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THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE NAMES *PIPUNCULUS LATREILLE* AND
DORILAS MEIGEN (DIPTERA, PIPUNCULIDAE)

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There are at least two good reasons for understanding the etymology of scientific names. The first is to satisfy the natural curiosity about the history of the terms we use, and to gain an entrée into the mind of the man who first used a name. A study of Fabricius' names, for instance, reveals that he had a playful sense of humor. Secondly, such understanding contributes to the stability of names, and helps to prevent irresponsible emendation of spelling, gender, or morphology such as burden the synonymies of most groups.

It is happily the modern practice for the proposer of a new name to explain its origin, but older authors did not do so, and in order to figure out what they intended, it is often necessary to do some complicated second-guessing. A case in point is the name of the type-genus of the big-headed flies, *Pipunculus*, the meaning of which has been regarded as uncertain (Hardy 1964:302). The name was invented by Latreille in 1802 (3:463). One would naturally expect it to refer to the characteristic feature of the insect which Latreille describes with the words "tête grande, presque globuleuse." The difficulty is that anyone who looks up the word *pipunculus* in a Latin or Greek dictionary will find nothing.

But there is a Latin word *pepunculus*, a diminutive which means 'little gourd, melon, or pumpkin,' from Latin *pepō* genitive *pepōnis* f. 'pumpkin,' which itself is a loan-word from Greek *pepōn peponos* f. 'melon.'¹ It is irresistible to suppose that to this little fly, whose large round head is its most obvious feature, Latreille would have given a name meaning 'little pumpkin.'

There are still a few problems. Why did Latreille spell the word with an *i* instead of an *e*? Such variation is not surprising since in French there are other examples of fluctuation in spelling between *pip* and *pep*. Compare French *pipier* and *pepier*. It is not, I think, a *lapsus calami*, but an admissible spelling variant.

The other problem is whether Latreille made the word up, or found it. To this we can give no secure answer. It is perfectly possible that he constructed the word himself as a correct diminutive of Latin *pepō*. Compare Latin *auricula* 'little ear,' *legiuncula* 'little legion,' *serviculus* 'little slave,' etc. It is also possible that he was acquainted with the one rather obscure place where the word *pepunculus* occurs, namely the *Notae Tironianae*, a system of shorthand invented in the first century B.C. by Marcus Tullius Tiro, who was Cicero's secretary. This system comes down to us in lists of words with their shorthand equivalents, and *pepunculus* is among them. Is it likely that Latreille would have known this? All that can be said is that the *Notae Tironianae* were just beginning to receive scholarly treatment at the time Latreille was publishing his parts of the *Histoire Naturelle*, and we can assume that it was a matter of discussion. Indeed a dissertation on the *Notae Tironianae* was published in 1804 (Engelbronner 1804).²

I have no hesitation in concluding that Latreille's name *Pipunculus* is a spelling variant of *pepunculus*, a Latin word meaning 'little pumpkin.'

¹I have transliterated all of the Greek words in this article for practical reasons. Greek letters admittedly give a pretty tone to discussions of nomenclature, but they also present an unnecessary difficulty to the very people one wishes to inform. Furthermore, long experience teaches me that Greek typography is almost certainly to come out wrong in the final printing.

²I have not seen Engelbronner's work, and do not know whether the word *pepunculus* is mentioned in it. I cite it only as evidence that the subject was current. The fundamental edition of the *Notae Tironianae* is Kopp (1817).

The Meigen 1800 name for the genus is *Dorilas* (Meigen 1800:31, No. 57). This is a Latin spelling of a Greek name found in the *Etymologicum Magnum* (579.20), where it is quoted from the ancient grammarian Apollonius Dyscolus in the Greek spelling *Dorylas*. This is an ancient spelling variant for Greek *Dorylaos* (cf. *Menelas* for *Menelaos*), a compound meaning 'one who possesses an army of spearmen.' It is formed from Greek *dory* 'spear' and *laos* 'army.' There are several persons of this name in antiquity mentioned by the ancient geographer Strabo (10.177;477), but Meigen is most likely to be referring to the Dorylaos who was a friend and general of Mithradates VI of Pontus (late 2nd early 1st century B.C.), who is also mentioned in Plutarch's lives of Sulla (20) and Lucullus (17). It is not immediately convincing that Meigen would have gone so far afield, but it is the only conceivable source for the name, and luckily there is a remarkable confirmation of the fact that he was interested in Mithradates. Among the 1800 names there is a genus *Amasia* (Meigen 1800:20, No. 22). This is the name of a town in Pontus mentioned by Strabo (12.3.39) and Pliny the Elder (6.3.3 f.). It is the birthplace of Mithradates. It begins to look as if Meigen was reading Strabo or perhaps some historical work on the great king of Pontus.

We have no hesitation in concluding that Meigen named his genus for Dorylaos of Pontus, but what connection he made between the general and the fly, I cannot divine. Ordinarily one looks for logical reasons behind zoological nomenclature, but it is a mistake to do so with the Meigen 1800 names. Of the 88 genera in that paper, Meigen proposes names for 60 of them, of which 26 are names of mythological characters; four are names of historical persons; two are geographical names; 11 are compounds invented by Meigen; and four have no obvious origin (*viz. Noeza, Zelina, Zelmira, Eulalia*, although the last may be discoverable). In no case where proper names are used, whether historical, geographical, or mythological, is there any convincing connection between the features or habits of the insect and the meaning, associations, or history connected with the name.

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