

Human saliva harming snakes

Post by “Bryan” of January 17, 2024 at 4:28 PM

We have in Lucretius:

“Est itaque ut serpens, hominis quae tacta salivis

disperit ac sese mandendo conficit ipsa.” (DRN 4.638)

"As a certain snake there is which, touched by spittle of a man, will waste and end itself by gnawing up its coil (Leonard)"

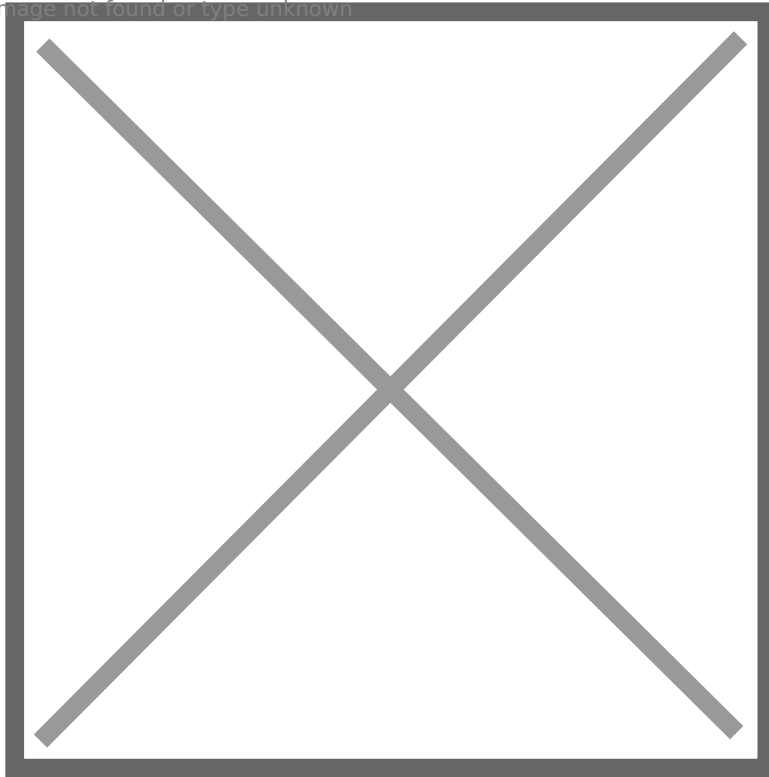
"There is, for instance, a snake which dies on contact with human spit - it commits suicide by eating its own body (Johnston)"

We also have Pliny saying:

“However, all men contain a poison available as a protection against snakes: people say that snakes flee from contact with saliva as from the touch of boiling water, and that if it gets inside their throats they actually die; and that this is especially the case with the saliva of a person fasting.” (Pliny, Natural History, Book 7.2.15)

And an article of a newspaper from 1875:

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[Human Saliva Kills Snakes, 1875](#)

Clipping found in The Osage County Chronicle published in Burlingame, Kansas on 1875-11-05.

Human Saliva Kills Snakes, 1875

www.newspapers.com

Post by “Cassius” of January 17, 2024 at 4:36 PM

Wow all the way down to the detail of spitting in its mouth -- I presumed it was just spitting on anywhere! I am not so sure I would try to get close enough to aim for the mouth!

Sounds pretty "conclusive" (as the article says) to me! 😊

Post by “Bryan” of January 17, 2024 at 5:07 PM

The starting text "est itaque ut" is uncertain, another possible rendering of the text is:

“**Excetra** ut serpens, hominis quae tacta salivis

disperit ac sese mandendo conficit ipsa." (DRN 4.638)

excetra = viper (it could be from ἔχιδνα, traditionally held as a poisonous snake, viper, but perhaps also a constrictor) (Wiktionary)

So instead of the usual "there is a certain snake" we could have "there is the Excetra Snake" or "there is the Echidna Viper"

This idea is from Bailey's commentary, page 1258, where he says "most likely the corruption conceals the name of some snake"