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CURSES IN AESCHINES' *AGAINST CTESIPHON*

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Abstract: This paper examines the role of curse language in Aeschines' *Against Ctesiphon* and argues that such vocabulary should not be understood as mere invective or metaphorical ornament. Terms such as γόης, μισρός, and ἀλιτήριος, together with the invocation of the Amphictyonic oath, situate Demosthenes in the context of public conditional curses (*arai*). By associating him with ritually polluted persons and oath-breakers subject to divine destruction, Aeschines transforms forensic accusation into a form of civic and religious sanction. The speech thus demonstrates how curse discourse, rooted in oath and civic religion, functioned as a mechanism of political exclusion in fourth-century Athens.

Keywords: Greek oratory; Aeschines; curse (*ara*); oath; Demosthenes

The oratory of classical Athens is saturated with religiously charged invective.¹ Terms such as “polluted” (μισρός) or “guilty” (ἀλιτήριος) recur frequently, especially in political trials, where speakers routinely portray their opponents as impure, accursed, or sacrilegious.² In Aeschines' *Against Ctesiphon* (330 BC), this vocabulary is deployed with particular intensity against the true target of the court case: Demosthenes. Yet such language has often been treated either as conventional abuse or as metaphorical embellishment. This paper argues that Aeschines' curse-inflected rhetoric should instead be understood in structural terms, as a deliberate reactivation of civic curse logic embedded in oath discourse and public sanction.

In contemporary Athens, a crucial distinction must be drawn between private binding curses (κατάδεσμοι or *defixiones*) and public civic curses (ἀραι).³ Curse tablets, as recent scholarship has emphasised, functioned as instruments of conflict management aimed at constraining adversaries in competitive set-

¹ I dedicate this paper to Prof. György Németh, who introduced me to the mysterious worlds of both ancient magic and oratory. I am also deeply grateful to the anonymous reviewer at *ACD*, who provided numerous helpful comments and made critical observations on the manuscript. Of course, I alone am responsible for any remaining errors or inaccuracies.

² Parker 1983, 262; Worman 2008, 213–274; Martin 2009, Serafim 2021.

³ Johnston 2004, 364–365; Eidinow 2013, 140. In contrast, Watson 1991, 6–12 offers an alternative subcategorization.

tings.⁴ By contrast, public *arai* operated within institutional frameworks (assembly and council procedures, decrees, etc.), and in the form of conditional curses they served to define and enforce communal norms.⁵ While these two domains differed in publicity and authority, both relied on the same underlying principle: transgression exposed the offender to divinely sanctioned exclusion. The language of forensic invective could therefore draw on the conceptual resources of both traditions.⁶

Some curse tablets from classical Athens show that courtroom conflict was indeed an environment in which binding curses could be deployed. Several *defixiones* explicitly target opponents in legal proceedings, seeking to restrain their speech, actions, or persuasive ability before the *dikastai*.⁷ In a few cases, the names Aeschines and Demosthenes appear among the intended victims, although the identification of these individuals with the orators remains uncertain.⁸ Despite this overlap in social and institutional context, there is no explicit reference to binding curses within the extant corpus of Attic oratory.⁹ The silence of orators about *defixiones* implies that, although curse tablets belonged to the wider world of legal disputes, their underlying logic reached forensic rhetoric mainly through the language of public oath and civic curse, rather than through any direct reference to private magical practices.

There is a structural link between oath and curse, which is central to this dynamic. As A. H. Sommerstein has demonstrated, a Greek oath is inherently reinforced by a conditional self-curse, whether explicitly articulated or implicitly understood.¹⁰ This curse element was fundamental to the cohesion of political communities and to the enforcement of interstate alliances, including the Amphictyonic oath invoked by Aeschines (Aeschin. 2,115 and 3,109–111, see below). Violating such an oath was more than a mere procedural or legal failure:

4 See Papakonstantinou 2021, *passim*, and Lamont 2023, 134–187. The latest collective edition of Attic curse tablets is Curbera 2024 (= IG II/III³ 8, 1). Tablets cited here are also identified by their number in the online Datenbank TheDefix (Thesaurus Defixionum): <https://www.thedefix.uni-hamburg.de/>

5 Rubinstein 2007, Serafim 2021, 5–8.

6 For the tradition of καταδεσμοί borrowing elements from sacred and civic ἀραί, see Lamont 2023, 224–247.

7 See e.g. IG II/III³ 8, 1, 274–328 in Curbera 2024. On the close connection between curse tablets and judicial competition in classical Athens, see Eidinow 2013, 167–168 and Papakonstantinou 2021, 134–135.

8 See Αἰσχίνης in IG II/III³ 8, 1, 179 (TheDeFix 904) and 288 (TheDeFix 402), and Δημοσθένης in IG II/III³ 8, 1, 280 (TheDeFix 138).

9 Words derived from καταδέω are absent from the extant corpus of Attic orators. The only reported exception is Dinarchus, who, according to Harpocration, used the perfect form καταδεδέσθαι in his lost speech against Pytheas, apparently in the same magical sense attested in *defixiones*. Harp. s.v. καταδεδέσθαι (K19): ἀντὶ τοῦ πεφαρμακεῦσθαι καὶ δεδέσθαι φαρμάκοις Δείναρχος ἐν τῇ κατὰ Πυθέου εἰσαγγελίᾳ. Keaney 1991, 143.

10 Sommerstein – Bayliss 2013, 3–6.

it was an act that threatened the sacred integrity of the sworn community. In this context, terms like *μιαρός* or *ἀλιτήριος* acquire a force that exceeds metaphor: they position the target within a framework of ritualised exclusion.

Aeschines' speech seems to mobilise this framework repeatedly. By invoking curse formulae and the authority of the Amphictyonic oath, he portrays Demosthenes not simply as politically misguided, but as a contaminating presence whose actions imperil the *polis* and its sworn commitments. Such rhetoric reflects the logic of public *arai*, which defined transgressors as sources of danger to the community and marked them for exclusion.¹¹ Aeschines does not merely employ religious invective, but deliberately reconfigures the logic of oath-bound curse and exclusion. By integrating curse discourse into forensic rhetoric, he transforms political accusation into a performative act of civic discipline. His curse-inflected rhetoric should be read within the long-term, broad-based political conflict between himself and Demosthenes between 346 and 330 BC, rather than as isolated invective.¹² Curse language in *Against Ctesiphon* is therefore not merely religious ornament, but a structurally embedded feature of fourth-century Athenian political culture.

Curse Vocabulary in *Against Ctesiphon*

Aeschines' portrayal of Demosthenes in *Against Ctesiphon* draws heavily on a cluster of terms related to magical deception and ritual pollution. These expressions do not merely function as conventional invective but situate Demosthenes within a semantic and conceptual field closely related to civic curse discourse. Among these, *γόης*, *μάγος*, and *ἐπωδή* form a group explicitly associated with magical manipulation, while terms such as *ἀλιτήριος* and *μιαρός* invoke the logic of religious transgression and exclusion. Taken together, this vocabulary presents Demosthenes as a figure whose rhetorical activity works not through legitimate persuasion but through a form of illicit enchantment and civic contamination.

The term *γόης*, commonly translated “sorcerer, wizard” (LSJ), probably derived from *γοᾶω*, “to groan”,¹³ already appears in Herodotus, in reference to exotic peoples possessing superhuman abilities (Hdt. 2,33; 4,105). By the late 5th century, however, its semantic range had expanded to encompass rhetorical deception. In Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*, persuasion itself is likened to witchcraft (*γοητεία*), capable of enchanting the soul and compelling belief through verbal artifice.¹⁴ As D. Ogden has shown, this association between rhetorical persuasion

¹¹ Parker 1983, 193–196; Rubinstein 2007, 278.

¹² Such “broad-based disputes” in Athens are discussed in Papakonstantinou 2021, 43–85.

¹³ Beekes 2010, 280.

¹⁴ Gorg. *Hel.* 10, see Ogden 2002, 17.

and magical coercion becomes firmly established in classical thought, especially in Plato, who describes rhetoric as psychagogy¹⁵ and regularly uses the term γοητεία to denote manipulative deception masquerading as truth.¹⁶

Aeschines repeatedly deploys this term against Demosthenes to portray him as a deceptive figure. As early as in his speech *On the False Embassy*, he calls on his audience to reflect on Demosthenes' methods: "See from [Demosthenes'] own statements the lies he has told. These are the mark of the charlatan (γόης)" (Aeschin. 2,124).¹⁷ The accusation is sharpened further when Aeschines describes himself as engaged in political struggle "with a charlatan and a criminal (γόητι καὶ πονηρῷ), a man who could not speak the truth even by accident" (Aeschin. 2,153). These passages present Demosthenes as a γόης, referring to his systematic dishonesty, and linking his rhetorical practice with moral corruption.¹⁸

In *Against Ctesiphon*, this characterization reaches its fullest development. Aeschines declares that none of the notorious criminals of the past was "such a magician and charlatan (τοιοῦτος μάγος καὶ γόης)" as Demosthenes (Aeschin. 3,137). The pairing of μάγος and γόης is especially remarkable. While μάγος originally denoted a Persian ritual specialist,¹⁹ by the classical period it had acquired strongly negative connotations, referring to individuals who employed illegitimate mystical praxeis for private ends.²⁰ Its occurrence here is unique within the corpus of Attic oratory,²¹ reinforcing the exceptional intensity of Aeschines' invective. The equivalence of μάγος and γόης is already evident in earlier rhetorical and philosophical traditions, where both terms denote figures who manipulate reality through deceptive speech and ritual techniques.²² A relevant parallel is the *agon* of Oedipus and Tiresias, where the former calls the seer a "magician forming crafty plans" (μάγος μηχανορράφος), who, in his opinion, only seeks his own benefit (Soph. *OT* 387–389).²³ This debate also indicates that besides the courtroom context, the rhetorical device of comparing the opponent to a fraudulent sorcerer was known in the theatrical discourse.

15 Plat. *Phdr.* 261a and 271c–d.

16 See e.g. Pl. *Smp.* 203a, *Rp.* 584a, 602a. For further examples, see Ogden 2002, 20–23.

17 Excerpts from Aeschines are quoted here in the English translation of Carey 2000.

18 Demosthenes applies this term in the same trial of 343 to refer to Philip of Macedon and the tricks he used to convince Aeschines: see Dem. 19,102 and 109. In his defensive oration in 330, Demosthenes confirms that Aeschines called him a γόης for his rhetorical tricks (Dem. 18,276). In response, Demosthenes used βασκανία ("witchery") and cognates as insults.

19 See *passim* in e.g. Hdt. or X. *Cyr.* Ogden 2002, 33.

20 See e.g. Hp. *Morb. Sacr.* 1, Eur. *Or.* 1497.

21 The verb μαγγανεύει occurs once (Dem. 25,80), but the speech *Against Aristogeiton* is spurious, see Harris 2018, 195 n. 10.

22 Ogden 2002, 22.

23 Here Oedipus calls Teiresias a treacherous beggar priest (ἄγύρτης), too, but this word does not occur in the orators.

Later in the speech, Aeschines again refers to Demosthenes as “this conjurer, this pickpocket (γότης καὶ βαλλαντιστόμος), who has carved up the constitution” (Aeschin. 3,207). Carey’s translation captures the accusatory force of the term: Demosthenes is a dangerous criminal, exploiting the city through deception. The association of magical practices with theft reinforces the idea that rhetorical manipulation constitutes a form of civic harm comparable to material crime.

This vocabulary serves several overlapping rhetorical functions. First, it delegitimizes Demosthenes’ persuasive authority by presenting his speech not as rational argument but as sorcerous coercion. Second, it implies that his influence over the assembly and courts is inherently illegitimate, achieved through deceptive techniques rather than lawful deliberation. Finally, by invoking terms associated with magical practice, Aeschines situates Demosthenes within a framework closely aligned with curse discourse, in which speech acts are capable of producing real harm through mysterious mechanisms.

Aeschines’ use of the term ἐπωδή (“song sung to or over: hence, enchantment, spell” [LSJ]) provides even clearer evidence of his engagement with magical discourse. At one point in *Against Ctesiphon*, he describes the dikasts’ passive response to legal procedure: “The clerk reads out the illegal proposal [i.e. to crown Demosthenes], while the jurors have their mind on something else, as though they were hearing an incantation (ἐπωδήν) or some issue of no concern to them” (Aeschin. 3,192). Here, the metaphor suggests that Demosthenes’ rhetoric functions not through rational persuasion but through enchantment, rendering its audience incapable of critical judgment.

The term ἐπωδή is strongly associated with magical practice in Greek literature, where it denotes spoken formulas intended to produce superhuman effects.²⁴ Its presence in forensic invective is unique. Within the corpus of Attic oratory, this is the only genuine occurrence of the term.²⁵ By employing this vocabulary, Aeschines explicitly aligns Demosthenes’ rhetorical activity with the domain of magical coercion, suggesting that his persuasive power derives from illegitimate manipulation rather than lawful argument.

This association mirrors the logic underlying curse tablets, which frequently seek to bind an opponent’s speech and cognitive capacity. Many *defixiones* explicitly aim to “bind the tongue” or “confuse the mind” of adversaries, particularly in legal contexts. By portraying Demosthenes’ rhetoric as an incantation, Aeschines reverses this logic: instead of being the victim of magical binding, Demosthenes himself becomes the practitioner of harmful enchantment.

24 See Plat. *Rp.* 364b, *Leg.* 933e.

25 Apart from this passage, the word occurs only once, namely in Dem. 25,79 (in the form ἐπωδάς). However, according to E. M. Harris, the speech *Against Aristogeiton* is not the work of Demosthenes, see Harris 2018, 194–196.

If terms such as γόης and μάγος emphasize deception and magical manipulation, the term **ἀλιτήριος** introduces a different but complementary dimension: religious transgression and civic contamination. Aeschines repeatedly refers to Demosthenes as “the curse of Greece” (τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀλειτήριος) (Aeschin. 3,131 and 157).²⁶ The semantic history of ἀλιτήριος reveals its religious origins. In earlier literature, the term is associated with individuals guilty of serious religious offences, particularly homicide or sacrilege. Antiphon uses it in plural form in reference to the superhuman forces, avenging spirits that pursue murderers, emphasizing the connection between crime, pollution, and divine retribution.²⁷ Andocides and Lysias employ the term to denote individuals whose actions have rendered them religiously culpable and dangerous to the community.²⁸

Aeschines’ use of the term can be considered a significant development. Applying it directly to his political opponent, he transforms a concept rooted in religion into a weapon of political invective. Demosthenes is not merely a corrupt politician; he is also presented as a source of pollution whose presence threatens the collective well-being of the Greek world.²⁹ This framing aligns closely with the logic of civic curses, which function to identify and exclude individuals whose actions endanger the community.

The rhetorical power of this accusation lies in its implicit curse structure. To call someone ἀλιτήριος is not merely to describe past wrongdoing but to identify them as a continuing source of danger. The term invokes a framework in which divine forces punish transgressors and those associated with them. In this sense, Aeschines’ language performs the same function as formal civic curses: it marks Demosthenes as an object of divine and communal exclusion.

Closely related to ἀλιτήριος is the term **μιαρός** (LSJ: “stained with blood, defiled, polluted”). As R. Parker has demonstrated, μιαρός denotes a condition of ritual contamination resulting from grave moral or religious offences.³⁰ Within forensic rhetoric, the term may function to portray the opponent as morally and religiously unfit to participate in civic life; however, it can also be a word of general insult, as is often the case in comedy.³¹

26 As opposed to the common form ἀλιτήριος, ἀλειτήριος is found exclusively in certain manuscripts of Demosthenes and Aeschines.

27 Antiph. 4,1,3; 4,1,4; 4,2,8; 4,3,7; 4,4,10.

28 Andoc. 1,51, 130, 131; Lys. 6,52 and 53; Lys. 13,79.

29 Dinarchus (1,77) borrowed and further developed the use of this term, see Vergara Recreo 2023, 113–116.

30 Parker 1983, 3–7.

31 See e.g. Antiph. 2,1,10 (ἀσύμφορόν θ’ ὑμῖν ἐστὶ τόνδε μιάρων καὶ ἄναγνον ὄντα εἰς <τε> τὰ τεμένη τῶν θεῶν εἰσιόντα μαιίνειν τὴν ἀγνείαν αὐτῶν... “it is harmful to you if this polluted and unholy person should enter the precincts of the gods and pollute their holiness...”), Lys. 13,77 (καίτοι πῶς ἂν γένοιτο ἄνθρωπος μιάρωτερος; “what sort of person could be more blood-cursed?”), Ar. *Eq.* 303 (Ἦ μιὰρὲ καὶ βδελυρὲ κῤῥᾱκτα “You’re a wretched, disreputable screamer!”), and for further examples see Donelan 2021, 29–31.

Both Aeschines and Demosthenes use the term as a form of invective, but their usage differs in tone and function. In Demosthenes, *μιαρός* often appears as part of generalized denunciation of his opponent, functioning as a conventional expression of hostility without necessarily developing its religious implications.³² Aeschines, by contrast, employs the term more systematically and in closer association with speech, rhetorical activity, and civic accountability. His use of *μιαρός* against Demosthenes (4 occurrences in *Against Ctesiphon*, see below) targets his words and public utterances, suggesting moral depravity and also a form of verbal contamination that threatens the civic order itself.³³

This rhetorical strategy has roots in Aeschines' earlier oratory. In *Against Timarchus*, he repeatedly associates his opponent with ritual impurity, describing him as “not pure” (οὐ καθαρός, Aeschin. 1,19 and 188, cf. 2,48), and explicitly labelling him *μιαρός* (Aeschin. 1.42, 54). These accusations are reinforced by related terms such as *ἀνόσιος* (“unholy,” Aeschin. 1.95), establishing a semantic framework in which political and moral misconduct is expressed through the language of religious pollution. He continues to exploit these terms in the subsequent trials against Demosthenes.³⁴

In *Against Ctesiphon*, Aeschines repeatedly applies the term *μιαρός* to Demosthenes, often in contexts that explicitly link pollution with political harm. He asks, for example, “How has this vile man (ὁ *μιαρὸς ἄνθρωπος*) brought our misfortunes upon us?” (Aeschin. 3,79), presenting Demosthenes not merely as responsible for policy failures but as a contaminating agent whose presence has infected the city. Similarly, he refers to him as “this vile and unholy man” (ὁ *μιαρὸς καὶ ἀνόσιος ἄνθρωπος*, Aeschin. 3,101), combining the language of ritual pollution with that of sacrilege. The association between pollution and speech is particularly clear when Aeschines urges his audience to recall Demosthenes' “vile and incredible statements” (τὰ *μιαρὰ καὶ ἀπίθανα ῥήματα*, Aeschin. 3,166), suggesting that the pollution resides not only in his actions but in his words themselves. In another passage, he refers to “this vile head of his, still subject to audit” (τὴν *μιαρὰν κεφαλὴν ταύτην καὶ ὑπεύθυνον*, Aeschin. 3,212), juxtaposing the religious language of pollution with the technical political term *ὑπεύθυνος*, thereby linking ritual contamination with civic accountability.³⁵

32 The term occurs 41 times in the *corpus Demosthenicum*. Some examples against Aeschines: Dem. 18,134 (οὐδεμία ψήφος ἠνέχθη τῷ *μιαρῷ* τούτῳ, “this scoundrel received not a single vote”), 18,289 (ἵν' εἰδῇς, Αἰσχίνη, καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τούτῳ σπαντὸν ἀγνώμονα καὶ συκοφάντην ὄντα καὶ *μιαρόν*, “so that you understand, Aeschines, that in this matter too you are a vile, malicious fool”). N. Worman claims that Demosthenes used *μιαρός* as “a generalized curse”, see Worman 2008, 272.

33 Worman 2008, 234, 261, 271. See esp. Aeschin. 3,166.

34 Martin 2009, 165–168.

35 Martin 2009, 175.

The expected effectiveness of this rhetorical strategy is reflected in its adoption by Deinarchus, who, in his own prosecution of Demosthenes in 322 BC, repeatedly refers to him as *μυαρός*,³⁶ demonstrating the persistence of this characterization within forensic oratory. The term thus becomes part of a shared vocabulary of political exclusion, marking Demosthenes as a figure whose presence threatens both the civic and religious integrity of the community. In Aeschines' speech, *μυαρός* is more than a conventional insult. It is a conceptually loaded designation that aligns Demosthenes with the broader logic of curse and exclusion embedded in Athenian political culture.

All these terms together reveal a consistent rhetorical strategy. Aeschines does not explicitly pronounce a formal curse against Demosthenes. Instead, he appropriates the vocabulary of curse discourse to construct his opponent as a legitimate target of divine and communal exclusion. This strategy allows him to transform political accusation into a form of symbolic sanction grounded in religion.

The Amphictyonic Curse and the Language of Total Destruction

The invocation of the Amphictyonic oath in *Against Ctesiphon* represents the clearest formal expression of curse logic in Aeschines' rhetoric. Unlike the diffuse invective examined above, the Amphictyonic oath introduces a formal, institutional curse articulating the consequences of violating sacred obligations.

Aeschines includes the oath within his account of the Sacred War (Aeschin. 3,107–129). His narrative covers the consecration of the so-called Cirrhaean plain and harbour, because of the lawless and impious conduct of its inhabitants toward the temple of Delphi. The Amphictyons, acting on the oracle of Apollo, destroyed the Cirrhaeans and dedicated their territory to the god.³⁷

They assembled a large force from among the Amphictyons and enslaved the inhabitants and demolished their city and harbor and consecrated their land as instructed by the oracle. In addition, they swore a binding oath (ὄρκον ὤμοσαν ἰσχυρόν) that they would neither work the land themselves nor allow anyone else, but would aid the god and the consecrated land with hand and foot <and voice> and every means. Not satisfied with swearing just this oath, they added a curse, a strong imprecation (καὶ προστροπήν καὶ ἄρᾶν ἰσχυρὰν), on the subject. The curse contains the following clause. “If anyone,” it says, “city or individual or people (ἔθνος), contravenes this, let them be cursed (ἐναγής) by

³⁶ Din. 1,21, 24, 50, 92, 95, 185.

³⁷ The reliability of Aeschines' account here has been seriously questioned by Robertson 1978, who claims that the myth of the so-called First Sacred War was invented around 340 BC. See also Davies 1994 and Londey 2015. Regardless of the historical reliability of the account, the oath and curse presented here fit well within the range of formulas that can be reconstructed from archaic and classical inscriptions and literary texts. Therefore, the oath and curse are generally accepted as authentic, Sommerstein – Bayliss 2013, 187 (n. 5), Lamont 2023, 234. For an opposite view, see Sánchez 1997.

Apollo, Artemis, Leto, and Athena Pronaia.” And a prayer is included that their land should not produce crops nor their women bear children that resemble their parents but monsters, nor their livestock bring forth natural offspring, but they should be defeated in war, lawsuits, and debates, and both they themselves and their households and their race should perish utterly. “And may they never,” it says, “offer pure sacrifice to Apollo or Artemis or Leto or Athena Pronaia, and may the gods not accept their offerings.” (Aeschin. 3.109–111)

In the subsequent passage, Aeschines has the clerk read out the oaths and the curse. The standard Greek term for a public, conditional curse is ἄρά, along with related forms such as κατάρα and ἐπάρᾱ, and their verbal derivatives.³⁸ These expressions may designate formal imprecations that invoke divine punishment upon those who violate sworn obligations or civic norms. In Aeschines’ excursus on the Amphictyonic oath, this vocabulary appears with striking frequency: various forms of ἄρά and its derivatives occur 14 times within the narrative (Aeschin. 3.107–129), whereas in the rest of the speech they appear only twice. This concentration underscores the importance of formal curse language in framing the Amphictyonic oath as an instrument of divine sanction. Notably, Aeschines does not employ the verb καταράομαι, which is otherwise common in Attic oratory and also frequently used by Demosthenes (especially in the form κατάρατος) to denounce Aeschines himself.³⁹ Instead, Aeschines consistently prefers the verb ἐπαράομαι and its derivatives, though the semantic difference appears to be minimal. The preference for ἐπαρά-forms in Aeschines’ narrative may reflect the traditional terminology: indeed, the archaic civic curse inscriptions from Teos employ exclusively the term ἐπαρή, demonstrating that this word belonged to an established and authoritative register of public imprecation.⁴⁰ The consistent usage reinforces the institutional character of the Amphictyonic curse and situates Aeschines’ language within a broader tradition of formalized civic sanction.⁴¹

The content of the Amphictyonic curse, preserved in Aeschines’ direct quotation (see above), follows a well-established pattern of public imprecation. Its central element is the threat of total destruction (ἐξώλεια), expressed through formulas invoking the annihilation of the transgressor and his lineage. One such clause declares that anyone who violates the sacred regulations shall suffer destruction “himself and his household and his entire race” (ἐξώλεις εἶναι καὶ αὐτοὺς καὶ οἰκίας καὶ γένος τὸ ἐκείνων). The formula, combining individual and genera-

38 Lamont 2023, 226.

39 For the Demosthenic use of κατάρατος, see Seres 2020.

40 For the *Dirae Teiorum* (c. 470 BC), see ML 30 and Colvin 2007, 112–115 (nr. 20).

41 See also ἐπαράσιος (Sg. gen. of ἐπάρασις, noun from ἐπαράομαι) in SEG 49-640 (c. 350 BC), a Dodona enquiry concerning a curse, Christidis et al. 1999, 70.

tional annihilation, reflects the characteristic structure of Greek civic curses, which target not only the offender but his descendants and social continuity.⁴²

Such language finds close parallels in a wide range of inscriptions. A West Locrian law (c. 525–500 BC) regulating land distribution, for example, invokes a curse upon violators of the regulations, declaring: “if anyone transgresses them, let them be cursed, himself and all his relatives” (ἐμὲν τοῖ ταῦτα παρβαίνοντι ἐξζόλειαν αὐτοῖ καὶ γενεᾷ καὶ πάντεσιν).⁴³ Similarly, the mid-4th c. BC Mylasan decrees concerning conspiracies against the satrap Maussolos conclude with the imprecations (ἐπαραί): “if anyone transgresses these provisions, let him and all his associates be utterly destroyed” (εἰ δέ τις ταῦτα παραβαίνοι, ἐξώλη γίνεσθαι καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἐκείνου πάντα).⁴⁴ These parallels demonstrate that the Amphictyonic oath participates in a broader tradition of curse formulae that articulate political and religious transgression through the language of annihilation.⁴⁵ Their logic corresponds closely to the structure of public *arai*. As Lamont has described, civic curses across the Greek world consistently employ three primary forms of sanction: utter destruction of the offender, destruction of his family or lineage, and infertility of land and household.⁴⁶ These elements appear in the Amphictyonic oath in fully developed form.

The Amphictyonic excursus in *Against Ctesiphon* shows a dense concentration of curse terminology, including especially adjectives of ritual condemnation. The adjective ἐπάρατος (“accursed”) is applied first to the land of Cirrha, which had been placed under a solemn curse after its destruction (Aeschin. 3,107, 119). Aeschines then extends this designation to the money of the Amphissaeans (3,114), which had become accursed through its association with the profanation of sacred land.⁴⁷ Since Demosthenes accepted this money as a bribe

42 Lamont 2023, 237.

43 IG IX 1² 3, 609 (ML 13), lines 15–16. Arnautoglou 1998, 110–111 (Nr. 94). See also lines 11–12: αὐτὸς μὲν φερέτο καὶ γενεὰ ἅματα πάντα (“let him be cursed and his whole family for ever”); cf. IG IV 506.

44 Tod *SGH* 138. See also IG I³ 37, IC III iv 7.

45 These formulae occasionally appear even in curse tablets, see Lamont 2023, 46 (TheDeFix 242) and 242–244.

46 Lamont 2023, 236. Although it escaped Lamont’s attention, it is worth noting that in the prologos of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* the priest complains about similar effects of the plague that the polis of Thebes must suffer: Πόλις γάρ, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸς εἰσορᾷς, ἄγαν | ἤδη σαλεύει [...] | φθίνουσα μὲν κάλυσιν ἐγκάρποις χθονός, | φθίνουσα δ’ ἀγέλαις βουνόμοις τόκοισί τε | ἀγόνους γυναικῶν (“For the city, as you yourself can see, is already reeling violently, [...] wasting away in the fruit-bearing buds of the earth, wasting away in the herds that graze the hills, and in the barren childbirths of women”), Soph. *OT* 22–27.

47 Closely related is the adjective ἐναγής, which occurs seven times within the excursus (3,107–129), usually referring to the lands and the inhabitants of Cirrha or Amphissa. By cultivating land consecrated to Apollo, they rendered themselves ritually polluted and subject to divine punishment. At one point, however, an anonymous Amphissan is reported to have called the Athenians ἐναγεῖς (Aeschin. 3,117).

(3,113–114), he too becomes implicated in its cursed status. This progression of the adjective ἐπάρατος (from land, to wealth, to recipient) demonstrates the transmissible nature of ritual condemnation: association with accursed persons or objects renders one subject to the same divine sanctions.⁴⁸

The excursus is explicitly framed to establish Demosthenes' participation in this curse structure. Aeschines introduces it by declaring that Demosthenes "destroyed the interests of Greece and our city, by committing impiety (ἀσεβήσας) against the temple at Delphi," and announces that he will begin "with his offenses against the gods" (ἀπὸ τῶν εἰς τοὺς θεοὺς πλημμελημάτων, Aeschin. 3,106). The narrative that follows demonstrates that those who violated the sacred land became accursed and subject to destruction. By linking Demosthenes to these violators through bribery and political collaboration, Aeschines implicitly places him under the same divine sanction.

This argument relies on a fundamental feature of Greek oath practice: the inseparability of oath and curse. As we have already seen, Greek oaths inherently invoked conditional self-curses, calling down divine destruction upon the swearer in the event of violation.⁴⁹ Aeschines repeatedly emphasizes Demosthenes' perjury, mocking his false oaths sworn in the names of Zeus and Athena (3,77), accusing him of reinforcing his lies with oaths that invoke destruction (3,99), and portraying him as a habitual violator of sworn obligations (3,207–208). In this framework, perjury is more than a personal moral failing: it is a religious offence that activates divine punishment.

The Amphictyonic oath thus provides the explicit institutional framework that gives full force to Aeschines' curse rhetoric. The vocabulary of pollution (ἐναγής), condemnation (ἐπάρατος), and destruction (ἐξώλεια) converges in a formal public curse that defines the ultimate consequences of sacrilege. By associating Demosthenes with those already condemned under this oath, Aeschines presents his political adversary as a violator of sacred order and as subject to divine annihilation. The jurors' verdict, in turn, becomes the civic mechanism through which this religious judgment is to be recognized and enforced.

Conclusion

Aeschines' *Against Ctesiphon* demonstrates that curse language in Athenian forensic rhetoric was neither ornamental nor merely metaphorical. Through a systematic deployment of vocabulary associated with magical manipulation and ritual pollution, Aeschines constructs Demosthenes as a figure whose presence threatens the religious and civic integrity of the *polis*. The terms he used against

⁴⁸ Martin 2009, 169.

⁴⁹ Sommerstein – Bayliss 2013, 3–6.

his opponent (γόνις, μάγος, ἀλιτήριος, μιάρός, ἐναγής, ἐπάρατος) situate him within a pattern traditionally associated with transgression and exclusion, while the invocation of the Amphictyonic oath provides the formal institutional structure that articulates the ultimate consequences of such violations through conditional self-cursing.

By integrating the logic of public conditional curses into forensic argumentation, Aeschines transforms political accusation into religious condemnation. Demosthenes is thus portrayed as a failed statesman exposed to divine sanction invoked in civic oath-curses. This rhetorical strategy reflects the integration of religious and political discourse in classical Athens, where oath, curse, and civic identity were structurally inseparable. Therefore, Aeschines' rhetoric reveals how the language of curse could function as a tool of political exclusion, embedding forensic invective within the institutional and religious foundations of the Greek *polis*.

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