

"Severus, bishop of Milevis"

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 04 Oct 1998

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Jon Camfield — 04 Oct 1998, 21:16

While reading through some Augustine, I came across this tidbit. While it seems to have little direct connection, Bathanarius does serve a similar purpose as Baldanders, showing Severus 'strange' technology (that at a different time is seen as unimpressive) yet offering no explanations.

But anyway, the text:

"Yet far more astonishing is what I heard about this stone [lodestone] from my brother in the episcopate, Severus bishop of Milevis. He told me that Bathanarius, once count of Africa, when the bishop was dining with him, produced a magnet, and held it under a silver plate on which he placed a bit of iron; then as he moved his hand with the magnet underneath the plate, the iron upon the plate moved about accordingly. The intervening silver was not affected at all, but precisely as the magnet was moved backwards and forwards below it, no matter how quickly, so was the iron attracted above. I have related what I have myself witnessed! I have related related what I was told by one whom I trust as I trust my own eyes.

Let me further say what I have read about this magnet. When a diamond is laid near it, it does not lift iron; or if it has already lifted it, as soon as the diamond approaches, it drops it. These stones come from India.

But if we cease to admire them because they are now familiar, how much less must they admire them who procure them very easily and send them to us? Perhaps they are held as cheap as we hold lime, which, because it is common, we think nothing of, though it has the strange property of burning when water, which is wont to quench fire, is poured on it, and of remaining cool when mixed with oil, which ordinarily feeds fire."

(City of God, XXI, 4-5; Trans. Dods)

This 'sounds' like Severian speaking, to my mind, and many parallels can be drawn, though some of which might be nothing more than pure academe-- the approach of the diamond causing the echnology to fail (Sev fighting with Baldanders), the rare stones which are in truth very common in other parts, not to mention the 'burning in water' connection ('bullets of power' of the shore-people at Diuturna)

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"The most incomprehensible fact about nature is that it is comprehensible"
-- Albert Einstein