CHAPTER FOUR

THE DEFIXIONES FROM THE SANCTUARY OF ISIS AND MATER MAGNA IN MAINZ

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1. Introduction

In 1999 two blocks of shops were pulled down in the centre of the city of Mainz on a site that in Roman times was not far from the major road that led from the camp of leg. XIV Gemina to the bridge over the Rhine (Text-fig. 1). At a depth of about 5m, the level of the Roman settlement, some structural remains and a paved area of considerable dimensions were found, which turned out to belong not to houses or workshops, as expected, but to two juxtaposed temples dedicated to Isis Panthea and Mater Magna dating from the early Flavian period, or even late in the reign of Nero. The founders, who are named on two virtually identical inscriptions, were Claudia Icmas, an imperial freedwoman, and Vitulus, an imperial slave (Icmas is named first in view of her higher social rank). Another inscription was dedicated to Mater Magna by one of the treasurers (arcarius) of the imperial procurator in Mainz under Vespasian. The foundation can thus be dated fairly closely to the decade 71–80 CE. In view of the dedicants’ status, it is virtually certain that the Palatine office had given its consent beforehand. The brick-stamps indicate that soldiers of leg. XIV Gemina provided the bricks. Nevertheless, there is virtually no evidence that

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2 The bridge was constructed in timber in the twenties of I p, in stone c. 90 CE.

3 See Witteyer 2004; 2005.


Fig. 1. Plan of Roman Mainz. No. 1 marks the site of the Lotharpassage.