A Note on Diogmitae

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While being transported as a condemned criminal to Rome, Ignatius bishop of Antioch writes to the Christian community in the capital: “From Syria to Rome I am fighting with beasts, being bound on land and sea, by night and day, to ten leopards, that is, a unit of soliders” (ἀπὸ Συρίας μέχρι Ῥώμης θηριομαχώ, διὰ γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης, νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας, δεδεμένος δέκα λεοπάρδοις, ὁ ἔστιν στρατιωτικῶν τάγμα). In a recent note Barry Baldwin has argued that these “leopards” “will almost certainly have been the so-called diogmitae, a tough crowd of vigilantes or enforcers, hardly deserving LSI’s mild description of them as ‘mounted policemen’.” Baldwin proceeds to discuss some Greek and Latin attestations of this word, and especially the Historia Augusta’s Marcus 21. 7, armauit et diogmitas. “This account ... 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” [27. 9. 6]. Baldwin suggests that “we have here yet another small link in the chain of details that betrays the fraudulent nature of the Historia Augusta.”

The classic discussion of the diogmitae is by W. H. Waddington, commenting on an inscription copied by Philippe Le Bas on the territory of Aezanoi in Phrygia; some refinements were added by Wilhelm Dittenberger in his edition of the same text. These scholars established that the diogmitae were a form of police, light-armed and operating on foot, attached to municipal officers such as the eirenarches and the paraphylax. In 1928 Louis Robert discussed some inscriptions from the borderland of Pisidia and Pamphylia which showed diogmitae acting in pairs or accompanying

1 Ign., Ep. Rom. 5. 1 (the best edition is by P. T. Camelot, Sources Chrétiennes 10 [Paris 1951]).
3 Le Bas–Waddington III 992, whence J. Franz, Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum 3831 a 8; Dittenberger, Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae 511, derives from L–W, G. Lafaye, Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas pertinentes IV 580 from Dittenberger. LSI take their definition of “mounted policeman” from Franz and ignore Waddington and Dittenberger: in their Supplement they refer to Dittenberger without changing their definition.
eirenarchae in threes; some ten years later he was able to add a relief from the Smyrna Museum, several times discussed and reproduced thereafter, which shows a mounted paraphylax accompanied by three lightly armed subordinates whom Robert recognized as diogmitae. As their name implies, these were “pursuers” usually employed to apprehend fugitives. It is inconceivable that even ten such local constables could constitute the “leopards” who travelled with Ignatius by land and sea from Syrian Antioch to Rome; these must be Roman legionaries, detached in the usual way to accompany a group of important prisoners.

The inscription from the Aezanitús records that a benefactor of the city “provided at his own expense a diogmites to fight under the lord Caesar in the proconsulship of Quintilius Maximus” (παρασχόντα τῷ κυρίῳ Καισάρι σύμμαχον διωμείτην παρ’ ἑαυτῷ κατὰ ἀνθύπατον Κυντίλιον Μάξιμον). The context in which the Historia Augusta says that Marcus Aurelius “armed the diogmitae” concerns the emperor’s preparations and departure for the German War in 169. Waddington, followed by Dittenberger, argued that the proconsul Quintilius Maximus was the consul of 151, who should have been proconsul in the later 160s, and that the inscription thus confirmed the testimony of the Historia Augusta. A milestone from Dascyleion now dates Maximus’ proconsulate to 169/70, and puts Waddington’s hypothesis beyond all doubt. In short, the diogmitae were neither “mounted policemen” nor “a tough crowd of vigilantes or enforcers,” but light-armed local constables. That is why the Historia Augusta singles out among Marcus Aurelius’ preparations for the German War the fact that “he also (or even) armed the diogmitae”; its testimony is confirmed by the inscription from the territory of Aezanoi.

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