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Animal Symbolism and its Interpretations in the Pictorial Programmes of the Illuminated Bestiaries

Among various aspects of medieval thought on nature the idea of nature as a school of human behaviour became one of the important bases of the Christian medieval didactics. In the context of this thought, animals and their characteristics are perceived as essential instruments of teaching offered by the Creator to a man. In the didactic writings of the Middle Ages the animal figures acquire the symbolical meaning and receive various moral and allegorical interpretations.

Very few manuscripts of the *Physiologus* are illustrated with the representations of allegorical moralisations or with images alluding to the symbolic significance of animals mentioned in the chapters of this work written around the IIIrd century A.D. In the most of cases the pictorial and iconographical tradition developed in the *Physiologus* manuscripts is limited by the representations of animals themselves.

A large fragment of the illuminated *Physiologus* which contains not only the representations of animals themselves and the narrative scenes illustrating their stories and characteristics but also their allegorical and moral significance makes a part of the ms. 1066-77 of the Brussels Royal Library, of the Xth century. Such are the scenes depicting the stories of the Eagle, of Sirens and the Onocentaur, or that of the Caladrius. The analogous approach distinguished a Greek Smyrna *Physiologus* (which could be a creation of the XIth or XIIth centuries but could also be a copy of the XIVth century of the manuscript dating of XIth century), destroyed in the fire of the Library of the Smyrna Evangelical School in 1921 but known thanks to the study by J.Strzygowski and several photographs taken before the fire. In the Latin West this tradition receives its continuation also in several illuminated manuscripts of the poetical *Bestiaire divin* written by Norman poet Guillaume le Clerc at the beginning of the XIIIth century.

As to the tradition of the illustrations of medieval Bestiaries, the creators of several manuscripts transform the miniatures, in some cases, in real pictorial commentaries of the text. They introduce the new figures and scenes which are even not mentioned sometimes in the text itself. These are, for instance, the scenes illustrating the passages from Gospels which are not included in the text but which enrich and develop the symbolic meaning of an animal, as it was done in the miniature of the Lion in the ms. Roy. 12. F.XIII of the British Library. These are also the illustrations of the passages from the Gospels which are quoted in the earlier versions of the Bestiary text (such as a so called transitional group between the First and the Second families of these manuscripts); they disappear in the texts of the Second family but continue to be represented in the miniatures of these manuscripts. Such is the representation of the Fox with small foxes in their holes which continue to be represented notwithstanding the omission of the Gospels quotation mentioning the foxes' holes.

In several cases the painter and the conceiver of the programme of the manuscript added to animal scenes some special features which are not mentioned in the text. The miniature with the Lynx in the ms. Ashmole 1511 of the Bodleian Library is one of the striking examples of such an approach: the animal is represented looking at a Lamb which is found on the top of a mountain. A visceral hate of the Lynx for the humanity is mentioned still by Isidore of Seville whose passage is included in the Bestiaries. Thus, the presence of a Lamb charges the representation of the Lynx with a new semantic: to the infinite love for the humanity represented by the Lamb, symbol of Jesus-Christ and his sacrifice for the humanity's salvation is opposed the hate nourished for the man by the Devil incarnated by the Lynx.

This particular manuscript offers several interpretations of the animal scenes which strike by their singularity. Such is the refined miniature of the Whale, image of the Devil, in which, in opposition to other Bestiary manuscripts representing the defeat of sailors in front of the sea monster, the travellers continue their journey in a boat which remains firmly on the water surface protected by the Cross which is found on the top of the mast. The particular significance of the scene is a result of the desire of the patron and the customer of the manuscript who was probably an important dignitary of the English Church.

Of particular importance for the definition of the general sense of the Bestiaries pictorial programme is the image of the Caladrius, a white bird interpreted by the *Physiologus* as an image of Christ. The Caladrius has a property to foresee the death or the healing of an ill man. The bird turns around from the ill man when his illness is mortal but it looks at him when the man will recover from his sickness. It is a symbolic image of Christ who takes the infirmity of man upon himself and flies up toward the sun. In the major part of the Bestiary manuscripts of various families and groups of the XIIth, XIIIth and XIVth centuries the Caladrius is looking at a sick man, thus inspiring a hope and faith and predicting the healing from the mortal illness. The cases where the Caladrius turns his head away from the patient are relatively rare. It is important to note that they become more often at the end of the XIIIth century, in the period of an increasing feeling of the loss of hope to heal sins through confession and penitence after the defeat of the Crusader movement, period which distinguishes itself also by the strong antagonisms in the heart of the Church.

The chapter of the Caladrius and the miniature which expresses its symbolic meaning belongs to the most important images of the medieval Bestiary. The choice of the Caladrius iconography gives a general tone to the spiritual and moral programme of each Bestiary manuscript directed to the victory over sin or, on the contrary, to the pessimism of the defeat in the eternal battle against the diabolical temptations of the terrestrial world.