

PENGUIN CLASSICS

PLINY THE ELDER
NATURAL HISTORY
A SELECTION



Natural History: A Selection by Pliny the Elder

Pliny the Elder

Pliny's usual heritage is an astonishingly formidable paintings that levels from astronomy to paintings and from geography to zoology. Mingling acute remark with frequently wild speculation, it deals a desirable view of the area because it used to be understood within the first century AD, no matter if describing the chance of diving for sponges, the 1st water-clock, or using asses' milk to take away wrinkles. Pliny himself died whereas investigating the volcanic eruption that destroyed Pompeii in advert 79, and the usual interest that caused his demise can also be a great Natural History: A Selection deal glaring within the typical historical past — a e-book that proved hugely influential correct up until eventually the Renaissance and that his nephew, Pliny the younger, defined 'as jam-packed with sort as nature itself'. John F. Healy has made a desirable and sundry choice from the average background for this clear, sleek translation. In his introduction, he discusses the publication and its resources subject by means of topic. This variation additionally incorporates a complete index and notes.

Pliny's ordinary background was once the go-to encyclopedia for over 1,500 years, from its e-book round the 12 months seventy seven until eventually good into the Renaissance. Its widespread digressions into problems with morality and gossipy, sometimes rambling type will surely no longer be at domestic in a latest encyclopedia, yet its all-encompassing scope (covering botany, zoology, astronomy, geology, and drugs between different topics) was once groundbreaking for its time and supplied the version for destiny works of its sort to emulate. The average background in its entirety is without doubt one of the biggest extant Roman texts, and the Penguin version comprises choices from 32 of the 37 books (overall, might be 25% of the whole work). this can be lots for all readers except real specialists. Pliny is likely one of the most vital surviving assets for our realizing of Roman wisdom and the Roman world, yet his ordinary heritage is usually of antiquarian curiosity today. provided that this was once written approximately 2,000 years ago, lengthy ahead of the beginning of the medical method, this isn't going to supply loads of exact wisdom concerning the traditional world. However, readers who're attracted Natural History: A Selection to studying what the folk of antiquity believed can be good served through this book. listed below are a few tidbits that struck me as rather interesting, noteworthy, or simply wacky:

- at the Earth: Pliny understood unequivocally that the realm Natural History: A Selection used to be spherical, no longer flat. publication II.
- On God: "God is guy supporting man." booklet II.
- On Fortune: "To her is debited all that's spent, and to her is credited all that's received; she on my own fills either pages within the ledger of mortals' accounts." booklet II.
- at the Chinese: "The chinese language are light in character, yet resemble wild animals in that they shun the corporate of the remainder of their Natural History: A Selection fellow males Natural History: A Selection and watch for investors to return to them." publication VI.
- On Ethiopia: "There are convinced experiences from the interior, at the japanese side, of races with no noses Natural History: A Selection and with thoroughly flat faces; every now and then tribes haven't any top lip, in others, no tongue. One team has no mouth and no nostrils; those humans breath via a unmarried gap and equally suck in drink via oat straws and in addition soak up grains of untamed oat for food. ebook VI.
- On Africans: "[The Psyllii's] customized was once to show kids at delivery to tremendous fierce snakes and

to exploit those snakes to check the faithfulness in their other halves for the reason that snakes don't flee humans of adulterous blood" publication VII. • On Indians: "A tribe of guys known as the Monocoli [have] just one leg and hop with remarkable speed. those everyone is often known as the Umbrella-footed, simply because while the elements is sizzling they lie on their backs stretched out at the floor and defend themselves via the color in their feet. The Monocoli usually are not far-off from the Cave-dwellers, and extra to the east of those are a few humans with no necks and with eyes of their shoulders...At the extraordinary obstacles of India, to the east, close to the resource of the Ganges, [live] the Astomi who've no mouth and whose physique is roofed in hair. They costume in cotton wool and stay merely at the air they breathe and the smell they attract via their nostrils...Megasthenes says that they could simply be killed through a very powerful odor." ebook VII. • On Pregnancy: "Women who devour meals that's too salty supply beginning to youngsters with no nails. Sneezing after sex can bring about an abortion." e-book VII. • On surprising Death: "Sudden deaths (the ultimate happiness in existence (!!!)) are staggering and frequent." ebook VII (emphasis added). • On Parakeets: "It greets its grasp and repeats phrases it hears, being in particular packed with enjoyable whilst given wine." booklet X. • On Eyes: "The Natural History: A Selection eyes are the home windows of the soul." e-book XI. • On Beer: "Western humans even have their very own liquor made of grain soaked in water. Alas, what significant ingenuity vice possesses! we've got even came upon easy methods to make water intoxicating!" ebook XIV. • On Sex: "Sexual sex therapies soreness within the reduce regions, impaired vision, unsoundness of brain and depression." publication XXVIII. • On Aphrodisiacs: "Salpe bids one plunge an ass's penis seven instances in sizzling oil after which rub the ideal half with this." e-book XXVIII. • On 1st Century Medicine: "Only a physician can kill a guy with impunity...I have discovered that via lack of understanding of names, crimson lead is usually additional to medicinal drugs rather than Indian cinnabar." e-book XXIX. • On Magic: "[M]agic is execrable, achieves not anything and is pointless." booklet XXX. Some of the proof above are patently erroneous, yet most of the details during this publication is obviously well-researched (by 1st century standards), and Pliny had a true ardour for the sciences. He died throughout the eruption of Mount Vesuvius – no longer simply because he was once current on the preliminary eruption, yet simply because he crossed the bay to monitor the phenomenon at shut quarters. this isn't the type of booklet I'd suggest you take a seat and skim hide to hide in a handful of sittings; even though its kind & tone make it extra enticing than a latest encyclopedia, it's nonetheless an encyclopedia. yet readers who are looking to find out about the heritage of information & actual Romanophiles will locate it interesting. three stars.

Natural History A Selection

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