

Man and Animals in the Byzantine World

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This research project focuses on the relationship between humans and the environment in the Middle Ages. In spite of the great significance of the “animal” in various fields of human activity, the topic has not been so far studied independently, at least within Byzantine Studies. The aim of this project is the study of the importance of animals for people and the relationship between people and animals in Byzantium, that is, the Eastern Roman Empire which survived in southeastern Europe, Asia Minor and the eastern Mediterranean (until the fifteenth century), characterized by new cultural features, such as Christianity, the Greek language, and Byzantium’s cultural influence in the Middle East and on the Slavs of the South.

The project is organized by the Faculty of Literature (School of Philosophy, University of Athens), the Department of Byzantine Literature and Folklore. This research endeavour is the result of the material that the initiator of the project has accumulated over the years. Since 2001, the project has been partially funded by the University of Athens Research Committee. In 2005, two-year funding was obtained from the Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Training, co-financed by the European Social Fund and National Resources. This provided for the employment of one researcher and one part-time research associate, as well as technical support. Within the frame of the financed project, research focuses on the period between the eighth and eleventh centuries. Although such a chronological distinction cannot be easily justified, it was necessary for practical reasons. Nevertheless, broader research is essentially extended throughout the entire Byzantine period.

At the current stage, data concerning animals are being drawn from primary written sources. But it is planned to extend the research into the areas of Byzantine art, archaeology and archaeozoology in collaboration with colleagues in these areas.

Of course, references to animals are variously attested in all genres of the medieval Greek literary tradition. Firstly, works which are expected to contain abundant information on animals are scrutinized, for example dream interpretations, vernacular literature (symbolic legendary stories with animals), veterinary accounts, medical accounts with information on human diet, lives of Saints, medieval dictionaries of the Greek language, legislation, epistles and so on. During the study of these sources the databases *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* and *Dum-*

barton Oaks Hagiography are useful and facilitate the researcher in tracing the relevant passages.

Up to now, the activities of this project are the following: collecting the relevant secondary bibliography, listing the main sources (written almost exclusively in Greek), which are expected to include considerable information concerning animals. There will also be a systematic study of these sources and inclusion of information into a database.

The database is in Greek but it is hoped that English will also be employed. The information held in this database will also be of interest to non-(modern)Greek speakers because through it will be possible to pick out passages about animals in primary sources.

The main themes of the research project are: animals as part of the human diet, animal symbolism, medieval attitudes towards animals, their importance in transportation, war, economy and agriculture. It is also expected to find material about humans working with animals, such as shepherds, nomads, horsemen, blacksmiths, fishermen, hunters, traders of animals and animal products, craftsmen and others for whom animals represented a source of living and an energy resource; in other words, about medieval people within the confines of Byzantine society who depended on the natural environment and for whom animals were a source of inspiration and interpretation.

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Edited by

Gerhard Jaritz and Alice Choyke

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Table of Contents

Preface	7
Aleksander Pluskowski, Wolves and Sheep in Medieval Semiotics, Iconology and Ecology: a Case Study of Multi- and Inter-disciplinary Approaches to Human-Animal Relations in the Historical Past	9
Alice M. Choyke, Kyra Lyublyanovics, László Bartosiewicz, The Various Voices of Medieval Animal Bones	23
Grzegorz Żabiński, Swine for Pearls? Animals in the Thirteenth-Century Cistercian Houses of Henryków and Mogiła	50
Krisztina Fügedi, Bohemian Sheep, Hungarian Horses, and Polish Wild Boars: Animals in Twelfth-Century Central European Chronicles	66
Hilary Powell, Walking and Talking with the Animals: the Role of Fauna in Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives	89
Gerhard Jaritz, Oxen and Hogs, Monkeys and Parrots: Using "Familiar" and "Unfamiliar" Fauna in Late Medieval Visual Representation	107
Sarah Wells, A Database of Animals in Medieval Misericords	123
Zsófia Buda, Animals and Gazing at Women: Zoocephalic Figures in the Tripartite Mahzor	136
Taxiarchis G. Koliás, Man and Animals in the Byzantine World	165
Ingrid Matschinegg, (M)edieval (A)nimal (D)atabase: a Project in Progress	167

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, ...

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