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The Laughing Men in the Lupercalia

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on the authority of Hesychius, who explains it by ἐργαλείον σιδηροῦν (Alberti's *Hesychius*, vol. ii., col. 543). The late appearance of the word in Latin (whence Fr. *marre*, 'mattock,') and the failure of lexicographers to find any instances of its use in Greek literature point to a foreign origin. It came, indeed, into Latin when *iam pridem Syrus in Tiberim defluxit Orontes*; for it is a Semitic loan-word. In Arabic there occurs *marr(un)*, 'spade' of iron (Freitag, *Lex. Arab.-Lat.*, iv., 164a; Dozy, *Supplément aux Dictionnaires Arabes*, ii., 576a), and in Syriac, *mar(r)ā* or *mārā*, 'spade' (Payne-Smith, *Thes. Syr.*, cols. 1996 and 2213), from which latter language it passed into Latin. But the word can be traced to a remote antiquity; in Assyrian the word *marāru*, 'to dig' or 'to hoe,' occurs in § 44 of the Code of Hammurabi, which fixes the terms on which a tenant 'shall hoe (*imarar*) and plough' unreclaimed ground; from this there was derived the noun *marru*, 'spade' or 'hoe,' mentioned three times in letters of the first Babylonian dynasty (Ungnad, *Babylonische Briefe*, Nos. 96, l. 11, 161, l. 18 and 179, l. 8), in each case specified as an instrument of bronze. Further, the use of the ideogram *MAR* for the phonetic spelling *mar-ru* in the two latter instances points to a probable Sumerian origin for the word.

G. R. DRIVER.

THE LAUGHING MEN IN THE LUPERCALIA.

ABOUT the middle of the Lupercalia ceremonial two men, chosen from the strongest and most active, had their faces daubed with blood, and laughed.

The reason is not understood.

It seems to me, as a keeper of wild animals, that the Lupercalia was the ceremonial of a society similar to the bloodthirsty Leopard societies in West Africa at this day, and that the laughing blood-daubed faces represented the open dripping gory jaws of ravening wolves.

GEO. JENNISON, F.Z.S.

IUNO SOSPITA AND ST. SILVESTER.

CUMONT quotes and comments on a curious legend of this saint, dating from the fifth century.¹ Under the Capitol or, more vaguely, *apud urbem Romam*, there was an underground pagan shrine, reached by a staircase of 365 steps and containing a formidable dragon. Monthly (A) or annually (B) food was brought to this creature by virgins who were *deuotae* (B) and decked with flowers, or at any rate *sacrilegae* (A), i.e. *sacrae*, but in a heathenish fashion. Either because the dragon grew restless and breathed forth pestilence (A), or because the girls were always killed, St. Silvester, in order to convince the pagans, puts a stop to the

brute's activities; or, according to the more rationalistic version of (B) an unnamed monk goes down, finds that it is only a *draco* . . . *mechanica arte formatus*, and cuts it to pieces.

Setting aside this last detail with one or two others which savour of Bel and the Dragon,² we have the following features: a pagan cult in an underground shrine; a dragon to whom offerings are brought; virgin priestesses who feed him; and the fact that the girls' lives are endangered. The 365 steps I consider frankly imaginary, despite the parallel from Malala which Cumont quotes, and will continue to do so until there is satisfactory evidence of an artificial cavern-shrine of such formidable depth and size as that would involve. The prevalence of solar cults, and consequently of solar theories about all cults, long before the date of our two documents, is too well known to need insisting on, and Malala is fond of connecting all manner of ritual with the seasons of the year and so forth. The question is, what cult the authors of these legends had in mind.

Cumont, rightly as I think, rejects the idea that the Mithraeum of Ara Caeli is meant, since that is on the wrong side of the hill; in any case the dragon in Mithraic cult plays but a subordinate part, to judge by the monuments. The latter objection applies to his own explanation that the cult of Hekate is meant, for although she has a serpent as one of her attributes, it can hardly be called a central feature of her worship.³ I suggest that we have here a confused recollection of a real cult in which a sacred serpent really did play a prominent part, that of Iuno Sospita of Lanuvium. We know from Propertius⁴ that there existed a deep cavern (*sacer abripitur caeco descensus hiatu*, l. 5) down which a maid, or maids (*puellae*, l. 9, might refer to the different officiants of different years) went yearly bringing food for a huge serpent which lived there; and that only the chaste could return safely.

But what is the serpent of Lanuvium doing at Rome? I suggest the following confusion: Propertius⁵ in the elegy quoted is describing

² Daniel xiv., Vulgate. Cf. especially v. 22, *et erat draco magnus in loco illo* with A, *erat draco immamissimus in monte Tarpeio*; B, *et hunc quidam monachus . . . subuertit* with 21, *qui subuertit eum* (sc. Bel).

³ This is not to say that a detail in B, that the monk was a friend of Stilicho, may not be due to some reminiscence of the suppression of the cult of Hekate in his time, perhaps by him; or that the locality of the dragon's lair may not be intended to be one of the caverns under the Capitol, as A seems to imply.

⁴ IV. (V.) viii. 3-14. Latest commentary, E. Rein in *Annales academiae scientiarum Fennicae* 1919, No. 3.

⁵ Very likely the hagiographers did not know him at first hand; he was little read at that date, see Schanz, *Gesch. der röm. Literatur*, II. i., p. 261. Aelian, the only other author to mention the serpent, is even less likely to have been known to them. The confusion was all the easier because the ancient cults of Lanuvium were managed by Roman officials and Iuno Sospita had temples in the capital.

¹ *Textes, etc., relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra*, I. p. 351, citing Duchesne, *Liber pontificalis*, I. p. cix ff. and Migne *Patr. Lat.* LI. p. 833 f. These documents I call for brevity's sake A and B respectively.