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The Gods at Play: Mapping the Divine at the Amphitheatres in Hispania

In all probability, one of the last gestures made by performers before going on stage was to turn to the gods.¹ What was at stake varied from spectacle to spectacle, so the issue is a complex one, given that amphitheatres were one of the main arenas for the representation of *romanitas*. The *animus* of all those involved in the show would depend on their assigned role. We can imagine that many in the audience did not share the participant's needs to communicate with the gods. Their passive role as spectators limited their level of engagement; for them, there was not much at stake. Therefore, it can be said that the involvement of donors in the performance is a relevant factor in the testimonies of religiosity found in amphitheatres.

Like all public spaces in Roman cities, amphitheatres hosted areas for the gods; niches, shrines, altars and inscriptions were reminders of the respect the gods were due, and spaces for an intimate moment of withdrawal before or after the show. These places, more or less discreet, more or less visible, channelled the devotion of those who believed themselves in debt to the divinities, aspired to their favour, or were, simply, thankful.

Depending on the relationship between each individual and the show, the need for communication with the supernatural could change, as could the target divinities, the way they were invoked, and the request that was made of them. As a result, we could expect copious evidence of religious practices in amphitheatres, but this is not the case, at least in *Hispania*, where only five out of 26 amphitheatres have yielded religious inscriptions. More surprising still is the fact that in some cities with a rich *corpus* of gladiatorial inscriptions, religious expressions are lacking. For instance, fifteen inscriptions related to gladiators have been found in the capital of *Baetica*, *Colonia Patricia Corduba*, but none of them contains the slightest reference to religious practices. This cannot be interpreted as a lack of interest in religion, but rather suggests that the inscriptions that have survived are related to other matters, probably simply a matter of chance. In other words, we must take into consideration the location of finds for us to be able to interpret the evidence consistently.

When the *Lex Vrsonensis* (V, *pars a*, col. 21, ln. 8–10) points out that *eisque pontificib(us) augurib(us)q(ue) ludos gladiatoresq(ue) inter decuriones spectare ius potestasque*

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est, it is clear that priests and augurs in the colony of *Vrso* (Osuna, Seville) enjoyed the privilege of attending gladiatorial games in the seats reserved for decurions. If these priests were to perform a religious ritual in these circumstances, it is to be expected that the target divinities would differ from those invoked by the gladiators at the centre of the show.

The law points out that magistrates, *duumviri* and *aediles* had the obligation to co-fund *munera* and stage performances, with a minimum of 2000 sesterces, to which they could add another 2000 from the public coffers (V, *pars b*, col. 22, ln. 11–14). The law prescribed that these spectacles be dedicated to the Capitoline Triad (V, *pars b*, col. 22, ln. 8–9), although they could simultaneously be dedicated to other gods (*deis deabusque*, without further detail).²

A good example of this is found in Cástulo (*Municipium Castulonensis*, *Tarracoenense*, Linares, Jaén), in which Lucius Licinius Abascantio honours his city for his appointment as *sevir*. The inscription on the pedestal of a lost silver statue of Antoninus Pius erected in AD 154 indicates that he organised several spectacles, including two days of gladiatorial games, which he dedicated to the divine emperors and their house.³ Abascantio, therefore, did not involve any of the expected divinities, but directly addressed the emperor and the imperial house as a show of loyalty and in the expectations of promotion. That is, he was not grateful to the gods in general or to any god in particular for having reached the *sevirate*, for being in the position of practicing *evergetism*, or for the success of the spectacles that he had organised. Abascantio is not placed in a ‘horizon of expectation’, but in a ‘space of experience’,⁴ sheltered by the divine power that he found most propitious at that time: the tutelage of the divine emperor.

The rules conveyed by the colonial law of *Vrso* do not differ substantially from those in the Flavian municipal laws, nor, specifically, from those prescribed by the *Lex Imitana*.⁵ This law does not give that many details about the obligations of magistrates, who were still responsible for the organisation of spectacles, although with more lax rules. The fact that no limitations are placed on the use of public funds and that no minimum spending cap is imposed on the magistrates seems to suggest that

2 See the acute comments by Rüpke 2006 and Gómez-Pantoja 2009, 38–42.

3 AE 1976, 351; AE 1978, 439; HEP 5, 1995, 424; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, 80, no. 13; HEPOL 13771.

[Im]p(eratori) Caes(ari) T(ito) Aelio / [Ha]driano Antonino / [Au]g(usto) p(atr)i p(atriciae) pont(ifici) max(imo) tri[bu]nticiae potest(atis) XVIII / co(n)s(uli) IIII / [L(ucius)] Licinius Abascantio / [in repub-lic]a Castulonensi VI viratu functus ex indul[gentia] splendidi ordinis quos [is] gerendos in hono/res d[ivoru]m et d[ivinae] [d]om[us] cen[sue]rat edi[tis] in amp[h]iteatro gladi[at]orib[us] bis spectaculorum die[r(um)] -c.-2-4-] item in theatro / [civ(ibus) et incolis] acroamatibus frequenter editis statu[am] / [imp(eratoris) Ant]onini Aug(usti) p(atr)i p(atriciae) optimi maxime prin[cipis] ac[cepto] loco a republica Castulonensium / [ob hon]orem V[ir]atus / [d(ono)] d(edit).

4 Koselleck 1993, 337: experience and expectation are two adequate categories to thematise the historical time, past and future cross in the present.

5 Gómez-Pantoja 2009, 44.

the state was no longer as concerned about the success of a model begun with colonial laws in the republican period. To begin with, the cultural expressions of *romanitas* were by then firmly established in the Empire; magistrates did their duty, and there was no need for legislators to be so punctilious; this is even without taking into consideration the fiscal issue which, undoubtedly, must have played a significant role in changing the norms that regulated the organisation of public spectacles.⁶ *Municipia* and their magistrates seem to have been given much more freedom of action than that bestowed by the colonial law, which gives precise details about how to proceed. This sort of emancipation continued rewarding evergetism with prestige,⁷ while liberating those magistrates who, not being in the position to face such an economic burden, could endanger the occupation of magistracies by making them seem undesirable. For the state, it was more important for local administration to run smoothly than to have more or less luxurious public spectacles organised. Imperial cities had become monumental enough to need to continue building arenas for the representation of *romanitas*; cities now operated within well-set parameters, and the *up down* vector was not as necessary as in the republican period.

Inscriptions describing the operation of those offering public spectacles present evidence for this. Let us see the example of G. Cexaecus Fuscus (fig. 1), who offered an ex-voto to Ermaeus Devorix for the success of a gladiatorial show near *Aquae Flaviae* (Conventus Bracaraugustanus, Chaves, Villa Real, Portugal).⁸ Although the document is hardly exceptional or particularly eloquent, it supports my previous arguments. The inscription reads as follows:

Ermaei De/vori ob ev/entum bo/num gladi/atori mun/eris / G(aius) Cexaec/us Fuscus {x} ex / voto

The authors that have examined this document agree in accepting the hypothesis that the subject is *G(aius) Cexaecus Fuscus*, whom Hübner identified as *G. Ceraecius*

C. fil. Quir(ina tribus) Fuscus, Aquifla(viensis) ex convent(u) Bracaraug(ustano), who reached the position of provincial flamen (*CIL* II 4204).⁹ The idea is suggestive, but uncertain.

⁶ The *SC de re gladiatoria* or Bronze of Italica, dated to Marcus Aurelius' reign, reveal many details about the complex ways in which games were funded. Cf. See the long and rich commentary by Gómez-Pantoja 2009, 44–66.

⁷ Melchor Gil 1994; Andreu Pintado 1999, 453–471; Melchor Gil/Rodríguez Neila, 2003, 209–239; Melchor Gil 2004, 255–266; Melchor Gil 2009, 145–169; Melchor Gil 2018; Melchor Gil 2019, 167–180.

⁸ On a granite altar used in a bridge and preserved in a chapel in Azinheira, north of Chaves (Villa Real). *CIL* II 2473; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 12, 80–81; *HEpOL* 8300. 2nd century AD.

⁹ *C(aio) Ceraecio / C(ai) fil(io) Quir(ina) / Fusco Aquifl(aviensi) / ex convent(u) / Bracaraug(ustano) / omnib(us) h(onoribus) in r(e) / p(ublica) sua func(to) / [flamini p(rovinciae) H(ispaniae) c(terioris) / p(rovincia) H(ispania) c(terior)]*. For the character, see Alföldy 1973, no. 18; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, 81, with earlier bibliography.



Fig. 1: Cexaecus' altar near Aquae Flaviae. © Archivo Hispania Epigraphica.

The donor, therefore, offers a programme of games in his city, not necessarily *ob honorem flaminatus*, because this is not specified. It would more likely be in connection with his local career, which he shows thanks for with an *editio gladiatorum munerum*.

The divinity invoked in the ex-voto is Hermes, with the peculiar spelling: *Ermaeei*.¹⁰ Scholars agree that *Cexaecus* has chosen Mercury because of this god's relevance for Celtic religiosity, which was famously confirmed by Caesar and Tacitus.¹¹ On the other hand, the worship of Mercury was relatively common in the NW of the Iberian Peninsula, especially in areas with a strong Celtic element.¹² Tovar¹³ related this Hermes with the Celtic god Lugu, a popular divinity in its region of origin, which brings to the fore an interesting connection to the choice of *Cexaecus*. An inscription from Genouilly refers to this Celtic god as *Luguri*, a dative of *Lugurix*,¹⁴ which helps to explain the meaning of the epithet *Ermaeei*. Indeed, this feature is as unparalleled as the theonym used: *Devori*. It is accepted that this word replaces the expected *Devorici*,

¹⁰ Better than the suggestion of separating the words: *Ermae Eide/vori* (Rodríguez Colmenero 1987, no. 78, 107–109, reading followed by Olivares Pedreño 2000, 129 and Baratta 2001, 78). The initial reading of the theonym was *Marti Deo Victori* (CIL II 2473), later corrected by Leite de Vasconcellos (1913, 505–507) with *Ermae*, which has since been followed.

¹¹ Caes. *Bell. Gal.* VI, 17: *Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt. Huius sunt plurima simulacra, hunc omnium inventorem artium ferunt, hunc viarum atque itinerum ducem, hunc at quaestus pecuniae mercaturasque habere vim maxime arbitrantur.* Tac. *Germ.* IX, 1: *Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt, cui certis diebus humanis quoque hostiis litare fas habent.*

¹² Baratta 2001, 111. Distribution map in p. 113.

¹³ Tovar 1981, 281–282.

¹⁴ Tovar 1981, 282.

with nominative *Devorix*.¹⁵ The word is constituted by two terms *Deus/-a* and *Rex*,¹⁶ that is, Hermes is invoked as ‘King of gods’, an argument supported by the above-noted comments by Caesar and Tacitus. The combination of a Greek theonym with such a rare epithet merits special attention.

The relationship of Mercury with amphitheatres was mentioned by Tertullian (*Ad Nat.* I, 10, 46 and *Apolog.* XV, 5),¹⁷ when he mocks the characters of Mercury, whose mission was to ensure that, at the end of fights, the loser was dead by applying a red-hot iron to the chest, and of *Dis Pater* who, should that not be the case, finished them off with a hammer. These scenes must have been uncommon, although Tertullian claims to have witnessed them. At any rate, this sporadic appearance of the god to check that the loser in a fight is dead does not seem sufficient reason for a munera editor to invoke Mercury. This is a psychopomp Hermes that is depicted in a *defixionis tabella* in the amphitheatre of Carthage,¹⁸ which does not fit well with the epithet *Devorix*, an exaltation of supreme divinity¹⁹ that does not become an infernal god.

The use of the Greek theonym has been highlighted by Giulia Baratta, who stresses Mercury’s relationship with gymnastics and entertainment in the amphitheatre; Hermes was, as well, the protector of youth, sports and practice in the palaestra, so in this case, in addition to the mixture with an indigenous god, there is also an influence of the Greek god over the Roman one.²⁰ This, however, does not explain why the Greek denomination is chosen over the Roman one. In my opinion, there are two additional angles to the enquiry.

It is clear that context, which has to date dominated the interpretation, is important, but the perspective of the dedicator has been neglected. We know two things about him that are, in my opinion, essential to understand his motivations. First, he was the organiser of the spectacle; second, while not totally certain but still likely, he was a religious specialist. Concerning the former, in addition to everything that I have already mentioned with regard to Hermes/Mercury and his relationship with spectacles, it must be remembered that *Cexaecus* was investing a substantial amount of money, so it is not secondary that he chose a supreme deity with an unquestionable economic dimension. We can easily imagine that *Cexaecus*

¹⁵ Tovar 1949, 142.

¹⁶ Albertos 1956, 294–297, argues that its meaning is ‘King of Goddesses’.

¹⁷ *Risimus et meridiani ludi de deis lusum, quod Ditis Pater, Iovis frater, gladiatorum exsequias cum malleo deducit, quod Mercurius, in calvitio pennatulus, in caduceo ignitulus, corpora exanimata iam mortemve simulantia e cauterio probat.* The text of the Apologetic reads: *Risimus et inter ludicras meridianorum crudelitates Mercurium mortuos cauterio examinantem, vidimus et Iovis fratrem gladiatorum cadavera cum malleo deducentem.* Cf. Ville 1981, 377–379.

¹⁸ Vid. Peyras 1996, 127–141.

¹⁹ Qualitative, relational, hierarchical epithet according to EPIDI’s taxonomy. Alvar *et al.* 2023 forthcoming.

²⁰ Baratta 2001, 111–112.

wanted to take no risks and invoked a god that protects the economic interests of his devotees, and who is also related to the amphitheatre.

The god was re-dimensioned by the religious specialist *Cexaecus*. He chose the god in his Greek denomination to add exoticism to the Roman Mercury and thus increase its prestige. That this was the choice of an expert may be confirmed by the spelling, to which little attention has been paid to date. The double –e is used to represent the long Greek vowel, also found in a *defixio* from Carthage, in which Hermes' name, in Greek, is written with a double epsilon.²¹ In conclusion, I do not think that this was a mistake by the engraver, but rather that the spelling seems to be intentional. The exotic choice that seeks the prestige of antiquity is compounded with a similarly exclusive epithet.

If Hermes comes down to the arena with *Cexaecus*, Martial brings Hercules. There is no certainty that Hercules was connected with the amphitheatres, in this case the one in *Segobriga* (*Municipium Saegobrigensis*, prov. *Tarraconensis*, Saelices, Cuenca). The inscription is succinct, so we cannot determine the context in which the altar on which it is engraved was consecrated: *Herculi / Martialis / exvoto*.²²

It is related to the amphitheatre because it was found in a nearby building, in which three other altars dedicated to Hercules were also discovered.²³ None of the altars draws a direct link between Hercules and spectacles, so all conclusions must remain speculative. A number of arguments can be put forth to suggest this connection, but none is conclusive. First, Martial's economic position seems anything but affluent, based on the poor quality of the inscription and his name, which is indicative of a low socio-economic status. In addition, Hercules was a popular deity among gladiators and their followers owing to his heroic credentials and physical strength.²⁴ At any rate, this would be the only testimony to link Hercules and the amphitheatre in the Iberian Peninsula, where approximately fifty invocations to Hercules have been found.²⁵ The most common epithet in them is *Invictus*, although most of these inscriptions bear no epithet at all.

That those fighting in the arena in *Segobriga* could access a space dedicated to the cult of Hercules is a possibility. Similar cases, with different deities, are found in the amphitheatres of *Emerita*, *Italica* and *Tarraco*. Only one full word survives in a fragmented inscription found in the amphitheatre of *Colonia Triumphalis Tarraco*,

²¹ Peyras, 1996 129. For the use of *defixiones* in amphitheatres, see Gordon 2012, 47–74.

²² Almagro Basch 1982, 341 and 1984, no. 6, 67–68; *AE* 1982, 598; Oria 1996, 157–158; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 70, 194–195. *HEpOL* 6731.

²³ As suggested by Almagro Basch 1984, nos. 4, 5 and 7 (Martial's was number 6).

²⁴ Ville 1981, 333; Berlan-Bajard 2019.

²⁵ This number comes from a quick glance using the Hispania Epigraphica online search engine, sub uoce *Hercul*. See in addition, Oria 1989, 263–274; Oria 1993, 221–232; Oria 1996; Oria 1997, 143–151; Oria 2002, 219–244.

the theonym of the god to which the altar was dedicated: *Iovi*.²⁶ The absence of an epithet and the uncertain reading does not allow us to reach further conclusions other than that, like with Hercules in *Segobriga*, Jupiter was invoked in the amphitheatre of Tarraco, but in the same place in which an altar dedicated to Nemesis stood (about which more shortly). The circumstances of the find, in fact, suggest that the altar was located in a sacred area in which the main divinity was Nemesis. We shall presently examine the presence of this goddess in the amphitheatres of *Italica*, *Emerita* and *Tarraco*. For now, I shall only emphasise the small epigraphic presence of Jupiter, to whom, according to the municipal laws and the law of *Vrso*, gladiatorial games were dedicated. This does not mean that this god and the triad to which he belonged had its own cult space in every amphitheatre; in fact, the flexibility of religious practice and the adaptability of agents and divinities was such that the cohabitation of various gods is unsurprising.²⁷

In consequence, the list of gods related to amphitheatrical spectacles is reduced to the Capitoline Triad (a legal obligation), Hermes and perhaps Hercules and Jupiter. Nothing particularly surprising, except for the paucity of the evidence. This paucity, however, is mitigated by the constant presence of Nemesis, the true divine leading role in Hispania's amphitheatrical games.

From the capital of Lusitania, *Augusta Emerita*, comes a dipinto found high on the right-hand wall of the northern access to the amphitheatre (fig. 2). It is a no longer preserved *titulus pictus* on red stucco, shaped like a *tabula ansata*. The white letters were well sketched, following the horizontal incisions.

The text reads:

Deae Invictae / Caelesti Nemesi / M(arcus) Aurelius Philo (!) / Roma v(otum) s(olvit) a(nimo) l(ibens) / sacra v(ota) s(olvit) m(erito).

For a long time, García y Bellido's suggestion that the name of the dedicator was that of an imperial freedman or someone acquiring citizenship as a result of the *constitutio Antoniniana* was accepted.²⁸ However, as pointed out by Gómez-Pantoja, nothing sustains this interpretation.²⁹ There is little that we can infer about the dedicator, other than his Roman origin. His motivations, however, are clear, since he himself states that he wished to fulfil his sacred vows. Whether this was triggered

²⁶ Alföldy 1975, 28; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 74, 200–201; *HEpOL* 19483: *Iovi* [- -] / *L(ucius) S(- -) [- -]* follows Alföldy's reading, which is also followed by all later authors except for Gómez-Pantoja, who assumes that the beginning of the text is lost, and suggests [—] / *Iovi* [*v(otum) a(nimo)*] / *l(ibente) s(olvit)*.

²⁷ For this matter, see Beatriz Pañeda's essential doctoral thesis *Divine Cohabitations in Sanctuaries of the Graeco-Roman World*, UC3M – EPHE, defended on May 31st 2021. Although this phenomenon is less common, or is less explicitly expressed, in the western provinces, the conclusions of the dissertation are applicable to the whole practice of Graeco-Roman polytheism.

²⁸ García y Bellido 1957 and García y Bellido 1959, 128.

²⁹ Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 58, 181.



Fig. 2: Dipinto from the amphitheatre of Emerita. © Archivo Hispania Epigraphica.

by his participation in a combat is difficult to say, but it is worth pointing out that, although he was from Rome, he decided to leave his testimony in a dipinto situated 4 m high in one of the entrances to the amphitheatre, which suggests that this was no banal gesture, as confirmed by the statement of his obligation and the good will with which he faced it: *v(otum) s(olvit) a(nimo) l(ibens) / sacra v(ota) s(olvit) m(erito)*.

This document brings us straight to the issue of the divinity that was most closely associated with amphitheatrical spectacles in *Hispania*, Nemesis. In this instance, the onomastic sequence seems to suggest the identification of *Dea Caelestis* and Nemesis, that is, that the devotee is addressing a single divinity, not two. The logic that underlies these identifications is always hard to determine.³⁰ Perhaps the devotee simply thought that *Caelestis* and Nemesis was one and the same goddess (i.e. a direct identification). This is probably the phenomenon to which authors that describe syncretism were referring. However, the union of theonyms can also respond to a cumulative logic if what the dedicator intended was to address a divine entity in which the powers of *Caelestis* and Nemesis converged, which would, therefore, be superior and distinct from both of them. This more complex meaning outlines the meaning of syncretism for Motte and Pirenne-Delforge,³¹ whom Wallensten follows to argue: “if a deity or a cult were to qualify as a syncretism, the end product had to be something more than its constituent parts; in other words, that the outcome of a meeting between two initially foreign ingredients, be they iconographical, conceptual or other, should be a new entity with distinctive characteristics”.³²

³⁰ Bonnet *et al.* 2018, 567.

³¹ Motte/Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 11–27.

³² Wallensten 2014, 160.

However, the logic behind the accumulation of powers does not necessarily have to crystallise in a new divine entity that can be worshipped as such. The complexity of this process has been emphasised by Daniela Bonanno, who examines practices of heteronomy, eponymy, superposition and juxtaposition.³³

The fact that this is the only epigraphic association between *Caelestis* and *Nemesis* makes it hard to believe that this is the result of a process of syncretism, according to the principles outlined above. The proximity of these goddesses becomes especially clear in the amphitheatre of *Italica*, but there, these goddesses were worshipped separately.

A third option is that *Nemesis* is an onomastic attribute³⁴ of *Dea Invicta Caelestis*, which would clarify the reason for which the latter was being invoked. In that case, the onomastic sequence would not express identification, but rather juxtaposition. It would be peculiar, however, for *Nemesis* to be reduced to an epithet in this dedication, given her relevance in amphitheatrical contexts.

Emerita was not the only city whose amphitheatre hosted a cult space for *Nemesis*. We have already seen the inscription mentioning *Jupiter* in *Tarraco*. To this, we must add an altar found in the centre of the northern side of the seating area which was erected by two or three people. The gender determinant of the first two is missing, so most authors have interpreted them as men, while the third was a woman. Gómez-Pantoja prefers to interpret all three of them as women, with no relation of kin between them. However, the following reading seems more acceptable:

[N]um(ini) s(anctae) / Nemesis[s] / Cornel[ius] / Senecia[nus] / et Valeria Po[mpeia] pro sa/lute Numm(i) / Didymi / v(otum) p(osuerunt).³⁵

The beneficiary of this request is *Nummius Didymus*, perhaps a *venator*, as the inscription was found right below a painting depicting a hunting scene. It is impossible to determine what the relationship between the dedicators was and how they were related to *Didymus*. Our only certainty is that *Nemesis* was worshipped in the amphitheatre, where she may have had her own cult area. It is interesting that the divine power invoked is not the divinity itself, but her numen, which reaffirms the awareness of *Nemesis*' capability of action through her numen. This was not a capricious choice, because what was being consciously invoked were the healing qualities of the goddess,³⁶ which is referred to as *sancta*, the meaning of which will be analysed in relation to the following inscription.

³³ Bonanno 2020, 1–20.

³⁴ Bonnet 2017.

³⁵ *RIT* 45 = *AE* 1956, 24 = *AE* 1965, 52 = *HAE* 861 = *CIL* II2/14, 2, 848 = *HEp* 18, 2009, 422: *HEpOL* 19488; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 71, 195–197, lám. XXXIX, Fig. 2 (312).

³⁶ A dedication found in *Emerita* attributed to *Nemesis*: *Dominae cur(atrici) anima[e] / palmam [exp(ondo) - - -]III / - - - - -* is put in relation with another one from *Italica*, the reading of which is more doubtful as I will show later, which could be read: *Lucanus Fedelis / Domin(a)e cur(atrici) ani/mae*.

In the same amphitheatre, another inscription was found in association with four anepigraphic altars. It reads as follows:

*Sanc(tae) / Augus/{s)t(a)e Neme/si ex vot(o) / [- M]ess[ius]*³⁷

There is no evidence on the identity and social status of the dedicator, only that he or she set up this altar in the area reserved for Nemesis in the amphitheatre, in which Jupiter was also invoked. This association is less surprising if we take into account the second of Nemesis' epithets, *Augusta*, a divine, operational, institutional, political and power-related epithet, according to the EPIDI classification;³⁸ this epithetic block is typical of Jupiter, so it can be argued that the *cultores* indulged in a sort of conceptual association that they did not find aberrant. In addition, the first epithet, *Sancta*, is also divine, although also qualitative, intrinsic and substantial. The implementation of this classification can help us to distinguish conceptual spheres in a reasonably flexible way. In this instance, two epithets that could initially be seen as redundant or simply as a mechanical choice with no defined motivation, turn into the expression of the mental space within which the practitioner places the invoked divinity.

An opisthographic stele with *vestigia* on both sides possibly comes from the same context as the previous ara (fig. 3). The inscription, which is poorly preserved, has been thoroughly reconstructed by Gómez-Pantoja:³⁹

Cum me mo<rit>u(rus) Se/verus, cautius cu/[rent no]s scuta, victo(rem) ta(ndem), Neme(sis), me (fac)!

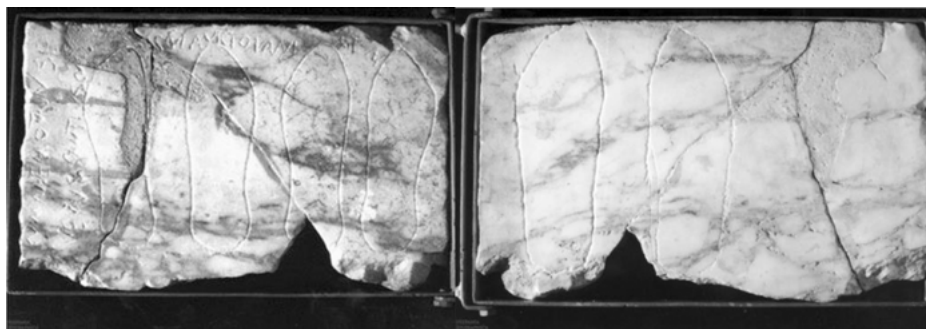


Fig. 3: Opisthographic plate with *vestigia* from Tarraco. © Archivo Hispania Epigraphica.

³⁷ RIT 46 = HEP 4, 1994, 840 = AE 1965, 53 = HAE 870 = CIDER 74 = CIL II2/14, 2, 849 = HEP 18, 2009, 423; HEPOL 19489; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 72, 197–198, lám. XXIX, Fig. 3 (312).

³⁸ Alvar *et al.* 2023 forthcoming.

³⁹ Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 73, 199–200. RIT 804 = HEP 5, 1995, 768 = CIL II2/14, 2, 847 = HEP 18, 2009, 424; HEPOL 18809.

The dedicator seems to have been a gladiator who was about to confront another, called Severus, invoking Nemesis to give him victory. The interpretation of this plaque is not easy due to both its opisthographic nature and the disposition and meaning of the text. Gómez-Pantoja suggested that if the text had a magic character, the inscribed face would have probably remained hidden; instead, he thought it more likely that the anepigraphic face was initially going to be inscribed, but that the tracing of the *plantae pedum* left almost no room for this, so it was decided to turn to the other face. In my opinion, an experienced engraver would have had no problem to inscribe the text, poorly fitted on the currently anepigraphical face. The text appears to have been engraved after the tracing of the *plantae*, so it seems that what we have here is a ‘preformed’ plaque featuring a text for which it was not originally conceived. The engraver thus struggled to write down the dedication to Nemesis on an already patterned plaque, fitting the letters to the lines. Following Valentino Gasparini’s interpretation of *vestigial*,⁴⁰ the gladiator found in them an instrument to communicate with the divinity, in which feet soles have a changing symbolic meaning, depending on individual memory and will. This is the reason why it is so difficult to determine whether the footmark is human or divine, because its presence is in fact suggestive of an encounter between mortal and deity; footmarks are an appropriate place to link with the supernatural, and therefore they will have a different meaning for each observer. In this instance, pre-carved footmarks, devoid of any meaning, acquire one through their appropriation by the gladiator who asks Nemesis to help him in his fight against Severus. Magical attributions are an elusive solution; we are used to epigraphic texts *post eventum*, and it is hard to recognise individuals oriented towards future expectations.⁴¹ The logical sequence of events was for the triumph over Severus to be followed by the setting up of a votive altar. If this is not a magical gesture, we must clarify why the gesture that led to it is. The answer lies in the ‘magical’ *formulae* used: *cum me moriturus* or *me fac*. This gladiator appears to have had no issue with his imprecation being visible, against standard marginal behaviour. In any case, the inscription on a bronze sheet found in the amphitheatre of *Carmo*, the magical nature of which is uncertain, does not consolidate the strictly magical interpretation that has been put forth.⁴² I tend to think that we are, once more, witnessing ambiguous behaviour, easier to tolerate for the users than for modern scholars. Before we leave Tarraco’s amphitheatre, it must be pointed out that the building hosted a *sacellum* specifically dedicated to Nemesis, although dedications to other gods, such as Jupiter, were also deposited in it, as archaeology has demonstrated.

From Carmona (*Carmo, conventus Hispalensis*) comes a bronze sheet with a hanging ring, seemingly found in the vicinity of the amphitheatre and now lost.

⁴⁰ Gasparini 2021, 272–365.

⁴¹ Vid n. 4.

⁴² Gómez-Pantoja 2009, 200.

The inscription has been variously interpreted. The text seems to read: *Om/p(h)e r(ei)p(ublicae) s(erva) / August(a)e / Nemesi*.⁴³ The dedicator, a public slave, wears a Greek *cognomen*. Gómez-Pantoja suggests that the sheet would have been fixed in a *sacellum* dedicated to Nemesis in the amphitheatre. Certainly, she was not engaged in a spectacle; at most, we can argue that the inscription is an expression of private devotion, set up in a suitable context for the cult of Nemesis.⁴⁴

I have left for last the most substantial assemblage of epigraphic evidence for the presence of Nemesis in amphitheatres, which comes from Italica. Fortunately, this assemblage has been analysed in two comprehensive studies that make my task lighter.⁴⁵

At least two sacred areas have been identified in Italica's amphitheatre. The first was dedicated to the cult of *Dea Caelestis*, and the other corresponds to the *sacraria* to Nemesis in the east aisle. In addition to this, a *sacrarium* to Hecate may have also existed.⁴⁶

Caelestis's sacred area is located to the north of the eastern access. It is outlined by the amphitheatre's structure, which forms a space reserved for private use, as indicated by the doorjambs. Sometime around AD 200, the room was redecorated and paved with marble slabs, and a statue of *Caelestis* was erected. Only the base survives, at the foot of which was a plaque paid by *C. Se[n]tius Africanus* for *Caelestis Pia Augusta* (fig. 4).⁴⁷ The length and the height of the vault must have made for an imposing room, similar to other amphitheatrical *sacraria*, such as the one in Tarraco.

Other *vestigia*, dedicated to Nemesis, were found in the corridor outside. According to Beltrán and Rodríguez (2004, 71–77), Nemesis' *sacraria* were independent from the closed area dedicated to *Caelestis*; Gómez-Pantoja (2009, 190) however, argues that it was all part of a single context, both because of the proximity of the different elements and because of the 'syncretism' that brought these divinities together in Hispania. It would appear that the intention existed to keep the dedications to both deities neatly separate; those to Nemesis were not deposited inside *Caelestis*'s sacred area, but displayed in the corridor, outside. The wish to distinguish between them seems clear, especially since these goddesses are not known to share the same *ex-voto*, at least in Italica; the identification of both

⁴³ *CILA* 841; Stylow 2001, 99–100; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 59, 182–183; *HEpOL* 4904.

⁴⁴ Alvar 2001, 483.

⁴⁵ Beltrán/Rodríguez 2004 and Gómez-Pantoja 2009.

⁴⁶ A painting of Hecate was discovered on a wall in the ring corridor under the podium, near the main eastern aisle. This may have constituted a *sacrarium* to this goddess. Cf. Beltrán/Rodríguez 2004, 79–81.

⁴⁷ *Caelesti Piae Aug(ustae) / G(aius) Se[n]tius Africanus cum liberis / a(nimo) l(ibente) v(otum) s(olvit)*, *HEpOL* 4734; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 63. A dedication to *Caelestis* by an *Africanus* is unsurprising, although the use of these *cognomina* are not full proof evidence of *origo*.



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Fig. 4: Italica. Africanus' plate dedicated to *Caelestis*. © Archivo Hispania Epigraphica.

deities seems, therefore, implausible. That is, that their names were not juxtaposed in epigraphic texts, and that there was no other sign of cohabitation.

Among the evidence for worship systematically compiled by Beltrán and Rodríguez, we are especially interested in those that provide specific information about the way amphitheatrical divinities were venerated. Of great interest is a rare plaque with *vestigia* bearing the transliteration of a Latin text in Greek characters; the words are written in reverse from right to left and from bottom to top (fig. 5).

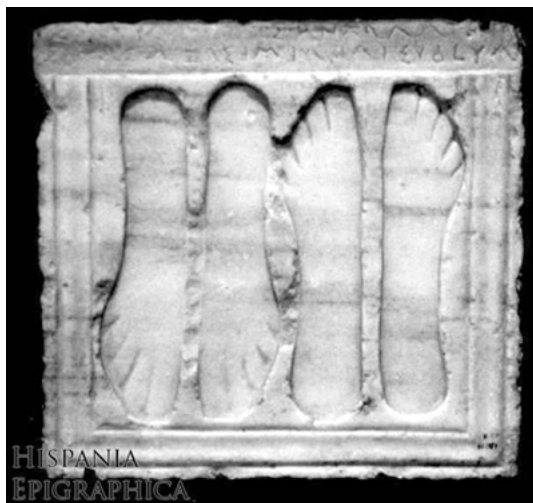


Fig. 5: Italica. Zosimos' dedication to *Nemesis*. © Archivo Hispania Epigraphica.

The apparently indecipherable *soikuL. muoisnekilatI. P / somisoZ isemeN eat-suoguA*, turns into Αὐγούσταε Νέμεσι Ζώσιμος / π(- - -) Ἰταλικήνσιουμ Λύκιος. This game of letters and words makes perfect sense if, as pointed out by Gómez-Pantoja, we interpret it as a magical spell with which the public slave Zosimos tried to conceal his invocation from indiscreet eyes.⁴⁸ Another interesting document is that dedicated by *Aurelius Polyticus / Nemesi Praesenti*.⁴⁹ The epithet (divine > qualitative > inherent > potential) is uncommon, but it emphasises the dedicator's wish for the goddess' protective presence.

Yet more complicated is a plaque with *vestigia* in its central area and texts on both faces (fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Italica. Fedeles' plate with *vestigia*. © Archivo Hispania Epigraphica.

⁴⁸ Vid Gómez-Pantoja 2007, 59–76. For this text, see Beltrán/Rodríguez 2004, no. 2, 90–92; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 62, 185–188. *HEpOL* 25771.

⁴⁹ Beltrán/Rodríguez 2004, no. 3, 92–94; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 60, 183–185; *HEpOL* 553. Another inscription from Italica uses the epithet: [—] / [Nemesi] *Praesenti*. Beltrán/Rodríguez 2004, no. 7, 98; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 64, 190–191. The photograph in *HEpOL* 4736 is cropped and the P from *Praesenti* is not visible; in the photograph published by Beltrán/Rodríguez it can be appreciated clearly.

The first three letters on the left can be read as *Lu/ca/nus*, and the three to the right as *Fe/de/les*, which gives us the name of the dedicator. The fourth line features the letter M to the left of a foot and the letters AE to the right of the other foot. One possible reading is the theonym *Mae*; otherwise, it could be an acronym to be freely interpreted by contemporary scholars. The last line reads *DOMINECVRANI*, which for some scholars means *Domin(a)e cur(atrici) ani//mae*, the three final letters featuring in the preceding line, while for others it can be developed as *Domin(a)e C(aelesti) Vrani(ae)*. According to Beltrán and Rodríguez, the latter interpretation, put forth by García y Bellido, is the most compatible with the context.⁵⁰ As such, the dedication would be to *Ma* (*Bellona*) and *Caelestis Vrania*, a redundant epithet, but one that is also consistent with the theonym; according to EPIDI's taxonomy, the epithet aims to exalt the intangible topography of the divinity. However, the similarity of the formula with that on a previously noted inscription from Emerita⁵¹ compels us not to overcomplicate the matter beyond plays of words, such as those indulged in by Zosimos. In this instance, the theonym is avoided and only *Domina* is used, a common epithet for *Nemesis*. It seems clear that it is her that a priest in Italica is invoking while assigning her epithets of power, *Domina* and *Regina*.⁵² Another epithet of power is *Augusta*, with which *Victoria* invokes *Nemesis* in a *tabula ansata* with a hanging ring attached, found among the other inscriptions discovered in the corridor.⁵³

Much has been debated about the dedicators of these religious testimonies. Originally, they were thought to be gladiators asking for *Nemesis*' protection.⁵⁴ This notion was challenged by Alicia Canto, who argued that all those inscriptions had been set up by magistrates and priests involved in the *munera* who, in this way, expressed their gratitude for their position.⁵⁵ Later studies have been more prudent and have argued for a variety of origins, despite the relative homogeneity of the inscriptions, which would be explained not by their association with a given social network but by what was on offer in the local workshops; these specialised in plaques that depicted feet, which had little to do with the proposition of the *pro itu et reddito*, but were a communication strategy with the gods, as noted above.⁵⁶ More interesting perhaps are the connections of the *cultores* with North Africa, the origin

⁵⁰ Beltrán/Rodríguez 2004, no. 15, 105–108; *HEpOL* 4728 for further information.

⁵¹ *Dominae cur(atrici) anima[e] / palmam [ex p(ondo) - -]III / - - - - -* *HEpOL* 22751.

⁵² *Dominae Regi(n)ae / P(ublius) B(- -) Fortunat(us) / sac(erdos) c(oloniae) A(eliae) Aug(ustae) Ital(icensium)*; cf. Beltrán/Rodríguez 2004, no. 16, 108–110; *HEpOL* 540.

⁵³ *Vict[or]ia vo[tum] demisit / Augustae / Nemesi*. Gómez-Pantoja 2009, no. 68, 192–193. *HEpOL* 4741.

⁵⁴ García y Bellido 1970, 133.

⁵⁵ Canto 1984, 190.

⁵⁶ Gasparini 2021, 272–365.

of *Caelestis*; although its identification with Nemesis seems shaky to me, as I have pointed out above.

The important role played by Nemesis in the amphitheatre is further confirmed by an enormously interesting document from Évora (Portugal), which expresses the relationship of gladiators with the goddess through religious and funerary colleges.⁵⁷

Conclusions

Nine amphitheatres have been identified in Baetica, twelve in Tarraconensis and five in Lusitania, a total of 26.⁵⁸ In only three of them, *Tarraco*, *Emerita* and *Italica*, have cult spaces been recognised inside the building (sometimes more than one). The eastern access gallery of the *Italica* amphitheatre yielded a *tabula ansata* and eight marble plaques with *plantae pedum* linked with Nemesis; a *sacrarium* to *Dea Caelestis* has also been identified, turning this into the amphitheatre with the most evidence for religious practices. In *Emerita*, the only religious testimony is the dipinto to Nemesis found near the northern entrance to the amphitheatre. Finally, the *lucus sacer* in the amphitheatre of Tarraco was located in the northern sector of the seating area. In addition to this, the bronze sheet with a hanging ring also documents devotion to Nemesis in the amphitheatre of *Carmo*. To these, we can only add a dedication to Hercules in *Segobriga*.

These were the gods that descended to the arena. It is, however, uncertain if all of them were directly involved in the games. This depends on what was on the *cultores'* minds when they decided to leave a testimony of their religious act. It has been shown that when the act unfolds in the dimension of Koselleck's 'expectation of future' this involvement is much clearer. When the dedicator is in the space of 'experience of the past', the relationship is less obvious. Naturally, sometimes even in these cases the connection is unequivocal, like with the example posed by *Ermaeus Devorix*. However, in most instances the relationship between the deity and the games is unclear, for instance with the *Sanc(ta) Augus[s]t(a) Nemesis* de Tarraco and the Hercules of *Segobriga*.

Unfortunately, practitioners were not generous with the epithets that they attached to their gods. The succinct nature of most inscriptions prevents us from delving deeper. Moreover, epithets are used almost exclusively with *Nemesis-Dea Caelestis*,

57 *T(itus) Calleus / Marcianus / an(norum) XX h(ic) s(itus) e(st) s(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(evis) / Cas(sia) Marcella / sob(rino) pin(nirapo?) f(aciendum) c(uravit) / item amici / Nemesiaci / ex lapide s(estertii) n(unmos) II // Emesiaci*. This is a funerary ara dated to the 2nd century AD, *CIL* II 5191; Gómez-Pantoja 2009, n^o 15, 84–85. García y Bellido 1967, 92 compares this inscription with a monument from *Ventium* (Maritime Alps) in which a *collign(ium)* (sic) *iuvē[um]* *Nemesiorum* contributed to the epitaph of a person with connections with the *ars gladiatoria*.

58 Gómez-Pantoja 2009, 220–224.

who can be indistinctly made *Invicta*, *Augusta*, *Praesens*, *Dea* and *Sancta*. Only one other god is granted an epithet: *Ermaeus Devorix*. The EPIDI's taxonomy enables us to perceive how they operated within a flexible classificatory network. All of them are divine epithets (as opposed to environmental and human epithets). *Dea* and *Sancta* are qualitative, intrinsic and substantial; that is, they belong to the sphere that substantiates the deity. *Praesens* is qualitative, intrinsic and potential; that is, it appeals to a capacity that is not necessarily constant, making it important to make it explicit to ensure that it becomes manifest. *Devorix* is qualitative, relational and hierarchical, putting it in an adjacent area to the previous ones. They are epithets that describe specific abstract qualities. The remaining two, *Invicta* and *Augusta*, sit side-by-side, in an institutional space. The former is an operational, institutional and military epithet, while the latter is also operational and institutional, but not military, being instead political and power-related. *Devorix* is susceptible of occupying the same space, because the classification is not rigid and the epithets are semantically variable. Operational and qualitative epithets are complementary; the former act in relation to human activities, while qualitative epithets constitute the deity's identity; operational epithets are related with expectations, channelling potency that is being mobilised for an expected benefit, under the shelter of physical strength or of the stability of the political system.

This means that the *cultores* did not always use epithets as mere courtesy formulas, but as communication tools that mobilised the machinery of divine protection. This, naturally, does not mean that all users were fully aware in all instances of the scope and reach of their choice; they were mediated by their socialisation space. Precisely for this reason, the uses attested in amphitheatres reveal that worshippers sought divine favour through the exaltation of the gods' qualities or abilities, as becomes the religious habit. In the first case, they are an expression of the submissive suppliant and, in the second, of divine intervention that is shaped by the request.

Finally, we have seen that the choice of communication mechanisms has specific motivations. Sometimes, the users pull risk-management levers,⁵⁹ to minimise potential hazards for both the organisers of *munera* and those who performed in them; in other instances, the dedicator acts guided by resonance, replicating habits, such as the recurrent presence of Nemesis in amphitheatres, but also modifying them to suit their specific circumstances, for instance, by her association with *Dea Caelestis*. It is this sort of resonance that links a normative Hermes/Mercury, required for the *curator* in the expectation of success, with a local epithet.

In this way, we can start weaving the networks within which generalised habits are reshaped by specific circumstances. Nemesis, *Dea Caelestis*, Hercules, Hermes

⁵⁹ Eidinow 2007 has analysed magic as a strategy to cope with critical situations. Later, Richard Gordon (2012, 47–74), applied Eidinow's arguments to the analysis of agonistic *defixiones* in Carthage. Alvar Nuño (2017, 321–325) presents a state of the art about this issue. More laterally, Alvar Nuño (2018, 528–544) presents a study on different forms of personal religiosity as risk-management strategies in times of uncertainty.

and Jupiter are summoned to the bloody games of the arena, but the dedicator addresses or thanks a specified Hermes, *Dea Caelestis*, and Nemesis with an epithet or a particular attribute to assure the correct name when communicating with a particular deity.

Abbreviations

AE	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i> , 1888–.
HEp	<i>Hispania epigraphica</i> , Madrid, 1989–2014, online repository (https://www.ucm.es/arquivoepigraficohispania/numeros-de-hispania-epigraphica).
HEpOL	<i>Hispania Epigraphica OnLine</i> (http://eda-bea.es/).
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> , 1863–.
RIT	Alföldy, Géza (1975), <i>Die römischen Inschriften von Tarraco</i> , Berlín.
HAE	<i>Hispania Antiqua Epigraphica</i> , Madrid, 1950–1969.
CIDER	Piernavieja, Pablo (1977), <i>Corpus de inscripciones deportivas de la España romana</i> , Madrid.
CILA	<i>Corpus de Inscripciones Latinas de Andalucía</i> , Sevilla, 1989–2002.

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