

Magic, Curses, and Superstitions

1. What are “dēfixiōnēs” ?

Small sheets of lead or pewter on which Romans wrote curses and dedicated them to the gods of the underworld in order bring harm to someone they disliked or hated.

2. What was the formula of a “dēfixios”?

The curse required the name of the person to be cursed, if known, or a list of suspects. Then the crime and the hoped for punishment.

3. What was done with the “dēfixio” after it was made?

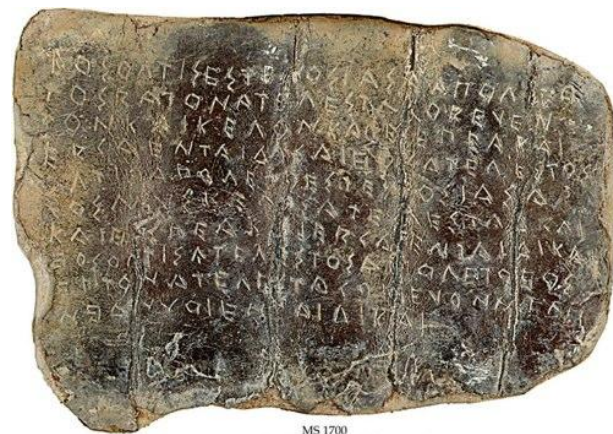
It was fastened to a tomb with a nail or thrown into a pool or spring.

4. List some peculiar elements of the writing on a “dēfixio”.

The curse was often written backwards and meaningless words such as “bescu” and “bazagra” were inserted. Often pictures and symbols of death were present.

5. What is an “omina”?

This is an omen or warning of impending danger given by a god. Proper action in response to the “omina” could avert the danger. Sometimes people wore amulets to ward off the “evil eye”.



MS 1700
Greek capitals. Greece, 5th c. BC

*****This is not all you need to know. Re-read the reading.*****