have been wrongly written as \textit{crurac} and then corrected into \textit{crura}.\textsuperscript{32} It would not be surprising to find a device like hendiadys within a passage with poetical reminiscences and in a “carefully ornamented” period;\textsuperscript{33} besides, it is used by Apuleius in many other places.\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Juan J. Martos}

\textit{Universidad de Sevilla}

32. Another example of a transmission mistake with \textit{ac} involved, though not exactly the same, is 8.2.5: \textit{praesenti ac Lipsius praesentia F.}

33. GCA 1985, 63.


\textbf{OF MICE AND EMPERORS: A NOTE ON AELIAN}

\textit{DE NATURA ANIMALIUM} \textbf{6.40}

\textit{Νήσος ἐν τῷ Πόντῳ Ἦρακλεῖ ἔπονυμος ἐκτετήμηται. οὐκόν ὅσον μιᾶν ἔστιν ἐνταῦθα σέβει τὸν θεόν, καὶ πᾶν ὅσον ἀνείται αὐτῷ τοῦτο πιστεύει τῷ θεῷ κεχαρισμένον ἀνείσθαι καὶ οὐκ ἂν προσώπατο αὐτῷ.}

There is an island in the Black Sea named after Heracles, which has been highly honored. Now all the mice there pay reverence to the god, and they believe that the god has taken pleasure in the dedication of everything that is offered to him and would not touch it. (Ael. \textit{NA} 6.40.1–5)

The author Claudius Aelianus, more commonly known as Aelian, was born in Praeneste (modern Palestrina) around 170 C.E. He spent his life in Rome.\textsuperscript{1} Though he was Roman, he chose to write in Greek. It is mainly for his mastery over that language that he is named as a sophist by Philostratus and in the Suda lexicon, which also states that Aelian was a priest, but does not say of which deity.\textsuperscript{2} In \textit{De natura animalium} Aelian regularly mentions deities, with, of course, their connection to certain animals.

I am indebted to Laurence Emmett, Jaś Elsner, Ted Kaizer, and Fergus Millar, and to Shadi Bartsch and the anonymous reader of \textit{CP}, for reading through earlier versions of this article. Their comments have greatly improved the argument, though that does not mean they actually believe it.


2. Philostr. VS 2.31 (= 624); Suda 2.168.23–25 [Adler edition]. As Kindstrand (“Claudius Aelianus” [n. 1 above], p. 2958, n. 30) argues (with references), there is no evidence for the late-nineteenth-century assumption that Aelian was priest at the Fortuna temple of Praeneste.
The purpose of these passages is, like that of most of the book, to teach and entertain, but also to moralize—to show how often animals’ virtues outshine those of men.3

The pious mice of the Black Sea fit this argument well. Not only do they worship the god properly, leaving the vine to grow luxuriously for him (οὐχοκόν καὶ ὑμελέος τῷ θεῷ κοµῇ), believing it to be for the sole purpose of sacrifice to Heracles. They even leave the island “when the grapes reach maturity,” (ὅταν οὖν ἐς ἁχύμην αἱ ράγες ἔρχονται, οἱ δὲ ἄπολείποντο τὴν νήσον οἱ μύες), because “they honor it as something that is dedicated to the god alone” (τετύμηται ὡς ἄναθήμα αὐτῷ μόνῳ). How much better their behavior is, Aelian finishes the passage by saying, than that of Hippon, Diogoras, and Herostratus—“men who preferred by one means or another to rob the gods of their names and functions” (οἱ καὶ τὰ τῶν θεῶν ὅνοματα καὶ ἔργα ἄμωσιγέως σολῶν προημιμεύον).4 At first sight this seems a wholly harmless moralizing passage, showing how the “Pontic mice” are more virtuous than the abhorrent “atheists.” Yet why mice? There is no apparent connection between Heracles and mice, positive or negative. This would not pose a problem if Aelian had brought together totally unrelated divinities and animals more often in his work. But he does not. In fact, he seems rather systematic in linking divinities with their sacred animals.

Aphrodite is mentioned in connection with pigeons and cows, both animals that were believed to have strong ties with the goddess.5 Monstrous sea serpents, and crabs “whose shell measured one foot across in all directions” (οὗς τὸ μὲν ὄστρακον τὴν περιφέρειαν εἶχεν πανταχόθεν πόδα) are quite naturally deemed sacred to Poseidon (Ael. NA 17.1). Apollo figures in passages with swans, wolves, hawks, ravens, and serpents. Swans were Apollo’s sacred animals, and wolves and hawks, too, were strongly linked with the deity.6 Ravens were well known as ominous birds, much used

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4. All three men were infamous for their “atheism.” Hippon of Samos was satirized by Cratinus as an atheist (cf. H. Diels and W. Kranz, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker und Sapphiker [Berlin 1952], 38), whereas Diogoras of Melos was similarly described by Cicero (Nat. D. 1.2.63; cf. Diod. Sic. 13.6.7); Herostratos of Ephesus, finally, was notorious for burning down Artemis’ temple.

5. Aphrodite and pigeons: Ael. NA 4.2; 10.33; 10.50. Depictions of Aphrodite with pigeons: LIMC 2.2.349–50, 1012. See also Ov. Met. 15.386; cf. Maspero, Bestiario antico (n. 3 above), 115–19, at 118. Aphrodite and cows: Ael. NA 10.27: “... they believe that cows are related to this goddess, because the cow feels a strong incitement to love....” Significantly, the passage takes place in Egypt, where cows were held in high esteem (Maspero, Bestiario antico, 50–54, at 50). The Egyptian goddess Hathor, among whose functions was that of a love goddess, was symbolized by a cow (H. Brunner, Altegyptische Religion: Grundzüge [Darmstadt, 1989], 21–23). For an illustration of Hathor depicted with a cow’s head: E. Hornung, Der Eine und die Vielen: Ägyptische Gottesvorstellungen (Darmstadt, 1971), pl. 1. Depictions of Aphrodite with cows: LIMC 2.2.899a–c.

6. Apollo and swans: Ael. NA 11.1; Maspero, Bestiario antico, 100–104, at 100: “Il cigno è l’uccello sacro ad Apollo.” Depictions of Apollo with swans: LIMC 2.2.342–50, 741, 802, 917–18, 936, 938. See further LIMC 2.1.227–28. Apollo and wolves: Ael. NA 10.26, referring to Hom. Il. 4.101, “the wolf-born Apollo” (ἀλυκτενεύς). Letos was said to have changed into a she-wolf before giving birth to Apollo (Arist. De an. 6.35). Further connections between Apollo and wolves: LIMC 2.1.223, 2.2.323. Apollo and hawks: Ael. NA 10.14 (in which Apollo is placed alongside Horus); Maspero, Bestiario antico, 144, 146–47. Cf. Ael. NA 12.4, in which several gods are placed alongside different types of hawks. Artemis’ link with hawks is well attested (Maspero, Bestiario antico, 146), whereas Hera’s follows naturally from Artem. Onirocritica 2.20. There are, however, no obvious connections with Athena and Hermes. Still, it seems that Aelian is here making the point that there are a great many kinds of hawks, rather than drawing a proper connection between the animals and particular deities.
in divination, and could thus easily be traced to the oracular Apollo. Finally, the serpents that Aelian mentions are explicitly said to have “sprung from the Python at Delphi” (ἔγγονοι τοῦ Ἕλεκτρος Πυθώνος εἶναι). Again the relationship between god and beast is obvious.

There is another type of animal with which Apollo was much connected in the ancient world, a connection made explicit by Aelian. For as Apollo Smintheus, a cult particularly popular in Asia Minor, the god “had a special relationship with mice.” He was either their divine exterminator or their protector, and sometimes even appeared in the shape of a mouse. Aelian mentions mice as Apollo’s sacred animal at Hamaxitus in the Troad (NA 12.5). He goes on to talk about the cult, recounting how “some Cretans who . . . were sent out to found a colony besought of the Pythian Apollo to tell them of some good place (χώρον ἀγαθόν . . . to found a city.” The oracle replied that the most advantageous place would be that “where the earth-born made war upon them” (Ἐνθά ᾧ αὐτῶν οἱ γηγενεῖς πολεμήσωσιν). Later, when the Cretans camped for a night at Haxamitus, “a countless swarm of mice crept stealthily upon them” (μῦνον δὲ ἄφωτόν τι πλῆθος ἐφερτύσαν), whereupon they decided to settle there, and built a temple to Apollo Smintheus.

The connection between Apollo and mice is not that surprising. Mice were famous in the ancient world for their oracular function, mainly forecasting disaster or death. In this, they could obviously be related to the oracular deity Apollo. Indeed, Aelian refers to the power of mice in premonition, both in his De natura animalium (7.8, 11.19) and in the Varia historia (1.11). Yet all of this still does not explain the pious Pontic mice who worship Heracles. Indeed, Aelian’s passage on Apollo Smintheus complicates matters even further. For in the first nine lines of that very passage, Heracles is mentioned, but not in connection with mice at all. These lines talk about the inhabitants of Thebes, who worship a weasel or marten (γαλέη) for helping during Heracles’ birth. This story, used by Ovid with some variations in Metamorphoses 9.306–23, recounts how Alcmene, unable to give birth through Hera’s evil ploys, was helped either by a weasel or by a nurse who was later transformed into a weasel. Aelian places this story alongside those surrounding Apollo Smintheus, to show that non-Egyptians, too, worship animals. But at the same time, he explicitly links

9. Exceptions to obvious connections between gods and animals are two passages in which Hephaestus (11.3) and Athena (11.5) are mentioned alongside dogs. In both cases, the dogs function as guard dogs for the temple, much as Cerberus guarded the underworld. Their function as guard dogs seems to supersede any necessary bond between dogs and deities. Another rare connection is that between lions and Hephaestus (Ael. NA 12.7), which Aelian instantly explains by pointing to a lion’s fiery nature.
12. Ael. NA 12.5. Aelian begins with a story which is derived from Iliad 1.39, and which was probably well known at the end of the second century C.E., as it is also mentioned in Clement of Alexandria (Protr. 2.39) and Pausanias (2.5; 10.12.3). On this passage, and its place in a wider literary context: Beckmann, Die Maus (n. 11 above), 70, 76–78. Beckmann, however, erroneously refers to NA 13.5. It might be worth mentioning that Smintheon, modern Gülpinar, was located near Hamaxitos; see Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World, vol. 2, Map-by-Map Directory, ed. R. J. A. Talbert (Princeton, 2000), 852.
13. Plin. HN 8.221–22; Livy, Epit. Per. 27.23; 30.2; Cic. Div. 1.44; Beckmann, Die Maus, 126.
Heracles to an animal that is a prime enemy of mice, just before emphasizing which deity mice should obey.

Let us look in more detail at the passage immediately following the devout Black-Sea mice (Ael. NA 6.41)—a passage that also emphasizes how weasels and mice are mortal enemies. It deals with Egyptian mice, but more than anything else the militarily influenced language of the passage strikes the eye. Mice climb walls (τοῖς δὲ θριγκοῖς . . . ἐκπαραβαίνουσιν), jump over trenches (ὑπερπηδοῦσι τὰς τάφρους), and retreat in the formation of a hollow square to some mountain (ἐς τι όρος ἀναχωροῦσι τάξιν πλαισίου φυλάττοντες). They are even said to wait for exhausted youngsters, as is normal “for an armed force” (ὁς ἐν δυνάμει στρατιωτικῇ). Though these legions of mice are different from those that worshipped Heracles in the previous passage, the connection could hardly be ignored. Of course there was nothing new in mice being belligerent. In antiquity it was not unheard-of to point to the military-style organization that assembled mice demonstrated. Aelian, however, does more than that. At one point (NA 17.17) he describes mice from the Caspian territory as a virtual invading army. They visit the land “in an invincible multitude” (πλήθος ἄμαχον), crossing torrential rivers by gripping each other’s tails with their teeth, thus making “an unbreakable chain” (σύνδεσμον ἵσχυρότατον). After doing so, they devastate the area, cutting and eating up anything that comes in their way.

So we have armies of marching and prophesying mice running through Aelian’s animal tales, some of which for still unknown reasons are described as worshipping Heracles. It is clear that they are unusual. What about Aelian’s Heracles? Are there any striking oddities about the deity in Aelian’s tales? As a matter of fact, there are. First of all, in the very last passage of the De natura animalium (17.46), right before the epilogue, we once more see Heracles surrounded by unusual animals: roosters. They are to be found in a temple to the deity adjacent to a temple to his wife Hebe, though the two temples are separated by a never-failing canal of clear water (ὑπαρ ἄναυ τε καὶ καθαροῦ ὑδάτος διαρρέει μέσος). It is this very division that is central to the passage, for where there are roosters in Heracles’ temple, there are hens that keep to Hebe’s. Only in the breeding season do the cockerels fly across the stream to mate, and then again later on, after the eggs have hatched, to collect the male chicks for Heracles’ temple. It may or may not be relevant here that chickens, like mice, were thought of as warriorlike, and are explicitly identified as such by Aelian. It might also be accidental that roosters were multiply linked to Apollo as sacred animals of his son Asclepius, favorites of his mother, Leto, and quite obviously as animals that announced sunrise. Yet it is conspicuous that Aelian shows his awareness of all these facts explicitly in his writing. Again Heracles is connected to animals that really do not fit him, but rather evoke Apollo.

Secondly, Aelian discusses Heracles in his Varia historia as well. It is striking that in three separate passages he brings up occasions for a “new” Heracles. Twice the passage concerns Milo of Croton, who on seeing the feasts of a certain Titomus, a man

16. Cf. also Ael. NA 5.22, showing how mice can save each other from drowning through similar actions.
17. Ael. VH 2.28; Maspero, Bestiario antico, 162.
18. Ael. NA 4.29; Ael. VH 5.17. Cf. Pl. Phd. 66; Maspero, Bestiario antico, 160–61, 162: “Nella mitologia il gallo era sacro ad Asclepio... ad Apollo, come dio del sole...”
of extraordinary strength, exclaimed: “O Zeus, have you fathered another Heracles upon us?” (ὁ Ζεύς, μὴ τοῦτον Ἡρακλῆ ἠμῖν ἑτέρον ἐπειράς;). The third passage, nearer the beginning of the work, is even more noticeable (Ael. VH 2.32). It records that Heracles was not originally so called. It was only when he needed an oracle for some reason that Apollo’s oracle stated: “Phoebus gives you the name of Heracles; for by doing favors to mankind you will win undying glory” (Ἡρακλῆ δὲ τὸ Φοῖβος ἐπάνω τούτων ἐδοξομαζέι· ἥρα γὰρ ἀνθρόποισι φέρον κλέος ἀφθόνων ἔξεις).

If one combines all the above-discussed notions, a rather peculiar Heraclean image arises. The god is linked to animals that were very much warriorlike, but otherwise totally unlinked to Heracles himself. They rather belonged to Apollo, whereas elsewhere Aelian strictly keeps to connecting deities with their “own” animals. The animals in question do duly obey Heracles, though, either through surprising piety (the mice), or by adhering to a strict but peaceful system of segregation (the chickens). In the latter case, the coexistence takes place in a joint temple complex of Heracles and Hebe, thus putting emphasis on the eternal youth of the deity. Not only does Aelian’s Heracles acquire stewardship over some of Apollo’s animals, but even the name Heracles itself is given to him by Apollo. Simultaneously, we are made aware that men of particular qualities could “become” another Heracles.

All of this shows strong similarities to an important political event that took place in the years when Aelian was about twenty years old. In 191 C.E. the emperor Commodus drastically changed his self-representation, portraying himself thereafter with the attributes of, and even as the new incarnation of, Hercules. Strong emphasis on peace, fertility, and the emperor’s eternal youth supported the new ideological program. But though the last year of Commodus’ reign was emphatically Herculean, Augustus’ “Apollonian” image still defined the Principate, much as Apollo’s temple on the Palatine still defined the imperial residence—something that must have been very visible to Aelian, who spent almost his whole life in the capital.

Commodus, through his coinage, also hinted at the importance of Apollo as “founder” of the empire. In the exact year that the emperor started to mint coins and medallions reading HERCULI COMMODIANO, Apollo reappeared on the imperial coinage. Coins of all denominations, and a medallion, depict Apollo either holding the cithara and leaning on a column, or receiving the cithara from Victoria. The legend APOLLINI PALATINO makes clear, beyond the shadow of a doubt, which Apollo was depicted. The appearance is all the more striking when one considers the almost complete absence of images of Apollo from imperial coins in the previous thirty years. But noticeable as this reemergence of Apollo may have been, the deity was clearly outshone by the almost omnipresent Hercules. Furthermore, when in the following

19. Ael. VH 12.22; 12.47b (the last but one passage of the work).
23. The exceptions are MIR 18, nos. 611 (184 C.E.) and 1062 (a medallion by Marcus Aurelius from 174/5 C.E.). Commodus also minted coins depicting the Apollo Moneta in 190 C.E.; MIR 18, nos. 793–94.
year Hercules Commodianus was replaced by Hercules Romanus—the emperor as the god incarnate—Apollo once again disappeared from imperial imagery. Commodus-Hercules was going to be the undoubted founder of a new Golden Age.

Could we not, then, read Aelian’s Heracles as in some way reflecting the policies of the time? As Apollo had once heralded the golden age of Augustus, Hercules was now presented as responsible for the age of peace and abundance that Commodus was going to bring about. Yet, this new Hercules could never have governed his subjects, nor ruled his realm, without the foundations that “Apollo” had laid for him. His mandate was, as it were, derived from someone else. Aelian’s Heracles obtained his name from Apollo, and was given the latter’s divine animals. Do the men of exceptional strength who “became” Heracles in the Varia historia perhaps refer to Commodus’ claims? The fact that the Pontic mice do not belong to Heracles as such then becomes the entire aim of the exercise. The unlikely soldiers leave the vine “to grow luxuriously” for a new Heracles, who has taken on many of Apollo’s functions.

The year 191 C.E. would be quite early for Aelian to have started writing. But Commodus’ change of representation, his death and the ensuing civil war, must have had their impact on anyone in the urbs—an impact that lasted until after the last Antonine’s death. Thus, Athenaeus explicitly referred to Commodus’ Herculean program. Private iconography and military inscriptions and imagery also seem to have reacted to the emperor’s portrayal as a new Hercules, both during his lifetime and afterwards. Septimius Severus, furthermore, deified Commodus, and retroactively adopted himself into the Antonine dynasty. He also, to some extent, continued Commodus’ Herculean image.

Aelian’s reception of the emperor’s new image, with all its subtleties, would have been far from unique. This does not necessarily imply that many readers would instantly see the similarities. But we have some reason to suppose that Aelian might have incorporated political connotations in his texts. After all, Philostratus records how Aelian wrote a vehement indictment of Elagabalus—though only after the emperor’s death. Such an indictment of Commodus’ reign would be more risky, even if Aelian had wanted to write it. Severus had, after all, become an Antonine. The message must have been clear. One had better comply with a new Heracles who commanded armies, both of men and beasts. This, perhaps, is what the mice on the unknown island in the Black Sea were trying to do.

Olivier Hekster
Wadham College, Oxford
Merton College, Oxford