
INGO SCHAAF (ed.), *Animal Kingdom of Heaven. Anthropozoological Aspects in the Late Antique World* (Millennium-Studien 80). Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter 2019. 161 pp. – ISBN: 987-3-11-060159-6 (€ 82.95)

- TRISTAN SCHMIDT, Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach
(tristan.schmidt@us.ed.pl)

This volume is dedicated to the question of human-animal relations and their manifestations in texts and visual representations from the first centuries AD to the early Middle Ages. It collects the contributions from an international workshop held in 2013 at Konstanz University. A fundamental point of departure, shared by all papers, is the consolidation in Late Antiquity of genuinely Christian approaches to the *kosmos*. These defined the views on and understandings of its human and nonhuman inhabitants. These approaches continued, but also stood in contrast to thought paradigms often characterized as “pagan” by early Christian authors and modern scholars alike. While this approach can be seen as a simplifying dichotomization, it does reflect the intellectual and ideological divisions perceived by Late Antique and Early Medieval contemporaries.

As the editor INGO SCHAAF remarks in his brief *introduction* (pp. 1–7), human-animal relations have gained increased attention “compared to previous centuries of the modern or even premodern era”. Phenomena such as “veganism, [...] the animal rights movement, or pet cemeteries”¹ are manifestations of an almost “revolutionary shift” in interest and attitude, both in scholarship and everyday life. As SCHAAF notes, contemporary Christian theology has also been affected by these developments, as new (or maybe not entirely new?) voices questioning the “God-given dominion over animals” indicate.

In this sense, the first centuries AD, when a gradual introduction of Christian approaches to the material and animated world took place, can be considered as a transitional phase as well. The ways humans and animals were conceptualized within the (divinely created) *kosmos* changed. The attentiveness of these papers to borrowings and re-workings of ancient ideas on human-animal relations and to the subsequent developments up to the Middle-Ages clearly reflects this transitional character.

1. SCHAAF, *Animal Kingdom*, p. 1.

The long list of existing publications on the study of (Christian) views on animals in Late Antiquity (p. 3, n. 11) presented by SCHAAF somewhat contradicts the statement on the book's back cover that this is a "thematic area largely neglected in previous research." Nevertheless, SCHAAF is absolutely right that the topic and the time period still offer a great deal of potential for new research, to which the present volume is a valuable contribution.

The first paper by ROBERTA FRANCHI (*«Ecco, io vi mando come agnelli in mezzo ai lupi»* (Mt 10,16): *eretici e animali nel cristianesimo antico*; pp. 9–34) focuses on a major aspect of Christianity's place within a social environment that was characterized by religious polyphony and the unfinished consolidation of Christian dogma: the search for the right faith and the definition of misbelief and heresy. As the paper shows, animal imagery played an important role in the rhetoric and literary treatment of those who became identified as transgressors within the continuously contested early Christian discourse. Already in non-Christian ancient traditions, animals' observed or ascribed behavior served as mirrors for human characterization. As FRANCHI argues, the Christian approach added a specific religious value with regard to different categories of the faithful inside and outside the church. She demonstrates how the writings of Theophilus of Alexandria, Irenaeus and Origen treat animals as polysemic concepts that allowed interpretations *in bonam* and *in malam partem* with regard to human moral behavior. In this context one might add that the legitimacy of interpreting animals as moral and metaphysical exempla was by no means uncontested in Late Antiquity. Despite its popularity, the practice did receive criticism from those who favored an exclusively literal treatment of animals and plants as parts of God's creation.²

The main part of FRANCHI's paper presents concrete examples of Christian texts from the first centuries AD that apply animal-imagery in the specific context of defining and identifying misbelief: rams (leaders of the heard/the church/heretic groups), high-flying vultures (representing the haughty pride of the church's enemies), various beasts of prey (threatening the faithful). Miniatures from the famous but later Aberdeen bestiary (ca. 1200 AD) accompany the text. The strong point of FRANCHI's selection is the clarity with which the examples reflect the challenges perceived by

2. On this topic and with regard to visual and textual sources, see the excellent discussion by HENRY MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean. The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art*. University Park – London 1987.

propagators of the still fluid Christian doctrine. Unity vs. deviation (see the example of the heron never changing its nest, i.e., the true faith), confusion and truth (night birds that do not stand the light) and “false” teachers assaulting the church (ravaging wolves or serpents poisoning the discussion among the faithful) are the dominant topics. They show the strong correlation of *zeitgeist* and perception of nature in early Christian discourse.

DANIEL OGDEN presents a well-structured analysis of *The Function of Dragon Episodes in Early Hagiography* (pp. 35–58). Referring to texts mainly between the 2nd and the 9th century AD, he identifies a set of motives common in most of these stories: the dragon’s pestilential breath “embodying a community’s commitment to pagan worship”; the saint’s victory over the dragon as a demonstration of his/her own faith and embodiment of the community’s liberation from their unbelief; mass conversion within the community; the construction of a monastery, church or hermitage in or on top of the dragon’s den; the dragon’s association with the devil, the Serpent of Eden or a demon and the revelation of its true identity by exorcism; while the dragon is rarely killed, something that OGDEN attributes to the assumed immortality of demons and Satan, it is frequently depicted as led by the saint with a delicate cloth, then expelled or confined in an underground abyss; finally, the resurrection of the dragon’s last victim(s). These common structural elements are drawn from canonical and apocryphal biblical texts. They also come from non-Christian dragon narratives, such as the depiction of the dragon’s death by bursting or the ancient idea of the dragons’ pestilential miasma. The intertextuality fits well in the broader context of dragon narratives common to Indo-European and Near Eastern civilizations.³ The texts analyzed here thus represent only a fraction within a much broader universe of interconnected dragon narratives. With regard to studies in late Antique and Medieval Byzantine hagiography, OGDEN’s work can easily connect to ongoing research that follows the “careers” of dragon episodes in (eastern) Christian hagiography into the Middle-Ages, showing remarkable developments in their importance, function and outlay.⁴

3. See SARA KUEHN, *The Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art* (Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts 86). Leiden – Boston 2011.

4. See, first and foremost, MONICA WHITE, *The Rise of the Dragon in Middle Byzantine Hagiography*. *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 32/2 (2008) pp. 149–67. Especially the discussion on the textual and visual tradition of the Vita of St. Marina (Margaret), witnessing a gradual displacement of demons as the main adversaries in favor of the dragon episodes, fits well to OGDEN’s discussion of the earlier versions of Marina’s

HORST SCHNEIDER provides a concise and rather basic presentation of the famous Physiologos tradition (*Tiere in Symbolischer Deutung: Der Physiologus*, pp. 59–76), with a focus on the oldest redactions. The discussion of the set of animals, plants and minerals appearing in the text(s), the appropriation and re-interpretation of pagan zoological knowledge and the structure of the chapters are well-known characteristics of the Physiologos tradition. An important aspect of the study is the identification of scholia and exegetic additions in the first Greek redaction (2nd–4th c. AD)⁵ that demonstrate the fluidity of the earliest preserved texts, edited by FRANCESCO SBORDONE in 1936. Another interesting point is SCHNEIDER’s contextualization of the early text versions within attempts to add or replace well-established genres of “pagan” literature with genuinely Christian equivalents, as one can see also in the emergence of a Christian form of romance in the 2nd century.

SCHNEIDER’s discussion of the critique of the Physiologos from an empirical point of view, informed by the reception of Aristotle in high-middle age occidental Europe (Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, etc.), might lead to the clearly unintentional impression that scholarly discussion about the facticity of the Physiologos stories emerged *only* from that period on. An excursus to Late Antique scholars such as St. Augustine and St. Ambrose, who already contemplated the questionable facticity of some of the stories, would have clarified the issue. In their view, the similitude to core insights into salvation history is much more relevant than empirical fact, which significantly changes the perspective on empirical accountability in medieval scholarship in general.⁶

While the Physiologos is a fluid, multifaceted result of centuries of re-working and re-appropriation, CLAUDIO MORESCHINI’s contribution *Gregorio Magno e il mondo animale, tra curiositas e simbologia* (pp. 77–95) presents an early medieval scholar’s personal “bestiarium”. The pa-

story. For another important motive that partly entered hagiography see OYA PANCAR-OĞLU, *The Itinerant Dragon-Slayer: Forging Paths of Image and Identity in Medieval Anatolia*. *Gesta* 43, 2 (2004) pp. 151–64.

5. See, most recently, ARNAUD ZUCKER, *Zoology*. In: STAVROS LAZARIS (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantine Science*. Leiden 2020, pp. 261–301, here p. 273.

6. For this see already NIKOLAUS HENKEL, *Studien zum Physiologus im Mittelalter* (Hermaea. Germanistische Forschungen. N.F. 38). Tübingen 1976, pp. 141-3 and, more recently, PIETER BEULLENS, *Like a Book Written by God’s Finger: Animals Showing the Path toward God*. In: BRIGITTE RESL (ed.), *A Cultural History of Animals in the Medieval Age* (A Cultural History of Animals 2). Oxford – New York 2007, pp. 127–52, here 134.

per discusses the different animals one by one as they appear in Gregory's *Moralia in Iob*, complemented by evidence from the *Homiliae* and *Dialogi* on Ezechiel and on the Gospels. Always grounded on biblical references and with occasional borrowings from ancient zoological tradition and empirical observation, Gregory's interpretations draw the usual connections to human moral behavior and salvation history, as they are typical for the Christian discourse on nature. While the passages on animals are scattered within Gregory's works, MORESCHINI categorizes them into three groups: fantastic (myrmicoleon; onocentaurus; dragon), exotic (camel, rhinoceros, ostrich) and common animals (asp, viper, the horned snake, scorpion, again dragon, ibex, deer, hedgehog and two caterpillars). From an analytical perspective, this division does not appear entirely consistent. The dragon, which Gregory closely associates with demons and the devil in an ontologic sense, appears among the common animals, together with deer and hedgehog. The border between "exotic" and "fantastic", on the other hand, often gets blurred when ancient and medieval authors describe the *kosmos*. This being just a minor issue, MORESCHINI's paper shows in practice how to reconstruct an individual author's bestiary, dispersed in different works with different aims and literary levels. A further evaluation of Gregory's animal imagery according to their frequency, function and internal consistency seems a worthwhile task for further research, to evaluate his specificity within the wider context of late Antique and Medieval exegesis.

FRANÇOISE LECOCQ investigates one specific animal concept and its long but by no means straightforward evolution from the Ancient Near East via Ancient Jewish, Greek and Roman hands and minds into Christian zoology: the legendary phoenix, the old Egyptian sun-bird, the mythical creature that already fascinated Herodotus with its ability to renew itself, a symbol of salvation and resurrection. In her paper on *The Flight of the Phoenix to Paradise in Ancient Literature and Iconography* (pp. 97–129) LECOCQ, who has produced ample literature on the phoenix, follows the different dwelling places attributed to the bird through the centuries. From the association with Egypt in Herodotus' famous description of the phoenix, centuries of Jewish, pagan and Christian tradition "moved" its abode to other places in the Near East (Syria, Lebanon, Phoenicia), Arabia, Ethiopia and far India. Ovid already imagined the bird in a paradisiacal *locus felix*. Christian authors – though not all of them – followed this lead, placing the phoenix in a paradisiacal (terrestrial) abode as well, with strong, albeit indirect references to Eden. Rather than tracing a straightforward development, LECOCQ's description shows a complex transmission of ideas

through time and space, resulting in the phoenix' oscillation between various places, with a tendency towards the material and imaginary east and the transcendental heaven. The paper follows the phoenix's journey also into the western middle ages and the Byzantine cultural sphere, although rather briefly. Concerning Byzantium, LECOCQ considers the so-called Pseudo-Basileian version of the Physiologos (dated between the 5th and the 11th c.). If one would follow the Medieval Byzantine source tradition – which lies outside the scope of this volume – one finds phoenixes in a wide range of other texts as well. The 7th-century poet Georgios of Pisidia describes the bird's resurrection in a poem on the Hexaameron. Michael Glykas' comment on the Hexaameron in his 12th-century world chronicle dedicates a lengthy passage to the bird, retelling the ancient legend of its flight to and renewal in Egypt. Remarkably, the late Byzantine scholar and poet Manuel Philes (13/14th c.) did not consider the mythical bird in his extensive collection of zoological poems.⁷ As a literary metaphor, the "Byzantine" phoenix appears less frequently than other animals.⁸ We find it, for instance, in Gorippus (7th c.) who applied the imagery of its renovation to Emperor Justin II in the context of imperial renewal.⁹ LECOCQ considers the role of the phoenix as a Roman imperial symbol only indirectly, referring to an older publication of hers from 2001. Considering the importance she attributes to this aspect in her concluding remarks, however, it would have made sense to repeat the discussion here.¹⁰

Similar to MORESCHINI's analysis of Gregory the Great's approach to the animal world, DIEGO DE BRASI subjects Lactantius' *De opificio dei* to an in-depth analysis with regard to the animals occurring there (*Das Tier, der Mensch und Gott in Laktanzens De opificio*, pp. 131–145). In contrast to MORESCHINI's focus on Gregory's bestiary, DE BRASI concentrates on the comparison between humans and (other) animals within the general

7. Georgios Pisides, Hexaameron. In: Migne, PG 92, p. 1520, ll. 1117–1200; Michaelis Glycae Annales. Recognovit IMMANUEL BEKKERUS (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae 24). Bonn 1836, pp. 88–89.

8. See, for example, the "fire poem" by Constantine Stilbes on a fire in Constantinople 1197, referring to the phoenix's renovation in fire. Ed. and trans. Trevor Layman, *The Incineration of New Babylon: The Fire Poem of Konstantinos Stilbes*. Geneva 2015, p. 100.

9. Flavius Cresconius Corippus. In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris. Libri IV. Edited, with a translation and commentary by AVERIL CAMERON. London 1976, p. 47.

10. In some cases a more detailed presentation of the source references would be preferable as well, for instance on p. 100 when a mosaic is mentioned but not listed in the footnotes, or on p. 101 the reference to Emperor Constantine's phoenix coinage.

argumentative framework of *de opificio dei*, whose aim is the proof and description of divine providence, visible in the human himself. This aim sets the direction of a deeply anthropocentric perspective, as it is visible in so many of the Christian authors discussed in this volume. The observation of nature and the animal world nevertheless receives ample attention in Lactantius as a means to experience God. As DE BRASI shows with regard to the treatment of birds, Lactantius' text contains clear traces of Aristotelian zoology. The general aim and arguments, however, show a close connection to Cicero's *de natura deorum*, a work that is an attempt to prove the existence of divine providence from a "pagan" perspective. DE BRASI also finds intertextuality between Lactantius' own works. In his view, the argument in the *divinae institutiones* that only Christians who are informed by the divine revelation can fully grasp the deeper meaning of God applies to the interpretation of knowledge and experience of nature in *de opificio dei* as well. With this assumed Christian epistemologic superiority, the paper adds another important aspect of Late Antique Christian interest in nature and the animal world, beyond or rather complementary to the moral-focused interpretations visible in most of the other articles collected here.

All in all, the present volume offers a wide variety of approaches towards anthropozoological aspects in the Late Antique pagan-Christian environment. While some of the papers investigate individual authors and texts (SCHNEIDER, MORESCHINI, DE BRASI), others focus on distinct genres (OGDEN), specific animals and their conceptual developments (LECOCQ) as well as ways of self-definition and othering within Christian communities (FRANCHI). The reader is confronted with different analytical levels and resolution-factors, all of which contribute to the understanding of continuities and developments during the period under investigation. One quibble regarding the whole volume is the rather short introduction. One misses some overarching remarks that would have brought the different, but generally well-fitting papers together, and position the volume's scholarly contribution within the whole trend of research in Christian studies and in studies of human-animal relations.¹¹

Keywords

animals; Late Antiquity; Christian theology

11. The editor of *The Byzantine Review* thanks Vasileios Marinis for revising the English text.