

UCLA

UCLA Previously Published Works

Title

Language of ritual cursing in the binding of Prometheus

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2zc4h1kn>

Journal

Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies, 47(2)

ISSN

0017-3916

Author

Marston, John M.

Publication Date

2007

Peer reviewed

Language of Ritual Cursing in the Binding of Prometheus

John M. Marston

THE MYTH OF PROMETHEUS is described in two early texts, the *Theogony* of Hesiod and the *Prometheus Bound*, traditionally ascribed to Aeschylus. Both recount the fate of Prometheus, the Titan who has been bound to a mountain by Zeus as a form of punishment or torture. This binding is usually understood as a physical shackling to the rock, but the language in both texts is evocative of the language of the magical curses that were produced throughout the Greek world from at least the sixth century B.C. This paper examines the relationship between the language and imagery of these literary accounts of Prometheus' binding and the epigraphic evidence of Greek magic, and suggests that the binding of Prometheus might have been interpreted as both physical and magical by the fifth-century Athenian audience of *Prometheus Bound*.

*Binding curses in the Greek world*¹

The origins of the “binding curse,” κατάδεσμος in Greek and *defixio* in Latin, can be traced archaeologically to the first half of the sixth century in Sicily and the fifth century in Attica.² The purpose of the spell was to “bind” an enemy—to

¹ Major sources for the texts of Greek binding curses used here are abbreviated as follows: R. Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae*, *IG III.3 App.* (1897) = Wünsch; A. Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae* (Paris 1904) = *DT Aud.*; D. R. Jordan, “A Survey of Greek Defixiones Not Included in the Special Corpora,” *GRBS* 26 (1985) 151–197 = Jordan.

² Evidence of inscribed binding curses from the Kerameikos of Athens dates as early as the mid-fifth century, e.g. Jordan no. 1. The site of Selinunte in western Sicily has provided even earlier *defixiones*, with at least four probably dating to the sixth century: M. López Jimeno, *Las Tabellae Defixionis de la Sicilia Griega* (Amsterdam 1991) nos. 1–4; see also Jordan nos. 94–

incapacitate or weaken the victim, or to make him unable to act according to his own wishes. This practice is well attested archaeologically since the curses were inscribed, often on the durable material of lead, although it is possible that earlier curses were spoken or inscribed on non-durable media that have not survived.³ Most often, the spell was inscribed on a lead strip or sheet that was then folded and tied or pierced with a nail and buried in or near a recent grave.

The written curses, which were presumably also intoned, have often been described as “sympathetic magic,” since the curser performs actions on a surrogate, in this case the tablet, that he wishes upon the victim.⁴ A more direct representation of the victim also can accompany the curse in the form of a figurine. Such figurines have been recovered archaeologically, often in the same context as the spell strips.⁵ Other figurines

108. Most were excavated from the necropolis of Buffa and the sanctuary of Demeter Malophoros at Gaggara.

³ Curses written on papyrus are common in Egypt, although these mostly date to the first few centuries A.D. Plato (*Leg.* 933B) and Ovid (*Am.* 3.2.29–30) also attest to the use of wax, as an image (Plato) or an inscription in wax (Ovid). Evidence for wax *κατάδεσμοι* in Athens is provided by a fourth-century *defixio* (Wünsch 55a.16): “All these [people] I bind in lead and in wax.” Early evidence for the use of wax figurines in oath rituals in both the Near East and Greece includes the eighth-century Aramaic Sefire inscription and the Cyrenean foundation decree attributed to the seventh century: C. A. Faraone, “Molten Wax, Spilt Wine, and Mutilated Animals: Sympathetic Magic in Near Eastern and Early Greek Oath Ceremonies,” *JHS* 103 (1993) 60–80.

⁴ F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge 1997) 134, disputes the term “sympathetic,” arguing instead that the curser is working in a different universe, one in which many facets of everyday life are reversed; see also E. W. and P. T. Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth* (Princeton 2004). 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* (New York 1991) 3–32, at 8, describes “persuasive analogy,” wherein ritual is used to encourage one item to become like another in a certain respect: “i.e., in the case of a lead *defixio*, with respect to coldness or uselessness.”

⁵ One burial from the Kerameikos, dating ca. 400 B.C., includes a curse against a number of men inscribed on a tablet that also served as the cover for a lead container containing a small lead figurine: J. Trumpf, “Fluchtafel

have been found with pins driven into certain parts of the anatomy, much like modern voodoo dolls, to enhance the efficacy of the spell. Like the lead curse tablets themselves, these figurines are often recovered from funerary contexts and sanctuaries with chthonic connections. The reason for this practice, it is generally believed, was to get the dead to act as intermediaries between the curser and the underworldly powers invoked to carry out the curse.

Binding spells appear in literature of the Classical period as well. The earliest attestation of a form of the word *κατάδεσμος* is in Plato, who mentions itinerant specialists in magic, who for a price can “harm the just and unjust alike with certain spells and *καταδέσμοις*” (*Resp.* 364C). The first attestation of a *defixio iudicaria* (judicial binding spell) in Greek literature appears almost one hundred years earlier in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus. The Furies use a spell against Orestes to gain an advantage over him before the beginning of his trial. The trial of Orestes is the first murder trial in Athenian history and is accompanied by the first *defixio iudicaria*; this implies that to fifth-century Athenians the origins of judicial trials and curses were understood to be contemporary.⁶

The binding of Prometheus

The account of the binding of Prometheus in *Prometheus Bound* contains multiple clues suggesting to the audience aspects of a magical ritual. Such an interpretation requires both an understanding of the language and imagery of the binding itself and consideration of the thematic structure of the play. While it is

und Rachepuppe,” *AthMitt* 73 (1958) 94–102, at 96–98; listed as no. 5 in C. A. Faraone, “Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: The Defensive Use of ‘Voodoo Dolls’ in Ancient Greece,” *CLAnt* 10 (1991) 165–220; see also D. R. Jordan, “New Archaeological Evidence for the Practice of Magic in Classical Athens,” in *Praktika tou XII Diethnous Synedriou Klasikes Archaialogias* IV (Athens 1988) 273–277, at 275–276. The figurine is inscribed on the right thigh with one of the names from the curse tablet, and its arms are tied behind its back in a position of submission.

⁶ Although this passage does not explicitly use the term *κατάδεσμος*, Faraone argues convincingly for it as the earliest literary reference to magical binding: C. A. Faraone, “Aeschylus’ ὕμνος δέσμος (*Eum.* 306) and Attic Judicial Curse Tablets,” *JHS* 105 (1985) 150–154.

impossible to determine conclusively how ancient individuals would interpret the connotations of specific language and imagery in a play, we can attempt to understand their perspective through a contextual study of the work. Though the binding is first and foremost a physical restraint and torture, I argue that the audience would have understood the scene as simultaneously possessing a secondary meaning, that of a magical binding spell.

Kratos, Bia, and Hephaistos perform actions in the binding of Prometheus that are analogous to the roles of the client and ritual specialist in a magical binding.⁷ Dramatic conventions aside, Zeus does not bind Prometheus directly because he is not the expert. Hephaistos, although unwilling, is the craftsman of the gods and thus the best at executing the physical binding. He functions as the ritual specialist but also as the invoked deity, serving both a practical and a magical purpose in the binding as a result of the unique circumstances of the event: here we have the enactment of a prayer actually represented before the viewers. Kratos, on the other hand, represents the might of Zeus and thus takes the role of the client, or *defigens*, urging Hephaistos to accomplish the binding and speaking aloud the words of the ritual. The division of labor implied by curse texts is visibly represented here. Kratos repeatedly orders Hephaistos to bind parts of Prometheus' body, and Hephaistos replies "I am doing it."

This repetition is notable: Kratos urges Hephaistos with imperatives eight times between lines 52 and 77, and five times Hephaistos replies that the binding is underway. Repetition here can be interpreted as an artifact of dramatic production—because there are no complex visual cues, the dialogue of the actors must inform the spectators of what they are doing—but the reinforcement of each step of the binding also evokes magic ritual. Many of the longer Attic curses are repetitive, both in listing targets of the spell and in repeating the main formula.⁸

⁷ Evidence for specialization includes Plato's mention of itinerant specialists, *Resp.* 364C, and similarities between figurines: Jordan, *Praktika* 276.

⁸ As in *DT Aud.* 49, where nine target individuals are listed similarly, or M. López Jimeno, *Nueva Tabellae Defixionis Áticas* (Amsterdam 1999) no. 26

In a standard binding ritual, the incantation was likely spoken as—or before—it was written, and this repetition possibly bolstered the power of the spell and enhanced its permanence.⁹ In the binding of Prometheus, the repetition of the spoken binding, together with the ongoing physical shackling, parallels the process of inscribing a binding curse; or perhaps, more accurately, the act of writing invokes the type of imagined binding performed by a god described here.

Kratos first orders Hephaistos to begin the binding in general fashion (52): οὐκ οὐν ἐπέειξεν τῷδε δεσμὰ περιβαλεῖν (“will you not hurry and put on the bonds”). The “bonds” are not detailed, but from the more specific terminology later in the passage, δεσμὰ probably represents the general group of shackles that Hephaistos has on hand. The first specific order from Kratos is for Hephaistos to bind the hands of Prometheus, which he does. Kratos then adds emphasis for doing the work well (58–59): ἄρασσε μάλλον, σφίγγε, μηδαμῆ χάλα. δεινὸς γὰρ εὐρεῖν καὶ ἀμηχάνων πόρον (“strike hard, bind him fast, don’t loosen him. For he is terribly good at finding a means of escape”). These repeated imperatives emphasize the need for ritual in binding the wily Prometheus. To bind him effectively they must take care that the physical bonds and the language of the spell itself are both accomplished correctly.

Hephaistos binds both arms at Kratos’ urging and then receives the harshest command of them all (64–65): ἀδαμαντίνου νῦν σφηνὸς αὐθάδη γνάθον στέρονων διαμπὰξ πασσάλευ’ ἐρωμένως (“now strongly drive the stubborn jaw of the adamantine wedge straight through his chest”). It is this action which, more than any other, suggests that Kratos and Hephaistos are carrying out a binding ritual upon the person of Prometheus. Why would the wedge be driven all the way

(= Jordan no. 44), where the target, Litias, is cursed both at the beginning and the end of the tablet with similar language.

⁹ As argued by Graf, *Magic* 131. The alternative view is that the spoken incantation was more important than the written one, as suggested by pierced blank tablets (e.g. *DT Aud.* 109) and those with only lists of names recorded without a verb. Faraone, in *Magika* 5, in support of this point mentions also the ὕμνος δέσμιος of the *Eumenides* and a fifth-century Sicilian tablet (Jordan no. 91) that refers to itself as an εὐχά.

through his chest? The word *διαμπαξ* is important here; it directly evokes the piercing of the curse tablet by a nail and the impaling of some “voodoo” figurines by a nail through the chest. This puncture, ordinarily completed at the culmination of the ritual, appears to have sealed the binding curse. Why does Hephaistos do this immediately after binding the hands and arms and before the legs? In other binding texts, the events are also out of the natural order: e.g., “All these I bind down ... I bury them, I nail them down” (*DT Aud.* 49.17), when one would expect binding, then nailing, then burial. The nailing in this passage is postponed to the end for effect, as it is the most important single action.¹⁰ Contrary to the typical binding spell, the piercing of Prometheus’ chest occurs halfway through the procedure, demonstrating the variability of the curse sequence.¹¹ This bizarre impaling is better interpreted in the ritual context of a magical curse, although it remains a part of the physical binding and torture of Prometheus.

After the gruesome piercing, Hephaistos fixes on the *μασχαλιστήρας* (71), the word for the girth or strap for a horse’s yoke. Presumably this is another type of restraint (possibly leather?) that binds Prometheus’ chest. This word choice conjures up images of animal training and submission, which is essentially what Zeus is trying to inflict upon Prometheus. Finally, Hephaistos binds the legs with circular bonds (*κίρκωσον*) and attaches the *διατόρους πέδας* (74–76), probably to the feet. These can be translated as “piercing bonds” (i.e. with spikes sticking into the feet) or as “pierced bonds,” implying that a nail or bolt would hold them shut.¹² This concludes the binding

¹⁰ Graf, *Magic* 134, similarly suggests that nailing is placed last because it is the most aggressive act and forms the climax of the ceremony. Whether that was the importance of the action, or nailing simply represents the closing of the curse, it was a significant step in the curse process, and one with some fluidity in the written sequence of the curse.

¹¹ Perhaps this occurs after the binding of the arms because it is on Hephaistos’ natural path down to the legs. After all, Hephaistos is the quintessential craftsman, and should be expected to be a model of efficiency.

¹² I agree with M. Griffith, *Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge 1983) 98, that the latter is more probable (there is no reason for “piercing bonds” to be used here).

of Prometheus: he is bound hand and foot, on his arms and legs, around his chest by the girth and through his chest by the wedge. The binding of hands and feet, as well as the piercing, fit the formula of spell inscriptions, but leave out some of the most important parts from those texts—the “tongue, soul, and speech” mentioned in judicial *defixiones* (*DT Aud.* 49). There are two possible reasons for this discrepancy. The first is practical: if Prometheus could not speak, the play would be much less interesting. The second is related to the plot. Zeus knows that he will have to obtain information from Prometheus concerning Thetis and the possibility of his overthrow. In order to allow Prometheus to divulge this information, Zeus cannot bind Prometheus’ mouth, as much as he might like to. Prometheus takes full advantage of this by speaking badly about Zeus whenever possible. This provides further evidence for magical overtones of the physical binding of Prometheus—just as curse tablets and figurines are physically treated in order to affect magically the target of the curse, so too is Prometheus, so that he will be weakened and submit to the will of Zeus.

The final stage in any binding curse is the burial of the curse tablet. Indeed, in the last scene of the play, we see Prometheus engulfed in the storm of torment sent by Zeus, bringing to a close the magical ritual begun in the first scene. Prometheus knows where this storm will take him (1050–1052): “let [Zeus] on high cast my body down to dark Tartarus with the strong whirlpools of necessity” (εἰς τε κελαινὸν Τάρταρον ἄρδην ὄψειε δέμας τοῦμὸν ἀνάγκης στεροαῖς δίναις). After the binding is physically accomplished and Prometheus has been pierced through, Zeus finishes the ritual by burying his adversary deep in the earth. That the final action of the play is also the final action of the ritual is significant, recalling for the audience the first scene of the play and the initiation of the binding ritual, and paralleling the structure of a cursing ritual. Zeus’ direct involvement is in keeping with what is known about the division of labor involved in the binding curse; while the specialist would inscribe the spell and pierce the tablet, it is possible that the *defigens* (client) himself would bury the inscrip-

tion.¹³ Zeus had previously acted through his agent Kratos to bind Prometheus, but now takes the role of *defigens* himself at the final step.

Zeus and Prometheus

The question arises why Zeus would be interested in using this magic against Prometheus when he could just strike him with a thunderbolt or imprison him in Hades. The use of the binding curse in Athenian society, and for that matter the Greek world as a whole, was intended to weaken an opponent for an upcoming confrontation. In that contest, whether of a judicial, athletic, or amorous nature, the curser seeks to gain any advantage possible over his opponent, and the binding curse might help by tripping up the opponent at a crucial point. Zeus anticipates such a struggle with Prometheus over divulging the prophecy concerning his overthrow, so a magical binding of Prometheus would weaken him for that confrontation.

Another undertone can be seen in Zeus' reasons for binding Prometheus. A common theme in binding curses is that the opponent who is cursed is almost always a near-equal rival in a particular sphere, including economic, athletic, amorous, and political opponents. In this case, Prometheus and Zeus are at opposite ends of the political spectrum. While Prometheus aided Zeus against the Titans, his own brothers, during the struggle for the throne of heaven, he now favors men. Prometheus' theft of fire, as well as his deceit in establishing burnt sacrifice, were manifestations of his lack of respect for Zeus. In the opening speech of the play, Kratos states that he and Hephaistos are to punish Prometheus for stealing fire and giving it to mankind (7–8). It is only later, after repeated entreaties from the chorus, Oceanus, and Io, that Prometheus assents to divulge his prophetic knowledge of the overthrow of Zeus and his unique ability to prevent it. As Prometheus is both very

¹³ It is unclear what role the curser had in the creation of a binding curse. He probably was responsible for certain verbal and somatic elements of the spell, perhaps including the final burial of the tablet; Graf, *Magic* 147; but see J. G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford 1992) 118, for the opposite view.

clever and prophetic, he is a worthy adversary of the all-mighty king of the gods. In addition, he is immortal, so Zeus cannot simply kill him, but more importantly—as Prometheus frequently points out throughout the play—he holds the knowledge that Zeus needs to maintain power, and for that reason Zeus might seek magical assistance against him. As noted by Galen, the efficacy of a *defixio iudicaria* lay in preventing an opponent from speaking well in court: καταδήσαι τοὺς ἀντιδίκους, ὡς μηδὲν ἐπὶ τοῦ δικανικοῦ δυνηθῆναι φθέγξασθαι (XII 251 K.). Zeus binds Prometheus in anticipation of a verbal battle, so again the form of a judicial curse is appropriate.

Kratos as the *defigens* orders Hephaistos to bind the body of Prometheus and pierce him, following the practice of a binding curse; but throughout the entire binding scene, Prometheus does not say a word.¹⁴ Several possibilities present themselves for why this would be the case, but the effect is that Prometheus is very much a physical medium for the binding rather than a clearly living entity. In a sense, during the binding he is reduced to the status of an inscribed lead curse strip or figurine, as the medium of a binding spell. Zeus is the king of the gods, and so he does not write on and bury a lead strip: he shackles and buries his opponent's body. Since Prometheus himself is a being of great power, a simple written curse might have no effect, while a ritual of this scale seeks to reduce his power substantially. As Kratos says, “bind him well ... for he is terribly clever” (58–59). Zeus is prevented from simply disposing of Prometheus, so he must inflict this magical torture upon his opponent to attempt to gain the upper hand in this contest of wills. Binding curses were often used against political adversaries in Athens, so the scenario in the play mirrors contemporary Athenian life.¹⁵ This is another case of the Greek gods

¹⁴ Perhaps also an indication that the spell is working: see Faraone's argument that Orestes' silence during his trial in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* indicates the success of the Furies' binding spell; C. A. Faraone, “Curses and Social Control in the Law Courts of Classical Athens,” in D. Cohen (ed.), *Demokratie, Recht und soziale Kontrolle im klassischen Athen* (Munich 2002) 77–92, at 88.

¹⁵ Faraone, in *Magika* 3–32; see also Jordan, *Praktika* 273–277, for a prosopographical reconstruction of the identity of some authors and targets of judicial curses in the late fifth century.

possessing social customs similar to those of contemporary humans, although as king of the gods, Zeus carries out his curse against his political rival Prometheus in a more elaborate and dramatic fashion, involving a physical shackling and piercing of Prometheus' body rather than of a strip of lead.

Additional sources for the magical binding of Prometheus

The earliest mention of the myth of Prometheus stealing fire for mankind and his subsequent punishment appears in the *Theogony* of Hesiod (615–616): Prometheus “did not escape the harsh wrath [of Zeus], but, by necessity, a great bond held him, although he was very wise,”

τοῖό γ' ὑπεξήλυξε βαρὺν χόλον, ἀλλ' ὑπ' ἀνάγκης
καὶ πολύιδρον ἐόντα μέγας κατὰ δεσμὸς ἐρύκει.

This δεσμός is not further described, but has usually been interpreted as a physical restraint to the rock.

An individual familiar with the term κατάδεσμος who heard this passage of Hesiod could have interpreted it differently. The words μέγας δεσμὸς are generally taken as the subject of the verb κατ[ὰ]ἐρύκει, where the prefix κατα has been separated from ἐρύκει by tmesis. This also could be understood by a fifth-century listener, however, as μέγας κατάδεσμος ἐρύκει. This does not change the meaning of the verb, as the simple and compound forms both mean “held,” but the noun κατάδεσμος suggests a binding curse.¹⁶ To the listener, certainly, these are equivalent interpretations of the sentence, and the listener's understanding of this line would be context dependent.¹⁷

Since Hesiod's poem predates all known curse tablets in Greece,¹⁸ there is no epigraphic evidence that the term κατά-

¹⁶ There is no metrical necessity for separating the verb prefix by tmesis. The line could end μέγας δεσμὸς κατέρυκει and still fit the meter, the only changes being a spondee rather than a dactyl in the fourth foot and the loss of the bucolic caesura.

¹⁷ The resulting change in accentuation is minor and unlikely to affect interpretation.

¹⁸ Hesiod is put in the later eighth century or first half of the seventh century: M. L. West, *Hesiod Theogony* (Oxford 1966) 40–44, suggests 730–700 B.C.; R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod, and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in Epic Diction* (Cambridge 1982) 94–98, places the work between 700 and 660.

δεσμος existed at the time with the meaning “binding curse.” Whether by coincidence or possible deliberate composition, however, the text would have conveyed that sense to later listeners familiar with the conventions of binding rituals. The author of *Prometheus Bound* could certainly have been among those, and this line might have suggested to him the connection between the physical torture of Prometheus and the invocation of a binding spell proposed here.¹⁹

Further support for the direct association of the myth of Prometheus and inscribed curses in the fifth century is provided by an unpublished tablet from Aegina, which was excavated by Papachristodoulou and mentioned in a 1970 excavation report.²⁰ This lead sheet came from Tomb 1, which was originally constructed in the Archaic period but used over the following centuries; it was wrapped around an iron nail. Papachristodoulou mentions that the interior sides were inscribed, but gives no further indication of the content. David Jordan, however, has had the opportunity to examine the inscription and reports that it has fifth-century Attic lettering, and that, although the text is fragmentary at the outset, it refers to the binding of Prometheus by Bia, Kratos, and Hephaistos as an analogue for the binding curse that follows.²¹ The fifth-century date of this inscription, together with its mention of Kratos and Bia, previously unassociated with the myth, suggests that the curse postdates *Prometheus Bound* and that a viewer replicated its magical binding on his or her curse tablet. In any case, this in-

¹⁹ Although ancient editors and authors believed the play to be the work of Aeschylus, a great deal of scholarship in the last century has been devoted to its proper attribution: see O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) 460–469; M. Griffith, *The Authenticity of ‘Prometheus Bound’* (Cambridge 1977) 1–3. Griffith was the first to examine objectively and statistically the style of the text and conclude that Aeschylus was not the author. M. L. West, “The Prometheus Trilogy,” *JHS* 99 (1979) 130–148, and *Studies in Aeschylus* (Stuttgart 1990) 65, establishes 430 as the *terminus ante quem* and argues convincingly for Euphorion, the eldest son of Aeschylus, as the author.

²⁰ I. Papachristodoulou, *ArchDelt* 25 B.1 (1970) 130–132: a group of three tombs excavated along the course of a modern road at Muloi.

²¹ David Jordan, personal communication, 2001 and 2004. Papachristodoulou’s publication of the tablet is forthcoming.

scribed curse demonstrates the direct link between the binding of Prometheus in literature and the magical ritual of inscribing curses on lead tablets.

Conclusions

Language in *Prometheus Bound* suggests that Zeus has ordered a magical ritual as well as a punishment against his foe. The date of the play is likely in the late fifth century, a time when judiciary curses were used in Athenian politics on a regular basis, so that the audience of *Prometheus Bound* could have understood the binding to be both physical and magical in nature. The appearance of the term *κατάδεσμος* in the late eighth-early seventh century text of Hesiod, though likely not intended at the time, may have been interpreted as such by a later audience. This suggests that the author of *Prometheus Bound* understood magical overtones in the binding in Hesiod, although it is conceivable that the association of a binding curse with the myth of Prometheus existed prior to the date of the first inscribed curse tablets that survive. Cursing and magic were part of Greek culture contemporary with our earliest texts (including Hesiod), as suggested by the Archaic bronze figurines of Tegea and Cephallenia, although the ritual inscription of curse tablets did not occur until the fifth century in Greece, contemporary with *Prometheus Bound*.²²

The *κατάδεσμος*, or binding curse, is used in a competition with an uncertain outcome. As Graf says, “it is always a situation in which a great uncertainty predominates, one that will be resolved by a future decision, while the ways to influence the result are very limited.”²³ In this very case, the future is uncertain: Zeus’ rule could collapse as had Uranos’ and Cronos’ before him. Prometheus holds the key, and must be convinced to reveal his secret. Indeed, Zeus has few options for how to convince Prometheus to disclose this information, so a binding curse is appropriate. The association of this magical curse with the myth of the punishment of Prometheus, possibly based on the description in the *Theogony*, is described in *Prometheus Bound*

²² Faraone, *CLAnt* 10 (1991) 201 nos. 8, 10. See also his arguments for verbal spells predating written curses, *JHS* 105 (1985) 153.

²³ Graf, *Magic* 157.

in the context of contemporary *defixiones iudicariae*. The physical binding of Prometheus represents a magical ritual common in contemporary Athenian life that would have been understood as such by the late-fifth-century audience of the play.²⁴

January, 2007

Cotsen Institute of Archaeology
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA 90095
marston@ucla.edu

²⁴ Many thanks are due to those who read drafts of this paper since its inception and for their many insightful comments and suggestions: Susan Rotroff, Robert Lamberton, David Jordan, John Papadopoulos, Christopher Faraone, Kathryn Morgan, Sarah Morris, Brendan Burke, and particularly to Kent Rigsby, the editorial board of *GRBS*, and an anonymous reviewer. Special thanks are owed to David Jordan for bringing the unpublished Aegina inscription to my attention.