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The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal: Natural History: Book 7

Beagon, M

Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2005.

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Abstract

Of the 37 books of Pliny's monumental natural history, book 7 is pivotal. It is entirely devoted to a survey of the human race, for whose sake, in Pliny's words, "nature appears to have created everything else". It is therefore at once crucial to the understanding of Pliny's enterprise as a whole but also relatively self-contained. Both factors made it eminently suitable for scholarly analysis in its own right. It lies at the heart of Pliny's tendency to see the world around him in terms of a symbiotic relationship between man and nature, a notion which, though rooted in Stoicising philosophical thought, had no obvious literary antecedent. The significance of book 7, however, goes beyond its role in the exposition of Pliny's thought. The detail and variety of its material illuminate previously unexplored areas in the intellectual tradition of his era. What emerges is a complex network of beliefs, some indebted to written sources, others more probably related to non-literary traditions of considerable antiquity. Its material has an interdisciplinary appeal, frequently reaching beyond the confines of first century Rome, and offering echoes and parallels for social historians, anthropologists and folklorists of other times and places. The variety, density and obscurity of such material presents a formidable challenge to the researcher. This is the only commentary on book 7 to date in English and the only detailed commentary in any language.

Bibliographic metadata

Type of resource: [text](#)
Content type: [Book](#)
Authored or edited book: [Authored book](#)
Type of book: [Research monograph](#)
Book title: [The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal: Natural History: Book 7](#)
Author(s) list: [Beagon, M](#)
Publication date: [2005](#)
Place of publication: Oxford
Publisher: [Oxford University Press](#)
Series title: [Clarendon Ancient History Series](#)
Abstract: Of the 37 books of Pliny's monumental natural history, book 7 is pivotal. It is entirely devoted to a survey of the human race, for whose sake, in Pliny's words, "nature appears to have created everything else". It is therefore at once crucial to the understanding of Pliny's enterprise as a whole but also relatively self-contained. Both factors made it eminently suitable for scholarly analysis in its own right. It lies at the heart of Pliny's tendency to see the world around him in terms of a symbiotic relationship between man and nature, a notion which, though rooted in Stoicising philosophical thought, had no obvious literary antecedent. The significance of book 7, however, goes beyond its role in the exposition of Pliny's thought. The detail and variety of its material illuminate previously unexplored areas in the intellectual tradition of his era. What emerges is a complex network of beliefs, some indebted to written sources, others more probably related to non-literary traditions of considerable antiquity. Its material has an interdisciplinary appeal, frequently reaching beyond the confines of first century Rome, and offering echoes and parallels for social historians, anthropologists and folklorists of other times and places. The variety, density and obscurity of such material presents a formidable challenge to the researcher. This is the only commentary on book 7 to date in English and the only detailed commentary in any language.
Total pages: 515 + xxii

Institutional metadata

University researcher(s): [Beagon, Mary](#)
Academic department(s): [Faculty of Humanities](#)
[School of Arts, Languages and Cultures](#)

Record metadata

Manchester eScholar ID: uk-ac-man-scw:4b2176
Created: 26th August, 2009, 19:38:31
Last modified by: Beagon, Mary
Last modified: 3rd September, 2012, 23:05:18



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As a detailed study of the human animal, described by its author as the *raison d'être* of nature, Book Seven of the elder Pliny's *Natural History* is crucial to the understanding of the work as a whole. In addition, however, it provides valuable insight into the extraordinary complex of ideas and beliefs current in Pliny's era, many of which have resonances for other eras and cultures. The present study includes a substantial introduction examining the background to Pliny's life, thought, and writing, together with a modern English translation, and a detailed commentary which *The Natural History*. "There is no book so bad that some good cannot be got out of it," Pliny the Elder used to say, and he read everything that he could obtain. His nephew Pliny the Younger gives an indication how devoted his uncle was to reading and studying, which was like working to him. The only time he took from his work was for his bath, and by bath I mean his actual immersion, for while he was being rubbed down and dried he had a book read to him or dictated notes. Book 7: Anthropology and human physiology. Julius Caesar. An accessible edition of the *Natural History* can be found in the Penguin series. The Latin text can be found here. This page was created in 2000; last modified on 11 October 2020. Pliny: *Natural History*, Volume VII, Books 24-27. Index of Plants. (Loeb Classical Library No. 393). *The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal: Natural History Book 7* (Clarendon Ancient History). Mary Beagon (Translated with Introduction and Historical Commentary by). 17.24 Mb. *The Natural History* (Latin: *Naturalis Historia*) is a work by Pliny the Elder. It is one of the largest single works to have survived from the Roman Empire to the modern day and purports to cover all ancient knowledge. The work's subject area is thus not limited to what is today understood by natural history; Pliny himself defines his scope as "the natural world, or life". It is encyclopedic in scope, but its structure is not like that of a modern encyclopedia. It is the only work by Pliny to have