Defixiones and the Temple Locus

The Power of Place in the Curse Tablets at Mainz

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The study of Latin curses was greatly augmented in 1999 with the discovery of the sanctuary of Magna Mater and Isis in Mainz, Germany (Roman Mogontiacum).[1] Like the curse tablets found at another sanctuary, that of Sulis Minerva at Bath, the tablets from Mainz seem especially connected to the sanctuary site and its eponymous deity.[2] This paper looks specifically at the curse tablets, or *defixiones*, found at the sanctuary of Magna Mater and Isis in Mainz, which date from between 70 and 130 CE.[3] The curse tablets found at this site are similar in their presentation: all are in the form of lead tablets, most were either rolled or folded (sometimes both), and most were intended to be burned in a firepit, with many showing evidence of fire-related damage.

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1. D. R. Jordan, "A Survey of Greek *Defixiones* Not Included in the Special Corpora," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 26, no. 2 (1985): 151. Jordan defines curse tablets, or *defixiones*, as "inscribed pieces of lead, usually in the form of small, thin sheets, intended to influence, by supernatural means, the actions or welfare of persons or animals against their will."

2. Jürgen Blänsdorf, "The *Defixiones* from the Sanctuary of Isis and Mater Magna in Mainz," in *Magical Practice in the Latin West: Papers from the International Conference held at the University of Zaragoza 30 Sept.–1 Oct. 2005*, ed. Richard L. Gordon and Francisco Marco Simón (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 141–89; R. S. O. Tomlin, *Tabellae Sulis: Roman Inscribed Tablets of Tin and Lead from the Sacred Spring at Bath* (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1988).

3. Jürgen Blänsdorf, *Die Defixionum Tabellae des Mainzer Isis- und Mater Magna-Heiligtums* (Mainz: Generaldirektion Kulturelles Erbe, 2012) is the *editio princeps* of the curse tablets from Mainz. This paper uses the abbreviation *DTM* to refer to the curses in this edition by the numbers Blänsdorf gave them; references to specific pages in this volume will be in the form "Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*."

The uniformity of tablet deposition within the sanctuary, as well as the thematic content of the tablets, suggests that certain types of cursing qualified as normative religious activity at this temple. The discovery of curse tablets alongside other votive offerings invites us to think of cursing at Mainz not as a deviant religious technology, but rather, as a normative ritual practice at the site.

This paper begins with the translation and close description of nineteen curses found at Mainz that form the core of my data. I then outline scholarly approaches to Roman religion, highlighting the benefits of the "open systems model" used in this paper for the study of religious phenomena in antiquity. I then consider how the curses at Mainz should be categorized. From a review of the ways in which scholarship has accounted for curses found in sacred sites, theories of efficacy, and the legal dimensions of cursing in the Roman Empire, I argue that the curses at Mainz require us to abandon distinctions between "religious" and "non-religious" curse technology. Rather, local customs likely guided what fell within acceptable parameters of religious engagement at the sanctuary of Magna Mater and Isis. I also observe that the legal climate might have paradoxically contributed to the use of curses by those disenfranchised from formal legal processes. Finally, I consider the materiality of the curse tablets, the temple-centric focus of their inscriptions, and the locative dimensions of their deposition, all of which suggest a strong connection to a sanctuary-specific religious ritual at Mainz. In conclusion, I argue from the evidence supplied by the curse tablets and examined here that we need to reconsider our formulation of cursing as a deviant or marginal religious practice, and instead recognize all the ways that it fell within normative religious habits in Roman antiquity.

THE CURSES AT MAINZ

Here follow translations and close descriptions of nineteen lead curse tablets from the *Defixionum Tabellae des Mainzer* corpus catalogued and edited by Jürgen Blänsdorf. These curses were found in a sanctuary site located in Mainz, or Roman Mogontiacum, the provincial capital of Germania Superior.[4] The sanctuary, dedicated to Magna Mater and Isis, dates from between the first and second centuries CE, and was built in two phases. The first phase is located at the north end of the complex and consists of an inner sanctum, *cellae*, firepits (totaling over one hundred in number), and *favissae* for the

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4. Rudolf Haensch, "Mogontiacum als 'Hauptstadt' der Provinz Germania superior," in *Die Römer und ihr Erbe: Fortschritt durch Innovation und Integration*, ed. Michael J. Klein (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2003), 71–86.

storage of ritual objects. The inner sanctum is the oldest structure on the site and is located at the terminus of a dead-end street. The southeast end of the site is built up with Roman structures that flank both sides of the road leading to the older temple.[5]

The majority of the curses examined here were discovered in a tightly circumscribed area along the northeast wall of the inner sanctum and the areas immediately abutting it on the outside. This area is part of the original sanctuary and contains *favissae*, firepits, and an altar. Two tablets (*DTM* 4, 7) come from the newer area at the south end of the complex. One (*DTM* 16) was found at the northwest end of the complex. Many of the tablets were found in the firepits and show evidence of exposure to heat, such as melted edges. Barbara Zach has suggested that these firepits served as places for temple patrons to make offerings. In addition to curse tablets, other objects—such as ceramic lamps, potsherds, coins, and pine cones—were found in these offering areas.[6]

Composed in Latin, these curses found at Mainz address personal concerns: the theft of property and revenge for perceived injustice. Although the entire *DTM* corpus contains thirty-four lead tablets, many of these are too partial or damaged to reveal anything significant about their contents. I have focused here on nineteen lead tablets that can be clearly identified as curse technology, either for their written content or the method of their composition and construction.

I will start with the most evocative tablets in the collection. These curses are lengthy, articulate, and clearly state their aims and reasoning. I provide my English translation of the curses here. The original Latin text, as edited by Blänsdorf, can be found in the appendix. Unclear sections of the text are denoted in my English translation by ellipses; full epigraphical conventions denoting missing words and restored text can be found in the appendix.

DTM 1

Magna Mater, I ask you, by your sacred rites and divine spirit: Gemella, the one who took my brooches, seek her out and cut her, so that she is never well. In the manner that the *galli* cut themselves, so too let her [not] cut herself, but let her wail in this way. And just as they make a deposit of their sacred things in the sacred treasury, thus should your life and health [be deposited], Gemella. Neither with animal sacrifices,

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5. Barbara Zach, "Vegetable Offerings on the Roman Sacrificial Site in Mainz, Germany—Short Report on the First Results," *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 11, no. 1/2 (2002): 101–3; Blänsdorf, "*Defixiones*," 141–45.

6. Zach, "Vegetable Offerings," 101; Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 6.

nor with gold, nor with silver, will you be able to redeem yourself from the Holy Mother, unless it so happens that the people watch you die. Verecunda and Paterna: I thus entrust their situation to you, Sacred Great Mother . . . I ask that they are destroyed in the manner that they defrauded the affairs of me and my husband. Let them not be able to redeem themselves from your power, neither with sacrifices of sheep // nor with lead tablets, nor with gold, nor silver, unless dogs and worms and other monsters devour them. Let the people see their death, just as . . . two women . . . just like this, let justice turn back these women, like these writings . . . if those hidden, golden, and sacred baskets . . .

DTM 1 was found in a firepit located in the inner sanctum along with another curse (*DTM* 9). Some clay oil lamps and other pottery were also found in this location. This tablet is double-sided, with the same curse on the front continuing to the back. The writing is linear from left to right.[7] This curse seeks the help of Magna Mater in rectifying two issues. The first part of the curse deals with the theft of some bracelets; the curse involves a request that the thief, a woman named Gemella, be saddled with ill health and suffer like the *galli*, the priests of Magna Mater who practiced ritual castration, self-laceration, and who wailed in public.[8] The second part of the curse offers two additional persons to the goddess and graphically asks her to strike them with worms and decay until they reach a deathlike state.

Both curses depicted on *DTM* 1 mention the ritual of the *galli* and the castration of Attis.[9] In the case of Gemella, it appears that the curse practitioner hopes that Gemella does not harm herself with cutting like the *galli* (denoted by the placement of "*nec*" in line 7—the tablet itself is corrupted here), but does hope that she experiences their anguish (*planctum habeat*). Thus, the hope is likely that Gemella goes mad or experiences mental remorse. The second part of the curse contains a reference to "sacred golden boxes," the boxes kept in the sanctuary of Magna Mater, which were believed to contain the genitals of Attis.[10]

This curse seeks a permanent remedy. There is no time limitation on the length of the punishment, nor is there any way for the victim to remove the curse—whether by donation to the temple, a performance of sacrifice, or a

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7. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 5–6, 50–63.

8. Juvenal, *Satire* 6.512–516; Seneca, *Agamemnon*, 687–92.

9. Philippe Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods: From Cybele to the Virgin Mary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 31–56. Borgeaud outlines the various myths surrounding Magna Mater and Attis and the ritual practice of castration among the *galli*.

10. Blänsdorf, "Defixiones," 148.

counter-curse.[11] The punishment is also intended to cause public humiliation; the withering away of the victim acts as a visible symbol of their unjust acts against the curse's author.

DTM 2

Whoever did this crime and stole this money . . . that man is richer and we are poorer. Sacred Mother, may you pursue him across the earth, through the sea, through the wet and dry places, by your righteous one [Attis] and all . . . Let this money bring harm and misfortune because you pursue him . . . In the way that the *galli* cut themselves and cut off their testicles, thus let that man . . . cut . . . his chest [?]. Do not allow him to redeem himself . . . neither with sacrifices, nor with . . . , nor with gold or silver, nor should that man be able to be saved or restored or redeemed. In the way that the *galli*, the *Bellonari*, and the *Magali* shed their boiling-hot blood, let him come cold to the ground, also [let him shed] his faculties, his thinking, and his intentions. He will see the extent of the [powers] of the *galli*, *Magali*, and *Bellonari*. The one who did the crime of [taking] this money, let them see him die, and for the same reason that salt dissolves in water, similarly let that man's limbs and marrow disappear. Let him be tortured and let him say that he admits his crimes. I entrust [him] to you with a solemn oath, so that you may find him guilty by my prayers. If you cause a bad death for this reason, I will return these things to you gladly and freely.

DTM 2 seeks to punish an unknown person or persons for committing fraud. This tablet was found in a firepit near the *cellae* located at the inner sanctum of the temple. The tablet was rolled, folded, and melted, resulting in a jagged edge on its right side.[12] The curse is contained on one side of the tablet and is written left to right. Like *DTM* 1, reference is made to punishments akin to the self-castration and self-laceration of the *galli*. Here, the punishment is spelled out as including a significant loss of blood, which is further analogized to the loss of mental faculties and personal mobility. The phrase "*illi membra m[ed]ullae extabescant*" (may his limbs and marrow disappear) may be a sympathetic analogy to the physical decomposition of the curse tablet in the firepit, suggesting a link between the curse and the praxis of depositing the curse in fire. This can be understood as what Christopher Faraone has termed a *Similia Similibus* formula, in which the victim of the

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11. On time-limited curses, compare the *DTM* materials with those mentioned in Esther Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 151–52. Eidinow lists several examples of time-limited curses as well as examples of curses being reversed.

12. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 64–75.

curse is likened by analogy to the object used to effect the cursing ritual.[13] This curse also seeks public punishment for the perpetrator of fraud and emphasizes the permanence of the curse. The goddess (and her consort, here indicated by the second person plural) is asked "to make a bad death for him" (*exitum malum feceris*). This tablet includes several figures outside the cult of Magna Mater, notably the *Bellonari*, the priests of the Roman war goddess Bellona, and the *Magali*. Bellona, whose priests also practiced ritual mutilation by cutting their arms, was closely identified with Magna Mater in Roman thought.[14] Blänsdorf also identifies the *Magali* as a priesthood, possibly one related to Isis or Mithras.[15]

DTM 3

I ask you, Mistress Magna Mater, that you avenge me concerning the goods of my spouse Florus. Ulattius Severus is the one who cheated me, and in the manner that I write this backwards, thus should all that man's affairs, whatever he does, whatever he may pursue, let all things of that man be reversed, let it come to that man like salt and water. Whatever he took from me concerning the goods of Florus my spouse, I ask you Mistress Magna Mater, that you avenge me for it.

DTM 3 is a shorter curse inscribed from left to right on both sides of the tablet.[16] The curse starts on one side and continues to the other. It was found just outside the inner sanctum wall. Authored by a woman whose husband was robbed (*fraudavit*), the curse's target (and presumed thief) is named as one Ulattius Severus. Magna Mater is asked to avenge the theft. Two *Similia Similibus* analogies can be seen in the curse. The first is the connection between the manner in which the author writes the curse (which was likely lettered backwards) and the misfortune that should be visited upon Ulattius. The second analogy is the dissolution of "salt and water" (*sal et aqua*); it is

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13. Christopher A. Faraone, "The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion,* ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5–10.

14. Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 41. Juvenal, *Satires*, 6.512–16. The identification of the priesthoods of Magna Mater and Bellona is especially evident in Juvenal, who lumps them together based on their practice of castration: "*Ecce furentis Bellonae matrisque deum chorus intrat et ingens semivir.*" *Juvenal and Persius*, ed. and trans. Susanna Morton Braund (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 2004), 282.

15. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 70–71.

16. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 76–81.

asked that the target's worldly affairs similarly disappear and that all things be made unfavorable for him (*omnia illi aversa fiant*).

DTM 6

I place [with you] Quintus, who has turned away from himself and his life concerns and has acted badly. Just as the *galli* and *Bellonari* cut themselves and fall to the earth, thus let his credibility, his reputation, and his abilities be cut off. Since those men are not reckoned in the number of men, do not let that man [be reckoned in the number of men]. Just like that man deceived me, thus holy Magna Mater, may you take away all his possessions. Like the tree that dries up in your sanctuary, thus let the reputation, credibility, and ability of that man dry up. I entrust [him] to you lord Attis, so that you will avenge me for this, and that, within the turning of the year, his death will be bad and vile. // He places the name with the spouses . . . If anything useful will be done, so then that man will be useful to us in his body. You will fear to be consecrated [to the gods].

DTM 6 was written horizontally from left to right, with the bulk of the text taking up the full length of the tablet. The curse contains an addendum on the left-hand side, which was written transverse to the main text. The tablet was rolled before its deposit.[17] The curse seeks retribution for wrongful actions performed by the curse's target, Quintus. Again, we have an analogy to the castrated *galli*: Quintus's affairs are to be cut off (*abscissa*) just as the *galli* and *Bellonari* cut themselves. Interestingly, we also have an analogy to the dried up tree in the sanctuary (*arbor siccabit se in sancto*), a likely reference to the pine tree under which Attis died (after cutting off his genitals). In Roman mythology, Magna Mater uprooted this tree and took it to her sanctuary, where she performed lamentations around it.[18] The left-hand side of the curse speaks of the horrible condition desired for the target's body. Both Magna Mater and Attis are expected to enact the revenge requested here.

DTM 7

Whoever took our money purse, in which there was money, both money and gold rings, let this happen by the Kalends of February which are approaching . . . either let him attend to his crime . . . [or] what little he is accustomed to, let it be reversed

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17. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 97–105.

18. Borgeaud, *Mother,* 44–46. Turcan, *Cults,* 44–47. The Roman calendar contained a set of springtime festivals held in March and April that centered on the cult of Magna Mater at Rome. These festivals included the procession of a pine tree to the temple of Magna Mater at Rome and the veneration of this tree as Attis.

in the manner of this backwards writing, gods and goddesses. May you allow this [to happen] to these men. Whoever seized these things with his hand . . . just as that sap flows down, so too will this lead [melt] . . . and be fixed on its target . . . Let him desire to be as if blameless . . . if it is . . . in the goddess . . .

DTM 7 also addresses theft (here, of a purse containing money and gold rings). This curse specifies a time in which the perpetrator (or perpetrators) is to be punished.[19] This curse is important because it outlines the means by which the curse is believed to take effect. Addressed to unnamed gods and goddesses (*Dii Deaeque*), this tablet, like *DTM* 3, likens the manner in which the curse was written to the victim's punishment: by writing the curse backwards, it is hoped that there will be a reversal in the victim's fortunes. Although the text is fragmentary here, there also appears to be an analogy made between the physical melting of the lead tablet and the "melting away" of the target's affairs.

DTM 11

I entrust and ask you by sacred oath, that you [pl.] take back the things entrusted to Publius Cutius and Piperion and // Placida and Sacra, her daughter. Let their limbs melt in the manner that this lead melts, so that they will die.

DTM 11 contains a curse against four persons. It was found in a firepit abutting the inner sanctum, in an area that was popular for depositing curses (eight curses have been found in this location). This tablet was inscribed on both sides, rolled, and then burned.[20] The tablet seeks remedy for the theft of items that were perceived by the author to be on loan to those named in the curse. The perpetrators are named as Publius Cutius and Piperion. Also named are two females, one Placida and her daughter Sacra. It is unclear how all the persons named on the tablet are related to the mentioned crime. Like other curses that we've already seen, there is an analogy made between the melting of the tablet and the victim's subsequent misfortune. *DTM* 11 also asks for the death of the curse's targets (*eorum existum sit*).

This tablet brings contractual ritual language to the fore. The author mentions that the curse is enacted by sacred oath, here indicated by the word *religione* in the ablative case. Alternatively, Blänsdorf has interpreted *religione*

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19. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 106–10. Blänsdorf suggests that the criminal(s) were given a time frame for the return of the stolen goods. The text does not specifically indicate this, but the presence of the word *sive* ("or") could indicate an either/or situation.

20. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 120–24.

as meaning that the author performed all the proper rites necessary prior to depositing the curse.[21] Both interpretations are supported by the use of *religio* in antiquity, and both uses point to a formal ritual or agreement enacted at the Mainz temple. *DTM* 1 also mentions the sacred rites (*sacra*) of Magna Mater. We can thus conclude that the curse's author perceived their actions to be in accordance with expected conventions when depositing the curse tablet at the temple.

DTM 16

Whatever bad man stole my father's fortune, [I give him] to you . . . by my god . . . IUNCNAO REIANTI // Mind, Memory, Heart, Thought. Whoever that man was who fixed his sights on my father, also [give] justice to that one.

Although this tablet was found at the northwest edge of the complex away from the core deposit area, two other tablets (*DTM* 27, 33) were also found in the vicinity—as were many coins—suggesting that this was a deposit area for offerings. *DTM* 16 is written on both sides of the tablet and was pierced with a nail. Damage to the tablet from the nail, as well as corrosion, prevents a clear reading of this tablet.[22] Blänsdorf has noted the alliteration employed in the curse formula (*mentem memoriam cor cogitatum*); to this I will add that it also appears to employ chiasmus in the opening text (*fortunam dolus . . . vir patri*). These stylistic features suggest that the curse's author possessed a sophisticated knowledge of Latin literary conventions.

The tablet appears to concern itself with the theft of some goods from the author's father, indicated here by the perfect verb *spoliavit* (to rob, deprive). The front side of the tablet concludes with the formula "IUNCNAO REIANTI," which Blänsdorf interprets as an invocatory formula. The curse addresses a male god, perhaps Attis, although we do not see any mention of the rituals in this curse that clearly locate some of our other curses within the mythology of Magna Mater. The backside seeks to disrupt the mental faculties of the perpetrator. The wish that justice be given (*ius*) designates this curse as a prayer for justice. I will speak more about this type of curse shortly.

DTM 4

Tiberius Claudius Adiutor: I ask in your temple, Magna Mater, that you receive him in your temple. And Lord Attis, I beseech you that this man is accepted like a sacrifice, and whatever thing he does or make, let it be like salt and water for that man. May

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21. Blänsdorf, "*Defixiones*," 178–79.
22. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 3–5, 140–44.

you make it so, Mistress, let this happen, let him cut his heart and liver. // Since that man and his limbs and marrow have been bound and consecrated [to you] . . . let there be nothing else, O Attis and Magna Mater.

DTM 4 is a folded tablet found in the newer area of the temple, apart from the main cache of curses. A double-sided curse, the inside text is clearly inscribed with capital letters, while the outside employs cursive.[23] The entirety of the inscription seeks a single aim: that Magna Mater and Attis treat the victim of the curse as a sacrifice. The degree of specificity indicated by the presence of the intended victim's praenomen-nomen-cognomen suggests that the author knew the target of the curse and serves as an identifier for the gods, who are asked to immobilize the victim and destroy his affairs.

This curse also evinces an understanding of temple ritual procedure. The curse victim is understood as akin to a sacrifice (*hunc hostiam acceptum*). There is also a reference to the cutting out of the victim's heart and liver. These two internal organs were essential to the act of sacrifice and the taking of auspices—examination of the *exta* was how one knew whether or not the god in question had accepted the sacrifice.[24] The ritual "sacrifice" of the victim on the curse tablet is a sympathetic analogy that relies on formal temple procedures to make a connection between the offering of the victim via curse tablet and his destruction by the gods in return.

DTM 5

Blessed and good lord Attis, be present, come angrily to Liberalus. I ask you through all things, lord, by your [gods] Castor and Pollux, by the innermost boxes, that you give him a bad mind and a bad death. As long as his life may exist, may he see himself die in his entire body before his eyes. // Let him not be able to redeem himself with any money, nor any deed, nor by you, nor by another god unless he dies badly. Do this, I ask you by your power.

DTM 5 was found within the inner sanctum along the wall in one of the favissae. Double-sided and folded, the tablet petitions Attis to inflict angry punishment on one Liberalus. The target is to suffer a bad mind (*malam mentem*) and a bad death (*malum exitum*), and it is additionally asked that the victim be conscious of his mental, physical, and social disintegration. In addition to Attis, the author also mentions the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, and

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23. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 3–5, 82–88.

24. John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 83–84.

the "innermost boxes" (*cistas penetrales*), a reference to the sacred boxes in the sanctuary of Magna Mater. Like some of our other curses (*DTM* 1, 2), the author leaves no wiggle room for escaping the curse; no amount of donation to Attis (or any other deity) will be able to release the curse—only a bad death will satisfy the author.

DTM 9

In this way I entrust Fuscinus to you . . . so that you . . . him at no time, but that my enemy is never released from his terrible anxiety.

DTM 9 consists of a rectangular tablet with amateur writing on one side; it was neither folded nor rolled. The tablet was found in the same firepit as *DTM* 1. The target of the curse is a man named Fuscinus, who is identified as the curse author's enemy (*adversarium*). As in *DTM* 16, we appear to have an invocatory formula (*ULTIPESLERAE*), which Blänsdorf identifies as a command for punishment. An efficient curse, the author entrusts the curse target to the god, and requests that he is never released from his punishment.

DTM 10

I consign to you and ask you: The freedwoman of Cerialis, make these things also . . . that she wails . . . and that she desire herself to be like the *Archgalli*. // . . . may you make internal illness for her . . . and in two months that I hear about their death. Let them melt away in the manner that this melts away.

DTM 10 is a rolled, double-sided tablet that was found in the inner sanctum.[25] The personages mentioned appear to be a freedwoman (*liberta Cerialis*), but the plural *diliquescant* (let them melt away) in the inside of the tablet suggests we may be dealing with multiple persons. Like *DTM* 7, it puts a time frame on the curse's fulfillment; here, the gods are given two months to fulfill the curse. This curse also contains two familiar analogies. The first analogy refers to the pain of the victim and the priests of Magna Mater: it is asked that she suffer like them. The second analogy refers to the melting of the tablet and the dwindling health of the victim; as the tablets melts, so too the health of the target is supposed to diminish.

DTM 13

Cassius Fortunatus and his possessions, and Lutatia Restituta, may you destroy them.

DTM 13 was found in the inner sanctum. The tablet itself is damaged from the deep folds in the lead and some melting along the bottom edge of the

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25. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 115–19.

tablet.[26] The melted edge suggests that this tablet, like many of those we have already seen, was burned as part of some ritual praxis. Brief and to the point, *DTM* 13 targets two persons known to the author: Cassius Fortunatus and Lutatia Restituta. The author makes a request to the gods (likely Magna Mater and Attis, as indicated by the second-person plural subjunctive form of *necare*) to destroy these persons as well as the fortune of Cassius Fortunatus.

DTM 14

. . . to view his death . . . and you ask me . . . and of Mars. // . . . Siccus . . . that the father-in-law not be able to move . . . Mogunus.

DTM 14 is mostly unreadable, and reverse writing on the tablet further complicates interpretation. The tablet itself is irregularly shaped and the top edge shows evidence of melting.[27] There is partial text on the front and back sides. The front side seeks the visible withering away of the victim's health resulting in death. The curse contains a typical motif found on the Mainz tablets: that the victim's suffering be visible (*existum spectare*). The back of the tablet identifies a person named Siccus, who appears to be the father-in-law of someone related to the curse. This curse is interesting in that two deities are named: Mars and Mogunus, the latter being a Germanic indigenous god. The naming of gods not officially associated with the temple (i.e. Magna Mater or Attis) seems to be an anomaly here. Perhaps it is suggestive of a belief that sacred spaces in general could serve as a contact point for any and all deities.

DTM 28

. . . I ask you by this vow, let him be condemned . . . to your power . . . accordingly . . . in their . . . // . . . I catch and bring [him to you] . . . let him be consecrated [to you], and although he is healthy and alive, let him be doomed to die . . . if he curses my . . .

DTM 28 was found near the main catchment of curses just outside the inner sanctum. The tablet itself contains reverse writing on both sides of the tablet, which was rolled before deposition. The text is mostly untranslatable and highly fragmentary.[28] The conditional phrase of *si devovet* (if he vows or curses) suggests that this tablet was a preemptive counter-curse. We have

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26. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 3–6, 128–29.
27. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 130–33.
28. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 3–6, 168–71.

quasi-legalistic language here that suggests the author is making a contract with the gods: in exchange for his vow (*voto*), the author requests that the gods will punish the transgressions of the curse's target with death.

DTM 12

As much as this is dry, in the manner that this [tablet] melts, thus melt away his neck, limbs, marrow, and fortune. // Let him suffer pain in the manner of your *galli*. Thus also let him make all those things, so that they may be suitable for this purpose. You are the one in charge, do this, so that in ten months his affairs perish.

Another short curse, *DTM* 12 was found along with two other curses (*DTM* 11, 15) in a popular area just outside the inner sanctum. The tablet contains writing on both sides and was rolled.[29] Like other curses, there is an analogy between the melting of the tablet (*quomodi hoc liquescet*) and the physical and economic demise of the curse's target.

DTM 15

Whatever Narcissus's lover Aemilia may do, whatever she undertakes, whatever she does, let all her endeavours be turned back. // At no time let that woman bring anything to fruition. Let her grow senseless and let her perform her affairs senselessly. Let Narcissus's lover conduct [her affairs] just like this tablet, which will never bloom in beauty.

DTM 15 was found in the same area as *DTM* 12 (above). This tablet is square-shaped and contains writing on both sides of the tablet. The majority of the text is contained on one side; the minimal lettering on the reverse side appears to be due to scribal error. This tablet displays an interesting stylistic touch: the core of the curse is contained in the center of the tablet, with the rest of the curse inscribed along the four edges, framing the main body of the text.[30]

The curse's target is identified as a woman named Aemilia. It seeks to compromise her mental faculties so that she is unable to undertake her affairs. It is unclear if this could be classed as an erotic curse; naming Aemilia as Narcissus's lover seems more for identification purposes since we do not have the typical language associated with erotic curses present here.[31] The request,

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29. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 3–6, 125–27.

30. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 134–39.

31. For a good overview of erotic curses, see John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 79–115. The curses surveyed by Gager under the context of "Sex, Love, Marriage" tend to indicate the desire to separate a person from their existing love interest, as well as

however, is clear and made by analogy to the tablet: that she never experience success.

DTM 8

I give Avita the stepmother to you and I give Gratus to you.

DTM 8 is a folded tablet with text on one side. The tablet is damaged with the lower right-hand corner ripped off, resulting in a loss of text. The text itself was lettered backwards, from right to left, thus indicating that the author was using cursing technology.[32] The tablet names two individuals, Avita and Gratus, and entrusts them to the gods, most likely for punishment of some sort.

DTM 19, DTM 22

Two additional curses are too partial to determine with any precision, but can easily be recognized as curses by their use of reverse lettering. *DTM* 19 was found in the inner sanctum. The text consists of capital letters written backwards, with text found on only half of the tablet. Like *DTM* 15 above, the inverse inscription marks this tablet out as a curse, as does its location in an area popular for the depositing of curse tablets. *DTM* 22 was found in the inner sanctum with three other tablets nearby (*DTM* 23, 24, 31). It is an unfolded tablet inscribed on both sides with a single name in capital letters: Eros.[33] The name reads forwards on one side of the tablet; on the other, the text appears backwards. The mirrored arrangement of the target's name suggests that this tablet was used for cursing.

ROMAN RELIGION AND THE RELIGIOUS INDIVIDUAL

In order to understand the connection between cursing and religion, it is necessary that some model of Roman religion be put forward. On the most basic level, I define religion as interactions between humans and "non-immediately plausible" agents. "Non-immediately plausible agents" is a term developed by Jörg Rüpke that has specific applicability to ancient contexts, since it encapsulates the host of figures that were imbued with extraordinary significance in the ancient world: heroes, ancestors, places, things, and of

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contain references to various sexual orifices and the intended sexual desires of the curse's target.

32. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 111–12.

33. Blänsdorf, *Tabellae*, 3–5, 157–58. Blänsdorf notes that the name Eros frequently occurs in inscriptions.

course, divinities.[34] Nevertheless, there are many models of how this interaction between humans and these other figures should be conceived, all with their supporters and detractors.

One of the more enduring formulations used to describe Roman religion is that of a civic-centric state religion. This is the model advanced by Georg Wissowa and Theodor Mommsen that posits a juridical Roman religion focalized on the city of Rome, its deities, and its administrators.[35] Contemporary scholars who have adopted this view include John Scheid and Clifford Ando.[36] This "civic model" (or "civic compromise") has two obvious drawbacks that are pertinent here. The first is that Roman religion becomes synonymous with the civic-religion of the ruling elite, and thus it may not reflect the religious activities of those who were socially, economically, or geographically on the margins of the Roman Empire. The second issue is that, because of its political focus, the civic-cult model, in use, frequently results in an analytical binary between public (politically oriented) cult and "private" cult. Within such a binary, the private cult—expressed usually through mystery religions or cults centered on Oriental deities—becomes the site of "true religiosity." Richard Reitzenstein and Franz Cumont are two foundational sources for this latter view.[37]

The emphasis on the civic-religion model, buttressed by elite Roman male sources, also has the effect of benchmarking contested practices against a standard of civic-religion in second-order scholarship. This can lead to an emphasis on upper-class, juridical notions of religion as a model of normative Roman religion. This has the effect of reifying notions of normative and

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34. Jörg Rüpke, "Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication: Reflection on History and Theory of Religion," *Religion* 45, no. 3 (2015): 348–49. Rüpke highlights the usefulness of the term "implausible" figures to discuss religion in the ancient world. The benefit of this approach is that it does not rely solely on the presence of deities to categorize phenomena as religious, and so allows for the heterogeneity in ancient practice.

35. Georg Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, 2nd ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1912); Theodor Mommsen, *The History of Rome*, trans. William P. Dickson (London: Macmillan, 1901).

36. Clifford Ando, *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); John Scheid, *The Gods, the State, and the Individual: Reflections on Civic Religion in Rome,* trans. Clifford Ando (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

37. Richard Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen: Ihre Grundgedanken und Wirkungen* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1910); Franz Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956); Robert Turcan is a more contemporary follower of the view that mystery cults offered true religious fervor.

non-normative (deviant) religion that did not uniformly exist at the emic level.[38] It also occludes understanding of the variety of contexts in which a disputed or deviant practice might be considered legitimate or normative. In short, there was much greater texture to the lived religious experience in Greco-Roman antiquity than the civic-religion model is able to capture.

There have been efforts to move away from the civic-religion framework and develop models that account for Roman religious complexity. John A. North, Richard Gordon, and Andreas Bendlin have all highlighted the multiplicity of religious options in the Roman Empire and opportunities for interaction.[39] I agree that we need to account for this complexity; we should not speak of Roman religion, but rather Roman religions in the plural. As such, this paper utilizes the "open system" model of Roman religion put forward by Bendlin.[40] The "open system" model posits a flexible religious pluralism that adapts to local concerns. Although a normative view of how to interact with the gods was communicated in ancient society, the ultimate interpretation of those norms would be defined by the individual recipient of that information and conditioned by local understanding of how to act religiously.[41] It is at the level of individual interpretation that religious meaning

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38. The characterization of magic as "inverted religion" is one such outcome of the civic-model standard. Such a formulation both privileges the civic-model as the normative standard of religion, and defines magic in a way that does not fully account for the expression of "magic" in various contexts. On inverted religion, see Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 126–28, 229–33.

39. John A. North, "Conservatism and Change in Roman Religion," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 44 (1976): 1–12; Richard Gordon, "Religion in the Roman Empire: The Civic Compromise and Its Limits," in *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. Mary Beard and John North (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 233–55; Andreas Bendlin, "Looking Beyond the Civic Compromise: Religious Pluralism in Late Republican Rome," in *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy: Evidence and Experience*, ed. Edward Bispham and Christopher Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 115–35.

40. Andreas Bendlin, "Social Complexity and Religion at Rome in the Second and First Centuries BCE," (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1998); Andreas Bendlin, "Gemeinschaft, Öffentlichkeit und Identität: Forschungsgeschichtliche Anmerkungen zu den Mustern sozialer Ordnung in Rom," in *Religiöse Vereine in der römischen Antike: Untersuchungen zu Organisation, Ritual und Raumordnung*, ed. Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser and Alfred Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 9–40. Bendlin has most fully developed Niklas Luhmann's systems theory within the Roman religious context; see also Niklas Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*, trans. Peter Gilgen (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

41. Bendlin, "Social Complexity," 135–41.

is formed.[42] The "open system" model allows for a fluidity in Roman conceptions of divinity (or "non-immediately plausible agents") and heterogeneity in religious meaning and practice.[43]

By conceptualizing Roman religion as an open system, we not only can better understand the pluralistic nature of religion in Roman antiquity, we are also in a better position to address questions of individuality and religious meaning. Such a conception opens the potential to understand Roman religion as comprised of individual religious agents, and provides the scholar with a starting point for investigating the religious choices an individual might make. Indeed, recent scholarship by Rubina Raja, Jörg Rüpke, and Richard Gordon engages the place of the individual, theories of "lived religion," and agency in Roman religious practice.[44] I argue that it is this religious individual—assessing religious options and making choices—that was able to choose cursing as a complementary technology to their religious practice at Mainz.

CATEGORIZING THE CURSES AT MAINZ

Certainly, many of the curses here clearly can be considered "prayers for justice." Henk Versnel has distinguished prayers for justice as a category separate from other *defixiones*.[45] In his typology, prayers for justice share the following similarities: the gods act as a legal authority to punish the perpetrator of a crime; the person who submits the prayer for justice does so with supplicatory language; and the stolen object (rather than the perpetrator) is dedicated to the deity. Furthermore, prayers for justice were likely publicized in some way, possibly by their display in the temple, with the author of the

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42. Bendlin, "Social Complexity," 140–41.

43. Rodney Stark, "Religious Competition and Roman Piety," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 2 (2006): 2–30; Bendlin, "Civic Compromise," 115–35. Both Stark and Bendlin have characterized Roman religious plurality as operating within a competitive dynamic, or what Bendlin has termed a religious "market place."

44. Rüpke, "Agency"; Rubina Raja and Jörg Rüpke, "Appropriating Religion: Methodological Issues in Testing the 'Lived Ancient Religion' Approach," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 1, no. 1 (2015): 11–19; Richard Gordon, "From Substances to Texts: Three Materialities of 'Magic' in the Roman Imperial Period," in *The Materiality of Magic*, ed. Dietrich Boschung and Jan N. Bremmer (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015), 133–76. Gordon has specifically noted the individual agency involved in the act of cursing.

45. H. S. Versnel, "Beyond Cursing: The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 61–106.

prayer clearly identified.[46] For Versnel, prayers for justice differ from "traditional *defixiones,*" which are authored anonymously, appeal to chthonic deities or figures (such as the furies), and command the gods to do their bidding using imperative verb forms rather than supplicatory language.[47] Versnel's creation of an intermediary category, that of "border-area curses," which shares traits with both *defixiones* and prayers for justice—as well as the category's inclusion of prayers for justice from the Bath tablets, which are dissimilar in typology—suggest that neat boundaries between religiously oriented prayers for justice and *defixiones* cannot be easily drawn.[48] Although this paper rejects Versnel's distinction between religious and non-religious curses, his broad definition of prayers for justice, that of curses which seek revenge or punishment for a perceived wrong, is pertinent here. [49]

How did the curses at Mainz work? Richard Gordon has argued that the curse tablets at Mainz functioned by inducing guilt in a criminal, thereby bringing "symmetry" to a situation.[50] The person who committed a wrong was thus "punished" by their feelings of guilt or remorse, indicated, in Gordon's view, by the inclusion of the phrase *mala mens* (a bad mind) on curse tablets. Similar conclusions are drawn by Esther Eidinow, who suggests that justice-oriented curses "gain their potency from being seen or heard."[51] The view that judicial curses involved a component of public shame related to the curse's publication or dissemination through alternative channels (such as a gossipy priesthood) has a long history that should not entirely be discarded.[52] Such a conclusion—that the offender would see that he/she had been "found out" and consequently feel remorse, perhaps to the point of being motivated to return the stolen goods—may be entirely relevant for publically displayed curses.

The Mainz tablets, however, give no indication that they were publically

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46. Versnel, "Beyond Cursing," 68–75, 90.

47. Versnel, "Beyond Cursing," 60–64.

48. Versnel, "Beyond Cursing," 81–90. One significant difference is that the Bath tablets were not publicized, but rather deposited privately.

49. Versnel, "Beyond Cursing," 65.

50. Richard L. Gordon, "Gods, Guilt and Suffering: Psychological Aspects of Cursing in the North-Western Provinces of the Roman Empire," in *Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis* 49 (2013): 269–74.

51. Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 140.

52. Versnel, "Beyond Cursing," 80–81. Versnel traces the debate over the "publication" of curses between scholars such as Charles Thomas Newton, Richard Wünsch, E. G. Kagarow, and Joseph Zingerle. Versnel argues that publication may be the case in some, but not all, curses.

displayed, or that they afforded criminals the opportunity to confess or return stolen goods. The tablets were rolled or folded, concealing their contents, and then burned in a fire. The tablet was not so much a public declaration as it was a private contract between the plaintiff and the gods. Many of the tablets explicitly state the permanence of the curse and its inescapability, and even seek the ultimate punishment—death—for their target. Within the context of the physical punishments enumerated at Mainz, the "bad mind" (*mala mens*) likely referred to a decline in mental faculties, which would result in the inability to administer one's affairs properly, an effect believed to be induced by harmful magic.[53] It is more helpful, in the case of the Mainz tablets, to understand the goal of these curses as the fulfilment of the contract by the god or goddess, not the return of stolen goods as a result of a guilty conscience. I will say more on the contractual nature of these curses shortly.

The legal status of curses in the Roman Empire stands as another argument against the publicizing of aggressive curses, such as the ones we find at Mainz. Second-order scholarship frequently categorizes cursing as an example of ancient magic. Indeed, Kimberley Stratton identifies curse tablets as "our only source for the practice of magic independent from imagined or stereotyped performances of it."[54] Nevertheless, I am reluctant to wade into the discussion of how the scholar defines magic, especially since so many others have already spoken so cogently on the topic.[55] Instead, I would like to consider the legal contexts for cursing and magic in Roman law, as this has direct

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53. For an example of harmful magic being believed to induce an incapacitated mental state, see Apuleius, *Apologia*, section 87. Apuleius responds to the charge that he bewitched the mind of Pudentilla with the challenge to his opponents to say that she was so insane and unable to speak properly that she was incapable of conducting the business of her estate: "Dicat hic pius filius, quid in eo tempore sequius agentem uel loquentem matrem suam propter insaniam uiderit; neget eam rationibus uilliconum et upilionum et equisonum sollertissime subscripsisse." *Apulei Platonici Madaurensis opera quae supersunt*, Vol. II Fasc. I: Pro se de magia liber (Apologia), ed. Rudolf Helm (Leipzig: Teubner, 1959).

54. Kimberly B. Stratton, "Early Greco-Roman Antiquity," in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West*, ed. David J. Collins, S. J. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 86–87.

55. For discussion of the term "magic" and its use in scholarship, see Sarah Iles Johnston, "Describing the Undefinable: New Books on Magic and Old Problems of Definition," *History of Religions* 43, no. 1 (2003): 50–54; Kimberly B. Stratton, "Magic Discourse in the Ancient World," in *Defining Magic: A Reader*, ed. Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg (Sheffield: England, 2012), 243–54; James B. Rives, "Magic in Roman Law: The Reconstruction of a Crime," *Classical Antiquity* 22, no. 2 (2003): 314–17. Johnston, Stratton, and Rives all discuss the various methodological issues one bumps up against when attempting to define and discuss magic

implications on the ways an individual might assess whether or not a curse was a viable strategy.

Magic first enters the Roman legal code in section eight of the *Twelve Tables,* which outlawed "harmful incantations" in 451 BCE. Violations of this law carried the penalty of death by beating.[56] A word of caution is, however, necessary here. The issue in question in section eight of the *Twelve Tables* was not so much magic, as it was personal injury and the disruption of the social fabric. In addition to incantations, topics addressed in this section of the *Twelve Tables* include conspiratorial meetings, false oaths, and murder with intent. That the *Twelve Tables* included civil injuries that were not caused by magic suggests that *dolus*, or harm (specifically harm undertaken in secret), was the main concern of these legal measures.

The legal focus on harm soon expanded to other concerns, however. The *Lex Cornelia de Sicariis et Veneficis*, established in 81 BCE by L. Cornelius Sulla, further emphasized the connection of harm and magic. In addition to theft and murder, the law included causing death through a "dangerous drug."[57] Despite the focus on physical harm, three commentaries suggest that the *Lex Cornelia* had broad applications. Marcianus and Modestinus suggested that the *Lex Cornelia* applied to "a person who owns, sells, or makes a drug for the purpose of killing someone."[58] Ulpian interpreted the *Lex Cornelia* to include not only harmful drugs and poisons (*mala medicamenta et venena*), but also "books on unacceptable subjects, magic for example and similar things."[59] Finally, the *Opinions of Paul*, written in 210 CE, listed the following crimes under the *Lex Cornelia*: administering a drug that caused death, administering a love potion (*amatorium poculum*), the practice of impious or nocturnal rites in order to enchant, curse, or bind someone (*qui sacra impia*

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in antiquity. See also Richard Gordon, "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe,* vol. 2, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999): 163–275. Gordon has argued that a "strong view of magic" emerged in the Hellenistic period and was fully operative in Roman discourse by the second century CE.

56. *Twelve Tables*, 8 "*Qui malum carmen incantassit . . .*", quoted from M. H. Crawford, *Roman Statutes* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1996), 555.

57. *Lex Cornelia*, Ch. 5. "qui hominis necandi causa venenum malum fecerit vendiderit emerit habuerit dederit." Ibid., 293.

58. Justinian, *Digest* 45.8.3. "qui venenum necandi hominis causa fecerit vel vendiderit vel habuerit." *Digesta Iustiniani Augusti*, ed. Theodor Mommsen (Berolini: Apud Weidmannos 1870). In Amanuensis V2.0 <http://www.riedlberger.de/08amanuensis.html>. Accessed 2017.

59. Ibid., 10.2.4.1. "tantundem debebit facere et in libris improbatae lectionis, magicis forte vel his similibus." Ibid.

nocturnave, ut quem obcantarent defigerent obligarent), having knowledge of the magical arts (*magicae artis conscios*), and owning magic books (*libros magicae artis apud se neminem habere licet*). Punishment was also spelled out: exile for *honesto-ries* (the upper classes) and a torturous death for *humiliores* (the lower classes).[60] From this, we can infer that, by the early third century, the *Lex Cornelia* could be used to address magic, here depicted as asocial behavior or improper religion (as defined by the ruling upper classes), and harmful acts of magic. Indeed, the historical record suggests that magical acts, such as curses or erotic magic, were prosecuted under Roman law as early as the first century CE.[61]

We are then left with a big question: given the legal and social ramifica-tions, why did so many people choose to curse anyway? For those who were unable to access the legal system, such as noncitizens, women, and those of low economic status, cursing offered significant advantages for disenfran-chised individuals who sought to gain control in difficult or disputed situa-tions.[62] Curses could also resolve matters that would never reach the courts, such as disputes within the Roman household. Undertaken in private, curs-ing also had the advantage of resolving otherwise public matters "on the

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60. Paul, *Opinions,* 5.23.14–19. "Lex Cornelia poenam deportationis infligit ei qui hominem occiderit eiusve rei causa furtive faciendi cum telo fuerit, et qui vene-num hominis necandi causa habuerit vendiderit paraverit, falsum testimonium dixerit, quo quis periret, mortisve causam praestiterit. Quae omnia facinora in honestiores poena capitis vindicari placuit, humiliores vero in crucem tolluntur aut bestiis obici-untur." *Fontes Iuris Romani Anteiustianiani*, Vol. II, ed. C. Bruns and T. Mommsen (Friburgi in Brisgavia: I. C. B. Mohr, 1887).

61. *Apologia* 25, 27, 28, 29, 79. Apuleius's *Apology* offers an oft-cited example of magic in the Roman law courts. Early in his defense, Apuleius says he has been brought to court solely on the "false charge of magic which more easily confers infamy than esteem." He also appears to define magic as acting with intent to do harm, "dein etsi maxime magus forem, tamen ostendam neque causam ullam neque occasionem fuisse, ut me in aliquo maleficio experirentur*."* For curses specifically, one notes the death of Germanicus recorded by Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.69. In the first century CE, Calpurnius Piso died awaiting trial for murdering the Roman general Germanicus by magical means—lead tablets inscribed with his name (*nomen Germanici plumbeis tabulis insculptum*) were found in Germanicus's room.

62. Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 228; Elizabeth Ann Pollard, "Magic Accu-sations against Women in Tacitus's Annals," in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*, ed. Kimberly B. Stratton with Dayna S. Kalleres (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 183–218; David Frankfurter, "The Social Context of Wom-en's Erotic Magic in Antiquity," also in *Daughters of Hecate*, 319–39. Both Pollard and Frankfurter have noted the ways that curses could be used by the upper classes in "factional disputes" (Pollard) and for the maintenance of social status, especially among women seeking financial or emotional security (Frankfurter).

down low." The private nature of curses offered the benefit of anonymity to high status persons (and anyone else) who would be damaged by airing their dirty laundry in public.[63]

The secretive nature of cursing and its widespread accessibility promised the rectification of difficult situations to those who otherwise had no recourse. All in all, we find cursing used to "solve" nearly every sort of problem. Cursing was a strategy to explain unexpected events, gain control in situations of crisis, negotiate social terrain, and safeguard one's interests.[64] Professional rivalries, social and romantic entanglements, theft, health matters, and wrongful death were all addressed by cursing.

The Roman legal climate, while hostile to curses, was paradoxically especially suited towards them. Breaches of Roman law were not policed but rather required intervention of individual plaintiffs to be heard in court.[65] Not only would this necessitate that the individual in question had the legal and economic means to access the courts, but it would also require them to have knowledge of the curse in question. In the case of the Mainz tablets, the concealment of the curse on a rolled tablet and its destruction in a fire provided the necessary cover to curse with impunity.

Moreover, local standards may also have guided social norms around cursing, as our "open system" model of religion suggested. C. R. Phillips III has suggested that the vagueness implicit in Roman laws on magic suggests that "the ancients were far more tolerant of unsanctioned religious activity than modern scholars have assumed." The application of vague laws would be

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63. Pauline Ripat, "Cheating Women: Curse Tablets and Roman Wives," in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*, ed. Kimberly B. Stratton with Dayna S. Kalleres (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 352–55; Fritz Graf, "Victimology or: How to Deal with Untimely Death," also in *Daughters of Hecate*, 386–417. Ripat suggests that Roman matrons could carry out curses in secret against potential threats to dominance in the household without losing face—or status. Graf notes that domestic issues were dealt with within the household and not mediated by the courts.

64. Graf, "Victimology"; Gordon, "Gods," 257; Ripat, "Cheating Women." Fritz Graf, for example, suggests that cursing epitaphs on funerary monuments and allegations of untimely death via witchcraft provide a social safety valve, a way to let off steam in the wake of inexplicable tragedy. Gordon similarly situates curses as "strategies to resolve individual crises by appeal to divine aid." Pauline Ripat has noted the way that curses could be deployed by Roman matrons against an adversary to ensure their status in the home.

65. C. R. Phillips III, "Nullum Crimen sine Lege," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 261–64.

decided at the local level, where the community played a role in setting standards of appropriate and inappropriate conduct. As Rives observes, magic was a space where "Roman authorities and the inhabitants of the provinces could to some extent work together in defining and policing the boundaries of the acceptable."[66] What was considered deviant religious practice by those who legislated the laws may not have been considered deviant by those who lived under those same laws. The illicit nature of a practice does not necessarily reflect non-normativity. In fact, the presence of legislation (and the material record) suggests the opposite: such practices were widespread and common. Judging by the prevalence of cursing at the sanctuary of Magna Mater and Isis, it is likely that the deposition of a curse tablet was considered by the community to fall within accepted parameters of normative religious engagement.

SACRED MATERIALITIES, SACRED LOCALITIES

The normativity of cursing at Mainz appears to be inextricably connected to the sanctuary locus. Three aspects of cursing at Mainz stand out as indicating their connection to religious practices at the Mainz temple: the uniformity of cursing rituals, the religious-oriented language of the tablets, and their deposition in the temple. These three dimensions of cursing at Mainz illustrate how the practice of cursing was conceived by those who used such technology. The tablets suggest that those who cursed viewed cursing as a way to negotiate their daily concerns with the help of the divine.

It is helpful to think about the Mainz curse tablets alongside other ritual deposits. I speak here of votive offerings. A votive can be understood as a material link in an exchange-based relationship between humans and gods. As Robin Osborne observes, such objects were deposited in hopes of acquiring "supernatural returns."[67] Votives, in general, were usually made specifically for the purpose of ritual. The ritual materiality of votive items is indicated by an object's inscriptions, its shape (for example, a votive of a body part at a healing shrine), or its size (for example, items rendered in miniature form).[68] Worshippers offered votives either to thank the god for a

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66. Rives, "Law," 335–36.

67. Robin Osborne, "Hoards, Votives, Offerings: The Archaeology of the Dedicated Object," *World Archaeology* 36, no. 1 (2004): 2.

68. Osborne, "Hoards, Votives, Offerings," 2; Kathryn Lomas, "Crossing Boundaries: The Inscribed Votives of Southeast Italy," *Pallas* no. 86 (2011): 312–18; Georgia Petridou, "Healing Shrines," in *A Companion to Science, Technology, and Medicine in Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Georgia L. Irby (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 442–45.

favor granted or as an offering in hopes of securing the god's help in some matter.[69] The type of votive offered was frequently sanctuary-specific and consonant with their patronage. For example, healing sites contain anatomical votives to correspond with the parts of the body healed, whereas sites frequented by women display an abundance of earrings and grooming tools.[70] Could curse tablets be an example of such site-specific votives?

The curse tablets at Mainz were not found alone; they were often in areas that contained other materials—potsherds, miniature ceramic lamps, and coins. These sorts of deposits are indicative of a ritual structure focused on votive offerings to the gods. The siting of curse tablets with other votive offerings suggests that those who utilized curses interpreted their materiality akin to that of other votive offerings—a way to petition the gods in times of need. The prominence of curse tablets at the site suggests that the temple of Magna Mater and Isis was a place that catered to this type of votary practice.

The language on the tablets strengthens the connection between the curse tablets and votive offerings. Seven tablets (*DTM* 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 28) use language that can be considered votary. Four employ the Latin word for vow or a cognate (*votum*, *devoveo*, *religione*).[71] Five (*DTM* 1, 2, 4, 6, 8) mention offering the curse tablet or the tablet's victim as if it were a sacrifice to the gods. The element of exchange is especially heightened in *DTM* 2, which specifies the thanks that lie in store for the god upon the fulfillment of the vow (*ut me uotis condamnes et ut laetus libens ea tibi referam*). The exchange of a votive offering for some benefit and further praise of the suppliant was a standard feature of the votary contract.[72] The formulation of the curse as a votive by these authors illustrates the connection these persons made between the creation and deposit of the curse tablet and votary ritual forms. In their formulations, there is no difference between a curse tablet offered to the gods and any other cult object deposited at the temple in hopes of stoking divine favor.

Many of these curses feature contractual or legal language. Seven of our tablets (*DTM* 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11) use verbs indicating the consignment of the curse's victim to the god (*commendo*, *dono*, *mando, recipio*). Two petition the gods to avenge the curse's author (DTM 3, 6), and two others (*DTM* 2, 28) ask that the gods condemn the curse target (*condemno, damno*). One (*DTM*

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69. Petridou, "Healing Shrines," 442. Petridou notes that items used as healing shrines could be dedicated before or after treatment.

70. Osborne, "Hoards, Votives, Offerings," 3–4.

71. *DTM* 2, 4, 11, 28.

72. Scheid, *Introduction*, 99–104.

5) asks Attis to be present as a witness to the curse (*adsis*), and another suggests (*DTM* 7) that the culprit of a crime might somehow declare innocence. Two curses (*DTM* 2, 7) use the legal term for fraud, *dolus malus*, something which, in Blänsdorf's view, links magical texts to legal ones.[73]

The legal/contractual language on the Mainz tablets echoes similar formulae found on curses from the temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath.[74] R. S. O. Tomlin has noted that the Bath tablets seem very administrative in tone, like "the writing of a clerk." That one would choose to seek legal remedy from a deity however, should not surprise us. Rather, the tablets are evidence of Eidnow's "overlapping, interacting and mutually stimulating relationships" between institutions that existed in the ancient world.[75] Curses and binding rituals are some of the earliest examples of this overlap. This technology, often using some form of sympathetic praxis such as the destruction of a figure or animal, was used in Near Eastern and Greek societies to ratify treaties, solemnify oaths, and punish enemies of the state. These rituals, occasionally decreed by the gods through their oracles, called upon the gods to provide the divine "back-up" needed in situations of uncertainty and danger.[76] Given cursing's long history of uniting the legal and divine realms, we cannot easily speak of a clear distinction between "religious and "legal" language on curse tablets. Rather, we should see them as complementary spheres of authority that were activated simultaneously through the creation and deposit of a curse tablet.

Formulating curse tablets as a contractual, votive offering to the gods brings the issue of place into focus. The act of creating a votive—or curse tablet—ignited the thread of communication between the individual and deity. But it was the locative space of the sanctuary that provided the conduit

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73. Blänsdorf, "*Defixiones*," 155. Blänsdorf discusses the legal language of *DTM* 7 in more detail, and concludes that the tablets evince more legal language than religious language.

74. Tomlin, *Roman*, 70–71.

75. Eidinow, "Oracles and Oracle Sellers: An Ancient Market in Futures," in *Religion and Competition in Antiquity*, ed. David Engels and Peter van Nuffelen (Belgium: Peeters, 2014), 58.

76. Christopher A. Faraone, "Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: The Defensive Use of 'Voodoo Dolls' in Ancient Greece," *Classical Antiquity* 10, no. 2 (1991): 165–205; Christopher A. Faraone, "Molten Wax, Spilt Wine and Mutilated Animals: Sympathetic Magic in Near Eastern and Early Greek Oath Ceremonies," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113 (1993): 60–80; Jan Assmann, "When Justice Fails: Jurisdiction and Imprecation in Ancient Egypt and the Near East," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 78, no. 1 (1992): 149–62.

to the gods. We would do well to consider the ways in which the physical space of the temple may have affected the practice of cursing at Mainz.

The city of Mainz, itself, was an important site in Roman Germany, serving as the provincial capital of Upper Germany (*Germania Superior*).[77] A prominent Roman military base, trading venue, and administrative center, the town was populated not only by military and administrative personnel, but also by civilians. Mainz was thus a vibrant place of commerce and daily activity, a city where both locals and those just passing through conducted their affairs. The sanctuary of Magna Mater and Isis was an integrated part of this community. Located at the end of a main road, it sat alongside the chief route used by the military to travel between the barracks and the Rhine River bridge. The temple was also nestled adjacent to an artisan's area, where goods were produced and sold.[78] As the sanctuary was located in a part of Mainz with high traffic and high visibility, the sanctuary—and the religious services it had to offer—would have been known to those who lived and worked in the city.

Gordon has suggested that the sanctuary of Magna Mater at Mainz had a reputation for being a place where one could curse.[79] Indeed, sanctuaries could gain reputations in an "area of specialty," for example being known as a site of prophecy or healing. In the case of the sanctuary of Magna Mater and Isis, such reputations would have been built by those who traveled to (and through) the sanctuary at Mainz.[80] We can conceptualize the city of Mainz as a regional hub, a space that held not only strong ties to the local community, but also contained numerous weak ties to other social networks.[81] Such a situation would allow for the transmission of socio-religious knowledge within the community, but also along other pathways of interregional connection. Given its location, the sanctuary of Magna Mater and Isis had the potential to cater to all those living in—and passing through—

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77. Haensch, "Mogontiacum."

78. Zach, "Vegetable Offerings," 101–2; Mareile Haase, "Kulte Der Isis in Den Germanischen Provinzen," in *Isis en Occident: Actes du IIème Colloque International sur les Études Isiaques, Lyon III 16–17 Mai 2002*, ed. Laurent Bricault (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 115–16.

79. Gordon, "Gods," 268.

80. Eidinow, "Oracles and Oracle Sellers"; Petridou, "Healing Shrines." Esther Eidinow provides a good analysis of the way the oracles of Delphi and Dodona functioned within regional religious networks. Petridou highlights how healing sanctuaries were a focus of pilgrimage in the ancient Mediterranean.

81. Anna Collar, *Religious Networks in the Roman Empire: the Spread of New Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 5–39.

Mainz. Cursing would have been just one of the services on offer to those moving through the city.

The uniformity of cursing praxis makes it likely that there was a specific ritual procedure about cursing at the temple that was common knowledge. This knowledge would appeal to an individual seeking divine assistance in negotiating their personal affairs. Indeed, Georgia Petridou has suggested that healing shrines offered an individual the option of "specialized treatment and personal one-on-one communication and interaction" in times of crises.[82] It would not be too far removed to think that something similar was happening at Mainz. Individuals could thus have their needs addressed directly by a divinity when visiting the Mainz temple.

As a religious focal point, sacred districts were the physical homes of the gods. They were the place where sacrifices were conducted and banquets were consumed.[83] Like the city of Mainz itself, sacred districts were vibrant venues for commerce.[84] Religious services were one such good that could be purchased and consumed in the temple marketplace. In fact, temples took advantage of this consumer niche, charging for temple access and the use of its religious apparatuses.[85] Freelance religious professionals, such as the itinerant priests of Magna Mater, also congregated in temple districts. Playing up their foreign lineages, these religious experts offered their exotic services to the public.[86] The temple locus was thus a place where individuals could find and transact religious technologies, either on their own or through a religious professional.

Temples were also the physical locations of the divine on earth, and frequently were located at the place of a god or goddess's choosing. The gods could indicate where a temple should be built by appearing to someone in a

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82. Petridou, "Healing Shrines," 434.

83. John E. Stambaugh, "The Functions of Roman Temples," *ANRW* 2.16.1, ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1978), 566, 577–79; Scheid, *Introduction,* 82–91. See also Louise Revell, "Religion and Ritual in the Western Provinces," *Greece & Rome* 54, no. 2 (2007): 210–28. Revell discusses the ways that the physical spaces of Roman temples in the Western provinces influenced their surroundings and acted as sites of communication between the gods and humans.

84. Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 234; Stambaugh, "Functions," 585–88.

85. Bendlin, "Civic Compromise," 133–35.

86. David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 185, 219–25; Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 71, 110–12, 138–39, 234; Ian S. Moyer, *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 224; Stambaugh, "Functions," 592–93.

dream or through a portent (such as a rush of wind). The deity thus had a foundational link to the temple locus. It also had the final say in its affairs. Any changes in temple use had to be approved through divination, ensuring the gods' consent.[87]

The place of the deity is especially evident in the Mainz materials. Deities and figures related to the temple are explicitly named in many of the tablets. Six tablets (*DTM* 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 12) petition Magna Mater by name or by title (*domina*). Four (*DTM* 1, 4, 5, 6) call on Attis and/or reference the "sacred boxes" that contained his genitals according to the mythology of Magna Mater. Five (*DTM* 1, 2, 6, 10, 12) make analogies to the *galli* and their rituals. One (*DTM* 4) specifically references the temple in which the curse tablet is deposited (*in megaro . . . rogo te*). Another (*DTM* 1) references her rituals (*tua sacra*). Occasionally we see the intrusion of other gods or priesthoods (Castor and Pollux, the *Bellonari*), but rarely without the presence of one of the major figures of the temple (e.g. Magna Mater, Attis, the *galli*).[88] The exceptions here include one tablet that mentions Mars and the indigenous German deity Mogunus (*DTM* 14), and another that petitions generic gods and goddesses (*DTM* 7). What is clear is that patrons believed they could access the powers of Magna Mater, Attis, and their attendants at this site. On occasion, other deities could also be petitioned at the temple. The curses thus show a strong connection between myth, divine power, the sanctuary locus, and the use of curse tablets.

Although many of the Mainz tablets seek death for their targets (*DTM* 1, 2, 3, 11, 5, 13, 14, 6), it is notable that none of the tablets mention chthonic deities or the restless dead—the sorts of underworld figures we expect to see in harmful *defixiones*. Eidinow has stressed that we should de-emphasize the role of the dead as the actors of curses, arguing that one would "more likely to turn to the gods, not the dead" when cursing.[89] This would be consonant with tablet depositions in the Mainz temple. Both the temple locus and the graveyard can be seen as acting as a conduit to the deity in question. The entrustment of curse tablets that name underworld deities to corpses, in this formulation, would have the dead acting as a messenger to the underworld gods, the deity in question being the ultimate arbiter of the curse. That we do not see the presence of the "restless dead" at Mainz highlights the connection between the deity petitioned and the physical space in which the curse was deposited.

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87. Moyer, *Egypt,* 157–161; *IMagnMai* 215 = *GRA* 143; Stambaugh, "Functions," 555–56, 560, 567.

88. *DTM* 2, 5, 6.

89. Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 148–49.

The deposition of the curse tablets at Mainz speaks especially to the viewing of the temple space as a space to access the gods. That many of these tablets were found in designated offering areas with other votive objects is suggestive, as is the number of tablets that reference the ritual burning of the tablet, show evidence of being melted, or that were found in firepits used for offerings located on the premises. Also important is the siting of fourteen of our tablets in or near the inner sanctum of Magna Mater. In fact, of the thirty-four curses catalogued by Blänsdorf, twenty-seven were found in the area of the inner sanctum.[90] This shows an overwhelming preference by temple patrons to use deposit sites closely located to in the inner sanctum, the place where the goddess dwelled. The physical placement of these tablets thus suggests a desire by the patron to get as close to the deity as possible, to deliver the curse's message to the inner sanctum and directly to the goddess and her attendants.

For those who needed the help of the gods in their personal matters, the sanctuary of Magna Mater and Isis at Mainz offered its patrons direct access to the divine. At the site, one could petition the gods directly by offering a vow in the form of a curse. The practice of cursing was directly linked to the temple and the gods who lived there. This is reflected in the placement of the curses in offering sites of the most sacred areas of the sanctuary, the *similia similibus* formulae on the tablets that reflect the mythology associated with Magna Mater, and votary/contractual language. Patrons who offered a curse at the temple likely saw themselves as participating in a local, normative religious tradition, one whose efficacy was directly tied to the temple locus.

CONCLUSION

This paper has surveyed nineteen lead curse tablets from the temple of Magna Mater and Isis at Mainz. Written in Latin, the majority of these tablets were deposited in or around the area of the inner sanctum, suggesting that certain types of cursing qualified as a normative religious activity at the site. Three aspects suggest that an established cursing practice existed at Mainz: the uniformity of cursing rituals, the religious orientation of the language on the tablets, and their deposition within the temple in designated offering pits, oftentimes close to (or inside) the inner sanctum.

The curses found at Mainz fit broadly in the category of prayers for justice, curses that seek the help of a divinity in righting a perceived wrong. The

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90. *DTM* 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 19, 22, 23, 28. When one looks at the entire *DTM* corpus (thirty-four tablets total), only seven of those curses were found outside the inner sanctum area.

discovery of curse tablets alongside other votive offerings invites the comparison of cursing at Mainz to that of votary ritual. Using the example of votary ritual, this paper has argued that we are better off thinking about curses as a private contract between the curse author and the gods. The formulation of the curse tablet as a contractual votary object can be seen by the language on the curse tablets that combines both religious and legal terms. That cursing had a long history of being used to ratify treaties and call upon divine enforcement of contracts, suggests we should not view these spheres of engagement as distinct. Rather, this paper has argued that we should view the tablets as integrating complementary religious and legal spheres of authority.

Formulating curse tablets as a contractual votive offering brings the issue of place into focus. Tablets that specifically name deities and figures associated with the temple at Mainz suggest a strong connection between myth, divine power, the sanctuary locus, and cursing. That we do not see chthonic figures or the restless dead mentioned on the Mainz tablets further supports the importance of the temple as specific to cursing at Mainz. The temple locus can be seen as working as a conduit to the divine, a place where individuals could directly access divine power to resolve personal issues. The curses at Mainz suggest a strong connection between the deities petitioned in the curses and the physical site of the temple. Those who cursed at Mainz did so with the understanding that they were entering into a private contract with the gods who resided at this location. That most of the tablets were found in or near the holiest part of the temple, the inner sanctum where the deity dwelled, suggests that those who cursed expected the deities themselves to handle their matter.

Just as certain sanctuaries possessed a reputation for healing or prophecy, it has been argued that the temple at Mainz was renowned as a cursing center. The physical location of the temple within a bustling city, populated by civilians, the military, administrative personnel, and frequented by traders, provided a ripe environment for the transmission of the temple's specialized services (i.e. cursing) to those who moved through Mainz. The sanctuary of Magna Mater and Isis provided a way for those in need to petition the gods through the site-specific votary practice of offering a curse tablet to the gods.

The curses at the sanctuary of Magna Mater and Isis demonstrate that we need to consider the variety of social contexts in which curses were used, as well as the ways in which the practice of cursing could fall within the scope of normative religious behavior. The tablets suggest that the normative standards of votary ritual and the temple as a site of divine power played a significant role in the practice of cursing at Mainz. Patrons who deposited a curse tablet at the temple likely saw themselves engaging in a normative ritual

activity on par with other votary rituals. Did the goddess at Mainz fulfill her end of the deal? We may never know. But it is clear that those who sought her out at the temple expected their prayers to be heard.

APPENDIX

The Latin here is reprinted with permission from Jürgen Blänsdorf, *Die defixionum tabellae des Mainzer Isis- und Mater Magna-Heiligtums: defixionum tabellae Mogontiacenses (DTM)* (Mainz: Generaldirektion Kulturelles Erbe, 2012).

DTM 1

Outside:

Mater Magna, te rogo / p[e]r [t]ua sacra et numen tuum: / Gemella fi blas meas qualis / sustulit, sic et illam REQVI (rogo ?) / (5) adsecet, ut nusquam sana si[t]. / quomodo galli se secarunt, / sic ea(m?) uelis nec se secet sic, uti / planctum ha[be]at. quomodo / et sacrorum deposierunt / (10) in sancto, sic et tuam uitam / ualetudinem, Gemella, / Neque hosti(i)s neque au-/ro neque argento redi-/mere possis a matre / (15) deum, nisi ut exitum tuum populus spectet. / Verecundam et Pater-/nam: sic illam tibi com-/mendo, Mater deum / (20) magna, rem illorum / in AECRVMO DEO UIS qua-/le rogo co(n)summent[u]r, / quomodo et res meas uire-/sque fraudarunt, nec se / (25) possint redimere / nec hosteis lanatis

Inside:

nec plum{i}bis / nec auro nec ar-/gento redimere / (30) a numine tuo, / nisi ut illas uorent / canes, / uermes adque / alia portenta. / (35) exitum quarum / populus spectet. / tamquam quae {C} FORRO (or: MO/L[.]) auderes comme[ndo] / duas (40) TAMAQVANIVCAVER{S}SO / scriptis istas / AE RISS . ADRICIS . S. LON / a . illas, si illas cistas / caecas, aureas, FECRA/E[. .] I [.]LO[. .]AS/OV[.]EIS . mancas A

DTM 2

quisquis dolum malum adm[isit de] hac pecun[i]a, / [---, ille melior et nos det[eri]ores sumus [---------------] / Mater deum, tu persequeris per terras, per [maria, per locos / ar(i)dos et umidos, per be|nedictum tuum et o[mnes ---. Qui de hac] / (5) pecunia dolum malu|m adhibet, ut tu perse [quaris---. Quomodo] / galli se secant et pra|ecidunt uir[i]lia sua, sic il [le——] R S Q / intercidat MELORE pec[tus...|..]BISIDIS [ne]que se admisisse nec[...] / hostiis si[n]atis nequis t[...] neque SUT[.]TIS neque auro / neque argento neque ille solui [re]fici redimi possit. Quomodo galli, / (10) bello-nari, magal[i] sibi sanguin[em] feruentem fundunt, frigid[us] / ad terram uenit, sic et[...]CIA, copia, cogitatum, mentes. [Quem-] / admodum de eis

gallo[r]u[m, ma]galorum, bellon[ariorum sanguinem or: ritus] / spectat, qui de ea pecun|ia dolum malum [admisit, sic illius] / exitum spectent, et a[d qu]em modum sal in [aqua liques-] / (15) cet, sic et illi membra m[ed]ullae extabescant. cr[a]s [ueniat] / et dicat se admisisse ne[fa]s. D[e]mando tibi rel[igione], / ut me uotis condamnes et ut laetus libens ea tibi referam, / si de eo exitum malum feceris.

DTM 3

Front:

Rogo te, domina Mater / Magna, ut tu me uindices / de bonis Flori coniugis mei. / qui me fraudauit Ulattius / (5) Seuerus, quemadmod[um] / hoc ego auerse scribo, sic illi

Back:

omnia, quidquid agit, quidquid / aginat, omnia illi auersa fiant. / ut sal et aqua illi eueniat. / (10) quidquid mi abstulit de bonis / Flori coniugis mei, rogo te, / domina Mater Magna, ut tu / de eo me uindices.

DTM 4

Inside:

Tiberius Claudius Adiutor: / in megaro eum rogo te, Ma-/t[e]r Magna, meg-aro tuo re-/cipias. Et Attis domine, te / (5) precor, ut hu(n)c (h)ostiam accep-/tum (h)abiatis, et quit aget agi-/nat, sal et aqua illi fiat. Ita tu / facias, dom(i)na, it, quid cor eoconora / c(a)edat. (?)

Outside:

(10) deuotum defictum / illum menbra, / medullas, {AA}/ nullum aliud sit, / Attis, Mater Magn[a].

DTM 5

Outside:

Bone sancte Atthis Tyran-/ne, adsi(s), aduenias Libera-/li iratus. Per omnia te rogo, / domine, per tuum Castorem, / (5) Pollucem, per cistas penetra-/les, des ei malam mentem, / malum exitum, quandius / uita uixerit, / ut omni cor-/pore uideat se emori prae-/(10)ter oculos

Inside:

neque se possit redimere / nulla pe{r}cunia nullaque re / neq(ue) abs te neque ab ullo deo / nisi ut exitum malum. / (15) Hoc praesta, rogo te per ma-/iestatem tuam.

DTM 6

Inside:

Quintum in hac tabula depon[o] auersum / se suisque rationibus uitaeque

male consum-/mantem. ita uti galli bellonariue absciderunt concide-/runtue se, sic illi abscissa sit fides fama faculit[a]s. nec illi / (5) in numero hominum sunt, neque ille / sit. Q[u]omodi et ille mihi fraudem fecit, sic illi, sancta Mater Magn[a], et relegis[ti] / cuncta. ita uti arbor siccabit se in sancto, sic et illi siccet / fama fides fortuna faculitas. tibi commendo, Attihi d(o)mine, / ut me uindices ab eo, ut intra annum uertente[m .....] exitum / (10) illius uilem malum.

Left hand side:

ponit nom(en) huius mari-/tabus I si agatur ulla / res utilis, / sic ille nobis / utilis sit suo corpore. / (15) sacrari horr<e>bis.

DTM 7

quisquis nobis sustulit sacc(u)lum, in quo pecunia erat / et eam pecuniam et anulos aureos [referat], quod des[ti]na[.]-/tum est XI K(alendas) febr(uarias), q(uae) p(roximae) s(unt) C [..] siue dolum / [m]alum adhib[et-- -, quo-]/mod[i] hoc grapphio auerso[.] quod minime, uti solet, sic [eum] / (5) auer-sum, dii deae{e}que[...,e]sse sin{e}at[i]s et [ho]minibus, siqui[s hunc] / manu contig{u}it [.]idaequ[e..], quomodi [.e]t ho[.] sucus defluit e[---] / hoc plumbum usse cum[---]geum desti[natum]ue esse uelit[---,] / sicut inno-centiam [---]est, si in dea [---]UNN CREU.

DTM 8

Avita(m) noverca(m)/dono tibi/et Gratum /[do]no tibi/[...]E MESMANT

DTM 9

Fuscinum commendo / tibi ita, ULTIPESLERAE / ut tu eum nusquam S / set resolu{g}tum adu[e-]/rsarium ma[l]um

DTM 10

Outside:

Mando et rogo, liber-/ta Cerialis ut ea ext[r]a / IPIVTI (ipsam?) fac[i]atis, ut se plan-/gat, [---u]elit se, quatmodum /(5) Arc[h]igalli se

Inside:

CO[.] L sibi settas facia[ti]s / [..]ita me(n)ses duos, ut eo-/rum ixsitum audiam. / [.]d[i]liquescant, quat{m}-/(5) modi diliquescet[---].

DTM 11

Outside:

Mando et rogo / religione, ut man-/data exagatis / Publium Cutium / (5) et Piperionem, et

Inside:
Placida et Sacra, / filia eius: sic illorum / membra liquescan(t), / quatmodum hoc plum–/(10)bum liquescat, ut eo–/ru(m) existum sit.

DTM 12

Inside:
sic[..]s siccum QUANMI / qu[omo]di hos liquescet / se[... sic co]llum membra / me[du]lla peculium / (5) d[e]l[i]ques[ca]nt
Outside:
eoru(m) quamodum / galorum angat se. / s[ic i]lla aga(t), ut de se / [pr]obant (?). tu dom(i)na es, / (10) fac, ut X mensibus / exitum illorum / sit.

DTM 13

Cassius Fortuna–/tus e[t] bona illius et / Lutatia Restituta: / necetis e[os].

DTM 14

Front:
ESSI[.]ISA[---]ATV / CTEQTCOASE[---]T[.]ENUC[...] O / OSACH [e]xistum [s]pectare / INDISNAU[.]XMICEVI / et me rogas[.]s ST / et Martis
Back:
SOTP . P . . S S C[. .]TICOT (*or:* ICCOT) /PR[.]VLOVM Sicco [– – –]DI / ECOSRVM non ire / [– – –] M[o]guno [.]OI / [– – –]VM [.]STI (*above the end of the line:* IMSI) / [– – –]MISOM [. ?]

DTM 15

Outside:
Prima Aemilia Nar–/cissi agat, quidquid co–/nabitur, quidquid aget, / omnia illi inuer/(5)sum sit.
Inside:
sic illa nuncquam / quicquam florescat. / amentita surgat, a–/mentita suas res agat. / (10) Quidquid surget, om–/nia interversum sur–/gat. <P>rima Narcissi / aga(t): como haec carta / nuncquam fl orescet.

DTM 16

Front:
For[r]tunam dolus / q[u]otti[die ...]i sed (or: q[u]ot ti[b]i sed) / Vir pa(tri ?) .... deo meo / i meo . u [sp]oliauit / (5) IUNCNAO REIANTI
Back:

Mentem memori-/am cor cogita-/tum il[le q]uiquis / patrem meum con[s]p[exit ?] / (10) illi et ius (*or backwards:* sui et illi)

DTM 19

(Written in reverse)
I[... / AN[/ Arbil[---] / Veceta i[---] / Verecundus / SANAACAS: sana agas (*or:* sacaanas) / sottas (*or forwards:* Sattos (?)) / malas.

DTM 22

Front:
SORE
Back:
EROS

DTM 28

Outside:
E[.]U [.]NAMSO[---] / NES RUOCNIOTESROSCO / uoto me con-dem-/[n]e[s] o[.]in uim CERO /(5) LAE[.]ILANT. quodsi / SEME[.]IS suo DEANTA VE
Inside:
OIVO[.]I[.]TTEPE fero et decipio / [.]OA[.] cum [.]eos deuo-/uet EXFETUM (= existum?) SET[. .] / (10) sa[.]um animosum / [dam]nat, si deuoue(t) m[e]os / EIVERAPE[.]NEAG . OM. (or: ESVERAPE) ...