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CURSES, CRIME DETECTION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION AT THE FESTIVAL OF DEMETER THESMOPHOROS

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Abstract: At the heart of the Thesmophoria festival lies the story of Persephone and the promise of agricultural fertility, but scholars point out that more seems to be at stake, suggesting that the scene of women ‘camping out’ in the sanctuary under the control of the female archons recalls a primitive time when women, perhaps, ruled the city or that the festival creates a place where women are at least beyond the control of men. There are hints, moreover, that during the Thesmophoria women were also actively involved in some kind of juridical activity, especially on the second day of the festival, when they fasted in imitation of Demeter’s grief over the abduction of Persephone and the injustice perpetrated against her. Indeed, the epithet Thesmophoros was understood already in ancient times to have some connection with human law. This paper argues that on the second day of the festival women engaged in some kind of impromptu juridical procedure aimed at solving crimes and punishing anonymous wrongdoers and it uses as evidence Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae and a series of curse inscriptions deposited in late Hellenistic times at the Sanctuary of Demeter at Cnidus, as well as a few single examples from Locri, Amorgos and elsewhere.

Aristophanes sets the action of one of his comic plays at the Thesmophoria, an important religious festival, during which the women of Athens gathered once each year to celebrate the secret rites of the goddess Demeter in a series of sanctuaries scattered throughout the city, the biggest of which stood above the Agora on the slope of the Acropolis.1 This three-day festival2 commemorated the grief of Demeter after the disappearance of her daughter and it created – for a short time, at least – a separate community of women, who slept on mats in makeshift huts, fasted for the entire second day and, on the third day, made animal sacrifices and feasted, all the while being governed by archousai, the temporary female equivalent of the male archons who stood at the head of the Athenian state.3 Central to the festival was a strange ritual during which a special team

1 Until recently most scholars, for example Parke (1977) 85; Simon (1983) 18, n.5; Burkert (1985) 242; Bowie (1993) 205–08; Versnel (1993) 240, no. 40, have all followed Thompson (1936), who argued that the site was on or near the Pnyx; Broneer (1942) had argued on the minority side that the City Eleusinion was the site and recently the tide has changed in his favour, albeit in the more sophisticated argument of Clinton (1996), who is followed by, for example, Bremmer (1994) 77, n.32; Sommerstein (1994) 196–97; Austin (1990) 20; Mikalson (2005) 144. Bierl (2009) 151–52 follows Henderson (2000) 448 in preferring Thompson’s thesis. Clinton (1996) shows, in fact, that there is no evidence for a single national festival, but plenty of evidence for local celebrations in small deme-sanctuaries, and thus suggests that Aristophanes probably reflects the local celebration of the largest and most central urban deme (Melite) at the City Eleusinon.

2 This is the view of most scholars, see, for example, Clinton (1996) 115–17, but the sources are problematic and scepticism persists in some quarters; see, for example, Robertson (1999) 1–14.

3 See, for example, Brumfield (1981) 70–103; Kron (1992) 615–20; Bowie (1993) 206–07 (‘they are symbolically replacing the men at the political centre of the city’); or Lowe (1998) 149 (‘[The festival] is constructed on exclusively female collective religious space in the very heart of the male city’).
of women climbed down into a pit called a *megaron*, scooped up the rotting remains of piglets that had been placed there on a previous occasion and brought them back to the surface, where these remains were mixed with seed-corn to promote the abundance of the next harvest.4

At its heart, then, this festival was concerned with the rape of Persephone and with agricultural fertility, but scholars have rightly pointed out that more seems to be at stake here. Some suggest that the scene of women ‘camping out’ in the sanctuary under the control of the female *archons* recalls a primitive and pre-cultural time when women, perhaps, ruled the city.5 Other scholars claim that the festival creates a place of reversal or lawlessness where women are at least beyond the control of men.6 There are hints, however, that during the Thesmophoria women were also involved in some kind of juridical activity, especially on the second day of the festival, when they fasted in imitation of Demeter’s grief over the abduction of Persephone and the injustice perpetrated against her.7 Indeed, already in ancient times the Greeks understood the epithet Thesmophoros to have some connection with human law.8

The connection between the Thesmophoria festival and legal procedures is, in fact, most obvious in the central action of Aristophanes’ play: a plan to convict the playwright Euripides on a capital charge, because he is constantly slandering women in his tragic plays. Thus, in the opening scene, when the character Euripides informs his Kinsman about the plot, the Kinsman asks with disbelief (lines 77−85):9 ‘How can that be? The courts won’t be trying cases today, and the council isn’t in session either, because it is the middle day of the Thesmophoria’. Euripides, however, responds that ‘today in the sanctuary of the Two Thesmophoroi [i.e. Demeter and her daughter Persephone] they’re going to hold an assembly (ἐκκλησίαζειν) on the question of my destruction... Because I write tragedies and slander them (κακῶς αὐτὰς λέγω)’10. As some scholars suggest, the closure of the civic courts and the political assembly of Athens on the same day as the juridical meeting of the women at the Thesmophoria points vaguely to some alternate, female system of justice – albeit a temporary one – that fits well within the larger pattern of female rule or self-rule during the three days of the festival.11

Could it be that Aristophanes’ play reflects some historical reality that the women of Athens on one day of the year might indeed have sat in judgment on slanderers or other kinds of wrongdoers – even men, if we take the case of Euripides as our model? This is hard to say, of course, because the secret rites were so well guarded that we know very little about what actually took place during the festival. There is, moreover, the larger problem of using comedy as a source for history. Aristophanes is our earliest and most detailed source for the Athenian version of the Thesmophoria, but it is unclear how much of his account reflects the late fifth-century reality of the festival and how much of it is simply comic invention or inversion. In the play, for example, Aristophanes repeatedly calls this group of women an ‘assembly’ (ἐκκλησία) and he presents the speech of the Heraldess as if she were opening up a female version of the democratic Assembly of Athens, rather than a religious festival:12

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4 See, for example, Parke (1977) 82–84; Burkert (1985) 242–44; Kron (1992) 615–17.
7 Plut. Mor. 378e; Dem. 30.
8 Literally it means ‘she who carries or produces the things that have been set down’, and scholars usually connect the epithet with farming, either to the piglets that are thrown down into the *megaron* or to the invention of agriculture itself, see, for example, Parke (1977) 83–84; Brumfield (1981) 72–73; Burkert (1985) 246; Parker (2007) 280. Simon (1983) 22 suggests that the *thesoi* may have been compost heaps originally. But as early as the Classical period we hear that it also refers to Demeter as a law-giver or an overseer of traditional customs; see Dillon (2002) 280.
9 Translations from Henderson (2000).
10 Lines 181–82.
11 For example, Zeitlin (1982) 139; Detienne (1989) 138–39. Bowie (1993) 209 suggests that Aristophanes himself makes this leap: ‘Aristophanes is again pushing the logic of the Thesmophoria’s ideology to comic limits: the festival is one of reversal and the male courts close, so why should the women not usurp the judicial function?’.
12 *Thesmophoriazusae* 372–79 in my translation.
Let every woman pay attention! The following things seemed best to the assembly (βουλή) of women – with Timocleia presiding, Lysilla serving as secretary and Sostrate proposing: to make an assembly (ἐκκλησία) at dawn on the middle day of the Thesmophoria, when we have the most free time (σχολή), and to decide first about what sort of punishment Euripides is to suffer, because he seems to do wrong to all of us (ἀδικεῖν γὰρ δοκεῖ ἡμῖν ἀπάσαςιν).

At this point in the play, at least, Aristophanes seems to combine a comic fantasy of a separate female legislative body with another, equally funny, depiction of the mysterious religious festival celebrated in the Sanctuary of Demeter. On the one hand, since from time to time the popular Assembly of men did prosecute individuals for crimes against the state, there is some logic to the Aristophanic combination here of male civic practice and female religious festival. But note once again the emphasis on the timing of the assembly on the second day of the festival, when the worshippers ‘have the most free time (σχολή),’ an important ritual feature of the Thesmophoria that Aristophanes could have easily left unmentioned.

In what follows, in fact, I shall press the case that here and elsewhere Aristophanes makes equally good use of the religious setting as a model for the prosecution of Euripides and that various speeches and actions in Aristophanes’ play of 411 BC reflect the idea that the women of Athens assembled at the Thesmophoria engaged in some kind of juridical procedure that aimed at solving crimes and convicting wrongdoers. I shall adduce as my chief comparanda similar accusations and procedures that appear in a series of curse inscriptions deposited in late Hellenistic times at the Sanctuary of Demeter Thesmophoros at Cnidus, as well as two other examples that seem to survive from Demeter sanctuaries in western Locri and Amorgos. I am not claiming, of course, that the rituals and formulas were the same in these different cities and time periods, but rather that they belong to the same ancient genre of cursing and that with care they can be used profitably to enlighten our understanding of Aristophanes’ play and give us new insight into the use of these sanctuaries in Athens and elsewhere as alternative sites for juridical discourse and conflict resolution.

I. The Cnidian curse tablets as prayers for justice
The best comparanda for similar juridical activity in sanctuaries of Demeter are 13 curse tablets from the Sanctuary of Demeter at Cnidus that date to the late Hellenistic period and give us important insights into how women might have used the sanctuary and perhaps even the occasion of the Thesmophoria to detect and punish wrongdoers, especially in cases of theft and malicious slander. In the real world of Cnidian ritual the women did not, however, take matters directly into their own hands like the women in Aristophanes’ play, but rather they appealed to Demeter and Kore to punish with fever and divine displeasure those who had mistreated or harmed them. It will become clear, however, from the public display of these curses and their appeals to justice, that their efficacy nonetheless depends in some large part on an implied audience of female worshippers, who might provide missing information about unsolved crimes and who might...
also bring social pressure to bear upon the alleged criminals (both male and female) and thereby resolve the conflict. As we shall see, even when the perpetrator was, like Euripides, a male, the women collected in the Thesmophorion seem to have provided enough community knowledge to help sharpen and articulate accusations as well as enough authority to broker negotiation and possibly even agreement between the disputing parties.

The curse tablets were discovered in the 19th century by C.T. Newton, while he was excavating a Demeter sanctuary that stood halfway up the acropolis of ancient Cnidus. Within this terrace he found votives of the type usually associated with Demeter Thesmophoros, for example, images of piglets (see Fig. 1) or women holding piglets. There was also an elliptical pit, which Newton tentatively identified as the *megaron* that one typically finds in sanctuaries of Demeter Thesmophoros. The lead curse tablets were discovered amidst a group of fragmentary statues and inscriptions dedicated by a group of apparently prosperous women.

Typical of the texts inscribed on the tablets is this pair of anonymous curses, the first against a slanderer and the second against someone who has made written accusations (*DT* 4a = Blümel no. 150a):

![Text of curse tablets]

\begin{quote}
I am dedicating to Demeter and Kore the person who slandered me [i.e. by saying] that I am preparing poisons [or perhaps ‘magic spells’] against my husband. May he go up to Demeter with all his family confessing out loud, because he is burnt [i.e. by fever]. And may he not find Demeter and Kore merciful, nor the gods with Demeter. As for me let it be lawful and free, if I come under the same roof as he or if I ever in any way have dealings with him.

I am also dedicating the person who made written charges against me or even the one who commanded [i.e. others to do so]. And may he not find Demeter and Kore, nor the gods with Demeter merciful, but may he go up together with all his family to Demeter because he is burnt [i.e. by fever]\footnote{It is unclear if the second curse ends here, since the bottom edge of the tablet is jagged and since most of the other texts end with the self-protection clauses discussed below.}

The first curse seems designed to ferret out and punish an unknown slanderer by dedicating the alleged culprit to Demeter, who (we infer) will make the perpetrator ill with fever\footnote{See Versnel (1994) for a detailed discussion of the term πεπρήμενος.} and cause him to ‘go up to Demeter’ (i.e. to the sanctuary halfway up the slope of the acropolis) and confess his crime. Such a public confession will, of course, inform the community of the source of the...
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anonymous slander, whereas the fever will serve both as a punishment of this individual and as a warning to others who might be tempted to slander in the future. If successful, then, this text adopts two roles: that of a private investigator (it reveals a hidden slanderer) and that of a successful prosecutor (it sees to it that the slander is punished).20

Another fairly well-preserved tablet reveals a somewhat different scenario and goal (DT 2 = Blümel no. 148):21

Artemeis is consecrating (ἀνατυροὶ) to Demeter, to Kore, to all the gods with Demeter, whomever did not return the cloaks, the clothes and the short frock that I left behind, although I asked for them back. May he personally carry them up to Demeter, and if anyone [else] has my things, burnt [i.e. with fever] and confessing out loud. But may it be lawful and free for me to drink and eat with [him] and to come under the same roof [as he]. For I have been wronged (ἀδικημαί), Mistress Demeter.

In this case a woman named Artemeis ‘consecrates’ (ἀνατυροὶ), rather than ‘dedicates’ (ἐναθήμαν), the alleged criminal, who in addition to confessing publicly and being punished with fever, must also return the stolen property. The language of consecration and dedication in all of the Cnidian curses suggests that these tablets were publicly displayed in the sanctuary and, in fact, the lead tablet on which Artemeis inscribed her curse has a suspension hole in the middle of its upper margin (see Fig. 2).22

Public display is also suggested by the analogy with other objects found in the same area: fragments of a number of marble statues of women or goddesses and various votive inscriptions, which all date stylistically and epigraphically to roughly the same period as the curses, that is to the second or first century BC. Two of these inscriptions give us a sense of the close relationship between the curses and the other dedications (Blümel nos 135, 138):

Nikoklea, daughter of Nikochoros and wife of Apollophanes [dedicated this] to Demeter and Kore and the gods with Demeter as [i.e. the fulfillment of] a vow.

20 I suggest below that the second curse was probably added at a slightly later time as an afterthought (line 7: ἰδαντυροὶ δὲ καὶ, ‘I am also dedicating…’) in response to some additional written assertion of the slander.
21 This translation follows that of Versnel (1991) 72.
22 Newton (1863) 724 says explicitly that the tablets had holes in their edges for suspension and Blümel (1992) 85 notes that of the half dozen or so scholars who have edited or worked on these texts, only Audollent believed they were secretly buried and not hung publicly on the wall. See more recently Riel (1995) 70 (‘The tablets were publicly displayed at the temple, since publicity was indispensable for their effectiveness’); Versnel (2009) 280–81, who says that they ‘often seem happy to publicize both the complaint or accusation and the intervention requested by the divinity’. He rightly cautions in n.22 that ‘in the West, these prayers were not always intended for display’ pointing out the curses from Bath as the most prominent example.
Plathainis, wife of Plato, dedicated (ἀνθήκε) [this] to Demeter and Kore and the gods with Demeter and Kore as a thank offering and a payment (χαριστεία καὶ ἐκτίμαστρα).

Note that these inscriptions invoke the same gods as the curses and that the second uses a verb of dedication that we also find in the curses, albeit in the aorist rather than present tense.

The Cnidian lead tablets use two Greek verbs of dedication interchangeably: ἀναστρέψων, ‘to consecrate’ or ‘to make holy’ (i.e. to cede as property to the goddess), and ἀναστιθέναι, ‘to set up’ a gift, such as a statue or an altar, in the sanctuary of a god or goddess. In two of the Cnidian curses (DT 4b, 6) women dedicate lost articles (a bracelet and a cloak), a formal act – common in such curses against thieves – that turns the thief into a temple robber, because as a result of the dedication the goddess herself becomes the victim of theft. In six other curses (DT 2, 3a, 5, 8, 10, 12), however, women dedicate the anonymous person(s) who have mistreated them. And in every case the use of the present tense (instead of the expected aorist) suggests that these acts of dedication and consecration are still in process and will not, in fact, be completed until the criminal physically comes into the sanctuary to confess or until the stolen property is placed in the home of its new owner, the goddess. These lead tablets are in some part, then, proleptic dedicatory plaques for items of the goddess’ property that will soon appear in the sanctuary.

24 I thank Cliff Ando for pointing this out.
25 The use of ἀναστρέψων may help, moreover, to explain the use of the adjective ὁσιος in the self-protection clauses (discussed below), which ask that the affairs of the author of the curse be ὁσια καὶ ἐλεοθερα. I have translated the first of these terms above as ‘lawful’, because the adjective ὁσιος has two distinct meanings, depending on the word it is contrasted with: it can signify ‘lawful in the eyes of the gods’ or ‘sanctioned by divine law’ (when contrasted with ἱερος, ‘sanctified by human law’), but it can also mean ‘permitted by divine law’ (when contrasted with λειψα, which means ‘sacred’ or ‘forbidden by divine law (i.e. to touch)’); see Connor (1988) 169–64; Kearns (1995) 512–13. Thus in her curse, Artemis is consecrating (ἀναστρέψω) the unknown thief – thus making him ἱερος, like a sacrificial victim or any other dedication – while at the same time she asks that all things be for herself ὁσια and ἐλεοθερα, ‘permitted in the eyes of the gods (= not ἱερος)’ and ‘permitted in the eyes of men’.
have harmed them, this fact does not exclude the possibility that women are included in the pool of possible suspects as well, since masculine pronouns and participles often stand for both male and female in such indefinite constructions, especially in legal or legalistic texts such as these.26

The Cnidian lead tablets belong to a special genre of curse that Henk Versnel has aptly named ‘prayers for justice’, in which the authors imagine themselves standing before a divine tribunal of sorts, at which they pray to a god or a panel of gods to punish a person who has allegedly committed a crime against them.27 The Cnidian curses are all concerned with such injustices (= Blümel nos 147–59):28

- DT 1: slander about poisoning a husband
- DT 2: missing clothing
- DT 3: missing deposit of money
- DT 4a: slander about poisoning a husband
- DT 4b: missing bracelet
- DT 5: missing husband
- DT 6: missing cloak
- DT 7: (accusation lost in lacunae)
- DT 8: theft and poisoning(?)
- DT 9: (accusation lost in lacunae)
- DT 10: missing husband
- DT 11: missing plate
- DT 12: missing drinking horns
- DT 13: assault and battery

As we can see, charges of theft predominate, as well as slander, all of which are usually lodged against an unknown perpetrator. There are, moreover, two implied audiences for these curses and two goals.29 On one level, the women directly address the gods of the sanctuary, with the hope that they will punish the alleged criminals with sickness and divine disfavour. But the texts also imply a human audience (see n.15) and with it a second goal: that the perpetrators and their criminal behaviour be revealed by public confessions to the community and that (in the case of theft) the missing property be returned. It does not suffice, in short, that the gods strike these criminals down with fever in the privacy of their own homes – usually they must come to the sanctuary personally to return the stolen goods or to confess their guilt in public.

II. Cnidian idiosyncracies: conditional blessings and protection clauses

The Cnidian curses have been studied primarily by scholars interested in confession and ‘heiliges Recht’30 or by those concerned with defining ‘prayers for justice’ and tracing their migration from the Levant, to the Greek world and then on to the Roman west.31 The category of ‘prayers for justice’, however, is a large and variegated one, so it is important to stress that in the pre-Roman

26 Michael Gagarin assures me per litteras that ‘it is clear that masculine forms are generic in Greek law. For example, Draco’s law refers to “the killer” (ho kteinas) but we know that it applied to women as well as men. Of course, Draco was probably thinking primarily of men killing other men, but the gender itself cannot be taken as excluding women’.
28 Basically they concern slander or things (and husbands) that have gone missing. Newton (followed by Audollent and Blümel) published the curses in the order of their legibility, so those at the end of the list are extremely lacunose.
30 Steinleitner (1913) 61–70; Latte (1920) 80–82; Zingerlie (1926); Bjöck (1938) 21–24. See Versnel (2002) 50–56 for a succinct summary of these earlier studies. More recent studies in this tradition include Ricl (1995); Chaniotis (2004).
examples, at least, the authors of prayers for justice are almost always women, who (with one notable exception) always invoke a female deity, usually a powerful mother goddess like Demeter or the Mother of the Gods. These kinds of curses, in short, seem to originate as a distinctly female ritual often performed in a goddess sanctuary.32 The Cnidian curses are clearly part of this earlier ‘female’ tradition, but they display some further idiosyncrasies that mark them apart as an distinct sub-group of the prayers for justice. These differences are best illustrated by giving an outline of the ‘typical’ Cnidian curse.

(1) Dedication (‘I am dedicating/consecrating... to Demeter etc.’):
   (a) a lost/stolen object or
   (b) a (usually anonymous) criminal33

(2) Wish (‘may he...’):
   (a) conditional blessing and conditional curse of perpetrator or
   (b) unconditional curse

(3) Self-protection clause (‘may I (i.e. without threat of illness) be able to eat, drink and share a roof with the victim’)

(4) Justification (‘for I have been wronged...’)

Past treatments of these curses have focused almost entirely on the features they share with the wider category of judicial prayers: the act of dedication or consecration in section 1, the unconditional curses in section 2b or the justification for the curse in section 4. In what follows, however, I shall discuss two features of the Cnidian curses that are not common in other prayers for justice: the cautious and polite manner in which conditional curses and blessings are sometimes made (section 2a); and the provisions for self-protection in section 3. My goal is to show that both formulae, although common enough in other kinds of legal discourse, are nearly unique among Greek curse tablets and can be explained by the uniquely Thesmophoric situation of the Cnidian texts and their authors.

We find the first idiosyncratic feature − the mixture of curses and blessings − primarily in the curses against thieves, such as this curse of a woman named Hegemone (DT 4b = Blümel no. 150b):

I, Hegemone, am dedicating (ἀνατίθημι) the bracelet, which I lost (ἡν ἀπώλεσα) in the gardens of Rhodokles, to Demeter and Kore and all the gods and goddesses [with them]. If he gives it back, may all things be lawful and free for him <and> for those who recovered the reward(?)34 and for me, because

32 The exception is the curse of Micah’s mother to Jahweh in the Book of Judges, but here as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible one can suspect that Jahweh has supplanted an originally female deity; see Faraone et al. (2005) 183–84.
33 In DT 1, Antigone (uniquely) seems to dedicate herself conditionally for punishment (if she did indeed poison her husband) and then the slanderer (if the charge is false). The self-curse is unique in the corpus, although it is clearly connected with the conditional self-curses found, for example, in oaths and in testamentary oaths in lawsuits; see Faraone (1999 & 2002).
34 The Greek is as follows: ἐνατίθημι κομισαμένοις τὸ κόμιστρον. This is difficult to translate, because of the lacuna and because the phrase has no parallel in any of the other tablets. Hegemone uses the same participle (although a present, rather than an aorist one) to describe herself in the next clause (καὶ ἐμοὶ τῇ κομισμένῃ). If the text is sound then there seem to be three parties who will benefit: the thief, Hegemone and a third party (those who accepted a “finder’s fee”; see Versnel (2002) 56). Other possibilities: (i) if the restoration of κομιστρον is incorrect, then the third party might be those ‘who received’ the stolen property (see the curse of Artemeis (DT 2.13–14) which asks that the thief burn ‘even if someone else has my possessions’); and (ii) if the participle κομισαμένοις was mistakenly written for the singular κομισμένῳ, then there are only two parties: the thief, who gave back the bracelet and ‘received the finder’s fee’, and Hegemone.
I recover [the bracelet] and for him, because he gave it back. But if he does not return it and if it is sold, for him let there be anger (ἔνθυμιον ἔττω) from Demeter, Kore and all the gods and goddesses who are with them...

In her appeal, Hegemone combines a conditional blessing and curse similar to those used in Greek oaths:35 if the finder returns the lost item, he will enjoy the divine favour of the goddesses, but if not, he will experience divine wrath instead. Such formulae are not, however, at all common in other prayers for justice, which typically focus simply on the punishment of the malefactor, who is offered no hope of reprieve.36

We should also note that by admitting at the very start that she ‘lost’ the bracelet Hegemone leaves open a face-saving option to the person who might with easier conscience return a ‘lost’ object, rather than a ‘stolen’ one. We see a similar pattern in another Cnidian curse, the name of whose author is lost in the initial lacuna (DT 6a = Blümel no. 152):

[So-and-so is dedicating] to Demeter and Kore... the cloak she lost (Ὅ ἀπώλεσεν). And if he gives it back, may she [Demeter] be merciful to him, but if he does not give it back, may he carry it up by himself to Demeter and Kore, burnt by fever, and may he not find them merciful, until [he gives it back.]

Here, the author, like Hegemone, admits culpability at the start when she describes ‘the cloak she lost’ and then offers a conditional blessing, if the cloak is returned. Had she or Hegemone wished, they could have easily chosen verbs that made clear the active guilt of the person who now has their bracelet or cloak. Indeed, on most curses against thieves we find such active phrases like κλέφαντα (‘the one who stole’) or ἔραντα (‘the one who took’), which leave the action and guilt in no doubt.37

What motivates the evenhandedness of these two Cnidian curses, which is so unconventional for such prayers for justice? In a curse discussed earlier, for example, Artemeis asked that the person who refused to return her missing clothes be struck with fever (DT 2.5–16). There are no conditions and there is no mention of a possible blessing, if the materials are returned. Why, then, does Hegemone approach the matter so differently from Artemeis? If such curses are designed solely for revenge or personal catharsis, as some have suggested, why not simply ask in every case that the goddesses wipe these people off the face of the earth? It is hard to say precisely, but in both of the curses which deploy conditional blessings there seems to have been some doubt in the minds of the authors as to whether a crime had in fact been committed. All they seem to know for certain is that a valuable possession has vanished. From a practical point of view, moreover, such an evenhanded request to the goddesses might be more effective in getting back the lost

35 See, for example, the Hippocratic Oath: ‘If I fulfil this oath without violating it, may it be granted that I enjoy a happy life and profession, honoured always among men. But if I violate it and perjure myself, may the opposite befall me’ (text of Heiberg (1929) 27, in my translation). There are, in fact, quite a number of oaths, which, like the proverbial carrot and stick, encourage good behaviour with a promise of reward and discourage bad behaviour with a threat of punishment. See Faraone (1993); (2006).

36 See, for instance, among the examples in Gager (1992) nos 87 (‘avenge and seek [justice] speedily’), 90 (‘will be punished’), 93 (‘destroy him utterly from the human race’), 95 (‘let him spill his own blood’), 97 (‘let him pay with his own blood’). Versnel (2010) 230 rightly stresses that the general tone of prayers for justice ‘is often remarkably emotional... manifested in sharp terms of abuse, especially the cursing of (extended) lists of body parts... that are supposed to be afflicted, thus causing the target to suffer, waste away and even die’.

37 See, for example, SGD 58: ‘I enrol the one who took, the one who stole the necklace’ (καταγράφω τὸν ἀρντα, τὸν κλέφαντα τὸ δρακύλιον); or a similar curse from Megara: ‘the one who seized my copper coins’ (λαβόντα τὰ χαλκία) (DT 42a.1–2, first or second century AD). For discussion, see Faraone and Rife (2007) 152–53. Among the Latin prayers for justice from Bath, the verb involare, ‘to steal’ is standard; see Tomlin (1988) 64.
items, especially in a publicly displayed text. As counter-examples, it is instructive to note that in the two cases of malicious gossip (DT 1, 4a) and in the one case of assault and battery (DT 13) no conditional blessing is offered at all, presumably because there is no doubt that a crime has been committed.

There are signs, in fact, that the different rhetorical strategies of Artemeis and Hegemone represent discrete steps in a longer process of crime detection and conflict resolution, beginning with the conditional curses and blessings and ending with the unconditional ones. We can, in fact, see this very process evolve in a pair of curses set up by a woman named Nanas (DT 3 = Blümel no. 149):38

Side A
To Demeter and Kore and the gods beside Demeter and Kore Nanas is consecrating those who received (τοὺς λαβόντας) a deposit [i.e. of money] from Diokles and are not giving it back, but rather they deprive him of it. If they give it back, may things be lawful (διὰ) for them, but if they do not, unlawful (παρὰ διὰ) and may they [themselves] carry [the deposit] up to Demeter and Kore and the gods beside Demeter and Kore because they are being punished (κολαζόμενοι)...

Side B
To Demeter and Kore and the gods beside Demeter and Kore Nanas is consecrating Emphanes and Rhodo, because they received a deposit from Diokles and are not giving it back, but rather they are depriving him of it. May things be lawful for me, but unlawful for them, if they do not give it back. But if in any way they bring any counter argument [or perhaps 'slander', προκαταλαλοῦσι] against me... [bottom of tablet missing]

Both curses begin with the same formula of consecration and are apparently concerned with the same missing deposit, but it is difficult to explain the different approaches, especially if these curses were inscribed at the same time, as most commentators have assumed. On side A, the alleged criminals are apparently unknown and Nanas uses a conditional blessing and curse to encourage them to return the money. On side B, however, Nanas publicly names Emphanes and Rhodo – perhaps husband and wife – as the perpetrators, curses them unconditionally and apparently alludes to an upcoming dispute over the deposit.

Since Nanas, like all of the other self-identified authors of these Cnidian tablets, is a woman, I suggest some scenario like this: she knew that Diokles, a man who was perhaps her husband, brother or father, had deposited money with someone else, but he either forgot who was holding the deposit or had died and she was trying to discover their identities. Therefore the curse on side A against the anonymous holders of the deposit must have been set up first and, like all of the curses against unknown thieves, it was principally designed to ferret out the criminals and encourage them to return the deposit, rather than face divine anger and punishment. But how do we explain the second curse written on the backside of the first one?39 There are a number of

38 Her name suggests that she may have been a slave; see Bresson (1997) 123 for a slave named Nanas on the island of Rhodes.

39 Six of the 13 Cnidian curses were inscribed on both sides. In two of these cases (DT 2, 7) the writing on the back is simply the end of the standard self-protection clause and thus unnecessary for the reader to see. In four cases, however, the curse on the back seems to be complete: DT 1 (the self-curse of Antigone is on one side and on the reverse, after 22 lines of unreadable Greek, we find the self-protection clause; one might argue that this was a single and very long curse, but it does not make much sense to have a self-protection clause at the end of a conditional self-curse); DT 3 (the double curses of Nanas); DT 4 (the anonymous curse of a slanderer on one side and on the other Hegemone’s curse concerning the lost necklace); and DT 6 (two anonymous and fragmentary curses regarding a lost cloak). In the last case, both of these curses might, like the curses of Nanas, represent an escalation in the pressure on the anonymous thief. Both sides offer a short conditional blessing and then a long conditional curse, but they differ in two ways: the second curse uses the ἡσια/ἀνήσια formula and it aims at punishing the thief’s family as well as the thief himself, and thus seems to be an escalation of tactics.
possible scenarios, but all must assume that the first curse failed to get the holders of the deposit to return it and this required a second tougher approach to the problem. 40

There are, in fact, hints that a few more of the Cnidian curses were likewise part of an ongoing dialogue or separate steps in an ongoing process of criminal detection and conflict resolution. Artemeis mentions in passing that the unknown thief did not return her lost clothes ‘although I asked for them back’ (ἐμοὶ ἄριστον ἵππας) (DT 2.9–10). One might indeed wonder how Artemeis could have made such a request to an unknown thief! It is usually assumed (plausibly enough) that she made some public announcement or put up some kind of notice, similar perhaps to attaching a notice to a telephone pole in the hopes of locating a missing cat. But given the double curse of Nanas, another simpler possibility emerges: Artemeis may have requested their return in writing in an earlier and presumably more polite version of her curse set up in the same sanctuary.

There may be similar evidence for a sequence of appeals in the second part of the anonymous curse discussed earlier, in which a woman dedicates the slanderer who claimed she was preparing poisons for her husband (DT 4a). As we saw earlier, after the self-protection clause of the first curse, usually the coda to these texts, the author unexpectedly adds a second curse (lines 7–10):

I am also (καὶ) dedicating the person who made written charges against me or even the one who commanded [i.e. others to do so]. And may he not find Demeter and Kore, nor the gods with Demeter merciful, but may he go up together with all his family to Demeter because he is burnt [i.e. by fever].

The καὶ suggests that this second curse is an afterthought, but how long afterwards? Here, too, we might assume that the entire text was inscribed at the same time, but, as the curses of Nanas demonstrate, this need not have been the case. The second curse, moreover, distinguishes between the person in the first curse – who made accusations orally (τὸν κατ᾽ ἐμοὶ ἵππας = slanderer) – and a perhaps second individual, who did so in writing (τὸν κατ᾽ ἐμοὶ γράψαντα), an expression that could easily refer to formal charges laid before a court of law. But here in the quasi-juridical setting of these sanctuary curses, we might just as easily assume that the phrase refers to another tablet that had been inscribed and set up in the same sanctuary – a tablet that did not, however, survive antiquity.

I suggest, then, that when these lead tablets refer to their opponents’ written statements (‘he who made written charges against me’) or to previous, unanswered communications (‘although I asked for them back’) they are in dialogue with and reacting to other tablets displayed in the same sanctuary, much like the legal briefs or speeches of disputing litigants. How, then, are we to imagine such exchanges occurring in a sanctuary? In the case of prayers of justice generally, one imagines that they were publicly proclaimed or set up in the sanctuary on one of the many days it was open and then the community learned about it gradually through hearsay or subsequent visits. Sanctuaries of Demeter Thesmophoros, however, were different. They were usually extramural, often at a distance from the city or on the slopes of the acropolis set off from areas of habitation. 41 More important, perhaps, is the fact that, unlike other deities, any appeals to Demeter and her daughter were most likely timed to coincide with the expected appearance of others, uses the anonymous blessing-and-curse formula initially to put gentle pressure on her and Emphanes to return the deposit without publicly revealing their names. They could do so, because the first curse does not require public confession. When they responded to this pressure with a ‘counter argument of their own’, Nanas turned the tablet over and inscribed the second curse.

40 For example, the first curse either led a third person with knowledge of the deposit to give Nanas the names of the culprits, or perhaps it forced Emphanes and Rhodo to reveal themselves directly and to make the ‘counter argument’ mentioned at the end of the second curse. Another possible scenario is that the anonymity of the first curse was not the result of ignorance, but rather of tact: Nanas, suspecting that Rhodo, at least, would read the curse herself or hear about it from others.

41 Cole (1994).
of the two goddesses at a fixed point in the agrarian cycle of the city. So even if we leave open the possibility (as we must) that these tablets might have been inscribed and set up at other times of the year, it seems likely that worshippers would do so more frequently during the Thesmophoria on the day before Persephone was reunited with her mother, at a time, moreover, when any previously installed curses could also be read and considered by the mass of women assembled in the sanctuary. According to the Athenian schedule of the festival, the single day of the Nesteia, no matter how leisurely, may have been too short for the discussions and revisions that we imagined above for the curses of Nanas and others, but we do not know, in fact, how long the festival lasted in Cnidus. Indeed, in some cities it was extended to four, five or even ten days.

As it turns out, we find more hints about the timing of these curses in the second enigmatic feature of the Cnidian tablets mentioned earlier: the self-protection clauses, which appear at the end of most of them. Take for instance the stipulation at the end of the curse of Artemeis (DT 2a.16–b4), which reads: ‘But may it be lawful and free (ἴσια καὶ ἐλεύθερα) for me to drink and eat with [him] and to come under the same roof [as he]’, or the similar request at the end of the anonymous curse against a slanderer (DT 4a): ‘As for me let it be lawful and free, if I come under the same roof or if in any way I ever have dealings with him (ομοστηγήσασθαι... ἐπιπλέκουμένη).’ In both cases the authors are concerned that the curse they have invoked may accidentally fall upon their own heads, if they unwittingly come into close contact with the newly cursed thief or slanderer. That innocent bystanders could be harmed if they were in close proximity to a cursed or impious person was a fairly widespread belief in ancient Greece, but what do these Cnidian stipulations suggest about the freedom of movement of the women who authored them? In the 21st century, of course, Artemeis would be worried about the possibility of accidentally eating in the same restaurant, drinking at the same bar or staying in the same hotel with the unknown perpetrators, but in the ancient Greek world the movements of women would have been more tightly restricted and the chances of them sharing a meal under the same roof with someone who was not a family member or close friend seems remote under normal circumstances.

Commentators are generally puzzled by these Cnidian self-protection provisions and some even dismiss them as formulae borrowed blindly from male cursing-rituals. It is true that we find similar stipulations in other kinds of Greek sources, but here, too, it is odd that – aside from a single Locrian text discussed below – they do not appear again in the rather large corpus of lead curse tablets. There is, in short, something special about the context of the Cnidian curses that encourages the use of this formula. I suggest, in fact, but cannot prove, that these stipulations were generally designed to protect the author from contact with the unknown thief or slanderer for the limited time of the Thesmophoria festival. As was mentioned earlier, during this festival the women of the city lived together for a number of days in makeshift huts or tents and shared a meal with each other. These primitive and democratic arrangements create a much

42 According to Aristophanes, the prosecution of Euripides was to take place on the second day of the festival, the Nesteia, when – as Bierl (2009) 151 comments – there was ‘ample opportunity for such an assembly... and ample time for women to come together because of the obligatory fasting and the accompanying cessation of all activities’. Indeed the Heraldess herself in the speech quoted earlier (372–79) says that this was the day the women had the most free time (ἐγείρομαι).
44 See the bibliography collected by Versnel (1991) 91, n.143; (2002) 52, n.56.
45 Versnel (2002) 53 suggests that ‘chance encounters and unavoidable meetings can easily be imagined in a small face-to-face community’ and I would agree, but why do we not find these stipulations on other prayers for justice set up in small face-to-face communities?
46 Although there is no epigraphical evidence that the women of Cnidus celebrated the Thesmophoria in the sanctuary where the curses were found, most scholars assume that they did, for the reasons mentioned earlier: the presence of a megaron and votive statuettes of piglets and women holding piglets; see n.17 above.
greater possibility that the author of the curse might accidentally eat or drink or even share a hut with the woman she has just asked the goddess to punish.47 These self-protection clauses do not, of course, prove or even imply that all of the Cnidian perpetrators were assumed to be women in the sanctuary; I suggest only that, because of their unique living situation during the festival, the authors of these curses had to guard themselves against the possibility, however remote, that they might come into contact with the object of their curses amidst the mingling crowds at the festival.

III. Juridical activity at other Thesmophoria

I have suggested, then, that some idiosyncratic features of the curses from the sanctuary of Demeter at Cnidus differentiate them in important ways from the larger pool of prayers for justice: whereas the latter seem to have been deposited in various sanctuaries randomly throughout the year, those at Cnidus seem to have been displayed, discussed and revised within the relatively short period of the Thesmophoria festival. They also illuminate the sanctuary as a religiously-sanctioned place for female adjudication and conflict resolution, both among the women themselves, but also regarding men who could not be present at the festival. We have begun to see, too, how these Cnidian texts might give us some insight into the Aristophanic procedures performed by Athenian women during a comic version of the festival of the Thesmophoria. But is it sound method to use these later Cnidian practices as comparanda for making more general claims about possible juridical rituals at Thesmophoria festivals in Athens and elsewhere in the Greek world? Since the Thesmophoria was one of the oldest Greek festivals and was celebrated (as far as we can tell) in nearly every Greek city,48 it indeed seems prudent to speculate that similar procedures may have also been a traditional part of the festival in other cities as well. There are, moreover, two additional comparanda that seem to come from goddess sanctuaries in other parts of Greece. The closest parallel is a pair of curses inscribed on a bronze tablet that was found in Calabria and has holes in its edges for suspension. The first curse is too lacunose to know its exact purpose (it seems to concern the theft of a dark garment), but the second is complete (DT 212):49

Kollura is consecrating (ἀναφιέζει) to the attendants (ταῖς προτόλοις) of the goddess the three gold pieces that Melitta took and has not returned. Let her consecrate to the goddess 12 times the amount with a measure of incense which the city customarily makes use of (ὡς πόλις νομίζει). Let her not breathe freely until she consecrates [these things] to the goddess. And if she [i.e. Kollura] should unknowingly eat or drink with her [i.e. Melitta], let her be unharmed [or perhaps ‘free’, ἀθροίσει], or if she comes under the same roof [literally ‘pediment’ or ‘gable’, αἰτήσει].

47 Variations among these stipulations suggest the existence in some sanctuaries of structures more permanent than the huts and tents recorded at Athens. The clause on one of the Cnidian texts (DT 1b), for example, has a unique addition: ‘May it be ὅσον for me to go into the bath, under a roof (στέγος) or to the same table (τράπεζαν)’. The word bath in the singular (βαλανίον) usually refers to a private bathing room in a house, but the existence of small baths attached to the dining rooms in the Sanctuary of Demeter on Acrocorinth suggests that this, too, may refer to baths taken in the sanctuary during the Thesmophoria. Bookidis (1993) 52 reports that such bathing rooms were ‘attached to most of the dining complexes from the fifth century on’, most of which were designed for a single person, although one was larger and had a low bench to accommodate waiting participants. She stresses that ‘the process of bathing would have been fairly public’. Doug Olson points out rightly that some of the words used in the self-protection clauses − stegos (‘roof’) at Cnidus and especially aetos (‘gable’) in the Locrian curse discussed below − suggest a more permanent building than the tents or huts described in the sources for the Thesmophoria. I agree in the case of aetos, but we do not know how customs varied from city to city and over time: the dining rooms in the sanctuary on Acrocorinth (see above) were certainly permanent buildings with roofs and small baths.


49 I use the text of Blomqvist (1975) 18, no. 9.
The inscription is apparently composed in the Locrian dialect and dates to the third century BC, at least a century before the Cnidian texts, but it is clearly part of the same tradition, as the context (an accusation of theft), the language of ‘proleptic’ consecration (ἀντιαριζεῖν; cf. DT 2.1: ἄνωροί) and the three parts of the final ‘protection clause’ – food, drink and roof – all show quite clearly. And as in the Cnidian curses, Kollura encourages the goddess to make Melitta ill in order to force her to return the coins. The suspension holes, moreover, and the references to incense and temple personnel, leave little doubt that this bronze tablet, too, was originally hung up in the sanctuary of an unnamed goddess. Who was she? Most scholars suggest Persephone, but, if I am right that the presence of the self-protection clause indicates a Thesmophoric context for the curse, we may want to reconsider the proposal that it was indeed Demeter.

These close parallels between Kollura’s tablet and the Cnidian ones suggest that very similar female, sanctuary-based prayers for justice were in use at least a century earlier and in a different part of the Greek world. But how widespread was the practice? Kollura’s curse was composed in the dialect of the Epizephyrian Locrians, and, despite long and widely held assumptions to the contrary, we now know that the Locrians in southern Italy spoke a dialect of Greek that is most similar to that of Sparta. And since Cnidus was, in fact, alleged to be a colony of Sparta, it is possible this kind of curse at Cnidus and Locri reflects a wider tradition of Spartan or Peloponnesian ritual.

Yet another lead tablet – this one dating to the second century BC – was found in a farmer’s field on Amorgos, an eastern Aegean island settled by immigrants from Naxos and Samos that is not far from Cnidus (SGD 60).

Lady Demeter Queen, as your supplicant, as your slave I fall at your feet. He has taken away my slaves, has led them into evil ways, indoctrinated them, advised them, misled them, he has rejoiced, he has them wandering around the marketplace, he persuaded them to run away. This is what a certain

50 These parallels have been repeatedly discussed; see Versnel (1991) 73–74. We can also compare the accusation that Melitta ‘took’ the coins ‘and does not give them back’ (lines 10–11: ἔλαβεν... καὶ οὕτω ἀπόδοικτοι) with the wording in the second curse of Nanas (DT 3b.3–5: λαβόντες... οὕτω ἀπόδοικτοι). And like the second curse of Nanas, this one seems to involve a named person, Melitta, who apparently received a deposit and refuses to return it. For recent discussion, see MacLachlan (2004–2005) 251–54.

51 The self-protection clause seems, in fact, quite senseless, because Kollura already knows the perpetrator’s identity and some have suggested that this stipulation was mistakenly copied from a formulary or produced from memory; see, for example, Versnel (2002) 54, n.61.

52 Most assume that the propoloi are temple attendants or slaves, and I follow their lead here, but the use of the verb ‘to consecrate’ (ἀντιαριζεῖν) with propoloi in the dative should most naturally mean that the propoloi are the divine recipients of the dedication. Could the propoloi be some anonymous minor deities in the same shrine, like ‘the gods and goddesses who are with Demeter’ in Cnidus?

53 Some scholars, stressing the Locrian dialect of the text, have suggested that it was originally displayed in the Temple of Persephone, the chief goddess of the city of Locri, but they are at a loss to explain how the tablet ended up several hundred miles away in Calabria. But other goddesses have been suggested, especially Hera and Demeter. MacLachlan (2004–2005) 251 cites all the earlier literature and supports the Persephone hypothesis.

54 Blomqvist (1975).

55 Such a conclusion may be strengthened by a soon to be published lead curse tablet from Roman Corinth. Among the 18 curse tablets excavated from the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on Acrocorinth one fragmentary text begins ‘Lady Demeter, just things’ (Κυρία Δήμητρα, δίκαια καὶ...), and a few lines later seems to preserve a verb of dedication (ἱλασθήκαν) (see Stroud (forthcoming) no. 16, who in his commentary points to the Cnidian parallels). The tablet was found in a late antique robbing trench near the main temple in the Upper Terrace, i.e. in the highest and innermost part of the sanctuary. For a general description of the finds, see Bookidis (1998) 231.

56 Translation by Versnel (1991) 69–70. David Jordan, apud Versnel (1991) 96, n.40, suggests that the words epaphroditus tis do not refer to a man named Epaphroditus, but rather describe an anonymous person (i.e. ‘some charming fellow’), which would fit the pattern of anonymous perpetrators that we see in the Cnidian curses, but it is hard to imagine that this man could have had such a devastating effect on the household, without anyone learning his name. Versnel (1999) 125, n.1 points out, too, that Epaphroditus was a very popular name in the Roman period.
Epaphroditus has done. The same man has bewitched my handmaid so that he could take her as his wife against my wishes. And for this reason he has had her flee together with the others. Lady Demeter this is what I have been through. Being bereft I seek refuge in you. Be merciful and grant me my rights. Grant that the man who has treated me thus shall have satisfaction neither in rest nor motion, neither in body nor in soul.

The text on side A then concludes with a rather long unconditional curse that notably does not aim at restitution. This text has all of the earmarks of a ‘prayer for justice’: the author takes the pose of a suppliant, claims to have suffered injustices and asks Demeter to punish the criminal who is the source of this suffering. Surprisingly, the anonymous petitioner is a man, as is clear from his self-description as suppliant, slave and sufferer (ἐκτης, δοῦλος and ἀθεῶν).

On the reverse of the same tablet we find a second curse that was apparently composed by the same man:

Lady Demeter, I supplicate you because I have suffered injustices (παθῶν ἀδικα); hear me, Goddess, and pass a just sentence. For those who have cherished such thoughts against us and who have joyfully prepared sorrows for my wife Epiktesis and me and who hate us, prepare the worst and most painful horrors. O Queen, hear us who suffer and punish those who rejoice in our misery.

This author begins, as he did on the first side, addressing Demeter by himself (‘Lady Demeter, I supplicate you...’), but then he switches to the plural, whom he identifies as ‘my wife Epitktesis and me’. As Versnel points out, both of these curses reflect the same situation, and side B probably aims at neighbours who are enjoying the spectacle of this couple’s misfortunes. I agree, but I suggest that, like the second curse of Nanas, the curse on the reverse of the Amorgos tablet may also have been inscribed at some later time, perhaps after the failure or even the backfire of the original curse became apparent. Like the curse of Artemeis, this tablet had a suspension hole in its margin and was probably nailed up publicly, but where? The appeal to Demeter suggests, of course, a local sanctuary of hers, a place that might also explain why the second curse, although apparently written by the husband, identifies the couple circuitously as ‘my wife Epiktesis and me’. This inversion of the usual Greek protocol for naming a husband and wife suggests, in turn, that in this Sanctuary of Demeter, at least, his wife was the one who was named and presumably it was she alone who entered the shrine and hung the tablet there. Since Amorgos lies outside of the Doric and Peloponnesian cultural sphere, we can now suggest an even wider cultural range for these kinds of cursing in sanctuaries of Demeter.

But if this is the case, why don’t we find more curse tablets of this type in many other Demeter sanctuaries? Lack of written evidence does not, of course, prove that this kind of cursing was a limited or rare social practice. Other more perishable media may have been used (for example, wax tablets, papyri or leather), but, given the antiquity of the worship of Demeter, it makes much more sense to think that these curses were usually pronounced orally. Indeed, the earliest report in the Mediterranean basin of a curse against an unknown thief is found in the Book of Judges of the Hebrew Bible, where the mother of Micah orally curses the unknown person who had stolen some silver from her. And in this case the curse worked perfectly, because soon afterwards her son Micah came to her, confessed to the crime and returned the stolen money. It is, I suggest, some orally-performed version of these curses that Aristophanes seems to reflect, however dimly, in his play set at the Athenian Thesmophoria.

58 Versnel (1991) 70.
60 Faraone et al. (2005) 174, n.49.
61 Faraone et al. (2005).
IV. Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae*

As we saw at the outset of this study, there is not much direct evidence for what happened during the annual celebrations of the Athenian Thesmophoria, despite the fact that Aristophanes wrote an entire comic play about it. The plot of his play, however, revolves around the conceit that the women of Athens on the second day of the Thesmophoria will convict Euripides on a capital charge for slander. The repeated emphasis in the play on slander recalls, of course, the charge of slander in two of the Cnidian curses, but there are other signs that Aristophanes may have had a vague understanding of some kind of Athenian process in the Sanctuary of Demeter similar to those I have traced at Cnidus and Locri and on Amorgos. At the start of the deliberations in the play, for example, the priestess Critylla bids the women to pray (331: εὐχεσθε) for the destruction of a long list of anonymous malefactors who are plotting evil for ‘the city (δῆμος) of women’ (335–36), including anyone who slanders a woman for passing off the child of another as her own (339–40). She ends this harangue, moreover, with a pair of blessings and curses (349–51): ‘Curse this guy so that he himself and his household perish wretchedly, but pray that the gods grant all the rest of you women many good things’.

Commentators rightly point out that the curse in the first part of the sentence seems to be ‘a faithful parody of the curse pronounced against the traitors to the city by the Herald at the beginning of meetings of the Athenian Council and Assembly’, but they cannot adduce any precise parallel for the final request that the gods give blessings to all the rest of the assembly.62 The combination of conditional blessings and curses in the Cnidian curses may, however, provide a good parallel, provided one accounts for some obvious comic distortion.63

A few lines later in Aristophanes’ play two women finally stand up, one after the other, to prosecute the specific case against Euripides. First a character named Mica gives a long speech (383–432) that details all of the scurrilous slander that Euripides has launched against women from the tragic stage. This speech draws on Athenian forensic oratory for its inspiration and has little in common with the Cnidian texts.64 The second and final accuser, however, is a poor garland-seller and a widow, who takes a different approach (444–54):65

…I want to speak out about my own personal sufferings. My husband died in Cyprus, leaving me with five small children and I had a struggle to feed them by weaving garlands in the myrtle-market. So until recently I managed to feed them only half-badly, but now this guy who composes in the tragedy market has persuaded the men that the gods don’t exist, so my sales aren’t even half what they were. I therefore urge and advise all of you women to punish this man for his many crimes, for wild are his attacks on us, O women!

This autobiographical account of personal misfortune is similar in its sad tone and its demand for punishment to the curse from Amorgos and a number of the Cnidian texts, and, although the garland-seller addresses her remarks to the assembled women, not the goddesses, I wonder if here, too, her speech dimly reflects some oral practice of accusation on the second day of the Athenian Thesmophoria, during which women could complain in the sanctuary about mistreatment and then demand some kind of punishment. The second day of the festival seems, after all, to have celebrated Demeter’s mourning and may have focused tightly on the injustice of

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62 See, for example, Austin and Olson (2004), who add: ‘According to Demosthenes 19.71, the actual curse [i.e. the one uttered at the Athenian Assembly] contained a clause against anyone who committed one of the crimes it listed, asking for the gods to.... “utterly destroy him and his family and household”... Doubtless a blessing similar to the one at lines 350–51 was included as well’; cf. also Bierl (2009) 166–67.

63 In the Cnidian texts, both the conditional curse and the blessing are extended to the target and this is fairly standard in oaths as well; see Faraone (2006). Here the joke may arise from the fact that they extend the curse to the target, but the blessing to themselves.

64 See the comments of Austin and Olson (2004).

the theft of her own daughter. What better day to ask the goddess to punish the unjust people who were harassing her devout followers?

In the play the women do, in fact, talk a lot about injustice. We have already seen how in her second speech the Heraldess defends the women’s plan (375–79): ‘For he seems to do wrong to all of us (ἀδικεῖν)!’ And although Euripides firmly believes that the women will have him murdered, there are hints that they, like their Cnidian counterparts, will rather implore the gods to be the agents of punishment. Thus, at lines 663–84, the Chorus claim that the gods punish those who violate divine and human law (675: ὀσία καὶ νόμιμα). They are referring at this point not to Euripides, but rather to his Kinsman, who has impiously attended a festival from which men are excluded; their comments, however, recall the language of the Cnidian tablets at a point in the play that is particularly marked by ‘a heightened religious tone’:66

_any man caught in an impious act
will burn and rage in rabid insanity,
his every act a manifest proof
for all women and mortals to see
that lawlessness and sacrilege
are punished on the spot by god!

Here, talk of what is lawful and unlawful, from both the divine perspective (翃σια and ἄνοσία) and the human (παράνομα), and of fever (φλέγων) as manifest evidence of divine punishment all recall ideas expressed in the Cnidian curses, some of which pray that fever sent by Demeter will force criminals to come to the sanctuary and publicly confess their crimes. The question arises, of course, why Classical Athens, a city famous for its many courts and its passionate love of lawsuits, would need yet another site for these kinds of accusations and legal processes? It has, in fact, been suggested recently that so few inscribed prayers for justice have been discovered in Classical Athens because, unlike the late Hellenistic and Roman cities of Anatolia (Cnidus included), the idea of divine justice does not prevail in Athens over the working of secular laws.67 One might reply, of course, that rituals connected with a festival as old as the Thesmophoria would have evolved at a time well before the invention at Athens of the democratic machinery for judicial processes. Such assertions, moreover, neglect questions of epigraphic habit and they ignore the practical point that it would be impossible in any Greek city in any time period to prosecute the crimes described in the Cnidian curses, because in nearly every case the perpetrators are anonymous.68 The juridical discourses in Demeter’s sanctuary do not, in fact, compete with or override traditional secular courts, but rather they complement them.

Recall, for example, the curse Nanas invokes on behalf of a man named Diokles whose deposit was not returned. In the second curse we discover that one of the alleged criminals was a man. Under normal circumstances we would expect that this case would be litigated by men alone in a civil court, but if we assume, as I suggested earlier, that Diokles is incapacitated or dead and that at the start of the process Nanas had no idea who the perpetrators were, it makes perfect sense that she initially placed this case before Demeter and Kore and before the women of Cnidus in

68 As Versnel (2002) 57 with n.67 acknowledges.
order to find out who the deposit-holders were and whether they might be persuaded to return the money without any fuss. We should, moreover, imagine that if the second curse had failed to force the return of the deposit, Nanas – now armed with full knowledge of their identities – could have prosecuted the couple in a civil arena with the aid of a male relative. It would be interesting to know how many of the Cnidian conflicts were resolved without going to court. In Euripides’ comic case at Athens, in fact, the Thesmophoric accusations and prosecutions for slander are in the end effective, because near the end of the play he promises, after some negotiation, ‘that in the future none of you women will ever be slandered by me’ (1162–63).

V. Conclusions
I have cautiously suggested, then, that the lead tablets from Cnidus, Locri and Amorgos provide us with valuable insights into how the Thesmophoria festival may have provided Greek women with a forum for crime detection and dispute resolution, especially in cases of anonymous theft and slander. Various features of Aristophanes’ play – especially the central charge of slander against Euripides and the autobiographical complaint of the garland-seller – suggest that, like their Cnidian counterparts, the women of Athens may have also used the second day of the festival as a venue for oral complaints and curses before the goddesses and the assembled women. The suggestion that women at the Athenian Thesmophoria performed some kind of alternate juridical function finds its best support, however, in the repeated mention that Euripides was being prosecuted on the second day of the festival, a day when the men of the city were barred from holding trials. As we saw earlier, some scholars explain this coincidence as a sign, like the primitive tents and bedrolls, of the pre-cultural origins of the Thesmophoria festival, at a time before the men of the city had invented their legal systems and democratic assemblies, whereas others see it as part of a topsy-turvy Saturnalian atmosphere, in which all juridical and legislative processes must be suspended so that the women can do whatever they want. Both of these suggestions are certainly defensible given our fragmentary knowledge of the festival, but I would like to suggest a third and equal possibility: the courts and assemblies were closed on the second day of the festival in recognition of the fact that on this one day of the year the women of the city took these civic functions into their own hands and convened a different and very ancient kind of court before Demeter, Kore and all the gods and goddesses with them.

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Abbreviations
DT = A. Audollent (1904) *Defixionum Tabellae* (Paris)

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69 Translation by Henderson (2000). I thank Froma Zeitlin for this insight.
70 See n.5 above.
71 See n.6 above.
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