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LOTORES: ROMAN BATH-ATTENDANTS

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1

Romans who practised the profession of *lotores* were obviously involved with water and washing in some way. Opinions diverge, however, about the precise nature of their occupation. Some scholars have suggested the possibility that *lotores* attended visitors in public baths.¹ More often, scholars think that *lotores* washed wool, and that *lotor* was a synonym for the more common term *fullo*.² The question is of general interest, since solving the problem will provide a better picture of what went on in Roman baths.

A recent paper has renewed the argument that *lotor* denoted a person engaged in fulling. A *lotor* was supposedly chiefly concerned with the urine used in the fulling process. The occupational term is thought to be connected to or somehow derived from *lotium*, which is another word for *urina*.³ On the other hand, etymological arguments provide equal support for the other view, that the *lotor* acted as a bath attendant: the perfect participle passive of Latin *lavare* (to wash, bathe) is *lotus*, *lautus*, *lavatus* (and very rarely *lutus*).⁴

In the following it will be argued that "*lotores*" were, if not always, at least occasionally, bath attendants.

2

Epigraphic evidence is scarce; the word *lotor* is attested in five inscriptions only.⁵ In one of them *lotor* lacks professional meaning,⁶ while one inscription from Aquileia mentions

¹ Most clearly G.Samonati in *DizEpi* IV (1972) 1865 s.v. "*Lotor*": "non è lecito affermare che tutti i *lotores* siano *fullones*". G.Mancini in *NSA* 1911, 266 was somewhat ambiguous. He stated both that *lotor* was a synonym of *fullo*, and, in reference to the mention of *lotores* in two inscriptions found in the neighbourhood of Lake Nemi: "Non vi è dubbio adunque, che questi *lotores* fossero addetti a delle terme o bagni pubblici, che erano annessi al santuario di Diana nemorense." Compare A.E.Gordon, *The Cults of Aricia*, Berkeley 1934, 20. For the treatment in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, see below.

² This meaning is given by e.g. Ae.Forcellini, *Totius latinitatis lexicon* III (1865) 800 (his material included two inscriptions later revealed as *falsae*); J.-P.Waltzing, *Étude historique sur les corporations professionnelles chez les Romains* I (1895) 198 and II (1896) 153; L.Pernier in *DizEpi* III (1922) 316-323 s.v. *fullones*, esp. 316 and 321; and S.Albert(a), "De opificibus Romanis atque de opificum nomenclatione Latina (II)", *Vox Latina* 24 (1988) 42-55, esp. 48: *lavator* [*lotor*] "is, qui vestimenta pannosque lavat - Wäscher". Although the word *lanilotor*, "is, qui in lana praeparanda eandem lavat - Wollwäscher" (*ibid.*) might be taken as supporting such a view, this is not necessarily so, as will be shown below.

³ A.Illuminati, "Lotores Nemorenses", *DocAlb* II ser. 11 (1989) 31-43, esp. 35f.

⁴ See *ThLL* VII.2, 1048, which shows that *lautus* and *lotus* are the most common forms. While giving the largest number of instances of *lautus*, the dictionary writes, after listing evidence for *lotus*: "et passim tam in prosa quam in poesi per totam latinitatem", so the latter form may well be the most common one.

⁵ See Samonati (above n.1).

⁶ *NSA* 1930, 479f. = *AE* 1931, 98: *In fronte p(edes) XXX ab lotor(?) p. XXX ab strat(?) p. XXXV ...*

gentiles Artoriani lotores, who commonly are thought to have been involved in the fullers' trade.⁷ The other three cases suggest a different meaning. A metric inscription from North Africa begins *Balnea, rura, domus* and goes on to mention *Nam ut plene, lotor, [dis]cas quid sit perferre laborem ...*, while the akrosticon contained in the inscription gives the exhortation *Bene lava te*.⁸

Finally there are two inscriptions from the neighbourhood of the Sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis on Lake Nemi in Italy. One of them mentions a certain L. Antonius Ionicus who was both *sodalis* of the *iuvenes collegii Martis Salutaris* and *quinquennalis* of the *collegium lotorum Nemorensium*.⁹ The other is a dedication to Diana Augusta by the *collegium lotorum sacr(um/orum)*. It was erected by one Primigenius, *servus arcarius* of the *res publica Aricinorum* and M. Arrecinus Gellianus filius, both curators of the *collegium* (CIL XIV 2156 = D 3255, cited in full in section 7). These two inscriptions have prompted dott.ssa Anna Illuminati in her recent paper to argue that the *lotores* were "quelli che lavano i tessuti e le vesti" and more specific, that they perhaps "svolgessero una mansione umilissima, quella di raccogliere i recipienti per urinare che i *fullones* ponevano agli angoli delle strade ...oppure che fossero addetti alle pulizie delle latrine pubbliche".¹⁰

The other explanation, that *lotores* were attendants in public baths, is discredited by Illuminati. She thinks that *lotor* cannot have been a synonym of *balneator*, because so few *lotores* are attested, while public baths are known widely around the Roman empire.¹¹ This argument from scarcity is, however, unconvincing. Epigraphic attestations of *balneatores* are almost equally rare.¹² Moreover, sometimes *balneator* denotes not an assistant, but the owner or leaseholder of privately owned baths.¹³

Still, the very rarity of "*lotor*" is worth attention. Precisely because the rare word *lotor* appears repeatedly in the context of the Sanctuary of Diana, which to be sure was no ordinary place, we should look for an interpretation which makes sense in a place dedicated to worship and cultic practices.

⁷ CIL V 801 = D 3128 and Illuminati (above n.3), 36. Her view is based on S. Panciera, *Vita economica di Aquileia in età romana*, Aquileia 1957, 25f., who shows that the question is vexed, and that there is no precise evidence about what the *gentiles Artoriani lotores* were engaged in washing. Recent support for the prevailing thesis may have turned up in the inscription AE 1987, 443 from Altinum, which mentions *collegiati gentiles lanarii purgatores*, as pointed out by Illuminati, *ibid*.

⁸ See L. Leschi, *Études d'épigraphie, d'archéologie et d'histoire africaines*, Paris 1957, 361-363. One part of this inscription has been published as CLE 577.

⁹ See NSA 1911, 265f. = D 9421 and a fragmentary stone with identical text presented by Illuminati (above n.3), 31f.: *Diis manib. L. Antonio Ionico sodali iuvenum colleg. Mart. Salut. et quinq. colleg. lot. Nemorensium quinq. Cornelia Thallusa coniug. suo ben. mer. f. et sibi cum quo vix. a. XXX.*

¹⁰ Illuminati (above n.3), 36.

¹¹ Illuminati (above n.3), 35f.

¹² E. De Ruggiero, *DizEpi I* (1895) s.v. "balneum", esp. 968f., registered only six occurrences. See also I. Nielsen, *Thermae et Balnea. The Architecture and Cultural History of Roman Public Baths I*, Aarhus 1990, 127f., 134. Literary references to *balneatores* are quite common, see ThLL II, 1703f. s.v. "balneator".

¹³ Thus Nielsen (above n.12), 127 n.37 on *balneatores* appearing in lead *tesserae*.

3.

Literary evidence for *lotor* is collected in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*.¹⁴ The entry is given as "lavator (lotor)", and each of the halfdozen references has to be looked up to see what word is actually used. With one exception¹⁵ the form encountered is *lotor* (once *lautor*). The general definition given by the ThLL is "is qui lavat (sc. aliquid vel aliquem; se ipsum)", and among the literary stances listed, there is evidence for *lotor* denoting somebody engaged in washing another person: *manus famulas et membris meis unctor et pedibus lotor adhibebat* (Paul. Nol. epist. 23,4). Another passage refers to the washing of clothes, while in one case a *lautor* appears in a *balneum*, and two passages provide no information relevant to our inquiry.¹⁶

A passage of Dioscorides Longobardus (VI century) is particularly interesting, edited by Stadler thus: *Strutio duo sunt genera, unum lotores lane utuntur ad fumigio, quod fumigio limpidant lana* (Diosc. 2,149).¹⁷ This looks like a clear indication that *lotor* can indeed refer to somebody engaged in washing wool. This impression seems to be confirmed by a variant reading of the passage (not referred to by the ThLL) where we read:¹⁸ *Strutio lanarii utuntur ad fumigande lane quod fumigium limpidat lanam*. It would appear that an early medieval scribe had glossed *lanarius* for *lotor*, thereby clearly indicating what the occupation of a *lotor* was considered to be (at that time anyway). But in fact the passage of Dioscorides shows precisely the opposite. A closer look at Stadler's version clearly shows that, although the Latin is bad, the term supplanted by "*lanarii*" is not "*lotor*", but "*lotor lan<a>e*". *Lan<a>e* cannot have any other function in the sentence but to qualify *lotor*. Clearly, then, *lotor lan<a>e* is merely synonymous for the more common *lanilutor*. Since the *lotor* dealing with wool was called *lotor lan<a>e*, we may conclude that an unqualified "*lotor*" was considered to be differently engaged (at least by Dioscorides and the later scribe).

4.

The Thesaurus only sparingly used the texts in the Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum, where other examples of "*lotor*" can be found. That *lavator* and *lutor* are synonymous is confirmed by CGL II 410,32 *πλύτης lutor lavator*, this being the only case of the form *lavator* found in the texts. *Lutor* appears five times. In four cases the Greek equivalent is

¹⁴ See ThLL VII.2, 1036 s.v. "lavator (lotor)".

¹⁵ Schol. Hor. epist. 1,16,60.

¹⁶ Optat. 3,9 p. 93,15: *apud lotorem pariter mundati sumus* (pieces of clothing are allegorically compared to Donatists and Catholics); Anth. Lat. 377,8: *fornacibus balneis aestuat ardor ...; stat tutus lator multo circumdatus igne*; Prob. app. gramm. IV 199,23: *inter labat et lavat hoc interest, quod labat nutat significat, lavat vero lotorem esse demonstrat*; Isid.diff. 1,342: *Inter labat et lavat. Labat nutat, lavat lotorem esse*.

¹⁷ H. Stadler, "Dioscorides Longobardus (Cod. Lat. Monacensis 3371)", *Romanische Forschungen* 10 (1899) 181-247, esp. 235.

¹⁸ See the apparatus criticus of Stadler (above n.17), *ibid.*

πλύτης or πλυτήρ (CGL II 410,31.32; III 455,23; III 485,35), and once we have ἡλιαστής (CGL III 367,32). The Greek translations do not allow precise deductions about the duties of such a "washer". According to the Greek-English lexicon by Liddell-Scott-Jones, ἡλιαστής is found in this meaning only in the Glossaria. Πλύντης is given as "clothes cleaner", but the verb πλύνω ("to wash") is not exclusively restricted to the washing of clothes.¹⁹ Nothing indicates that a πλύντης (who in the Greek world was usually a woman; for men the word κναφεύς was used!²⁰) could not also have washed e.g. customers of public baths.²¹

The context where the Glossaria mention *lotor* is sometimes helpful. Firstly, it should be noted that a separate word that denotes fullers appears in the CGL, namely *lanilutor*, for which the Greek translation ἐριοπλύτης is given (see CGL III 453,72; III 485,34; II 314,22 (*lanitor*); and II 585,47 and IV 359,4 without Greek translation). Secondly, the Hermeneumata Stephani lists in the chapter "de artificibus" as separate professions *fullo*, *lanarius*, *balneator*, and *lutor* (CGL III 367,6.7.20.32). This implies that, for this grammarian at least, the *lotor* had a different occupation from the *fullo*, *lanarius*, and *balneator*.²²

5.

For want of further attestations of the term *lotor*, some particular uses of the verb *lavare* deserve consideration. Water and the act of washing were important in Roman religious practice.²³ This is sometimes documented epigraphically. When the Arval Brethren took ceremonial baths in their grove on the outskirts of Rome, the term used in their Acta is the perfect participle *lotus*.²⁴

The participle *lotus*, as part of the expression *salvum lotum*, seems to have been a standard expression connected with visits to bathhouses. The exhortation appears both in

¹⁹ Hj.Frisk, Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch II, Heidelberg 1970, 564; P.Chantraine, Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue grecque III, Paris 1974, 918.

²⁰ Chantraine (above n.19), 919: "πλύντης celui que lave les vêtements, le travail étant fait par des femmes, les formes de m. sont rares".

²¹ All translations of πλύντης seem to depend on the lexicographic work of the late second century grammarian Pollux, see E.Bethe (ed.), Pollucis Onomasticon II, Lipsiae 1931, p. 62 ch. 7,37ff., The text does not exclude that a πλύντης might have washed other things than wool.

²² The Glossae Loiselii give separate entries to *lanilutor* and *lutor* (CGL III 485). But this is a wordlist compiled in the 16th century, presumably by excerpting various older sources and rearranging the material alphabetically. Therefore its value is dubious.

²³ J.Scheid, "Sanctuaires et thermes sous l'Empire", Les thermes romaines (Coll. EFR 142), Rome 1991, 205-216, esp. 210-214. See also M.Gaggiotti in JRA 4 (1991) 238 on "strutture espressamente destinate allo svolgimento di una pratica religiosa che prevedeva l'uso di bagni rituali" at Paestum, and perhaps at Atri.

²⁴ As pointed out by H.Broise & J.Scheid, Le balneum des frères Arvales, Roma 1987, 16 n.20; see CIL VI 2114, l.15 and NSA 1914, 466, l.33.

inscriptions,²⁵ and in literary texts.²⁶ Of particular interest are the so-called Colloquia or bilingual "schoolbooks" from late antiquity, several of which can be found in the *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum*. One such text, giving like the rest of these writings concrete advice on everyday behaviour, was recently edited by A.C. Dionisotti and contains a passage describing a visit to the baths. The Latin text goes: *Salvos lotos, bene tibi sit, bene vobis sit. Bene lavate, salvus lotus, bene lava, bene lava, salvum lotum. Vale domine, bene tibi sit.*²⁷ The expression *salvum lotum* appears in the *Colloquium Montepessulanum* as well.²⁸

Because the word *lotus* was an integral part of the language used when visiting public baths, one could easily imagine that *lotor* at least occasionally designated a person assisting visitors in the process of bathing and washing.²⁹ We know that such attendants existed: among those performing such duties are found e.g. *perfusores* (pourers) and *unctores* (anointers).³⁰ It is by no means implausible that certain assistants occasionally were called *lotores*, at least in particular circumstances.

6.

The Sanctuary of Diana on Lake Nemi is clearly central to this discussion, as two out of five inscriptions mentioning *lotores* have been found there. The archaeological context of the sanctuary has been used for arguing the traditional view, that *lotores* were fullers. We know that the theatre area next to the temple of Diana contained water basins, nymphaea, and presumably a bathbuilding.³¹ In the temple area itself, a water basin has been found, as has a

²⁵ Bathing greetings in mosaic floors of bathbuildings have recently been discussed by K. Dunbabin, "*Baiaurum grata voluptas*. Pleasures and Dangers of the Baths", *PBSR* 44 (1989) 6-46, esp. 18f. Two cases are of relevance here: in Timgad there is the inscription *Salvu lotu[-]*, see Dunbabin pl. IVb and S. Germain, *Les Mosaiques de Timgad*, Paris 1969, 77 no. 96, pl. XXXIII, while CIL V 4500 = D 5725 in a mosaic floor in Brescia, apparently belonging to a nymphaeum, gives *bene lava, salvu lotu, peripsu ma su*.

²⁶ That *salvum lotum* was a commonplace is shown by its appearance in the *Passio S. Perpetuae* 21. The crowd at Carthage shouted sarcastically *salvum lotum* at a man who was dripping with blood (as if having bathed in blood) after an attack by a leopard in the amphitheatre; for the passage, see recently L. Robert, "Une vision de Perpétue martyre à Carthage en 203", *CRAI* 1982, 228-276, esp. 237.

A different interpretation of this passage is given by A. Rousselle, *Porneia. On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (French orig. 1983, transl. by F. Pheasant), Oxford 1988, 118: the exclamation *salvum lotum* "is probably the ritual exclamation during a sacrifice to Saturn". But the reference for this assertion, M. Leglay, *Saturne africaine: histoire*, Paris 1966, contains no such statement.

²⁷ A.C. Dionisotti, "From Ausonius' Schooldays? A Schoolbook and Its Relatives", *JRS* 72 (1982) 83-125, esp. 103, l. 63.

²⁸ CGL III 657f., 16: *salvum lotum, domine*.

²⁹ Admittedly the text edited by Dionisotti (above n. 27), 103, l. 64 finishes the visit in the baths by thanking the *balneator*.

³⁰ See Nielsen (above n. 12), 127-131 and M. Wissemann, "Das Personal des antiken römischen Bades", *Glotta* 62 (1984) 80-89 (who however do not mention *lotores* anywhere).

³¹ On the purpose of the buildings next to the temple area, see recently Scheid (above n. 23), 215f. and Chr. Bruun, "Private Munificence in Italy and the Evidence from Lead Pipe Stamps", *Acta of the 1991 Colloquium in Helsinki on "Latin Inscriptions: Text, Material, Context"* (forthcoming).

structure identified as a bathbuilding. Leadpipes prove the use of water, and an inscription mentions a *balneum vetus*, which implies that a *balneum novum* existed as well.³²

Because a fuller's shop has been found in connection with a bathbuilding in Ostia,³³ one might suggest that a similar situation existed on Lake Nemi. However, no archaeological evidence shows that fullers were active there, nor is there any epigraphic evidence for persons involved in woolprocessing (as Illuminati conceded). Nor can the Ostian case be used to explain why we should find woolwashers or gatherers of urine working in or nearby the Temple of Diana Nemorensis. To judge from the existing evidence, fullers established themselves in the proximity of baths only exceptionally.³⁴

In this context the remarks of the late antique writer Palladius about the use of the overflow from baths are also of some interest. He mentions the subject twice. On one occasion he recommends that the overflow should be used for watering gardens: *si fieri potest, ita constituentur balneae, ut omnis earum per hortos decurrat eluvies* (Pall.agr. 1,39,4). He also recommends that the water from baths should be used for water-mills (*si aquae copia est, fusuras balnearum debent pistrina suscipere*, Pall.agr. 1,41). Nowhere does he mention fulleries.

7.

On the contrary, the archaeological context of the Temple of Diana easily permits the interpretation that the *lotores Nemorenses* were involved in some sort of bathing and cleaning, perhaps for sacrificial purposes.

Support for the meaning of *lotor* advocated here can be found in the Nemi inscriptions themselves. Firstly, there is the name of the *collegium lotorum* to consider. Diana Nemorensis being the name of the goddess, a *collegium* using the same epithet (as in D 9421 = NSA 1911, 265f., for which see section 2 above) presumably had some sort of cultic associations (other than a simply physical presence on the site while using temple water for washing wool).

Then there is the abbreviated word *sacr.* in CIL XIV 22156 = D 3255: *Dianae Aug(ustae) / colleg(ium) lotor(um) / sacr. / Primigenius r(ei) p(ublicae) / Aricinorum ser(vus) arc(arius) / curator II cum / M. Arrecino Gelliano / filio curatore I / d(onum) d(ederunt)*. It seems that *sacr.* is commonly read as *sacr(um)* and connected to the preceding *Dianae Aug(ustae)*. However, it seems odd that "*collegium lotorum*" would have been placed

³² For the water basin see L.Borsari, NSA 1895, 424; for the baths see the map in *Mysteries of Diana*. The antiquities from Nemi in Nottingham Museums, Castle Museum Nottingham 1983, 24; for the stamped lead pipes see CIL XV 7827 and 7830. The inscription mentioning *balneum vetus* is CIL XIV 4190 = D 5727 of imperial date.

³³ See Nielsen (above n.12), 24 n.26 on the Terme del Mitra in Ostia (earlier in I.Nielsen & Th.Schiøler, "The Water System in the Baths of Mithras in Ostia", ARID 9 (1980) 149-159, esp. 151).

³⁴ L.Jacobelli, "Terme Suburbane: stato attuale delle conoscenze", RivStPomp 2 (1988) 202-208, esp. 206 on a similar situation in the Terme Suburbane in Pompeii is conjectural.

between "*Dianae Aug.*" and "*sacr.*", if the latter words belonged together.³⁵ A better way of expanding "*sacr.*" would give a *collegium lotor(um) sacr(orum)*, a "college of persons involved in sacred washing". Surely the members of such a *collegium* would be more likely to devote their time to washing visitors to the sacred precinct, than to industrial washing of wool or cloth.

Finally, another religious connection seems to be present in the fact that Antonius Ionicus, who appears as *quinquennalis* of the *coll. lotorum Nemorensium* in D 9421, was also *sodalis iuvenum collegii Martis Salutaris*. Mars Salutaris is otherwise unknown, but his epithet makes a connection to ritual washing more likely than to wool processing.³⁶

The *lotores Nemorenses* therefore constitute further evidence for the importance of water and washing in Roman religious practice. They also point to the possibility that *lotores* encountered elsewhere in the Roman world may have had similar functions.³⁷

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³⁵ The *tituli sacri* in Dessau's *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* confirm this impression. For instance, a survey of the inscriptions mentioning Diana (D 3233-76) showed that whenever "*sacrum*" is present (in 12 cases), it follows immediately after the name and the epithet(s) of the goddess. Three dedications contain the expression *Dianae Nemorensi sacrum* (D 3243-45).

³⁶ See W. Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* IV (1909) 301-303 s.v. "Salutaris" (Höfer) and *RE* I A,2 (1920) 2059f. s.v. "Salutaris" (Thulin) for the use of the epithet Salutaris for deities.

³⁷ My sincere thanks are due to Mr. Simo Örmä of the Institutum Romanum Finlandiae for his help, and to Dr. Hans-Joachim Schalles of the Regionalmuseum Xanten, Dr. Janet DeLaine of St. John's College, and Mr. Claude Eilers of Brasenose College for valuable comments on the content of this paper. Mr. Eilers also kindly revised my English.