This short text has delighted, confused, and provoked scholars since its discovery in the Eastern Arabah archaeological digs, near the ancient city of Petra, in 1844. The dispute continues regarding precisely how to categorize such a work: an irony not lost on those representing all sides of the argument, given that the text itself is explicitly dedicated to the act of categorization. The original Latin script dates from the seventh century AD, was inscribed on the finest vellum (suggesting official patronage), remarkably well preserved in a garnet-encrusted bronze cylinder, seemingly designed for just this purpose. Liberal use of terms and phrases in Arabic suggest the work was written—probably collectively—between neo-Aristotelian theologians and Persians of the cosmopolitan Sufi persuasion. (Such collaborations were reasonably common, up until the Crusades.) Certain interweavings of monism, occasionalism, and other heterodoxia reinforce this hypothesis, given that no single religious or philosophical orientation can be definitively obtained (much as the experts try, from one perspective or another). The rather risky—not to mention risqué—topic of the flesh is clearly contextualized within a Christian sensibility, yet threatens to escape at any moment into the more sensual pages of The Song of Solomon.

This piece originally appeared in Cabinet magazine in slightly different form. We thank them for permission to include here.
or certain pseudo-Islamic homages to terrestrial pleasure. One aspect of this anomalous work, upon which the scholars do agree, is the remarkable form of the taxonomy itself, anticipating the system usually attributed to Linnaeus himself. The elusive story surrounding the Father of Taxonomy’s classificatory system—gestating behind his stern Swedish brow—and his knowledge or ignorance of the present text, has yet to be written. Such a coincidence, however, is most provocative, even to the casual student of the natural sciences and the history of ideas. In any case, this edition faithfully renders the original table of elements: itself a most suggestive sketch of that “significant ephemera” which should be of interest to the archaeologist and anthropologist, as much as to the physician and metaphysician. This scholastic exercise stands alone as a quiet murmur amongst our species’ ongoing obsession with placing kind with kind, and separating goats from sheep, wheat from chaff, night from day, and love from less exalted types of attraction. If nothing else, in regard to the amateur reader, “A Taxonomy of Bruises” (Partitio de Cicatricibus) can form the basis of spirited discussion for one’s next salon or tiresome train journey.

—Dominic Pettman, Founding Editor-at-Large,
The Institute of Incoherent Geography, 2010
It is said that both man and woman bruise “like a peach.” And it is true that mortals share a kind of flesh with the succulent products of the fruit tree. Perhaps God—praise be His name—has prepared a secret affinity between our own bodies and the sweet texture yielded from a harvest of apricots, nectarines, peaches, pears, and plums. It is even possible that the apple—symbol and cause of Adam’s exile from Paradise—forms an invisible continuity with the soft tissues of our Earthly bodies. (Strangely, the beasts do not seem to bruise, suggesting a closer kinship with certain botanical entities, at least in terms of the subject under examination.) Folk wisdom tells us that the fair sex bruise more easily than the male, and to this we must concur, with certain exceptions, detailed anon.

Those trained in the arts of Hippocrates will tell you that a bruise is caused not by a sharp object, nor a light one, but of a blunt and heavy disposition. The skin must not break or lacerate, but remain in plane, to act as cover for the local injury beneath, swelling and darkening black and purple, like a storm cloud trapped inside the body of young and old alike. (Unlike the peach, the bruises of men heal—or at least, the majority do, of those we have yet to inventory.) But here the physicians are indifferent and uncurious, content to treat one such contusion with another. The learned, however, who seek to learn ever anew, take a longer path, and offer this taxonomy of bruises as a gift to descendents of a similar spirit, to complete as they see fit.
BRUISES OF THE FIRST TYPE: DOMESTIC

cicatrix pedis: a bruise of the foot

cicatrix cruris: a bruise of the legs (lower)

cicatrix femoris: a bruise of the legs (upper)

cicatrix clunium: a bruise of the buttocks

cicatrix manus: a bruise of the hand

cicatrix bracchii: a bruise of the arms (lower)

cicatrix lacerti: a bruise of the arms (upper)

cicatrix pectoris: a bruise of the torso (front)

cicatrix tergi: a bruise of the torso (back)

cicatrix colli: a bruise of the neck

cicatrix faciei: a bruise of the face

cicatrix palmae: a bruise caused by an open hand

cicatrix pugni: a bruise caused by a closed fist

cicatrix ex inquisitione obscurata: a bruise caused by searching for an object in the dark

cicatrix domestica: a bruise caused by clumsiness, inflicted by tables, chairs, furniture, or doorframes
cicatrix ex gravi: a bruise caused by dropping a heavy object

cicatrix nubilosa: a bruise resulting from daydreaming or slowness of mind

cicatrix ex casu: a bruise caused by falling (for instance, from a ladder)

cicatrix ex casu alieno: a bruise caused by accident, inflicted by another (for instance, an overzealous gesture)

cicatrix ex pecore: a bruise caused by one’s livestock

cicatrix ex equitando: a bruise caused by the riding of a horse

cicatrix ex cinyphe: a bruise resulting from the bite of an insect

cicatrix religiosa: a bruise resulting from religious fervor or penance

cicatrix conjugis: a bruise caused by the hand of one’s husband or wife, for being disagreeable

cicatrix parentis: a bruise caused by the hand on one’s father or mother, for being disobedient

cicatrix avunculi: a bruise caused by one’s uncle, for being lazy

cicatrix apud familiam: a bruise, self-inflicted, to garner sympathy within the family

cicatrix in familiar: a bruise, self-inflicted, to garner sympathy regarding one’s family
cicatrix ex obliterato: a bruise for which one can no longer remember the cause

cicatrix ex ignorato: a bruise for which one never was cognizant of the cause

cicatrix ex dyscolitate: a bruise resulting from ill humor

cicatrix ex ludo nimio: a bruise resulting from horse-play

cicatrix natalis: a bruise which peaks on the day of one’s own birth

cicatrix naevia: a bruise which overlaps with a birthmark

cicatrix conpicta: a bruise wished away through the artful application of powders or paste

cicatrix mnemosyna: a bruise brought back from travels afar

cicatrix ad osulum patruelis: a bruise which invites the kiss of a cousin

cicatrix nuptialis: a bruise received on one’s wedding night

cicatrix ex conplexu: a bruise resulting from an excessive embrace

cicatrix ex coitu: a bruise resulting from passionate love-making (within wedlock)

cicatrix ex fornicatione: a bruise resulting from passionate love-making (out of wedlock)

cicatrix ex masturbatione: a bruise acquired during onanistic activity, as divine punishment of the same
*cicatrix patefaciens*: a bruise that betrays a secret

*icatrix zelotypa*: a bruise stemming from jealousy

*icatrix libidinis*: a bruise stemming from desire

*icatrix libidinis zelotypa*: a bruise stemming from jealous desire

*icatrix latrini*: a bruise stemming from a dispute over the latrine
BRUISES OF THE SECOND TYPE: CIVIC/PUBLIC

cicatrix ex pede suo: a bruise formed after tripping over one’s own feet

cicatrix ex pede alieno: a bruise formed after tripping over the feet of another

cicatrix crystalli: a bruise which blossoms after slipping on ice

cicatrix musci: a bruise which forms after slipping on moss

cicatrix virgae: a bruise resulting from birch cane or willow paddle for misbehavior (especially in a convent or seminary)

cicatrix arboris: a bruise inflicted by the ground after falling from a tree

cicatrix muri: a bruise inflicted by the ground after falling from a wall

cicatrix fenestrae: a bruise caused by an object falling from a window

cicatrix plostri: a bruise caused by a cart, or other moving vehicle

cicatrix verpae: a bruise caused by dancing around the May Pole

cicatrix ex cubito concubitando: a bruise inflicted (most commonly in the vicinity of the rib cage) by a companion’s elbow, deployed to draw attention to the proximity of a comely stranger
cicatrix ex calce submensali: a bruise received from a kick underneath the dinner table

cicatrix stulta: a bruise acquired while trying to draw attention to oneself in a vain, foolish manner

cicatrix crapulata: a bruise sustained while intoxicated

cicatrix Jovis: a bruise given as a poisoned gift by a rival for a woman’s (or girl’s) affections

cicatrix Jovis graeci: a bruise given as a poisoned gift by a rival for a man’s (or boy’s) affections

cicatrix monita: a bruise suffered as a warning of worse to come, unless certain conditions are met

cicatrix fata: a bruise suffered as a warning of worse to come, no matter how the sufferer comports him or herself in future

cicatrix nobilis: a bruise caused by one of noble birth

cicatrix plebis: a bruise caused by one of lower social rank

cicatrix nobilioris: a bruise resulting from (accidentally) bruising someone of higher social rank

cicatrix insidiarum: a bruise resulting from revolutionary or mutinous activity

cicatrix barbara: a bruise received by another who speaks not one’s own tongue

cicatrix ex veritate: a bruise received for speaking one’s mind openly
cicatrix ex silentio: a bruise received for not speaking when one should

cicatrix ex mendacio: a bruise received for voicing untruths in an unconvincing fashion

cicatrix ex despoliatione: a bruise manifesting the legacy of attempted robbery

cicatrix audacia: a bruise received in battle (through bravery)

cicatrix ex pusillanimitate: a bruise received in battle (through cowardice)

cicatrix honesta: a bruise which enhances one’s reputation

cicatrix viduatae: a bruise which exaggerates a melancholy beauty

cicatrix athletica: a bruise received while participating in athletic activity

cicatrix cygnis irati: a bruise inflicted by an angry swan

cicatrix experientiae prima: a bruise received as a direct result of experimentation

cicatrix experientiae secunda: a bruise received as an indirect result of experimentation

cicatrix penitus: a bruise received while tarrying inside a public building

cicatrix deforis: a bruise received while tarrying outside a public building

cicatrix crepusculo: a bruise inflicted at dusk
cicatrix *ghibli*: a bruise which blooms during the sirocco

cicatrix *celsa*: a bruise received at high altitudes

cicatrix *sali*: a bruise received on the high seas
BRUISES OF THE THIRD TYPE: MYSTERIOUS

*cicatrix ex distractione*: a bruise resulting from unthinking activity or distraction (not noticed at time of impact)

*cicatrix somnambulatoris*: a bruise acquired while sleep walking

*cicatrix coelestis*: a bruise inflicted by the will of God (most commonly through the mediation of an angel with special tools, as punishment for minor sins)

*cicatrix lemuris*: a bruise created through the mischief of spirits or jinns

*cicatrix symbolica*: a bruise which forms a sinister symbol, such as the Evil Eye

*cicatrix lunaris*: a bruise which waxes and wanes according to an unknown cycle
BRUISES OF THE FOURTH TYPE: INTERNAL/INVISIBLE

*cicatrix sub praecordio*: a bruise located beneath the rib cage stemming from grief

*cicatrix in visceris*: a bruise located in the pit of one's viscera from disappointment

*cicatrix in gula*: a bruise located in the throat from an unnamable fear

*cicatrix in corde*: a bruise located inside the heart from rejection by a beloved

*cicatrix nigra*: a bruise blossoming everblack from unrequited love (or requited love at a distance)

*cicatrix cotidiana*: a bruise created throughout the flesh by the daily pummeling of existence