

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD AND IMMENSE SERPENTS

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such that they are larger than a large loaf of ours worth four dinars, all shining; the mouth so large that it would well swallow [53d] a man[or]an ox at one time. It has very large and sharp teeth. And it is so very exceedingly hideous and great and fierce that there is no man nor woman nor beast in the world that does not fear to go near them, and that has not dread of them. And again there are smaller ones than these, that is of eight paces long and of six and of five.¹ The way that they are caught by the hunters is this. You may know that they stay under ground in caves by day because of the great heat, and at night it comes out to feed and eat, and they seize all the animals (whether lions or wolves or others whatever they may be) which they can overtake² & eat them all. And when they have eaten it goes crawling into the rivers and into lakes and to springs to drink. It is so large and so heavy and so stout that when it goes crawling in this way through the sand to the rivers either to eat or to drink, and this is by night, it makes on its way owing to the exceeding amount of its weight so great a furrow in the sand that it seems as if there is rolled a full butt of wine.³ And the hunters who go specially to catch them, observing this, catch them in such a manner. For they put a trap in the road by which they see that the adders are usually gone towards the water, because they know that they must pass there again. For they fix a very thick and strong wooden stake so deeply in the ground, that is in the road of those adders, on some sloping bank by which the path descends, that as it were none of the stake is seen; in which stake is fixed a sword-iron made like a razor or like a lance-iron, and it projects about a palm above the stake, very sharp and cutting and always sloping slightly towards the approach of the serpents. And he covers it all with earth or sand so that the adder does not see it at all. And the hunters put very many of such stakes and of such irons there in many places, according to the many roads of many serpents. And when the adder, or rather the serpent, at the hour when it hastens to the rivers for drink, comes down the middle of that road where those irons are, flying along because of the slope of the bank, then it strikes on them with so great force that the [54a] iron enters it by the breast and rends it as far as the navel, so that the adder dies immediately. And when they see them dead the crows begin to clamour. And then one knows by the noise of the birds that the serpent is dead, and then he goes there to find it; otherwise he dares not go near there. And when the hunters see the blood they follow that trace and find it dead. And in this way the hunters take it. And when they have taken it, skinning it immediately they draw out the gall from the belly and sell it very

¹ de viii. pas & de v. & de v. Z,L,LT,R: 8.6.5 V: zingue only

² atendre with a written over between t and e in a later hand, and the e left uncanceled. So read ataendre FA: ataindre

³ Z: quasi una magna trabs illac foret deducta