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MARTIAL'S *LAGALOPEX* 'LONG-EARED BAT'

ABSTRACT: The Roman epigrammatist Martial mentions the 'long-eared lagalopex' (Latin *aurītā lagalōpece* in the ablative sg.) as a pet animal kept by his good friend Flaccus (*Ep.* VII 87, 1). Multiple identifications of the Latin zoonym *lagalōpex* (gen. sg. *lagalōpecis*) have been suggested so far. The author discusses the problem at hand once more, concluding that the correct identification of Flaccus' pet animal as the long-eared bat (Pol. *gacek*) was offered 110 years ago by Jan Czubek, the excellent classical philologist and translator from Cracow.

KEY WORDS: animals, bats, epigram, Greek, Latin, Martial, pets, Rome

*In the memory of Prof. Dr. Jan Czubek (1849–1932),
the excellent translator of Martial's epigrams*

1. INTRODUCTION

In one of his epigrams (VII 87) Martial informs us that the ancient Romans owned small animals to keep as pets. The text in question runs as follows:¹

¹ Galán Vioque 2002: 42.

*Si meus aurita gaudet lagalopece Flaccus,
 si fruitur tristi Canius Aethiope,
 Publius exiguae si flagrat amore catellae,
 si Cronius similem cercopithecon amat,
 delectat Marium si perniciosus ichneumon,
 pica salutatrix si tibi, Lause, placet,
 si gelidum collo nectit †Gadilla† draconem,
 lusciniolum tumulum si Telesina facit,
 blanda Cupidinei cur non amet ora Labyrtae,
 qui videt haec dominis monstra placere suis?*

If my Flaccus likes to play with long-eared lagalopece, / If Canius takes his delight in Aethiopian, black as night,² / If Cronius loves a long-tailed ape, very like himself in shape, / If, Lausus, it's as good as fame to have your magpie call your name, / If Marius has set his heart on a harmful mischievous ichneumon, / If Glaucilla, 'stead of gold, winds round her neck a serpent cold, / If Telesilla built a tomb, when her pet lark met its doom, / Why not love the features mild of Labycas, true Cupid's child, / When such monstrous sights as these have all the power their lord to please?

(translated into English by Mary M. Innes³)

Flaccus was one of Martial's good friends and addressees.⁴ The poet mentions him in a number of epigrams placed in most books. Flaccus takes pleasure in his unusual long-eared (*aurita*) animal called *lagalōpex*. The noun *lagalōpece* (abl. sg.) is an extremely rare appellative (the so-called *hapax legomenon*) which appears only once in the entire Latin literature.⁵ The context clearly demonstrates that the Latin name *lagalōpex*

² It is possible that Canius likes the black fish called *aethiops* (Gk. αἰθίωψ), mentioned by Agatharchides of Cnidus (2nd c. BC) and Photius, see Galán Vioque 2002: 467 and additionally Malinowski 2007: 704.

³ Innes 1952: 81. A different English translation is given by Ker 1979: 483.

⁴ Pitcher 1984: 414–423; Watson, Watson 2003: 261.

⁵ See Glare 1982: 997. The form *lagalopece* (abl. sg.) is printed in most modern editions, e.g. Gilbert 1907: 171; Isaac 1930: 236; Lindsay 1959; Ker 1979: 482; Heraeus, Borovskij 1982: 171; Vivaldi 1993: 352; Beta 1995: 466; Polis 2002: 112; Galán Vioque 2002: 42. Two related families of Martial's codices demonstrate very similar

has to denote a small animal.⁶ The main problem is precisely what animal was called *lagalōpex*.⁷ Of course, the Latin term should be treated as a borrowing from a Greek source. Unfortunately, the Hellenic zoonym *λαγαλώπηξ (gen. sg. *λαγαλώπεκος) is completely absent in the preserved Ancient Greek works. It is obvious that the animal in question was rarely mentioned in the ancient literary and scientific sources.

2. HITHERTO SUGGESTED IDENTIFICATIONS FOR *LAGALŌPEX*

There are many suggested identifications of the animal called *lagalōpex* and no consensus has been reached among modern researchers.⁸ Below I would like to discuss a number of selected earlier suggestions.

As far as I know, Emil Renn was the first scholar who extensively discussed the problem of identification of *lagalōpex*, suggesting finally that the animal in question represents a fox with long ears.⁹ He correctly rejected the alternative (not-metrical) lection *lagopide* (abl. sg.) 'a kind of bird, especially willow ptarmigan, *Lagopus lagopus* L.' or 'a kind of owl, especially long-eared owl, *Asio otus* L.' (see Plin., *HN* X 133).

Gustav Friedrich rejects Renn's identification, strongly arguing that *lagalōpex* can be an alternative name for 'Egyptian goose', called usually χηναλώπηξ (literary 'goose-fox') or simply ἄλώπηξ ('fox'). He does not exclude, however, that it can be an affectionable term for a pet hare.¹⁰

readings: *lagagocepe* β, *lagaopece* γ, cf. Heraeus 1925: 325, fn. 3; Lindsay 1959; Heraeus, Borovskij 1982: XLIV; Polis 2002: 112. Cf. also Schneidewin 1842: 315 and Friedländer 1886: 517. Scaliger's amendment *glaucope* is nothing more than a guess. It is printed in Martialis 1823: 555, but two 19th-century German editors, namely Friedrich Schneidewin (1842: 315) and Ludwig Friedländer (1886: 517), correctly propose *lagalopece*. Renn's *glagalocepe* is a superfluous improvement, see Renn 1877: 212–214.

⁶ Ellis 1888: 287; Innes 1952: 81; Galán Vioque 2002: 466; Watson 2003: 397.

⁷ Cf. Kitchell 2014: 105, s.v. *Lagalopex*.

⁸ See Kitchell 2014: 105. It is worth emphasizing that Ker 1979: 483, who gives a concrete meaning 'a lynx' in his translation, expresses his doubts in the following way: "What animal the *lagalopex* was is unknown." See Ker 1979: 482, fn. 2.

⁹ Renn 1877: 212–214.

¹⁰ Friedrich 1913: 272.

Alois Walde and Johann Baptist Hofmann define *lagalōpex* as ‘ein Vogel’, stressing that the Greek animal name χηναλώπηξ denotes ‘a kind of duck, commonly called Egyptian goose, *Alopochen aegyptiaca* L.’.¹¹ In fact, this duck resembles a goose and has brownish (fox-like) plumage.

Mary Innes expresses her own opinion, according to which “the long-eared lagalopece, which should be a cross between a hare and a fox, has defied identification.” She does not exclude, however, that “it may have been the ‘fennec’, a small fox with very long ears, a native of North Africa”, but at the same time she concedes that this identification has been suggested to her”.¹²

Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee thinks that the animal referred to as *lagalōpex* is a long-eared fox¹³ (and not ‘a long-eared seal’, as wrongly summarized by Galán Vioque¹⁴).

According to the authors of the well-known *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, the noun *lagalōpex* probably has the meaning: ‘a fennec’.¹⁵

Translators of Martial’s epigrams give a number of different meanings¹⁶, e.g.

2.1. ‘a long-eared bat’;¹⁷

2.2. ‘a kind of fox’;¹⁸

2.3. ‘a lynx’;¹⁹

¹¹ Walde, Hofmann 1938: 752, s.v. *lagalopex*.

¹² Innes 1952: 81.

¹³ Toynbee 1973: 102.

¹⁴ Galán Vioque 2002: 466.

¹⁵ Glare 1982: 997, s.v. *lagalopex*. Similarly Lowe 2015: 54, fn. 56.

¹⁶ I intentionally omit Berg’s identification ‘die lang gehörete Eule / the long-eared owl’ (*Asio otus* L., 1758), as the German translator informs us that he is unable to render the Latin word *lagalopece* in German. In fact, he translates Scaliger’s emendation *glaucope*, cf. Berg 1865: 263.

¹⁷ Czubek 1908: 229 (‘gacek’ in Polish).

¹⁸ Helm 1957: 286 (‘Fuchsart’ in German).

¹⁹ Isaac 1930: 236 (“un lynx aux longues oreilles”). Mitchie 1973: 115 translates the line as follows: “My friend Flaccus fancies, ears and all, a lynx”; similarly Ker 1979: 483: “If my Flaccus delights in a long-eared lynx”; see also Kitchell 2014: 105. The same meaning is accepted by some Italian translators, who render Martial’s words *aurita... lagalopece* as “una lince orecchiuta” (Vivaldi 1993: 353) or “una lince dalle lunghe orecchie” (Beta 1995: 467).

2.4. 'a red squirrel' or 'a Siberian flying squirrel';²⁰

2.5. 'a fennec'.²¹

A different stance is taken by Filomena Fortuny Previ, who believes that the noun *lagalōpex* is an erotic term for male genitals (= Lat. *mentula*).²² However, the erotic interpretation of the epigram VII 87 is rejected by other researchers, including Galán Vioque, who strongly stresses that the other animals mentioned in Martial's epigram VII 87 "as being the solace of their owners are real and attested".²³

Guillermo Galán Vioque, the author of an extensive commentary to the seventh book of Martial's epigrams, does not doubt that the term *lagalopex* denotes an "*animal ignotum*, and object of various conjectures." He prefers Friedrich's alternative suggestion,²⁴ according to which it is "an affectionate term for a pet hare [...], so called because it resembles the fox in cleverness".²⁵

Two English researchers Lindsay Watson and Patricia Watson claim that "*lagalopece* is thought to refer to a fennec, a small North African fox noted for its huge pointed ears. Most of the individuals in this epigram exhibit some resemblance to their pets and Flaccus (lit. 'floppy eared') is a suitable owner for a fox with large ears like a hare. The hybrid form, which underlines the creature's oddity, recalls composite names such as *χηναλώπηξ* 'goose-fox', and *στρουθοκάμηλος* 'sparrow-camel', ostrich".²⁶

In 2014 Kenneth F. Kitchell presents the current state of research on the identification of Martial's *lagalopex*, which is far from settled. He correctly explains the noun *lagalōpex* as a Greek compound with the possible original meaning 'hare-fox', cf. Gk. Hom. *λαγώς*, Ionic *λαγός* m. 'hare'; Gk. *άλώπηξ* (gen. sg. *άλώπεκος*) f. 'fox'. Eventually, he draws

²⁰ Petrovskij 1994: 195 ('векша' in Russian). Petrovskij's translation begins with the following line: "Если приятель мой Флакк ушастью векшей утешен / if my friend Flaccus is comforted by a long-eared squirrel."

²¹ Polis 2002: I 113: "Si mon ami Flaccus se délecte de son fennec aux grandes oreilles".

²² Fortuny Previ 1983: 120; 1986: 74–87.

²³ Galán Vioque 2002: 466.

²⁴ Cf. Keller 1909: 216.

²⁵ Galán Vioque 2002: 466.

²⁶ Watson, Watson 2003: 261.

the conclusion that “the name does not refer to a discrete species, but simply compares the long ears of the fox to those of a pet hare”.²⁷

The above short review of selected previous interpretations clearly shows that there is no agreement as to the exact identity of Flaccus’ long-eared animal. Numerous identifications for *lagalōpex* have been suggested so far, e.g. ‘a kind of fox’, ‘a fennec’, ‘a lynx’, ‘a squirrel’, ‘a kind of bird’, ‘a pet hare’ and even ‘a penis’.

3. SEMANTIC ASPECTS OF THE GREEK NOUN ΑΛΩΠΗΞ

The Greek noun ἀλώπηξ (f.) appears in a number of meanings: [1] ‘fox, *Vulpes vulpes* L., syn. *Canis vulpes* L.’; [2] ‘a small Egyptian species of fox’, probably ‘*Vulpes vulpes niloticus* Saint-Hillaire’; [3] ‘a large bat’ (and not ‘a Siberian flying squirrel, *Pteromys volans* L.’); [4] ‘common thresher or fox shark, *Alopias vulpinus* Bonnaterre, syn. *Squalus vulpes*’, [5] ‘mange’, pl. ‘bald patches’; [6] in pl. ‘muscles of the loins’; [7] ‘a kind of dance’.²⁸

The Greek animal name ἀλώπηξ not only refers to ‘a fox’, but also ‘a bat’ or ‘a shark’. The meaning ‘a large bat’ (or ‘flying-fox’) is attested in Aristotle’s works (HA 490a8–9). Kitchell correctly stresses that:

LSJ’s²⁹ tentative identification of the *alōpēx* with the flying squirrel, *Pteromys volans*, is probably unjustified. Thompson³⁰, ad loc., translates this as “flying fox,” and today’s “flying fox,” is a very large type of fruit bat whose face is, in fact, canine. Its range, however, is largely confined to Asia, from India eastwards, and Peck³¹ (ad loc.) denies that this can be the animal in question. It is not inconceivable, that Aristotle heard of animals such as the Indian flying fox (*Pteropus giganteus*) from veterans of Alexander’s exploits in India. Its four-foot wingspan would have made

²⁷ Kitchell 2014: 105.

²⁸ Cf. Abramowiczówna 1958: 100; Adrados 1995: 175–176; Liddell, Scott 1996: 75; Montanari 2003: 138.

²⁹ *LSJ* = Liddell, Scott 1996: 75.

³⁰ Thompson 1910. Also Siwek 1982: 15 accepts the identification with the (Indian) flying-fox.

³¹ Peck 1965: 28 says: “A large bat; not the animal now called flying-fox.”

it memorable. Other candidates might include the straw-colored fruit bat (*Eidolon helvum*), whose range includes Egypt, Ethiopia, and southwest Arabia. A tempting identification is the Egyptian rousette (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*), found from Egypt to Turkey and on Cyprus, whose German name, *Ägyptischer Flughund*, bespeaks its canine features.³²

Aristotle differentiates two kinds of bats, νυκτερίδες (f.) and ἰλῶπες (f.), following a Greek folk lexical tradition. A similar distinction is suggested by modern zoologists, who distinguish two main families of bats, i.e. those belonging to the order *Chiroptera*, namely insectivorous microbats or true bats (*Microchiroptera*) and herbivorous megabats or fruit bats or flying foxes (*Megachiroptera*).³³ It is unclear whether Aristotle's distinction is identical with the modern one. In my opinion, the first name νυκτερίδες refers probably to common bats with black, grey or brown-grey fur, whereas the second one ἰλῶπες generally denotes European bats with fox-like (i.e. brown, reddish or chestnut) hair and face. In other words, Aristotle's ἰλῶπιξ (*HA* 490a8–9) means nothing other than 'a fox-like red-haired bat'. The term *λαγαλώπιξ (gen. sg. *λαγαλώπεκος) is not used by Aristotle or other Greek authors. It is a simple Greek compound created on the basis of two animal names, λαγῶς (m.) 'hare' and ἰλῶπιξ (f.) 'fox'.³⁴

The term *lagalōpex* may be rendered not only as 'hare-like fox', but also alternatively as 'hare-like bat'. On the other hand, the Latin adjective *aurītus* means plainly 'having large ears; long-eared'.³⁵ In other words, the Latin phrase *aurīta lagalōpex* implies two alternative (potentially acceptable) translations: (1) 'fox having large ears like a hare' and (2) 'red-haired bat with the hare-like long ears'. Unfortunately, no kind of fox has ears as large as a hare. Nonetheless, the fennec fox (*Vulpes zerda* Zimmermann), a nocturnal mammal living in North Africa, Arabia and Palestine, exhibits unusually large ears as the most distinctive feature. Even though it cannot

³² Kitchell 2014: 11, s.v. Bat. According to Sfikas (1996: 107), the Egyptian fruit bat (*Rousettus aegyptiacus* Saint-Hilaire) is nowadays a rare species on Cyprus.

³³ See Hill 1998: 90–91; Malinowski 2003: 147. Note that the biggest megabat, namely greater Indian fruit bat (*Pteropus giganteus* Brünnich), is commonly called (*Indian*) *flying-fox* (in Polish *lis latający* lub *pies latający*).

³⁴ Cf. Innes 1952: 81; Kitchell 2014: 105.

³⁵ White 1899: 72.

be excluded that Flaccus' pet name refers to 'a fennec fox', a different identification seems, in my opinion, more plausible.

4. LONG-EARED BATS IN SOUTH EUROPE

Are there Mediterranean (or South European) bats with distinctively long ears like those of a hare? Of course, it is possible to identify a number of species exhibiting such a feature. However, extremely huge ears are a distinctive feature of two closely related species, namely [1] the common long-eared bat or the brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus* L.) and [2] the grey long-eared bat (*Plecotus austriacus* J.B. Fischer). It is worth emphasizing that "[t]he ears of a long-eared bat are so long (almost as long as its body) that when the animal is at rest they are folded concertina-wise and tucked under the wings."³⁶



Fig. 1. A domesticated long-eared bat.

Source: Wikimedia Commons. Photo by Олексій Титов and Ігор Загороднюк.

³⁶ Ovenden, Corbet, Arnold 1985: 22.

These two species in question are hardly distinguishable by non-specialists.³⁷ Until recently (ca. 1960), they “were not recognised as separate species”³⁸. Generally, the first species’ body is covered with brown fox-like fur, whereas the second one usually has a hare-like grey hair. Both types of long-eared bats live side by side in Europe (mainly in Northern Italy), though the grey long-eared bat shows a more southern distribution and appears also in South Italy and Sicily extending even to Africa and to the Middle East.³⁹ The ancient Romans might have also known another similar species, namely the Sardinian long-eared bat (*Plecotus sardus* Mucedda, Kiefer, Pidinchedda & Veith).⁴⁰ This endemic species has hare-like long ears, as well as hare-like grey fur (see Fig. 2).

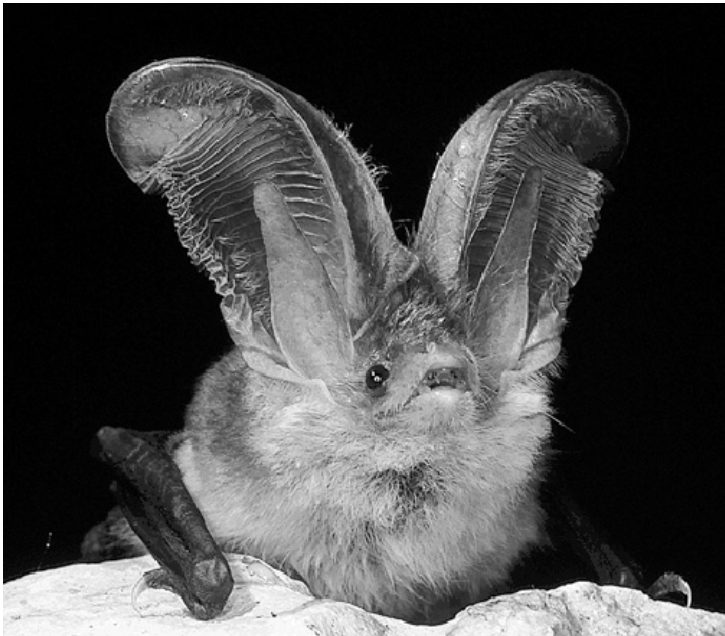


Fig. 2. Sardinian long-eared bat (*Plecotus sardus*).

Source: Wikimedia Commons. Photo made by Mauro Mucedda.

³⁷ Burton 1984: 91.

³⁸ Dobroruka 1998: 60.

³⁹ Dobroruka 1998: 60.

⁴⁰ Mucedda, Kiefer, Pidinchedda, Veith 2002: 121–135.

Some species of bats, including long-eared bats, can be easily domesticated (see Fig. 1) and thus they can be kept as pets. An adult brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus* L.) is a relatively small animal. Its body length amounts to 4.5–4.8 cm, whereas its ear length is in the range of 3.3–3.9 cm. The grey long-eared bat is relatively bigger, with its body length up to 6 cm.⁴¹ I believe that Flaccus' pet animal called *lagalopex* should be identified as the grey long-eared bat (= *gacek szary* in Polish) or perhaps as the Sardinian long-eared bat (= Polish *gacek sardyński*). My identification is not completely novel. It should be emphasized here that a similar suggestion was made 110 years ago by Jan Czubek (1849–1932), a classical philologist from Cracow, who begins his translation of Martial's epigram VII 87 with the following line: "Flakkus ma uszatego gacka dla zabawy" ("Flaccus has a long-eared bat for entertainment").⁴²

5. CONCLUSIONS

In 1908 the Polish classical philologist, bibliographer and well-known translator Jan Czubek published his own translation of the twelve books of Martial's epigrams. He used the previous edition by Ludwig Friedländer.⁴³ Below I would like to quote Czubek's Polish version of Martial's epigram VII 87.

*Flakkus ma uszatego gacka dla zabawy,
Kaniusza murzynek zachwyca niemrawy,
Psiny znów lubownikiem Publi zapalonym,
Kronius za małpeczką przepada z ogonem;
Ichnejmon się Maremu podoba szkodliwy,
Lauzus zakochany w sroczce gadatliwej;
Gładylla zimnym szyję okręca wężykiem,
Telezylla słowika uczciła pomnikiem –*

⁴¹ Dobroruka 1998: 60.

⁴² Czubek 1908: 229.

⁴³ Friedländer 1886: 517–518.

*Gdy tak innym się niema podoba zwierzyzna,
Mnie zachwyca Labykas, Kupido-chłopczyna.*

(translated into Polish by Jan Czubek⁴⁴)

In my paper I have attempted to prove that Czubek's identification of *aurita lagalopex* as a 'long-eared bat' is correct and well-founded.

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⁴⁴ Czubek 1908: 229.

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