

Mithridates VI Eupator king of Pontus and the venomous snakes

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Dear Editor,

We read with interest the paper by Elham Behzady and Payam Behzadi published in Central European Journal of Urology (2016; 69: 404-410) entitled “The role of toll-like receptors (TLRs) in urinary tract infections (UTIs)” [1]. In this article, these authors quote (their reference n.7) a paper written by us entitled “Mithridates VI Eupator of Pontus and mithridatism”, which appeared in Allergy (2012; 67: 138-140) [2] and attach to us fake statements that we never made and that we entirely disagree with. Particularly we want to stress that:

1. Mithridates VI king of Pontus (132-63 BC) never ruled Iran (Parthia). At that time, in fact, Iran was under the Arsacid domination. An Arsacid king, Mithridates II the Great (123-88 BC) effectively governed Parthia but he was not king of Pontus. The two kings Mithridates VI of Pontus and Mithridates II of Parthia shared the same name and lived in the same time. This can explain some confusion but the two rulers must not be mistaken for each other.
2. Most importantly, our paper [2] was written to refute an article by Ring and Gutermuth stating that Mithridates VI Eupator, king of Pontus, used increasing doses of snake venom to make himself immune against poisons [3]. In our paper [2] we stressed that snake venoms are universally known to be, essentially, a mixture of enzymatic proteins that, if consumed by mouth, are digested and, therefore, inactivated in the gastro-intestinal tract. We also clearly reported that, in the first century BC, the loss of toxicity of snake venoms, if they are taken by mouth, was already known as it is reported, for example, by the Roman writer Lucan (Bellum Civile/Pharsalia 9.614). Therefore, it is quite unlikely that a snake venom was used by Mithridates VI king of Pontus to strengthen himself against poisons.

References

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