

In Blood and Ashes

CURSE TABLETS AND BINDING SPELLS

Introduction

Chapter 4 concluded with a survey of the influences at work upon Athenian curse-writers, from private letters to civic decrees, and suggested that oral binding spells also influenced some practitioners by the Classical period. Allusions to binding rituals in fifth-century drama include the Erinyes's "binding hymn," incanted against Orestes in the context of a trial (*Eum.* 306–96), in addition to the binding and "nailing" of Prometheus by Zeus, Hephaistos, Bia, and Kratos in the *Prometheus Bound* (52–87), which may have served as a dramatized re-enactment of a binding ritual.¹

These references speak to the familiarity of Athenian audiences with binding rituals, and help account for the abundance of binding verbs (δέω, καταδέω) in Attic curse tablets—especially relative to early Selinountine curses, in which such verbs are seemingly absent. This chapter investigates the relationship between inscribed curse texts and older, oral binding traditions; it demonstrates how binding spells and incantations could influence private curse-writers, and are accordingly preserved in several lead curse tablets. The chapter opens with three sets of Attic curse tablets that carry remnants of dactylic hexameter and epic diction, including language known from Homeric epic, theogonic poetry, and hymns. Considered alongside older epic hexameters, these curse tablets can be used to triangulate and reconstruct a "binding language" exploited by both performative genres—an early, widespread tradition of incantations known to poets, oracles, and curse-writers alike. One strand of this tradition employed an expression with (1) δέω as a verb of binding, (2) δεσμῶν/-οῖς as a cognate instrumental dative, and (3) a powerful adjective such as ἀργαλέος or κρατερός to describe the bond. This language emerges both in literary and epigraphic hexameters from

across the Mediterranean. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the mechanisms by which binding spells circulated in Greek antiquity, including traditions outside of Attica (attested by metrical curse tablets from Sicily, North Africa, and elsewhere). From Athens to Cyrene, curse tablets document how binding spells were broadly embedded in popular culture; as performative speech acts, incantations were common forms of cultural knowledge, and could be flexibly employed across genres and media for centuries. I do *not* mean to suggest that all curse tablets evolved from oral binding spells—far from it. The orality argument is, in my opinion, valid for only a small subgroup of Greek curse tablets. As noted in Chapter 1, it is difficult to envision a scenario in which early Selinountine curse tablets, which use scribal signs and repeatedly employ compounds of γράφω to “register” victims, derived from oral incantations.² So too the curses discussed in Chapter 4 that refer to themselves as “letters,” and their deposition as an act of “sending.” But the handful of Greek curse tablets that contain dactylic hexameter, epic formulae, and performative future verbs suggest that some curse tablets *do* preserve fossils of older ritual speech; these lead texts document how binding spells could inform and sculpt private curse-writing rituals. They also reveal how cosmogonic myth could intervene in daily life and influence patterns of thought and conflict management across the Greek Mediterranean. Together with Chapter 6, this section shifts from a regional-historical approach to the study of curse-writing rituals, to a thematic investigation of particular linguistic features within these texts, and their relationship to ritual speech acts (both binding spells and, in the following chapter, public *arai*).

In Blood and Ashes: Five Attic Binding Curses

In order to assess the relationship between oral binding spells and private curse texts, let us consider a cache of curse tablets that bear connections to older myth and performative verse (5.1–5.5). Recovered north of Piraeus in 2003 CE, the five tablets emerged in the pyre grave of a young girl, and date from c. 375 BCE.³ They contain remarkably similar but not identical curses, all of which were inscribed in the same neat hand. The composer altered each curse to tailor it against different individuals; scribal intervention can be seen in proper names and details of the targets’ property (the tavern of Demetrios and Phanagora, but the household of Euphiletos), but otherwise the “template” curse undergirding the texts remains largely unchanged. Tablets 5.1–5.5 afford a glimpse of the curse-creation process in the early fourth century BCE, and how one ritual practitioner customized a fixed spell to suit a client’s needs and circumstances. The five tablets are presented as a group, after which the curse underpinning all texts is analyzed.

A close reading of these texts alongside older hexameter verse brings to light their oral antecedents, thereby connecting us to an ancient, widespread tradition of performed spells and incantations.

Tablet 5.1. Lamont 2021b, no. 1⁴

Athens, Agios Ioannis Rentis: Pyre-grave enclosure

c. 375 BCE

Piraeus Archaeological Museum, Inv. ΜΠ 11948

- 1 [Ἑκ]άτη χθονία, Ἄρτεμι χθονία, Ἑρμῇ χθόνιε,
 ἐπιφθόνησον Φαναγόραι καὶ Δημητρίῳι
 καὶ τῷ καπηλείῳι καὶ χρήμασι καὶ κτήμασι.
 Δήσω τόγ γ' ἐμὸν ἐχθρὸν Δημήτριον καὶ Φανα-
 5 γόραν ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίαισιγ
 σὺμ πᾶσιμ φθιμένοις. Ο(ὐ)δέ σε λύσε(ι) πρώτη πεν-
 [θ]ετηρίς. Τοιο(ύ)τωι σ' ἐγὼ δήσω δεσμῶι,
 [ὦ Δ]ημήτριε, ὥσπερ κρατερῶτατόν
 [έστ]ιν, γλώττει δὲ/ κυνωτὸν ἐπεγκρο(ύ)σω.

Hekate Chthonia, Artemis Chthonia, Hermes Chthonios: envy Phanagora and Demetrios, and their shop and their property and their possessions. I bind my enemy Demetrios, and Phanagora, in blood and ashes, with all the dead! Nor will the next four-year cycle release you. I bind you in such a bind, Demetrios, as strongly as possible, and upon [your] tongue a *kynoton* I strike in.

Tablet 5.2. Lamont 2021b, no. 2

Athens, Agios Ioannis Rentis: Pyre-grave enclosure

c. 375 BCE

Piraeus Archaeological Museum, Inv. ΜΠ 11949

(Figure 5.1a, b)

- 1 Ἑκάτη χθονία, Ἄρτεμι χθονία, Ἑρμῇ χθόνιε, ἐπιφθόνησον Εὐθύδημ[ωι]
 καὶ Κρίτει, καὶ αὐτοῖς καὶ χρήμασι καὶ κτήμασι. Δήσω τόγ γ' ἐμὸν
 ἐχθρὸν Εὐθύδημον καὶ Κρίτην ἐ[ν] αἵματι καὶ κονίαισιν
 σὺμ πᾶσιν φθιμένοις. Ο(ὐ)δέ σε λύσει πρώτη πενθετηρίς.
 5 Τοιο(ύ)τωι σ' ἐγὼ δήσω δεσμῶι, ὦ Εὐθύδημε, καὶ Κρίτην,
 ὥσπερ κρατερῶτατόν ἐστιν, γλώττει δὲ κυνωτὸν
 ἐπεγκρο(ύ)σω.

(a)



(b)

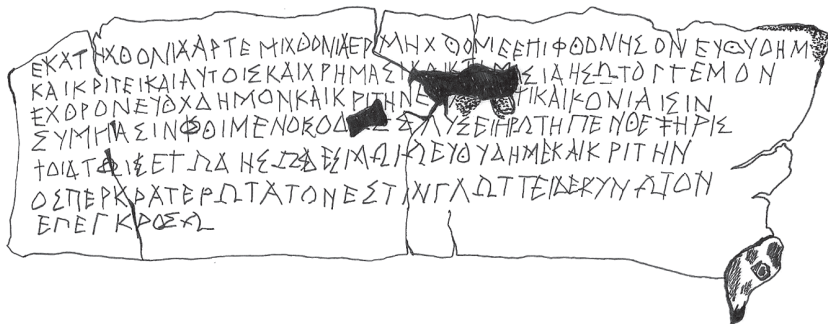


FIGURE 5.1 Tablet 5.2 (Lamont 2021b, no. 2), c. 375 BCE. Athens, Agios Ioannis Rentis: Pyre-grave enclosure. Piraeus Archaeological Museum, Inv. MΠ 11949. Photograph and drawing by author.

Hekate Chthonia, Artemis Chthonia, Hermes Chthonios: envy Euthydemos and Krite,⁵ both themselves and [their] property and possessions. I bind my enemy Euthydemos and Krite in blood and ashes, with all the dead! Nor will the next four-year cycle release you. I bind you in such a bind, Euthydemos, and [I bind] Krite, as strongly as possible, and upon [your] tongue a *kynoton* I strike in.

Tablet 5.3. Lamont 2021b, no. 3

Athens, Agios Ioannis Rentis: Pyre-grave enclosure

c. 375 BCE

Piraeus Archaeological Museum, Inv. MΠ 11950

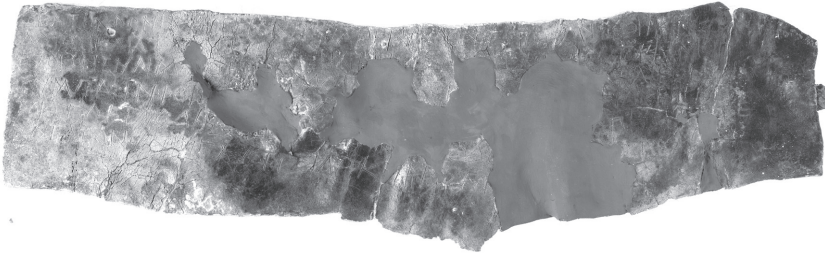
(Figure 5.2a, b)

- 1 Ἐκάτη χθονία, Ἄ[ρ]τεμι χθονία, Ἑρμῇ χθόνιε, ἐπιφθόνησον Κηφισο-
δότῳ καὶ αὐ[τῷ] καὶ τῇ γυναικ[ὶ] καὶ τῷ [-^{c4}-]ῳ[ι. Δ]ήσω τόγ γ' ἐμὸν
ἐχθρὸν ἐν αἵμα[τ]ι Κη[φισ]όδοτο[ν κ]αὶ τῇ[ν γυναικ]α καὶ κονίασι
σὺμ πᾶσιν φθιμ[ένοις]. Ο(ὐ)δέ σε λύσει πρώτ[η] πενθετηρίς.

- 5 Τοιο(ύ)ται σ' ἐγὼ δήσω [δεσμῶι, ὦ Κηφισ]όδο[τ]ε, ὅσπερ κρατε-
ρωτάτον ἐστίν, γλώττει δὲ κυνωτὸν [έπε]'γ' κρο(ύ)σω.

Hekate Chthonia, Artemis Chthonia, Hermes Chthonios: envy
Kephisodotos, both himself and his wife and his . . . I bind my enemy
in blood, Kephisodotos and his wife, and ashes, with all the dead! Nor
will the next four-year cycle release you. I bind you in such a bind,
Kephisodotos, as strongly as possible, and upon [your] tongue a *kynoton*
I strike in.

(a)



(b)

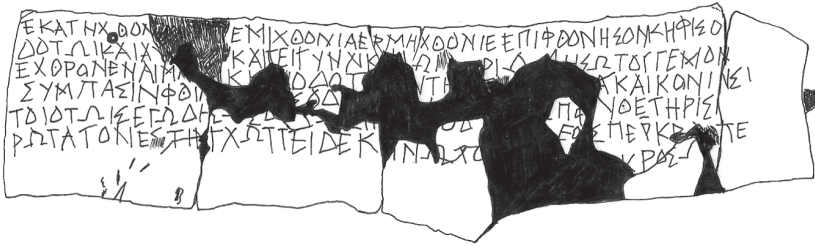


FIGURE 5.2 Tablet 5.3 (Lamont 2021b, no. 3), c. 375 BCE. Athens, Agios Ioannis Rentis: Pyre-grave enclosure. Piraeus Archaeological Museum, Inv. ΜΠ 11950. Photograph and drawing by author.

Tablet 5.4. Lamont 2021b, no. 4

Athens, Aghios Ioannis Rentis: Pyre-grave enclosure, young female

c. 375 BCE

Piraeus Archaeological Museum, Inv. ΜΠ 11951

I

N

Ἐκάτη χθονία, [Ἄ]ρτεμι χθονία, Ἑρμῇ χ[θόνι]ε
ἐπιφθ[όνη]σον [Εὐ]φιλήτῳ καὶ αὐτῶ(ι) καὶ τεῖ γ[υ]ναικί
κα[ὶ] χρήμασι καὶ οἰκία(ι). Δήσω τόγ γ' ἐμὸν ἐχθρόν

- 5 ἐν αἵματι Εὐφίλητον καὶ κονίαισιν σὺμ πᾶ-
 σιν φθιμένοις. Ο(ὐ)δέ σε λύσει πρώτ[η π]ενθετηρίς.
 Τοιο(ύ)τωι σ' ἐγὼ δήσω δεσμῶ[ι, ὧ Εὐφίλητε,] ὅσπερ
 κρατερώτατόν ἐστιν, γλώτ[τει δὲ] κ[υνωτ]ὸν
 ἐπεγκρο(ύ)σω.

N

Hekate Chthonia, Artemis Chthonia, Hermes Chthonios: envy Euphiletos, himself and his wife, and their property and household. I bind my enemy in blood—Euphiletos—and ashes, with all the dead! Nor will the next four-year cycle release you. I bind you in such a bind, Euphiletos, as strongly as possible, and upon [your] tongue a *kynoton* I strike in.

Tablet 5.5. Lamont 2021b, no. 5

Athens, Agios Ioannis Rentis: Pyre-grave enclosure, young female

c. 375 BCE

Piraeus Archaeological Museum, Inv. ΜΠ 11952

A: text begins at bottom of tablet,
 runs up

- 1 . Ν [-^{c.3}-] ΑΙ
 χθονί[α -^{c.3}-] ΦΑ
 [Ἐ]κάτη χθονία
 Ἑρμῇ χθόνιε, ἐ[πιφθόνησ-
 5 [ov] . Ε [-^{c.2}-]ΚΡ[-[?]-]
 [-¹⁻²-] Ε [-¹⁻²-]ΜΝ . . Ω[-^{c.2}-]Ν
 [-^{c.2}-]ΦΝΙΑ . Ι . ΕΙ
 [-[?]-].Φ . . ΑΤ [-[?]-]
 [-[?]-]ΔΗ[-[?]-]
 10 [-^{c.1?}]ΤΗΦ[-^{c.5}-]ΤΗΘ[-[?]-]
 [-[?]-] ΕΛΥΣ[-¹⁻²-] ΗΠ [-^{c.2}-]Σ
 [-[?]-] . . Μ . Α . [-^{c.3}-]ΝΟΙ .
 [-^{c.1}]ν ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίαι-
 [σιν -[?]-]ΑΜ[-^{c.3-4}-] . ΧΘ .

B: text begins at top of tablet,
 runs down

- 15 [-^{c.3}-] τόγ γ' ἐμὸν ↓
 [-[?]-] Ν [-[?]-]
 [-[?]-]ΜΟ
 [-[?]-]
 [-[?]-]
 20 [-^{c.1}].Ε [-[?]-]
 [Τ]οι[σὺ]τ[ωι σ' ἐγὼ] δήσω δε-
 [σμῶι, ὥσπερ κρ]ατερώ[τ]α-
 [τον] ἔστιν, γλώτ-
 [τει δὲ κ]υνωτὸν
 25 [ἐπεγ]κρο(ύ)σω

... Chthonia ... Hekate Chthonia, Hermes Chthonios, envy ... in blood and ashes ... my ... I bind you in such a bind ... as strongly as possible, and upon [your] tongue a *kynoton* I strike in.

This cache of binding curses is something new, the likes of which we have not yet encountered in this study. The recovery from a secure archaeological context of not one but *five* curse tablets, inscribed in the same hand, is rare. Rarer still, and with

no fourth-century parallels, is the fact that all texts employ the same binding curse, with only minor variations between them. Apart from individual names and possessions, the texts are sufficiently similar as to suggest that a shared archetype curse underpins them, which must predate the tablets themselves. Much like the Getty Hexameters discussed in Chapter 2, these tablets seem to document the transmission of oral hexameter verse into written, textual form during the Classical period. The Ur-text undergirding tablets 5.1–5.5 can be reconstructed as follows:

Archetype Curse (pre-375 BCE)

- I. Ἑκάτη χθονία, Ἄρτεμι χθονία, Ἑρμῇ χθόνιε,
ἐπιφθόνησον NAMES (dative), καὶ POSSESSIONS (dative).
 - II. Δήσω τόγ γ' ἐμὸν ἐχθρὸν ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίαισιν,
σὺν πᾶσιν φθιμένοις.⁶
 - III. Ο<ὐ>δέ σε λύσει πρώτη πενθετηρίς.
 - IV. Τοιο<ύ>τωι σ' ἐγὼ δήσω δεσμῶι, ὦ NAME (vocative),⁷
ὥσπερ κρατερώτατόν ἐστιν, γλώττει δὲ κυνώτὸν ἐπεγκρο<ύ>σω.
- I. Hekate Chthonia, Artemis Chthonia, Hermes Chthonios, envy <NAMES>
and <POSSESSIONS>.
 - II. I bind my enemy in blood and ashes, with all the dead!
 - III. Nor will the next four-year cycle release you.
 - IV. I bind you in such a bind, <NAME>, as strongly as possible, and upon
[your] tongue, a *kynoton* I strike in.

Here, then, is the archetype curse from which tablets 5.1–5.5 were drawn.⁸ On the whole, the texts are remarkably consistent: across the tablets, vocabulary and grammar are quite stable—there is no substitution of indicatives for participles, imperatives for infinitives, and the like, as happens in redactions influenced by orality in this period. This may suggest that the scribe, though aware of the curse's oral antecedents, was already copying from a written text (or collection of texts) when inscribing these spells on lead. Indeed, in the final line of 5.1, the curse-writer initially omitted the particle δέ, but returned to insert it as a superscript—a scribal emendation that reveals a grounding in the written transmission of text. After an opening invocation to three chthonic deities, and the cursing of male-female couples and their property (I), the second sentence unfolds as a full line of dactylic hexameter verse (II):

- - | - ~ ~ | - ~ ~ | - ~ ~ | - ~ ~ | - X
Δήσω τόγ γ' ἐμὸν ἐχθρὸν ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίαισιν
- - | - ~ ~ | -
σὺν πᾶσιν φθιμένοις.

I bind my enemy in blood and dust/ashes,
together with all the dead!

The hexameter, continued in σὺν πᾶσιν φθιμένοις (which also scans as half a pentameter), is a striking feature of these curse tablets. I only noticed their metrical core after removing the names of the various targets, which were consistently added in one of two places across the texts: either just after ἐχθρόν at the caesura, or after αἵματι at the diaeresis, where the end of the metrical break coincides with the end of the word.⁹ These two sites were not randomly chosen, but were added with an eye to metrical stopping points; they suggest that the scribe was aware of the hexameter undergirding the curse. Further, the γε in τόγ γ' ἐμόν is required by the meter but makes little sense otherwise.

The hexameter occurs alongside a smattering of other dactylic and spondaic metra, which might themselves be combined into tolerable hexameters depending upon where line divisions fall. Within the final sentence (IV), which binds the victims a second time, the meter is no longer intact: τοιοῦτωι σ' ἐγὼ δήσω δεσμῶι, ὥσπερ κρατερώτατόν ἐστιν. That said, the sentence *does* contain two dactylic feet, and is certainly “metricizing,” though no longer a perfect hexameter.¹⁰ This was likely one place in which the meter degenerated after the spell passed out of (exclusively) oral transmission, and assumed written diffusion.

The hexameter embedded in 5.1–5.5 concludes with the phrase “in blood and dust/ashes” (ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίησι), a striking expression known from early Greek verse.¹¹ The same colon appears in several well-known death scenes from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, including those of Patroklos, Sarpedon, and the Suitors in the Great Hall of Odysseus’s palace (Table 5.1).¹²

Table 5.1 “[In] blood and dust,” [ἐν] αἵματι καὶ κονίησι

Reference	Greek Text	Translation	Who, Where?
Hom. <i>Od.</i> 22.383–4	τοὺς δὲ ἴδεν μάλα πάντας ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίησι πεπτεῶτας	“but he saw them all, the men, in blood and dust, lying fallen . . .”	Death of Suitors, Great Hall of Odysseus’s palace
Hom. <i>Il.</i> 16.795	μιάνθησαν δὲ ἔθειραι αἵματι καὶ κονίησι	“and the plumes were defiled with blood and dust”	Patroklos’s helmet, death on battlefield at Troy
Hom. <i>Il.</i> 16.639	ἐπεὶ βελέεσσι καὶ αἵματι καὶ κονίησιν ἐκ κεφαλῆς εἵλυτο διαμπερὲς ἐς πόδας ἄκρους	“since he was enwrapped through and through with arrows and blood and dust, from his head to the tips of his feet”	Death of Sarpedon, battlefield at Troy
Hom. <i>Il.</i> 15.118	κεῖσθαι ὁμοῦ νεκύεσσι μεθ’ αἵματι καὶ κονίησιν	“to lie together with the dead in blood and in dust”	Reference to corpses on battlefield at Troy

The forboding phrase [ἐν] αἵματι καὶ κονίαισιν recurs in Homeric scenes of death and defilement;¹³ in three passages, it forms the hexameter's second colon, as in tablets 5.1–5.5.¹⁴ Let us consider the contexts in which the expression was used in early epic, beginning with *Odyssey* 22.¹⁵ On the heels of the slaughter in the Great Hall, a scene of frenzied butchery, Odysseus surveys the house, looking for signs of life (22.381–9):

πάπτηνεν δ' Ὀδυσσεὺς καθ' ἐὼν δόμον, εἴ τις ἔτ' ἀνδρῶν
ζωὸς ὑποκλοπέοιτο, ἀλύσκων κῆρα μέλαιναν.
τοὺς δὲ ἶδεν μάλα πάντας ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίῃσι
πεπτεῶτας πολλούς, ὥστ' ἰχθύας, οὓς θ' ἄλιῃς
κοῖλον ἐς αἰγιαλὸν πολιῆς ἔκτοσθε θαλάσσης
δικτύῳ ἐξέρυσαν πολυωπῶ: οἱ δέ τε πάντες
κύμαθ' ἄλδος ποθέοντες ἐπὶ ψαμάθοισι κέχυνται:
τῶν μὲν τ' Ἥλιος φαέθων ἐξείλετο θυμόν:
ὣς τότε ἄρα μνηστήρες ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισι κέχυντο.

Odysseus gazed around all through his house, to see if one of the men still lived, and was hiding, avoiding black death. But he saw them all in blood and dust, lying fallen like fish whom the fishermen have taken in their net of many holes, and dragged out of the gray sea onto the shore, and they all lie heaped on the sand, longing for the waves of the sea, and shining Helios takes away their life: just as now the suitors lay heaped upon each other.

Amidst the carnage—bodies spoiled and defiled in death—the poet elected to use the phrase ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίαισιν. These polluting agents were also paired in one of the *Iliad*'s most haunting scenes, when Patroklos, fighting at Troy in Achilles's armor, was killed. The phrase described Patroklos's plumed helmet, falling to the ground moments before the hero himself would follow (16.793–9):

τοῦ δ' ἀπὸ μὲν κρατὸς κυνέην βάλε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων:
ἦ δὲ κυλινδομένη καναχὴν ἔχε ποσσὶν ὕφ' ἵππων
αὐλῶπις τρυφάλεια, μιάνθησαν δὲ ἔθειραι
αἵματι καὶ κονίῃσι: πάρος γε μὲν οὐ θέμις ἦεν
ἱππόκομον πῆλῃκα μιάινεσθαι κονίῃσιν,
ἀλλ' ἀνδρὸς θεῖοιο κάρη χარიέν τε μέτωπον
ῥύετ' Ἀχιλλῆος.

And from his head Phoebus Apollo struck the helmet, which rang as it rolled beneath the feet of the horses—the crested helmet—and its plumes were befouled in blood and dust. Not until that hour had the gods suffered that helmet, with plume of horse hair, to be befouled with dust, but ever did it guard the head and comely brow of a godlike man, of Achilles.

The verb *μυαίνω*, to “taint, defile, or sully,” occurs once in the line immediately preceding the phrase *αἵματι καὶ κονίῃσι*, and then again in the line succeeding it. The framing of *αἵματι καὶ κονίῃσι* between installments of *μυαίνω* is no coincidence, but anchors the phrase in the realm of defilement and baseness. Before Apollo struck down the helmet, the gods had not permitted it to be tainted. Its fall metonymically foreshadows Patroklos’s own death, along with the eventual death of Achilles, the helmet’s true owner.¹⁶

This is much the same context—a body defiled in death on the battlefield at Troy—in which the phrase occurs in *Iliad* 16.638–40, when the corpse of Sarpedon is described as violated beyond recognition:

οὐδ’ ἂν ἔτι φράδμων περ ἄνῃρ Σαρπηδόνα δῖον
ἔγνω, ἐπεὶ βελέεσσι καὶ αἵματι καὶ κονίῃσιν
ἐκ κεφαλῆς εἴλυτο διαμπερὲς ἐς πόδας ἄκρους.

Nor could a man, even knowing him well, any more have discerned godlike Sarpedon, since he was enwrapped through-and-through in arrows and blood and dust, from his head to the tips of his feet.

The phrase appears in a similar context in *Iliad* 15.115–8 where, noting the possibility of death on the battlefield at Troy, the poet has Ares exclaim,

μὴ νῦν μοι νεμεσῆσέτ’ Ὀλύμπια δώματ’ ἔχοντες
τίσασθαι φόνον υἱὸς ἰόντ’ ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν,
εἴ πέρ μοι καὶ μοῖρα Διὸς πληγέντι κεραυνῷ
κεῖσθαι ὁμοῦ νεκύεσσι μεθ’ αἵματι καὶ κονίῃσιν.

Do not begrudge me now, you that have dwellings on Olympus, if I go to the ships of the Achaeans and avenge the slaying of my son, even though it be my fate to be struck with the bolt of Zeus, and to lie together with the dead, in blood and in dust.

The proximity of *αἵματι καὶ κονίῃσιν* to the phrase *ὁμοῦ νεκύεσσι μεθ’*, “together with all the dead,” resembles the hexametric *σὺμ πᾶσιν φθιμένοις* of tablets 5.1–5.5

(ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίασιν, σὺμ πᾶσιν φθιμένοις). As Peter O’Connell wrote, also struck by epic parallels in the morphology of 5.1 (2017, 42),¹⁷

The incantation on this curse tablet, therefore, belongs to a poetic tradition that shares with the Homeric tradition a common way both of conceptualizing violent death as lying with dead bodies in blood and dust and of using the phrase μεθ’ αἵματι καὶ κονίησιν or its variant ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίασιν at the end of a hexameter.

As these curse tablets were deposited in a grave containing significant amounts of ash from the burning of the corpse and pyre, it seems possible that the fourth-century practitioner intended κονίησι to signify the “ashes” in the grave in which the assemblage was buried.¹⁸ After all, κονία already had the sense of “ashes” in Homeric epic (κατ’ ἄρ’ ἔζετ’ ἐπ’ ἐσχάρῃ ἐν κονίησι, *Od.* 7.153), in addition to that of “dust.” But the archetype curse was likely drawing upon older binding traditions that threatened pollution if not outright destruction on opponents (perhaps similar to those incanted by the Erinyes over Orestes at trial). Recently, Athanassia Zografou has also called attention to the “connotations attached to places of burial” for curse tablets that invoke Hekate, Artemis, and Hermes with the Chthonia/Chthonios epithet, including the pyre grave in which tablets 5.1–5.5 were interred.¹⁹ She suggests that the phrase “seems to be first and foremost a Homeric way of referring to the *locale* of the ritual deposit and the place where the practitioner wishes the victims to be bound; a place contaminated by death which is simultaneously the grave and *the land* of ‘all the perished’ closely connected to it . . . ‘to be bound with the dead’ means primarily to be confined, inactive and powerless in the way dead people are both in their graves and in Hades.”²⁰ Zografou’s point is well taken, and adds another layer of meaning to the phrase ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίασιν and the significance of the deposition site, without undermining arguments for an earlier, performative ritual context. Regardless of which explanatory model one prefers—and all can, it seems to me, coexist in the context of this particular pyre grave (hence I prefer the flexibility of translating κονίασι as “ashes” here)—the expression ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίασιν, the dactylic hexameter, and the insertion of victims’ names at the caesura or diæresis suggest that parts of these curses evolved from a performative tradition of binding spells, which had been passed down orally before being committed to writing. Other aspects of the curse texts strengthen this argument.

Deictic Language: Performative Futures

Like the hexameter and epic diction, deictic language also suggests that the archetype spell undergirding these curse tablets once circulated orally, in performative

ritual contexts. Personal pronouns (ἐγώ, ἐμόν) and the demonstrative intensifier (τοιούτοι) refer to the agents and materials involved in the ritual at hand; they cannot be understood apart from their circumstantial meaning, and, anchoring the curse in the present moment, they intensify and strengthen performative speech.²¹ Even more striking are the verbs δήσω (used twice) and ἐπεγκρούσω, each assuming the future tense. The future is rarely used in Classical and Hellenistic Greek curse tablets; further, there is little point in vowing to bind an enemy at some *future* moment in time, rather than in the present moment in which the ritual is enacted.²² In fact, these first-person future verbs describe the *present*, ongoing actions that comprise the binding ritual itself: the performative feats of “binding” and “nailing-in.” Δήσω and ἐπεγκρούσω should be understood as performative future verbs, in that the performative force of the verb effects an action simply through its utterance.²³ In other words, though they masquerade morphologically as verbs in the future tense, these self-referential, performative speech acts refer to the present ritual in which they appear—they initiate an exploit (i.e., “bind” an enemy) through their utterance and incision, and so enact the very curse being pronounced.

Indeed, the realm of magical ritual was no stranger to the performative future, as Faraone first documented. Verbs like θυσῶ and καταδήσομαι, he noted, were used to narrate rituals unfolding in present time, such as those enacted by Simaetha when invoking Selene and Hekate (Theoc. *Id.* 2.10–7).²⁴ Theocritus’s Simaetha also used the future tense to refer to ongoing rituals in her binding spell, actions performed by her at that very moment. Often these first-person futures are accompanied by the adverb νῦν, “now,” which further moors the gestures in the ritual present: e.g., “now I burn the bran,” νῦν θυσῶ τὰ πίτυρα, “now I bind with my love charms,” νῦν μὰν τοῖς φίλτροις καταδήσομαι (Theoc. *Id.* 2.33, 159, with Faraone 1995, 11–2).

Faraone also showed that performative future verbs emerge, if rarely, in curse tablets and papyrus charms from the Hellenistic and Roman periods.²⁵ In each instance, a first-person future verb was employed to narrate present, ongoing rites in the process of spell-casting—nonverbal actions such as binding, throwing, and burning. The use of the performative future to cue present action “signals a ritual or ceremonial context for the performance of the poem, whether the rite is an elaborate erotic incantation like Simaetha’s, the important public ceremony at which a victory ode or paean is sung, or the somewhat simpler act of inscribing a binding curse and burying it.”²⁶ When Faraone published this seminal article, tablets 5.1–5.5 lay buried beneath modern Athens but, now surfaced, they exemplify this phenomenon in performative ritual texts, and document its presence in the Classical period.

*The Language of Binding:
To Bind in a Powerful Bond*

The concluding sentence of the archetype spell, in which victims are bound a second time, also reaches back to older traditions of binding. Here δῆσω is again used as a performative future, as is ἐπεγκρούσω, which initiates another violent speech act meant to silence the tongue: “I nail in a *kynoton* upon your tongue,” γλώττει δὲ κυνωτὸν ἐπεγκρούσω. The meaning of κυνωτόν is uncertain (perhaps, literally, “dog’s ear,” from κύων + οὖς, ὠτός, or a contract verb like κυνώ), but possibly it was a colloquial term for a type of nail or peg.²⁷ As in the oldest Selinountine curse tablets, the tongue was shorthand for an opponent’s speech or testimony in court; here the cursing of the tongue has become more discursive and ritualized.

I suggest that the curse’s final line, Τοιούτῳ σ’ ἐγὼ δῆσω δεσμῶι, ὦ [*so-and-so*], ὅσπερ κρατερῶτατόν ἐστιν, was built around an older binding expression that employed the following elements: (1) δέω as verb of binding, (2) a cognate instrumental dative object (δεσμῶι or δεσμοῖς), and (3) a powerful adjective used to describe the bonds. The same features appear in other hexametric Greek curse tablets (5.6–5.7, discussed below), and also in early hexameter poetry, including Homeric epic, Hesiod’s *Theogony*, and the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysos* (Table 5.2).²⁸

In assembling a narrative for performance, Homer, Hesiod, and other anonymous poets of the Archaic period drew upon powerful binding language to describe a distinct scene type: immobilizing, ensnaring, or rendering a man helpless, often but not always an enemy, by “binding [him] in a powerful (vel sim.) bond.” Like 5.1–5.5, these hexameters also employ (1) δέω as binding verb; (2) δεσμῶι or δεσμοῖς as cognate, instrumental datives; and (3) a powerful adjective describing the bonds. While this binding language can be found in later poetry and prose, it concentrates most densely in the Archaic verses in Table 5.2, all of which circulated orally in performative contexts. Let us examine the passages in which this expression occurs, as context can explicate the function of the language itself. The first scene comes from the fifth book of Homer’s *Iliad*, a tale in which Aphrodite, wounded by the raging Diomedes, is comforted by her mother, Dione, with stories of immortal suffering (Hom. *Il.* 5.383–7):

πολλοὶ γὰρ δὴ τλήμεν Ὀλύμπια δώματ’ ἔχοντες
ἐξ ἀνδρῶν χαλέπ’ ἄλγε’ ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοισι τιθέντες.
τλή μὲν Ἄρης ὅτε μιν Ὠτος κρατερός τ’ Ἐφιάλτης
παῖδες Ἀλῶης, δῆσαν κρατερῶ ἐνὶ δεσμῶι:
χαλκῆφ δ’ ἐν κεράμφω δέδετο τρισκαίδεκα μῆνας.

Table 5.2 “To Bind in a Strong Bond” δεῖν δεσμῶ [ἐν κρατερῶ/
ἀργαλέῳ/νηλεΐ/θυμαλγεί]

Reference	Greek Text	Translation	Who Bound Whom?
Hom. <i>Il.</i> 5.386	δῆσαν κρατερῶ ἐνὶ δεσμῶ	“they bound [him] in a strong bond”	Otos and Ephialtes (sons of Aloeus) bound Ares
Hes. <i>Th.</i> 618	δῆσεν κρατερῶ ἐνὶ δεσμῶ	“he bound [them] in a strong bond”	Ouranos bound Kottos, Briareos, and Gyes
Hes. <i>Th.</i> 521–2	δῆσε δ’ ἀλυκτοπέδησι Προμηθεά ποικιλόβουλον δεσμοῖς ἀργαλείοισι	“And he bound wily Prometheus with unbreakable bonds, harsh bonds”	Zeus bound Prometheus
Hes. <i>Th.</i> 718	δεσμοῖσιν ἐν ἀργαλείοισιν ἔδησαν	“they bound in harsh bonds”	Kottos, Briareos, and Gyes bound the Titans
Hom. <i>Od.</i> 12.160–161	ἀλλά με δεσμῶ δήσατ’ ἐν ἀργαλέῳ	“but bind me in a harsh bond”	Odysseus ordered his men to bind him when near Sirens
Hom. <i>Od.</i> 12.196	μ’ ἐν δεσμοῖσι δέον μᾶλλον	“they bound me with still more bonds”	Perimedes and Eurylochos bind Odysseus near Sirens
Hom. <i>Od.</i> 15.232	δεσμῶ ἐν ἀργαλέῳ δέδετο, κρατέρ’ ἄλγεα πάσχων	“he had been bound in a harsh bond, suffering strong pains”	Melampous bound by Neleus’s daughter, an Erinys
Hom. <i>Od.</i> 15.444	ὁ δ’ ὀϊσάμενος καταδήση δεσμῶ ἐν ἀργαλέῳ	“he, being fearful, might bind [me] down in a harsh bond”	King Ktesios to bind Phoenician slave
Hom. <i>Hymn</i> <i>Dion.</i> 12	δεσμοῖς ἔθελον δεῖν ἀργαλείοισι	“they wanted to bind [him] in harsh bonds”	Pirates attempt to bind Dionysos ¹
Hom. <i>Il.</i> 10.443	ἥέ με δήσαντες λίπετ’ αὐτόθι νηλεΐ δεσμῶ	“or leave me here, binding me in a ruthless bond”	Diomedes to bind Dolon
Hom. <i>Od.</i> 22.189	σὺν δὲ πόδας χειράς τε δέον θυμαλγεί δεσμῶ	“and they bound his feet and hands in a painful bond”	Eumaios et al. bind Melanthios

¹This instance suggests that mortals cannot bind gods, only gods can bind other gods. That a bound god is out of his natural habitat: Purves 2006, 199, 204–5.

Many of us that have homes on Olympos have suffered
 at the hands of men, in bringing difficult pains upon one another.
 So suffered Ares, when Otos and mighty Ephialtes
 the sons of Aloeus, bound him in a strong bond:
 in a bronze jar he was bound for thirteen months.

This story-within-a-story preserves a tradition in which the giants Otos and Ephialtes had stormed Mount Olympos and bound Ares in a strong bond, in the context of suffering and grievous pains. Bound in a bronze jar for a year and greatly weakened, the bound Ares “might have perished” (ἀπόλοιτο) had Hermes not rescued him, as “the harsh bond was overpowering him” (χαλεπὸς δέ ἐ δεσμὸς ἐδάμνα, *Il.* 5.391).²⁹ The epic composer deployed the language of binding—δησαν κρατερῷ ἐν δεσμῷ (386), δέδετο (387), χαλεπὸς δέ ἐ δεσμὸς (391)—to describe a scene in which an enemy was immobilized, incapacitated, and nearly destroyed.

The expression “to bind in a strong (*vel sim.*) bond” occurs frequently in the middle of Hesiod’s *Theogony*, in passages used to narrate the binding of Prometheus, and the binding of the Titans and Hekatoncheires in Tartarus. First, it is in the *Theogony* that we encounter the children of the Titans, offspring who suffered terribly at the hands of Zeus.³⁰ The plight of Prometheus is treated in the greatest detail.³¹ Just before Hesiod describes the Titanomachy proper, we hear that the errant Prometheus was “bound in harsh bonds” by Zeus (δῆσε . . . δεσμοῖς ἀργαλέοισι, 521–2; cf. also 614–6, where “a great bond restrained” Prometheus: μέγας κατὰ δεσμὸς ἐρύκει).

This act of binding creates Hesiod’s narrative segue, as the poem then flows into a tale involving other offspring of Ouranos and Gaia, “three sons great and mighty” (τρεῖς παῖδες μεγάλοι τε καὶ ὄβριμοι, 148, cf. 153), introduced earlier as Kottos, Briareos, and Gyes. With 100 hands and 50 heads, the Hekatoncheires were, like Prometheus, “bound in a strong bond” (δῆσε κρατερῷ ἐν δεσμῷ, 618). Here is another theogonic binding scene, motivated in this instance by resentment and envy (by their father, Ouranos, 617–23), in which adversaries were bound in punishment. The poet narrates this scene with the verb δέω and δεσμῷ as cognate dative, modified by κρατερῷ, a powerful adjective. This phrase mirrors that used less than 100 lines earlier in relation to Prometheus (δῆσε . . . δεσμοῖς ἀργαλέοισι, 521–2, cf. 616) as well as the archetype curse underpinning 5.1–5.5 (Τοιούτῳ σ’ ἐγὼ δῆσω δεσμῷ, ὅσπερ κρατερῶτατόν ἐστιν). In the case of the Hekatoncheires, the image of being bound “under the ground” is reiterated (ὕπὸ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης, 620; ὑπὸ χθονὶ ναιετάοντες, 621). The Hekatoncheires also played a decisive role in the Titanomachy: the battle scales were tipped by the lightning bolts of Zeus (687–704), and the fighting of Kottos, Briareos, and Gyes, who overcame the Titans and then “bound them in harsh bonds”

(δεσμοῖσιν ἐν ἀργαλέοισιν ἔδησαν, 718) in murky Tartarus (ἐς τάρταρον ἠερόντα, 721; cf. 729–30). Here again the notion of being bound “under the earth” is emphatically reiterated (ὕπὸ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης, ὑπὸ χθονὶ ναιετάοντες), and we might compare the invocation of subterranean deities in tablets 5.1–5.5 (Ἐκάτη χθονία, Ἄρτεμι χθονία, Ἑρμῇ χθόνιε).

In passages concerning the Hekatoncheires, Titans, and Prometheus, Hesiod employs forms of δεῖν δεσμῶ with κρατερῶ or ἀργαλέοισιν, “to bind in a strong/harsh bond,” to narrate a particular scene-type: the conquest and binding of divine enemies in mighty bonds, in moments of great suffering. This is the same way in which the binding of Ares by Otos and Ephialtes was described (δῆσαν κρατερῶ ἐν δεσμῶ). A similar phrase, “from cruel bond(s),” clusters near these Hesiodic passages, though without δέω: ἀμειλίκτων ὑπὸ δεσμῶν (659), δυσηλεγός ὑπὸ δεσμοῦ (652).

Though not so densely concentrated as in this core section of Hesiod’s *Theogony*—concerned as it is with the binding of the Titans and Hekatoncheires in Tartarus—this language is employed elsewhere in early hexameter poetry. Notably, it emerges in *Odyssey* 15.232–4, used to describe the sufferings of Melampous:

δεσμῶ ἐν ἀργαλέῳ δέδετο, κρατέρ’ ἄλγεα πάσχων
εἵνεκα Νηληϊὸς κούρης ἄτης τε βαρείης,
τὴν οἱ ἐπὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε θεὰ δασπλήτης Ἑρινύς

He had been bound in a harsh bond, suffering strong pains on account of both the daughter of Neleus and the heavy *ate* that a dread Erinys set upon his wits.

The entrapped Melampous is “bound in a harsh bond,” an expression followed by one of suffering, κρατέρ’ ἄλγεα πάσχων. As in Aeschylus’s later “binding hymn” (ὕμνος ἐξ Ἑρινύων δέσμιος φρενῶν, *Eum.* 331), heavy ἄτη is cast upon the wits by a dread Erinys. It is no coincidence that here too the binding expression δεσμῶ ἐν ἀργαλέῳ δέδετο occurs together with references to the δασπλήτης Ἑρινύς, ἄτη, and the incapacitation of the wits, ἐπὶ φρεσὶ.

In brief, the other examples of epic hexameters collected in Table 5.2 use the δεῖν δεσμῶ binding expression to narrate various scene types, denoting both literal restraint and immobility or imprisonment, when someone is bound in “shackles.”³² For example, Dionysos is nearly bound (*Hom. Hymn Dion.* 12) and Odysseus is bound to the ship’s mast when passing the Sirens (*Hom. Od.* 12.160–1, cf. 12.164). Before Melanthios was strung from a pillar, mutilated, and disemboweled—his innards a feast for dogs—his hands and feet were “bound

in a painful bond” on Odysseus’s instruction (Hom. *Od.* 22.189, 474–7). In *Odyssey* 15.443–4, the Phoenician slave recounts that Eumaios’s father would “bind [her] down in a bitter bond,” which is to say, imprison her, if the plan to escape became known. With the exception of Odysseus bound to the mast “in a bitter bond” in order to hear the Sirens (and arguably even here, with enemies and death so close at hand), these scenes all involve the incapacitation or ensnarement of an enemy or rival. The passages are violent and laden with terms for pain and torment (ἄλγεα πάσχων, ἄλγε’, χαλέπ’ ἄλγε’, μέγα πένθος, etc.).

Indeed, the Homeric, Hesiodic, and hymnic verses above bear some resemblance to the concluding lines of tablets 5.1–5.5, “I bind you in such a bond, as strongly as possible!” (τοιούτωι σ’ ἐγὼ δῆσω δεσμῶι, ὥσπερ κρατερώτατόν ἐστιν). Again, shared between 5.1–5.5 and these early Greek hexameters are forms of δέω, δεσμῶι/δεσμοῖς (positioned near δῆσω), and a strong adjective describing δεσμῶι/δεσμοῖς, in the case of the curse-cache, the demonstrative τοιούτωι. In tablets 5.1–5.5, the subsequent clause ὥσπερ κρατερώτατόν ἐστιν further qualifies the binding; the superlative κρατερώτατον likely evolved within this same tradition, and in some hexameters κρατερός directly modifies δεσμός—we can compare the κρατερῶ δεσμῶ of Hom. *Il.* 5.386 and Hes. *Th.* 618, and the position of κρατέρα in *Od.* 15.232: δεσμῶ ἐν ἀργαλέῳ δέδετο, κρατέρ’ ἄλγεα πάσχων. There are thus clear parallels between the concluding line of the archetype spell underpinning tablets 5.1–5.5, and the early epic hexameters collected in Table 5.2.

Let us reflect on what these findings may signify for the broader history of Greek curse-writing rituals. The archetype spell preserved in 5.1–5.5 was likely hexametric in nature; it contains deictic language, notably performative future verbs, and bears striking parallels to early Greek verse, features that intimate oral, performative antecedents. Tablets 5.1–5.5 likely evolved from (and preserve) an older, oral binding tradition, which was passing into written transmission around this time. These curses were *not* copied or excerpted from older poetry by a scribe particularly well-versed in epic literature: indeed, nowhere does the language replicate extant hexameter verse, as happens in later centuries when Homeric verses are used as incantations for treating headache, insomnia, etc.³³ Rather, the variation in word order and morphology, but close overlap in vocabulary and semantic context, points to the elasticity of oral composition—that the archetype curse underpinning 5.1–5.5 developed within the same hexameter tradition known to Homer, Hesiod, and other Archaic poets. These composers consistently used the expression “to bind in a powerful (*vel sim.*) bond” to narrate scenes of immobilizing, ensnaring, or rendering powerless an enemy or opponent. The presence of this same phrase in private curse texts suggests that we are observing traces of a distinct type of ritualized speech act: the binding

incantation. As O'Connell wrote, in regard to other poetic features of tablet 5.1 (2017, 42):

This binding poetry would have drawn on some of the same formulae as Homeric and Hesiodic poetry, such as using αἵματι καὶ κονίαισιν at line end in contexts of violent death, but it would not have quoted from the poems as though they had magical powers themselves. Recent discoveries, including the Derveni Papyrus and the so-called Getty Hexameters, have demonstrated the broad range of non-Homeric and non-Hesiodic hexametric poetry in the Classical period. This incantation further expands the scope of traditional hexametric poetry beyond epic and didactic contexts.

Indeed, these epic, theogonic, and hymnic traditions should be understood in terms of *speech*.³⁴ All operated by way of the intensification of the spoken word: through recitation and performance, the composer recreated in the present a tradition already familiar to his audience.³⁵ Early Greek poets chose to narrate scenes in which divinities were overthrown and punished with powerful binding language, speech also utilized by curse practitioners. Incantation may even have formed a subcategory of epic, a form of ritualized speech appropriated by epic and employed alongside other embedded genres such as lament and lyric.³⁶ The archetype curse preserved in tablets 5.1–5.5 could be an intermediary text, which connects back to an older binding tradition already present in Archaic poetry; these curse tablets illuminate the contours of a spell from this early hexameter genre, lost no longer. At least one incantation within this tradition likely employed the expression δῆσω δεσμῶι + powerful adjective, and the hexameter δῆσω τόγ γ' ἐμὸν ἐχθρὸν ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίαισιν, perhaps followed by σὺμ πᾶσιν φθιμένοις. This latter phrase, “σύν + supernatural agents,” probably served as an invocation for divine assistance in bringing the curse to pass. A stage in the shift from oral incantation to the envelopment of the binding tradition within written curse practice is captured here: a phase in which writing was grafted onto an earlier (and continuing) oral convention.³⁷

DTWünsch 108 and Murky Tartarus

Both dactylic hexameter and the δεῖν δεσμῶ binding phrase occur in other Greek curse tablets, which adds credence to the notion that some of these inscriptions were built on earlier, oral bindingspells. The best parallels are found in DTWünsch 108, an Attic curse tablet found in the second half of the nineteenth century CE. The tablet had once been dated to the third or second century BCE by Kaibel and Wünsch,³⁸ but several features point to a date in the later fourth century.³⁹

Tablet 5.6. Curbera forthcoming, *IG II/III*³ 8 no. 404 (prev. *DTWünsch* 108)
Attica, purportedly from a grave
Mid-fourth century BCE
Athens, National Archaeological Museum X 27719
(Figure 5.3)

A

1 Δήσω ἐγὼ Σωσικλείαν κα[ὶ κ]τήματα
καὶ μέγα κῦδος / καὶ πρᾶξιν καὶ νῶν, ἐ-
χθρὰ δὲ φίλοισι γένοιτο· / Δήσω ἐγὼ κ-
εῖνην ὑπὸ Τάρταρον ἀερόεντα /

B

5 δεσμοῖς ἀργαλείοις σὺν θ' Ἐκάτει χθο-
νίαι. /
Βιττώ. ΑΙΕΛΚΙΣΩΣ ↑
καὶ Ἐρινύσιν ἡλιθιώναις. ↓

B.3: Σωσίκλεια. Βιττώ: both names upside down; Βιττώ also retrograde.

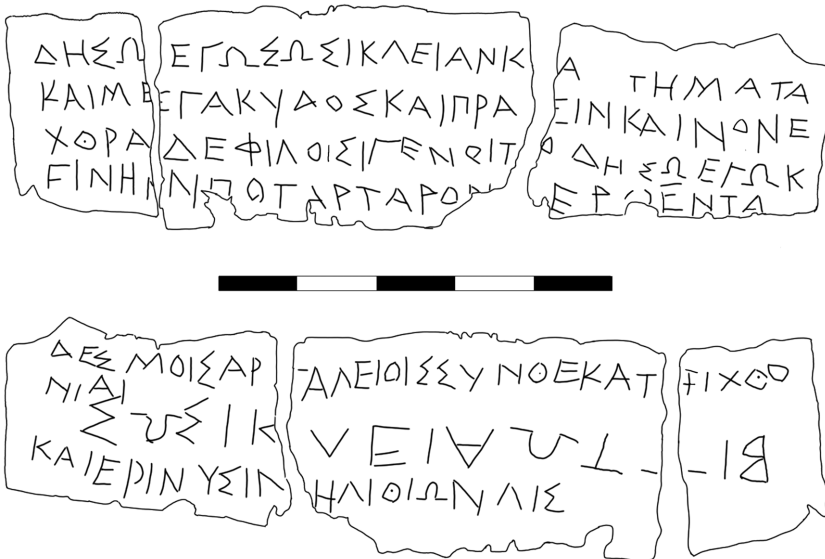


FIGURE 5.3 Tablet 5.6 (*DTWünsch* 108), later fourth century BCE. Attica. Athens National Archaeological Museum. Drawing by J. Curbera.

I bind Sosikleia, her property, her great reputation, her activity, her mind. May she become hateful to her friends! I bind her under murky Tartarus in harsh bonds, together with Hekate Chthonia—SOSIKLEA BITTO—and the bewildering Furies!⁴⁰

Tablet 5.6 binds down Sosikleia, along with her possessions, reputation, deeds, and mind. With the deictic κείνην, the text coldly requests that Sosikleia become hated by her friends; she is then bound a second time, with Hekate Chthonia and the “disorienting” Erinyes (ἡλιθιώναις, a *hapax*).⁴¹ The third line of text on the tablet’s back side contains two names inscribed upside down and running in different directions. In large letters, the name ΣΩΣΙΚΛΕΙΑ was incised from left to right; it collides with a second word, BITTΩ, which runs from right to left, as though confounded by the disorienting Furies, who occupy the space directly below.⁴² In his first edition, Koumanoudes compared the placement of the two names to “fighting roosters,” as the juxtaposition of text gives the appearance that the names were crashing into one another from opposing margins—visual shorthand, it seems, for the conflict between the two women themselves.

Several aspects of tablet 5.6 support the notion of an early, oral tradition of binding spells, and further adumbrate the shape that such language once assumed. First, Sosikleia too was “bound in harsh bonds”: δῆσω . . . δεσμοῖς ἀργαλείοις (here the scribe surely meant ἀργαλέοις, ~~~ –). This curse preserves the same binding language found in tablets 5.1–5.5 and the epic hexameters collected in Table 5.2. Here the adjective ἀργαλέοις is used with δῆσω δεσμοῖς, an expression with antecedents in the following passages:

Hes. *Th.* 521–22, “he bound . . . in harsh bonds”: δῆσε . . . δεσμοῖς ἀργαλείοισι
 Hes. *Th.* 718, “they bound in harsh bonds”: δεσμοῖσιν ἐν ἀργαλείοισιν ἔδησαν
 Hom. *Od.* 12.160–61, “bind me in a harsh bond”: με δεσμῷ δῆσατ’ ἐν ἀργαλέῳ
 Hom. *Od.* 15.232, “he had been bound in a harsh bond”: δεσμῷ ἐν ἀργαλέῳ δέδετο
 Hom. *Od.* 15.444, “he might bind in a harsh bond”: καταδήσει δεσμῷ ἐν ἀργαλέῳ
 Hom. *Hymn Dion.* 12, “to bind in harsh bonds”: δεσμοῖς ἔθελον δεῖν ἀργαλείοισι

Indeed, so well-attested is ἀργαλέω/ἀργαλείοις that we might assume that this was the “default” binding expression, with synonyms like κρατερός substituted as required by the meter. Deictic language is also present in abundance. In addition to ἐγὼ and the demonstrative κείνην, δῆσω is twice used as a performative future: Δῆσω ἐγὼ Σωσικλείαν . . . Δῆσω ἐγὼ κείνην. As in 5.1–5.5, δῆσω refers to the ongoing actions that comprise the ritual at hand, and its very utterance initiates and enacts the binding itself.

Familiar too is the metrical structure of tablet 5.6, best observed in the hexameter in lines 3–4: Δήσω ἐγὼ κείνην ὑπὸ Τάρταρον ἀερόντα. The opening line also scans as a hexameter if we assume that κείνην replaced the proper name Σωσίκλειαν in the archetype spell (Δήσω ἐγὼ κείνην καὶ κτήματα καὶ μέγα κῦδος).⁴³ A pentameter underpins δεσμοῖς ἀργαλέ<ι>οις σύν θ' Ἐκάτει χθονίαι, which led Wunsch and Jordan to suggest a composition in elegiac couplets.⁴⁴ Following Kaibel, Faraone instead read “five passably good hexameters,” while Zerhoch proposed a combination of hexameters with an elegiac couplet.⁴⁵ We might conclude that, while the silhouettes of hexameter are visible (fully so in lines 1–2, 3–4), they are no longer sharp in outline; editors accordingly assemble different metrical schema, all of which contain hexameters, but also some lines that scan otherwise.

Finally, we also encounter epic diction in 5.6, most notably in the phrase [ὑπὸ] Τάρταρον ἀερόντα ([~] ~ ~ ~ ~ X). Though without parallel in other curse tablets, the term is common in early Greek verse,⁴⁶ where it appears in Homeric epic and the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*, and is especially prominent in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Several cosmogonic references to “murky Tartarus” were flagged in our earlier discussion of the Titanomachy, as [ὑπὸ/εἰς] Τάρταρον ἀερόντα occurs alongside the δεῖν δεσμῷ binding expression. As in 5.6, the first four passages in Table 5.3 employ Τάρταρον ἀερόντα in line-end position, as does the later Orphic *Hymn* 56 to Adonis.

The majority of passages employing [ὑπὸ/εἰς] Τάρταρον ἀερόντα—six out of ten⁴⁷—emerge within a particular cosmogony: the Titanomachy, which concluded with the defeat and binding of the Titans “in murky Tartarus.” It is here that the phrase Τάρταρον ἀερόντα leads us time and again: to the crepuscular depths of Hesiod's Titanomachy.⁴⁸ Of course, we have already found ourselves in these misty hallows: these same passages carry the “δεῖν δεσμῷ + powerful adjective” binding expression. Like curse tablets 5.1–5.5, 5.6 also recalls the binding of the Titans and Hekatoncheires in Hesiod's Titanomachy, and perhaps in other Titanomachies too, like those of the lost Orphic cosmogonies.⁴⁹ Both sets of curse tablets are rooted in older cosmogonic traditions of binding. Especially prominent was the binding of the Titans in murky Tartaros. The Erinyes too had a place in this myth, and the reference to Ἐρινύσιν ἡλιθιῶναις in 5.6 may harken back to a binding tradition in which the Erinyes—figures who emerged from the blood of Ouranos's castrated genitals, in the midst of a cosmogonic struggle—played a prominent role.⁵⁰

One final similarity between 5.6 and tablets 5.1–5.5 can be seen in the phrase “σύν + supernatural/Underworld agents,” which follows soon after δήσω in both curses and explains the mechanisms by which the curse was

Table 5.3 DTWünsch 108A line 4 “[under/in] murky Tartarus,”
[ὕπδ/εἰς] Τάρταρον ἠερόεντα

Reference	Greek Text	Translation
Hom. Il. 8.13–4	ἥ μιν ἐλὼν ῥίψω ἐς Τάρταρον ἠερόεντα τῆλε μάλ’ , ἥχι βάθιστον ὑπὸ χθονός ἐστι βέρεθρον	“or taking him I shall hurl him into murky Tartarus, so far away, where is the deepest pit beneath the earth”
Hes. Th. 721	τόσσον γάρ τ’ ἀπὸ γῆς ἐς Τάρταρον ἠερόεντα	“so far is it from earth to murky Tartarus”
Hes. Fr. 30.22 [M–W]	Τὸν δὲ λαβὼν ἔρριψ’ ἐς Τ[ά] ρταρον ἠερόεντα	“taking him, he hurled him into murky Tartarus”
Hymn Hom. Merc. 256–7	ρίψω γάρ σε λαβὼν ἐς Τάρταρον ἠερόεντα, ἐς ζόφον αἰνόμορον καὶ ἀμήχανον	“For taking you I shall hurl you into murky Tartarus, into gloom deadly and hopeless”
Hes. Th. 119	Τάρταρά τ’ ἠερόεντα μυχῶ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης	“and murky Tartarus in the depth of the wide-pathed Earth”
Hes. Th. 682	ἔνοσις δ’ ἴκανε βαρεῖα Τάρταρον ἠερόεντα	“heavy quaking reached murky Tartarus”
Hes. Th. 723a	ἴσον δ’ αὖτ’ ἀπὸ γῆς ἐς Τάρταρον ἠερόεντα ¹	“and in turn it is the same distance from the earth to murky Tartarus”
Hes. Th. 736–739 = Hes. Th. 807–10	ἐνθα δὲ γῆς δνοφερῆς καὶ Ταρτάρου ἠερόεντος πόντου τ’ ἀτρυγέτοιο καὶ οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος ἐξείης πάντων πηγαὶ καὶ πεύρατ’ ἔασιν ἀργαλέ’ εὐρώεντα, τά τε στυγέουσι θεοὶ περ	“There in all their order are the sources and ends of gloomy earth and murky Tartarus and the unfruitful sea and starry heaven, loathsome and dank, which even the gods abhor”
Orph. Hymn 56.10	ὃς ποτὲ μὲν ναίεις ὑπὸ Τάρταρον ἠερόεντα	“... you who dwell under murky Tartarus”

¹In 723a, ἴσον δ’ αὖτ’ ἀπὸ γῆς ἐς τάρταρον ἠερόεντα, is a variant for Hes. Th. 723, οὐρανόθεν κατιών, δεκάτη κ’ ἐς γαῖαν ἵκοιτο: West 1966, 111–49.

accomplished;⁵¹ these agents assist in enacting the binding, which is localized beneath the earth. On the whole, these parallels suggest that we are glimpsing an early binding tradition manifest in two “channels” within fourth-century Athenian curse-writing rituals:⁵²

Tablet 5.6	Tablets 5.1–5
δήσω ἐγώ, “I bind”	ἐγὼ δήσω, “I bind”
καὶ κτήματα, “and property/possessions”	καὶ κτήμασι, “and property/possessions”
ἐχθρά, “enemies”	ἐχθρόν, “enemy”
Ἑκάτει χθονίαι, “Chthonic Hekate”	Ἑκάτη χθονίαι, “Chthonic Hekate”
Δήσω ἐγὼ . . . δεσμοῖς ἀργαλείοις, “I bind in harsh bonds”	Τοιοῦτοι σ’ ἐγὼ δήσω δεσμῶι, “I bind in such a bond”
σύν θ’ Ἑκάτει χθονίαι, “with Chthonic Hekate”	σὺν πᾶσιν φθιμένοις, “with all the dead”

Prometheus Bound in Aigina

A third curse tablet, 5.7—introduced in the previous chapter in regard to the early transmission of curse-writing rituals to Attica—also forges a link between cosmogonic binding myths and private curse rituals of the Classical period. Folded and pierced with a nail, the lead tablet was recovered in the fill of a shaft grave on the island of Aigina in the 1960s.⁵³ The object may date from as early as the fifth century BCE, though the editor notes that it could also be as late as the early fourth century BCE.⁵⁴ If the upper chronology is accepted, this would be one of the oldest “Attic” or Attic-adjacent curse tablets, as Aigina was annexed as an Athenian cleruchy throughout the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE)—though the text is mainly Doric in dialect, and was not composed by an Athenian.⁵⁵ Side *A* is most relevant to the discussion at hand, though Side *B* targets supporters at trial (line 4, τὸς συνδίκος) and refers to a μέτοικον (line 3), suggesting that the tablet was judicial in nature. Strikingly, the curse engages with mythological binding traditions:

Tablet 5.7. *IG* IV II² 1012.A⁵⁶

Myloi, Aigina: Chambered shaft grave

425–385 BCE

Aigina Museum Inv. 7899; Piraeus Museum (temporary location)

Side *A*

10	KATEPO	← <i>a</i>
1	—ὡς Ἐφαιστος ἐδέεσάτο ΜΑΝΤΕΙΑ TANAYTOΔΕΣΜΟΣΕΚΑΤΕΡΟΙ ΚΕΡΑΥΝΟΙΑΣΣ τε παῖς Ζεὺς με- [γά]λο Κρόνο{1} καταέδεσεν vacat	→

- 5 ἸΣΔΕ Προμεθέα{ι} Βίαι Κράτε[ι]
 P . . . ΤΕΡΟΡΤΑ καὶ Μαντίθεος ΑΡΕ
 T . . . ΑΙΔΕΥΣΕ- - - - ΕΙΚΑΜΟΕΙΣΑ
 [.]YET. . \ - - - - α νικάσαιμι
 ΕΚΑΤΑΙ[.]P- - - - - AN

Just as Hephaistos bound his mother in powerful bonds . . . and as Zeus, the son of mighty Kronos, bound down Prometheus with Bia (“Force”) and Kratos (“Strength”) . . . and Mantis theos . . . might I conquer . . .

The first verse with which we are concerned can probably be construed as “Just as Hephaistos bound his mother in powerful bonds” (ὥς Ἥφαιστος ἐδήσατο ματέρα τὰν αὐτοῦ δεσμοῖς κρατεροῖς, apud *IG*, lines 1–2). This verse is certainly metrical, but contains too many feet for a single hexameter; the fifth foot is a spondee, rather than a dactyl, and κρατεροῖς could not open a second hexameter line. We might again call this verse “metricizing,” and focus instead on the phrase ἐδήσατο . . . δεσμοῖς κρατεροῖς (δεῖν δεσμῶ + powerful adjective), here explicitly used to narrate Hephaistos’s binding of Hera. The text forges a direct link between the persistent δεῖν δεσμῶ binding expression found in tablets 5.1–5.6 and the early epic hexameters collected in Table 5.1.⁵⁷

Tablet 5.7 carries direct references to the mythological bindings of Hera by Hephaistos, and of Prometheus by Zeus, Bia (“Force”), and Kratos (“Might”). These brief mythic allusions or *historiolae* provide paradigms for the ritual actions that follow.⁵⁸ First, Hera’s binding by Hephaistos is conjured as a mythological analog for the binding of Mantis theos and others (line 6), and establishes the validity of the ritual operation. Not preserved in extant epic, this myth is known only from fifth-century Athenian vase paintings and from later literary sources. In addressing myth and allegory, Plato refers to “Hera’s fetherings by her son” (*Pl. Resp.* 378d), and Pausanias later summarized the tale as follows (*Paus.* 1.20.3; cf. 3.18.16):

One of the Greek legends is that Hephaistos, when he was born, was thrown down by Hera. In revenge he sent as a gift a golden chair with invisible fetters (ἀφανεῖς δεσμοῦς). When Hera sat down she was bound fast (δεδέσθαι) . . .

Within tablet 5.7, the tale of Hera’s binding by Hephaistos is conjured as an *historiola*: here the myth provides a model for the desired outcome of the spell, that is, the binding of a mortal opponent. The same applies to the text’s second (and final) intelligible clause, which translates “and as Zeus, the son of mighty Kronos, bound down Prometheus with Bia and Kratos” (τε παῖς Ζεὺς με[γά]λο Κρόνο{ι}

καταέδεσεν [. . .] Προμηθέα {ι} Βίαι Κράτε[ι]).⁵⁹ Here is a second *historiola*, which Marston and Papachristodoulou associate with the fifth-century *Prometheus Bound*, the drama in which Prometheus was bound and pierced through by Zeus, Hephaistos, Bia, and Kratos. As discussed in Chapter 4, Marston compares the scene in which Prometheus was impaled and buried to the ritualized piercing and burial of a curse tablet.⁶⁰ Hesiod's earlier description of Prometheus's binding also included the driving of a column through his middle, and may provide a mythical precedent for this ritual act. Hesiod's Prometheus-episode begins with the Titan's punishment (Hes. *Th.* 521–2): “He [Zeus] bound Prometheus of the dappled councils in unbreakable bonds, dreadful chains, having driven a column through the middle” (δῆσε δ’ ἄλυκτοπέδεσσι Προμηθέα ποικιλόβουλον, δεσμοῖς ἀργαλέοισι, μέσον διὰ κίων’ ἐλάσας). In 5.7, Prometheus's mythical binding is also invoked as a model or paradigm for the unfolding ritual: as Prometheus was bound, so too the curse's flesh-and-blood targets. Manti-theos and the other objects of the curse were cast in the roles of primordial, mythic wrongdoers—persons who opposed the proper order of the universe. Framed in this way, the rite is not a malicious or hostile act for private benefit in court, but rather, an undertaking that assists in rectifying the ordered cosmos, a way of preserving society at large. Tablet 5.7 may also be the oldest inscribed curse containing the δεῖν δεσμῶ expression (ἐδήσατο . . . δεσμοῖς κρατεροῖς), and the text unequivocally employs the phrase in the context of mythical binding scenes: Hephaistos's binding of Hera, and Zeus's binding of Prometheus. Even the description of Zeus as the “son of great Kronos” (παῖς μεγάλου Κρόνου) recalls early cosmogonic succession myths (cf. Hom. *Il.* 5.721, 8.383, 14.194).

Binding Language in Classical Athens

In various ways, these Attic or Attic-adjacent curse tablets harken back to cosmogonic binding myths: scenes in which the Titans, Hekatoncheires, Prometheus, and other divinities were vanquished and bound in defeat. Such punishments were then projected onto human enemies. Tablets 5.1–5.7 date from the late fifth and fourth centuries BCE, and are alike in their use of dactylic hexameter (though less obviously so in the fragmentary 5.7), deictic language (especially performative future verbs, 5.1–5.6), epic diction (ἐν αἵματι καὶ κονίαισιν, Τάρταρον ἀερόντα, παῖς Ζεὺς μεγάλου Κρόνου), and, what I believe can advance discussions about the relationship between orality and binding spells in new directions, an expression that turned upon “δεῖν δεσμῶ + powerful adjective,” shared by these lead texts and early epic hexameters. These ritual objects speak to an early and widespread tradition of binding hexameters, from which poets, oracles, and curse-writers alike could draw when narrating scenes of the incapacitation or conquest of

enemies. Unlike the curse tablets encountered in previous chapters, tablets 5.1–5.7 preserve remnants of older, performative speech: a species of binding incantation. A stage in the transmission has been captured here, like a fly in amber, of the gradual shift from oral spells to the envelopment of the tradition within the written medium. Other ritual texts underwent a similar evolution around this time: the Getty Hexameters, for example, also bear traces of oral antecedents (meter, deictic language). They boast of the power of song while asserting the new efficacy of writing, and we ultimately know them as protective hexameter incantations inscribed on lead.⁶¹

What of the mechanisms by which these binding traditions were circulating in Classical Athens? Certainly tablets 5.1–5.5, and possibly 5.6–5.7 as well, were composed by a ritual professional; one can imagine that such practitioners had access to books or other collections of text when writing curses (again, 5.1–5.5 show evidence of scribal copying.) Yet we need not confine ourselves to narrow trajectories of transmission, when incantations in general and binding hexameters in particular were widely present in the ancient city. The *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Theogony*, *Homeric Hymns*, and other hexameter poetry were very much alive in speech and song of the Archaic and Classical periods. Hymns and epic were performed annually at the Panathenaia, where myth was respun in festival performance.⁶² The Dionysia and Lenaia festivals provided further venues for myth to be reformulated in new ways on stage—consider the binding of Prometheus in the *Prometheus Bound*, and the trilogy to which it belonged (in which the Titans played no small role). The Athenian Prometheia festival is also known to have hosted choruses, and it is imaginable that Prometheus's binding featured in performances or other rites therein.⁶³ Zoe Stamatopoulou has shown that Hesiod too was reperformed and familiar to Classical Athenian audiences.⁶⁴ In the more intimate and habitual space of the Athenian home, where memory was also socially mediated, Plato notes that myths were passed down to infants and children in the form of incantations (ἐν ἐπὶ δαίτῃ, Pl. *Leg.* 887d; cf. 659d–e). Like Hesiod's *Theogony*, such tales and lullabies would have functioned didactically, sculpting individual and kin-group memory from an early age. These traditions were living and breathing alongside oral and written binding spells, and curse-writers would not have had far to look to find hexameter binding language in song and speech. Of course, these myths also circulated visually, painted on walls and vases and carved into reliefs all across Attica and the broader Mediterranean, and these included scenes of divine bindings.⁶⁵ Material objects, as much as oral poetry and performative media like song and dance, would have continuously drawn upon myth and thereby shaped (and reshaped) perceptions of the cosmic past.

By the fifth century, furthermore, binding language was also present in non-hexametric poetry. As mentioned above, the binding of Prometheus in the *Prometheus Bound* provides a good case study: Marston has convincingly shown that the violent driving of an “adamantine peg straight through” Prometheus’s chest (ἄδαμαντίνου . . . διαμπὰξ πασσάλευ’, 64–5) would have been recognized by the play’s audience as a binding ceremony carried out on the person of Prometheus.⁶⁶ Pindar likely also drew upon binding incantations when composing *Pythian* 4, as seen in a verse that plays with both binding language and ritualized curse praxis (*Pyth.* 4.71). Here δεσμοῖς, “bonds,” has been substituted with ἄλοις, “nails,” in what might be an early reference to the nailing of curse tablets (460s BCE): “What danger bound them with strong nails of adamant?” (τίς δὲ κίνδυνος κρατεροῖς ἀδάμαντος δῆσεν ἄλοις;)⁶⁷ And binding language was also drawn into prose texts, showing itself familiar and fluid within Attic speech of the fourth century BCE. Plato’s use of the same binding expression confirms that it was still circulating in the place and time that gave rise to 5.1–5.7 (Table 5.4).⁶⁸

In his *Cratylus*, Plato employs the binding expression to narrate scenes in which the souls of the dead might flee from the Underworld, were they not “bound in the strongest bond” by Hades. Thrice it is Hades himself who performs the binding.⁶⁹ The expression is also used in the invocation of Kronos,

Table 5.4 “To Bind in a [Strong] Bond” δεῖν [ἰσχυροτάτῳ, μεγίστῳ, λεγομένοις] δεσμῷ/δεσμοῖς

Reference	Greek Text	Translation	Who Bound Whom?
Plat. <i>Crat.</i> 403c6	τῷ ἰσχυροτάτῳ δεσμῷ ἕξει	“he bound in the strongest bond”	Hades bound the dead in Underworld.
Plat. <i>Crat.</i> 403c9	τῷ μεγίστῳ δεσμῷ δεῖ	“he binds with the greatest bond”	Hades binds the dead in Underworld.
Plat. <i>Crat.</i> 403d2	εἴπερ μέλλει τῷ μεγίστῳ δεσμῷ κατέχειν	“if he is to restrain with the strongest bond”	Hades restrains the dead in Underworld.
Plat. <i>Crat.</i> 404a	οὐδ’ ἂν ὁ Κρόνος δύναιτο ὁ πατὴρ συγκατέχειν αὐτῷ ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς δῆσας τοῖς αὐτοῦ λεγομένοις;	“not even his father Kronos could restrain them himself, binding them in his famous bonds?”	Kronos bound souls.

in an allusion to his cosmogonic overthrow (404a). Finally, in a passage concerned with the binding of souls in the Underworld, the nature of the bonds is explained in terms of persuasive incantations recited by Hades over the deceased (403d–e):

Then, Hermogenes, we must believe that this is the reason why no one has been willing to come away from that other world, not even the Sirens, but they and all others have been overcome by his enchantments (ἀλλὰ κατακεκληῆσθαι ἐκείνας τε καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους πάντας), so beautiful, as it appears, are the words which Hades has the power to speak.

Plato's *Cratylus* thus situates our binding expression within the realm of the Underworld and connects it with Hades's casting of spells over the souls of the dead. Binding language was indeed widely present in the Classical city.

Binding Traditions in the Broader Mediterranean

As this and the previous chapter have demonstrated from a methodological perspective, it is from Athens that we have an abundance of epigraphic, literary, and archaeological evidence. But outside of Attica, did cosmogonic myth and binding incantations also influence private curse practice? The answer is yes, they did—in slightly different ways. While tablets 5.1–5.7 contain remnants of older binding spells, curse-writers elsewhere referred to cosmogonic myth without incorporating binding incantations proper; some curses make reference to the Titans and Titanomachy for ritual efficacy, for example. This is evident in a previously discussed tablet from Hellenistic Lilybaeum, 3.3. We need here consider only the text's opening:

Tablet 3.3. A.1–4

← καταδέω Ζωπυρίωνα τᾶς Μυμβυρ παρὰ Φερσε-
 ← φόναι καὶ παρὰ Τιτάνεσσι καταχθονίοις καὶ παρ' ἄ-
 ← π[ε]νχομένοισι νεκροῖς.^{vac} <Καταδέω δέ νιν> {ἐς τοὺς ἀτελέστους} καὶ παρ-
 ← ἃ [ἰ]αρίαις Δάματρος <καὶ> παρ' ἀπενχομέ[ν]α[ισ]ιν.^{vac}

I bind down Zopyrion, son of Mumbur, alongside Persephone and alongside the subterranean Titans and alongside the trembling dead, among the unfulfilled and alongside the priestesses of Demeter [and] alongside the abominating ones!

Tablet 3.3 invokes various Underworld figures as the agents beside and before whom Zopyrion was bound, beginning with Persephone. Persephone is followed by Τιτάνεσσι καταχθονίοις; yet again the Titans, beneath the earth, serve as a paradigm for the binding of mortal enemies.⁷⁰ The restored ἱαρίαίς Δάματρος, “priestesses of Demeter,” probably refers back to the Erinyes.⁷¹ Tablet 3.3 also carries snatches of dactylic hexameter, though no complete lines as in 5.1–5.6. Ruptured by proper names and a long period of textual transmission, the meter can be glimpsed only in dactylic phrases such as παρὰ Φερσεφόνοι (~~ ~~~ -), καὶ παρὰ Τιτάνεσσι καταχθονίοις (~~~~ - ~~~ ~~~ -), and τοὺς ἀτελέστους (~~~ - -). It is no longer clear where metrical breaks occurred, but the hexameter is most pronounced toward the curse’s opening (παρὰ Φερσεφόνοι, καὶ παρὰ Τιτάνεσσι καταχθονίοις), so much so that Jordan suggested decades ago that these phrases originated in dactylic poetry.⁷²

The Titans feature in other curse-writing rituals from across the Mediterranean as well. A fourth-century CE tablet from the island of Kos refers to Zeus as “he who battled the Titans” (ὁ τοὺς Τιτάνας πολεμήσας, *IG* XII 4.3401 lines 26–7),⁷³ while an erotic curse from third-century CE Cumae requests that a wronged husband come to resent his wayward wife, and forget all love and affection for her: “. . . stop the affection, the love; bind her in Tartarus (δῆς αὐτὴν [εἰς Τάρ]ταρα), and make those who are in the light hate her!”⁷⁴ Curse practitioners also conjured the Titans on an individual basis, alongside verbs of binding. The Titan Tethys, for example, is found in *DTAud* 68 from fourth-century Athens: “I bind Theodora before Hermes of the Underworld, and before the unfulfilled, and before Tethys (πρὸς τὴν Τηθύν, *B* lines 15–17)!” Kronos appears in a large cache of curse tablets from Amathous, Cyprus;⁷⁵ found deep in a shaft with human bones, the assemblage includes over 200 lead and selenite tablets, at least some of which entreat the dead “by the gods who were set out from Kronos” (τοὺς ἀπὸ Κρόνου ἐκτεθέντας θεούς).⁷⁶ Referring to the infant Olympians vomited up by Kronos, these tablets point to the same cosmogonic myth, and again demonstrate how curse-writers, when cursing mortal opponents, could invoke moments in which the universe shifted in order and enemies were vanquished.

This chapter concludes with a curse tablet from Cyrene (Libya) which appears to draw upon older binding incantations in ways similar to 5.1–5.7: dactylic hexameter, performative future verbs, and epic language are all present within the text. Yet tablet 5.8 contains no δεῖν δεσμῶ binding expression, and engages in no obvious way with cosmogonic myth. This Cyrenean curse may capture a binding tradition different from that preserved in 5.1–5.7, or document another way in which myth served as paradigm for the creation of private curses. Composed in

the Doric dialect, 5.8 emerged in Italian excavations of Cyrene in 1930, in the region between the temple of Apollo and the Fountain Terrace.⁷⁷ Scholars have speculated that the tablet was intended for Demeter and Kore, but their extramural precinct was, in fact, quite distant from the object's findspot (across the city, and outside the walls).⁷⁸ It is possible that 5.8 had instead been destined for the so-called fountain of Apollo or spring of Kyra, or any of the various fountains or grottos within the broader Apollo precinct (this was also the region in which the so-called Purity Law of Cyrene was displayed, with instructions for ritual purification—as in Selinous's Gaggera precincts, there were real concerns in this area about harmful spirits and private ritual practice).⁷⁹ Tablet 5.8 was dated to the third century BCE by Pugliese Carratelli on the basis of script and letter forms, though nothing in the text itself or the excavation report would, in my opinion, rule out a fourth-century date. The text was carefully inscribed in 10 clean rows; all characters start on a neat left margin, and the scribe took care to correct mistakes, such as the omission of letters.⁸⁰

Tablet 5.8. GVCyr 039 (see too *SECir* 193)⁸¹

Cyrene, Libya

Fourth or third century BCE

Dept. of Antiquities, Shahat Inv. E4024 (now lost)

- 1 δεῦρ[ο] Τύχαν καλέω νῦν δῆ
 τυ τῇδε παρῆμεν σὺν
 τε Ζηνὶ σὺν τε δυοῖς Χά-
 ρισ'σ'ιν. *vac.*
- 5 Πραξιδικά κώρα μεγάλη τῷ
 Ἀ'γ'λαοκάρπου, δῆσόν μοι
 Φερονίκας γλῶσαν χῆράς
 τε πόδας {τε πόδας τα}· ταῦτα δὲ
 ἐγὼ ἐρήσω ἐν βοέωι κέρατι
- 10 πολιᾶς ὑπένερθέ τε γαίας

Here do I summon Tyche! Right now, you, be present here with Zeus and the two Graces. Praxidika, daughter of great-hearted Aglaokarpos, bind for me Pheronika's tongue, hands, and feet. These things I deposit in an ox horn, beneath the hoary earth!

With some immediacy (“Here!”; “Right now!”), this curse against Pheronika conjures Tyche, Zeus, and two Graces in its opening invocation, which

recalls a prayer or hymn.⁸² Tyche and the Charites were offspring of Titans (Hes. *Th.* 360, 907–9, Apollod. 1.3.1), while Praxidika, “doer of justice,” is often understood as an epithet of Persephone.⁸³ The Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* uses the epithet Ἀγλαοκάρπου, “of the shining fruit,” in reference to Demeter, and the epithet is again used of Demeter in later Orphic texts (*OF* 48, Kern): Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Δημήτερος ἀγλαοκάρπου.⁸⁴ Praxidika, the daughter of Aglaokarpos, is commanded with the imperative to perform the binding (δῆσον). The final enigmatic clause probably refers to actions within the ongoing binding ritual, which involved depositing “these things” (ταῦτα) beneath the earth in an ox horn (ἐν βοέωι κέρατι). It is unclear how to interpret ταῦτα, but possibly it refers to the incised tablet itself, and other *materia magica* that were deposited together with the tablet as part of the ongoing spell—an ox horn, string, nail, water, wine, wax, hair, etc.—none of which has been preserved in the archaeological record.⁸⁵ The ox horn can be understood in a literal sense, interpreted in part through an early Homeric simile from *Iliad* 24, as pointed out by Faraone (2004a): in her plunging down into the sea to find Thetis, the movements of the goddess Iris are similarly described (Hom. *Il.* 24.81–3):

ἧ δὲ μολυβδαίνη ἱκέλη ἐς βυσσὸν ὄρουσεν,
 ἧ τε κατ’ ἀγραύλοιο βοὸς κέρας ἐμβεβαυῖα
 ἔρχεται ὠμηστῆσιν ἐπ’ ἰχθύσι κῆρα φέρουσα.

She sank down into the depths like a leaden sinker which, mounted alongside the horn of a field ox, goes down bearing death to ravenous fish.

Homeric audiences would have been familiar with a maritime practice that involved affixing a piece of lead (μολυβδαίνη) and an ox horn (βοὸς κέρας ἐμβεβαυῖα) to a fishing line; the ox horn probably served as a protective cover that, once attached to the line, prevented fish from breaking the line with their teeth (or so the Homeric scholia suggest). The assemblage was then sunk underwater to attract and catch fish.⁸⁶ Bettarini suggested that the lead and ox horn from both the Homeric simile and 5.8 were related in their ability to bring ruin: one to fish, the other to Pheronika.⁸⁷ Struck by the epic reference to the manner of fishing, Faraone suggested that this curse reflects a “lost Greek tradition of maritime binding curses.”⁸⁸ He understands ἀγλαοκάρπου to refer to Thetis or another sea nymph, and suggests that the ritual would have culminated in the tablet’s deposition underwater, perhaps

rolled up in the horn of an ox (the object's recovery near the spring could strengthen this suggestion).

Though nothing within this Cyrenean curse points to cosmogonic myth, it resembles tablets 5.1–5.5 in ways that suggest, idiosyncracies and all, that it too evolved from an older tradition of binding incantations. It consists of three parts, which correspond loosely to parts I, II, and IV of 5.1–5.5. Tablet 5.8 (I) opens with a prayer-like invocation to three deities, followed by (II) an address to Persephone, commanding her to bind various parts of Pheronika (δησον, cf. ἐπιφθόνησον in 5.1–5.5), including her tongue, and (IV) concludes with a performative future verb used to enact the ritual (here ἐρησῶ, “I deposit,” describes the ritual act of burying the tablet; the opening verb καλέω, “I summon,” is probably another first-person performative future, with parallels in Pindaric epinician and the Homeric *Hymns*).⁸⁹ Another parallel is the dactylic hexameter. Gallavotti's 1963 edition finds three lines of hexameter (lines 1, 3, and 6), in addition to a fourth that scans as such if the proper name Pheronika is removed and the reduplicated πόδας τα is included: δησόν μοι [Φερονίκας] γλῶσ<σ>αν χῆράς τε πόδας τε {πόδας τα}.⁹⁰ The remaining two lines are metrically corrupt, but scholars agree that the spell as a whole once circulated in hexameter form.⁹¹ Tablet 5.8 also employs ἐγώ, νῦν, the adverbs τῇδε and δεῦρο (referring to the site to which the deities were summoned), and the demonstrative ταῦτα. This constellation of deictic language points to the actions, agents, and objects implicated in the binding spell at hand, and anchors the curse in the unfolding ritual moment. Finally, 5.8 contains epic diction. As noted above, the epithet ἀγλαοκάρπου is known from the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*. The phrase πολιᾶς γαίας is also of Homeric vintage, though in early Greek verse “hoary” often modifies words for “sea,” rather than “earth.”⁹² Here γαίας may serve a locative function, signaling the site of deposition; it has been suggested that πολιᾶς γαίας refers to the soil of Cyrene itself, which is light in color.⁹³ The phrase may also play on the traditional Homeric epithet πολιῆς ἄλός, or possibly it is the construction “black earth” that is here being inverted (e.g., γαῖα μέλαινα, Hom. *Il.* 15.715; *Od.* 11.365, 587, 19.111; κελαινὴ χθών, Hom. *Il.* 16.384).⁹⁴ Whatever the case, the phrase reveals a familiarity with the conventions of performative, hexameter speech. Tablet 5.8 contains epic diction, dactylic hexameter, and deictic language, including performative future verbs; it too may have evolved from an older tradition of binding incantations, though nothing here points to cosmogonic myth—the binding of the Titans in Tartarus or otherwise. As this Cyrenean text helps reveal, a diverse, vibrant array of oral binding spells was in circulation

throughout the Greek world, and many different individuals were consuming these incantations for close to a millennium. This is still another insight that curse tablets can provide into the world of early Greek ritual thought and performative speech. In a way not previously encountered in this book, these tablets suggest that some ritual practitioners were influenced by older hexameter binding spells, and that these traditions informed curse-writing across the Mediterranean.