Walking and Talking with the Animals: the Role of Fauna in Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives

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The Irish Lives are filled with saints wrestling with a variety of monsters:[1] whether it be the leviathanic sea monster which attacked Columba and his companions,[2] or Brendan's sea-cat, which had eyes as big as a cauldron, tusks like a boar and the jaws of a leopard.[3] If we are to believe Brendan of Clonfert's biographer, lions roamed throughout Britain.[4] But on the subject of these mythical lions and sea monsters the Anglo-Latin Lives fall strangely silent.[5] Instead, we encounter more prosaic beasts-of-burden: oxen, horses and the odd pig. Rather than blessing sea monsters, the Anglo-Saxon saints spent their time looking after their sheep or yoking their oxen to the plough.[6] Yet, despite their more humble apparel, animals were a recurrent feature of Anglo-Latin hagiography, and most saints star alongside a supporting cast of farmyard animals. This paper will explore how animal motifs are deployed within the hagiographical material and endeavour to show that while it rendered Doctor Doolittle a trifle eccentric, walking and talking with the animals was, in fact, a sign of remarkable sanctity.

Animals feature in a variety of different hagiographical contexts, but the two most prevalent motifs are the taming of wild animals and the identification of sacred ground through the guiding actions of an animal. My paper will focus on these two motifs, examine the numerous guises they took and consider the role played by the animals as the *vitae* unfolded.

A saint's ability to tame wild animals is a widely used narrative motif, common to both hagiographical texts and tales of secular heroes. The progeni-

[1] For a complete listing see Dorothy Ann Bray, *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints*, Ff Communications *252* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1992), 88.

[2] Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba,*, ed. R. Sharpe, trans. Philip Rahtz (London: Penguin, 1995) I:19, 125-6.

[3] *BNE* I, 75.

[4] *BNE* I, 82.

[5] The only lion to appear in an Anglo-Latin Life occurs in the *Vita S. Milburge*, where the conversion of her father, Merewald of Mercia, after a skirmish with a lion is related, see *Vita. Milburge* at f. 208^{r}, col. 2.

[6] Cuthman appears minding his sheep (ch. 2) and putting his oxen out to pasture (ch. 9); see *Vita S. Cuthmanni*, 188, 191.

tor, at least in the hagiographical sphere, was Athansius's Life of Antony, where he drove the wild asses from the garden he had planted in the desert.[7] Yet the motif can take many different forms. In Abbo of Fleury's Life of Edmund, a lone wolf cradles the king's decapitated head in his paws, guarding it against other animals. When the men carry the head home with them, the wolf follows as though tame.[8] The same motif occurs in the *Vita S. Wihtburge* but in a different format. In this case, provisions for the builders and nuns of the monastery of East Dereham had run dry, and Wihtburh, at her wits' end, prayed to the Virgin Mary. During a vision, she was told to send two servants to a bridge over a river in the woods, where two wild does would provide them with milk. This she did, and the girls returned with so much milk that 'two men had to carry the full churn on their shoulders with poles slung through its handles'.[9] Both the wolf and the does curb their natural instincts and come to the aid of the saint as though domesticated creatures.

Any animal which submits to the will of a saint is technically tamed, even if only temporarily. There are several instances where a saint gives an order and the animal is forced to comply. According to the eleventh-century Life, abbess Mildburh was making a tour of the lands owned by her monastery at Much Wenlock when she heard the news that one of the sowed fields had been plundered by a flock of birds.[10] On arriving at the scene to inspect the damage, she ordered the birds to depart at once, ruling that neither they, nor their successors, might ever land there again.[11] Every year the birds reportedly returned, hungry and eager to rest, but were prevented from settling on the land or feeding off the seeds. The birds may not have come to Mildburh's aid, but their reluctant obedience betrays their domesticated status. This *vita* was written by Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, and it is a miracle which may be observed in two of his other works, the *Vita S. Werburge* and the *Vita S. Amelberge*.[12] The structure is principally the same, however, in Waeburh's miracle the geese are herded, like cattle, into a pen where they are kept overnight. When morning arrives, the geese are released, but one of them is missing. After beseeching Waeburh's help, the culprit is apprehended and the goose returned to the flock.[13] At the end of the

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[7] Athanasius, "Life of Antony," in *Early Christian Lives*, ed. Carolinne White (London: Penguin, 1998), 40.

[8] Abbo of Fleury, "Life of St Edmund," in *Three Lives of English Saints*, ed. Michael Winterbottom (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1972) ch. 12, ll. 40-8, p. 81.

[9] *Vita S. Wihtburge*, 58.

[10] *Vita. Milburge*, f. 213^{r}, col. 2.

[11] *Vita. Milburge*, f. 213^{r}, col. 2.

[12] On the authorship of the *Vita beate ad Deo dilecte uirginis Milburge* see A. J. M. Edwards, "An Early Twelfth-century Account of the Translation of St Milburga of Much Wenlock," *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society* lvii (1961-4): 137. For the ascription of the Lives of Waeburh and Amelburh to Goscelin see R. C. Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, *Oxford Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), lxxi-lxix.

[13] *Vita S. Werburge*, 40-2.

miracle Goscelin comments that 'Brute beasts rightly obeyed her, who continually submitted herself with total devotion to God'.[14] He follows on to say:

> Just such a miracle may also be read in the Life of the blessed virgin Amelburga, which I have fashioned with my pen, so that in the same deed the same faith may be demonstrated in each virgin, even though they lived at different times and in difference places.[15]

In these two comments Goscelin hits the nail right on the head. Let us take first of all his comment about the rightful obedience of brute beasts. The ability to tame wild animals, to bend their will contrary to their natural inclination to the needs of the saint, was considered a sign of remarkable sanctity, because it demonstrated the reassertion of humanity's original authority over the animal kingdom. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve had been granted dominion over all the animals in the garden of Eden:

> And God blessed them, saying: increase and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea and fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth.[16]

Exhibiting control over wild creatures symbolised the restoration of the prelapsarian state of harmony and revealed the innocent status of the saint. The more docile the creature, the closer the saint was to mankind's original state. In using this motif of taming wild animals, the interest of the hagiographer lay not so much with the animals themselves, but with what their peaceful and demure behaviour revealed about the holiness and purity of the saint.

This feeds into Goscelin's second point about how 'in the same deed the same faith may be demonstrated'. Mildburh, Waeburh and Amelburh possess a miracle in common. But they are not alone, for it also surfaces in the Welsh Lives of Illtud, Cadog, Dewi and Ieuan Gwas Padrig.[17] The version which appears in these Lives adheres closely to the Waeburh model; the birds are shepherded into a barn where they repent and are released the following day. Christopher Brooke has attributed the similarities between these Welsh *vitae* to textual borrowing.[18] The Lives bear such close resemblance to one another that such a conclusion is difficult to disprove. Yet there was a hagiographical precursor in Bede's Life of Cuthbert, when he too drives away a flock of birds feeding on his crops.[19] This miracle brings to mind the biblical parable of the sower where wild fowls of the air ate up the seeds that fell on the pathway.[20] The par-

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[14] *Vita S. Werburge*, 42. The phrase *pecualis creatura* is used, meaning 'pertaining to cattle'. The wild geese took on the characteristics of domesticated cattle.

[15] *Vita S. Werburge*, 42.

[16] Gen. 1:28 .

[17] Elissa R. Henken, *The Welsh Saints: A Study in Patterned Lives* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 81-4.

[18] Christopher Brooke and D. N. Dumville, *The Church and the Welsh Border in the Central Middle Ages*, Studies in Celtic History 8 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1986), 77.

[19] B. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940) ch. xix, pp. 220-22.

[20] Matt. 13:1-15 and 18-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15.

able offers its own exegesis; the seed represented the word of God and the voracious birds, the devil. This is the interpretation which was championed by the early Church Father St Augustine of Hippo.[21] Convention presented sanctity as a common essence, the holy spirit, which infused the lives of all of the saints. Gregory of Tours provided a helpful definition when he wrote:

> … it is better to talk about the *Life* of the Fathers than the *Lives* because … the life of one body nourished them all in the world.[22]

It was through the recurrence of familiar themes and the effectuation of the same miracles in each generation of the Chosen that the believer was assured of Christ's continued presence in the life of the Church. The reuse of biblically-patterned stories does not point to a lack of originality but rather suggests the considered arrangement of themes which carry significant narrative and spiritual weight. In both the *Vita S. Werburge* and *Vita S. Mildburge* these miracles are claimed to have been passed down through the ages,[23] and indeed, were apparently still evident at the time of writing.[24] Yet, in neither Life are there any topographical details to ground the episode within a specific locality, nor do the Lives contain any of the usual appeals to reliable and trustworthy witnesses as one might expect with tales which enjoy local currency. Instead, given the striking similarities between both passages and the strong exegetical resonance of the miracle, one is tempted to consider whether Goscelin deliberately inserted a generic motif into the Lives in order to situate the saints within an accepted schema of sanctity and emphasize the validity of their claims to sainthood.

If animals were used by hagiographers to enhance the holiness and purity of their saint, they could also be used to the opposite effect, to highlight the heinous behaviour of the impious. The anthropocentric nature of medieval society created a hierarchy in which humans stood above animals. Possessing neither the capacity for rational thought nor an immortal soul, an animal was decidedly inferior to a human. Humanity was a spectrum where the opposing poles were the divine and the bestial. The murderous tutor Æscberht who beheaded his young charge, Kenelm, was condemned for his bestial inhumanity (*inhumanitas beluina*).[25] Through his crime, he had sunk to below the lowest rungs of human life, and his spiritual home was now amongst the beasts in the field. Furthermore, he began to assume bestial characteristics. The tutor appears to have lost his mental faculties, hunting high and low for a suitably secluded site with a maddened mind (*mente furiata*). As animals were incapable of rational thought, a man deprived of reason was identified with the animal world. In legal contexts

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[21] Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon on the Mount; Harmony of the Gospels; Homilies on the Gospels*, NPNF, First Series, vol. 6 (Michigan: 1974), 492-4.

[22] Gregory of Tours, *Life of the Fathers* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1985), 28.

[23] *Vita S. Werburge*, 40: *...a generatione in generationem hoc eius miraculum asseritur ab ipsa plebe tota*.

[24] *Vita. Milburge*, f. 213^{v}, col. 1: … [the miracle] *usque hodie sicut annuatim frequentatur, sic annuali frequencia sui sese testator*.

[25] *Vita S. Kenelmi*, 62.

animal symbolism was used in rituals of public humiliation to punish those who had transgressed the boundaries of the normative.[26] Glimpses of this can be found in the Anglo-Latin material. In the late eleventh-century Life of Cuthman, two boys impound the oxen which the saint had put out to pasture. Cuthman punishes the brothers by ordering them 'in the name of Jesus Christ to serve the Lord as the oxen would do if they were free' and yoked them to the wagon.[27] The saint decreed that the boys and all their descendents would forever have multiple ridges on their necks from the weight of the yoke and therefore bear the perpetual stigma of this ignominy.[28] The substitution of a human for an animal was a well known form of infamy and disgrace.[29] Another common form of ritual public derision was to be forced to ride backwards on a donkey or mule. In the legend of the Kentish princes Æthelberht and Æthelred, their murderer, the wicked Thunor met his death by falling backwards from a horse and being swallowed alive by the earth which had opened up into a form of hell-mouth.[30] Falling backwards from a horse was a biblical sign of impiety.[31] The reason being, as Gregory the Great explained, that in falling forward one confesses one's faults and dies penitent, but in falling backwards one departs suddenly, without the opportunity to confess or knowing what punishments are to follow.[32] It is unclear whether Thunor was actually riding backwards or simply fell backwards from his horse. However, he was certainly impious and such a form of ritual punishment would undoubtedly have been appropriate.

Animals were a medium through which sanctity was established, the frame of reference against which piety and righteousness were measured. Yet they also had the ability to identify sacred places. Space is not a homogenous entity; there are pockets of land which are inherently holy.[33] The innate sacred quality of certain places supposedly prevented mankind from arbitrarily designating land to be so. Humans are presented in hagiographical writing as relying on acts of God to reveal the location of hallowed ground, be it through the performance of a miracle, a vision from heaven or through the guiding actions of an animal. Monasteries were sacred places for they afforded spiritual access to the Divine. Their location could not be chosen by their founders, only revealed to

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[26] Esther Cohen, "Animals in Medieval Perceptions: The Image of the Ubiquitous Other," in *Animals and Human Society*, ed. A. Manning and J. Serpell (London: Routledge,1994), 59-80.

[27] *Vita S. Cuthmanni*, ch. 9, p. 191.

[28] *Vita S. Cuthmanni,* ch. 10, p. 191.

[29] Cohen, "Animals in Medieval Perceptions: The Image of the Ubiquitous Other," 71.

[30] *Passio SS. Ethelberti atque Ethelredi (Byrht.)*, 11: *... ex sonipede ruit*; *Passio SS. Ethelberti atque Ethelredi (Anon.),* 97*:...a tergo frendentis equi cecidit*; *Vita Mildrethe*, 118: *...excussusque equo more impiorum retrorsum cecidit*.

[31] See Isaiah 28:13 and Genesis 49:17.

[32] Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* (Oxford: 1844) bk. 31, ch. 24, p. 458. I wish to thank Helen Gittos for drawing my attention to this.

[33] Amy G. Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 43.

them by an agent of God. Consequently, monastic foundation legends often feature tales of heavenly visitors or animals bidden to do God's work. The hagiographical representation of animals as instruments of theophanic revelation is, therefore, a common occurrence. A familiar theme in the Irish, Welsh and Breton Lives,[34] the motif was also widely used by Continental hagiographers.[35] The Anglo-Latin material does not prove the exception, and, although the motif does not appear as frequently as it does in the Celtic Lives, there are still a significant number of Lives which feature a guiding animal.

Animals are used to demarcate holy places in several ways: by lying *in situ* or leading the saint to the site, by circumnavigating the land and delineating the boundaries, and finally, in some cases, holy space was actually defined by the absence of animal life. The most famous case of an animal leading the way to a sacred location is probably that of the dun cow which led the roving company of Lindisfarne monks to Durham and the final resting place of their saint, Cuthbert.[36] It is a white cow, however, which appears in the eleventh-century Life of Kenelm. The *vita* relates how a white cow abandoned the common pasture land along the crest of the Clent Hills (*Worcs*.) and ran down the hillside to the unmarked grave of the saint. She grazed on the grass growing on the grave site and yielded miraculous quantities of milk.[37] White sows with a litter of suckling piglets were another popular *topos*. The twelfth-century *De antiquitate Glastonie ecclesie*, written by William of Malmesbury, may not be a hagiographical text, but relates how the swineherd Glaesting came upon his sow suckling her pigs under an apple tree and thus revealed the location for what became Glastonbury Abbey.[38] The *Vita Sancti Fremundi* by Burchard also contains the suckling pig motif.[39] The Life tells the bizarre and convoluted tale of Freomund, whose body had eventually been buried beneath a carved white stone at Prescot, near Cropredy (*Oxon.*), where a willow rod, planted to mark the grave, sprouted into a fully-grown tree overnight. In the meantime, in the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, a pilgrim named Albert received a visit

[34] For example in the Lives of the Welsh saints Collen, Carannog, Gwydion, Gwynllyw and Manawydan and Pryderi, see Henken, *The Welsh Saints: A Study in Patterned Lives*; and from the Irish material, the Lives of Berach and Patrick, see Bray, *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints*

[35] For details see Alexander H. Krappe, "Guiding Animals," *The Journal of American Folklore* 55, no. 218 (1942): 228-46.

[36] This legend is related in James Raine, *A Description or Breife Declaration of All the Ancient Monuments, Rites and Customes Belonginge or Beinge within the Monastical Church of Durham: Written in 1593*, Surtees Society 15 (London: J.B. Nichols, 1842), 74, 254.

[37] R. C. Love, *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, Oxford Med*ieval Texts* (Oxford: 1996), 62. Cattle led an alderman named Ailwen to the future site of Ramsey Abbey. He watched his cattle and noted the spot where they would lie down at night. Krappe, "Guiding Animals," 239.

[38] See John of Glastonbury's *Chronicle*, edited and translated in James P. Carley (ed.) and David Townsend (trans.), *The Chronicle of Glastonbury Abbey* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1985), 10-13.

[39] *Vita S. Freomundi* II, 689-98.

from an angel. He was told to search for the body of the holy Freomund under the roots of a willow tree and that beneath the tomb he would discover a sow with thirteen piglets.[40] According to the Life, neither birds nor animals were able to approach the grave site, yet the sow and her litter were perfectly able to lie in the holy hovel.[41] A third example of this motif can be found in the hagiography of Ecgwine, an eighth-century bishop of Worcester and founder of the Abbey of Evesham. According to the early eleventh-century Life, written by Byrhtferth of Ramsey,[42] Ecgwine, on acquiring a leafy woodland from King Æthelred, divided the wood into four sections, apportioning a swineherd and several pigs to each quadrant. A sow belonging to the swineherd Eoves kept disappearing into the dense woodland and returning with a litter of piglets. On the third occasion, Eoves went in search of the sow himself and found her lying with her litter at the feet of a vision of the Virgin Mary. Astounded, he reported this vision to Bishop Ecgwine, who set off to corroborate this claim. On seeing the apparition himself, he gave thanks to God and ordered a monastery to be erected on the site.[43]

The Ecgwine material is interesting, not least for what it reveals about attitudes towards swine, and it is worth examining in greater detail, starting with the origin of the motif. Theophany in the shape of swine is a frequent element in Celtic hagiography.[44] Although most of the Lives adhere to the basic plot structure whereby a saint finds, through the agency of a pig, a particular location designated by God for his church, there is a considerable degree of inconsistency between the various Lives.[45] The three Lives which bear the closest similarities to that of Ecgwine are those of the Welsh saints Brynach, Dyfrig and Illtud, since they feature sows with litters of piglets lying *in situ*.[46] These three Lives

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[40] *Vita S. Freomundi* II, 696.

[41] *Vita S. Freomundi* II, 695.

[42] J. A. Giles, *Vita Quorundum Anglo-Saxonum* (London: Published for the Caxton Society by J.R. Smith, 1854), 249-96. For the dating and authorial attribution see Michael Lapidge, "Byrhtferth and the *Vita S. Ecgwini*," *Mediaeval Studies* 41 (1979): 331-53.

[43] Giles, *Vita Quorundum Anglo-Saxonum*, 363-76. There is an error with the pagination; page 364 is followed by page 375.

[44] Karen Jankulak, "Alba Longa in the Celtic Regions? Swine, Saints and Celtic Hagiography," in *Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults*, ed. Jane Cartwright (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 272. The Lives of the following Celtic saints bear this motif; Wales: Brynach, Cadog, Cyngar, Dyfrig, Illtud; Ireland: Ciarán of Saigir, Fínán, Mochoemóc, Rúadán; Scotland: Kentigern; Brittany: Malo, Paul Aurélien.

[45] In the Life of Ciarán of Saigir, the saint tames a wild boar who then helps the saint collect the material with which to construct a church, *BNE* I: (I) ch. 3; (II) ch. 1. And in the ninth-century Life of St Malo, the saint resurrected a sow for the local lord and was rewarded with a grant of land, ibid. 272.

[46] Brynach was told to walk along the river as far as the second rivulet and look for a wild white sow and her piglets; Arthur W. Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae*, History and Law Series 9 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1944), 2-15, at 8. Dyfrig, meanwhile, was advised by an angel to build a church where he saw a white sow with her litter, W. J. Rees, *The Liber Landavensis, Llyfr Teilo, or the Ancient*

exhibit a considerable degree of interdependence. Not only were the saints given instructions to find the sow, but they share verbal parallels in their use of the term *oratorium* to refer to the church, which, in the case of Dyfrig and Illtud, was dedicated to the Holy Trinity. These parallels are sufficiently significant to suggest textual borrowing between the Lives. However, Byrhtferth could not possibly have used these Lives as exemplars as they all postdate his account.

The phenomenon of *chercher le cochon* has a classical precedent. In Book VIII of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas is visited by the God of the river Tiber in a dream and told that he will find a white sow and thirty white piglets on the shore of the river.[47] The extent to which this episode was widely known in the Middle Ages is unclear. Byrhtferth was undoubtedly acquainted with classical works. His education at Ramsey under the tutelage of Abbo of Fleury would have extended to the great classical and Christian authors.[48] The history of Ecgwine's episcopacy and the early history of Evesham were shrouded in obscurity. Possessing only a spurious foundation charter, Byrhtferth appears to have padded out the few facts he had by inserting arithmological digressions and allegorical expositions.[49] He may have dipped into his classical education to supplement the paucity of miraculous material. A second episode may also betray a classical origin. Before heading off to Rome, Ecgwine shackled himself and threw the key into the Avon. When in Rome his companions went fishing and caught a salmon, which when gutted, was discovered to hold the key to the bishop's fetters.[50] This closely resembles Herodot's story of Polycrates who threw an emerald-studded ring into the sea only to be presented with it again by a fisherman who found it in the belly of a fish.[51]

Byrhtferth may have been influenced by classical tales, but it is also possible he might have been repeating oral legends circulating within the local area.

Register of the Cathedral Church of Llandaff (Llandovery: W. Rees for Welsh MSS. Soc., 1840), 75-83 at 77.

[47] Virgil, *Virgil*, ed. G. P. Goold and H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. ed., 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library 63, 64 (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), bk. VIII, ll. 43-47.

[48] See Michael Lapidge, "Schools, Learning and Literature," in *Anglo-Latin Literature, 900-1066*, ed. Michael Lapidge (London: Hambledown Press, 1993), esp. 40-1 for Abbo's influence at Ramsey.

[49] Michael Lapidge and Rosalind C. Love, "The Latin Hagiography of England and Wales (600-1550)," in *Hagiographies: Histoire Internationale de la Littérature hagiographique latine et vernaculaire en Occident des origines à 1550*, ed. Guy Philippart (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 221.

[50] Giles, *Vita Quorundum Anglo-Saxonum*, 58-9.

[51] Herodotus, *Herodotus*, ed. A. D. Godley, 4 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1920), bk. III, ll. ch. 41-2. This motif also crops up in hagiographical texts, e.g., the Lives of Maglorius, Ambrose of Cahors and Maurilius of Angers, see Hippolyte Delehaye et al., *The Legends of the Saints* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 24 and Cogitosus's *Vita Sanctae Brigidae*, see Sean Connolly and J.-M. Picard, "Cogitosus's *Life of St Brigit*: Content and Value," *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquities of Ireland* 117 (1987): ch. 25, pp. 21-2.

Byrhtferth acknowledges that he used a combination of ancient charters and oral testimony.[52] Recourse to 'trustworthy people' is a hagiographical *topos* in itself. The citing of reliable witnesses follows rhetorical practices employed by Gregory the Great in his *Dialogi* and later by Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.[53] But this does not preclude the possibility that he actually did make use of oral sources. Michael Lapidge has persuasively demonstrated that the story of the four swineherds, Eoves, Ympa, Trottuc and Cornuc may preserve some vestige of fact.[54] By examining local place name and charter evidence, he has shown that these names and therefore, possibly, these people, are grounded in historical reality.[55] Furthermore, the place name 'Evesham' offers some interesting insights. It reputedly derives from Eoves, the name of the swineherd. But this is a genitive rather than nominative form. It seems strange that Byrhtferth would have made such a cardinal error and suggests that he was in fact simply trying to make sense of a dimly remembered local tradition. Alternatively, it is possible that the first element may have had nothing at all to do with the swineherd. 'Eoves' may derive from the OE *eofor* meaning 'boar'.[56] If this were the case, the tale about the sow and her piglets might actually be the remnant of a genuine legend.

Whether Byrhtferth came across an oral legend or simply wove snippets of local tradition into classical tales, one thing is evident, pigs were considered a suitable conduit for Divine revelation. This does not appear to be the case just eighty years or so later when Dominic, an early twelfth-century prior of Evesham, rewrote the *Vita S. Ecgwini*, for he omitted the tale of the wandering sow. The possible reasons for this omission are varied. Dominic transformed Eoves from a *subulcus* into a *pastor* and continued the theme by drawing a parallel with the Nativity.[57] Eoves may have been re-branded a shepherd to make Dominic's exegetical point. Alternatively, it is possible that Dominic was endeavour-

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[52] *Vita S. Ecgwini (Byrht.)*, 350.

[53] John McNamara, "Problems in Contextualizing Oral Circulation of Early Medieval Saints' Legends," in *Telling Tales: Medieval Narratives in the Folk Tradition*, ed. Francesca Canadé Sautman, Diana Conchado, and Guiseppe Carlo Di Scipio (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), 24. The earliest use of this trope within hagiography can be found in Athanasius's *Life of Anthony* (c. 357).

[54] His arguments are set out in full in Lapidge, "Byrhtferth and the *Vita S. Ecgwini*," 309.

[55] He does, however, concede that the names were later inventions to reaffirm ownership of several Evesham estates, rather than the preservation of former tenants' names, ibid., 309.

[56] The etymological origin of the first place name element is usually given as either the OE *aet*, rendering Evesham as 'at the hemmed-in land', or the OE personal name *Eof*, see A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Worcestershire* (Cambridge: University Press, 1927), 263. Although Evesham does not feature in Ekwall's list of place names derived from the OE *eofor* 'boar', the element is so similar that it should not be discounted, see Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 167. I wish to thank John Blair for drawing my attention to the place-name material.

[57] Michael Lapidge, "Dominic of Evesham *Vita S Ecgwini Episcopi Et Confessoris*," *Analecta Bollandiana* xcvi (1978), 84-5.

ing to make Ecgwine a more 'universal' figure and hence sought to remove all traces of local colour.[58] During the eleventh-century Ecgwine's popularity rocketed; his fame spread far beyond the environs of the diocese of Worcester.[59] Details such as place names ground saints in particular localities which may have made them less attractive as intermediaries to people from other regions and therefore less inclined to patronise the cult. Whereas Byrhtferth relates the story of a seal which appeared in the Avon on Ecgwine's feast day, Dominic mentions the seal, but remains quiet as to the name of the river.[60]

The deliberate erasure of a key element of a foundation legend is a momentous decision. It is widely recognised that foundation legends possess a 'constitutive' power: the capacity to create identity and meaning for the institution, social group or even the individual.[61] Sharing a sense of an imagined past enables a social group to establish its identity and reaffirm its cohesion. Consequently, revising that imagined past inevitably changes a community's sense of identity. In dispensing with the old legend, the new *vita* was carving out a new history for the Abbey, disassociating the community from its previous identity. The question is why?

A third *vita* appears to hold the key. Preserved in two manuscripts and for convenience called the Digby-Gotha recension, this is an abbreviated redaction of Dominic's Life.[62] The author stuck closely to his exemplar, utilising the same phrasing and syntax and electing to omit superfluous passages than to paraphrase in his own words. Significantly, this *vita* includes the tale of the sow. Evidently the author retrieved this detail from another source and considered it worthy of inclusion. The Digby-Gotha author chose to add a short commentary, putting words of explanation into Ecgwine's mouth. After dividing the land and allocating the pigs, the bishop drew a comparison with the 'filthy and swine-like minds' of the local inhabitants, as yet unconverted to the Christian faith.[63] The author directly acknowledges that pigs were considered filthy animals on account of their signification, however, he continues, 'but every creature of God is

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[58] See C. Cubitt, "Universal and Local Saints in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. A. T. Thacker and R. Sharpe (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 423-54.

[59] His feast day is noted in calendars from all over England, see Lapidge, "Dominic of Evesham Vita S Ecgwini Episcopi et Confessoris," 67 and Francis Wormald, *English Kalendars before A.D. 1100*, Henry Bradshaw Society 72 (1934): 97, 209, 251 and 265. His relics were taken on a fund-raising tour of England, which attests to his national popularity, see Thomas of Marlborough, *History of the Abbey of Evesham,*, eds. J. E. Sayers and L.Watkiss, *Oxford Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), ch. 88-9, 93-8, 102 and 103.

[60] *Vita S. Ecgwini (Byrht.)*, 391; *Vita S. Ecgwini (Dom.)*, 97-8.

[61] Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France,* 2.

[62] The Life is discussed and edited in Michael Lapidge, "The Digby-Gotha Recension of the Life of St Ecgwine," Vale of Evesham Historical Society Research Papers 7 (1979).

[63] *Vita S. Ecgwini (D-G)*, ch. 8, p. 45.

reckoned to be good and clean'.[64] Later, we are told that the litter of seven piglets represents the people of the Evesham region who were yet to receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.[65] Confusion therefore reigns as to whether the sow and her piglets were good or bad, but one thing is evident, and that is that pigs were spiritually ambiguous figures.

The pig seems to have been an object of suspicion and revulsion. In the Christian tradition swine symbolised gluttony and sexual indulgence. The practice of not chewing cud was considered symptomatic of the sinner's neglect in meditating upon spiritual matters. This negative symbolism was rooted in pig imagery employed by Jesus himself. The Gospels tell the story of the time when Jesus cast two demons into a herd of pigs and the whole herd plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned in the water (Matt. 8:28-34). And again, in the parable of the prodigal son, the wayward son stands for the person who strays from God (Luke 15:16-20). To return to God's fold, he must leave his life with God's enemies which were symbolised by swine. This pejorative attitude towards pigs may have been present in Anglo-Saxon England, for in the Canons of Edgar, priests are warned not to let dogs or horses into the churchyard, and, significantly, 'still less a pig'.[66]

On the other hand, swine played an integral role in early Irish and Welsh saga tradition.[67] Tales such as *Math uab Mathonwy*, *Culhwch ac Olwen* and the versions of the 'Three Powerful Swineherds' triad present swine as otherworld creatures. These stories may preserve genuine traditions about pig divinities sacred to the Celts,[68] which may, to a certain extent, have been upheld in early Christian writings, for the early Lives of Patrick depict him as a swineherd rather than the shepherd he later became.[69] The swineherd appears to have enjoyed an exalted position in insular tradition. The story of Eoves as given by Byrhtferth contains a number of parallels with this narrative material. The piglets in the second litter were said to have been white except for their ears and feet.[70] Non-natural colouring is a well-known symbol of otherworld animals. Secondly the sow behaves in a similar way to the sow who led Gwydion to the Otherworld plain of Lleu's torment. Of the sow, the swineherd tells Gwydion, 'Every day when the sty is opened she goes out; no one can hold her, nor do we

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[64] Ibid..

[65] Ibid.

[66] Dorothy Whitelock et al., *Councils & Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) I, 323; although this may have been for more practical than symbolical reasons. As pigs are known to root around, they would hardly have been desirable animals to have in a churchyard.

[67] Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 308-21.

[68] Patrick K. Ford, "A Highly Important Pig," in *Celtic Language, Celtic Culture: A Festschrift for Eric Hemp*, ed. A. T. E. Matonis and Daniel F. Melia (Van Nuys, California: 1990), 292, 299.

[69] His early biographers Muirchú and Tírechan use the term *porcarius*, ibid., 298.

[70] *Vita S. Ecgwini (Byrht.)*, 364.

know where she goes any more than if she went into the earth'.[71] The Evesham sow repeatedly disappeared into the dense thorn bushes and reappeared with a litter in tow. Furthermore, the piglets in the first and third litters numbered seven and nine. These numbers, especially seven, held symbolic resonance in Celtic culture.[72] This evidence raises the possibility that Byrhtferth's story of the sow was heir to a long, entrenched oral tradition rooted in a pagan belief-system. It is probable that Dominic chose to omit the tale on account of its symbolical impropriety. No matter how well dressed it was in the cloak of Christianity, the tale preserved certain tenets deeply at odds with the Christian faith.

This survey of the Ecgwine material has thrown up some interesting points, not least how attitudes towards animals were seldom static or necessarily collectively shared. This material may reveal a genuine disparity between the type of beliefs acceptable in the higher ecclesiastical circles and those held by the local clerical and lay communities. In attempting to increase the profile of the cult and make Ecgwine accessible to a wider audience, it may have been necessary to espouse a more doctrinally orthodox approach. The fact that the legend was still circulating at a local level is proven by its reappearance in the Digby-Gotha redaction.[73] It is highly probable that this tale still held currency for the monastic community at Evesham, whose anecdotes and legends, orally relayed, provided the Digby-Gotha hagiographer with alternative material for his Life.

Let us now consider the other ways in which animals were used to demarcate holy places. A second method was by establishing the parameters of the sacred ground. The Minster-in-Thanet foundation legend tells the tale of a deer whose miraculous sprint around the Isle of Thanet delineated the boundaries of the monastery's land.[74] It starts with the story of the two Kentish princes, Æthelberht and Æthelred, who were murdered by the wicked counsellor Thunor with the tacit assent of their uncle King Ecgberht. In an act of restitution, Ecgberht conceded to grant their sister Domne Eafe all the land on Thanet around which her hind could run. The hind started its run, describing a vast circuit. Thunor protested loudly at the apparent largesse and was punished, cast from his horse

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[71] Jeffrey Gantz, *TheMabinogion*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 1976), 114.

[72] For example, the pigs belonging to the father of Ol son of Olwydd were 'carried off seven months before he was born; when he grew up he tracked down the pigs and brought them home in seven herds', ibid., 147.

[73] Michael Lapidge has suggested that the Digby-Gotha author may have had access to Byrhtferth's Life, Lapidge, "The Digby-Gotha Recension of the Life of St Ecgwine," 40. However, there are no verbal or syntactical parallels as one might expect. There are also slight, yet significant discrepancies between the two accounts. The subtle changes are symptomatic of oral transmission.

[74] It can be found in *Passio SS. Ethelberti atque Ethelredi (Byrht.)*, ch. 8, pp. 11-2; *Passio SS. Ethelberti atque Ethelredi (Anon.)*, 96-7; *Vita Mildrethe* written by Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, ch. v, p. 118; and the OE *S. Miłdryð*, 427-8. Byrhtferth's *Passio SS Ethelberti atque Ethelredi*; MS 285, Goscelin and the KRL. There are only slight variations between the versions.

and swallowed alive by the earth. In each of the different versions this basic storyline is embellished upon, the emphasis shifted and the relative roles afforded to Domne Eafe and her hind revised. According to the argument presented by Stephanie Hollis, the OE Life of *S. Milðryð* awards the Abbess an active role in the duping of the king.[75] She was familiar with the hind's behaviour, because we are told the hind 'always ran before her when she was travelling'.[76] She was fully aware of what would happen and exploited her knowledge of her tame hind's behaviour to gain most of Thanet. It was pure feminine guile and prescience which pulled the wool over King Ecgberht's eyes. Significantly, this is just the role the Thunor of Goscelin's *vita* accuses Domne Eafe of playing. She is accused of rigging the show. Thunor protests:

> This is the flower and bridal-chamber of your kingdom, and alas, you have handed it over to be taken away by the judgement of a brute beast. What measure, what limit will the irrational beast set for you? How much more praiseworthy would you (have acted if) you had allotted a modest and well considered portion rather than that you should have submitted to the terms, fit to be ridiculed for centuries, of a chanting woman and (her) unbridled beast.[77]

There is a twist; in this *vita* Domne Eafe plays a passive role. The hind is an agent of Divine will, performing His work. We are told the hind was 'sent by divine judgement' and 'flew forth like an arrow'.[78] In Goscelin's opinion Thunor's punishment actually derived from his condemnation of the hind as a brute, mindless beast. Not only does he accuse God's saint of witchcraft, but he fails to recognise that the hind is an agent of God.

Exactly how Thunor fails to notice this is a mystery because, since the second century, exegetical and hagiographic tradition interpreted the deer as an allegory for Christ. Considered the mortal enemy of the snake by classical authors,[79] this view filtered down through the second-century *Physiologus* into the medieval bestiary tradition and was taken to symbolise Christ's triumph over the devil. Given the Christological value of the deer, far from being an irrational beast, the hind was an instrument of Divine will and by calling her a brute animal Thunor is committing the gravest of blasphemies.

This legend offers a very interesting insight into the relationship between sacred ground and animals. In the anonymous Life from the mid-eleventh century,[80] Domne Eafe uses the verb *lustro* when she asks for the land around which her hind is willing to run. This means 'encircle', but it also carries the meanings

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[75] Stephanie Hollis, "The Minster-in-Thanet Foundation Story," *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998), 41-64.
[76] *S. Milðryð*, 427.
[77] *Vita Mildrethe*, 118, ll. 18-23.
[78] *Vita Mildrethe*, 118, ll. 5-6.
[79] Pliny, *Pliny: Natural History*, ed. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1951), bk. VIII, ch. 50.
[80] *Passio SS. Ethelberti atque Ethelredi (Anon.)*, 96, l. 40.

'purify' or 'cleanse'. The hind's run establishes the perimeter of the land owned by Minster-in-Thanet. This demarcation of the monastery's boundaries is strongly reminiscent of the sanctifying circumambulations of bishops and clergy in ceremonies of dedication.[81] The hind, a symbol of Christ and agent of God, was performing an act of consecration.

The idea that animals may have had a sanctifying presence is not supported throughout the hagiographical corpus. As previously mentioned, animals were unable to approach the place where Freomund lay buried, nor were birds allowed to roost in the willow tree that marked his grave.[82] The Life of Mildburh tells of a similar embargo. Appended to the *vita* as an epilogue are a collection of miracles said to have originated from Wales. They apparently occurred in a place which was called *Landmylien* in Welsh.[83] Originally a possession of the monastery at Much Wenlock, it is said to have been lost sometime before the *vita* was written.[84] Nevertheless, the local inhabitants retained the memory of the virgin, passing the stories down from father to son.[85] Near to this place was a great stone which Mildburh reportedly used for a chair. Such was the sanctity of this stone that 'no animal could venture near the stone, nor graze on the nearby grass without dying immediately or being seized by a powerful plague'.[86] This was considered inviolable evidence of the sanctity of the site, and a church was erected in honour of the blessed Mildburh. The *vita* continues to comment that animals, or 'those possessing the intellect of a beast' were forbidden to enter the church, in the same way that they were prevented from approaching the stone. The author invokes a parallel with Jacob who upended a stone at the place where he had seen the ladder descending from heaven.[87] Jacob declared the place to be 'none other than the house of God, … the gate of heaven!'.[88] The stone is understood to be a gateway to heaven, a *porta caeli*. As animals were unable to profess to the Christian faith, they were excluded from heaven and consequently forbidden to approach the means of accessing heaven, the stone. The story concludes by relating how the stone could still be observed lying in front of the door to the church, as a perpetual reminder that animals and those possessing the mental faculties of beasts were forever to be separated from the cornerstone that is Jesus Christ.[89]

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[81] Helen Gittos, "'Creating the Sacred' Anglo-Saxon Rites for Consecrating Cemeteries," in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales,* Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 17, ed. Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (London: The Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2002), 195.
[82] *Vita S.* Freomundi, 695, ll. 30-31.
[83] VSM f. 216^{r}, col. 1.
[84] VSM f. 216^{r}, col. 2.
[85] VSM f. 216^{r}, col. 2.
[86] VSM f. 216^{v} ,col. 1.
[87] Gen. 28:10-22.
[88] Gen. 28:17.
[89] VSM f. 216^{v}, col. 1.

These final remarks from the Life of Mildburh succeed in pulling together many of the themes touched upon in this paper, but equally it raises further questions, most notably, why certain animals are conduits for the Divine, when others, especially as a collective group, are thought to have had a pollutant effect. The relationship between animals, humans and the Divine is a complex one. On one hand, animals were the medium through which sanctity was established; the taming of wild animals served to augment the holiness and purity of the saint, and they are depicted as bridging the interface between the Divine and human worlds by their capacity to identify sacred places. Animals frequently feature as intermediaries between the spiritual and secular domains. But, on the other hand, animals are also depicted in terms of the social 'other', the outcast. Incapable of either rational thought or acquiring an immortal soul, animals were also presented in an antithetical relationship to the Divine, either as a pollutant force or as a means of conveying a concept of spiritual punishment. Furthermore, as the examination of the Ecgwine and Minster-in-Thanet material demonstrates, attitudes towards animals were continually evolving and undergoing a constant process of refinement. This material also illustrates that attitudes were not monolithic and may have varied between different social groups with the upper echelons of the Church potentially holding very different opinions from those held by local clerical and lay communities. Animals were an integral hagiographical device, invested with symbolic and exegetical undertones, their representation in hagiographical texts was a matter of considerable thought and for us, a matter of considerable interest.

Abbreviations

BNE	Plummer, Charles. *Bethada Náem Nérenn: Lives of Irish Saints*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
Passio SS. Ethelberti atque Ethelredi (Anon.)	Rollason, D. W. *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982, 90-104.
Passio SS. Ethelberti atque Ethelredi (Byrht.)	Symeon of Durham. *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia,*. Edited by T. Arnold. 2 vols., London: Rolls Ser. 75, 1882-5, vol. 2: 3-13.
S. Miłdryð	Cockayne, O. *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*. 3 vols, London: Rolls. Ser. 35c, 1866, 422-32.
Vita S. Cuthberti (Bede)	Colgrave, B. *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940, 141-307.

Vita S. Cuthmanni	Blair, John. "Saint Cuthman, Steyning and Bosham." *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 135 (1997): 173-92.
Vita S. Ecgwini (Byrht.)	Giles, J. A. *Vita Quorundum Anglo-Saxonum*. London: Caxton Society, 1854, 249-96.
Vita S. Ecgwini (D-G)	Lapidge, Michael. "The Digby-Gotha Recension of the Life of St Ecgwine." *Vale of Evesham Historical Society Research Papers* 7 (1979): 39-55.
Vita S. Ecgwini (Dom.)	———. "Dominic of Evesham *Vita S Ecgwini Episcopi Et Confessoris*." *Analecta Bollandiana* xcvi (1978): 65-104.
Vita S. Freomundi	Horstmann, Carl. *Nova Legenda Anglie*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901, vol. 2: 689-98.
Vita S. Kenelmi	Lov, R.C. *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, *Oxford Medieval Texts*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, 49-89.
Vita. Milburge	BM Additional MS 34633 ff. 206^{r}-218^{v}.
Vita Mildrethe	Rollason, D. W. *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982, 108-43.
Vita S. Werburge	Love, R.C. *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, *Oxford Medieval Texts*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004, 25-51.
Vita S. Wihtburge	———. *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, *Oxford Medieval Texts*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004, 53-93.

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MEDIUM AEVUM QUOTIDIANUM

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON GERHARD JARITZ

SONDERBAND XVI

ANIMAL DIVERSITIES

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Krems 2005

GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER ABTEILUNG
KULTUR UND WISSENSCHAFT DES AMTES
DER NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG

niederösterreich kultur

Cover illustration:
The Beaver,
Hortus Sanitatis (Strassburg: Johannes Prüm the Older, c. 1499),
Tractatus de Animalibus, capitulum xxxi: *Castor.*

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– ISBN 3-90 1094 19 9

Herausgeber: Medium Aevum Quotidianum. Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der materiellen Kultur des Mittelalters, Körnermarkt 13, A–3500 Krems, Österreich. Für den Inhalt verantwortlich zeichnen die Autoren, ohne deren ausdrückliche Zustimmung jeglicher Nachdruck, auch in Auszügen, nicht gestattet ist. – Druck: Grafisches Zentrum an der Technischen Universität Wien, Wiedner Hauptstraße 8-10, 1040 Wien.

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Preface

Over the last two decades, interests in animals and the relationship between humans and animals in the past have increased decisively. This is also true particularly for the research into the Middle Ages. A variety of perspectives and approaches can be traced concerning

- the questions asked;
- the used source evidence: zooarchaeological, textual, visual;
- the embedding of the analyses into the wider fields of the study of the history of nature, environment, economy, religion and theology, signs and symbols, social history, and so on;
- the degrees and levels of the application of interdisciplinary and comparative methods;
- the level of consciousness of the diversities of use and functions of animals in medieval society, on the one hand, and of the contextualized networks of their meanings, on the other hand.

Such a consciousness of animal diversities and, at the same time, of animal networks has been the basis for this volume of collected essays. They originate from a number of international research collaborations, communications, and presentations at international meetings, such as the annual Medieval Conferences at Kalamazoo and Leeds. All the contributors have aimed to show individual aspects of human-animal relations and have also been interested in the social contexts animals occur in. Therefore, the book is meant to represent *Animal Diversities* but certainly also, in particular, the indispensable *Animal Contexts* and *Contextuality*: from zooarchaeological evidence to zoocephalic females in visual representations of Ashkenazi Jews; from the economic function of animals in Cistercian houses to the role of their representations in Gothic misericords; from animals in chronicles or hagiographical texts to their images at different levels of late medieval visual public space.

Some recently initiated projects, two of them introduced in the volume, others referred to in the contributions, will hopefully also open up possibilities for new insights into the variety of roles and functions that were played by and constructed for all kinds of fauna in the Middle Ages.

"Zoology of the Middle Ages" may then perhaps be seen, in general, as one of the model fields for representing the importance of relations and connections between the sciences and humanities, economy and theology, daily life

and symbolic meaning, nature and culture, intention and response, as well as construction and perception, …

December 2005 Gerhard Jaritz

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