

Securing the Savages: The Boundaries of Numidia in *Historia Naturalis* 5.22

The resurgence of scholarship on *Historia Naturalis* in the two previous decades exposes a shifting of intent. While earlier efforts were primarily concerned with “assessing the accuracy of [*Historia Naturalis*]’s contents and... tracing its sources” (Howe 1985.561), current scholarship has tended to focus on the act of encyclopedism itself, especially in terms of its ability to unify empire or elucidate the attitude of the Flavian-period Roman towards knowledge. Though the onset of this Plinian revival could be traced to a series of colloquia in 1979-1985, the last decade in particular has seen a flourishing of scholarship, with authors such as Rhiannon Evans (2003, 2005) and Trevor Murphy (2003, 2004) suggesting thematic coherence throughout the *HN*. These, in turn, owe much to John F. Healy (1988, 1999), Mary Beagon (1992, 1996), S. Citroni Marchetti (1991), and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (1990) who, though in some ways much more narrowly focused on issues such as luxury, leisure, and science in Pliny’s work, engaged with Pliny a careful critic and author rather than a copyist. With larger theories on subjects such as structure and imperialism having been explored, one of the challenges of Plinian scholarship is the unification of narrow, specialized topics with the recent broad-themed analysis techniques.

Pliny spends one paragraph (V.xxii) on the country of Numidia, as opposed to time he lavishes on Africa, Egypt, and even Mauretania. But that one paragraph, in a geographical book that is supposedly ‘free of humanity’, contains famous men, nomads, and Roman citizens surrounded by ferocious beasts. The land itself is divided from the rest of the African continent by means of the rivers Ampsaga and Zaina. In my reading of the text, these rivers, along with possible borders to the South of either river or stone and the Mediterranean to the North, act as a fence and liminal space to separate this ferocious and savage place from its surroundings as well as give boundaries to the wagon-dwellers, who posed many problems for geographers (Shaw 1981, 1982, 1983). The Numidia passage and its context reveal a system of separating the civilized from the uncivilized in *Historia Naturalis* which does not rely solely on geography or imperialistic ideology.

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