

Magic in the Ancient Greco-Roman World -

Assignment 1

Using the texts we have studied in the collections of Gager and Betz as examples, create a curse tablet or erotic charm and then provide a commentary on the features of the spell. You should explain the context of the magic, the agent and the target, and the means by which the magic operates (i.e., the standard What, Who, Where/When, Why, and How questions we have explored for the readings). Since the magical tradition in the Greco-Roman world operated by use of familiar elements complemented by competitive innovations, you should provide parallels for the features of your spell and its context from the examples in the readings, especially any voces magicae (magical words), deity names, or ritual actions that are part of the procedure. Make sure to include any oral components or ritual actions that are part of the spell as well as the inscribed or written component. Any protective measures, ritual preparations and purifications, or amulets that are needed should be both described and commented upon. You may design it as a recipe or as an executed example, but please make sure to note and comment upon your choice.

You should use the comparisons and contrasts with the parallels to illustrate the meanings and functions of the common elements within these spells. Parallels need not be exhaustive, but you should try to cite more than a single parallel for common features. The purpose of the assignment is for you to demonstrate your familiarity with and understanding of the primary texts and secondary interpretations we have studied. While you should discuss the specific features and context of the spell in terms of the broader context of magical practices in the ancient Mediterranean world, please avoid vague and sweeping generalizations. Please assume that your reader has a good general background in the subject of ancient magic but is perhaps excessively

skeptical of any claims you might make about these particular spells. Specific evidence and careful argumentation are the best ways to convince your audience.

Your commentary should be 3-5 pages of printed text, given a double-spaced document with reasonable serif font and margins (e.g., this document is Garamond 12 pt. with 1" margins). Please proofread your papers carefully to ensure that they are free from annoying typographical, spelling, and grammatical errors. You should cite the parallels according to the bibliographic form, abbreviations and conventions used in Gager. You may include the spell itself in whatever format you deem best. The assignment is due in my office no later than **noon** on **Monday, February 17**. Any late assignments will be penalized by one grade for each 24 hour period they are late (including weekends). Extensions are negotiable only if you discuss the situation with me no less than 24 hours in advance.

