small amount has also been found in other areas of the city like the city wall in Kerameikos and close to the Acropolis.[91] They appear below or near, and sometimes even in the walls of, buildings of the industrial, residential, and commercial varieties. The practice is believed to have started around the late fifth century BC but was at its height during the fourth and third centuries BC.[92] According to Lamont they started to be used for the deposition of curse tablets in the fourth century BC.[93]

Susan I. Rotroff in her monograph concerning the saucer-pyres of the Athenian Agora describes their chthonic and funerary nature. She mentions multiple types of vessels that occur only in graves and pyres, but rarely or never in other situations, including ribbon-handled plates, stone *alabastra*, handleless *lekanides*, *chytridia*, *lopadia*, and pyre saucers. Most importantly, she notes the *chytra*, and its strong association with chthonic and funerary rituals. She specifically mentions the Anthesteria, an Athenian festival in honour of Dionysus in which the spirits of the dead were believed to roam around, and the name of its third day: *Chytroi*. The rites preformed on that day concern boiling seeds in a *chytra* and sacrificing to Hermes Chthonios on behalf of the dead.[94] Rotroff also adds that literary evidence suggests that rituals in and around pits are exclusive to reaching dwellers of the Underworld, whether these be gods or spirits of the dead.[95] This chthonic nature of the saucer-pyre deposits makes them the perfect place for the deposition of curse tablets. We will see why in the next chapter. Of course, this is

[88] Idem, 35. For Lamont's argument see Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 166-167.
[89] Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 35.
[90] Jordan, 'Defixiones from a Well'.
[91] S. I. Rotroff, *Industrial Religion: The Saucer Pyres of the Athenian Agora*, Hesperia Supplement 47 (Princeton NJ 2013) 1-2, 6-7, 9.
[92] Idem, 46-53.
[93] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 170.
[94] Rotroff, *Industrial Religion*, 67.
[95] Ibidem; Rotroff gives the example of a sacrifice performed by Odysseus: Hom. Od. 10.517-542, 11.23-50.

also attested by the *chytra* used as a curse tablet and inscribed with a curse that was mentioned in chapter 1 (figure 3).

Rotroff's idea of the purpose of the saucer-pyre deposits is also something to consider. She poses that the saucer-pyre deposits might have been a purification ritual to protect against and turn away malevolent spirits, a way of protecting against things like curse tablets, and possibly a way to purge the industrial workspace after an accident or untimely death, because one expected something like a curse could have been involved.[96] However, why would one deposit a curse tablet in a place that contained the remains of a ritual meant to counter curses like that? Lamont, and seemingly also Rotroff, think that it is the connection with the dead and the Underworld that the pyres provided was exploited by curse practitioners.[97] This could very well be true. Maybe curses against rivals were deposited alongside the ritual of the saucer pyres in order to both protect themselves and disadvantage rivals at the same time. Nonetheless, I still find this a strange and seemingly counterintuitive occurrence: depositing ritual opposites together. While Rotroff's arguments are convincing, her reasoning concerning the curse tablets' deposition in combination with the saucer-pyres is not sufficiently explained. Lamont also fails to address this in her book.[98]

Sanctuaries

Sanctuaries are a less common findspot for curse tablets, specifically in Classical Attica. The only real sanctuary we can speak of where curse tablets have been found within the regional and time constraints of this study is the sanctuary of Palaimon-Pankrates. While this sanctuary and its findings have not been published yet and which god it housed is still under debate, one tablet dating to the fourth century BC was found there, which shows an interesting connection with its findspot.

> 'I bind down before Palaimon Aristophanes and Aristarchos and Kephisophon and Kephisodotos and Epikouros and Alexandros and Alexias, and I beg you, Palaimon, become an avenger of those whom I have inscribed to you, and to the judges let them seem to speak unjust things, and for the witnesses, may what they do be useless! And bind their hands, tongue, soul, and their works, for the unjust things that they both do and say. Acting unjustly, then, may Aristophanes incur your hatred!'[99]

Palaimon is directly addressed in this curse and asked, even begged, to enact it and bind down its targets. Not only is Palaimon asked to become an avenger (τιμωρός γένοιο) but it seems that the creator of the curse is trying to convince Palaimon of the unjustness of the targets and their words and deeds.[100] However, the connection between Palaimon, a child sea god that protects sailors, and a curse of a judicial character is unclear. An interesting aspect of this curse,

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[96] Rotroff, *Industrial Religion*, 84-85.
[97] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 170; Rotroff, *Industrial Religion*, 84.
[98] Rotroff, *Industrial Religion*, 80-85; Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 170-178.
[99] Translation by Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 164, tablet number 4.8. For more information, see D. R. Jordan, 'An Athenian Curse Tablet Invoking Palaimon' in: A. Matthaiou and I. Polinskaya eds., *Μικρός Ιερομνήνων: Μελέτες εις μνήμην Michael H. Jameson* (Athens 2008) 133-144.
[100] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 166.

however, is the language used, which according to Lamont is similar to a prayer.[101] Nonetheless, it still carries clear aspects of curses. For example, the formulae are visible: 'may what they do be useless!'; the binding of the hands, tongue, soul, and works are present; and the verb καταδέω appears as well. This combination of religious and cursing language hints at the possibility that magic and religion could go together in Classical Athens.

Curse tablets have been found in other sanctuaries of ancient Greece, however, like the erotic tablets found in the sanctuary of Nemea, which housed the Heroön of Opheltes. While the dating of the four tablets found there is uncertain and problematic, it has been suggested the tablets have been deposited there not to call upon Opheltes directly, but probably simply because of the unfulfilled life he led and the violent nature of his death, as he was killed by a snake as an infant.[102] As we will see in the next chapter of this section, these are qualities that are exceptionally ideal for the deposition of curse tablets.

Conclusion

Answering the first question set forth for this chapter, it has clearly outlined the differing common places where curse tablets have been found and were deposited in the past and why this was possibly the case. It discusses graves and tombs, wells, saucer-pyre deposits, and sanctuaries and details the debates concerning their usage as a deposition spot for curse tablets. As the reason for deposition of graves and tombs is closely related to the *daimones* they were buried with, this will be discussed in the next chapter.

The second question concerning what the common places of deposition can tell us about the connection between Classical Athenian curse tablets and the Underworld has been answered in this chapter. It has been made clear that this connection is central to the reason why curse tablets were deposited in specific places. While the connection for graves and tombs will become more clear in the next chapter, it has been shown that wells have clear associations with an entrance to the Underworld. Additionally, it has been suggested that Naiads residing in wells could aid in the transport or enactment of curses. In the case of saucer-pyre deposits, their chthonic and funerary nature pose a great connection to the Underworld and have similarities to pits used to commune with the dead. While the proposed reason for the saucer-pyre deposits conflict, in my opinion, with the intended use of curse tablets, their close relation to the Underworld and communication with the dead give reason enough for their exploitation by curse practitioners, as beings of the Underworld were necessary to transport and fulfil the curse. The reason why some curse tablets have been deposited in sanctuaries have been shown to be less clear and with that their connection to the Underworld has also not been attested. While in the case of the tablets found in the Heroön of Opheltes, we can simply see Opheltes as a restless *daimon*, for those found in the sanctuary of Pankrates-Palaimon, a clear connection has not been found. After having established the relation between the Underworld and curse tablets' places of deposition, the next chapter will continue this line of enquiry by focusing on the connections between curse tablets and the dwellers of the Underworld that are necessary for their completion.

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[101] Ibidem; H. Versnel, 'Prayers for Justice in East and West: Recent Finds and Publications' in: R. L. Gordon and F. Marco Simón eds., *Magical Practice in the Latin West: Papers from the International Conference Held at the University of Zaragoza, 30 Sept.– 1 Oct. 2005* (Leiden and Boston 2010) 275-354, q.v. 311.

[102] J. J. Bravo III, 'Erotic Curse Tablets from the Heroön of Opheltes at Nemea,' *Hesperia* 85:1 (2016) 121-152, q.v. 125-127.

Chapter 3: Dwellers of the Underworld

This chapter focusses on the beings that are important to the enactment of the curses inscribed on curse tablets, many of which are temporary dwellers of the Underworld. While *daimones* have often been included in research into curse tablets, the gods that are invoked on them often only get a mention. The research into their connections to the Underworld and reasons for being mentioned on curse tablets is remarkably lacking. That is why this chapter will detail the close connection between the Underworld and these beings which are vital to the fulfilment of curse tablets. It will answer the questions: What are *daimones* and why were they employed to transport curse tablets to the Underworld? And which gods are invoked on curse tablets and what is their relation to the Underworld?

Spirits of the Dead: *Daimones*

As briefly mentioned before, the spirits of the dead, often referred to in Greek as *daimones*, had an important role to play in the enactment of the curse inscribed on the tablet. They were specifically needed for the transportation of the curse to the Underworld, after which it would be fulfilled there by the gods. Particular *daimones* were chosen for this task, mainly ones that were restless, as it was believed these could still wander around their graves and would not have permanently gone to the Underworld. They would still have the capability to travel freely between the Underworld and their graves. Even Plato writes of souls of recently deceased being afraid of Hades and therefore lingering, hanging around their gravestones and tombs. His work attests that people have seen shadowy images close to graves, which are the souls of those that have not parted from their body completely. This why they still can be seen. Whether Plato himself believed this or only used this notion as an instrument to make a larger point in his dialogue is not relevant, as it shows that the notion of ghosts lingering around their graves did exist at the time.[103] Thus these restless spirits and their ability to come and go to the Underworld is exploited by the creator of the curse as a means of transport for their curse.

However, there are particular categories of *daimones* that were deemed ideal for this task, due to their restless nature. The first of these is the ἄωροι, those that had led an unfulfilled life and died before their time. This category could theoretically apply to anyone that did not die of old age. Nonetheless, the term was normally used to refer primarily to children. These souls would be restless as they had been robbed of their full life and remained to haunt those that were still able to live life to the fullest. Often also counted in this similar theme are ἄγαμοι, people that died before being wed. This category can also fit into the theme of ghosts that did not live a fulfilled life. Both men and women could fit into this category, even if female *daimones* of this category were seen as more bitter.[104]

Another category is referred to as βιαιοθάνατοι and it includes those *daimones* that were killed in a violent matter. This included murder, suicide, and those killed in battle. Executed criminals are often counted in this category as well, but Stroszeck keeps them separate, calling them πεπελεκισμένοι, or criminals that were 'axed' to death. She also adds the category of those that were in a mass grave (πολυάνδριοι) but these can be rightly attributed to this same category as they usually surmise war casualties.[105] All these types of *daimones* have in common that their lives were violently ended, which could make them restless. Specifically, victims of murder and suicide are said to be the most bitter in this category.[106]

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[103] Plat. Phaedo 81c-d; see commentary by C. J. Rowe; Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 24-25; Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 147-148.
[104] Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 146; Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 146.
[105] Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 24.
[106] Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 146.

Lastly, there is the category of people who had not had the privilege of a proper burial, referred to as ἄταφοι. *Daimones* that did not receive the proper rites could not find rest. Whether it concerned a person whose body was hidden away, or someone who died on the road or in battle and there were no resources available for the proper burial, or simply because the deceased was from a poor background and their family did not have the financial capabilities to provide a proper burial. In all of these circumstances a spirit could not find rest and was found to be a wandering soul.[107]

There are also examples of curse tablets that mention the *daimones* in some way or form. For instance, when the tablets are formulated as a letter, sometimes the names of the *daimones* they were buried with or the gods they are addressing are written on the outside of the rolled-up tablet. In some cases, they are even addressed in the text:

> 'I am sending this letter to the *daimones* and to Persephone, conveying
> Tibitis, the daughter of Choirine, who has wronged me!''[108]

There is one example, which specifically mentions the name of the person who it was buried with multiple times but it originated from a different uncertain region of Greece (Megara or Arkadia) and is dated to a much later date than what this study focusses on, namely around the second or first century BC. While it falls outside the scope of this research, it is still worth the mention. Its contradictory nature, when it speaks of the spirit Pasianax' ability and inability to read the text on the tablet has been seen as an interesting feature of the spell. The curse starts with 'Whenever you, O Pasianax, read this text…' but then continues to compare Pasianax' inability to read the spell to the inability of the target to make a case against his opponent.[109] It is a curious contradiction that is not seen often on curse tablets.

We do have Classical Athenian examples, of course, of when qualities of the corpse are compared to the intent of the curse on its target. A good example is the curse that was already referred to in chapter 1 in the passage on love curses. Theodora is cursed 'in the presence of the one at Persephone's side and in the presence of those who are unmarried.'[110] This is a clear reference to the category discussed above, ἄγαμοι, those who died before marriage and therefore led an unfulfilled life (ἄωροι). A specific category of *daimones* is referred to here to aid in fulfilling this curse. Additionally, the analogy used on side B of the tablet connects the corpse of the *daimones* to the curse and its target: '[And just as] this corpse lies useless, [so] may all the words and deeds of Theadora be useless…'.[111] Again, the unmarried are mentioned on side B. These references to the *daimones* and the dead within the curses of curse tablets show their close relation and association.

Gods of the Underworld

A similar connection is visible between the chthonic gods and Classical Athenian cursing practices. The most common gods to be referred to and called upon in curse tablets are, in order of most common to least common, Hermes, Gaea, Hekate, and Persephone.[112]

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[107] Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 24; Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 146.
[108] Translation from Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 184; Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, 26, tablet number 102; Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 4.
[109] Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 211, number 170.
[110] Translation by Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 90, tablet number 22. Gager gives additional references: Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae*, 95, tablet number 68; Petropoulos, 'The Erotic Magical Papyri,' 219-220.
[111] Ibidem.
[112] Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 6.

Additionally, a wide range of epithets are used, therefore referring to specific tasks or qualities of these gods. Often, multiple gods or multiple variants of the same gods are invoked on the same tablet. There was apparently no limit to the number of gods to be called upon, and it would make sense to ask multiple to enact the curse to ensure its completion. In some cases, curses even simply refer to 'gods of the Underworld' as in the following curse, which first invokes all gods of the Underworld after which it refers to Hermes specifically.

> 'Glykera, the wife of Dion, we bind down, before the gods of the Underworld,
> in order that she is punished and her marriage is *ateles*(unfulfilled)! I bind down Dion's
> Glykera before Hermes Eriounios the Chthonian: her vulva, her insolence,
> her debauchery, and everything of the erring Glykera!'[113]

Hermes

Hermes is often mentioned with multiple different epithets, as we can already see in the previous love curse. Hermes Eriounios (Ἑρμῆς Ἐριούνιος) is used, but the Chthonian is added as well, which is also often used as an epithet (Ἑρμῆς Χθόνιος). As discussed before in chapter 2, Hermes Eriounios is the personification that guides the souls of the dead to the Underworld in the imagery on the white ground *lekythos* that is discussed by Stroszeck. Eriounios has also been mentioned in multiple other examples of funerary context and specifically his guiding of the dead to their final resting place: the Underworld. This would clearly explain this personifications' connection to the Underworld and its usage on curse tablets. However, while the epithet Eriounios has been translated as bringer of good fortune this translation comes from an old source and the true meaning of the epithet is often regarded as uncertain.[114] Other possible interpretations include wily, benevolent, or swift.[115] In some cases, it is interpreted as Hermes' abilities concerning being a quick runner and messenger and an expert thief.[116] While its true meaning remains uncertain, Eriounios is definitely closely related to his task of guiding the dead to the Underworld, which perfectly fits the context of curse tablets.

When we speak of Hermes Chthonios (Ἑρμῆς Χθόνιος),[117] probably best interpreted as Hermes of the Underworld, his connections are a bit more certain. As Hermes is a god who often dwelled in the Underworld, and specifically travelled to and from the Underworld when he guided the souls of the dead, he seems a logical choice for invocation on curse tablets. He is also the most common god to be called upon when communicating with the dead in theatre.[118] A last epithet that often accompanies Hermes on curse tablets is Katochos (Ἑρμῆς Κάτοχος), which is translated as the Restrainer.[119] This epithet could simply mean 'immobilizer' but is better interpreted as physically 'holding down' the dead. In this manner Hermes can both be seen as a god that physically restrains, as well as one who enables swift movement, as a divine messenger of the gods, and being capable of traveling to and from the Underworld quickly and

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[113] Translation by Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 182, tablet number 4.12; J. Curbera, 'Five Curse Tablets from the Athenian Kerameikos,' *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 199 (2016) 109-118, number 1. Text in brackets added by author.

[114] W. Smith, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* (London 1848).

[115] A. Zografou, 'Gods around the Grave: Hermes and Hekate in early Attic curse tablets,' *Kernos* 34 (2021) 9.

[116] Idem, 27, n. 91; Curbera, 'Five Curse Tablets,' 112; cf. E. Dettori, 'Su ΕΡΙΓΟΥΝΙΟΝ: ZPE 199, 2016, p. 112, ll. 5 e 12', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 204 (2017) 136-137.

[117] Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, 22, tablet number 91; Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 5.

[118] Zografou, 'Gods around the Grave,' 3.

[119] Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, 29, tablet number 109; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 156, tablet number 61.

frequently.[120] Both these qualities are perfect for enacting curse tablets, as transport to the Underworld is vital, but so is the restraining of targets. While Hermes is the only Olympian god referred to on curse tablets, it is specifically his chthonic qualities and tasks that are invoked on curse tablets through the epithets. Thus, the connections between curse tablets and the Underworld are visible.

Gaea and Persephone

Gaea, often also called Ge, is the ancient Greek personification and goddess of the Earth, who was worshipped throughout Attica. She is often mentioned together with Hermes Katochos and can indeed also carry the same epithet, namely Katoche. Her association with the Underworld is relatively straightforward, as the Underworld is believed to reside within her. The connections between the Earth, and Hades and his realm are deemed strong for that reason. She is also often regarded as a power of physical restraint, as evident in the epithet Katoche. Her appearance on curse tablets is therefore a logical choice.[121]

A similar thing is true for Persephone. She is often seen as the hostess of the Underworld, being the wife of Hades, and residing in the Underworld a part of the year. While she is only in the Underworld temporarily, her association with the place is strong. Additionally, Hermes is also not a permanent resident of the Underworld, but he can still be strongly associated with the place. However, Persephone is almost never mentioned with an epithet.[122] Both Gaea and Persephone are often mentioned alongside Hermes and, especially together, their connections to Underworld and their usage for curse tablets is clear.

Hekate

Another goddess often mentioned on curse tablets alongside Hermes, as well as, on her own is Hekate, goddess of magic. She is often accompanied by other gods when referred to on curse tablets and does not appear alone very often. As previously mentioned, she is often present next to Hermes. It is also apparent that she carries the epithet Chthonia (Ἑκάτη Χθονία)[123] when Hermes Chthonios is present, almost like they work as a duo in the context of curse tablets. It has also been previously proposed by Athanassia Zografou that the similar sounds might have had formulaic meaning in the oral performance of the curse, meaning the 'He' in Hermes and Hekate and the similarity between Chthonios and Chthonia. She does not provide clear evidence for this, however.[124]

While the use of Chthonia again gives a clear relation to the Underworld, the epithet Epitymbia (Ἑκάτη Ἐπιτυμβία), translated as 'the one on [or at] the grave'[125] refers more to a relationship with a place or space, perhaps indicating a connection to funerary or mortuary contexts, or simply a relationship with the spirits of the dead. Indeed, it could also indicate a place where many magical practices are often preformed, like the ritual deposition of a curse tablet. Since Hekate is often said to be the goddess of magic and witchcraft, and since she is often associated with ghosts, the dead and spells, she seems a very logical choice for invocation when one is trying to implement a binding spell upon someone. She is probably the most straightforward choice, which makes it exceptionally interesting, however, that she is only the third most common deity found on curse tablets, after Hermes and Gaea.

[120] Zografou, 'Gods around the Grave,' 7.
[121] Idem, 7-8.
[122] Idem, 2.
[123] Idem, 12-13, tablet number 2.
[124] Idem, 2-3.
[125] Idem, 3, 9, 14, tablet number 5.

Conclusion

This chapter answered the first question posed by clearly outlining the different kinds of restless *daimones* appropriate for depositing a curse tablet with, namely: those with unfulfilled lives, including children and the unmarried; those killed with violence, including victims of murder or suicide, war casualties and executed criminals; and those without proper burial. It has been explained how these spirits were deemed restless and therefore had the ability to traverse to and from the Underworld and this ability was exploited by curse practitioners for the transport of the curse to the Underworld.

After this, the chthonic gods would be able to enact the curse and bring it to completion. This chapter has answered the second question posed at its beginning by discussing each god that is commonly invoked on curse tablets and detailing their connection with the Underworld as well as, in some cases the notion of binding or restraining. For Hermes it has been made clear that his connection to the Underworld comes from his guidance of the souls of the dead to the Underworld, while his epithet of Restrainer fits clearly with the restraining qualities of curse tablets. Additionally, as messenger of the gods his swift travel to and from the Underworld is a useful quality for the transport of curses. Persephone has close connection to the Underworld due to her temporary residence there as the wife of Hades. Gaea's connection is also clear as the Underworld is believed to be part of her. Additionally, her restraining quality also makes her perfect for invocation on curse tablets. Lastly, Hekate, as the goddess of witchcraft and spells and with a close connection to the spirits of the dead is a clear choice for cursing, while her connection with the Underworld probably comes from her connections with *daimones* and the use of the epithet Chthonia in combination with Hermes Chthonios. Conclusively, the connections between curse tablets and the dwellers of the Underworld have undoubtedly been outlined in this chapter.

Conclusion Section 2: The Underworld

This section has clearly shown the many connections between the Underworld and curse tablets. It has been made clear that there are a variety of deposition spots for curse tablets, including graves, tombs, wells, saucer-pyre deposits, and sanctuaries that have distinct connections with the Underworld. Additionally, the chapter has shown the importance of the spirits of the dead and their function for transporting curses to the Underworld to be enacted. The various different restless spirits chosen for this task have also been discussed, including those who lived an unfulfilled life (children, the unmarried); those who were killed with violence (victims of murder or suicide, war casualties, executed criminals); and those without proper burial. It has been explained that the restless nature of these spirits allowed them to travel to and from the Underworld and therefore they provided the perfect transport for curse tablets. The curses would then be enacted by the appropriate gods and goddesses, the most common of which were Hermes, Gaea, Hekate, and Persephone. Their clear connections to the Underworld and to the binding qualities of curse tablets have been explained. In this manner, the connections between the various religious entities that appear on and are important to the functioning of curse tablets have been shown. Most importantly, this section has highlighted the centrality of the Underworld to the ritualised usage of curse tablets, and it has made clear that the position of curse tablets within Classical Athenian religion is further removed from the Olympian gods and religious beings and instead closely connected to their Chthonic counterparts.

Section 3: Gender

A perspective that has clearly been insufficiently studied in the small field of curse tablets is gender. That is why this section will investigate the connections between ancient Greek magical practices and gender. The first chapter of this section will focus specifically on women and the associations with the female gender and magic, while the second discusses the connotations between gender and curse tablets. This section will answer the questions: What are the connections between curse tablets and gender in Classical Athens? And what can these connections tell us about the position of curse tablets in the wider society of Classical Athens?

Chapter 4: Women and Magic

This chapter specifically focusses on the female gender and its connotations with magical practices in Classical Athens. The first segment will discuss the goddess Hekate and the mythological figures of Circe and Medea, as they are attested in ancient Greek literature. These female figures have strong association with magic, and their appearance in ancient Greek literature could have had a great influence on how women were viewed in relation to magic in Classical Athens. Following this, it will further discuss women and their associations with magic in Classical Athenian society, exploring ideas of witchcraft. It will discuss accusations of magic against women in the Athenian lawcourts in order to get closer to the associations between magic and women that were present within their contemporary society. This chapter will serve as a background of information necessary to dive into the relation between gender and curse tablets specifically in the next chapter. It will answer the questions: What female figures with strong magical prowess existed in Greek religion and mythology? And what associations between women and magic were present in Classical Athens?

Hekate

First in our discussion of figures attested in ancient Greek literature that are often associated with magic is one who was discussed in the previous chapter already, Hekate. We have established already that Hekate is the goddess of magic and witchcraft and is often associated with spells and the dead. We have also seen that she often appears and is invoked on curse tablets, specifically in combination with other chthonic gods like Hermes. We can add to this that she is often depicted carrying two torches and referred to as a light-bringer. She is also a goddess of pathways of the night, and goddess of the moon and often accompanied by dogs.[126]

There are also apparent associations between her and crossroads. Her connections with the crossroads logically follow her association with magic and witchcraft, as crossroads are often seen as a place where magic is to happen. Suppers were even taken to imagery of Hekate at crossroads. Crossroads further hold a symbolic meaning as places of transition or liminal points between boundaries, similar to the symbolic meanings of other liminal points, like doors, gates, and rivers. Not only were they associated with new beginnings, as a first step out of the door, but also with chaos, as a liminal place between two extremes. [127] This might be why certain magic and rituals were so prominent at crossroads and why Hekate, as the goddess of magic and witchcraft, was associated with them.

What has to be kept in mind, however, is that she was not a "negative" or "bad" goddess. While she is often associated with liminal points like crossroads or the spirits of the dead, she is also simultaneously portrayed as she who guides people through these liminal points and who protects people against spirits of the dead. Her images, *hekataia*, were often present at crossroads, doors, and gates and offerings in the form of food were given to them to ensure protection against evil.[128] What makes this discussion concerning the crossroads so interesting is that Plato, as mentioned before in chapter 1, notes crossroads and doorways as a place where wax curse effigies were left behind.[129] Therefore, crossroads seem to be a common place for cursing practices. Stroszeck, in her detailed explanation on the archaeological contexts of the curse tablets found in the Athenian Kerameikos mentions that curse tablets were indeed

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[126] W. Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (Malden MA etc. 1985) 171; S. I. Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate's Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature* (Oxford 1990).
[127] S. I. Johnston, 'Crossroads,' *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 88 (1991), 217-224, q.v. 217-218.
[128] Idem, 219; Aristoph. Wasps 804; Aristoph. Lys. 64; Rotroff, *Industrial Religion*, 85.
[129] Plat. Laws 933b.

found at crossroads within the necropolis.[130] Additionally, the Crossroads Enclosure and Well in the Athenian Agora, discussed in chapter 2, where a number of curse tablets were found is logically also located at a crossroads. Johnston even argued that crossroads are a space where restless spirits of the dead convene.[131]

It has been made clear that crossroads have a strong connection to magical practices and their representative goddess Hekate. However, is it relevant that the goddess so closely related with these magical practices and witchcraft is female? Perhaps we cannot say anything concrete about this on its own. However, if we look at more prominent examples of magic users in ancient Greek literature our view could become clearer.

Circe

Another figure who is often referred to when it comes to ancient Greek magic is Circe. The main source we have for her is Homer's *Odyssey*. She is referred to as a dread goddess (δεινὴ θεός)[132], a daughter of Helios and Perse, and is capable of various magical acts. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus on his long journey home to Ithaka, comes upon the island of Aeaea, Circe's home. Here Circe makes some twenty-two of his men forget their homeland by means of a potion and mixing evil drugs into their food. She then turns them into pigs by striking them with her wand. With the help of Hermes and his herb 'Moly', Odysseus is able to withstand her potion and drugs and convinces her to take an oath not to trick him again. He is also able to convince her to revert his men to their human shape. Circe does so with an ointment, leaving Odysseus' men looking younger, handsomer, and taller than before their transformation.[133]

However, this is not the only magic she is capable of. Daniel Ogden gives a clear indication of many of her magical capabilities. He mentions her control of the weather, when granting favourable winds for Odysseus when he leaves the island; the way in which she rejuvenates Odysseus' men when reverting them to their human form; of course, their transformation into pigs and back; her detailed instructions to Odysseus on how to raise the spirits of the dead in order to talk to the ghost of the prophet Tiresias; and her ability to make two black sheep appear for Odysseus' sacrifice to the dead, whether she got them there while travelling invisibly or through other means.[134] It is clear her magical abilities are plenty.

Circe is also once referred to with the epithet *polypharmakos* (πολυφάρμακος)[135] referring to her use of many *pharmaka*. Our term pharmacy is said to come from this word. While initially the term *pharmaka* is thought to have meant drugs or potions, like the evil drugs said to be used by Circe, its meaning seems to have shifted at some point in time to also include spells.[136] While Circe does not appear on Athenian curse tablets, she can still be useful to our research as a representation of a woman engaged in magic. However, while it is true that women employing magic are present in ancient Greek literature this does not mean these women represent an accurate picture of actual ancient Greek women. What ancient Greek literature is able to tell us, however, is how people of the time thought about women practicing magic, or more accurately what kind of images of women practicing magic were present and could have influenced the thoughts and practices of the audience. Additionally, as expertly shown in the work of Barbette Stanley Spaeth, when literature shows representations of women

[130] Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 1.
[131] Johnston, 'Crossroads,' 223.
[132] Hom. Od. 10.136. See commentary by I. J. F. De Jong.
[133] Idem, 10.134-396. See commentary by I. J. F. De Jong.
[134] Ogden, *Night's Black* Agents, 22-25.
[135] Hom. Od. 10.276. See commentary by I. J. F. De Jong.
[136] Ogden, *Night's Black Agents*, 15.

performing magical actions, but does not show the same actions performed by men, this could tell us something about the cultural associations between gender and magic within a society.[137] Furthermore, Spaeth shows that Hekate and Circe are not the only women that could be deemed a 'witch'.

Medea

While Medea is best known from Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, this source is a bit late for our consideration as it was written sometime between 270-245 BC. However, the story of Medea was around long before that. Euripides' tragedy *Medea* does fit within our timeframe, having been dated to 431 BC.[138] Additionally, Pindar's *Fourth Pythian Ode* also tells of Jason's Argonauts and his beloved Medea. This work is dated to 462 BC. Apart from these grander works there are some smaller passages referring to Medea in a number of other works of ancient Greek literature. Additionally, depictions of Medea have also been known to appear on pottery from 425 BC. Many of these sources show Medea's magical prowess and knowledgeable use of *pharmaka*. A fragment from Sophocles' *Root-Cutters* describes Medea collecting white, foamy juice from the cuttings of roots she had severed with bronze sickles. It describes her uttering loud cries while naked, as she collects her materials.[139] The collection of ingredients for one of her many potions is interesting in this account, as it shows a part of magical practice that is essential to the completion of spells and potions but is not always shown in literary and material evidence.

Medea's naked appearance alludes to the sexual nature of magical practice when it is performed by women in ancient Greek literature. Both Circe and Medea are driven by sexual desire to help the hero in question and perform their magic in aid of said hero.[140] For Circe, as has been discussed above this was Odysseus. For Medea, it is Jason. While it is true that Medea turns against Jason at a later stage, leading her to kill their children, initially she is shown to use her magic primarily to aid him. Euripides clearly refers to her love for Jason as her primary motivation to aid him and her full commitment to this cause.[141] Not only does she brew a potion of drugs for Jason to protect him from the fiery bulls he has to defeat as one of the tasks from Medea's father,[142] she also helps him steal the Golden Fleece by feeding its guard, a serpent, magical drugs that make it fall asleep. While this last story's primary source is the Hellenistic *Argonautica*, the image of Medea drugging the serpent already appears on pots from around 425 BC. These pots are evidence for the already existing story before it was written down in detail in by Apollonius of Rhodes.[143] After Jason betrays her, however, she takes her revenge, not only by killing their children, but also by poisoning the dress and charming the crown which she gifts to the woman who Jason is to marry. This dress poisons the flesh of Jason's bride to be and the crown spits flame upon her head, killing the woman in a most horrific manner.[144] In both her aid

[137] B. S. Spaeth, 'From Goddess to Hag: The Greek and the Roman Witch in Classical Literature' in: K. B. Stratton and D. S. Kalleres eds., *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World* (Oxford and New York 2014) 41-70, q.v. 43.
[138] Ogden, *Night's Black Agents*, 27.
[139] Soph. Fragments of Known Plays, The Root-Cutters, fragment 534, translation Loeb Classical Library; see also S. Radt, *Tragicorum Greacorum Fragmenta, Vol. IV: Sophocles* (Göttingen 1999) fragment 534.
[140] Spaeth, 'From Goddess to Hag,' 47.
[141] Eur. Med. 7-8, 10-15. See commentary by D. J. Mastronarde.
[142] Pind. P. 4.220-223. See commentary by L. R. Farnell.
[143] Ogden, *Night's Black Agents*, 33.
[144] Eur. Med. 783-789, 1156-1203. See commentary by D. J. Mastronarde.

and her revenge, Medea's affinity for magical potions and ointments is clear, providing our enquiries with another example of woman in ancient literature with such magical capabilities.

Women and Magic

The discussions on the mythological figures above clearly describe these women and their magical capabilities as attested by ancient literature. We see the use of *pharmaka* return multiple times, whether in the form of spells, potions, drugs, or ointments, specifically in the case of Circe and Medea. For the divine figures that are referred to as goddesses: Hekate and Circe, we also see other kinds of magical abilities, like protection at liminal points for Hekate and control of the weather for Circe. However, what can this tell us about the relation between gender and magic. First of all, it is telling that these female figures are associated so clearly with such a degree of magical abilities and practices, while the attestations of male sorcery or witchcraft is not so strongly represented in mythological texts dating to or predating Classical Athens. When male mages or sorcerers do appear, they are often just that, an undefined group of magicians.[145] There are no comparable known and even famous figures with a name that are associated so closely with magic within Greek mythology at the time of the Classical period, that are male. This shows that, at least within literature and mythology, magic was closely associated with the female gender. Whether this was representative of the reality of magical practitioners and their gender is uncertain. However, it does clearly show the cultural and social associations that were present at the time.

Ogden states that the 'witch paradigm', as he calls the concept of female magic practitioners, existed long before the 'mage paradigm', its male counterpart. He adds that the origins of the 'witch paradigm' are hard to trace, as it would have its origins before Homer, in prehistory. However, according to him it is not difficult to explain the logic behind the appearance of female magic practitioners as the activities that figures like Circe and Medea deal in correlate closely to traditionally female tasks. He speaks of cooking, nursing, cosmetics. He correlates the female task of cooking with the feeding of drugged foods to Odysseus' men by Circe or the administration of a sleeping draught within the food of the serpent guarding the Golden Fleece by Medea. The application of ointments by Circe to restore Odysseus' men to their human state and by Medea to protect Jason for the tasks set by her father is compared to the use of healing salves or massage oils, corresponding to the task of nursing and the craft of cosmetics.[146]

While I am inclined to partially agree with this notion, as some tasks and skills do indeed appear similar to some of the magical practices described for these figures, it certainly does not apply to all of them. For example, the collection of ingredients and mixing and brewing of food, herbal remedies, and oils is similar to the creation of potions and ointments used for magic. However, magic usually takes this to the next level, not only in the more exotic ingredients used, but also when it comes to raising the dead and influencing the weather these skills and tasks are not present. Additionally, I do not imagine women performed these tasks (partially) naked. The aforementioned sexual quality of the narratives concerning Circe and Medea are also questionable in this regard. Thus, I can agree that perhaps these tasks and skills had some correlation to magical practices, but I cannot say that the female nature of these practices was the only or primary reason for the emergence of female figures of magical prowess, or therefore, the relation between women and magic.

[145] Ogden, *Night's Black Agents*, 36-38, table 1.1.
[146] Idem, 34-35.

Accusations of Magic

The accusations made in the lawcourts of Athens against women who supposedly used magic could bring us closer to the reality of female magic practitioners. However, it has to be said that simply because these women were accused of magic, this does not mean they actually engaged in magical practices. Nonetheless, it can bring us closer to the associations between magic and women in the society of Classical Athens. Instead of only relying on literature showing us representations of women which could stray far from the historical reality, these accusations show us the situation in the Athenian lawcourts that actually occurred. Whether the accusation was grounded or not, they tell us of the associations between women and magic that were present at the time.

Esther Eidinow in her work *Envy, Poison, Death: Women on Trial in Classical Athens* gives an overview of three cases where women were accused of magic. The women in question are Theoris, Ninon, and Phryne. For Theoris there are three sources available, the first being a speech by Demosthenes. It mentions Theoris in passing, during a trial of an Athenian politician, talking of potions and incantations taken from her maidservant, calling Theoris a filthy (μιαρός) sorceress (φαρμακίη) and stating that she had been executed for 'those things', referring back to the drugs and incantations.[147] It is clear from this passage that Theoris was supposedly executed for her use of *pharmaka*, whether these be drugs, potions or spells, and ἐπωδαί, meaning incantations. The questionable part of this statement is, however, that there is no evidence of these magical activities being illegal in Athens. As this statement is simply meant to make the man on trial look bad by association, the terms used to describe Theoris are supposed to paint a negative picture of her. She is described as Lemnian, possibly referring to the mythical 'women of Lemnos' who murdered their husbands. Additionally, the term μιαρός, in this case translated as filthy, could also mean pollution, indicating a negative dirty or even corrupting quality.[148] Other, far later sources, speak of her as seer or diviner (μάντις) and a priestess (*ἱέρεια*). They also add the accusation of evil or criminal deeds, teaching slaves how to deceive, and impiety (ἀσέβεια).[149]

The other women discussed by Eidinow also seem to be accused of similar things, even though we have less certain sources and information concerning their trials. Ninon is also accused of using *pharmaka*, and making love potions (φίλτρα), although some sources mention the introduction of foreign gods, which was said to be illegal at the time. Ninon is said to have been put to death because of this. The accusations against Phryne are less clear, indicating impiety (ἀσέβεια), introducing a new god, and organising unlawful religious gatherings.[150] Her connection with magical practices is less clear. However, the reoccurring connection with the production and use of *pharmaka* is quite pronounced in these attestations.

Conclusion

This chapter started with a discussion of three female figures from ancient Greek religion and mythology that are capable of great magical feats. Firstly, it spoke of Hekate, goddess of witchcraft and magic. While her connections with the dead and the Underworld were discussed in the previous section, this chapter investigated her connection to crossroads and liminal points in general and her protective qualities when it comes to these places of chaos and danger. Subsequently, the dread goddess Circe and her appearance in the *Odyssey* was

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[147] Dem. 25.79–80; E. Eidinow, *Envy, Poison, Death: Women on Trial in Classical Athens* (Oxford 2016) 11-14.

[148] Eidinow, *Envy, Poison, Death*, 14.

[149] Plut. Dem. 14.4; Dindorf, A., *Harpocrationis Lexicon in Decem Oratores Atticos* (Oxford 1853) FGrH 382 F60; Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 107, number 85-86; Eidinow, *Envy, Poison, Death*, 15-16.

[150] M. R. Dilts, *Scholia Demosthenica, ii* (Leipzig 1986) 19.281, 495A-B; Eidinow, *Envy, Poison, Death*, 18, 22.

analysed, where it became clear she created and made use of *pharmaka* and a wand. She had the capabilities to transform men into pigs and back; influence the weather; rejuvenate Odysseus' men; give clear instructions on how to raise the dead; and make two black sheep appear. The mythological figure of Medea often makes use of potions and ointments as well. Additionally, a passage has been discussed where she is seen collecting ingredients for her *pharmaka*, as well as her revenge by means of a poisoned dress and charmed diadem. The sexual aspect attributed to Medea and Circe is also addressed, specifically in their motivation to aid the hero in question. The prominent attribution of magical powers to these female figures in ancient literature and the absence of any specifically named male equivalent shows that, at least in literature, women were more closely associated with magic than men, whether this emerged from traditional female tasks or not. The chapter then moves from literature to accusations of magic against women in court. Here *pharmaka* are also a reoccurring feature, along with accusations of impiety (ἀσέβεια) and the penalty of death. These instances make it clear that the connections between women and magic were not only prominent in literature, but also in the minds and culture of Classical Athenian society and these connections cannot be found as strongly for men.

Chapter 5: Gender and Curse Tablets

Building upon the previous chapter and the connotation that existed between women and magic, this chapter will investigate the relation between gender and curse practices. While it will largely discuss the connections between curse tablets and the female gender, this chapter aims to include the male gender as well. It will first continue the discussion of the last chapter by discussing attestations of women practicing cursing, specifically concerning love related curses. Additionally, it will discuss the use of curse tablets by both male and female cursers. Through these investigations this chapter will answer the questions: What associations between women and cursing practices were present in Classical Athens? And what can curse tablets tell us about the relations between gender and curse practices?

Gender and Love Spells

In a poem by Theocritus, written in the 270s BC, there are clear references to love binding magic as it is used on curse tablets. While the dating is rather late and the place of writing is not likely to be Athens as Theocritus was from Sicily and later worked at court in Alexandria, it is important to include this example. As stated in the introduction, this research does not make use of strict parameters when it comes to time constraints of the so-called Classical era, as the people of the time would not have seen a sudden shift in their daily lives and practices. Additionally, this research does not refrain from including sources from other areas when they can enhance the analysis.

Simaetha, the woman practicing the magic within the poem, explicitly states she will bind (καταδήσομαι) her dear lover. She invokes Hekate to aid her in her work and asks her to make her drugs as potent as those of Circe or Medea. Not only in her explicit statement of binding and her invocation of Hekate can we see the resemblance to the binding spells used on curse tablets. We can also note the constant repetition that occurs throughout the poem. Additionally, she states: 'whether it be woman that lies by him now, or whether man, may he as clean forget then as once, men say, Theseus forgot in Dia the fair-tressed Ariadne.' The manner in which she bids her lover to forget all others is very reminiscent of how this is done in love curse tablets. This concept of memory and forgetting is strongly related to love in ancient Greek culture.[151] All in all, this source does seem to show a connection between women and cursing practices, specifically bindings spells. However, this is still an association present in ancient literature, which leaves us to question what can be gleaned from the binding spells themselves.

First of all, it is apparent that there is a clear correlation between the use of love magic and gender in binding spells. Faraone makes a distinction between *eros*, spells that induce erotic passion and are generally used by men on women, and *philia*, spells that maintain or increase affection generally used by women on men. He goes on to say that whenever women do make use of the *eros* category, they usually take on a more masculine role in society, specifically the roles of *hetaerae*, meaning courtesans or prostitutes. Additionally, when men make use of the *philia* variant, Faraone poses they are usually in a position of social inferiority. He continues by posing that the *eros* variants are more likely related to cursing aspects of magic, while the *philia* can be more closely related to healing magic.[152] Still, qualities of binding are present in both variants and both categories also appear on curse tablets.

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[151] Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*,108-112, number 89; Theoc. Id. 2, see translation and commentary by A. S. F. Gow.

[152] C. A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (n.p. 2001) 27-30, 146-160.

While Faraone gives some arguments concerning his idea of the gender roles when it comes to love magic, I find them highly unconvincing. Not only does he make use of unprofessional derogatory language throughout his work, he proposes a very traditional view on the gender roles of the time, based on outdated works.[153] Additionally, it is unclear exactly what his methodology is. While it is apparent in his sources that some hetaerae made use of *eros* magic, this does not immediately mean that they took on a more masculine social position because of it. As we will be discussed next section, magic could have simply been a way for women to break social norms and find a way to influence society despite them. The same goes for his position on socially inferior men making use of *philia* magic. He gives no clear argument for his statement, other than to refer to a number of works that, as he states in his note, already have been criticized for their traditional views, and lacking analysis.[154] While his distinction between *eros* and *philia* magic and his research into which category is used more by which gender can still be useful for our consideration, the subsequent conclusions concerning gender roles are not sufficiently substantiated with the proper argumentation or evidence and can therefore not be utilised in this research.

Faraone's work does give us more insight into which genders are more prone to use love binding spells, in his analysis it seems both genders are capable of doing so. However, Gager notes, as we have seen previously, that in literature it is common to see women associated closely with love magic, but when it comes to curse tablets the majority of love curses with identifiable genders concern men in pursuit of women. Only the second most common category concerns women in pursuit of men, which is the category that the literary record fits into. After this comes women in pursuit and women, and only then men in pursuit of men. It appears Gager makes use of statistical analysis here and builds upon previous works. However, his exact methodology is unclear.[155] While this does confirm that both genders made use of love-related curse tablets, it also shows that the literary record concerning magic might not fit the reality of curse practices.

Male and Female Cursers

However, cursing is not just limited to love magic. Other variants of curse tablets should also be included, even if there is more clarity on the usage of love curses. The following curse from early fourth century BC Attica gives us some insight into who might be expected to make use of curses.

> Side A:
> 'If anyone put a binding spell [*katedêsen*]
> on me, be it man or woman, slave or free,
> alien or citizen, from my household or
> from outside it, be it out of envy toward my work or my actions, if anyone put a
> binding spell on me before Hermes, be it Hermes Eriounios or Hermes Restrainer or
> Hermes Trickster, or before some other power, I bind in return [*antikatadesmeuô*]
> all my enemies.'
>
> Side B:

[153] Idem, 147, n. 57.
[154] Ibidem.
[155] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 80; Winkler, 'The Constraints of Desire,' 71-98.

'I bind [*katadesmeuô*] my opponent in court Dion and Granicos.'[156]

This peculiar curse tablet makes use of an interesting approach when it comes to its targets of binding. Its targets are said to be anyone who attempts to curse the creator of this tablet, a clever approach to disadvantage a rival who has disadvantaged you. However, in doing so it lists any possible persons who could curse them mentioning: 'be it man or woman, slave or free, alien or citizen, from my household or from outside it'. While it seems to be a figure of speech to include anyone who could curse the creator of this spell, it does give an indication as to who the creator expects to possibly be cursed by. Not only does it make clear that both men and women could make use of curse tablets, as we have already seen in the passage above, it also seems to be the case that people from all kinds of social standings could be expected to make use of them as well, including slaves and free people, whether they were a citizen or not.

While it can prove difficult to discern the gender of the creator of the tablet, sometimes there are ways of figuring this out through grammar. On some occasions the name of the creator is mentioned, but often this is not the case. Nonetheless, sometimes a gender is alluded to. See for example the following tablet:

'(I bind?) Aristokudes and the women who will be seen with him. May he not marry any other woman or young maiden.'[157]

While we will not assume that the creator of the curse is female simply because Aristokudes is cursed not to be with women. The significant part of this text is that it states 'any other woman' ('άλλην γυναικα) as if it means any other than the curse creator, who could have been the lover or wife of the target. Nonetheless, it could also indicate any other women than the ones he has been with already. The tablet therefore alludes to a female creator but does not confirm it. This is why it is difficult to give a clear indication of the gender of curse creators. It seems that gender is most indicated on love curses specifically, on which we have seen both men and women made use of curses, however, seemingly more so by men. Whether this also holds true for different curse variants is therefore unclear. Additionally, when it comes to the gender of the targets the gender is often easier to identify and here it is also the case that both men and women appear to be common targets of curses.

Conclusion

The literary record has shown that women were mainly associated with curse practices, as opposed to men. We see this not only from the poem of Theocritus, but also from sources like Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, which is discussed in chapter 1, in which the Furies (female goddesses of vengeance) sing a binding hymn to bind Orestes. Additionally, it has been shown that it is difficult to determine the gender of the curser on many occasions, while it seems to be easier in the case of love curse tablets. However, Gager has shown that, specifically when it comes to love curses, men in pursuit of women are more common than women in pursuit of men. Furthermore, spells that induce erotic passion are generally performed by men on women, while spells that maintain or increase affection are generally used by women on men. However,

[156] Translation by Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 211, number 169; see also D. R. Jordan, H. Montgomery, and E. Thomassen eds., *The World of Ancient Magic.* Papers from the Norwegian Institute at Athens 4 (Bergen 1999).

[157] Translation by Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 91, number 23; Faraone, 'Agonistic Context', 14; Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, 17, tablet number 78; Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 228, number 198.

there are of course exception to this rule. These indications do hint at a different view in ancient literature than the tablets themselves. While the literary record seems to associate women with magical abilities including cursing practice, it does seem apparent that in reality both men and women made use of tablets. There does not seem to be a clear majority in overall use, specifically also because the majority of curses do not allow us to identify the gender of its creator.

Conclusion Section 3: Gender

This section, which approaches magic and specifically curse tablets from the perspective of gender, has shown that the connections between magical practices and gender are complex. First of all, it has established that the literary record shows a clear connection between the female gender and magic. It has done so by discussing female figures in ancient Greek religion and mythology and their connection to magical practices, noting that these kinds of connections do not occur for any prominent named male figures. The literary record also shows a connection between women and cursing practices. Additionally, accusations made in the lawcourts of Athens also show an association between the female gender and the use of magic, specifically the creation and use of *pharmaka*, an association also seen in the literary records. An analysis into curse tablets themselves, however, does not support this view. Though, we must be aware it does not necessarily discredit such a view either. Since the majority of cursers' gender cannot be identified, we cannot confidently state that the majority of cursers cannot have been female. What we can state confidently, however, is that it appears both men and women did indeed make use of curse tablets in Classical Athens. The situation for love curses is a bit more clear than that of the other situational variants of curse tablets, as men in pursuit of women seem to make use of curse tablets more often than the other way around. Moreover, when it comes to what kind of love magic is used, spells inducing passion are commonly employed by men on women, and spells that maintain or increase affection are generally utilized by women on men. Though, of course, exceptions are present. While the connections between gender and curse tablets have been made clear through this section, what can these connections tell us about the position of curse tablets in the wider society of Classical Athens? While we cannot say anything about which gender was in majority when it comes to the use of curse tablets, this section has shown how cursing was not exclusive to any one gender. It therefore places curse tablets and their usage within the wider society as a practice that is common in both female and male dominant spheres of society and, as we shall see in the next chapter, the widespread usage of these tablets is not limited to theme of gender.

Section 4: Society

This section will investigate the role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society as attested by ancient literature. The first chapter will focus on curse tablets as common knowledge, showing that curse tablets were not a niche of society, but indeed a practice that people were aware of. It discusses their negative connotations to establish how people might have viewed these objects and their usage. The second chapter in this section will focus on the consequences of curse tablets in society. It investigates what can be said about the workings of the objects and their effects on their targets and creators. Ultimately, this section aims to answer the question: what was the position of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society? And what was the role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society?

Chapter 6: Classical Athenian Curse Tablets as Common Knowledge

This chapter explores the position of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society. It investigates curse tablets as common knowledge in society and discusses excerpts from ancient Greek literature that were famous and known in Classical Athens to show that curse tablets were not a niche of society but indeed common knowledge. It will first discuss the attestations known from Plato, as he is one of the first and few to refer to them. Following the negative associations with curses that arise from Plato's work, the chapter moves on to explore this negativity further, additionally looking into the magic versus religion debate. Lastly, it will further discuss ancient literature that can attest to curse practices being common knowledge in Classical Athens. It will answer the questions: How can we observe that curse tablets and their usage were common knowledge in Classical Athens? And what were the negative associations with the creation and use of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society? Through these questions it answers the question: what was the position of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society?

Plato on Curse Tablets

As stated before in chapter 1, Plato's *Republic*, written in the first quarter of the fourth century BC, is one of the very first and very few instances we have where curse tablets are directly referred to. He uses the noun 'καταδέσμοις'.

> 'Wandering priests and prophets approach the doors of the wealthy and persuade them that they have a power from the gods conveyed through sacrifices and incantations, and any wrong committed against someone either by an individual or his ancestors can be expiated with pleasure and feasting. Or if he wishes to injure any enemy of his, for a small outlay he will be able to harm just and unjust alike with certain spells and incantations (καταδέσμοις) through which they can persuade the gods, they say, to serve their ends.'[158]

As seen in this translation, this passage speaks of wandering priests and prophets (ἀγύρται δὲ καὶ μάντεις) who knock on the doors of the wealthy and offer to do harm to an enemy for money. This particular translation translates the noun κατάδεσμοι as incantations, while it would best be interpreted as curse tablets or even binding spells.[159] The image of these vagabonds going from door to door offering to curse enemies and convincing the gods to do their bidding is an interesting one. It brings to mind the possibility of an existing group of magicians, making cursing their expertise and even their profession. This has been posed by other scholars to be likely.[160] Even in the tablets' text, one can discern between apparent professionals and amateurs, and a wide range of literacy and writing skills, from the use of clear punctuation, margins, and clear, confident hands, to sloppy inscriptions with an abundance of misspellings.[161] Examples have also been found were multiple curse tablets were found with different targets inscribed in the same hand, which could indicate a deposition by a professional curser for multiple clients. In some cases, suspicions have arisen of the use of written templates. These have sometimes been identified by the remarkable similarity of curses found together in one deposition spot. Additionally, it has been posed that professionals used templates, almost in a sense of mass production, by writing the curse out but leaving the target blank, to be filled in later when a client presents themselves. These kinds of curses have

[158] Plat. Rep. 364b-c. Translation by C. Emlyn-Jones and W. Preddy (Loeb Classical Library).
[159] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 7.
[160] Ibidem; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 5, 14, 118; Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 4.
[161] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 7.

specifically been attested in Roman times, by names that were too long to fit in the blank space, leading to them being squeezed in or their last letters written in slant or in-between lines.[162]

Another work of Plato's which gives us insight into these cursers is his *Laws*, written in around 355 BC. He clearly delineates in his punishments between amateurs and professionals.

> 'And if it be held that a man is acting like an injurer by the use of spells, incantations, or any such mode of poisoning, if he be a prophet or diviner, he shall be put to death; but if he be ignorant of the prophetic art, he shall be dealt with in the same way as a layman convicted of poisoning,—that is to say, the court shall assess in his case also what shall seem to them right for him to suffer or pay.'[163]

In this translation again, καταδέσεις is defined as spells or incantations, but in this case as well, the better translation would be binding spells or curse tablets, specifically.[164] A distinction is made between those 'ignorant of the prophetic art' whose appropriate punishment would have to be decided by the court, and a 'prophet or diviner', who would have to be put to death. This shows that indeed there appears to be a difference between professionals and amateurs. As this is simply a dialogue discussing just laws, this does not reflect actual Athenian law. Additionally, it is not clear whether this is Plato's own opinion shining through, or simply the opinion of one of the characters participating in the dialogue. What is apparent however, is that this work speaks of the use of curse tablets and spells rather negatively, whether it reflects Plato's view or not. Furthermore, Plato's works are not the only ones to do so.

Negative Notions of Curse Tablets and Magic

There are indeed more sources that refer to the use of magic and spells negatively. The work *Sacred Disease*, tentatively attributed to Hippocrates and written around 400 BC, discusses disease as not being something divine, but something natural. It states the following:

> 'I believe that the first people to regard this disease as sacred were what are still today called magicians, purifiers, mendicants, and charlatans, people who present themselves as being especially pious and knowledgeable. Being in fact helpless and having nothing useful to offer, such people cloak themselves and hide behind superstition in order to prevent their ignorance from being exposed: they deem the disease to be sacred, and, by contriving a plausible argument, set up a method of treatment that serves their own purposes: they prescribe purifications and incantations, prohibit the use of baths and many foods unsuitable for the ill to eat…'[165]

This passage regards the use of magic, purifications, and spells as highly negative, posing people that make use of these things, magicians, purifiers, mendicants, and charlatans, hide behind superstition, presenting themselves as knowledgeable but truly being ignorant. It certainly makes sense that a such a medically and naturally oriented work, which renounces the effects of divinity on disease, would see any form of magic as ungrounded and false. This source is biased in that regard and might not represent the view of the majority of society at the

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[162] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 192-196, tablet numbers 5.1-5.5; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 5, 14, 118; see Jordan, 'Defixiones from a Well', 251 for an example of a curse tablet with a squeezed-in name, found in the Athenian Agora.

[163] Plat. Laws 933d-e. Translation by R. G. Bury (Loeb Classical Library).

[164] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 7.

[165] Hp. Morb. Sacr. 2. Translation by P. Potter (Loeb Classical Library). See commentary by J. Jouanna.

time. However, since it is not the only source expressing a negative perspective, it seems to reinforce a reoccurring pattern.

Another source which does the same is Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, a play first performed around 429 BC in Athens. In the play, Oedipus states:

> '...that Creon the trusty, my friend from the first, has crept up to me and longs to throw me out, setting upon me this wizard hatcher of plots, this crafty beggar, who has sight only when it comes to profit, but in his art is blind!'[166]

While again in this instance the circumstances of the story make it logical for Oedipus to be hostile towards the prophet in question, the text does show clear associations with wizardry, hatching plots, and crafty beggars. Furthermore, both sources show the synonymous usage of words like *magos* (μάγος) and *agurtes* (ἀγύρτης) with terms meaning 'charlatan' or 'quack'.[167] This shows a possible negative view on the use of magic and spells, like binding spells.

If the use of magic was so negatively perceived, what kept the Greeks from making its practice illegal? As we have seen in chapter 4, there were accusations made in Athenian lawcourts against women using magic, but these often employed other accusations that we know were illegal, like impiety (ἀσέβεια). Some scholars have suggested that it was not necessary to create legislation against magic or curse tablets specifically, because other laws like those against ἀσέβεια were used in those cases instead.[168] However, there is one law code from 479 BC in which the community of Ionian Greeks at Teos declared the preparation and usage of *pharmaka* to be a capital offence. While there is no attestation that a similar law existed in Athens, it does slightly discredit the aforementioned argument that legislation against magic must not have been necessary. Thinking back on Plato's discussion on the proper punishment for the use of magic and curse tablets specifically, it only furthers the uncertainty on whether such a law was present. It is not apparent if his discussion mirrors an existing policy that we are unaware of, or if he is introducing a new law due to a lack of legislation on magic and curses. However, while there is proof that in Roman times, *defixiones* were illegal, we have no such evidence in Greek law.[169]

Magic and Religion

As apparent from the quote this thesis began with, magic can be considered different from religion simply by negative social evaluation. However, this is only one view in the widespread and never-ending scientific debate concerning magic versus religion. While many accounts in this debate are often based on Christian views, especially those seeing magic as a wastebasket of religion or a 'dark' or 'evil' counterpart to religion, I believe we have to move further back in time, to before the Christian ideas of magic to understand what it could have meant in ancient times. I mention this debate here because it is imperative to understand what relation between magic and religion could have existed at the time and in the culture of the subject of our enquiry, and specifically because our enquiry has often been defined as magical objects and their accompanying practices, not only from our modern view, but also in its ancient contemporary society.[170] As religion was an integral and interconnected aspect of Classical Athenian society, this is a debate that cannot be ignored when speaking of the position of Classical Athenian curse tablets within their contemporary society.

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[166] Soph. OT 385-389. Translation by H. Lloyd-Jones (Loeb Classical Library). See commentary by J. March.
[167] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 268-269, n. 19, 20.
[168] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 23.
[169] Idem, 23-24.
[170] Idem, 24-25.

While it makes sense that curse tablets are often referred to by academics as an expression of ancient magic, as they take the form of a spell, this does not necessarily exclude them from religion. Scholars have shared their findings on whether curse tablets should be defined as magic or religion. Attempts have been made to distinguish magical curses from religious ones, for example, by seeing if they invoked deities to perform the curse, assuming that a miracle performed without the aid of the gods could be considered magic, while those performed with the aid of gods were religious. However, this was a difficult exercise, seeing that even if tablets did not make use of the 'prayer formula', as explained in chapter 1, they still often referred to gods using other formulae.[171] Faraone poses that using the different formulae to attempt to distinguish between magical or religious curses is an artificial exercise which cannot actually tell us anything regarding their function or use in society. Furthermore, I would pose that it does not seem useful to define the difference between religion and magic as being 'with the aid of gods' versus 'without the aid of gods' as some gods, specifically Hekate, are simply closely associated with magic. Hence, I would argue that magic is a part of ancient Greek religion, and as such, so are curse tablets. Additionally, we cannot base our magic versus religion debate on whether gods, often seen in modern times as positive and religious beings, or *daimones*, often seen as negative and supernatural beings, were present in the ritual of cursing or in the curse itself, because both of these entities, gods and *daimones*, were used as much in curses as in other 'proper' rituals of Greek religion.[172] What I believe the presence of these entities can tell us however, is described in the section on the Underworld is this work, namely there is a close association between curse tablets and these entities from or closely related to the Underworld. So while magical practices like the use of curse tablets can be said to have close connections with the Underworld, this does not exclude them from religion, but actually places them within ancient Greek religion.

Moreover, it has been attested that Classical Athenian curse tablets closely resemble a prayer. As in other prayers, we can state that it is not relevant whether their intent was malevolent or benevolent, as long as a god is addressed in a ritually correct manner, they will do what is asked of them. This is the same for curse tablets.[173] So concerning the negative associations that could have been present with the use of curse tablets, it is uncertain if they arose from their associations with magic, the Underworld and the religious domain of the dead, or their often interpreted as malevolent nature. What is apparent, however, is that their ritual function can be deemed a religious practice as much as a magical one.

Common Knowledge

When it comes to the commonality of curse tablets, one can say that their usage was widespread. This is first attested in the sheer number of examples we have. Faraone explains that, at the time of his writing, nearly 600 Greek curse tablets had been published and over 400 were dug up but still awaited study.[174] Who knows how many still sit underground, waiting to be found. While these numbers cover all Greek curse tablets, from the start of their usage in the fifth century to Roman times, they do attest to a flourishing practice. Additionally, it has been made clear that people from all layers of society made use of them. They allow us to see snapshots of the lives of 'ordinary' people, those that are usually hard to find in our usual source material. While curse tablets seem to have initially been used by the elite, with time their use

[171] F. B. Jevons, 'Graeco-Italian Magic' in: R. R. Marett ed., *Anthropology and the Classics: Six Lectures Delivered Before the University of Oxford* (Oxford 1908) 93-120, q.v. 109-15; Cf. Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 20.
[172] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 12.
[173] Faraone, 'Agonistic Context,' 19.
[174] Idem, 3.

expanded to all layers of society.[175] I have comprised a list of professions of targets mentioned on Classical Athenian curse tablets that includes the likes of tavern- and shopkeepers, workshop-owners, barbers, actors, chorus directors, servants, slaves, butchers, cooks, netmakers, fabric sellers, woodworkers, helmetmakers, goldworkers, pipemakers, carpenters, soldiers, potters, bronzeworkers, silverworkers, boxers, concubines, and courtesans. It can often be said that the cursers hold a similar standing in society as those they curse, as the usage of curse tablets usually concerns a rivalry with a close competitor.[176] Specifically, the curses that are made in the context of a business rivalry mention the profession of the target, and therefore simultaneously allude to the profession of the curser. It is clear that Classical Athenian curse tablets reached all layers of society.

Specifically, the legal variety of curse tablets seem to have been common. They are one of the largest categories of curse tablets we have for Greek curse tablets, especially when it comes to examples from Classical Athens. As attested by Aristophanes' *Peace*, Athenians never busy themselves with anything but litigation. Additionally, as has been made clear by Lamont and discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, the practice of curse writing grew alongside the development of speechwriting during the late-fifth and fourth centuries BC, leading to both logographers and curse-writers profiting from the abundance in legal trials that occurred during this tumultuous period. This shows the close connections between the curse practice and the prominence of trials in the lawcourts of Athens and, as attested by other scholars, it is necessary to consider that the pre-emptive use of curse tablets to give the opponent a disadvantage was likely a regular feature in the litigation process of the Athenian court.[177]

It can therefore be said that curse tablets and their use were common knowledge, people were aware of their existence and that they could be used against them. Other sources of ancient literature support this statement. The passages of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and *Eumenides*, which were discussed before in chapter 1, give the impression that the concept of ritualized binding was familiar to the Athenians of the fifteenth century BC. The clear references to the ritual concerning the nailing and deposition of curse tablets in the binding of Prometheus is one example of this, and the binding hymn of the Furies performed in the context of litigation is another.[178] They indicate that Athenians must have been aware of binding rituals either through the plays described above, or we can go even further to state that the plays must have been created in the context of already existing societal knowledge of binding practices like curse tablets.

Plutarch, in his biography of the Athenian general Alkibiades, written around the start of the second century AD, gives an interesting insight into the possible use of public curses in the Classical period. While it is true Plutarch was writing several centuries later and we cannot be certain about the accuracy of his words as he favoured discussing the character and morals of the people he writes about and cared less for historical correctness, we cannot leave his work without consideration. In the relevant passage, on his return to Athens, Alkibiades addresses the assembly and gains their grace and adoration again, after his previous betrayal. Speaking then of the actions of the people of the assembly towards Alkibiades, Plutarch writes:

> 'At last they crowned him with crowns of gold, and elected him general with sole powers by land and sea. They voted also that his property be restored to him, and that the Eumolpidae

[175] Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 3, 12; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 119.
[176] Jordan, 'New Archaeological Evidence,' 277; Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 12.
[177] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 116-117; Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 179; Aristoph. Peace 503-505. See commentary by M. Platnauer.
[178] Aesch. PB 64-5, 113; Aesch. Eum. 306, 328-333; Lamont, *In Blood and Ashes*, 185-186.

> and Heralds revoke the curses wherewith they had cursed him at the command of the people. The others revoked their curses, but Theodorus the High Priest said: "Nay, I invoked no evil upon him if he does no wrong to the city."'[179]

The interesting part of this passage concerns the revocation of curses against Alkibiades. It states that the Eumolpidae and Heralds had cursed Alkibiades at the command of the people, suggesting a public nature of these curses. Other scholars have also taken this passage as proof of the existence of public curses in Classical Athens.[180] While I cannot conclusively call it proof, it certainly sets up the concept of public usage of curses and binding spells in Classical Athens as a clear possibility. Additionally, the passage raises interesting questions about such a possibility. If there were indeed negative associations attached to the use of curse tablets and binding spells, why would their usage against enemies be condoned? Perhaps it is simply the fear of curses being used against citizens that bring negative associations about, and therefore the use of curses in itself is not problematic. However, these questions cannot be answered with the current sources available. Perhaps with new forms of enquiry and more sources being unearthed, we could reach a more substantial conclusion in the future. For now, the passage reinforces the idea of curses being common knowledge and even public practice, but its credibility is questionable, as such it has to be treated with care.

Lastly, we must consider a passage originating from Aristophanes' *Wasps*, performed in 422 BC. This passage concerns a dog on trial in Athens supposedly for the theft of cheese. During the trial, the dog takes the stand and while famed for his barking, it remains remarkably silent. Its uncommon silence is then commented on by stating:

> 'No, I think the same thing's happened to him that once happened to Thucydides when he was on trial: his jaws suddenly got paralyzed.'[181]

This passage speaks of the paralysis of the dog's jaws, giving no other explanation as to how this might have come to pass. However, a reference is made to Thucydides, according to the scholiast, not the famed general and historian, but a famous orator of the time, son of Melesias, and great rival of Perikles until he became tongue-tied at a trial.[182] The scholiast further writes of this Thucydides saying:

> '…an excellent orator who after he had heard his accusers make their case in the course of a trial, was not able to plead his own defense, just as if he had a tongue which had been bound from within. In this way he was convicted and afterwards ostracized.'[183]

A clear reference is made here to binding of the tongue in the trial of Thucydides, probably held sometime after 433 BC, which gives the impression of the use of a binding spell and additionally using a common Athenian verb of binding seen on curse tablets in the Classical era. Additionally, it has been argued that the scholiast in question is an Atthidographer, a writer of

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[179] Plut. Alc. 33.3. Translation by B. Perrin (Loeb Classical Library).
[180] Stroszeck, 'Archaeological Contexts,' 34.
[181] Aristoph. Wasps 946-948. Translation by J. Henderson (Loeb Classical Library). See commentary W. J. M. Starkie.
[182] See Aristoph. Ach. 703-718, for another description of Thucydides' trial.
[183] Translation by C. A. Faraone, 'An Accusation of Magic in Classical Athens (Ar. Wasps 946-48)', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 119:1 (1989) 149-160, q.v. 149.

local Athenian history, from fourth century BC Attica.[184] It is telling that a fourth century BC contemporary would recognise the possible use of binding spell in this work, as this would indeed indicate that their use was common knowledge, specifically in the case of trials.

Additionally, Faraone identifies parallels with the descriptions of these trials and other later inferences where experienced orators like Thucydides suddenly experienced inexplicable seizures and moments of paralysis while pleading their case in a trial. In these cases, the victims and the society around them often seek the explanation in the supernatural. He also determines similarities with proclamations of being a victim of magic and binding spells to save face when a moment of stage fright or even any other mistake or failure occurs. These parallels lead Faraone to conclude a binding spell could indeed have been at fault in the trials described above.[185] Taken together, these ancient sources seem to indicate that the use of curse tablets, specifically in the lawcourts of Athens, were common, and also common knowledge to the Athenians in the Classical era.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown through multiple different ancient sources, both literature and attestations from the tablets themselves that the use of curse tablets was widespread. It was used by and on people from many different layers of society. It has also shown that curse tablets and their usage were common knowledge in Classical Athens. They were specifically regularly used in the litigation process of the Athenian lawcourts. What has also made clear in this chapter is that there were negative associations present when it comes to the use of curse tablets and binding spells. It is unclear, however, where these negative associations specifically derive from. Possible reasons for this negativity include their associations with magic, the Underworld and the religious domain of the dead, or their often interpreted as malevolent nature. What is apparent, however, is that curse tablets can be deemed a religious practice as much as a magical one.

[184] Idem, 158; see also Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 120 on the trial of Thucydides.
[185] Faraone, 'Accusation of Magic,' 152, 154-155.

Chapter 7: Did Curse Tablets Work?

This short chapter considers a strange but also important question, namely did curse tablets work? And if so, what were the consequences of their use? While the chapter does not judge the belief of the people of the time, it also does not consider the "magical" consequences of the tablets, more so it will discuss their possible placebo effect and their other possible consequences. Through this it builds on last chapter's conclusion concerning the position of curse tablets in society, and asks: What was the role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society? The distinction between these terms being that "position" focusses more on a placement within society, concerning how contemporaries viewed them, while a "role" in society more distinctly highlights their active usage and its consequences, and more specifically their supposed purpose in society.

The Consequences of Curse Tablets

The importance of the question posed in this chapter's title becomes clear when we consider that, as we would assume from a scientific standpoint, magic like curse tablets cannot possibly have worked in the manner it was meant to. While we as academics would and should never judge the people of the time for their beliefs, we also cannot accept that their magical effects occurred. The question then remains, why did people continue using them for centuries onwards deep into the times of the Roman Empire if there was no evidence of their effect? There must have been a consensus or idea that they did indeed work. One could, of course, pose the same question about religion, but as most religious figures were based on some form of natural phenomena, these natural phenomena were often taken as proof of their existence and influence. Thus, what provided this "proof" for curse tablets? Did they perhaps work, but in a different manner than intended?

First, there is the possibility that, as writing down feelings and wishes can often accomplish, the curser may simply have been able to deal with their emotional turmoil by writing about it, similarly to how a diary functions. Additionally, the ritual surrounding curse tablets could have unintentionally served a similar purpose. There is something therapeutic about writing down the names of those causing you trouble, having said your piece, and then burying it or throwing it down a well. It could have removed tensions, allowing one to deal with or let go of their troubling emotions.[186] Furthermore, as the curser would have believed in the functioning of the tablet, they might have felt that at least something had been done against their opponent, relieving tensions, and possibly leading to a more favourable outcome for them in their particular situation. Not only could their usage provide peace for the curser in this manner, but also faith that they would be able succeed in their goals unhindered.

The possibility of a similar placebo-like effect has been posed for the effects on cursed targets as well. While of course the victims in this case would not actually have been the target of a curse, the idea and knowledge that one could be cursed could often lead to the exact same effect. As the previous chapter has shown that the use of curse tablets was indeed common knowledge, specifically when it comes to the law courts of Athens, if orators expected curse tablets to work and knew they were often used in trials, it is not surprising that the extra nerves might have led exactly to what the tablets asked for.[187] Stage fright was indeed something that did appear at the time, as becomes clear from a fragment of a lost play by Euripides:

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[186] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 22-23; R. S. O. Tomlin, 'The Curse Tablets' in: B. Cunliffe ed., *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath, vol. 2: The Finds from the Sacred Spring* (Oxford 1988) 59-277, q.v. 101-102, 136.

[187] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 121.

> ‘Whenever anyone stands opposite in the debate and is about to speak at a trial for homicide, fear paralyzes the mouth of men and prevents the mind from saying what it wants to say.’[188]

As discussed in the previous chapter, these moments of stage fright would be explained away by stating a curse must have placed upon them. The same would be done when other moments of failure occurred.[189] These indications show that indeed, it is possible that a placebo-like effect could have played a role in the consequences that curse tablets brought. Additionally, it could have provided the “proof” needed to reinforce the belief that cursing practices worked, therefore keeping the practice going for centuries.

Curse Tablets and their Role in Society

Scholars have posed that perhaps curse tablets and magic on a wider scale were a manner of influencing society outside of its usual legal, political, economic, and social parameters. Curse tablets worked in ways that anyone could pay a professional magician or even create a curse themselves, allowing those who often stood against the structures set in place by the rulers and elites of society to influence society outside of the elite’s control. This applied not only to those who had less influence within the normal system, like women, slaves, or the poor, but also to rivalling elites trying to gain more control. In this manner, there was a power to be exerted on society that could not be controlled by its ruling elite, therefore posing a large threat to them.[190] However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, it seems that curse tablets, as religious rituals as much as magical ones, did actually have their place within society, instead of outside of it. They were part of religion, and they were a regular part of the litigation process. While their influence certainly provided a power that could not be controlled by the local ruling elite, this does not mean they functioned “outside” of society. Additionally, while we might not consider curse tablets and their usage to be a “normal” parameter of society from our modern point of view, this does not mean that the same perspective would be held by those living in Classical Athens.

Faraone seems to support this view, indicating that curse tablets ‘fit easily into the popular competitive strategy of survival and dominance that permeates ancient Greek society, regardless of whether the contests in which they were deployed were international, civic, or personal in scope’ and that they ‘somehow remained within the rules of the game for intramural competition in the Greek city-state.’[191] Thus, curse tablets functioned within society. While they did provide an additional way to exert power on their targets which could not be controlled by the authorities, they were still part of society’s legal, political, economic, and social parameters.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that curse tablets did seem to have worked, even if not in the manner that their creators believed they would. They could have worked in a therapeutic manner to either process emotions and tensions that were present or instil faith that future goals could be reached. Additionally, they seemed to have had further consequences. The knowledge that they could be used against people, specifically in court, could have caused moments of stage fright.

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[188] Fragment of Euripides' lost play *Alcmene*, in: R. Kannicht, *Tragicorum Gracorum Fragmenta, Vol. V: Euripides* (Göttigen 2004) fragment 88a; translation by Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 121; Faraone, ‘Accusation of Magic,’ 152.

[189] Faraone, ‘Accusation of Magic,’ 152-155; Faraone, ‘Agonistic Context,’ 15-16; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 121; see Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 23 for more sources and their discussion on magic being used to explain personal misfortune and public failure, also in other cultures.

[190] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 24.

[191] Faraone, ‘Agonistic Context,’ 20; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 38, n. 109.

Similar effects could have been present for the other situational variants, but we have no evidence for this. Furthermore, curse tablets provided a way to influence society that could not be controlled by local ruling elite. However, this did happen within society's legal, political, economic, and social parameters, not, as posed by some, outside of it.

Conclusion Section 4: Society

The first chapter in this section showed that curse tablets and their usage were widespread, used by multiple layers of society. Their usage was also common knowledge in Classical Athens, specifically in the lawcourts. Additionally, while their use can be described as a magical practice, this did not exclude them from religion. They were as much a religious practice as a magical one. The second chapter subsequently discussed the consequences of the use of curse tablets, focusing less on their magical effects, but on their unintended additional consequences. It showed how they could have had a therapeutic effect, allowing one to deal with their emotions, relieve existing tensions, or give hope and faith that future goals could be achieved. Additionally, a placebo-like effect was discussed, indicating that moments of stage fright could have been brought on by the knowledge of the possibility that a curse tablet could be used, specifically in court. Furthermore, curse tablets were likely used to explain away moments of failure or misfortune. Lastly, it discussed the role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society posing that they functioned within society's parameters but could have provided a way to exert influence on society outside of the control of the local authorities.

Conclusion

This research asked the question: what were the position and role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian religion and society? It approached this question by exploring two underexplored themes: gender, and the Underworld, using them as perspectives with which to answer this central question. The following results of the research will answer this question and be presented in two parts: one concerning the position and role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian religion, and subsequently a part on the position and role of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society.

Religion

Concerning the position of curse tablets within Classical Athenian religion, section 2 has made clear that there is a close connection between curse tablets and the manner in which they were believed to function, and the Underworld and the religious domain of the dead. This connection has been seen in the places where curse tablets were deposited, the use of *daimones* for transport, and the enactment of the curse by chthonic gods with the invocation of these gods being present on the tablets themselves. Through this it has been made clear that the use and functioning of these tablets are further removed from the domain of the Olympic gods within Classical Athenian religion.

Additionally, section 4 has shown that the creation and ritual usage of curse tablets are as much a religious practice as they are a magical practice. Magic is a part of Classical Athenian religion. Thus, when it comes to the role of curse tablets within Classical Athenian religion it seems their usage is a ritual like many others, one that invoked gods and makes use of *daimones* to aid them in attaining a certain purpose, generally disadvantaging a rival. The ritual had certain parameters that had to be met in order for them to succeed, for example the proper formulae and invocations, the rolling or folding and nailing of the tablet, and the right place and manner of deposition. While these parameters might not have been the same in each case, as different conventions and habits could exist alongside each other, they certainly show the religious and ritual role of Classical Athenian curse tablets.

Society

The investigation into the position of curse tablets in Classical Athenian society has also yielded a number of results. First of all, it has been made clear in section 4 that the usage of curse tablets was very widespread. Both the targets and creators of the curses were from all different layers of society, from poor to rich and from peasants to elites. Section 3 has also indicated that in the literary record and in descriptions of trials in the courts of Athens it seems women were mostly associated with magic and cursing practices, more so than men. However, the tablets themselves show a different reality, curse tablets were used by both men and women, as well as by people of all layers of society. Additionally, section 4 has shown that curse tablets and their usage were common knowledge, specifically in the litigation process. People were aware of their existence and knew they could be used against them. The same section also made clear that there were negative associations present concerning the utilisation and creation of curse tablets. However, it remains unclear exactly what caused these negative associations, whether it was their association with magic, the Underworld and domain of the dead, or their nature and purpose which has been interpreted as malevolent. Thus was their position in Classical Athenian society: a negatively associated practice which was widespread and common, and participated in by all layers of society and genders.

Concerning the role of curse tables in Classical Athenian society, there have also been a number of findings. Curse tablets did seem to work, even if they did not work in the way their users expected or intended them to. They had effects on their contemporary society, namely possible therapeutic effects allowing cursers to deal with their emotions or possibly tensions

that existed. Additionally, they could bring faith and instil confidence in their creators that they would achieve their goals, through their belief in the tablets' functioning. Additionally, they may have caused a placebo-like effect. By knowing a curse tablet could be used against them, specifically in court, people could have experienced more nerves, leading to moments of stage fright. They were also used to explain away moments like this, specifically moments of failure or misfortune. Lastly, Classical Athenian curse tablets functioned within the parameters of society, as they were part of society. They did not function outside of it. However, they did provide a manner of influencing society outside of the control of the local ruling elite, but not just for people with less power in society like women, slaves, or the poor. They also provided a similar opportunity for the rivalling elite and the wealthy. Thus, their role in Classical Athenian society is manifold. They provided a way to influence society, but also a way to explain away failure, and, while perhaps unintended, could have a therapeutic role, as well as an encouraging and assuring one.

Conclusively, this research has shown the commonality and interconnected character of curse tablets and their usage in Classical Athenian religion and society. It has demonstrated that these objects are worth studying and should not be neglected by academics in their research because of mere 'negative social evaluation'. Additionally, there is much work to be done in the field. The investigation into the gender of cursers which has made its first steps in this study needs further research. A linguistic study into the grammar used in tablets could prove fruitful in attempting to discern the gender of the curser. Furthermore, it would be highly useful to find out where the negative associations originate that were present with curse tablets in Classical Athens, as discussed in section 4. Lastly, it would, of course, be worthwhile to expedite the publishing of unpublished curse tablets and to continue to do so as new ones are found. This field is deserving of more attention than it has previously received. I certainly hope this research has shown its reader as much.

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