Curse

I (name of affected) dedicate to the divinity Hermes the small belongings in my home as well as two of my cows that have been stolen from me so that he shall pursue them. I pray to the divinity Hermes that he exact judgement on the individual that committed these crimes against me. I pray to the divinity Hermes that you allow the individual whether woman, man, child or slave be made responsible for the crime they committed and for them to not be prosperous in the future. I pray to the god Hermes to recover the goods and animals stolen from me, and in-return l will give you, Hermes a portion of the profits from the goods taken from me.

Commentary

This curse is inscribed on a lead tablet folded and sealed with a nail. This tablet as found in a well. This cursed tablet is a prayer for justice, it is one of the most distinctive categories of the curse tablets and, seeking justice for stolen goods is the specific type most are searching for1. This is a prayer for justice as the affected person has lost some property and they wish it to be recovered and the perpetrator to be prosecuted. Prayers for justice like this one do not seek to bind like other tablets but are more of a prayer to the gods for justice and seem to have more in common with common religious practices than magic2. The saying “I Pray to the divinity Hermes” is repeated three times as it thought to help with the efficiency of the spell. This repetition is used in a lot of antidotes and counter spells including number 125 and 124 in Gagers book curse tablets and binding spells.3 In number 124 the word “overturns” is repeating multiple times throughout while in 15 “the phrase I call upon the one”.4 This cursed tablet is of Greek nature as Hermes is not referred to as mercury which is done by the Romans.5

The person who has been casting the cursed tablet is not a professional as he would too poor to pay for one. Therefore these stolen things are critical to him. The caster names himself in the curse so that the goods can be returned to them.5 The person casting the curse has some knowledge of spell writing and has had some experience in curses, so he knows what he needs to do. We do not know who the target is as the caster did not see the burglary happen, so the curse is directed at the culprit whether women man, child or slave. This curse aims to make the goods stolen become the property of Hermes so that he will feel he was stolen from and he will seek out the goods no matter what it takes. This aim means that when this is carried out the curse will end which is dissimilar to non-prayers for justice.6

The divinity that was chosen to pray to was Hermes (Mercury) because it has been said he could travel easiest through all the realms, was all right with making mischief where ever he went and was very popular.7 Prayers for justice are usually set toward respectable or major gods, but gods like Hermes that have an affiliation with the underworld are also preferred.8 Stating “whether women, man, child or slave” is a popular statement in many other spells. This is seen on curse tablets and binding spells from the ancient world written by John G. Gager including number 88 where it says, “whether man or women”.9 This statement is seen in number 96 with “whether pagan or Christian, whether man or woman, whether boy or girl, whether slave or free, whoever has stolen from me”.10 This statement probably became more popular as the curses became more elaborate and longer in the later times.

Footnotes

1. Bengt Ankarloo & Stuart Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe Ancient Greece and Rome,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania,1999).
2. Ankarloo & Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*.
3. Gager, J C. Curse tablets and binding spells from the ancient world, (New York: Oxford University Press,1992) 188&195.
4. Gager, J C. *Curse tablets and binding spells*.
5. Faraone, C A. & Dirk Obbink, *Magika Hiera Ancient Greek Magic and Religion,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
6. Ankarloo & Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe.*
7. Ankarloo & Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe.*
8. Ferguson, J. *Among the Gods An archaeological exploration of ancient Greek religion,* (London& New York: Routledge, 1989).
9. Ankarloo & Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*.
10. Ankarloo & Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*.
11. Gager, J C. *Curse tablets and binding spells.*

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