

Books of Natural History in the Medieval World
Leiden University Library, 1 February 2013, 10 am - 6 pm

- Abstracts -

Christopher de Hamel (Cambridge)

Medieval Bestiaries and their Original Purpose

Bestiaries are medieval encyclopaedias in Latin of all the animals (or beasts) in the world, with enchanting and often credulous accounts of their habits and attributes. They are usually illustrated with spectacular pictures of creatures such as elephants, unicorns, tigers, wyverns, crocodiles, and other animals, known (or hardly known) from ancient legends and travellers' tales. Most Bestiaries are English, and date from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The lecture considers the original purpose of Bestiaries, which would have been to understand God's purpose in creating animals. The habits of each creature were understood in the Middle Ages as divinely encoded messages, planned from the beginning of the world, to provide prophecies and instructions to people. Properly used, Bestiaries were not so different from Psalters, in that they were devotional texts to be mediated over in private.

Pieter De Leemans (Leuven)

Aristotle's Natural Philosophy and the 'Corpus Vetustius'

It is well-known that Aristotle's works on natural philosophy were rediscovered from the twelfth century onwards by means of translations made both from the Greek and the Arabic into Latin. Several of these twelfth-century translations were eventually combined in the so-called *Corpus Vetustius* (in contrast to the *Corpus Recentius*, which originated in the second half of the thirteenth century and contained, a.o., William of Moerbeke's translations). In my contribution I will study the extant *Corpora Vetustiora*. I will examine their content, the order in which texts occur, and how this is related to medieval conceptions on natural philosophy. Moreover, I will consider the possibility of using material characteristics of the manuscripts as a means for evaluating the textual tradition of these translations.

Martine Meuwese (Utrecht)

Painting Metaphorical Beasts: Animal Illustration in a Middle Dutch Bestiary of Love

Richard de Fournival's *Bestiaire d'amour* re-tells the animal stories of the Bestiary as an address to a fictional beloved whose heart he hopes to win. In the prologue, Fournival emphasises the importance of pictures for his text, which explains why most manuscripts containing the *Bestiaire d'amour* have extensive illustration programmes. Copies of Fournival's French text were especially popular in northern France in the late-thirteenth century. Illustrations of these 'metaphorical beasts' also occur in a late-thirteenth century Middle Dutch manuscript containing a translation of Fournival's text, embedded in a didactic and moralising manuscript context. Although the Count of Guelders seems to have played a key role in the commission of this manuscript and in spite of the manuscript's Lower-Rhine dialect that confirms a Guelders provenance, the style and illustration programme of this codex are definitely northern French. Can the lay-out of this manuscript and the French illustration cycles help to explain its form and function?

Francis Newton (Duke)

Magic and Magic from a Single Pen: The Famous Apuleius MS from Monte Cassino and its Medical Sister in Copenhagen

The manuscript Florence Laur. 68.2 actually consists of two celebrated manuscripts in Beneventan script (but in different hands) from Monte Cassino, bound together: Tacitus, *Annals*, xi-xvi, and *Historiae*; and Apuleius, *Apologia*, *Metamorphoses*, and *Florida*. The books are of the highest importance textually; many scholars consider them the source of all other surviving MSS of these texts. The Apuleius part is written in a hand that occasionally lapses from Beneventan into late Caroline minuscule; this aspect has never been discussed in print. Apuleius' novel, known to Augustine as "The Golden Ass," and his "Apology" focus on magic, the art by which Lucius was transformed into an ass; he resumed his human form at the end only thanks to the healing power of Isis. It has not been observed that a manuscript in Copenhagen (Old Royal Collection 1653. 40), Soranus, Hippocrates, Oribasius, etc. was copied by the same hand (who again demonstrates his knowledge of both Beneventan and Caroline) as the Apuleius, and we can therefore localise this important medical manuscript as a Monte Cassino product. The book is one of the most significant for gynaecological knowledge in the Middle Ages, and its scary illustrations of foetal positions are, or should be, famous. The paper concludes with consideration of the level, within a famous scriptorium, of scribes, such as this one, who were occupied with rare classical texts and with rare medical texts, and so, despite their modest skills, with copies of supreme textual value.

Mariken Teeuwen (Utrecht/Huygens ING)

Ancient Knowledge through Medieval Eyes: Annotations, Symbols and Diagrams in the Margin

In the Carolingian world, a great respect and authority was attached to the ancient learned tradition on the seven liberal arts. We can see evidence of the avid pursuit of learning that characterises the Carolingian period not only in the amount of manuscripts that they produced of ancient and late-antique texts, but also in the margins of these manuscripts, which were often filled with annotations that respond to the revered authorities. The study of these marginal texts, however, is hampered by the complexity of the material: it is written in tiny script, in a difficult style, transmitted with more flexibility than traditional philology is used to. Moreover, they are often anonymous, undated and unedited, and a single manuscript typically holds several layers of annotations that are hard to distinguish. Despite the difficulties, it is these texts that my paper will focus on. I intend to show how Carolingian scholars stored, organised, selected and processed the ancient learned tradition by showing you their activity in the margin.

Manuscript displays

At the end of the morning and afternoon session there will be a substantial number of manuscripts pertaining to the lectures on display. Each manuscript is accompanied by a description. These descriptions will be made available below a week before the colloquium.