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Leopards, Roman Soldiers, and the *Historia Augusta*

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Ἀπὸ Συρίας μέχρι Ῥώμης θηριομαχῶ, διὰ γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης, νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας, δεδεμένος δέκα λεοπάρδοις, ὅ ἐστιν στρατιωτικὸν τάγμα.

Thus Ignatius, in the opening sentence of his Fifth Letter to the Romans, describing his journey in captivity and expectations of martyrdom. Or, as Jerome, *De Vir. Illustr.* 16 (*PL* 23. 635A), renders the key words, *ligatus cum decem leopardis, hoc est, militibus qui me custodiunt*, translating (it should be noted) a Greek text whose reference to the soldiers at the end of the sentence is different, reading as it does τουτέστι στρατιώταις τοῖς φυλάσσουσί με. As a convenience to readers, I might mention that this point is obscured in the *TLL*'s notice of *leopardus*, where also Jerome's *decem* is misreported as *duobus*.

This passage bothered Kirsopp Lake, the Loeb editor of Ignatius, who felt that "leopards" was the name of a regiment, the following words in the Greek being an explanatory gloss. But, as he admitted, there is no evidence for any such nomenclature, rich though Roman military slang was in such contexts.[1] Ignatius is probably being figurative,[2] as his opening verb θηριομαχῶ implies. He could well have been trying a conscious variant on figurative uses of other animals in Christian literature, e.g., the lion in Paul, II Timothy 4:17.

[1] See the examples collected by R. MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Harvard 1963), pp. 166–67.

[2] Also the view of Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (2nd edn., Chicago 1979), p. 471.

Such an explanation does not detract from the linguistic interest of the passage. If we may trust the dictionaries, this is the first occurrence of "leopard" in both Greek and Latin. *LSJ* adduce only Galen 5. 134 (Kühn), *Edict. Dioclet.* 8. 39, and Theognostus, *Canon* 98. Lampe's Patristic Greek Lexicon adds to the present passage only *Acta Philippi* 96 and the seventh century Joannes Climacus, *Scala Paradisi* 7 (*PG* 88. 812D). All the examples collected by the *TLL* are late, whilst Lewis & Short quote only two passages from the *Historia Augusta*, and the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* merely a couple of inscriptions. Furthermore, the Ignatian passage is the only figurative example in Greek, and there is none in Latin.

The Roman soldiers who provoked Ignatius to this apparent artistic innovation will almost certainly have been the so-called *diogmitae*, a tough crowd of vigilantes or enforcers, hardly deserving *LSJ*'s mild description of them as "mounted policemen."[3] *LSJ*, who spell the word διωγμείτης, adduce only *CIG* 3831 a8; this is altered in their Supplement to *OGI* 511. 10, actually the same inscription via Dittenberger's *OGIS*, with the addition of a second inscription from Pisidia, published by Louis Robert, *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 52 (1928), 407–09. It is striking that all four of the examples in Lampe (who spells it διωγμίτης) come from martyrologies.[4] To give the best example, Polycarp was arrested by a joint force of *diogmitae* and cavalry (the distinction is to be noted) who were sent out to find him "with the usual arms as though against a brigand."[5]

The Latin equivalent *diogmitae* (which may justify the orthography of Lampe over that of *LSJ*) is not to be found in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Both Lewis & Short and the *TLL* are confined to the same two passages. Ammianus Marcellinus 27. 9. 6 relates how Musonius, the *vicarius* of Asia in 368, tried to combat the brigands of Isauria *adhibitis semermibus paucis, quos Diogmitas appellant*. It may be notable that the historian, who says that Musonius was compelled to use this posse because the regular soldiers were enfeebled by luxury, finds it necessary to explain the term.

The other passage is in the *Historia Augusta*. In his Life of Marcus Aurelius (21. 7), 'Julius Capitolinus', having said that the emperor created bands of Volones (armed slaves), Obsequentes (armed gladia-

[3] For discussions of their quality and functions, with concomitant bibliography, cf. Fiebiger's notice in *RE* 5, col. 784, Robert, *loc. cit.*, and now B. Shaw, "Bandits in the Roman Empire," *Past & Present* 105 (1984), 18, n. 35.

[4] *M. Poly.* 7. 1; *M. Pion.* 15. 1, 7; *M. Agap.* 2. 1.

[5] Text and translation in H. Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford 1972), pp. 6–7; the last words in the Greek constitute a quotation from Matthew 26:55.

tors), and reformed bandits from Dalmatia and Dardania, adds the laconic sentence *armavit et Diogmitas*. The word is absent from Lessing's Lexicon to the *Historia Augusta* perhaps because he treated it as a proper name.[6] This account has been accepted at face value by the best modern authority,[7] and may be authentic, given the undoubted existence of *diogmitae* at that time. Yet one has to wonder what the chances are of the *Historia Augusta* independently coming up with the only extant Latin use of the term outside Ammianus, especially when we notice how a crude alliteration (*Dalmatiae . . . Dardaniae . . . Diogmitas*) is thereby achieved, also that the biographer's account opens with an ablative absolute, *instante sane adhuc pestilentia*, as does that of Ammianus, *deploratis novissime rebus, luxuque adiumento militari marcente*. Conceivably, then, we have here yet another small link in the chain of details[8] that betrays the fraudulent nature of the *Historia Augusta*.

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[6] As does the Loeb text of Magie; in Hohl's Teubner, it is printed with a small "d."
[7] A. R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (London 1966), p. 218, also in his Penguin translation of the *HA*.
[8] As put together by many scholars over the years since Dessau. A bibliography is here unnecessary; *HA* fanciers know where to look.