Magic and Witchcraft Classical Essay

Option 2

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*I bind SULYHCSEA son of ASPASIA, may he be confined and bound like the doll in this coffin. As this moonless night grows cold so to shall SULYHCSEA son of ASPASIA no longer feel warmth. To you, LINOs who rests here, I entrust this tablet. May your spirit take vengeance on him and may he become as silent and unmoving as you who lay here. I call upon the great goddess Hekate; ruler of crossroads, walker of the veil, one with power over the sky and sea to bring vengeance upon SULYHCSEA son of ASPASIA. May he be bound for the end of his days by his crimes of ANXPLBI and LXNBAI. May his crimes suffocate his as this soil suffocates this tablet. This I entrust to you.*

*Actions: A doll with AESCHYLUS’s essence is bound and placed in a small coffin then buried with the tablet. The tablet is rolled and pierced three times, buried in a grave.*

This is a curse spell that directly binds the victim (whose name is AESCHYLUS) with the use of a binding tablet. Binding tablets have many different uses and purposes ranging from erotic to commercial. In this certain case, a curse of revenge is being invoked. Binding tablets are a form of Imitation magic which is ‘magic based on the assumption that a desired result (as rain, the death of an enemy) can be brought about or assured by mimicking it’ (Merriam-Webster, 2017). By rolling up the tablet and piercing it with nails, the caster intends to bind and nail down the victim. Though it is also imitative, there is also a contagious magic aspect to this spell with the curse doll. It contains AESCHYLUS essence to ensure whatever happens to the doll will also happen to him. The doll creates further themes of confinement through it being bound and placed in a small confine. This could also hint at the outcome the caster wants from the spell, which is possibly for AESCHYLUS to meet his demises.

The tablet is also buried in a grave. From the context of the spell it is clear that the grave belongs to a person named LINOS. Having the tablet buried in a grave serves two purposes; to further the imitation and to invoked a vengeful spirit. Having the tablet buried in a grave could suggest again that the caster wants the victim dead or to suffer horrible. This want becomes clear through their vocal incantations which was also inscribed in the tablet. The caster compares the victim to the corpse in the grave, wanting him to become ‘as silent and unmoving.’ This is a common theme in spells when the tablet is buried in a cemetery. Take, for instance, this excerpt from John G. Gager book *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient* *World* ‘[and just as] this corpse lies useless, [so] may all the words and deeds of Theodora be useless…’ (1999).

On the other hand, the caster can use the grave of a deceased person to command their spirit. It was believed that those who died before their time or of a violent death were vengeful and willing to exact harm against others. Another reason for burying the tablet with the dead was to turn the spirit into a messenger ‘…the idea being that the dead person would carry the curser’s desires down into the underworld with them, delivering a message to the underground gods.’ (Onion, 2016).

Moving on from the actions taken, the incantation shows the victim’s name being written three times. Three is a significant number in greek society, three fates, three furies, Cerberus the three-headed dog etc. AESCHYLUS name is written backwards in the text. This is often another way the caster can disrupt the victim’s life and use imitation magic in their curse. The name of his mother is also included on the tablet to ensure the right person is being cursed. The text also features Ephesia Grammata, words with no meaning. These were thought to be a language that only the deities, the beings evoked and the caster could understand. Because of this it is unclear what crimes AESCHYLUS committed as they are written in the strange text, that is a secret that only the gods will know.

Lastly, the Goddess Hekate is invoked in the curse. As said in the curse it is being recited and buried during a new moon. This could correlate with the goddess herself as she is known to be associated with the darkness of night and the three phases of the moon. She is often depicted as a three-headed figure because of this as well. She is the goddess of magic who all people turn to when enacting a spell or curse. In the curse, she is described as the ruler f crossroads. Her supposed three heads allow her to look in every direction ensuring safe passage. She is the crosser of the veil because she can travel between earth and the underworld and has close ties to Persephone and Hades the rules of the Underworld. This further amounts her magical prowess. She is respected and feared among humans and gods for her extensive abilities. Between the gods of the underworld, she is the most common deity to be invoked. This can be seen in from this ancient excerpt that also praises her many capabilities. ‘…Lady Hekate of the heavens, Hekate of the underworld, Hekate of the crossroads, Hekate of the triple-face, Hekate of the single-face…’ (Gager, 1999).

References

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