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Biblical Creatures

*The Animal as an Object
of Interpretation in Pre-Modern
Christian and Jewish
Hermeneutic Traditions*



Karel Appel, *Femmes, enfants, animaux*, 1951: oil on jute, 170 x 280 cm
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Biblical Creatures

The Animal as an Object of Interpretation in Pre-Modern Christian and Jewish Hermeneutic Traditions – an Introduction

1. See for example DeMello; Waldau; Rossini and Tyler; Spannring *et al.*; Taylor and Signal.

In recent years, the growing field of ‘Human-Animal Studies’ has done much to bring animals into the focus of a variety of academic disciplines.¹ Historical research, for example, has been dealing extensively with actual human-animal relations, with animal metaphors and allegories, and with imaginings of animals and their characteristics in ancient, medieval, and early modern times for some time. This issue of *Interfaces* primarily deals with medieval Jewish and Christian texts featuring animals and human-animal contacts of many kinds, focusing on a limited but still large section of the vast field of ‘animals in the pre-modern era’ in order to present a number of different possibilities for interdisciplinary research on the subject.

Both Jews and Christians who wanted to live their lives according to God’s will in pre-modern times sought to be aware of what God wanted them to do, to know, and to believe. The two divine works in which God revealed his power and which could therefore be consulted in order to find out about his intentions were thought to be God’s creation (the so-called Book of Nature) and God’s word (the Bible). Jewish and Christian scholars thus had much in common in ancient, medieval, and early modern Europe: They shared the physical world in which they lived, while at the same time relying on the same religious reference text (*i.e.* the Hebrew Bible / the Old Testament) whenever they needed to make sense of what they could see, hear, and touch. In their eyes, the literal as well as the allegorical text had to be read and interpreted in the correct manner, disclosing as many layers of meaning as possible. Pre-modern scholars regarded every object in a broad sense, *i.e.*, every singular or repeated event, every person, city, landscape, thing, plant, or animal they encountered in the biblical text or in the empirical world as a poten-

tially important signifier of some hidden truth. By striving to draw plausible and meaningful connections between signifier and signified, they tried to unravel the secrets embedded in their textual and empirical worlds and thus to comprehend mankind's position within the whole of God's creation.

In this process, biblical and other textual representations of the world were often considered to take precedence over the extra-textual world. On the other hand, pre-modern scholars could not help but view the 'biblical world' through the lens of what they knew from other texts – e.g. biblical commentaries, bestiaries, the writings of the Greek and Latin natural historians – as well as from everyday observations. Sometimes, they needed to be ingenious in harmonizing the facts they read about in the Bible with what they knew from other sources or from their own experience. One famous example for difficulties of this kind are the Jewish and Christian discussions about an animal mentioned, among other places, in Psalm 103.18: "the rocks are a refuge for the *shafanim*" (סלעים מחסה לשפנים). What kind of creature does the Bible mean when it speaks about the *shafan*? Modern zoology uses the term 'rock hyrax' for this animal. Pre-modern scholars, however, did not agree on how to refer to it. The Septuagint calls it a hare, the Vulgate a porcupine (*chyrogryllus*), a hedgehog (*erinacius*), or a little hare (*lepusculus*), which led other translators to think of a rabbit or coney (Luther, King James Version). Notker of St. Gall calls the animal 'mouse of the mountain' (*mus montis*), which his pupil Ekkehart IV later transforms into a groundhog (Old High German *murmenti*), etc. (Müller 31–40). When speaking about the weakness and helplessness of the *shafan* hiding among the rocks (Proverbs 30.26), every translation provoked different interpretations of this biblical passage. Accordingly, different scholars learned slightly different lessons from the Bible. In turn, every interpretation affected the learned readers' and writers' attitudes towards the same animal in different kinds of texts, and perhaps also towards animals encountered in everyday life.

This issue of *Interfaces* explores the question of how Jewish and Christian authors in pre-modern Latin Europe thought and wrote about some of the animals mentioned in the Bible that they would either encounter in everyday life themselves or that they thought other people might. Medieval and early modern scholars regarded animals as excellent signifiers. In contrast to human biblical personages, animals were not perceived as individuals but rather as representatives of their respective species. Since every species constantly

regenerates itself, ‘the rock hyrax,’ ‘the wolf,’ or ‘the snake’ is virtually immortal and can be encountered again and again outside of the biblical text. In contrast to towns, geographical spaces, and inanimate things, the animal is alive and therefore possesses agency and even the capability to take decisions. Moreover, in contrast to plants, animals are free to move in space, making their interactions with human beings more complex.

Thinking about animals in the Middle Ages was basically a way of thinking about what it means to be human. Animals’ nature, animals’ actions and animals’ virtues or shortcomings were used as symbols and metaphors for describing human behavior, human desires, human abilities and disabilities, and positive or negative inclinations or traits of character. Animals were thought to be pious or idolatrous, insidious or benevolent, chaste or impure, just like human beings. They were considered to display human types of being and behavior in an especially pure, essential form. Thus, for example, comparing a man to a wolf produced a different idea of his character (wild, violent) than comparing him to a fox (smart, cunning). The European beast fables in the tradition of Aesop, but also mock epics like the Latin *Ysengrimus* and the medieval vernacular story cycles it inspired on Reynard the Fox (e.g., the French *Roman de Renart*, the German *Reinhard Fuchs*, or the Flemish *Van den vos Reynaerde*), in which animals exemplify social and moral norms, make use of such attributions, amplifying and distorting them to make their point (Bonafin; Henderson). Moreover, many animals seemingly embodied several different and even contradictory characteristics, as some bestiaries pointed out.² The ass, for example, was said to be a peace-loving, patient, and amicable creature. On the other hand, medieval scholars also described it as unchaste, lazy, and stubborn. Thus, when admonishing their readers and listeners to stick to the rules, medieval poets, theologians, historians, or philosophers could refer to different traits within the same animal or to the same trait in different animals when speaking about human nature and human behavior, choosing from a rich and elaborate set of anthropomorphizations.³

In order to reach a higher understanding of creation by systematically describing and interpreting the characteristics of animals mentioned in the Bible, pre-modern scholars developed a hermeneutics in which each animal is at the same time a thing in itself and a signifier representing something else, as the thirteenth-century German poet Freidank states in a piece of didactic poetry (*Freidank* 12.9–12, “Bescheidenheit”):

2. See, for example, Hassig, *The Mark of the Beast*; Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*; Kay; and Baxter.

3. See, for example, Crane; McCracken and Steel; Friedrich; and Klinger and Kraß.

Diu erde keiner slahte treit,
 daz gar sî âne bezeichnenheit.
 nehein geschephede ist sô frî,
 si'n bezeichne anderz, dan si sî.

The earth does not carry any species that is without the capacity to signify something else. No creature is so free that it can signify only itself.

In order to understand what any given creature signifies in a certain context, a Christian reader can observe it, as it were, through the lens of the four senses:

- the *sensus litteralis*
- the *sensus allegoricus*
- the *sensus moralis*
- the *sensus anagogicus*

A popular mnemonic explains how you should use the system of the four senses:

*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
 moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.*

The literal sense teaches what has been done, the allegorical sense what you should believe, the moral sense what you should do, and the anagogic sense what you should strive for.

To name but one example: in the literal sense, the serpent signifies a snake. In the allegorical sense, it signifies the enemies of the Church. In the moral sense, the serpent represents humankind who can turn away from worldliness, just as the snake can shed its old skin. Finally, in the anagogic sense, the serpent signifies the Devil who will fight against God on the Day of Judgment. As the last example makes clear, the anagogical sense is not only what one should hope or strive for, but also a sense relating to eschatology. In practice, however, medieval scholars often did not apply all of the 'four senses' but only distinguished between a literal and a non-literal (spiritual) meaning.⁴ Rabbinic Judaism knew a comparable fourfold hermeneutic system. It is called PaRDeS (literally: 'orchard'), which is an acronym on the

4. The model of the 'four senses' was thus a way of systematizing different non-literal ways of reading and not understood as applicable everywhere. For the typological and allegorical tradition, see de Lubac; Ohly 1–23; and Wells 43–70.

four words representing the four approaches to a given text:

Peshat (פֶּשֶׁט): the literal meaning

Remez (רִמְזָה): the allegorical meaning

Derash (דֶּרֶשׁ): the homiletic meaning

Sod (סוֹד): the esoteric or mystical meaning⁵

5. See Idel 87–100.

6. For interpretations of medieval Jewish animal iconography, see Epstein.

In short: Both Christian and Jewish medieval and early modern scholars wondered about how they could possibly delve into the deeper layers of meaning they assumed any textual or extra-textual animal to convey.⁶ Not surprisingly, they often had to deal with the fact that a specific animal was of interest to members of both religious communities. A comparison between Jewish and Christian ways of reading and interpreting biblical passages featuring animals demonstrates what the two hermeneutic traditions had in common, what separated them, and how they influenced each other, depending on the historical context in which the authors worked.

The papers in this special issue cover a wide range of animal species, such as the dove, the stag, the unicorn, the elephant, the crocodile, the lion, the hyena, the raven, the hare, and the dog as medieval and early modern authors and illuminators portrayed and interpreted them. Several themes come up in several different papers concerning different kinds of animals. It becomes obvious, for example, that both Jewish and Christian writers and artists sometimes drew on the Christian and Jewish tradition, respectively, when reflecting on the characteristics of a given animal, be it the lion or the dove. It might prove interesting to investigate under what circumstances they did this and whether that kind of cross-religious borrowing can be observed more often for some genres or topics than for others. Another theme that surfaces more than once is the pre-modern practice of deprecating the religious ‘other’ by comparing ‘the others’ to animals. Moreover, adherents of both faiths sometimes employed the same animal for this purpose, *e.g.* the dog, although destructive implications were certainly more dangerous for the religious minority than for the majority. Finally, quite a few animals are implicitly or explicitly associated with aberrant sexuality and obscenity. Chiding and condemning the hyena’s or the raven’s unchaste nature, their incapacity or unwillingness to conform to gender norms, and the unnatural acts they habitually perform was a way of discussing (by proxy) various aspects of human sexuality without leaving the safe ground of moral theology and natural philosophy and, more impor-

tantly, without having to approach the subject straight on.

This issue of *Interfaces* groups its papers in three sections. These sections deal with divine creatures, exotic creatures, and social creatures. However, as should be noted, almost every paper in one section touches upon the two other sections as well.

Divine Creatures

The first section contains those papers that focus on medieval discourses on animals as a means to discuss the relationship between mankind and God. The issue thus opens with Beatrice Trinca's paper on the medieval fascination for the inside of the human body and for the Christian mystics' desire to enter and participate in the body of Christ. To illustrate this desire, writers like Bernard of Clairvaux or Mechthild of Magdeburg likened the human soul to the dove and Christ's body to the rock, which, according to the *Song of Songs*, the dove enters through the clefts in its surface. Elke Koch centers her contribution on the stag in the Eustachius legend and its ability to signify both Christ and the Christian believer. The author shows how Christian medieval hagiographers adapted saints' legends by choosing from a wide array of existing texts and modes of presentation, thereby giving the animal at their work's center the role that best fitted their specific perspective on animals as mediators between God and mankind. Julia Weitbrecht, in turn, asks how late medieval authors and artists received the many different meanings that the unicorn had been carrying since ancient times. She analyzes in what ways they selected certain aspects from the material at their disposal and rearranged it in their own texts and images, thereby producing new perspectives on the connection between humankind's fall from grace and God's incarnation in the body of Christ.

Exotic Creatures

The papers in the second section deal with pre-modern ways of describing and picturing animals as a way of thinking about those parts of the natural world that were accessible only by reading about them, *i.e.* by approaching not physical but textual animals. In his paper, David Rotman explores how medieval writers depicted the marvelous, *i.e.* things, events or creatures that appear extraordinary but are be-

lieved to be existing within the natural order of things. He argues that in order to describe an elephant, for example, European Jewish authors resorted to spatial metaphors linked to Biblical landscapes and that they used Biblical words depicting similar phenomena. Similarly, as Johannes Traulsen shows, the medieval German translations of the *Vitaspatrum* relied, among other things, on their readers' and listeners' familiarity with the biblical creature Leviathan when depicting the otherwise unfamiliar crocodile. By presenting their audiences with an animal that evoked both the hardships of living in the wilderness and the dangers posed by evil incarnate, these texts created a powerful metaphor for monastic life. Another non-European animal that seems to have created a fair amount of fascination among European audiences is the lion. Oren Roman concentrates on biblical narratives about men fighting lions with their bare hands and on how these stories were elaborated on in Yiddish biblical poetry, drawing on Christian iconography and thereby not only expanding the repertoire of Yiddish literature, but also re-appropriating biblical heroes that had formerly been 'Christianized.'

Social Creatures

The third and last section of this issue assembles those contributions that deal with pre-modern art and literature using animals as a means to discuss commendable or reprehensible relationships among human beings. Andreas Kraß leads our attention to biblical and non-biblical discourses on the sexuality of the hyena, which ancient and medieval natural historians and theologians thought of as untrustworthy, sexually ambiguous, defying gender norms, prone to morbidity and acting on perverse impulses. They used the hyena as a daunting example in order to caution against homosexuality, idolatry or other kinds of 'abominable' behavior. Sara Offenberg's article on an illuminated thirteenth-century Hebrew prayer book asks how the Jewish patron who ordered the manuscript may have envisioned himself and his Christian neighbors in this work of art. She argues that several illuminations containing depictions of animals or human-animal hybrids contain both polemical and redemptive messages pointing to an anticipated shift in religious relations and to messianic salvation. In his contribution, Bernd Roling traces different and sometimes intermingling pre-modern Jewish and Christian traditions of explaining why the dove returned to Noah's ark while

the raven did not and what conclusions were drawn from the animals' behavior. While the writers generally considered the dove to be the perfect role model for the virtuous believer, they painted a more complex and often rather negative picture of the raven. Finally, Kenneth Stow opens up the scope of this special issue by extending the time frame from pre-modern discourses on animals to contemporary debates. His article reveals Christian anxieties about Jewish practices of ritual slaughter and the selling and eating of kosher meat from the early modern period to present-day discussions about the kosher and halal slaughter of animals. It connects the Christian preoccupation with a supposed Jewish kind of carnality with a long tradition of concerns about purity and impurity, human-animal relations and the often unstable relationship between Christians and Jews – and, today, also between Christians and Muslims.

In this sense, this special issue on biblical creatures could also be thought of as a challenge and an incentive (1) to further pursue pre-modern reflections on the relationship between animals and human beings in the light of recent insights gained by human-animal studies. (2) It might also be worthwhile to consider systematically the consequences that pre-modern discourses on animals still have for the way we perceive animals today. (3) This issue has been concentrating on animals in Jewish and Christian hermeneutic traditions, centering on pre-modern Latin (and Western) Europe; it would certainly broaden our horizons to experiment with an even stronger focus on comparative research – also including, for example, sources from Eastern Christendom and from the Muslim world and beyond.

Warm thanks go to the editors of *Interfaces*, especially to Lars Boje Mortensen and Paolo Borsa, for their generous help, and to the many anonymous reviewers of the submitted contributions, whose efforts, distinguished expertise, and selfless commitment have been essential in assessing the quality of the papers published in the journal and who have contributed to their quality by suggesting potential improvements.

Karel Appel's painting from 1951 – a product of the Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam movement CoBrA – invites us to see human and animal forms intertwined without secure reference points.

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The Bride and the Wounds

– “columba mea in foraminibus petrae” (Ct. 2.14)

Abstract

The dove – as a term of endearment from the *Song of Songs* – constitutes a subtle recurring sign throughout a medieval mystical tradition that links it to Christ's wounds and therefore to human anatomy, as well as to the poetic traditions of courtly love.

1. “Among other things, these events clearly demonstrate the absence in this period of either an effective ecclesiastical prohibition or a cultural taboo regarding the opening of human bodies, even in the immediate wake of Pope Boniface VIII's famous bull of 1299, *Detestande feritatis*, which is often invoked in this connection (even though it forbade only boiling flesh off bones);” “Boniface's supplementary letter of 1303, which forbade any opening of the human body, seems to have had equally little effect” (Park 47, 281).

The dove is a subtle recurring sign throughout a medieval mystical tradition that links birds with human anatomy. In the late thirteenth century, opening and inspecting human bodies became an established practice in European corporate institutions such as in university medical faculties (Park 13–14). Yet, the interest in human dissection developed not only out of medical practices but cultural practices, especially funerary rituals including evisceration for embalming bodies, autopsies for criminal and public health purposes, surgical intervention in Caesarean section (*sectio in mortua*), as well as the relic cults of Christian saints (Park 15).¹ As Katharine Park observes, the anatomic inspection of open bodies was *inter alia* motivated by the need to determine holiness, to prove paramystical somatic phenomena or by the desire to understand the “mysterious workings of the uterus” (Park 26), the origin of life. The anatomical practice emerged as an investigative regard into bodies that had been opened for other reasons.

Caroline Walker Bynum notes that, in the years around 1300, torture was revived in judicial procedures (Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection* 323), and that the “same period saw increased enthusiasm for boiling and dividing holy bodies in order to produce relics for quick distribution” (Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection* 322). Additionally, from “the thirteenth century on, bands of flagellants roamed Europe, tearing out of their own flesh the suffering and joy of union with Christ” (Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 4).

Exposed open bodies (injured skin, visible internal organs, bodies cut into pieces or dissected) seem to have been very much in

vogue in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe. However, a consonant interest began in the twelfth century. This developed at the same time as the interest in cut and opened bodies in the contexts of funerary rituals, birthing processes, autopsies for science, criminal and public health purposes, relic production, flagellation, and torture. This interest became a fascination with the imagined glorified body, or in other words, incorruptible bodies. Mystical writings and treatises for use in meditation contain descriptions of open bodies or bodily interiors that are not linked to ritual fragmentation, that are not investigative, and where the concern is not anatomy, but rather with proximity to holy figures, as well as an aesthetic and, of course, spiritual regard. The main concern was not science, but admiration and intimacy. Whereas flagellants open their own bodies in order to experience God, the writings that I will discuss here reveal divine bodies that lay open. Whereas relics emerge out of decayed, fragmented bodies, mystical writings deal with whole, glorified corporality often bearing the traces of torture.

Several of the mystical or meditational episodes that belong to this tradition anticipate the anatomic fascination with the female womb. For example, the *Legatus divinae pietatis* (*The Herald of Divine Love*) narrates the spiritual life of the late thirteenth century Cistercian (Ruh 298–300) mystic Gertrude of Helfta. She is said to have received at Christmas, the Nativity Feast (which celebrates holy parturition) a vision that offered her a glimpse into the body of Saint Mary:

Apparuit quoque immaculatus uterus Virginis gloriosae ad instar purissimae crystalli perspicuus, per quam omnia viscera ejus divinitate medullitus pertransita et repleta refulgebant, velut aurum diversi coloris serico convolutum elucere solet per crystallum. (Gertrude of Helfta, *Legatus divinae pietatis*, 4.3.4)

There also appeared the immaculate womb of the glorious Virgin, as transparent as the purest crystal, through which her internal organs, penetrated and filled with divinity, shone brightly, just as gold, wrapped in a silk of various colors, shines through a crystal. (trans. Hamburger 118)

2. For other examples see Tammen, *Marianischer*, and Tammen, *Das Verborgene sehen*.

Gertrude's vision responds to the interest in the one elect womb where incarnation took place.² It explicitly denies specific interest in

anatomy. Organs function only as undifferentiated recipients of divinity evoking spiritual pregnancy unnaturally spread all over the belly. Saint Mary's organs are compared with gold, but they are covered, wrapped in translucent silk: partially unseen, like relics. Instead of being the object of organ investigation, her womb offers one of the many examples of celestial artificiality in Gertrude's book. Veneration results in imagined luxuries. Precious materials shape the aesthetic approach to the virginal body, that is perceptible in terms of *aisthesis* (perception through the senses) but is also pleasing or beautiful (Menninghaus; Braun and Young, ed.).

Another important example of the fascination with the interior of divine bodies is the devotion to Christ's wounds. Christ's wounds confront believers with another elect, glorified body that lays open. The mystical or meditative fixation on the wounds can be traced back to Bernard of Clairvaux's "Passion-centered reading of *Song of Songs* 2.14" (Hollywood 176): "My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, shew me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears [...]" (Douay-Rheims-Bible); "columba mea in foraminibus petrae in caverna maceriae ostende mihi faciem tuam sonet vox tua [...]" (*Vulgata*). Bernard "follows Gregory the Great († 604) in interpreting the clefts of the rock as Christ's wounds" (Hollywood 176, 342). This interpretation, which links the *Song of Songs* with the image of Christ as a rock (1 Cor. 10.4), can also be found for example in commentaries by Haimo of Auxerre and Williram of Ebersberg.

Bernard takes the lovers of the *Song of Songs* as the soul and the Word. At the same time, he does not reject the reading that identifies the dove with Ecclesia³ as he writes in sermon 61, 6.312: "Et si Christum et Ecclesiam dixero, idem est, nisi quod Ecclesiae nomine non una anima, sed multarum unitas vel potius unanimitas designatur" ("And if I should say Christ and the Church the same applies, except that the word Church signifies not one soul but the unity or rather unanimity of many;" trans. Walsh and Edmonds). Yet Bernard's emphasis on the relationship between Christ and the soul, his focus on religious subjectivity paves the way for a number of mystical texts and meditational treatises dealing with different forms of intimacy between the Word and the soul, Christ and his human bride – an intimacy conceived under the banner of salvatory torture and suffering.

In sermon 61, the soul's access to the wounds – the "clefts of the rock" (Ct. 2.14) – signifies redemption, refuge, preservation from sin, and satiety as well as insight. Bernard's sermon became important

3. For a history of these readings, see Astell, *The Song of Songs*.

for later authors. Even if the ornithological details borrowed from the Bible and early commentaries declined, passages such as these were influential:

In his “passer invenit sibi domum, et turtur nidum ubi reponat pullos suos” [Ps. 83.4]; in his se columba tutatur, et circumvolitantem intrepida intuetur accipitrem. Et ideo ait: [Ct. 2.14] “Columba mea in foraminibus petrae”. [...] Et revera ubi tuta firmaque infirmis requies, nisi in vulneribus Salvatoris? (6.312–14)

Within them [the clefts of the rock] “the sparrow finds a home, and the turtle a nest where she may lay her young;” in them the dove finds safety and fearlessly watches the circling hawk. This is why he says: “My dove in the clefts of the rock.” [...] And really where is there safe sure rest for the weak except in the Saviour’s wounds? (trans. Walsh and Edmonds, modified)

Foderunt manus eius et pedes [cf. Ps. 21.17], latusque lancea foraverunt, et per has rimas licet mihi sugere mel de petra, oleumque de saxo durissimo [cf. Ps. 80.17], id est gustare et videre quoniam suavis est Dominus [cf. Ps. 33.9]. (6.314)

They pierced his hands and his feet, they gored his side with a lance, and through these fissures I can suck honey from the rock and oil from the flinty stone – I can taste and see that the Lord is sweet. (trans. Walsh and Edmonds, slightly modified)

The pierced body of Christ is described as pleasurable, not in the sense of sight (like Mary’s womb in Gertrude’s vision), but in the sense of taste. This veneration does not address visuality above all else. Safety and nurture are the soul’s only concerns, and the dove, like the other birds, stands for the need for safety. Of course, entering these clefts does not imply anatomical investigation, but Bernard later points out the knowledge to be obtained by looking into the Savior’s open body:

Quidni videam per foramen? [...] Patet arcanum cordis per foramina corporis, patet magnum illud pietatis sacramentum,

patent “viscera misericordiae Dei nostri, in quibus visitavit nos oriens ex alto” [Lk. 1.78]. Quidni viscera per vulnera patent?” (Sermon 61, 6.314–16)

Why should I not gaze through the cleft? [...] The secret of his heart is laid open through the clefts of his body; that mighty mystery of loving is laid open, laid open too “the viscera of our God’s mercy, in which the morning sun from on high has risen upon us” [Lk. 1.78]. Surely his viscera are laid open through his wounds! (trans. Walsh and Edmonds, modified)

While this perspective is anything but the examination of an internist, love and mercy are located in, and associated with, the heart and viscera: they do have an anatomy. Christ’s body reveals spiritual deeds. Its openness recalls the sacrifice of the Christian *Sol invictus* and transforms anatomy into an abstract cluster of redemptive acts. The imagery sheers off significantly from Bernard’s starting point with the “dove, in the clefts of the rock.”

The fascination with Christ’s open body subsequently develops in different ways focusing various aspects of Christ’s abstract and concrete anatomy and highlighting the pleasures that emerge from it. The origins of this discourse, the dove and its clefts, either disappear completely or they play a discreet yet significant role in enactments of spiritual and erotic intimacy.

Beginning in the thirteenth century, Franciscans and Dominicans took up and intensified Cistercian Passion theology and spirituality (Steer 56). Bernard would adore Christ’s wounds, while St. Francis of Assisi († 1226) would receive them (Köpf 30–31) – after living a life of frequent outer and inner isolation:

Insensibilem omnibus quae perstrepunt exterius se reddebat, et totis visceribus undique sensus exteriores recolligens ac motus animi cohibens, soli vacabat Deo; “in foraminibus petrae” nidificabat, et “in caverna maceriae” [Ct. 2.14] habitatio eius. Felici certe devotione circuibat caelibes mansiones, et in vulneribus Salvatoris, exinanitus totus, diutius residebat. (Thomas de Celano 27.71)

He made himself insensible to the din of all outward things; and, collecting the outward senses from every side with all

his might, and keeping the natural impulses in check, he occupied himself with God alone. “In the clefts of the rock” he built his nest, and his habitation was “in a hollow of the wall.” Surely in felicitous devotion did he roam round lonely dwelling-places, and, wholly emptied [of himself], he rested longer in the Savior’s wounds. (trans. Ferrers Howell, Shopkow, modified)

A Franciscan guide to meditation of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (Lewis 214; Karnes 146), the *Stimulus amoris*, *The Goad of Love*, likewise represents the shift from Cistercian to Franciscan Passion piety, showing a greater interest in bodily details. The text was formerly attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux or to Bonaventure but scholars now regard the Franciscan James of Milan as its author. There are at least five versions of the Latin text (Eisermann 62–63). One of the first meditations reads as follows:

O amatissima vulnera Domini mei Iesu Christi! Nam, cum ea quadam vice oculis subintrarem apertis, ipsi oculi sanguine sunt repleti, sicque nihil aliud videns coepi ingredi manu palpans, donec perveni ad intima viscera caritatis suae, quibus undique circumplexus reverti nequivi. Ideoque ibi habito et, quibus vescitur, cibus vescor ac ibi inebrior suo potu; ibi tanta abundo dulcedine, ut tibi non valeam enarrare. Et qui prius pro peccatoribus fuerat in utero virginali, nunc dignatur me miserum inter sua viscera comportare. Sed multum timeo, ne veniat partus eius, et ab illis deliciis excidam, quibus fruor. Certe, et si me pepererit, debebit me sicut mater suis lactare uberibus, lavare manibus, portare brachiis, consolari osculis et fovere gremiis. Aut certe scio, quid faciam; quantumcumque me pariat, scio quod semper sua vulnera sunt aperta, et per ea in eius uterum iterum introibo, et hoc toties replicabo, quousque ero sibi inseparabiliter conglobatus. (102–04)

O most loving wounds of my Lord Jesus Christ! For when in a certain time I entered into them with my eyes open, my eyes were so filled with blood that they could see nothing else; and so, attempting to enter further in, I groped the way all along with my hand, until I came unto the most inward bowels of His charity, from which, being encompassed on all

sides, I could not go back again. And so I now dwell there, and eat the food He eats, and am made drunk with His drink. There I abound with such sweetness that I cannot describe it to you. He that previously was in the womb of a virgin for sinners now deigns to carry me, unfortunate one, in his bowels. But I greatly fear that the time of being born from him approaches, when I will be deprived of the delights which I am enjoying. But of course, if he has given birth to me, he must then, like a mother, feed me with his breasts, wash me with his hands, hold me in his arms, console me with his kisses, and cherish me in his lap. Or certainly I know what I will do: Although he gives birth to me, I know that his wounds remain always open, and through them I will again enter into his womb, and entirely repeat this, until I am inseparably gathered up into him. (trans. Luongo 105–06, modified)

This passage emphasizes the life-giving qualities of Christ's passion: fertility and birth within the horrifying imagery of a salvatory framework. For the soul that fears delivery, mystical union is fragile and too brief. On the themes of dwelling in God, sweetness, breastfeeding, and pleasurable nurture ("abundo dulcedine"), James of Milan is indebted to Bernard's sermon 61. The *Stimulus amoris* shifts from the unsavoury imagery of bowels and blood to Bernardian sweetness. "[S]anguis qui in se est abominabilis," as Gertrude of Helfta experiences it (*Legatus* 3.30.13), becomes desirable. Christ's body is likewise an abstract spiritual one, as the speaker reaches the "most inward bowels of His charity".

Entering Christ does not permit anatomic exploration because the speaker is blinded by blood. This opulent flood evokes the blood piety of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. What's more, the holy body shifts from masculinity to femininity. The fluidity of Christ's sexual difference (Hollywood 187, Störmer-Caysa) may have been facilitated by the similarity between the terms *vulnera* and *vulva* (Karnes 158). James of Milan takes up the Cistercian "feminization of religious language" (Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* 129). Neither the Cistercians nor the *Stimulus* narrator, however, seem interested in the origins of life, in the construction of the uterus, but in forms of physical and spiritual union.

To be sure, James's passage – like many contemporary vision narratives – deals with God's transgressive sexuality and gender, and has

been analyzed as such by scholars of religion and literature (Hollywood, Lewis, Störmer-Caysa, Walker Bynum). Additionally, the passage might implicitly be seen to oppose Jewish polemics against incarnation centered on the impurity of human bodies: the uterus and bowels (Cuffel 12, 14). The medieval Christians, who shared many of these views of the body with their Jewish contemporaries (Cuffel 12, 124–25), proclaimed a different corporeality for Saint Mary and Christ, while still emphasizing their humanity (Cuffel 109–17, 155). What is interesting here, however, in addition to the non-investigative entering of Christ's body, is the absence of the dove. The first-person speaker does not identify her- or himself with the "columba mea." The gestation and parturition narrative that occasionally evokes parasitism as well as the blinding flood of blood belong to a quite different register. They exclude the lyrical Eros of the *Song of Songs* with its seductive theriomorphic imagery.

In the *Song of Songs*, the dove is a recurring motif that stands for the beloved, her singular personality, beauty, and purity in verses like Ct. 6.7–8:

sexaginta sunt reginae et octoginta concubinae et adulescentularum non est numerus una est columba mea perfecta mea una est matris suae electa genetrici suae viderunt illam filiae et beatissimam praedicaverunt reginae et concubinae et laudaverunt eam

There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and young maidens without number. One is my dove, my perfect one is but one, she is the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her. The daughters saw her, and declared her most blessed: the queens and concubines, and they praised her. (Douay-Rheims-Bible)

The women's love and admiration motivates and enhances the attractiveness of the bride. The bridegroom praises an adult daughter who has always been "the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her." By contrast, James of Milan, stressing the role of Christ's wound as "refuge and consolation" (Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 14) transforms the male lover, Christ, into a mother and muses about the relationship between the mother and baby.

However, the dove is included in other texts, such as the *Rule of Life for a Recluse*, *De institutione inclusarum* (c. 1160–62), which was

written by Bernard's Cistercian fellow Aelred of Rievaulx († 1167, Karnes 120). Aelred's text, which was dedicated to his sister, a recluse and bride of Christ, includes a series of meditations that belong to the genre that explicitly encourages the meditant to imagine her- or himself within biblical scenes (Karnes 115, 131). Aelred writes about the wound in Christ's side as follows:

Tunc unus ex militibus lancea latus eius aperuit, et exiuit sanguis et aqua. Festina, ne tardaueris, comede favum cum melle tuo, bibe uinum tuum cum lacte tuo [cf. Ct. 5.1]. Sanguis tibi in uinum uertitur ut inebrieris, in lac aqua mutatur ut nutriaris. Facta sunt tibi in petra flumina [cf. Ps. 77.16], in membris eius uulnera, et in maceria corporis eius cauerna, in quibus instar columbae latitans et deosculans singula ex sanguine eius fiant "sicut uitta coccinea labia tua, et eloquium tuum dulce" [Ct. 4.3]. (31.671)

Then one of the soldiers opened his side with a lance and there came forth blood and water. Hasten, linger not, eat the honey-comb with your honey, drink your wine with your milk. The blood is changed into wine to intoxicate you, the water becomes milk to nourish you. From the rock streams have flowed for you, wounds have been made in his limbs, holes in the wall of his body, in which, like a dove, you may hide. And while you kiss them one by one, "your lips," stained with his blood, will become "like a scarlet ribbon, and your word sweet." (trans. Macpherson, modified)

Aelred borrows from his master Bernard: the honey, the notion of nurture and gustatory pleasure, as well as notions of being hidden and taking comfort and refuge. He also quotes from the *Song of Songs* 5.1: "comedi favum cum melle meo bibi vinum meum cum lacte meo," "I have eaten the honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk" (Douay-Rheims-Bible).

The two meditational treatises discussed here (Aelred's twelfth-century *Rule* and James of Milan's thirteenth/fourteenth-century treatise) anticipate a shift within vision narratives. Caroline Walker Bynum describes this shift: "Whereas the central liquids in thirteenth-century visions (even of wounds and hearts) are water, honey, and milk, the liquid in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century visions is blood, ever more copiously pooling or shed." (Walker Bynum,

Wonderful Blood 6). In Aelred the bodily fluids rapidly become tasty nurture – honey, milk, and wine – evoking the erotic consumables in the *Song of Songs* that excludes blood floods and such dominant imagery as blinding blood.

Aelred mentions the soul entering the Saviour's body, but unlike James of Milan, focuses on the surface of these internal spaces. The reader kisses the wounds – from within. The trace of Christ's suffering is not a repulsive bleeding flood; this blood makes the lips attractive. Combining passion with beauty and with valuable materials, Aelred's quotation of the *Song of Songs* 4.3 mentions a small and precious textile artifact, the "scarlet ribbon."

Internal examination or anatomic regard into the body of the Man of Sorrows, his heart or bowels, would not fit with this erotically charged discourse. The collage of Biblical references seeks to seduce readers into meditation as the text praises closeness with God. To this effect, Aelred quotes details from the laudatory speech of the *Song of Songs*, Salomon's "epithalamii carmen" (Sermon 1, 5.6), as Bernard calls it. Aelred promises attractiveness of the soul, which he identifies with the dove. In this way, he suggests godly desire. He takes the verse "My dove, in the clefts of the rock [...], shew me thy face" traditionally as the imploring words of the bridegroom. In this way, the dove figures as a term of endearment. Unlike the *Stimulus amoris*, Aelred demonstrates a concern with the bridegroom's attractiveness, disregarding the inner body of Christ which might appear unsavoury.

Another author who maintains the importance of the dove is Mechthild of Magdeburg (+ 1282), the beguine and later nun in Helfta. In her *Flowing Light of the Godhead*, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, written in Low German, Mechthild adapts the language and motifs of courtly literature to religious purpose.⁴ We have Mechthild's text both in Latin and in a High German translation, made by the secular priest Henry of Nördlingen in the fourteenth century (Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* 177–78). Mechthild's writings depict forms of erotic intimacy with God, often presented as visions. Her text sometimes reads as a guide to meditation, like the lyrical passage I cite here.⁵

Inspired by the dialogic structure of the *Song of Songs* (Haug), Mechthild orchestrates a passionate conversation between God and a soul that says about itself: "Ich bin ein vollewachsen brut, ich wil gan nach minem trut" (1.44.62), "I am a full-grown bride. I want to go to my Lover" (trans. Tobin). The (earlier) dialogue between lovers op-

4. On Mechthild's authorship, cf. Nemes.

5. Cf. *Lyrische Narrationen*; Hempfer.

erates with transformed *Song of Songs* imagery:

14. Wie dú sele got enpfahet und lobet
 [...] O du hoher stein,
 du bist so wol durgraben,
 in dir mag nieman nisten denne tuben und nahtegalen!
15. Wie got die sele enpfahet
 Siest wilkomen, liebú tube,
 du hast so sere geflogen in dem ertriche,
 das dine vedern sint gewahsen in das himelriche.
 (1.14–15.34)

14. How the Soul Receives and Praises God
 [...] O you lofty Crag.
 You are so nicely perforated.
 In you no one can nest but doves and nightingales.
15. How God Receives the Soul
 Welcome, my precious dove.
 You have flown with such pains over the earth
 That your feathers reach to heaven.
 (trans. Tobin, modified)

Mechthild's lyrical language of intimacy, her bridal mysticism, excludes the interior of the beloved's body or anatomical investigation. Nor does she look into the painfully perforated crag (which is not bleeding in her text). Rather, her interest is in the appropriateness and beauty ("wol durgraben") of the surface of Christ's body from the outside. In terms of *aisthesis* it addresses the sense of sight. Her eye doesn't follow the birds that enter the crag. Mechthild even modifies the *Song of Songs* by adding another bird, the nightingale, the bird of courtly love poetry, and a protagonist in the pleasant green spaces of the *locus amoenus*. With the addition of this bird, Mechthild enriches the biblical verse with elements from courtly poetry, adding special emphasis to the seductive qualities in the speech.⁶ This passage can also be understood as a tacit refusal to consider the ugliness in Christ's maltreated body.⁷ By contrast, a contemporary text by Bonaventure, for example, the *Lignum vitae* compares the Man of Sorrows with a leprosed body ("quasi vir leprosus," 76). *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* tacitly implies that Christ's beauty is the result of redemption.

God's response in this text identifies the soul with the dove,

6. Another example in which a nightingale in a courtly passage is found is 1.44.30.

7. A later poetic reference to the attractiveness of the dove's red feet emphasizes the connection between the dove and Christ's passion. The color red is linked with Christ's blood, while the dove stands, as usual, for the soul. Passion means beauty. Cf. 2.17–18.10–20.

thereby suggesting that the crag functions as a shelter for the elect one, called the “dove” as a term of endearment. At the same time, the answer focuses on heaven. It gives rise to a grotesque image of oversized, non-anatomic feathers that disrupts visual harmony. The feathers’ shape is due to a suffering that enables the dove to grow into the sky. Unlike Christ’s, the soul’s passion does not result in beauty. The incongruity of this image may also indicate the inadequacy of language and the visible when confronted with transcendence.

The availability of Christ’s open body, in meditation, offers direct experience of God within the paradoxical framework of incarnated transcendence. God is both near and remote. While James of Milan’s foetal speaker fears delivery, Mechthild of Magdeburg’s soul requires impossible feathers to reach heaven. Bernard of Clairvaux puts it as follows in sermon 61:

Ero quasi columba nidificans in summo ore foraminis, ut cum Moyse positus in foramine petrae, transeunte Domino merear saltem posteriora eius prospicere [cf. Ex. 33.22–23]. Nam faciem stantis, id est incommutabilis claritatem, quis videat, nisi qui introduci iam meruit non in sancta, sed in sancta sanctorum? (6.316–18)

I shall be as the dove nesting at the highest point of the cleft, so that like Moses in his cleft of the rock, I may be able to see at least the Lord’s back as he passes. For who can look on his face as he stands, on the splendour of the unchangeable God, but he who deserved to be introduced not only to the holy place but to the holy of holies. (trans. Walsh and Edmonds, modified)

Bernard’s speaker does not pretend to have access to the holy of holies (yet), but – as cited earlier – there is access to Christ’s immortal humanity, to God’s sweetness. Later, Christ is said to be “*Sublimis in regno, sed suavis in cruce*” (6.318), “He is sublime in his kingdom, but sweet on the cross” (sermon 61, trans. Walsh and Edmonds, modified).

Bernard of Clairvaux’s interpretation of “*columba mea in foraminibus petrae*” is specifically Christian, and Passion-centered. However, his primary witness concerning the idea of God’s unapproachability is the Jewish prophet Moses. Being “as the dove nesting in the highest point of the cleft” protects the speaker from God’s

anthropomorphic, yet terrifying majesty. The “clefts of the rock” now offer shelter from God himself, rather than from evil, “the circling hawk.” This sermon oscillates between intimacy and awe, even more explicitly than the later texts discussed here.

Returning a last time to anatomy: as Park shows, female dissection raised “a broad set of issues regarding female modesty and the contemporary understanding of sight as a primary mover of the passions, especially sexual desire” (Park 69). Anatomical images of female bodies produced during the early modern period have much in common with contemporary erotic prints (Park 200). Wax Venus anatomical models from the 17th to 19th centuries combine science, eroticism, horror, and disgust (Böhme 465).

However, the religious fascination with opened bodies, especially of a male whose sex is fluid, operates differently. Spiritual intimacy begins with exposed wounds, excluding anatomical investigation. The dove that enters the wounds does not guide the sight to bodily details. In Bernard’s pivotal sermon, Christ’s heart and viscera reveal abstract concepts, while the body of Christ offers savoury nurture. As we have seen, this body is not explicitly erotic or pleasurable to the sense of sight, but it is pleasurable to the sense of taste. Whereas James of Milan narrates from the point of view of a (blind) foetus (omitting the dove), the lyric, erotic approach found in Aelred and in Mechthild prevents looking inside the beloved’s body. This kind of regard, instead, fosters contemplation of pierced surfaces and a consideration of their beauty – even if this is not without horror.

As a term of endearment, the dove of the *Song of Songs* is a sign of intimacy in two ways. First, this dove is enclosed within the clefts that double as Christ’s wounds. Second, the dove is associated with the lyricism of birds in the poetic traditions of courtly love. These allusions to the bird suggest (erotic) intimacy with God, despite his remoteness. In Bernard, however, the dove can likewise emphasize God’s unapproachability.⁸

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A Staggering Vision

The Mediating Animal in the Textual Tradition of S. Eustachius

Abstract

1. The name of the saint varies in the textual tradition. In this paper, it is consistently given as 'Eustachius,' the heathen name of the protagonist as 'Placidus.'

The paper concentrates on the story of St. Eustachius¹ and discusses the famous episode in which the protagonist is led to conversion through an epiphanic encounter with a stag. This episode, known as Eustachius' vision, highlights the semiotic polyvalence of the animal mediating between God and (Hu-)man. The paper analyses the discourse on animals in the vulgate version of the passion of Eustachius. It shows how the representation of the stag differs between redactions of the story, outlines the alternative readings of the vision episode suggested by this textual variance, and points out their relation to different contexts.

1 Animals in hagiography

In the proliferating scholarship on animals in medieval literature, saints' lives have for some time been identified as a natural habitat for beasts. Salisbury (147) comments that "[i]n their relations with animals [...], medieval saints served to define the nature of the animal world." The critical agenda of scholars who investigate the boundaries drawn by humans to distinguish themselves from other mammals and put them to their use might be one of the reasons why questions of identity, control over nature and on practices of power within the creational hierarchy (Cohen; Crane; Salter) have received special attention. However, as Alexander has pointed out, "[a]nimal and saint stories are not [...] in any primary sense records of medieval attitudes towards nature. They make up a highly versatile genre capable of expressing theological and spiritual concerns, while perhaps being usefully employed for immediate political purposes [...]" (19). One of the spiritual concerns which the cult of saints is 'about' and which saints' lives accordingly address as a genre, is mediation between God and men. Animals as mediators, however, have not yet figured prominently in the medievalists' animal turn.² The same can

2. For animal saints see Hobgood-Oster.

be said about studies that aim at a typology of animal motifs in saints' lives. In the list of functions of animal motifs compiled by Obermaier (46), the mediating animal does not appear.

The mediating function is manifest when intermediaries such as angels appear in the form of animals (the white birds in the *Navigatio Brendani* [ch. 11]) or in animal epiphanies. Schmidtke (1.151) defines animal epiphanies as episodes in which God becomes visible in the shape of an animal (the Lamb in the Book of Revelation [Apoc. 5.6–8.1], and the dove in the baptism of Christ [Matt. 3.16; Mark 1.10; Luke 3.22; John 1.32] which became interpreted as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit), and distinguishes these narratives from animal symbolism. He points out that apart from these canonical episodes, animal epiphanies of God occur rarely in religious literature, whereas the devil frequently appears in animal shape. Although mediating between God and the human saint is thus only a marginal function of animals in hagiography, it is the role that one of the most famous animals in this genre plays: the stag in the story of St. Eustachius,³ a saint less important to medievalists because of his cult than because of the fascination his story had for medieval authors writing in Greek, Latin, and the vernacular languages,⁴ as well as for artists into early modern times.⁵

3. A more frequent function of stags in hagiography is to guide the saint to a destined place, see Franz.

4. In his chapter on Eustachius, Salter 55–70 focuses on knighthood and treats the saint's passion as background to *Sir Isumbras*. The stag is not discussed.

5. On the iconography of Eustachius see Werner. The way in which animals figure in the treatment of this subject would deserve to be studied by art historians.

6. This version is often referred to as *vita* (*vita et passio* in the BHL), although Eustachius and his family are venerated as martyrs. This version (see below) is sometimes distinguished as *vita* from another version which is then called *passio* (BHL 2761), e.g. Ott 486. I will not distinguish between versions by using sub-generic terms as names, instead, I use the term '*passio*' or '*passion*' for the hagiographic narrative, regardless of the fact that the plot deals in large parts with the conversion, separation and reunification of Eustachius' family. Weitzbrecht 111 has shown that this narrative is best understood as the story of the sanctification of a family, not of a single saint.

2 Animal discourse in the passion of Eustachius

The textual tradition of the story of Eustachius, the origins of which remain debated (see below) is vast, and a comprehensive study of the Latin versions and their relation to the Greek is lacking (Batalova 326). There is no modern critical edition of the Latin vulgate *passio* (BHL 2760),⁶ which until today is accessible only in the *Acta Sanctorum* (Sep. 6.123–35; Ott 563–75) and in the collection by Mombricitus (1.466–73). The summary follows the Latin vulgate version (BHL 2760; AASS Sep. 6):

In the beginning, Eustachius has the name Placidus. He is a heathen and a military leader of the Roman emperor Trajan. One day, he is out on a hunt with his companions when they come upon a herd of deer. An especially large and beautiful stag separates from the herd, and Placidus follows it into the woods, leaving all others behind. Deep in the wilderness, they come to a halt. The animal climbs on top of a rock and

stands still, out of reach. Placidus watches the stag, pondering how to catch him. Suddenly he sees a shining cross and the image of Christ between the stag's antlers. Christ himself speaks to him through the mouth of the stag and tells him to become baptized. Placidus returns home and receives baptism, together with his wife and his two sons. Now named Eustachius, he comes back to the place where the stag had spoken to him. Again he meets Christ and is told that he will have to endure heavy losses but in the end will be rewarded with eternal life. Eustachius, in a manner that recalls Job's fate, loses all his possessions. The impoverished family secretly departs for Egypt. After crossing the sea, Eustachius is forced to leave his wife to the shipowner. Coming to a river, he also loses his children: Since he is not able to carry them both through the current, he intends to take them in turns. But when he has carried the first boy over and is on his way back to fetch the other, a wolf drags the child away. Simultaneously, the other boy is kidnapped by a lion. Eustachius is left in despair. He is not aware of his children's rescue: ploughmen rescue the first son and shepherds the other. Eustachius laments his fate, is consoled by God and wanders off to a village where he lives for fifteen years. After that time, Trajan is in need for his much-missed military leader. He sends soldiers to look for him and they finally arrive at the village. They recognize Eustachius and he enters again into service. When he himself sets out recruiting for the army, he unknowingly enlists his two sons. They camp in a town where a poor woman caters to them – she turns out to be Eustachius' wife, who had remained untouched by the shipowner. The two young men recount their childhood stories of being saved from wild beasts, and recognize each other as brothers. Their mother overhears the conversation and believes them to be her sons. She goes to see their captain, recognizes her husband and the family is reunited. Upon coming back to Rome, Eustachius refuses to sacrifice to the pagan gods. Trajan's successor Hadrian has the family arrested and, after a failed attempt at killing them in the arena, put into a furnace in the shape of a bull. Their prayer to God to receive them in the company of the saints is answered by a voice from heaven. Singing hymns, all four give up their spirits, but their bodies remain untouched by the fire. Their

relics are secretly buried by Christians, and an oratory is built over their grave where the memory of the martyrs is celebrated.

The story of Eustachius has been studied for its assemblage of motifs from scripture, folklore and Greek romance (Bousset, “Die Geschichte;” Bousset, “Wiedererkennungsmärchen;” Delehay; Gerould; Heffernan; Monteverdi). It has been noted by several authors that it can be divided into three narrative units: the conversion, the sufferings (or alternatively: the *anagnorisis*), and finally the martyrdom. The animal motif recurs in all three units. Whereas the stag is central to the conversion, the wolf and the lion who carry the children away are less conspicuous. Animals also appear in the martyrdom of the family: They meet a second lion in the arena who refuses to kill them. After that, they are put into the *machina* of the brazen bull. The animal motif is thus clearly important for the composition of the story (Thiébaux 64–65), but it goes beyond constituting a link between the narrative units. Through its development within the plot, it conveys a statement on the relationship between God, humans and animals.

The animal discourse of the *passio* can be read as a pledge for a cooperative relation between humans and animals as creatures of the same creator. This is not only played out through the theme of the hunt, but also in the following parts of the narrative. The wild beasts are checked in their doings by humans in compositional pairs: shepherds rescue the first boy from the lion, and ploughmen rescue his brother from the wolf. Gilhus (22–26) has argued that philosophers from Aristotle on had referred to agrarian life as model of the peaceful cohabitation of humans and animals, suggesting a contract which allows men to use domestic animals for production, and gives animals human protection against their eating enemies. In Eustachius’ story, the shepherds and farmers represent the agrarian life to which Eustachius and his sons will become accustomed. They serve as indicators of the peaceful cooperation of men and animals, and contrast with the protagonists’ former hunting customs. Eustachius’ children enter this sphere of human-animal cooperation and are educated in it, but Eustachius also spends his years of exile in this sphere: He is employed by the villagers as a guard for their fields (“posuerunt eum custodire agros suos” AASS Sep. 6.128). In this perspective, it is not so much the lowly status by which the convert atones for his former heathen life, but rather by establishing a new relationship to God’s creation. In this, he unites with his family, at

least his sons, whereas the woman seemingly does not need to be ‘educated’ in this way.

The link to the third narrative unit is constituted by the compositional correspondence of the wild lion and the lion in the arena who is ‘tamed’ by the sanctity of the martyrs. The lion in the arena, in refusing to attack the family, attests to Eustachius’ transformation from hunter to guard of agrarian creational peace. And since Eustachius’ family is so much in harmony with their fellow creatures, the emperor has to construct an artificial animal, a perverted imitation of God’s creation, in order to kill them effectively.

The animal discourse of the Eustachius story might be read with a focus on the dichotomy of ‘wild’ and ‘tame.’ In this view, the stages of the protagonist’s progress from convert to penitent to martyr-saint would indicate a progress in terms of domestication: the hunter is ‘tamed’ by the wild stag in the beginning and, after living humbly side-by-side with animals, is able to ‘tame’ the lion in the end. The animal discourse would in that case appear to be guided by the concept of domination and could be linked to a Christian doctrine of control of the passions. However, if the ‘sermon’ delivered through the mouth of the epiphanic stag is taken as the key to the animal discourse of the story, it is the aspect of creation, not of domination, which is at the heart of the matter: “Ego sum Jesus Christus, qui caelum et terram ex nihilo feci, qui indiscretam materiam distinxī, qui lucem oriri feci, et tenebras divisi” (AASS Sep. 6, 128; “I am Jesus Christ, who made heaven and earth out of nothing, who distinguished indistinct matter, who made light appear and separated it from the dark”). Cooperation and harmony, not the (self-)discipline of the individual underlie the construction of this story. This is evidenced by the collective conversion and sanctification of the family. Even plants are included in Eustachius’ life in harmony with creation: rather than having his protagonist plow with an ox under the yoke, the narrator gives Eustachius the occupation of guarding the crop.⁷

7. It might be noted that the symbolism of the shepherd is not employed either.

One might not be too surprised about such an optimistic view on the relationship between animals and humans in a story which features an animal saying the words ‘I am Christ.’ The discourse of creational harmony woven into the plot by the recurrent animal motif is closely connected to the idea of Christ addressing Placidus through the mouth of a fellow creature.

3 Stag semiosis

Scholars at the beginning of the last century debated whether the motif of the stag is of oriental, buddhistic origin or whether it is derived from Christian symbolism (Gaster; Petersen; Monteverdi). A more recent approach tries to trace the origins of the Eustachius legend back to a stag cult in the Middle East (Thierry), but the general influence of biblical narrative on the composition of the story cannot be overlooked (Heffernan 70–75). The stag appears frequently in scripture, but two passages are of special importance.⁸ In the Song of Songs, the lover's beauty is praised by his comparison to a graceful young deer (Cant. of Cant. 2.9). The second important passage of scripture involving the stag can be found in Psalms,⁹ where the soul's yearning for God is compared with the thirst of the stag that drives him to the water: "Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum / ita desiderat anima mea ad te Deus" (Ps. 41.2). Christian authors who commented the biblical passages involving stags frequently made use of their knowledge of natural history, building on what Pliny and Aelian had written about stags. Pliny states that stags are enemies to snakes (*Naturalis historia* 8.118),¹⁰ and Aelian describes how stags catch snakes and eat them (*De Natura animalium* 1.2.9).¹¹

There is hardly a more inviting combination for Christian allegory than the antagonism of an animal to the snake. The church fathers who interpreted the erotic poetry of the Song of Songs in terms of the relation between Christ and church understood the young stag to be a signification of Christ (Origen, *Homiliae in Canticum Canticorum* 2.21.11; Ambrose of Milan, *De Isaac et anima* 1.4.31). For Ambrose, the enmity of the stag to the serpent is the final and strongest point of his argument that animals can signify Christ (*De interpellatione Job et David* 2.1.4–5).

The stag thirsting for water in Ps. 41.2 was often interpreted with regard to baptism (Puech 33–47), and there is evidence of stag iconography in the decor of Early Christian baptisteria (Domagalski 116–19). Augustine reads the snake-resisting stag as signifying Christianity. In his *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (41.3), he relates the stag's thirst to the animals' snake-eating habits – after devouring snakes, the stag feels hot inside and yearns for water. Augustine explains the stag as the church yearning for God, and also as the Christian individual who has to overcome his own vices, described as temptingly hissing snakes (41.1). The Greek *Physiologus* (48–52) quotes Ps. 41.2 and ex-

8. The species of the metaphorical animal is not fully certain (McCullough), it is referred to as *cervus* in the Vulgate.

9. Other passages involving the stag, which are of less importance in this context, are e.g. Gen. 49.21; Job 29.4–7; Ps. 28.9; Is 35.6; Jer. 14.5; Hab. 3.19. For patristic exegesis see Puech 42.

10. Smoke from burning stag antlers expels snakes, stag embryos can be used for making an antidote to snake bites.

11. Aelian also describes how smoke from burning stag antlers expels snakes, this is repeated in *De Natura animalium* 2.9.20.

12. On the representation of the stag in medieval bestiaries see Hassig 40–51.

13. The symbolism of the love chase, well known in Greek mythology, might be considered as another influence in the choice of the motif. The figuration of the ‘stag of love,’ however, is younger than the Eustachius story; it is shaped in the context of courtly allegorical literature, see Thiébaux 103.

14. All translations, unless indicated otherwise: E.K.

horts the individual Christian to squash and spit out the sins within him like the stag kills the snake. The stag’s killing of the snake is then interpreted typologically as victory of Christ over the ‘old enemy,’ the devil. Thus, the *Physiologus* offers a synthesis of the two meanings of the stag established in the exegetical tradition: as Christian soul and as Christ himself.¹²

Supported by this long-standing allegorical tradition, it does not seem too daring a strategy of the unknown author of the *passio* of Eustachius to choose this animal as a manifestation of Christ, maybe even to construct the whole episode of the hunt resulting in a vision around the possibilities of playing out the multiple meanings offered by this animal: prey on the one hand, allegory of divine magnificence and baptism on the other.¹³ In fact, the symbolism of stag-as-Christ may have been all too evident for an intended literate audience. Nevertheless, the narrator of the *passio* goes to some length to explain the appearance of Christ-as-stag, albeit with no allusion whatsoever to its allegorical dimension. Instead, he introduces a whole bundle of comparisons between his hagiographic constellation and episodes from the Old and the New Testament:

Sed totius sapientiæ & misericordiæ Deus, qui cunctas vias ad salutem hominum providet, venantem venatus est: non sicut Cornelium per Petrum, sed sicut Paulum insequentem per suam ostensionem. Diu vero stante Placida, & aspiciente cervum, & admirante vastitatem ejus, & deficiente circa captionem, demonstrat illi Deus indicium tale, quod non timeret, neque supra suæ virtutis esset magnitudinem: sed sicut sub Balaam, tribuens asinæ verbum, arguit ejus insipientiam [...]. (AASS Sep. 6.124).

But in the full wisdom and mercy of God, who provides all the paths to human salvation, the hunter is [really] the hunted: not like Cornelius by Peter, but like Paul being tracked by his revelation. While Placidas was standing there for a long time, looking at the stag, admiring his magnificence and letting go of his intention of capturing him, God gave him a sign in such a way that he would not be afraid, and one that would not surpass his abilities by its magnitude: but like he does with Balaam, when by giving speech to the ass he shows him his lack of judgement.¹⁴

Balaam's ass, the classical speaking animal of scripture (Num. 22.28–31), does not at all manifest Christ, it rather becomes entangled in a visionary encounter between the traditional mediators of the divine-human borderline: a prophet and an angel. In the episode told in the Book of Numbers, Balaam does not see the angel with the sword blocking his path, but the ass does and refuses to go on. Balaam hits her and the ass, whose mouth is opened by the Lord, complains to the prophet about her unjust maltreatment. Only then Balaam's eyes are opened and he is able to see the angel. In this episode, Balaam is taught a lesson in humility, by being surpassed and corrected by his own mount. The ass becomes the instrument of a communication between God and Man, but one that operates only indirectly.¹⁵ Throughout the episode, the ass remains nothing but an animal: she articulates her animal perspective when she complains of being hit. Therefore, when Balaam's ass is cited as the model of the speaking stag in the *passio*, this actually underlines the stag's nature as a creature.

The central argument of the passage, however, does not rest on the reference to the ass. Rather, the explanation revolves around the rhetorical inversion of the 'hunter becoming the hunted.' The narrator evokes the comparison of Eustachius with Cornelius in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 10). Cornelius is a rich and charitable Roman heathen who receives a vision and is among the first gentiles baptized by Peter. This analogy is drawn only to be dismissed immediately and to be replaced by a comparison even more flattering and significant in terms of the hagiographical construction of sainthood: Eustachius is 'tracked down' just like the apostle Paul was by his vision of Christ. (Acts 9.3–11).¹⁶ Paul was granted an immediate encounter with the divine, so by this parallel, the stag's revelatory character rather than his animal nature is underlined.

Thus, the vision in BHL 2760 highlights the different dimensions of the stag: he is a creature that can be subjected to exegesis, and he embodies the creator speaking through his creation, *i.e.* the condition of extending exegesis to nature. The speaking stag is therefore not a 'simple' folkloristic motif. In the interplay of hagiographic narrative and biblical references, he becomes a dynamic, miraculous figuration of the different ways Christians were taught to encounter God in the word and the world.

As if to make sure that simple, ready-made allegory is not sufficient to understand the complexity of the stag saying 'I am Christ' in this text, its visual appearance is further developed by the narrator:

15. On the differing interpretations of the episode in patristic, rabbinic and early medieval Christian writing see Roling 9–16. Roling (20–24) shows that Christian authors in the twelfth century began to understand the speech of the animal as being produced by an angel.

16. The "quid me persequeris" of the stag (see below) quotes Paul's vision in Acts 9.4. On biblical parallels and quotations see Heffernan 70–75.

[...] sic & huic demonstravit inter cornua cervi formam sacrae Crucis supra claritatem solis splendentem, & in medio cornuum imaginem Domini nostri Salvatoris Jesu Christi. Qui etiam humanam vocem imponens cervo, advocat Placidam, dicens ei: O Placida, quid me insequeris? Ecce tui gratia veni, in animali isto ut appaream tibi. Ego sum Christus [...]. (AASS Sep. 6.124)

[...] and in this way [God] revealed between the horns of the stag the shape of the holy Cross shining brighter than the sun and in the middle of the antlers the image of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Who also giving human speech to the stag called out to Placidus and told him: "O Placidus, why do you chase me? Behold, I came for your sake, into this animal where I make myself visible to you. I am Christ [...]."

This puzzling description keeps the cross and the image apart from each other, it is not said that the image of Christ appears on the cross, nor what kind of image – the crucified body? his face? – we are to imagine. Iconography and also other versions (as well as scholarship) simplify this complex and overdetermined arrangement to a crucifix between the stag's antlers, whereas in this description it is not even clear that cross and image appear at the same place 'above' or 'on' the animal. This peculiar description brings three different types of signs into a configuration: the iconic sign of the image, the symbolic sign of the cross, and the allegorical sign of the stag, all three bound together by the figuration of Christ, himself not a sign of God, but God incarnate.

The reasons for this astonishing effort at bolstering the stag with biblical allusions and semiotic complexity cannot be ascertained, especially since the origins of the story are not clear. It is usually assumed that the passion of Eustachius is of Byzantine origin. Heffernan has pointed out the appeal of this story in a Byzantine context:

The earliest mention of St. Eustace is contemporary with the iconoclastic controversy, and moreover is by John of Damascus, the leading opponent of the iconoclasts. Damascus was an ardent supporter of the belief that it was in images that God made the invisible readily visible, and considered visual representation a valuable pedagogical tool. It seems likely that

the Eustace legend with its use of miraculous images, especially that of the stag, would be favored by this anti-iconoclastic faction of the clerical hierarchy fresh from their triumph at the Second Council of Nicea (787). (Heffernan 67)

Heffernan's point is the story's interest as material for preaching. In the following part, I will take a closer look at the stag in the context of John Damascene's treatise and compare it with another early version in Latin.

4 Meta-image and mirror image: the vision in John Damascene's *De imaginibus oratio* and in BHL 2761b

The supposedly earliest Greek testimony of the textual tradition of Eustachius concerns exactly the semiotic configuration of the stag discussed so far: the episode of the vision (and only this episode from the Eustachius legend) can be found in the third and probably latest redaction (Kotter 5–7; Louth 208) of John Damascene's *De imaginibus oratio*, in which he develops his defence of images against iconoclasm in Byzantium. This third treatise is dated later than 730. Like the other two treatises, the argument of John's text is followed by a florilegium which assembles extracts from the Fathers and other sources considered authoritative for the argument, including hagiographic material. The florilegium of the third treatise is preserved in a singular manuscript from the thirteenth century, the *codex unicus* which alone preserves all three of John's treatises in full (Kotter 25). This situation has led some scholars to suggest interpolations (Louth 212), however, this question has not been extended to the extract that is given from the *martyrion* of Eustachius-Placidus (*De imaginibus oratio* 3.83). The seventeenth century editor of the Greek passion of Eustachius, Combefis, noted the identity of John Damascene's extract with his version (BHG 641.4).

John Damascene, living near Jerusalem, wrote in response to the first iconoclastic policy that was initiated by emperor Leo III. Although his writings were not much echoed in the controversy that ensued until iconoclasm was condemned in 843 (Louth 197–98), John was recognized as one of the foremost defenders of images and anathematized by the Synod of Hieria in 754 (Mango 3). One of the lines of reasoning which John establishes in his treatises, especially

in *De imaginibus oratio* 3, is the systematic development of what he considers as an image (εἰκὼν: 3.17–24). An image is not to be reduced to a man-made representation, as posited by the iconoclasts, but according to John, a concept intrinsic to God's predestination, creation and work of salvation (3.26). In his third treatise, John distinguishes six types of images (Louth 215–16): the natural image (the Son of God as image of the Father: 3.18), the images in God's mind of what will be in the future (3.19), human kind created in the image of God by imitation (3.20), figures and forms by which humans are able to imagine the spiritual world (e.g. angels) and also elements of the visible world which humans can perceive as images of the Divine (the sun, the light and the beam as images of the Trinity: 3.21), types of the Old Testament (3.22), and finally images that recall the past and are used for instruction (3.23). Under the latter category, written words are described as images in two ways: because letters are images of spoken language, and because written representations of exemplary men imprint their portrayals in the minds of the readers for emulation. Barnard (12) summarizes the list as six hierarchical stages evolving from God, descending from Christ, the direct image of God down to the historical icon.

The configuration in Eustachius' vision brings together different images in John Damascene's conception. Christ as the natural image of God speaks to Eustachius in a dialogue prefigured by the episodes of Balaam and Paul; Eustachius heeds him as man made in the image of God and able to imitate Christ. The stag is an element of the visible world that in a flash becomes perceptible as revealing God. In combination with the cross and the epiphanic (but silent) image, the configuration of the stag demonstrates "the way in which the visible world finds its reality in the spiritual world and images it forth" (Louth 216). The stag-as-Christ can thus serve in John's treatise as a meta-image, being "the manifestation and display of the hidden" (Louth 215; *De imaginibus oratio* 3.17: Πᾶσα εἰκὼν ἐκφαντορικὴ τοῦ κρυφίου ἐστὶ καὶ δεικτική). The animal, however, is only one element in this assemblage of images, which in itself is an image in John's humblest sense: a written image as a recollection of the past and a model of virtue.

Whereas the semiotic splendour of the stag in the Greek text (BHG 641) makes a perfect *exemplum* for John's argument of the divine sanctioning of images, it seems that a more sober representation of the animal was preferred in a different context. The 'Byzantine' version of Eustachius' vision was the most influential during the

17. Batalova posits that this system needs a revision.

18. The texts vary in the date of the liturgical feast, giving either the 20th of September or a day in the beginning of November or 20th of May. An early manuscript from St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek (Cod. Sang. 561, 152–62, written around 900) does not mention the date of commemoration, but has Eustachius between Genoveva and Agnes, both commemorated in January. As Heffernan (67) observes with regard to the variance of the date in liturgical sources, “these inconsistencies reflect wide popularity and local manifestations of piety.”

19. I will refer to this text by ‘Cass.’

20. Meyer, “Der Rythmus” 232–34, posited that the story of the Roman martyr was written in Latin in the fifth or sixth century, was slightly expanded in the seventh century, and was then more thoroughly revised and elaborated by a Greek hagiographer in the eighth century. The resulting Greek version (i.e. BHG 641) was soon translated (back) to Latin and became the most widespread version in the Middle Age (i.e. BHL 2760). The basic reason for his argument is that Roman martyrdoms were usually recorded in the Roman language and could have been translated in Greek-speaking communities, e.g. in the south of Italy. He thus opposes the equally wholesale basic argument brought forth by Monteverdi (396) for a Greek origin of the text: the general priority of Greek texts (biblical, apocryphal and patristic literature) in the Christian tradition to Latin translations. A controversy between Bousset, “Die Geschichte;” Bousset, “Wiedererkennungsmärchen;” Meyer, “Die älteste lateinische Fassung” ensued on the question of textual origin. Delehay (208) dismissed Meyer’s theory. Heffernan (70) remarks: “Though exceedingly interesting and of considerable importance, Meyer’s thesis is highly idiosyncratic and has a great number of opponents.”

Middle Ages, it was translated into Latin and spread in the West, and it was used also by Jacobus de Voragine in his *Golden Legend*. However, Jacobus does not only re-tell the story according to this version, but also records information for preachers who will be using his collection as a manual. Thus, Jacobus comments the stag episode: “Alii tamen dicunt, quod ipsa imago Christi, quae inter cornua cervi apparuit, haec verba protulit” (*Legenda Aurea* 2.2068.21–22; “Others say, however, that it was the image of Christ itself that appeared between the antlers of the stag, which spoke these words”). Jacobus is aware of the existence of two different versions of the story, which are, among other aspects, distinguished by the way in which the animal is involved in the epiphany.

Before I come back to this difference, some observations on the Latin textual tradition are necessary to explain the position of the text that will be discussed next. In the grouping introduced in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*,¹⁷ the tradition of Eustachius is headed by the reconstructed text edited in the *Acta Sanctorum* (the *vulgate* passion summarized above) given the number BHL 2760. It is a Latin translation of a Greek passion (BHG 641), represented by the texts edited by Combefis and in the *Acta Sanctorum*, the vision episode of which parallels the extract in John Damascene’s *Florilegium* 3. The Latin texts that are affiliated to this translation have the longest manuscript tradition (from the ninth to the sixteenth century).¹⁸

A second group of shorter texts is headed by number 2761 in the BHL table, given to a text which is recorded in a relatively late manuscript of the eleventh-twelfth century from Montecassino. It has been printed in the *Bibliotheca Casinensis* (3, *Florilegium*, 351–54; Ott 575–80).¹⁹ At the beginning of the twentieth century, scholars debated the origins of the Eustachius tradition. A minority position was proposed by Meyer: he believed that the texts of the second group represented the original passion.²⁰ The question of origin notwithstanding, Meyer (“Der Rythmus” 270–71) identified the Montecassino text as a later redaction of a version recorded in earlier manuscripts. The earlier version (*recensio antiquior*) is given the number BHL 2761b, it has been edited with variants by Meyer (“Der Rythmus” 272–87). In a follow-up publication, Meyer added the variants of another early manuscript: München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4585 (ninth century).

The fact that the texts belonging to the second group (BHL 2761) differ from texts of the other groups in respect to the representation of the stag has not been noted apart from Meyer’s argument on textual origins. In the texts of group 1, as in BHG 641, it is the stag who

21. "Acta græca S. Eustathii" 66–112.

speaks the words: I am Christ. In the texts of group 2, Christ speaks in the manifestation of the image that appears between the stag's antlers, as Jacobus tells us. Other versions listed in the BHL, such as the *passio Eustachii* of the *Legenda Aurea* (BHL 2762), of Jacob's predecessor John de Mailly (BHL 2771) and of the *Gesta Romanorum* (BHL 2763) also have the speaking stag and seem to belong to the 'family' of group 1. There is also an interesting Greek text that has the speaking image (BGH 642),²¹ but the relation to the Latin version is not clear. Its editor van Hooff (66) observes that the author of this version which has been attributed to Symeon Metaphrastes, seems to correct its source where he deems it implausible, and he points out the speaking stag as an example.

What difference does it make whether Christ speaks to Placidus through the mouth of the stag or through the image above the animal's head? I will discuss this question by using the text of 2761b (Meyer, "Der Rythmus" 272–87). Eustachius, having followed the stag into the woods, watches the animal standing on an elevated rock, but does not let go of his hunting intentions at all: "[...] stetitque cogitans qualiter posset capere eum." (Meyer, "Der Rythmus" 273 [2], "[...] and he stood thinking about how he might catch him"). In this redaction, there is no lengthy comment of the narrator on Bal-aam's ass and also no reference to the Acts of Apostles. The narrative goes on:

22. In this passage, the wording of BHL 2761b is identical to BHL 2761.

Et dum consideraret magnitudinem eius, ostendit deus magnum miraculum super cornua eiusdem cervi; et apparuit signum sanctae crucis super claritatem solis illustrans se. Et vidit inter media cornua eius imaginem salvatoris. Cuius vocem audivit dicentem sibi: O Placidus, quid me persequeris? ego sum Ihesus [...]. (Meyer "Der Rythmus" 273 [3])²²

And when he considered his magnitude, God revealed a great miracle above the antlers of the stag, and the sign of the Holy Cross appeared, shining brighter than the sun. And he saw between the middle horns the image of the Saviour, whose voice he heard, saying to him: 'O Placidus, why do you chase me? I am Jesus [...].'

Whereas in BHL 2760 the narrator gives his audience the perspective of God, who turns the hunter into the hunted and captures him by an overfraught vision, the narrator of BHL 2761b focuses on Eus-

tachius watching his game turn into a miraculous animal, brilliantly marked by the sign of Christ. I would argue that this version, by giving the voice of Christ to the image, also uses a different semiotic configuration which suggest a different reading of the stag. Although the animal is still at the centre of the revelation, he is not an ‘animal epiphany’ in the strict sense. Throughout the vision, the mute animal remains nothing but a creature, looking back in a mirroring glance at its fellow creature, man. Although the allegorical tradition allows an interpretation of the stag as Christ, this meaning is not foregrounded. Rather, the stag-as-creature evokes the exegesis of Ps. 41.2 that interprets the stag as signifying the Christian individual. With the light of the Cross shining on it, the stag of the vision can also be read in the context of baptism, as the neophyte craving for God, in line with the exegetical tradition. In this configuration, the allegorical stag is an image of Placidus’ hidden, ‘alien’ self (already serving Christ in his charity, but not yet Christian), and at the same time an image of what he is to become (Eustachius, the convert) in effect of his conversation with Christ. Thus, in the version of BHL 2761b, Eustachius encounters God in the ephiphanic image of Christ and himself in the mirror image of the stag.

The narrator of BHL 2761b seems less concerned with the semiotic intricacies of mediating between God and Man. Instead, the theme of conversion takes center stage, and the stag iconifies conversion, as his turning back to the hunter initiates a series of turns and returns, finally leading Eustachius and his family to their place in the *communio sanctorum*. I suggest that a context for this rendering of the vision can be found by looking at the monastic culture in which the earliest manuscripts of this version were written.

The earliest witnesses according to Meyer (“Der Rythmus” 272; “Die älteste lateinische Fassung” 794) are the Munich codex Clm 4585 (f. 59v–65v), and the manuscript Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 5771 (f. 228v–231v). The Munich codex, a collection of saints’ lives, is described by Meyer as coming from Benediktbeuren. It consists of three parts (Glauche 140), the first of which that contains Eustachius’ passion is dated to the first half of the ninth century. Its origin has been located in Regensburg by Bischoff (206) and attributed to the circle of Baturich, bishop of Regensburg and prior of St. Emmeram, where the manuscripts of this circle were written. The Vatican manuscript was kept at the monastery of Bobbio (Poncelet 141) and is thought to have originated there (Gamber 593).

The early tradition of BHL 2761b is thus connected to Benedictine houses with an active literary production. Whether this text is an abridged redaction of the ‘Byzantine’ version, as most scholars think, or whether it witnesses an even earlier and ‘original’ text, as Meyer has proposed, is not to be decided here. More important is the question in what light the monks of Bobbio and St. Emmeram might have read ‘their’ narrative of Eustachius’ vision.

In Benedictine monastic culture, the Psalms accompanied the monks through day and night. The Psalms were used as material for the liturgy in the offices, and the *regula Benedicti* (18) ordered the monks to repeat the Psalter in its entirety every week. Leclercq has described how the rule of continual prayer resulted in a “deep impregnation with the word of Scripture that explains the extremely important phenomenon of reminiscence whereby the verbal echoes so excite the memory that a mere allusion will spontaneously evoke whole quotations” (Leclercq 73). It can be assumed that for the literate monks to whom the passion of Eustachius’ was read in the refectory, the stag would trigger echoes of scripture, and especially of Ps. 41.2. Praying the Psalms meant giving one’s own voice to their ‘speaker’ and modelling one’s own reverence and desire on his, in Ps. 41.2 comparing one’s own desire for God with the stag’s thirst for water. The stag as the *momentum* of conversion in Eustachius’ vision could have a special appeal to monastic communities for whom conversion was a mental practice to be continually rehearsed in a habitus of humility and compunction (Leclercq 29–32).

The different readings that can be unfolded by following the seemingly minor differences in the versions of Eustachius’ vision lead to some general observations on animals in saints’ lives. It is true that spiritual matters, not animals in their own right, are the primary concern of these stories. However, the spiritual or theological meanings of animals in hagiography cannot be ‘fixed’ by the reference to allegorical traditions, even if these traditions have produced long-lasting and powerful *topoi*. Hagiography is a textual practice that consists of re-writing even more (in a qualitative and a quantitative sense) than of writing. The re-writing, even the copying of the lives and passions of the saints, is deeply embedded in immediate pragmatic contexts, and it is with regard to these that the meanings of animals in hagiography can be traced.²³

23. In the context of this volume, a Hebrew spell making a reference to Eustachius ought to be mentioned. The spell is preserved in a manuscript from the Cairo Genizah (New York, Jewish Theological Seminary Library, ENA 2672.20, f. 20b/2–10; Marmorstein 294–98). For a discussion of the fragmentary and obscure text with regard to the story of Eustachius see Leicht.

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“Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns”

The Biblical Unicorn in Late Medieval Religious Interpretation

Abstract

This article investigates the ‘allegorical hunt of the unicorn’ in late medieval visual and narrative art. The existence of the unicorn in biblical lore is an important factor in how the unicorn has been integrated into Christian symbolism. By expanding the narrative connection between hunting, virginity, and taming provided by *Physiologus*, the allegorical interpretations turn the taming of the wild unicorn into signifying the incarnation of Christ. This influential interpretation enables an overlaying of allegorical meanings in various media. In this process, knowledge is organized into clusters of meaning in which the creature functions as a dynamic reservoir of knowledge. This perspective allows for a deeper understanding of the functions of animals (or more specifically, human-animal relations) in medieval Christian interpretation.

The Unicorn in Biblical Lore

We do not usually think of the unicorn as a ‘biblical creature,’ but it can indeed be found in Bible translations from Late Antiquity. These, as well as ancient zoological texts, were the sources for interpretation during the Middle Ages, and the mere existence of the unicorn in biblical lore is an important factor in how the unicorn has been integrated into Christian symbolism. Appearing as an elusive hybrid creature throughout time, the unicorn nonetheless avoided objectification through its (imagined) desire to associate with humans.

The focus on encounters and relations between humans and animals is significant with regard to how animals are perceived and interpreted in the Middle Ages. An especially influential aspect of the creation story is that it also reveals the origins of the relationship between humans and animals. The story of Paradise presents man and beast living peacefully side by side in a natural state, which ends with

the lapse. The fall from grace marks a *caesura*, after which peace is followed by the practices of hunting and domestication. In Christian medieval literature, there seems to be both a deep fascination with the loss of the natural state and a deep yearning for its return. It is also understood that the divide can no longer be recovered. This tension provides a background for the history of fascination with the unicorn.

While Rainer Maria Rilke called the unicorn “the animal that does not exist” (“das Tier, das es nicht giebt:” Rilke, “Die Sonette an Orpheus” 2.4, 273), during the Middle Ages, its existence was considered a zoological fact. In antiquity, natural history regarded it as a chimera that defied essentialistic description. According to Pliny The Elder, “the body resembles a horse, but in the head a stag, in the feet an elephant, and in the tail a boar” (“corpore equo similem, capite cervo, pedibus elephanto, cauda apro”). Despite its small size, it is considered to be “the fiercest animal” (“asperrimam autem feram monocerotem:” Pliny, *Natural History* 8.76, 56f.).

These ‘ancient’ qualities were complemented by several passages in the Old Testament that refer to a likewise ferocious beast called *re’em* with a powerful horn (for example, in Job 39.9 or in Psalm 22.21, which is quoted in the title of this article). Therefore, Jerome and other translators of the Bible never questioned whether or not the unicorn existed. Instead, they dealt with the philological question of whether *re’em* should be translated as *rhinoceros* or *monoceros* (Einhorn 48). This was resolved one way or the other (Wischnewsky 20), but there was never any doubt about the animal itself and its characteristics. This meant the unicorn was firmly placed within the overall scheme of creation. Its connotative characteristics also made it suitable for Christian allegorical interpretation. Yet, unlike a horse or dog, this *fera asperrima*, or exceptionally wild creature, provides no functional level for a relationship. The unicorn keeps its distance, with access possible only through hunting or taming.

The Unicorn in Christian Interpretation

The Christian interpretation focuses on the ‘hunt of the unicorn’ in a special and very exclusive way – with a lasting influence on perceptions of the unicorn. The influential narrative of the unicorn being

tamable only by a beautiful virgin is first found in the Greek *Physiologus* tradition:

The monoceras, that is, the unicorn, has this nature: he is a small animal like the kid, is exceedingly shrewd, and has one horn in the middle of his head. The hunter cannot approach him because he is extremely strong. How then do they hunt the beast? Hunters place a chaste virgin before him. He bounds forth into her lap and she warms and nourishes the animal and takes him into the palace of kings. (*Physiologus*, “On the unicorn” 51)

The *Physiologus* provides ancient zoological knowledge in a Christian interpretation, yet this narrative *might* go back to Indian mythology (Einhorn 35; Lavers 9f.). Unicorn here is the name of a man, son of a human and a gazelle with a single horn on his head, who is living as an ascetic in the forest. He is lured from his hermitage by a beautiful woman, and together their union brings rain to a drought-stricken land. If this fertility myth left any traces in the medieval versions of the unicorn narrative, they are hidden in the gender coding, in the encounter of male animal and virgin. Yet it seems futile to try to reconstruct exactly how the virgin enters into the story of the unicorn. We can see, however, how certain animal topics are transformed by interpretation within the Christian tradition. This is how the *Physiologus* participates in generating new knowledge – unicorn knowledge. By expanding the narrative connection between hunting, virginity and taming, the unicorn simultaneously becomes the object of an allegorical interpretation, in which the unicorn represents Christ, the enticing Virgin Mary, and the motif of taming signifies the incarnation of Christ.

The narrative correlation of unicorn and woman remains consistent throughout the Middle Ages and, thus, can itself become an object of interpretation. The influential interpretation as incarnation enables a layering of allegorical meanings in various media. In the process, unicorn knowledge is organized into clusters of meaning in which the creature functions as a kind of dynamic reservoir of knowledge. This is important for understanding the functionalizing of animals (or more specifically, human-animal relations) in medieval Christian interpretation. I will illustrate this by presenting an example of the pictorial subject usually referred to as ‘allegorical hunt of the unicorn’ (or simply: *hortus conclusus*) (Schiller 63; Burgs-

dorff 311). It is predicated on the above-mentioned narrative connection between hunting and taming and can be found in a variety of allegorical images.

The 'Allegorical Hunt of the Unicorn' in Textile Art

The subject is primarily found in German and Swiss textile art of the fifteen and sixteenth centuries (Rapp Buri und Stucky-Schürer 64; Vizkelety 592). Typically, it draws a connection between the allegorical hunt of the unicorn and the divine Annunciation. The subject associates hunter and virgin from the *Physiologus* tradition with the archangel Gabriel and Mary, which makes for an easy step from 'hunting' or 'taming' to 'conceiving.' This is shown by the image of the unicorn seeking shelter from the hunter in Mary's lap. The abstract nature of the Annunciation is set concretely in time and space at the very moment of impregnation. This is not just a visualization of the unicorn hunt, but through the animal image, the allegory also creatively lends material substance to the mystery of the incarnation (Manuwald 139).

A very detailed example is a large-scale tapestry (or *antependium*), dated 1480, which very likely was produced for the nunnery St. Agnes in Schaffhausen (Rapp Buri und Stucky-Schürer 205; Bartl 234; fig. 1).

On the left, the archangel Gabriel can be seen holding a hunting horn to his mouth with his left hand. His right hand holds a lance with a banner as well as four dogs on leashes. Their banners identify them as *veritas* ("truth"), *iustitia* ("righteousness"), *pax* ("peace") and *misericordia* ("mercy"), a common connotation for the dogs within this topic. The group stands before a low wall which encloses an elongated, six-sided garden. There are three towered entrances set in the wall, a fountain in the middle of the composition, and to its right is a spotted unicorn. It stands on its hind legs and leaps toward the seated Mary. She holds a book in her left hand, bows toward the unicorn and holds its long spiral horn in her right hand.

As we have seen before, the reference of the hunter to the archangel enables an association with the Annunciation. In this example, additional focus is drawn to Mary by the many references to virginity. There is clear reference to the Song of Songs with *hortus conclusus* ("enclosed garden") spelled out on the banner beneath the uni-

Figure 1. Hortus conclusus. Antependium (104 x 380 cm), 1480. Zürich, Landesmuseum, Inv. LM 1959.



corn. The garden wall has three gates: the *porta clausa*, the *porta ezechielis* and the *porta aurea*. The latter, the Golden Gate, makes reference to the encounter described in the *apocrypha* between Mary's parents, Anne and Joachim, after having conceived the holy virgin (Schiller 64). Further architectural elements include the Tower of David (up right) and the sealed fountain (*fons signatus*), which are both symbols for Mary in the Litany and in hymns. Further symbols of Mary appear as the *stella Jacob* (star of Bethlehem), the Ark of the Covenant, Aaron's rod, and Gideon's fleece (Unfer Lukoschik 76; Bartl 241).

While the subject may be conventional, the tapestry is exceptional in bringing together the references to Mary and the incarnation in a comprehensive interrelationship to the history of salvation. The dominant reference to the virgin conception is completely in line with the tradition of biblical interpretation. On the other hand, the unicorn – a novelty – is used as a typological reference to manifest the fall of man and his redemption through Christ's sacrifice (Rapp Buri und Stucky-Schürer 205). At the peak of the hunt, at the very moment of conception, this particular animal is not just tamed but also killed. The unicorn flees to the lap of the virgin, who holds it firmly by the horn. Simultaneously, Adam fatally lances the creature from above while Eve catches the flow of blood in a chalice from below. Banners near Adam and Eve display quotes from Isaiah about the connection between sacrificial death and redemption: "[p]se . aut . vulneratus . ē prup/ter . iniquitates . nostras" ("But he was wounded for our transgressions") and "Et livore . eius . sanati . sumus" ("and with his stripe[s] we are healed" Isaiah 53.5).

This motif can probably be traced back to a German version of the *Gesta Romanorum* titled *Das ist der Römer Tat* ("These are the Romans' Deeds") from the fourteenth century (Rapp Buri und Stucky-Schürer 64; Bartl 246).

Here, the unicorn is actually captured by two virgins:

Aber die iunchfraw die daz swert trüg do die sach . daz es
entslaffen waz . in der schos irer gespiln . die slûg im sein
haubt ab . vnd tötet ez . die ander vieng sein plût . in daz pech.
Vnd von dem plût hiezz im der chûnich machen ein purpur.
(*Gesta Romanorum* 129)

The virgin with the sword cut off its head and killed it while

it slept in her companion's lap. And the other caught its blood in a basin from which the king requested purple dye to be made.

In this allegorical tale, the two virgins are interpreted as being Eve who kills the unicorn, and Mary who receives the blood. While, in this typology, Mary stands as an antitype to compensate for Eve's primordial sin, the Basel tapestry distinguishes Adam and his lethal spear. This provides a universal connection between the fall of man and Christ's sacrificial death, which enhances the incarnation symbolism (Bartl 244). As Henrike Manuwald has shown with reference to another, more diagrammatical textile representation of the subject, the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' is more than just an *accumulatio* of topics. The various interconnected fields call up associations which lend additional plasticity to the depiction (Manuwald 141, n. 61). In order to 'read' and understand this complex visualization – especially the aspect of self-sacrifice – one must know the history of unicorn interpretations; in other words, one must possess unicorn knowledge (Bartl 250).

In its weave of edification, allegory and narration, the tapestry offers varying modes of creating meaning which allude to religious reflection. The eye is led from left to right, more or less following a series of spiritual stations. These can be assimilated by reading the banner inscriptions in sequence, or by taking an imaginary walk through the garden. In the National Museum in Zurich, where the tapestry is exhibited today, you can take an audio-visual 'tour.' By illuminating individual parts of the tapestry, the presentation successively points out areas on the weaving that refer to the hunt, but which also represent the universal salvation drama of pursuit, deliverance and sacrificial death. In the center of the image, the sealed fountain stands for the virgin's constant and eternally unspoiled state. However, the visual axes draw focus to Mary and the unicorn. The dramatic, eye-catching figure is the spotted creature. The dynamic of the visualization is evoked by the Christian interpretation of a virgin who hunts and tames the animal. However, it is not the virgin who is penetrated by the unicorn, but the unicorn that is run through by Adam's lance.

At the juncture of knowledge, interpretation and narration, human-animal relations stimulate various associations. This process is connected to the system of Christian allegory, and yet seems to be more dynamic than the strict procedure following the four scriptur-

al senses that we commonly associate with it (cf. Freytag). Jens Pfeiffer has asserted that the process of Christian hermeneutics is not fixed to an already existing, pre-defined meaning (Pfeiffer). Instead, it is facilitated and modified by each new layer that is added to the original topic. Medieval fable commentaries provide different modes of allegory that indicate the manifold possibilities of interpretation that fable topics (and that is: mostly animals) cater to, thus producing new meaning (Wheatley).

The 'Allegorical Hunt of the Unicorn' in the *Beschlossen gart des Rosenkrantz Marie* (1505)

Regarding the unicorn, this can be shown by the example of an allegorical story from the late Middle Ages. In this case, the dense visualization of the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' that we have seen in the tapestry is transferred, or re-literalized, into a narrative structure. I will examine a chapter from the sixth book in the religious anthology *Beschlossen gart des Rosenkrantz Marie* (*The Enclosed Garden of Mary's Rosary*), which was published in 1505 by Ulrich Pinder in Nuremberg. It has been of particular interest to art history because of its over 600 woodcut images by, among others, Hans Schäufelein and Hans Baldung Grien (Vollmer). The collection was probably commissioned by the Fraternity of the Rosary to disseminate religious knowledge and techniques for the use of the rosary (Illing 829) – or as written in the book's foreword, instructions for "the daily commemoration of Mary's gift of virtue and grace" ("teglicher gedechtnus der tugent gab un[n] genad marie:" *Beschlossen gart*, f. i^{rb}). The specific context for usage may be found in private reading. By using the medial potential of both image *and* text, this book reconfigures unicorn knowledge in a specific way.

I will first describe the image of the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' that is used as a title woodcut for the chapter of Book 6 called "Von der menschwerdong gottes nach geistlicher auslegong der hystori von dem einhorn" ("On God's Incarnation According to the Religious Interpretation of the Story of the Unicorn"; fig. 2).

Compared to the meditative composition of the Basel tapestry, the dynamics here are striking. The entire hunting party is located within the walls, appearing to be frozen in their movements. The archangel's robe billows; the dogs leap toward the seated Mary. The unicorn itself appears to be the leader of this wild hunt rather than

Figure 2. *Der beschlossn gart des rosenkra[n]tz marie*, Nürnberg: Ulrich Pinder (1505). München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, ESlg/2 Pl.at. 1237-2, f. ix^v.



its harried prey. Its head is lowered like a charging bull with its sharp horn pointed directly at the virgin's lap. By comparison, the whole right side of the image seems still, beginning from the Ark of the Covenant, which dominates the center of the arrangement and, together with tower of David and the sealed fountain, forms a line of typological references that is leading to Mary. With her arms crossed, Mary patiently awaits the impregnation. The entire depiction is focused on the moment of conception. The excessive action of the unicorn seems to produce a surplus of meanings, which, unlike more traditional versions, radicalizes the embodiment and physicality of the subject. This incarnation has not been tamed, and this unicorn is not a victim.

Similar to this visualization, the following allegory makes use of existing information from natural science and the Christian interpretation, but it is applied in narrative form. The associative complex of themes for the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' has been transferred to the story (German: *hystori*) of a king whose first son has died, and whose second son is deathly ill. The unicorn is first mentioned in the advice given by doctors who have been called in from many different countries and

[...] beschlussen [...] einhelle[n]glichen disen rat dz disem
verwonten son kein andere erzney hiflich möchte sein/ dann
das plût des einhorns / was das uber die wonden des kranken

gestrichen wird/ verhoffend gesond wird seiner tötliche
krankheit [...]. (*Beschlossen gart*, f. ix^{vb})

unanimously concluded that the only medicine this poi-
soned son should receive / is unicorn blood. It is to be
smeared on his wound / with the hope that his fatal condi-
tion will be healed.

This story has abandoned the earlier focus on the Virgin Mary (the reference is established within the context of the anthology). The hunting motif has been reconfigured in connection to the concept of healing through blood, similar to that suggested by the Isaiah quotes on the tapestry. Unicorn blood is also ascribed healing qualities in the previously mentioned *Das ist der Römer Tat*, but the discourse on the medicinal aspect actually extends as far back as antiquity (Einhorn 215).

Thus, the allegorical hunt of the unicorn refers to a new literal sense. In the following, the tale alternates between narrative and allegorical interpretation, in which the (allegorical) hunt of the unicorn appears as a prerequisite to the literal healing of the king's son. This presents a somewhat complicated reversal of the hermeneutic process, which causes the topic's status to swing between the significant and the signified. The association of incarnation to sacrificial death carried by the unicorn that we saw in the Basel antependium is also implicitly present here. The blood shed by the unicorn is (literally) medicine, but also serves as a symbolic remedy for sinful mankind. The following interpretation of the story identifies the first son as the fallen Lucifer (*Beschlossen gart*, f. x^{ra}). The son who has been poisoned is Adam, the father of humanity who can only be healed by unicorn blood.

While the visual examples use typological references to further establish the allegorical connection between Eve and Mary, the lapse, Christ's sacrificial death and the redemption of mankind, the allegorical narrative transfers these associations to an index of individual piety. Once the redemptional reference to the two sons has been determined, the participants in the hunting party are categorized according to their virtues. This time it is a whole group of virgins (that is: Mary's virtues) who lure the unicorn. Filling the role of the hunter are four greyhounds (*fier schnell hond*) as well as a little lead dog or flushing dog (*leythindlen, vulgariter stöberlin: Beschlossen gart*, f. ix^{vb}–x^{ra}). Here, further intertextual associations are at play since the

names of the greyhounds make reference to Bernhard's von Clairvaux parable of the four sisters' litigation (Bernhard von Clairvaux 115; Wischnewsky 33). The four sisters Mercy (*misericordia*) and Truth (*veritas*), Righteousness (*iustitia*) and Peace (*pax*) argue about how to deal with sinful mankind. A solution is provided by the incarnation of Christ and the salvation of humankind. Thus, the parable serves as a sort of preamble to the unicorn hunt to which God has sent the four virtues. They are shepherded by the little lead dog Love (*caritas*) who, "flushed out the unicorn and brought it to the greyhounds, who chased it further into the lap of the beautiful virgin" ("das da spyrend das einhorn aufftrybe von seiner stat / vn[n] brechte für die wind die eß dan fürter jagte in die schoß der schöne juncfrawe:" *Beschlossen gart*, f. x^{ra}). The arrangement of the hunt falls completely under *sensus moralis*. The hunt leads the virtue-dogs to Mary's virtues and flows into the conception scene:

Als bald nach dem vn[n] die juncfraw vonn der heilige
dryeinikeit außewelt ward / die jaghond bestellt mit sampt
dem leithindlin / vnd die vereinigung der vier wind gehöert
ward / Sant der förderlichost jeger / sez / d[er] heilig geist
auß seinen knecht / den engel Gabriel zu der juncfrawe die
da schön von leib / und noch schöner nach der sel was / dz sy
sich bereyten wer / mitsampt jeren juncfrawen vn[n] die
herzlich begrüste sprechend / Ave Maria / Griest seyst
duß Maria / voller genad / d[er] her ist mit dir. (*Beschlossen
gart*, f. x^{va-b})

After the virgin had been chosen by the Holy Trinity, the
hunting dogs had arrived with the lead dog / and the four
greyhounds had been bound together / the foremost hunter
(that is: the Holy Ghost) sent out his servant / the angel
Gabriel to the beautiful virgin whose soul was even more
beautiful / so that she and her virgins should prepare / and he
sincerely greeted her, saying / Ave Maria / Hail Mary / full of
grace / the Lord is with you.

The hunt is not reinterpreted as the conception itself, but instead provides a prerequisite for it. What follows is a holy salvation drama including injury, healing and recovery (*vulneratio*, *medicacio* and *sanacio*) with a focus on unicorn blood. There can be no healing without unicorn blood; no unicorn without the Annunciation; and

no Annunciation without the preceding hunt. Therefore, at the end of the search, there is no allegorical interpretation of a *res propria*. Instead, both – the *res* itself and its significate – join together, “so that at this very moment the unicorn, the son of God, was caught” (“Dz also do zu der selbe stund gefangen ward das einhorn der son gotes:” *Beschlossen gart*, f. x^{vb}).

By identifying the different levels of allegorical meaning, I find it notable how new meaning is created in the process of layering various levels of interpretation. In the end, salvation is not an abstract reference gained by heaping layers upon layers of allegorical interpretation. Instead, the central event of Christ’s sacrifice is re-literalized in the healing of the poisoned prince, and thus made very concrete. We can also observe this procedure in the dogs. The four greyhounds are ‘biblical creatures’ too, but unlike the wild *re’em* creature, they only appear as abstract cardinal virtues in Psalm 84, which Bernhard refers to. Their canine materialization requires the unicorn – more specifically, the whole subject of the ‘allegorical hunt of the unicorn’.

Courtly Reinterpretations of the ‘Hunt of the Unicorn’

This article began by considering the questions: how are the intricate relationships between unicorn and woman, as well as hunt and virginity, symbolized and functionalized in various contexts? How are they enriched with new meaning? And to what degree is this tied to animals or the concepts of animality? Especially within religious contexts, it is apparent that we come back to creatureliness in order to evoke or at least suggest a sensual religious experience. The depiction always oscillates between the concrete and the abstract while adhering to clusters of meanings associated with each species. These do not necessarily refer to the animal itself but rather to specific configurations of human-animal relationships. Perhaps this explains why the religious identification of the unicorn as Christ is a prerequisite for enabling a reinterpretation within concepts of courtly love. The unicorn; the chimera – unicorn; the tamed beast – unicorn; the man, redeemer, and lover: in every variation, the narrative of the virgin, the unicorn and its taming remains stable.

When creatureliness, on the other hand, is linked to desire within the discourse on courtly love, the unicorn’s ambivalence appears on a different level than in the allegorical examples given above. By

emphasizing its purity, references to the unicorn in courtly literature also address the status of the virgin in the process of taming. In Wolfram's *Parzival*, Orgeluse compares her dead husband Cidegast to the unicorn ("der triuwe ein monîzirus:" Wolfram von Eschenbach 613, 22; 541) and relates the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' to the motif of fidelity beyond death, when she calls upon the virgins to mourn the beloved animal that is sacrificed for purity ("daz tier die meite solten klag'n: ez wirt durch reinekeit erslagn:" Wolfram von Eschenbach 613, 25–26; 541).

With this shift of focus to the role of the virgin the narrative permits an ironic distance within the discourse on courtly love, a discourse that issues continuous challenges and endangerments to purity. In Rudolfs von Ems *Weltchronik*, the taming of the unicorn is described as a test in which women who falsely claim to be virgins are killed – that is: penetrated – by the beast (Rudolf von Ems 1782–99; 25). Johann von Würzburg uses unicorn knowledge to criticize courtly love in his romance *Wilhelm von Österreich* (Einhorn 154–67). The protagonist's hunting master reports to the court that the track of a unicorn has been spotted. This puts the entire court in a state of frenzy and prompts them to set off in an attempt to lure the elusive creature with the help of a virgin. Thus, Johann von Würzburg adapts the religious subject of the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' for a courtly context. The printed edition from 1491 (fig. 3) even features an illustration that takes up motifs typical of the subject, but transfers them to the mundane setting of a *locus amoenus*.



Figure 3. *Historia. Wilhelm von Österreich. Wilhelm von Orléans.* Augsburg: Anton Sorg, 1491, f. 62r. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, GW12844.

However, the perspective on the hunt of the unicorn changes as well. The only person at court who remains unenthusiastic is Wilhelm's wife Aglaye, who warns her maid that this will all end badly:

Agly daz wiplich bilde
 hazzt das gejægde;
 si sprach zu der mægde:
 'du bist ein tōrinne.
 war hastu dine sinne
 getan? Wiltu ain tier dich
 lan ertōten daz sich
 niht verstat umm sache kain?
 und wærstu aller mægde rain,
 zwar, ez nimpt dir den lip.'
 (Johann von Würzburg v. 18886–95, 268)

The beautiful Aglaye hated the hunt. She spoke to her maid,
 'You are a fool. Have you lost your senses? Will you let
 yourself be killed by a witless beast? And if you were the
 purest of virgins, it would surely take your life anyway.'

Aglaye's view on unicorn knowledge, as well as the narrator's, is both rational and ironic. Consequently, the creature is not captured. Instead, all the courtiers are diverted from the hunt by a charging horde of heathens. The original romance remains a fragment, so we don't know how the story ends. As the reclusive unicorn pulls even further away from us, all that remains are its tracks. These examples of courtly reinterpretations display a rather ironic treatment of unicorn knowledge and offer a hint as to why, much later, Rilke would have reason to describe the single-horned beast as "the animal that does not exist," that feeds by the mere "possibility of existing" ("Sie nährten es mit keinem Korn, nur immer mit der Möglichkeit, es sei:" Rilke, "Die Sonette an Orpheus" 2.4.753).

I have tried to show that these possibilities of existing, though imaginary, are not arbitrary or semantically indetermined. The unicorn's topical qualities have been formed by ancient knowledge, Biblical lore, and medieval allegorical interpretations that shape and lend associations to certain aspects. The process of creating meaning may be foreign to us, but specific symbolic concentrations prove to be surprisingly long-lasting, especially when they relate to the untamable unicorn.

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Textual Animals Turned into Narrative Fantasies

The Imaginative Middle Ages*

Abstract

* This article is based on a paper delivered at the conference *Biblical Creatures. The animal as an object of interpretation in pre-modern Jewish and Christian hermeneutic traditions* which took place in Freie Universität Berlin in December 2016. I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Astrid Lembke and the conference organizers for the invitation and their generous hospitality. I would also like to thank the two anonymous readers of this article for their enlightening and generous remarks.

1. This problem defining the term known in Latin as 'mirabilis' was already discussed by Augustine in his *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans* 970–80. Since then it was discussed not only by religious theologians but also by historians, literary critics, and folklorists. In Jewish literature the definition of the category is even more problematic, given the lack of a Hebrew term which is equivalent in its meaning to that of the Latin. See Brown; Le Goff; Daston and Park; Bynum; Dinzelbacher; Watkins; Bakhtin 196–277; Tolkien 9–73; Cohen, "Monster Culture" 3–25; Grimm; Dégh 1–22. For a critical summary of the discussion see Rotman 37–62.

This article focuses on the concept 'reconstruction of the world' proposed by G. Zoran in his theoretical work on the representation of space in narrative. It makes special reference to the inter-medially transformative processes that narrators and audiences undergo, as materially concrete objects in space turn into representations in the verbal medium. Investigating the possible bodies of knowledge common to the participants in the communicative process, the article specifically discusses animals widely described in late antique and medieval Jewish folk tales and considers the possibilities for reconstructing the sources of shared imaginary worlds.

This article is part of an ongoing discussion that I have been having with myself and with colleagues for the past years on fundamental issues raised by narratives – especially medieval ones – about encounters with marvelous phenomena and events. These narratives, in my opinion, raise the question of the relationship between such phenomena and events, their textual representations (especially in Jewish literature), and the real-life experiences of the narrating communities. The biblical creatures that are the focal point of this issue are, I believe, a manifestation of one aspect of the topic, albeit a very illustrative one.

One of the main challenges for anyone who deals with the subject is how to define and classify the marvelous as a concept, a category of human knowledge. This matter has been controversial at least since Late Antiquity.¹ To discuss this concept, I have developed in earlier works the following operational definition, which, for lack of any other alternative, is an analytic one, and is deliberately disconnected from terms used by the narrating societies. I crafted this definition because I could not find any other one that was both consensual and included the literary, religious, folkloristic, and philosophic

2. I elaborate on this definition, its weaknesses and advantages, and why I prefer it in my book: see Rotman 62–65.

3. In this I differ from J.R.R. Tolkien's position about "Fairy Stories" who based his definition of the literary genre of Fantasy on the reader's ability of "suspension of the disbelief" and creating a temporary "secondary belief." One of the main impacts of the stories about marvelous phenomena and realms is based on the belief of the readers or listeners that they are all part of their mortal world. Compare: Tolkien 9–73.

4. On Jewish travelers in Late Antiquity and their literary representations, see Hezser 197–440.

ical meanings of the concept. The limitations of this definition, like any definition of an abstract term, were taken into consideration; however, to my mind we cannot analyze manifestations of the marvelous without first explaining what the marvelous is.²

I define the marvelous in narratives in terms of its position *vis-à-vis* the narrating consciousness. I suggest that to be considered marvelous, phenomena and events must be related to that consciousness in three ways. First, they must be alien to and exceptional in the narrating community's life experience and everyday reality. At the same time, the members of the narrating community must believe them to be possible in the real, extra-literary world. Third, they must be tangible: they must be described as perceivable by the senses (especially the sense of sight). This third feature reinforces the first two, in that the tangibility of the marvelous phenomenon stresses both its exceptionality and its real possibility. To count as marvelous, a phenomenon must meet all three conditions: it is not marvelous if it is familiar or mundane, if the narrating community considers it impossible in the real world, or if it is described as completely unperceivable.

I have found that this last element of the definition of the marvelous – that the phenomenon or event must be possible in the extra-literary world – requires the most attention in the context of textual representations, and particularly, narratives.³ There is something elusive in the relationship between marvelous phenomena and events and real, extra-literary life. Despite the fact that the title of this article refers to narratives from the Middle Ages, in order to demonstrate how this matter is problematic I would like to start with older narratives: a few accounts by travelers included in the Babylonian Talmud, that is, from Late Antiquity. In these cases, the traveler-narrators were Babylonian Torah scholars who had returned from trips, usually to Eretz Israel (Palestine), and told their colleagues what they had seen and experienced.⁴

The first example is that of Rami b. Ezekiel:

Rami b. Ezekiel once paid a visit to Bene Berak, where he saw goats grazing under fig trees while honey was flowing from the figs. Milk ran from them, and these mingled with each other. 'This is indeed', he remarked, '[a land] flowing with milk and honey' [Exod. 33.3]. (BT Ketubbot 111b)

On the surface, nothing in this story would be regarded as supernatural, either today or in Late Antiquity. Honey flows from figs and

5. On this aspect see various sources in Kiperwasser 225–26, no. 42.

milk flows from goats. Even the abundance, while unusual, would not have prompted the traveler to spend much time describing the incident. What lends this event marvelous qualities is the combination of two aspects that are really one: the physical location of the event in Eretz Israel and its connection to the biblical text.⁵ The event is exceptional in terms of life experience because it is the realization of a metaphor found in the Bible.

The traveler set out on his journey with the biblical text in his ‘baggage.’ He arrives at the place discussed by the Bible and sees the biblical text coming to life before his eyes. He then immediately recites the relevant verse, which turns an everyday natural phenomenon into something marvelous. But it does not remain so. The physical event taking place in space itself becomes a text as Rami b. Ezekiel relates it to his audience. The audience now has two texts corroborating each other: the familiar biblical text and the unfamiliar story of Rami b. Ezekiel’s encounter.

From this example, I believe we can already see how one of the anchors linking the marvelous in narratives to extra-literary reality is the spatial nature of the marvelous. The marvelous is part of space. It is born in space, takes place in space, affects it, and is affected by it. The dragon is a dragon because of its appearance and its actions; the same is true of the Fountain of Youth. In the example above, the marvelous is defined as such by virtue of the space in which it is located. Its spatial nature is what lends the marvelous its extra-textual dimension, that of ‘real life,’ which it requires in order to elicit wonder in the readers or listeners.

This relationship between the marvelous and space is particularly important in the context of textual representation. At least since the beginning of the famous ‘spatial turn’ in the humanities and the social studies, back in the late 1960’s, space is known to have a special status in fiction as one of the main elements connecting the text to extra-textual life.⁶ Around forty years ago Gabriel Zoran, who sought to develop a theory of spatial organization in narrative texts, put it as follows (25–26):

If we understand the concept of fiction in its simple sense, i.e., as something [...] that does not exist in reality, as opposed to something that exists in a tangible way, we see that very often it is space that does not take part in the fabrication. Every reader of novels knows [...] that Anna Karenina and Madame Bovary are fictional characters [...] but it would not

6. Although it has been discussed for almost half a century, the ‘spatial turn’ in Jewish Studies, and specifically in the studies of pre-modern Jewish literature is a phenomenon of the last two decades. For a survey of the history of dealing with Jewish literary representations of spaces and places, see Brauch, Lipphardt and Alexandra. One should also notice some of the earlier pioneering works, like those of Bar-Itzhak and Bar-Levav who used some of the tools offered by Michel Foucault and others to study such representations in Jewish folklore and folk literature.

occur to them as a result to question the existence of St. Petersburg or Lyons. The locations of the action are perceived [...] as some coordinate connecting these characters to the real world.

In other words, the linguistic representations of space, according to Zoran, are essentially the closest factor in the story to the extra-narrative reality of the audience. This is true when the story is described as a complete fabrication, and all the more so when it is said to document events that actually occurred. However, this fact necessitates consideration of a broader problem, namely, the very representation of spaces, or spatial objects, in literary texts. In other words, we, as readers or listeners, can believe that an event or phenomenon described in the text is possible outside it as well, but to do so we have to overcome the limited capacity of language to represent spatial objects.

I will illustrate this with another story about a Talmudic traveler:

Said Rabbah [bar Bar Hannah]: I saw with my own eyes a one-day old *re'em* which was as big as Mount Tabor. And how big is Mount Tabor? Four parasangs.⁷ The stretch of its neck was three parasangs and the expanse of its head one and a half parasangs. And it cast a ball of excrement which obstructed the Jordan. (BT *Baba Batra* 73b)

7. About 24 kilometers.

It seems that this traveler-narrator has a bigger problem than the narrator of the previous story. He is describing an encounter with a creature like nothing his audience has ever seen and he has to describe it in such a way that they can imagine it. Zoran refers to this process, in which the members of the audience create in their imagination the space described to them in words, as a “process of reconstructing the world:” the listeners, assuming that they understand the meaning of the words and language, use their knowledge of history, geography, physics, politics, and so on to link up the details of the text, thereby creating a framework in which the world described can be reconstructed in their imagination (Zoran 32–34). This framework serves as the armature for the ‘reconstructed world’, a space that exists only in the mind and the imagination. This world cannot be completely identical to the actual world described or to the world in which we live. But it is constructed on the basis of those worlds and makes it

possible to transmit the story from the narrator's mind to the listener's (or reader's) mind (*ibid.*).

This framework created by the audience is based on previous knowledge that they have brought with them to the encounter with the literary text. It must be constructed by them, whether because they are not given certain details of the description or because it is always conveyed in language. As every first-year student of comparative literature knows, descriptive language is always exclusively temporal, whereas the objects and events are generally spatial. To put it more simply: dealing with descriptions of spaces and objects that exist or occur in space requires a preliminary knowledge base shared by both sides participating in the narration process: the narrators and the audience. This is a critical matter that cannot be ignored when it comes to the genre of travelers' and pilgrims' narratives in the pre-modern period.⁸

Rabbah bar Bar Hannah's listeners have never seen a *re'em*. He has to describe its size to them by comparing it to objects that are familiar to them in order to make the reconstruction process possible. The first object to which he compares the creature he encountered is Mount Tabor. This is a surprising comparison because presumably his audience – Torah scholars in Babylonia – have never seen this mountain. Why, then, is this the object that the narrator chose for comparison with the size of the *re'em*, thereby presuming a shared knowledge base, even though he has been in Eretz Israel and they have not? The answer is that although the narrator and his audience do not share familiarity with the actual space, they are all thoroughly acquainted with the textual space of the Bible. The *re'em* is a biblical creature, so neither side has any doubt of its existence. According to one of its descriptions, it cannot be tamed except by God himself: "Will the wild ox (*re'em*) be willing to serve you? Will he be by your manger?" (Job 39.9).⁹ Here the narrator says he has seen it and adds another trait: its size. To illustrate this trait, he first uses an object that his audience also knows of mainly from the textual space of the Bible. Mount Tabor, which is described as a lofty mountain: "'As I live,' says the Lord, whose name is the Lord of hosts, 'Surely as Tabor is among the mountains.'" (Jeremiah 46.18). Again we see the role played by the Bible and its descriptions in the process of reconstructing the world. To the narrator, the Bible is as good a framework of knowledge, if not better, than even the extra-textual world.¹⁰ The proof of this is that he does not bother to compare the *re'em* with an object familiar from Babylonia, for example, where some mountains

8. Ora Limor elaborates on these aspects of travelers' stories, mostly about Christian pilgrims in the Early and High Middle Ages. See for example Limor, "With their Own Eyes" and "Pilgrims and Authors."

9. As with many other biblical Hebrew terms, later readers had difficulties with understanding what exactly the *re'em* was. The Jewish mythology of late antiquity, for example, bridges this gap by describing it as a unique gigantic creature, and even as a unicorn. See Schaper.

10. Dina Stein suggests that this issue of the Bible being a source of knowledge which is more important than physical space is actually the theme of a cycle of Talmudic stories that this and the story discussed below are part of, and this is an example of a political and theological concept of space of the Babylonian rabbis of the Talmudic era. I fully agree with this suggestion but think it should be added to the more general issue of the limitations of literary representation of spaces discussed here. Compare Stein 58–83.

there are certainly higher than Mount Tabor. But despite the importance of the Bible as a source of knowledge, it is ultimately a text, not a spatial object, and that is what underlies the question of the altitude of Mount Tabor. The narrator has to switch from a purely textual comparison object to universal units of length before returning to a comparison with textual spaces. The only action in the story is the obstruction of the Jordan by the *re'em*'s excrement. Here again we see the importance of knowledge based on the Biblical text in creating the marvelous effect: If the audience didn't know that the last time the Jordan had been obstructed, as related in Joshua, chapter 3, it had required divine intervention, they most likely would not have been impressed that it had been blocked again.

In the next story, which appears shortly afterwards and is related to the same narrator, the role of the Bible as a text that explains space becomes almost official:

Said Rabbah bar Bar Hannah: Once, as we sailed on a ship, we saw a bird in the sea up to its ankles, while its head reached the sky. Thinking that the water was shallow, we desired to go in and cool ourselves. But a *bat-kol*¹¹ called out: Do not attempt to go in, for a carpenter dropped his axe here seven years ago and it has not yet reached the bottom. [...] R. Ashi identified the bird as the *ziz sadai* [a roaming creature of the field that is included among the fowl of the mountains] (Ps. 50.11). (BT Baba Batra 73b)

11. In this case: a representation of the divine voice.

12. For example, in the next story in this cycle, he identifies a certain kind of fish. See BT *Baba Batra* 73b.

R. Ashi is cited in several stories as an expert in zoology.¹² Here we see how his theoretical knowledge combines with the sensory experiences of the traveler-narrator to form a textual object, in this case: a huge bird, whose extra-textual existence is beyond doubt.

These aspects of the Bible and later the Talmud as texts used in reconstructing the world of travelogues became more important in the Middle Ages and supported the frequent appearances of the marvelous in such narratives. The historian Aaron Gurevich noted the relatively narrow horizons of Europeans in the High Middle Ages as one of the factors that facilitated the prevalence of literary manifestations of the marvelous. To put this in our terms, Gurevich maintains that the knowledge with which medieval audiences came to travelers' accounts and the spatial descriptions included in them was almost never based on personal acquaintance. On the contrary, most medieval Europeans, for instance, knew about spaces to which they

did have access solely through the mediation of either visual or textual sources, oral or written (and these could be real places like the Holy Land or less real, such as the kingdom of Prester John or Hell) (Gurevich 25–92).

The knowledge gaps between the traveler-narrators, whether real or fictional, and their audiences facilitated their use of hyperbole when describing the marvelous. These same gaps, however, required that the narrators use elements from the audiences' world of knowledge to describe the unfamiliar. Basically, the language forced the narrators to distort the sensory experiences that they believed they had personally had in order to adapt them to the limited knowledge of audiences that could otherwise not even imagine these things. The audiences themselves, especially in medieval Christian Europe, could call on knowledge from a variety of sources, to understand and enjoy the exotic descriptions.

I would like to focus here on this enjoyment. Travelers' and pilgrims' narratives, especially in the Middle Ages, are often discussed from a variety of standpoints – as an orientalist or proto-orientalist medium, as an important source of confirmation of religious truths, and as texts that enabled audiences to share in the experience of an encounter with a sacred space.¹³ Most of all, however, these medieval narratives were stories of Europeans in other geographical spaces, especially in the east. This otherness was manifested in the different climate, in different natural resources and fauna. These subjects excited listeners' or readers' imagination no less than the descriptions of the sacred geography.

Latin Christian texts had two major advantages over their Hebrew counterpart. One was the iconographic tradition. What is hard to describe in words can be shown in pictures, and Christian authors had a tradition of a bestiary and visual representations ranging from the classical period to church decorations.¹⁴ These illustrations were sometimes included in the manuscripts of travelogues and made it easier to describe things. When a narrator wanted to present a camel, he could describe it in words next to an illustration. Animals that the narrator had not seen could also be 'shown' in this way, as proven by numerous illustrations of dragons and griffins in manuscripts of those times. The tradition of illuminated Hebrew manuscripts developed slowly, later, and with certain limitations (see Kogman-Appel). In the High Middle Ages it had not reached the level of Christian bestiaries or illuminated travelogues.

13. To mention a few examples out of many from the last four decades: Howard (1980); Campbell (1988); Cohen, "Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlands" (2001); Mittman (2003); Veltri (2005); Jacobs (2014).

14. About the tradition of illustrated bestiaries see Hassig; Jones.

Another tradition that the Jewish travelers and authors of their accounts lacked, unlike the Christians and Muslims, was that of systematic, scientific or pseudo-scientific descriptions of nature written in Hebrew. Although such compositions did exist, they were rare and were not familiar to the broad segments of the population to which the travelers' accounts were addressed.

The tool that Jewish narrators and audiences did have available to them was the Hebrew language, especially biblical and rabbinic Hebrew. This was the almost exclusive source for classifying and identifying natural phenomena and animals. The Hebrew language, in which the stories were told, was also the language of their sources of knowledge: the Midrash (exegetic literature), Talmud, *piyyutim* (Hebrew liturgy), and most importantly, the Bible. In the next two narratives, one from the 1170s and the other from the 1210s, two travelers contend with the advantages and disadvantages of this language.

The first story is by Petahia of Ratisbon,¹⁵ who set out from Prague in the mid-1170s for a long journey through the Middle East, especially Babylonia and Eretz Israel:

At Nineveh there was an elephant. Its head is not at all protruding. It is big, eats about two wagon loads of straw at once; its mouth is in its breast, and when it wants to eat it protrudes its lips about two cubits, takes up with it the straw, and puts it into its mouth. When the sultan condemns anybody to death, they say to the elephant, this person is guilty. It then seizes him with its lip, casts him aloft, and kills him. Whatever a human being performs with his hand it performs with its lip; this is exceedingly strange and marvelous. Upon the elephant is the structure of a city, upon which there are twelve armed warriors; when it stretches forth its lip they ascend as over a bridge. (Benisch 11–13)

The signifier 'elephant' (פֶּיל in Hebrew) is not mentioned in the Bible. It was known to Jewish audiences from the Talmud as a strange animal – so strange that when seeing it, one must recite the blessing over a marvelous creature¹⁶ – but its form is not specified. This time the narrator of Petahia's story cannot rely on biblical descriptions and comparisons. But we have here more than a hint that he is familiar with the textual and perhaps even visual sources known to non-Jewish audiences of the period. There is no hyperbole in this description – just the standard conventions of bestiaries. For example, depictions

15. For a folkloristic view of Petahia's travelogue see Hasan-Rokem. There are two scientific editions of this composition, both of them are based on much later sources: that of Gruenhut and that of David. An English translation is available in Benisch.

16. For example, BT *Berakhot* 58b: "Our Rabbis taught: On seeing an elephant, an ape, or a long-tailed ape, one says: Blessed is He who makes strange creatures. If one sees beautiful creatures and beautiful trees, he says: Blessed is He who has such in His world."

17. I thank the anonymous reader of the article who introduced me to this illustration.

Figure 1: Amsterdam Mahzor, held by the Jewish Cultural Museum (JHM B166), f. 52v (detail). Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam and MiQua. LVR-Jewish Museum in the Archaeological Quarter Cologne. Purchased with support of Landschaftsverband Rheinland, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Mondriaan Fund, BankGiro Lottery Fund and private donors. I thank Mr. Anton Kras and the Museum's authorities for their permission to use this illustration.



Unlike the word ‘elephant,’ the Hebrew word for trunk (חֲדָק) was not familiar to Petahia or his audience, so he had no choice but to refer to “lips” that protrude “about two cubits.”

In any case, we can see how, with an animal whose name is familiar but which is not mentioned in the Bible, the available sources of knowledge required for the process of spatial reconstruction in the audience’s minds are extra-biblical. What was done with an animal that is not only not mentioned in the Bible by name, but is not mentioned by other Hebrew sources either? How could such an animal be described? This problem was encountered by Menahem ben Peretz, who apparently traveled from France to Eretz Israel about thirty years after Petahia:¹⁸

R. Menahem ben Peretz of Hebron further [told] us that he saw a large animal in Eretz Israel that tramples on, decapi-

18. The story of Menahem ben Peretz is known from a single thirteenth-century manuscript and was published by Neubauer. Since this first edition (1868) historians were doubting its authenticity, a question which is irrelevant for the current discussion.

tates, and devours other animals. When it is hungry, it devours them limb by limb. It has no orifice to eliminate anything from its body, but when it has filled itself with food and wants to empty its body and relieve itself, it goes to the seashore or riverbank, sits down, and opens its mouth very, very wide – as wide as it can. The birds then descend into its body, eat everything they find in its guts, remove all food and excrement that they find there, and go away. It then fasts for a week or fifteen days, and when it is hungry it kills and eats other domestic or wild animals until it is satiated, and then waits a week or two. And when it wants to relieve itself, it follows its practice. R. Menahem of Hebron saw that animal, which is as big as an ox. Its feet are cloven in three and its nails are sharp and long. It has something sharp and horn-like on its head, and something sharp and horn-like under its chin as well. Those small birds created for this purpose are prepared for this. And whenever it likes, it drinks its fill of water from the river. (Neubauer 628)

This description demonstrates the severe limitations of the language. The narrator, who apparently believed he had really encountered such an animal, simply could not find the words with which to describe its appearance or way of life in detail. His knowledge seems to have come not from long-term observation, but from local informants.¹⁹ Was he able to induce his audience – his contemporaries – to conduct the process of reconstructing the world and to imagine the animal themselves? We cannot tell.

In any case, modern audiences have clearly had difficulty conducting this process. When reading the descriptions of animals in travelers' accounts such audiences, especially scholars, tend to assume that they are familiar with many of them and can even distinguish between those that really existed and those that did not. But here, too, the precondition is some foundation of shared knowledge, or shared language, between readers today and the narrators, and this, unfortunately, is limited. An attempt to reconstruct the process of 'reconstructing the world' engaged in by audiences of that period with respect to sights unfamiliar to them entails 'translation' into terms corresponding to our knowledge.

Indeed, ever since the account by Menahem ben Peretz was discovered, scholars have been hard pressed to figure out what animal is being described here. The first to publish the text, the bibliogra-

19. This practice of medieval travelers and pilgrims of learning about Palestine from the locals, is discussed by Yassif, and Reiner.

pher Adolf Neubauer, maintained, based on this story, that the text is full of fabrications and delusions (Neubauer 626). Later scholars have even suspected forgery (e.g. Klein). Today, too, scholars who consider the story authentic have had difficulty agreeing on the identity of the animal described and whether it is real or fictional. In recent decades some have claimed it is a unicorn (Yassif 892); others have suggested a rhinoceros, a hippopotamus (Malkiel 137–38), or a hybrid of several of these creatures. Apparently, this is the both strength and the weakness of a purely linguistic description where it is hard to identify the textual tradition from which it is taken. A possible answer to this lies in the fact that aside from the Bible and other sacred texts we have medieval sources of information, as mentioned above, that combine descriptions of animals and spaces with descriptive conventions of their own. And in addition to earlier traditions, some later Hebrew traditions make use of the same conventions but do name the animal, which Menahem ben Peretz may indeed have seen.

This is probably a description – conventional, common, and even rather realistic, to be fair – of the Nile crocodile, an animal common in Eretz Israel until the nineteenth century, especially in the area of the Caesarea Rivers (two streams that are called today Nahal Alexander and Nahal Taninim), which Menahem ben Peretz states he was near (Neubauer 626). Although its size is a bit exaggerated, other earlier descriptions, such as that by Pliny the Elder, exaggerate it even more when referring to this creature as one that is eighteen cubits long (*Natural History* 8.37).

The bird described is the ‘Egyptian plover’ (*Pluvianus aegyptius*), which is still found in today’s Israel.²⁰ The narrator’s claim that “those small birds created for this purpose are prepared for this” is a popular reflection of the philosophical position that views creation as perfect, with all its components well-matched. This view continues a Latin tradition of natural history, which often stressed this lesson using the example of the relationship between the Egyptian plover and the crocodile.²¹ As in the case of the elephant’s “lips,” the narrator could find no better word than “horn” to describe the crocodile’s long jaws. This choice of words makes the ‘reconstruction process’ harder for an audience that is familiar with crocodiles and knows they do not have horns, perhaps even more than for an audience that was not familiar with them. One can claim that reality, in this sense, disturbed medieval readers of the spatial description less than it bothers us when we approach the ancient texts.

20. This is the bird that modern scholars identify with the well-known *trochilus*.

21. See the various sources brought by Malkiel.

From these few of many examples of Jewish literary representations of marvelous creatures, we can learn how biblical text functioned for Jewish narrating societies. As the ultimate source of knowledge about the world, it functioned as a kind of a screen; a tool that enables the readers and listeners to imagine phenomena and creatures which they had never been able to perceive by the senses. But since this tool was exclusively textual, it contained the same limits of texts: *i.e.* if and when the senses perceived something which the bible has nothing to say about, its representation became nearly impossible. These advantages and disadvantages are part of what makes, I believe, medieval Jewish representations of the marvelous so interesting.

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The Desert Fathers' Beasts

Crocodiles in Medieval German Monastic Literature

Abstract

This paper explores the literary representations of one of the most terrifying animals in the medieval imagination, the crocodile, in two monastic texts written in the German vernacular (*Väterbuch*, *Alemannische Vitaspatrum*). The literary figure of the crocodile in these religious texts combines ancient knowledge of crocodiles, biblical motifs, allegorical attributions and the lived experience of the Christian hermits, who encountered crocodiles as a part of their environment. Thus, crocodiles appear simultaneously as representations of divine power, as devilish beasts, as challenges to ascetic life in the desert, and as creatures miraculously tamed by the hermits' charisma. The ambiguous status of the desert as a space of temptation and redemption is thus reflected in literary representations of the crocodile, which in turn can be understood as a reflection on monastic life in general, intended for the medieval audience of the texts discussed.

1 Introduction

The crocodile is a fascinating but horrifying animal, which often represents a physical danger to humans, while also serving as a figuration of evil, in European literature.¹ This is possibly based on its very natural features and behaviour: as opposed to other wild animals, crocodiles cannot possibly be tamed. They represent a terrible threat to any other creature approaching them. Thus, it would never be safe for humans to live in proximity with crocodiles. While the Egyptians worshiped the crocodile as a sacred creature, in the Bible and in ancient Greek and Roman literature the crocodile has always represented a terrible danger to humans. In the Christian tradition, moreover, it is a figuration of the devil and of hell (cf. Boskovits 659). However, as opposed to other fiendish and demonic creatures, e.g. dragons, crocodiles could be observed in their natural environment on a regular basis. Accordingly, the natural behaviour of crocodiles constantly determined its literary representations.²

1. E.g. in Aesop's fable ἀνδροφόνος (the manslayer) a murderer is running from his pursuers and encounters first a wolf, then a snake, and finally a crocodile in the wilderness. While he manages to escape the wolf and the snake, the crocodile as the most fierce animal swallows him at last. Cf. Äsop 38f. For a general introduction to the motif of the crocodile in literature cf. Pöge-Alder.

2. Another example of the combination of symbolic and natural aspects in the representation of animals in premodern literature is given by Weitbrecht, *Lupus in fabula* 23.

3. E.g. in Ulrich of Etzenbach's *Alexander* or in Albrecht of Scharfenberg's *Jüngerer Tituel*.

4. The Christian ascetic movement of the so-called Desert Fathers arose in the fourth century in the Middle East. The Desert Fathers are revered for their ascetic life, they are considered the founders of monastic culture and many of them are regarded, in the Roman Catholic Church, as saints. The writings on the life and teachings of the Desert Fathers were in medieval times well known from the Latin books of *Vitaspatrum* (Lives of the Fathers).

5. Williams lists 84 manuscripts containing text of the *Alemannische Vitaspatrum*. Cf. Williams 453 and 455.

6. The critical edition of the *Alemannische Vitaspatrum* contains reproductions of the two original texts and represents the fifteenth century amendments in the appendix. Cf. *Die Alemannischen Vitaspatrum* 17*f.

The Middle High German term *kokodrille* (or *kokadrille*) is a loanword from the Latin *crocodilus* (gr. κροκόδειλος), more specifically from the Medieval Latin *coco-* or *corcodrillus* (cf. Lexer 1: 1662). In secular medieval literature, crocodiles commonly appear in narratives reporting travels to the Middle East, then a natural habitat of crocodiles.³ However, they feature much more prominently in certain religious texts. In the following, I will concentrate on the narratives and teachings of the Desert Fathers,⁴ known by the Medieval Latin title of *Vitaspatrum*; firstly, because one might find many more stories about crocodiles here than in other literary genres, and secondly because these texts reveal how four main sources of literary animals are merged: the natural history of the ancient Greek and Roman traditions, the Bible, the allegorical tradition, and lived experience of nature. In the following, I shall focus on two texts that were translated into the German language in the context of the emerging religious lay movement from the thirteenth century on: 1. the *Väterbuch* that was written in the late thirteenth century, probably for a chivalric order (cf. Traulsen 18–24, 44–46), and 2. the *Alemannischen Vitaspatrum* (*Alemannic Vitaspatrum*), both among the most commonly reproduced texts of the late Middle Ages in the German language.⁵ Unlike the *Väterbuch*, which is written in verse, the texts of the *Alemannischen Vitaspatrum* are written in prose. Originally consisting of two separate texts dating back to the early fourteenth century, a comprehensive text of the *Alemannischen Vitaspatrum* was first published around 1430 in Nuremberg.⁶ According to the surviving manuscripts and prints, the *Alemannischen Vitaspatrum* were mostly read in monasteries and by religious laymen. The *Nuremberg Version* was especially read by members of female religious orders, namely the female Dominican Order (cf. Williams 455).

2 Ancient sources

One major source of medieval knowledge about animals was the ancient natural history, as found in the works of Herodotus, Pliny the Elder, and Isidorus of Seville. In the eighth chapter of the *Naturalis historia*, for example, Pliny the Elder describes the crocodile as a most peculiar animal with many unique features (cf. Plinius 8.72–77): it lives both in the water and on land, it is the only land animal that does not use its tongue, and it is also the only animal moving its upper and not its lower jaw when biting. Furthermore, Pliny reports

7. The most accessible presentation of this extensive medieval *mappa mundi* is provided by a [website hosted by the University of Lüneburg](#).

8. Bright 24–39 lists the references to Behemoth and Leviathan in the Bible and discusses possible meanings of the creatures.

9. This unusual feature can be explained: crocodiles have a reflective layer of membrane at the back of the eye (cf. Bright 37).

that the crocodile hatches from a very small egg and that no other animal shows such growth in its development as the crocodile. According to Pliny, the crocodile is particularly dangerous due to its biting, its claws, and its impenetrable skin scales. These ancient descriptions of the crocodile were consistently adapted and varied in the literature of later times. In the Christian context, traces of the ancient knowledge about crocodiles can be found for example in Isidorus' of Seville *Etymologiae* and even in the well-known *Ebendorfer Weltkarte*.⁷ The fascination deriving from crocodiles as natural wonders is shown most obviously by the fact that stuffed crocodiles circulated in medieval courtly culture; for example, Seville Cathedral contains a crocodile that was given to Alfonso X by the sultan of Egypt in 1260 (cf. Daston and Park 84). However, by taking it into the sacral space of the church, the crocodile is not only treated as a natural wonder here, but also as a religious symbol connected to biblical depictions of the crocodile.

In the Bible, Leviathan in the Book of Job is the most impressive and extensive depiction of a crocodile-like creature. God shows Job quite plainly the overwhelming power recognizable in his creation of Behemoth and Leviathan:⁸

An extrahere poteris Leviathan hamo et fune ligabis linguam ejus [...] pone super eum manum tuam memento belli, nec ultra addas loqui. (*Vulgata*, Iob 40.20–27)

Canst thou draw out Leviathan with a hook? or his tongue with a cord [...] lay thine hand upon him, remember the battle, do no more. (KJV, Job 41.1–8)

Many of the creatures mentioned in the Bible cannot definitely be identified as animals (cf. Roling 321). While Behemoth might be identified as a hippopotamus, the Leviathan appears, in God's speech, as a crocodile (cf. Feliks; Weber 172; Bright 34): this monster is inhabiting a river, it is armed with teeth and scales, its eyes are glowing,⁹ and it is reeling in the waters. God is emphasizing that the monster should never be approached by man, it should not be hunted nor tamed, its skin should not be traded, and it would be hopeless to attack it.

It is possible that the biblical description of Leviathan as a crocodile is indebted to the natural characteristics of this animal. But here

again the uniqueness of Leviathan as the most frightful and evil beast is especially emphasized:

Non est super terram potestas quæ comparetur ei qui factus est ut nullum timeret omne sublime videt ipse est rex super universos filios superbiæ. (*Vulgata*, Iob 41.24 f.)

Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear. / He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride. (KJV, Job 41.33 f.)

In the Book of Job, God not only warns mankind against Behemoth and Leviathan, but he also promises a peaceful coexistence with the wild animals for those who follow him unconditionally. In the New Testament, an image of a state of peace with the wild animals is given as well, e.g. when, according to the synoptic gospels, Christ is tempted and challenged in the desert:

Et erat in deserto quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus et tentabatur a Satana eratque cum bestiis et angeli ministrabant illi. (*Vulgata*, Marcus 1.13)

And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him. (KJV, Mark 1.12–13)

Accordingly, the wilderness with its inhabitants appears as most ambiguous. It is a space of hopelessness where the devil is present, but also a space of heavenly support and peace with the wild animals.¹⁰ The ambiguous status of the wilderness and its inhabitants can also be found in the early Christian ascetic literature which describes Christian hermits and is an important link between early Christian writings and later European hagiography.

The Christian allegorical tradition has its roots in biblical literature and the history of nature from antiquity. In commentaries on biblical texts, the crocodile is often represented as an incarnation of danger. Accordingly, Leviathan was identified with the Antichrist in later times.¹¹ In the Christian *Physiologus*, the crocodile is mentioned only when it comes to the *niluus* (*hydrus*), a legendary creature, possibly an otter, that allows the crocodile to swallow it, but then kills the crocodile by freeing itself through bursting out of the

10. Weitbrecht, in a recent paper, points out that ascetic narratives are dealing with the border between humanity and wilderness and that thus the differences between human and animal can become fluid. However, in contrast to my approach here, Weitbrecht concentrates on benevolent animals in the desert and is especially interested in human-animal communities. Cf. Weitbrecht, *Scorpionum socius et ferarum*.

11. E.g. Gregory the Great in the *Morals on the Book of Job* 8.13, which is of great importance for the medieval reception of Job.

12. The motif of the sacred figure bursting out of the stomach of the evil beast is also transferred to hagiography. According to the *Legenda aurea*, Margaret of Antioch encountered a dragon while being imprisoned for her Christian belief. This monster swallowed her wholly before she also burst out of its stomach (cf. *Legenda aurea* 2: 1218). However, Jacobus de Voragine stresses that this story is considered to be *apocryphum et frivolum*.

13. For a general introduction to the topic of biblical animals cf. Riede 29–56.

crocodile's stomach (*Physiologus* 53 f.). This idea can also be found in Pliny's *Naturalis historia*. However, the *Physiologus* interprets this scene in a special way. According to the *Physiologus*, the swallowed *niluus* is an image of Christ descending to hell and defeating the devil. In this respect, the crocodile here stands for hell and thus for the ultimate evil.¹²

As I am trying to show in this paper, Christian hagiography refers to the biblical Leviathan as a specific figuration of the crocodile.¹³ Additionally, it complements the biblical notion of the crocodile with other ideas of the concept of the wild animal. Unlike dragons and the monster Leviathan in premodern times, crocodiles lived in the rivers of Palestine and Egypt and thus were part of a wilderness in the Middle East well known to its human inhabitants. In contrast to most of the later European readers of the hagiography deriving from the Desert Fathers, the hermits living in these deserts encountered crocodiles as living creatures dwelling in the rivers in their environment. Accordingly, the literary texts narrating the hermits' encounters with crocodiles represent both the devilish characteristics of literary tradition as well as the lived experience of these animals. The medieval recipients of the German translations of the *Vitas patrum* that I am especially interested in were thus confronted with the figure of the crocodile according to the biblical text, to the allegorical tradition which had adopted the ancient sources, and to the real-life experience of the hermits.

3 Crocodiles in the German translations of the *Vitas patrum*

My first example from the *Väterbuch* is narrated in analogy to the biblical text in the Book of Job. There, Eliphaz is speaking of God's punishment and grace:

Beatus homo qui corripitur a Domino. increpationem ergo Domini ne reprobes quia ipse vulnerat et medetur percutit et manus ejus sanabunt in sex tribulationibus liberabit te et in septima non tangent te malum [...] in vastitate et fame ridebis et bestias terræ non formidabis sed cum lapidibus regionum pactum tuum et bestiae terræ pacificæ erunt tibi.
(*Vulgata*, Iob 5.17–23)

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. [...] At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee. (KJV, Job 5.17–23)

This passage is adopted in the *Vitaspatrum*. A short episode at the end of the *Väterbuch* tells of monks who travel through the desert and is connected to the passage of the Book of Job quoted above. The narrator speaks of six and one dangers of their voyage (thirst and exhaustion, bad roads, mud, flood, robbers, shipwreck). The seventh danger in the *Väterbuch* arises from the curiosity of the traveling monks. The monks arrive at the banks of the Nile and discover a group of crocodiles lying motionlessly in the sun. When the monks curiously approach the crocodiles, they wake up to attack them. Only the intervention of Christ can save them:

Crist der vil getruwe,
Der zu allen zite nuwe
Mit helfe bi den vrunden ist,
Loste uns wol zu der vrist.
Sine vorhte quam vil schiere
Uf die wazzertiere.
Sie ilten in der selben stunt
Wider in des wazzers grunt,
Rehte als ein engel were ob in,
Der sie sluge von uns hin. (VB 11483–94)

We were then saved by the loyal Christ who always helps his followers. His terror came over the animals. They hurried back into the water as if an angel were pushing them back from us.

The references of this text to the Book of Job are obvious: firstly, there is the quotation of the six troubles and of the saving by God from the seventh danger. Secondly, the monks run into the seventh

14. This motif is quite common in the *Vitaspatrum*. Cf. Weber 184.

15. Curiosity in medieval hagiography is further discussed by Schnyder.

danger because they do not seem to fear the crocodiles enough, similar to those ignoring God's warning against Leviathan. However, the notion of the angel throwing the beasts back into the swamp¹⁴ also suggests an eschatological dimension of the scene: one may read the crocodiles allegorically – according to the interpretations of Leviathan as the Antichrist – as the devil coming out of hell to attack humankind but eventually being repelled by the heavenly powers. Thus, the scene is connected to the apocalyptic struggle between the Archangel Michael and the devil at the end of days. But the beasts are not only figurations of Leviathan and incarnations or representations of evil. As dangers and as marvels, the animals are natural inhabitants of the desert and also represent the overwhelming power of God, and thus their divine origin is reflected in the monks' curiosity and admiration.¹⁵

The second example I wish to highlight is a story of the deeds of the famous Desert Father Helenus, told by another hermit named Copres. Saint Helenus has been living in the desert for years and fosters good relationships with the animals inhabiting his environment. Helenus then visits a monastery that has a serious problem. The priest who normally celebrates the communal mass lives beyond a river occupied by a crocodile. The German text from which I am quoting specifies the description of this animal:

[Es] wer ein kocodrillus in das wasser komen, das ist halbes en tier vnd halbes ein wurn, vnd ist wol zweinzig elnen lang, vnd vor dem getar nieman vber das wasser komen, wan swas er lúten vnd viches ergrifet das ist alles tot. (*Die Aleman-nischen Vitaspatrum* 118. 6–9)

A crocodile had come to the river. It is half animal and half serpent and it is twenty ells long, and nobody can cross the water, because every person and every animal it catches is brought to death.

The crocodile here appears as an animal (*tier*) that is a natural part of the monks' environment. However, it is also named a serpent (*wurn*) and therefore appears as a figuration of evil. When Helenus hears that the animal is preventing the monks from celebrating mass, he offers his help. He promises to make sure that the priest may join the congregation. Having reached the dangerous water, Helenus

prays for a safe crossing. The crocodile approaches and it “wart als ein senftes schefli, vnd tet sinen ruggen nider vnd liez in uf es sizzen vnd trüg in vber” (*Die Alemannischen Vitaspatrum* 118.15 f.; “started behaving like a meek lamb, lowered its back to let him sit on it and carried him to the other bank of the river”). The notion of somebody crossing a river by riding on a crocodile’s back is a literary topos and can already be found in Pliny’s description of the crocodile. In the *Alemannischen Vitaspatrum*, it is transformed into a hagiographic motif: as soon as it approaches the blessed Helenus, the monstrous beast starts behaving like a tamed animal.

Helenus then searches and finds the priest and takes him back to the river bank. Due to his fearlessness and humble way of talking, the priest identifies Helenus as a holy man. However, the story is not yet complete. Helenus calls the crocodile to allow the passage back to the other bank:

Zehant do kam das vngehúre tier us dem wasser, do es erst sin stimme erhörte, also so vngestümlich, das das wasser da von wart bewegt recht als ein grozer wint dar in komen were, vnd neigte sinen ruggen nider. dem heiligen vatter uf ze sizzenne. (*Die Alemannischen Vitaspatrum* 118.18–32)

When it heard his voice, the monstrous animal immediately came out of the water. It was so impetuous that the water was moved as if a great wind was churning it up. And it bent its back for the holy father to sit on.

The behaviour of the crocodile evokes the image of the biblical Leviathan churning up the waters, but the beast is also bending its back for a rider like a tamed animal. The priest accompanying Helenus is scared, but then trusts Helenus and crosses the river on the back of the beast together with him. In this regard, the crocodile acts as a helping figure for the hermit and the Christian congregation, but on the other hand, the ambiguous status of the crocodile is quite obvious, as only the presence of the saint guarantees the obedience of the animal. The description of the crocodile’s behaviour and the fearful reaction of the others reveals that even though the crocodile has been a trustworthy ally to Helenus, it is still an extremely dangerous being. Having reached the other bank, Helenus turns to the crocodile and says the following words:

“Swie das si das du mir gehorsam sist gewesen, so ist doch besser das du sterbest dan das du grôz vbel begest.” Mit dem selben wort do lag der cocodrille tot. (S. 118, Z. 39 f. u. S. 119, Z. 40.)

“Although you have been obedient to me, it is better that you die rather than that you do a lot of evil.” By this word the crocodile lay dead.

The holy Desert Father decides to remove the crocodile from its place and thus removes its ambiguous double nature of good and evil. Here, the ability to approach the evil creature is limited only to the most blessed hermit. Accordingly, the people living in the surrounding area feel the need to get rid of the creature's dead body. They come together and bury it “das der luft nit wurde von dem bösen smak verunreint” (*Die Alemannischen Vitaspatrum* 119.3; “so that the air would not be not polluted by the evil smell”), thus removing ritually every trace of evil from their homes.

The polyvalence of the crocodile as described above continues throughout the *Vitaspatrum*. The beasts may be shown to be the hermits' enemies, but in some of the stories, crocodiles may also serve as helping figures for the Desert Fathers or at least as equal creatures, as is shown in the third example (*Die Alemannischen Vitaspatrum* 328 f.) I wish to discuss: two brothers are living together in a monastery. While one of them is fasting strictly, it is the other brother who is widely known for his obedience and is revered as an extraordinary monk. The fasting monk envies his brother for his fame and decides to test him. He leads his brother to a body of water which is inhabited by a group of crocodiles and commands him to dive into the water. When his brother follows this command, the crocodiles gather around him but, instead of tearing him to pieces, they start licking his body.

Apparently, the crocodiles here do not behave like wild beasts. The focus of the story, however, is centred on the relationship of the two monks. Obedience and selflessness are of central importance to monastic cultures, which are based on a strong ideal of community. By command of his brother, the obedient monk approaches the dangerous creatures, who then unexpectedly behave as if tamed and thus reveal the acknowledgement of the virtues of the monk. They turn out to be obedient to God, so obedient that they even give up their crocodile nature through which they otherwise would tear the monk

apart. Danger and distance between animal and human are turned into sweet temper and proximity revealing the power of God, favouring the exemplary monk and the community. When the untameable animals are behaving as if they were tamed, they represent the peaceful community in the desert in the way this community is shown in the Book of Isaiah (1.12), the Book of Job (5.23) and the Gospel of Mark (1.12 f.) (cf. Riede 153–164). In fact, they also represent the monastic ideal of a peaceful community of equals that was broken by the envy of the other monk beforehand.

4 The hermit, the beast, and the desert

When St. Anthony, who is one of the most famous Desert Fathers, lives in the desert, he is threatened by the devil appearing with a pack of demons in the shape of wild animals (although not as crocodiles). In difference to famous visual depictions of Anthony in later times, some medieval book illustrations show the natural character of the scene by picturing the demons not as monstrous creatures, but as animals attacking the saint.¹⁶ The Latin *Vitaspatrium* also describe the typical behaviours of the various species and emphasize that *haec singula secundum suam fremebant naturam* (Rosweyde 132; “every single creature expresses itself according to its nature”). The followers of the devil do not appear as demons, but rather as wild desert animals. One reason for this ambiguous status of the creatures between animal and demon might be that the ascetic withdrawal into the desert is a confrontation with nature, as well as a confrontation with the self.¹⁷ The ascetics are encountering their own nature when being threatened by nature in the desert. Accordingly, in ascetic literature, the desert with its inhabitants always refers to a real as well as to a symbolic environment. The outer environment and the inner challenges are bound together and thus the texts do not make a clear distinction between the natural dangers of the desert and the imaginary dangers and evil of the devil in the desert. This applies to the figure of the crocodile as well. The crocodile in ascetic literature turns out to be characterized especially by its most dangerous and untameable nature. The crocodiles’ most salient characteristic is that they become dangerous when approached by humans. Crocodiles do not visit the hermits in their homes, but the monks encounter them on their journeys. The crocodiles frighten and test the inhabitants of the desert, but in the hermits’ presence they can also lose their predato-

16. E.g. a picture of the demons attacking Anthony in a book of hours that is kept in the National Library of France (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, manuscrits latin 757, 296v). It shows the demons tearing at Anthony in the shape of animals without any demonic features.

17. Referring to Sigmund Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* Harald Haferland is interpreting the demons in the Desert Father’s literature as externalisations of their inner struggles deriving from the deprivation in the desert. This interpretation could also apply to the ascetic environment more generally, including the wild animals. Cf. Haferland 224.

ry character and thus prove the ascetics' efforts, their charisma and values. In the examples given here, the protagonists approach the crocodiles willingly although aware of the danger: the first approach occurs out of curiosity, the second is an act of support, and the third results from a test for obedience. All three crocodiles are representing figurations of the desert and, at the same time, figurations of evil. Encountering them is dangerous but, at the same time, might show the exceptional quality of the monks' asceticism. The beasts might turn into peaceful animals, but only if they are exemplarily showing the power of holy obedience. A crocodile might even provide a safe river passage to a holy hermit, but it remains to be a danger to everyone else.

The stories of these hermits were normally not read by hermits themselves, but by their successors living in the monasteries and all over the Christian world.¹⁸ The *Vitaspatrum* were not primarily written to give insight into the hermits' specific life, but rather to give examples for Christian monastic values in general. In this perspective, they purport knowledge of life. For those recipients living in the northern, German-speaking countries, the desert and the crocodiles were mere literary constructs. Few had ever seen a crocodile or knew the natural behaviour of a crocodile. Nevertheless, the literary representations of the crocodile in the German texts integrate ancient knowledge on crocodiles, the biblical motif of the crocodile, its allegorical attributions and the lived experience of the deserts fathers with crocodiles as part of their environment. Accordingly, for the readers of the *Väterbuch* or the *Alemannischen Vitaspatrum*, the desert and the figure of the crocodile might have been a basis for meditation and admiration of the dangers and promises waiting for those who dare to choose a monastic life in the tradition of the Desert Fathers.

18. One could even say that the desert life of Christian hermits was primarily a literary construction based on the dichotomy of city versus desert. Cf. Goehring 285f.

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A Man Fighting a Lion

A Christian ‘Theme’ in Yiddish Epics

Abstract

During the medieval and early modern periods, lions served as a common motif in Ashkenazic Jewish culture, bearing diverse symbolism. Also in literature written in Yiddish, the vernacular language of Ashkenazic Jews, lions were often mentioned. In this article, three songs about a man fighting a lion – Samson, David, and Benaiah – found within early modern Yiddish epics, are presented. An analysis of these songs’ similar content and form suggests that they are short epic songs which have been initially orally transmitted, and later incorporated into the written long epics in Yiddish which have come down to us. In two of the songs the hero holds the lion’s mouth with both hands, shortly before subduing him, an image common in Jewish art but lacking any basis in Jewish texts. This study identifies a Christian background to this image, namely that Samson’s battle with the lion foreshadows the Harrowing of Hell and Jesus’ releasing mankind’s souls from eternal damnation. The study points to the close cultural ties between Jews and Christians in the medieval and early modern eras, which were possible in the sphere of vernacular Yiddish literature. This closeness brought about influences which do not seem to exist in Hebrew literature.

1 Introduction

The lion has been an important motif in many cultures since Antiquity, symbolizing great strength – at times protective and at times destructive. This cultural significance stems most likely from actual encounters with lions, in which this animal’s immense physical power and elegant movements (of both males and females), and splendid mane (of males only), were acknowledged. Indeed, the lion was often referred to as ‘king of the animals’ (e.g. BT *Hagiga* 13b).

Lions can easily win a battle with a human being – especially if that human being does not shoot from a gun or drive a motor vehicle. Therefore, a story about a man who wins a fight with a lion, at times only with his bare hands, could have evoked excitement among

its audience, as it related great human strength and courage. Such stories appear already in ancient cultures, like Hercules and the Nemean lion in Greek mythology, or in Assyria the lion hunt of King Ashurbanipal. In ancient Rome *bestiarii* went into public battles with lions, either voluntarily seeking pay or glory, or involuntarily having been sentenced to death (*damnatio ad bestias*). St. Ignatius of Antioch, for example, is attributed such a death (Brent).

On the other hand, some stories tell of people who encountered lions but were surprisingly unharmed by them, like Daniel who was thrown into the lions' den (Daniel 68.25), or St. Gerasimos of the Jordan who tamed a lion in the wilderness by healing his paw.

During the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, the time frame of this article, lions served as a common motif in Ashkenazic Jewish culture, bearing diverse symbolism. For example, the image of lions was often depicted on Torah Ark curtains, and the given names *Arye* and *Leyb* (meaning 'lion' in Hebrew and Yiddish respectively) were common among men (Beider 277–78 and 358–62). Also in literature written in Yiddish (Shmeruk *et al.* 338–44), the vernacular language of Ashkenazic Jews, lions were often mentioned. So, for example, in one of the oldest extant literary Yiddish documents, we find a fable on a sick lion (Timm, "Fabel vom alten Löwen" 109–70). Likewise, in the sixteenth-century novel entitled after its main protagonist, *Buovo d'Antona*, it is related how two lions entered a hut in which Buovo's wife – a princess – and their two children were present, but did not harm them at all:

Then two lions [...] saw the hut; they quickly ran inside.
Drusiana began to scream. They sniffed her and the children
and began to wag their tails, for a lion will do nothing to a
person of noble blood. ("Bovo of Antona", stanzas 472–73:
Early Yiddish Epic 295)¹

1. For the readers' benefit, I chose to use the original Italian name form 'Drusiana' over Frakes' transliteration 'Druzeyne.'

2. *E.g.* in the late eighth century Charlemagne's menagerie in Aachen held a lion which had been received as a gift from the Emir of Cairo, see Mullan and Marvin 97.

This presence in Ashkenazic culture is not self-evident, since there were no wild lions in medieval and early modern Europe, and captive lions were uncommon.² It should therefore be primarily attributed to the ancient strata of Judaism (starting with the Hebrew Bible, see below) in which actual encounters with lions were possible. In addition, the general European fascination by this animal (*e.g.* numerous heraldic signs of European royal dynasties depict an image

of a lion: Fox-Davies 172–90) sustained this motif within Ashkenazic Jewish culture as well.

In the following lines three songs about a man fighting a lion, found within early modern Yiddish epics, will be presented. The similarities between them in both form and content will be examined, as well as the influences of relevant texts from Hebrew and German literatures on them. Additionally, possible influences of visual art and Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible will be considered. The great similarities between the Yiddish songs, and the suggested explanation for a detail in two of the songs which is unaccounted for in Jewish sources, lay the basis for a theory on the songs' possible common origin within the literary tradition of Yiddish epic.

Epic Poetry on Biblical Narratives in Old Yiddish Literature

Retelling single episodes or entire Books of the Hebrew Bible in the Jewish vernacular, the genre of biblical epic held a central role in Yiddish literature for centuries (Turniansky; Frakes). As vernacular retellings of the Bible are an ancient Jewish literary tradition (Levinson 308; Guez-Avigal; Moreen), this genre's expression in Yiddish may have begun as early as the tenth century, when Jews settled in southern Germany and the Yiddish language came into existence. The Yiddish genre was certainly well developed by the fourteenth century, as the earliest extant epic poems in this language indicate. Four short songs written in a manuscript dated 1382 which was found in the Cairo Geniza, have reached us.³ The short songs retell scenes from Genesis: the expulsion from Paradise, the death of Aaron, Abraham and his father's idols, and Joseph and Potiphar's wife. These poems draw on two cultural sources which seem to characterize most of the genre's works: thematically they are mostly based on classical Jewish sources, namely the biblical text and its midrashic (exegetical) elaboration, while stylistically they demonstrate the influence of literary forms and aesthetic norms used in German epics, especially in the depiction of battle scenes and scenes set in the royal court (Frakes xxii).

Although the extant inventory of Yiddish epics is lacking, it does provide reason to assume that at first single episodes were framed as short songs that could have been transmitted orally, setting the stage for much longer renditions of entire Books, composed in writing later (Shmeruk, *Aspects* 118).

3. This manuscript is found today in the Cambridge University Library (T-S.10.K.22): see Fuks, *Das altjiddische Epos*; Frakes xxii–xxiv, 1–14; Shmeruk, *Aspects* 26–29.

4. *Shmuel-bukh* was probably composed in the last third of the fifteenth century. To date three manuscripts from the early sixteenth century as well as seven print editions (*editio princeps* 1544, last known edition 1612) are known. See Shmeruk, *Aspects* 122; Shmeruk, “Shisha defusei Mantova;” Timm, *Yiddish Literature* 30–31.

5. *Doniel-bukh*, an epic on the Book of Daniel, printed in Altona 1730. See: Dreeßen and Hermann 1: 15 and 17.

The pinnacle of the genre is considered the epic rendition of the Books of Samuel (known as *Shmuel-bukh*) which have been preserved in manuscripts as well as several printed editions.⁴ Other Yiddish epics state that they should be sung according to the *Shmuel-bukh*’s melody (Roman 146, n. 3).

Although print boosted the circulation of Yiddish epics, the seventeenth century brought a decline in the creative achievements of this genre, symbolically indicated by the last known edition of the *Shmuel-bukh* in 1612. The last known printing of any Yiddish biblical epic, however, took place in 1730.⁵ The genre consecutively fell into oblivion until the late nineteenth century, when manuscripts and print editions of Yiddish biblical epics have been rediscovered in libraries and archives by researchers of Yiddish literature.

Following their rediscovery, excerpts of these works were printed anew and have started to circulate again among a varied readership of Yiddish and German speakers (Grünbaum; Basin; Staerk and Leitzmann). However, as these poems reached their modern readership through written documentation only, and not as a living tradition, their performative aspects have been lost.

For many years researchers of Yiddish literature accepted the texts’ markers of orality, especially the strong presence of a lively ‘intrusive’ narrator in most of them, at face value. Subsequently, the *Spielmann Theory* which assumed the existence of a class of wandering Jewish *trouvères* who sustained themselves through public performances of the epics, has ruled supreme within the study of Yiddish literature for most of the twentieth century (Shulman viii–ix; Landau xliii–xliv; Erik 67–129). Later opponents of this theory highlighted the lack of historical evidence to support the existence of such a *Spielmann*-class, and argued instead that the Yiddish epics’ authors came from rabbinic circles. The opponents of this theory also utterly rejected the significance of orality markers within the texts, dismissing them simply as ‘a literary norm’ (Shmeruk, “Can the Cambridge Manuscript”). Nevertheless, even the most bitter of opponents to the *Spielmann Theory* agreed with the assumption that the tradition of biblical Yiddish epics began in the Middle Ages in the form of short songs which were orally transmitted and sung to a set melody (Shmeruk, *Aspects* 118). It is important to stress this matter, since unlike written transmission within Jewish society which most often sets the text in the realm of Hebrew-literate rabbinic circles, an oral transmission in the vernacular provides the possibility for additional Jewish voices to be heard. Oral literature, especially in

the Early Modern Era, may draw on narrative traditions preceding print and present variation in narratives which today are considered as canonical texts. This thesis will be demonstrated in the case-study below, highlighting elements of popular entertainment as well as cultural transfer from the co-territorial German Christian society within the Yiddish texts studied.

The Oral-Formulaic Theory

In their early twentieth-century study of epic poetry in the Balkans, Milman Parry and Albert Lord came up with profound insights regarding the transmission of oral literature (Lord). Thanks to their Oral-Formulaic Theory, characteristics of oral composition and transmission could be discovered in epic works originating in pre-modern times, which have reached us only in writing. Later researchers have expanded this theoretical analysis, often criticizing its dichotomous division between orality and literacy, and suggesting also intermediate modes of composition and transmission between the written and the spoken (Green 12 and 169–202). However, for the purpose of this paper, Lord's definition of purely oral epic poetry is used:

The singer of tales, equipped with a store of formulas and themes and a technique of composition, takes his place before an audience and tells his story. (Lord 99)

According to Lord, an epic *formula* is “A group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea,” and “provide[s] a means for telling a story in song and verse” (Lord 4).⁶ The epic *themes*, however, have to do with the story itself. These are “groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale,” such as the assembly of people, writing a letter, description of the hero's clothes and horse, or the killing of a monster (Lord 68 and 198–99). Although the *theme* usually makes up part of the whole story, it may also circulate as a short independent work (Lord 94).

6. See also Parry 80.

2 Three Yiddish Songs

As mentioned above, confrontations between a man and a lion are common in the Hebrew Bible, although usually described very

7. For Samson, David, and Benaiah, read below. The man of God: Fuks, stanzas 670–74; the prophet's neighbor: Fuks, stanzas 945–46; Ezekiel's prophecy: ben Moshe, chapter 19, 31v–32r; Daniel: Dreeßen und Müller, *Doniel*, vol. 2, stanzas 345–70.

briefly, e.g. Samson (Judg. 14.5–6), David (1 Sam. 17.34–36), Benaiah (2 Sam. 23.20), the man of God (1 Kings 13.24–28), the prophet's neighbor (1 Kings 20.36), Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezck. 19.1–9), Daniel (Dan. 6.8–25), etc. Almost all of these stories are found within Yiddish biblical epics as well.⁷ While some Yiddish retellings remain close to the original brief biblical text (at times combined with Rashi's commentary), others elaborate it significantly. The former concise retellings are of no interest to this research, since their textual sources are evident and they clearly fulfill their aim to present a vernacular and aesthetic version of the Hebrew Bible to Yiddish-speakers. The elaborate retellings, on the other hand, will be discussed, as they do something more. Their authors take the canonical text as a starting point, and use their own artistic creativity, which is influenced by Jewish Midrashic sources as well as German literary traditions, in order to create a new and exciting version of the ancient story. With Albert Lord's observation in mind, three such Yiddish retellings constitute in my mind a recurring epic *theme*. As stated above, elaborations of battle scenes far beyond the biblical and midrashic texts and bearing influence of the German epics, are common to the Yiddish genre (Turniansky 30) and the *theme* describing a battle with a lion belongs to this category.

Before the three songs can be analyzed, they will be presented here in English translation, preceded by the biblical text, for the benefit of the readers.

Samson

In the Book of Judges it is said that Samson confronted a roaring lion and killed him with his bare hands:

Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.⁸ (Judg. 14.5–6)

8. All Bible translations in this article (including the New Testament) are taken from the King James Bible. However, when only a reference to the Bible is given (no citation) then the reference follows the verse numbering common in the original Hebrew text.

9. Found in Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Ms. 5123. This text has been edited in Oren Roman's doctoral dissertation: Roman, "The Old Yiddish Epics."

The Yiddish epic entitled *Sefer Shoftim*, preserved in a *unicum* manuscript copied in 1511,⁹ retells nearly the entire Book of Judges in 524 four-lined stanzas. The epic remains throughout close to the biblical

text along with Rashi's commentary. However, when depicting Samson's fight with the lion, it untypically elaborates the original text. The succinct two biblical verses become eighteen lines in Yiddish, portraying at relative length a fierce fight along with details that are not found in any known Hebrew source:

10. The original Yiddish text reads as follows:

שמשון און' וואטר און' מוטר גין תימנא
זיא דאר צוגין און' זי גינג' / און' זיא קומן
אן דען וויין גרטין איין יונגין ליבא זיא דו
ווינגין / דער ווארד שרייאן זוא מורטליכ
ן זיר / דו ער זיא זאך הער קומן אין דער
ווייט אלזו ווער:
שמשון דער מאכט זיך אויף ער יאגט דעם
ליבן נאך / ער אובער איילט אין צו שט-
רייטן וואש אים גר גוך / דו הטן זיא מיט
אנדר איין מורטליכן שטרייט / דש גריינן
בון דעם ליבן הורטן מן אלזו ווייט:
שמשון דער העלד שטארק דעגין אלזו פֿיין
/ ער שפרנג דען ליבן ווילד וואל אויף דען
רוקן זיין / דער ליבא דער מושט זיך ביגאן
וואל נידר צו דער ערדא / ער בויר אים מיט
ביידן הענדן אין זיין מויל און אלש גפֿערד:
גמויט גוט' עש דער שאלט און' אויף אים
עש דער גרויזיט / ער שפילט דען ליבן בון
ווארן ביש הינטן אויף / און מעשר און' און
שווערט נישט אין זיין הנט / עש ווער עש
איין ציקליין גוועזן אזו ער אין אנטרנט:
דען ליבן ער צו שפילט מיטן אין דען פלון
/ ער קאם צו וואטר און' צו מוטר און' זייט
אין נישט דער בון.

11. Yaakov zu der Kannen, *Sefer Shoftim*. This epic (different from the 1511 manuscript which bears the same title) retells the Book of Judges in 396 eight-lined stanzas, the *unicum* of this book is kept in Jerusalem, the National Library of Israel (Signature: R8=94A2391). This text too has been edited in Roman, "The Old Yiddish Epics."

12. Yaakov bar Yizhak, *Sefer Kehillat Ya'akov*. See Staerk and Leitzmann 261–70.

Samson and his father and mother journeyed and went down
[to Timnat

And they came to the vineyard

They encountered there a young lion who growled ever so
[ferociously

As he saw them approach from far away.

Samson set off, he chased the lion

He rushed, he was so eager to fight the lion

Then the two had a ferocious fight

The roaring of the lion could be heard from afar.

Samson the strong hero, a warrior ever so fine

He jumped right on the wild lion's back

The lion was compelled to crouch down to the ground

He grabbed him at once by the mouth with both hands.

The spirit of God resounded and he trembled

He split the lion in two from the front to the back

With neither a knife nor a sword in his hands

He rent him as if he were a goat's kid.

He split the lion up in the midst of the place

He returned to his father and mother and told them nothing of it
(Anonymous, *Sefer Shoftim*: Ms. Parm. 1523, stanzas 316–20)¹⁰

It should be mentioned here that in two other early modern epic renditions on the Book of Judges, the text remains close to the Hebrew original. The first case is in another – different – Yiddish epic also entitled *Sefer Shoftim*,¹¹ and the other case is in the epic rendition of the Pentateuch as well as parts of Joshua and Judges, entitled *Sefer Kehillat Yaakov*.¹²

Another relevant matter to be pointed out in this context is that the elaboration of Samson's story in the 1511 epic reflects the new inter-

13. This may have been based on earlier narrative traditions, see Zakovitch.

14. E.g. Mishna *Nazir* 9.5; BT *Bava Batra* 91a.

15. E.g. Mishna *Nazir* 1.2; Mechilta derabi Yishmael, Beshalakh.

16. E.g. *Hadar Zekenim* commentary on the Torah (Gen. 49.18); *The Book of Pious* (Margaliot ed.) no. 167. Also the Mantua 1564 Yiddish epic on Judges announces in the beginning of the Samson story: "A son was born to Manoah, Samson the Mighty was his name" (Yaakov zu der Kannen, *Sefer Shoftim*, stanza 215.3).

17. Both as a strong Jewish man who fought and defeated his people's enemies, and even as a martyr: Einbinder 134; Offenberg.

est that his character arose in Jewish Ashkenazic culture. While the Bible presents Samson as a hero with immense physical strength and mentions him along with the other Judges who led Israel,¹³ in post-biblical rabbinic literature there are also views which frown upon his actions (Cohen). For example, the saying in the Mishna "Samson went after [the desire of] his eyes, therefore the Philistines put out his eyes" (Mishna *Sota* 1.8), refers in disapproval to Samson's relationships with the Philistine women (cf. Judg. 14.1, 16.1). In this Mishnaic example and in others, Samson is mentioned either without any epithet,¹⁴ or with the lukewarm *ben Manoah*, 'the son of Manoah.'¹⁵ However since the Middle Ages the term *Samson the Mighty* (שמִשּׁוֹן הַגִּבּוֹר) starts appearing in Ashkenazic sources, reflecting an improvement in his status.¹⁶ The reason for the improvement in Samson's status exceeds the scope of this article, but it may have to do with his good status in the co-territorial Christian culture (see below), where at times he was even referred to as *Sampson fortissimus* (Büchi 163; Wilson and Wilson 200). On the other hand, Samson's rehabilitation could have also been brought about through the contextualization of his story into medieval Jewish existence, as a Jew who dared fight the non-Jewish powerful neighbors.¹⁷

Shmuel-bukh: David and Benaiah

There are two elaborate stories of a man fighting a lion in the *Shmuel-bukh*. Their original description in the Hebrew Bible, however, is quite short. The first case is David who while trying to convince King Saul to allow him to fight Goliath, boasts that he had killed a lion and a bear. The Bible states:

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear. (1 Sam. 17.34–36)

There is evidence suggesting that this narrative has often been elaborated upon. For example, in the commentary of Rashi, we read about four additional animals:

'Both the lion and the bear' (1 Sam. 17.36): These three words

18. Cf. Midrash Shmuel 20.5; Midrash Lekach Tov, Vayikra, 152.

(גם את גם) are of inclusive nature, meaning a lion and its two whelps, and a bear and its two cubs.¹⁸

The second story is also mentioned briefly in the Bible:

And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lionlike men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow (2 Sam. 23.20).

Both of these biblical narratives are retold and expanded in the *Shmuel-bukh*, the epic considered, as said above, to be the jewel of the crown of Yiddish biblical epic.

It appears at first sight that the story about David has been translated accurately and in fact briefly in the *Shmuel-bukh*, when David tells King Saul:

I have slain bears and lions without a sword.
("Shmuel-bukh," stanza 352: *Early Yiddish Epic* 43)

Yet the *Shmuel-bukh*'s author had composed in addition to this also an entire passage, indeed an epic *theme*, describing David's battle with the lion (as well as with a bear). This theme has been set within the Yiddish narrative just before the introduction of Goliath (cf. 1 Sam. 17.4), a setting which lacks any parallel in the Hebrew biblical text whatsoever.

It is possible that these lines have also existed as an independent short epic song, as we find in their beginning the opening formula "We want to sing the marvels of a little man" ("Shmuel-bukh," stanza 304: *Early Yiddish Epic* 40). In order to keep the paper focused, only the lines which describe David's fight with the lion are given here, omitting the preceding, similar description of his fight with the bear:¹⁹

[...] Then a huge lion came and carried off one of his sheep, which deeply dismayed that most worthy youth: "Can I have no peace from these evil beasts?" He took a huge pole that was thick and long. He swung it at the lion with great force. He gave it such a vehement blow on the back that the huge lion lay stretched out on the ground before him. He thought

19. Frakes' prose translation, in which the four-lined stanzas have been translated as one grammatical unit, is used here. This choice brings about a clear English text, but inevitably loses the epic meter.

that he had quite slain the lion, but up the lion sprang and charged at the lad.

The lion was enraged and roared in its wrath. They fought with each other, those two exceptional ones. The lion struck boldly at the youth, so that his red blood ran down over his ears.

“I think that you want to rage,” said the small hero. He chose a very large stone for himself; he threw it with such force at the huge lion, that its red blood flowed down over its ears.

The lion was quite enraged and sprang on the man. It again charged him on its hind legs. Then little David said with a raging spirit: “If you want to wrestle with me, that seems alright with me.”

He attacked the lion, grabbed its mane, and threw it to the ground, which enraged the lion. It sprang back up and bit the youth hard. It gnashed its mighty teeth together.

That greatly annoyed the youth; the lion was so strong that it was not going well for the lad. The lad brought the lion to great sorrow: he grasped it by the mouth²⁰ with both hands.

The lad had won; the lion was injured. He steeled himself to the lion and quickly slew it. “You most powerful devil; you brought me into great distress. I have now well rewarded you for your misdeeds.”

(“Shmuel-bukh,” stanzas 312–20: *Early Yiddish Epic* 41)

Finally, let us consider the retelling of the single verse recounting Benaiah’s battle with a lion. In this Yiddish version, Benaiah is presented as a European knight with a horse and a sword:

It began to snow heavily; that angered the lad. He wished to ride away from there; he put on his spurs. Then the young warrior heard such great clamor that it troubled the youth deeply.

“Truly,” said Benaiah, “before I ride away from here, I will indeed have to find out what devilish thing cries out thus.” He turned toward a pit in order to follow the clamor. There he found a mighty Egyptian underway [...]

He hurried toward the pit from which the clamor came. There he found a mighty lion that roared from hunger. The Moabite counts had put it in there for the sake of entertainment.²¹ “Truly,” said Benaiah, “Sir Lion, I must have you.”

20. Frakes translated here: ‘throat.’ The original Yiddish anatomical term שלונד can refer to various parts of the beginning of the digestive tract (cf. German *Schlund*, e.g. in Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch*). In this specific context, as supported by literary parallels and visual depictions, *mouth* seems the more correct translation (read below).

21. I could not find any Jewish source for this detail, which brings to mind the above-mentioned Roman practice of *bestiarium*.

He hurried to fetch his sword and put it on while up
above, and he leapt into the pit, that marvelously bold man.
He thought that he could carry off the lion. The lion then
roared with rage and attacked the man.

The lion roared with rage in that heavy snow. Clawing
and biting, it caused the youth great pain. The youth none-
theless defended himself in his deadly peril, until he had also
slain the mighty lion.

The lad then rode from there until he came to David.
("Shmuel-bukh," stanzas 1001–02, 1006–08: *Early Yiddish Epic* 90)

Discussion

Apart from their thematic content, there are also some poetic and formal traits common to all three songs. So, for example, they all describe in detail the actual fighting, which like other elaborate battle scenes in the Yiddish genre, do not draw on the Bible or any Jewish exegetical text.²² All three songs portray the hero's emotions, namely his eagerness and excitement to fight the lion, while the lion on the other hand is also portrayed as angry and aggressive. Likewise, all three songs narrate the actual battle in a dramatic tone culminating in the hero's triumph over the lion, indicating that these songs' purpose is to entertain their listening human audience.

Moreover, from a formal point of view, all three songs expand a brief biblical description to a longer report, in a manner which is not typical for the rest of the epic work in which they are incorporated. The different manner of retelling the text distinguishes the three songs from the rest of the *Shmuel-bukh* or the Judges-epic, respectively. All this gives rise to the assumption that the three Yiddish songs are in fact renditions of the same epic *theme* describing a man fighting a lion.

Looking closely, the two songs from *Shmuel-bukh* bear similarities which distinguish them from the song found in the Judges-epic: 1) they both describe the blows that the hero suffers from the lion; 2) they both include direct speech, namely the hero's reference to the lion as 'devilish', and his inciting words to the lion; 3) while in the Judges-epic Samson killed the lion with his bare hands (cf. Judg. 14.6), both songs in the *Shmuel-bukh* indicate an instrument used to kill the lion, which is not mentioned in the biblical text (while David's throwing of a stone may be attributed to his subse-

22. E.g. see 2 Sam. 21.15–22 elaborated in *Shmuel-bukh* stanzas 1091–130: *Early Yiddish Epic* 96–99; Turniansky 30.

quent battle with Goliath (cf. 1 Sam. 17.35–36, 49–50), his use of a pole (a shepherd's crook?), and Benaiah's use of a sword, are not based on any Jewish source known to me); 4) finally, although all three songs mention the roaring of the lion, only the song on Samson has a biblical source for this (Judg. 14.20).

The similarities between the songs on David and Benaiah seem to have been added to the text in order to make it more aesthetic and appealing. As such, they may be attributed to the literary style of the *Shmuel-bukh*'s author and suggest that the song on Samson may have been retold by a different poet.

On the other hand, there are similarities that occur only between the songs on Samson and David, which make use of details not found in the classical Jewish sources. Both songs mention that the lion was hit on his back and subsequently fell on the ground; and they both relate how the brave hero held with both hands the lion's mouth, shortly before subduing him. While hitting a lion on his back may seem logical during a battle with him, holding his mouth is in fact illogical, as one risks being bitten this way. These similarities were presumably initiated by a common influence, but I could not find any parallel to these details in Jewish classical sources. In 1 Sam. 17.35 it says that David grabbed the lion's beard when trying to free the goat's kid – but a beard is not a mouth,²³ and at any rate in this context it would imply grabbing at the lion's chin with one hand and hitting him (or pulling the kid) with the other. Also Judg. 14.6 relates that Samson simply tore the lion apart like a goat's kid – and as gruesome as that action may sound, realistically speaking it cannot be done starting at the mouth, for if pulled hard enough the jaw would break away from the skull.

23. Interestingly, the classical Aramaic Targum Yonatan translates זקן ("beard") as לוע ("jaw," "mouth").

3 Narrative Art

A study of narrative imagery within Jewish and Christian art sheds light and may even offer a direct source to Samson's hand gesture. As presented below, this gesture is found in visual images which bear particular significance moving beyond literary style, and in fact echo Christian religious thought. It should be stressed, however, that this current research does not claim to offer an exhaustive description of the extant corpus of Jewish or Christian art, but rather to point out

that the image of Samson forcing the lion's mouth open was common and known and may have influenced the songs' authors.

Samson Fighting a Lion in Jewish Art

Descriptions of Samson fighting the lion and holding his mouth with both hands are common in Jewish art, especially in the medieval and early modern Ashkenazic realm.²⁴ So, for example we see it in a thirteenth-century illuminated manuscript, where Samson also jumps on the lion's back and forces him to the ground. While the Hebrew inscription says: "this is Samson riding the lion and tearing his mouth", it does not imply that this is how he tore the lion "like a kid," only that he forced his mouth open.

24. I am grateful to Dr. Sara Offenberg of Ben Gurion University in the Negev, for generously sharing her vast knowledge in Jewish art and art history with me. After my initial discoveries, Dr. Offenberg has brought to my attention further pictures that support my thesis, some of which are used in this research.



Fig. 1. Samson Rending the Lion, North French Hebrew Miscellany (c. 1278): BL, Ms. Add. 11639, f. 520r © British Library Board.

A similar scene is also found in the *Second Nuremberg Haggada* (Germany c. 1450), as part of a small cycle of depictions of Samson stories. On the bottom Samson is seen sitting on the lion (having jumped on him?) and holding his mouth, while bees fly in front of them. The Hebrew inscription above explains with incorrect, pseudo biblical citations: "And Samson rent the lion with his mightiness" (Judg. 14.6) followed by "and, behold, there was a swarm of bees before him" (Judg. 14.8) referring to the honey that Samson later found inside the lion's carcass, as well as his riddle about it to the Philistines (Judg. 14.12–14). To the left of that image stands a woman holding a

red flower, representing Samson's first wife who also gave out the riddle's answer to the Philistines. The caption cites (this time accurately) Samson's words after the Philistines had solved his riddle: "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle" (Judg. 14.18).



Fig. 2: Samson Rending the Lion, *Second Nuremberg Haggada* (15th century), f. 39r
© Collection David Sofer, London.

It seems reasonable that the authors who composed the above-mentioned Yiddish poems drew details from such visual depictions. Still the cultural significance and source of this image of narrative art also need to be determined, and as the Jewish sources have been ruled out, the answer should be sought in the co-territorial Christian culture.

A Man Fighting a Lion in Christian Art and Theology

Depictions of Samson fighting the lion were popular in Christian art of the Middle Ages. In fact, during the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries this biblical subject was one of the most frequent representations taken from the Old Testament (Swarzenski 68 and 71). We find among such depictions the image of Samson holding the lion's mouth with both hands, too, for example in a twelfth-century mosaic:



Fig. 3. Samson Rending the Lion, Cologne, St. Gereon's Basilica (c. 12th century)

© Prof. Dr. Klaus Koenen, Universität zu Köln.

25. The *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* was a popular illustrated work of popular theology in the late Middle Ages concentrating on typology, *i.e.* the view that the events of the Old Testament prefigured the events of the New Testament. See Wilson and Lancaster Wilson.

And also in a fourteenth-century *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* illuminated manuscript:²⁵



Fig. 4. Samson Rending the Lion, *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, Hs. 2505 (c. 1360), f. 55r © Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek.

26. See for example the depiction of David killing the Lion in the Winchester Bible (Winchester Cathedral Library, 1160-75), f. 218r.

27. It should be noted, however, that in early Christian thought some views considered Samson as a type of the Sinner and the lion as a symbol of Christ (Swarzenski 72).

28. In the medieval bestiaries Jesus was likened to a lion, because it was believed, for example, that lion's cubs were born dead and three days after their birth they were brought to life by their father. See: White 7-11; Clark 40, 42 and 60.

29. The Harrowing of Hell refers to Jesus' victory over the Devil and death between the time of his Crucifixion and his Resurrection. In his triumphant descent to Hell, Jesus brought salvation to the righteous people who had died since the beginning of the world until the Harrowing, as their souls could not have been saved prior to his atoning death. See Warren; Romilly Allen 278-81.

30. In German it is called *Höllenschlund*, 'schlund' being the word used by the *Shmuel-bukh* to describe the lion's mouth.

31. The *Biblia pauperum* ("Paupers' Bible") was a medieval tradition of picture Bibles visualizing the typological correspondences between the Old and New Testaments. These Bibles placed the illustration in the centre, with only a brief text or sometimes no text at all. See Horst 14-17 (especially 16 n. 26).

At times, interestingly, the gesture of holding the lion's mouth with both hands is also used in Christian art for depicting David's battle.²⁶

The significance of this gesture is clear in Christian religious writing. Indeed, unlike some Jewish sources, in Christian thought Samson is regarded positively.²⁷ Already the New Testament mentions him among other pious men such as David and Samuel:

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. (Letter to the Hebrews 11.32-34)

Within these lines, the lion bears a negative significance in Christian thought (though not always).²⁸ Thus, the New Testament likens the Devil to a lion:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5.8)

In this sense, according to the typological view of the Old Testament, Samson's battle with the lion foreshadows the Harrowing of Hell,²⁹ with the lion symbolizing the Devil. Moreover, Samson's forcing open the lion's resisting jaws actually symbolizes one of the most fundamental ideas of Christian thought – Jesus forcing open the Gates of Hell, thereby releasing mankind's souls from eternal damnation. The Gates of Hell are also known as "Hellmouth," a metaphoric image often envisaged as the gaping mouth of a monster (Romilly Allen 280).³⁰

A clear and decisive visual depiction of this typological view is found in a fifteenth-century Netherlandish *Biblia Pauperum*.³¹ The central image is of Jesus saving souls from the Hellmouth. To the left is an image of David defeating evil by killing Goliath, and to the right is an image of Samson defeating the lion. The text at the top right explains: "Samson signifies Christ who when he freed man from the power of the devil killed the lion."



Fig. 5. Descent into limbo, flanked by David slaying Goliath left, and Samson killing the lion right, Netherlandish *Biblia Pauperum*, c. 1465 © Trustees of the British Museum 1845, 0809.29, sheet 28.

Most interestingly, in the same manuscript of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* referred to earlier, the story of Benaiah and the lion (top) is also painted as foreshadowing Christ's victory over the Devil (bottom). In the picture, Benaiah stabs the lion with a weapon, steps with his foot on the lion's body (back?), causing subsequently the lion's death and the opening of its mouth:



Fig. 7. Christ's victory over the Devil (top), Benaiah killing the lion (bottom), *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, Hs. 2505 (c. 1360), f. 54v © Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek.

4 Conclusions

The three Yiddish songs about a man's battle with a lion discussed in this article are a good case study for three cultural phenomena: the oral transmission of epic narratives within Yiddish speaking society, the strong relationship between text and picture, and the influence Christian culture had on Ashkenazic Jews, especially through their vernacular culture.

The similarities between the three songs which are not based on biblical or other Jewish exegetical texts serve as an indication that they

are a classical epic *theme*, as described in the Oral-Formulaic Theory. While lengthy Old Yiddish epics such as *Sefer Shoftim* appear to have been composed in writing, the genre's beginning was in short songs which were transmitted orally. Within the lengthy written epics an oral texture is still present, like the stanzaic structure and the use of epic formulae and epic *themes*. These may be remnants of a lost oral epic tradition. Likewise the transmission of details from one context to another similar one (like the lion's roar in Samson's song transmitted to David's and Benaiah's songs) is a phenomenon common to oral literature.

The gesture of opening the lion's mouth with both hands is clearly of Christian origin. This Christian depiction was adopted into Jewish vernacular-literary and visual traditions, by Jewish authors and artists who undoubtedly knew that its origin was in Christian culture where they had first seen or heard it. Although they probably did not accept its religious meaning and merely considered the gesture as an act of strength. We thus learn of the close cultural ties between Jewish and Christian epic poets in the German lands during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era, and inevitably also between their audiences. Just like the poet, it may be that also the Jewish audience had heard such a description ('theme') in a Christian recital, and liked it. This contact between Jews and Christians may also have been the reason for the rehabilitation of Samson in Jewish Ashkenazic culture, echoing Samson's good status in Christian culture (this does not undermine other aspects of this process, namely identifying the Christian neighbors with the Philistines whom Samson defeated several times).

Finally, another possible path along which the Christian story penetrated Jewish culture is the visual image. It may very well be that a Christian picture or a statue of Samson fighting the lion and opening his mouth inspired Jewish poets to retell Samson's story – either while being aware of the original religious meaning of the story, or fully unaware of it.

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The Hyena's Cave

Jeremiah 12.9 in Premodern Bestiaries

Abstract

The premodern bestiary tradition portrays the hyena as a creature that annually changes its sex. While the *Greek Physiologus* interprets it as an allegory of sexual aberration, the various versions of the *Latin Physiologus* read it as a symbol for religious duplicity. Since the late twelfth century, the bestiaries transform the hyena into a signifier of the abominable *par excellence*. Throughout the bestiary tradition, the interpretation of the hyena draws on a quotation from the *Book of Jeremiah* where God compares his land to a hyena's cave (Jer. 12.9).

1. For the medieval Latin and German bestiaries, see Henkel; Schröder; for the medieval Latin and French bestiaries, see Kay. For a translation, introduction and commentary of the early Latin texts (*Physiologus versio Y*, *Physiologus B*), see Curley. For the hyena, see Kay 70–73.

2. For a chronology of the various Latin bestiaries, see Kay 157–62.

From the Aesopian fables to the film and musical *The Lion King*, the hyena has always had a dubious reputation (Glickman; Brottman). The premodern bestiary tradition is no exception, portraying the hyena as a creature that annually changes its sex.¹ While the *Greek Physiologus* interprets it as an allegory of sexual aberration, the various versions of the *Latin Physiologus* read it as a symbol for religious duplicity.² Since the late twelfth century, the bestiaries transform the hyena into a signifier of the abominable *par excellence*. Throughout the bestiary tradition, the interpretation of the hyena draws on a quotation from the *Book of Jeremiah* where God – deploring Israel's moral decline – compares his land to a hyena's den: “Is not my inheritance to me a hyaena's cave?” (Jer. 12.9). Yet only the Septuagint refers to a hyena in this context. The Hebrew text talks more generally about a ‘speckled’ creature, and the Vulgate identifies the latter as a ‘speckled bird’ rather than a spotted hyena.

1 The Greek Tradition: Sexual Aberration

The earliest document hinting at the sexual ambiguity of the hyena are two Aesopian fables. Each of them consists of a zoological statement, a brief narrative and an interpretation. The first fable states as

a fact that the hyena is a sexual shapeshifter and tells a story about a male hyena going to copulate with a female partner:

The Hyenas

They say that hyenas change their sex each year and become males and females alternately. Now, one day a male hyena attempted an unnatural sex act with a female hyena. The female responded: 'If you do that, friend, remember that what you do to me will soon be done to you.' (Aesop 249, no. 340)

The 'unnatural sex act' the narrator mentions seems to refer to anal intercourse. The male hyena desires to mount the female partner. Although this is a heterosexual sex act, it bears a strong homosexual implication. The female advises the male to reconsider since the very same sex act might soon be performed on him in turn. At that time, he will be a female himself – yet while he is wondering what it might be like to be mounted, he is still a male. Leaving the realm of sexuality, the conclusion of the fable compares the hyena to a judge who should be aware that he might once be judged himself: "This is what one could say to the judge concerning his successor, if he had to suffer some indignity from him." The second fable begins with the same statement but then tells a different story:

The Hyena and the Fox

They say that hyenas change their sex every year and become alternately male and female. Now a girl hyena, fancying a fox, reproached him bitterly for rejecting her advances and driving her away from him when she had wished to become friendly with him. 'It's not to me you should complain,' retorted the fox, 'but to your own nature, which gives me no way of knowing whether you would be my girlfriend or my boyfriend.' (Aesop 250, no. 341)

In this case, the punchline draws on the idea that the male fox cannot be sure whether he is having an affair with a male or a female hyena, since the hyena changes its sex annually. Consequently, the conclusion reads, "This relates to the sexually ambiguous man."

In the fourth century BCE, Aristotle challenged the common belief that the hyena changes its sex (Glickman 508–13). In his *History of Animals*, he explains that the alleged sexual ambiguity of the hyena results from a misperception of its peculiar anatomy. Aristotle

claims that both the male and the female hyena possess three organs that are located under the tail. The first one is a genital (either a penis or a vagina), the second the anus and the third a specific orifice which is unconnected to either the uterus or the intestines. According to Aristotle, the resemblance of this appendage to the vagina explains the misapprehension of the hyena as being a beast that is either both male and female or changes its sex regularly:

What is recounted concerning its genital organs, to the effect that every hyena is furnished with the organ both of the male and the female, is untrue. The fact is that the sexual organ of the male hyena resembles the same organ in the wolf and in the dog; the part resembling the female genital organ lies underneath the tail, and does to some extent resemble the female organ, but it is unprovided with duct or passage, and the passage for the residuum comes underneath it. The female hyena has the part that resembles the organ of the male, and, as in the case of the male, has it underneath her tail, unprovided with duct or passage; and after it the passage for the residuum, and underneath this the true female genital organ. (*History of Animals* 6.32.579b; quoted from Glickman 509)

He makes the same statement in his book *Generation of Animals*:

Much deceived also are those who make a foolish statement about the [...] hyena. Many say that the hyena [...] has two pudenda, those of the male and of the female [...] and that [...] the hyena mounts and is mounted in alternate years. This is untrue, for the hyena has been seen to have only one pudendum, there being no lack of opportunity for observation in some districts, but hyenas have under the tail a line like the pudendum of the female. Both male and female have such a mark, but the males are taken more frequently; this casual observation has given rise to this opinion. (*Generation of Animals* 3.6.757a; quoted from Glickman 509)

As Aristotle points out, the widespread misinformation about the sexual abnormality of the hyena results from a lack of thorough observation. Aristotle's reference to the assumption that the hyena "mounts and is mounted in alternate years" seems to respond to the sources that also inspired the Aesopian fables about the hyenas (see Aesop 249).

Nevertheless, the early Christian tradition readily adopted the superstitious belief that the hyena is sexually ambiguous (Boswell 137–43). This is where the Bible comes into play. The so-called *Epistle of Barnabas*, a Christian text from the first century, claims that the hyena changes its sex and thus signifies a sexual predator. Referring to the dietary laws of Moses, the author equates the hare, the hyena and the weasel with various sexual practices such as oral and anal intercourse and the change of sexual roles:

You shall not eat the hare (cf. Lev. 11.5). Why? So that, he said, you may not become a boy-molester or be made like these. For the hare grows a new anal opening each year, so that however many years he has lived, he has that many anuses. Nor should you eat the hyena, he said, so that you may not become an adulterer or a seducer,³ or like them. Why? Because this animal changes its gender annually and is one year a male and the next a female. And he also rightly despised the weasel (cf. Lev. 11.29). You shall not, he said, become as these, who we hear commit uncleanness with their mouths, nor shall you be joined to those women who have committed illicit acts orally with the unclean. For this animal conceives through its mouth. (Boswell 137–38)

3. The word φθορεὺς ('seducer') hints back at the word παιδοφθόρος that is used for the 'boy-molester.'

The Mosaic prohibitions indeed refer to the hare and the weasel; however, they do not at all mention the hyena. The writer of the epistle mistook the swine (ὑν) mentioned in Lev. 11.7 for a hyena (ὑαίνα) – probably since both words are quite similar and etymologically related. In addition, the alleged sexual practices are not part of the biblical text but taken from different sources. The misreading of the hyena's anatomy in combination with the misreading of the biblical text results in the perpetuation of a zoological myth that perfectly serves the Christian damnation of non-heterosexual and non-reproductive sexuality.

In the second century, the Christian theologian Clement of Alexandria confirmed the alleged sexual perversion of the hyena. Like the *Epistle of Barnabas*, he refers to the Mosaic prohibitions and insinuates that the hyena is prone to excessive sexuality. In his *Paedagogus*, he writes:

Consider, for instance, how the all-wise Moses somewhat

symbolically repudiated fruitless sowing, saying, 'You shall not eat the hare or the hyena.' For he did not wish men to partake of the qualities of these or to taste such wickedness themselves, since these animals are quite obsessed with sexual intercourse. (Boswell 355–59, here 356)

Then he gives the well-known explanation for the hyena's immorality that is easily transmitted to those who eat the hyena:

The hyena, on the other hand, is alternately male and female in succeeding years – by which [Moses] suggests that those who abstain from the hyena will not be very prone to adultery. (Boswell 356)

Clement is aware of Aristotle's objections to the traditional superstitions about the hyena but draws a different conclusion from the philosopher's explanations. Clement claims that the particular appendage of the hyena Aristotle talks about proves its inclination to lust and fornication including homosexual penetration:

Since this animal is extremely lewd, it has grown under its tail in front of the passage for excrement a certain fleshy appendage, in form very like the female genitalia. This design of the flesh has no passage leading to any useful part, I say, either to the womb or to the rectum. It has, rather, only a great cavity, whence it derives its fruitless lust, since the passages intended for the procreation of the fetus are inverted. This same thing occurs in the case of both the male hyena and the female, because of their exceptional passivity. The males mount each other, so it is extremely rare for them to seek a female. Nor is conception frequent for this animal, since unnatural insemination is so common among them. [...] 'The ungodly, moreover,' as the Apostle says (Rom 1.26–7), 'he gave up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature; and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working that which is unseemly and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.' (Boswell 356–57)

In order to emphasize his depiction of the hyena, Clement introduc-

es a second biblical reference, quoting two lines from Saint Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* that condemn male and female homosexuality (Rom 1.26–27). Finally, Clement offers a third biblical quote, this time referring to the prophet Jeremiah:

When Jeremiah – or the Spirit speaking through him – used to say, ‘The cave of the hyena has become my home’ (Jer. 12.9; cf. 7.11), loathing the food of the dead bodies, he was referring in a subtle parable to idolatry; for the house of the Lord should truly be free of idols. (Boswell 357)

At this point, Clement switches from the literal to the spiritual meaning of the hyena. On the literal level, the hyena stands for the sexual appetite it can induce in a person eating its meat. On the spiritual level, however, the hyena is a parable for idolatry. Clement thus metaphorically transforms the sexual sin attributed to the hyena into a religious sin – yet without dismissing the sexual meaning. In Clement's view, sodomy equals idolatry as in turn procreative sexuality equals orthodoxy.

The quote from the *Book of Jeremiah* is the single authentic biblical reference to the hyena. It only exists in the Greek version of the bible (*Septuagint*). The prophet complains about the deplorable state of Israel. He claims that the wicked prosper while the righteous wither. God responds to his complaint with an elaborate monologue about Israel's decline. He first reproaches the prophet for being impatient, then presents an allegory of Israel's hostility against him, and finally promises to renew his people if they are willing to serve him again. The first portion of the allegory talks about the wild beasts besieging the land, the second about the devastation of the vineyards and fields. The hyena occurs in the first section as one of the wild animals depriving God of his heritage:

I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given my beloved one into the hands of her enemies. My inheritance has become to me as a lion in a forest; she has uttered her voice against me; therefore have I hated her. Is not my inheritance to me a hyaena's cave, or a cave round about her? Go ye, gather together all the wild beasts of the field, and let them come to devour her. (Jer. 12.7–9)

The Greek bible uses the word ‘hyena’ (ὑαίνα) in order to translate

the Hebrew word *šāvūaʿ* (צבוע), which means ‘speckled creature’ (Frey-Anthes; McKane 268–73). While the Greek bible identifies this creature as a spotted hyena (it remains unclear whether or not this interpretation is correct), the Latin bible offers a different meaning by translating the Hebrew word as ‘speckled bird’ (*avis discolor*).

In the second century, another theologian, most likely also from Alexandria, composed the *Greek Physiologus*. This book presents a premodern zoology combining descriptions of beasts, trees and stones with allegorical readings. While the descriptions draw on ancient natural history, mostly borrowed from paradoxographical sources, the interpretations refer to the tradition of Christian hermeneutics. The beasts collected in the *Physiologus* include imaginary creatures such as sirens, centaurs, phoenixes and unicorns, yet most of them are animals that in fact exist in Africa such as the hyena. However, the depictions of the real beasts are as fantastic and bizarre as the descriptions of the monsters. There are four different redactions of the *Greek Physiologus*.⁴ The chapter on the hyena is documented in the first, third, fourth and fifth family of the first redaction; the text is identical except for an omitted sentence in the fourth family. According to the canonical edition by Francesco Sbordone, the relevant chapter reads as follows:

On the hyena

The law says, ‘You shall not eat the hyena or anything like it’ (Deut. 14.8). The *Physiologus* has written of it that it is male-female, that is, at one time male and at another female. It is therefore an unclean animal, because of this sex change. This is why Jeremiah says, ‘Never will the den of the hyena be my inheritance’ (Jer. 12.9).

You must not, therefore, become like the hyena, taking first the male and then the female nature; theses, he says the holy Apostle reproached when he spoke of ‘men with men working that which is unseemly’ (Rom. 1.27).

Physiologus spoke well about the hyena. (Boswell 142)⁵

The *Greek Physiologus* makes the same argument and refers to the same biblical quotes as Clement of Alexandria. It also reads the hyena as an allegory for homosexual men (Rom.) that are considered unclean (Deut.) and ungodly (Jer.). The hyena’s shift from male to female sex is interpreted as an allegory of a man first penetrating a

4. For the different redactions of the *Greek Physiologus*, see Kaimakis, *Der Physiologus nach der ersten Redaktion* 72 (hyena); Offermanns, *Der Physiologus nach den Handschriften G und M* 88 (hyena).

5. For the Greek text, see Sbordone 85–86; Schönberger 40–41 (text), 117–18 (commentary).

woman ('active' role) and then being penetrated himself by a man ('passive' role).

2 The Early Latin Tradition: Religious Aberration

While the Vulgate version of the *Book of Jeremiah* replaced the hyena with a bird, the Latin versions of the *Physiologus* stuck to the hyena. They all share the belief that the hyena changes its sex and quote the same biblical lines in order to prove the uncleanness of the hyena. However, they do not reiterate the notion that the hyena is a signifier of homosexuality. Their interpretation of the hyena refers to religious rather than sexual misdemeanor.

The *Physiologus versio Y*, which played a minor role in the Latin tradition and had no impact at all on the vernacular versions, reads the hyena as an allegory for effeminate men, which behave like men while attending mass but adopt female nature as soon as they leave church:

On the Hyena or the Brute

The Law said, 'Thou shalt not eat the brute, nor anything similar to it' (cf. Lev. 11.27). This animal is an *arenotelicon*, that is, an alternating male-female. At one time it becomes a male, at another a female, and it is unclean because it has two natures. Therefore, Jeremiah said, 'Never will my heritage be to me like the cave of the brute' (cf. Jer. 12.9).

Thus double-minded men are compared to the brute. They have the nature of men, that is, courage at the signal for gathering the congregation together, but when the assembly is dismissed they take on womanly nature.

Physiologus spoke well. (Curley 52–53)⁶

6. For the Latin text, see Carmody, *Physiologus Latinus Versio Y* 129.

The text adopts the references to Leviticus and Jeremiah but drops the reference to Saint Paul, since it dismisses the sexual interpretation. Instead, it offers a religious reading that addresses courage as the "nature of men" and, as one can conclude, weak-mindedness as "womanly nature." Thus, the hyena signifies the duplicity and hypocrisy of people that only pretend to be religious.

The most influential version of the Latin tradition is *Physiologus B*, an extended branch of *Physiologus versio Y*. The chapter on the hyena presents two additions. The first concerns the distinction be-

tween the 'hyena' and the 'brute': "There is an animal which is called the hyena in Greek and the brute in Latin" (Curley 52). The second addition is inserted after the second paragraph:

The sons of Israel are like the animal since in the beginning they served the living god but later, given over to pleasure and lust, they adored idols. For this reason, the Prophet likens the synagogue to an unclean animal. Whoever is among us eager for pleasure and greed is compared to this unclean brute since he is neither man nor woman, that is, neither faithful nor unfaithful. The Apostle said: 'The root of all evils is enslavement to idols' (Eph. 5.5; 1 Tim. 6.10). Solomon said of these without doubt, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways' (Jac. 1.8). The Saviour said to them in the Gospel, 'You are not able to serve two masters, God and mammon' (Matt. 6.24). (Curley 53)⁷

7. For the Latin text, see Carmody, *Physiologus Latinus*, 34–35; also see Baxter.

This addition considerably differs from the *Greek Physiologus* as well as from the Latin *Physiologus versio Y*. It offers a religious reading of the hyena as a signifier of infidelity. This accusation aims against both Jews committing idolatry and Christians favoring money over God.

The Latin *Physiologus B* was the source for various medieval versions. One of them is the *B-Isidore*, which inserts quotes from the *Etymologies* by Isidore of Sevilla into the text. In the case of the hyena, the *B-Isidore* adds the myth of the prophetic stone: "Etymology. The hyena has a stone in its eyes called the hyena, which, if someone holds it under his tongue he is thought to predict the future" (see Morini 44).⁸ Another medieval version related to the *Physiologus B* is called *Dicta Chrysostomi*, since it was traditionally ascribed to Saint Chrysostom. This version presents a shortened and somewhat confused redaction of the chapter on the hyena. It confounds the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, misreads *belua* (beast) as *fulica* (coot) (see Lauchert, *Geschichte* 285), and treats the latter as a different species. In addition, the *Dicta Chrysostomi* relates the hyena to the infidelity of the Jews and the coot to the infidelity of the Christians:

There is another animal, which is called the hyena in Greek and the beast [*belua*] in latin. The law says about it, 'Thou shalt not eat the brute, nor anything similar to it' (cf. Lev. 11.27). The prophet Isaiah said, 'My heritage is to me like the cave of the hyena' (cf. Jer. 12.9). Physiologus explains that this

8. Morini provides the Latin text (and an Italian translation); the relevant passage reads: "Ethim[ologia]. Hiena lapidem in oculis habet nomine hienam, quem si qui sub lingua sua tenuerit futura predicere creditur."

9. For the Latin text, see Wilhelm 24–25; English translation partly from Kay 70.

is because it has two natures. At times it is male and at others female, and hence it is an impure animal. The sons of Israel are to be seen as similar to it in that first they worshipped the living lord but later, abandoned to lust and sensual pleasure, they worshipped idols; and whoever now cultivates avarice, which is enslavement to false images, is comparable with this beast. The same applies for the unclean coot, which is said to be neither man nor women, that is, neither faithful nor faithless. Salomon said, ‘A double-minded man is instable in all his ways.’⁹

The *Dicta Chrysostomi* is the source of two early German translations of the *Physiologus*. The *Althochdeutscher Physiologus* (*Old High German Physiologus*), written in the eleventh century, offers a simplified version of the *Dicta Chrysostomi*:

Ein tier heizzit igena un ist uuilon uuib, uuilon man, unde durih daz ist ez uile unreine. solihe uuarin, di der erist Crist petiton un after diu abgot beginen. Daz bezeichnenet di der neuuedir noh ungeloubige noh rehte geloubige nesint. Von diu chat Salomon “Di dir zwiualtic sint in iro herzin, die sint ouh zwuualtic in iro uuerchin.”

An animal is called hyena. At times it is male and at others female, and hence it is an impure animal. Those are similar to it who first worship Christ and later idols. This animal signifies those who are neither faithless nor faithful. Salomon says about them, “They who are duplicitous in their hearts are also duplicitous in their deeds.” (Maurer 93; my translation)

The text focusses on Christian idolatry and hypocrisy and omits the allusions to Jews. The references to Leviticus and Jeremiah (respectively Isaiah) are replaced by an alleged reference to Salomon, which in fact is a quote from the *Epistle of James* (Jac. 1.8).

The *Millstätter Physiologus*, a Middle High German translation from the early twelfth century, presents a versified version of the *Dicta Chrysostomi*:

Ein andir tier ich funden han, chriesken heizzet ez Hinam.
Danne ist in der alten e gescriben: “die Hinam solt du niht
[zeliden

noch ezzen ir geslehte.” Esaias, der vorsage, sprichtet rehte:

“Diu holde des tieres Hine, daz ist min erbe.”

Danne zelt Phisiologus, daz ez zwei geslehte habes sus;
undirstunden ist ez der er, da nach diu si ein vrist, da von ez
[unreine ist.

Dem tiere gelich sint diu israheliscen chint.

Si betteten ze erist an got herist.

Darnach durch glust unde durch huor uoboten si dei apgotir.

Diu Hina die gir bezeichinot, swer noch uobet dirre werlde
[apgot.

Di Fulica ist ein unreiner vogel, si ist ze frume niht ze loben.

Dem vogel der ist gelich, der enwedir ist geloubich noch
[ungeloubich.

Also Salomon gesprochen hat: “swelch man ist zwivilhaft
an sines muotis gedanchen, der ist unstæte an allen guoten
[werchen.”

I found another beast, which is called the hyena in Greek. It is written in the old law: “You should not chop the hyena nor eat her kind.” The prophet Isaiah rightly says, “The den of the beast hyena is my heritage.” Moreover, Physiologus says that it has two sexes; sometimes it is a he, sometimes a she, therefore it is unclean. The children of Israel are like this beast. They first worship the mighty God, then they seek the idols because of their lust and desire. The hyena signifies the lust of those still seeking the idols of the world. The coot is an unclean bird that a pious person should not praise. They are like this bird who are nor faithful nor faithless. So Salomon said, “A double-minded man is instable in all his ways.” (Maurer 18–21; Schröder 82–85)

The German translation closely follows the Latin text. It also distinguishes between the hyena as a signifier for the idolatry of the Jews (the ‘children of Israel’) and the coot as a signifier for the duplicity of the Christians.

3 The Later Latin Tradition: The Abominable

Since the late twelfth century, a new Latin bestiary tradition of English origin emerged. This redaction, the so-called Second-family bes-

10. This book was also known as *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* or *Polyhistor*. – In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder writes on the hyena: “It is the vulgar notion, that the hyæna possesses in itself both sexes, being a male during one year, and a female the next, and that it becomes pregnant without the co-operation of the male; Aristotle, however, denies this. The neck, with the mane, runs continuously into the backbone, so that the animal cannot bend this part without turning round the whole body. Many other wonderful things are also related of this animal; and strangest of all, that it imitates the human voice among the stalls of the shepherds; and while there, learns the name of some one of them, and then calls him away, and devours him. It is said also, that it can imitate a man vomiting, and that, in this way, it attracts the dogs, and then falls upon them. It is the only animal that digs up graves, in order to obtain the bodies of the dead. The female is rarely caught: its eyes, it is said, are of a thousand various colours and changes of shade. It is said also, that on coming in contact with its shadow, dogs will lose their voice, and that, by certain magical influences, it can render any animal immoveable, round which it has walked three times” (296 [8.44]).

tiary, incorporates additional material into the *B-Isidore* (which is in turn referred to as the First-family bestiary). One of the main sources of the Second-family bestiary is the book *Wonders of the World* (*De mirabilibus mundi*), written in the third century by the grammarian and compiler Gaius Julius Solinus, who in turn drew on the *Natural History* written by Pliny the Elder in the first century.¹⁰ The Second-family bestiary was frequently copied; around fifty manuscripts have been documented so far (Kay 159–60). While the religious interpretation of the hyena including the reference to Jeremiah 12.9 remains the core of the portrayal, the additional material dominates the chapter. It presents the hyena not only as a sexually ambiguous creature and a symbol of idolatry and religious duplicity but also as a signifier of the abominable par excellence. The hyena of the Second-family bestiary lives in graveyards, digs up human corpses and devours them. It imitates vomiting humans in order to attract, kill and devour dogs. It freezes and silences dogs by staring at them as well as casting its shadow on them. It also imitates the human voice in order to attract, kill and devour humans. It cannot bend its rigid spine. In addition to these features, the hyena is paired with the one-toothed “crocotta,” which supposedly is the monstrous offspring of a male hyena and a female lion and has similar characteristics like the hyena:

Hyena and Crocotta

There is an animal called the hyena, living in the tombs of the dead and eating their bodies. It is its nature that it [is sometimes male], sometimes female, and for that reason it is an unclean animal. Because its spine is rigid, it can not be turned about gradually as a unit, only by a twist of its whole body. Solinus reports many wonders relating to it. The first is that it haunts sheepfolds and circles homes at night, and with persistent listening it learns the vocalization that can produce an imitation of the human voice, so that at night it can attack a man summoned by the ruse. And it feigns human vomiting, and with simulated weeping <can> thus eat the dogs attracted <by the sound>. If by chance hunting <dogs> should touch its shadow while it follows them, they cannot bark, having lost their voices. The same hyena digs up graves, searching for buried bodies.

The children of Israel, who from the beginning served the living God, are like this beast. Given later to riches and riotous living, they worshipped idols, and for that reason the

prophet compared the synagogue to the unclean animal, saying, My inheritance is become to me as a hyena in its den. (Jer. 12.8) Thus, whoever among us is a slave to riotous living and avarice are compared to this beast, since they are neither men nor women, that is they are neither faithful or unfaithful, but are, without doubt, those about whom Solomon <sic> said, *A double minded man is inconstant in all his ways* (Jas 1.8). And about whom the Lord said, *No man can serve... God and mammon* (Matt. 6.24).

This beast has a stone in its eyes called the hyena, which, if someone holds it under this tongue he is thought to predict the future. In truth, any animal that the hyena looks at three times cannot move. For that reason, some proclaim that <hyenas> have knowledge of magic.

In the region of Ethiopia <the hyena> copulates with the lioness, whence is born a monster named crocote. Like <the hyena> it imitates human voices. It tries never to alter its gaze, but to stare unswervingly. Its mouth has no gums. <The crocote> has one continuous tooth which, so that it is never dulled, closes naturally like little boxes.¹¹

11. Clark 130–33, also including the Latin text; quotation marks omitted.

Altogether, the Second-family bestiary portrays the hyena as a kind of morbid creature. By associating it with tombs, corpses, vomit, blood, murder, and dark magic, it transforms the hyena into an outcast and pariah, a monstrous and repulsive being that should never be touched.

In the thirteenth century, the bestiaries enter the encyclopedic *Books of Nature* such as Thomas of Cantimpré's *De natura rerum* and Alexander Neckam's *De naturis rerum*. The chapters about the beasts are very similar to the Second-bestialy tradition. However, the *Books of Nature* omit the biblical references and instead rely on the authorities of natural history. Naming Aristotle, Pliny, Solinus, and Jacques de Vitry as his sources, Thomas of Cantimpré writes on the hyena (4.53):

As Pliny and Solinus say, the hyena is an animal that always lives in the tombs of the dead. It has two natures, male and female. Because its spine is rigid, it cannot be turned about gradually as a unit, only by a twist of its whole body. It haunts the horse stables, as Jacques and Aristotle say, and with persistent listening it learns the name which it can produce

12. My translation; for the Latin text, see Boese 138–39. For Alexander Neckham's similar portrayal of the hyena, see Wright 232.

imitating the human voice, so that it kills a man summoned by the ruse. By faking sobs, it also feigns human vomiting. In the same way it seduces and devours dogs. If hunting dogs should touch its shadow while it follows them, they cannot bark, having lost their voices. It can change its color at will. If it looks at an animal, it freezes. This beast holds a precious stone in its eyes or, as some say, on its forehead. The hyena is as big as a wolf. The hair on its neck is like the hair on the neck of a horse and it has rough hair on its spine. As Pliny says, the hyenas are born in Africa.¹²

In the fourteenth century, Konrad von Megenberg translated Thomas of Cantimpré's book into German. Konrad coins a new German word for the hyena, calling it the *grabtier*. This name hints at the hyena's habit of living in the tombs of the dead: *Yena mag ze dāutsch haizzen ein grabtier, wan sam Plinius und Solinus sprechent, daz tier wont in toter lāut greber* (Konrad von Megenberg 167). The following depiction of the hyena is almost identical with the Latin original. In contrast to the bestiaries, the *Books of Nature* are biological rather than theological treatises. As for the hyena, they are only interested in its biological and behavioral characteristics – not in their allegorical meaning. Nevertheless, the depiction of the hyena still breathes the air of uncanniness that has accumulated from the *Greek Physiologus* to the late medieval *Books of Nature*.

4 Conclusion: The Ark of Heteronormativity

The notion that the hyena is sexually ambiguous – transsexual, homosexual or hermaphroditic – persisted throughout the ancient and medieval bestiary tradition. Thus, the hyena served as a premodern signifier for what is nowadays often called *queer*. Even though the Latin tradition from *Physiologus versio Y* to the Second-family bestiary prefers the religious to the sexual meaning of the hyena, the latter remains present in two respects. On the one hand, the religious interpretation is based on a sexual characteristic; on the other, Latin versions such as the *Dicta Chrysostomi* argue that the idolaters abandoned themselves to “lust and sensual pleasure.” The queerness of the hyena is linked to sexual excess, religious perversion, and morbid behavior. The hyena never completely lost the connotation of homosexuality that is characteristic for its portrayal.

13. Boswell 143; the quote is from Bernard's *De contemptu mundi*.

14. The first manuscript was produced in the twelfth century in the Benedictine monastery of Göttweig in Austria (New York, Morgan Library, ms. 832, f. 4r), the second in the fourteenth century in the Cistercian monastery of Fürstenfeld in Bavaria (München, BSB, clm. 6908, f. 79v); see Boswell tables 9 and 12. The third manuscript was produced in the twelfth century, possibly in the Augustinian Canons monastery of St. Florian (Wien, ÖNB, cod. 1010, f. 67r), see Kay plate 11.

15. Digital reproduction available at [this link](#).

al in the *Greek Physiologus*. John Boswell states that in the twelfth century, Bernard de Cluny “could assail homosexual relations with the simple observation that a man who thus ‘dishonors his maleness’ is ‘just like a hyena’” (“Mas maris immemor, o furor! O tremor! Est ut hyaena”).¹³ He also presents two miniatures from Latin bestiaries showing two hyenas embracing each other (Sarah Kay recently added a third example).¹⁴ Each of these manuscripts, two from the twelfth and one from the fourteenth century, contain the *Dicta Chrysostomi* version that lacks the notion of homosexuality. The sex of the depicted hyenas is indeterminate; “but given their alleged degeneration from male to female, [their desire] may well be understood as homosexual” (Kay 71; in Kay’s example, male genitalia were later on added in red ink in order to clarify the sex). As it seems, the influence of the *Greek Physiologus* persisted in the pictorial tradition even if the illustrated manuscripts belong to the Latin bestiary tradition.

Fig. 1: *Fürstenfelder Physiologus*, 14th c. (München, BSB, clm 6908, f. 79v, detail).¹⁵



16. Brehm 450–57, here 458: “Mir hat es immer scheinen wollen, als wenn dieses eigenthümliche und im höchsten Grade widerwärtige Geschrei eine gewisse Wollust des Thieres ausdrücken sollte; wenigstens benahm sich die lachende Hiäne dann auch in anderer Weise so, daß man dies annehmen konnte” (my translation; these lines were omitted in the English edition of this book).

There are more examples. In the early fourteenth century, the Italian theologian Cecco d’Ascoli writes in his encyclopedic poem *L’Acerba* that the hyena is a sodomitic beast since it changes the sexual role: “Muta ’l sexo, animal sodomito” (Morini 607). Even zoological studies of the nineteenth century still portray the hyena as a sexually ambiguous animal. In his widely read *Animal Life*, first published in the 1860s, Alfred Brehm hints at the unsettling sexual activity of the spotted hyena. He writes: “It has always seemed to me as if this peculiar and most repulsive screaming should express a certain lust of this animal. At least the laughing hyena would then similarly behave in some other way so that one should assume this.”¹⁶

In the later Middle Ages, the biblical references and allegorical readings were eliminated when the bestiaries entered the encyclopedic *Books of Nature*, due to their primarily physiological interest. Nevertheless, the issue of the biblical role of the hyena re-emerged in the seventeenth century. In his book *History of the World*, published in 1614, the English writer and explorer Sir Walther Raleigh wonders whether Noah took a pair of hyenas into his ark. God had told Noah to choose a pair of each species of animals: “And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive” (Gen. 6.19–20). Nevertheless, space was limited: “The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits” (Gen. 6.15). Saint Augustine writes in *The City of God* that the ark was of sufficient size since animals which are not part of the regular cycle of reproduction need not be included. Augustine distinguishes between two kinds of non-reproductive animals: those generated by decaying matter such as flies, and those that are the infertile offspring of different species such as horse and ass. He writes,

Then, as to those animals which have sex, but without ability to propagate their kind, like mules and she-mules, it is probable that they were not in the ark, but that it was counted sufficient to preserve their parents, to wit, the horse and the ass; and this applies to all hybrids (Augustine 468 [15.27]).

Raleigh agrees with Augustine. In a lengthy paragraph of his book,

he argues that the ark was “of sufficient capacite” indeed. Regarding the animals of “mixt natures,” he comments:

But it is manifest, and vndoubtedly true, that many of the Species, which now seeme differing and of seuerall kindes, were not then *in rerum natura*. For those beasts which are of mixt natures, either they were not in that age, or else it was not needful to præserue them; seeing they might bee generated againe by others, as the Mules, the Hyæna's, and the like: the one begotten by Asses and Mares, the other by Foxes and Wolues (Raleigh, 94–95 [1.9]; see Glickman 521).

Raleigh claims that the hyenas were dispensable since they could easily be reproduced by interbreeding wolves with foxes. According to Augustine and Raleigh, the ark can be seen as an allegory of heteronormativity since it housed only those animals in the boat that are reproductive. The hyena, however, allegedly eludes the reproductive circle and is therefore denied a place in the ark of heteronormativity.

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Animal Attraction

Hidden Polemics in Biblical Animal Illuminations of the *Michael Mahzor**

Abstract

* An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Interdisciplinary Conference: *Biblical Creatures: The Animal as an Object of Interpretation in Pre-Modern Jewish and Christian Hermeneutic Traditions* Berlin, 5–6 December 2016, organized by Prof. Dr. Astrid Lembke. I am indebted to Leor Jacobi for having read earlier drafts of this paper and making numerous suggestions and comments. My thanks are also due to the anonymous readers, whose comments helped me to refine many of my arguments.

The *Michael Mahzor*, produced in Germany in 1258, one of the earliest illuminated *Mahzorim*, is a two-volume prayer book containing liturgical poems for the Holy Days and the ‘four special Sabbaths,’ when liturgical additions are made to the regular weekly chapter reading during the month of Adar. The manuscript is copiously illuminated, with animals adorning the opening words of the liturgical poem, and contains a militant iconographical plan, including knights and fighting warriors. The relationship between text and image in illuminated manuscripts is important, because they need to be ‘read’ together in order to understand the illuminations in their immediate and general context. The novelty of this study is in a holistic reappraisal of the manner in which we think about illustration in connection with text. This paper addresses three scenes containing animals in the *Michael Mahzor*: *El Mitnase*, Mich. 617, f. 4v; *Zakhor*, Mich. 617, f. 11r; and *Kol Nidrei*, Mich. 627, f. 48r. The first two examples discussed here are the illumination of *El Mitnase* for *Shabbat Shekalim*, the Sabbath beginning the month of Adar and the *piyyut* for the pericope *Zakhor* for the Shabbath that immediately precedes Purim, which is celebrated on the fourteenth of Adar. The third is the liturgical formula *Kol Nidrei* for *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. The article suggests that the animals in the last two scenes represent the four kingdoms mentioned in chapters seven and eight of the *Book of Daniel*. Jewish exegesis commonly interpreted these beasts as symbols of four historical kingdoms. In addition, aspects of animal symbolism in the illuminations – such as hunted and hunting animals – should be considered in the context of medieval Jewish-Christian polemics. By examining the scenes together, we can speculate as to the greater plan the patron might have had in mind when ordering this manuscript. The article seeks to understand how the Jewish patrons envisioned themselves and their neighbors, through a prism of images, *piyyutim*, and the writings of Hasidei Ashkenaz.

1. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 617; 627. Neubauer, No. 1033. Both volumes of the manuscript are available online.

2. Jewish Figural art was abandoned around the mid-sixth century and reemerged in book illuminations around 1230 in German lands. On this issue see Kogman-Appel, “Christianity.”

The *Michael Mahzor*,¹ produced in Germany in 1258, one of the earliest illuminated *Mahzorim*,² is a two-volume prayer book containing liturgical poems for the Holidays and the ‘four special Sabbaths,’ when liturgical additions are made to the regular weekly chapter reading during the month of Adar. The four special portions of the Torah are *Shekalim*, *Zakhor*, *Parah*, and *ha-Hodesh*. The name of the

scribe, Judah bar Samuel ‘Zaltman,’ is inscribed in the colophon of the second volume, MS. Mich. 627, f. 174, alongside the date of production. The manuscript is copiously illuminated, with animals adorning the opening words of the liturgical poem, and a militant iconographical plan, including knights and fighting warriors. Normally, only the first *piyyut* (liturgical poem) of a given holiday or Shabbat is illuminated, and it is this single poem that is adduced in the scholarship concerning the image. However, it is my contention that because the illumination is related to the entire holiday, it should be understood together, not only with the text it adorns, but with *piyyut* commentaries and rabbinical literature related to the *piyyut* in question.³ The relationship between text and image in illuminated manuscripts is important, because they need to be ‘read’ together in order to understand the illuminations in their immediate and general context. The novelty of this study is in a holistic reappraisal of the manner in which we think about illustration in connection with text. I am interested in understanding how the Jewish patrons envisioned themselves and their neighbors, through a prism of images, *piyyutim*, and the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.

In this paper I would like to address three scenes containing animals in the *Michael Mahzor*: *El Mitnase*, Mich. 617, f. 4v (figure 1); *Zakhor*, Mich. 617, f. 11r (figure 2); and *Kol Nidrei*, Mich. 627, f. 48r (figure 3). The first two examples discussed here are the illumination of *El Mitnase* for *Shabbat Shekalim*, the Sabbath beginning the month of Adar and the *piyyut* for the pericope *Zakhor* for the Sabbath that immediately precedes Purim, which is celebrated on the fourteenth of Adar. The third is the liturgical formula *Kol Nidrei* for *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. I suggest that the animals in the last two scenes represent the four kingdoms mentioned in chapters seven and eight of the Book of Daniel. Jewish exegesis commonly interpreted these beasts as symbols of four historical kingdoms.⁴ According to the *Midrash va-Yikra’ Rabba* 13.5:

Fear refers to Edom, on account of the following verse: “And this I saw, a fourth beast, fearful, and terrible” (Dan. 7.7) [...] Daniel foresaw what the evil kingdoms would do [to Israel] [...] “The first was like a lion” (Dan. 7.3). This refers to Babylonia [...] Then he went and saw it as an eagle [...] “And behold, another beast, a second one like a bear” (Dan. 7.5). This refers to Media [...] “Another, like a leopard” (Dan. 7.6) [...] This refers to Greece [...] “And behold, a fourth beast,

3. Kogman-Appell, *A Mahzor from Worms*, 1–35; Shalev-Eyni, “The aural-Visual” 189–204; Sed-Rajna. On the types of *piyyutim* in Ashkenaz see Fleischer, *Hebrew Liturgical Poetry* 442–66.

4. For research of Jewish sources representing the four beasts as the four kingdoms see Chazan; Raviv; Rowland.

terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong” (Dan. 7.7) [...] This refers to Edom [...] “[t]he pig” (Deut. 14.7) [...] Why is [Rome] compared to a pig? It is to teach you the following: Just as when a pig crouches and produces its hooves, it is as if to say, “See how I am clean [since I have cloven hoof],” so this evil kingdom acts arrogantly, seized by violence, and steals, and then gives the appearance of establishing a tribunal for justice. (Neusner 299–301)

In addition, aspects of animal symbolism in the illuminations – such as hunted and hunting animals – should be considered in the context of medieval Jewish-Christian polemics. By examining the scenes together, we can speculate as to the greater plan the patron might have had in mind when ordering this manuscript.

With the exception of some works by Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, there has been little scholarship focused on the *Michael Mahzor*.⁵ Recent studies on the manuscript were undertaken by Eva Frojmovic, who posited a Christian illuminator (Frojmovic 45–46), and Sarit Shale-Eyni, who relates discusses the role of illuminated animals as a tool for visual reminder for the reader on a given *piyyut* (Shalev-Eyni, “Between Interpretation”). According to Shalev-Eyni, the beasts are copied from Christian manuscripts, such as the *Necrologus* from the twelfth century.⁶ Another important source of knowledge about the animal world and its portrayal are the *Bestiaries*; in many Hebrew manuscripts we find that the animals resemble portrayals in contemporary bestiaries, which were used as models.⁷ In many Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, the iconography and style of the images are closely related to Christian art, but only in rare cases can we actually discern whether the work was produced by a Jewish illuminator or a Christian one. I do not suggest that the illuminations of the *Michael Mahzor* were necessarily created by a Jewish illuminator. Rather, I would maintain that the patron or a person acting on the patron’s behalf (such as the scribe, for example) directed the artist’s design and illustration of the scenes.

In a recent article, Katrin Kogman-Appel discusses methodological aspects of what she refers to as the “the three-way relationship” among patrons, artists, and viewers, as well as the hierarchy between the textual and the visual in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts (Kogman-Appel, “Pictorial Messages”). She analyzes terms which describe that relationship, for example the term “authorship” proposed by Marc Michael Epstein,⁸ and settles on the term “de-

5. Sed-Rajna 13–14, 63–64. Narkiss 43–44 mentions this *Mahzor* in the Hebrew edition of his book (first published in English, 1969).

6. Hauptstaatsarchiv, Klosterliteralien Obermünster 1, Dieses Nekrolog (herausgegeben M. G. Necrol. IH, 334); München, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, ms. 1. Boeckler 54–59. On example books see Alexander; Lowden and Bovey; Scheller.

7. On bestiaries see Barber; Baxter; Hassig. See also *The Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages*.

8. Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah* 6: “A collaboration between Jewish patrons who sponsored and conceptualized the manuscript (in some cases, it seems, with the aid of rabbinic advisers), and artists (Jewish or non-Jewish) who executed the commission. [...] First, in the planning of each manuscript, the authorship emphasized (either subtly or explicitly) those aspects of the narrative that highlight the agenda it wished to convey, clothing these ideas in visual language. Then, these concepts were transmitted through the interpretation of their commission by the designers and executors of each work. Ultimately, the images and their motivating ideas were received and reinterpreted by the various audiences of each manuscript over time.”

Figure 1. *El Mitnase*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 617, f. 4v.



Figure 2. *Zakhor*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 617, f. 11r.

Figure 3. *Kol Nidrei*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 627, f. 48r.

9. Kogman-Appel 12: “By designers I mean the people who were responsible for the subject matter, the contents and messages conveyed in the cycles. [...] In referring to the designers of the cycles, I thus mean the persons who stood behind them intellectually, whereas by artists I mean the craftsmen engaged in the actual drawing and painting of the miniatures. This does not mean, however, that the two functions did not overlap in some cases.”

10. We should mention two other main esoteric traditions in Ashkenaz: “Special Cherub,” active in northern France between the end of the Twelfth century and the beginning of thirteenth century; and Rabbi Nehemiah ben Shlomo Troestlin, the Prophet from Erfurt, active in the first third of the thirteenth century. According to the distinction made by Idel, esp. 73.

11. For a study on the Leipzig *Mahzor*, produced in Worms around 1310 and based on R. Eleazar’s writings, see Kogman-Appel, *A Mahzor from Worms*, which offers an interdisciplinary study of the manuscript’s illuminations, the community’s rituals, and their close relation to the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.

12. Hollender, “Narrative Exegesis” esp. 430. On *piyyut* commentary see Hollender, *Clavis Commentariorum* 1–20; Hollender, *Piyyut Commentary*.

13. On another thirteenth century manuscript illuminated based on the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* and *piyyut* commentaries see: Offenberg, *Illuminated Piety*.

14. On the associative nature of the writings in Ashkenaz, see Soloveitchik, esp. 462–63. More on the issue of the urtext see Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts* 486–500. On *Hasidei Ashkenaz*’s unsystematic way of writing see Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders* 16–18.

signers,” which she employed in a previous study of Haggadot from Spain.⁹ After analyzing the iconography, and at times new portrayals, not based on Christian iconography, we turn to the meaning of the scene displayed. Images are not merely illustrations of the texts, but rather, they extend the meaning of the text; moreover, images unpack or divulge latent traditions of the culture not articulated in discursive text. A major factor in terms of the patron’s intention and the artist’s implementation of the manuscript’s texts and illustrations is whether they were intended for communal use in the synagogue or for private use. When an idea appears in an illuminated manuscript, particularly one used by the whole community (e.g., the *Mahzor* in our case or the giant Ashkenazic Masoretic Bible), it attests to the concepts contained within, which were considered acceptable in a public forum, even if the idea was not necessarily understood by all.

Some of the concepts displayed in the *Michael Mahzor*’s illuminations seem to parallel concepts in the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, the German Pietists, a pietistic movement active in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Germany. The trend is associated with the Qalonymus family,¹⁰ especially Rabbi Judah the Pious (d. 1217) and his student, Rabbi Elazar of Worms (d. c. 1230);¹¹ to them we should add two figures: Rabbi Eleazar ben Moshe the preacher, grandson of Rabbi Judah the Pious, who wrote a commentary on Exodus (to be discussed later) and Rabbi Abraham ben Azriel of Bohemia (a student of R. Elazar of Worms), the author of *Arugat ha-Bosem*, a collection of commentaries on *piyyutim* and *selihot*, written c. 1234 (Bar Azriel). According to Elisabeth Hollender, the need for *piyyut* commentary emerged from the difficulty to understand words and phrases in the *piyyutim*. Via their interpretations, the commentators elevated the status of *piyyut* as a central part of the synagogue service. In most cases we know the name of the *payyetanim*, but there are few *piyyut* commentaries where the author’s name can be identified, so they remain anonymous.¹² In this regard, Rabbi Abraham ben Azriel is exceptional. Of course, this does not mean that all *piyyut* commentaries written in Ashkenaz are necessarily related to *Hasidei Ashkenaz*. That said, our manuscript relates to both *piyyut* commentaries and biblical commentaries influenced by writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.¹³ Here we should note the nature of medieval scriptural interpretation of this sort: the commentator can jump from one issue to another merely because of a small – and not necessarily because of a prominent – connection between them.¹⁴

I will now associate displays of biblical animals with commentaries, by first discussing each illumination separately and then connecting them all together.

El Mitnase, Mich. 617, f. 4v

The *piyyut* ‘*El Mitnase*’ for tractate *Shekalim*, based on Exodus 30.11–16, describes the raising of money (*shekalim*) for building the desert tabernacle. This *piyyut* is the first one illustrated in most Ashkenazi *Mahzorim*, as the volume opening with the four special Sabbaths was regarded as the first.¹⁵ The text of the *piyyut* is decorated with a rectangular frame, while the initial panel of *El Mitnase* contains an unusual upside-down scene on a yellow and blue background. When inverted, the panel portrays a hunt scene. On the right, an archer dressed in green wears a great helm, kneels, and draws his bow. In front of him, two dogs are chasing a deer. On the left, a warrior dressed in red holds a round shield and brandishes a sword that seems to have blood on it. Below this scene two pairs of peacocks are facing each other. Above the scene, inside the letter *taf*, a red fox stands on its hind legs.

15. On this see Fleischer “Prayer and Piyyut” 1: 36–78.

Figure 1, a detail.



According to Eva Frojmovic, the inversion here is the result of the fact that the illustration is the work of a non-Jewish artist who could not read Hebrew, and therefore has inverted the scene. She suggests that

not only could the painter not read the text, but he was unfamiliar with the appearance of the Hebrew alphabet [...] the painter sought to right the unnatural order – as he saw it – by standing the page upside down before painting it [...] the error occurs only once in the entire *Mahzor*. It seems that Judah bar Samuel ‘Zaltman’ then took control and supervised the illuminator more closely. (Frojmovic 49–51)

However, the lower end of the frame remains unfinished, and even if the artist had no idea how the Hebrew script was read, he certainly must have had a notion of the orientation of the page, judging by the design of the frame. I therefore suggest that the scene was inverted intentionally, and not due to a lack of understanding.¹⁶ Furthermore, in another illumination in this *Mahzor*, several pages after our folio, on f. 16r (figure 4), we find an illustration of the *piyyut* for Purim “Va’ye’ehav Oman Yetomat Hegan” (“The Nurse Cared for the Orphan of the Garden”) (Davidson 197; Sed-Rajna 23–24). It depicts the tree on which Haman and his sons are hanged, arranged horizontally.¹⁷ These figures are part of this panel’s decoration, and here there can be no doubt regarding the intention of the artist to display them in such a manner. Thus, it stands to reason that the artist was consciously playing with the directionality with the upside-down illumination to the *El Mitnase piyyut*.

In fact, the inverted illustration of the *El Mitnase* scene can be explained based upon the context in which it appears in the *Mahzor*. *El Mitnase* is recited on the first Sabbath morning of the month of Adar. Purim, the climax of the Adar prayers and festivities, is celebrated on the fourteenth of the month. This month contains or is proximate to the “four special Sabbaths,” when four different additions are made to the regular weekly chapter reading. As mentioned, the four special portions of the Torah are entitled *Shekalim* (Exod. 30.11–16), *Zakhōr* (Deut. 25.17–19), *Parah* (Num. 19.1–22), and *Shabbat ha-Hodesh* (Exod. 12.1–20). I suggest that the upside-down scene alludes to Esther 9.1: “it [the decree of genocide against the Jews] was reversed.” These words appear at the end of the verse:

16. This does not mean that it was made necessarily by a Jewish illuminator, but only that the patron or a person acting on his behalf (such as the scribe, as Frojmovic suggests) ordered the artist to design and illustrate the scene in this manner.

17. The faces of Haman and his sons are covered with helmets, although they are not engaged in battle. This is in accordance with most of the manuscripts illuminated in Ashkenaz during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, where the human faces are mostly replaced by zoocephalic portrayal. For more on this phenomenon in the most recent study see Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah* 48–61. On Haman’s tree in Ashkenazi *Mahzorim* see Kogman-Appel, “The Tree of Death.”

Figure 4. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 617, f. 15r–16r.



And so, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month – that is, the month of Adar – when the king’s command and decree were to be executed, the very day on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to get them in their power, it was reversed, and the Jews got their enemies in their power. (Esth. 9.1).

The phrase “it was reversed” is portrayed literally in our scene. In the Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 13b, we find the reason why the additional Torah reading *Shekalim* is located before that of *Zakhor*, which tells the story of the routing of Haman’s ancestor, Amalek, and is thus associated with Haman himself: “If it please your majesty let an edict be drawn for their destruction and I will pay ten thousand talent of silver’ [...] Said Resh Laqish: It was clearly known to the one who spoke and made the world come into being that Haman would pay shekels for Israel. Therefore, he advanced their shekels to his.” The

18. A hunting scene appears in other illuminations for this *piyyut* in Ashkenazi manuscripts, such as the *Laud Mahzor*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Laud Or. 321, fol. 38a, probably written in Franconia around 1240–60. The image depicted on the arch portrays, from left to right, four men and two dogs chasing a deer and a hare, and the other is from the *Leipzig Mahzor*, where a hound dog on the right is sniffing after a hare that is running free on the left. The *Leipzig Mahzor* was studied by Katrin Kogman-Appel (“The Scales”), who demonstrated that along with ideas of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, there are also messianic notions in this *piyyut*’s illumination.

19. See also Ayali; Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion*; Horowitz, “Odd Couples;” Offenberg, “Expressions of Meeting,” chap. 4; Offenberg, “Illuminations of *Kol Nidrei*.”

20. Black and white dogs that represent the friars are seen in Andrea di Bonaiuto’s representation of the Dominican friars as Dalmatian dogs in the fresco *Allegory of the Triumphant Church and the Dominican Order* in the Spanish Chapel at the Santa Maria Novella in Florence, painted in 1365–67: cf. Nirit Ben-Aryeh. See also Stow 137–44. Kurt Schubert (251–54) has demonstrated that the same dogs may also symbolize the Dominican friars or Christians in general in the Sephardic *Rylands Haggadah*, Manchester, John Rylands University Library, MS. Ryl. Hebr. 6, fol. 29, representing the Christian persecutor of the Jews.

21. According to Gerson Cohen (esp. 29), this tradition is traced back to Rabbi Akiba (cf. *Genesis Rabba* 65.21). According to Cohen, the medieval Jews believed that “Esau might exchange his eagle for a cross, but he was Esau nonetheless.” See also Yuval, *Two Nations*.

Talmud makes a clear connection between tractate *Shekalim* and Haman. It explains that the reason for tractate *Shekalim* being at the beginning of the month of *Adar* is because of the money Haman would later pay for Israel, and thus Israel redeemed themselves by paying in advance half a *shekel* for the Temple. Hence, we may approach this illumination as encoding the larger meaning of the month of *Adar*.

A hunting scene illuminates the *piyyut* in the *Michael Mahzor*,¹⁸ and as Kurt Schubert and numerous other scholars of Jewish art have demonstrated, hunting scenes are common in Jewish illuminated manuscripts.¹⁹ They are understood as allegories for the Jew, usually represented as a hare or a deer, being persecuted by Christians, depicted as a hunter and his dogs. In Christian art, white dogs with black spots often represent the Dominican friars, who are also known as “Dogs of the Lord” (*domini canes*).²⁰ The dog is associated with the image of the hunter, especially the biblical hunter Esau, who had long symbolized the Christians in Jewish art and culture. In medieval rabbinical language, Esau, the forefather of Edom, symbolized the Roman Empire and ‘Christianity,’ which had been considered a direct successor of the Roman Empire ever since the fourth century.²¹ The portrayal of the hunter is associated with each of the four Kingdoms that enslaved Israel – Babylon, Medea, Greece, and Edom – in *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, Toledot, 65:

“Now then take your weapons, your quiver, and your bow and go out to the field” (Gen. 27.3): “Weapons” refers to Babylonia [...] “Your quiver” speaks of Medea, as it says, “So they suspended Haman on the gallows” (Est. 7.10). “And your bow” addresses Greece: “For I bend Judah for me, I fill the bow with Ephraim and I will story up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece” (Zech. 9.13). “And go out to the field” means Edom: “Unto the land of Seir, the field of Edom” (Gen. 32.4). (Neusner 2: 389)

This *midrash* links Esau the hunter, Haman, and two more items that appear in our scene: a bow and a sword. The verse mentioned here (Zech. 9.13): “When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man,” also relates to the *piyyut* via the verse that precedes it (Zech. 9.12): “Return to Bizzaron [stronghold], you prisoners of hope.” One of the *piyyut*’s last verses reads: “Always Bizzaron will be for the Rose of Sharon.” While the

term *bizzaron* is based on the Biblical verse, the Rose of Sharon stands for the people of Israel, as mentioned in *Midrash Song of Songs Rabbah* 2.1. The context of this verse in the *piyyut* is that the people of Israel will always have hope and a stronghold for redemption. By keeping the Law and paying the monetary tithes for the Temple, the people of Israel redeem themselves and will be saved from their enemies.

Ephraim and Judah, mentioned in the quoted sources, hint at the Jewish tradition of the two saviors. The first is sometimes referred to as the son of Joseph, and sometimes, more specifically, as the son of Ephraim, while the second is the son of David, from the tribe of Judah (Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 52a). The Anti-Messiah, generally called the Antichrist but referred to in Jewish literature as Armilus, stands opposed to them. According to this tradition, at the End of Days there will be a war between the nations led by the Anti-Messiah and between the People of Israel, who will be led by the two Messiahs (Yehudah, Jellinek 2: 54–57; Berger; Biale). This tradition already appears in the ancient *midrash*, in the *Book of Zerubabel* (Dan; Himmelfarb; Lévi; Patai), and in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century writings of the Tosafists in France and Germany. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the idea of two Messiahs was widespread. There seems to be an increase in interest in the two Messiahs and Armilus in the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, for example, in the book *Arugat Habosem*. References and extensive commentaries on this Messianic narrative remain unpublished in manuscripts, such as the commentaries on the Bible of R. Elazar ben Moshe the preacher in München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 221,²² and his commentary on Exodus in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. 202,²³ where the two saviors call for revenge against the Gentiles. The concept may thus have been familiar to the readers of the *Michael Mahzor*, and the figures of the armed men could be understood as each symbolizing a Messiah: son of Joseph and son of David.

We mentioned that each of the warriors is wearing a great helm, a technology invented around 1220, which was more protective than the helmets used previously. This helmet has a flat top and surrounds the entire head, thus protecting the warrior's face (DeVries 70–73). Jews were clearly intimately aware of their surrounding material cultures,²⁴ and this development in military technology was such a breakthrough that a brief time after its development, it was prominently illuminated in both volumes of the *Michael Mahzor*. As shown by the studies of Israel Jacob Yuval ("Jewish Messianic Expecta-

22. On this manuscript, see Abrams, "A Commentary to the *Sefer Yetsirah*" and "*Sefer Ha-Yehud*".

23. Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew*, Nr. 945. I am currently working on its publication.

24. On the importance of material culture in the study of the Middle Ages see Lipton.

25. Yuval, "Jewish Messianic Expectations;" and *Two Nations*, 33–49, 92–106, 173–74.

26. On the upside-down world in Jewish art see U. Schubert. For more on the characters of animals and the upside-down world see Kunzle; Sprunger. For more on *inversus mundi* see Jones. On marginalia see Camille; Randell; Sandler.

27. For more on the issue of the intellectual atmosphere see Kanarfogel, *The Intellectual*, esp. chaps. 3–4.

tions;" *Two Nations*, chap. 6), Ephraim Kanarfogel (Kanarfogel, "Medieval Rabbinic Conceptions"), and others, messianic expectations reached a climax around the year 1240, and along with historical events such as the Crusades and the Mongol threat, are recorded in the literature, drama, and art of the period. Yuval demonstrated in his study that messianic aspirations in Ashkenaz carried expectations of vengeance against the Gentiles.²⁵ Elliot S. Horowitz (*Reckless Rites*; "The Rite to Be Reckless") analyzed connections between the celebration of *Purim* and violence against Christians among some Ashkenazi Jews. The sword in our image has blood on it, and this may refer to the verses (Isa. 34.5–6): "For my sword shall be drunk in the sky; Lo, it shall come down upon Edom, upon the people I have doomed to wreak judgment; The LORD has a sword it is sated with blood [...] for the LORD holds a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom." This source was interpreted as referring to Christians, the putative inheritors of the title "Edom." In the context outlined by Yuval and Horowitz, this small detail seems particularly relevant.

I suggested above that the inverted scene represents the biblical verse from Esther 9.1. This verse speaks not only of salvation, but also of vengeance and domination of enemies. The verses from Zechariah and the warriors in the image represent the forthcoming battle. This image not only portrays the contemporary situation of the Jews being 'hunted,' but also shows an upside-down world (*inversus mundi*) with an inversion of power structures. This is a well-known motif in medieval art and literature. It appears in various marginal illuminations that often display animals.²⁶ The upside-down world portrays the imagined alternative reality of the Jewish patron, in which the Jews hold power over their current enemies. The opening verse of the *piyyut El Mitnase* is based on Chronicles 29.11: "To you Lord belong kingship and pre-eminence above all." Rabbi Elazar of Worms (1176–1238) wrote a commentary on the *Siddur*, where he explains this verse in terms of vengeance against the Gentiles (Rokeach sign. 130, 753). This inverse world then, may serve as a reflection of the intellectual atmosphere in Ashkenaz during the first half of the thirteenth century.²⁷ So far, we have noticed that the *piyyut* and the scene point to an anticipated shift in status of the Ashkenazic Jews.

The hunt scene represents the status of Israel in the present day, as the Jews are being persecuted by the Christians. In this illumination, the hunted animal is a deer (male), as opposed to other images that portray a hind (female). Both the deer and the hind represent

Israel, but in this image, the portrayal of a male deer seems intentional. The deer represents not only the people of Israel, but also the land of Israel (*Erez HaZevi*, see below). The Seventh Crusade, which lasted six years, ended four years before the production of this manuscript, and at the time this manuscript was produced, the Land of Israel was a pilgrimage destination for Jews, whether as part of their messianic aspirations or because of a lull in crusade warfare (Elchanan). Kogman-Appel has demonstrated that the *El Mitnase* hunt scene in the *Leipzig Mahzor* relates to messianic concepts: “This variation of the hunting motif thus presents an earlier stage, one in which the preconditions for the arrival of the Messiah are about to be fulfilled” (Kogman-Appel, “The Scales” 310). We can also understand the image in the *Michael Mahzor* in this way.

If we look above the hunting scene, inside the letter *taf*, we will notice a fox. Rachel Wischnitzer concluded that the portrayal of a fox in illuminated Hebrew manuscripts represents messianic aspirations, based on a *midrash* describing the encounter of Rabbi Aqiba and his companions with a fox (cfr. Wischnitzer). As is described in the Babylonian Talmud, *Makkot* 24b:

When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox emerge from the house of the Holy of Holies. They began to cry, but R. Aqiba brightened up. They said to him, “Why so cheerful?” He said to them, “Why so gloomy?” R. Aqiba explained to them that now that the harsh prophecy of Uriah is fulfilled: “Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field” (Mic. 3.12), therefore the optimistic prophecy of Zechariah will be fulfilled: “Thus says the Lord of hosts, there shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem” (Zech. 8.4).

The fox in our image may represent the fox walking on the Temple Mount, as a reflection of contemporary misery, based on Lamentations 5.18: “Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.” Just as the hunt scene describes the Christian persecution, the fox represents the ruins of Jerusalem; beyond that, it may reflect the fulfillment of the prophecies of Uriah and Zechariah, and the future redemption. Furthermore, we should remember that the *piyyut* describes the raising of funds (*shekalim*) for the building of the desert tabernacle, as well as a half *shekel* for the Temple.

28. A further connection to salvation motifs may be found in the portrayal of the peacocks at the lower margins of the scene. For Jewish examples, Dalia-Ruth Halperin has shown that depictions of peacocks represent the notion of salvation. Since ancient times, the peacock usually appears near the Tree of Life, and thus is connected with notions of afterlife: Halperin 240, 277–81. The *Michael Mahzor* is suffused with these birds, in various scenes, and here the peacocks may represent another aspect of the messianic aspiration.

29. For more on illuminations of ‘Jewish knights’ see Offenberg, “Jacob the Knight.”

Thus, the *piyyut*’s Temple context suggests that the fox here deserves consideration in light of the messianic narrative.²⁸

This image may hint that the exceptional reversal which occurred historically only on *Purim* in the present world will become the norm in the Messianic era. The ‘Jewish knight’ can be seen as a symbol of messianic yearning among thirteenth-century Ashkenazic Jews. In recent years, the imagined identity of Jews who portrayed themselves as knights has received scholarly attention, most recently and notably from Ivan G. Marcus, who focuses mostly on written sources. He discusses the dissonance between actual Christian knights in the Middle Ages, whom he identifies with the Crusaders, and the fact that some Jews saw themselves as knights. According to Marcus, “the Jewish writers portray Jews as knights of the God of Israel in contrast to the Christian knights and rabble, who travel toward a worthless goal” (“Why Is this Knight Different?” 148).²⁹ In his discussion of passages from *Sefer Hasidim*, Marcus contends that the Jewish sage appreciated the positive value of the knightly code of honor and of valorous behavior, implying that the Jewish Pietist should also serve the Lord fearlessly without expecting any reward (151–52). Knights in Jewish texts suggest spiritual aspects of noble warriors, qualities that reveal a heroic nature.

The image of ‘Jewish Knights’ in medieval Jewish art continues a midrashic theme of the reversal of tragedy through redemption. Salvation is viewed in terms of a biblical verse (Esth. 9.1) speaking of a reversal which implies that when the Messiah will come, he will gather the people of Israel, ascend the mountain of Zion, and the Temple will be rebuilt. This process originates in the celebration of the month of *Adar* that commemorates the great salvation in which the people of Israel faced tremendous danger but emerged victorious. This reversal is represented in the statement that “it was reversed, and the Jews got their enemies in their power” (Esth. 9.1). The scene in the *Michael Mahzor* portrays both the current state of the Jews in Ashkenaz, as they are persecuted by the Christians, demonstrated by the hunt scene, and the upcoming salvation as demonstrated by the warriors. Now let us turn to hybrid warriors.

***Zakhor*, Mich. 617, f. 11r**

The second of the four special Sabbath Torah readings is the one before *Purim*, known as *Zakhor* (meaning: ‘remember’). It deals with

30. On hybrids and transformation from human to bestial form in medieval Ashkenazi literature and especially related to *Hasidei Ashkenaz* see Rotman 136–88; Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders* 131–60.

Israel's obligation to remember Amalek's wickedness in the desert and its need to extirpate his seed. The illumination for pericope *Zakhor* fits inside a rectangular frame, with the initial word written on a blue and pink background surrounded by both beasts and hybrids.³⁰ On the right, it features a hybrid with a human body dressed in white and a bear's face brandishing a sword and holding a long spear. In front of him, a leopard faces another hybrid on the left, dressed in green with a human body and a wolf's face, stretching a bow and arrow. At bottom right, we find an eagle, and on the left two warriors clashing their swords and holding small round shields. The one on the left has a bird's face and the figure on the right is wearing a helmet of the great helm type. Gabrielle Sed-Rejna identified these beasts as hinting at the four kingdoms. I would like to explore this concept further, especially the beast illuminated only in this scene and, as opposed to the other beasts, not in any other scene of either volume of the *Michael Mahzor*: the wolf.

In Esther Rabbah 10:13 we encounter the concept of the four kingdoms in relation to Esther and Mordechai. Because Haman descends from Amalek, he is described as a wolf, like the rulers of Media and Persia:

“For I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek” (Ex. 17.14): blotting out in this world, I will blot out in the next. “The remembrance of (zeker) Amalek,” this refers to Haman, the passage having been [erroneously] read, “The males of (zakar) Amalek.” The patriarch Jacob also hinted at all this in the blessing of the tribes, as it says, “Benjamin is a wolf that raveneth; in the morning he devoureth the prey” (Gen. 49.27): this refers to Saul who was the morning of Israel, being the first of the kings, and who was from the tribe of Benjamin and smote Amalek and spoiled all their possessions. “And at even he divideth the spoil” (*ibid.*): this refers to Mordechai and Esther, who championed Israel in their exile, which is like the shadows of evening and divided the spoil of Haman, who is compared to a wolf. For God raised him up to oppose the wolf, namely, the kings of Media and Persia, who are compared to a wolf, as it is written, “And behold another beast, a second, like to a wolf” (Dan. 7.5). In Babylon, however, they say: This refers to the kings of Media and Persia who eat like a bear and are restless like a bear and are shaggy like a bear. God raised up them to confront Morde-

chai and Esther from the tribe of Benjamin, who is called “A wolf that raveneth.” (Freedman and Simon 239–40)

Benjamin and his descendent Mordechai are compared to a wolf in order to oppose Haman. Portrayals of Benjamin as a wolf were thoroughly examined by David Shyovitz, who demonstrates how *Hasid-ei Ashkenaz* understood that werewolves take on an entirely bestial form, not merely a hybrid one. He elaborates on the thirteenth-century French biblical commentary of Rabbi Ephraim b. Samson on Genesis 49, and the blessing to Benjamin:³¹

Benjamin was a ravenous wolf, who would occasionally maul people – and when the time came for him to turn into a wolf, as it says, “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf” (Gen. 49.27), if he was with his father he would lean on the doctor, and in that merit would not turn into a wolf. Thus it says, “and if he leaves his father he will die” (Gen. 44.22) – that is to say, if he separates from his father he will turn into a wolf [and attack] people on the way, and anyone who encounters him will kill him.³²

A similar passage is found in Rabbi Elazar the Preacher’s commentary on Exodus 30.11–13:³³ “When you take a census of the Israelite people according to their enrollment, each shall pay the Lord a ransom for himself on being enrolled, that no plague may come upon them through their being enrolled. This is what everyone who is interested in the records shall pay: a half-shekel by the sanctuary weight – twenty gerahs to the shekel – a half-shekel as an offering to the Lord.” Rabbi Elazar’s commentary associates the wolf with Mordechai, paying the half shekel, and the hanging of Haman. I suggest that the portrayal of the wolf in the illumination was also inspired by this line of Ashkenazic thought. Perhaps that is the reason why it bears a different weapon, i.e. a bow and arrow, as opposed to the other fighting figures that each wield a sword. Now, let us turn to a scene that portrays the four animals/kingdoms as beasts alone, without any human figures.

***Kol Nidrei*, Mich. 627, f. 48r**

The initial word *Kol* (‘all’) is inhabited with animals twisting around

31. Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders* 134–44; Shyovitz, “Christians and Jews”. On Rashbam’s commentary on Exod. 8.17 and the connection between werewolves and Arov see Liss 239–40.

32. London, British Library, MS Or. 10855, published as *Perush Rabeinu Ephraim b. R. Shimshon u-Gedolei Ashkenaz ha-Kadmonim al ha-Torah*, ed. Yo’el Klugman (Jerusalem, 1992). I used Shyovitz’s translation (“Christians and Jews” 529).

33. Oxford, BL, Opp. 202, fol. 234a
שלא יהיה בהם נגף בימי המן לכך יקראו
שקליהם: ד“א יהי“ה בה“ם נג“ף המ“ן:
איש כפר נפ‘. שיתנו צדקה לפני ראש השנה
ולפני יום הכפ‘ ליי‘ בפקד אתם. כשהקב“ה
פוקדם ונם קרין לפניהם בסקירה אחת
ועוברים לפניו כבני מרון. נגף בפקד אותם
זה. זא“ב בנימן זאב יטרף זה מרדכי. וקדמו
שקליהם לשקלי המן: ... מחצית בשקל לפי
שנ‘ כופר נפשו והשקל הוא כופר נפש.
שק“ל בגי‘ נפ“ש: מחצי“ת השק“ל. תרומה.
תל“ה. בזכות זה תלה את המן.

a thin, winding branch. Progressing from right to left, following the Hebrew text, we find a lion, an eagle (standing in the same position as the one illuminating *Zakhor*), a deer, and an ibex; at the bottom appears a bear, a lion inside the letter כ (kaf), and a beast seeming to be a leopard (standing in the same position as the one illuminating *Zakhor*, but with less elaborate facial and fur detail). The heraldic lion is emphasized by contrast between its white body and the blue background. A biblical emblem of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49.9), the lion may designate the scribe, Judah bar Samuel.³⁴ In Jewish thought, the deer often allegorized the entire people of Israel, for one of the biblical names of the Land of Israel is נַחֲלַת צִבְי (nahalat zevi: literally ‘inheritance of a deer,’ Jer. 3.19). Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, 1040–1105), recalled this denomination in his commentary to Daniel’s prophesy of a he-goat that extends its horn אֶל הַצִּבִּי (el ha-tzevi: literally, ‘towards the deer,’ Daniel 3.9), stating that the destination is אֶרֶץ צִבִּי (erez tzevi: ‘the land of the deer’).

The image of a goat-like animal turning its sharp horns toward the deer suggests that this and the other zoomorphic allegories of the persecutors were inspired by chapters seven and eight in the Book of Daniel. The lion with eagle’s wings, bear, leopard, and a monstrous horned beast, are the “four great beasts” rising from the sea in Daniel 7.3–8. The ibex may be identified with a he-goat in Daniel 8.5: “And as I was considering, behold, a he-goat came from the west ... and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes.” In Daniel 8.21, the rough goat is associated with “the king of Greece.”

The four kingdoms in the Book of Daniel are mentioned in many *Rosh Hashanah selihot* recited before the Day of Atonement and thus appear just a few pages before *Kol Nidrei*.³⁵ The texts clarify that the salvation of a personal soul on the Day of Atonement entails the physical salvation of the whole nation of Israel from the hands of the alien government.³⁶ A *seliha* by Shephtyah ben Amittai of Italy (d. 887), *Israel Nosha be-haShem* (“Israel that is saved by the Lord”),³⁷ reads: “They are intimidated by all their enemies who reproach and revile them [...] Extirpate the tyranny of Se’ir [Esau] and his father-in-law [Ishmael] and saviors will rise to Zion.” A young deer escaping from danger and crying for help portrays the people of Israel in the *piyyut Anusa le-Ezra* (“I will flee for help”) allegorically concluding the entire period of the High Holy Days;³⁸ the *piyyut* features the enemy pursuing “smooth-skinned” Israel as one with hairy hands, alluding to Esau, described in Genesis 27.11 as “a hairy man” in contrast to “smooth-skinned” Jacob.

34. For the English translation see Frojmovic, “Early Ashkenazic Prayer Books” 56 n. 8.

35. Goldschmidt, *Mahzor for the High Holy Days*.

36. See Yuval, “God will See the Blood.”

37. Davidson, *Osar ha-shira* 1: 4234. Goldschmidt, *Mahzor for the High Holy Days* 2: 775.

38. Davidson, *Osar has-sira* 1: 6396; Goldschmidt, *Mahzor for the High Holy Days* 1: 265–270; Hollender, *Clavis Commentariorum* 408–09; *In the Michael Mahzor*, fols. 45v–47v.

39. *Arugat ha-Bosem* 3: 295. More commentaries on *Israel Noshah be-haShem* are listed in Hollender, *Clavis Commentariorum* 702.

40. Goldschmidt, *Mahzor for the High Holy Days* 1: 251. The *piyyut* rephrases the Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 29a: “R. Shimon ben Yohai says: Come and see how dear [the nation of] Israel is before The Holy One, Blessed be He, for wherever they were exiled, the Divine Presence was with them. [When] they were exiled to Egypt, the Divine Presence was with them [...] [When] they were exiled to Babylonia, the Divine Presence was with them, as is said, ‘for your sake I sent to Babylonia’ (Isa. 43.14). And also when they will be redeemed [in the future], the Divine Presence will be with them, as is said, ‘and the Lord your God will return your return’ (Deu. 30.3). It does not say ‘and He will cause to return’ (*ve-heshiv*) but ‘and He will return’ (*ve-shav*). This teaches that The Holy One, Blessed be He, will return with them from among the places of exile.”

41. For selected bibliography on Jewish-Christian relations see Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* and *Living Letters of the Law*; Lasker; Malkiel; Marcus, “A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis” and “Jews and Christians Imagining.”

In a gloss to the verse “And saviors will rise to Zion” (Obadiah 1.21) in his *Arugat ha-Bosem*, Rabbi Abraham ben Azriel restated and expanded the association of the enemies of Israel with the kingdoms symbolized by the four animals:

after extirpating the evil kingdom, there will be salvation for Israel [...] when the Lord extirpates the seed of Esau the evil and Ishmael, then shall be salvation and the Messiah will come [...]. I saw in Midrash Tehilim [6.2] that the four beasts that enslaved Israel were double: Babylon and Chaldaea, Media and Persia, Greece and Macedonia, Edom and Ishmael; therefore eight [...] Edom [that was] the fourth [is now] the eighth.³⁹

The worshippers chanting the *piyyut Anusa le-Ezra from Ashkenazi Mahzorim*, proclaimed: “Ve-Nilva li Be-Shevi” (“And He [God] accompanied me in captivity”), expressing their belief that even after the exile from the Holy Land, the people of Israel had not been forsaken by God.⁴⁰ The next verses of the *piyyut* also mention the animals representing the alien kingdoms. For Jews living in Christian countries, explicitly describing Christianity as an evil kingdom that would fall as other ancient kingdoms had, was obviously dangerous.⁴¹ *Arugat ha-Bosem*, written several years before the *Michael Mahzor*, exemplifies the intellectual atmosphere in which repentance provided Jews with hope for redemption from their contemporary evil kingdom, as from ancient ones.

The fourth beast, understood as a pig referring to Edom, is not illustrated; rather, the beasts portrayed here refer to past kingdoms from which Israel was saved. The scene displays more than four beasts around the deer, just as the Book of Daniel mentions more than four beasts if we read chapters 7–8 together. The emphasis is not on the precise numerical count, but on the concept of beasts representing kingdoms that previously enslaved the people of Israel. The contemporary kingdom, which casts fear in the hearts of the people of Israel, is not illuminated, but is implied by the portrayal of the other animals and is borne out by the *Midrash*. The medieval Ashkenazi liturgy of the High Holidays and the illustration to *Kol Nidrei* in the *Michael Mahzor* were thus imbued with the same historiosophy which perceived the religious persecutions of the Jews as temporary and promised that their pious behavior would accelerate the messianic salvation. The deer surrounded by the beasts visualizes the hope

of the worshipers chanting Kol Nidrei for redemption from the persecutors, just as it occurred repeatedly in the past.

Purim and Kippurim

The interesting proximity between Yom Kippurim and Purim with regard to the four kingdoms (as well as the proximate illuminations of *Zakhor* and *Kol Nidrei*) may refer to a concept attested to in a later textual tradition: *Purim like [Yom Ha] Kippurim* (פורים ככיפורים). The aforementioned thirteenth-century unpublished commentary on Exodus by Rabbi Elazar the preacher (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. 202) may shed light on the matter. It contains an extensive discussion of the war against Amalek and stories from the Book of Esther in relation to the inversion between the holidays of Purim and Yom Kippur. Rabbi Elazar's commentary on Sabbath *Shekalim* is based on pericope *Ki Tissa*, Exodus 30.11–16, which describes the raising of funds (*shekalim*) for building the desert tabernacle. The text is read on the first Sabbath morning of the month of Adar. Purim, the climax of the Adar prayers and festivities, is celebrated on the fourteenth of the month. Rabbi Elazar explains the verse from Exodus 30.12: "When you take a head count of the children of Israel according to their numbers, every man shall give atonement money for his soul unto the Lord." He explicitly connects between *Shekalim* and Yom Kippur by explaining that the half-*shekel* in advance for the Temple in the month of Adar is a "down payment" toward redemption on the Day of Atonement.⁴²

Moreover, in the Tripartite *Mahzor*, Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akademia, MS. Kaufmann A 384, f. 34v,⁴³ produced in 1340 near Lake Constance, a marginal commentary on the *piyyut El Mitnase* for Sabbath *Shekalim* is attributed to Rabbi Judah the Pious: "That the Lord is figuring Kippurim money for grace and charity. 'And their enemy shall be thinner.' For the money of Kippurim that came before Haman's money, a thin man and an enemy, Israel were saved, and he failed [...] And they shall view the *Shekhinah*. [Thanks] to the money of Kippurim, which is charity, [they] shall view the glory of the *Shekhinah*."⁴⁴ This source stems from the leader of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, i.e. Rabbi Judah the Pious, Rabbi Eleazar's grandfather; so, we find a similar concept expressed over several generations. At the end of a commentary to *El Mitnase* from an Ashkenazi manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, heb. 709, f. 3r),⁴⁵ a connection is

42. On fol. 242a:

כי תשא את ראש בני ישׂ: משה פרשׁ: זו פרשׁ. כי תחילת דבר היא. לענין פרשׁ שקלים וסמך לכאן שהזכור למעלה עניין יום הכפורים וביום הכפור נידונין הוא ומזכירי. הנשמות ונותנין כסף לצדקה. וסמך כסף כפורים לחטאת הכפורים שהכסף כמו כן כפרה.

43. The entire manuscript is [available online](#).

44. On fol. 34b:

שהק' חושב להם כסף כפורים לחדש וצדקה. "וצוררם ירזה". כי לבעבור כסף כפורים שקדם לכסף המן איש צר ואויב ניצלו ישר' והוא נכשל ... ושכינה יזכו לחזה. בשביל כסף כפורים שהוא צדקה יחזו כבוד השכינה ... צורריהם יומעטו ויוחסרו. המן ובניו. שרבו על ישר' נתמעטו בזכות כסף כפורים. ועל צוארם יוגברו כד"א ונהפך הוא אשר ישלטו היהודים. ושובע שמחות יהומו בשמחת פורים נתחברו. והכל בזכות כסף הכפורים שנ' והכסף יענה את הכל. ובזכות כסף הכפורים הצילם בימי אחשורוש.

45. The entire manuscript is [available online](#).

made among Kippur, redemption, and the lily of the valley (associated with Israel) mentioned at the end of the *piyyut*.

A similar concept appears in two additional commentaries, also composed in Ashkenaz during the thirteenth century. The first is Yitzhak bar Yehudah HaLevi's *Paneach Razah* (62), and the second is a commentary of *Ba'al haTurim*, composed by Jacob ben Asher (c. 1270–1340), son of Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel (Rosh) (Gold and Touger). The *Arba'ah Turim* (*Ba'al haTurim*) frequently refers to piteistic writings of Hasidei Ashkenaz regarding religious practices and prayer (Abrams, "From Germany to Spain;" Kanarfogel, *Peering Through the Lattices*; Galinsky): "The Torah juxtaposed Yom Kippur with [the verses that speak of] ransom for his soul, for on that day all the people of the nation are counted and pass before Him. For this reason, it is customary to make pledges to charity on Yom Kippur." As stated above, the *Michael Mahzor* visually and conceptually associates between Purim and Kippurim via the four kingdoms and the same color plate. The use of the animals (even hybrid ones) in this manuscript, more than mere decoration, conveys a polemical message as well as an eschatological one of redemption. Even though they appear in separate volumes of the *Mahzor*, the same visual associative mechanism is used in both. Ideas found in the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* and the rabbis influenced by their writings are apparent in this manuscript's images. By studying the texts and images together and in relation to the Christian milieu, we can achieve a deeper understanding of the original purpose for ordering these illuminations and better reconstruct the original interpretations of the images. Thus, employing known animal symbolism, the patron of this prayer book could insert both polemical and redemptive messages disguised as 'innocent' bestial iconography.

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Zurück ins Paradies

Der Rabe, die Taube und das Ende der Sintflut

Abstract

When the Flood finally disappeared, according to *Genesis* 8 Noah sent out first the raven and afterwards the dove as messengers. According to the Hebrew Bible, both birds returned to the ark. According to the Greek *Septuaginta* and the *Vulgata*, however, the raven failed and remained absent. Since both versions of the text nevertheless were transmitted to the Western world by Jerome, the question arose of how to unify the stories. The paper sums up the many medieval and early modern approaches to the biblical text, taking into account the long tradition of medieval allegory on the one hand, as well as the search for the *sensus litteralis* on the other and the attempts to reconcile the different versions of the story. The final section is dedicated to the interpretations developed by early modern physico-theology to explain the different behaviour of the animals. The article demonstrates that even in this case medieval strategies kept their attraction.

1 Einleitung

Die Biblische Zoologie, also die Tierkunde, die vom Text der Offenbarung ihren Ausgang nahm, war ein Unternehmen, das über die Epochen hinweg eine enorme Dynamik gewinnen konnte; das galt nicht allein für die Moralisierung der Tiere, ihren Symbolwert und ihre Einbindung in die *eloquentia rerum* und das Buch der Natur, die beide schon von den Kirchenvätern beschworen worden waren, das vielfältige Geflecht der Typologie, sondern auch für die einfachen Fragen nach dem historischen Schriftsinn, die Generationen von Hermeneuten umgetrieben hatten.¹ Welches Tier hatte dem Leviathan zugrunde gelegen, ein Krokodil oder ein Flußpferd? Was hatte es mit den *selavim* auf sich, die Mose den Israeliten in der Wüste als Speise gegeben hatte, was mit dem *tachash*, das Mose auf dem Tabernakel platziert hatte? Waren es wirklich Wachteln gewesen und das Fell eines Seehundes? Die Theologie hatte über die Epochen hinweg denkbar unterschiedliche Antworten gegeben. Ein auf den ersten

1. Ein Beispiel einer diachronen biblischen Zoologie über die Epochen hinweg, die Eselin Bileams und den Fisch, der den Propheten Jona aufgenommen hatte, gibt Roling, *Physica Sacra* 9–63, und 321–402.

Blick viel schlichteres Beispiel einer biblischen Zoo-Semiose, in der sich naturkundliche Fragen mit allegorischen Zugriffen vermengen konnten, soll hier gegeben werden. Was hatte es mit den beiden Vögeln, die Noah als Botenvögel aus der Arche entlassen hatte, auf sich, mit Rabe und Taube? Wie sich diese beiden Kreaturen in der Exegese entfalten konnten und wie sich dabei Allegorie und Naturkunde auf elementare Weise aufeinander bezogen, wird dieser Beitrag in einem kursorischen Durchgang durch die Epochen zeigen. Dem Mittelalter wird dabei besondere Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt; ein großer Teil dieser Untersuchung wird sich dann mit der frühneuzeitlichen Bibelhermeneutik beschäftigen und dabei besonderen Wert auf die Schriftauslegung der Jesuiten legen, die zur akademischen Debatte um die Vögel den reichsten Beitrag geleistet hatten.

2. Meine Zusammenfassung folgt dem Bibeltext.

Die Episode der Genesis selbst sei kurz in Erinnerung gerufen.² Als die Sintflut sich langsam dem Ende entgegenneigte, landete die Arche auf dem Berg Ararat, und zwar am siebzehnten Tag des siebten Monats, wie es heißt. Als weitere vierzig Tage vergangen waren, öffnete Noah das Fenster der Arche, die er gebaut hatte, und ließ zunächst einen Raben heraus. Jener flog ein und aus, so heißt es, bis die Wasser auf der Erde vertrocknet waren. Dann schickte Noah eine Taube hinaus, um zu sehen, ob die Wasser weiter zurückgegangen waren. Die Taube jedoch, weil sie keinen trockenen Platz für ihre Füße finden konnte, kehrte zu Noah zurück. Nach sieben Tagen entsandte Noah den Vogel ein weiteres Mal; auch diesmal flatterte die Taube dem Patriarchen wieder entgegen, doch nun mit einem Ölzweig im Schnabel. Nach weiteren sieben Tagen wurde das Tier ein drittes Mal auf Mission geschickt, nun jedoch blieb die Taube aus. Die Wasser hatten sich verzogen, Noah öffnete die Luke der Arche und sah, daß die Erde trocken war. Und Gott forderte ihn auf, die Arche zu verlassen.

2 Textüberlieferung und Moral: Zwei gefiederte Kontrahenten und ihre Moralisierung im Mittelalter

Von Anbeginn war die Exegese dieser Passage mit einer Überlieferungstechnischen Schwierigkeit verbunden. Sie betraf den Raben. Im hebräischen Text der Genesis fand sich die Wortreihe “ve-jatzah jatzeh ve-shov,” also wörtlich “er flog und herausfliegend kehrte er wieder zurück,”³ in der *Septuaginta* dagegen war die Rede davon, daß der Rabe *nicht* wieder zurückkehrte.⁴ In der *Vulgata* hatte sich Hie-

3. *Biblia hebraica*, Genesis 8.6–12.

4. *Septuaginta*, Genesis 8.6–12.

5. *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, Genesis 8,6–12, dazu Hieronymus, *Hebraicae questiones in Genesim* 8,3, S. 10, aber auch Hieronymus, *Dialogus contra Luciferanos*, c. 23, Sp. 185, C.

6. Johannes Chrysostomos, c. 8, *Homilia* 26, § 4, lateinisch und griechisch, Sp. 234, C–D.

7. Cyrill von Alexandrien, *In Genesim*, Liber 2, § 8, griechisch und lateinisch, Sp. 69–72, D–C.

8. Augustinus, *In Evangelium Johannis*, Tractatus 4, c. 19, S. 64.

9. Augustinus, *Contra Faustum*, Liber 12, c. 10, S. 348.

10. Augustinus, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, Liber 1, §§ 13–14, S. 8f.

11. Ambrosius von Mailand, c. 17, § 62, Sp. 411, A–B.

ronymus für die Lesart der *Septuaginta* entschieden, die hebräische Lesart allerdings in seinen Anmerkungen repetiert und auf diese Weise ebenfalls an das Mittelalter weitergegeben.⁵ Die ersten griechischen Kirchenväter hatten sich erwartungsgemäß für die Variante der griechischen Übersetzer entschieden, denen vielleicht ein anderer hebräischer Text vorgelegen hatte, darunter Johannes Chrysostomos in seinen Genesis-Homilien und Cyrill von Alexandrien in seinem Pentateuch-Kommentar.⁶ Auch die syrischen und arabischen Bibelübersetzungen hatten die Lesart der *Septuaginta*. Die lateinische Tradition wiederum folgte der Tradition der Vulgata. Damit jedoch bot sich zunächst ein Bild, das die ganze Episode in einem anderen Licht erscheinen lassen mußte. Der Rabe, das scheinbar treulose Tier, war davongeflogen und hatte Noah im Stich gelassen, die verlässliche Taube jedoch hatte den Weg zum Patriarchen wieder zurückgefunden. Für die Kommentierung der ersten Jahrhunderte war hier eine Disposition geschaffen, die sich denkbar einfach in eine Allegorie transformieren ließ. Zugleich mußte eine Frage beantwortet werden. Wenn der Rabe nicht wieder zur Arche zurückgefunden hatte, wo war er dann geblieben? Schon Cyrill von Alexandrien hatte in seinem Genesis-Kommentar im vierten Jahrhundert nach Christus eine Antwort parat. Der Vogel war in den Fluten des Meeres schlicht ertrunken.⁷ Augustinus schlug in seinem Johannes-Kommentar die gleiche Lösung vor,⁸ im Traktat *Contra Faustum* stellte er eine bessere Hypothese zur Diskussion, die den Raben zugleich noch mehr ins Zwielficht rückt. Der Rabe war von einem vorbeischwimmenden Tierkadaver angelockt worden und einfach auf dem Aas, seiner natürlichen Nahrung sitzengeblieben.⁹ In seinen *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* wußte der Kirchenvater es noch etwas genauer. Raben konnten sich von Kadavern ernähren, die Taube jedoch mied diese Überreste; schon aus diesem Grund war sie zu Noah wieder zurückgefliegen.¹⁰

Beide Vögel standen also in Kontrast zueinander. Es lag nahe, sie mit den entsprechenden Wertungen zu versehen und ihr Verhalten in ein ebenso moralisches wie typologisches Gefüge einzuordnen. Ambrosius in seinem *Liber de Arca* machte den Auftakt in einer langen Kette von moralischen Auslegungen des gefiederten Pärchens. Raben waren Orakeltiere der Alten Welt, wie Ambrosius weiß, und daher ideal geeignet gewesen, um Kundschafterfunktionen wahrzunehmen. Auf der Ebene des historischen Schriftsinns hatte Noah also eine plausible Entscheidung getroffen, als er den Raben aussandte, um den Wasserstand zu überprüfen.¹¹ Auf der symbolischen Ebene

12. Ebd., c. 17, § 63, Sp. 411, B–C.

13. Ebd., c. 18, §§ 64–65, Sp. 411f, D–D.

14. Avitus von Vienne, Liber 4, *De diluvio mundi*, v. 541–84, S. 251f.; Claudius Victorius, Liber 2, V. 498–515, S. 164f.

15. Ambrosius von Mailand, c. 19, § 67, Sp. 413f., B–B.

16. Ebd., c. 19, § 68, Sp. 414, B–C.

jedoch stand der Rabe als Vogel, der sich von Aas ernährte, für die Dunkelheit, die Sünde, das Unrecht und die Schuld, mit der sich der Mensch beladen konnte. Der Gerechte schickte sie fort, um sich so weit wie möglich von ihr zu entfernen.¹² In der Taube manifestierte sich das Gegenteil. Sie war, wie Ambrosius fortfährt, ein Signum der *virtus* und der *simplicitas*, die sich gegen das Laster wandte; sie suchte die Gesellschaft des Gerechten. Auch sie war in die Welt hinausgeflogen, in die Wasser der Sintflut, doch konnte sie, wie Ambrosius unterstreicht, in ihren Fluten keine Ruhe finden. Die irdischen Dinge, die *res saeculares* mit ihren Verlockungen, vermochten sie im Unterschied zum Raben nicht zufriedenzustellen. Als Tugend schloß sie der Gerechte wieder in seine Arme.¹³ Als die Taube auf ihrem zweiten Flug mit dem Ölzweig zurückkehrte, trug sie, so Ambrosius, das erwartbare Signum im Schnabel. Den Ölzweig hatten schon die ersten Exegeten als Friedenssymbol gedeutet, als Zeichen des Bundes, den Gott mit Noah noch hatte schließen wollen. Hieronymus hatte auf diese Konnotation hingewiesen, ebenso auch Johannes Chrysostomos in seinem Kommentar, auch viele spätere Bibeldichter, darunter Avitus von Vienne und Claudius Victorius, waren im fünften oder sechsten Jahrhundert in ihren breiten Versifizierungen der Episode auf diesen besonderen Zeichenwert des Ölzweigs eingegangen.¹⁴ Schon die antike Historiographie hatte ihm eine ähnliche Bedeutung zugesprochen. Wenn die Taube ein Zeichen der Tugend war, wie der Rabe ein Signum der Sünde, offenbarte der Zweig, wie Ambrosius in seinem hermeneutischen Tableau weiter ausführt, die Buße und Reue, aber auch, weil das Öl ja brannte, die Erleuchtung, die mit ihr verbunden war. Die Taube war erneut von dannen geflogen, weil sie die *bona doctrina* des Christentums auch anderen Menschen zugutekommen lassen wollte. Als sie beim dritten Mal nicht wieder zurückkehrte, waren die Wasser der Sünde verschwunden. Die Offenbarung hatte sich ausgebreitet.¹⁵ Zumindest eine Frage, die den historischen Sinn betraf, kann Ambrosius zum Abschluß der Parasche noch stellen. Woher hatte der Vogel den Zweig? War er von einem Baum, der in der Sintflut überschwemmt worden war und die Wasser unbeschadet überstanden hatte, oder hatte Gott einen neuen Ölbaum wachsen lassen? Im zweiten Fall hätte Noah sich über die Barmherzigkeit seines Schöpfers freuen können, der die Schöpfung mit neuem Leben erfüllt hatte. Wahrscheinlich jedoch war, so Ambrosius, die erste Lösung. Gott hatte Reste der Vegetation bewahrt und unter den Fluten gerettet, nicht anders als er auch Noah in der Arche vor dem Untergang beschützt hatte.¹⁶ Die Frage sollte,

wie wir noch sehen werden, noch viele weitere Ausleger dieses Kapitels beschäftigen.

Die moralische Dichotomie, die Rabe und Taube charakterisiert hatte, konnte nach Ambrosius noch andere Exegeten umtreiben.¹⁷ Der Antagonismus der beiden Tiere ließ sich um weitere Elemente bereichern. Für die Exegeten war es evident, daß der Rabe sich von einem Tierkadaver hatte anlocken lassen und aus diesem Grund verschwunden war. Isidor von Sevilla sah im Raben den gefallen Menschen, der von den Lastern der Welt angelockt, die schützende Kirche, die Arche, verlassen hatte. Die Taube dagegen war in den Schoß der Kirche zurückgekehrt. Kein Gerechter konnte in der Welt, den Wassern der Sintflut, zur Ruhe gelangen. Die sieben Tage, die sieben Gaben des Geistes, hatten ihr den Weg in die Gemeinschaft der Heiligen eröffnet. Der Ölzweig entsprach dem Friedenskuß, der den Übertritt in die Gemeinde garantieren konnte. Als die Taube beim letzten Kundschafterdienst nicht zurückkehrte, hatte sie ihre Aufgabe erfüllt. Am Ende der Zeiten hatte sie die Wasser der Welt und der Sünde zurückgelassen und war, wie jeder Gerechte, zur Betrachtung der göttlichen Vollkommenheit geleitet worden.¹⁸ Beda und Rhabanus Maurus konnten diese Lesart im achten und neunten Jahrhundert noch weiter vorantreiben, zugleich bemühten sie sich um eine genauere Lektüre des Bibeltextes.¹⁹ Beda entschied sich, ohne einen Grund anzugeben, für die von Hieronymus referierte erste Textvariante, wie sie die hebräische Bibel angeboten hatte. Der Rabe flog ein und aus, bis er jenseits der Arche einen Ort gefunden hatte, an dem er sich niederlassen konnte. Die Disposition, die beide Botenvögel ausgezeichnet hatte, blieb trotz der zweiten Lesart die gleiche. Der Rabe stand für die Menschen, die zwar die Kirche, die Arche, aufsuchen konnte, doch in deren Fall die Fallstricke der äußeren Welt dennoch stärker waren. Die Taube dagegen entflog der Arche durch das Tor der Kontemplation, die Dachluke, die Noah geöffnet hatte, und kehrte in die sichere Gemeinde zurück, denn die Welt hatte sie nicht verlocken können. Die *oblectamenta* des Diesseits konnten für sie, wie Beda unterstreicht, keine Rolle mehr spielen. Der Rabe entsprach in seiner Gier nach der Welt den Simonisten, den Ämterkäufern, die den Weg in die *communio sanctorum* nicht mehr finden konnten.kehrte die Taube nicht mehr zurück, hatte die Seele des gläubigen Christen die Welt und ihren vergänglichen Leib hinter sich gelassen; es bestand für sie kein Bedarf mehr, zur *conversatio terrena* zurückzukehren. Auf erwartbare Weise manifestierte die Taube auch den Heiligen Geist selbst, denn sie hatte ja, wie bekannt,

17. Wie sehr die Genesis-Lektüre des Ambrosius im Mittelalter weiterwirkte, zeigt z. B. Gorman "From Isidore to Claudius of Turin."

18. Isidor von Sevilla, §§ 26–28, Sp. 233f., C–A.

19. Allgemein zum in der Zuschreibung umstrittenen, doch außerordentlich erfolgreichen Penta-teuch-Kommentar Bedas Gorman, "The Commentary on the Penta-teuch" 68–101.

20. Beda Venerabilis, *Hexaemeron*, Liber 2, Sp. 100f., B–D.

21. Zur enormen Reichweite der *Glossa ordinaria* im späteren Mittelalter Dahen 103–28.

22. *Biblia latina cum Glossa ordinaria*, Bd. 1, In *Genesim*, c. 8, fol. bvaf.

23. Allgemein zur alttestamentlichen Exegese des Rhabanus Maurus De Jong 161–76.

24. Rhabanus Maurus, Liber 2, c. 8, Sp. 520f., B–A, ähnlich z. B. auch Bruno von Segni, c. 8, Sp. 181f, C–B, oder (Ps.-)Hugo von Sankt-Viktor, Liber 1, Sp. 15, A–B.

25. Alkuin, c. 14, Sp. 623, D.

26. Petrus Riga, Bd. 1, *Liber Genesis*, V, 625–34, S. 51f.

27. Zur Exegese Ruperts von Deutz z. B. Holze 229–39.

28. Rupert von Deutz, In *Genesim*, Liber 4, c. 22–23, Sp. 346f., B–C.

ihre typologische Entsprechung in der Taube, die während der Taufe des Erlösers im Jordan über dem Heiland erschienen war.²⁰

Mit seiner Entscheidung für die zweite, hebräische Lesart war Beda weitgehend allein geblieben. Die Verfasser der *Glossa ordinaria*, der am meisten verbreiteten Bibelkommentierung des Mittelalters,²¹ hatten sich für die Variante der Septuaginta entschieden. Ihre Interpretation repetierte im wesentlichen Augustinus und Isidor von Sevilla.²² Auch Rhabanus entscheidet sich für die Septuaginta-Lesart.²³ Seine Allegorese kann unserer Episode jedoch einige neue Aspekte abgewinnen. Auch bei Rhabanus steht die Arche für die Kirche, Taube und Rabe artikulieren zwei Formen, auf ihr Heilsangebot zu antworten. Beide Vögel waren zunächst, wie Rhabanus behauptet, gleichzeitig entlassen worden, der Rabe hatte versagt, weil er auf einem vorbeischwimmenden Kadaver sitzengeblieben war, die Taube war zurückgekehrt. Einige Menschen verstrickten sich in den Verlockungen der Welt, andere hatten erkannt, daß dem Menschen im Diesseits keine dauerhafte Wohnung beschieden sein konnte. Vierzig war die Zahl der Jahre, die dem Menschen in dieser Welt in Aussicht gestellt war, die Zahl sieben stand erst für die *gratia spiritualis*, dann für das Ende der Welt, das dem Gerechten schließlich die wahre Seligkeit gewähren konnte. Mit dem Austrocknen der Wasser, also dem Vergehen aller Sünde, war zugleich, wie Rhabanus noch hinzufügt, die Notwendigkeit verschwunden, die Taufe zu empfangen.²⁴ Rhabanus direkter Zeitgenosse, Alkuin von York, kann in seinem *Liber de vitiis* dieser Zweiheit noch eine besondere Note hinzufügen. In seinem Gekrächze und der fehlenden Bereitschaft, sich die Forderung nach der Tugend zu eigen zu machen, verkörperte der Rabe auf ideale Weise die moralische Prokrastination. Das Gurren der Taube entsprach einem bereitwilligen *hodie, hodie*. Der Rabe jedoch krächzte lautmalerisch *cras, cras*, („morgen, morgen“).²⁵ Viele weitere Moralisten sollten dieses Sprachspiel übernehmen, nicht zuletzt der bekannteste Bibeldichter des Mittelalters, Petrus Riga, in seiner *Aurora*.²⁶

Welche Auslegungen schlossen sich im weiteren Mittelalter an? Glaubt man Rupert von Deutz, einem monastisch orientierten Exegeten des frühen 12. Jahrhunderts,²⁷ dann standen Rabe und Taube für Juden und Christen. Die ersten vertrauten den äußeren Opfern, eben den Kadavern, und blieben der sinnlich faßbaren Ebene verhaftet; die anderen hatten das Geheimnis der Offenbarung und ihre messianische Verheißung erkannt; ihnen stand nach dem Ende der Zeiten wie der Taube der Weg in den Himmel offen.²⁸ Bei Guibert

von Nogent können Rabe und Taube etwas zeitgleich die Seelenvermögen des Menschen repräsentieren. Der Rabe war ein Signum des frei flottierenden Affektes, des *affectus carnalis*, der, einmal durch die Luke des Geistes herausgelassen, dem Fleisch, den bewährten Kadavern, nicht mehr entrinnen konnte. Die Taube offenbarte den von der Vernunft geleiteten Affekt; auch dieser Affekt trat in die Welt hinaus, doch konnte wie die Taube in ihrem Schlamm keinen Ort finden, auf den er seinen Fuß hätte setzen können. Daß der zweite Vogel nach sieben Tagen ein weiteres Mal in die Welt hinauszufiegen genötigt war, zeigte auch, wie Guibert glaubt, daß die Kontrolle des Affektes immer nur als temporärer Sieg verbucht werden durfte. Nur wer zur Gänze in sich selbst, seiner eigenen Arche, ruhte, dem drohte aus der Welt keine Gefahr mehr. Gegen die Sünde hatte Gott jedoch ein Mittel in Aussicht gestellt, die Gnade, die im Ölweig ihr Gegenstück besaß. Mit dem Ende der Zeiten und der Wiederkunft des Messias hatte das Bedrohungsszenario dann ein Ende gefunden.²⁹

Auffällig ist, wie sehr der Rabe als Kadavervogel gesehen wurde, obwohl die Schrift darüber selbst kein Wort verlor.³⁰ Ein Blick in die großen Bibelkommentare des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts kann uns zeigen, daß, wie auch in vielen anderen Fällen der biblischen Zoologie, die Moralisierung der Kreatur mit der Klärung des historischen Schriftsinns, damit aber auch dem naturkundlichen Erklärungshorizont, Hand in Hand gehen konnte. Wenig änderte sich dabei am Schicksal des Raben. Als Aasvogel hatte er sich aus dem Staub gemacht, wie Petrus Comestor in seiner *Historia scholastica* weiß,³¹ der bekannteste aller Summisten der Heiligen Schrift.³² Die Taube jedoch war zurückgekommen, so Petrus, aber auch Andreas von Sankt Viktor, weil sie das Wasser scheute.³³ Mochten auch die Bergwipfel vom Wasser freigelegt worden sein, wie die Bibel berichtet hatte, ohne einen vom Schlamm freien Grund hätte das Tier außerhalb der Arche nicht ausharren können. Bevor er zur spirituellen Exegese der beiden Vögel übergeht, versucht Hugo von Sankt Cher, der wichtigste Kommentator des Dominikaner-Ordens,³⁴ eine Frage zu beantworten, die sich scheinbar vorher noch niemand gestellt hatte. Der Rabe war auf einem vorbeischwimmenden Kadaver sitzengeblieben und nicht mehr zur Arche zurückgeflogen. Noah jedoch hatte von allen Tieren nur jeweils ein Männchen und ein Weibchen mitgenommen. Wie sollte sich das zweite Tier ohne seinen Gefährten fortpflanzen? Gottes Vorsehung konnte am Aussterben des Raben wenig gelegen sein, das männliche Exemplar war seiner Paarungspflicht also noch vor seinem Abflug nachgekommen. Der Antinomie von

29. Guibert von Nogent, Liber 3, V. 8–11, Sp. 100f., D–D.

30. Alanus ab Insulis, s.v. *corvus*, Sp. 753f., D–A.

31. Zur enormen Bedeutung der *Historia scholastica* in der Vermittlung literaler Auslegungen z. B. Luscombe 109–29.

32. Petrus Comestor, *Liber Genesis*, c. 34, B–C.

33. Andreas von Sankt Viktor, *In Genesim*, 8.7–9, S. 51.

34. Eine Zusammenschau der Schriftauslegung Hugos von Sankt Cher geben die Beiträge im Band von Bataillon und Dahan.

Taube und Rabe kann Hugo in seiner weiteren Auslegung eine neue Variante hinzufügen. Tatsächlich verkörperten beide Vögel, wie schon Beda angedeutet hatte, auch den idealen Kleriker und seine moralische Depravation. Der eine Scholar begab sich wie der Rabe in die Stadt Paris, um Wissen zu erlangen, doch kam in den Wassern der Schrift zu Tode, ohne wieder zurückzukehren. Die Taube dagegen erwarb wahre Gelehrsamkeit und kehrte mit der *doctrina* im Schnabel heim. Der Rabe manifestierte den Prälaten, den Christus ausgesandt hatte, doch der in den Vergnügungen den Weg zurück zur *arca ecclesiae* nicht mehr finden konnte. Der gerechte Kleriker, so Hugo, trug wie die Taube die Lehre in seinem Mund wie die Frucht seiner Arbeit und wurde mit dem Kuß des Friedens in seiner Gemeinde wieder aufgenommen.³⁵

Es ist bemerkenswert, daß die Kolorierung der beiden Vögel auch in die mittelalterliche Enzyklopädie übernommen werden konnte. Vinzenz von Beauvais, Thomas von Cantimpré, Bartholomaeus Anglicus oder Konrad von Megenberg, die Standardvertreter der mittelalterlichen Naturkunde des Hochmittelalters, hatten Rhabanus und Beda gelesen.³⁶ In ihren Zettelkästen erscheinen Taube und Rabe in einem Licht, das die Moralisten der Bibelkommentare vorgegeben hatten. Der Rabe war ein Vogel, der ebenso sorglos wie rücksichtslos agierte. Den Großteil seiner Jungen warf er aus dem Nest; er fütterte sie erst nach sieben Tagen, wenn sie schon die schwarze Farbe angenommen hatten. Als Aasvogel hackte der Rabe größeren Tieren die Augen aus, so daß sie für ihre Besitzer unbrauchbar werden mußten. Waren sie dann getötet worden, konnte er über die Überreste herfallen. Zugleich, so betonen es z. B. Thomas von Cantimpré und Konrad, waren Raben von so großer, wie es heißt, 'Unkeuschkeit', daß sie selbst im Flug noch kopulieren konnten.³⁷

35. Hugo von Sankt Cher, Bd. 1, *Liber Genesis*, c. 8, S. 12af.

36. Vinzenz von Beauvais, *Liber 16*, c. 53–59, Sp. 1187–91, c. 61–63, Sp. 1192f.; Bartholomaeus Anglicus *Liber 12*, c. 6, S. 524–27, c. 10, S. 530f. Ähnlich auch Marcus de Urbe veteri Bd. 1, *Tractatus 3*, c. 10, S. 275–79.

37. Konrad von Megenberg, c. 18, S. 176f., c. 22, S. 179–82, und Thomas von Cantimpré, *Liber 5*, c. 31, S. 190f., c. 36, S. 192–94.

3 Die jüdische Bibelauslegung und ihre Rezeption

Für das beginnende Spätmittelalter lassen sich für die Exegese unserer Genesisepisode zwei Akzentverschiebungen konstatieren, die sich für die biblische Zoologie generalisieren lassen und die zugleich als symptomatisch für eine grundsätzliche Verschiebung im Fokus der Schriftauslegung gelten dürfen. Stärker als bisher rückt die Auslegung des historischen Schriftsinns, der historischen Faktizität der Ereignisse, in den Vordergrund. Zugleich beginnen die Hermeneuten, sich auch mit der jüdischen Schriftauslegung auseinanderzusetzen.

38. Zu den Hebräischkenntnissen Roger Bacons noch immer Hirsch 34–38, zu seiner allgemeinen Kritik an Übersetzungen Lemay 37–43.

39. Roger Bacon, Bd. 1, Pars 3, S. 79f.

40. Rashi, Bd. 1, *Sefer Bereshit*, Parasha 33, §§ 5–6, *ad loc.*, auch lateinisch mit weiteren Parallelstellen als Breithaupt, c. 8, S. 74.

41. *Sefer Midrash Rabbah*, Bd. 1, *Sefer Bereshit Rabbah*, Parasha 33, §§ 5–6, *ad loc.*, auch englisch als *Genesis Rabba*, Bd. 1, Parasha 33, 5–6, S. 348–51.

zen. Roger Bacon hatte sich in seinem *Opus maius* im frühen 13. Jahrhundert wütend darüber beklagen können, daß sich in der lateinischen Tradition die weniger plausible Lesart der Septuaginta durchgesetzt hatte, obgleich Hieronymus selbst doch die andere Option referiert hatte.³⁸ Warum hatte niemand es bisher auf sich genommen, die Übersetzung der Vulgata einer Überarbeitung zu unterziehen?³⁹ Jüdische Kommentare waren für den Freidenker Bacon jedoch keine Alternative. Für das westliche Mittelalter, das hier im Vordergrund stehen soll, waren es im Weiteren vor allem zwei hebräische Autoritäten, die zur Lektüre der Parasche einen Beitrag leisten konnten, die *Bereshith Rabbah* und *Rashi*. Beiden hatte natürlich die im Westen lange verworfene Lesart vorgelegen; der Rabe war in die Arche ein und aus geflogen. Rashi, der einflußreichste jüdische Kommentator, wußte nicht nur, daß der Rabe wiederholt die Arche umkreist hatte; er kannte auch den Grund seiner Anhänglichkeit. Der Rabe hatte Angst gehabt, daß Noah oder jemand anders seinem Weibchen nachstellen konnte. Als klar war, daß der erste Vogel seine Mission nicht erfüllen wollte, war Noah genötigt gewesen, die Taube auszusenden. Auf seltsame Weise schien sich diese Information mit einer Eigenschaft zu decken, die das Gros der mittelalterlichen Enzyklopädisten dem Raben zugeschrieben hatte, mit seiner Triebhaftigkeit.⁴⁰ Das zweite Detail fand sich im großen hebräischen Genesis-Kommentar, der *Bereshit Rabbah*, die auch *Rashi* schon herangezogen hatte. Auch hier stand das Verhältnis zwischen Noah und seinem ersten Botenvogel im Vordergrund, denn Noah, so heißt es, hatte keine laueren Motive gehabt, als er den Raben als Kundschafter auf die Suche geschickt hatte. Raben waren unreine Vögel und weder als Nahrung noch als Opfertiere geeignet gewesen; es wäre kein Verlust gewesen, so hatte Noah geglaubt, das Tier auf eine vergleichbare Weise zu beseitigen. Gott jedoch hatte seinen Patriarchen getadelt und die Würde des Tieres wiederhergestellt. Der Rabe wurde noch gebraucht, denn dem Propheten Elijah sollte er in der Wüste noch Brot und Fleisch zur Verfügung stellen. Raben waren also kostbare Kreaturen. Auch für die Taube kann die *Bereshit Rabbah* mit einer Zusatzinformation aufwarten. Sie hat zwei Vorschläge, woher der Vogel den Zweig genommen haben könnte. Vom Ölberg zu Kanaan, denn, so die Rabbinen, das Heilige Land war nicht von der Sintflut in Mitleidenschaft gezogen worden; oder direkt aus dem Paradies, denn auch diesen Heiligen Garten hatte die Urkatastrophe unbeschadet gelassen.⁴¹

Nikolaus von Lyra geht in seiner *Postilla* direkt auf die jüdische

Tradition ein. Dem Vorschlag der Rabbinen bringt er, wie vielleicht zu erwarten, wenig Sympathie entgegen. Warum sollte der Rabe um sein Weibchen fürchten, wenn Geschlechtsverkehr auf der Arche von Anfang an ausdrücklich untersagt gewesen war? Niemals hätte Noah ja eine Vermehrung der Tiere zulassen können, die er bereits so sicher nur mit Mühe hatte ernähren können. Dennoch war, wie auch Nicolaus zugesteht, die hebräische Variante der Episode plausibler als die Fassung, die man in der Septuaginta lesen konnte. Das entscheidende Argument lieferte die Erzähllogik selbst. Der Rabe war ein und aus geflogen und immer wieder, wie die hebräische Schrift behauptet hatte, zur Arche zurückgekehrt, weil er im Wasser keine Nahrung gefunden hatte und auf dem Schiff noch immer auf Futter hoffen konnte. Wäre er stattdessen von Anfang an ausgeblieben, hätte Noah kaum Klarheit über die Situation außerhalb der Arche erlangen können; erst als der Rabe wieder zurückgekehrt war, war die Taube dann zum Einsatz gekommen.⁴² Weitaus ausführlicher als Nicolaus geht ein anderer unter den spätmittelalterlichen Bibelkommentatoren auf die beiden Botenvögel ein, Alonso Tostado Ribera y Madrigal, der Bischof von Avila, dessen monumentale Bibelkommentare in der Frühen Neuzeit trotz ihres gewaltigen Umfangs dreimal vollständig gedruckt wurden, das letzte Mal in der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts in mehr als 40 Bänden.⁴³ Auch Tostado, der des Hebräischen mächtig war, fühlt sich im frühen 15. Jahrhundert berufen, auf die jüdische Auslegung der Passage einzugehen. Aus den gleichen erzähllogischen Gründen entscheidet sich Tostado jedoch mit Blick auf den Raben für die Lesart der Septuaginta. Was hatte der Vogel getan und was hatte Noah mit ihm erreichen wollen? Es war, wie Tostado einwendet, kaum sinnvoll, daß der Rabe lange Kreise um die Arche gezogen hatte und ein und aus geflogen war, bis, wie es hieß, die Wasser wieder vollständig verschwunden waren, “donec siccarentur aquae.” Hatte er also Kreise gezogen und war zu Noah zurückgefliegen, als die Sintflut ihr Ende gefunden hatte? Etliche Exegeten hatten, wie Tostado weiß, zurecht vermutet, daß der Vogel einen schwimmenden Kadaver als Beutegut gefunden haben könnte. Warum hätte der Vogel dann aber, wenn er auf Nahrung gestoßen war, überhaupt wieder zur Arche zurückkehren sollen, wenn die Wasser vollständig verschwunden waren? Er war dem Kapitän der Arche also, wie es schien, schon mit dem ersten Flug abhandengekommen.⁴⁴ Für die Einlassungen Rashis hat Tostado kein Verständnis. Der Fortpflanzung auf der Arche hatte Gott mit gutem Grund einen Riegel vorgeschoben.⁴⁵ Auch der Rabe konnte von die-

42. Nikolaus von Lyra, Bd. 1, *Liber Genesis*, c. 8, fol. Eiiiira–Eiiivb.

43. Eine allgemeine Würdigung der zahllosen Schriften des Alonso de Madrigal, genannt ‘El Tostado,’ geben Belloso Martín, *passim*. Zu Tostados exegetischen Arbeiten auch Santiago-Otero und Reinhardt 131–38, und Minnis 170–78.

44. Alphonsus Tostadus, c. 8, q. 7, S. 143af.

45. Ebd., c. 8, q. 8–9, S. 1143b.

46. Ebd., c. 8, q. 8, S. 143b.

sem Verbot nicht ausgenommen gewesen sein. Wenn man der hebräischen Variante dennoch Rechnung tragen wollte, so Tostado, konnte man zu einer gleichsam dialektischen Lösung greifen. Vielleicht war der Vogel nicht bereit gewesen, unmittelbar zu Noah zurückzukehren, vielleicht hatte er sich also auf der Arche unbemerkt niedergelassen, so daß ihr Lenker ihn nicht mehr hatte bemerken können. Seine Mission war auch in diesem Fall vergeblich gewesen, obwohl Noah, so Tostado, den Raben doch ausgesandt hatte, gerade weil diese Tier so gelehrig und so gut zu zähmen waren.⁴⁶

4 Der lange Atem des Mittelalters: Physikotheologie und Schriftauslegung

Es verwundert vielleicht nicht, daß Taube und Rabe als Gegenstände der Schriftauslegung, der Moralisierung und der zoologischen Realienklärung ohne Schwierigkeiten den Weg in die exegetischen Debatten der Neuzeit finden konnten. Wie reich diese Debatten an sich waren, welche große Zahl an Texten in Gestalt von Kommentaren, Einzelabhandlungen, Disputationen und unserem Fall vor allem biblischer Zoologien aus ihnen hervorgegangen war, ist immer noch nicht ausreichend gewürdigt worden. Auch der weitreichenden Kontinuität des Mittelalters und dem enormen Wissenstransfer hat man bisher eher selten Rechnung getragen. Am Ende dieser langen Tradition finden sich die großen physiko-theologischen Bibelkommentare, die im Umfeld eines Johann Jacob Scheuchzer geschrieben worden waren und deren Echo sich bis ins 19. Jahrhundert verfolgen läßt. Sie können als die letzten Zeugen einer Überlieferungskette gelten, die über mehr als ein Jahrtausend an die Bibel und ihre Auslegung koppelte. Es lohnt sich, auch diese Texte in den Blick zu nehmen.

In seiner *Historia animalium sacra*, der am meisten verbreiteten biblischen Zoologie des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts, die Dutzende von Auflagen erlebte,⁴⁷ geht Wolfgang Franz, wie zu erwarten, auch auf Rabe und Taube ein. Franz dokumentiert anschaulich, wie die Mehrzahl der Allegoresen, die das Mittelalter den beiden Vögeln zuge-dacht hatte, ohne Brüche vom akademischen Protestantismus übernommen werden konnte. Der Wittenberger Professor repetiert Beda und Rhabanus, wenn auch, ohne ihren Namen zu nennen, und auch ohne die Einlassungen der mittelalterlichen Enzyklopädien, die zum Teil schon auf Plinius zurückgegangen waren, namentlich zu benennen. Als Aasvogel, der keine Brutpflege betrieb und perfide agierte,

47. Eine allgemeine Würdigung der *Historia animalium* des Wolfgang Franz liefert Roggen, *passim*.

48. Franz, Pars 2, c. 14, S. 311–19.

49. Ebd., Pars 2, c. 15, S. 324–28.

50. Zu Thomas de Vio Cajetan als Kommentator des Alten Testaments z. B. von Gunten, *passim*, oder kurz Grendler 251–63, und O'Connor 79–83.

51. Cajetan, *Genesis*, c. 8, fol. 26v.

52. Zur katholischen Rehabilitation der *Vulgata* und ihren zumeist jesuitischen Kommentierungen zu Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts z. B. Bedouelle 322–44, 350–55, 361–68; Baroni 245–96.

53. Sisto da Siena, Bd. 2, Annotatio 83, S. 387f.

54. Gordon, Bd. 1, c. 19, S. 90f.

um an seine Beute zu gelangen, war ihm, wie Franz unterstreicht, nicht allzu viel an Dignität geblieben. Gleichzeitig war das Tier intelligent und als Orakelvogel denkbar gelehrig gewesen. Daß Noah sich seiner bedient hatte, mußte daher nicht weiter überraschen.⁴⁸ Das Gegenbild als Vogel verkörperte die Taube, so Franz, die dem Heiligen Geist als Erscheinungsform gedient hatte. Sie konnte alle Attribute der Kirche auf sich versammeln. Sie war “mansueta, simplex et pacifica”.⁴⁹

Auf der anderen Seite bemühten sich auch katholische Kommentare im Gefolge des Lyranus oder Tostados um die Klärung des historischen Sachverhaltes. Tommaso de Vio Cajetan, dessen Bibelkommentare weit verbreitet waren, nimmt die hebräische Textgestalt im frühen 16. Jahrhundert bereits als gegeben hin.⁵⁰ Noah hatte auf sein Horologium, sein Stundenglas, gesehen, so Cajetan, und geahnt, daß ein Ende der Sintflut gekommen sein mußte; er hatte den Raben herausgeschickt, der einmal müde und unmotiviert um die Arche geflattert war, und vielleicht, als er nur Wasser gesehen hatte, wieder zum Schiff zurückgekehrt war. Gemeinsam mit dem Raben war auch die Taube durch die Luke gelassen worden, die im Unterschied zum Raben bereitwillig ausflog, doch ebenfalls wieder zurückkehrte, weil sie, wie alle ihre Artgenossen, ihre Füße nicht mit dem Schlamm belasten wollte.⁵¹ Im Gefolge Cajetans hatte sich die gleichsam dialektische Lösung, die der hebräischen Fassung genügt, doch die Rückkehr des Raben zumindest etwas hinauszögerte, als weithin akzeptierte Lesart unserer Genesis-Episode herauskristallisiert. In den großen katholischen Schriftkommentaren, die im 17. Jahrhundert in der *Biblia sacrae Vulgatae* gebündelt worden waren, und den vielen Kommentaren, die sie begleitet hatten, stoßen wir weitgehend auf diese Fassung.⁵² Versuche von Theologen wie Sixtus Senensis, der einfach die Existenz zweier Raben angenommen hatte, konnten sich dagegen nicht durchsetzen.⁵³ Die meisten dieser Autoren sind heute weitgehend unbekannt, auch wenn sie in ihrer Zeit eine fast kanonische Bedeutung hatten.

Gerade den Jesuiten fehlt es nicht an Sympathie für den schwarzen Vogel. Jacob Gordon malt sich in seinen *Controversiae* aus dem Jahre 1613 aus, wie der Rabe mit seinen Schwingen die Arche wieder und wieder umkreiste, froh endlich wieder in Freiheit und dem Dunkel des Schiffsladeraums entkommen zu sein, doch zugleich nicht bereit, dem Patriarchen ernsthaft zu helfen.⁵⁴ Sein Ordensbruder Benito Pereira hält die Kadaver-Variante, die Augustin einst etabliert hatte, zwei Dekaden vorher schon deshalb für unmöglich, weil zehn

Monate nach der Sintflut auch die letzten Überreste der einst in den Wassern umgekommenen Tiere längst den Fischen zum Opfer gefallen sein mußten. Pereira, dessen Genesis-Kommentar mehr als 2000 Seiten umfaßt, weiß auch, daß der Rabe die Arche zwar umflogen hatte, doch dann auf der Spitze ihres Daches sitzen geblieben war. Er war also, gut jesuitisch gesprochen, zurückgekehrt und doch nicht zurückgekehrt. Zumindest mittelbar war damit auch der Septuaginta Genüge getan worden. Woher jedoch hatte das Tier unter diesen Umständen eigentlich seine Nahrung erhalten? Hatte Noah ihm, so Pereira, fürsorglich durch die Luke des Schiffs etwas Futter herausgereicht? Hatte Noah den Tod des Vogels angenommen, wie Tostado stattdessen gehant hatte? Oder war der Patriarch, als dritte Option, davon ausgegangen, das Tier hätte fortan eigenständig für seine Ernährung sorgen können?⁵⁵ Eine letzte Antwort wagt der Jesuit nicht zu geben. Vergleichbare Überlegungen, die den Raben zwar auf der Arche, doch nicht in die Arche lassen wollen, lesen wir im 18. Jahrhundert noch bei Augustin Calmet,⁵⁶ dem wohl wichtigsten Vertreter der katholischen Bibelauslegung der Epoche der französischen Aufklärung,⁵⁷ aber auch bei seinem reformierten Antagonisten und Zeitgenossen, bei Jacques Saurin, dessen *Discours bibliques* auch in einer deutschen Fassung kursierten.⁵⁸ Auch die Taube war in der Gesellschaft Jesu nicht vergessen worden. Cornelius a Lapide, dessen Kommentare fast ein Dutzend Auflagen erlebten und dem Mittelalter immer noch sehr verpflichtet waren,⁵⁹ stellt sich die schon vorher ventilerte Frage, auf welchem Wege der Vogel, dessen Mission ja erheblich erfolgreicher gewesen war als die seines schwarzen Freundes, eigentlich in den Besitz des Ölzweiges gekommen war. A Lapide macht einen Vorschlag, der die jüdischen Einlassungen weitgehend ignoriert. Im Unterschied zu vielen anderen Pflanzen waren Ölbäume, wie a Lapide glaubt, in der Lage, längere Zeit unter Wasser leben zu können. An Berghängen in der Nähe des Ararat, auf dem die Arche gelandet war, konnte ein solcher Baum also in Flugweite des Vogels vorhanden gewesen sein; es mußte eines der ersten Gewächse gewesen sein, die von der Arche aus überhaupt erreichbar waren.⁶⁰

Auch wenn reformierte Theologen wie Louis Cappel unsere Genesis-Passage im frühen 17. Jahrhundert für emendationsbedürftig hielten und die Septuaginta-Variante zu diesem Zweck noch einmal ins Feld führten,⁶¹ hatte sich der hebräische Text auch auf lutherischer und reformierter Seite endgültig durchgesetzt, auch dank wichtiger Hebraisten wie Theodor Hackspan, Heinrich Hottinger,

55. Pereira, Bd. 2, Liber 13, Disputatio 8, S. 218f.

56. Calmet, Bd. 1, *In Genesim*, c. 8, S. 71b.

57. Zu Augustine Calmet als Schriftausleger z. B. Martin und Henryot 175–96, oder Marsauche, *passim*.

58. Saurin, Bd. 1, *Discours* 9, S. 119–21.

59. Als Beispiel Elliott 454–59.

60. Cornelius a Lapide, Bd. 1, *In Genesim*, c. 8, S. 119b.

61. Cappel, Liber 5, c. 10, S. 367.

Johannes Buxtorf und vieler anderer. August Pfeiffer kann es in seinen *Dubia vexata* der Bibel aus dem Jahre 1679 noch einmal auf den Punkt bringen. Warum hätte die jüdische Bibelüberlieferung die Passage auch mutwillig korrumpieren sollen? Pfeiffers Synthese liest sich besonders einfühlsam und scheint alle Aspekte noch einmal mit einschließen zu wollen. Der Patriarch hatte den Raben aus der Luke gelassen, er war ausgeflogen und hatte sich dabei, wie es für seine Artgenossen üblich war, vielleicht auch auf einen der einen oder anderen der so oft beschworenen Tierkadaver gesetzt, die an ihm vorbeigeschwommen waren, oder auf einen der Berggipfel, den die Wasser endlich freigegeben hatten. Dann aber war der Vogel wieder zur Arche zurückgekehrt, weil ihm sein Weibchen gefehlt hatte, jenes Weibchen, um das sich auch Rashi schon Sorgen gemacht hatte. Eine Zeit lang hatte sich der Rabe nach seiner Rückkehr auf die Arche gesetzt. Im Anschluß war der Vogel dann wieder von dannen geflogen, denn außerhalb des Schiffes war für ihn mit dem abfließenden Meeresspiegel immer mehr Nahrung aus den Fluten emporgestiegen.⁶²

Der Hugenotte Samuel Bochart hatte mit seinem *Hierozoicon*, das bis in die Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts neu aufgelegt und auch kommentiert wurde, die wichtigste biblische Zoologie seiner Epoche vorlegt, ein Monument an philologischer Gelehrsamkeit, das seinesgleichen suchte.⁶³ Fast alle Quellen, die Rabe und Taube betrafen, lassen sich bei ihm finden. Bochart summiert auch die Parallelen der klassischen Literatur und nennt Episoden, die zumindest mittelbar der Genesiserzählung vergleichbar waren. Hatte nicht auch der Gott Apoll erst einen Raben ausgesandt, um Wasser zu beschaffen, und war dieser Rabe nicht ebenfalls ausgeblieben, weil er es vorgezogen hatte, auf einem Feigenbaum sitzenzubleiben? Auch Bochart sorgt sich um die Reproduktion des Raben auf der Arche. War das Weibchen allein zurückgeblieben? Der Rabe war offensichtlich nicht ausgestorben; Gott mußte also dafür Sorge getragen haben, daß die Rabenmutter noch vor dem Verschwinden ihres Männchens besamt worden war. Vielleicht hatte die jüdische Tradition, wie Bochart zu Bedenken gibt, sogar recht, wenn sie dem Raben wie im Fall Rashis einen besonders ausgeprägten Paarungstrieb unterstellte; immerhin hatte die mittelalterliche Naturkunde ja etwas Ähnliches behauptet.⁶⁴ Intensiver setzt sich Bochart mit der Taube auseinander. Hier treibt auch ihn vor allem die Frage um, wie der Vogel in den Besitz des Ölzeigs gekommen sein könnte. Konnte der Zweig aus dem Heiligen Land stammen oder direkt dem Paradies entnommen worden sein? Wohl kaum. Wenn Kanaan, von der Sintflut verschont ge-

62. Pfeiffer, *Centuria prima*, Locus 27, S. 73f.

63. Grundlegend zum Leben und Werk Samuel Bocharts und seiner Bedeutung in der Geschichte der Exegese ist mit Blick auf die Geographie Shalev 141–204. Zur Bedeutung Bocharts in der Erschließung der orientalischen Zoologie außerdem immer noch Fück 84–85.

64. Bochart, *Pars 2, Liber 1, c. 12*, Sp. 209–13.

blieben wäre, wie die Rabbinen behauptet hatten, hätte Noah wohl kaum Anlaß gehabt, sein Schiff zu kalfatern, sondern hätte sich mit den Seinen bequemer ins trockene Israel zurückziehen können. Schwieriger gestaltete sich die zweite Option. Das Paradies war nach allgemein anerkannter Meinung – Bochart nennt einige der mittelalterlichen Sentenzenkommentare, aber auch Cajetan und Bellarmin – tatsächlich von der Sintflut nicht in Mitleidenschaft gezogen worden; die Taube hätte also tatsächlich, wenn sie bis in den Garten Eden vorgedrungen wäre, auch einen Ölzweig von dort beschaffen können. Doch welchen Erkenntniswert über die Sintflut hätte dieser Zweig gehabt, aus einem Territorium, das von vornherein trocken geblieben war? Aus dem gleichen Grund wären auch Unterwasserpflanzen keine große Hilfe gewesen, denn Noah war ja auf den Rückgang des Wassers angewiesen. Die Taube hatte ihren symbolbeladenen Zweig daher, wie Bochart betont, von einem der Ölbäume in der Nähe der Arche gepflückt, die an den Hängen der benachbarten Berge aus dem Wasser emporgestiegen waren.⁶⁵ Bochart wie die Jesuiten vor ihm hatten auch der Allegorese der beiden Vögel reichlich Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt, doch hatten sie zur mittelalterlichen Tradition wenig hinzugefügt. Letztere war darüber hinaus, wie zu erwarten, im 17. Jahrhundert vor allem mit Blick auf die Taube der Jordantaufe in einer Fülle von Predigtreihen in lateinischer und deutscher Sprache weiter repetiert worden.⁶⁶

Von der Realienklärung der Jesuiten war es nur ein kurzer Weg zu den großen Physiko-Theologen des 18. Jahrhunderts.⁶⁷ Daß den Vögeln in den Klassikern des Genres, also den Schriften von William Derham, Antoine Pluche oder Bernard Niewentjod auf einer allgemeinen Ebene reichlich Raum geschenkt wurde, liegt auf der Hand. Auch eigene 'Ornitho-Theologien,' 'Vogel-Theologien,' wie sie z. B. Pehr Kalm und Carl Mennander vorlegt hatten, waren geschrieben worden.⁶⁸ Die physikotheologischen Bibelkommentare scharten sich um die *Kupferbibel des Schweizers* Johann Jacob Scheuchzers, dessen *Physica sacra* zum wichtigsten Referenzwerk geworden war.⁶⁹ Aus der Fülle von Autoren, die sich direkt an Scheuchzer anschließen, soll nur auf einige Figuren des 18. Jahrhunderts verwiesen werden, auf Samuel Donat, der direkt in Berlin tätig war, Ysbrand van Hamelsveld, Laurenz Meijer und Theodor Lilienthal, der in Königsberg mehr als zwanzig Bände in Ergänzung Scheuchzers produzieren konnte; in England zählen Anti-Deisten wie Samuel Nelson zu diesem Zirkel, deren Werke ebenfalls breitflächig ins Deutsche übertragen wurden. Sie alle hatten eine Gruppe von Gelehrten geformt,

65. Ebd., Pars 2, Liber 1, c. 6, Sp. 27–38.

66. Als Beispiel unter vielen Tympius, *passim*.

67. Zu einem ähnlichen Beispiel zwischen Jesuitenexegese und Physikotheologie auch Röling, "Critics of the Critics" 372–89.

68. Mennander, Kalm und Malm, *passim*.

69. Zur Schriftauslegung und zur Physiko-Theologie Scheuchzers Giacomoni, *passim*; Kempe 150–87; Müsch 131–54; Michel 111–21.

70. Scheuchzer, *Kupfer-Bibel*, Bd. 1, Tabula 61–62, S. 73f.

71. Donat, Bd. 1, c. 23, §§ 161–65, S. 188–92, dazu auch Ray, S. 346f.

72. Lilienthal, Bd. 12, c. 23, § 40, S. 804–07. Ähnlich auch in der niederländischen Kommentierung Scheuchzers durch Laurentius Meijer, als Scheuchzer, *Bijbel der Natuur*, Bd. 1, Deel 23, § 161, S. 580.

denen die Erklärung und Plausibilisierung auch des letzten biblischen Details besonders am Herzen lag. Der Großgelehrte aus Zürich weiß, daß Noah den Raben, wie es heißt, auf “blos liegende Gebeine von Menschen oder Thieren oder Fischen” angesetzt hatte, doch hatte sich das Tier seiner Mission verweigert. Für den Zweig der Taube, das erlösende Signum der endlich abgeflossenen Wasser, hat Scheuchzer noch eine weitere Erklärung. Vielleicht hatten die Fluten der Sintflut einen der verbliebenen Bäume ans Ufer getragen, wo die Taube sich seiner bemächtigt hatte. Meerpflanzen konnten für sich genommen, so betont es auch Scheuchzer, keine Hilfe gewesen sein.⁷⁰ Noah mußte erkannt haben, daß wieder Pflanzen existierten, die einen Neuanfang ermöglichten. Donat, der Scheuchzer ausführlich kommentiert hatte, aber auch Meijer aus Franeker und Lilienthal geben dem Schweizer zur Gänze recht. Donat weiß, daß Noah den Raben als Botenvogel nur ausgewählt hatte, weil er als Aasvogel besonders scharfsinnig war. Seine Fähigkeit aber spielte das Tier nicht aus; es hatte nur ein paar Mal seine Bahnen um das Schiff gezogen. Für die Taube und ihr Beutegut gibt Donat zusätzlich noch zu bedenken, daß Bäume auf dem Seewege eine denkbar große Strecke zurücklegen konnten, ja daß es sogar Reste von vorsintflutlichen Fichtenbäumen, wie John Ray gezeigt hatte, durch die Wassermassen der Urflut bis nach England geschafft hatten.⁷¹ Warum sollte die Taube also nicht, wo auch immer die Arche gelandet war, rasch in den Besitz eines solchen Zweiges gelangt sein? Vielleicht war das handzahme und vertrauenswürdige Tier auch, so Lilienthal, der Zeitgenosse Immanuel Kants, nur einige Meter von der Arche entfernt bereits fündig geworden.⁷²

5 Schlußfolgerungen

Man könnte diese Geschichte ohne Schwierigkeiten noch weiter schreiben und um weitere Kapitel bereichern. Was auf den ersten Blick wie eine Entsprechung zur scholastischen Distinktionsfreude auf Seiten der Schriftauslegung wirkte, einer Distinktionsfreude, die die barocke Schultheologie, wie gesehen, noch um weitere Details vermehren konnte, verdankte sich in Wirklichkeit einem einfachen Faktum, der unglaublichen Dignität der Heiligen Schrift, die alle Bereiche des mittelalterlichen wie frühneuzeitlichen Theologiebetrieb für sich in Anspruch nehmen konnte. Allen zeitgenössischen Moden der Allegorese und Moralisierung zum Trotz blieb ein Hauptanlie-

gen dieses Theologiebetriebes, wie gesehen, spätestens seit dem zwölften Jahrhundert die genaue Bestimmung des historischen Schriftsinnes, damit aber auch der präzisen Realienklärung. Naturkunde und Philologie gingen hier Hand in Hand, während die Konfessionalisierungsprozesse diese Kontinuität weit weniger in Frage stellten als man vielleicht vermuten könnte. Die Mehrzahl der Festschreibungen des Spätmittelalters ließ sich vergleichsweise bruchlos vom Mittelalter bis ins 18. Jahrhundert tragen, als Teil eines Wissenstransfers, den die Reformation weitgehend unberührt gelassen hatte. Die enorme Popularität, die der mehrfach gedruckte Tostado allein aufgrund seiner Liebe zum Detail auch in protestantischen Kreisen genoß, ist hierfür sicher ein aussagekräftiger Beleg, gleiches gilt für die reiche Rezeption der mittelalterlichen Enzyklopädik und ihrer Naturauslegung auch im Kreise der protestantischen Allegoriker.

Deutlich geworden ist nach diesem Parforceritt durch die Epochen der Bibelauslegung vielleicht Folgendes: Die allgemeine Realienklärung und der Wunsch, die narrativen Lücken der Schrift zu füllen, konnten mit der Allegorese der Kreaturen Hand in Hand gehen, ja beide beflügelten sich wechselseitig, wenn der Kalauer erlaubt ist. Die Taube war bereits durch das Evangelium eindeutig positiv konnotiert gewesen; niemand hätte dem Alten Testament also eine andere Auslegung abringen können. Nirgendwo in der Schrift hatte sich auf der anderen Seite allerdings ein Hinweis darauf gefunden, daß der Rabe, der im Narrativ der Allegorese zwangsläufig den Kontrast zur Taube formen mußte, dem Patriarchen als Aasvogel abhandengekommen war. Dennoch war diese Information auf fast natürliche Art und Weise in die Exegese des Vogels übernommen worden, so daß sie selbst, wie gesehen, einen festen Bestandteil seiner Moralisierung formen konnte. Die gleiche Moralisierung des Vogels, als Teil einer hermeneutischen Logik, die in Dichotomien denken wollte, hatte schon vorher dafür gesorgt, daß die Lesart der Septuaginta trotz der durchgehenden Kopräsenz der heute üblichen Textvariante ihren Platz bewahrt hatte. Die Treue, die man vor allem unter katholischen Theologen auch weiterhin dem Vulgata-Text schulden wollte, konnte hier ihr Übriges tun. Als die Kenntnis des Originaltextes sich langsam wieder durchsetzte, war die Konnotation des Vogels in der exegetischen Tradition bereits so selbstevident, daß selbst die rein historische Realienklärung der Frühen Neuzeit noch eine inhaltliche Synthese beider Textvarianten bevorzugte, anstatt dem Raben noch einmal eine Chance zu geben. Die Taube dagegen hatte von Anfang an auf der richtigen Seite gestanden.

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The Jewish Dog and *Shehitah*

Abstract

The essential clash between Judaism and Christianity, especially Catholic Christianity, has been over purity and contamination, in particular, by touch. The anxiety is biblically derived. It pertains especially to consuming meat and is amplified by the biophilic ‘affiliation’ of humans with animals. The current debate over kosher and halal slaughtering carries over these anxieties. That debate is exemplified in the article by the prohibition of Christian butchers purchasing and selling non-kosher quarters of meat in the early eighteenth century Roman Ghetto and the fight against this prohibition waged by Rabbi Tranquillo Corcos.

The Temple, says the Lord, is my throne. It is my doing, my making. I will thus bring my attention to the poor and lame of spirit, and to the one who is punctilious in fulfilling my command. (But he who performs rituals outside the Temple will come to bad recompense.) To slaughter an ox will be to murder a man; to sacrifice (*zoveah*) a lamb to behead a dog; to bring a grain offering (*minhah*) to bring the blood of a pig; to offer incense to bless a void. (Isa. 66)

1. Gordon 204. This translation, as opposed to the now standard one of the Jewish Publication Society, properly emphasizes the transformations that are central to this essay’s arguments. Cf. the JPS version: “He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; He that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he broke a dog’s neck; He that offereth a meal-offering, as if he offered swine’s blood.” I have removed the “as if,” which I do not see in the original, my enormous regard for the JPS translators notwithstanding.

שׁוֹחֵט הַשּׁוֹר מִכֶּה-אִישׁ, זֹבֵחַ הַפֶּסַח עֵרֵף כָּלֵב,
מַעֲלֵה מִנְחָה דָם-תַּיִר

I see rather direct equivalences through the absence of a linking word/verb.

The translation is mine, aided by the critical commentary of Sh. L. Gordon in parentheses.¹ The subject is proper sacrifice, but also improper, based on the propriety of the offerant and the offering of the sacrifice, which must take place in the Jerusalem Temple of the Lord alone, where, by implication, all will gather. The prophet goes on:

To those who have chosen these (evil) ways, to follow in their hearts abominations, I shall bring tribulation. I called, and they did not answer. I spoke, and they failed to hear. They did evil, and elected to do what I spurned. (Again, my translation/paraphrase.)

Recompense for improper sacrifice thus was immediate: a pure ani-

2. See Stow, *Jewish Dogs*, especially on Chrysostom in detail.

3. One sees precisely this interchange in Virgulti, chapter 9, who writes (I paraphrase): food discrimination was also established to keep Jews from gentiles. The pig reminds us of carnal people. But once the carnal law (the law of the carnal Jews, as opposed to the spiritual Christians, as emphasized by Augustine) was voided and replaced by the spiritual one (of Christianity), all the significations changed. It is nature that makes animals like the pig and lamb what they are. [...]. Besides, Christ wanted men to realize God created all things, including the pig. What makes man impure is not what goes in, but what comes out of the mouth. I return to Virgulti below.

4. ASCER, 1Sf, 1 inf. 7, fasc. 01, but also, and esp. 1Qa, 1 inf. 1, fasc. 06, for the text.

mal transformed into an abominable other – and the determination to prevent this scenario’s realization was profound. Laws, practices, and, especially, opinion, all oozing anxiety, leave no doubt. The anxiety was particularly great with respect to Jewish ritual slaughter, *shehitah*, and the meat, both kosher and non-kosher, that this slaughter generates. Forceful reservations about this meat and its consumption, we shall see, are also bound up with the image of the Jew as a dog, an image first seen in the writings of John Chrysostom, who wrote that the Jews were once “the [pure] children,” but now they are [impure] “dogs,” while the Christians who were once dogs are now God’s children.² Indeed, the constant sub-theme of this essay is anxiety about the substitution of the impure for the pure, alongside the affects of the interchange, frequent in our thinking, of humans for animals, animals for humans.³

I begin by focusing on an incident – the real, beneath which lurks the theoretical – that occurred in the eighteenth century, or about two millennia after Isaiah wrote. The resonance of Isaiah’s challenge was long-reaching. It persists, as we shall see, even unto today.

I confess that I am about to violate the normal rule that limits a paper to a specific issue set in a specific time and place, just as in this essay far more questions will be raised than answered, avenues to be explored opened, but not closed. Admittedly, this paper will also be speculative. Yet speculation, like the reiteration of dry fact, has its place in historical writing, as long, that is, as readers are let in on the ‘secret,’ and the author does not delude him or herself about what he or she is doing. Yet minus speculation, through retreat to safe positions, doors that can be – and should be – opened will remain regrettably closed.

I turn to the early eighteenth century, to the year 1723, when the noted Roman Rabbi, Tranquillo Corcos, wrote a detailed protest to papal authorities. The subject was the sale of meat.⁴ This was not the first time Corcos had represented Roman Jewry; Corcos’s centrality in communal affairs was overwhelming.

In 1705, Corcos composed a brief defending Jews charged with strangling a Jewish child in Viterbo. The usual ingredients were there, and Corcos responded in kind, not only by denial, but with claims that Jews loved Christians (he cites Abner of Burgos), for instance, by drinking Gentile wine in friendship (he cites both Buxtorfs, elder and younger, and Leon Modena). He deflects Maimonides on the passage *hatov shebagoyim harog* (kill even the best of the Goyim), and

he sustains Catholic monotheism staunchly, while calling Luther and Calvin heretics. In addition, Corcos composed a brief on why Jews attending forced sermons in Rome should not be being poked with a verger (while digesting their Sabbath *hamim*), citing Quintilian and Suetonius; he also refers to Origen and Tertullian. He wrote about Jews following their law, the *halakhah*, on inheritances, not the Hebrew Bible, as some legal experts in his day were insisting; and he defended the contents of *mezuzot* and *tefilin* as not superstitious, or idolatrous. He has read Raynaldus, the great sixteenth-century Church historian. He was at home in the ideas of Divine, Natural, and Human law, and he cites the seventeenth century jurist Pignatelli on blood libels, conversant as he was with *ius commune* and canon law, the legal foundations of the Papal State. In other words, he knew Christian tradition and teaching intimately. I highlight Corcos's polyglot citing of Christian sources that paralleled his awareness of rabbinics (not the forbidden Talmud itself); although he probably read Jacob ben Asher's *Tur* and Maimonides *Yad* directly; citing Buxtorf for safety.⁵

5. That is ben Asher's Arba'ah turim and Maimonides' Mishneh Torah. On Corcos and his works in general, see Berliner, vol. 2, part 2, 69–81; and also Sermoneta 70–72, Hebrew section. The old *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Tranquillo Corcos" has an excellent summary, and, of course, original texts (or their copies) may be seen in ASCER.

From the late 1690s and the early 1700s, Corcos was one of Rome's three leading rabbis, prominent in the council of Sixty, the deliberative body of the Roman Jewish Community, and de facto permanent head of the Talmud Torah confraternity. On various occasions, he served as a *fattore* (*memune*), one of three heads of the Community, elected on a revolving basis. He died at about age 70 in 1730. Corcos, as seen in the late Yosef Sermoneta's essay on the *Academy* Corcos founded, was perhaps the foremost, although not Rome's only scholar during the later ghetto period; studies in this academy emphasized dialectic and literary skills. Corcos's family belonged to the ghetto's upper class, taking advantage of new papal initiatives in Civitavecchia and importing spices, although it was not a major player like the Barraffaele or Pepe. Untypically, I believe, for Roman Jews, Corcos's sons married out, meaning Jewish sisters from Siena. His focus, though, was the Roman ghetto, including the brief he wrote contributing to negotiations about reducing the ghetto's dimensions in order to eliminate rents due on unoccupied apartments.

Corcos's appeal in 1723 was against a recent attempt to prohibit the sale to non-Jewish butchers of the non-kosher hindquarters of ritually slaughtered (kosher) animals – cuts of meat Jews would not eat – for resale to Christian clients: actually, partnerships between Jewish and Christian butchers, as will become clear; I reserve the details of the appeal for later. But why, of all things, did such a prohibi-

tion, which makes no logical sense, exist? Why slaughter and then waste half an animal? Is that not a mockery of attempting to slaughter in a humane fashion, or at least an attempt not just to kill and then dispose?

Seen in a vacuum, it certainly would be. However, the question of meat and its consumption (in fact, the consumption of all food handled by Jews) had raised hackles since Christianity's start.⁶ It was there already in Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1.16–21, where one cannot fail to see a mirror image of Isaiah 66:

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons, too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

The sacrifices to demons are the same as the false sacrifices offered outside the unifying Temple and spoken of by Isaiah that transmogrify into the dog, pig, and murdered human. Sacrifices themselves, moreover, as already Leviticus prescribes, must be pure, but, so too, must be the one offering them, who must consume them in purity (Lev. 7.15; 19.6; 22.30; Smith 277–89). To this we add Paul's warnings about giving in to one's carnal nature, the very carnality Christian tradition from the time of Augustine, in particular, attaches to the Jews. This is the same carnality about which Paul warns in 1 Cor. 6.15–19, against associating the body of Christ (in effect, any Christian, especially one who has taken the Eucharist) with the harlot, and the 'loose livers' with whom it is forbidden 'to dine' (1 Cor. 5.11). Ezekiel 44.7, no doubt under Isaiah's (tritero-Isaiah's) direct influence, had put it succinctly, warning against the introduction into the Temple of aliens, the uncircumcised of heart and flesh, "who pollute my house by offering the sacrifice, my bread, which is the fat and the blood; their abominations violate my covenant." The bread was that which Paul had spoken of as the "one loaf," which was all Christians,

6. The point here is that all food handled by Jews potentially contaminates, to wit, the bull *Cum nimis absurdum* of 1555, which prohibits Jews commerce in comestibles; and see Freidenreich, *passim*.

7. On Cyprian and *lapsi*, see Cyprian, “De lapsis,” treatise 3.15; English trans. in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, [online](#), and the discussion in Stow, *Jewish Dogs* 11–15, as well as pages 137–45, for Jewish responses.

8. Stow, *Jewish Dogs* 20–21 on *omnes* and *Christianorum ad aras* (with precise citations); also Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo*, 102.

9. On Victorinus and Burchard, see Stow, *Jewish Dogs* 14 and 17, as well as the citations of texts in Linder, nos. 544, 569, 576, 597, and 1163, including *Christianorum ad aras*.

10. An Iraqi woman in Israel told me that this practice was still in force in Shiite ruled areas, at least during her own youth in Iraq. She was not allowed physically to enter a grocery store, lest she touch the food and contaminate it. Rather, she passed the order in, the food was given her, and she passed in the money. The same problem of impurity created by contact exists with respect to ‘over familiarity’ (as it was termed) of any kind, especially sexual. These are the same affects spoken of by students of biophilia; see below.

11. Blumenkranz 50 n. 30 bis for Caesar of Arles. Even Augustine accuses Jews of corruption and magic. In each case, the point is that contact with Jews pollutes, the “venin mortal.”

12. On Matthew Henry, see Stow, *Jewish Dogs* 4 and 210 n. 15, referring to Henry [online](#); on Buxtorf, *Synagoga Judaica*, chap. 27, see also Stow, *Jewish Dogs* 17 and 155–56; I cite this book on various occasions for convenience; the book is both available and contains additional citations of the authors cited here, as well as many others.

united in Christ. The portrait was completed by Cyprian who spoke out against those priests who would avoid persecution by offering pagan sacrifice, then to return to officiate at a Christian altar, contaminating “the bread” and, in turn, contaminating all those who accepted the Eucharist from them, whom Cyprian terms *lapsi*.⁷ These priests, to follow Isaiah, had converted the bread, Christ himself, into dogs and pigs, animals whose sacrifice had been prohibited as far back as the Hittites.

Admonitions to preserve purity were converted into legislation. The canon *omnes* prohibits mixed dining on the grounds that it makes Jews look superior to Christians. Gathering all these points into one pithy rule, the Roman law *Christianorum ad aras* of the fourth century – which reveals how endemic these matters were to western Christian society – forbade Christians to participate in pagan and Jewish rites.⁸ Thus one did not dine with Jews. So said Victorinus Africanus in the second century, Chrysostom, in the fourth, and Burchard of Worms, in the tenth, who called on violators to cleanse themselves through fasting.⁹ To dine with the Jew, to share the Jew’s food, any food, was contaminating, evoking the punishments Isaiah promises. Maurice Kriegel has written of the idea that even the touch of food by a Jew might pollute, a rule enforced in later medieval Provence.¹⁰

The contamination was fatal; Cesar of Arles likened consuming Jewish food to ingesting poison.¹¹ Through the consumption of this tainted meat, one acquired not only the impurity of the animal’s flesh, but also the impurities inherent in the animal, if one did not (shades of Chrysostom’s Jewish dog!) become literally the animal itself. To eat Jewish meat endangered the Christian’s salvation, and not only that of the individual. In Cyprianic terms, the impurity of one was passed on to all, menacing the entire Christian corporate body. This, moreover, was the meat of the same Jews whom – to bring us back to the eighteenth century – the English Divine Matthew Henry, a contemporary of Corcos, (once more) called dogs. It was also meat that Buxtorf said Jews had their children piss on before putting it up for sale, adding active, to an already existent intrinsic contamination.¹²

Capistrano

Yet, ignoring the rules, buying and consuming non-kosher parts of

kosherly slaughtered animals is precisely what Christians habitually did. There were even those who defended the practice, like the noted fifteenth century legist Angelo di Castro as he faced a situation similar to that with which Corcos would have to contend centuries later. Possibly in Jewish employ – he would be neither the first nor the last *ius commune* legist the Jews hired – di Castro wrote to defend the sale of hindquarters. He also evoked a sharp response from the noted Franciscan Giovanni di Capistrano.

Di Castro was well aware of the rules prohibiting the purchase of Jewish meat, as well as prohibitions on partaking Jewish foods, especially Passover matzah. He also knew of Paul's warnings in Galatians about giving in to one's carnal self. Still, he insisted that to refrain from buying and consuming Jewish meat is *ridiculum*, "nonsense; [...] in fact, it is to Judaize and sin" (*sic Iudaizare et peccare*). He was privileging that aspect of Pauline teaching where, as di Castro put it, did not "the Apostle say that Christians should not discriminate concerning food?" Possibly, di Castro was thinking of (the hopeful side of) Galatians 5.1–24: "[...] if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law [...] those who belong to Christ have crucified the lower nature with its passions and desires."¹³

This verse may easily be read as a mandate to end discrimination about anything one ate. In other words, if the Christian were to deny the carnal and raise the spiritual to the sublime, this-worldly things would be meaningless, a sign of which would be to eat Jewish meat. To think to the contrary, that refraining from its consumption guaranteed purity was to acknowledge that one was still bound to his (or her) carnal nature, hence, that Christians who discriminated were placing themselves under a law no less binding than that of the Jews. Refraining meant to corrupt the physical body in a way that traduced man's higher, spiritual nature. We might say that di Castro was accusing normative Christian practice of adhering to what eventually Ludwig Feuerbach would call a Jewish "alimentary (materialistic) theology," whose meaning – carnality as central – is much as Luther accused the pope of being Esau. It also traduced the Augustinian duality of carnal Jews and Judaism standing opposed to a spiritual Christianity and Christians.¹⁴

This was a good argument, but it ignores the Pauline contradiction (of 1 Cor. 6.16–17) that to unite with a harlot makes the one who does so a carnal being; propriety lay in spiritual union alone with Christ.¹⁵ And apparently, this is what the Franciscan Giovanni di Capistrano understood, who responded passionately to di Castro,

13. Again Stow, *Jewish Dogs*, 153–55, and 279 nn. 62 and 63, for Di Castro's text, alongside Capistrano's response, which are both presented by Angiolini.

14. Feuerbach is cited extensively in Bland 25; see, too, Stow, *Jewish Dogs*, 53–54. On Augustine, see Gonzalez Salinero 81–104, esp. 94, which cites an epistle of Jerome.

15. "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.' But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit."

although his terms were traditional, as he fell back unreflectively on traditional canonical prohibitions. If, he wrote, “Jews consider the meats we handle as filthy, why should Christians eat the meat the criminal and putrid hands of Jews and other infidels treat as refuse.” We become their inferiors, Capistrano continued, and as though their slaves (subverting the Pauline order in which Jews were always subservient).

Capistrano had misconstrued di Castro’s argument. It was precisely by eating Jewish meat, di Castro was saying, “that one becomes superior” (*fatiendo non facit se inferiorem Iudeo, sed maiorem potius*) and free – declaring him or herself to be rid of the carnal law – to seek salvation in the realm of the spirit alone. Ultimately, however, it was easier for Capistrano to impugn Jewish carnality and the Jews’ alleged attempt to gain superiority rather than to confront Christian ‘carnality:’ the truth that di Castro’s argument had unmasked. It was easier to resort to what Gerhard Ladner named the *iudicio alienum* (the judgment of the other) that was so typical of the Middle Ages, to wit, to judge and impugn Jews, rather than judge one’s-self (Ladner 233–59). It was this same projection onto Jews of Christian ‘carnality’ and the fear of its effects that led Innocent III in his 1208 letter to the Count of Nevers to lump together laments about the meat Jews sold to Christians with anger at the rancid wine he said Jews were selling to Christians.¹⁶ Innocent, it is important to note, was apprehensive that the wine deemed unholy might end up in the communion chalice; it was actually the marc, which Innocent seems (erroneously) to have associated with the dregs (not the high quality sticks used for making grappa). Innocent’s additional condemnation of Jewish women buying the choicest milk fits this pattern, too. Pope Innocent may, however, have been most taken with an argument that Giovanni di Capistrano missed: namely, that sharing the food of Jews was degrading – an argument that the jurist Antonio Ricciulo was still repeating in the seventeenth century – to say that when Jews and Christians sit at a common table, deceit and corruption follow. Conviviality of all kinds when food or drink were involved was anathema.¹⁷

16. Innocent’s letter is cited in Grayzel, vol. 1, n. 24.

17. Antonio Ricciulo, chapter 46: “Ad tollendam quantum fieri potest occasionem familiaritatis inter christianos et iudaeos et ut iudaei in debitis obsequiis conteneantur, Pius IV provide constituit ut ipsi sola arte stracciarum seu cienciarum contenti aliquam mercaturam frumenti vel ordeï aut aliarum rerum usui quotidiano necessarium facere nequeant. [...] Contrahitur enim in convivii magna familiaritas et facilius quis inter epulas decipitur.” (So, there was to be no mixed dining.)

Biophilia

Yet something is missing in this picture. Though I have referred to the interchangeability of the terms animal, human, spiritual, and carnal, the terms of the argument have been essentially metaphorical, albeit

in the Pauline belief system and the Pauline construction of the world and salvation, these metaphors and the fear of contamination can be exceedingly powerful. Yet to my mind, they are insufficiently powerful to get us to the verge of the near hysteria visible in rants like that of Giovanni di Capistrano about not consuming meat the Jews refuse, meat that comes from an animal the Jews themselves consider clean, and, furthermore, whose hindquarters could be made kosher by removing the sciatic nerve. We need something more concrete, or at least a mental process that reifies the metaphorical.

Let us turn to the story told by Marjorie Agosín, of a game where children encircle one of their mates and chant questioningly *Quien robò el pane del horno* (“who has stolen the bread from the oven”), to which they respond *El perro judío* (“the Jewish dog”), which they then strike.¹⁸ This is patently a host libel. Yet the dog the children playing the game imagine (I am told this game is still played in Chile) is a real one, of flesh and blood, not a metaphoric stand-in for a Jew. Otherwise, the game makes no sense. Nonetheless, what has occurred here is an interchangeability. We see the reciprocity, the commensurability, of the human and the dog in at least potentially concrete terms.¹⁹

Let us suppose, then, that the dog attacking the Eucharist in this ‘game’ is perceived in the way people perceive and relate to dogs and other animals in reality. This supposition is not my convenient invention. The interaction of people and animals has been studied intensively by Edward O. Wilson and others under the name of biophilia. The founder of this field, Edward O. Wilson, is the world’s leading authority on the study of ants. But the study of biophilia is more than biology. It ranges into what looks like biological psychology or certainly anthropology. Biophilia, furthermore, and as I see it, has an historical dimension in that it seeks to relate the interactions it charts to real historical phenomena. And, beyond that, it makes use of the very texts brought in evidence above. Just as Isaiah pictures the wrongly sacrificed lamb as a beheaded dog, a specifically animal comparison, biophilia asks how one relates humans – and reciprocally, how humans are related – to other animals.

We must, of course, take care in borrowing from a field so definitionally distinct from the normal landscape of historical research. Some would see biophilia in strictly biological and non-anthropological, transactional, let alone historical terms. My own limited reading in this field leads me, as just indicated, to a different conclusion. Biophilia is a field from which historians may gingerly borrow, if only

18. Agosín’s mention of this game is found in Agosín and Sepúlveda 13. See also Stow, *Jewish Dogs* 3.

19. Recent discussions relating humans and animals, as well as Jews and animals, may be found in the work of Alexandra Cuffel, who, with great detail, emphasizes the polemical use of animal metaphors, especially to cast Jews as disgusting, or filthy. She mentions, too, impurity, but not in the terms in which the idea is cast here. She borrows from Epstein; and here, too, we note, Kogman-Appel, and the many essays in Burns and McCracken, where we see that interchangeability between humans and animals can be complex and not always pejorative.

20. Edward O. Wilson is also recognized a proponent of the much debated field of sociobiology, the study of the genetic basis of the social behavior of animals, including humans; see Wilson 249.

21. Houston 199. Jews have the extra problem in that the pig is tempting, since it is half-kosher, as Deut. 14 itself indicates in forbidding the animal. It has a cloven hoof, but does not ruminate, both of which are required.

22. Of course, it can go in the other direction, too, as one reads in the paper of David Shyovitz in this collection about Jews who say dogs are good; and I think of the dog who brings bread to San Roque.

23. Guillelmus Armoricus's writings are found in Bouquet 17:66; and for more on William, see Stow, *Jewish Dogs* 84–86.

because it is not as completely divorced as some would argue from non-biological human activity. Rather, anthropology, epistemology, and even history come into its ken. Thus Wilson, in his classic essay “Biophilia and the Conservation Ethic,” speaks of nature that is “mediated by rules of prepared and counter prepared *learning* – the tendency to learn or to resist learning certain responses.” “Biophilia,” he continues, “is a complex of learning rules and feelings molded (by these rules) from attraction to aversion and [...] anxiety.” Yet biophilia is also, if not predominantly, “the innately emotional *affiliation* of human beings to other living *organisms*. Innate means hereditary and hence part of ultimate human nature.”²⁰ In other words, what one generation does, a later one will, too – and vice versa. This means that what becomes an affect carries on, neither simply, but going beyond what is *learned*.

In a collection of essays, edited by Wilson and Stephen Kellert, Kellert writes that this kind of interaction extends to inanimate nature, not only animals. Affiliation means true identification, true interchangeability of characteristics between human and animal, but also between animals and humans, each one possessing the qualities of the other, *as though* the possession were real, if not *truly* real. In this same volume, Walter Houston carries these perceptions back to the Ancient Near East – my point of (Hittite) departure, where, as a whole, dogs and pigs pollute and are not used sacrificially. Even later Christians describe the pig negatively.²¹ The dog or pig, Houston writes, is the enemy, the animal a model of human degradation.²² The dog especially symbolizes impurity. As Houston describes it, the dog is also the animal on which people take out their rage. Yet, extrapolating from Houston, what if that rage is anagogically and allegorically transferred to humans, attributing them with canine qualities?

This, writes Aviva Cantor, in another context, is what the Nazi's did, who made laws protecting animals, but then transferred the anger that is so commonly taken out on dogs and similar household animals to Jews (Cantor 95–113). That transfer would occur also with the meat the ‘other’ ate, but also the meat the other would *not* eat. Impure and inferior become identical – think of the aforementioned canon *omnes*; but think, too, of the chronicler William the Breton, who writes that Philip Augustus believed the Jews “sacrificed and consumed” the heart of a Christian child.²³ The fear for – and of – the Eucharist and its powers, since it is that which is imagined here, has been transferred onto the Jew, a fear that is perhaps most obvious in host libels. For these libels bespeak both reversal and counter-

transference: to wit, blaming the other for corruption, when it is really the one levelling the blame who is corrupt. Here again, one sees the ascription of failings or anxieties onto another, who is then accused of propagating these negative qualities him or herself.

In a biophilic context, the propensity for such predatory, animalistic behavior would be considered integral to Jewish nature, transmitted over the generations. Likewise, the tendency to perceive the Jew in this way would be reinforced by concepts of reciprocity. Paul Shepard writes that we relate emotions (read: anxieties) to animals; dove, spiritual, wolf, aggressive – pig and dog, filth (Shepard). The animals represent what is obscure to the conscious self. How easily, then, could, and was, the process reversed, with fears for Eucharistic purity tied to the filth of the Jewish dog?

In this world of human-animal interchange, moreover, the impure is balanced by the pure, for notable example, the purity associated with the bee. Bees, writes Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, are said to be endowed with wisdom and sensitivity, and they are sometimes viewed and treated as surrogates for the Holy Trinity, if not Christ himself (Atwood Lawrence). As a sign of veneration, only a person of physical and spiritual purity, dressed in clean clothing, may approach the hive. The bee is pictured as our better, if not perfected, selves; hence, bees are bestowed with human qualities and to be approached as such. The bee is also viewed as part of a community, reminding us of Paul's *unus panis*, a community in which all labor together for the *communis utilitas*, the *res publica*. Interlopers must be destroyed.

Those interlopers are the dogs, but also pigs, who, by contrast (to bees), Lawrence writes, are “repositories for our own fears of ourselves and the animal within us.” In this vein, Lynn White suggests that butchering pigs is symbolic of human mastery over nature,²⁴ an act which Lawrence, as Houston, describes as counter transference (Lawrence 301). She adds that the more vehement their feelings, the more surely do people articulate them in animal terms... (which she names) cognitive biophilia, and, in this context, she evokes Levi-Strauss, who views animals as symbolizing human desires. The Christ-like bee, living in the community of Christians, is purity, whereas the pig is foul, the product of wrongful sacrifice, as in Isaiah.

Such constructions are not novel. The legist and judge of the Jews in Turin in the early eighteenth century, Giuseppe Sessa suggests the famous Jewish odor may come from the onions (*coepis*) and garlic

24. Citing White, esp. 1205.

Jews eat or from their life style and sedentary work, which makes them sweat profusely (Sessa 130). No animal is mentioned, but – within the terms of biophilic thinking – the clear allusion to the filth of dogs and pigs, but also the incestuous dog, seems obvious. The ideological visualization of Jewish carnality and its threat to Christian purity blends, or at least is superimposed, over a structured perception of reality in the animal world.

Lorenzo Virgulti, a convert to Catholicism and an almost exact contemporary of Tranquillo Corcos, did not hold back. For him, Jews and pigs were transposable – serpents, too – a figure he also associated with blood and its consumption, or the Jewish total prohibition of doing this. The pig symbolizes as well Jewish carnality. The Jews, Virgulti insists, are gluttonous with permitted foods, which, he suggests, is to compensate for foods that are forbidden,²⁵ an idea that makes us wonder – for the sake of contrast – whether in the Jewish mind, pork consumption is a badge of impurity. Thus Jews and Christians debated each other ferociously about respective purity.²⁶ Through constant inversion of Christian motifs, Jews denominated themselves pure, Christians contaminated (by their idolatrous ritual). *Sefer Yosef HaMekaneh*, skillfully using a passage in Matthew, calls the Eucharist human waste.

25. Virgulti chap. 9, as in n. 3, above.

26. *Sefer Joseph HaMekaneh*. The struggle over purity is the overall theme of Stow, *Jewish Dogs*, stated explicitly on page 153.

Slaughter

I would like to transfer these biophilic ideas to the contemporary problem of animal slaughter, to ask whether in biophilic terms, the Jewish sale of non-kosher quarters of beef may become an existential threat in the sense of the poison referred to by Caesar of Arles. Through such sales did not the purportedly and innately animalistic Jew seek to corrupt Christian purity, an action that is commensurable with Augustine's admonition warning spiritual Christians to avoid carnal Jews?²⁷ What is more, because kosher or halal meat involves ritual (invoking Allah or a blessing that God has commanded us *lish-hot*), does this not make the non-Jew, in the spirit of Isaiah, a participant in stigmatized Jewish rites through the medium of the meat to be consumed?

There are further twists related to rage and its outlets. When the Nazis pressed those they ruled to transfer rage otherwise taken out on animals to humans and then to reify this transfer by likening humans to dogs and pigs, was it not consequential that the same peo-

27. The carnal Jews versus the spiritual Christian is the theme of Augustine's late tract *Adversus Judaeos*, available in various editions and translations.

ple (expressing, transferring, and projecting their rage) would find special fault with the way the object of their projection – now branded as a legitimate target of violence – treated animals? This includes with the way these ‘objects’ slaughtered living creatures for meat. In the same vein, might not Christians (like Capistrano) expressing rage see the attempt of the Jewish objects of their rage passing on to them (the Christians) what they themselves refuse (non-kosher meat, or even non-kosher cuts) as a modus of contamination? Might this attempt not also be seen as a ploy on the part of the Jewish objects of rage to incorporate the enraged Christians into their own (purportedly) filthy and contaminated animalistic communal body (the antithesis of the purportedly pure Christian one)?

Phrased in concrete terms, might not a fear of contamination lurk behind otherwise apparently justifiable attempts by modern bodies – notably various European nations, and especially those of the European Union – to protect animals about to be slaughtered for meat from cruelty? We must beware of labelling these initiatives ‘anti-Jewish’ or ‘anti-Semitic,’ undertaken deliberately to restrain Jews. But there is an underlying anxiety on the part of at least some of those seeking limitations, which – as the anxiety is expressed – connects the present questioning of Jewish and, now, Muslim slaughter to past (religious) teachings. We need but look at statements made with reference to the anti-*shehitah* laws that have existed and aroused Jewish displeasure in Sweden since 1937, laws that were renewed in 1988.²⁸ In the words of one of the commissioners in charge of implementing the 1937 law, he said:

In my opinion, one should [...] as far as possible, show consideration [for] the Mosaic believers [Jews] in the country [...] On the other hand, it is in my opinion obvious that the interest of avoiding a disruption in a numerically few citizens’ religious practices [...] cannot outweigh the ethical interest which is born by a heavy majority of the population and which demands that animals are protected against unnecessary suffering, as well as the interest of eliminating a method of slaughter that in wide circles is perceived as offensive and shocking.

Even more than “ethical interest,” then, it is the so-called “offensive and shocking” that motivates these laws’ proponents. I cannot unpack the meanings of “offensive and shocking” for Sweden, but a

28. See Hofverberg, who summarizes legislation from 1937 through 1988; the long citation is found on page 5. See also Alwall 157.

29. Mark Mullins on Nicky Cambell's *The Big Question*, April 29, 2012, titled: *Should Halal and Kosher Meat Be Labelled?* With respect to the question of stunning itself, opinions differ enormously, for instance, that of Rabbi Dr. Riccardo di Segni about to be mentioned in the text.

clear indication comes from a BBC program aired on April 29, 2012, featuring a live debate among about twenty participants. The debate does not distinguish halal from kosher (most of the time), nor is kashrut unintended collateral damage of a desire to repress Muslims. Nonetheless, in the clearest of tones, the noted barrister Mark Mullins, demands that all meat slaughtered without stunning should be plainly marked. However, what perturbs him, he says, is not humane slaughter, rather, that he does not wish to partake of meat blessed in the name of 'another God.' That he might do so, even unknowingly, is a source of fear.²⁹

To complicate the argument is the fact that the question of which mode of slaughter causes less suffering is fraught. Whether slaughtered by having its throat cut or by first having it rendered unconscious, animals are aware of impending trauma. Nor – in the words of Dr. Riccardo di Segni, the Chief Rabbi of Rome, but also a distinguished radiologist, hence, a physician of great experience, not a religious source alone – is stunning painless. Electroshock, he points out, is not always perfect; gas (used to slaughter pigs) creates enormous stress-damage to the respiratory system. A third method, a pistol with a retractable bullet, works most imperfectly. By contrast: "*shehitah* with a razor sharp blade, long enough to make the single cut, using no pressure whatsoever, guarantees minimal pain." It is much, di Segni says, like anesthesia, that the rapid loss of blood leads to an instant drop in pressure and unconsciousness. The studies that argue the advantage of stunning are not at all accurate.

At the same time, Di Segni (following Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi of Britain) says that apart from all this – arguments raised to salve the conscience – *shehitah* is a ritual practiced for centuries. To ask Jews to give it up is tantamount to attacking Judaism itself. And he notes that the same forces attacking *shehitah* are those attacking circumcision (Di Segni 157–66). Di Segni thus has gone to the point that is our point. However one scientifically judges (or justifies) *shehitah*, it is outlooks like those in the BBC video, not supposedly humanitarian ones, that he perceives as determinate, and against which he defends by insisting on the right of Jews (and Muslims) to their mode of *shehitah*. We might say he is asking whether – and expressed in Pauline terms in the Epistle to the Romans (chapter 9) that "the elder shall serve the younger," *rav ya-avod tsa'ir* – the Jewish "body" is to be controlled (by laws in restraint of ritual slaughter) and thus made submissive to the Christian one – and, in the words of those like Mark Mullins, in order to preserve the latter from

defilement. To go one step further, is not the attempt to reign in Jewish *shehitah* akin (at least metaphorically) to reigning in what is perceived as a Jewish carnal sacrifice, an unwanted offering that may end up on the Christian table, polluting the diner and perhaps transferring to unwitting Christians, along with impurity, the Jewish (carnal) nature: thus to infect the bee-like purity of its Christian counterpart.

However preposterously, the Christian by eating *taref* becomes a part of the Jewish intestine. This is a true inversion if ever there was one, which is what gave/gives Christians their fears. And in this context, we should not neglect the insistence of the former pope Benedict XVI, who wanted the word Christian to be added to a proposed European constitution as defining that body's identity and nature. Likewise, in 1946, Pius XII demanded that the European states put marriage under exclusive Church supervision.³⁰

30. Pope Benedict's stance is well known. For Pius XII, see Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo* 83.

I would not speculate so boldly about the implications of laws in restraint of *shehitah* were it not for the decree of Pius VI in 1775, *Fra le pastorali sollecitudini*. This bull renews with a vengeance every piece of legislation intended to keep Jews and Christians separate. It prohibits Christian laundry women from removing clothes from the ghetto for cleansing – the ghetto water supply was insufficient – and it prohibits Christian carters from removing refuse, both of which had been common practice.³¹ Their absence, the Jews protested, would lead to plague throughout the city. Equally disturbing, licenses were no longer going to be given to Christian wet nurses; a profession, the Jews argued, that Jewish women did not practice, since they normally nursed their own (Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo* 97–98).

31. Water and the maintenance of its sources was of great concern, to wit, the ten page long contract made by Tranquillo Corcos, representing the Jewish Community, with two Christian plumbers to keep the water flowing, including emergency repairs to the fountains known as the Acqua Paola and Trevi; ASCER, 1Ta, 1 inf. 8, a single bound volume.

The core clauses of the bull were harsher yet, in which new rules were laid down legitimizing the virtual kidnapping of children in order to effect their baptism. Everything else in the text was ancillary to this goal. The bull had been originally formulated in 1733, then issued, but never fully carried out, in 1751. Now, from 1775, it would be rigorously enforced (Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo* 82, 97).

It should be no surprise that as part of the bull's attempt to repress Jewish life to the point that as many Jews as possible desert their religion – conversion, after all, being the ultimate strategy (by way of eliminating Jews entirely) for halting Jewish contamination – Christian butchers were ordered not to traffic in non-kosher portions of meat that had been slaughtered by *shehitah*. A Jewish protest of 1751, perhaps in response to the formulation of *Fra le pastorali* of that

32. ASCER, 1Sf, 1 inf. 7, fasc. 01, 1754, with marginal approval in pen in 1755.

33. ASCER, 1Tf, 2 inf. 2, fasc. 03, 1751. And there had been a previous attempt in 1723, which is when Corcos wrote his memorial.

34. *Minute Book of the Roman Jewish Community*, ASCER, for 1787, entry for 18 August.

35. Even more, both sides could see that the more civil law (*ius commune*) inserted the Jews into the regular mechanisms of the state, as it was indeed doing, the more untenable the contradiction became between civil privilege and canonical restriction. This was also incompatible with newer political ideas that were poised to question the idea of the confessional state and were redefining the nature of citizenship. Sooner or later, that contradiction would have to give way. The ghetto experience had demonstrated to both Jews and many Christians that the source of their, the Jews', problem was not repression, nor constantly applied conversionary pressure, but what that pressure symbolized, namely, the Jews' permanent exclusion from full membership in society. And just because of the Jews' 'civil absorption' kept widening as the state's operations modernized, that exclusion, based on confessional-spiritual priorities, was becoming ever more intolerable. The 1558 definition of Marquardus de Susannis focuses the issue. For de Susannis, in his *De Iudaeis*, full citizenship was acquired by *regeneration* in the baptismal font. Yet the modernizing state (I am highly syncopating) was more and more insistent on equal law for all, excluding religious criteria. The only, and obvious, way to eliminate this inherent contradiction was by reformulating the concept of 'regeneration' and giving it a civil definition; on which, see Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo*, *passim*.

year, had argued that the prohibitions on the sale of meat would make Jewish meat consumption virtually impossible. Kosher meat would become too expensive, precisely as Riccardo di Segni also points out, since only about 30% of the kosher slaughtered animal is eaten. Without the sale of the rest, prices would skyrocket.

And it seems that the 1751 protest prevailed. A text of 1754 presents, in Latin, a judicial decision favoring the Jewish petition.³² What happened in 1775, when *Fra le pastorali* was formally issued, I do not know. But I think one can make a good guess.³³ The Jewish Community's minute book for August 1787 reports that meat prices had gone way up, to the point that there was a black market that weighed heavily on the poor.³⁴

Corcos on Meat

Let us return to Tranquillo Corcos, who, we have said, had to deal with an earlier episode of the prohibition in 1723. Corcos was a contemporary of Lorenzo Virgulti, who likely knew Virgulti both before and after the latter converted, and who likely also knew Virgulti's words about Jews, pigs, and serpents; he certainly knew their spirit. However, it was the practical that Corcos emphasized, as he composed his appeal as part of his involvement in the so often frustrating daily operation of the community – an involvement that, as mentioned above, had on many occasions led him to invoke both *ius commune* and the canons (not only rabbinics or their Christian exponents) in defense of Jewish rights. The *ius commune*, he knew, denominated Jews *cives*, citizens with full *civil* rights; on this status Christian legists universally concurred. Discrimination was limited to religious matters.³⁵ And was not the sale of meat, in Rome, any meat, a purely civil, commercial process? In the event, Corcos now argued, recent developments challenged a long-existing status quo, regardless of Christian theology.

Jews, he wrote, had always been authorized to sell to non-kosher hindquarters to Christian butchers. They were, he went on, given license to do so as far back as the time of Sixtus V (5 October 1586), who personally authorized the practice. Moreover, Christian butchers have the advantage that they buy this meat without having to deal with the forequarters that the Jews take – an opinion Pope Sixtus apparently shared, who himself added that: "this is advantageous to

36. Corcos, ASCER, 1Qa, 1 inf. 1, fasc. 06, cited above, n. 4, cites Pope Sixtus V: “che non reca niun pregiudizio a Cristiani, anzi li torna in beneficio et utile: E similmente possino fare con Cristiani partiti et haver pratiche, familiarità, et amicizie con essi etc., valendosi delle mestieri, ufficii, esercitii, et manualità di Cristiani con pagare le loro oneste, e debiti mercedi, e particolarmente di Macellari Cristiani, quali siano tenuti dargli la Carne secondo si usa in Ancona, et altri luoghi al presso che pagano li Cristiani” (Corcos summarizes: “ma ancora ordino che fossero tenuti a dargli la carne, e che non potesso alterargli il prezzo di quello la vendono a Cristiani [...]”).

37. Various texts discuss the *polpina*, among which ASCER, 1Gb, 1 inf. 2, fasc. 03 and 08, “di valersi di essigere dui quatrini per libra, che l’assegnò per dote del Monte Sanità del Popolo Romano [in other words, it is a tax that the Jews collect to go to pay off debts]. Ni possino servire etiam di Macellari Cristiani.”

38. ASCER, 1Gb, 1 inf. 2, fasc. 03, and 1Gc 1 inf. 2, fasc. 02, “la concessione privative del Macello a due Macellari Cristiani,” 24 agosto, 1720. Also 1Sf, 1 inf. 7, fasc. 01.

the Christians, who can work with the Jews, even in *amicizie*” (he probably means ‘without frictions’). The price of the meat, moreover, was to remain equal for both Christians and Jews. Pope Sixtus’s bull, Corcos added, is recorded (and repeated) annually in the Statutes of the Butchers of Rome, chapter 18.³⁶

Sixtus V, Corcos continued, was echoed by Clement VIII, on 15 October 1595, who allowed the Jews to collect two *quatrini* a pound (a levy known as the *propina*), which the Jews would then reassign to the Monte Sanità; *monti* being the rough equivalents of today’s governmental bonds.³⁷ On 24 September 1613, Paul V confirmed these decrees, then Urban VIII, who added an additional *quatrino*, this time to pay off obligations to the Monte Sale, to be followed by Innocent X, on 7 September 1647, for debts to the Monte Annona. On 24 August 1720, Innocent XII assigned the *quatrini* to the Monte San Pietro, including a special license to two specifically designated Christian butchers.³⁸

Reality backed up both Corcos *and* the papal decrees. The new prohibition he was protesting threatened to upend a practice that had been formalized for generations. A series of documents from no later than 1660 regulates the activities of Christian butchers working hand in hand with Jewish ritual slaughterers (all denoted rabbis) both inside – and outside – the ghetto. The texts specify in great detail how the Rabbis do the slaughtering (*sciattare*; in Judeo-Roman, and used in papal texts as well), aided by Jewish *garzoni*, who purge the meat according to Jewish law. The butcher, always a Christian – we know many by name – did the heavy lifting, including removing the meat for sale to Christians from the ghetto; for instance, as one butcher explained, to his stall in the Campo di Fiore. Eventually, even the draconian legislation of Pius VI, which, as suggested, seems to have been put into practice for some time, gave way. Licenses to Christian butchers to set up shop in the ghetto in cooperation with the Jewish Community were being issued as late as 1837, whose texts repeat almost verbatim the same formula that appears in their mid-seventeenth century predecessors, including the price the slaughterer was to receive for each animal butchered (ASCER, 1Gb, 1 inf. 2, fasc. 08).

The crisis of 1723

As for the crisis that prompted the written protest of Tranquillo Corcos in 1723, it was provoked by the Cardinal Camerlengo, who, antic-

39. ASCER, 1Qa, 1 inf. 1, fasc. o6: “Ne puo ostare una supposta prohibitione fatta dalla bona memoria del Signor Cardinal Spinola San Cesareo cammerlengo [...] che li quarti di dietro degli animali macellati per il Ghetto non si potessero portare ne macelli di fuori del ghetto, mentro può sentirsi da Monsgr. Illus.o e Rever.mo Marasoschi Uditore di Nostro Signore et a’ hora uditore di [the permit is so the Jews can pay back major debts to the Camera] detto eminentissimo cammerlengo, che subito che furono sentire l’allegate ragioni di detta Università fu rievocata detta prohibitione, come lo dimostra la continua pratica. Venendo hora preteso da Monsr. Ill.o e Rev.mo Presidente della Grascia di rimuovere questo inveterato stile, praticato per il corso di cento cinquanta e più anni roborato e coadiuvato da tante concessioni e Costituzione Apostoliche, e ultimamente risoluto dalla Sagra Congregazione del Sant’offitio per gl’ebrei di Ferrara li 15 luglio 1722 [to sell hind quarters. However, now, with the order of the Presidente, we cannot pay our debts to the Monte].”

40. ASCER, 1Qa, 1 inf. 1, fasc. o6: “che si v’è obligato di macellare l’agnelli e vaccini che bisogneranno per il Ghetto per il corrente anno, in conformità di un foglio concordato con Msagr. Il.mo Presidente, [...] havendo poi detto Msgr ristretto al deto Macellaro di non potersi portare detti quarti di dietro nel suo Macello, anzi obligatolo a dover aprir un macello vicini a Ponte quattro capi per vendenere solamente detti quarti di dietro [in the past, the butcher sold the meat] nel suo macello che tiene aperto in Campo di Fiore, come sempre si è praticato [now people do not have meat, including the sick]. Pietro Manieri Govr della Grascia si fece intendere che non poteva il medesimo in pregiudizio della RCA e della Dogana tener’ un macello aperto senza macellarci, oltre che l’istesso macellaro già si lagnava non poter resistere alla spesa che li portava [the butchery under these conditions].”

ipating, as it were, Pius VI, blocked Christian butchers from taking hind-quarters to butcheries outside the ghetto, but who then backed down when the Jewish Community reacted. Matters went back to normal – until, that is, the President of the Grascia, the powerful, clerical head of all matters concerning food, decided to put spokes in the wheels. He disregarded not only the Camerlengo, but also an act of the Holy Office in Ferrara from 15 July 1722, which assented to the transport of non-kosher meat to external butcheries. Corcos recounts this sequence of events in detail, as well as commenting that the decree of the President of the Grascia’s has made it impossible to pay (communal debts to) the *monti*.³⁹

This decree, he writes, has brought a complete halt to the slaughter and the consumption of meat. It has gone on for weeks, indeed, affecting the collections of the Apostolic Chamber, which supervises the *monti*. Absent the four *quatrini* assessment on each pound of meat sold, the Community, too, has suffered the loss of about 100 scudi in capital. When, moreover, through a partial compromise, a Christian butcher agreed to sell the non-kosher meat in a stall right outside the ghetto, not at his usual place of business in the Campo di Fiore (700 meters away), the expense became too great for him to continue, with the result that there is no meat in the ghetto, even for the ill and infirm.⁴⁰

Corcos submitted his petition on 23 May 1723, and we must assume that things were restored to the status quo ante. Indeed, Corcos represented the Roman Jewish Community’s application for a butchery license that was issued that very year (ASCER, 1GB, 1 inf. 2, fasc. o8). Calm had returned, but only until the next crisis, apparently that of 1751, to be followed by the long term trials in the wake of *Fra le pastorali*. There was clearly a seesaw of priorities, theology balanced against the pragmatic. For much of the time, the perspective of the late Paolo Prodi holds true. When faced with a choice between theology and the concrete good of the state, the latter took precedence (Prodi). Yet only up to a point. As the bull of 1775 testifies, with the Church believing itself to be ever more threatened by the forces of the Enlightenment and modernity, it was, as I have argued elsewhere, theology and the canons that reigned supreme (see Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo, passim*).

Pragmatic exigencies, specifically, the need for meat in the ghetto, did lead to a restoration of the old policy, as witnessed by the renewed butchery licenses of the 1830s; we do not know how long the deprivations of the late eighteenth century lasted, which were surely

overturned during the time of Napoleonic rule. Nonetheless, however much restrictions were eased, the advantages gained were overshadowed by a pyrrhic victory of theological drives. For it was by insisting on doctrinal supremacy that in 1858, and as he (mis)handled the Mortara case, Pius IX brought about the dissolution of the Papal State (Kertzer). This was the same Pius IX, who, in 1871, with the ghetto walls razed, commented that daily we see the Jews *latrare per le vie* (Stow, *Jewish Dogs* 50). The Jews were dogs; the ghetto itself had been a kennel. Jewish ‘over-familiarity,’ to use the term invoked by Antonio Ricciulo among many others,⁴¹ contaminated. Jewish meat, like the Jews themselves, contaminated absolutely (Grayzel 1989 22, 149).

41. Ricciulo, *Tractatus de iure personarum extra ecclesiae gremium existentium*; Chap XLVI: “Ad tollendam quantum fieri potest occasionem familiaritatis inter christianos et iudaeos.”

Which path the states of Europe will follow in the matter of *shehitah*, of the pragmatic one the early modern popes, or the theologically anchored one of the later eighteenth century pontiffs, we shall have to wait to see. Certainly from the Jewish perspective, and as made clear in the BBC debate, the path of marking meat slaughtered without stunning would be tantamount to declaring war on kosher slaughtering. On the possible underlying motives, the continuities, and potential anxieties, I hope this essay has shed some informative light.

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