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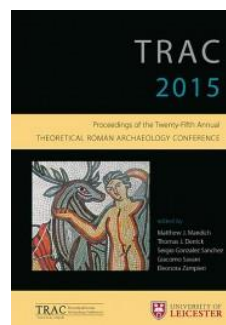
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Distraught, Drained, Devoured, or Damned? The Importance of Individual Creativity in Roman Cursing

Stuart McKie

Introduction

The corpus of known curse tablets from the Graeco-Roman world has grown dramatically in the last 30 years, and now numbers are somewhere around 2000 individual tablets (Gordon 2013: 268), ranging from simple statements of the name of the victim to elaborate works including a whole host of complex features. The range of possibilities within ancient cursing is so wide and variable that scholars have spent most of the last century drawing and redrawing the boundaries of the categories into which they are placed for modern study (e.g. Audollent 1904; Faraone 1991; Kropp 2010). Problems have arisen because the surviving curses are often so fragmented that a complete reading is impossible, and even the complete tablets present a picture that is amorphous and ambiguous. Any attempt to impose order on the whole corpus leaves many grey areas, making analysis extremely difficult (e.g. the ‘border curses’ in Versnel 1991). Part of the reason for this is that Latin curse tablets were rarely connected to any large-scale formalised tradition. This is especially the case in the north-western provinces of the Roman Empire, on which this paper is focussed. In this region it is likely that there existed no templates or instruction manuals to copy from, and there is no evidence for the scribes or professional magicians who may have worked in the eastern Mediterranean (Gordon 2013: 256). As a result, individuals seem to have composed their own curse tablets, using their own personal experiences and knowledge to make the most effective curse for their own circumstances.

In order to proceed past these difficulties, I argue that a new approach to the evidence is needed. This new approach will not attempt to force curses into neat categories that suit the needs of modern scholars, but will take them as they were: individual petitions to the gods that address a very specific set of problems facing a person at a particular time in their life. This paper will apply this insight to the tablets from Bath and Mainz, reassessing them with a central concern for the individuals who wrote them, the actions and movements they carried out and the locations and contexts that influenced them. This new approach to ancient cursing rituals is born out of an appeal to wider theoretical discussions, which has been sorely lacking in past scholarship on curse tablets. This absence is regrettable, as movements involving greater use of theoretical models within other areas of archaeology, as well as other disciplines, have been responsible for great advancements in our understanding of religious belief and practice in both the modern world and the past (for the ancient world see, for example, Webster 1997; Revell

2007. Modern examples include McGuire 2008; Gilhus 2013). There is great potential in their application to the evidence for ancient magic, and curse tablets in particular.

The theory of vernacular religion, developed by Primiano and other scholars of modern religious studies (Primiano 1995; Bowman and Valk 2012), is especially applicable to ancient magic. It starts from the suggestion that the notion of official religion is a mistaken ideal, an imaginary model that does not exist in real life. In reality all religious people interpret their beliefs and practices through their own experience of life. According to the theory of vernacular religion, we should not be focussing on how closely or not people adhere to ideal models, but on how religious belief and practice differ for individuals based on environmental, social, political and economic factors. This frames religion as the lived experience of thinking and feeling humans, not as a set of beliefs and rituals written down and repeated by mindless automatons. A human life is filled with moments of creative performance and expression, which are influenced by the contexts in which they occur. Three themes of vernacular religion have been identified (Primiano 2012: 387), namely:

- The significance of creativity to religious life,
- The ambiguity of people's religion,
- The relationship of creativity and ambiguity to forms of power.

Of these three themes, it is the first that will be the primary focus of this paper, although all are relevant and readily apparent when curse tablets are examined through the lens of vernacular religion.

In the study of the ancient world specifically, the most vocal support for a contextual and individualistic interpretation of religion has come out of several projects centred on the Max Weber College at the University of Erfurt. Various publications have appeared in the last five years, and have emphasised the importance of individuality and everyday experience in ancient religious life (Rüpke 2012; Rüpke and Spickermann 2012; Rüpke 2013; Rüpke and Woolf 2013). They have argued that in even the most formulaic and routine rituals there existed the potential for innovation, and that they were all the product of choices made by individual priests or petitioners, embedded within wider frameworks of what was deemed acceptable and effective (Muñiz Grijalvo 2013: 244; Woolf 2013: 147). The repetition of these rituals built social identities at a community level, and allowed individuals to establish their own place within that social order. The theory of vernacular religion itself has not been absent from these discussions. Goldberg has used it to challenge the well-established notion of syncretism in the northern Roman provinces (Goldberg 2009). His criticism was that syncretism was static, frozen at the point of fusion, and that as a result it acknowledged none of the constant transformation and re-constitution that must have occurred in a society with ever-shifting power relations and cultural contexts. Vernacular religion, he argued, could provide new insights into religious practice in the provinces by considering hybridised ritual practices in specific local contexts.

How does all of this apply to curse tablets? If we remember that all the tablets from the north-west were composed by the individual petitioners themselves, we can see that an appreciation of the individual, specific circumstances that triggered their creation is essential. In this paper I will be applying the insights gained from these theoretical discussions to the curse tablets themselves in order to demonstrate where individual creativity can be detected, and how significant it was for ancient cursing rituals.

Bath and Mainz

There are many similarities between the two sites of Bath and Mainz in terms of location and context. First and foremost, they are both urban temple sites in the north-western provinces dedicated to popular and conventional deities. In the case of Bath, the dedication to Sulis Minerva is well known. At Mainz, the temple was the focus of an unusual pairing of Magna Mater and Isis Panthea (known from dedicatory inscriptions: *AE* 2004: 1015–16). Various possible reasons for the combination have been given, and it is most likely that they were worshipped together as eastern goddesses, or mother figures, or probably both (Blänsdorf 2010: 145). Both the Bath and Mainz temples were at central locations in their respective settlements, and were built at around the same time, probably A.D. 69 or 70.

Although curse tablet deposition began almost immediately after construction of the temple in Mainz, it took until the late second century for the peak of deposition at Bath. The two sites saw very different uses in terms of worship on all scales, from individual dedications to the celebrations of the official priests of the various cults. Worship of Sulis Minerva at Bath appears to have followed the standard Roman pattern of animal sacrifices conducted by a dedicated priesthood on an altar in front of the temple (Fig. 1). Individual offerings were concentrated on the sacred spring that was enclosed behind walls and under a barrel-vaulted ceiling from the late second or early third century (Cunliffe and Davenport 1985: 65). Where palaeography can date the curses they almost all come from after this time (Tomlin 1988: 85). Petitioners were now required to either enter the spring through a small doorway from the temple side, or make use of a purpose-built ‘deposition gallery’ on the bath side, now completely separated from the baths by new walls and accessed by a dedicated external door.

At the Mainz temple, worship looked radically different. Descriptions of the ecstatic ritual behaviour of the priests of Isis and of Mater Magna are well known from ancient literary sources, and their uniqueness was further marked by hair styles, clothing and castration (For Magna Mater: Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.19.4f and Juv. 6.511–21. For Isis: Apul. *Met.* 11 *passim* but especially 9–10, and Juv. 6.522–41. The priests also appear on sculptures and gravestones, see Beard, North, and Price 1998: 211, 136 (vol. 2)). At Mainz it seems that the two goddesses

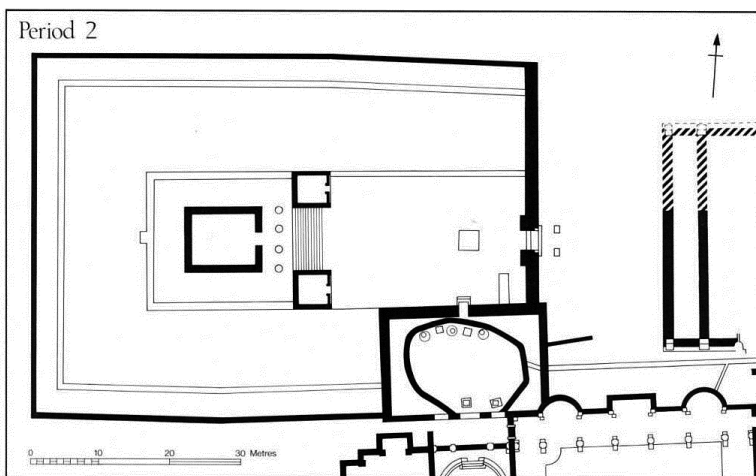


Figure 1: Building phase 2 of the Bath temple complex (Cunliffe and Davenport 1985: 179).

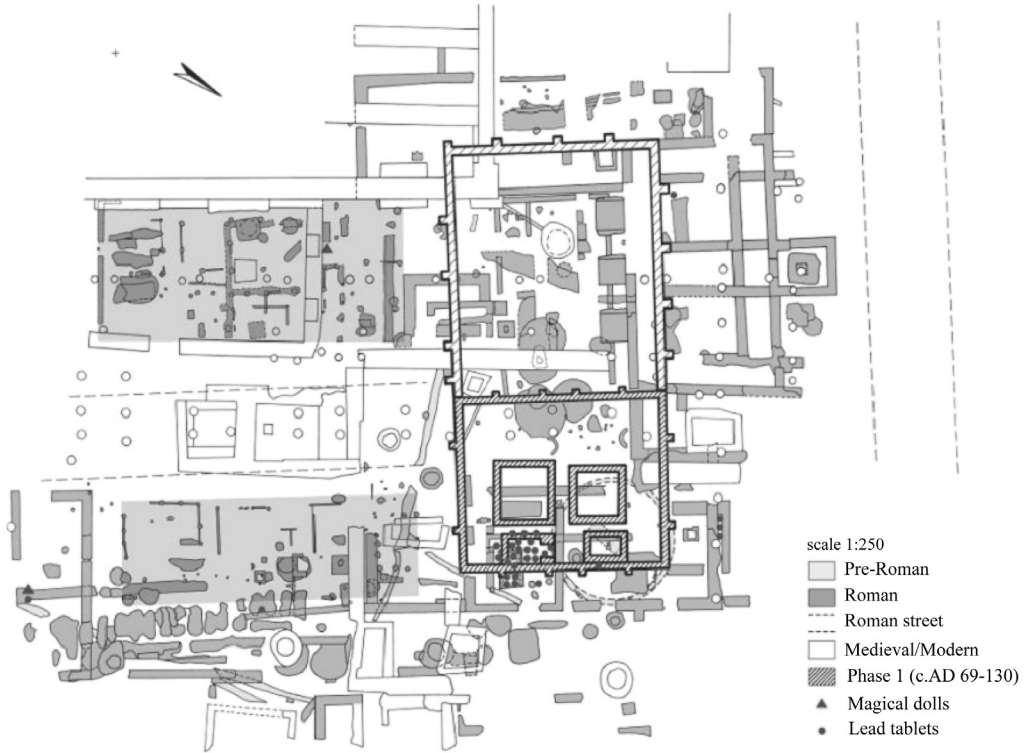


Figure 2: The temple of Magna Mater and Isis in Mainz (after Blänsdorf 2010: 144).

had their own separate sections of the temple, as indicated by the two structures within the sacred enclosure (Fig. 2). Alongside the rituals imported with the cults themselves, the main private ritual seems to have been the offering of goods that were burnt and then buried in the ground of the temple precinct in one of the many pits dug for this purpose (Witteyer 2003: 10).

There is no clear evidence from either site for exactly where the petitioners obtained the raw materials necessary for the ritual. At the very least, each individual required a flat piece of metal and a stylus to write with, and in some cases a nail for piercing. Chemical analysis of the Bath tablets revealed that very few of them were actually pure lead, with the majority being made from pewter, an alloy of lead and tin (Tomlin 1988: 81–84). As there was a concentration of pewter manufacturing in the region around Bath from at least the third century (Lee 2009), this would suggest that the tablets were off-cuts or side-line products of local industrial production, perhaps available for purchase at the temple. Such chemical analysis has not been conducted on the Mainz tablets but from physical observation they seem to be pure lead. Owing to the size of the city, neither the petitioners nor the temple authorities would have had any difficulty in obtaining such a common raw material.

Although it is possible that the petitioners could have prepared their tablets off site, only coming to the temple for the deposition, I would argue that this is unlikely. As will be discussed below, it is likely that petitioners sought advice from priests or other temple attendants regarding the correct ways of communicating with the deities, meaning they would have to be on-site

when inscribing their tablet. Alongside this, the importance of sacred places to the practice of Roman religion should be taken into account. Archaeologists and historians have often argued that the locations in which rituals were enacted were incredibly significant to the performance (see in particular Revell 2007: 2009), and great importance was placed on the ability of the gods to witness rituals performed for their benefit (Corbeill 2004: 26–32). There is no reason to think that this should not also be true for the curse tablets from Bath and Mainz, which seem to have been common and accepted methods of communicating with the goddesses of the temples.

There is no evidence for scribes, textbooks, templates or professional magicians in the curse tablets from either site, and there are very few cases in which the same handwriting can be seen on more than one tablet, so we must conclude that they were all composed and written by the individual petitioners themselves. This is something that is occasionally mentioned in existing scholarship (e.g. Tomlin 1988: 98–101; Gordon 2013), but which is rarely given the attention it deserves. It is more likely that the petitioners at Bath and Mainz drew upon their own creativity to interpret local traditions and beliefs to best suit their needs. The people who wrote the curse tablets were influenced by several factors, including the physical location in which they composed their curse and what they understood from local traditions about the best ways to appeal to the goddesses.

Surroundings

It is clear from several examples that their physical surroundings had a profound effect on the petitioners who wrote the curse tablets at both sites. At Bath, the enclosure and deposition gallery created conditions of dark and damp, as light was restricted and the steam from the spring was trapped within the structure. This may be the reason behind two Bath curses that contain unique words or phrases. First, there is the well-known *Vilbia* curse, which includes the only example of sympathetic magic from Roman Britain: ‘may he who has stolen the brooch (or cutting tool) from me become as liquid as water...’ (*Tab. Sulis* 4). We have no other evidence of formulae like this on Romano-British curse tablets, so it was probably not a common part of the wider culture of cursing in the province. Rather it could have been a fitting punishment for the suspects that sprung to the petitioner’s mind as they were composing the curse in front of the sacred spring. The second, and perhaps best example of environmental inspiration, is *Tab. Sulis* 100:

Si puer si puella si vir si femina qui hoc invol[a]vit non ei remittatur nis(i) inn[o]centiam... non illi dimitta[t]ur nec somnum nisi ut Euticia modium nebulae modium veniat fumi

Whether boy or girl, whether man or woman, forgiveness is not to be given to the person who has stolen this unless [...] innocence. Forgiveness is not to be given to her, nor shall she sleep, except on condition that Euticia sells a bushel of cloud, a bushel of smoke.

The curse starts with a series of common formulae, found on several Bath tablets as well as others from across Britain, but ends on a unique condition that is difficult to explain with reference to other ancient textual sources. However, if we remember the physical surroundings of the petitioner, we can get closer to a satisfying answer. Although Tomlin translates *fumi* as ‘smoke’, it could just as easily be ‘steam’, which makes more sense in the context of a steaming thermal spring. Now that the steam was trapped beneath the roof, the sights and smells of misty, damp and sulphurous air may have been more apparent than before. If it was indeed

a proverbial saying, as Tomlin suggests (1988: 237), the spring itself may have prompted the petitioner to remember it at the time of composition. Although environmental inspiration can only be read with confidence in the texts of these two tablets, the fact that the majority of the curses were deposited after the spring was enclosed is surely significant. The newly-created deposition gallery created a far more intimate environment for private rituals at the spring, and curse tablet deposition may have flourished in part because of this new personal, and perhaps secret, surrounding.

At Mainz, too, the surroundings of the petitioners affected how they composed their tablets. Of the two goddesses worshipped at the temple, Magna Mater is singled out for appeals on the curse tablets. Various explanations for this have been suggested (Blänsdorf 2010: 145–146), but none that take into account the evidence of the tablets themselves. On those curses where Magna Mater is directly named, it is predominantly done in connection to her ecstatic eunuch priests: the *galli*. These men were infamous for the self-inflicted wounds that characterised their devotion to their goddesses, and this clearly had a particular resonance with the authors of the Mainz curses. Of the 34 curse tablets found on the site, at least five used the act of genital mutilation of the *galli* in sympathetic magical formulae. One example is *DTM 2*, which includes the line ‘...just as the *galli* cut themselves and chop off their genitals, so shall they... cut their chest...’. This is one of the more direct formulae, which seeks to transfer the pain suffered by the *galli* onto the victim of the curse. Some of the other curses are more abstract in their application of the formula; for example *DTM 6* directs the cutting to the victim’s ‘loyalty, reputation and ability’ (in the original Latin text the petitioner used the alliterative triplet of *fides fama facultas*.)

Other rituals associated with Magna Mater and her consort Attis also inspired the composers of the curse tablets. On the 22nd of March each year, worshippers would bring a tree into the temple in commemoration of Attis’ death under a pine (Salzman 1990: 164–166). *DTM 6* refers to this ritual, again in a sympathetic magical formula: ‘... just as the tree in the temple will dry up, so shall his reputation, loyalty, his happiness, his ability dry up ...’.

From these six curses it seems clear that the witnessing of the rituals of the priests and followers of Magna Mater (or at least the knowledge that these took place) inspired the content of the curse tablets. The stark imagery of self-inflicted wounds and dead trees evidently had a profound effect on those who visited the temple, especially at this early point in the Roman presence in northern Europe. The temple at Mainz is our earliest evidence for worship of Magna Mater and Isis in the north-west, so it is likely that their rituals were something of a novelty to those who had not experienced Rome or the provinces further east, where they would have been more common (Gschlöbl 2006: 84; Blänsdorf 2012: 1).

In the phrases and formulae from Bath and Mainz described above, we have clear evidence of the creativity of individuals in the cursing rituals at the two sites. In the terminology of vernacular religion, each tablet was a moment of creative performance, and that creativity was influenced by the petitioner’s surroundings at specific moments in time and space.

Gestures and Movements

The words of the curses were not the only important part of cursing rituals: they were accompanied by a complex series of gestures and movements. It should not be forgotten that the deposition of the inscribed tablet was the last step in a process. All the steps that preceded deposition were as important, if not more important than the final product, and had an impact on the outcome of the process as a whole. In the words of the anthropologist Tim Ingold, ‘a text is a woven

crystallisation of movement within an environment' (Ingold 2000: 404). There has been a bias in previous scholarship toward form over process, which has led scholars in a wide variety of fields to ignore or undervalue the creative production of objects or texts in favour of detailed analyses of the finished product. In other societies this bias is absent, and we know from other parts of Roman religion that sacred significance was attached to every movement, action and gesture within a ritual from start to finish (for a detailed discussion of this see Corbeil 2004). There is no good reason to think that this was not true in ancient cursing, and in fact the *PGM* (a collection of late-antique, Graeco-Egyptian magical instruction manuals, recipes and templates) are incredibly prescriptive of the ways a petitioner should comport their body when engaging in the rituals they describe. Actions of tying, binding, folding and piercing add extra power to curses, and attempt to further ensure their success in controlling or affecting the victim (e.g. *PGM* 7. 429–58).

Although there is little evidence that instruction manuals like those of the *PGM* were available in the north-west, they should nevertheless remind us that gesture and movement were important in the production of curse tablets in the ancient world, and with the evidence from Bath and Mainz it is still possible to attempt a reconstruction of the process that went into the creation of curses on these sites. Almost half of the Bath tablets, and just over two thirds at Mainz, were either folded or rolled. Eight of the Bath curses had nail holes, as well as three of those from Mainz. There is no set pattern within these – the number and direction of folds or the location of the nail holes were apparently all left to the creativity of the individual petitioners. When nails were used they tended to miss the inscribed text, which means that the petitioner either left an area clear for nailing or pierced the tablet before it was inscribed. There is one exception from Bath, where the writing has been carefully coordinated on both sides so that the nail would hit both instances of the name of one of the victims, Anniola (*Tab. Sulis* 8).

Although often taken for granted, the act of writing itself is a ritual movement. It demands certain postures and gestures, and involves the entire body – not just the hands, but the arms, face, eyes and head (Ingold 2000: 401–404). The size to which the Bath and Mainz tablets were cut made them easy to inscribe while being held in one hand, but may have required resting on a flat surface or using the leg if no obvious surface was available. Either way, it would be apparent to any onlooker what the person was doing by the comportment of their body, especially in the temples at Bath and Mainz where cursing was common. One example from Mainz shows the constant process of creative adaptation perfectly (Figs. 3 and 4). The petitioner began on one side, but then changed their mind, turned over the tablet and started again in a more 'magical' style – spiralling the text around the outside. When all four sides were full, they started writing in the centre, and when the space ran out again they started up at the top of the tablet. The petitioner did not have a plan before they started, but made it up as they went along, fitting their text to the physical realities of the tablet. The movements of flipping and rotating the tablet, as well as the physical action of carving the words into the metal with a stylus, are woven into the text, and all would have had significance to the petitioner as they attempted to add more power to their intention. These actions are unique – as far as we know, no-one else in Mainz or even in Roman Germany thought to write some of the curse as edge text in this way. However, the petitioner still chose to deposit their curse with those of others at the temple of Magna Mater. If there is any unifying feature to the curse tablets from the two sites it is the location of deposition, and therefore the sacredness of the place. This is a factor not defined by the curse tablet ritual, but is the point at which these rituals intersect with wider religious action in their social context.

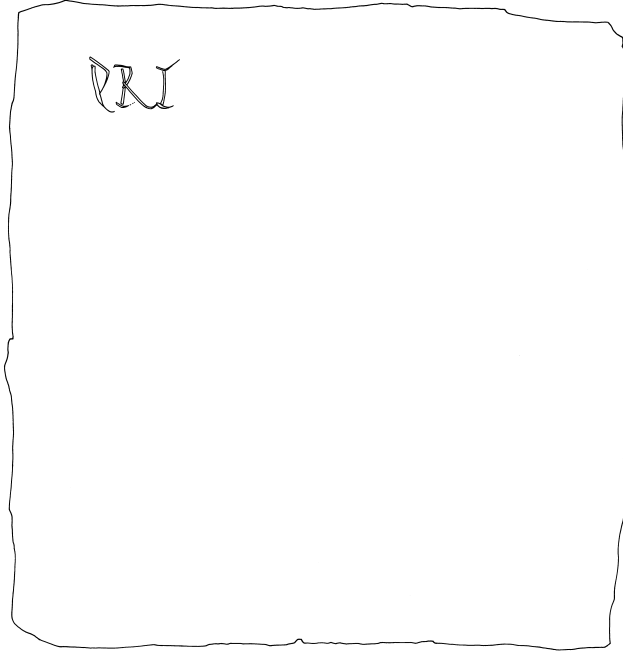


Figure 3: The front of DTM 15 (Blänsdorf 2012: CD).

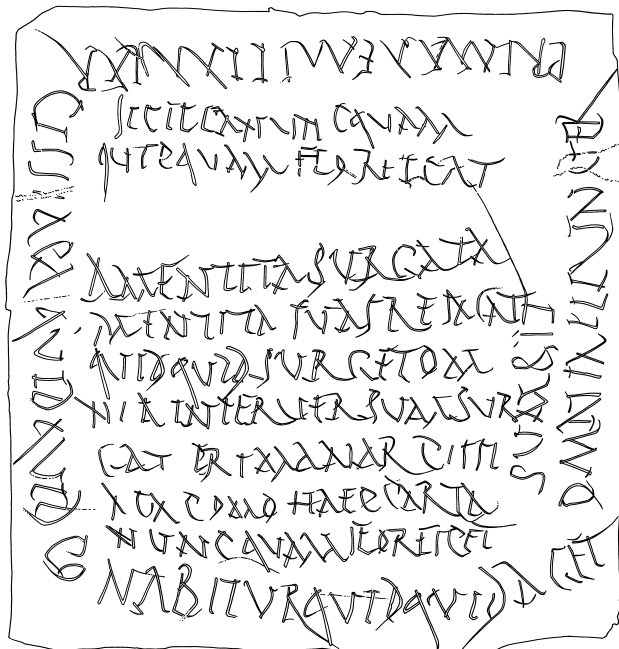


Figure 4: The back of DTM 15 (Blänsdorf 2012: CD).

The relationships between curse tablets and these contexts connect with the on-going and unresolved scholarly debates surrounding the boundaries between magic and religion. This is far too large a discussion to deal with properly here but at least a few remarks are necessary. As creativity has been the central topic of this paper, perhaps the most pertinent model to apply would be that of Smith (2003: 35), who conceptualised magic as part of the religion of ‘anywhere’. The religion of ‘anywhere’, in Smith’s model, represents a creative combination of elements from both domestic and temple religions (the religions of ‘here’ and ‘there’), and can both imitate and also reverse norms from these other spheres. This chimes with calls from some scholars – most recently Otto (2013) – to abandon the study of magic in ways that divorce it from other religious rituals and beliefs. This would also seem to fit well with vernacular religion, which emphasises individual human experience over abstract scholarly classification (Primiano 1995).

Oral Tradition

As well as their physical and religious contexts, people took creative inspiration from local traditions and customs when composing curse tablets. This is evident in the repetition of stock formulae at both Bath and Mainz, some of which drew on wider traditions of cursing on a local or regional scale, particularly in Roman Britain. Formulae and phrases such as mutually exclusive alternatives, payment in blood and the giving of victims or items to the deity or temple are found at Bath, Uley and several other sites throughout Britain – mostly on tablets from the second to the fourth centuries. Even within these stock phrases however, there is little evidence for direct copying, and considerable variation in their use on individual tablets. The most common formulae at Bath are the mutual exclusives of ‘whether man or woman’ and ‘whether slave or free’. Most often they are written as *si vir si femina* and *si servus si liber*, but various individuals chose to alter the pattern by reversing the standard order, or by using different connecting words or synonyms for the alternatives (Table 1).

Table 1: The variations of the two most common stock formulae and the curses on which they appear.

Man or woman	Slave or free
<i>si vir si femina</i> (Tab. Sulis 10, 32, 36, 49, 52, 66, 71, 100)	<i>si servus si liber</i> (Tab. Sulis 10, 32, 34, 39, 44, 47, 45, 49, 55, 57, 62, 63, 65, 66, 71, 97, 102, 105)
<i>si baro si mulier</i> (Tab. Sulis 57, 65)	<i>si liber si servus</i> (Tab. Sulis 11, 36, 38, 62)
<i>si vir si femina si ancilla</i> (Tab. Sulis 52)	<i>si libera si serva</i> (Tab. Sulis 62)
<i>sive vir sive femina</i> (Tab. Sulis 61)	<i>si serva si libera</i> (Tab. Sulis 62)
<i>utrum vir utrum femina</i> (Tab. Sulis 98)	<i>utrum servus utrum liber</i> (Tab. Sulis 98)
<i>si femina si vir</i> (Tab. Sulis 38)	<i>si servus si liber si libertinus</i> (Tab. Sulis 31)
<i>si mulier si baro</i> (Tab. Sulis 44)	<i>si liber si ancilla</i> (Tab. Sulis 52)

The best example of an individual adding their own creative input onto these stock phrases is *Tab. Sulis 62*:

[. . .] Jeocorotis perdedi la[enam] [pa]lleum sagum paxsam do[navi] [..].[S]ulis ut hoc ante dies novem [si li]ber si ser(v)us si [li]bera si serva [si] pure si puell[a i]n rostr[o] s[uo] defera[t] caballeram s[i ser(v)us si liber si] serva si libera si puer [si puella] in suo rostro defer[at

I, [...]eocorotis, have lost (my) Italian, Greek, Gallic cloak (and) tunic, (which) I have given... Sulis, that (he) may bring it down in his snout before nine days, [whether] free or slave, whether free woman or slave woman, [whether] boy or girl... horse blanket, [whether slave or free, whether] slave woman or free woman, whether boy [or girl], bring down in his snout.

The petitioner has used three different alternatives (whether free or slave, whether free woman or slave woman, whether boy or girl), but switched the order when repeating them. It seems that although it was important to include these mutually exclusive alternatives, there was no requirement to conform to set arrangements even within the same tablet.

At Mainz there were also a few phrases that were common across several of the tablets. I have already mentioned above the references to the *galli* in sympathetic formulae, but those are not the only ones. Three of the tablets refer to the lead being melted or burnt (*DTM* 10, 11, and 12), and one of the tablets bears physical evidence that this was actually done to it after inscribing (Fig. 5). It is possible that this idea came from the influence of other ritual activity on the site, which, as already mentioned, seems to have focussed on the deposition of burnt offerings. As the curse tablets were also found in a purpose-dug pit within the sanctuary, there is good reason to suggest that they were seen as part of the same votive practice. There is also the recurring mention of salt dissolving in water, which appears on another three tablets (*DTM* 2, 3, and 4) – for example *DTM* 2: ‘and just as salt will become liquid in water, so shall his limbs and marrow waste away’.

The Mainz tablets are far more visceral than those from Bath in terms of explicit pain and torture inflicted on the victims, often in imaginatively gruesome ways. The most popular targets are the limbs and marrow – attractive not only because of their position as external and internal features but also as an alliterative pair in Latin – *membra et medulla*. We have already seen the repetition of another set of alliterative targets in *DTM* 6 – *fama fides fortuna facultas*. Another tablet (*DTM* 1) asks that the victim be devoured by ‘dogs, worms and other monsters’ (*canes uermes adque alia portenta*), and yet another (*DTM* 5) prays that the victim will watch themselves die all over their body, except the eyes.

Most petitioners at both sites seem to have been aware of the correct ways in which the respective goddesses should be approached, but did not have access to set templates from

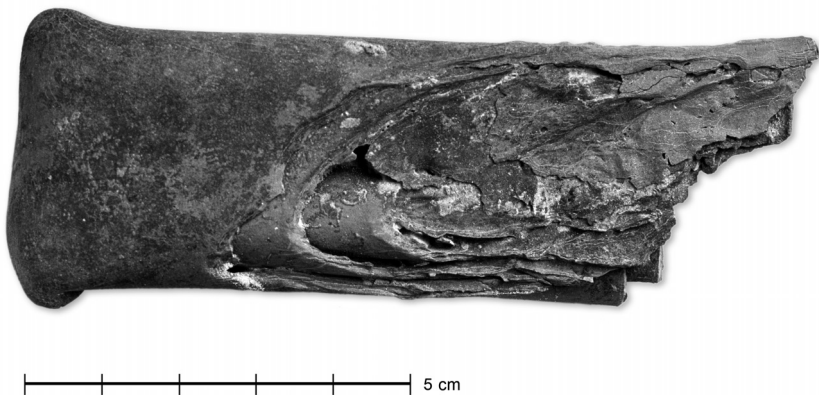


Figure 5: Image of *DTM* 2 (Blänsdorf 2012: CD).

which to compose their curses. The formulae and terminology must have circulated orally in the communities surrounding the temples and through family and friendship networks, as well as being directly available from temple attendants. Individual petitioners absorbed these and employed them according to their own understanding in a moment of creative expression at the time of composition of their curse tablet. The involvement of temple attendants and priests in this process connects the study of curse tablets to the third of Primiano's themes of vernacular religion (above). There is not space to discuss this further here, but it shows how much fertile ground there is for further study in this area.

Conclusion

As this paper has demonstrated, much can be gained from using vernacular religious theory as a basis for thinking about ancient cursing. It has been shown that the contexts of curse rituals, in terms of physical location and the wider social traditions and conventions in which the petitioners were embedded, had a huge impact on the ways those rituals were understood and carried out. Following Primiano, we must think of each curse as the end result of a series of moments of creative expression and performance, rather than an inert inscription that can be neatly classified according to the needs of modern scholarship. The process involved the actions of writing, folding, nailing and depositing, all of which were loaded with religious significance. Each individual petitioner made their own creative choices regarding how to perform the most appropriate and effective petition possible under the specific circumstances.

More generally, it has been shown how valuable curse tablets are as a body of evidence for thinking about the nature of religious activity in the Roman world. Curses should be considered alongside more well-known artefact types, such as votive deposits or inscriptions, as part of a more holistic approach that would deepen our understanding of how individuals negotiated their communications with the gods in specific local and regional contexts. However, there is much work still to be done before this can be fully realised, especially in the application of modern theoretical approaches to curse tablets from other sites in the Roman Empire, especially Uley, Carthage and Hadrumetum, which have produced the most finds after Bath (see Kropp 2008 for the most up-to-date collection of Latin curse tablets). In this way the field can continue to move away from seeing curse tablets as inert inscriptions scratched onto corroded sheets of lead, and towards appreciating them for what they are: the final outcome of a complex and powerful ritual that held great importance for the people who performed them.

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Abbreviations

- AE* *L'Année épigraphique: Revue des publications épigraphiques relatives à l'antiquité romaine* (Paris 1888–).
- DTM* *Defixionum Tabellae Mogontienses*. Edited and translated into German by Blänsdorf (2012). English translations are my own.
- PGM* *Papyri Graecae Magicae*. Edited and translated by Betz (1992).
- Tab. Sulis* *Tabellae Sulis*. Edited and Translated by Tomlin (1988).

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