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BOUND FOR SUCCESS: CURSING AND COMMERCE IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

Commercial curses indicating an occupation, business, profit, workshops or shops, or targeting individuals identified by a trade number about sixty; most come from Greece and date to the fifth to third century BCE. That the texts concern rivalries or conflicts between tradesmen has been the prevailing opinion, though ambiguity in curses that include multiple targets (sometimes with different trades) or family members have led some to maintain that competition may not explain commercial curses best, and instead suggest that the tablets reflect attempts to deal with risk or uncertainty arising from a range of social, legal, or political contexts. Though a steady stream of scholarship detailing economic activity, particularly at non-elite levels, has rightly reoriented the debate about the nature and scale of the ancient economy, and the strategies that craftsmen, merchants, and others engaged in commerce employed to mitigate concerns about risk and competition, the contribution of commercial curses, spells, and oracles has not been a part of the conversation. The curse tablets help further refine our understanding of the ancient economy because of what they reveal about concerns related to competitors, profit, and reputation, and the methods the practitioners used to hinder opponents. Rather than being at odds with commercial competition, those methods which target multiple craftsmen, their families, and others besides workshops, skills, and profit align with strategies of collaboration among ancient craftsmen and merchants and their reliance on social capital, described as social networks and notions of trust, reputation, and the shared norms that supported them.

Keywords: associations, craftsmen, curses, merchants, social capital, workshops, family, neighbourhood, commerce

In an attempt to secure advantages over business competitors or settle a private score, someone living in Attica during the fourth century BCE resorted to a curse against multiple shopkeepers, their shops, family members, and slaves, along with a linen-seller and a hemp-worker.

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To do so, perhaps following a formula from a professional or established method he had come to trust, he inscribed their names on a lead tablet (*DTA* 87), sometimes adding a profession or other identifying information, places of business, and body parts as the targets of a binding curse, and deposited it in a grave, as the text indicates, after folding it and piercing it with a nail:

I bind Kallias, the local shopkeeper, and his wife Thraitta, and the shop of the bald man, and the shop of Anthemion, which is adjacent to…and Philon the shopkeeper. Of all these people I bind their soul, work, hands, feet, and shops.

I bind Sosimenes (and ?) his brother, and Karpos his slave, the linen-seller, and Glycanthis, whom they call 'Gentle', and Agathon the shopkeeper, the slave of Sosimenes, of all these people I bind their soul, work, life, hands, and feet.

I bind Kittos, my neighbor, the hemp-worker, the craft of Kittos, his work, his soul, his mind, and the tongue of Kittos.

I bind Mania the shopkeeper at the spring and the shop of Aristander the Eleusinian, their work and mind. Soul, hands, tongue, feet, mind: I bind all these in graves…before Hermes the Restrainer.[1]

This is a detailed curse that targets men, women, shopkeepers, craftsmen, slaves, and members of the same family or household in multiple ways. In addition to their work (*ergasia*) and physical shops or workshops, the curse seeks to bind the soul (*psychē*), mind (*nous*), and life or livelihood (*zoē*), as well as the hands, feet, and tongues of the targets. Like all but a handful of curses, the practitioner is unknown, as is any knowledge of the circumstances that brought about the curse.[2] Given the focus on shopkeepers, craftsmen, *ergasia*, and *ergastēria*, commercial competition or a financial dispute seems probable. Reference to Kittos the hemp-worker as a neighbour and identification of other adjacent shops also suggests that the conflict was embedded somehow within a neighbourhood where those named lived and worked, though the tablet's exact findspot is unknown. Besides professional rivalry, a personal crisis or conflict involving those named, or problems with disgruntled customers, agents, workers, or apprentices could also have precipitated the curse.[3]

[1] *DTA* 87 = John G. Gager (ed.), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1992), 62; translated in D. Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds. A Sourcebook* (Oxford, 2002), 215 (no. 176). *DTA* = *IG*, vol. 3, pt 3, Appendix: 'Defixionum Tabellae' (Berlin, 1897).

[2] E. Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford, 2007), 146–7, counts only six curse tablets of pre-Roman date that include the name of the practitioner.

[3] C. A. Faraone, 'The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells', in C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds.), *Magika Hiera. Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford, 1991), 11; F. Graf,

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Either as the impetus for the curse, or merely as a suitable and significant target to hinder their success, the professions and workplaces of those named clearly mattered to the practitioner. But questions regarding the commercial nature of conflicts that prompted such curses remain somewhat contentious, especially those curses that include multiple targets: specifically, whether the curse quoted above and many others that take aim at large groups of people from different trades, reflect the personal animosities between neighbours or competitive business problems between rival shopkeepers or craftsmen in the same area. Comparison with other commercial curses and consideration of commercial and production practices among craftsmen and merchants provides context that helps better understand *DTA* 87 and answer these questions.

There are nearly sixty (fifty-six and counting) published commercial curses that reference an unspecified occupation (*ergasia*), work (*erga*), business (*praxis*), profit (*kerdē*), craft (*technē*), or workshops or shops (*ergastēria* and *kapēla*), or that target individuals identified by a trade – a significant number, considering that nearly three-quarters of the more than 1,600 curses published to date contain only lists of names.[4] The commercial curse tablets include a range of professions, but most often (seventeen tablets) they target various kinds of merchants and shopkeepers (*kapēloi*), a term typically used to designate small-scale, local traders but one which could also include tavern-keepers trading in wine, foodstuffs, and other goods.[5] Craftsmen (cobblers, smiths,

Magic in the Ancient World (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 157–61; D. Ogden, 'Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds', in B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (eds.), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. Ancient Greece and Rome* (Philadelphia, PA, 1999), 31–5; R. G. Edmonds, *Drawing Down the Moon. Magic in the Ancient Greco-Roman World* (Princeton, NJ, 2019), 68–74. On curses and crisis, see Eidinow (n. 2); more recently, see also E. Eidinow, 'Magic and Social Tension', in D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic* (Leiden, 2019), 746–74.

[4] For commercial curse catalogues, see Faraone (n. 3), 27 n. 47; Eidinow (n. 2), 326 n. 4. Several recently published texts should be added to these lists: J. Lamont, 'A New Commercial Curse Tablet from Classical Athens', *ZPE* 196 (2015), 159–74; J. Lamont, 'Crafting Curses in Classical Athens: A New Cache of Hexametric *Katadesmoi*', *ClAnt* 40 (2021), 76–117; A. Hollman, 'A Curse Tablet against Babylas the Greengrocer', *ZPE* 177 (2011), 157–65. Another example, *SGD* 60 = Gager (n. 1), no. 75, is a prayer for justice that concerns financial loss.

[5] M. I. Finkelstein [= M. I. Finley], 'ἔμπορος, ναύκληρος, κάπηλος: A Prolegomena to the Study of Athenian Trade', *CP* 30 (1935), 329–31; L. Kurke, 'Kapeleia and Deceit: Theognis 59–60', *AJP* 110 (1989), 538; R. Garland, *The Piraeus. From the Fifth to the First Century* (Bristol, 2001), 68; E. M. Harris, 'Workshop, Marketplace, and Household: The Nature of Technical Specialization in Classical Athens and Its Influence on Economy and Society', in P. Cartledge,

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potters, weavers), who themselves likely also sold their own wares, were the next most common target. As in *DTA* 87, three-quarters of the commercial curses target multiple people. Though the exact findspots of most are unknown, the majority (forty-two tablets) come from Greece, mainly Athens and its environs, and date to between the fifth and third centuries BCE. Examples from across the Graeco-Roman world, however, invite analysis as a group because they follow certain cursing conventions: they are typically inscribed on lead, often twisted, folded, or pierced, and use binding or restraining verbs; one-quarter incorporate backward writing or inverted word order; one-third invoke divine witnesses. As with curses of all types, commercial curse tablets could also be quite simple: for some, it was enough just to list opponents' names.[6]

That the texts concern rivalries or conflicts between tradesmen has been the prevailing opinion. Faraone maintained that competition between individuals inherent in a Graeco-Roman agonistic cultural context motivated curses, which sought 'containment and restraint' often aimed against stronger opponents intended as defensive or pre-emptive measures.[7] More recently, however, Eidinow has suggested that competition may not properly explain the motivation behind commercial curses. She points to the ambiguity inherent in curses, like the long curse quoted above (*DTA* 87), that include multiple targets (sometimes with different trades, or none listed at all) or family members which defy models (or assumptions) of head-to-head commercial competition. The details on an individual's trade included in long lists, such as is the case with Kittos the hemp-worker or Karpos the linen-seller, she considers to be either incidental or formulaic, like body parts commonly specified in curses.[8] Instead, she maintains that

E. E. Cohen, and L. Foxhall (eds.), *Money, Labour and Land. Approaches to the Economies of Ancient Greece* (London, 2002), 67–99; D. M. Lewis, 'Labour Specialization in the Athenian Economy: Occupational Hazards', in E. Stewart, E. Harris, and D. Lewis (eds.), *Skilled Labour and Professionalism in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Cambridge, 2018) 142–3.

[6] *DTA* 12, 30, 53, 72, and 73. On the particulars of magical lists, see R. Gordon, '"What's in a list?" Listing in Greek and Greco-Roman Magical Texts', in D. R. Jordan, H. Montgomery, and E. Thomassen (eds.), *The World of Ancient Magic. Papers from the First International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, 4–8 May 1997* (Bergen, 1999), 239–78.

[7] Faraone (n. 3), 4 and 20; Gager (n. 1), 152; F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 152–61; Ogden (n. 3), 32. On agonistic context, see D. Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 1995), 88–90; see also C. A. Faraone, 'Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: The Defensive Use of Voodoo Dolls', *ClAnt* 10 (1991), 193.

[8] Eidinow (n. 2), 5; E. Eidinow, 'Why the Athenians Began to Curse', in R. Osborne (ed.), *The Anatomy of Cultural Revolution. Athenian Art, Literature, Language and Politics c. 430–380 BCE* (Cambridge, 2007), 55 ff. See also E. Eidinow, 'Risk and the Greeks: A New Approach to

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people used curses to manage risk and uncertainty, which can imply a range of social, political, legal, environmental, and financial concerns, and the factors that cause them.[9]

Of course, the need to deal with risk and uncertainty not limited to weather, disasters, or social catastrophes like slander and gossip was no less a part of ancient commerce and production than competition – in particular, when it came to competition for goods, customers, resources, reliable partners, useful information, reputation, and profits. Besides production challenges, high transaction costs hampered trade and manufacture. Imperfect information about goods, prices, quality, partners, and customers compounded difficulties associated with search, bargaining, and enforcement costs.[10] To counter these obstacles, individual craftsmen and merchants used different strategies. Many relied on collaboration and investing in social capital, a term used by anthropologists, sociologists, and economists in various ways, but that has come to describe notions of trust, reputation, esteem, social networks, and the shared norms that support them.[11]

Understanding Binding Curses', in M. Piranomonte and F. M. Simon (eds.), *Contextos Magicos. Colloquium on Ancient Magic* (Rome, 2007), 14; E. Eidinow, 'Binding Spells on Tablets and Papyri', in Frankfurter (n. 3), 383–6.

[9] Eidinow (n. 2), 234. Frank Knight, who laid the groundwork for the topic a century ago, described 'risk' as random outcomes with known factors and probabilities and 'uncertainty' as random outcomes with unknown factors and probabilities: see F. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (Mineola, NY, 2006 [first published 1921]). Discussions of risk and uncertainty have progressed and extended to a wide range of topics; in general, see D. Lupton, *Risk* (New York, 2013); on risk, uncertainty, and Greek oracles and curse tablets, see Eidinow (n. 2) and Eidinow (n. 8); on risk and survival strategies in ancient Greece, see T. Gallant, *Risk and Survival in Ancient Greece* (Stanford, CA, 1991).

[10] On transaction costs, see R. Coase, 'The Nature of the Firm', *Economica* 4 (1937), 386–405; R. Coase, 'The Problem of Social Cost', *Journal of Law and Economics* 3 (1960), 1–44; also T. Eggertsson, *Economic Behavior and Institutions* (Cambridge, 1990), 13–16. For transaction costs in antiquity, see B. W. Frier and D. P. Kehoe, 'Law and Economic Institutions', in W. Scheidel, I. Morris, and R. P. Saller (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 2007), 115–17; and D. P. Kehoe, D. Ratzan, Y. Yiftach, *Law and Transaction Costs in the Ancient Economy* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2015), 10. On imperfect information, see G. A. Akerlof, 'The Market for "Lemons": Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 84 (1970), 488–500; D. C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance* (Cambridge, 1990), 27.

[11] On social capital, see P. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in J. G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, 1986), 241–58; J. S. Coleman, 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital', *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988), S95–S120; R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York 2000) 19–22; and more recently S. Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade. Merchant Guilds, 1000–1800* (Cambridge, 2011), 6–13. Debate about social capital continues: see J. Farr, 'Social Capital: A Conceptual History', *Political Theory* 32 (2004), 6–33; and A. Christoforou, 'On the identity of social capital and the social capital of identity', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 37 (2013), 719–36.

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Though a steady stream of scholarship detailing economic activity, particularly at non-elite levels, has rightly reoriented the debate about the nature and scale of the ancient economy, the contribution of curses, spells, oracles, and the like has not been a part of the conversation.[12] Yet curse tablets can help further refine our understanding of the ancient economy and of commercial competition in several ways. Not only do commercial curses express the concerns and anxieties about profit and competitors that those engaged in economic activity felt, but the tablets also provide additional insight into how craftsmen and merchants sought to acquire success and hinder opponents. The tendency to target multiple craftsmen, their families, and others, besides workshops, skills, and profit, aligns with strategies of collaboration among craftsmen and merchants and their reliance on social capital. In this sense, rather than being disconnected from commerce or production, the texts speak to the shape of economic competition as the craftsmen and merchants themselves experienced it.

Competition, commerce, and production

Literary depictions of competition in commercial or productive contexts tend to focus on two types of head-to-head scenarios. The first concerns competition between individual craftsmen or merchants – potter against potter and carpenter against carpenter, as Hesiod described.[13] The second type deals with competition between merchants, craftsmen, and customers in passages that detail the skill (and trickery) with which merchants and craftsmen persuaded customers to negotiate a sale – or, as Plato would have it, lied to them outright.[14] Plato famously compared shopkeepers (*kapēloi*) to sophists because they even praised bad merchandise, like the merchants who misled people about the quality of wine, figs, or fish that Athenaeus described in the anecdotes he collected centuries later.[15]

[12] The bibliography is extensive, but Flohr and Wilson have provided important surveys of the current debate regarding the Roman economy in their volume on urban production and trade: see M. Flohr and A. Wilson, 'Introduction' and 'Roman Craftsmen and Traders: Towards an Intellectual History', in . Flohr and A. Wilson (eds.), *Urban Craftsmen and Traders in the Roman World* (Oxford, 2016), 1–54; see also E. M. Harris and D. M. Lewis, 'Introduction: Markets in Classical and Hellenistic Greece', in E. M. Harris and D. M. Lewis (eds.), *The Ancient Greek Economy. Markets, Households and City-States* (Cambridge, 2016), 1–37, for a similar and probing introduction.

[13] Hes. *Op.* 25.

[14] Hdt. 1.153.

[15] Ath. 3.76d, 15.700b; Pl. *Prt.* 313d.

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Authors throughout antiquity routinely deployed these tropes to comedic effect when telling stories about markets, shops, or trading stalls.[16] The Pythonesque market scene Apuleius included in the *Metamorphoses* remains a favourite and is often cited for its depiction of the commercial realities that confronted customers, merchants, and market officials: high transaction costs, uncertainty, and information asymmetry (in this case the quality and price of fish), all readily apparent in Lucius' less than successful attempt to procure his dinner. What Lucius had assumed to be a triumphant bit of haggling over 'some elegant fish' that he managed to get for twenty denarii (instead of twenty-five) is quickly revealed by his old friend Pythias (and current market official) to not be the case:

But Pythias saw my basket and shook the fish up so that he could see them more clearly. 'How much did you pay for this rubbish?' he asked. 'I just managed to twist a fishmonger's arm to take twenty denarii for them', I answered. [25] When he heard this, he instantly grabbed my hand and led me back to the provision-market. 'And from which of these merchants', he asked, 'did you buy that junk?' I pointed to a little old man who was sitting in a corner, and Pythias immediately began to berate him in an extremely harsh tone befitting the authority of his office as inspector. 'So now!' he shouted. 'You do not even spare my friends, or indeed any visitors to this place. You mark up worthless fish at high prices, and you are reducing this flower of Thessalian territory to the semblance of a deserted, barren cliff by the costliness of your wares. But you will not get away with it, because now I am going to show you how rogues are going to be checked while I am magistrate.' Then he emptied the basket out on to the open pavement and ordered his assistant to trample on the fish and crush them to a pulp with his feet. Content with this display of stern morality, my friend Pythias advised me to be off, saying, 'I am satisfied, Lucius, just to have abused the old fellow that way.'[17]

In Apuleius' version of this agonistic moment, customer and merchant both lose, in a manner of speaking, thanks to Pythias' swift action: the merchant might have lost face as Pythias intended, but Lucius leaves the market without his money or his dinner. Besides Pythias' display, Lucius' ignorance about where and from whom he should have purchased fish certainly would have added to the humour for Apuleius' audience: ancient shoppers knew where they should go to

[16] On comic depictions of merchants and markets, see J. Paulas, 'The Bazaar Fish Market in Fourth-Century Greek Comedy', *Arethusa* 43 (2010), 403–28; see also R. J. Hopper, *Trade and Industry in Classical Greece* (Ithaca, NY, 1979), 64–7. On exchange and on haggling in the agora, see S. Johnstone, *A History of Trust in Ancient Greece* (Chicago, IL, 2011), 12–34.

[17] Apul. *Met.* 1.24–5; translation from J. A. Hanson (trans.), *Apuleius. Metamorphoses, Volume I* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

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find what they needed in a market, or so they believed, and came to know craftsmen, suppliers, and merchants, and who worked in shops.[18]

But only a small portion of curses that concern commerce or production (eleven texts) have a single target,[19] and few of these actually indicate a specific trade: one text from Rome targets a doctor and one text found at Antioch contains two curses against the same vegetable merchant.[20] The rest are primarily from Attica and refer to business (*praxis*), work (*erga*), or trade (*ergasia*) of a single person. The other forty-five commercial curses actually take aim at multiple individuals: people from the same household, different tradesmen, and others not necessarily identified (who could potentially be employees, partners, or slaves).[21] Most of these (thirty-five texts) targeted fewer than ten people: twenty-four cursed between two and four people, and eleven tablets cursed between five and nine. The ten tablets that targeted larger groups of ten people or more, such as *DTA* 87, still comprise a sizeable body of texts, although several of these focus on the same group and may have encompassed wider networks or multiple shops.[22]

Households and associations

More common, then, were tablets like an example from Athens (before the second century BCE) that cursed a helmet-maker, his wife (who may have gilded the helmets), their household, their workshop, and a third man identified only by name.

[18] Xen. 821; Pollux 9.47–8; A. Gottesman, *Politics and the Street in Democratic Athens* (Cambridge 2014), 38; Harris and Lewis (n. 12), 12–13.

[19] *SGD* 60 = Gager (n. 1), no. 75; *SGD* 73 = E. Ziebarth, 'Neue Verfluchungstafeln aus Attika, Boiotien und Euboia', *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historischen Klasse* 33 (1934), 1022–50, no. 8; *SGD* 75 = Ziebarth (this note), no. 13; *SGD* 129 = Gager (n. 1), no. 79; *DTA* 52; *DTA* 108 = Gager (n. 1), no. 69; *DTA* 109 = Gager (n. 1), no. 61; Gager (n. 1), no. 78; Hollman (n. 4); Lamont (n. 4). Another fragmentary text that only mentions Paul the stone mason probably included others (*DT* 74). Half of these date to the fifth through third centuries BCE and come from Athens and Attica; the rest come from elsewhere: a second-century BCE tablet from Amorgos that targeted Epaphroditus for meddling in household affairs (*SGD* 60 = Gager [n. 1], no. 75), a curse aimed at a vegetable merchant from Antioch in the third century CE (Hollman [n. 4]), and two examples from Rome dating to the third and fourth centuries CE that concern conflicts with masters or employers (*SGD* 129 = Gager [n. 1], no. 79, and Gager [n. 1], no. 78).

[20] *SGD* 129 = Gager (n. 1), no. 79; Hollman (n. 4).

[21] One exceptional tablet targeted almost one hundred, but reference to a scribe and the layout of the tablet in three columns reminiscent of an association membership list, may indicate that someone cursed an entire group (*SGD* 48 = Ziebarth [n. 19], no. 1). Membership lists were often posted in public or semi-public places and it may have been possible to copy the list.

[22] *DTA* 30, 55 (= Gager [n. 1], no. 64), 68 (= Gager [n. 1], no. 68), 87; *DT* 72 (= Gager [n. 1], no. 74); *SGD* 11, 43, 48, 88, 124 (= Gager [n. 1], no. 81).

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I bind Dionysios the helmet-maker and his wife Artemis the gilder, and their household, and their workshop, and their deeds and life, and Kallip[pos ?]. . .[23]

Tablets that specifically targeted workshops generally focused on fewer than ten individuals, such as the third-century BCE tablet that targeted five people (including two identified as netmakers), their trade or work (*ergasia*), and their workshop.[24] One outlier targets eighteen people, though it deals not with a single workshop but with multiple shops.[25]

Other examples that reference only a trade or work (*ergasia*) also tend to focus on smaller groups of individuals seemingly involved in commercial or craft pursuits.

I bind over before Hermes the Restrainer Androsthenes and (?) Iphemuthanes and (?) Simias (and Dromon) – feet, hands, soul, tongue, work (*ergasia*), and income (*kerdē*).[26]

Though no workshop is targeted in this fourth-century BCE curse tablet from Attica that is aimed at four people, the inclusion of *ergasia* and, perhaps more tellingly, income or profit (*kerdē*) as a target makes the connection to a trade or commerce clear, even without knowing its exact findspot.

Besides reference to a trade, archaeological context can help anchor some curses more securely to commerce or production and, potentially, also help clarify motivations for composing such curses in the first place. These curses tend to exhibit features found in texts specifically mentioning a workshop, shop, or occupation/trade. For example, a fourth-century BCE text found in the Athenian Agora rolled and pierced with a nail that targeted two bronzesmiths and several others may push beyond a household, but still focuses on a relatively compact group:

I bind Aristaichmos the bronze-worker to those below and also Purrias the bronze-worker and his work and their souls and Sosias of Lamia and his work and his soul and Alegosi (?) and strongly {and strongly} and Agesion the Boeotian woman.[27]

[23] *DTA* 69 = Gager (n. 1), no. 63; translation from Gager.

[24] Gager (n. 1), no. 60 = *SGD* 52; see also *DTA* 74–5.

[25] *DTA* 68 = Gager (n. 1), no. 68.

[26] *DTA* 86 = Gager (n. 1), no. 67; translation from Gager.

[27] *SGD* 20 = Gager (n. 1), no. 71 (fourth-century BCE), translation from Gager. On the findspot, see A. Burford, *Craftsmen in Greek and Roman Society* (Ithaca, NY, 1972), 163; C. Mattusch, 'Bronze- and Ironworking in the Area of the Athenian Agora', *Hesperia* 46 (1977), 341–2; H. A. Thompson and R. E. Wycherley, *The Agora of Athens. The History, Shape and Uses of an Ancient City Center* (Princeton, NJ, 1972), 177. J. Curbera and D. R. Jordan, 'A Curse from the 'Industrial District' near the Athenian Agora', *Hesperia* 67 (1988), 215–18, suggested that the tablet may not have originally been deposited in the workshop. Eidinow

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Aristaichmos and Purrias the bronzesmiths may have run a single workshop as partners or operated their own shops and collaborated somehow; unlike Dionysus the helmet-maker and his wife, who worked in the same shop in *DTA* 69 (presumably with the others mentioned), the context is less certain in this case. Since small shops were the norm in most production contexts, including metal working, it would not have been unlikely that others mentioned in the text, whether slaves, metics, or employees, also worked in a shop run by either smith. Estimates suggest that Athenian bronzesmiths, for instance, typically worked alone or with a few employees, metics, or slaves; the same was true for those producing fine metalwork or jewellery.[28]

Athenian examples are often cited to indicate the possible scale of production. Shops where thirty people made knives or where another twenty made furniture, both inherited by Demosthenes from his father in the fourth century BCE, or the shield factory that Cephalus owned that Lysias mentioned, where 120 people worked, were probably exceptional.[29] Pottery workshops could have had larger workforces, but that may not have been normal either, at least in Athens, where potteries likely contained a kiln or two operated by two or three potters plus several workmen to assist; larger pottery workshops may have accommodated perhaps twelve people.[30] That the household (*oikos*) overlapped with or provided a location for ancient production (to which wives, children, and slaves contributed) also explains the inclusion of family members and the *oikos* itself as curse targets in these examples and others: one tablet that targets numerous shopkeepers includes 'all those living together and the whole household (*sunoikia*)'.[31]

(n. 2), 199, following Jordan, suggests that it could refer to people from Chalkis and not necessarily bronzeworkers.

[28] P. Acton, *Poiesis* (Oxford, 2014), 125–6, 130.

[29] Dem. *Against Aphobous* 1.9; Lys. *Against Eratosthenes* 1.9. See also Acton (n. 28), 138–9, 253–70; L. Migeotte, *The Economy of the Greek Cities. From the Archaic Period to the Early Roman Empire* (Berkeley, CA, 2009), 98; Hopper (n. 16), 128.

[30] E. Hasaki, 'Crafting Spaces: Archaeological, Ethnographic, and Ethnoarchaeological Studies on Spatial Organization in Pottery Workshops in Greece and Tunisia', in M. Lawall and J. Lund (eds.), *Pottery in the Archaeological Record. Greece and Beyond* (Aarhus, 2011), 26; see also Acton (n. 28), 97–8. Larger pottery operations, such as in Arezzo, existed during the Roman period, but these, too, were probably exceptional: see G. Fülle, 'The Internal Organization of the Arretine Terra Sigillata Industry: Problems of Evidence and Interpretation', *JRS* 87 (1997), 111–55; A. Wilson, 'Large-Scale Manufacturing, Standardization, and Trade', in J. P. Oleson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Engineering and Technology in the Classical World* (Oxford, 2008), 396–402.

[31] *DTA* 68 = Gager (n. 1), no. 69, side A, line 6; Thompson and Wycherley (n. 27), 173–91.

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Even if the bronzesmiths or other craftsmen mentioned here did not work in the same shop, household, or physical location, they may have collaborated or worked together. Many craftsmen in the Graeco-Roman world likely coordinated and partnered with each other when necessary to complete orders or to deal with trade, market, personal issues, and other risks or uncertainties of production and commerce. Xenophon suggested that in larger cities craftsmen relied on collaboration, and pointed to shoemaking as an example: some cut the leather, others sewed it, and different cobblers assembled the shoes.

For in small towns the same workman makes chairs and doors and plows and tables, and often this same artisan builds houses, and even so he is thankful if he can only find employment enough to support him. And it is, of course, impossible for a man of many trades to be proficient in all of them. In large cities, on the other hand, inasmuch as many people have demands to make upon each branch of industry, one trade alone, and very often even less than a whole trade, is enough to support a man: one man, for instance, makes shoes for men, and another for women; and there are places even where one man earns a living by only stitching shoes, another by cutting them out, another by sewing the uppers together, while there is another who performs none of these operations but only assembles the parts.[32]

Augustine similarly described collaboration by silversmiths centred within a neighbourhood:

We laugh, to be sure, when we see them [pagan gods] assigned, according to the fancies of human beliefs, to the tasks that are shared out among them, as if they were subcontractors for the collection of taxes, or workmen in the silversmiths' quarter where a vessel passes through the hands of many craftsmen before it comes out finished, though it could have been perfected by a single perfect craftsman.[33]

The tendency among certain craftsmen and traders to concentrate in specific areas, as Augustine describes, may have fostered collaboration (as well as possible conflicts that led to curses), as with *DTA* 87 and others. Evidence exists for six metal-working shops in the Athenian Agora and another four in the Kerameikos, or Potters' quarter, during the classical period.[34] Athens also was home to the so-called marble workers' street.[35] Similar areas existed for traders, retailers, and

[32] Xen. *Cyr.* 8.2.5; translation from W. Miller (trans.), *Xenophon. Cyropaedia. Books 5–8* (Cambridge, MA, 1914).
[33] August. *De civ. D.* 7.4; translation from W. M. Green, *Augustine. City of God, Books 4–7* (Cambridge, MA, 2014).
[34] Acton (n. 28), 215.
[35] *Ibid.*, 125, 217–18; see also Hopper (n. 16), 49–51, 68–70.

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wholesalers interested in specific goods: locations for sellers of honey, cheese, incense and perfumes, fruits, and nuts, as well as tanners, are reported – and not only in Athens.[36]

Such collaborative relationships could be institutionalized via partnerships or associations, but of course did not need to be. Associations (whether a *koinon*, *sunodos*, *collegium*, *thiasos*, *eranos*, *sunergasia*, or *plēthos*) already existed in Athens during the classical period, though few of an explicit professional nature save for a group of fullers.[37] Numerous associations existed in the Piraeus as well, including groups of foreign merchants, though many likely filled religious, social, and economic roles in members' lives.[38] Associations became increasingly prevalent in Athens and throughout Attica in the Hellenistic period and later under Roman rule across the Mediterranean.[39] The proliferation of these groups indicates a tendency toward collaboration and investment in social capital among craftsmen and merchants, a tendency those craftsmen, merchants, and others who turned to curses may have understood and tried to exploit.

It follows, then, that the curses cited above against craftsmen like Dionysios the helmet-maker (*DT* 69) or Purrias the bronzesmith (*SGD* 20), which focus on craftsmen, households, workshops, and/or wider networks, align with production norms and habits of association that helped manage risks and uncertainties of production and commerce. The other curses against metal workers – one targeting a

[36] Ar. *Eq*. 852–4 for honey, cheese, tanners; Pollux 9.47–8 (Eupolis) for incense and perfumes. On trading areas in Athens, see Hopper (n. 16), 49; Harris and Lewis (n. 12), 12. For Rome, see C. Holleran, 'The Retail Trade', in C. Holleran and A. Claridge (eds.), *A Companion to the City of Rome* (Malden, MA, 2018), 460–2.

[37] *IG* II^2 2934. See also *IG* II^2 2941; N. F. Jones, *The Associations of Classical Athens. The Response to Democracy* (Oxford, 1999), 4.

[38] *IG* II/III^2 337. See M. Leiwo, 'Religion or Other Reasons? Private Associations in Athens', in J. Frösén (ed.), *Early Hellenistic Athens. Symptoms of a Change* (Helsinki, 1997), 103–17; Garland (n. 5), 105–11; A. Gottesman (n. 18), 45–55.

[39] For classical and Hellenistic Greece, see Jones (n. 37); I. N. Arnaoutoglou, *Thusias Heneka kai Sunousias. Private Religious Associations in Hellenistic Athens* (Athens, 2003), J. S. Kloppenborg and R. S. Ascough (eds.), *Greco-Roman Associations. Texts, Translations, and Commentary. Volume I. Attica, Central Greece, Macedonia, Thrace* (Berlin and Boston, MA, 2011), C. A. Thomsen, 'The Eranistai of Classical Athens', *GRBS* 55 (2015), 154–75; V. Gabrielsen, 'Associations, Modernization and the Return of the Private Network in Athens', in C. Tiersch (ed.), *Die Athenische Demokratie im 4. Jahrhundert. Zwischen Modernisierung und Tradition* (Stuttgart, 2016), 121–62. On associations beyond Greece, see O. van Nijf, *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East* (Amsterdam, 1997); P. A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations. Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis, MN, 2003); J. Liu, *Collegia Centonariorum. The Guilds of Textile Dealers in the Roman West* (Leiden, 2009); and P. F. Venticinque, *Honor Among Thieves. Craftsmen, Merchants, and Associations in Roman and Late Roman Egypt* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2016).

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goldsmith along with three others whose trades are not mentioned (*DT* 53), and two tablets against the same silver worker and his wife (*SGD* 3 and 4), all from Athens and Attica, dating between the fifth and fourth century BCE – similarly concentrate on what would appear to be small workshops or networks. The same can be said for curses involving production beyond metalwork, including a text that targeted two potters along with six others:

I bind Litias before Hermes the Restrainer and Persephone, the tongue of Litias, the hands of Litias, the soul of Litias, the feet of Litias, the body of Litias, the head of Litias. I bind Nikias before Hermes the Restrainer, of the Areopagite, the hands, the feet, the tongue, the body of Nikias. I bind Demetrios before Hermes the Restrainer, the body, the business (*ergasia*) of Demetrios the ceramic worker, the hands, the feet, the soul. I bind Epicharinos before Hermes the Restrainer. I bind Demades the ceramic worker before Hermes the Restrainer, the body, the business (*ergasia*), the soul...I bind Daphnis before Hermes the Restrainer. I bind Philonides before Hermes the Restrainer. I bind, I bind Simale Piste before Hermes the Restrainer. I bind Litias, the feet, the hands, the soul, the body of Litias, the tongue of Litias, the will of Litias, which is carried out before Hermes the Restrainer and Persephone and Hades.[40]

The involvement of someone identified as an Areopagite, as well as repeated references to tongues as targets, may suggest the possibility of a legal dispute, but that does not preclude commercial competition or conflict that gave rise to legal claims in the first place. The fact that the curse targets the business or trade (*ergasia*) of potters/ceramic workers, along with their hands, feet, souls, and tongues, indicates an overlapping commercial and legal context to some extent. The networks that craftsmen relied upon for support that could be implicated in a curse would be likely targets in a legal dispute as well. The same intersection between commerce and legal issues occurs in another tablet from Athens that involves efforts to hinder testimony and counterclaims lodged by a number of individuals, including three cooks or butchers (*mageiroi*).[41]

Overlapping commercial and production obligations, interests, and connections would have added nuance to the competition between rival potters, smiths, and shopkeepers, and their customers, that are not necessarily revealed by literary treatments. Seeing competition primarily through the lens of head-to-head rivalry obscures the collaboration between individuals and groups vital to production

[40] *SGD* 44 = Gager (n. 1), no. 70; translation from Gager.
[41] *DT* 49 = Gager (n. 1), no. 44.

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and commerce, including the interactions directed at finding supplies, completing orders, and obtaining necessary credit that led to the ultimate sale of an item at an ancient market, shop, or stall. In this sense, by including others possibly involved in production, commerce, or financial matters within a workshop, family, or wider network, the tablets may illuminate dealings that a focus on customer–merchant or craftsman–craftsman relations omits.

Multiple targets, merchants, and reputation

Those engaged in retail trade – like the various merchants and shopkeepers targeted in curses, no less than the fishmongers in Apuleius or Athenaeus – relied on wider networks for success, too. The salt merchants who formed an association in first-century CE Tebtunis, for instance, coordinated aspects of their work, set prices (minimums at least), shared information, and, though they all had the right to sell salt in the community, pledged to supply salt to each other when necessary to fill larger orders according to their charter.[42] Papyri indicate that linen merchants and linen weavers similarly depended on each other for information and to coordinate efforts at times.[43]

In his discussion of social capital, James Coleman provides an anecdote about craft and merchant relationships present in modern Cairo's market that offers a model for better understanding similar relationships in antiquity:

> In the central market in Cairo, the boundaries between merchants are difficult for an outsider to discover. The owner of a shop which specializes in leather, when queried about where one can find a certain kind of jewelry, will turn out to sell that as well – or what appears to be the same thing, to have a close associate who sells it, to whom he will immediately take the customer…For some activities, such as bringing a customer to a friend's store, there are commissions; others, such as money changing, merely create obligations. Family relations are important in the market, as is the stability of proprietorship. The whole market is so infused with relations of the sort just described that it can be seen as an organization, no less so than a department store. Alternatively, the market can be seen as consisting of a set of individual merchants, each having an extensive body of social capital on which to draw, based on the relationships within the market.[44]

[42] *PMich*. V 245; see also Venticinque (n. 39), 67–74.
[43] *POxy*. 12.1414.
[44] J. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 303–4.

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Obvious differences between department stores, modern bazaars, and ancient markets aside, the overlapping professional and personal relationships across trade boundaries may be no less fitting or appropriate. This tendency for relationships to overlap may help further explain, then, the tendency of commercial curses to aim at multiple merchants or craftsmen (or merchants embedded within larger groups).

The importance of networks, collaboration, and social capital to ancient commerce and production helps make sense, for instance, of a small archive of five curse tablets from Attica dating to the third century BCE that focus on what appears to be a circle of shopkeepers.[45] Four of the five texts include shopkeepers named Ophelion and Olympos, though five other men are mentioned in at least two texts: the shopkeepers Syriskos and Hekataios, as well as three men only identified by name, Manes, Pistias, and Thoukleides.[46] The texts, found together and likely deposited as a group, targeted twenty-six different people. Four of the five tablets concern larger groups: two texts list twelve people (*DT* 72), the others list seven (*DTA* 71 = *DT* 71) and nine (*DTA* 70 = *DT* 70) respectively; the fifth is the exception and targets only two people (*DT* 73). Since seven of those named in the curses are identified either as a shopkeeper (*kapēlos*), the owner of a shop (*kapelion*) or, in Ophelion's case, the owner of both a shop and a workshop (*ergastērion*), the tablets concern at least seven different businesses (or eight, if the *ergastērion* and *kapelion* of Ophelion refer to different establishments owned by the same man).[47]

Despite explicit attempts to bind the trades or professions and the shops of those named in two of the texts, it is unclear what trades the others listed practised.[48] Some individuals are not uniformly identified as shopkeepers either; Ophelion and Olympos, for instance, are not identified in the same way on all the tablets, so it is possible that the others named kept shops too. Common curse targets and the shared deposit suggest that the practitioner(s) took aim at a number of

[45] *DTA* 70=*DT* 70; *DTA* 71= *DT* 71; *DT* 72 = Gager (n. 1), no. 74; *DT* 73; *SGD* 43. For a similar archive of curses focused on shopkeepers, see Lamont (n. 4).

[46] Manes: *DTA* 70 = *DT* 70; *DTA* 71 = *DT* 71; *SGD* 43. Pistias: *DTA* 70 = *DT* 70; *DT* 72; *SGD* 43. Syriskos: *DTA* 70 = *DT* 70; *SGD* 43. Hekataios: *DTA* 71 = *DT* 71; *SGD* 43. Thoukleides: *DT* 72; *DT* 73. See Lamont (n. 4) for other examples.

[47] The *ergastērion* of Ophelion: *DTA* 70 = *DT* 70; *DTA* 71= *DT* 71. The *kapelion* of Ophelion: *SGD* 43.

[48] Trades and professions: *DTA* 70 =*DT* 71. Binding all the shops: *SGD* 43.

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individuals associated with each other who had formed a social and business network and did what we have come to expect: targeted not a single individual but a wider network upon which craftsmen and merchants may have relied for support.

Another small archive of five texts that targeted shopkeepers, uncovered together in a classical cemetery located in the deme of Xurete north-east of the Piraeus, outside the Long Walls, offers a parallel to the tablets that cursed Ophelion, Olympos, and their associates. I cite only one here, but Lamont has shown that they all are similarly structured and concern male–female couples and the shops (*kapeleia*) they managed.[49]

> Hekate Chthonia, Artemis Chthonia, Hermes Chthonios;
> cast your hate upon Phanagora and Demetrios,
> and their tavern and their property and their possessions
> I will bind my enemy Demetrios, and Phana-
> gora, in blood and in ashes.
> With all the dead. Nor will the next four-year cycle release you,
> I will bind you in such a bind,
> Demetrios, as strong as possible,
> And I will smite down a *kynotos* on [your] tongue.[50]

Taken alone, the text offers an example of a curse directed at a single shop (such as the examples against smiths or other craftsmen mentioned above). As Lamont rightly asserts, finding the texts together as part of a single act of cursing aimed at multiple shopkeepers reveals 'private ritual, commercial rivalries, and social networks'. It also indicates that, in a single act of commercial cursing, the practitioner aimed at multiple targets – in this case, eight people. Rather than write out one long curse tablet, however, the practitioner listed each shop and its proprietors on a separate tablet. In that sense, it would appear to be an alternative, yet related, cursing strategy to that demonstrated on *DTA* 87 or the Ophelion and Olympos examples, one that still suggests that a response to the risks inherent in commerce and production could involve a wider network.

Tablets like those targeting Ophelion and Olympos may also reflect another reality of commerce and collaboration: problems with one merchant could lead to negative reactions across a social network,

[49] Lamont (n. 4).
[50] Translation from Lamont (n. 4), 162–3.

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which is to be expected from the sort of private order enforcement that it is assumed many merchants and craftsmen relied upon.[51] Associations in Roman and late antique Egypt, for instance, punished members for dishonesty, stealing customers, selling below prices, and violating agreements with colleagues.[52] That groups instituted such measures suggests not only how merchants may have regularly collaborated (or intended to under ideal circumstances that associations tried to institutionalize) but also reveals the potential to run afoul of associates.

A tablet from the Piraeus of classical or Hellenistic date reflects the importance of a network for managing business matters in a different way. In addition to its four individual targets and their trades, it binds 'those that act on the behalf' of the two men, Melas and Hermeias, implying employees, slaves, agents, or unnamed family members:

> I register Melas, his business, soul, work of his workshop (*ergasia*), feet, hands, tongue, heart and those acting on behalf of Melas. I register Hermeias, deeds, business, soul, hands, children, work of the workshop (*ergasia*) and if anyone is acting on behalf of Hermeias. I register Euagora, hands, feet, soul, tongue, work of workshop (*ergasia*), and everything that belongs to that woman. I register Biote, hands feet, soul, tongue, workshop (*ergasia*), children and everything that belongs to her.[53]

That the text was uncovered in the Piraeus adds further strength to the idea that it relates to business and commerce, and the relationships with shipping agents or middlemen upon whom merchants relied to transact business at a distance. As the central harbour and port with an emporium focused on shipping and long-distance trade, as well as its own agora, the Piraeus would have offered ample opportunities for craftsmen and merchants to make such arrangements.[54] Though relying on agents was common for long-distance trade, it need not have been limited to shipping, nor was the Piraeus solely focused on seaborne trade; craftsmen and merchants would potentially have used agents regionally, as many goods and raw materials acquired in the Piraeus and its *emporion* were destined for local markets, trade, and workshops.[55]

[51] C. R. Hawkins, *Romans Artisans and the Urban Economy* (Cambridge, 2016), 101–24.

[52] *PMich.* V 243, *PMich.* V 245, and *SB* III 6704. On associations, rules, and organization, see Venticinque (n. 39), 35–66.

[53] *DT* 47; translation from Eidinow (n. 2), 395.

[54] Harris and Lewis (n. 12), 13; Garland (n. 5); S. von Reden, 'The Piraeus: A World Apart', *G&R* 42 (1995), 24–37.

[55] Garland (n. 5), 78.

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Several curse tablets also indicate the importance of the norms that support social capital within a network by including specific targets that speak to the weight of such capital in commerce and production. One tablet found in a grave in the Piraeus makes the connection between commerce and reputation clear in a curse aimed at preventing the four targets from saying 'harsh words' about a rival and a desire for their business to be unprofitable and fail if they do so.

I have seized Mikion and bound his hands and feet and tongue and soul; and if he is in any way about to utter a harsh word about Philon…may his tongue become lead. And stab his tongue, and if he is in any way about to do business, may it be unprofitable for him, and may everything be lost, stripped away, and destroyed.

I have seized Hipponides and Sokrates and bound their hands and feet and tongues and souls; and if they are in any way about to utter a harsh or evil word about Philon, or do something bad, may their tongues and souls become lead and may they be unable to speak or act; but rather stab their tongue; and if they have anything, or about to have anything, whether possessions or property or business, make it lost, stripped away and destroyed, and let them be destroyed for them.

{I Aristo} I have taken Aristo and bound the hands and the feet and the tongue and the soul; and may she be unable to speak any evil word about Philon, but may her tongue become lead; and stab her tongue.[56]

A third-century BCE tablet found in an Attic grave targeted one woman's property and her business (*praxis*), which Gager translates as 'fortune', but also included a wish that she 'become hateful to (her) friends'.

[Side A] I will bind Sosikleia an[d (her) p]roperty (*ktemata*) and great fame (*kudos*) and fortune (*praxis*) and mind. Let her become hateful to (her) friends. I will bind her under murky Tartaros

[Side B] in troublesome bonds, with Hekate of the underworld.
BITTO SOSIKLEIA
For the hateful furies.[57]

The aim of making Sosikleia hateful to friends indicates that, although the curse targets one person, it embeds the target in a wider conception of economic and social life – whatever business Sosikleia is engaged in, she is not doing it alone.

A detailed fourth-century BCE tablet from Athens that targeted at least twelve people, as part of a curse that touched upon commercial

[56] *DTA* 97 = Gager (n. 1), no. 66; translation from Gager.
[57] *DTA* 108 = Gager (n. 1), no. 69; translation from Gager.

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and household affairs, ended with an attack on their social capital and prospects for future business by consigning them to unemployment (*agria*), obscurity (*aphania*), and a bad reputation (*adoxia*).[58] Only two individuals are identified by trade, Kimonokles and a carpenter, though others listed might have plied a trade, too, as the practitioner used patronymics, demotics, and occupation to identify people without any sense of consistency.[59] The practitioner also took care to write half the names twice: once spelled correctly, and a second time with letters scrambled or written backwards to emphasize the intended inversion – and failure. Yet, the wish to hand the people named over to unemployment, along with their families, suggests the commercial nature of the concerns that may have precipitated the curse, and the financial aspects of the hoped-for reversal, very much in line with other examples of commercial curses.

Conclusions

A better understanding of how the people of classical Athens worked in shops, engaged in commerce, transacted business, and relied on social capital and networks leads to a more nuanced understanding of how they cursed or performed ritual acts aimed at being successful (or hindering the success of others) in production and commerce in antiquity. Rather than non-competitive practices, the way in which practitioners structured commercial curses, focusing on multiple targets, may, in some sense, reflect strategies used by craftsmen and merchants and be linked to how practitioners who were engaged in commerce and production understood the conflicts and crises they faced. The presence of so many tablets concerning shopkeepers may, in fact, indicate the presence of lively competition in small-scale retail trade.[60] The particular commercial competition that the curses address, however, does not seem to be the agonistic context of potter against potter, at least not exclusively.

[58] *DTA* 55 = Gager (n. 1), no. 64.

[59] The curse also mentions soldiers and possible complications regarding betrothal or marriage, which either indicates three separate issues, as Gager (n. 1) suggested, or may indicate complicated, embedded relationships. Marriage issues as well as difficulties arising from absence caused by military service might also have caused stress related to production and commerce.

[60] Acton (n. 28), 230–47.

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This is entirely appropriate. The lone craftsman plying his or her trade in isolation, disconnected from the social and economic world of a community or family probably never really existed, or never existed so neatly. Craftsmen and merchants relied on each other, as both literary and documentary texts indicate, even if small workshops remained the norm. It is not surprising, then, that curse tablets often targeted not one but several craftsmen, merchants, or others who were presumably affiliated in some way that resulted in being party to a curse levelled against them. Additionally, the curse tablets help refine the list of economic concerns experienced by individuals besides status, once thought to be the prime driver of economic activity. These craftsmen and merchants who commissioned or composed the curse tablets articulated their concerns in their choice of targets: namely, profit, property, reputation, and – most unpredictable and dangerous of all – other people.

As such, it would be too much to abandon the interpretive framework provided by competition or the 'commercial curse' as an important category. Instead, the definition of what the competition looked like on the ground and to the individual practitioners should be broadened, especially by taking into account the social reality of craft production, commerce, and workshop management. When examined in this light, some of the allegedly peculiar features of these tablets (such as the preponderance of targets, sometimes from different trades) becomes more intelligible and allows us to see more clearly that they are indeed directed at practitioners' intended economic and commercial goals. Beyond just harming individuals or their work and workshop, a strategy for cursing that targets support networks tied to a household, a neighbourhood, or their profession, and the qualities used to sustain those relationships, implies a more damaging attack. Such a curse ultimately targets not only an individual's wealth and success but also how they would manage to maintain that wealth, too – competing for reputation, trust, and money.

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