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INTERESTING FACTS CONCERNING THE ANCIENT WORLD

1-25

Version 1.2

1. The month of May was considered an inauspicious month to get married because it fell between the two months which are sacred to the goddesses of marriage, Aprilis, sacred to Venus, and Iunius, sacred to Juno. There was an old Latin adage, *mense Maio nubunt malae*, that is, bad women get married in May.

See ad. 309.

2. Both Milo of Croton and Thagenes of Thasus were believed to have consumed entire cows all by themselves.

See ad. 1210

3. Mithridates, the great king of Pontus, allegedly knew 22 languages.

Erasmus says in *de Pueris Instituendis* ASD pg. 49 line 20 that Mithridates knew 22 languages echoing Quintilian in *Inst. Or.* XI, 2, 50. But in *de Conscribendis Epistolis* Erasmus says 21. The gist: he knew a lot of languages.

4. The Pygmaei were a fabulous group of dwarfs living in Africa who were constantly at war with cranes. They were also apparently constantly bested.

See *Lewis and Short* entry for 'Pygmaei'

5. Augurs predicted that Midas would become rich after hearing that ants bearing grains of wheat had crawled into his mouth while he was sleeping.

See ad. 524.

AR

6. The Athenians once accidentally lost the bull that they were about to sacrifice to Hercules. In its stead they fashioned its image out of a few sticks and an apple. The debacle gave rise the expression, 'Pomarius Hercules', said of someone who is not who they say they are.

See ad. 1930. Also, according to one story, a ram - See ad. 1601.

7. Argus, the protector of Io had 100 eyes.

See *Lewis and Short* entry for 'Argus' and Ov. *Metamorphoses* 1.624.

8. According to Philostratus, if you want your children to abhor the taste of wine when they get older, you simply feed them a lightly cooked owl egg when they are young.

See ad. 1044.

9. Jupiter was believed by the ancients to keep a register of all events written on the hide of a goat.

See ad. 958.

10. Hercules exhausted from his journey into the underworld is said to have woven himself a garland from the branches of a Poplar tree. His sweat gave the tree its distinctive white color and the heat of the underworld gave it the color black.

See *Serv.* 8.276.

11. After a poet named Stesichorus spoke poorly of Helen in a poem, he was punished by being stripped of his eyes, which likely does not mean they were plucked out, since he was granted his sight back after singing a palinode in praise of Helen.

See ad. 859.

12. Cassius was once the name of a group in Egypt that was famous for their ability to tie knots, hence the expression: nodus cassioticus.

See ad. 1434.

13. Two serpents are often featured alongside Mercury's staff, one male, one female.

See ad. 1434.

AR

14. The town of Amyclae was apparently founded by followers of Pythagoreans. Their philosophical practices ended up causing the town's downfall, since it prohibited them from killing specific snakes that were from a neighboring swamp. The town was destroyed by those same snakes. In another version of the story, the Amyclae had passed a law that prohibited them from announcing that they were under attack because they had a problem with people falsely announcing the approach of enemies. The city was eventually taken, because it was illegal for anyone to announce that it was being attacked, hence the expression 'silentium Amyclas perdidit'.

See ad. 801.

15. According to Pliny, hunger is the leading cause of death for eagles, since, in their old age, their beak curves in such a way that prevents it from being opened, and it is forced to drink. Hence the expression 'aquilae senecta' .

See ad. 856 and Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 10. iv.

16. On their birthdays in ancient Rome, men would make sacrifices to their tutelary "genius", and women would sacrifice to Juno.

See *Lewis and Short* entry for 'natalis'.

17. Rumor had it that Hesiod's corpse was thrown into the sea, but then recovered by dolphins.

See ad. 1661.

18. According to Pliny, infants are not able to muster a smile until they are forty days old.

See *Nat. Hist.* 7.1. The word he uses is *risus*, which is commonly translated laughter. I have never seen a one-month-old baby laughing, so I assume Pliny means smile, a feat that infants could achieve at that age.

19. Azania, a part of Arcadia, was said to have a fountain whose water caused its drinker to abhor the taste and the smell of wine.

See ad. 1509.

20. According to Socrates, the best swimmers come from the island of Delos.

See *Lewis and Short* entry on "Hecate".

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AR

21. According to Pliny, Chelidonia is an herb that swallows use to restore eyesight to their blinded young.

See *Nat. Hist.* VIII 98.

22. Orcus' helmet was said to grant its wearer invisibility.

Perseus acquires it from some daughters of Phorcus – see ad. 1974.

23. Cabbage was highly recommended by the philosopher Pythagoras.

See *Lewis and Short* entry for 'Brassica'.

24. Callisto, the mother of Arcas by Jupiter, was transformed into a bear by Juno, and she was raised to the heavens as a constellation, Ursa Major.

See *Lewis and Short* entry for 'Callisto'.

25. The most outside edge of ancient gardens was frequently adorned with parsley.

See ad. 989.

BONUS – In his work entitled *Theogony*, Hesiod mentions a certain 'Momus', whose mother was Night, but who apparently had no father.

See Hesiod's *Theogony* line 213 and ad. 474. Erasmus mistakenly designates Momus as the offspring of Night and Sleep.

Abbreviations:

Ad. – *Adagia* Erasmi Roterodami

ASD – The Amsterdam edition of the collected works of Desiderius Erasmus

Inst. Or. – *Institutio Oratoria*

Nat. Hist. – *Naturalis Historia*

Ov. – Ovid

Serv. – Servius Grammaticus (*Commentarii*)

Authors and Works Referenced:

Erasmus

- *Adagia*
- *De Conscribendis Epistolis*
- *De Pueris Instituendis*

Hesiod

- *Theogony*

Lewis and Short

- *A Latin Dictionary*

Ovid

- *Metamorphoses*

Pliny

- *Naturalis Historia*

Quintilian

- *Institutio Oratoria*

Servius Grammatici

- *Commentarii qui Feruntur in Vergilii Carmina*

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 - o Added logo
 - o Reformatted
 - o Grammar and formatting corrections
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Version 1.2 released 6.16.23

- Changes made to version 1.1
 - o Some facts were swapped for more interesting ones.
 - o Formatting
 - o Grammar corrections