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AN EXECRATION FORMULA FROM LUGO (*LUCUS AUGUSTI*)¹

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Abstract: Excavations in the Plaza do Ferrol in Lugo (Galicia, Spain) during 1986 brought to light a necropolis with *cistae* datable from the middle of the 1st. century to the end of the 3rd. On one of the funeral urns (with a typology pointing to the first half of the 3rd. century) a graffito was written with a *formula execrationis* invoking “two *genii*” or, more probably, *Duagena* to punish the possible looters. This theonym, a *hápax*, seems to belong to a Celtic chthonic goddess whose personality (“Born Dark”, or “Born from Darkness”) finds parallels in other magical texts (e.g. *antumnos* in Larzac).

Keywords: execration text, *Duagena*, funerary context, *Lucus Augusti*.

1. During a dig carried out in 1986 in the necropolis of cremation cists found in the Plaza do Ferrol in Lugo, dating from between the mid-first and second half of the third centuries², a funeral urn was discovered with an inscription that has given rise to this article. The site reveals a lack of organisation and a paucity of grave goods (only two plots had items of Hispanic *terra sigillata* and a thin-sided beaker) and this, in the opinion of the archaeologists, seems to indicate the poverty of the settlement. At any event, what does seem interesting is the mention of the sporadic discovery of larger nails, related to the cremation grills of the *ustrinum* or to coffins for burial.³

¹ This study has been conducted as part of the research project ‘Espacios de penumbra: cartografía de la actividad mágico-religiosa en el occidente del Imperio’ (FFI 2008-01511/FISO), financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. I am grateful to the Lugo Museum of Archaeology, and particularly the municipal archaeologist, M^a Covadonga Carreño Gascón, for the facilities provided for this study, including the use of the photograph and sketch of the urn in question. I should also like to express my thanks to my colleagues in the Department of Ancient History of Zaragoza University, S. Alfayé, G. Fontana, F. Beltrán and C. Jordán for their comments and suggestions. A paper concerning this topic has been included in a volume in homage to prof. Julio Mangas Manjarrés (Universidad Complutense, Madrid).

² No trace has been found to identify the cists, although the construction of the walls might have re-used existing stone monuments (Hervés Raigoso 1995, 121-122).

³ However, the discovery of nails in other burial and particularly cremation necropoleis suggests another interpretation: that they had a function that went beyond the merely utilitarian, and might have been used as symbolic elements to defend the deceased from the perils of the Other

The cists were found in burial plots in shallow, small-diametered circular pits. Some of them contained a selection of bones from birds and other small animals, which seems to imply a parallel cremation ritual. The urns were covered with fragments of *tegulae*, *imbrices* or else slate slabs, and in only 6 of the 66 cists discovered were the plots divided by *tegulae* laid out in rectangles, triangles or trapezoids. One final feature of interest is the discovery of a set of locally-produced African-type lamps, dating from the last quarter of the first century and the first half of the second.⁴

The urn that interests us here (FE86.E21) has, like the others, a spherical body, with a flat base and a flared curved rim (fig. 1), with a decoration of irregular vertical spatulate forms from the rim to the base. Made from a crude grey quartzite amalgam, it measures 18.5 cm tall by 21 cm in diameter, with the rim 16.6 cm across. It dates from the late second to mid-third centuries.⁵ The most interesting feature is the inscription beneath the rim (plate 1). This is a graffito that, in the opinion of the editors, would have been a *formula defixionis*:⁶

Olla Saturn[---] habebit dua gena irata.

2. This text which, as we shall see later, has not been preserved intact, offers two possible interpretations. The first would be: ‘The urn of Saturn[---] will have two angry spirits’.

The switch from the masculine to the neuter (*genius* > *genia*) seems to be an epigraphic *hapax*. But documents containing the expression *habere genios iratos*⁷ give us a possible reading of *gen(i)a*, which opens various avenues of explanation. One is that *gena* is simply a mistake by the stonecutter, something that occurs often in the Latin of *defixiones*.⁸ But another possibility is that there was a palatalisation of the *-ni-* into *-ñ-* (so that the *n* would have represented the palatal *ñ* and not the alveolar *n*);⁹ nor can we discard the possibility that it might have been an instance of hypercorrection.

World, or else to affix him to the tomb thereby preventing his returning to harm the living. A reasoned and painstaking analysis of this in Alfayé Villa 2010.

⁴ Hervés Raigoso 1995, 122-123.

⁵ Hervés Raigoso 1995, 122 – fig. 106 – and 124.

⁶ Hervés Raigoso 1995, 124; *Hispania Epigraphica* 13, 2007, 432.

⁷ Petron., *Sat.*, LVII 24: *Viderint quid de hoc alii exopinissent; ego si mentior, genios uestros iratos habeam.*

⁸ On the language of *defixiones* see Jeanneret 1918; García Ruiz 1967; Marina Sáez 1999; Kropp 2008.

⁹ I am reminded by Dr Gonzalo Fontana of the different ways of writing the *ñ* in the eastern (*gn* in Aragonese, *ny* in Catalan) and western areas of the Peninsula (*nm* and *n* in Asturian and Leonese), which would seem to fit the term *gena* in the Lugo inscription.

Angry spirits are mentioned in the passage referred to in the ‘Satyricon’, although there are more allusions to the anger of the gods (*dei irati*), appearing in earlier authors such as Plautus and Terence.¹⁰

Various *defixiones* asked for victims to be affected by the wrath of gods or demons – a common category in papyri and *defixiones* in Greek, corresponding to the Latin notion of *genius*¹¹ – to whom a *defigens* would direct his petition. One from Sagunto – in the shape of a human hand, dating from the end of the first or beginning of the second century – commends to Iao a certain Heterius Aurelianus, *in omni ira*;¹² *irati* appears in an execration text from Carthage;¹³ *nec has iras redimere possint* on another from the sanctuary at Uley, in Britain, with Mercury as the object of the petition,¹⁴ and yet another document from Petronell (*Carnuntum*) contains the phrase *habeat vos iratos*, also directed at chthonic deities such as Dis Pater and Veracura, as well as Cerberus.¹⁵ Similarly, one of the inscriptions from the sanctuary of Isis and Mater Magna in Mainz is directed towards Attis for his wrath to fall upon a certain Liberalis.¹⁶

3. The second possibility is that *dua gena* is not two separate words but just one. Indeed, there does not seem to be any gap between the final *-a* in the first word and the *g-* at the beginning of the second, and while the two names of the demon are mentioned in the papyri referred to, it is true to say that no parallel exists for ‘two *genii irati*’. This suggests that what we might have here is a theonym *Duagena*, hitherto not attested epigraphically, of a probably Celtic nature. A possible etymological explanation¹⁷ might be based on a Celtic **dubwo-* ‘dark’ (drawing on an Indo-European **dhewbh-*) and *gen-* ‘to be born’. In Ogham there is an anthroponym *Dovagni*, which might be very close in formation, although it should be borne in mind that here, the second element of the compound *-genos* appears in another vowel grade, *-gno*, and has a di-

¹⁰ Plaut., *Poen.* 452: *Ego hodie infelix deis meis iratissimis / sex immolauī agnosi.*; Ter., *Phorm.* 74-75: *memini relinqui me deo irato meo. coepi advorsari primo: quid verbis opust?*

¹¹ A magic papyrus contains instructions for exorcising the two names of the demon (*PGrMag* VII; 243, 246), and other cases refer to the writing of the two names (of demons: *PGrMag* II 64; II 70).

¹² *Hispania Epigraphica* 10, 623.

¹³ Kropp 2008, dfx. 11. 1. /3.

¹⁴ *AE* 1995, 985; Kropp 2008, 3.22/32.

¹⁵ *AE* 1929, 228; Kropp, 2008, 8.3./1.

¹⁶ Blänsdorf 2010, no. 2, 166-167: *Bonne sancte Atthis Tyran- / ne, adsi(s), aduenias Libera- / li iratus. Per omnia te rogo, / domine, per tuum Castorem, / Pollucem, per cistas penetra- / les, des ei malam mentem, / malum exitum, ut omni ocr- / pore uideat se emori prae- / ter oculos.* Véase igualmente la tablilla de Cnidos en *DTAud* 1 A 19-22 (= Blümel 1992, no. 147 A).

¹⁷ I am grateful to Dr. Carlos Jordán Cólera for this explanatory hypothesis.

minutive meaning.¹⁸ With regard to this anthroponym, we might be talking here of a divinity **dubwo-gena* > *dowagena* > *Duagena*, ‘born dark’ or ‘born from the darkness’, an interpretation which could suit our text perfectly. This theonym finds parallel in the *antumnos* (<**ande-dubnos*), “Underworld” of the Larzac inscription¹⁹.

The root might be connected with all the anthroponyms with the base **dou(i)-* in the Iberian Peninsula.²⁰ *Duanna* (or *Duauna*), for example, is attested as a female anthroponym in an epigraph from Salvatierra de los Barros, in Celtic Beturia, dating from the first half of the first century CE.²¹ The second element reappears in other Hispanic names such as (*Acca*) *Deocena* -the deceased to whom the stela of San Miguel de Bernuy (Segovia) is dedicated-²², *Maticenus*, *Medugenus*, *Rectugenus*, etc.²³

4. The incomplete anthroponym in the text is most likely to be Saturninus/Saturnina, the ninth most frequent *cognomen* in Hispania, with about 130 examples listed. Specifically, Saturninus is attested in various inscriptions from Astorga (*Asturica Augusta*) or León (*Legio*), and is also documented on a tombstone from Lugo itself.²⁴

The inscription on the Lugo urn fits in perfectly with the pattern of curse formulas which, while frequently deposited in funeral contexts, as we know, were normally inscribed on lead plates (*defixiones*). The only other example of a curse inscription on a terracotta funeral urn appears in Rome; it was inscribed on the inside of an *olla* of this type, with the text – in beautiful cursive minuscule – in two columns addressed to the Holy Angels in a ritual of ‘transferred death’,²⁵ with a certain Collecticius as the victim.²⁶ Everything points to the fact

¹⁸ Ziegler (1994, 169) explains the anthroponym as ‘der kleine Dunkel/Dunkelhaarige’, and draws on the compound in Uhlich (1989) for the first part.

¹⁹ Delamarre 2003, 151; Mees 2009, 66-67.

²⁰ In this respect, see Prósper 2002, 417-421, better than the hypotheses that – like Holder’s – explain these names as being based on **dowis*, ‘strong, good’, from the root **dew-/du-* ‘to venerate’, or those that explain them as being based on the numeral ‘2’ (Albertos Firmat 1985, 282). On these Hispanic onomastic materials and their roots, see Vallejo 2005, 303-312.

²¹ Ramírez Sádaba 2001, 229, 232-233.

²² Santos Yanguas-Hoces de la Guardia Bermejo 2001, 324-235, fig. 7.

²³ Albertos Firmat 1965, 142, 151, 192-193; Abascal Palazón 1994, 408, 420, 482. A Hellenised form of the *retukeno* documented in the Celtiberian inscription of Langa de Duero (Jordán Cólera 2004, 230-231) is the well-known *Retogenes* of *Numantia* (App., *Hisp.* 407).

²⁴ Abascal Palazón 1994, 496-497. This was a freedman and *augustalis* (*AE* 1980, 595 bis; *Hispania Epigraphica* 1, 457) whose activity was involved with mining (see also Le Roux 1985, 225).

²⁵ Marco Simón 2009.

that in this case the inscription – probably dating from the fifth century – was written *before* the ashes were placed in the urn by the person responsible for the funeral rites or for looking after the *columbarium*.²⁷

But the formula on the Lugo *olla* actually seems to be a counter-*defixio* aimed at dissuading a possible tomb defiler, comparable to the large number of funeral texts aimed at preserving the integrity of the space where the remains of the deceased lie, by invoking the action of the angry gods against defilers,²⁸ even in Christian contexts,²⁹ or to apotropaic amulets found in tombs in *Amisus* (Pontus), *Beroea* and other locations.³⁰ Although these epigraphic formulas express the punitive action of the gods in the subjunctive, there are also examples that do so in the future indicative, as is the case with the Lugo text. The same goes for a North African inscription and another from *Moesia Inferior*, the latter with a reference, together with the angry gods, of a *Geniu(m) IMP*].³¹

²⁶ The text dates from the fourth to fifth centuries. *AE* 1941, 138; Kropp 2008, dfx. 1. 4. 4/13: *Deprecor vos sancti angeli / quomodo (ha)ec anima intus in/clusa tenetur et angust[i]atur(!) / et non v<i=E>de(t) neque lum<e=I>n[e] ne[que] aliquem / refrigerium non (h)abet sic anima / mentes corp<u=O>s Collecticii quem peper<i=E>t Agnella // teneatur ardeat / de{s}tabescat usque / ad infernum semper / ducite Collecticium / quem peper<i=E>t / Agnella.*

²⁷ Muzzioli 1939, 46, with the possible adscription of the text to the Sethian gnostics.

²⁸ Most of the cases have been found in Rome: *AE* 1967, 42: *quicumque hoc violarit superiores inferio(re)s / deos iratos habeat*; *CIL* VI 13740: *VII qui / hic mixerit aut / cacarit habeat / deos superos et / inferos iratos*; *CIL* VI 25605: *qui / hanc aram sust(ulerit) Man(es) irat(os) h(abeat)*; *CIL* VI 29848b: *Duodecim deos et Deanam(!) et Iovem / optimum(!) maximu(m) habeat iratos / quisquis hic mixerit aut cacarit*; *CIL* VI, 36537: *facere si / quis autem sibi ad/miserit non bono / suo fecerit et superos / et inferos iratos / habeat lecto me/ru(m) profunde*; *CIL* 06, 37530: *superos et inferos] / [ha]beat iratos [*; *CIL* VI 5075: *Net agito / o mortales / reverere / Manes deos*; *AE* 1967, 42: *quicumque hoc violaverit, superiores inferos deos iratos habeat*. But other epigraphs of this type have been attested in Italy (*CIL* V 3034, Padova: *illi de/os iratos quo/s omis colunt si / quis deo sepulcro / violarit*; *CIL* XIV 1872, Ostia: *Quicumque violaverit / sive inmutaverit / sentiat iratos / semper sibi*), Proconsular Africa (*CIL* VIII, 15716, El Kef: *[q]ui hoc [s] <e=II>pulchrum violarit deos / [s]uperos inferosq(ue) iratos habea[t]*), Numidia (*CIL* VIII 18261, Lambaesis: *Constant[i]ne / tuos sic semper / malis iratos / cernimus Augustis / malis et pace / potimur / cum et in hoc G[e]/nio sese provin/cia monst[re]t / nam po[ni] <t=I> ille / cruces et proe/lia saeva tyranni*) and Pannonia (*AE* 1937, 197, Budapest: *aliqui <d=T> spur/ci velle fece/rit habeat et / superos et / infer{n}os / deos iratos*).

²⁹ By way of example, the following inscription was used to protect a tomb in Rome in 398, to defend the deceased against the perils of the demon *Bacus*: *Hic con<s>iste deus, hic [---] / ne Bacus inqu<u>s temptet t[---] / depositus Sabin[---] / XVIII kal(endas)) d[ecembres] / d(omino) n(ostro) Honor[io III] et Fl(avio) Eutychn[iano] cons(ulibus)* (*AE* 1945, 24).

³⁰ Gager 1992, 225 ff.

³¹ *CIL* VIII, 11825, Makthar: *qui me commusserit / habebit deos iratos et / vivus ardebit*; *AE* 1991, 01375, Svishtov: *quis monumentum?] hoc vio[laverit] / [3 h]abebit deos i[ratos] / [3]s et Geniu(m) IMP*].

5. Thus the curse inscription on the Lugo urn might have read:

[*Quicumque?*] *olla[m] Saturn[ini uiolauerit] habebit dua gen(i)a irata.*
‘Whoever defiles the urn of Saturninus will have two angry spirits’.

Or, more likely:

[*Quicumque?*] *olla[m] Saturn[ini uiolauerit] habebit Duagena irata.*
‘Whoever defiles the urn of Saturninus will have an angry Duagena’.

Within the context of a relative religious conservatism with regard to the other two main administrative cities of the Hispanic north-west, *Bracara* and *Asturica*,³² the formula inscribed on the Lugo urn from the Plaza do Ferrol documents a pattern of magic-religious practices similar to those attested in other urban and rural environments of the western Roman provinces, and adds to a ritual panorama for the conventual capital which has been enriched in recent years with the discovery of the *mithraeum* in a palatial *domus*, dating from the beginning of the third century.³³

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Funeral urn from the necropolis in the Plaza del Ferrol, Lugo (drawing: Servicio Municipal de Arqueología).

Plate 1. Detail of the curse graffito (photo: Servicio Municipal de Arqueología).

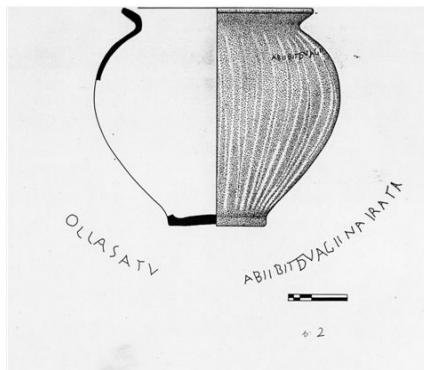


Fig. 1.



Plate 1.

³² A greater presence of the indigenous deities – even more than in *Aquae Flaviae* (Chaves) – is highlighted by Rodríguez Colmenero (2005, 112).

³³ Alvar-Gordon-Rodríguez 2006.

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