

Adis: a ghost Latin zoological term*

Between the end of the year 448 and the beginning of 449 Polemius Silvius, member of what could be considered the Christian cultural elite of that period in the Gallic field, sent to Eucherius of Lyon, by the time bishop of the Lugdunensis Episcopal see, a revised and abridged version of a *laterculus*¹. The original redaction of this *laterculus* ought probably to be dated back to the first decades of the fifth century². Immediately after the short introductory epistle, Polemius offers an enumeration of the contents of the work (*quae in eo sunt*) and this outline lets us know them in full detail. Otherwise, our knowledge of the subjects dealt with in the œuvre would have been defective because it has not been preserved complete.

In this initial synopsis there is mention of a section of chronologic-chronographic content, a list of emperors and tyrants, another list of Roman provinces, a catalogue of animals, the method for reckoning the celebration date of the Paschal festivity, an *enarratio fabricarum Romae* – to be understood as the most remarkable places, monuments or buildings located in the *Vrbs* –, a breviary of Roman history, a register of animal voices, an index of *fabulae poeticae*, an inventory of metrological units, another list on metrics, and finally an account of philosophical sects. Of all these topics, the method for establishing Easter's date, the *fabulae poeticae*, the inventory of metrical feet and the chapter on philosophical sects are lost.

The catalogue of animals, the section that attracts our attention here, presents an internal distribution in six different parts: *Nomina cunctarum* (sic) *spirancium atque quadrupedum*, *Item volucrum*, *Item eorum que se non mouencium*, *Item colobrarum*, *Nomina insectorum sive reptancium*, *Item natancium*.

In the first part of the catalogue, that concerning four-legged animals³, the twenty-second listed animal is the *adis* (p. 543, 4). The animals mentioned just before the *adis* are “*pardus, lupus, ursus, lacerta, lacrimusa*” and those following it are “*bannachus*,

* This paper is set in the frame of study of the Research Projects BFF-2003-07912 (DGICYT) and SA103A5 (JCYL).

¹ The nature of this work is described specifically by Polemius Silvius as a “*laterculum quem priores fecerunt cum difficilibus supputatoribus indicii notatum*” on which he has operated some modifications “*ne minus doctis esset obscurior absolute*”. In other words, the *laterculus* presented by Silvius is a corrected and shortened version of a singular work preexisting to his intervention on it. The critical edition of reference for the consultation of Polemius Silvius' *Laterculus* is still now Th. MOMMSEN, *Polemii Silvii Laterculus*, *MGH, Auct. ant.*, t. IX, *Chronica minora saec. IV.V.VI.VII*, vol. I, Berlin, 1892, pp. 511-551.

² G. WESCH-KLEIN, “Der Laterculus des Polemius Silvius – Überlegungen zu Datierung, Zuverlässigkeit und historischem Aussagewert einer spätantiken Quelle”, *Historia*, 51 (2002), pp. 57-88.

³ The participle *spirancium* (= *spirantium*) is a perfect synonym for *animalium*.

leontofanio, scincus, parander". In vain will we search in our dictionaries the term *adis*, because it is not displayed in any of them⁴. Neither the text nor the context allow any progress in the identification of the animal that received this name, as far as the zoological terms framing *adis*, namely, *lacrimusa* and *bannachus*, do not offer a pattern of homogeneity susceptible of being extended also to the *adis*. *Lacrimusa* is a hapax designating some kind of reptile, surely to be identified with some variety of lizards, whose etymology remains in darkness⁵. On the other hand, at first sight, *bannachus* might well embarrass not only the reader but even the scholar⁶; but in fact there is no more to it than a little deformation of *bon(n)acus*, the term employed by Solinus (40, 10) to refer to a kind of bison⁷. Solinus' *bon(n)acus* offers an interesting graphical alternative to the more well-known *bonasus* of Pliny the Elder (8, 40). Thus, the *bannachus* written in the *Laterculus* represents undoubtedly a defaced form of the solinian *bon(n)acus*⁸.

Therefore, whoever wants to read (and understand) this catalogue compiled in the *Laterculus* will have desperately recourse to the *Thesaurus linguae Latinae* as a last resort in search of further information about the *adis*. In *ThlL* I, 692, 65-67, we will find the headword *adis* in the same terms as reproduced below:

adis σιτος GLOSS. II 7, 7 (*adus i. ador margo cod. Leid. ; ados vel ador Scaliger*) *an σητός ab σής? cf. POL. SILV. chron. I p. 543, 4 inter spirantes et quadrupedes lacerta lacrimusa adis bannachus.*

Thence, in the *ThlL* no supplementary information or indication is offered about the animal mentioned in Polemius Silvius' catalogue, but in return it is pointed out a second text attesting the use of the term *adis*. And, as it is well known, when there is only a sole attestation of a term, finding a second attestation increases much more the possibilities for a better understanding of its meaning. At least, this statement works this way in the theoretical plane.

Let us consider this second testimony afforded by the *ThlL*, that's to say, GLOSS. II, 7, 7. Under this abbreviation it is hidden the so-called *Glossae latino-graecae* erroneously ascribed to Philoxenus⁹. The gloss concerned (7, 7) is, indeed, "*adis σιτος*". But therefore, according to this collection of glosses, *adis* has no relation with any four-legged animal, because its meaning is "grain". Perplexity is served. Vollmer, author of the lemma *adis* for the *ThlL*, perceived the trouble and tried to find a solution. In this

⁴ The entry is missing in the LEWIS-SHORT, in *Le Grand Gaffiot* (2000), in the *OLD* (for obvious chronological limitations), in the CONTE-PIANEZZOLA, in the CASTIGLIONI-MARIOTTI, and also in the etymological dictionary by ERNOUT-MEILLET.

⁵ Cf. G. B. SOLERI, "Denominazioni dialettali della lucertola in Liguria", *Onomasiology Online*, 3 (2002), p. 4 and n. 7 (<<http://www1.ku-eichstaett.de/SLF/EngluVglSW/soleri1021.pdf>> [10th november 2006]), A. THOMAS, "Le *Laterculus* de Polemius Silvius et le vocabulaire zoologique roman", *Romania*, 35 (1906), pp. 180-181.

⁶ The entry *bannachus* in the *ThlL* does not add any information beyond the plain "*inter quadrupedes* POL. SILV. nom. anim. chron. I, p. 543, 5".

⁷ In the Mommsenian edition of Solinus' work, Th. MOMMSEN, *C. Iulii Solini Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, Berlin, 1895 (1864), the *lectio* adopted by the editor under the authority of three manuscripts is *bonacum* (it appears in accusative), but the *apparatus criticus* indicates that all the other manuscripts utilized by Mommsen (7) present gemination in the consonant -n - (*bonnacum*, *bonnacon*), and this fact makes indeed more plausible to prefer this last graphical option.

⁸ I will return to the *bannachus* in note 20.

⁹ G. GOETZ, *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum*, vol. II, Leipzig, 1888, pp. 1-212.

sense, he firstly drew attention to the fact that the *adis* of this glossary was not attested without divergence in the manuscripts and, in second place, that perhaps *σιτος* should be understood in a different way from the conventional one. Certainly, in this glossary *adis* is not a *lectio* free of problems, because in the margin of the manuscript Leiden, Scal. 61 it is written¹⁰ “*ados*” or “*ador*”, as Mommsen informs in *apparatu critico*, while another manuscript – Leiden, Bibl. publ. gr. 3 – shows in its margin “*adus ·i· ador*”. Anybody acquainted with Latin lexicology is perfectly aware that Latin Glossaries are source for countless ghost words often explainable as simple deformations, contaminations or confusions of other resembling words. And this happens even when the readings in the manuscripts are unanimous. In the present case the manuscripts show divergences that allow to glimpse which was the term involved in the confusion. As both these manuscripts indicate with their respective divergences, the Latin term equivalent to *σιτος* can not be other than *ador*. Pompeius Festus gives a perfect definition of *ador* when he says (PAVL. FEST. 3, 10): “*ador farris genus*” and adds “*edor quondam appellatum ab edendo, uel quod aduratur, ut fiat tostum, inde in sacrificio mola salsa efficitur*”. And also Nonius Marcellus defines it (52, 14) as “*frumenti genus quod epulis et immolationibus sacris pium putatur; unde et adorare*”. So, this term (*ador*) does match a Greek equivalent term *σιτος*.

Simultaneously, the fact that in the glossary, just six entries before, it is written “*adis παρεισιν*” might have led the copyist to confusion, in such way that a defaced form of *ador*, *adus* or *ados* might have been reinterpreted, even on a subconscious level, from resemblance to the former *adis*.

Moreover, a further sign of the inconsistency is that Goetz himself noticed this confusion. This is proved by the fact that in the final index of Latin forms of his *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum* (GLOSS. VI) *adis* shows a direct reference to *ador*, and *ador* itself a note referring again to *adis*.

The Du Cange Dictionary is the only one out of those dedicated to mediaeval Latinity containing the headword *adis*, which is presented with the meaning of “*frumentum*”. Nevertheless, the writer of this headword couldn't restrain himself – and he was fairly right to do so – from adding “*forte legendum adus vel ador*”.

The second attempt of explanation offered by Vollmer in his article of the *ThlL* is even weirder, as he leaves the reader in suspense with the unanswered question “*αν σητός ab σής?*”. The German scholar did not dare to formulate this possibility in positive sense; anyway, had he done so, it would imply that the *σιτος* found in the glossary was in fact a deformation of *σητός*, a late genitive-form of the noun *σής*, *σεός*, “moth”. Vollmer's efforts to find a Greek form somehow similar to *σιτος* employed to designate an animal were all in vain; it would be very improbable to find the moth among the *quadrupes*¹¹. As a matter of fact, *tinea*, the equivalent Latin term to Greek *σής*, appears in the *Laterculus* (p. 543, 38) among the *Nomina insectorum vel reptantium*, some lines below in the text, but not in the register of *Nomina cunctarum spirantium et quadrupedum*.

Thence, what was displayed by the *ThlL* as an alternative source to determine the meaning of *adis* turns out to be barren, because in fact it hides nothing else than a

¹⁰ Probably by Scaliger's own hand.

¹¹ But not impossible in the *Laterculus*, where sometimes there are animals located in a wrong category.

misleading confusion *adis / ador*. In this situation, whoever wants to solve the enigma of *adis* will have no alternative but resorting to the Latin zoological tradition in search of an answer; all the other ways are definitively cul-de-sac.

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Pliny the Elder dedicates the eighth book of his always inexhaustible *Naturalis historia* to zoology, and more particularly to land animals. The first part of this book (1-141) offers an enumeration and description of wild and exotic animals, while its second part (142-229) is reserved to domestic and common animals. The book opens with a long section where the author describes the characteristics and the special features of elephants (1-32), afterwards he refers to the *dracones*, outsize snakes that feel a congenital hostility towards elephants (35-37), and to Germanic wild bullocks and aurochs (38). Subsequently, Pliny passes to deal with wild horses and elks, and after the mention of the elk, Pliny inserts a notice about the *achlis* (39)¹²:

septentrio fert et equorum greges ferorum, sicut asinorum Asia et Africa, praeterea alcen iumento similem, ni proceritas aurium et ceruicis distinguat; item natam in Scadinauia insula nec umquam uisam in hoc orbe, multis tamen narratam, achlin haud dissimilem illi, sed nullo suffraginum flexu, ideoque non cubantem et adclinem arbori in somno eaque incisa ad insidias capi, alias uelocitatis memoratae¹³.

Thence, according to Pliny, this *achlis* is an animal native to Scandinavia and never seen beyond the boundaries of this region; notwithstanding, the attestation of a vague “*multi*” asserts that it is similar to the elk but with non-articulated hocks, which do not allow it to lay down and, for this reason, it must sleep leaning against a tree. As said by Pliny, this very feature lets to catch it by preparing a trap: the tree’s trunk is cut almost completely through so that it will fall down as soon as the *achlis* will lean against it to rest¹⁴. And the Roman naturalist adds as the last particularity of this animal an outstanding speed. Pliny’s attestation of the term *adis* is twofold because, besides this text (on 8, 39), in the general index of contents which configures the first book of the

¹² A. ERNOUT, *Pline l’Ancien. Histoire Naturelle, livre VIII*, Paris, 1952. The spacing of *achlin* is mine.

¹³ I set out H. RACKHAM’s translation (*Pliny, Natural History. vol. III Libri VIII-XI*, London-Cambridge, 1967 [1940], p. 31) “The North also produces herds of wild horses, as do Asia and Africa of wild asses, and also the elk, which resembles a bullock save that it is distinguished by the length of its ears and neck; also the *achlis* born in the island of Scadinauia and never seen in Rome, although many have told stories of it, an animal that is not unlike the elk but has no joint at the hock and consequently is unable to lie down but sleeps leaning against a tree, and is captured by the tree being cut through to serve as a trap, but which nevertheless has a remarkable turn of speed”. Notice that Rackham says “never seen in Rome”, because his plinian Latin text was *in hac urbi*, instead of *in hoc orbe*.

¹⁴ Pliny’s passage, extremely concise, can be understood better reading Solinus’ parallel passage, in which he also refers to this animal; cf. *infra*. Caesar reports this same strategy to capture the elk (*Gall.* 6, 27).

work (1, *ind.* 8, 16) he announces¹⁵ he is going to talk “*de... achli*”. No other testimony of the term *achlis* can be found in Latin literature.

Solinus in 20, 7 refers to this four-legged animal in a context very close to that of the Plinian text. Solinus, as Pliny does, mentions bisons, aurochs and elks in the chapter dedicated to the geographical and natural exposition of Germania (20). Just after the mention of the elks, he begins to talk about an “*animal quale alce*” which “*Gangauia insula e regione Germaniae mittit*”, but whose name is not indicated explicitly. Following this geographical location of the animal, Solinus reports the same features indicated by Pliny, but with further details¹⁶:

cuus suffragines ut elephantis flecti nequeunt: propterea non cubat cum dormiendum est, tamen somnulentam arbor sustinet, quae prope casuram secatur, ut fera dum adsuets fulmentis innititur faciat ruinam. ita capitur: alioqui difficile est eam mancipari: nam in illo rigore poplitum incomprehensibili fuga pollet¹⁷.

There subsist some divergences between Pliny’s and Solinus’ versions, like the different location of the *achlis* in *Scandinauia* and in *Gangauia* or the difficulty to catch it reported by this last author (*alioqui difficile ... eam mancipari*), but the features offered in both descriptions are referred to the same animal. Will Richter studied the tradition of this zoological species attested *nominatim* in Pliny, so it is very useful to resort to his article¹⁸ to go into some particular questions regarding the identification of this animal. In this sense, the most interesting aspect is Richter’s hypothesis that the *achlis* would have been some kind of Palaeozoic deer (he even proves to identify it with the *Cervus Megaceros Euryceros Aldrov.*) with horns similar to the elk’s, which would have survived in Northern Europe perhaps until mediaeval times¹⁹.

¹⁵ A. ERNOUT – J. BEAUJEU, *Pline l’Ancien, Histoire naturelle, livre I*, Paris, 1950.

¹⁶ Th. MOMMSEN, *C. Iulii Solini Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, ed.cit. note 8.

¹⁷ Arthur Golding, in his sixteenth-century translation of Solinus’ work – the only available in English – translates the passage as: “(sc. Over against Germanie is the Ilande Scandinauia, which breedeth a beast much resembling an Alce), which like y Olphant boweth non the nether ioyntes of his legs, and therefore lyeth not downe when he sleepeth, but resteth himselfe when he is drowsie, against a Tree, the which is sawne almost a sunder, ready to fall, that when the beast leaneth to his accustomed staie, he may fall downe: and so he is caught, for otherwise it is a hard matter to catch hym by hand. For although hys ioyntes be so stiffe, yet is he of incomparable swiftnesse”. Cf. G. KISH, *The Excellent and Pleasant Worke Collectanea rerum memorabilium of Caius Julius Solinus translated from the Latin (1587) by Arthur Golding*, Gainesville, 1955, cap. XXXII.

¹⁸ W. RICHTER, “Achlis. Schicksale einer tierkundlichen Notiz”, *Philologus*, 103 (1959), pp. 281-296. Cf. also H. LEITNER, *Zoologische Terminologie beim Älteren Plinius*, Hildesheim, 1972, s. u. *achlis*.

¹⁹ In 1901 J. P. Postgate dealt briefly with Pliny’s and Solinus’ accounts about this animal in a short note regarding the eclogues of Calpurnius Siculus (J.P. POSTGATE, “Some suggestions on Calpurnius Siculus”, *CR*, 15 [1901], pp. 213-214). Among his reflections, Postgate assured that the form *achlis* was a double of the form *alce* and that *alce* and *achlis* were the words to designate the elk in two different Teutonic dialects. But Postgate did not provide any further information or justification about this possibility that he gave as certain and that is commonly accepted.

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But let us come back to the lexicological question that concerns us. At this point, it can be easily guessed that the hypothesis we propose in this paper is the identification of Polemius Silvius' *adis* with Pliny's *ac(h)lis*. For this purpose, it will be only necessary overcoming a few minimal obstacles. From the palaeographical point of view, the transition from *aclis* to *adis* turns out to be excessively simple. If it needed be justified that *aclis* has lost the intercalated *-h*, then it would be enough taking a look at the *Laterculus* itself, where the reader will be able to find, for example, *manticora* instead of *mantichora(s)*, *celidrus* instead of *chelydrus*, *ecinus* instead of *echinus*, and even in opposite sense, due to hypercorrection, *schitale* instead of *scytale*, *siptacchus* instead of *siptace* (contaminated with the lexical variant *psittacus*), or the aforementioned *bannachus* instead of the solinian *bon(n)acus*²⁰. Regarding the mistake *-cl-* > *-d-* the *Laterculus* offers too an analogous case in *cidammus*, a certain kind of bird, whom Mommsen adds *-cl-* over the *-d-*, giving to understand the possibility of reading *ciclammus* in the place of *cidammus*²¹.

Finally, it neither seems necessary to find a particular justification to the fact that the author of the *Laterculus* had used Pliny's work as source for the redaction of this zoological catalogue. If something characterized the plinian work it was its immediate authority in Latin cultural field as primary source for any naturalistic issue, whether zoological, botanical or mineralogical.

A harder matter will be determining if the mistake *adis* for *achlis* must be attributed to the copyist of the *Laterculus* or if it might even derive from the manuscript tradition of Pliny's work. However, the fact that no variant in the *apparatus criticus* of Pliny's text bear any relation to the slip *aclis* > *adis* and also that the *Laterculus* shows many other mistakes of a similar nature drive us to think that the error arose in the process of creation (author's fault) or of copy (copyist's fault) of the *Laterculus*.

In conclusion, from the arguments furnished in the previous exposition we believe that the *spirans quadrupes* denominated *adis* in Polemius Silvius' *Laterculus* turns out to be in fact a graphical deformation of the *ac(h)lis* whom Pliny's refers to in *Nat.* 8, 39.

²⁰ Returning to the *bannachus* for a moment, the fact must be now remarked that in Pliny's Book 8 the mention of the *aclis* is followed by the *bonasus*, exactly in the same order adopted by these two zoological terms in the catalogue of animals of the *Laterculus*. This would invite us to think that the arrangement of the plinian zoological contents should have had some weight in the process of elaboration of the catalogue of animals found in the *Laterculus* and that probably, after reading Pliny's work, those contents were corrected reading Solinus' compilation.

²¹ The substantive *ciclammus* is not included either in F. CAPPONI, *Ornithologia latina*, Genova, 1979, or in J. ANDRÉ, *Les noms d'oiseaux en latin*, Paris, 1967, or even in the *ThLL*. In the *ThLL* it is included the headword *cidammus* that for some reason (difficult to understand) sends to *cilamnus*. This headword *cilamnus*, that only presents the text of Polemius Silvius, is introduced by an eloquent interrogation mark (?) and, immediately after, it is given the indication "*corr. ex cidamnus*", without any further explanation or justification of such a correction. In fact, this *ciclammus* seems to be a deformation of *cychramus*, a bird mentioned by Pliny in the tenth book of his *Naturalis historia* (10, 67-68). *Cychramus* is taken directly from the Greek form *κύχραμος*, the same bird mentioned by Pliny, which I have found only twice attested: in Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* (597b 17) and in Hesychius (K 4755). Cf. D. PANIAGUA, "*Lexicologica: el Laterculus de Polemio Silvio, tormento del ThLL*", *Voces* 2005, forthcoming.

Consequently, in the text of the *Laterculus* it should be read *aclis* instead of *adis*. Neither “grain” nor “moth”, nor any other of Vollmer’s vain attempts to solve this brainteaser, but that elusive Northern deer of astounding speed that slept leaning against the trunks of the trees. The most curious thing of all is that in the *ThlL* the headword “*achlis*”, the key affording the solution to the puzzle, was redacted by... Vollmer himself.

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