

LISTY
FILOLOGICKÉ
FOLIA
PHILOGICA

138/2015/1–2

DANIELA URBANOVÁ, *Latinské proklínací tabulky na území římského impéria* [*Latin Curse Tablets Found throughout the Roman Empire*].

Brno, Host – Masarykova univerzita 2014, 444 pp. ISBN 978-80-7294-681-5 (Host), 978-80-210-6784-4 (Masarykova univerzita Brno).

Daniela Urbanová's extensive monograph, presented as her habilitation thesis at Masaryk University in Brno, analyses Latin *defixiones*, i.e. curse texts scratched on sheets of lead, produced throughout the Roman Empire territory between late 2nd century BC and turn of 4th–5th century AD.

Daniela Urbanová builds upon existing publications of *defixiones*. Whereas the latest edition compiled by A. Kropp (AMINA KROPP, *Defixiones. Ein aktuelles Corpus lateinischer Fluchtafeln*, Speyer 2008) comprises 382 items (there are around 500 known inscriptions), D. Urbanová decided to further reduce the corpus removing the texts too fragmentary or damaged and thus works with 309 inscriptions.

In her extensive introduction (Chapter 1–7, pp. 13–164), Urbanová first defines two groups of texts she will be working with: *defixiones* (i.e. common curses) and *pleas for justice* (i.e. texts conveying messages to gods asking them to punish someone who had done the author a disservice). Both types of texts are then analysed separately. Urbanová also defines categories she will be scrutinizing further on in her book (12 categories for curses, e.g. provenance, date, findspot, the way the tablet was dressed, type of curse..., and most importantly type of incantation – see below; in case of pleas for justice, there are even 6 more categories: plea reason, stolen items, writer's wish, his/her name, deity and the way the deity is addressed). In the next section, D. Urbanová provides a typology of incantations based on semantic, pragmatic and especially syntactic criteria. She sets six basic types of incantations: simple list of cursed persons, direct curse (e.g. with the verb *defigo*), curses with pleading or hand-ing-over incantation (*oro, trado* etc.), with imperative (*interficite, obligate...* etc.), with subjunctive (*pereat, mutus sit...*) and so-called *simile*-incantations (with *quomodo – sic*). The final chapter of the Introduction discusses three specific categories the analysis deals with further on: types of curses (judicial, agonistic, arising from rivalry in love...), intention of the curse (death, illness, incurring romantic feelings...) and the reason why the plea for justice was written.

In chapters 8–13 (pp. 165–313), D. Urbanová analyses the texts found in various parts of the Roman Empire: in Italia; Hispania; Gallia; Germania, Raetia, Noricum and Pannonia; African provinces; Britannia. Each chapter ends with a conclusion informing us primarily about incantations most frequently used in the relevant territory. Chapter 14, “Conclusion” summarizes information from the partial conclusions from individual chapters and aspires to draw a more general conclusion as for distribution of individual types of incantations in time and space.

In her footnote 28 on p. 18, D. Urbanová explains why she is not using the Leiden System commonly employed by classical philologists for transcribing inscriptions by referring to “common readers” (i.e. laymen), however throughout her monograph, and in the Introduction in particular, she is addressing readers who are obviously rather familiar with the topic. Throughout her book, Urbanová is using a number of very

specific international terms, such as “restriction” (“restricting, paralyzing the enemy”) or “separation” (“separation of lovers” or “destruction of an inappropriate love affair”). These may be commonplace terms perfectly understandable to someone who is working with *defixiones* on daily basis, however laymen readers would surely prefer more ordinary terms as especially in Czech, these international terms sound obscure.

The text has the attributes typical of scholarly style – it is very dense, full of information, often repetitive; paragraphs are very long, there are many internal and external references right in the text (i.e. not always in a form of footnotes). All these aspects make the work less readable, however readability is not the main criterion for scholarly texts. What is very pleasant are very coherent translations of tablet inscriptions; this makes the publication very user-friendly as these inscriptions may sometimes be a tough nut to crack even for experienced Latinists. Also, the translations are a tell-tale proof of Urbanová’s translating gift (what a pity that she does not apply herself to translating more).

It is a real shame that the monograph does not show photographs or facsimiles of the curse tablets, though the reasons are obvious and understandable. Suggestiveness of some descriptions makes readers crave for pictures. The maps at the end of the monograph showing distribution of individual types of curse tablets throughout the Roman Empire are great, however, inadvertently they point out the sore spot of not only the monograph, but of all scholarly publications on Latin *defixiones* – these texts survived, in fact, by coincidence (unlike literary texts) and in view of extremely low number of existing tablets of various types in individual provinces conclusions from any type of analyses of these tablets need to be understood as more or less interim. Daniela Urbanová’ monograph is honest about this fact and does mention it.

The text reveals high scientific ambitions, however the fact that the monograph was written in Czech reduces them considerably. Number of scholars who could make full use of it and appraise it is, in view of the language used, critically low. Thus, unfortunately, it will be very difficult for D. Urbanová’s text to participate in international discourse. The monograph as it is now can serve as a very useful tool for archaeologists, religionists and anthropologists studying magical practice in general. Also both professional and hobby-Latinists, who see Latin only as the language of great literary authors, can see the monograph as an interesting (and surprising, for many) addition. However, it will hardly become a reference guide for scholars studying non-literary Latin texts – which would definitely be the case had the monograph been written in one of global languages, spoken internationally.

To cut a long story short, I believe that Daniela Urbanová’s habilitation should have resulted in two works – one in Czech, aimed not only at scholars, presenting Latin *defixiones* as part of wider-ranging context of Ancient magical practice, and one in a globally spoken language to make it part of international scholar discourse.

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