

## An unexplained Syriac Word in Athenaeus

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Kynulkos said: "Stuff yourself, Ulpian, with *χθωρόδλαπον* from your native country. That is a word, by Demeter, which none of the ancients has recorded, except perhaps your fellow-countrymen, Sankhuniathon and Mokhos".

Ulpian replied: "Enough of your honey-cakes, (*μελιπήκτων ἄλις*)" [3.126a].

None of the lexa gives an etymology for *χθωρόδλαπον*, but it is likely that it represents an attempt accurately to reproduce a Syriac word which had a meaning very similar to the Greek *μελίπηκτον*, 'congealed' or 'conglomerate honey'. If this is so, a possible version is *q̄toro d-debshā*, 'a congealing' or 'stiffening of honey'. *χθωρο* represents the verbal noun *q̄tārā* from *q̄tar* = *πήγνυμι*: more exactly, it is *q̄toro*, the Jacobite pronunciation of the word. Payne Smith, in the *Thesaurus Syriacus*, gives various meanings for *q̄tar* and its derivatives—nodus, ligamen, vinculum, and coagulatio which is the one required here. *δ* = *d*, the Syriac genitive, after which comes *debshā*, the ordinary Syriac word for honey. Alteration of the second *d* into *l* can be explained by a copyist's error during transcription of a Greek uncial version in which ΔΔ became ΔΛ by a simple slip of the pen<sup>1</sup>).

## κοπιδερμία/κοπίδερμος

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*Ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ χρόνῳ ἐξεφώνησεν ὁ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς διάταξιν, ὥστε μὴ ποιεῖν τινα ἔγγραφον κοπιδερμίας, μήτε δὲ αὐτὸ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κοπιδέρμου ὀνομάζεσθαι, μήτε τὸ πρᾶγμα γίνεσθαι, τῆς αὐτοῦ νομοθεσίας ἐχούσης οὕτως.*

Thus Malalas (p. 401 Bonn), in the first of three sentences concerning the desire of Anastasius to eliminate slavery. The two words in question have caused much trouble to lexicographers. E. A. Sophocles, citing only this passage, admitted them with a curt

<sup>1</sup>) I am very grateful to Mr. W. Lockwood for his comments on an earlier draft of this note.

*quid?*, a bewilderment echoed by the most recent study<sup>1)</sup> of Malalas' vocabulary. They are registered in Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, again with only this extract cited, with a suggested meaning of laceration of the skin as a sign of slavery. *LSJ*, who exclude *kopidermia*<sup>2)</sup>, illustrate *kopidermos* only by a vague reference to Latin Glosses; their Supplement adds Aesop, *Proverb.* 15 (Perry, *Aesopica* 267), but does not attempt to explain the word.

The fact that it could be used in the title to an Aesopian tale implies that *kopidermos* was in common use. So does its appearance in the Latin Glosses, in both Greek and Latin dress<sup>3)</sup>. The connection with donkeys<sup>4)</sup> in Aesop supports the notion that it has something to do with slaves. The word, in fact, looks like a vulgar colloquialism. This would suit the explanation of Chilmead<sup>5)</sup> who, calling the terms in question "nova prorsus mihi que inaudita", thought that Anastasius was re-enacting the legislation of Constantius and Constans (Cedrenus, p. 522 Bonn) against Jews owning slaves. Stein<sup>6)</sup> was sceptical, albeit his own explanation ("une sorte de patronage particulièrement désavantageux pour les clients") is not very illuminating. A further possibility might be that Anastasius was, like other emperors of the period, legislating against castration and the trade in eunuchs, for which the words in question would be crudely appropriate<sup>7)</sup>.

Whatever the precise meaning of these words<sup>8)</sup>, this entire passage deserves attention, casting light as it does on a humanitarian side of Anastasius that is not always fully brought out in modern accounts<sup>9)</sup>.

<sup>1)</sup> A.-J. Festugière, 'Notabilia dans Malalas', *Rev. Phil.* 52 (1978), 227.

<sup>2)</sup> And *kopidermos* too, in earlier editions.

<sup>3)</sup> For references, see *TLL*, s.v. *copidermus*, where the word is glossed as "de servis circumcisis".

<sup>4)</sup> The full title being *ὄνος καὶ κοπίδεσμος μίαν τύχην ἔχουσιν*.

<sup>5)</sup> The first editor of Malalas (Oxford, 1691); his explanation is reproduced in Stephanus, *TLG*.

<sup>6)</sup> *Histoire du Bas-Empire* 2 (Paris, 1949), 207, n. 5.

<sup>7)</sup> For texts and discussion, cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), 2, 854; 3, 287. This trade tended to attract slang terms: *Galata*, for instance, was evidently a colloquialism for slave dealer (Ammianus 22.7.8; Claudian, in *Eutr.* 1.58-9). Attested terms such as *θλαδίας* point to the crude language used of eunuchs.

<sup>8)</sup> On any interpretation, Malalas' notice remains cryptically without any real context.

<sup>9)</sup> Not, for example, addressed in Bury's account of Anastasius' social legislation, *LRE* (repr. New York, 1958), 1, 441-7.