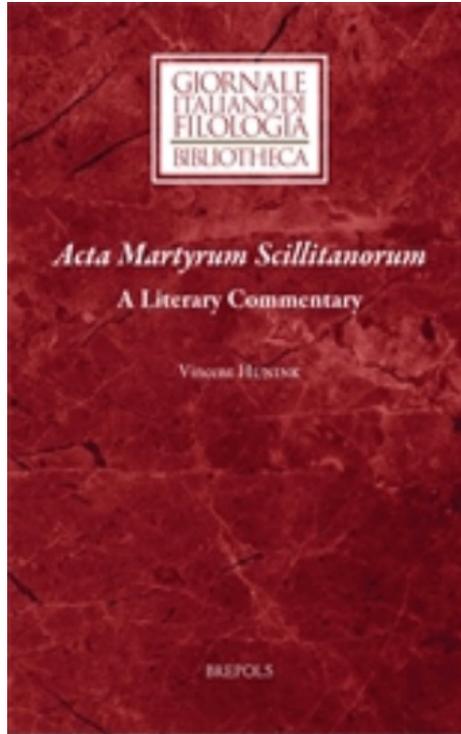


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SAMPLE

12

Text

Saturninus proconsul dixit: 'Quae sunt res in capsula uestra?'
Speratus dixit: 'Libri et epistulae Pauli uiri iusti.'

Proconsul Saturninus said: 'What things are in your box?'
Speratus said: 'Books and epistles of Paul, a righteous man.'

Σατουρνίνος ὁ ἀνθύπατος ἔφη· "Ὅποια πραγματεῖαι τοῖς ὑμετέροις ἀπόκεινται σκεύεσιν;'
Ὁ ἅγιος Σπεράτος εἶπεν· 'Αἱ καθ' ἡμᾶς βίβλοι καὶ αἱ προσεπιτούτοις ἐπιστολαὶ Παύλου τοῦ ὁσίου ἀνδρός.'

Proconsul Saturninus said: 'What kind of things lie in your baggage?'
Speratus said: 'Our normal books, and in addition epistles of Paul, a holy man.'

Commentary

12 dixit: the third exchange in the second sequence between Saturninus and Speratus. Again, the question is not put to Speratus as an individual; cf. the second-person plural *uestra*. The content is quite remarkable: all previous questions had been formal and judicially relevant, referring to the Christian name and identity. By contrast, the following intervention seems to be *extra causam*. Because of this, scholars sometimes doubted the historical character of the exchange and assumed it was a later, Christian insertion; cf. BONNER 1956, 142 quoting DELEHEYE 1966; further ROSSI 2004, 263-4.

Recent scholars have gone even further, presenting section 12 as the central part of a closely connected passage AMS 10-13; with AMS 10 corresponding to 13b ('I am a Christian') and 11 to 13a (on a possible delay). This has been labeled as a chiasmic structure, which possibly highlights the centrality of Paul in the Scillitan martyrs' thinking; thus EASTMAN 2011, 157 and MOSS 2012, 126.

However, there seems to be no good reason why the proconsul could not ask a simple question like this, before returning to his previous point. He is in charge of judicial proceedings and he is perfectly entitled to ask whatever he wants. The text can be read as a natural dialogue, and we should perhaps avoid reading too much into it.

Quae sunt res in capsula uestra?: after Speratus' stern rejection of the last proposal, little more is to be done or said. The case is clear and the proconsul will have to pronounce his verdict or come to a decision. Instead, he leaves the formal matters for a moment, and asks a question out of curiosity concerning their baggage.

Interestingly, the Christians have a case with them, containing some important or personal objects. Apparently, they had been allowed to keep this case with them and even brought it into the room where they are questioned. One wonders if it had not been examined on their entering, as it could contain a weapon or poison or magical objects or books of magic; for the last suggestion cf. BONNER 1956, 143-4 and LANATA 1973, 143; recently also Seeliger/Wischmeier 2015, 98. There may have been a hint at magic earlier; see on 2 *numquam malediximus*.

The proconsul's question shows that he does not know what is inside, and that he does not object to their having it with them. He seems just curious. Meanwhile, it is no more than 'just one more question', since whatever the answer will be, it will not make any difference. The only material object that could conceivably make the Christian case any better would be a pagan religious object such as a little statue of a 'normal' divinity. However, there is very little chance that the Christians would be carrying anything like that.

quae... res: the syntax with *quae res* interrupted by *sunt* does not seem particularly meaningful. According to Gärtner 1989, 163-4, it marks the language used by the Roman official as more formal and stylized, in contrast to Speratus' simpler words.

capsula: a repository or box, especially for books (LSh s.v.), or to be more precise: book-rolls; cf. DEN BOEFT/BREMMER 1991, 116-7. The word is classical, cf. e.g. Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.22 and 1.10.63; Juv. 10.117. Interestingly, a *capsula* could also be used for fruit, as in Mart. 11.8.3 (other examples in LSh s.v.). This perhaps explains why the proconsul puts his rather general question (*quae sunt res...?*). If he were convinced beforehand that the Christians were carrying books, he might more naturally have asked a specific question about them, e.g. *qui sunt libri...?*

According to RUGGIERO, 109, the word is a Grecism. However, the Greek version does not retain it, replacing it with the more neutral *τοῖς ὑμετέροις σκεύεσιν*. The whole Greek line seems rather long-winded.

uestra: again, second-person plural. The question may have been put to the whole group, or to Speratus as its representative; cf. above on AMS 11 *Speratus dixit*. Given the singular

noun *capsa*, we must conclude that the group of Christians is carrying one collective box. It is not clear who among the six is in charge of it.

libri et epistulae Pauli: Speratus' answer is as clear as can be. It is, in fact, the only occasion in the AMS that he gives an immediate, direct, and unambiguous reply to what has just been asked of him by Saturninus.

Meanwhile, for modern readers, there remain a number of intriguing problems of interpretation. How should we connect the genitive *Pauli*? Does it go only with *epistulae* (as the Greek version suggests and as most scholars assume; cf. RUGGIERO 1991, 110) or with *libri et epistulae*? That is, does the box contain just texts by Paul, namely books and letters, or rather some books by other authors, as well as some letters by Paul? And if just Paul is meant, should we think of 'books of Paul', or rather '*the* books of Paul' or even 'books about Paul'? For the last two suggestions see MOSS 2012, 126. For the material aspect of the 'books' in question, see separate note on *libri*.

It is difficult to see which 'books of Paul' could possibly be meant apart from his famous letters. On the other hand, if *Pauli* is not to be taken with *libri*, it is difficult to establish what kind of books could be meant at all. Some have opted for an easy solution for the entire phrase. Thus, CHIARINI/BASTIAENSEN 1987, 103 simply render as 'I libri con le epistole di Paolo'. This seems to do little justice to the subtlety of the Latin here.

As to Paul's letters, we may wonder which of the 'canonical' letters from the New Testament were in the *capsa*. All of them or just a selection, and if so: which ones, and were they in the original Greek or rather in a Latin translation? The latter is actually suggested by several scholars, e.g. *Schiavinato* 1964, 454-5, who argues that the Christians could hardly have knowledge of Greek ('the privilege of merchants in the maritime towns, or of literati'). Many recent studies also assume the texts must have been in Latin; e.g. *Rives* 1995, 224 ('we may be fairly certain that someone like Speratus was ignorant of Greek'); MULLEN 2004, 317; PATOUT BURNS/ JENSEN 2014, 5; and MERDINGER 2014, 234. Actually, the text of AMS offers no indication about the language, as REBILLARD 2017, 359 n46 rightly argues. It is by no means impossible that these early Christians were carrying original New Testament texts, that is, in Greek. In the end, the matter must be left open.

It is easy to suppose that Paul's 1 Tim., alluded to in AMS 6, is among the texts, as scholars notice (e.g. SMARIUS 2009, 34), but there is no proof for this either, as the phrase in AMS 6 may have simply been in the Christian's mind.

Why are the Christians carrying Paul's letters with them anyway? According to *Bastiaensen* 1987, 410 the letters were brought along by the defendants to show the proconsul that they contained lists of honorable virtues to be pursued or vices to be shunned, as e.g. Rom. 12.9; 1 Cor. 6.9ff.; Gal. 5.19ff. More recently, it has been suggested by EASTMAN 2011, 158-9 that 'in the midst of persecution' the Christians carried with them texts of Paul from which they drew 'encouragement to persevere and face any trial', such as Rom. 8.16-18 or 2 Cor. 11.24-27. That is, to them Paul's letters were a source of 'comfort and encouragement in their time of distress': the Christians did not have to face death alone, but had the 'model martyr' and widely acclaimed letter writer Paul as their companion.

Although these notions sound attractive, there is no evidence for them, and the risk of 'dramatic' or 'romantic' overinterpretation looms large. There is simply no way to know why the Christians were carrying these texts with them. They might equally have been arrested while transporting some of Paul's letters for another purpose, such as teaching or liturgy.

One wonders, meanwhile, why the Christians are not carrying books containing the Gospels. (Or could the Gospels actually be meant with *libri*, as BONNER 1956, 144 states?; cf. also SMARIUS 2009, 34.) Moreover, why does Speratus not explicitly refer to the 'Bible' or New Testament in his answer? Were Paul's letters not part of the Bible as he knew it (cf. RUGGIERO, 111), or does he rather wish to avoid mentioning the Bible at all? And if that is so, why? Is he

keen on avoiding further trouble, or does he consider the proconsul not worthy of getting to know the Word of God? The least we may say is that for these Christians Paul's texts are important enough to keep them with them all the time.

Saturninus' reaction is also problematic: he does not seem to react at all, and the mention of Paul's letters does not lead to further dialogue. Does the mention of the name of Paul deter the Roman official from further questioning? Or has he lost all interest once the *capsa* appears to contain Christian texts, which he may have considered 'nonsense'? Perhaps he is simply content to see that nothing dangerous has been carried into the room.

On the level of the literary composition of AMS, the intervention about the *capsa* and its contents remains a somewhat curious element too, even allowing for a possibly chiasmic structure of AMS 10-13 (see above on AMS 12 *dixit*). A Christian editor might be expected to either omit these lines from a formal, Roman record he used as the source, as it offers too little, or rather to elaborate upon it and to enlarge it to a more satisfactory section. For instance, he might easily have expanded Speratus' reply with some edifying and instructive lines (or some words in praise of Saint Paul; cf. below on *uiri iusti*), or he might have presented the proconsul as making some disparaging or sarcastic remarks on Saint Paul. Instead, there is just the brief question and the brief answer. The easiest explanation is that the exchange actually took place in court and was duly recorded.

As it is, the short intervention ends up confronting the modern reader with a great number of puzzling questions that are as fascinating as they seem insoluble.

libri: since the *libri* are carried in a *capsa*, they must be scrolls or book-rolls. At this early time in Africa, early Christians apparently read Bible books from book-rolls and not yet in codex form (although this was actually suggested by scholars such as BONNER 1956,145-6); cf. DEN BOEFT/BREMMER 1991, 116-7.

uiri iusti: the epithet *iusti* has kindled some debate among earlier scholars about the allegedly great respect for Paul in the African church (cf. REBILLARD 2017, 359), but with BASTIAENSEN 1997, 410 we may take the word simply as underscoring Christian morality. It is, in fact, a rather neutral reference to Paul, who is neither called *sanctus* nor given any other specifically praising epithet. It has already been observed that in his answer about the *capsa* Speratus avoids referring to the Bible (see note above).

Within AMS, *iusti* continues Speratus' line of defence that had started in AMS 2 and was resumed in 6: the Christians are righteous and behave in a correct manner. In the context at hand, Speratus clearly wishes to underscore that the books in the *capsa* do not imply any harmful intention on the part of the Christians; cf. BONNER 1956, 144 and 146. In addition, Speratus has just referred to the Christians' cause using this very adjective; cf. AMS 11 *in re tam iusta*.

Ἄϊ καθ' ἡμᾶς βιβλοῖ: this element of the Greek suggests that the translator was thinking of a distinct group of books normally used, to be distinguished from letters by Saint Paul (see note on *libri et epistulae Pauli*).

προσεπιτούτοις: written as one word, a non-classical form.