

Unexpected Modifications? Perceptions of Animals and Their Visual Images in the *Hortus Sanitatis*¹

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The first edition of the natural history encyclopedia *Hortus Sanitatis*² was published in Latin by Jakob Meydenbach at Mainz in 1491. The publisher was inspired by the very successful editions of an herbal in Latin and the vernacular called *Herbarius Moguntinus* and *Gart der gesuntheit* a few years before.³ The *Hortus Sanitatis* of 1491 became much bigger than the herbal. It consists of 1073 illustrations, 530 chapters on plants, 163 on animals living on land, 122 on birds, 106 on fish, and 144 on stones and minerals. It was, thus, as Noel Hudson already stated in 1954, “a vast compilation, a stupendous effort to collate biological knowledge and medical science ...”⁴ Jakob Meydenbach, the publisher, himself saw it as an *opus preclarissimum (ac) laudatissimum*, although it was not as successful as he might have expected.

Like the herbal, the *Hortus Sanitatis* also went through various editions which became more successful than the first one; between 1497 and 1499 the second, third, and fourth were issued at Strasbourg, and an edition in Venice in 1511. Five editions of the encyclopedia in German followed (Strasbourg: Beck) between 1515 and 1530. Around 1500, a French edition was published in Paris.

¹ This contribution is based on a paper presented at the conference “(Un)Expected Animals in (Un)Expected Places” (University of Louisville, Kentucky, May 2014).

² For the following general remarks in regard to the *Hortus Sanitatis* see Gundolf Keil, “Hortus Sanitatis,” in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, vol. 4 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1983), coll. 154-64; idem, “Gart der Gesundheit,” in *ibidem*, vol. 2 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1980), coll. 1072-92.

³ See Brigitte and Helmut Baumann, *Die Mainzer Kräuterbuch-Inkunabeln – „Herbarius Moguntinus“ (1484) – „Gart der Gesundheit“ (1485) – „Hortus Sanitatis“ (1491). Wissenschaftshistorische Untersuchung der drei Prototypen botanisch-medizinischer Literatur des Spätmittelalters* (Stuttgart: Hierseemann, 2010).

⁴ Noel Hudson, *An Early English Version of Hortus Sanitatis: a Recent Bibliographical Discovery* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1954), vii.

In 1520/21 the animal part of the *Hortus* was used for a Dutch and an English edition, both printed at Antwerp (*Der dieren palleyes* and *The Noble Lyfe ...*).⁵

The conception of the work follows a connection between the traditional general encyclopedic interpretation of nature and practical medical knowledge.⁶ Each plant, animal, and stone is illustrated and described based on ancient and Christian authorities, most often followed by a description of the medical effects, that is, *operations* in the Latin editions, *würckung* in the German ones, or *operation* in the English one.

What I would like to concentrate on here are mainly the illustrations of the animals and any surviving traces of the reception of these illustrations that can be recognized in textual and visual notes added by readers of the volumes. For my analysis, I went through a sample of about thirty surviving Latin and German volumes of the *Hortus*. Readers left comments in about one third of them.

The illustrations themselves followed more or less the example of bestiaries and applied similar methods as in the visual representation of objects, towns, nature, and so on in this period. While well-known objects are often represented following their actual appearance in a rather recognizable way for our modern understanding, those which were unknown or less known were depicted in either a formulaic or stereotypical manner following a type based on textual descriptions. However, I consider it dangerous or even illegitimate to speak of ‘correct’ and ‘wrong’ visual representations or ‘realistic’ and ‘fantastic’ ones; this would be too great an attempt to merge our twenty-first-century understanding of reality and non-reality with the different understandings and perceptions of the fifteenth and sixteenth century.⁷ Just recently this problem was nicely referred to in the catalogue of a large exhibition on animals in the past presented by the Swiss National Museum in Zurich:⁸ “The world of

⁵ *Der Dieren Paleys* (Antwerp: Jan van Doesborgh, 1520); *The Noble Lyfe & Natures of Men of Bestes Serpentys Fowles & Fisshes* (Antwerp: Jan van Doesborgh, 1521). See Hudson, *An English Version*; L.A.J.R. Houwen, “*The Noble Lyfe*: An Early English Version of the *Hortus Sanitatis*,” in *Schooling and Society: The Ordering and Reordering of Knowledge in the Western Middle Ages*, ed. Alasdair A. MacDonald and Michael W. Twomey (Leuven et al.: Peeters, 2004), 62-71.

⁶ Christel Meier-Staubach, “Der ‘Hortus Sanitatis’ als enzyklopädisches Buch. Zur Pragmatisierung traditionellen Wissens und ihrer Realisierung in der Illustration,” in *Alles was Recht war. Rechtsliteratur und literarisches Recht. Festschrift für Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Hans Höfinghoff et al. (Essen: Item-Verlag, 1996), 191-92.

⁷ Cf., e.g., the problematic discussion on “wrong” (“falsch”) and “realistic” (“wirklichkeitsnah”) medieval visual representations of animals in Dominic Olariu, “Miniaturinsekten und bunte Vögel. Naturbeobachtung und Tierdarstellungen in Manuskripten des 13. Jahrhunderts,” in *Similitudo. Konzepte der Ähnlichkeit in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Martin Gaier et al. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2012), 59-76.

⁸ Luca Tori and Aline Steinbrecher, “Zwischen Fiktion und Realität. Zu Tieren und Fabelwesen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit,” in *Animali: Tiere und Fabelwesen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit. Eine Ausstellung des Schweizerischen Nationalmuseums im Landesmuseum Zürich*, ed. iidem (Geneva and Milan: Skira, 2012), 14 (my translation).

imagination of the pre-modern period merged and mixed the differently conceptualized levels of being of the modern world so that animals, humans and composite beings were equally thinkable and presentable as living species.”

The depictions of the *Onocentaurus* and *Orasius* (fig. 1),⁹ here taken from a German edition of the *Hortus Sanitatis* from 1529, follow the verbal description, based, in the case of the *Onocentaurus*, on the ‘Book of Nature’ of Thomas of Cantimpré: “it is a strange and wondrous animal of twofold shape, the head like an ass and the body like a human.” The *Orasius* or *Orafflus*, following Albert the Great, has “a long neck, a horse’s head, is twenty ells high in the front, multi-colored, with more red and white.” This is clearly the description of a giraffe, which the depiction follows only to some extent.



Fig. 1: *Onocentaurus* and *Orasius*

⁹ Gart der Gesuntheit zũ Latin Ortus Sanitatis von allerley Tieren, Vöglen, Vischen oder Mörwundern und edlem Gstein ... (Strasbourg: Balthasar Beck, 1529), Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Düsseldorf:
[http://digital.ub.uni-duesseldorf.de/download/pdf/1402363?name=Gart der gesuntheit](http://digital.ub.uni-duesseldorf.de/download/pdf/1402363?name=Gart%20der%20gesuntheit) (last access December 2015), *Von den Thieren*, chapter 107.

The picture shows some signs of sixteenth- or seventeenth-century reception of the image – two kinds of crosses – which, however, do not suggest any particular meaning. This is not true for other kinds of scribbles or notes that one can find in the surviving volumes, which originate mainly from monastic space. In the Latin editions one sometimes comes across translations into the vernacular as, for instance, in a volume of the 1499 edition of the *Hortus* from the Lower Austrian Benedictine monastery of Göttweig; for *ciconia*, for instance, the stork, the reader added the German translation: *ein storch* (fig. 2).¹⁰ A similar example also shows that volumes printed in Germany found their way to the British Isles. One of them, kept today in Glasgow, contains a number of translations in a seventeenth-century hand, like the *bistrix* receiving the caption *the porkopyne* (fig. 3).¹¹



Fig. 2: *Ciconia* – *Ein storch*

¹⁰ *Hortus Sanitatis* (Strasbourg: Johannes Prüss, 1499), Krems (Lower Austria), Institut für Realienkunde of the University of Salzburg (from the Benedictine house of Göttweig), *De animalibus*, chapter 27.

¹¹ *Hortus Sanitatis* (Strasbourg: Johannes Prüss, 1497) Glasgow, University Library, Sp Coll Bm4-e.2: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/uofglibrary/7655465804/in/photostream/> (last access December 2015), *De animalibus*, chapter 73.



Fig. 3: *Bistrix* – the porkopyne

Sometimes, one comes across explicit evaluations of the images and their quality, as in a volume of the 1536 edition with a note dated 1618 saying *ein schens roß ist daß* ('This is a beautiful horse') (fig. 4).¹² In a number of cases, however, there are already questions concerning the correctness of the visual representations of an animal, as, for instance, in the same volume and by the same reader, concerning the *Duran*, about which, as the text says, the 'Book of Nature' states, based on Aristotle, that it is a strong and quick animal, which, when no longer able to flee from hunters, throws its excrement against their dogs, who will not be able to stand the stench. The reader had problems with the image and noted: *Ist das ein ox oder waß ist daß anzuschau* ('Is this an ox or what is it?') (fig. 5).¹³ The same reader also had problems with another image. The description of the badger (*dax*) is illustrated in a rather surprising way,

¹² Gart der Gesuntheit zû Latein Hortus Sanitatis (Strasbourg: Mathias Apiarius, 1536) Vienna, University Library, II-249973:

<https://fedora.phaidra.univie.ac.at/fedora/get/o:12682/bdef:Asset/view>
(last access December 2015), *Von den thieren*, chapter 54.

¹³ Ibidem, chapter 53.

which motivated the reader to write on the image: *ein sau ist daß an zu sehen* ('this looks like a sow') (fig. 6).¹⁴



Fig. 4: "This is a beautiful horse"



Fig. 5: The *duran* – "Is this an ox, or what is it?"

¹⁴ Ibidem, chapter 50.



Fig. 6: The badger – “it looks like a sow”

Sometimes the scientific interest of the reader can be demonstrated as when he added notes to the description of the animal or to the medical effects connected with it that do not refer to the animal's image but to the textual information. Less reference to scientific interest is shown in remarks or additions that lead into the field of scatology. In all the editions describing the *lumbricus*, that is, the roundworm (*Ascaris lumbricoides*), the image shows a man defecating and the worms coming out of his excrement. In a volume of the 1536 edition that was used in Bohemia, the Czech reader was led to note on the man's naked backside the term representing the result of the activity depicted, *kakay* – shitting (fig. 7).¹⁵ Another reader of the volume of the 1499 edition from the Lower Austrian Benedictine house of Göttweig (mentioned above) also clearly had problems with this scene, as he scribbled on the face of the man doing his business (fig. 8).¹⁶

¹⁵ *Hortus Sanitatis* (Strasbourg: Mathias Apiarius, 1536), Vienna, Austrian National Library, 70 P. 13, *De animalibus*, chapter 90 (from Czech ownership): http://digital.onb.ac.at/OnbViewer/viewer.faces?doc=ABO_%2BZ175148702 (last access December 2015), Photo: Austrian National Library, Vienna.

¹⁶ *Hortus Sanitatis* (see note 10), *De animalibus*, chapter 90.



Fig. 7: The round worm I: *kakay*



Fig. 8: The round worm II: Scribbling on the face of the person defecating

A similar scribble on the face, this time of an animal, appears in a volume of the 1536 edition, again representing the reader's negative appreciation. The animal is the *draconcopes*, the snake with the face of a virgin, which authorities supposed that it was the one in whose mask the devil had seduced Eve in Paradise (fig. 9).¹⁷



Fig. 9: Scribbling on the face of the *draconcopes*

I found some of the most unexpected additions drawn by readers of the *Hortus Sanitatis* in the volume of the 1499 Strasbourg edition from the Benedictine monastery of Göttweig in Lower Austria. There, a reader added to the images of a large number of animals in a relatively consistent way. An unmodified sample illustration from another volume (fig. 10)¹⁸ shows the *camelopardus*, an animal about which Isidore of Seville stated that it lived in Ethiopia and had white dots, a neck like a horse, feet like cattle, and the head like a lion. According to Pliny, it had a horse's neck, cattle's legs and feet, and the head of a camel, with white dots on red. Again, as in the case of the *orasius*

¹⁷ *Gart der Gesundheit*, 1536 (see note 12), *Von den Thieren*, chapter 49. Concerning the *draconcopes* see Gerhard Jaritz, "Draconcopedes, or, the Faces of Devilish Virgins," in *Animals and Otherness in the Middle Ages: Perspectives across Disciplines*, ed. Francisco de Asís García García et al. (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2013), 86-93.

¹⁸ *Hortus Sanitatis* (Strasbourg: Reinhard Beck, 1517), *De animalibus*, chapter 29. Nanterre, Bibliothèque André-Desguine, B 01242:
http://bibliotheque-desguine.hauts-de-seine.net/desguine/Expositions/Images-de-Science/Inventorier?lang=fr#p7-sciinvent_6 (last access December 2015).

(mentioned above), this is the description of a giraffe. One can certainly discuss how close the illustration is to the description, but this is of less relevance here. Comparing the animal in figure 10 with the *camelopardus* in the volume from Göttweig, one finds an explicit different detail which is rather interesting and perhaps surprising for a sixteenth-century reception of the images and the volume as a whole. The addition does not depict one of the readers' interests recognized above, but goes in a different direction (fig. 11).¹⁹ The reader added genitals to the *camelopardus* (fig. 12).



Fig. 10: The *camelopardus* without any modification

¹⁹ *Hortus Sanitatis*, 1499 (see note 10), *De animalibus*, chapter 29.

pentes separari. et ad alia multa.



Capitulum. xxxix.

Camelopardus. ysidor? Camelopardus est dictus eo qd cum sit ut pardus albis maculis superaspis collo equo similis: pedibus bubulis. capite tamen camelo similis est. Hinc ethiopia gignit. ¶ Plin. li. viii

Fig. 11: The modified *camelopardus*



Fig. 12: Detail: The penis added to the *camelopardus*

In the Göttweig volume of the *Hortus Sanitatis* the *camelopardus* was not the only animal to receive genitals; a number of other mammals did also. Moreover, the reader did not always create the same type of genitals in his gendering of the animals. Sometimes, one can recognize his attempt to add udders, as in the example of *caprea*, that is, the goat (figs. 13 and 14).²⁰ Other additions of genitals make the situation less clear, as when the drawing is just a kind of unidentifiable scribbling on the image of the bull by the industrious inhabitant of the monastery cattle (figs. 15 and 16).²¹ Maybe he intended to construct an ox by adding such type of not identifiable scribbling.



Fig. 13: Udders added to the goat (*caprea*)

²⁰ Ibidem, chapter 33.

²¹ Ibidem, chapter 14.



Fig. 14: The gendered *caprea*



Fig. 15: Undefined genitals of a bull (or an ox?)



Fig.16: The modified bull

* * *

This small selection of the traces of the reception of mainly visual information on animals by late medieval and early modern readers and beholders of the *Hortus Sanitatis* shows variety and differences of interests. These interests, mainly from inhabitants of monastic space, might sometimes be rather unexpected for the modern reader.

One general component can be found: In the recognizable reactions (which left visible evidence), the images of the animals played the decisive role, much more than the textual parts of their descriptions and the medical aspects connected with them. This phenomenon can be seen as probably confirming Luuk Houwen's statement that the *Hortus Sanitatis*²² "... was certainly not a medical handbook, but an encyclopedic work, albeit one that shares affinities with such works as *Mandeville's Travels* or the romances of the east, and which

²² In Houwen's case the *Noble Lyfe*. See idem, "The Noble Lyfe," 71.

would be read for what it had to offer in the realm of the unusual, the marvelous.” This “realm of the unusual” was much more represented by the visual than by the textual information, which, at least partly, led to the visible reactions.

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VON GERHARD JARITZ

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Vorwort

Der erste und umfangreichste Beitrag des vorliegenden Heftes beschäftigt sich mit einem Thema und Forschungsansatz, die recht weit von alltagsgeschichtlichem Interesse entfernt erscheinen. Göttlicher Zorn und seine Rezeption und Umsetzung durch mittelalterliche Menschen stellen jedoch einen Bereich dar, welcher regelmäßig in schriftlicher und bildlicher Überlieferung auftritt und mit dem sich Jeder konfrontiert sehen konnte. Die kritische Analyse von Mihai Dragnea zum Wendenkreuzzug von 1147 zeigt deutlich, in welchem Maße politische, religiöse und wirtschaftliche Konfrontationen und Krisensituationen einerseits Hand in Hand auftraten und andererseits nicht nur die in den Quellen genannten handelnden Protagonisten betrafen, sondern natürlich gravierende Einflüsse auf alle Gruppen der Bevölkerung hatten, die sich der Krisensituation ausgesetzt sahen. Der Aufsatz stellt daher einen wichtigen Beitrag zu auslösenden Faktoren für einen „Alltag in der Krise“ dar.

Die drei weiteren Beiträge beschäftigen sich mit einem bedeutenden alltagsbestimmenden Thema, mit welchem sich *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* schon des Öfteren beschäftigte: der Beziehung von Mensch und Tier im Mittelalter. Eine Spezies, die in unterschiedlichsten Überlieferungstypen regelmäßig in oft kontrastierender Bewertung auftritt, ist das Schwein. Ingrid Matschinegg und Angelika Kölbl widmen sich einerseits Tierkunden und andererseits weltlicher deutscher Literatur des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters und untersuchen die Rolle des Schweines in den Aussagen dieser Quellengruppen. Mein Beitrag beschäftigt sich schließlich mit der sichtbaren Rezeption der Tierillustrationen in einer der wichtigsten naturkundlichen Enzyklopädien des endenden Mittelalters und der beginnenden Neuzeit, dem *Hortus Sanitatis*.

Gerhard Jaritz