

CELIA SÁNCHEZ NATALÍAS

A NEW *DEFIXIO* FROM VERONA

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## A NEW *DEFIXIO* FROM VERONA<sup>1</sup>

Due to the construction of a road connecting Verona's city-center to its stadium, an emergency excavation was conducted along the ancient *Via Postumia* from 1989–1991. During this excavation, a necropolis, containing 554 tombs from the first century BC through fourth century AD, was unearthed<sup>2</sup>. In one tomb south of the *Via Postumia* (a “capuccina” cremation), archaeologists discovered two lead tablets. The first tablet reads: *Secunda Sentia*<sup>3</sup>, while the second comprises a longer list of names and forms the focus of this study.

In addition to these two tablets, tomb number 1281 contained an urn filled with ashes, lamp, penknife, and coin. This final item, a corroded *as* dating from the reign of Antoninus Pius, suggests a terminus *post quem* of 140–144 AD<sup>4</sup>. The penknife was found close to the tablets and its blade was wrapped in a piece of cloth. For M. Bolla, the placement of these objects in close quarters was hardly a coincidence: she has argued that the knife was not a grave good, but rather played a role in some sort of magical ritual<sup>5</sup>. While this hypothesis is suggestive, I am sceptical for two important reasons. Not only in this same necropolis and the area surrounding Verona<sup>6</sup>, but also further afield throughout Alto Adige, knives are commonly found in tombs of the same or similar date, where they are typical grave goods<sup>7</sup>. Second, though *defixiones* are indeed associated with nails, as far as I am aware there are no extant parallels in the larger *corpus* of curse tablets for such a deposit made up of a lead tablet and knife<sup>8</sup>. For these two reasons, it is safer to assume that the knife was simply a grave good in the burial and should not be analysed as part of an otherwise unknown magical ritual.

The unpublished *defixio* is currently in the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici del Veneto (Nucleo Operativo di Verona, inventory number VR19924)<sup>9</sup>. The piece of lead is irregularly shaped and was probably cut from a larger sheet (*vid.* figures 1 and 3). It measures 10.6 cm in height by 12.1 cm in width by *circa* 0.1 cm in thickness. Despite some corrosion on the surface, the tablet has been well preserved. The text is written from left to right in capitals (with letter size ranging from 0.5 to 0.9 cm in height) and contains a list of names in the accusative followed by the verb *defigo* (see figure 2).

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<sup>1</sup> This article has been written while enjoying a fellowship, “Ayuda para la Especialización de Personal Investigador del Vicerrectorado de Investigación de la UPV/EHU” (2015–2016), at the Basque Country University. I would like to thank Drs. A. Buonopane, F. Marco Simón and R. Tomlin for their help with this article, whose contents are my sole responsibility. In addition, I want to thank Dr. V. Tinè for allowing me to study and publish this curse tablet, and Dr. M. Bolla for information related to the archaeological context. In this regard, the help of G. Pelucchini has been invaluable as well as that of Dr. B. A. Jerue with the English. This paper forms part of the project “Procesos de aculturación religiosa en el Mundo Antiguo y en la América Colonial”, directed by F. Marco Simón (reference number HAR 2014 57067-P).

<sup>2</sup> There are 484 cremations and approximately 70 burials. *Vid.* Cavalieri Manasse and Bolla 1998: 106.

<sup>3</sup> See Buonopane (2002: num. 63 = *AE* 2002, 566), who has dated the tablet to the I century AD based on palaeography and onomastics. From the same necropolis (tomb 142) comes a third *defixio*, dated between the end of the II century AD and the beginning of the III century AD, which reads: *Trophimen, / Zosimen, / Chariten. / Vindictam de / illis fas* (on this, *vid.* Buonopane 2000 = *AE* 2000, 618).

<sup>4</sup> *Vid.* *RIC* 691(a) or 706 (a).

<sup>5</sup> In her own words, it was used for “rinforzare la minaccia contenuta nelle laminette” (Cavalieri Manasse and Bolla 1998: 139).

<sup>6</sup> *Vid.* Cavalieri Manasse and Bolla 1998: 136, where the author states that some knives made of iron were found (some of them in tombs for women).

<sup>7</sup> On this regard, see Francisci (2010: 76 and 106), who demonstrates that in the Adige Valley knives are a typical grave good from the I century AD onwards (and above all from the II to the IV centuries AD). This is so much the case that a single tomb could contain more than one knife (Francisci 2010: 82). In addition, see also Noll 1963: 76–87, Tafel 18–22.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, *circa* 12% of the *defixiones* from the Roman West are closely associated with nails. The tablets could be pierced, but also rolled around the nails or be attached to a surface (mostly tombs) in order that they might be exposed.

<sup>9</sup> Autopsy done 23 September 2013.



Fig. 1. *defixio* from Verona (author's image). Produced by courtesy of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo. Archivio SBAVen, all rights reserved



Fig. 2. *defixio* from Verona (author's illustration)



Fig. 3. *defixio* from Verona (detail of the text, author's image). Produced by courtesy of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo. Archivio SBAVen, all rights reserved

Transcription:

AVGVŜTVM  
 CARSADIA  
 SECVNDVM  
 CAVPVNVM

5 DEF[-c.2-]O

Reading:

*Auguŝtum*  
*Carsadia*<*m*> or *Cars*<sup>f</sup>*i*<sup>d</sup>*ia*<*m*> (?)  
*Secundum*  
*Caupunum* or *Caup*<sup>f</sup>*o*<sup>n</sup>*i*<sup>u</sup>*m* (?)

5 *deffiglo*

Unfortunately – though in line with 60% of Latin *defixiones* – this sparse text does not give any indication of what motivated the composition of this curse. As I shall discuss in detail, the *scriptor* appears to have been semi-literate and made several mistakes.

1. *augustum* = *Augustum*: the unusual form of the fifth letter is worthy of note: made with a horizontal and a down stroke which curves to the left, this symbol is a linked *s* and *t*. *Augustus* is, indeed, a well attested *cognomen*<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Vid. Kajanto 1982<sup>2</sup>: 61 and 316, and *CIL* V 1784, 7862; *CIL* XIII 3278, 3279, 4705, etc. It is not attested as a *nomen*.

2. *carsadia* = *Carsadia*<*m*> or *Cars<sup>f</sup>i<sup>d</sup>ia*<*m*> (?): Given that this name comes in the middle of a list of accusatives, a final *m* is surely to be restored. The name *Carsadia* could be understood as either an unparalleled Latin *cognomen* or preferably as a mistake for *Carsidia* (i.e. repeating the ‘a’), a *nomen* already attested<sup>11</sup>.

4. *caupunum* = *Caupunum* or *Caup<sup>f</sup>o<sup>n</sup><i>um* (?): There are two main possibilities for understanding this *cognomen*. Though unattested, it could be taken as a name derived from *Caupo* (which is, indeed, a known *cognomen*). The second possibility would be a restoration as *Caup<sup>f</sup>o<sup>n</sup><i>um*, although it would imply *u* for *o*, as well as the omission of *i*. This explanation seems likely, since *Cauponius* is already attested as a *nomen* (vid. Solin–Salomies 1994<sup>2</sup>: 54).

5. *deff-c. 2-jo* = *deffigjo*: Although this verb is not exceedingly common in the *corpus* of Latin *defixiones*, there are several good parallels for the present form, such as tablets from Mentana (I century BC, side A, lines 9–10: *defigo in has tabellas*), Cremona (I century AD, line 8: *defigo illos quo pereant*), Petronell (*Pannonia Superior*, II–III centuries AD, line 15: *defigo Eudemum*) and others<sup>12</sup>.

The dating of the tablet provides some complications that can be explained along the following lines. As mentioned above, our *defixio* was found in the tomb 1281, a cremation which contained an *as* from *Antoninus Pius* dated to 140–144 AD. In addition, our *defixio* was also placed in the same archaeological stratum as another tablet undoubtedly dated to the first century AD. While it is tempting to use the date of one tablet to deduce the date of the other, this solution does not work. As Pelucchini has explained (*per litteras*), tomb 1281 was partially overlapping with an older burial (number 1381), which has been dated to the end of the I century AD. In her opinion, due to the modern construction work and the pressures of an emergency excavation, the archaeological context was slightly disturbed and the contents of these tombs were accidentally mixed together. This would explain the chronological differences between the tablets, since for both archaeological and palaeographical reasons the *defixio* discussed here should be dated to the second half of the II century AD.

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Celia Sánchez Natalías, Departamento de Estudios Clásicos, Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea. C/ Tomás y Valiente, s/n, 01006, Vitoria, España – [celia.natalias@gmail.com](mailto:celia.natalias@gmail.com)

<sup>11</sup> For instance, vid. *CIL* VI 14440 and 34697 (both from Rome), and *CIL* XIV 4838 (from Ostia). On the *nomen Carsidius*, vid. Solin–Salomies 1994<sup>2</sup>: 48.

<sup>12</sup> Vid. *DT* 135, *AE* 1987, 455 and 1929, 228.