Empire and Invention: The Elder Pliny's Heurematography

This paper focuses on the catalog of inventions and inventors that concludes book 7 of Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* (*NH* 7.191-215). While the list is certainly a fundamental source for the largely lost tradition of Greek invention-catalogs, the literary, rhetorical, and intellectual-historical importance of Pliny's heurematography has, to date, rarely been appreciated for its own merits. I argue that, in spite of the seemingly irregular and heterogeneous character of the catalog, the underlying rhetorical strategy of Pliny's heurematography allows the list to become a teleological narrative.

Although Plinian specialists have subjected *NH* 7 to careful scrutiny of the sources or taken it as a springboard for studying Pliny's relationship with ancient technology and material culture (cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991; Healy 1999; Fögen 2013), this paper is the first English-language analysis of *NH* 7 as a form of heurematistic literature. In examining the inner logic of Pliny's catalog, I highlight the main tensions with which it grapples. As I show, the list of inventions carefully alternates between polar opposites, such as inventions contributing to war and inventions fostering peace, or typically employed in a conflict-free context (cf. *NH* 7.206-209). Pliny also alternates between Greek and non-Greek inventors (cf. *NH* 7.199-200).

Quite strikingly, Pliny does not mention any Roman *primi inventores*, attributing most discoveries to Greek and Near-Eastern culture-bringers; yet his catalog ends with a parade of the first Roman employers of globally widespread technologies (cf. Naas 2008). Pliny's practice of 'domesticating' foreign inventions mirrors the Greek heurematographic tradition of appropriating Oriental discoveries (Vasunia 2001), which played a major role in the dynamics of knowledge transmission shaping cultural power struggles throughout the Classical and the Hellenistic age. For Pliny, as I show, the Romans are 'latecomers' *par excellence*: and yet, they have surpassed their neighbors and rivals in the arts of both war and peace, finally unifying the whole Mediterranean world through the appropriation of its cultural and technological patrimony.

Select Bibliography

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Audio-visual aids: digital projection needed.