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Poison: Nature's Argument for the Roman Empire in Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*

MOLLY AYN JONES-LEWIS

ABSTRACT: In Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* poisonous plants and animals are intimately associated with their countries of origin. Moreover, Pliny often focuses on those poisonous substances found in lands where Rome had carried out major campaigns, particularly Egypt and Pontus. The power and influence of poisons in these locations is deliberately emphasized in order to justify Italy (and by implication Rome) as a natural physician of the world ideally suited to subdue untamed poisons and make them over as powerful and life-saving medicines. In this way Pliny structures his view of *natura* to justify the existence and rule of the Roman Empire.

Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* presents a rich and nuanced portrait of a Roman's universe even as it presents the modern scholar with many difficulties stemming from its singular status among the works of ancient literature.¹ It could be many things at once: a reference manual and a triumphal procession of information, the author's own personal notebook, and a work with any number of agendas for his readers.² It is all of these things and more; to say that it is completely one thing or another is to cause the collapse of polyvalent readings of the text, each of which works as a legitimate mode of interpretation.³ No attempt is made here to give *the* definitive reading of the *Historia*, or to choose

¹ A. Doody (*Pliny's Encyclopedia: The Reception of the Natural History* [Cambridge and New York, 2010]) illuminates the susceptibility of the *Historia* to the projections and expectations of scholars from different times, and how even the commonly applied label of "Encyclopedia" can cause the scholar to approach the text with unreasonable and distorting expectations. For this reason, I prefer the title *Naturalis Historia* absent any genre labels. All translations of Pliny are my own.

² T. Murphy argues well and persuasively for this "triumphal encyclopedia" reading in *Pliny the Elder's Natural History: The Empire in the Encyclopaedia* (Oxford 2004).

³ In this I follow A. Richlin's lead from her article "Pliny's Brassiere" in J. P. Hallett and M. Skinner, eds., *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton 1997). She likewise allows multiple layers of belief, reasoning and meaning to co-exist in her reading of Pliny.

one from among the several approaches taken in recent scholarship, as the one true purpose of Pliny's work. This paper will instead offer an additional refinement to one of many possible readings: the political. In particular it responds to ideas set forth by Mary Beagon in "Situating Nature's Wonders in Pliny's Natural History," which describes the *Historia* as a cosmos that situates Italy in the center of geographical space and time surrounded by a less perfect periphery.⁴ Not only is Pliny's Italy the paradise of other *Laudes Italiae*, but it is also a center of attraction that has the power to produce wonders equal to those other lands as well as the capacity to bring such wonders to the capital city. The present reading focuses specifically on the peculiar connection shared in the *Historia* between lands known for poisonous substances and countries that had at one time threatened Rome militarily. There is a statistical correlation between the references to poison, as described by the noun *venenum* and adjective *venenatus*, and allusions to Egypt, North Africa, and Pontus that go beyond what one would expect to be preserved from the source material, and it is these passages that this paper will explore.⁵

The majority of the poisonous substances mentioned by Pliny are tied to Greece, but this in and of itself is hardly surprising, since his source material (Theophrastus in particular) originates from Greece. The second place most closely associated with poison is Pontus and its immediate vicinity, which is not surprising in view of the Greek sources. Colchis was the home of Medea, and legends about the special dangers of that region were related long before Rome arrived on the scene. Likewise Egypt, the region with the third greatest frequency of poison-related entries, had long been associated with *pharmaka* and scorpions. Finally North Africa, in particular a tribe known as the Psylli,⁶ has another disproportionately high number of poison-related mentions. This last ethnic group is the least expected, given our Greek sources, and seems to show up for the most part in other authors of the first century C.E.

The ties posited between these regions and poisons are not a new development in the first century C.E.; Homer, Herodotus, Theophrastus,

⁴ M. Beagon, "Situating Nature's Wonders in Pliny's Natural History," in E. Bispham and G. Rowe, eds., *Vita Vigilia Est: Essays in Honour of Barbara Levick* (London 2007) 19–40.

⁵ For a full list of poison-related citations grouped by geographical region see tables 1–4.

⁶ I have preferred the spelling "Psylli" over "Psylooi" since the primary reference text for this paper is Latin and uses that spelling. Other names (e.g., Cleopatra, Theophrastus) have been Latinized for the same reason.

and Euripides each contributed to the reputation of these locations in memorable ways. Pliny's discussion of these areas, however, reappropriates these traditions for a specifically Roman cultural context. Each of these regions had at once time presented Rome with a significant military threat, and Pliny would have had this history in mind whenever he came across citations of these places in his reading. For instance, although Colchis and Egypt were identified with drugs and poisons early in Greek literature, Pliny makes a point of identifying with this tradition Mithridates 6 and Cleopatra 7, monarchs of clear interest to a Roman audience, instead of Medea and Helen.⁷ Likewise, he mentions the Psylli, poisoners and healers from North Africa, seven times, which seems excessive for a minor North African tribe.⁸ Also, the importance of the poisons from these areas seems to be underscored by repeated references to the same substances; the infamous poisonous Pontic honey, for instance, is mentioned five times.⁹ It is likely that the Roman tradition here took existing tales of threatening people and places from the Greek authors, and then fixated upon those aspects that bolstered the fearsome reputations of hard-won "trophy provinces" now safely secured under Roman rule.¹⁰ Fearsome enemies, once defeated, make for strong and enduring propaganda. Likewise, by making the subject peoples seem to be masters of the art of poisoning, Pliny, as a representative of the Roman intellectual tradition, glorifies the Roman culture and ethics of war as superior.¹¹ After all, Rome did conquer Mithridates and Cleopatra. Adding to an enemy's reputation after defeat does nothing but good for the victor's cause.

In many ways it is unsurprising to find Egypt associated with poisons since it was known to be a land of *pharmaka* from the time when the Homeric epics were composed.¹² Helen is said to have employed nepenthe brought from Egypt at *Odyssey* 4.220–221, and the large numbers of Greek intellectuals in Ptolemaic Alexandria guaranteed that a plethora of Egyptian items would make their way into the *Naturalis Historia*. It can hardly be surprising, then, that there is a cluster of references to Egyptian snakes and scorpions as well as remedies for their

⁷ Mithridates is so associated with poison that A. Mayor's recent book on the topic is titled *The Poison King* (Princeton 2009).

⁸ *NH* 5.27, 7.14, 8.93, 11.89, 21.78, 25.123, and 28.30.

⁹ *NH* 21.74, 77, 83; 29.97; and 32.43.

¹⁰ Murphy (above, n.2).

¹¹ Beagon (above, n.4) 109.

¹² For the full list of Egyptian poison-related citations, see table 1 below.

bites and stings. The interest falls not in the fact that Egypt has links to poison, but the ways in which Pliny shows these links to his audience in certain passages. Most of the passages are passing mentions of poisonous plants and animals native to Egypt, or plants and animals that can be used against such poisons. They are interesting only insofar as they call attention to this connection between “Egypt” and “poison,” as the reader’s eye is wont to see the two superimposed.

There are two items in the Egypt-and-poison category that merit closer attention, related at 29.93 and 21.12. The former tells the story of an unfortunate Roman *eques* who died under treatment by an Egyptian physician:

Cossinum equitem Romanum amicitia Neronis principis nostrum, cum is lichene correptus esset, vocatus ex Aegypto medicus ob hanc valetudinem eius a Caesare, cum cantharidum potu praeparare voluisset, interemit. verum inlitas prodesse non dubium est cum succo taminiae uvae et sebo ovis vel caprae. (29.93)

It killed Cossinus, a Roman Eque and friend of our Emperor Nero, when he was seized by an attack of lichen and a doctor had been called from Egypt by Caesar because of his health.¹⁵ When [the doctor] ordered him to prepare cantharis in a drink, the drug finished him off. But there is no doubt that as a topical preparation with the juice of a Taminian grape and the suet of a sheep or nanny goat it is quite useful.

This passage appears in a list of remedies derived from animals and concludes a list of other cures derived from insects. Among the longer digressions in this section, this anecdote is unusual for illustrating the failure rather than the success of a treatment. Book 29, in which it appears, is best known for its opening, which includes a long diatribe on the evils of foreign physicians quoted from Cato the Elder. The previous reference to foreign physicians who harm Roman patients may account in part for Pliny’s inclusion of this anecdote. But it does not explain his interest in this doctor who treats this patient.

We can assume that a doctor with a reputation strong enough to be summoned by the emperor from Egypt was sufficiently aware of the known dangers of cantharis, a genus of beetle commonly known today as “blister beetles” for their ability to secrete a substance that causes

¹⁵ J. Scarborough (“Some Beetles in Pliny’s Natural History,” *The Coleopterists Bulletin* 31 [1977] 293–96) suggests a diagnosis of ringworm for the “lichen” as well as describing the preparation and usage of cantharis in ancient medicine.

skin lesions. These beetles were crushed and/or dried to be used as the cantharis drug that Pliny discusses here. Nevertheless, if we give the Egyptian the benefit of the doubt, he could have hoped that a severe cure would produce better results in a severe case, or he could have fallen afoul of a negligent drug-seller. Cantharis was one of the few named substances whose sale was somewhat regulated by Roman law, which allowed one to prosecute the vendor if it were found that the cantharis was intended to poison someone.¹⁴ Indeed, Pliny himself goes on to mention a Roman prosecuted for selling cantharis later in this very passage.¹⁵

What is certain in this passage is where Pliny himself puts the blame. The Egyptian physician ordered (*potu praeeparare voluisset*) an internal application of a drug that was for external use only, and the patient died. Pliny, however, does not go out of his way to blame the physician. In fact, the subject of the verb *interemit* is *cantharides*, not the *medicus*. Giving the doctor's nationality seems to do as much to exonerate the doctor as to implicate him. Egyptian doctors had a reputation for knowledge and excellence that had existed in the Mediterranean basin for well over a thousand years.¹⁶ There is much more to this incident than a doctor's fumble, and it is bound up with the limits of imperial control over the nature of that empire's periphery.

The doctor came in response to an imperial summons; Nero assumes that the ability to command the Egyptian *medicus* to come to Rome is sufficient to guarantee a positive outcome for his friend's illness. The outcome illustrates that this level of imperial control is insufficient; the Romans in this case needed the power of knowledge as well as the power of command in order to protect rulers from the potential harm that their subjects can do them. Furthermore, it is not enough simply to remove all power from one's subjects. In order to be effective, the Egyptian and the drug must both be allowed to retain their own agency over life and death. The physician need not even be deliberately harmful to Romans; simply a careless mistake on his part allows the drug itself to attack. In order to perfect their domination over foreigners and their remedies, Romans must also acquire the knowledge that goes with the possession of her provinces. Had Cossinus only been aware of the dangers posed by

¹⁴ The punishment was relegation, a limited form of banishment. Marcian, *Digest* 48.8.3.2–3.

¹⁵ *NH* 29.96.

¹⁶ H. von Staden, *Herophilos: The Art of Medicine in Early Alexandria* (Cambridge 1989) 1–6.

cantharis, he would have lived and the foreign threat would have been vanquished. By recording the incident, Pliny protects his readers from any future attacks from abroad.

Cleopatra 7, arguably the most notorious Egyptian from classical antiquity, is also associated with poisons.¹⁷ Indeed, Pliny mentions her four times in the *Naturalis Historia*.¹⁸ His anecdotes about the queen focus not only on her excesses in seeking creature comforts but also on her colorful reputation in regards to poison, thereby rendering her a doubly corrupting force of *luxuria* and *venenum*. The various traditions about Cleopatra's skill in poisoning likely originated from actual expertise on her part (or at least on the part of those physicians residing at her court). There may be some truth to the tales linking her to poison, since Ptolemy 12 hosted Zopyrus in his court, a physician with Mithradatic connections and a Persian name that could indicate a Pontic origin.¹⁹ However, the complex details of Cleopatra's character and reign suffered from distortion over years of telling and retelling her life story, reducing her complex character to a mere figure with a talent for poison and a taste for luxury. Pliny portrays her according to post-Augustan fashion, as a *fatale monstrum*, but before the image of poisoner-queen had gained ascendancy over the caricature of her as utterly dissipated and obsessed with luxury.²⁰

The episode most clearly evoking Cleopatra as an incarnation of Egypt and its poisonous luxuries is placed early in book 21. It appears within a discussion of various flowers and follows a discussion of the history and making of chaplets, their ritual use, laws against their being worn inappropriately, and the crowning of Scipio Africanus with one such floral offering. This anecdote serves as the culmination of a section that emphasizes the particularly Roman significance of garlands, and lends seriousness to a subject that would seem rather frivolous otherwise. At this point, Cleopatra defiles the custom of garland wearing by turning what was meant to be a festive token of honor into an instrument of death:

¹⁷ See also D. W. Roller, *Cleopatra: A Biography* (Oxford 2010) 129–50.

¹⁸ *NH* 9.119–21, 19.22, 21.12, and 33.50.

¹⁹ Kuhn's *Galen* 14.150 and Celsus 5.23. See also F. Stock, "Zopuros of Alexandria," in P. Keyser and G. Irby-Massie, eds., *Encyclopedia of Ancient Natural Scientists: The Greek Tradition and its Many Heirs* (London 2008) 851.

²⁰ Horace *Odes* 1.37.21.

scelerata Cleopatrae sollertia. namque in apparatu belli Actiaci gratificationem ipsius reginae Antonio timente nec nisi praegustatos cibos sumente fertur pavore eius lusisse extremis coronae floribus veneno inlitis capiti inposita; mox procedente hilaritate invitavit Antonium, ut coronas biberent. quis ita timeret insidias? ergo conceptam in scyphum incipienti haurire opposita manu: en ego sum, inquit illa, Marce Antoni, quam tu nova praegustantium diligentia caves; adeo mihi, si possim sine te vivere, occasio aut ratio deest! inductam custodiam bibere iussit ilico expirantem. (21.12)

Take for example the wicked cleverness of Cleopatra. For in the preparations for the battle at Actium, when Antonius feared even the favor of the queen herself, and did not even take food unless it had been tasted beforehand, she is said to have amused herself with his fear by putting poison on the tips of the flowers in his wreath. Then, as the party went on, she tempted Antonius to drink the wreath. Who would fear such a plot? Therefore she interposed her hand when he went to drink the flowers shredded into his cup and said, "Well, am I the one, Marcus Antonius, against whom you take the new precaution of taste-testing? If I were able to live without you, would I lack either opportunity or ability?" She ordered a prisoner to drink it, and he died on the spot.

Although the story of the crown is not found in other accounts of Cleopatra's antics, it does share common features with the more common Cleopatra-as-poisoner tales. The victim is a prisoner, and Cleopatra herself applies the poison, making her expert enough to know that the very act of wearing the wreath will not harm Antonius. Cleopatra herself is a direct threat to Antonius like some sort of Circe, toying with the Roman's helplessness against both her wiles and her poisons. More than the other stories of Cleopatra, this episode speaks to some of the deepest anxieties of the Roman male: foreigners, women, and poison.

Antonius here is in danger of perishing not as a Roman soldier in battle, but as the kept man of a Hellenized Egyptian queen. The fact that he escapes by her whim and not by his own *virtus* further explains the harsh "*scelerata Cleopatrae sollertia*." This incident in Cleopatra's alleged career as a poisoner would in many ways be disturbing to a male Roman audience. In terms of the *Naturalis Historia*, Egypt remains an enticing land full of wonders and knowledge. These are dangerous in the hands of Egyptians but potent cures under Roman control. There is, however, an understanding that outside of Roman administrative regions, wonders of the type found in Egypt can turn suddenly and catastrophically deadly.

Adjacent to Egypt is North Africa, which is both more intriguing and more problematic as a cluster point for poisons and antidotes.²¹ Its four provinces (Mauretania Tingitana, Mauretania Caesariensis, Numidia, and Africa Proconsularis) account for a total of twelve poison- and antidote-related entries, seven of which concern the Psylli, a single African tribe known for its ability to resist and cure poisoning. The entries not concerned with the Psylli are passing mentions of North African toxins, particularly the infamous scorpions native to that region. If one were to associate “scorpion” with “North Africa” and include every mention of scorpions as relating to this region, the tally would climb quite high indeed. Although the region includes the former territories of Carthage and Numidia, which both loom large in the annals of Roman military history, neither could claim leaders remembered for their use of poison. Rather than mentioning, as he does with Egypt and Pontus, the African monarchs conquered by Rome, Pliny makes these references to the Psylli, six of which have something to do with their ability to use and resist the effects of snake venom and at least one that suggests the Psylli were, at an undefined time, hostile to Rome.²² In this way the Psylli substitute for a conquered monarch and instead become a more prominent conquered people than other ethnic groups discussed in the *Historia*.

Pliny was not the only imperial Roman author to mention the Psylli and their abilities. Strabo also mentions the ability of the Psylli to withstand snake poisons, and seems to think that the Ophiogenes in the region of Parium on the Hellespont are descendants of a Pysillos chieftain. He too mentions their ability to cure snakebite, but in his version it is done by stroking the patient, not by sucking on the wound.²³ At *Augustus* 17.4 Suetonius claims that the Psylli were summoned to resuscitate Cleopatra. Lucan also mentions the snake-healing ability of the Psylli in *Pharsalia* 9.907–908. In his life of the Younger Cato, Plutarch records that he brought the Psylli along on his campaigns in order to cure snakebites by sucking on the wounds and to dismiss the snakes themselves by means of incantation.²⁴

Two of Pliny’s citations on the Psylli bear closer inspection. The first is the reference to the Psylli importing scorpions into Italy:

²¹ For the full list of North African poison-related citations, see table 2 below.

²² Pliny mentions the Psylli with reference to their ability to cure poison at 7.14, 8.93, 21.78, and 28.30, and for less specific involvement with poisons at 11.89 and 25.123.

²³ Strabo 2.5.33, 13.1.14, 17.1.44.

²⁴ Plut. *Cato the Younger* 57.

saepe Psylli, qui reliquarum venena terrarum invehentes quaestus sui causa peregrinis malis implevere Italiam, hos quoque importare conati sunt, sed vivere intra Siculi caeli regionem non potuere. (11.89)

Often the Psylli, who, acting for their own self-interest by importing poisons from other lands, have attempted to fill Italy with foreign evils, have also tried to import these [flying scorpions], but they were not able to survive above the latitude of Sicily.

This short aside separates the sections of the larger discussion of poisonous scorpions, forming the transition between a discussion of where scorpions are found and how their bites can be treated. This anecdote adds nothing to the practicalities of avoiding and treating scorpion bites and seems somewhat jarring at first blush. But it does offer a sort of treatment option: Italy kills scorpions. More to the point, this passage occurs fairly early in the *Historia* and after the Psylli have already been mentioned twice before. Those reading from the beginning to the end of the work will by now be familiar with the name of the tribe, which Pliny renders more important in his readers' minds by mentioning the Psylli four further times. Then in this passage the reader is told that these people, "*quaestus sui causa*" ("acting for their own self-interest"), have been engaging in what appears to be biological warfare at worst, and a clever self-marketing scheme at best.²⁵ Thus these Psylli are characterized by Pliny as dangerous and unprincipled, but would at the same time be recognized by educated readers as friendly foreigners who were relied upon by Romans on campaign.

Pliny's penultimate account of the Psylli is likewise memorable, and indicative of the image accorded to these people in the Roman world. It describes the competitive application of heated poisonous frogs to the skin:

Sunt et ranis venena, rubetis maxime, vidimusque Psyllos in certamen e patinis candefactis admittentes, ociore etiam quam aspidum pernicie. (25.123)

There are also poison frogs, especially the rubeta, and we have seen the Psylli taking [the frogs] from heated plates and applying them as a competition, resulting in a swifter poison even than that of an asp.

²⁵ This group profited from their reputation as venom healers, and more venom would therefore be good for business.

Pliny places this passage in a list of poisonous amphibians that is otherwise purely descriptive of the characteristics of such animals. It stands out because Pliny has already brought the Psylli to the reader's attention, and because the very image of people poisoning themselves by sticking hot frogs on their skin as a kind of street theater is a striking one. "*Vidimus*" likewise gives an unusual eyewitness perspective to Pliny's usually literary sources, suggesting that perhaps such conduct went on in the streets of first-century Rome or the military camps in Germania, where Pliny had been stationed.²⁶

In his description of the Psylli, perhaps as the result of a subconscious process, Pliny represents this foreign tribe as both particularly useful and particularly threatening because they are not Roman. The Marsi, after all, have the same snake-repelling properties as the Psylli, but they are not being taken along on campaigns or threatening Rome with their foreign creatures.²⁷ The Psylli gain such an unassailable reputation because they are foreign, and because their lands now belong to Rome. Like the provincial *auxilia*, the Psylli now serve the cause of Rome, but are not themselves sufficiently Romanized to be trustworthy. Although they are depicted as a foreign prize in the Roman arsenal, they are by no means safe to consult without consequence. By importing the Psylli, Rome likewise imports their *materia venenata*, and introduces danger both to itself and to its enemies. When they are under Roman control, however, the Psylli ward off poison rather than utilize it. Thus the Roman foreign policy of assimilation likewise gives Rome yet another way to neutralize poison. The enduring presence of the Psylli acquires the historical menace associated with their homelands, thereby linking North Africa to poison, and poison to lands conquered with difficulty and danger.

In Pontus, more than in Egypt and North Africa, the land itself is a hotbed of hidden danger liable to strike at any time. Pontus' relationship with poison and powerful drugs was well established by Pliny's day, and Pliny latches onto that connection strongly as he covers Pontic herbs and the history of Roman pharmacology.²⁸ Things that are usually harmless

²⁶ Exhibitions of this kind are hardly unique to the Psylli. The anatomical demonstrations of Galen may provide a useful context; Galen's public dissections and vivisections were a potent vehicle of self-promotion. Perhaps the Psylli too conducted these demonstrations in order to secure the best paid positions for poison control among wealthy clients.

²⁷ Interestingly, Servius claims that the Marsi learned their anti-poison skills from Medea, not Circe as Pliny maintains. *Commentary on the Aeneid* 7.750.

²⁸ For the full list of Pontic poison-related citations, see table 3 below.

or even helpful, like ducks and honey, can kill, or cure, depending on the intent of the pharmacist. The Black Sea region has a long history of association with poisonous and medicinal substances, going back at least as far as the myths of the Colchian Medea. In Hellenistic times the region was absorbed into the kingdom of Pontus, ruled by King Mithridates 6. As the prototypical “frontier” of Greek knowledge and exploration, Colchis (and later Pontus) joined Egypt and Persia as the places most likely to be mentioned when exotic foreign locations were imagined by inhabitants of mainland Greece.²⁹ This special status ensured that Roman tradition would have a great deal of material with which to build its own legends of Pontus.

Pliny is not the only author for whom Pontus is a land of poisons and dangerous drugs. Dioskourides lists twenty *materia medica* that are either native to, or best found in, Pontus, many of which have toxic effects.³⁰ He ends each of his entries with a list of alternative names for each drug, and some variation of “Pontic” is often given as the Latin name. He also mentions the value of duck blood in antidotes, and quotes Mithridates’ court physician Krateuas more frequently than any other sources.³¹ There is even an intriguing entry for the plant “kuamos aigyptios,” which is also called “Pontikon,” although it does not actually

²⁹ D. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia 550 B.C.–A.D. 562* (Oxford 1994).

³⁰ Following are the *materia medica* that Dioscorides connects to Pontus in his *On Medical Items*. Included in parentheses are the specifically toxic properties attributed to each item by Dioscorides. Where modern phytochemistry gives us further knowledge of a plant’s actual properties, I have added a square bracketed notation. I rely on T. A. Osbaldeston’s edition for this modern information, and Wellman’s 1914 Greek edition for the rest. I have used the item names as given by Dioscorides rather than the suggested modern identifications. See *Dioscorides: De materia medica—five books in one volume* (Johannesburg 2000). 1.2 Akoron (recommended for antidotes), 1–9. Asaron (induces sleep, strong emetic and purge) [poisonous], 1–10. Phou (described as having a poisonous smell, used in antidotes), 1–14. Amomon (induces sleep, treats scorpion bites), 1.179. Karua Pontika (antidote, strong purge, expels parasitical worms, harmful if misused), 1.353 Acacia (laxative), 2.7 Muakes ([rabid?] dog bite), 2.103 Meli Ponticon (causes heavy sweating, ingestion requires treatment, topical use only), 2.105 Beeswax (Pontic and Cretan are the best quality), 2.128 Kuamos Aigyptios (also called “Pontikon” despite not growing in Pontus), 3.2 Ra (called “Pontikon” by the Romans) [poisonous leaves], 3.7 Glukoriza (no toxic effects, also known as “Pontika”), 3.26 Apsinthion/Wormwood (not recommended for drinking) [Narcotic], 3.29 Abrotonon (Antidotes, called “Pontikon” by the Romans), 3.125 Skordion (expectorant and emmenagogue), 3.175 Chamaepitys (Antidote), 4.84 Colchium (poisonous when ingested) [poisonous], 5.49 Absinthe Wine (emetic, worms, purgative) [narcotic], 5.121 Arsenikon/Orpiment (shrinks growths, makes hair fall out) [poisonous], 5.147 Thracian Stone (induces epilepsy, repels snakes, cures hysteria).

³¹ *NH* book 1 in many lists of *auctores*, 20.63, 22.75, 24.167, 25.8, 25.62.

grow in Pontus, further highlighting the hold that the region has over the concept of poison in the ancient mind.³² Clearly the reputation of Pontus after the death of Mithridates was not confined to Pliny, nor entirely to the Latin record.

In the *Naturalis Historia* there are fifteen clear references to Pontic connections to poison, and there are another seven from nearby provinces.³³ Duck blood and poisonous honey are mentioned more than once; the honey is mentioned enough times that Pliny is able to refer to it vaguely as *venenatum mel diximus* (“We have already mentioned poisoned honey”) without any doubt as to what he means by it. Additionally, one of the most deadly poisons known to Rome bears the name “Aconite” from Acone, the Pontic city known for producing it. Unlike Egypt and North Africa, where most of Pliny’s entries are for antidotes rather than poisons, Pontus has a connection to poisons that is largely negative and dangerous without possessing much in the way of beneficial properties. Many of these properties are of the sort that could only be cured by recourse to captured Pontic drug lore or by the application of the antidotes of Egypt and the Psylli; in essence, one needs the Roman Empire and the trade within it to keep Pontus from poisoning the rest of the world.

Pliny’s references to Pontic poison are the easiest to link to Roman wars of expansion, since Pliny himself discusses conquest and poison together at *NH* 25.5–7. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a way of discussing Mithridates 6 without references to poison, since the monarch himself seems to have used his country’s reputation for amazing medicinal substances and poisons to his own advantage. When assembling his court, he made a point of engaging medical authorities such as Krateuas the rhizotomist.³⁴ Mithridates’ experiments with antidotes were sufficiently well known that *Mithradatium*, a generic term for complicated prophylactics against poisoning, entered the language as a term for describing antidotes.³⁵ The story of his suicide, in which his daily doses of poison

³² Dioskourides 2.97.

³³ See table 3 below of venom-related Pontus citations.

³⁴ Rhizotomoi were specialists in the gathering and preparation of herbal remedies. See J. Jaques, “Krateuas,” in Keyser and Irby-Massie (above n.19).

³⁵ Celsus records the earliest attestation of *Mithradatium* at 5.23.3. In Pliny, a version of the recipe can be found at 23.149. L. Totelin (“Mithridates’ Antidote—A Pharmacological Ghost,” *Early Science and Medicine* 9 [2004] 1–19) also points out that given the plethora of recipes for “*Mithradatium*,” it is quite likely that Romans remodeled the history of the king’s death in order to invent a Roman antidote. If this is the case, then Mithridates and Pontus is even more a part of the process of Romanizing Mithridates for political purposes.

had been so successful in immunizing him that he had to resort to the sword, became a parable for what happens to a person who is too clever about cheating death.³⁶

Pliny's account sets up Mithridates as an evil genius of poison, an opponent who inspired respect for his cleverness, and does so as a turning point in his narrative of the history of pharmaceutical writing in Rome. Strabo, who was Pontic and mentions Mithradates frequently, nowhere names him as a poisoner; this suggests that Pliny's version of Mithradates relies on later Roman traditions based on anti-Mithridates propaganda. Before this, he mentions Cato and Valgius as purely Roman authors, and then positions Lenaeus, the Latin translator of Mithridates' writings, as the first Roman author (save Cato) to introduce this sort of literature to Rome. Cato and Valgius have a line or so each; Mithridates receives three chapters devoted to his learning and the circumstances by which his writings came to Rome.

namque Mithridates, maximus sua aetate regum, quem debellavit Pompeius, omnium ante se genitorum diligentissimus vita fuisse argumentis, praeterquam fama, intellegitur. uni ei excogitatum cotidie venenum bibere praesumptis remediis, ut consuetudine ipsa innoxium fieret; primo inventa genera antidoti, ex quibus unum etiam nomen eius retinet; illius inventum, sanguinem anatum Ponticarum miscere antidotis, quoniam veneno viverent; ad illum Asclepiadis medendi arte clari volumina composita extant, cum sollicitatus ex urbe Roma praecepta pro se mitteret; illum solum mortalium certum est XXII linguis locutum, nec e subiectis gentibus ullum hominem per interpretem appellatum ab eo annis LVI, quibus regnavit.³⁷ (25.5–6)

For Mithridates, a very great king in his time, whom Pompeius conquered, is understood to have been the most diligent of all those who lived before him in the sciences during his life, and later in legend. By him alone it was first thought of to drink poison daily after prophylactic remedies had been taken, in order that [the poison] itself would become harmless by habit; [several] classes of antidotes were invented first by him, out of which one still retains his name; his innovation was to mix the blood of Pontic ducks into antidotes, since they [the ducks] live on poison; it was to him that the volumes on the art of medicine written by the renowned Asclepiades were dedicated; when he [Asclepiades] was sent for from the city of Rome, he sent them in his place; that man alone of mortals spoke twenty-two languages, and there was not any

³⁶ Appian, *Mith.* 111–112.

³⁷ The full passage is found at *NH* 25.5–7.

man from the peoples subject to him that was addressed through an interpreter by him during the sixty-one years of his reign.

Such a lengthy encomium to a foreign enemy—an enemy who had harassed and threatened the Roman *res publica* for many years—is quite unusual. The passage is constructed in such a way as to glorify the king, but to the benefit of Rome since it is safe and useful to portray conquered enemies to be as formidable as possible. Beagon views this encomium of Mithridates as problematic given Pliny's dismissal of Greek ingenuity elsewhere, but in the context of prizes of war, such praise is perfectly in line with Pliny's policy towards former enemies elsewhere.³⁸ Strong, clever, and wily enemies, once defeated, are far more useful for the purposes of propaganda than weak, easily overcome ones.

Mithridates as Pliny portrays him is not so much a military threat as an intellectual one; this description of his life focuses on his scholarly accomplishments, and of all the acts of aggression against Rome that he perpetrated, it is his attempt to lure Asclepiades away from Rome that Pliny uses to transition into the account of Pompey's victory over Pontus. At the time, Asclepiades was the foremost medical authority in Rome, and was hailed as a savior of the profession after the physician Archagathos had put a great number of people on guard against Greek physicians with his harsh treatments and surgeries.³⁹ Asclepiades used an innovative medical theory that attributed health and disease to the flow of small particles through the body. His treatment, which involved a good deal of water drinking, bathing, and massage, was considered to be less invasive and radical than other methods being imported from the East. This method of medicine, invented to fit the squeamish Roman medical marketplace, made Asclepiades something of an icon in Rome. The fact that Mithridates tried to get Asclepiades for himself and partially succeeded in the form of a book dedication shows the king's desire to take what was Rome's and (presumably) use it in his wars.⁴⁰ When Pompey conquered Mithridates militarily, the victory was incom-

³⁸ M. Beagon, *Roman Nature: The Thought of Pliny the Elder* (Oxford 1992), 228–9.

³⁹ Von Staden, "Liminal Perils: Early Roman Receptions of Greek Medicine," in F. J. Ragep and S. P. Ragep, with S. Livesey, eds., *Tradition, Transmission, Transformation* (Leiden 1996) 369–418.

⁴⁰ J. Vallance, *The Lost Theory of Asclepiades of Bithynia* (Oxford 1990); E. Rawson, "The Life and Death of Asclepiades of Bithynia," *CQ* 32 (1982) 358–70.

plete until Mithridates' "Empire of Knowledge" was likewise put under Roman control.⁴¹

It is for this reason that Pliny concludes this discussion of Mithridates' role in the development of pharmacy as an academic discipline in Rome with this account of Pompeius Lenaeus' translation of Mithridates' works into Latin.⁴²

is ergo in reliqua ingeni magnitudine medicinae peculiariter curiosus et ab omnibus subiectis, qui fuere magna pars terrarum, singula exquirens scrinium commentationum harum et exemplaria effectusque in arcanis suis reliquit, Pompeius autem omni praeda regia potitus transferre ea sermone nostro libertum suum Lenaeum grammaticae artis iussit vitaeque ita profuit non minus quam reipublicae victoria illa. (25.7)

He, therefore, was particularly interested in the great sweep of the medical arts, and he drew on information from all his subjects, which encompassed a great part of the lands, by seeking out each of the books on these subjects, and he left behind case studies and the effects [of drugs] among his secret records. Pompeius, however, obtained all the king's effects and ordered his freedman Lenaeus the grammarian to translate them into our tongue, and that victory was no less profitable for life than it was for the *Res Publica*.

Mithridates is the closest easy connection between foreign lands with a reputation for poison and foreign wars that had been won at great cost and anxiety to Rome. This passage also gives us the clearest picture of how these lands are portrayed in this "natural history," a subject that on its surface is concerned primarily with *natura* rather than the history of war or political intrigue. However, Pliny's vision of nature is not a neutral one, but rather a vision of a cosmos whose human components have a certain amount of personality and character. The character of Pontus

⁴¹ I borrow R. Flemming's concept of intellectual empire here from her article, "Empires of Knowledge: Medicine and Health in the Hellenistic World," in A. Erskine, ed., *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Oxford 2003) 449–63.

⁴² According to Suetonius, *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus* 15, Lenaeus had run away at a young age and obtained an education "*in patriam*," then returned to Pompey with the price of his freedom. Pompey then freed him and allowed him to keep the money. In return, Lenaeus remained loyal to Pompey long after the his death, going so far as to lampoon Sallust for making unflattering comments about his patron. Lenaeus accompanied Pompey on his campaigns, which suggests that Lenaeus would have been the logical choice if Pompey wanted a reliable translation of Mithridates' papers by a loyal and trusted scholar. Lenaeus' work seems to persist only in the Latin tradition of Pliny and Scribonius Largus, a pharmacist writing in the emperor Claudius' court.

as a land is best exemplified by the poison-obsessed King Mithridates; the military conquest of Pontus only dealt with the problem on a military level. Pliny's "*reipublicae victoria*" is not the military conquest of Pontus, but the more symbolic conquest of Mithridates' knowledge. By taking that knowledge and putting it into Latin, Pompey's conquest and control of Pontus was complete. This translation by Leneaus acts as an "antidote" against future trouble from Pontus and a potential weapon that Romans may now wield. Pontus can no longer harm Rome because Rome has the knowledge to defend against it, but Rome may still use the knowledge and possession of Pontus against others, should it so choose. This again is the logic under which Pliny himself operates when he warns his reading public against other foreign poisons, as in the case of Cossinus.

In opposition to these poisonous regions, there is Italy, which is often, if not consistently, depicted as a place where poison is mitigated rather than produced.⁴³ As in his discussions of poison in Egypt, Pontus, and North Africa, Pliny reflects larger trends in his literary tradition, particularly that of Augustan poets using healing metaphors to justify Augustus' novel political position.⁴⁴ Scorpions, mentioned frequently in the rest of the *Naturalis Historia* as poisonous hazards, are said to be harmless in Italy; this is the passage discussed above in which the Psylli were said to be importing scorpions by way of attack.⁴⁵ This is the most obvious example of Pliny's representation of Italy as an antidote, since in this case the poisonous creature dies on contact with Italian soil. Similarly, Pliny cites Theophrastos as saying that the bite of the lizard is poisonous in Greece, but not in Italy.⁴⁶ There is also a rather lengthy story in the opening chapters of book 25, which cover the history of pharmacy and include Pliny's own appeal for greater attention to writing down folk remedies. A soldier serving in Spain is said to have been saved from the

⁴³ For the full list of Italian poison-related citations, see table 4 below.

⁴⁴ See also J. Nelson-Hawkins, "The Ritual of Therapy: Venus the Healer in Virgil's *Aeneid*," in A. Barchiesi, J. Rüpke, and S. Stephens, eds., *Rituals in Ink: Proceedings from a Colloquium on Roman Religion* (Stuttgart 2004) 77–97.

⁴⁵ . . . *sed vivere intra Siculi caeli regionem non potuere. visuntur tamen aliquando in Italia, sed innocui, multisque aliis in locis, ut circa Pharum in Aegypto* (" . . . but they were not able to survive above the latitude of Sicily. However, they are seen from time to time in Italy, but they are harmless there; and they are seen in many other places, like in the region of Pharos in Egypt," *NH* 11.89).

⁴⁶ *NH* 8.111, a passing comment in a discussion of epilepsy cures derived from animals.

bite of a mad dog when his mother, warned in a dream, sent the root of a wild rose from home.⁴⁷ This story is used to prove that new remedies are constantly being discovered, but also as an example of the ideal attitude toward pharmacy: traditional wisdom, particularly that of Italy, is the true locus of herbal knowledge, and pharmaceutical writers merely write down what *pagani* discover.⁴⁸ These entries all support the idea of Italy as Healer, a species of *Laudes Italiae* particularly well suited to answer to the poisonous threats from abroad.

These are not the only ways, however, in which Italy is said to be able to fend off foreign poison; Pliny mentions the venom-mitigating ability of the Psylli several times.⁴⁹ In three of these instances he makes a point of also mentioning the Italian tribe of the Marsi to emphasize that the remarkable Psylli are equaled by an Italian tribe.⁵⁰ Unlike the Psylli, however, the Marsi are not actively trying to export scorpions and other venomous animals abroad, nor are they seen performing street theater with frogs. Pliny gives this comparison mythological underpinnings as

⁴⁷ *nuper cuiusdam militantis in praetorio mater vidit in quiete, ut radicem silvestris rosae, quam cynorrhodon vocant, blanditam sibi aspectu pridie in fructo, mitteret filio bibendam. in Laetania res gerebatur, Hispaniae proxima parte, casuque accidit, ut milite a morsu canis incipienti expavescere aquas superveniret epistula orantis, ut pareret religioni, servatusque est ex insperato et postea quisquis auxilium simile temptavit. (NH 25.17)* ("Recently the mother of a certain man serving in the praetorian guard saw in her sleep that she should send the root of a forest rose to her son to drink, which they call cynorrhodon, pleasant to her to look on in the first day of its blossoming. He was serving in Laetania, the nearer region of Hispania, and it happened by chance, that when the soldier was bitten by a dog and began to fear water the letter arrived from the mother praying that he (the son) would follow the omen, and he was saved unexpectedly and subsequently each who tried it found a similar remedy.")

⁴⁸ *quod eas agrestes litterarumque ignari experiuntur, ut qui soli inter illas vivant; praeterea securitas quaerendi obvia medicorum turba. multis etiam inventis desunt nomina . . . turpissima causa raritatis quod etiam qui sciunt demonstrare nolunt, tamquam ipsis peritum sit quod tradiderint aliis. (NH 25.16)* ("But the reason why not many are familiar [with herbs] is due to the fact that they are tested by those country folk who are illiterate, since they are the only ones who live among them; besides there is an apathy for learning about them with such a gaggle of doctors close at hand. There are many herbs found that have no names. . . . But the most disgraceful cause for the rarity of herbal knowledge is due to the fact that even those who know about them are unwilling to share the knowledge; as though it would be blotted from their minds if they were to pass on the knowledge to others!")

⁴⁹ Pliny mentions the Psylli with reference to their ability to cure poison at 7.14, 8.93, 21.78, and 28.30, and for less specific involvement with poisons at 11.89 and 25.123.

⁵⁰ The Marsi are mentioned with the Psylli at NH 7.15, 21.78, 28.30 and without the Psylli at 25.11, 25.86, 28.19. This list is confined only to the Marsi as poison specialists, excluding mentions of the Marsian War or Marsian customs unrelated to herbs or poison.

well by explaining the skills of the Marsi by claiming their descent from Circe. The Psylli have no such mythological progenitor. Furthermore, the same passage juxtaposes Colchian Medea with “*Itala Circe*,”⁵¹ and goes on to discuss strong Egyptian herbs in the following chapter. In this, there is a direct comparison not only of North African Psylli to the Marsi, but also of Italy to Pontus (Medea) and Egypt. By so often mentioning the Marsi in close proximity to the Psylli, Pliny counters these foreign and less trustworthy poison specialists with an Italian alternative that is just as good, if not quite as interesting.

Pliny does not, however, claim a universal absence of poison in Italy. Acknowledging that poison does exist in Italy is, however, a complex matter. On one hand, Pliny’s portrait of the natural world conforms with the tradition of *laudes Italiae*, which emphasizes Italy’s ideally balanced and beneficial qualities in contrast to the imbalances found in other regions of the world. However, the *laudes* taken to their natural extent can render Italy as a poison-free zone, and therefore somewhat toothless among a pit of foreign vipers. By including poisons from Italian sources, Pliny manages to have his cake and eat it too. Not only is Italy milder, but it can also produce poisons that are better than foreign poisons of a similar nature.

There are two instances of poison on the Italian mainland. The first is a spring on Mt. Soracte that boils at sunrise and kills whatever drinks from it; its description is embedded in the center of a list of poisonous springs from various points around the Eastern Mediterranean.⁵² It is placed a few chapters following 31.4–10, a lengthy discussion of medicinal waters that focuses in large part on Italian healing waters, particularly

⁵¹ *certe quid non repleverunt fabulis Colchis Media aliaequae, in primis Itala Circe dis etiam adscripta? unde arbitror natum, ut Aeschylus e vetustissimis in poetica refertam Italiam herbarum potentia proderet, multique Circeios, ubi habitavit illa, magno argumento etiam nunc durante in Marsis, a filio eius orta gente, quoniam esse domitores serpentium constat.* (NH 25.10–11) (“What country, in fact, have Media of Colchis and other sorceresses not filled with tales, the Italian Circe in particular, who has even been deified? I believe that is the source whence Aeschylus, among the oldest poets, says that Italy is known as being powerful in its plants, and that many say the same about Circeii, where she lived, and even now there remains a great point of proof in the Marsi, a race said to be born from her son, since it is known that they are tamers of snakes.”)

⁵² *Varro ad Soracten in fonte, cuius sit latitudo quattuor pedum; sole oriente eum exundare ferventi similem; aves, quae degustaverint, iuxta mortuas iacere* (“Varro [says] about the spring on Soracte [in Italy], whose width is four feet; with the rising sun it roils as if it were boiling; whatever birds may have drunk from it lie dead next to it,” NH 31.27).

those at Baiae; in consequence, this single mention is opposed to multiple beneficial instances. Soracte's lake includes Italy in a Hellenic grouping in order to make the point that Italy also has what Greece has. The Italian spring, moreover, boils at sunrise as well as being poisonous, which makes it stand out from the less energetic waters of Greece, that merely affect those who drink them, and sometimes only mildly.

The Italian spring seems to indicate that when Italy does produce a poisonous item, it is more interesting (and perhaps more potent) than its non-Italian competitors. Likewise, the next item of Italian poison lore: a shrew-mouse that is poisonous in Italy, but is unable to survive elsewhere.⁵³ This entry is also buried in a lengthy list of things that are only found in one place in the world. It is an interesting sort of poison when compared to the case of scorpions, which die when taken to Italy. Here Pliny employs a different strategy from that which he uses in the *laudes Italiae* by arguing not that Italy is an ideal location but that it possesses something other places lack. This is also a short item buried in the middle of a list of other animals who likewise lose certain of their powers when moved from one region to another. It is so deemphasized that it is easy for the casual reader to miss, thus preserving the theme of the *laudes* as dominant over this secondary theme of Italy's ability to produce powerful poisons when it has to.

Many of these items found their way into the *Naturalis Historia* via Greek sources, but the information when reappropriated by a Roman author and politician like Pliny has a very different meaning. To the Greek, Italy is a barbarian frontier, and so a shrew that is poisonous in Italy but not in Greece is a foreign wonder, and writing about it is proof of Greek superiority over barbarian knowledge. But when Pliny includes that shrew in his Roman encyclopedia, he highlights a native animal with special powers that similar animals abroad lack. One could say that the shrew, which is hardly an animal that strikes fear into the hearts of men, becomes more potent in Italy; thus by implication humans also become more potent in Italy. In the context of inbound poison from scorpions and lizards that are neutralized on contact with Italy, the implication is that Italy herself has centrality and power in a dangerous world. Italy, moreover, has a command over poisons equal, if not superior, to

⁵³ *In Italia muribus araneis venenatus est morsus; eosdem ulterior Appennino regio non habet. iidem ubicumque sunt, orbitam si transiere, moriuntur* ("In Italy the bite of shrew-mice is venomous; the region beyond the Appenines doesn't have any of them. Wherever those mice are, should they cross their boundary, they die," NH 8.227).

that possessed by other nations and lands. *Natura* herself has appointed Italy to control the poisonous dangers of the world, so that the world can benefit from the beneficial powers of these substances and, by implication, the places that produce them can likewise be made into similarly improved places to live. It is this mindset that drove Romans to add improvements like baths and aqueducts to newly conquered provinces and impose Roman forms of government as well. It is the universal logic (and justification) of empire.

As a final point, one might ask, What about Parthia? If civilized countries with a history of harassing Rome became identified with poison, should Parthia not also join Egypt, North Africa, and Pontus in the list of poisoned lands in the *Naturalis Historia*? In a way, it does not. Though it has as much literary baggage in the Greek tradition as does Pontus (if not more), Persia/Parthia is hardly identified with poison at all in the *Naturalis Historia*, save one anecdote about Persian apples being transported to Egypt:

falsum est venenata cum cruciatu in Persis gigni et poenarum causa ab regibus tralata in Aegyptum terra mitigata. id enim de Persea diligentiores tradunt, quae in totum alia est, myxis rubentibus similis, nec extra orientem nasci voluit. eam quoque eruditiores negaverunt ex Perside propter supplicia tralatam, sed a Perseo Memphi satam, et ob id Alexandrum illa coronari victores ibi instituisse in honorem atavi sui. (15.45–46)

It is a lie that the peach which grows in Persia is poisonous, or that it produces tortuous pain, and that it was brought into Egypt by the [Persian] kings for the purpose of revenge, but that the earth mitigated the poison. More careful authors also say that this regards the “Persea,” which is entirely another tree, similar to a red Myxis, and that it does not grow outside the east. Also those who are more learned deny that it was brought from Persia for punishment, but that it was planted by Perseus in Memphis, for which reason Alexander gave orders that the victors should be crowned with it in the games which he instituted there in honor of his ancestor.

And so the only instance of something poisonous coming from Persia/Parthia turns out to be a myth at best, and a gross misunderstanding on the part of incompetent scholars at worst. Unlike these other provinces, Parthia was never brought under Roman control, and was always a threat to the Roman frontier. For this reason, there was no advantage in touting its native dangers, and there were many disadvantages in

making that particular enemy more menacing than it already was. In this case, the exception proves the point—Parthia is hardly empty of scorpions, snakes, and threatening tribesmen, but it seems almost to disappear from Pliny's map. Only areas that have been incorporated safely into the *Pax Romana*, after all, are safe enough to be dangerous.

To Pliny, knowledge is a kind of booty, and like other spoils of war it is destined to be best used at the hands of the conquerors; to ignore the acquisition of knowledge along with territory is to be an irresponsible imperialist. Poison is a particularly telling substance in this cultural exchange since (like knives, painkillers, or fertilizer) it can be either a benefit or a danger to society depending on those who wield it. In Pliny's pro-empire encyclopedia, poison is nature's endorsement of Roman control; in the form of poison, *Natura* demands that Italy rule the cosmos.

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TABLES

Table 1. Egyptian Poisons and Antidotes

<i>Citation</i>	<i>Region named</i>	<i>Nature of the citation</i>
8.91	Egypt	Antidote, love charm
11.89	Egypt	Scorpions native to Egypt
13.126	Egypt	Poison, used by Nero as a topical bruise treatment following nights spent brawling
20.187–195	Egypt	Antidote to asp bite
21.12	Egypt	Cleopatra, Antonius, and a poisoned chaplet
21.177	Egypt	Trychnon, a toxic ivy, used in garlands. Pliny remarks that he wishes the Egyptians would not keep doing this.
21.184	Egypt	Antidote
23.134	Egypt	Antidote
23.158	Alexandria (Egypt not specifically mentioned)	Alexandrian laurel, antidote
29.93	Egypt	Cossinus killed by Cantharis at the hands of an Egyptian physician
32.56	Egypt	Antidote

Table 2. North African Poisons and Antidotes

<i>Citation</i>	<i>Region named</i>	<i>Nature of the citation</i>
5.16	Mauretania	Juba of Mauretania mentions the anti-venom properties of “Euphorbea” on Mt. Atlas
7.14	Africa	Psylli immune to poison
8.93	Africa	Psylli immune to poison
11.88–89	Africa	Psylli exporting scorpions; scorpions as native to Africa
11.279	(Africa implied)	<i>diximus hominum genera qui venena serpentium suctu corporibus eximerent.</i> Oblique reference to the Psylli
13.125	Africa	Thapsia in Africa is the strongest variety, poisonous
20.120	Africa	An item of African scorpion-bite lore
21.77	Mauretania	Poison bean
21.78	Africa	Psylli’s immunity to poison
25.123	Africa	Psylli and frog-heating contests
28.30	Africa	Psylli (and Marsi) as poison-resistant people
32.33	Africa	Africa as an especially rich source of anti-venomous meats

Table 3. Pontic Poisons and Antidotes

<i>Citation</i>	<i>Region named</i>	<i>Nature of the citation</i>
6.4	Acone, Pontus	<i>Portus Acone, veneno aconito dirus</i> — associates Aconite with its region of origin
11.194	Pontus	A discussion of how venom is made from gall, and the animals in Pontus who feed on wormwood are free of gall
21.74	Heracliae, Pontus	Poisonous honey
21.77	Pontus	Insanity-producing honey
21.85	Pontus	Poisonous honey
22.18	Pontus	Heraclides (a medical author from Pontus) cited on duck-blood antidote
25.149	Pontus via Mithridates*	Mithradatium recipe
25.5-7	Pontus	The story of Pompeius Lenaeus and Mithridates's writings.
25.97	Pontus	Antidote
25.127	Pontus via Mithridates	"Mithradatica" used as a synonym for "antidotes"
27.4	Pontus	Aconite
29.24	Pontus via Mithridates	A complaint against Mithradatium as a foreign perversion of nature
29.97	Pontus	<i>Diximus et mellis venenati genera</i> (poisonous honey)
29.104	Pontus	Duck-blood antidote
32.27	Pontus	Antidote
32.43	Pontus	<i>Venenatum mel diximus ubi nasceretur</i> (poisonous honey)
Further poison-related citations in the Black Sea region		
7.13	Parium near the Hellespont	Ophiogenes cure snakebites
8.100	(Acone)	Hunting panthers with aconite (see "Acone" above)
11.280	Pamphylia, Cilicia	<i>Quae animalium pascerentur veneno diximus</i> (a general reference back to the venom-eating ducks and bees in Pontus) Also, boars that become poisonous after eating poisonous salamanders
20.132	Galatia	Antidote
21.160	Galatia	Poison (Absynthium)
22.98	Bithynia	Poisonous mushrooms
25.35	Galatia	Antidote

* "Via Mithridates" indicates that the passage mentions Mithridates without using the word "Pontus." These are included due to the fact that its nearly redundant to mention Mithridates and Pontus every single time the country's most (in)famous monarch is invoked.

Table 4. Italian poison-related citations

<i>Citation</i>	<i>Region named</i>	<i>Nature of the citation</i>
7.15	Italy	The Marsi's immunity to snakes and descent from Circe
8.227	Italy	Shrew-mouse poisonous in Italy, but not elsewhere
8.111	Italy	The bite of the lizard is poisonous in Greece, but not in Italy (quoting Theophrastos)
11.89	Italy, regions north of Sicily	Scorpions unable to survive when brought to Italy
21.78	Italy	Marsi immune to snakebite
25.10	Italy	Italian Circe compared (favorably) to <i>fabulis Colchis Media</i> and Circe given as the reason Aeschylus refers to Italy as a place known for potent plants
25.11	Italy	Marsi immune to snakebite
25.17	(Probably Italy)	Rabies cure sent to a Roman soldier by his mother
25.86	Italy	Land of the Marsi contains a cure for <i>pthisis</i> (tuberculosis)
28.19	Italy	Marsi using song to charm snakes
28.30	Italy	Marsi immune to snakebite
31.10	Italy, Mt. Soracte	Poisonous bubbling spring