CHAPTER ELEVEN

EXECRATING THE ROMAN POWER: THREE DEFIXIONES FROM EMPORIAE (AMPURIAS)*

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1. A Fresh Look at the Texts

Excavations carried out during August 1944 by Martín Almagro in the necropolis of Ballesta, to the west of Ampurias, unearthed a quadrangular structure that contained eight funerary urns with gifts: glass and ceramic exaleiptra or alabastra, one or two thin-walled beakers, bronze objects, an iron key, and two coins—an Ampurian as and a coin with the word Indica on it—dating at the earliest to 25 BCE.¹ Three of the urns were associated with opisthographic lead plaques. I give here a more or less definitive version of the texts inscribed on them, based on recent direct examination of the pieces in the Barcelona Archaeological Museum:²

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¹ Pi Vázquez 2005, 166. Andrew Wilburn (2005, esp. 180–181), misunderstanding what Almagro Basch says (1955, 25), has recently claimed that “the archaeological context of the artifacts demonstrates that the tablets and the funerary urns were buried concurrently, most likely with the knowledge of those participating in the funerary ritual (...) For the Ballesta tablets, the discovery of the artifacts within the three funerary urns and as part of a shared burial area implies that the family members or other close associates who were present at the funeral would have been aware of the inclusion of magical objects within the burials. No indication of discomfort or anxiety is apparent in the archaeological evidence or the texts of the curse tablets, which are, admittedly, very brief”. This is quite wrong: the urns and their accessories can be dated to the reign of Augustus, while the three defixiones were written—and, of course deposited—much later, in the latter part of the reign of Vespasian (see infra).

² I thank the Director of the Museum, Dr. Nuria Rafel, for his aid in my study of these texts. My order corresponds to that of IRC nos. 172–174, where a tally of the numerous different readings that have been offered since 1944 can be found. Almagro’s text was repr. as AE 1952: 122, with important remarks by H.-G. Pflaum.
No. 1a:
Lamboglia 1959, no. 3a = Gager, CT no. 52.2b = Pi Vázquez 2005, no. 2b = Wilburn 2005 no. 1a. See Plate 21a.

Dimensions: 5.9 × 3.1 × 0.2 cm; approximate letter heights: 0.5–0.4 cm.

_Fulvus legatus Augusti, Rufus legatus Augusti, Maturus procurator Augusti,
5 <consilium> legati, atvocati Indicetanorum._

Fulvus, the legate of the emperor, Rufus, the legate of the emperor, Maturus, the procurator of the emperor, the legate’s (consilium) and the defenders of the _Indicetani._

No. 1b:
Lamboglia 1959, no. 3b = Gager, CT no. 52.2 a = Pi Vázquez 2005, no. 2a = Wilburn 2005 no. 1b. See Plate 21b.

_Consilium Fulvi,
legati Olossitani, Campanus Fidentinus Augusti,
5 t[i?---]_

The council of the legate Fulvus, the _Olossitani_ legates, Campanus Fidentinus, the imperial (?)…


No. 2a:
Almagro 1952, no. 2b = Lamboglia 1959, no. 1ª = Gager, CT no. 52.1b = Pi Vázquez 2005, no. 1 = Wilburn 2005, no. 2b. See Plate 22a.

Dimensions: 5.7 × 6 × 0.2 cm; approx. letters heights: 0.5–0.4 cm.

_Olossita[ni]
Titus Aurelius
Fulvus legatus Augusti,