

# EPIGRAPHICA

PERIODICO INTERNAZIONALE  
DI EPIGRAFIA

LXXXI, 1-2  
2019



FRATELLI LEGA EDITORI  
FAENZA



FRANCO LUCIANI\* - DANIELA URBANOVÁ\*\*

CURSING NOT JUST THE BODY. SOME REMARKS  
ON A *DEFIXIO* FROM *NOMENTVM* IN THE LIGHT  
OF THE ROLE OF FEMALE PUBLIC SLAVES  
IN THE ROMAN WORLD\*\*\*

■ *Abstract*

An opisthographic lead tablet from *Nomentum*, dating to the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, contains two anatomical curses against a man (side A) and a female public slave (side B). Whilst the curse against the man aimed to affect not only some parts of his body, but also his social and economic status, the one against the woman describes in detail only pieces of her body, with particular emphasis to her abdomen and genitals. The first section of the paper aims to provide the *status quaestionis* of the study of this curse tablet, with particular regard to the epigraphic and linguistic aspects of the text. The second section sets out to offer a general overview of the role of female public slaves in the Roman world, which may allow a better contextualization of the meaning of the curse on side B.

*Keywords:* curse tablets, *defixio*, *Nomentum*, anatomical curse, *Rufa publica*, public slaves.

---

\* School of History, Classics and Archaeology, Newcastle University (United Kingdom); franco.luciani@newcastle.ac.uk

\*\* Department of Classical Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University (Repubblica Ceca); urbanova@phil.muni.cz

\*\*\* Daniela Urbanová is responsible for section 1 and Franco Luciani for section 2. This paper is a collaborative development of a private discussion that we had at the *XV Congressus Internationalis Epigraphiae Graecae et Latinae* (Wien 28 August - 1 September 2017). We should like to thank Dr Daniela Porro and Dr Maria Daniela Donninelli (Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome) for having provided us with two photographs of the epigraphic artefact, together with Prof. Paolo Poccetti who acted as an intermediary with the institution. We are also grateful to Célia Natalías Sánchez for her remarks and for having shared the information about this lead curse tablet provided in her unpublished PhD thesis: C. SÁNCHEZ NATALÍAS, *El contenido de las defixiones en el Occidente del Imperio Romano* (Universidad de Zaragoza – Università degli Studi di Verona 2013). Many thanks to the anonymous reviewers who provided us with helpful advice. Finally, we express our sincere gratitude to Aaron Collier for revising our English texts.

## 1. Some Textual Comments

The opisthographic curse tablet from *Nomentum* (*AEP* 1901, 183) (1), dating to the first half of the first century CE (2), probably represents the best-known example of a particular magical cursing procedure – the so-called *anatomical curse* (3). This specific type of curse enumerates the body parts and organs of the victim which were intended to be afflicted by the curse in very detailed lists of individual limbs (4). In addition, the cursers also aimed at affecting the victim's ability to think or, more generally, his/her

---

(1) L. BORSARI, *Mentana. Tombe romane scoperte presso l'abitato*, «NotSc» (1901), pp. 207-208 (= *AEP* 1901, 183); A. AUDOLLENT, *Defixionum tabellae*, Paris 1904, pp. 191-193 no. 135; ILS 8751; A. AUDOLLENT, *A propos de la langue des «tabellae defixionum»*, «REA», 11 (1909), pp. 366-368; E. DIEHL, *Vulgärlateinische Inschriften*, Bonn 1910, p. 75 no. 851; M. JEANNERET, *La langue des tablettes d'exécutions latines*, «Revue de Philologie», 41 (1917), p. 130; H. SOLIN, *Zu den nomentanischen Fluchtafeln*, «Arctos», 23 (1989), pp. 195-199; J. GAGER, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, Oxford 1992, p. 172 no. 80; H. SOLIN, *Corpus defixionum antiquarum, quelques réflexions*, in *Latin vulgare - latin tardif. Actes du IVe colloque international sur le latin vulgare et tardif*, ed. L. Calebat, Hildesheim 1995, pp. 571-572; A. VALENTINI, *I reperti nomentani al Museo Nazionale Romano*, «Annali dell'Associazione Nomentana di Storia e Archeologia» (1997), p. 86; H. VERSNEL, *An essay on anatomical curses*, in *Ansichten griechischer Rituale*, ed. F. Graf, Stuttgart 1998, p. 223; R. GORDON, *What's in a list? Listing in Greek and Graeco-Roman World*, in *The World of Ancient Magic*, eds. D. R. Jordan, H. Montgomery and E. Thomassen, Bergen 1999, p. 270; A. WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt. Untersuchungen zur öffentlichen Sklaverei in den Städten des römischen Reiches*, Stuttgart 2004, p. 196 no. 20; S. GREGGI, *La documentazione epigrafica dell'antica Nomentum*, «Annali dell'Associazione Nomentana di Storia e Archeologia» (2007), p. 43 no. 8; A. KROPP, *Defixiones. Ein aktuelles Corpus lateinischer Fluchtafeln*, Speyer 2008, no. 1.4.2/3; V. PETTIROSSI, *Aggiornamento al corpus epigrafico dell'antica Nomentum*, «Annali dell'Associazione Nomentana di Storia e Archeologia» (2016), pp. 12-13 no. 8; C. SÁNCHEZ NATALÍAS, *A Cartography of defixiones in the Western Roman Empire, in Contesti magici. Contextos mágicos*, eds. M. Piranomonte, and F. Marco Simón, Roma 2012, p. 126; D. URBANOVA, *Latin Curse Tablets of the Roman Empire*, Innsbruck 2018, pp. 217-219 no. 12. On-line sources: EDCS-38400059 (last access: 4 January 2018); EDH032766 (last access: 4 January 2018); EDR071810 (last access: 6 January 2018); TheDeMa 220 (last access: 6 January 2018). The tablet was found inside a cinerary urn: see also C. PALA, *Forma Italiae. XII. Nomentum*, Rome 1976, p. 65 no. 1,89.

(2) SOLIN, *Zu den nomentanischen* cit., pp. 195-196 dates this inscription to the late Republic/early Empire (considering Audolent's dating to the third century CE as a misleading interpretation of the archaeological context). See also KROPP, *Defixiones* cit., no. 1.4.2/3. Different dating in EDR071810: 1-50 CE (based on palaeography and archaeology).

(3) VERSNEL, *An essay* cit., pp. 223-235 uses the term 'instrumental curses' for those curses where the authors deliberately attempt to limit the abilities of their adversaries in agreement with the actual purpose of the curse (in legal or agonistic contexts) to gain advantages for themselves in a specific situation. These are unlike most of the later curses containing extensive lists of almost all body parts, which he calls 'anatomical curses', where the author's aim is to destroy his/her victim completely.

(4) For the interpretation of this cursing procedure, see also F. GRAF, *Gottesnähe und Schadenzauber*, München 1996, pp. 130-138; GORDON, *What's in a list?* cit., pp. 263, 269-270. P. POCETTI, *Manipolazione della realtà e manipolazione della lingua: alcuni aspetti dei testi magici dell'antichità*, in *Linguaggio-Linguaggi. Invenzione-Scoperta*, ed. R. Morresi, Roma 2002, p. 26 sees the enumeration of body parts intended to be afflicted by the curse as a linguistic transposition of the ritual procedure of transfixing (expressed by the Latin verb *defigo*) the body parts of clay figurines, *kolossoi*. See also GAGER, *Curse Tablets* cit., pp. 14-21.

life and health. The wealth of the victim, which was probably a frequent cause of rivalry, was often targeted, as well. This means that the authors tried to destroy not only the physical condition of their enemies but also their social status. In the Latin cursing tradition (5), this type of curse formulation mostly appears in non-specific curses, i.e. those where no reason or context is stated (6), and is most often found in Italy and Africa (7).

#### a) Texts

This section aims to provide the *status quaestionis* of the study of the opisthographic curse tablet from *Nomentum*, with particular regard to the epigraphic and linguistic aspects of the text. It is the occasion to publish for the first time photographs of both sides of the tablet and, for the second time since Borsari's edition, a new version of the facsimiles of the texts on both sides.

The opisthographic lead tablet from *Nomentum* (5.5×9.5 cm) contains two different curses. Side A contains a malediction aimed at a man named *Malchio*, the son or slave of *Nico* (Figs. 1-2); the fact that both are mentioned through their *simplex nomen* seems to suggest that they were both slaves (8). On side B, we find a curse against *Rufa pu(b)lica* (Figs. 3-4). Regarding the expression *pulica* that twice follows the name *Rufa*, Solin's interpretation of it as a variant of *pu(b)lica* seems to be perfectly plausible: the woman was therefore a public

---

(5) The oldest Greek evidence of lists of accursed body parts or victim's fortunes has been preserved from the fourth century BCE in Attica, see R. WÜNSCH, *Defixionum tabellae Atticae*, Berlin 1897, p. 24 no. 97; R. JORDAN, *Defixiones from a Well Near the South-West Corner of the Athenian Agora*, «Hesperia», 54 (1985), pp. 205-255, and R. JORDAN, *New Archaeological Evidence for the Practice of Magic in Classical Athens*, in *Praktika tou XII diethnous synedriou klasikes archaiologias*, IV, Athens 1988, p. 273, but from the end of the sixth century BCE also in Selinunte, see GAGER, *Curse Tablets* cit., pp. 138-139 no. 49; L. BETTARINI, *Corpus delle defixiones di Selinunte*, Alessandria 2005, XI-XII; G. ROCCA, *Grecità di Sicilia: il caso defixiones. Un nuovo testo da Selinunte*, in *Convivenze etniche e contatti di culture, Atti del Seminario di Studi (Milano, 23-24 novembre 2009)*, Trento 2012, pp. 209-215 most frequently in connection with the actual motif of the curse, e.g. in a legal context. In the latter case, however, the curse is usually meant to limit an adversary's tongue and ability to speak and think; in the context of rivalry in business, the curse usually aims at the object of rival's enterprise, see GORDON, *What's in a list?* cit., pp. 258-259; while the agonistic curses target the physical abilities of gladiators, charioteers, and horses.

(6) Mostly shorter lists of cursed body parts, souls, or minds are, nevertheless, found many times especially in Greek, but also in Latin, agonistic or legal curses, love spells, and prayers for justice. See also VERSNEL, *An essay* cit., p. 217.

(7) See also GORDON, *What's in a list?* cit., pp. 270-277.

(8) See the interpretative comments of SOLIN, *Zu den nomentanischen* cit., pp. 196-197 who speaks about the slave milieu in which this curse originated: *Nico* must have been a slave or a former slave from Syria and the master or the father of *Malchio*.



Fig. 1. Lead curse tablet from *Nomentum* (*AEp* 1901, 183), side A (su concessione del Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo - Museo Nazionale Romano).

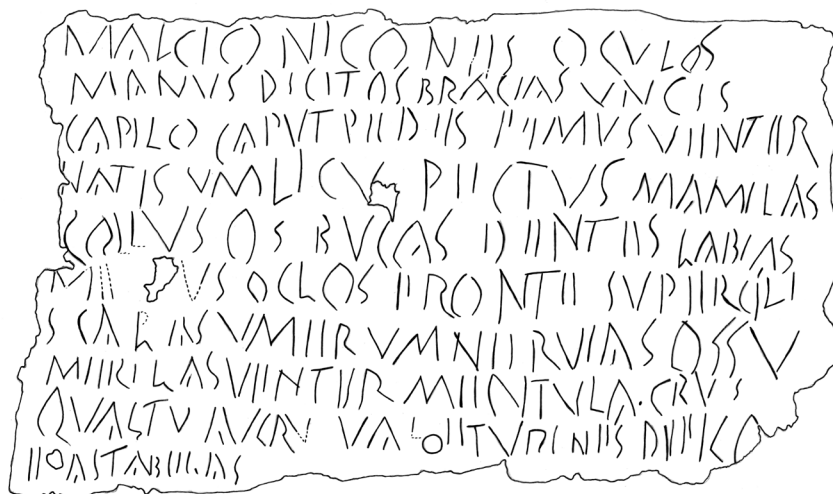


Fig. 2. Lead curse tablet from *Nomentum* (*AEp* 1901, 183), facsimile of side A (author: FRANCO LUCIANI).



Fig. 3. Lead curse tablet from *Nomentum* (*AEp* 1901, 183), side B (su concessione del Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo - Museo Nazionale Romano).

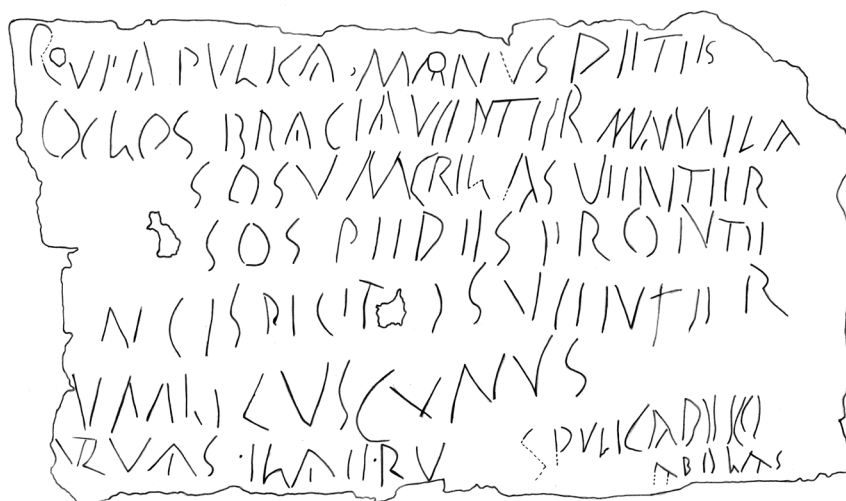


Fig. 4. Lead curse tablet from *Nomentum* (*AEp* 1901, 183), facsimile of side B (author: FRANCO LUCIANI).

slave (9). The generally low social status of the context in which the two *defixiones* were produced is also attested by the poor spelling by the author of the text. Indeed, as is common in such texts (10), the curse formulation deviates from the syntactic rules of Classical Latin. Moreover, other peculiarities are recorded. The names of both victims, mentioned at the very beginning of each curse as *Malchio* and *Rufa*, are in the nominative. We would rather expect the name of the cursed person to be in the accusative (e.g. *Malchionem defigo*) or the genitive (e.g. *Malchionis oculos defigo*). Furthermore, the accursed body parts syntactically depend on the verb *defigo* mentioned at the end of the text and are listed in accusative forms. Although many of these terms contain Vulgar Latin features, it is clear that the author tried to use the accusative case while naming the body parts. Nevertheless, he also wanted the most important part of the curse, i.e. the victims' personal names, to be in the nominative (11). On the basis of an analysis of two photographs very recently taken at the Museo Nazionale Romano - Terme di Diocleziano in Rome, where the tablet is held (inv. no. 52186), the texts can be read as follows (12):

**Original text side A**

MALCIO NICONES OCVLOS  
 MANVS DICTOS BRACIAS VNCIS  
 CAPILO CAPVT PEDES FEMVS  
 VENTER  
 NATIS VMLICVS PECTVS MAMILAS

**Amended text side A**

*Malc(h)io Nicon' i's oculos,*  
*manus, di' g'itos, brac(h)ia{s}, un' gue's,*  
*capil(l)o(s), caput, pedes, femus,*  
*vent' re'(m),*  
*nat' e's, um(bi)licu' m', pectus, mamil(l)as,*

(9) SOLIN, *Zu den nomentanischen* cit., p. 197. The word *pulica* is nowhere else attested in Latin inscriptions, as far as names are concerned, only *Pulicio, -onis* (CIL II, 6116; CIL VIII, 18795; ILLg II, 3, 7699; AEp 2011, 579) is attested. Moreover, the whole text contains many vulgar Latin features: a similar omission is documented in CIL XIII, 5695 (see Computerized Historical Linguistic Database of Latin Inscriptions of the Imperial Age: LLDB-5148 PVLICIO = *publico*). On female public slaves, see F. LUCIANI in Section 2.

(10) See JEANNERET, *La langue* cit., p. 133; SOLIN, *Zu den nomentanischen* cit., p. 196; J.N. ADAMS, *Social Variation and the Latin Language*, Cambridge 2013, pp. 226-228.

(11) For curse texts, the crucial and only inextricable element that must be present in a *defixio* is the name of the victim. This might be the reason the name of a person must be written in its true form and correctly in curse texts and why it tends to stand in the nominative, especially in the case of nominal lists, not only in magical contexts. The tendency to isolate or emphasise proper names is also apparent in our text: see ADAMS, *Social Variation* cit., pp. 226-228 and D. URBANOVA, *Between Syntax and Magic. Some Peculiarities of Nominal Syntax in Latin Curse Tablets*, in *Proceedings of the 19th International Colloquium on Latin Linguistics in Munich*, forthcoming.

(12) See also A. TORO (ed.), *Ritrovamenti e contesti*, Roma 2001, p. 335. Some corrupted parts of the text, due to damaged parts of the tablet or the presence of plexiglass added in recent times to maintain the integrity of the object, were restored based on BORSARI, *Mentana* cit., p. 208.



5	COLLVS OS BVCAS DENTES LABIAS ME[NT]VS OCLOS FRONTE SVPERCILI SCAꝀLAS VMERVM NERVIAS OSSV MERILAS VENTER MENTVLA CRVS QVASTV LVCRV VALETVDINES DEFICO		
10	IN AS TABELAS.		
	<b>Original text side B</b>		<b>Amended text side B</b>
	RVFA PVLICA MANVS DETES OCLOS BRACIA VENTER MAMILA <u>PECTVS</u> OSV MCRILAS VENTER <u>CRVS</u> OS PEDES FRONTEꝀ		Rufa pu(b)lica manus, de(n)tes, oc(u)los, brac(h)ia, ventʳ reʳ(m), mamil(l)a(s), <u>pectus</u> , os(s)u(um) mʳ eduʳ(l)as, ventʳ reʳ(m), <u>crus</u> , os, pedes, fronteʳ mʳ,
5	VNCIS DICITVS VENTER VMLICVS CVNVS VLVAS/QVAS ILAE RVFAꝀ PVLICA DEICO IN AS TABELAS.		<u>unʳ</u> gueʳs, dʳ gʳitos, ventʳ reʳ(m), un(bi)licuʳ mʳ, cun(n)uʳ mʳ, v(u)lvaʳ mʳ, il(i)a{e} vel quas il(l)ae Rufaʳ eʳ pub(l)ica(e), deʳ fʳ gʳo <u>in (h)a(s) tabel(l)as.</u>

The beginning of line 7 on side B is difficult to decipher, and many *lectiones variae* have been proposed in various editions. Borsari (13) read: *quas (?) ilae Rufas Pulica def(i)co /in as tabelas*. Audollent amended Borsari's lection to: *(v)ulvaʳ mʳ, il(i)a{e} Rufas Pulica(e) de(f)i[c]o* (14). Kropp read: *qua<e>stum Rufa<e>s (!) publica<e> (!) def<i>go*, presumably following the model of the text on side A. Finally, Cimarosti (15) suggested the reading *quasil(l)a{e}(ria)*, which would indicate that *Rufa* was employed in a spinning workshop.

The clear presence of the letters *ILAE* and the punctuation mark before them lead to the exclusion of both Kropp's and Cimarosti's lection. In contrast, both *quas* and *v(u)lvas* seem to

(13) BORSARI, *Mentana* cit., p. 208. The same reading, i.e. *quas il(l)ae* has been proposed also by Celia Sánchez Natalías in her PhD thesis.

(14) AUDOLLENT, *Defixionum* cit., pp. 191-193 no. 135. This reading has been accepted by SOLIN, *Corpus defixionum* cit., p. 571; A. ÖNNERFORS, *Antike Zaubersprüche*, Stuttgart 1991, p. 48 no. 19; GAGER, *Curse Tablets* cit., p. 172 no. 80; VERSNEL, *An essay* cit., p. 222; GORDON, *What's in a list?* cit., p. 270; KROPP, *Defixiones* cit., no. 1.4.2/3; TheDeMa 220. See also PETTIROSSI, *Aggiornamento* cit., pp. 12-13 no. 8, with detailed enumeration of the *lectiones variae* and interpretation of the text.

(15) See E. CIMAROSTI, *Schiave e liberte pubbliche nella documentazione epigrafica: note a CILA, 541*, in *Donna e vita cittadina nella documentazione epigrafica, Atti del II Seminario sulla condizione femminile nella documentazione epigrafica* (Verona, 25-27 marzo 2004), eds. A. Buonopane, and F. Cenerini, Faenza 2005, pp. 453 n. 2.

be possible readings. From a palaeographic point of view, it is worth noting that the alleged *Q* in *QVAS* would be very different in its handwriting from the only other *Q* in line 9 of side A. Analogously, the possible *L* in the reading *VLVAS* would appear quite differently from all of the other *Ls* engraved on both sides (16).

Borsari's lection implies that the relative pronoun *quas* refers to all of the aforementioned parts of *Rufa's* body. It is a possible explanation, even though it is not attested in any other Latin curse. Indeed, the Latin terms *quas/quos* are attested with regard to accursed individuals rather than accursed parts of their bodies, e.g. *Pro me pro meis devotos defixos inferis, devotos defixos inferis, Timen et Niciam et ceteros quos merito devovi supr[a]* (17); *Dis Manibus hos v(oveo): L(ucium) C(a)eli(um), C(aium) Haeb ... et si quos alios hos(tes) habeo, neca illa nom(ina)* (18); *Adligate lingu(a)s horum, quos suprascripsi, ne adversus nos respondere (possint)* (19).

Audollent's lection appears to be more logical for the general meaning of the malediction; indeed, two more accursed organs of *Rufa* would be listed: *vulva* and *ilia*.

Consequently, it is possible to propose the following translations:

A: *Malchio*, (son or slave) of *Nico*: (his) eyes, hands, fingers, arms, nails, hair, head, feet, thigh, belly, buttocks, navel, chest, nipples, neck, mouth, cheeks, teeth, lips, chin, eyes, forehead, eyebrows, shoulder blades, shoulder, muscles, bone marrow (20), belly, cock, shin, profit/business, fortune, and health I do curse in this tablet.

B: *Rufa*, the public slave: the hands, teeth, eyes, arms, belly, nipples, chest, bone marrow, bowels, shin, mouth, feet, forehead, nails, fingers, womb, navel, cunt, vulva?, loins? of *Rufa*, the public slave, I do curse in this tablet (or alternatively ... cunt, all these organs of this *Rufa*, the public slave, I do curse in this tablet).

(16) For palaeography of Latin curse tablets see G. BARTOLETTI, *La scrittura romana nelle tabulae defixionum (secc. I. a.C.-IV. d.C.). Note paleografiche*, «Scrittura e civiltà», 14 (1990), pp. 7-47.

(17) TheDeMa 372.

(18) TheDeMa 743.

(19) TheDeMa 785.

(20) KROPP, *Defixiones* cit., no. 1.4.2/3 interprets this passage as *osu* and *merilas*, but it could also be read together with *merilas* as *ossu(u)m medullas* «bone marrow», and similarly on side B. See also slightly different interpretations and translations from other scholars: GORDON, *What's in a list?* cit., p. 270; ÖNNERFORS, *Antike Zaubersprüche* cit., p. 48 no. 19; SOLIN, *Corpus defixionum* cit., pp. 571-572; GAGER, *Curse Tablets* cit., p. 172 no. 80; VERSNEL, *An essay* cit., pp. 223-224.

## b) Analysis of the texts

The text on side A is longer and contains four or five body parts on each line. The list does not proceed downwards systematically, as lists of body parts preserved in other Latin curse tablets usually do (21). The first item is the eyes, probably the most important body part. Then, the hands follow, even though we would rather expect a sequence listing arms, hands, fingers, and nails (22). In contrast, the procedure is different in this tablet, and especially the skip *caput-pedes* is significant: the author leaps ‘from head to toe’ (more precisely to the feet). Then he proceeds back to the head and again downwards. Some body parts appear multiple times, e.g. *oculos* in the first and sixth lines and *venter* in the third and eighth lines. R. Gordon assumes that this repetition may be a reflection of the perception of the body from outside to inside (the organs hidden inside the body); therefore, he translates the word *venter* as ‘belly’ and the second occurrence as ‘guts’ (23). With regard to the term *oculus*, Gordon stated that its use at the beginning of the curse does not refer to the mere organs of sight, the eyes, as is the case in the sixth line, but that it must be understood in a wider sense as a reflection of the victim’s soul and character.

Finally, the last sequence of the curse (*quaestum, lucrum, valetudines*) is supposed to afflict not only the health of the victim, but also his social and economic status. Other curses proceed from more general terms concerning the physical appearance, such as *salus, corpus, color, vis*, etc. (24), to the outer and inner body parts and social status, or just briefly state the most important features, such as *vita, valetudo, quaestus* (25).

(21) See, e.g., TheDeMa 488-492, and 510, proceeding roughly from the head to the toes.

(22) As, for instance, in TheDeMa 488: the curse against Plotius: *Proserpina Salvia, do tibi nares, labra, aures, nasum, linguam, dentes Ploti, ne dicere possit Plotius, quid sibi doleat: collum, umeros, brachia, digitos, ne possit aliquid se adiutare, pectus, iocinera, cor, pulmones...* See the entire unrestored text in TheDeMa.

(23) See GORDON, *What’s in a list?* cit., pp. 270-274. Words referring to entrails, such as *intestina, viscera, interanea, and exta*, rarely occur in *defixiones*. In tablet TheDeMa 510, *cor, pulmones*, and *i(n)testinas* are combined with *venter*; in TheDeMa 488-492, the sequence is *intestina, ventrem, umbilicum*; in TheDeMa 512, there are *viscera* and *exta*, but not *venter*; in TheDeMa 96, aimed against the gladiator *Maurussus*, one can read: *apsumatis, desumatis, consu(m)at(i)s cor, membra, viscera, interania Maurussi*. Finally, in the very sophisticated curse from Rome - via Ostiense, TheDeMa 517, one can find *viscera: Canes Or[c]ini, Orcini tricipites, vos, illius Caeciliae Primae exedit[is] iocinera pulmones, cor cum venis, viscera, membra, medullas, eius diripiatis (...)*.

(24) See TheDeMa 488.

(25) See TheDeMa 540: *Cn(aeum) Numidium Astragalum v(oveo) il(l)ius vita(m) vale-*

The list of accursed limbs on side B is briefer and limited to only the body parts, completely omitting head, hair, and facial elements (26), as well as social status, which could not be the author's concern in this case. However, the end of the curse clearly focuses on a detailed enumeration of body parts connected with sexual life and reproduction (27). The text reads *venter* three times, in the second, third, and fifth lines. According to R. Gordon, the term is to be interpreted as a belly from the outer appearance and also from the inner appearance i.e. the guts, as well as the female organs, i.e. womb.

Other terms concerning the abdominal part of the woman and her female sexual organ appear in line 6 after the third mention of *venter*: *umbilicus*, *cunnus*, and even two others, if we consider Audollent's lection: *vulva* and *ilia*. The first term means either vulva (in the sense of vagina) or womb (28). The word *ilia* can also denote both bowels and loins. Even though Borsari's lection is accepted, this special emphasis on *Rufa's venter* and genitals is surprising, since a similarly detailed list of such organs has not survived in any other Latin anatomical curse.

What then might have been the reason for such a curse? The fact that two individuals, a man and a woman, are accursed on two different sides of the same tablet, with two very similar cursing rituals and handwriting with a strong resemblance, seems to suggest that the curse was made at the same time and probably by the same person, the gender of whom we do not know. It might be a case of a spell against two lovers. It is certainly striking that the curse against *Malcio* on side A was supposed to affect not only the victim's health, but also his social and economic status, while the one against *Rufa* on side B was clearly addressed at her body, with particular regard to her genitals. Cursing a woman's genitals makes sense if the victim is a thorn in author's side in some way –

---

*tudin(em), quaistum ipsu(m)q(ue) uti tabescat morbu...* ('I dedicate? Gnaeus Numidius Astragalus, his life, health, profit and himself, may he die of disease').

(26) When cursing *Malchio*, the author used 29 different body parts and three general expressions referring to the victim's health and fortune; against *Rufa*, however, he/she only used 16 or 18 body parts, excluding especially facial parts and the head.

(27) ÖNNERFORS, *Antike Zaubersprüche* cit., p. 48 no. 19 translates the last part *ventrem, umbilicum, cunnum, (v)ulva(m), il(i)a* as 'Bauch, Nabel, Geschlecht, Gebärmutter, Eingeweide'; GORDON, *What's in a list?* cit., p. 270 as 'womb, navel, cunt, vulva, groin'; GAGER, *Curse Tablets* cit., p. 172 as 'belly, navel, genitals, womb, groin'; VERSNEL, *An essay* cit., p. 223 as 'womb, navel, cunt, vulva(?), groin'. GORDON, *What's in a list?* cit., p. 270 notes: '*Rufa* is represented solely as a body, most insistently, it seems, as a thing to be penetrated'.

(28) See J.N. ADAMS, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, London 1982, pp. 102-103.

either because of some love affair or successes with men. Does this mean that our curse is the expression of a love rivalry (perhaps a competition between prostitutes), or a case of envy regarding another woman's pregnancy? The term *vulva* appears only sporadically in *defixiones* and always in a different context. For example, if the name of a victim's mother was unknown to the author of a curse, the term *suavulva* was used instead, as in a tablet from Hadrumetum: *Alimbeu, Columbeu, Petalimbeu. Faciatis Victoria(m), quam peperit suavulva, amante(m), furente(m) pr(a)e amore meo, neque somnu(m) videat, donec at me veniat puella(r)um d(eli)cias* (The love spell begins with names of demons and continues: «get Victoria, who was born to XY, to love [me], burn with passion for me, may she not sleep until she comes to me, the sweetest of girls») (29). Moreover, the word *cunnus* is attested only in another curse from Pompeii, which also seems to indicate a love rivalry context: *Philematio Hostili (serva): faciem... capillum, cerebrum, flatus, ren(es)..., ut illi non succedat... ut ille illam odiat. ... Quomodo is eis desertus, illa deserta sit cunno.* («Philematio, the (slave) of Hostilius: [I curse? her] face... hair, brain, breath, kidneys..., may she not succeed... may he hate her. ... Just like this one is deserted by them, may she be deserted in her cunt») (30). A tablet from Ptuj is considered one of the few preserved Latin curses documenting a rivalry in love: *Paulina aversa sit a viris omnibus et defisca sit, ne quid possit mali facere. Firminam (cl)od(as) ab omnibus humanis.* («May Paulina be turned off by all men and may she be cursed, so that she can do no evil. Seclude Firmina from all men») (31). Nevertheless, *Rufa* might have been someone's mistress, but she probably could not have been a prostitute. Still, the author of the curse from *Nomentum* clearly wanted *Rufa*'s genitals

(29) See TheDeMa 21. Other occurrences of the term *vulva* in *defixiones*, such as *vulva facta* (TheDeMa 838) and *vulva maledicta* (TheDeMa 501), refer to victim's mother. Similarly, an alternative term – *nomen* – is used in *defixiones* when the author does not know the victim's name, especially in prayers for justice aimed at an unknown thief, as, e.g., TheDeMa 687: *Nomen furis, qui frenum involaverit, si liber si servus, si baro si mulier, deo donatur...* («The name of the thief [i.e. the thief] who has stolen the bridle, whether free or slave, whether man or woman, is given to the god...»), see D. URBANOVÁ, J. FRANEK, *Il campo semantico di nomen nelle tavole defixionum*, in *Latin vulgare - latin tardif XI*, eds. A. García Leal, and C. E. Prieto Entrialgo, Hildesheim 2017, pp. 616-628.

(30) TheDeMa 543. The text inscribed on two tablets, found in a grave context, is damaged to a large extent; for the entire unrestored text, see TheDeMa 780; the text in the *simili-formula*, *quomodo is eis desertus*, refers to the dead person buried in the grave.

(31) TheDeMa 780. See A. PREMERSTEIN, *Ein Fluchtäfelchen mit Liebeszauber aus Poetovio*, «Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes in Wien», 9 (1906), pp. 192-198, who states that the accursed women were local prostitutes.

to be most afflicted by the curse. Therefore, it is possible that he/she tried to prevent *Rufa* from getting pregnant and having children (32).

\* \* \*

## 2. Notes on Female Public Slaves

The re-examination of both epigraphic texts, especially the one on side B, provided by Daniela Urbanová, offers the chance to give a general overview of the role of female public slaves in the Roman world, which may allow a better contextualization of the meaning of the *defixio* from *Nomentum* (33).

In the Latin West, 38 inscriptions attest 17 *servae* and 23 *libertae publicae*: this evidence comes from Italy, the Iberian Peninsula (*Baetica*, *Lusitania*, *Tarraconensis*), Africa (*Mauretania Caesariensis*), Gaul (*Aquitania*, *Lugdunensis*), and Germany (*Germania superior*) and covers a relatively wide time span, from the first to the third century CE (cf. Table 1) (34). No attestation of female public slaves comes from Rome, as public slavery in the City was

---

(32) Only a single Latin tablet from Bath (Britain) documents an attempt to prevent someone from having children, as a punishment for stealing a cloak from the author: *Docilianus Bruceri deae sanctissimae Sulis devoveo eum, qui caracallam meam involaverit, si vir si femina, si servus si liber, uti eum dea Sulis maximo leto adigat nec ei somnum permittat nec natos nec nascentes, donec caracallam meam ad templum sui numinis pertulerit.* («Docilianus, [son] of Brucerus to the most holy goddess Sulis. I curse him who has stolen my hooded cloak, whether man or woman, whether slave or free, so that the goddess Sulis may inflict death upon him and not allow him to sleep or [to have] children now and in future, until he has brought my hooded cloak to the temple of her divinity»), see TheDeMa 156, and R.S.O. TOMLIN, *The Curse Tablets, in The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath*, II, *The Finds from the Sacred Spring*, ed. B. Cunliffe, Oxford 1988, pp. 122-123 no. 10.

(33) This study is part of the ‘*Servi Publici*: Everybody’s Slaves (SPES)’ project, which was based at Newcastle University, and received funding from the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship (H2020-MSCA-IF-2015) under grant agreement no. 704716. I am very grateful to Simon Corcoran, Ulrike Roth, Federico Santangelo, and Daniela Urbanová for their comments on previous (oral and written) versions of this paper.

(34) Two inscriptions (nos. 36-37) mention the same woman as a public slave and as a public freedwoman: she is therefore included in the figure of *libertae publicae*. The interpretation of nos. 18 and 26 as references to female public slaves is far from certain. The table is based on: S. DARDAINE, *Les affranchis des cités dans les provinces de l’Occident Romain: statut, onomastique et nomenclature*, in *Ciudades privilegiadas en el Occidente Romano*, ed. J. Gonzalez, Seville 1999, pp. 213-228; WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt* cit., p. 25 n. 4; CIMAROSTI, *Schiave e liberte pubbliche* cit., pp. 450-456; F. LUCIANI, *Public Slaves in Rome and in the Cities of the Latin West: New Additions to the Epigraphic Corpus*, in *From Document to History: Epigraphic Insights into the Greco-Roman World*, eds. C. Noreña, and N. Papazarkadas, Leiden - Boston 2019, p. 287 no. 1, p. 289 nos. 23, 25, 292 no. 42, p. 293 no. 47.

Table 1. Epigraphic corpus of female public slaves and public freedwomen in Roman Italy and the Western provinces (author: FRANCO LUCIANI).

	Origin	Edition	Name(s) of female public slave(s) and/or public freedwoman/-men	Date
1.	Bovillae (Regio I)	CIL XIV, 2470	Sebera, mother of Seberianus rei publicae ver(nae)	3 <sup>rd</sup> c. CE
2.	Nomentum (Regio I)	AEp 1901, 135	Rufa pub(lic)a	First half of the 1 <sup>st</sup> c. CE
3.	Capua (Regio I)	CIL X, 4334	Campania Phronime, daughter of Sedatus col(onorum scl. servus)	2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
4.	Brundisium (Regio II)	G. NERVEGNA, <i>Brindisi. Nuove epigrafi latine dell'antica necropoli</i> , «NotSc» (1892), 352 no. g; A. WEISS, <i>Epigraphische Kleinigkeiten</i> , «ZPE», 204 (2017), pp. 239-240 no. 2	[- - ] publica muni[ci]pum B[rundisinoru]m ser(ua)	Unknown
5.	Lucerù (Regio II)	CIL IX, 819	Agra s(erva) p(ublica)	First half of the 1 <sup>st</sup> c. CE
6.	Beneventum (Regio II)	CIL IX, 1538 = ILS 4185	Concordia col(oniae) lib(eria) Iamuar[ia] c[on]sul[is] m[unicipalis]	228 CE
7.	Terrentum (Regio IV)	CIL IX, 2606	Terrentinia Calliste, partner of [- -] nus rei p(ublicae) Ter[re]nt[is] m[unicipalis] ser(vus) arb(arius)	1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
8.	Aesernia (Regio IV)	CIL IX, 2676	Aesernina S[er]v[us] m[unicipalis] che, mother of Expertus publicus	1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
9.	Histonium (Regio IV)	CIL IX, 2889; cf. <i>SupplIt 2</i> (1983), p. 116	Lepora His[toniensium] ser(vua)	1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
10.	Histonium (Regio IV)	CIL IX, 2900; cf. <i>SupplIt 2</i> (1983), pp. 117-118	Primenia [r(eg) p(ublicae)] His[toniensium] scl. serva	1 <sup>st</sup> c. CE
11.	Corfinium (Regio IV)	CIL IX, 3219; cf. <i>SupplIt 3</i> (1987), p. 123	Cypare, mother of Castorius Cor[finiensium] servus	2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
12.	Corfinium (Regio IV)	AEp 1983, 323; <i>SupplIt 3</i> (1987), pp. 200-201 no. 86	[T]hymele Corfiniens[is] scl. serva	2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> c. CE

(Follows Table 1).

	Origin	Edition	Name(s) of female public slave(s) and/or public freedwoman/-men	Date
13.	<i>Aequiculi</i> (Regio IV)	CIL IX, 4112 = ILS 4381	<i>Aequicula Bassilla</i> , daughter of <i>Apronianus r(eti) p(ublicae) Aequiculanorum ser(vus) arb(arius)</i>	Second half of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
14.	<i>Hispellum</i> (Regio VI)	L. SENSI, <i>Hispellata Valentina</i> , « <i>Bullettino storico della città di Foligno</i> » 35-36 (2012-13), pp. 291-296	<i>Hispellata Valentina</i> , partner of <i>Ianuaris r(eti) p(ublicae) colonorum Hispellatum a(ctor?)</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
15.	<i>Carsulae</i> (Regio VI)	<i>AEp</i> 2012, 466	<i>Quint(a) R[e]stituta Car[sulanorum scil. serva]</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> c. CE
16.	<i>Saturnia</i> (Regio VII)	CIL XI, 2656	<i>Publicia</i> vel <i>Saturnia Fortunata</i> , mother of <i>Secunda publica</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE (?)
17.	<i>Volturni</i> (Regio VII)	CIL XI, 3419, cf. pp. 1464, 1465	<i>Charis Vols[iniensium scil. serva]</i>	Unknown
18.	<i>Pola</i> (Regio X)	CIL V, 396b, cf. p. 1021; <i>InscrIt</i> X, 2, 229	<i>Helena color[or(um scil. serva)?]</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
19.	<i>Pola</i> (Regio X)	CIL V, 83; ILS 6677; <i>InscrIt</i> X, 1, 104	<i>Pollentia Processa</i> , fellow freedwoman of (scil. <i>Pollentius colonorum Pol[ensium] lib(ertus) Valerianus summorum dispensat(or)</i> )	Late 1 <sup>st</sup> /early 2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
20.	<i>Altinum</i> (Regio X)	<i>AEp</i> 2001, 1049; cf. <i>AEp</i> 2010, 548	<i>Publicia Amabilis</i> , partner (?) of <i>Virilis n(unicipum) A[ltinatium] s(ervus) vilic(us) aer(arii)</i>	First half of the 1 <sup>st</sup> c. CE
21.	<i>Verona</i> (Regio X)	CIL V, 3470; cf. <i>AEp</i> 2007, 634	<i>Veronia Caecia</i> , partner of <i>Heliodorus Veronensium scil. servus</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
22.	<i>Verona</i> (Regio X)	CIL V, 3832; <i>IG</i> XIV, 2312	<i>Veronia Chreste</i> , mother of <i>C[hr]estus Veronensium (scil. servus)</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
23.	<i>Brixia</i> (Regio X)	CIL V, 4686; <i>InscrIt</i> X, 5, 497	<i>Publicia Quint[ia]</i> , mother of <i>Faustinus Brixianol[er(um scil. servus)]</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
24.	<i>Augusta Emerita</i> (Lusitania)	CIL II, 504	<i>Publicia Em[er]itensium [lib(erta)] Ebora</i>	Unknown



	Origin	Edition	Name(s) of female public slave(s) and/or public freedwoman/-men	Date
25.	<i>Augusta Emerita</i> (Lusitania)	<i>AEp</i> 1998, 747	<i>Publicia coloniae</i> ( <i>liberta</i> ) <i>Graccula</i> [a]	Mid-1 <sup>st</sup> c. CE
26.	<i>Carmo</i> (Baetica)	<i>AEp</i> 1961, 49 = <i>AEp</i> 2001, 1195	<i>Omp(b)e r(ei)p(ublicae) s(erva) vel De(- -) r(ei) p(ublicae) s(ervus)?</i>	Imperial age
27.	<i>Italica</i> (Baetica)	<i>CILA</i> II, 541 = <i>AEp</i> 2005, 802	[ - - ] <i>reip(ublicae) Ita</i> [ <i>licensium</i> ] <i>serva</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> c. CE
28.	<i>Saguntum</i> (Tarraconensis)	<i>CIL</i> II, 6027 = <i>CIL</i> II <sup>7</sup> /14, 378	– <i>Publicia Sagguntinorum</i> ( <i>liberta</i> ) <i>Sacerdos</i> – <i>Publicia m(unicipii) Sagguntinorum</i> ( <i>liberta</i> ) <i>Acritilla</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> c. CE
29.	<i>Segobriga</i> (Tarraconensis)	<i>EE</i> VIII, 182, cf. <i>EE</i> IX, p. 124 = <i>AEp</i> 1903, 186	[ <i>Barba</i> ] <i>rae rei</i> [ <i>publi</i> ] <i>cae Segob[ri]ge</i> <i>Insium</i> [ <i>serva</i> ]	2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
30.	<i>Avaricum</i> (Aquitania)	<i>M. PROVOST et alii, Carte archéologique de la Gaule</i> , 18, <i>Le Cher</i> , Paris 1992, p. 127 no. 429	<i>Pixitrix ancil(la) publica</i>	Unknown
31.	<i>Burdigala</i> (Aquitania)	<i>CIL</i> XIII, 603 = <i>ILS</i> 7039 = <i>ILA</i> Bordeaux 43	<i>Nemetogena ancilla publi</i> [l]ca	Second half of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
32.	<i>Lugdunum</i> (Lugdunensis)	<i>CIL</i> XIII, 1914	<i>Claudia Suavis colonor(um) lib(erta)</i>	Unknown
33.	<i>Andemantunum/Civitas Lingonum</i> (Germania superior)	<i>CIL</i> XIII, 571	( <i>Aelia liberta p(ublica)</i> )	2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
34.	<i>Civitas Vangionum</i> (Germania superior)	<i>AEp</i> 1933, 113	<i>Decorata libert(a) public(a)</i>	250 CE
35.	<i>Celeia</i> (Noricum)	<i>CIL</i> III, 5228, cf. p. 1830 = <i>ILLPRON</i> 1687	<i>Claudia Secunda</i> , partner of <i>Capitus Celeian(orum) scil. servus</i>	Second half of the 1 <sup>st</sup> c. CE
36.	<i>Stifis</i> (Mauretania Caesariensis)	<i>AEp</i> 1972, 737	– <i>Secundula publica</i> <i>ser(va)</i> – <i>Cocceia Felicitas</i> (she is most likely the same woman mentioned as a public slave in no. 37)	Early 2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
37.	<i>Stifis</i> (Mauretania Caesariensis)	<i>AEp</i> 1972, 733	– <i>Publica</i> (most likely a public freedwoman), sister of: – <i>Felicitas</i> (she is most likely the same woman mentioned as a public freedwoman in no. 36)	Early 2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE
38.	<i>Caesarea</i> (Mauretania Caesariensis)	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 21073	[ - - ] <i>ia lib(erta) r(et) p(ublicae) C(aesariensis)</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> c. CE

exclusively concerned with male individuals (35).

Among these texts, references to possible occupations carried out by *servae* or *libertae publicae* have been recognised in only two cases, and one of these was actually the inscription on side B of the lead curse tablet from *Nomentum*. However, both possible readings of line 7, *VLVAS ILAE* (= *v(u)lva<sup>r</sup>m<sup>1</sup>, il(i)a{e}*) or *QVAS ILAE* (= *quas il(l)ae*), and especially the presence of a punctuation mark between these two words, now confirmed by Urbanová (36), exclude the possibility that *Rufa* was a *quasil(l)a{e}(ria)*, i.e. a female servant employed in a spinning workshop, as suggested by Elena Cimarosti (37).

The other mention of a job performed by a female public slave had been detected in an inscription from *Capera* (*Lusitania*): *C(aius) Camilius Pa/ternu(s) / Gal(eria) Clu/n(i)ensis / an(norum) XXV / h(ic) s(itus) e(st) s(it) t(ibi) t(erra) / l(evis) vicini/a Clun/ie(n)sium / f(aciendum) c(uravit)* (38). Following Emil Hübner's interpretation (39), Alexander Weiss suggested that *VICINIA* in lines 4-5 might have been the name of a female public slave of the *Clunienses*, i.e. the inhabitants of *Clunia* (*Hispania citerior*), although he conceded that this was far from certain: the woman would have been a *serva publica* of the *Clunienses*, named *Vicinia*, who escorted *C. Camilius Paternus*, a man coming from *Clunia*, as his personal maidservant during an official mission (40). Nevertheless, there is no mention of any office held by *C. Camilius Paternus*. Moreover, in the Latin epigraphic evidence *Vicinia* is attested only twice as a *cognomen* or rather as a *simplex nomen* (41).

(35) L. HALKIN, *Les esclaves publics chez les Romains*, Brussels 1897 (reprint 1965), p. 141; W. EDER, *Servitus publica. Untersuchungen zur Entstehung, Entwicklung und Funktion der öffentlichen Sklaverei in Rom*, Wiesbaden 1980, p. 7 and n. 5; E. HERRMANN-OTTO, *Ex ancilla natus. Untersuchungen zu den «hausgeborenen» Sklaven und Sklavinnen im Westen des römischen Kaiserreiches*, Stuttgart 1994, p. 200; WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt* cit., p. 25. Analogously, no female public slaves in Classical Athens are attested: O. JACOB, *Les esclaves publics à Athènes*, Liège 1928, p. 8. On public slavery in ancient Greece, see P. ISMARD, *La démocratie contre les experts. Les esclaves publics en Grèce ancienne*, Paris 2015 (= P. ISMARD, *Democracy's Slaves. A Political History of Ancient Greece*, Cambridge MA - London 2017).

(36) See D. URBANOVÁ, Section 1.

(37) CIMAROSTI, *Schiave e liberte pubbliche* cit., p. 452 n. 14, 453 n. 2.

(38) *CIL* II, 821.

(39) Cf. apparatus in *CIL* II, 821: 'Vicinia Cluniensium serva publica videtur fuisse, nisi de vicinitate cogitare mavis'.

(40) WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt* cit., p. 26 n. 42, and 35. The same interpretation is in E. SCHLÜTER, *Hispanische Grabstelen der Kaiserzeit. Eine Studie zur Typologie, Ikonographie und Chronologie*, Hamburg 1998, pp. 235-236 no. 68.

(41) The only reference provided by I. KAJANTO, *The Latin Cognomina*, Helsinki 1965, p. 312 is *CIL* V, 7695 = *Inscrpt* IX, 1, 115 (*Augusta Bagiennorum, Liguria*): *Victoriae / Vicinia /*

On the contrary, a similar inscription from *Capera* shows that an interpretation of *VICINIA* as a substantive (*vicinia*, i.e. ‘the neighbours’) should be preferred: *Saluti / vicinia / Capere/nsis* (42). According to the interpretation suggested by Johann Caspar von Orelli (which met with Theodor Mommsen’s approval, but not Hübner’s), it pertained to an altar that had been dedicated to the *Salus* by a neighbourhood association of *Capera* (43). In one more inscription from *Capera*, the term *vicinia* seems to indicate a neighbourhood association, which prepared a tomb for *Petronius Capito* and *Severus*: *Petronis / Capitôni / et Severo / p(ater) et f(ilio) vi/cinia / pia felix / de suo f(aciendum) c(uravit) / cura(verunt) Procu/lae uxoris / s(it) v(obis) t(erra) l(evis)* (44). Analogously, in the above-mentioned case of the funerary stele to the *Cluniensis C. Camilius Paternus*, it is most likely that a neighbourhood association of his fellow townsmen set up a tombstone for him when he died at *Capera* (45).

Consequently, the only two attestations of possible tasks performed by female public slaves fail, and no references to any occupation of *servae* or *libertae publicae* can be found in the Greco-Roman world.

The absence of any mention of duties carried out by female public slaves in the available evidence is not surprising, especially

---

*Campani v(otum) s(olvit) / l(aeta) l(ibens)*. Among the other records mentioned in OPEL IV (2002) 167, only CIL XIII, 6115 (Neustadt an der Weinstrasse, *Germania superior*) seems to be accepted, even though the interpretation of *Vicinia* as a *cognomen* – or *simplex nomen* – is far from certain: [- - -] *Viciniae* / [- - -] *tullini et* / [- - -] *co* *niux donavit* / [- - -] *reficiendam* / [- - -] *INAGLO* / [- - -] *[[D]ecio]] Aug(usto) / [- - -] [[De]cio Caes(are)] co(n)s(ulibus) / [- - -] Iun(ias)*. For *Vicinia* as a *nomen*, see CIL VIII, 14743 (Ghardimaou, *Africa proconsularis*): *Vicinia Secun/[di]na vix(it) an(nos) LXXX / h(ic) s(ita) e(st)*; A. R. STAFFA, *Contributo per una ricostruzione del quadro insediativo della vallata del Tordino dall'antichità al medioevo*, in *Teramo e la valle del Tordino, Documenti dell'Abruzzo Teramano VII*, 1, Teramo 2006, 200 (*Interamnia Praetuttorum, Picenum*): *F(austae?) Viciniae C(ai) l(ibertae) Hil(arae), / F(austae?) Viciniae C(ai) l(ibertae) De[- - -], / F(austae?) Viciniae C(ai) l(ibertae) [- - -] / - - - - - ?*. Cf. also W. SCHULZE, *Zur Geschichte Lateinischer Eigennamen*, Berlin 1904 (1966<sup>2</sup>), p. 102.

(42) CIL II, 806.

(43) Cf. apparatus of CIL II, 806: ‘*Id est vicinitas; nomen enim proprium feminae hoc non videtur*» Or. [= Orelli], *quod Mommseno placuit; mihi magis visum est nomen proprium esse, quamquam certum eius nominis exemplum*’.

(44) HÉp 11 (2001) 124, cf. HÉp 9 (1999) 251.

(45) For this interpretation, see also J. F. RODRIGUEZ NEILA, *Consideraciones sobre el concepto de vicus en la Hispania romana. Los vici de Corduba*, «*Corduba archaeologica*», 2 (1976), pp. 101-118; S. HABA QUIRÓS, V. RODRIGO LÓPEZ, *Aportaciones a la epigrafía latina del área caparense*, «*Norba. Revista de historia*», 7 (1986), pp. 44-48; J. ANDREAU, *La vicinia d’Olbia, «REA»*, 99 (1997), p. 471; J. GÓMEZ PANTOJA, *Historia de dos ciudades: Capera y Clunia*, in *Économie et territoire en Lusitanie romaine*, eds. F. G. Rodríguez Martín, and J.-G. Gorges, Madrid 1999, pp. 94-95.

if we consider the text of chapter 78 of the so-called ‘*Lex Irnitana*’, the Flavian municipal law from *Irni* in *Baetica*, which refers to the kind of business that should be assigned to each public slave by the decurions (46). Both in the title (Table VIII C, l. 29: ... *servus publicus* ...) and in the text (Table VIII B, l. 34: ... *ser{v}vos publicos* ...), there are only explicit references to public slave(s) in masculine forms, and no mention of *servae publicae*. In contrast, clear allusions to both male and female public slaves are found in chapter 72, which set the conditions for manumitting public slaves (Table VIII B, l. 7: ... *servum publicum servamve publicam*...; l. 15: ... *eum servom eamve servam*...) (47). In the same chapter, services (*operae*), gifts (*dona*), and duties (*munera*) required from both public freedmen and freedwomen are also mentioned (Table VIII B, ll. 22-26: ... *inque eius, qui ita manumissus manumissave / erit, hereditate{m} bonorum possessione petenda / operis dono munere idem iu{ri}s municipi Flavi Irni/tani esto, quod esset, si municipi Italiae libertus liberta / esset*...). It is not possible to infer whether *operae* were actually required of the *libertae publicae* and, should this have been the case, what kind of services public freedwomen were supposed to offer. As for public freedmen, various epigraphic sources show that they were generally required to perform for the city the same tasks as those that they had carried out as public slaves (48). In contrast, as already mentioned, no reference survives to any occupation carried out by *libertae publicae* for the city.

It cannot be excluded that public freedwomen (and possibly female public slaves) might have been involved within the religious sphere, as supposed in the past (49), even though the evidence is not conclusive. Only one inscription from *Beneventum* attests with certainty to a public freedwoman, *Concordia col(onorum) lib(erta) Ianuaria*, involved as a cymbal-player (*cymbalistris*) in the worship of *Magna Mater* (50). A slave *cymbalistris*,

(46) J. GONZALEZ, M.H. CRAWFORD, *The Lex Irnitana: A New Copy of the Flavian Municipal Law*, «JRS», 76 (1986), pp. 173, 194.

(47) GONZALEZ, CRAWFORD, *The Lex Irnitana* cit., pp. 171, 192-193. See also WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt* cit., p. 28.

(48) F. LUCIANI, *Cittadini come domini, cittadini come patroni. Rapporti tra servi pubblici e città prima e dopo la manomissione*, in *Esclaves et maîtres dans le monde romain. Expressions épigraphiques de leurs relations*, eds. M. Dondin-Payre, N. Tran, Rome 2017, pp. 47-56.

(49) HALKIN, *Les esclaves publics* cit., p. 160; HERRMANN-OTTO, *Ex ancilla natus* cit., p. 200.

(50) *CIL IX*, 1538 = *ILS 4185* = *AEP 2005*, 426; cf. Table 1 no. 6.

named *Secunda*, recorded in an altar dedicated to *Magna Mater* in *Tergeste*, could also be interpreted as a female public slave, as she is mentioned together with a *sacerdos* and an *aedituus*, who bore the *nomen Publicius*, common among the public freedmen of the *Tergestini*: *Q. Publicius Charito* and *C. Publicius Hermes* (51). In *Verona*, a priestess of *Magna Mater*, *Veronia Trofime*, who clearly bore a *nomen* derived from the toponym of the city, generally used by its municipal freedmen and freedwomen, might have also been a *liberta publica* (52). The interpretation of the two latter sources, however, is clearly far from certain. As for the inscription from *Beneventum*, the role of *cymbalistris* did not necessarily indicate an 'official' position within the cult, but could have reflected only a ritual function that the public freedwoman *Concordia Ianuaria* might have performed on her own (53). In any case, it would not be surprising if she had actually been chosen by the city authorities, as the members of the priesthood of *Magna Mater* were generally municipal and appointed by the local senate (54).

Even though we assume an engagement of *servae* and *libertae publicae* within the religious sphere on the basis of these few (and uncertain) sources (55), and without overlooking the problem of the general underrepresentation of women in the epigraphic evidence (56), the absence in the available sources of any reference to other possible tasks performed by them must be considered. According to Elisabeth Herrmann, and Weiss himself, this would demonstrate that the main function of female public slaves in the cities of the Empire was linked to the supply of public slaves (57).

(51) CIL V, 519, cf. p. 1022 = ILS 4110 = *InscrIt* X, 4, 11.

(52) CIL V, 3438.

(53) See also WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt* cit., p. 144.

(54) A. VON DOMASZEWSKI, *Magna Mater in Latin Inscriptions*, «JRS», 1 (1911), p. 50; H. GRAILLOT, *Le culte de Cybèle mère des dieux à Rome et dans l'Empire romain*, Paris 1912, pp. 239-240; F. VAN HAEPEREN, *Les acteurs du culte de Magna Mater à Rome et dans les provinces occidentales de l'Empire*, in *Figures d'Empire, fragments de mémoire. Pouvoirs et identités dans le monde romain impérial (2e s. av. n.è.-6e s. de n.è.)*, ed. St. Benoist, Lille 2011, pp. 472, 475. For a general discussion of these inscriptions, see F. LUCIANI, *Servi et liberti publici dans la Regio X: nouveautés épigraphiques*, in *La Praxis municipale dans l'Occident romain*, eds. L. Lamoine, C. Berrendonner, and M. Cébeillac-Gervasoni, Clermont-Ferrand 2010, p. 282.

(55) F. GRELE et alii, *La Puglia nel mondo romano. Storia di una periferia. L'avvio dell'organizzazione municipale*, Bari 2017, p. 171.

(56) See, e.g., C. HOLLERAN, *Women and Retail in Roman Italy*, in *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, eds. E. Hemelrijk, and G. Woolf, Leiden - Boston 2013, pp. 313-330; C. BRUUN, *Tracing Familial Mobility: Female and Child Migrants in the Roman West*, in *Migration and Mobility in the Early Roman Empire*, eds. L. de Ligt, and L. E. Tacoma, Leiden - Boston 2016, p. 202.

(57) HERRMANN-OTTO, *Ex ancilla natus* cit., p. 200; WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt* cit., pp. 24-28.

Indeed, as a consequence of the *ius gentium*, children born from a union between a man (regardless of his status) and a female public slave obtained the same status as their mother; therefore, they were all public slaves, mostly called *vernae publici*.

Convincingly, Weiss assumed that a crucial supplying source of *servi publici* for the cities of the Empire – arguably more important than purchases, confiscation, gifts, and inheritance – was ‘slave breeding’ (58). It is thus likely that the cities maintained *servae publicae* specifically to ensure the natural reproduction of public slaves. Probably, they had also to carry out the task of rearing them, perhaps in addition to performing a variety of other domestic tasks. Municipalities were surely interested in promoting cohabitations between male and female public slaves in order to increase their own *familia publica* with the children born from these unions: quite a large number of inscriptions attest that such partnerships were frequent (59). However, the practice of ‘mixed marriages’ was also common; indeed, the epigraphic evidence shows that *servi civitatum* quite often had *ingenuae* or *libertae* (or *incertae*) as partners (60). According to the *ius gentium*, children born in such ‘mixed marriages’ followed their mother’s condition (61), also obtaining her *nomen*; therefore, they were illegitimate freeborn children.

The promulgation of the *senatus consultum Claudianum* in 52 CE, which, according to an inscription from *Augusta Emerita*, might have also affected the members of the municipal *familia publica* (62), probably provided a solution to this situation, preventing municipalities from losing new potential public slaves.

---

(58) WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt* cit., p. 24. On the phenomenon of ‘slave breeding’, see K. BRADLEY, *On the Roman Slave Supply and Slavebreeding*, in *Classical Slavery*, ed. M. I. Finley, London 1987, pp. 42-64.

(59) WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt* cit., p. 24.

(60) WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt* cit., pp. 166-167.

(61) Gaius *inst.* 1, 80. See also P.A. WEAVER, *The Status of Children in Mixed Marriage*, in *The Family in Ancient Rome*, ed. B. Rawson, London - Sydney 1986, pp. 145-147.

(62) M. SCHMIDT, *Spiegelbilder römischer Lebenswelt. Inschriftliches aus dem Archiv des Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum ausgewählt und kommentiert / Reflections of Roman Life and Living: Clichéés from the Archive of the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, selected and with a commentary*, Berlin - New York 2003, p. 28 no. 12: *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / Herennius / col(oniae) Emer(itensis) ser(vus) / annor(um) XXVII / h(ic) s(itus) e(st) s(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(evis) / Luceia Herennia / mater fec(it)* (second half of the first century CE). On this inscription and its implications, see J. EDMONDSON, *Glimpses inside the familia publica at Augusta Emerita (Mérida)*, in A. Baete ad fluvium Anam: *Cultura epigráfica en la Bética Occidental y territorios fronterizos. Homenaje al profesor José Luis Moralejo Álvarez*, eds. J. Carbonell Monils, H. Gimeno Pascual, Alcalá de Henares 2016, pp. 65-81; LUCIANI, *Public Slaves* cit., p. 298.

According to this *senatus consultum*, a free woman (*ingenua* or *liberta*) who established a relationship with a slave without the knowledge and the consent of his master became a slave of her partner's owner; she could, however, remain free if the slave's master agreed to it, but any child that would be born from her union with the slave would become a slave of the father's master; the ancient practice of the *ius gentium* was later restored by Hadrian (63). In the case of a free woman who cohabited with a municipal slave, the consequence was that any child born from that union would be a *servus publicus* or a *serva publica*. It is not to be excluded that, from Claudius to Hadrian, a non-negligible number of the municipal slaves recorded by the available sources may have been born from a free woman (*ingenua* or *liberta*) who cohabited with a *servus publicus*. Nonetheless, a large proportion of (male and female) municipal slaves were generally children of *servae publicae*.

As Weiss has already pointed out, female public slaves could not be sold; they could only live and die as slaves, or, at some point, be manumitted (64). On the basis of a passage from Columella (65), Weiss convincingly suggested that, after having given birth to a certain number of children, female public slaves might be rewarded and given freedom by the city authorities. This practice would explain well why the number of attestations of female public slaves is lower than that of public freedwomen, contrary to what is attested for their male counterparts. The case of a public freedwoman recorded together with her partner and children, who were all public slaves, is fairly common. In contrast, a public freedman is more rarely attested together with a woman who is still a *serva publica* (66).

In view of these remarks, it is perhaps possible to better understand the overall context of the *defixio* from *Nomentum*. If, as it seems, the same person put a curse on both the man and the woman at the same time, his/her target was the couple itself.

---

(63) Gaius *inst.* 1, 84. Cf. P.A. WEAVER, *Gaius i. 84 and the S. C. Claudianum*, «CR», 14 (1964), p. 137. For the *SC Claudianum* see P. BUONGIORNO, *Senatus consulta Claudianis temporibus facta. Una palinogenesi delle deliberazioni senatorie dell'età di Claudio (41-54 d.C.)*, Naples 2010, pp. 311-325.

(64) WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt* cit., pp. 27-28.

(65) Colum. *rust.* 1, 8, 19 (freedom to female slaves after four children). Cf. also *Dig.* 34, 5, 10, 1 (Ulp. 6 *disp.*) (freedom to a female slave after a child).

(66) See CIMAROSTI, *Schiave e liberte pubbliche* cit., pp. 450-451 n. 11.

As for the man mentioned on side A, *Malchio*, the author of the *defixio* did not confine him/herself to merely cursing his body and health (*valetudo*): his/her aim was also to affect *Malchio*'s economic status (*quaestum* and *lucrum*). Analogously, in the case of the woman, the public slave *Rufa*, the author of the curse probably intended to hit not only her body, but also her future: cursing insistently *Rufa*'s abdomen and genitals, and not just her body in general, might have aimed at depriving the female public slave of her reproductive function, probably the only thing that could have provided her with a realistic prospect of freedom.



# EPIGRAPHICA

PERIODICO INTERNAZIONALE DI EPIGRAFIA

LXXX 1-2, 2018

## INDICE

Attilio MASTINO, <i>Presentazione</i> .....	p. 9
María Angeles ALONSO ALONSO, <i>Un médico, dos alae auxiliares y un salario municipal. Acerca del epitafio de M. Ulpius M. fil. Sporus en Ferentium (CIL XI, 3007)</i> ....	» 13
Samir AOUNALLAH - Frédéric HURLET, <i>Deux nouvelles inscriptions latines de Pheradi Maius Sidi Kblifa (Tunisie)</i> .....	» 33
Lorenzo CALVELLI, <i>Il problema della provenienza delle epigrafi nel Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum</i> .....	» 57
Astrid CAPOFERRO, <i>Un lemma ancora da scrivere: l'iscrizione funeraria di Flavia Capitolina quae et Paccia</i> .....	» 79
Francesca CENERINI, <i>CIL XI, 753: un documento epigrafico dalla pianura bolognese. Qualche spunto di riflessione</i> .....	» 99
Antonio M. CORDA, <i>Mercurio Augusto a Thignica (oggi Ain Tounga, Tunisia): una nuova testimonianza nell'età di Marco Aurelio</i> .....	» 109
Christopher DAWSON, <i>The Regulations adopted by the Curia Iovis in Africa Proconsularis, 27 November 185 CE (CIL VIII, 14683=ILS 6824)</i> .....	» 121
Werner ECK, <i>Die prokuratorische Laufbahn des Ritters Ti. Claudius Ilus aus Misenum in CIL X, 270*</i> .....	» 165
Xavier ESPLUGA, <i>L'ultimo manoscritto epigrafico autografo di Felice Feliciano (Vat. lat. 3616)</i> .	» 183
Mounir FANTAR, Raimondo ZUCCA, <i>Tituli areae et templi Saturni Sobarensis (Africa Proconsularis)</i> .....	» 239
Claudio FARRE, <i>Severo Alessandro e le città dell'Africa Proconsolare: una nuova testimonianza da Thignica</i> .....	» 285
Paolo GAROFALO, <i>Un manoscritto inedito con iscrizioni latine e greche, ovvero ricerche intorno all'Anonymus Vallicellianus (S. Borr. Q. VI. 188)</i> .....	» 299
Maurizio GIOVAGNOLI, <i>Inediti, revisioni e contributi di epigrafia latina dallo spoglio degli archivi storici di Roma</i> .....	» 333
Maria Grazia GRANINO CECERE, <i>I XVviri sacris faciundis nei ludi saeculares severiani</i> ..	» 401
Franco LUCIANI, Daniela URBANOVA, <i>Some Remarks on the defixio AEp 1901, 183 (Nomentum, Latium): Why Curse a Female Public Slave?</i> .....	» 421
Juan MARTIN-ARROJO SANCHEZ, <i>La metodología Codex y Los tituli picti gilvi de las ánforas Pompeii 8 - Crétoise 2</i> .....	» 443
Marc MAYER, <i>Ruscino y Publius Memmius Regulus</i> .....	» 471
Enrique MELCHOR GIL - Víctor A. TORRES-GONZÁLEZ, <i>Los praefecti Caesaris o Imperatoris de las ciudades de la Hispania romana, treinta años después</i> .....	» 487
Javier MORALEJO ORDAX, <i>Soldados y monumentos funerarios en Tarraco (siglos I-III d.C.). Los pedestales como elementos de prestigio en la representación sepulcral de los centuriones y los milites principales</i> .....	» 527

Gianfranco PACI, <i>L'epigrafe di Turo(s) Gramatio(s) da Numana</i> .....	» 553
Andrea RAGGI - Laura PARISINI, <i>Novità epigrafiche da Mutina</i> .....	» 565
Giovanna ROCCA, <i>C(h)arta o piombo?</i> .....	» 595
Alessandra VALENTINI, <i>Vipsania Giulia, Vipsania Agrippina, Vipsania Giulia Agrippina: note sull'onomastica femminile nella Domus Augusta</i> .....	» 607

\* \* \*

#### *Schede e notizie*

Simona ANTOLINI, <i>Un nuovo centurione della legio XXII Primigenia</i> .....	» 623
Maria Silvia BASSIGNANO, <i>Recupero di CIL V, 3043</i> .....	» 626
Juan Manuel BERMUDEZ LORENZO, <i>Los nuevos grafitos sobre ánforas encontrados en Raetia</i> .....	» 634
Giuseppe CAMODECA, <i>Rilettura di CIL XI 6712, 46 e 151: due signacula di servi del cavaliere di età traiana Q. Planius Trutedius Pius</i> .....	» 643
Alessandro DELFINO, Marco PALLONETTI, <i>S. Maria Capua Vetere: iscrizioni sulla crepidine dell'Anfiteatro Campano</i> .....	» 649
Piergiorgio FLORIS, <i>La stele di Sissinas da Thignica (Ain Tounga)</i> .....	» 654
Annarosa GALLO, <i>Iscrizione inedita di un classario misenate da Taranto</i> .....	» 659
Gianluca GREGORI, <i>Un nuovo magistrato di Ocriculum (Umbria): C. Litrius Clavianus Passer</i> .....	» 666
Andrew C. JOHNSTON, <i>New epigraphic evidence for municipal institutions at imperial Gabii</i> .....	» 669
Patrick LEROUX, L. A. S. <i>sur une arula de Mérida de Lusitanie: le votum d'un miles leg. VII G. F.</i> .....	» 676
Edoardo MELMELUZZI, <i>Cinque nuove iscrizioni di urbaniciani provenienti da Roma</i> .	» 683
Mario PAGANO, <i>Una iscrizione del V-VI secolo d.C. Dalla cattedrale di Vico Equense (NA)</i> .	» 692
Mattia VITELLI CASELLA, <i>Qualche considerazione storica sulle ghiande missili di Ossero/Osor: in margine a CIL I<sup>2</sup>, 887; 888</i> .....	» 697

\* \* \*

#### *Bibliografia*

Alfredo BUONOPANE, recensione a Claudio Farre, <i>Geografia epigrafica delle aree interne della Provincia Sardinia</i> , Ortacesus 2016 .....	» 709
Claudio ZACCARIA, recensione a <i>Lettere di Theodor Mommsen agli Italiani</i> , vol. I-II, a cura di M. Buonocore, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Studi e Testi 519-520, Città del Vaticano, 2017, pp. 1296, ill. ....	» 712
<i>Annunci Bibliografici</i> .....	» 723
<i>Nouvelles de l'A.I.E.G.L.</i> .....	» 725
<i>Elenco dei collaboratori</i> .....	» 731
<i>I cinquanta anni della Collana «Epigrafia e Antichità»</i> .....	» 733