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MODERN OBJECTS WITH ANCIENT INSCRIPTIONS FROM SPAIN

Abstract: Two inscribed bronze plates from a private collection in Poland were examined and found in one case to be a miniature copy of a large marble slab discovered at Baria (Villaricos) in Hispania Citerior in the early 20th century and now held by the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid. The Latin inscription on this slab has been the object of repeated commentary due to the incomplete preservation of the text. The other plate turned out impossible to read and identify, partly because of the poor state of preservation of the letters.

Key words: Spain, Latin epigraphy, forgery, bronze plates

Two inscribed bronze plates from a private collection in Poland were first examined on the occasion of an exhibition, *The Legions Are Coming*, organized by the Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe, University of Warsaw, at the Warsaw Museum of Technology in 2017. The documentation prepared at that time allowed to verify the view that they couldn't be military diplomas.

The two plates were cast in a mold, rendering the letters in relief and hence difficult to read. One of the plates is 8.3 cm high and 5.5 cm wide, and has a double molding 0.5 cm wide on three sides; the missing molding from the left edge indicates the fragmentary character of the piece along with the Latin inscription [Fig. 1]. The following letters, each 0.5 cm high, may be discerned in the epigraphic field:

[---]AESIANVS
[---]OCOPVS
[---]HV+CDONO
4 [---]+NOEDVXERV+
[---]OIVSINPENDE
[---]IICLVI++CVSTO
[---]PLIDEDERVNT
8 [---]ORNELIFAVSTI
[---]ICILIBPRETI
[---]ISHSICCCC



Fig. 1. Bronze plate from a private collection in Poland
(photo J. Żelazowski)

The poor readability of some of the badly impressed letters encumbers the reconstruction of the text and its interpretation. Even so, it was possible to trace a record of this text in the Epigraphik-Datenbank Claus/Slaby (EDCS-24400055) in the following form:

[...] *Caesianus*
 [testamento] *hoc opus fieri*
 [iussit a]c *huic dono he-*
 4 [red(es) XX (vicesima) n]on *deduxerunt*
 [... am]plius *impende-*
 [runt item HS] XI (milia) CLVI a(d=t) *custo-*
 [diam huius te]mpli *dederunt*
 8 [arbitratu ... C]orneli *Fausti*
 [... Fe]licio *lib(erto) preti-*
 [um fun]eris HS I (mille) *CCCC*

The inscription was carved on a large (78 × 48 × 6 cm) marble slab with double molding at the edges (W. 3.5 cm, so-called *cyma inversa*), partly preserved and held in the collection of the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid since 1907 (inv. no. 1907/32/110). The slab came from the seaside town of Baria (Villaricos) in Hispania Citerior (Almería, Andalusia) and was donated to the Real Academia de la Historia by D. Pedro Gómez Flores in 1904.¹ The text [Fig. 2] is composed of large, very elegant and technically well executed letters (height 4.5–6 cm), but the reading has always raised doubts due to the fragmentary state of the artifact. Made public in 1908, it was repeatedly commented on and supplemented, most recently by A. U. Stylow, who referred to a reconstruction of the text found in a letter from Hermann Dessau to the Jesuit Fidel Fita sent on

¹ *HEp* online, record no. 18; ABASCAL, GIMENO 2000, p. 65, no. 18; cf. *HEp* 10, 2000, no. 5.

3 December 1906.² For years the scholars had corresponded on the topic, partly because of Dessau's obligation to continue Emil Hübner's project for publishing in CIL all the inscriptions from Spain. Fita's position as a scholar was confirmed by his nomination in 1912 to the post of director of the Real Academia de la Historia, but already in 1903 he was instrumental in making Dessau a corresponding member of this academy. Stylow reconstructed the text of this inscription as follows:³

[ca. 10?] *Caesianus*
 [testamento] *hoc opus fieri*
 [iussit ex HS ca. 2?] *C. Huic dono he-*
 4 [redes XX p(opuli) R(omani) n]on deduxerunt
 [et HS ca. 4–5 am]plius impende-
 [runt item HS] XI (scil. milia) CLVI at (!) custo-
 [diam huius te]mpli dederunt
 8 [arbitratu – C]orneli Fausti.
 [Curam egit Fe]licio lib(ertus). Preti-
 [um solutum op]eris HS I (scil. milia) CCCC.



Fig. 2. Marble slab at the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid (after Stylow 2009, p. 115)

² STYLOW 2009; cf. *HEp* 18, 2009, no. 12; *AE* 2009, 576a. ³ STYLOW 2009, p. 123.

It appears to be a testamentary record of one Caesianus, concerning the building or perhaps the rebuilding of some temple in the Baria municipium. His name is occasionally reconstructed as Cornelius Caesianus by analogy with l. 8, but it is impossible to ascertain this for sure. In l. 3, one should note Dessau's hypothesis that the letter C could have been part of a numeral stating the amount of the bequest and not part of the [a]c referring to [iussit]. Similarly in l. 5, Dessau would like to see a specific sum instead of the phrase [sed etiam am]plius. In l. 9 he read the *cognomen* Felicio in the nominative and added a verb in consequence. Dessau's suggestion that l. 10 could be a reference to the remuneration of the *operarii* finds no parallel, hence the current view that these were rather the costs of a funeral.⁴ Nevertheless, this is a dedication rather than a funerary inscription. In any case, the heirs not only needed to pay tax on the inheritance (*vigesima*), but they also decided to contribute the sum of 11 156 (or maybe only 6 156) sestertii to be given to the freedman Felicius with the consent of Cornelius Faustus for taking care of a temple. The paleography of the inscription places it in the 2nd century AD and it has been discussed mainly with regard to *vigesima hereditatum* and testamentary euergetism.⁵

The shape of the bronze plate, the molding and disposition of the letters imitate the appearance of the original slab in a different material. The execution of the piece suggests that several other imitations of this kind could have been made, possibly for distribution among collectors and antiquity experts as an epigraphic souvenir, even without any intention to deceive anyone. The marble inscription must have been known in Spain and important, considering that it is presented as a frontispiece of the *Hispania Epigraphica* Online Database. The miniature bronze copy is thus not necessarily a forgery making use of authentic texts for the production of false artifacts.⁶ Naturally, the definition of a forgery is conditioned by the intentions of the forgers and the awareness of the buyers,⁷ hence even if at the beginning the plates were a nice epigraphic souvenir from Madrid, with time they became a fully fledged forgery, especially once the information about their provenance was lost.⁸ It may be assumed that the plate was made in Spain because the inscription was important and popular to some extent, and because the original artifact was there to be seen. However, a published photograph or drawing of the inscription would have sufficed. Forgers and copyists used inscriptions which were on hand, but this was hardly a rule, especially as we cannot know the motivation behind their choices and they could well have been commissioned by collectors.⁹ The plate was surely made in the 20th century and the very characteristic patina, assuming it is natural, would suggest a time before World War II.

Little can be said of the second plate, which is 7 × 9 cm [Fig. 3]. It could not be read or identified, partly because of the poor preservation of the small letters (height 0.2–0.3 cm) disposed in 13 lines. The irregular shape of the impressed letters suggests an inscription or its part, which was originally engraved in metal, such as a military diploma. However, it was not possible to decipher any name, which brings to mind bronze plates with legislative texts of which there is no small number in Spain, especially in Baetica, and which could have been copied in part. Even so, the long traditions of forging and copying antiques in Spain¹⁰ cannot justify in any way the belief that both were made in Spain and that it was the antiquaries market that actually connected them.

⁴ STYLOW 2009, pp. 120–121.

⁵ MELCHOR GIL 1994–1995, pp. 222–223; TOLSA DOMÈNECH 2011, p. 191, no. 11.

⁶ BILLANOVICH 1967; DI STEFANO MANZELLA 1987, pp. 195–198.

⁷ BUONOPANE 2014.

⁸ WEBER 2001.

⁹ BILLANOVICH 1967; WEBER 2001.

¹⁰ *Monumento* 2011.



Fig. 3. Bronze plate from a private collection in Poland
(photo J. Żelazowski)

Abbreviations

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i> , Paris.
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> , Berlin.
EDCS	Epigraphik-Datenbank Claus/Slaby.
<i>HEp</i>	<i>Hispania Epigraphica</i> , Madrid.
<i>HEp</i> online	<i>Hispania Epigraphica</i> Online Database (www.eda-bea.es).

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