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DIVINE HELP FOR »MOONSTRUCK« MODESTUS

A silver *lamella* for epilepsy from the ancient city of Tlos in Lycia and its archaeological context

The thin ›leaf‹ (Lat. *lamella*, Greek πέταλον, λείπις) of inscribed silver presented here was recently found rolled up in a bronze tubular capsule among the discarded debris of the excavated Parliament building at Tlos, Lycia, in southwestern Turkey (Anatolia), a city with a rich archaeological history. Of 3rd (or early 4th) century date, the Greek text preserves a spell exorcising a ›wicked spirit‹ from the body of Modestus, the bearer of the amulet. The owner, also called ὁ σεληνιαζόμενος, is therefore said to be suffering from the ›moonstruck‹ disease, an uncommon description for epilepsy found, *inter alia*, in the gospel of Matthew (Mt. 4,24; 17,15), with which this text is compared as invaluable *Hintergrund* to the pagan, Jewish, and modestly Biblical ancestry of the spell, the textual antecedents of which may reach back to as early as the 1st century CE. A single anachronistically placed vanquishing ›cross‹-formula, atop the amulet, is also compared to the slogan ›By this (cross) conquer‹, championed by Constantine the Great on the eve of his famous battle at the Milvian Bridge in 312 CE, a battle, as it were, for all of Christendom. But the Tlos amulet, otherwise entirely non-Christian, is rather more noteworthy for its Semitic-based divine names, formulas, and language, not to speak of a non-Septuagintal citation of Gen. 1,2c. The spell was clearly the product of a text mediated by early Jewish exorcists and *magoi* (cf. Act. 19,13).

Keywords: *lamella*; magic; epilepsy; Lycia; Tlos

Introduction: archaeological setting

Ancient Tlos (Τλώς, Lycian *Tlawa*), one of the major cities of the Lycian region, was favoured for its mountainous terrain which provided an opportune defence and controlling position over the Eşen Valley (pl. 10a)¹. Located within the boundaries of the modern village of Yakaköy, approximately 15 km southeast of the Seydikemer District of Muğla Province, Tlos is strikingly picturesque with its naturally rich water sources and archaeological remains. The Saklıkent Canyon lies to the south of the settlement with the Seydikemer District to the northeast, the whole occupancy area extending broadly from the western slopes of the Akdağ mountains (Kragos), the highest range

¹ KORKUT 2016; id. 2018, 165/83; id., Die Ausgrabungen in Tlos: P. Brun et al. (eds.), Euploia. La Lycie et La Carie antiques. Dynamiques des territoires, échanges et identités, Actes du Colloque de Bordeaux, 5, 6 et 7 Novembre 2009 (Bordeaux 2013) 333/44. – On inscriptions from Tlos, see TAM 2,2, 548/649; R. TEKOĞLU / T. KORKUT, Activities of Eueresia from the ancient city of Tlos: O. Tekin / C. H. Roosevelt / E. Akyürek (eds.), Philanthropy in Anatolia through the ages, Proceedings of the first international Suna & İnan Kiraç Symposium

on Mediterranean civilizations, March 26–29, 2019, Antalya (Antalya 2020) 97/109 (with add. lit.). See ARSLAN / KOTANSKY / YEĞİN 2021–2022; further below, n. 20. Inscribed ›magical‹ *lamellae*, the discovery of which is the subject of this article, are rarely found in verifiable excavational contexts. For this reason, we address in some detail the urban and extra-urban setting of this find within the broader archaeology of Tlos, a city not otherwise known for its Jewish, ›quasi‹-Christian, or even Early Christian influences.