

2011

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Preaching the Book of Creation: Memory and Moralization in Medieval Bestiaries

By Bobbi Dykema, *Independent Scholar*

In 1125, Bernard of Clairvaux was asked by the abbot William of St. Thierry to speak in defense of Cistercian simplicity over and against what both saw as the excesses of Cluniac monasticism. In his *Apologia XII*, Bernard rails against the ornamentation of the Cluniac cloister:

But in the cloisters, before the eyes of the brothers while they read—what is that ridiculous monstrosity doing, an amazing kind of deformed beauty and yet a beautiful deformity? What are the filthy apes doing there? The fierce lions? The monstrous centaurs? The creatures, part man and part beast? The striped tigers, fighting soldiers, and hunters blowing their horns? You may see many bodies under one head, and conversely many heads on one body. On one side the tail of a serpent is seen on a quadruped, on the other side the head of a quadruped is on the body of a fish. Over there an animal has a horse for the front half and a goat for the back; here a creature which is horned in front is equine behind. In short, everywhere so plentiful and astonishing a variety of contradictory forms is seen that one would rather read in the marble than in books, and spend the whole day wondering at every single one of them than in meditating on the law of God. Good Lord! If one is not ashamed of the absurdity, why is one not at least troubled at the expense?¹

While some scholars have interpreted Bernard's diatribe as a rant against grotesquerie and excessive ornamentation in religious architecture generally, it seems clear from the context that he was particularly concerned about the potential distractions and waste of money represented by such details in specifically monastic settings, and that he sought to draw attention to their

¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia XII.29*, as translated by Conrad Rudolph in *The "Things of Greater Importance": Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 283. Quoted in Nona C. Flores, ed., *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), xv-xvi. Elided material supplied as translated by David Burr, *Medieval Source Book* <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/bernard1.html>, accessed 5 October 2010.

presence in Cluniac houses as further evidence of the Cluniacs' worldliness. However, at the very moment of Bernard's writing, there were arising in his own Cistercian order, as well as in other monastic establishments, any number of bizarre and monstrous creatures, lurking in the pages of illuminated manuscript books. The books in question were bestiaries, and one of their purposes, interestingly, in a contemplative order, was to facilitate the creation of sermons memorable for both preacher and audience.

Bernard's world of twelfth-century Western Europe was in many ways in a state of profound change, in social, religious, environmental and economic terms. The population was becoming increasingly urbanized, with the accompanying sense of rootlessness for those who were no longer directly attached to the land.² A new educated class was beginning to appear with the rise of the universities³ and the influx of both new and forgotten learning from the Islamic world.⁴ Medicine, theology, and law were beginning to emerge as specialized, self-governing professions.⁵ Population pressures affected both the natural and the built environments,⁶ as demand for more arable land came into conflict with royal privilege enshrined in such traditions

² Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse, *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 192.

³ John C. Jacobs, ed. *The Fables of Odo of Cheriton* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), p. 12.

⁴ Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952), p. 91.

⁵ Jacobs, p. 26.

⁶ Aleks Pluskowski, "The Zooarchaeology of Medieval 'Christendom': Ideology, the Treatment of Animals and the Making of Medieval Europe," *World Archaeology* 42/2 (2010), p. 203.

as the English Forest Law,⁷ laid down by William the Conqueror to reserve both huge tracts of land and the most desirable game for the pleasure of the king.⁸

The world was changing in religious terms, as well. The first Crusade was preached by Pope Urban II in 1095 in response to Muslim incursions into the Byzantine Empire, and crusading continued throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Crusading abroad was accompanied by religious revival at home. The Gregorian Reform of the mid-eleventh century began a process of shifting the locus of lay affective piety from saints' relics to the Eucharist,⁹ and both lay men and women began joining monastic orders in large numbers, or seeking to practice, inasmuch as it was possible, monastic forms of spiritual devotion at home.¹⁰ New, apostolic forms of monastic life were beginning to be created to meet this burgeoning need.¹¹ Innocent III's Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 articulated and responded to the growing demands of lay spirituality by providing for the appointment of preachers and confessors to assist the bishops with the care of souls, along with the establishment of cathedral schools to train the new dispensers of the *cura animarum*.¹² Preaching took on a "quasi-sacramental character"¹³ in this context, and with the rise of the universities and of theology as a discrete profession, a new

⁷ Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 46-47.

⁸ Jacobs, pp. 21-22.

⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 10.

¹⁰ C.H. Lawrence, *The Friars: The Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society* (New York: Longman, 1994), p. 121.

¹¹ Giles Constable, *Monks, Hermits and Crusaders in Medieval Europe* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988), p. 365.

¹² Joseph Goering, *William de Montibus (c. 1140-1213): The Schools and the Literature of Pastoral Care* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992), p. 75.

¹³ Constable, "The Language of Preaching in the Twelfth Century," *Viator* 25 (1994), p. 135.

rhetoric of preaching supported by a wide array of new textual resources began to develop.¹⁴ The rising interest in both preaching and active monasticism coalesced in the establishment of the mendicant orders, with the Dominicans receiving papal approval in 1216 and the Franciscans in 1220.¹⁵

All of these developments are bound up with the phenomenon of medieval contemplatives being called upon to preach, and needing textual resources to support them in their pastoral ministry. But the most compelling reason for the Church to press monks into service outside the cloister was what Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse have called “the most widespread and successful challenges to orthodoxy that the Church had faced in many centuries”¹⁶—namely, the Cathar and Waldensian heresies.

Both the Cathars and the Waldensians favored voluntary poverty and (unauthorized) evangelistic preaching.¹⁷ However, the Cathars’ rejection of the sacraments and denial of the humanity of Christ,¹⁸ as well as the anticlerical streak found in both groups, brought them into conflict with Church orthodoxy. The Premonstratensian prior Everwin of Steinfeld contacted Bernard of Clairvaux in 1143, asking him to speak out against the heretics.¹⁹ Bernard’s Sermons 65 and 66 on the *Song of Songs* constituted his first response to Everwin;²⁰ in 1145 the Cistercian abbot traveled to southern France to preach against the heretics himself, thus opening the door

¹⁴ James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 310.

¹⁵ Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade in Occitania, 1145-1229: Preaching in the Lord’s Vineyard* (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), p. 46.

¹⁶ Rouse and Rouse, p. 192.

¹⁷ Kienzle, p. 44ff.

¹⁸ Kienzle, p. 47.

¹⁹ Kienzle, p. 82.

²⁰ Kienzle, p. 85.

for a more concerted Cistercian response to the problem.²¹ From 1145 to 1229, Cistercians went forth to Languedoc and the Rhineland attempting to persuade the dissident groups to return to orthodoxy.²²

This was in contradiction of both the Cistercian contemplative tradition and official Church prohibitions; however, the need was perceived to be sufficiently great that under Innocent III the order was effectively made the “papal workhorse,”²³ whose commission to preach lasted through the early years of the mendicant orders.²⁴ By the time of the formation of the Dominican Order of Preachers and the Franciscan Friars Minor — whose establishment in response to Catharist and Waldensian threats to the Church²⁵ is paralleled by that of the Jesuits in the wake of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation — preaching by contemplative monks had become accepted as a “normal and even laudable practice.”²⁶

Itinerant preaching by contemplatives against heresy and vice was a new mode of discourse in many respects. The preachers and audiences were oftentimes unknown to one another;²⁷ the audiences were likely to represent a mix in terms of education, background, interests, and economic class;²⁸ and the preaching itself was likely to take place in the open air.²⁹

²¹ Kienzle, pp. 90-91.

²² Kienzle, p. 1.

²³ Jessalynn Bird, “The Religious’s Role in a Post-Fourth-Latern World: Jacques de Vitry’s *Sermones ad Status* and *Historia Occidentalis*,” in Carolyn Muessig, ed., *Medieval Monastic Preaching* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 216.

²⁴ D.L. d’Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris Before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 24.

²⁵ Anders Piltz, *The World of Medieval Learning*, trans. David Jones (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p. 159.

²⁶ Constable, *Monks, Hermits and Crusaders*, p. 374.

²⁷ Claire M. Waters, “Talking the Talk: Access to the Vernacular in Medieval Preaching” in Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson, eds., *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), pp. 33-34.

²⁸ Constable, “The Language of Preaching in the Twelfth Century,” p. 142.

The thrust and content of preaching also changed, from careful explication of a long biblical text to moral persuasion based on a short passage.³⁰ And itinerant preachers were unlikely to be carrying very many books, so much of the homiletic craft relied on the preacher's memory.³¹

Part of the challenge posed to the preacher's memory skills was met by the structure of the sermon itself. The "old" sermon form, dating back to Origen (c. 185-c. 254), consisted of the *exordium* (allusion to Scripture), a lengthy exegesis of a passage's allegorical, tropological, and analogical meanings, practical application, and exhortation; and doxology.³² In the new, thematic and moralized sermon form, known as *dilatatio*, the preacher began with a prayer for divine aid, followed by a *prothema* (introduction); *thema* (short scriptural quotation); *divisio* of the *thema* into (usually three) *articuli*, each further subdivided into a number of *capitula*;³³ and *prosecutio* of the members of the *divisio*.³⁴ The thirteenth-century English theologian Thomas de Chobham, and the fourteenth-century Catalan Franciscan Francesc Eiximenis, in their respective *Artes praedicandi*, both explicitly recommended such an orderly structure to facilitate the preacher's memory.³⁵ The preacher might additionally employ a mnemonic rhyme consisting of summary catchphrases to recall each of the divisions.³⁶

²⁹ H. Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 71.

³⁰ Kimberly Rivers, "Memory and Medieval Preaching: Mnemonic Advice in the *Ars Praedicandi* of Francesc Eiximenis (ca. 1327-1409)," *Viator* 30 (1999), p. 256.

³¹ Kurt Danziger, *Marking the Mind: A History of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 79-80.

³² J. Kevin Coyle, "From Homily to Sermon to Homily: The Content of Christian Liturgical Preaching in Historical Perspective," *Liturgical Ministry* 15 (Winter 2006), p. 3.

³³ Carolyn Muessig, "Preaching the Beatitudes in the Late Middle Ages: Some Mendicant Examples," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22/2 (2009), p. 142.

³⁴ Murphy, p. 325.

³⁵ Rivers, p. 258, 265.

³⁶ Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge:

The emergence of these mnemonically organized, moralized thematic sermons in the twelfth century coincides with that of textual collections of biblical *distinctiones*—explications of individual words of scripture which distinguish each word’s various figurative meanings, supplying a scriptural text for each meaning.³⁷ *Distinctiones* were not the only form of textual preaching resource to flourish in this period. Collections of *exempla* (moralized anecdotes), *vitae de sanctis* such as the Golden Legend, treatises on virtue and vice, *florilegia* (anthologies of quotations from earlier writers), model sermons, and *Artes praedicandi* (art of preaching) manuals all multiplied across England and the Continent in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,³⁸ many of which were used for explicitly mnemonic purposes. Collections of *fabliaux* such as that by theologian and preacher Odo of Cheriton (c. 1185-1246/47) were used as reference handbooks for preachers and orators,³⁹ and Chaucer in his Pardoner’s Tale alludes to the mnemonic value of the short edifying tales collected in books of *exempla*,⁴⁰ for the audience and presumably for the preacher as well.

The mnemonic value of the tales collected in books of *exempla* and *fabliaux* lay precisely in their capacity to surprise and amuse with colorful detail. Witness this example from Odo, about a man pursued by a unicorn:

Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 105.

³⁷ Rouse and Rouse, p. 209, 205.

³⁸ d’Avray, pp. 64-80.

³⁹ Arnold Clayton Henderson, “Medieval Beasts and Modern Cages: The Making of Meaning in Fables and Bestiaries,” *Publication of the Modern Language Association* 97/1 (1982), p. 41.

⁴⁰ “Thanne telle I hem ensamples many oon / Of olde stories longe tyme agoon. / For lewed peple loven tales olde; / Swiche thynges kan they wel reporte and holde.” Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VI, ll. 435–38, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L.D. Benson (Oxford, 1988). Quoted in Sebastian Sobceki, “Exemplary Intentions: Two English Dominican Hagiographers in the Thirteenth Century and the Preaching Through *Exempla*.” *New Blackfriars* 89/1022 (2008), pp. 479-80.

A unicorn was following a certain man who, as he fled his pursuer, came upon a tree loaded down with beautiful fruit. Below the tree was a pit filled with serpents, toads, and reptiles. Also, two worms—one white and the other black—were gnawing away at the tree. Even so, the man climbed up into it and dined upon the fruit, all the time delighting in the tree's leafy branches. To those two worms who kept on gnawing, he paid no attention. And the tree fell. And the wretched man plunged down into the pit.⁴¹

The lively details of the unicorn, worms, serpents and toads create a vivid and memorable mental picture. Stories such as this were commended to the medieval preacher and orator in the popular *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, attributed to Cicero and both utilized and commented upon by numerous medieval theologians and authors, which advised that “what is unusual and marvelous strikes us and is retained in the memory more than what is ordinary.”⁴² And no volume likely to be found in a library of monastic preachers was apt to contain more unusual, marvelous, striking and colorful material than the medieval bestiary.

Bestiaries are illustrated compendia of both real and fabulous animals, which developed out of the early Christian/late antiquity text the *Physiologus*.⁴³ While the date of the *Physiologus* is much debated, it is generally accepted that it was first produced in Egypt, most likely in Alexandria, perhaps as early as the second century.⁴⁴ Drawing from the fables and animal tales of Aristotle, Pliny, and other ancient sources, including both Greek and Near Eastern religion and natural philosophy, the *Physiologus* is the original bestiary in that it provides moral exegesis of the described animal characteristics and habits through a system of correspondences by which

⁴¹ Odo of Cheriton, *The Fables of Odo of Cheriton*, trans. and ed. John C. Jacobs (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), pp. 120-21.

⁴² “mirabile plus movet quam consuetum,” quoted in Carruthers (who is herself quoting Albertus Magnus), p. 141.

⁴³ Hassig, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Michael J. Curley, trans., *Physiologus* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), xvi-xviii.

animals with good habits figure as types of Christ, saints, or virtuous persons, and animals with bad habits as types of the Devil or persons seized by vice.⁴⁵

By the twelfth century, the *Physiologus* was beginning to be adapted and appended with source materials such as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, the *Hexaemeron*s (six days) of both Basil and Ambrose, and other texts;⁴⁶ it is at this point that the work evolves into the medieval bestiary. The number of animals increases significantly, from two or three dozen to as many as a hundred and fifty.⁴⁷ The majority of the bestiaries were illustrated, some of them lavishly;⁴⁸ for their mnemonic function in crafting sermons the pictures were at least as important as the text.

While bestiaries were long disparaged by post-Enlightenment natural historians as naïve and unsystematic scientific treatises characterized principally by their incredulity,⁴⁹ it is now well understood that the bestiaries were theological in nature.⁵⁰ For the medieval person, God had revealed Himself not only in the words of scripture, but also in the works of nature.⁵¹ Scripture itself declared this truth: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen” (Rom. 1:20). Making use of God’s creatures to teach faith and morals made

⁴⁵ F.N.M. Diekstra. “The *Physiologus*, the Bestiaries, and Medieval Animal Lore,” *Neophilologus* 69 (1985), pp. 142-43.

⁴⁶ Christopher de Hamel, “Introduction,” in *Book of Beasts: A Facsimile of MS Bodley 764* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2009), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁷ Curley, pp. xxx.

⁴⁸ Richard Barber, trans., *Bestiary: Being an English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford M.S. Bodley 764 with all the Original Miniatures Reproduced in Facsimile* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993), p. 11.

⁴⁹ Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 138.

⁵⁰ de Hamel, p. 12.

⁵¹ Spencer, p. 81.

sense from a theocentric perspective in which animals ranked below human beings;⁵² it affirmed humans' divinely-ordained dominion over the natural world.⁵³ Even imaginary creatures could

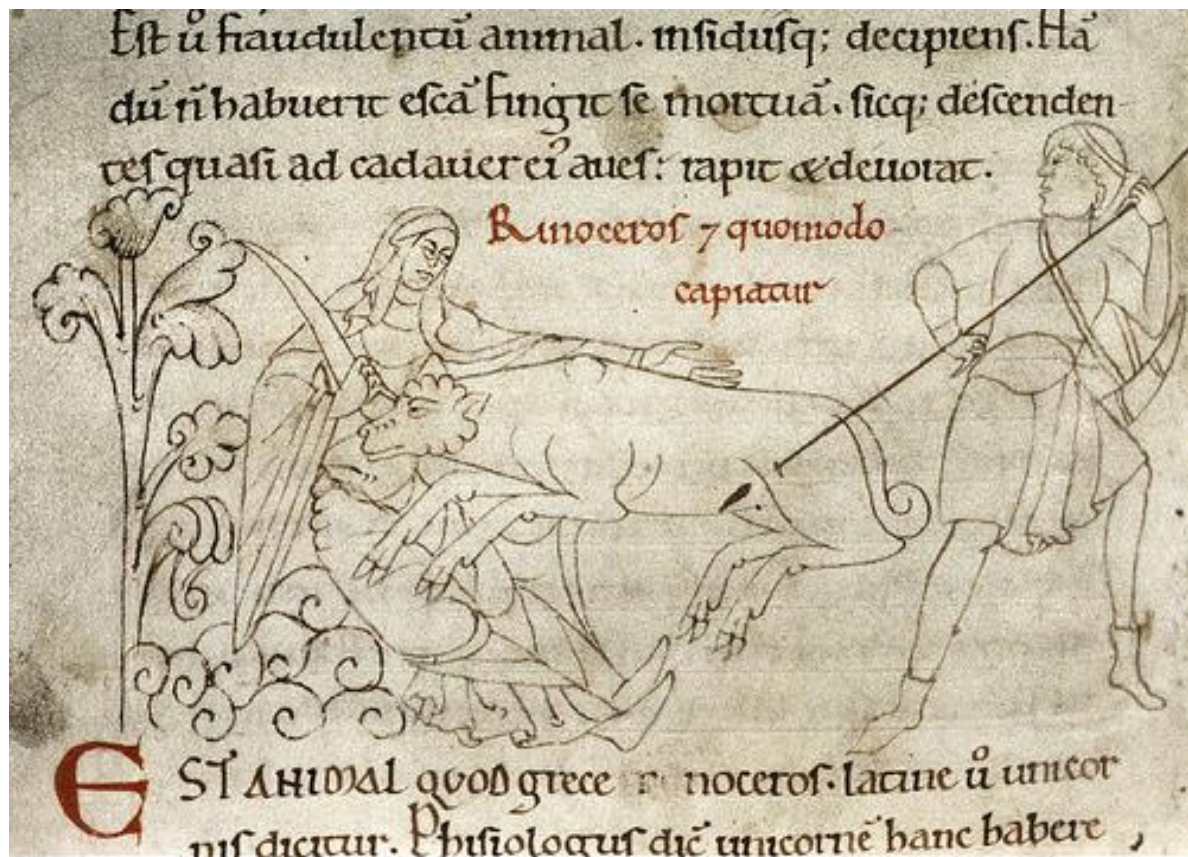


Figure 1 Unicorn, *Physiologus*, Oxford University MS Laud Misc. 247 fol-149v b, England, c. 1120. Photo: Oxford University.

serve a didactic purpose;⁵⁴ and monstrous ones, imaginary or not, revealed God's power to violate the order of nature as a means of instructing humankind.⁵⁵ Indeed, failure to include any creature that might possibly exist somewhere could be seen as censorship of the divine

⁵² L.A.J.R. Houwen, "Animal Parallelism in Medieval Literature and the Bestiaries: A Preliminary Investigation," *Neophilologus* 78/3 (1994), p. 492.

⁵³ Pluskowski, p. 202. Cf. Genesis 1:28-30.

⁵⁴ Pamela Gravestock, "Did Imaginary Animals Exist?" in Debra Hassig, ed., *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), p. 130.

⁵⁵ John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 109, 119.

message.⁵⁶ The implicit antithesis of animality and humanity set up by the bestiaries was analogous to that between holy and unholy, human and divine.⁵⁷

These beliefs were skillfully exploited by the itinerant preachers. Indeed, evidence for the use of bestiaries as theological works and preaching resources is manifold. Based on their appearance in contemporary book lists, Ron Baxter has described monastic institutions as the “prime consumers” of bestiaries;⁵⁸ and Cistercian houses in particular owned significantly more bestiaries per 1,000 total volumes than any other monastic group.⁵⁹ Indeed, the Cistercians also owned the oldest surviving manuscript of the bestiaries’ prime source document, the *Physiologus*.⁶⁰ Other religious orders with bestiaries in their libraries included Augustinians, Benedictines, Carmelites, Cluniacs, Franciscans, and Premonstratensians,⁶¹ all of whom were, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, involved in preaching.⁶²

In medieval library catalogues, bestiaries are classified with other theological works, and in mixed volumes they are bound with such works, particularly other types of preaching resources, including *exempla*, sermon collections, and *vitae de sanctis*.⁶³ One example of this is

⁵⁶ de Hamel, p. 17.

⁵⁷ Alison Syme, “Taboos and the Holy in Bodley 764,” in Debra Hassig, ed., *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), p. 174.

⁵⁸ Ron Baxter, *Bestiaries and Their Users in the Middle Ages* (Strand: Courtauld Institute, 1998), p. 212.

⁵⁹ Baxter, p. 180.

⁶⁰ John Morson, “The English Cistercians and the Bestiary,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 39:1 (September 1956), p. 147.

⁶¹ Baxter, p. 180.

⁶² Andrew Jotischky, *The Carmelites and Antiquity: Mendicants and their Pasts in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 334.

⁶³ Baxter, pp. 188-89.

MS Harley 3244, (**fig. 2**) which contains a bestiary, a collection of *exempla*, sermons, Peraldus' *Liber de vitiis* (Book of Vices), and Robert of Thetford's *Ars praedicandi*.⁶⁴



Figure 2 Pard and Panther, British Library Harley 3244 f. 37, England; 2nd or 3rd quarter of the 13th century, after c. 1236. Photo: British Library.

A donation inscription in Pierpont Morgan Library MS 81, a deluxe English bestiary of the last quarter of the twelfth century, indicates that the bestiary was a gift to Worksop Priory from a canon at Lincoln, along with a Psalter, Gospels, *mappa mundi*, and a copy of the Meditations of the Blessed Anselm “for the edification of the brethren.”⁶⁵ Not only were bestiaries classified with other preaching resources; the peak of bestiary production coincides with the

collecting of such textual preaching resources by mendicant orders,⁶⁶ and David d’Avray has demonstrated that the loss rate for manuscripts in constant use by traveling preachers is likely to have been significantly higher than that for other types of medieval books.⁶⁷ Hence, extant

⁶⁴ Hassig, p. 175.

⁶⁵ “ad edificationem fratrum,” quoted in Xenia Muratova, “Bestiaries: An Aspect of Medieval Patronage” in Sarah Macready and F.H. Thompson, eds., *Art and Patronage in the English Romanesque* (London: The Society of Antiquaries, 1986), p.118. See also <http://corsair.morganlibrary.org/msdescr/BBM0081a.pdf>

⁶⁶ Baxter, p. 209.

⁶⁷ David d’Avray, “Printing, Mass Communication, and Religious Reformation: The Middle Ages and After” in Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham, eds., *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 55-56.

bestiaries whose provenance indicates the patronage and/or ownership of pious and wealthy nobles⁶⁸ may be a very minor subcategory of usage with a much higher survival rate, while the bulk of contemporary production was aimed at itinerant preaching use (and thus lost).

Bestiary quotations and references in extant recorded sermons are further evidence for their usage as sermon source materials. Bernard himself employed the bestiary's description of the mythical basilisk in a sermon on Psalm 15:

The basilisk, they tell us, bears in his eye his poison, vilest of animals, beyond others to be execrated. Wilt thou know the eye that is empoisoned, eye of evil, eye that has fascination? Then think thou upon envy.⁶⁹

Vollhardt's survey of the Latin homilies of Bernard of Clairvaux and Radulfus Ardens finds additional references to "the adder, with a jewel in its head, the fox, the wolf, the bear, the lion, [and] great and little fish."⁷⁰ In an exhaustive study of the sermons of the Cistercians Aelred of Rievaulx (1109-1167), Gilbert of Hoiland (d. 1172), and Baldwin of Ford (d. 1193), John Morson found forty-six references to bestiary creatures, the majority of which could not have come from any other source.⁷¹ A hundred years later in Italy, Marcus of Orvieto's 1290 *Liber de moralitatibus* contains a lengthy bestiaresque exposition on the peacock.⁷²

⁶⁸ de Hamel, p. 20.

⁶⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux on the Psalm *Qui habitat*, xv. 4, in *Patrologiae latina* 183:237, ed. J. P. Migne. (Paris: Migne, 1841), quoted in Charles Sears Baldwin, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (to 1400) Interpreted from Representative Works* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), pp. 235-236.

⁷⁰ W. Vollhardt, *Der Einfluss der lateinischen geistlichen Litteratur auf einige kleinere Schöpfungen der englischen Übergansperiode* (Leipzig, 1888), quoted in Joseph Albert Mosher, *The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of England* (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1911), p. 48.

⁷¹ Morson, pp. 165-166.

⁷² Friedman, "Peacocks and Preachers: Analytic Technique in Marcus of Orvieto's *Liber de moralitatibus*, Vatican lat. MS 5935" in Willene B. Clark and Meradith T. McMunn, eds., *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), p. 188.

Even into the fifteenth century, preachers were employing bestiary illustrations; John Felton (d. 1434) in his *Sermo de Innocentibus* recounts the bestiary story of the mother ape, who has two young. She loves one and hates the other. When she is hunted, she runs off with the loved one in her arms, but the other clings to her neck. When the ape is hard-pressed by the hunters, she is forced to drop the baby she loves, but she cannot rid herself of the other, and by that means she is caught. Likewise the covetous man has two offspring: worldly goods, which he loves very much, and the wrath of God. When he is pursued by devils, he loses his goods, but the wrath of God cannot be shaken off, and brings him to destruction.⁷³ Joyce Salisbury notes that the story of the ape mother with twins who accidentally loses her favorite was one of the most popular animal stories used in *exempla* collections, and thus one of the most likely to be used in sermons.⁷⁴

Further evidence for bestiary usage in preaching can be seen in just such cross-fertilization between bestiaries, *exempla*, *fabliaux*, and other preaching resources. Odo of Cheriton's collection of stories may be considered a blending of the *fabliaux* tradition of Aesop with that of the bestiaries. Odo's tales include unicorns, which are bestiary, not fable, animals, and conclude with strongly Christian morals foreign to Aesop.⁷⁵ Jan Ziolkowski sees such Christian conditioning in the fables of the fifteenth-century Scottish poet Robert Henryson, as well.⁷⁶ The preaching manuals themselves, such as Richard of Wetheringsett's *Summa Qui bene*

⁷³ John Felton, *Sermo de Innocentibus*, Oriel College MS 10, fo. 279^{va}, quoted in Spencer, p. 344.

⁷⁴ Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 127.

⁷⁵ Salisbury, p. 125.

⁷⁶ Jan M. Ziolkowski, "Literary Genre and Animal Symbolism" in L.A.J.R. Houwen, ed., *Animals and the Symbolic in Mediaeval Art and Literature* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997), pp. 13-14.

presunt, composed in the first quarter of the thirteenth century,⁷⁷ often employ bestiary imagery and lore, sometimes extensively. In a discussion of the capital vices, Richard mentions the scorpion, the lion, the serpent, the onager, the fox, the hedgehog, the ostrich, the owl, the peacock, the sparrow, the bear, the camel, the dog, the fish, and the spider; elsewhere he employs the bestiary description of lion cubs born dead and resurrected by the breath of their father, as (fig. 3) well as discussing the elephant in connection with the danger of concupiscence of the

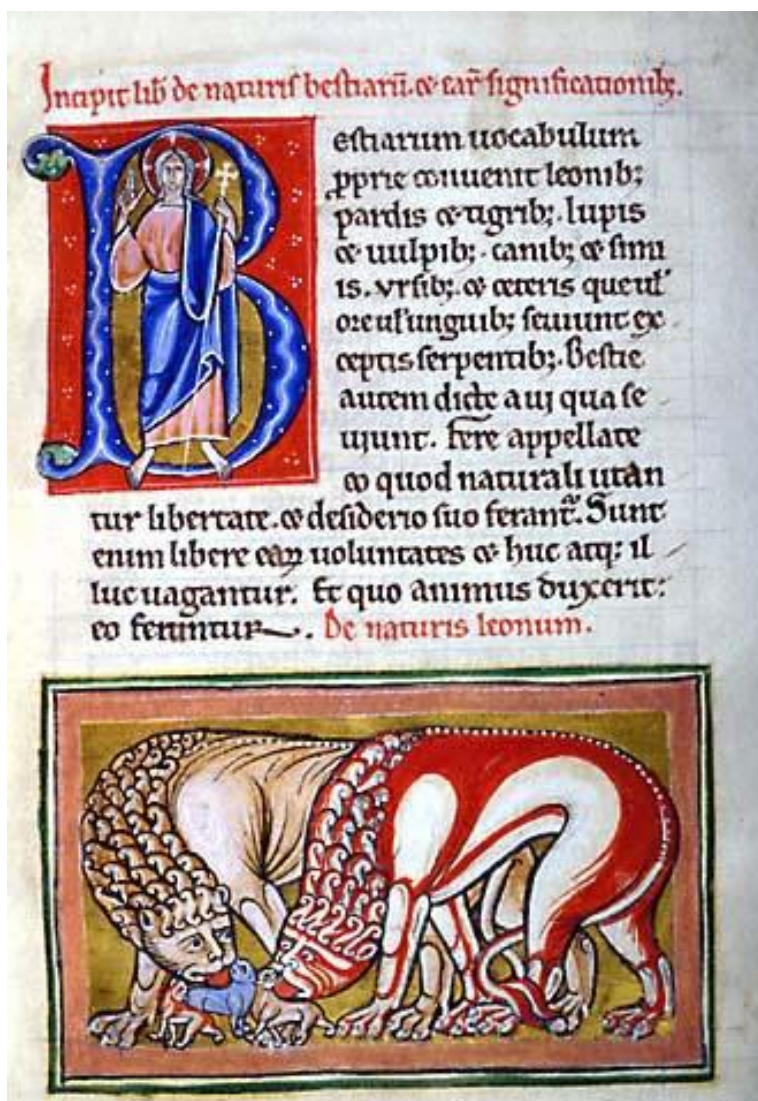


Figure 3 Lions with Young, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M.81 fol. 8r, England, possibly Lincoln or York, c. 1185. Photo: Pierpont Morgan Library

⁷⁷ Goering, p. 86.

flesh.⁷⁸

The anonymous English Franciscan author of the *Fasciculus morum* also draws upon bestiary animals as moralizations of vice, in a passage that is virtually a verbatim quote of the English bestiary manuscripts Cambridge Ii 4 26 and MS Bodley 764:

we read further about an animal called panther, which is very meek and beautiful because it is sprinkled with various colors. Its company is very delightful to all other animals except the dragon and its offspring. When this animal has eaten its fill, it enters its cave, where it is said to sleep for three days and nights without interruption. But on the third day it awakens and gives forth a loud cry, accompanied by a most sweet odor. When the other animals hear this cry, whether they are far or near, they run toward it because of the sweet smell and follow it... This panther, because of its meekness and beauty, symbolizes Christ...⁷⁹

The illustration of the panther in Bodley 764 (**fig. 4**) is indeed quite memorably “sprinkled with various colors.” If the writers of the preaching manuals (who themselves preached) demonstrate such familiarity with the bestiaries, it seems safe to conclude that itinerant preachers were familiar with them also. Clearly, medieval preachers were encouraged to rely on both the book of scripture and the book of creation, in which the animals could be understood as the words of the text.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Muratova, p. 132. Muratova attributes the *Summa* to Richard’s master, William de Montibus, who was chancellor of Lincoln Cathedral, including its school, from c. 1189 to his death in 1213. Goering, p. 43.

⁷⁹ “de quodam animali pantera nomine narratur, quod est animal mansuetum et pulcrum valde, eo quod variis coloribus est respersum. Cuius presencia omnibus animalibus est valde delectabilis preterquam draconi et pullis eius. Cum ergo comederit animal illud et fuerit saciatum, cavernam intrat, ubi tribus diebus et noctibus continue fertur dormire. Tercio vero die evigilans clamorem magnum emittit, quem odor suavissimus committatur. Cuius clamorem cum audierint animalia longe aut prope distancia, propter odoris suavitatem sibi occurrunt et secuntur... Pantera autem iste propter suam mansuetudinem et pulcritudinem signat Christum...” Siegfried Wenzel, ed. and trans., *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher’s Handbook* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), pp. 274-75.

⁸⁰ Ziolkowski, p. 8.

Beryl Rowland has argued that bestiaries were “intended as aids to the creation of invisible pictures in memory.”⁸¹ She notes that, particularly in the deluxe editions of English bestiaries produced in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, “the animals are presented with such vivacity and vigor that they are oddly compelling, pulsating with life even when



Figure 4 Panther, Bodleian Library, Oxford University, MS Bodley 764 f. 7v, England, c. 1225-50. Photo: Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

grotesque.”⁸² The moral teachings embodied by these compelling and memorable animals were reinforced by the ubiquity of bestiary imagery in late medieval literary and visual culture.⁸³

Bestiary animals and lore pop up in contemporary stained glass⁸⁴ and sculpted church decor,⁸⁵

⁸¹ Beryl Rowland, “The Art of Memory and the Bestiary” in Willene B. Clark and Meradith T. McMunn, eds., *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 17-18.

⁸² Rowland, p. 17.

⁸³ Houwen, “Animal Parallelism in Medieval Literature and the Bestiaries,” p. 484.

heraldry,⁸⁶ maps,⁸⁷ wall paintings,⁸⁸ hunting manuals,⁸⁹ books of hours,⁹⁰ Psalters,⁹¹ and mnemonic bibles,⁹² and even in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.⁹³ Lina Bolzoni adumbrates how the systems of mnemonic architecture enjoyed a rich interplay in the visual world of the medieval Christian:

The schemas are primarily in the mind and take on form in various ways: through words, purely mental images, mixtures of words and images, illuminated manuscripts, images that are painted, sculpted, broken up and recomposed in mosaic or made to gleam in stained-glass windows. They are schemas straddling the border between the visible and the invisible, between reading and writing, memory and invention, exegesis and recycling.⁹⁴

The liminal quality of the bestiary figure can be observed through a number of *topoi*. The moralized animals of the bestiary mediate between the material, terrestrial plane and the cosmic,

⁸⁴ Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dora Nussey (New York: Harper & Row, (1958) 1972), pp. 38-43. Mâle observed that the animal program in symbolic windows in cathedrals at Lyons, Bourges, Chartres, Le Mans, and Tours are directly influenced by the *Speculum Ecclesiae* of Honorius Autun. However, he argued that medieval preachers came by their knowledge of bestiaries through this work, and not through direct use of the bestiaries themselves.

⁸⁵ Wilma George and Brunson Yapp, *The Naming of the Beasts: Natural History in the Medieval Bestiary* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1991), pp. 14-16.

⁸⁶ Hassig, p. 40.

⁸⁷ Margaret Hoogvliet, "De ignotis quarumdam bestiarum naturis" in L.A.J.R. Houwen, ed., *Animals and the Symbolic in Mediaeval Art and Literature* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997), pp. 189-208.

⁸⁸ Miriam Gill, "Preaching and Image: Sermons and Wall Paintings in Later Medieval England" in Carolyn Muessig, ed., *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 163.

⁸⁹ James I. McNelis, III, "A Greyhound Should Have 'Eres in þe Manere of a Serpent'" in L.A.J.R. Houwen, ed., *Animals and the Symbolic in Mediaeval Art and Literature* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997), pp. 67-76.

⁹⁰ Roger S. Wieck, *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., (1988) 2001), p. 99.

⁹¹ de Hamel, p. 21.

⁹² Carruthers, pp. 246-47.

⁹³ L.A.J.R. Houwen, "Flattery and the Mermaid in Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*" in L.A.J.R. Houwen, ed., *Animals and the Symbolic in Mediaeval Art and Literature* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997), pp. 77-92.

⁹⁴ Lina Bolzoni, *The Web of Images: Vernacular Preaching from its Origins to St. Bernardino da Siena* (Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), p. 6.

spiritual plane.⁹⁵ They partake of both the real world and the world of ideas,⁹⁶ negotiating the shifting chasm between fact and fiction and endowing both with enhanced meaning.⁹⁷ They traverse the boundary between human and animal.⁹⁸ Dwelling in *chronos* time, they point the way toward the *kairos* time both of salvation history and the future eschaton.⁹⁹ Existing as both picture and verbal story, they bridge speech and apophasis.¹⁰⁰

With so many symbolic and semiotic functions, bestiaries undoubtedly had a plurality of uses. Willene Clark has demonstrated how the *De avibus* of Hugh of Fouillooy was likely to have been used in the instruction of lay brothers among the Cistercians and other monastic orders.¹⁰¹ Other scholars have noted the bestiaries' utility as both instructional books for the young¹⁰² and devotional works for wealthy, pious and literate nobles.¹⁰³ While the bestiaries undoubtedly enjoyed multivalent usage, it is my contention that they reached their apogee as homiletic resources. Amid far-reaching social and religious change, including the rise of heretical sects, a growing need for preaching and pastoral care among the laity summoned contemplative monks, especially the Cistercians, from their cloisters. These newly commissioned itinerant preachers

⁹⁵ Thomas Rockwell, "Visual Technologies, Cosmographies, and our Sense of Place in the Universe," *Zygon* 37/3 (September 2002), p. 608.

⁹⁶ Mâle, p. 34.

⁹⁷ Jacobs, p. 45.

⁹⁸ Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 29.

⁹⁹ Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 80.

¹⁰⁰ David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), p. 9.

¹⁰¹ Willene B. Clark, "The Illustrated Medieval Aviary and the Lay-Brotherhood," *Gesta* 21 (1982), pp. 63-74.

¹⁰² Willene B. Clark and Meradith T. McMunn, "Introduction" in Clark and McMunn, eds., *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), p. 5.

¹⁰³ de Hamel, p. 20.

had need of vivid mnemonic markers to create sermons memorable for both themselves and their audiences. The bestiaries arose as one means of meeting this need, as is evidenced by their contemporary classification with other preaching resources and theological works, as well as by the use of bestiary material in recorded sermons and preaching handbooks. The moralized instruction emblemized by the bestiary animals was reinforced by animal imagery throughout medieval visual and literary culture.

The medieval preacher in this context became the transmitter of a series of images, translated from the visual to the auditory in the preparation of the sermon, and from the auditory back to the visual as the listeners reconstructed their own striking and memorable allegorical menageries in their minds. Martin Luther described what such a cognitive process may have been like for the listener, in writing about his internal responses to hearing Christ's Passion preached:

it is impossible for me to hear and bear it in mind without forming mental images of it in my heart. For whether I will or not, when I hear of Christ, an image of a man hanging on a cross takes form in my heart, just as the reflection of my face naturally appears in the water when I look into it.¹⁰⁴

Luther seems to have experienced these internal, mental images in response to auditory descriptions with sufficient clarity to compare them to a reflection seen in a pond. Likewise, medieval preachers in their use of bestiary imagery sought to inscribe both the natural and human-made worlds with reminders to embrace virtue, flee vice, and to meditate day and night on the wonders God has made. 🌿

¹⁰⁴ Martin Luther. "Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments, 1525" in *Luther's Works Vol. 40: Church and Ministry II*. Edited and translated by Conrad Bergendoff. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 99-100. "ich's aber hören oder gedenten, so ist mir's unmöglich, dass ich nicht in meinem herzen sollte Bilder davon machen. Denn ich wolle oder wolle nicht, wenn ich Christum höre, so entwirst sich in meinem herzen ein Mannsbild, das am Kreuze hängt, gleich als sich mein Untliss natürlich entwirst ins Wasser, wenn ich drein sehe." Luther. "Wider die himmlischen Propheten, von den Bildern und Sakrament, 1525" in *Martin Luther's Werke: Kirtische Gesamtausgabe, 18 Band*. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1908), p. 83.

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