

Myth and Mythography in Pliny's Geography, *Naturalis Historia* 3–6

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The following essay has three goals. First, drawing on previous scholarly work (esp. Naas 2002, 2008), it provides a systematic assessment of Pliny's approach to stories from the *spatium mythicum*, with a specific view toward his explicit and implicit attempts to rationalize and historicize the fabulous aspects of mythical stories. Next, it will offer the first comprehensive survey of the mythical references in Pliny's description of the world,¹ that is, a mythographical study that serves as a foil to my earlier work on Pomponius Mela in this journal (Smith 2016). A close examination of the ways in which Pliny deploys—or omits—mythical material in his geographical description of the world reveals that, while he acknowledges the importance of Greek heroes who were the first to expand geographical knowledge, the Greek past

¹ Sallman 1977: 194–95 provides a cursory survey of myth for book 3; Zehnacker and Silberman 2015 presents a short overview of myth in book 4, focusing on a comparison with Mela.

has firmly and completely given way to the Roman present. Pliny's deployment of myth, then, is further indication of the view, now current, that Pliny's *Natural History* is a sort of index of Roman imperialism.

1. An Authorial "I" in Pliny's Text

Work on Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* has, in recent years, caught fire, and along the way Pliny's reputation has been substantially rehabilitated. After a long period that was characterized by source criticism,² Pliny's "encyclopedia,"³ or perhaps better his "monumental cultural text" (Conte 1994: 90), has been studied intensely as a work with authorial intent. Most recently, several scholars have sought to articulate the relationship between knowledge and power and have viewed the work as a sort of catalog of the Roman achievement.⁴ To take the most obvious example, Trevor Murphy's 2004 book, subtitled "*The Empire in the Encyclopedia*," envisions Pliny's work as a whole as a sort of "triumphal exposition" (163), and the geographic books themselves as a series of "parading geographies," equating Pliny's text with the visual maps and trophies paraded throughout the streets of Rome. On Murphy's reading, the *Natural History* would have been seen as a natural complement to the triumph over Judaea in 71 CE, as well as its permanent memorial still displayed on the Arch of Titus.

It may seem surprising that an author like Pliny, who self-professedly compiled material from several sources (over one-hundred authors and some 2000 volumes) into a single work, can be seen as promoting an imperialist ideology. Indeed, for a long time the idea of the "credulous" Pliny endured, a figure who mindlessly passed on the work of previous scholars without conducting any research himself, prone to pass on erroneous facts and to fall prey to the marvelous and miraculous. As Serbat reminds us (1973: 40), however, Pliny is not a scholar in the modern sense, nor is he a specialist like, for instance, Archimedes. The vast scope of Pliny's enterprise meant that, to a large degree, he had to accept previous authors' works. Because Pliny's

² See Sallmann 1971: 21–164 for a comprehensive review of earlier work on the so-called geographic books (3–6).

³ On the use of "encyclopedia" in reference to Pliny's text see Doody 2009 (reprinted and expanded in Doody 2010), who remarks (4), "If Pliny's *Natural History* is an encyclopedia, it is not because of authorial intention;" rather, it is because of its reception history, linked as it has been with our modern conception of the encyclopedia.

⁴ Especially Naas 2002, Carey 2003, Beagon 2007, Pollard 2009, Jones-Lewis 2012, Libonati 2017, and the papers of Ash, Fear and Naas in Gibson and Morello 2011.

research, like much research in antiquity, was imitative rather than creative (Healy 1999: 73), it was inevitable that he would sometimes reproduce the errors and misconceptions of his predecessors.

Yet, several studies have revealed that he did not blindly accept what he read, but, as Sallmann succinctly puts it (1977: 174–5), “daß er sich nach Kräften um eine Scheidung von Sicherem, Unsicherem und Falschem bemüht.” Not being a specialist in physics, geography (either mathematical or descriptive), anthropology, botany, entomology, medicine or mineralogy, Pliny cannot be expected to control all of the facts—either 20,000 or 34,000, depending on whether one takes the number given in the index or adds up the numbers at the end of each book. Rather, he had to rely on his breadth of knowledge, based from his prodigious reading and excerpting of texts,⁵ to make authorial choices about what is true or not, as well as what he would include or not. The dry appearance of his encyclopedia in fact obscures the workings of an active intellect.

The very act of including or omitting material is an authorial decision. So too are the placement of that material and the manner in which the material is presented. For instance, Pliny's inclusion of a long list of “first inventors” (more fully discussed below), drawn from a Greek source⁶ but culminating in “first Romans,” may have been included as an implicit appropriation of Greek culture on the part of the Romans (7.191–209; Naas 2008: 140). Similarly, it stands to reason that his inclusion or exclusion of material that we call mythical in his geographic books (3–6)⁷ was determined not only by his sources, but also by his broader aims to Romanize what is essentially a Greek matrix of stories and figures. The ways in which he deploys stories and figures from the *spatium mythicum* ought to reveal something about Pliny's view of the world. As will become clear below, Pliny downplays stories from mythical Greece in favor of those that show the shift *from* Greece to other parts of the world, including and especially those that bring Greeks to Italy—a clear indication that Pliny's mythography is part of his wider plan to

⁵ As recorded in his nephew's account (Pliny, *Ep.* 3.5; cf. Beagon 2005: 30–36).

⁶ Probably drawing on Strato's polemical work against Ephorus' *Περὶ εὐρημάτων* as indicated in the index for book 7.

⁷ By “geographic” I do not mean mathematical geography, but (following Dueck 2012) “descriptive geography,” in which an author attempts to organize ancient space in narrative form. Unlike mathematical geography, its descriptive counterpart allows for the inclusion of, so to speak, three-dimensional historical, ethnographic, and mythical material.

celebrate the triumph of the Romans. But first, we must examine how Pliny approaches the stories from the mythical past.

2. Pliny and Myth

Even a cursory reading of Pliny's work reveals a rather critical attitude toward the Greeks, especially their credulity in believing fantastic stories or their capacity for inventing them. When he reports Arcadian rituals that result in lycanthropy, for instance, he expresses surprise that anyone could believe that humans could turn into wolves: "it's shocking how far Greek gullibility has gone!" (8.82 *mirum est quo procedat Graecia credulitas!*). When Pliny begins his account of Greece (4.1), he insists that it is not only the birthplace of literature, but also of *fabulositas* ("fabulous story-telling"). Sometimes, the Greeks are capable of outright lies, often outrageous: (5.4 *portentuosae Graeciae mendacia*, concerning Antaeus, Hercules and the Gardens of the Hesperides). And people can be gullible. Those who think that Sirens still live in India, Pliny exclaims, would also believe the story that snakes, by licking the ears of Melampus, gave him the power to understand the language of birds (10.137).

Nowhere is Pliny's attitude toward Greek stories more evident than in his extended treatment of those told about Phaethon and amber in his final book (37.31–44).⁸ "Here is the chance," Pliny enlightens us (7.31), "to expose the Greeks' foolishness (*vanitas*)." His readers need to know that "not everything the Greeks have handed down to us is to be admired." A special, though not exclusive, target of Pliny's bile are those poets (Aeschylus, Philoxenus, Euripides, Satyrus and Nicander are named) who place the story of Phaethon's fall along the Eridanus (Po) river.⁹ This is impossible, Pliny firmly tells us, because amber is not native to northern Italy. Here, Pliny is not critical of all the fantastic details in the story; that a human drove the chariot of the sun is not at issue. Instead, it is the *location* of the myth that is problematic.

Pliny reserves his strongest condemnation for Sophocles, whose geographical contortions deserve special derision (37.40–41, translation mine):

⁸ See Serbat 1973: 48, Healy 1999: 250–53. On the digression as signifier of Pliny's anti-Greek stance see Darab 2012: 151–54.

⁹ Pliny's subsequent treatment reveals that the poets were not unanimous in placing the Eridanus in Italy.

super omnes est Sophocles poeta tragicus, quod equidem miror, cum tanta gravitas ei cothurni sit, praeterea vitae fama alias principi loco genito Athenis et rebus gestis et exercitu ducto. hic ultra Indiam fieri dixit e lacrimis meleagridum avium Meleagrum deflentium. (41) quod credidisse eum aut sperasse aliis persuaderi posse quis non miretur? quamve pueritiam tam inperitam posse reperiri, quae avium ploratus annuos credat lacrimasve tam grandes avesve, quae a Graecia, ubi Meleager periit, ploratum adierint Indos?

Surpassing them all [in foolishness] is the tragic poet Sophocles. I for one am shocked at this, considering the weighty influence he holds because of his lofty style, and all the more when one considers that he otherwise held a high reputation in his way of life, was born in Athens, was active in politics, and served as general. This man said that amber was created beyond India from the tears of the Meleagrides birds that wept over Meleager. (41) Who wouldn't be shocked that he believed this or hoped that others could be persuaded that this was true? And does such a childish mindset exist that would believe that birds cry on a yearly basis, or that their tears would be so big, or that, when Meleager perished, birds native to Greece (cf. 10.74) went to India to cry for him?

Sophocles should have known better than to perpetuate such nonsense. In addition to geographical concerns, Pliny criticizes other unbelievable elements: birds' tears aren't so big, nor do they cry only once a year. At this point Pliny introduces an unnamed interlocutor to object: "So what? Don't poets tell many stories just as *mythical* as that?" (*quid ergo? non multa aequae fabulosa produnt poetae?*). Even so, Pliny replies, when the *facts* of the matter reveal that such a story is rubbish, we must dispose of it. This is, in Pliny's words, a typical example of the "intolerable falsehoods made with impunity" (*intoleranda mendaciorum impunitas*) so typical of the Greeks.

What Pliny is reacting to is the *implausibility* of a story, highlighted here by the key word *fabulosus* ("beyond belief"). This term, as has been discussed elsewhere in reference to Roman geographical works,¹⁰ can have either a temporal or spatial component, either set in distant antiquity or in distant lands. In Mela, it was primarily used for the former. The same is true for Pliny's geographical books, but in the rest of the *Natural History* it is commonly used for fabulous creatures still said to exist; see, for example, the section *de fabulosis avibus* noted in the Index for book 10.¹¹ This is perhaps

¹⁰ For Pliny see Naas 2002, esp. 252–53, for Mela Smith 2016: 97–98.

¹¹ At 10.136, Pegasus, Griffons and Sirenes are, in his judgment, tall tales (*Pegasos equino capite volucres et gryphas aurita aduncitate rostri fabulosos reor [...] nec Sirenes impetraverint fidem*), alongside the so-called "tragipan" and "galerita."

due to Pliny's nearly obsessive interest in *mirabilia*. Be that as it may, events denoted by *fabula* or as *fabulosa* mostly refer to those stories set in the past and which defy belief according to the laws of nature—"tall tales" that beggar belief.

We tend to think of myth as belonging to a certain time, set during a period of the distant past, a primordial period where gods interacted with heroes (Piérart 1983: 48). Did Pliny himself recognize a division between historical and mythical periods? He never explicitly addresses the issue, but there are signs that he does. A crucial piece of evidence comes from 6.49, which concerns Alexandria Eschate, founded by Alexander at the far limits of the *oecumene*:

arae ibi sunt ab Hercule ac Libero Patre constitutae, item Cyro et Samiramide atque Alexandro, finis omnium eorum ductus...

There are altars there set up by Hercules and Liber Pater, and likewise by Cyrus, Semiramis and Alexander, the end of the campaign for all of them...

The distinction is implicit, to be sure, yet Pliny seems to recognize a firm separation between a mythical "then"—when Liber and Hercules walked among humans—and a more verifiable historical present era, where Cyrus and Alexander are placed aside the legendary Semiramis.¹² It is possible that Pliny is following Varro in these categories, or at least shares a common viewpoint.¹³ According to Censorinus (*De die natali* 21.1–2), Varro divided up time into three periods: ἄδηλον (obscure) for the period before the flood, μυθικόν (mythical) for that between the flood and the first Olympiad, and ιστορικόν (historical) for the rest.¹⁴ We cannot know anything about the first period; we have stories, many fabulous, about the second (*multa in eo fabulosa referuntur*); the third contains events that we can verify and authenticate (*res in eo gestae veris historiis continentur*). A survey of Pliny's references to the time, however, strongly suggests that, for him, the Trojan War was the hinge between the "mythical" and "historical" periods, not the first Olympiad. This is perhaps because of Homer's position as the first

¹² Cf. 7.95, where Pompey's victories are compared first to Alexander's (*non modo*), then to those of Hercules and Father Liber (*sed etiam*). Some chapters later (6.59) Pliny reports an account that enumerates 153 kings from Pater Liber to Alexander the Great with a precise calculation of 6451 years and three months. Censorinus (21.2) offers a period of 1600 years for the *mythicum spatium*.

¹³ On Pliny's use of Varro, see Sallmann 1971, with further bibliography at pp. 89–164.

¹⁴ On the passage in Censorinus see Piérart 1983: 49–50 and Naas 2008: 147.



witness (*testis*) for cultural, historical and geographical data,¹⁵ as it was for Strabo, but one also notes that Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* stops with the death of Odysseus.

Stories from the second period—the *spatium mythicum*—are a record of the past, but they have been obscured by the fabulous nature of some of the accounts. It was up to a historian or other intellectual to decide whether to reject such stories or include them in some way or another. Generally speaking, “the tendency of historiography was to reduce the mythical past to that of humans” (Piérart 1983: 49), a process of historicization that was perhaps unavoidable. This is true even for Polybius, who vigorously rejected fabulous stories in favor of the verifiable facts of the present: now that “every sea and land has been thrown open, it would not be appropriate (πρέπον) to use the poets and mythographers” (4.40.2). And yet, in the chapter before, the historian reports that (“they say”) Jason sacrificed to the twelve gods at Hermaion along the Bosphorus (4.39.6), and three chapters later (4.43.6) he notes that further south was a place called the Cow, where (according to the μῦθοι) Io crossed over into Asia. By using unnamed sources the historian may distance himself from such stories, but he feels compelled to report them nonetheless. The alternative would be to leave the place as a bare name, without identity. As Clarke notes (1999: 95), despite Polybius' stark rejection of poets and mythographers, a “shared knowledge of the past, both mythical and historical” serves as the “active foil to geographical exposition.”

As the intermediate period between the antediluvian obscurity and modern historicity, the *spatium mythicum* provides insights into the past, providing kernels of truth embedded in a matrix of unbelievable stories. Pliny, himself a historian, does not believe that the laws of nature operated differently in the age of Greek heroes and applies a basic test: is the story plausible (*secundum naturam*) or not (*contra naturam*, thus *fabulosa*)?¹⁶ As a test case, let us examine Pliny's account of Achilles' discovery of a healing agent at 25.42. He offers two possibilities: Some claim that 1) he discovered a plant (called the Achilleon) that could heal wounds, others 2) that he was

¹⁵ Homer is cited several times for geographical data, mostly for the old name of an island: 3.57 (topography of Circe's Island); 3.82 (Inarime is Homeric name for Pithecusa); 3.96 (Calypso's Island Ogygia); 4.13 (Araethyrea Homeric name for Phlius); 4.28 (Homer's name for Greeks); 4.52 (Scheria and Phaeacia for Corcyra); 5.43 (breaks Ethiopians into two groups); 5.53 (Homer calls the Nile “Aegyptus”); 5.124 (lost Homeric towns in Troad); 5.141 (Adrastia Homeric name for Parus); 5.143 (Halizones). On Strabo and Homer see Biraschi 2005 and Clarke 1999: 248–49.

¹⁶ A criterion found also in Mela (Smith 2016: 98), as well as in the rhetorical tradition and Servius (Dietz 1995).



the “first” to discover that copper-rust was useful for plaster applications. The latter, he goes on, is why “Achilles is sometimes depicted in pictures as scraping rust off of a spear into the wound of Telephus.”¹⁷ Despite citing unnamed sources, there is nothing inherently impossible about Achilles’ healing of Telephus. The name of the plant itself suggests the story could have been true. The idea that verdigris could have been part of a plaster application is also plausible; indeed, the image of Achilles scraping rust off a spear, which must have arisen from somewhere, is evidence for the story.

For Pliny the line between what is plausible and not is somewhat blurred by his view of *Natura* herself, whose marvels (*mirabilia*) continue to make humanity reconsider what is possible.¹⁸ “How many things,” Pliny exclaims, “are judged impossible before they occur?” (2.208). Later, he echoes this sentiment, “When I observe Nature, she has continually induced me to believe that nothing about her is unbelievable” (11.6; cf. 22.1). For instance, that women change into men is not a myth (7.36 *non fabulosum*). On what grounds? Pliny found such an occurrence in records and himself was a witness (*vidi*) to such an event in Africa, thus lending credibility to other stories of sex-shifting women. Supporting evidence can render what was once *fabulosum* into something believable.

One might imagine that such a view of the creative power of Nature would have led Pliny to be more accepting of fabulous stories. Yet, as Naas (2008: 148) rightly concludes, “Le merveilleux ne sert pas à prouver l’affabulation: il illustre au contraire la puissance créatrice de la nature et la majesté de Rome.” Pliny’s obsession with *mirabilia*—the rare item that is worth noting because it is unusual—is rather further expression of the Roman Empire’s triumphant position at the epicenter of the world in space and time.

Stories told by poets and mythographers, on the other hand, must still be subjected to the test of plausibility and must conform to the laws of nature. Anything that patently defies belief is relegated to the category of *fabulosus*. To take an example from outside of the geographical books, in book 7 Pliny criticizes poets and historians for their outlandish claims about the lifespan of mammals. Hesiod, the first to discuss such matters, makes many animals

¹⁷ See, for instance, the famous Telephus relief in the house in Herculaneum of the same name; for the story see also Apd., *Epit.* 3.20.

¹⁸ On *natura* and *mirabilia* in Pliny’s work see Beagon 1992, 2007, 2011, Healy 1999: 61–70, Naas 2011.

more long-lived than humans: crows live nine human generations, deer four, ravens three (7.153), all of which Pliny regards as “unbelievable” (*fabulose, ut reor*). So too Anacreon’s account of humans living 160 (Cinyras) or 200 years (Aegimius), Hellanicus’ claim to have found whole nations in Epirus who lived to be 200 years (7.154), Ephorus’ assertion that Arcadian kings lived to be 300, and Xenophon’s tale of a father-son duo who lived 600 and 800 years (7.155)

Such stories, however, are not supported by any evidence and defy belief. Pliny corrects the record by moving to incontrovertible cases (7.156, *ad confessa transeamus*) that put the outer limits on a human life at about 120 years, rare though that might have been. Most of the examples Pliny presents are between 90–100 years of age, but he presents two cases of people living to 150 years of age. Pliny passes along Mucianus’ claim that people on Mt. Tmolus live to that age (7.159).¹⁹ A Roman example, one Titus Fullonius from Bononia, seems verified (*verum*) by the emperor Claudius’ exacting research into the matter.

How does Pliny explain the extravagant claims of poets and historians about the life spans of humans? It is, he claims, their ignorance about local methods of time-reckoning. Some races count both summer and winter, other all four seasons, as a year; the Egyptians reckon each month as a year, accounting for their claim that people live over 1000 years (7.155). This is of course special pleading, though Augustine, Macrobius and Solinus all take him at face value (see Beagon 2005 *ad loc.*). Implicitly, Pliny acknowledges that earlier thinkers applied critical approaches to the past, but failed because of their methods were faulty. More importantly for our purposes, in a process we will discuss more below, Pliny attempts to account for *how* the false information became “mythologized” through misunderstanding of language, one of the common methods of rationalizers like Palaephatus: a “year” is not always a year.

A similar attempt to show how real events could become mythologized is found at 10.126–7, where Pliny discusses the birds of Diomedes, located on an island off the coast of Apulia, where they watched over the tomb and sanctuary of Diomedes. Pliny reports the unusual behavior of these birds: they flock around non-Greeks (*barbaroi*), screeching, whereas they fawn on Greeks in a kindly fashion and cleanse Diomedes’ tomb daily. It is from their behavior that the metamorphosis myth arose (*unde origo fabulae Diomedis*

¹⁹ Elsewhere Pliny rejects Mucianus’ claim to have read a letter written by Sarpedon in Lycia (13.88).

socios in earum effigies mutatos, “from this arose the story that Diomedes’ men were turned into the form of these birds”).²⁰ The idea that a story originated from a real event that was subsequently mythologized is also found at 6.79, where the myth of Liber’s birth from Jupiter’s thigh is explained by the confusion of language about Mt. Meros (Thigh Mountain, perhaps taken from Mela 3.66; see Smith 2016: 99). One is reminded of the common final statement in Palaephatus’ stories to the effect of “this is how the myth arose.”

Pliny frequently resorts to this sort of explicit rationalization to explain how implausible stories arise from real events. We will return to this interpretative approach in our discussion of the geographical books, but let us return briefly to the discussion of amber presented above. After criticizing the Greek *fabulositas* intensely, Pliny eventually offers a plausible explanation for why the Greeks set Phaethon’s myth along the Po River: the Veneti, called Eneti by the Greeks, were nothing more than important middlemen in the importing and marketing of this substance (37.43). Pliny offers further evidence from the region: peasant women from Transpadana commonly wore necklaces of amber (37.44). Though not native to the area, amber was a visible commodity in the area, hence the placement of the myth in northern Italy.

The process of rationalization can thus be explicitly described—think of Palaphaetus, who is at pains to explain systematically how myths came to exist—or implicitly adopted. Implicit rationalization may be found in the “first inventor” (πρῶτος εὐρητής) motif, which is a “common fallback for rationalizers” (Hawes 2014: 28).²¹ This interpretative method is but one to offer a coherent explanation for how mythologized stories came to be, one that imagines the mythical world as a time of major human technological progress. One can see this process at work in Pliny’s lengthy list at 7.191–209,²² where the list, though predominantly mythological, is mixed with historical characters—another indication of the merging of the mythical and historical periods. Only a few here can be adduced. Bellerophon was the first to ride a horse; the Thessalians from Pelion, meanwhile, were the first to fight

²⁰ Compare the story of Diomedes’ birds at Antoninus Liberalis 31, where, contrary to Pliny’s explanation, the behavior of the birds (originally Diomedes’ men) is preserved *through* the process of metamorphosis; see also Forbes Irving 1992: 230–32.

²¹ For “first inventors,” which figure prominently in rationalizing mythographers like Palaephatus see Hawes *passim*, Stern 1996: 18–20; on the origin of the motif up to the Peripatetic period see Kleingünther 1933.

²² See Naas 2008, arguing that Pliny is appropriating Greek culture as part of his Roman imperialist work.

on horseback and so were called Centaurs (7.202). Epeus was the first to create a battle ram, which was at first called a “horse,” but the name had since been changed to “ram” (*equum, qui nunc aries appellatur, in muralibus machinis Epium ad Troiam*, 7.202). As for ships, Erythras was the first to sail by raft in the sea named after him (7.206); Danaus, who also invented wells (7.195), was the first to sail on a ship, but Jason was the first—at least according to Philostephanus, a mythographer—to sail on the so-called “long ship” (7.207). But Icarus was the first to invent sails, while Daedalus came up with the mast and antennae (7.209). These last details line up with Palaephatus 12, where Daedalus and Icarus do not “fly away,” but simply lower themselves down from their prison cell and board a boat, which seemed to the onlookers “to fly away,” hence the myth (see Stern 1996 ad loc.; cf. Paus. 9.11.4–5).

To summarize, Pliny's attitude toward the *spatium mythicum* is clearly similar to that of other historians and rationalizing mythographers: if cleansed of unbelievable elements (or already clean), events can be seamlessly integrated into a geographical matrix to explain how the world, and the names used to describe it, came to be. What is clearly implausible (Pegasuses), or contradicted by other facts (amber along the Po), must be rejected, omitted or, at the very least, kept at a distance by attributing the claim to one or more sources. This last approach, common in Pliny as a sign of detachment,²³ will become especially important in the next section. What follows will not be a survey of myth defined as fabulous stories of the past (*fabulosa*), but rather the way in which Pliny treats and reports events and figures that were thought to occur in the *spatium mythicum*.

3. Mythography in Pliny's Description of the World

The first half of Pliny's vast work is structured to move from a cosmic perspective from above (book 2), down to the terrestrial sphere (books 3–6) and humanity (book 7), and finally through less complex life forms, following the *scala naturae* (animals books 8–11, plants and botany 12–19). In his description of the known world (3–6), Pliny seeks to provide a complete but efficient account of the “places, nations, seas, towns, harbors, mountains, rivers, distances, as well as people past and present” (Index, 1.3, 4 and 6). So that the geographical books do not become outsized, Pliny's exposition is necessarily brief, consisting of, he explicitly tells us, a list of bare

²³ See especially Serbat 1973 and now Naas 2008.

names (*nuda nomina*, 3.2). In terms of sources, it seems likely that Pliny did use a more or less comprehensive periplus (“coastal circuit”), probably from the late Republican era, that served as a basic framework for his account. Yet, as he informs us early in book 3, he does not use one authority, preferring the accounts of authors who lived near the places described, for instance Turranius Gracilis, who was born near the Straits of Gibraltar (3.3) and is cited in books 9 and 18 for information pertaining to Spain and Africa (9.11).²⁴ To graft other material²⁵ onto this basic geographical network, he certainly drew from various other works, including Agrippa’s *commentarii*, administrative documents, any number of Varro’s works, Mucianus’ work on *mirabilia* while governor of Lycia, Cato’s *Origines*, an anonymous Περὶ νήσων that probably included material from Callimachus’ work of the same title, and, of course, his own experiences in Spain, Africa and Germany. If the index can be trusted, Pliny used his predecessor Mela, although he never cites him by name in the body of the work. The close correspondence of language in some places strongly suggests that Pliny took specifically *mythical* material from Mela. Otherwise, we would have to suppose that the periplus that served as the basis for both the *Chorographia* and the *Naturalis Historia* already included mythological references shared by Pliny and Mela.

As might be expected, Pliny’s treatment of myth in the geographical books is similar to that found in the rest of the work. Some events or peoples from the *spatium mythicum* are either dismissed outright as *fabulosus* or attributed to an unidentified source. The story of Hercules and Pyrene is judged to be especially unbelievable (3.8, *fabulosa in primis arbitor*), although we are not given the details. For that one would have to go, of all places, to Silius Italicus (3.415–441), whose poem shares occasional points of contact with Pliny’s text. The Hyperboreans are celebrated for marvelous miracles too unbelievable to be true (4.89 *fabulosis celebrata miraculis*). It is handed down in myths that the Symplegades crash together (4.92 *traditae fabulis*); as we will see below, this implausible detail arose from an optical illusion. There are many unbelievable stories told about the river of Oblivion and the area

²⁴ For a convenient survey of Pliny’s sources see Healy 1999: 42–58 (local authorities like Turranius on p. 55); see also Sallmann 1971 *passim*, Naas 2002: 143–45.

²⁵ We might use the so-called “Klein-Elemente of Sallmann (1971: 192–201) to categorize the kinds of information that can be added to a geographical matrix, with caution: 1) antiquaria; 2) foundation myths; 3) mythology; 4) etymologies; 5) metanomasia; 6) ethnographic information; 7) history; 8) paradoxography. Such categories cannot account for instances where a mythical story also explains a foundation or a place name (categories 2, 4, and 5).

around the Lixos river and Mt. Atlas (4.115, 5.2–6).²⁶ One of Pliny's criticisms of myth is that the same story might be said to occur in different places, thus betraying its falsehood. The location of the Garden of the Hesperides is placed now in Cyrenaica (5.31 *vagantibus Graeciae fabulis*), now near the Lixos (5.3, 5.46). Compare also the different locales for the Laestrygonians at Formiae (3.59) and in Sicily (3.89). Greece itself (4.1) is associated with *fabulositas*, which is in a later book connected directly to poetical fictions (7.101 *poetica...fabulositas*).

In addition to outright rejection Pliny can also signal his suspicion about the truth of a story or other statement by attributing it to specific or unnamed sources. This distancing technique has been well documented for Pliny's other books. Serbat 1973 has shown, through a survey of books 28–30, that when Pliny cites specific sources it is for explanations to which he does not subscribe. In turn, “les faits indubitables ou plausibles restent généralement anonymes” (42), that is, presented as Pliny's own. More recently, Naas 2008 has argued for the same in reference to book 7. In the geographical books Pliny does not generally attribute any detail from the *spatium mythicum* to a specific source, although from time to time we do find a source named. Varro is almost certainly the source for the Latin and Greek etymological interpretations of Lusitania (3.8).²⁷ He may have been the source for other etymologies as well. Cato, whose *Origines* would have been an obvious source for Pliny's description of Italy in book 3, is named as the authority for the claim that the Veneti are of Trojan descent (3.130; however cf. 6.5, citing Cornelius Nepos). Later, Cato is cited as the source for a non-mythological explanation for the Lepontii, whereas “everyone else” (*ceteri*) derives the name from a mythical episode involving Hercules (3.134).²⁸ In his discussion of the name of Crete, found in one of the *Zitatenneste* common for the islands, we find cited Dosiades (the island was named after Crete, daughter of one of the

²⁶ For Atlas at the limits of knowledge and Pliny's “symbolic representation” of it see Hamdoun 2009.

²⁷ NH 3.8, *in universam Hispaniam...M. Varro pervenisse Hiberos et Persas et Phoenicas Celtasque et Poenos tradit. lusum enim Liberi Patris aut lyssam cum eo bacchantium nomen dedisse Lusitaniae et Pana praefectum eius universae* (cf. Sallmann 1971: 237–38). For the story of Liber and Pan in Spain one has to consult with [Ps.]-Plutarch, *De Fluviis* 16.3, citing Sosthenes' *Iberica* (book 13!): “After he [Dionysus] conquered Iberia, he left Pan in charge of the area. He changed the name to Pania after himself, but the people who came after pronounced it slightly differently (παρραγώως), ‘Spania.’” It is doubtful whether Sosthenes ever existed (he is *only* cited, twice, in the *De Fluviis*, notorious for its fictitious citations; see Cameron 2004: 131–34), but Pliny's report confirms, if not the etymology, at least the detail that Pan was put in charge of the Iberian peninsula.

²⁸ On Cato as a source see Sallmann 1971: 40–41.

Hesperides) and Anaximander (after the king of the Curetes), as well as Philistides and Crates (called Aeria first, then Curetis, 4.58). It is clear from his distinct presentation of the islands that Pliny is drawing on a specialized work that itself drew on Callimachus' *Κτίσεις νήσων καὶ πόλεων*; such a work doubtlessly included mythical explanations for earlier names.²⁹ Homer, too, is frequently cited as a source for the old names for places as well as other ethnographic details, though almost certainly through intermediaries (such as the previously mentioned work on islands) or from exegetical works on Homer.³⁰ All of these, we might say, are incidental references to a mythical detail.

Most often, however, Pliny reports an event from the *spatium mythicum* by citing unnamed sources.³¹ A brief survey follows:

ut credunt(ur): 3.4 (Columns of Hercules), 3.134 (Lepontii), 4.44 (Pygmies driven away by cranes), 4.89 (Hyperboreans)

existimant: 3.59 (Laestrygonians); 3.94 (Aeolus commanded winds); 4.120 (Geryon), 6.157 (Minaei descend from Minos); cf. 3.96 (Homer calls Calypso's island Ogygia)

dixerunt/-ere: 3.60 (*veteres*, contest between Liber and Ceres); 3.73 (*aliqui*, Crataeis mother of Scylla); 6.32 (*Graeci*, Aria, where birds shoot arrows)

memorant: 3.123 (Hercules traversing Alps); cf. 5.31 (Hesperides);

memoria: 3.34 (Hercules in Campi Lapidei)

tradunt: 3.8 (Liber and Pan, Hercules and Pyrene, the latter noted as *fabulosa*); 3.94 (Aeolus, rationalized); 3.128 (Argo); 4.92 (Symplegades); 5.43 (Homer on two Aethiopias); 5.46 (Blemmyes); 5.109 (Pygmies; cf. 6.70).

ut volunt: 4.25 (Thebes home of Liber and Hercules)

produnt/proditur (memoriae): 4.44 (Pygmies), 4.66 (Delos floating), 4.91 (Hyperboreans), 6.197 (Aegipans and Satyrs near Atlas)

interpretare: (of a Greek word) 3.134 (Lepontii); 5.3 (Serpents guarding the Gardens of the Hesperides, rationalized)

²⁹ Zehnacker and Silberman 2015: xx and Sallmann 1971: 52–54

³⁰ See above, n. 15, for references to Homer. To take one example of Pliny's use of Homeric scholarship, at 5.143 Pliny claims *hos Homerus Halizonas dixit, quando praecingitur gens mari*, "Homer called these 'Halizones,' because the nation is surrounded by the sea," as if from ἅλ- "salt, sea," and ζώνυμι "gird, encircle." Homer, however, says no such thing, offering us only the bare place name in his catalog of Trojans (2.856). Instead, one must look to the Homeric scholia for such a detail (Erbse): οὔτοι γὰρ οἰκοῦσι γῆν ὑπὸ θαλάσσης ἐζωσμένην (cf. Steph. Byz. s.v.).

³¹ Cf. Sallmann 1971: 174–76.

(ut) ferunt (common in Mela): 5.69 (Iope founded before the flood), 5.128 (Canopus named for Menelaus' helmsman, Andromeda myth), 6.38 (Albani descended from Jason), 6.76 (Hercules and the Pandae).

putant: 3.112 (Umbrians named after rain), 6.16 (Dioscurias founded by Jason's charioteers), 6.158 (Rhadamaei < Rhadamanthus)

Such an attribution does not necessarily mean that Pliny rejects the story, only that he wishes to pass it off as a tradition. Such phrases can signal to the reader that suspicion is warranted, however, especially when he adds some other indication of disbelief, such as when he adds a rationalizing explanation or suggests that he is appealing to a "local tradition." In terms of the latter, we find Pliny ascribing to locals a mythical explanation for the formation of the Mediterranean Sea (3.4):

Abila Africae, Europae Calpe, laborum Herculis metae, quam ob causam indigenae columnas eius dei vocant creduntque perfossas exclusa antea admisisse maria et rerum naturae mutasse faciem.

...Abila on the African side, Calpe on the European, the limits of Hercules' labors. This is why the locals (*indigenae*) call them the columns of this god and believe that they, when dug out, let in the seas that had been previously kept out and changed the face of nature.

Is this what the locals said, or is Pliny simply using the ploy as a way to push the authority off from himself? It is hardly likely that Pliny was using first hand, local information for the story of Hercules' ripping apart the mountains and letting in the sea. It is commonly found in mythographical, geographical and poetical texts. Diodorus Siculus (4.18.5) attributes such a view to "some people" (τινές), and Seneca's *Hercules Furens* includes this event as one of many examples of Hercules' breaking through natural barriers (237–38). A comparison with Mela is instructive, not least because it suggests that Pliny may have used Mela as a source (1.27, bold shared language):

hunc Abilam, illum Calpen vocant, Columnas Herculis utrumque. Addit fama nominis fabulam, Herculem ipsum iunctos olim perpetuo iugo diremisse colles, atque ita exclusum antea mole montium oceanum ad quae nunc inundat admissum.

Pliny's attribution of a myth to locals—of which Mela was fond (Smith 2016: 98 with n. 33)—is but one of the many ways that an author can create an illusion of an original enactment of mythical storytelling.

If not outright rejecting fabulous stories or distancing himself through the attribution of such stories to an unnamed "tradition," Pliny also will reject an implausible story but also explain how the myth came to be—an example

of the explicit kind of rationalization that we saw above. We encounter several instances of such an interpretation. A peculiar rock formation that happens to look like a ship off the coast of Phalacrum, Corcyra, gave rise to the myth that it was once one of Ulysses' ships that had been transformed there (4.53; cf. *Od.* 13.84–88). The myth that serpents guarded the Gardens of the Hesperides was merely the mythologization of the winding channel from the sea that “guarded them like two serpents,” a common explanation based on the corruption of language or a natural feature in the landscape.³² At 3.94 Pliny offers an explanation for the winds supposedly “obeying” Aeolus: the locals believed that they could predict wind patterns three days before based on the smoke coming from the mountain on the island of Strongyle—hence the myth.³³ In distant India the mountain named Merus (Grk. “Thigh Mountain”) gave rise to the myth that Liber was born from Jupiter’s thigh (6.79), a story that Mela—likely Pliny’s source—harshly rebukes (3.66). Another form of rationalizing is Euhemerism, an interpretative process according to which great men and women who have contributed something to human progress have been mythologized as divinities. Such was Jupiter Belus, the inventor of heavenly knowledge in Babylon, whose accomplishments prompted the locals to build a temple for him (6.121).

The most extensive rationalization involves the Cyanean rocks at the mouth of the Bosphorus (4.92):

in Ponto duae...Cyanaeae, ab aliis Symplegades appellatae traditaeque fabulis inter se concucurrisset, quoniam parvo discretiae intervallo ex adverso intrantibus geminae cernebantur paulumque deflexa acie coeuntium speciem praebebant.

In Pontus are the two Cyanean rocks, called Symplegades by others, and it is recorded in myth that they crashed together. This is because these two islands, separated by a small distance, look like two separate ones if entering straight on, but even at a small angle they appear like they are coming together.

³² Cf. Healy 1999: 12. Desanges 1980 ad loc.

³³ In this interpretation Pliny echoes that of Diodorus Siculus 5.7.7 (trans. Oldfather): “This is the Aeolus to whom, the myths relate, Odysseus came in the course of his wanderings. He was, they say, pious and just and kindly as well in his treatment of strangers; furthermore, he introduced sea-farers to the use of sails and had learned, by long observation of what the fire foretold, to predict with accuracy the local winds, this being the reason why the myth has referred to him as the ‘keeper of the winds.’”

The myth, then, derives from an optical illusion based on the angle at which one approaches the Bosphorus. Nature has deceived travelers, who went on to invent the myth. Compare Mela's non-rationalizing version (*Chor.* 2.99): *duae parvae parvoque distantes spatio et aliquando creditae dictaeque concurrere; et Cyanaeae vocantur et Symplegades* ("two small islands separated by just a little space and sometimes believed and said to crash together; they are called Cyanaeae and Symplegades").

An extremely sophisticated form of historicization occurs at 6.182, where Pliny offers a brief history of Ethiopia. "The Romans," Pliny assures his readers, "did not devastate Ethiopia." Rather, after a long period of ascendancy up into the age of Memnon, it was a series of wars with Egypt that ruined this once powerful nation. To prove the extent of Ethiopia's power during the mythical period, he uses myth as evidence: "it is clear from the myths (*fabulis*) of Andromeda that Ethiopia ruled Syria and our shore (the Levant) in the age of Cepheus." Here we can see how the *spatium mythicum* can transmit true information in the guise of *fabulae*, so long as the absurd parts of the story are ignored. Pliny's detail, an obvious attempt to reconcile the two traditions that placed the Andromeda myth now in Ethiopia, now in Joppa,³⁴ is unique in that it gives Ethiopia such a wide-ranging empire. One wonders if he found such an interpretation in a source or if this is Pliny's own synthesis of disparate traditions.

Names, of course, are the threads in a geographical tapestry, and names themselves can be bearers of meaning. Some offer a link to the world of gods and heroes without an explicit statement on the part of the author, especially if the place name itself includes a mythical figure (such as *portus Herculis Monoeci*, Monaco, at 3.47³⁵), but some mythical names are more recognizable than others. Those from the Homeric and Vergilian epics, studied intensely in the course of education, hardly needed explicit explanations. The *scopuli tres Cyclopum* (3.89) would be immediately recognized as part of the Ulysses myth. A brief remark, however, would emphasize the connection to the mythical world. The link found in less explicit names, however, required explanation, such as the Heniochoi, descended from the "charioteers" of

³⁴ For the Andromeda myth in Iope see Kaizer 2011. Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.2), explains that the Jews are exiles who, afraid of king Cepheus, fled from Ethiopia and settled in Phoenicia—thus reconciling the variant locations for the myth.

³⁵ From this bare name, almost certainly related to Hercules because of his temple there (Strabo 4.6.3), a later author could assume, erroneously, that Hercules had founded the city, just as Ammianus Marcellinus did (15.10.9).

Jason, who also (according to some) founded Dioscurias, a once-flourishing city along the eastern side of the Black Sea (6.16). Given the enormous number of names that Pliny records in books 3–6 it is clear that he cannot comment on *all* of those that are associated with the *spatium mythicum*, but must instead be selective. Pliny’s inclusion of such references could be idiosyncratic, a hodge-podge of random items taken from his sources and vast reading. To a certain extent any selection of mythical references has to be idiosyncratic, but that does not mean that it must be random. Indeed, as I will argue below, the consistent reminder of the specifically Greek *spatium mythicum* is calculated to emphasize that that world has fundamentally shifted to the world of the here and now, that is, to the Roman Empire. This “replacement” story is especially highlighted by the curious fact that Pliny “hides” the myth of mainland Greece and the Peloponnesus.

First, let us briefly consider some of the many names on which Pliny does not comment. In his brief note on Circeii he, citing Homer, is concerned only with the changes to its topography, once an island, now a plain (3.57); compare Mela’s explicit note that it was “once Circe’s home” (*Chor.* 2.71). Caieta (3.59) Palinurus (3.71) and Misenum (3.61) are mere names nothing more (see below); Mela directly connects all three to the Aeneas myth (*Chor.* 2.69, 2.70). Along the east coast of Sicily, one encounters in order the *scopuli tres Cyclopum*, *Portus Ulixes...intus Laestrygoni campus* without elaboration (3.89). In Greece itself, to which we will return below, Oeta does not include any mention of Hercules’ death (4.28), nor is any myth associated with Calydon (4.6) or Sparta (4.16). It may be true that Pliny’s audience did not need any explicit mention of a myth with these places. Surely his readers would have met these figures while reading Homer, Vergil and other poets. Yet other more obscure place and ethnographic names remain unexplained. The Ilienses on Sardinia, labeled *celeberrimi* (3.85), are not connected to the Trojans, as they are in Pausanias (10.17.7–8; Mela *Chor.* 2.123 called them “the oldest people of Sardinia”). Niobe, Amymone and Psamathe are springs in the Argolid, nothing more (4.17). Pamphylia was once called Mopsopia, but we are not told why (5.96).

For some place names Pliny adopts specifically a non-mythical explanation even when a mythical explanation was available. At 4.51 Pliny explains the name “Aegean” as deriving from a crag (*scopulus*)—so small it can hardly be called an “island”—between Tenedos and Chios. The name of this island, Aex, derives from a kind of goat (*capra*, Grk. *aix*), further

described as “suddenly leaping (*exiliens*) from the middle of the sea.”³⁶ It is impossible to tell whether Pliny is consciously suppressing the mythical explanation, but we see the same decision for the Myrtoan (< Myrtos, a small island south of Geraestus, 4.51) and Icarian (< island Icaros, 4.68) seas (cf. Carpathian Sea at 5.122). Even if the derivation of Aegean from Aegeus is not part of the Greek tradition, it seems to have been common in Latin.³⁷ In any case, Pliny simply ignores the stories of Myrtilos and Icaros in favor of more pedestrian explanations.

In a similar vein, Pliny rejects a derivation of a place name said to derive from one of Aeneas' followers (3.82):

Prochyta, non ab Aeneae nutrice sed quia profusa ab Aenaria erat; Aenaria a statione navium Aeneae, Homero Inarime dicta, Pithecusa, non a simiarum multitudine, ut aliqui existimavere, sed a figlinis doliorum.

Prochyta is not named after Aeneas's nurse, but because it was “poured forth” from Aenaria; Aenaria, in turn, was named after the fact that Aeneas stopped there, but was called Inarime by Homer and Pithecusae, not after the crowd of monkeys (πίθηκοι), as some have supposed, but after earthen *dolia* (= Grk. πίθοι).

Pliny corrects the version that connects the island to the Aeneas myth in favor of one based on a Greek etymology from προχυτός,³⁸ which accords with his earlier expressed “scientific” view that it was created when the mountains “tumbled forward” (*provolutis montibus*, 2.203). As we noted above, neither Caieta, Misenum, nor Palinurus are connected explicitly to the Aeneas voyage, nor is the Achates river near Mt. Eryx (3.90). The only reference to Aeneas at all is the alternate name for Pithecusa, Aenaria, in the passage given above; this is where Aeneas' ships paused. Indeed, the “Trojan” element of Italic settlement seems muted, found only at 3.63, where the

³⁶ One wonders whether this is hinting at another Greek etymology, from ἀίσσω, “to leap.”

³⁷ The first clear association between Aegeus and Aegean, perhaps implicit in Greek myth, is found in Hyginus, *Fab.* 43, 242 and Serv. ad Aen. 3.74; Gantz 1993: 276, “not impossibly the whole idea is a Roman notion.” Strabo 8.7.4 says it is “probable” that it got its name from Aegae on Euboea.

³⁸ For other Greek etymologies from Greek myth see 3.8 (Lusitania < λύσσα, “madness” of Bacchants); 3.134 (Lepontii < λείπω “left behind,” Euganeis < εὐγενής, “well-born”); 4.44 (Gerania, “Crane-land,” where the Pygmies were routed); 4.83 (Dromos Achilleos, where Achilles “exercised”); 5.136 (Chios < χιών “snow”); 6.15 Heniochi (< ἡνίοχοι, “charioteers” of Castor and Pollux); 5.106 (Aulocrene, where Marsyas competes in a flute contest) 6.79 (Mt. Meros, “Thigh,” origin of Pater Liber's birth from Jupiter's thigh; cf. Mela 3.66) Cf. 3.50, where the Tyrrhenians are called Tusci in the Greek language from sacrifice, that is from θύειν; 3.112 (Umbrians, the “oldest Italian race” that survived a flood < ὄμβρος, “rain”). Pliny obviously assumes a firm knowledge of Greek on the part of his audience.

Corani are said to have descended from Trojan Dardanus, and 3.130, where, according to Cato, the Veneti are descended from Trojan stock without specifically naming Antenor.

By contrast, the Greek presence in Italy—indeed the whole world—is frequently emphasized by Pliny. In particular, the travels of Ulysses and Diomedes after the Trojan War are foundational for Italy. On the west coast of Italy, one meets several places associated with the Sirenes, creatures whose hybrid nature Pliny elsewhere expresses doubts (10.136): Leucosia (3.85), Surrentum (3.62), and Naples, the last of which is called Parthenope “after the Siren’s tomb.” Near Leucosia are small islands called “Ithacesiae” because that’s where Ulysses surveyed the area from a lookout (3.85). Aeolus, considered a real king (see above, rationalization), features prominently in the discussion of the Aeolian islands (3.92). These are the explicit references; as noted above, several other groups that Ulysses met in his travels are preserved in place names.

Argive Diomedes’ presence in Italy, dating to at least Mimnermus’ day, also looms large on the east coast of Italy. In Apulia he founds Arpi, once called Argos Hippium, after having destroyed two cities and their inhabitants (3.104). His father-in-law Daunus gave his name to the Daunii in the area. Off Apulia lies his island, Diomedia (3.151), though he saves his discussion of Diomedes’ birds until book 10. Finally, the northern and once wealthy city Spina is said to have been founded by Diomedes (3.120), a detail not found in any other authority.³⁹ Diomedes influence, then, stretches throughout Italy

Other Greek heroes emerge in Italy as well. In addition to the several references to the “Pelasgians” we find Ardea founded by Perseus’ mother Danae (3.56), doubtlessly drawing on the Vergilian tradition.⁴⁰ Jason, too, makes an appearance at the Foce del Sele, where he was said to have built the temple to Argive Juno (3.70), which Strabo also calls Ἰάσονος ἱδρυμα (Strabo 6.1.1; see 5.2.6 for Jason’s attempt to sail to Circe’s island). Normally, the Argonaut myth is confined to the Adriatic.⁴¹ Finally, there are a number of foundation myths in southern Italy attributed to earlier figures

³⁹ See Briquel 1987, who views the story of foundation by Diomedes as a late development for propagandistic reasons. On the rich tradition of Diomedes in Italy and the *Aeneid* see Fletcher 2006.

⁴⁰ See Vergil, *Aeneid* 7.409–11 (*quam dicitur urbem / Acrisoneis Danae fundasse colonis / praecipiti delata noto*) with Servius *ad Aen.* 7.372.

⁴¹ Pola (3.29) and Olcinium (3.146) were founded by the Colchians, presumably in pursuit of Medea, while the nearby Absyrtydes Islands (3.151) were named after Medea’s brother.

such as Boeotian Messapus, Peucetius and Oenotrus (sons of Lycaon, 3.99), as well as Iapyx son of Daedalus (3.102). The Greek presence in Pliny's geographical works is accentuated, while that of Aeneas seems to be downplayed.

Surprisingly, Hercules does not figure at all in Italy. But as expected he is present, sometimes alongside Liber Pater, throughout the rest of the world, from the far west (3.4 columns of Hercules, 4.120 Geryones, 5.2–6 Antaeus, 5.46 Pharusii left behind by Hercules), through France (3.34), the Alpes Graiae (3.123, 3.134 Lepontii left behind by Hercules), to furthest India (4.39, 6.49, 6.76) and Taprobane, where he is worshiped by the locals (6.89). The great figures who first opened up the vast world are the Greeks who traveled the earth during the age of gods and heroes: Liber (euhemerized at 7.191), Jason and the Argonauts (the first to sail a long ship 7.206–7) and Hercules, and finally the Greek heroes after the Trojan War.

When we turn to the Greek mainland and the Peloponnesus (Pliny's third *sinus* 4.1–74), however, Pliny turns virtually silent about the age of heroes—this despite the illustrious position Greece holds in literature and myth. Before he embarks on his description, he makes it clear that Greece is worth dwelling on precisely because it is the area from which not only *litterarum claritas*, but also *fabulositas* emerged and shone brightly (4.1). Because of Greece's fame, Pliny intends to “linger on this *sinus* for a little while” (*quapropter paululum in eo commorabimur*). Yet, despite Greece's position as a literary and cultural light, Pliny's exposition hardly includes a reference to any myth associated with it. At 4.25 Thebes is, “they say,” the home (*patria*) of Hercules and Liber. Helicon is also said to be the home of the Muses, perhaps a testimony to the *litterarum claritas* and *fabulositas*. There is a very brief mention of the kings of Thessaly, including Graecus and Hellen (4.28). Finally, Orthrys is quickly described as *Lapitharum sedes* (4.30). That is all. Pliny's account seems barren compared to Pomponius Mela's almost lyrical celebration at 2.35–36 (compare the radically different approaches to Crete at Pliny 4.58 and Mela 2.112). Even Thrace gets more attention than its southern neighbor (4.41 Orpheus, 4.42 Diomedes and Cicones, 4.43 Polydorus, 4.47 Tereus). Major centers in Greece that are intimately associated with myth, such as Calydon (4.6), Sparta (4.16), Argos (4.17–18), Arcadia (4.21) and Oeta (4.28), are passed over without reference to myth: no mention of Meleager, Leda and Helen, Danaus and Atreus, Lycaon, or Hercules. Instead, Greece is simply the locus of divine cult: 4.2 (Jupiter Dodonaeus), 4.5 (Apollo at Actium), 4.7 (Oracle of Apollo at Delphi), 4.14

(Olympian Jupiter in Elis), 4.18 (Aesculapius in Epidaurus), 4.21 (Jupiter Lycaeus in Arcadia).

It is possible that Pliny simply thought that the mythical period of Greece was well enough known that he did not have to be explicit in his account. Yet, the almost complete omission of references to the *spatium mythicum* in that region remains curious, not least because of the insistence elsewhere that the Greeks spread throughout the world during that period. Even northern peoples such as the Albani near the Caspian Sea were said to be descendants of Jason (6.38; cf. Strabo 11.4.8, Tac. *Ann.* 6.39); the Minaei and Rhadamaei (in modern Yemen) were said to have drawn their lineage back to Minos and Rhadamanthus. The Heniochi and the city Dioscorias on the distant shores of the Black Sea go all the way back to the Argonaut adventure. Pliny could have simply omitted such connections, but he included them, I think, to remind the reader of his dry catalog that the Greek adventurers paved the way for the current world. In other words, there is a connection between the here and now to a there and then. The names in the world that bear the mark of the *spatium mythicum* highlight the unmistakable fact that Greek stories—if the fantastic elements are removed—tell of a world that was made Greek by Greek adventurers. And no place in all the world was made more Greek than Italy—so much so that Pliny emphasizes Ulysses and Diomedes over the Trojan hero Aeneas.

The Greek center, then, once exploded outward to reach the far corners of the known world, and the first to do so were the Greek heroes who traveled the earth, leaving traces from the far west to the far east. But in Pliny's conception of the world the former center has now been eliminated in favor of the new one, that is, Rome and its empire. As Pliny reminds us, "right here in the *middle of the world* there once lived the Laestrygonians and Cyclopes" (7.9). The barbaric peoples who lived on the edges of the earth in the past have morphed into the cultural center of a new empire with Rome firmly in command. Pliny's effacement of Greece and its *fabulositas* signals a new world order, one that rejects, as far as possible, the past in favor of the present. If Mela's mythographical picture of the world is both lyrical and poetic despite his skepticism toward the stories, Pliny's mythography is focused, in part, on the replacement of Greece with Italy Rome.

This is not to say that every choice Pliny makes is a conscious approval of imperial Rome. Some references to the mythical world were doubtlessly made impulsively, whether based on something Pliny found in a source or something that occurred to him from his broad reading as he composed his

grand mental map of the world. When he contemplated the broad swath of the *oecumene*, it was inescapable that the contemporary world was stamped with impressions from the distant past, usually but not solely through preserved names. And yet, rather than embracing a poetic vision, Pliny creates a matrix of meaning that emphasize *where the Greeks went* rather than *where the Greeks were from*. The *oecumene* that was once opened up by the Greeks from the mythical past, and expanded by Alexander and his successors, has irrevocably passed on to the Romans, whose Greek debt was unmistakable but now relegated to the past. That he consciously paid homage to the mythical world of Jason, Hercules and Greek heroes who wandered after Troy is an acknowledgment of the debt the Romans owed to Greece. Yet, the effacement of Greece itself in his mythographical matrix suggests that Greece was destined to yield to Rome. Even if the *Natural History* is the result of Pliny's "good luck of coming at the beginning of a whole culture's autumn, when the fruits of the great classical season had already ripened" (Conte 1994: 70), the story of empire was still his to tell.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Mythical References in Pliny the Elder by Figures

- Aborigenes: 3.56 (Latium)
 Absyrtus: 3.151 (Absyrtides insulae)
 Achaeans: 4.83 (Portus Achaeorum, near Borysthenes); cf. 4.28, .49.
 Achilles: 4.83 (Insula Achillis, Dromos Achilleos; cf. 4.93), 5.125 (Achilleion)
 Aegipans: 5.7 (Atlas Mt.); 6.197 (Western Horn of Africa)
 Aeneas: 3.82 (Aenaria)
 Aeolus: 3.92 (Aeoliae insulae), 3.94 (Strongyle)
 Aesculapius: 4.18 (Epidaurus)
 Aethiope, filia Vulcani: 6.187 (Aethiopia)
 Aiax: 5.125 (Aeantion)
 Amazons: 5.115 (Ephesus), 5.118 (Zmyrna), 6.19 (Gynaecocratumenoe)
 Amphitus, charioteer of the Dioscuri: 6.16 (Dioscurias, Heniochi)
 Andromeda: 5.69 (Iope), 5.128 (Arados/Paria), 6.182 (Syria, Aethiopia)
 Angerona: 3.65 (Rome)
 Antaeus: 5.2–3 (Tingi, Lixos)
 Apollo: 4.5 (Actium), 4.7 (Delphi), 4.66 (Delos), 4.92 (Apollonia Pontica = Capitolinus), 5.20 and 5.23–4 (Promunturium Apollonis), 5.60 (Heliopolis), 5.106 (Aulocrene), 5.112 (Didyma; cf. 6.49), 5.116 (Claros), “Zminthius” 5.123 (Zminthe)
 Argo/Argonauts: 3.128 (Hister, Savus, Nauportus, Adriatic, Tergeste)
 Atargatis: see Derceto
 Aves Martis: 6.32 (Aria/Chalceritis)
 Bacchantes: 3.8 (Lusitania)
 Cadmus: 5.112 (Miletus)
 Calchas: 3.104 (Lucani = Atinates)
 Calypso: 3.96 (Ogygia)
 Canopus: 5.128 (Canopus)
 Cepheus: 6.182 (Syria, Aethiopia)
 Ceres: 3.60 (Campania)
 Chimaera: 5.100 (Chimaera mons)

- Chione nympa: 5.136 (Chios)
 Cicones: 4.43 (area around Hebrus)
 Colchians: 3.129 (Pola), 3.144 (Olcinium/Colchinium)
 Crataeis: 3.73 (Crataeis fluvius)
 Crete nympa: 4.58 (Crete)
 Curetes: 4.58 (Crete)
 Cyanaeae: see Symplegades
 Danae: 3.56 (Ardea)
 Dardanus: 3.63 (Corani), 4.73 (Dardania/Samothrace)
 Daunus: 3.103 (Daunia)
 Derceto: 5.81 (Bambyce/Mabog)
 Diana: 5.115 (Ephesus)
 Diomedes (Thrax): 4.42 (Tirida)
 Diomedes (Argivus): 3.104 (Argos Hippium/Arpi), 3.120 (Spina), 3.141 (Promuntory of Diomedes), 3.151 (Diomedia insula)
 Erythras: 6.107 (Mare Rubrum)
 Geryones: 4.120 (Gades)
 Gorgons: 6.200 (Gorgades Insulae)
 Graecus rex: 4.28 (Haemonia/Thessaly)
 Hammon: 5.31, .49, .50 (Cyrenaica), 6.185–6 (Meroe)
 Hecuba: 4.49 (Cynossema)
 Hellen: 4.28 (Haemonia/Thessaly)
 Hephaestus: 5.100 (Hephaestium)
 Hercules: 3.4 (Abila, Calpe, Columns of Hercules), 3.8 (Pyrenees), 3.34 (Campi Lapidei), 3.47 (Monaco), 3.123 (Alpes Graiae), 3.134 (Lepontii), 4.25 (Thebes), 4.39 (India), 4.120 (Geryon), 5.2–5 (Columnae Herculis, Lixos, Atlas), 5.46 (Pharusi), 6.49 (Alexandria Eschate), 6.76 (Pandae gens), 6.89 (Taprobane), 6.212 (Columns)
 Hesperides: 5.2–3, 46 (Lixos), 5.31 (Berenice)
 Hyperboreans: 4.89 (beyond Rhiphaean Mts.)
 Iapyx: 3.102 (Iapyx River, Acra Iapygia)
 Iason: 3.70 (Ager Picentinus = Foce del Sele), 6.38 (Albani); see also Argo, Argonauts

Juno: 3.7 (Promunturium Iunonis = Tartesos), “Argiva” 3.70 (Ager Picentinus = Foce del Sele), 3.85 (Heras Lutra, island near Sardina), 6.200 (Carthage)

Iupiter: 3.56 (Lucus [*locus* mss.] Iovis Indigetis), “Dodonaeus:” 4.2 (Dodona, Molossia), “Olympius:” 4.14 (Elis), “Lycaeus:” 4.21 (mons Lycaeus), “Cassius:” 4.52 (Cassiope, Corcyra), “Hammon:” 5.49 (Hammoniacus nomos), “Casius:” 5.68 (Casius mons), 6.79 (Merus mons), “Belus:” 6.121 (Babylon), 6.152 (Macaë)

Laestrygonians: 3.59 (Formiae)

Lapiths: 4.30 (Orthrys mons)

Leucosia (Siren): 3.85 (Leucosia)

Liber Pater: 3.8 (Lusitania), 3.60 (Campania), 4.25 (Thebes), 4.39 (India), 5.74 (Scythopolis), 6.49 (Alexandria Eschate), 6.79 (Merus mons), 6.89 (Taprobane); cf. 6.59 (Chronology)

Liparus (successor of Aeolus): 3.93 (Lipara)

Lotophagi: 5.28 (Ora Lotophagon), 5.41 (Meninx)

Magna Mater: 5.147 (Gallos flumen)

Mars: 6.32 (Aria/Chalceritis insula)

Marsyas: 3.108 (Archippe, Marsorum oppidum), 5.106 (Aulocrene)

Memnon: 6.182 (Aethiopia)

Mercury: 3.87 (Promunturium Mercuri), 5.23 (Promunturium Mercurii)

Messapus: 3.99 (Messapia)

Minerva: 3.62 (Promunturium Minervae = Surrentum)

Minos: 6.157 (Minaei)

Muses: 4.25 (Helicon)

Neptune: 4.18 (Isthmus), 5.150 (Hieron), 6.111 (Aracha), 6.152 (Macaë)

Nymphs: 6.97 (Nympharum Cubile)

Nysa nutrix: 5.74 (Scythopolis)

Oblivionis fluvius: 4.115 (river of Oblivion)

Oenotri: 3.85 (Pontia and Isacia, called collectively Oenotrides)

Orpheus: 4.41 (Scythia, Moriseni, Sitoni)

Osiris: 5.10 (Abydos)

Pan: 3.8 (Hispania)

Parthenope: 3.62 (Naples region)

- Pelasgians: 3.50 (Umbria), 3.51 (Agylla), 3.56 (Latium), 3.71 (Lucania)
 Perseus: 5.7 (Atlas Mt.)
 Peucetius: 3.99 (Peucetia)
 Phaethon: 3.117 (Padus/Eridanus)
 Polydorus: 4.43 (Aenos)
 Prochyta (nurse of Aeneas): 3.82 (Prochyta)
 Protesilaus: 4.49 (Sestos)
 Pygmies: 4.44 (Gerania), 5.108 (Tralles), 6.70 (Prasii), 6.188 (Fons Nili)
 Pyrene: 3.8 (Pyrenees)
 Raetus: 3.133 (Raeti)
 Rhadamanthus: 6.158 (Rhadamaei)
 Saturnus: 3.8 (Pyrenees)
 Satyri: 5.7 (Atlas Mt.), 6.197 (Western Horn of Africa)
 Scylla: 3.73 (Crataeis fluvius)
 Sirens: 3.62 (Surrentum)
 Stentor: 4.43 (Portus Stentoris)
 Symplegades: 4.92 (Hellespont)
 Teanus: 3.104 (Teani)
 Telchius, charioteer of the Dioscuri: 6.16 (Dioscurias, Heniochi)
 Tereus: 4.47 (Bizye)
 Trojans: 3.130 (Veneti)
 Ulysses: 3.85 (Ithacesiae islands), 4.53 (*scopulus* off Phalacrum)
 Venus: 3.22 (Pyrenees, near Flumen Ticer)
 Vulcan: 3.93 (Hiera)

Appendix B: Mythical References in Pliny the Elder by Place

- Abila: 3.4 (Hercules)
 Absyrtides insulae: 3.151 (Absyrtus, Medea)
 Abydos: 5.60 (Osiris)
 Achilleion: 5.125 (Achilles)
 Achillis insula: 4.83 (Achilles)
 Acra Iapygia: 3.102 (Iapyx son of Daedalus)
 Actium: 4.5 (Temple of Apollo)
 Adriatic: 3.128 (Argo/Argonauts)

- Aeantion: 5.125 (Aiax)
 Aeminius fluvius: 4.115 (river of Oblivion)
 Aenaria: 3.82 (Aeneas)
 Aenos: 4.43 (Polydorus)
 Aeoliae (insulae): 3.92 (Aeolus)
 Aethiopia: 6.182 (Memnon, Cepheus, Andromeda), 6.187 (Aethiope, Vulcan)
 Agylla (Caere): 3.51 (Pelasgians)
 Albani: 6.38 (Jason)
 Alexandria Eschate: 6.49 (Hercules, Liber Pater)
 Alpes Graiae: 3.123 (Hercules)
 Apollonia Pontica: 4.92 (Apollo Capitolinus)
 Arados/Paria (off Iope): 5.128 (Andromeda)
 Archippe (Marsorum oppidum): 3.108 (Marsyas)
 Ardea: 3.56 (Danae)
 Argos Hippium (= Arpi): 3.014 (Diomedes)
 Aria/Chalceritis: 6.32 (aves Martis/Mars)
 Atlas Mons: 5.7 (Aegipans, Satyrs, Hercules, Perseus), 6.197 (Aegipans, Satyrs)
 Aulocrene: 5.106 (Marsyas, Apollo)
 Babylon: 6.121 (Jupiter Belus)
 Bambyce: 5.78 (Derceto/Atargatis)
 Berenice: 5.31 (Hesperides, Horti Hesperidum)
 Bizye: 4.47 (Tereus)
 Calpe: 3.4 (Hercules)
 Campania: 3.60 (Ceres, Liber)
 Campi Lapidei: 3.34 (Hercules)
 Canopus: 5.128 (Canopus, gubernator Menelai)
 Carthage: 6.200 (Juno)
 Casius mons: 5.68 (Juppiter Casius)
 Cassiope (Corcyra): 4.52 (Jupiter)
 Chios: 5.136 (Chione nympa)
 Claros: 5.116 (Apollo Clarius)
 Columnae Herculis: 3.4, 5.2, 6.212 (Hercules)

- Corani: 3.63 (Dardanus)
 Crataeis fluvius: 3.73 (Scylla)
 Crete: 4.58 (Crete nympa, Curetes)
 Cynossema: 4.49 (Hecuba)
 Cyrenaica: 5.31, .49, .50 (Hammon)
 Daunia: 3.103 (Daunus, Diomedes)
 Delos: 4.66, .91 (Apollo)
 Delphi: 4.7 (Oracle of Apollo)
 Didyma: 5.112 (Apollo)
 Diomedia insula: 3.151 (Diomedes)
 Dioscurias: 6.16 (charioteers of Dioscuri)
 Dromos Achilleos: 4.83 (Achilles)
 Elis: 4.14 (temple of Olympian Jupiter)
 Ephesus: 5.115 (Amazons, Diana)
 Epidaurus: 4.18 (temple of Aesculapius)
 Foce del Sele (= Ager Picentinus): 3.70 (Iuno, Iason)
 Fons Nili: 6.188 (Pygmies)
 Formiae (= Hormiae): 3.59 (sedes Laestrygonum)
 Gades: 4.120 (Geryones)
 Gallos flumen: 5.147 (Magna Mater)
 Gerania: 4.44 (Pygmies and Cranes)
 Gorgades insulae: 6.200 (Gorgons)
 Gynaecocratumenoe: 6.19 (Amazons)
 Haemonia: 4.28 (Graecus, Hellen)
 Hammoniacus nomos: 5.49 (Jupiter Hammon)
 Hebrus: 4.23 (regio Ciconum)
 Helicon: 4.25 (Muses)
 Hellespont: 4.92 (Symplegades)
 Heniochi: 6.16 (Amphitus and Telchius, charioteers of Dioscuri)
 Heras Lutra: 3.85 (Iuno)
 Hiera: 3.93 (Vulcanus)
 Hieron: 5.150 (Neptune)
 Hispania: 3.8 (Pan)
 Hister: 3.128 (Argo/Argonauts)

- Iapyx amnis: 3.102 (Iapyx son of Daedalus)
 India: 4.39 (Liber Pater, Hercules)
 Iope: 5.69 (Andromeda)
 Isthmus: 4.18 (temple of Neptune)
 Ithacesiae islands: 3.85 (Ulysses)
 Latium: 3.56 (Aborigenes, Pelasgians)
 Lepontii: 3.134 (Hercules' men)
 Leucosia: 3.85 (Siren)
 Lipara: 3.93 (Liparus, successor of Aeolus)
 Lixos: 5.2–3, .46 (Antaeus, Hercules, Horti Hesperidum)
 Lucani (= Atinates): 3.71 (Pelasgians), 3.104 (Calchas)
 Lucus (mss. *locus*) Iovis Indigetis: 3.56 (Iuppiter)
 Lusitania: 3.8 (Liber, Bacchantes)
 Lycaeus Mons: 4.21 (temple of Lycaean Jupiter)
 Mabog: see Bambyce
 Macae: 6.152 (Jupiter, Neptune)
 Mare Rubrum/Erythrum: 6.107 (Erythras)
 Meninx: 5.41 (Lotophagi)
 Meroe: 6.185–6 (Hammon)
 Merus mons: 6.79 (Liber Pater, Iupiter)
 Messapia: 3.99 (Messapus)
 Miletus: 5.112 (Cadmus)
 Minaei: 6.157 (Minos)
 Molossia: 4.2 (temple and oracle of Jupiter Dodonaeus)
 Monaco (portus Herculei Monoeci): 3.34 (Hercules)
 Nauportus: 3.128 (Argo/Argonauts)
 Nympharum Cubile: 6.97 (Nymphs)
 Nysa: see Merus mons
 Nysa: see Scythopolis.
 Ochinium (Colchinium): 3.144 (Colchians)
 Oenotrides (islands Pontia and Isacia): 3.85 (Oenotri, descendants of
 Oenotrus)
 Ogygia: 3.96 (Calypso)
 Ora Lotophagon: 5.28 (Lotophagi)

- Oricum: 3.145 (Colchians)
 Orthys Mons: 4.30 (Lapiths)
 Padus/Eridanus: 3.117 (Phaethon)
 Pandae (gens): 6.76 (Hercules)
 Parthenope (Naples): 3.62 (Siren Parthenope)
 Phalacrum: 4.53 (Ulysses)
 Pharusii: 5.46 (Hercules)
 Phygela: 5.114 (*fugitivi* = soldiers of Agamemnon)
 Pola: 3.129 (Colchians)
 Portus Achaeorum: 4.83 (Achaeans)
 Portus Stentoris: 4.43 (Stentor)
 Prasii: 6.70 (Pygmies)
 Prochyta: 3.82 (Prochyta, nurse of Aeneas, disputed by Pliny)
 Pyrenees, near Ticen River, Pyrenaean Venus: 3.8 (Hercules, Pyrene, Saturnus), 3.22 (Venus)
 Raeti: 3.133 (Raetus, father of Anchemolus)
 Rhadamaei: 6.158 (Rhadamanthus)
 Rhiphaean Mts. (beyond): 4.89 (Hyperboreans)
 Rome: 3.65 (Angerona)
 Samothrace/Dardania: 4.73 (Dardanus)
 Savus: 3.128 (Argo/Argonauts)
 Scythia (Moriseni, Sitoni): 4.41 (Orpheus)
 Scythopolis/Nysa: 5.74 (Nysa nutrix, Liber Pater)
 Sestos: 4.49 (Protesilaus)
 Sminthe/Smyrna: see Zm-
 Spina: 3.120 (Diomedes)
 Strongyle: 3.94 (Aeolus)
 Surrentum: 3.62 (Sirens)
 Syria: 6.182 (Andromeda, Cepheus)
 Taprobane: 6.89–90 (Hercules, Liber)
 Tartesos (Promunturium Iunonis): 3.7 (Juno)
 Teani: 3.104 (Teanus)
 Tergeste: 3.128 (Argo/Argonauts)
 Thebes: 4.25 (Liber Pater, Hercules)

Tingi: 5.2 (Antaeus)

Tirida: 4.42 (Diomedes)

Tralles: 5.108 (Pygmies)

Umbria: 3.50 (Pelasgians, Lydians, Tyrrhenians, Tusci)

Veneti: 3.130 (Trojans)

Zminthe: 5.123 (Apollo)

Zmyrna: 5.118 (Amazons)