



REPRESENTING BEASTS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLAND AND SCANDINAVIA

EDITED BY

MICHAEL D. J. BINTLEY AND THOMAS J. T. WILLIAMS

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REPRESENTING BEASTS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL
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THE BOYDELL PRESS

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Abbreviations

ASD	J. Bosworth and T. Toller, <i>An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary</i> (Oxford, 1898)
ASE	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
ASPR	The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records
ASSAH	<i>Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History</i>
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
CDEPN	<i>The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names, Based on the Collections of the English Place-Name Society</i> , ed. Victor Watts (Cambridge, 2004)
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
DOE	<i>Dictionary of Old English: A to G Online</i> , ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey <i>et al.</i> (Toronto, 2007)
EETS	Early English Text Society
	es extra series
	os original series
	ss supplementary series
EPNS	English Place-Name Society
ES	<i>English Studies</i>
JEGP	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
JEPNS	<i>Journal of the English Place-Name Society</i>
LSE	<i>Leeds Studies in English</i>
ME	Middle English
MedArch	<i>Medieval Archaeology</i>
NM	<i>Neuphilologische Mitteilungen</i>
OE	Old English
OED	Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed at http://www.oed.com/
OFr	Old French
ON	Old Norse
PDE	Present Day English
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>

Introduction

Michael D. J. Bintley and Thomas J. T. Williams

A man stands with arms raised, brandishing spears in both hands; he appears to be naked apart from a belt and a sheathed sword slung from a baldric over one shoulder. His head is adorned by a helmet – or it might be a head-dress – from which rise two horn-like projections, each one terminating with the head of a bird, clearly delineated with eye and beak. The birds (the curl of their beaks suggests they are intended to be understood as raptors) face each other, curving inward until they overlap and form a circle above the spearman's clean-shaven face. To the right of this figure stands another apparition. He too holds a spear, thrust seemingly into the earth – or perhaps into the foot of his companion. He is drawing a sword with his right hand. This figure is clothed, perhaps even in armour, but a tail hangs down at his rear and his features are inhuman. He has the head of a beast.

Various overlapping interpretations have been offered for this striking image – it is Oðinn/Woden leading an ecstatic dance; a warrior in ritual transformation from man to wolf; a shaman enacting an initiatory rite; the dramatisation of a mythological scene.¹ We will almost certainly never understand what message this image was truly intended to convey. What is clear, however, is that in this image the categories of beast and human are inextricably blurred, confused, confounded. Who here is the human? Which is the god, the animal, the hybrid? Does the naked spearman wear birds upon his head or do divine raptors control the body of a human puppet? Does a man wear a wolf's clothing, or does a wolf wear a man's? It is precisely this sort of ambiguity in the representation of beasts and beast-identities that lies at the heart of this collection of papers.

The image on the cover of this book is a matrix of seventh-century date, found at Torslunda in Sweden, and designed for the production of panels of decorated metal ultimately destined for the ostentatious helmets of an élite warrior aristocracy. Objects bearing this style of iconographic display are exemplified by finds from the Swedish cemeteries of Vendel and Valsgärde, and also in similar objects from English contexts: the famous helmet from mound 1 at the Sutton

¹ A. Margaret Arent, 'The Heroic Pattern: Old Germanic Helmets, *Beowulf*, and *Grettis Saga*', in *Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Symposium*, ed. Edgar C. Polome (Austin, TX, 1969), pp. 130–99; Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 66–72; Neil Price, *The Viking Way* (Uppsala, 2003), pp. 372–88.

Hoo cemetery in East Anglia, and fragments from the Staffordshire Hoard found in the West Midlands. The exact mechanisms that linked England and Scandinavia in this period are hard to define with precision, but artefactual, iconographic, linguistic, literary and mortuary parallels demonstrate a degree of contact and the sharing of cultural concepts. The geographical remit of the papers presented in this volume reflects the fact that ideas about the natural world – especially the ways in which its fauna were represented and imagined – were fluid around what might be described as a ‘north sea cultural zone’: they certainly did not respect the political boundaries of modern nation states. How and in what ways ideas changed over time and were shared among the inhabitants of this zone will be explored by some of the chapters directly, and will also (we hope) be illuminated by the juxtaposition of studies treating the theme of ‘beasts’ from a variety of disciplinary and regional perspectives.

Scholarship has been undergoing something of a renaissance in recent years as far as understanding the relationship between humans and non-humans is concerned, whether the latter are mammals, fish, fowl, plants, or even objects which those in the modern developed West would not customarily think of as living.² While interest in this aspect of the ‘natural’ world is nothing new in medieval studies, the important contribution that animals made to the lives and cultures of early medieval people in northern Europe is often addressed within relatively narrow disciplinary contexts. The aim of this book, whose individual chapters engage with a range of disciplines, is to offer new insights into the way that beasts of all kinds were represented among the peoples of early medieval England, Scandinavia, and other related cultures. This volume refers to ‘beasts’ not only because the word evokes a sense of wild and untamed creatures, but because the non-humans whom the reader will encounter in its pages are primarily those which *cwice hwyrfab* (‘move around with life’), as the hall-singer puts it in *Beowulf*’s song of creation.³ This is not, therefore, a book about non-humans that were rooted to the ground in the same

² One of the principal advocates of object-oriented philosophical approaches has been Graham Harman, who also builds on the work of Bruno Latour; see Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago, 2002); Graham Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism* (Winchester, 2010); Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester, 2011); Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne, 2009); see also Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford, 2005).

³ Klaeber’s *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Toronto, 2008), line 98. This, of course, might be comfortably applied to plants as well as mammals, in so far as new philosophical approaches to plants are revealing behaviours once thought limited to animals with a consciousness apparently closer to our own. Some written works from early medieval England and Scandinavia also suggest the plants had their own agency, and were sometimes thought of in similar terms to humans. See discussion in Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*

way as trees and rocks, but rather those which (arguably) had more direct interaction with humans in both symbolic and practical terms. The discussions cover domesticated animals, like pigs, cows, sheep and poultry, as well as wild animals that were hunted and killed for food and sport, like boars, deer, and wolves; some chapters feature animals that could impart hidden knowledge – both in the waking world, like ravens, and in sleep, where they had the potential to be far more exotic; also considered are animals more obviously mythical to modern readers, like dragons, whose forms appeared in literary works and visual art; and smaller, creeping and crawling creatures whose ubiquity could be both a blessing and a curse. Then there are the humans themselves, whose savagery or religious affiliations were sometimes cast in a bestial light, and, finally, certain objects which, though created by humans, were thought to possess their own vitality. However, no suggestion is made here that this final class of beasts, and what defined it, was any more or less important than other non-humans; much work remains to be done before the full range of relationships between these various categories can be adequately represented.

In many ways this book endeavours to set a precedent for the further exploration of these relationships, by reflecting both on certain topics that are already the focus of long-established study, and on others that have received comparatively little attention. In each case, the studies included here address what the representation of beasts in early medieval England and Scandinavia can tell us about how their inhabitants defined themselves in relation to the non-humans who shared their world – whether real or imagined. Each chapter endeavours to advance the field (or fields) it represents, while simultaneously contributing to a broader understanding of the interaction and interchange between humans and non-humans.

The importance of defining and delineating the characteristics of non-humans, and, indeed, stratifying their role in the life of the earth, was known to European thought long before Carl Linnaeus. Matthew Hall has argued that the Classical philosophical tradition and the Judaic religion, as cornerstones of the Western Christian tradition, bear significant responsibility for subsequent modes of thought which have encouraged humans to think of themselves as in some way distinct from ‘animals’ and ‘nature’.⁴ Realisations to the contrary, born out of twentieth-century countercultures, have only recently gained a foothold in mainstream scholarship. However, the questioning of social boundaries and definitions is often symptomatic

(New York, 2011), esp. pp. 119–35; see also Michael D. J. Bintley, *Trees in the Religions of Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2015).

⁴ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, pp. 17–71.

of the erosion of self or group identity – a phenomenon far more likely to be found among those working at the frontiers of intellectual enquiry. For the majority of early medieval people, living their lives at some remove from the learned and literate world of ecclesiastical scholarship, category questions would not only have been irrelevant but probably incomprehensible. Moreover, as art, poetry, place-names and chronicles suggest, this was an age better acquainted and more comfortable than our own with shape-shifters, monsters, talking animals, and the repeating cycle of the agricultural year: the boundaries observed between humans and animals throughout much of the modern world would have been far less rigid to many in the early Middle Ages.⁵ New approaches to the interaction between humans and non-humans within these networks (or entanglements, as Ian Hodder calls them) are beginning to represent the extent to which these relationships, and even dependencies, were recognised.⁶ This book aims to contribute to this understanding, by examining some of these relationships within one group of linguistic and cultural relatives during the early medieval period.

This focus derives from growing interest in the degree to which the ‘natural’ world contributed to daily life in early medieval cultures.⁷ The majority of those living in the developed world today exist at a significant distance from raw materials and the means of production, and many of the tools, products and foodstuffs that we encounter are largely divorced from their point of origin. Humans at all levels of early medieval society were far better acquainted with the origins of these things – albeit to different degrees. Additionally, they were also better aware of the way in which the products of animals (and other non-humans) were essential to everyday life on multiple levels. For example, the material products of animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, and fowling were not only a vital source of sustenance, but also offered up other materials, such as leather, bone, horn, fur and feathers. While all of these products are still in use today (albeit often in different capacities), the distance at which the majority of people reading this book will live from their cultivation and harvest is probably great. The early medieval understanding of this ‘natural’

⁵ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has helmed the most extensive body of criticism on this subject so far; see, for example, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen (Washington, DC, 2012); Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis, 2003); Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: Of Difficult Middles* (Basingstoke, 2006); Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 1999).

⁶ See Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA, 2013).

⁷ See also discussion by Michael D. J. Bintley and Michael G. Shapland, ‘Introduction to Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World’, in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. Michael D. J. Bintley and Michael G. Shapland (Oxford, 2013), pp. 1–18.

Introduction

world was complex and multi-faceted, displaying a understanding of the need for nuanced approaches to managing and maintaining certain relationships, while actively seeking to disrupt and destroy others – however wisely or unwisely. It is worth remembering that the very medium upon which knowledge was most permanently recorded and preserved – vellum – was itself an animal product. For the monk hunched over in the scriptorium, the relationship between the technological and the spiritual was mediated through the interplay of human hand and animal skin. How this symbiosis affected the way that a monk understood and thought about his world is not, perhaps, recoverable; nor is it unique to northern European experience. But the fact of the matter is worth bearing in mind as we try to make sense of medieval mentalities from the perspective of an electronic age.

The chapters in this volume make use of a variety of evidence from numerous sources, in the belief that correspondences between different types of material and documentary evidence are indicative of deeper levels of ‘cultural structure and practice’, as John Hines has put it.⁸ Documentary sources include literary, historical, religious, devotional and magical texts, in addition to linguistic and place-name evidence. Onomastic evidence also contributes to those chapters that are more broadly grounded in historical geography and landscape archaeology. In addition, several chapters also engage with the more obviously manufactured products of material culture, whose various levels of artistry reflect interactions between humans and animals in a shared world.

Critical and Theoretical Contexts

Given that the subject of this book is the relationship between humans and aspects of the ‘natural’ world, it inevitably engages to some degree with ecology and ecocriticism, though the range of approaches within these fields, many of which are still emergent (not to mention conflicting), complicates detailed discussion. The range of eco-philosophies that have already developed distinct identities makes it difficult for this introduction to offer more than a brief overview of how this book engages with existing ecological and ecocritical discourse. Furthermore, its chapters have been written from a range of perspectives, and it would be misleading for the

⁸ John Hines, ‘Literary Sources and Archaeology’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. Helena Hamerow, David A. Hinton and Sally Crawford (Oxford, 2011), pp. 968–85 (p. 974).

authors of this introduction to suggest otherwise.⁹ This volume has not been assembled from an ecological or ecocritical perspective, in so far as it does not present an ecological agenda either in its individual parts, or as their sum. This said, it does nevertheless reflect elements of contemporary ecocritical approaches to the relationship between humans and non-humans, in so far as these have contributed to the development of the current academic climate, and have helped to foster approaches in medieval studies (or ‘ecomedievalisms’) which will better represent how humans have engaged with and attempted to understand non-humans.

The title of this book, *Representing Beasts*, ostensibly draws a sharp line between humans and non-humans. The Old English word *deor*¹⁰ or the Norse *dýr*¹¹ may seem more appropriate here, given their shared origin and the volume’s geographical focus,¹² rather than the Middle English word derived from Latin *bestia* via OFr *beste*.¹³ ‘Beast’ still has the same connotations in Modern English that it had for Latin speakers (denoting non-humans, as opposed to ‘animal’, which includes humans), whilst *deor* has come to represent only deer.¹⁴ Whatever conception pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians may have had of their relationship with animals, the conversion of northern Europe drew more definite lines between beasts and humans. Before this, lacking written representations of human relationships with the ‘natural’ world, we cannot represent these cultures in their own words, even if we can understand them through archaeology. There can be little doubt that, by the end of the period, the rational Christian human was recognised as something quite different from the beasts of the field, the air and the sea. This is before one even considers ‘lower’ orders of life, such as vegetation, or material, like stone – the latter being the sort of thing we would still not normally think of as possessing life

⁹ ‘Nature’ is used in this introduction as a problematic term of convenience that is nevertheless often used by deep ecologists (e.g. Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Layton, UT, 1985)). Broadly speaking, deep ecology rejects the dualist separation of humans from ‘nature’ that underpins the history of western philosophical thought, humans being nothing if not natural. The Judaeo-Christian tradition, as reflected in the vast majority of medieval writing, *did* draw a marked distinction on certain levels between the human and the non-human (see below). An important work to have challenged deep ecological approaches, proposing an alternative ‘dark ecology’, in which ‘nature’ is no longer held at an aesthetic distance, is Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature* (Cambridge, MA, 2007); see also Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

¹⁰ DOE [accessed 11 December 2013].

¹¹ Geir T. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic* (Toronto, 2004), p. 100.

¹² Vladimir Orel, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology* (Leiden, 2003), p. 71.

¹³ DOE [accessed 11 December 2013].

¹⁴ *A Latin Dictionary Founded on Andrews’ Edition of Freund’s Latin Dictionary*, ed. E. A. Andrews, Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford, 1879), p. 234.

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outside of models such as Lovelock's 'Gaia' hypothesis.¹⁵ This is not to say that everyone thought in this way; these divisions primarily reflect mainstream Christian thought. An anonymous Middle English lyric encapsulates the uncertainty with which those in the later Middle Ages were still consciously considering their own bodies in relation to those of beasts:

Foweles in the frith,
The fisses in the flod,
And I mon waxe wod.
Mulch sorw I walke with
For beste of bon and blod.¹⁶

Like many anonymous Middle English lyrics, there are riddling qualities to these lines which resist definitive interpretation, much like the Old English riddles of the Exeter Book. They do, however, expose uncertainties regarding the bodies of beasts of bone and blood in the world in which the speaker exists, and the fear of their own mortality and the final destination of the soul.

In a general sense, then, it can be said that humans throughout the period understood that they shared with other living things a vitality that could be extinguished. This commonality is perhaps most obviously shared with the majority of the beasts considered in this book, whether they were domestic animals, wild animals, or supernatural creatures – humanoid or otherwise. But it was also true that life could be extinguished in trees and plants and, perhaps, in inanimate objects that could be imbued with a degree of sentience or mortality. Objects like swords and buildings could be named and possess unique and well-defined corporeal forms – even, perhaps, identities independent of their human wielders and fabricators. They might also be destroyed: rapidly, like Heorot by fire, or by a slower process of decay, like the treasure from the dragon's barrow in *Beowulf*. They might even be deliberately destroyed in the context of funerary or votive deposition – one of the clearest indications that objects could be imagined to retain a power independent of human manipulation.¹⁷ It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that people during this

¹⁵ James Lovelock proposed his Gaia hypothesis (later Gaia theory) of the earth as a self-regulating organism in *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford, 1979). Lovelock revisited this idea in various works, including *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of our Living Earth*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 2000), and *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back, and How we Can Still Save Humanity* (London, 2006), by which time he claimed that 'Gaia' had received a degree of general acceptance.

¹⁶ *Middle English Lyrics*, ed. Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman (New York, 1974), p. 7.

¹⁷ Hilda E. Davidson, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England: Its Archaeology and Literature* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 10–11.

period were maintaining (at any phase in their religious history) an idyllic balance with the animals and the environment in which they dwelt. It would also be an error to suggest that paganism or Christianity invariably privileged certain relationships between humans and non-humans. Christians and pagans both made use of and manipulated their environment in order to suit their own ends. If the conversion to Christianity introduced dividing lines between humans and non-humans that had not hitherto been so clearly marked, these did not segregate the two so much as draw attention to the mutability of the boundaries between them.

* * *

The chapters in this volume have been arranged in order to bring together topics which naturally lend themselves to proximate discussion, rather than to separate them according to disciplinary boundaries. It begins with four studies, by Adams, Brunning, Symons and Osborn, which address some of the ways in which real and mythological animals appear in early medieval English and Scandinavian culture, offering insight into how cultural creators conceptualised and ordered systems of belief, exchange, and the transmission of goods and ideas.

Noël Adams discusses the unique position of Anglo-Saxon animal art, poised between the ‘reality’ of the Classical tradition, which provided much of the visual source material for craftsmen, and the ‘myths’ of the Germanic tradition recorded in literary sources. Although mythological traditions recorded many centuries later are often used to interpret early Anglo-Saxon art, often with questionable results, this chapter argues that it is important not to lose sight of the influence of earlier Roman and contemporary Late Antique and Byzantine imagery. In addition, Classical literary evidence expresses certain fundamental concepts regarding the relationship between humans and animals which remain outside the mythic themes of Germanic literature. Adams argues that this is particularly true in relation to representations of animals of the hunt – a central theme of much early Anglo-Saxon animal imagery.

Sue Brunning then considers connections between snakes and swords in Viking-age Scandinavian culture, focusing on serpentine ornament on swords and other artefacts, in addition to written descriptions of swords as serpents in contemporary literature. Brunning compares literary descriptions of swords and the patterns created by pattern-welding, in a discussion which illuminates the complex relationship between humans, animals and artefacts, and raises important questions about the boundaries between what are commonly thought of as distinct categories of ‘beings’. As do many of the chapters in this book, Brunning suggests that these boundaries

were mutable, and that there was great potential for overlap, as well as the lending and borrowing of individual characteristics. Brunning shows that a nuanced appreciation of these associations reveals the networks of meaning which connected serpents, swords and humans in the minds of those who crafted and wielded these weapons.

Victoria Symons also confronts serpents and serpentine imagery, focusing her discussion on the relationship between dragons and runes in Old English and Old Norse literature, but also considering the rune stones which bear dragon decorations in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. While dragons function as a symbol of impending doom in sources like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in literary works like *Beowulf* they tend to lie coiled beneath the earth, in barrows piled with hoarded treasure – a tendency which stands in opposition to the circulation of wealth in the world of men, where material exchange is essential to the maintenance and development of social bonds. Runes, by contrast, which are associated with both treasure *and* dragons, can be understood as a means of uncovering hidden knowledge. Thus Symons argues that dragons and runes, as representatives of concealment and revelation, are frequently set in opposition to one another in ways that reveal underlying anxieties concerning wealth and its appropriate distribution in early medieval England and Scandinavia.

Moving away from serpents, but not southern Scandinavia, Marijane Osborn's chapter is centred upon the tiny Viking-age sculpture discovered at Lejre in 2009, which depicts an enthroned figure flanked by a pair of ravens, who have been identified as Óðinn and his corvid companions, Huginn and Muninn. Questioning this admittedly attractive interpretation, Osborn's chapter addresses a number of issues concerning the transmission and reception of artistic motifs, and the way in which these can develop as they encounter new cultural traditions and – in this case – their specific relationship with indigenous avifauna. In this wide-ranging study, Osborn considers representations of enthroned figures with birds in late Antiquity; the reception of this imagery in early medieval northern Europe; the materiality of the sculpture itself; birds in 'Germanic' and 'Celtic' visual art; and relations between humans and ravens in ancient and modern Iceland. Although, as Osborn writes, the various characteristics associated with ravens *can* be taken to identify the enthroned figure with Óðinn's feathered friends, there is no reason that the ravens flanking the Lejre throne need be Huginn and Muninn, nor that the central figure, similarly, need be the one-eyed god himself.

In the following two chapters, Lacey and Chardonnens move away from the discussion of objects and towards written sources, considering how the cultures of early medieval England and Scandinavia were influenced by animals in the pursuit of hidden knowledge, whether

this was revealed through divination, prognostication, or even by means of non-human speech. Like Marijane Osborn, Eric Lacey is also interested in ravens; in this case the blithe-hearted bird whose song heralds sunrise over Heorot in *Beowulf* – a curious episode in which the raven's customary morbid associations are at odds with positive events in the narrative. Lacey addresses a number of issues raised by the communication gap between humans and beasts, including the raven's ambiguous symbolism (either of triumph or impending doom), and its role as a bringer of knowledge in Old Norse–Icelandic analogues. The chapter further connects this aspect of the raven with a wider body of evidence for bird-augury among the early Germanic and Anglo-Saxon peoples, arguing that this literary motif in *Beowulf* draws on longstanding cultural traditions in which birds revealed hidden knowledge of future events.

Sandor Chardonens addresses similar questions in his chapter about the role of exotic beasts in Anglo-Saxon prognostics: in other words, those beasts of which the early English would have had only limited experience, such as lions, camels, and elephants. This was a group that also included fantastical beasts such as phoenixes, which existed at a similar geographical abstraction, unlike the far more familiar domestic dragon. Both indigenous and exotic beasts appeared in prognostics, but here Chardonens tackles the interesting question of how the early English would have imagined such animals, which they were familiar with through religious texts, but whose physical forms were ultimately alien to their everyday experience. The chapter considers beasts in Anglo-Saxon prognostics in a variety of different capacities: as symbolic animals; as an equivalent to animals used in modern laboratory research; and as means of assisting seasonal forecasts. Chardonens addresses some of the reasons why certain animals appear in certain capacities, and discusses the prevalence of 'exotic' animals in dream books, in contrast with the rather more limited presence of husbandry animals and their products in year prognoses.

This is followed by two studies in which North and Williams examine the influence of beasts upon the identity of peoples and landscapes, both as untamed denizens of the wilderness, and as animals that symbolised kinship groups within 'Germanic' cultures. Richard North focuses upon the curious depiction of a pet pig in a Latin poem written by Luxorius of Carthage (c. 520), arguing that it may represent the tamed Vandals whose kings ruled Carthage from 439–533, and who patronised North African poets like Luxorius himself. North connects Luxorius's pet pig with boar cults in Vandalic and other Germanic cultures through a variety of documentary and material sources. He discusses boar symbolism and boar deities in the ancient heathenism which the Vandals inherited, particularly in

the Vanic god variously known as Enguz, Ing and Ingvi-freyr, and compares this with surviving boar motifs in Old English and Old Norse literature of the Christian era. North argues that although the Vandals themselves were Arian Christians in Tunisia at the time of the poem's composition, they could still have maintained the boar symbolism of warfare and fertility seen elsewhere among Germanic cultures. In this light, Luxorius's depiction of a pet pig in a Roman villa is presented as a parodic depiction of his Vandal rulers, as a once ferocious beast domesticated by the comforts of Carthage.

The boar raises his tusked head again as one of a number of creatures that were associated with violence and warfare in the Anglo-Saxon imagination. Williams reviews the evidence for beast symbolism in archaeological and poetic contexts, placing this in relation to a wider cosmology that equated violence with the outpouring of energies that could be conceived of as monstrous or bestial, and thus imagined to occupy a space 'outside' the realm of the normal sphere of human behaviour. In particular, he compares the descriptions, place-names and investigable topography of Anglo-Saxon battlefields with the imagined landscapes of conflict presented in the poetic and hagiographic corpus, revealing how these places spoke to a sense of marginality and 'wilderness' that reveals some of the concepts that underpinned ideologies of violence in early medieval England. Using evidence from related social phenomena such as judicial and administrative processes in the landscape, Williams shows how identities could become blurred and mutable in violent contexts, and how warfare occupied a liminal cognitive space where the symbolic boundaries between man and monster were negotiated in a visceral process of semiotic exchange.

Williams's discussion of beasts as denizens of wild places and perpetrators of bestial deeds is further developed by Bintley, who also considers how landscapes and settlements were attributed particular qualities in Old English poetry according to the virtuous or sinful actions of rational beings within them. Dangerous beasts, both real and imagined, have primarily been represented in Anglo-Saxon studies as occupying marginal spaces on the fringes of human society, whether they are the beasts of battle waiting in the forests, the Grendels in their sub-aquatic lair, or dragons clutching their gold in ancient barrows. Conversely, this chapter considers the depiction of humans as beasts when they act in the manner of beasts, and the way in which this influences the presentation of a variety of landscapes. Bintley's discussion also considers Nebuchadnezzar's bestial madness in the Old English *Daniel*, and the satanic cannibal Mermedonians of *Andreas*, arguing that any landscape can be made monstrous by its inhabitants if they act as beasts – that is, if they reject those virtuous practices that bound together Christian Anglo-Saxon

society. Correspondingly, any space – be it rural or urban – might be reclaimed as a place for humankind, if those who inhabited it were seen to behave as virtuous Christians.

The final two chapters of the volume, which focus on place-name evidence from charters and other sources, present some of the most enduring evidence of animal-human interaction in Anglo-Saxon England: that which has left its influence imprinted on the landscapes of today. John Baker presents the first study of the way that place-names reflect the smallest of beasts – the invertebrates that are much neglected in studies of the early medieval societies, either through their lack of prominent cultural symbolism, or because they represent an unpleasant intrusion into our modern separation from the land. These mini-beasts are nevertheless a vital part of our ecosystems, and although they are not culturally represented to quite the same extent as dragons or wolves, Baker shows that they nevertheless made a significant contribution to the way in which early medieval people thought about their world. This chapter raises important questions about how the Anglo-Saxons, at the very least, conceived of their landscape as being underpinned by the actions of mesofauna, in ways which permit valuable insight into other aspects of medieval society and economy, including agricultural and pastoral arrangements and preoccupations.

Della Hooke also examines charter and place-name evidence, questioning what it reveals about the relationship between animals and humans in Anglo-Saxon England, and how people viewed and interacted with their local environment. As Hooke demonstrates, the vast majority of references to beasts in the landscape of early medieval England indicate the practical use of the land, and there are relatively few instances in which fantastical creatures have left their mark. This evidence reveals a great deal about the way in which animal husbandry took place, indicating varieties of livestock, their management, the locations of enclosures, and how this varied on a seasonal basis. Elsewhere, terms for wild beasts and other animals of the hunt show animal exploitation and management in other respects, extending to avifauna and other creatures whose presence in the British Isles has been perhaps irrevocably diminished. This final chapter reveals the depth of the Anglo-Saxons' local knowledge and understanding of the beasts with whom they shared the landscape, presenting a rich and intimate picture of early England as it was understood by the people who lived and toiled in its fields and woods, and of the beasts that were variously incorporated into their lives.

Between Myth and Reality

Hunter and Prey in Early Anglo-Saxon Art

Noël Adams

‘... most swift and wise and divine’.

Arrian (*Cynegetica*, V.6) on his Celtic
hunting dog named Horme (Impulse)

Isidore of Seville (c. AD 560–636), in his *Etymologiae siue Origines*, interpreted the Latin word for animal as deriving from *animans* (living), ‘because they are animated (*animare*) by life and moved by spirit’.¹ Isidore derived much of his information directly from the great imperial Roman author Pliny (d. AD 79), whose Books VIII–XI in his *Naturalis Historia* divided the animal world into creatures of land, sea and sky. The Romans not only observed and commented upon creatures of every sort but also depicted them with varying degrees of naturalism in the major and minor arts.²

Anglo-Saxon animal art was of a very different nature. Surviving ‘art’ from the fifth to the seventh centuries consists primarily of ornamental metalwork, worn as personal jewellery or used to embellish arms and armour, horse harness and containers. With few exceptions, animals were not made as sculptures in the round but were cast in low relief in copper alloy; high-status ornaments displayed animals shaped with filigree wire on precious metal or fashioned in gold and garnet cloisonné cellwork. Many of these images were highly stylised and

¹ *Latine autem animalia siue animantia dicta, quod animentur vita et moveantur spiritu*: Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae siue Origines*, XII.i, *De animalibus*. The above translation is in Steven A. Barney, Wendy J. Lewis, Jennifer A. Beach and Oliver Berghof, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 247. Isidore’s thesaurus of Latin terminology suggested etymologies for a vast number of terms, some accurate, others bastardised, invented or mnemonic, combined with commentaries upon them. His categories ranged from mathematics, medicine and law to all aspects of the Church, humans and animals, stones and metals, buildings and agriculture, war, ships and domestic accessories. Virtually every medieval library is recorded as holding a copy.

² For examples in the minor arts, with further bibliography, see Debra Noël Adams, ‘Roman Empire’, in *When Orpheus Sang*, ed. Debra Noël Adams, Emma C. Bunker, Trudy Kawami, Robert Morkot and Dalia Tawil (Paris, 2004), pp. 182–243.

decorative. Accompanying representations in organic materials such as bone, wood, leather and textile are virtually lost to us.

The creatures that can be identified in Anglo-Saxon period metalwork are principally quadrupeds and birds, complemented by snakes and fish. The quadrupeds included canines, boars and probably horses; birds were generally raptors with curved beaks. In some cases these appear only as disembodied heads or as heads united with interlace to form ambiguous zoomorphs. There are, in addition, a few identifiable mythological composites derived from Classical forms, notably winged griffins, marine creatures with coiled tails, and hybrids derived from these. Both Pliny and Isidore included griffins in their compendia, Pliny judging them to be fabulous (*Naturalis Historia* X.lxx), but Isidore accepting their existence (*Etymologiae* XII.ii.17). Isidore (*Etymologiae* XII.vi.8) also simply accepted the existence of vast sea monsters, distinct from or related to whales. For the purposes of this paper, all these creatures – mammals, birds, reptiles and fantastic hybrids – are broadly referred to as animals.

Before beginning this study it is worth considering the animals from the Graeco-Roman pantheon that are largely or completely missing on Anglo-Saxon period metalwork. The large exotica with which Pliny opened his study of land animals – elephants, lions, tigers, panthers – are absent or not visible to us. The horned herbivores which were essential food animals – cattle, sheep, goats – do not feature, although they appear on Scandinavian bracteates. Deer, the prize wild game animal, are under-represented, but do appear on cremation urns³ and on high-status objects, often with Celtic/Romano-British influence, such as the stag figurine on the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 sceptre.⁴ There are several famous representations of boars, always identifiable by their tusks, but none of pigs, another key domestic food animal. Birds that can be classified are, for the most part, limited to raptors and doves. Cockerels, the consorts of Mercury and symbols of good fortune, are missing, together with other barnyard animals, like geese. Wading birds and the Christian peacocks found on Late Roman belt plates in Britain disappear. Game birds are represented only by the ducks on the purse lid from Sutton Hoo Mound 1 (see Fig. 1.20 below)

³ Catherine Hills, Kenneth Penn and Robert Rickett, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham*, part IV: *Catalogue of Cremations*, EAAR 34 (Norwich, 1987), p. 60, fig. 73, no. 2594; Carola Hicks, *Animals in Early Medieval Art* (Edinburgh, 1993), fig. 1.6, pp. 22–3; Catherine Hills, Sam Lucy et al., *Spong Hill*, part IX: *Chronology and Synthesis* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 391 (phase A/B, c. AD 400–80).

⁴ Carola Hicks, 'A Note on the Provenance of the Sutton Hoo Stag', in *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, vol. 2: *Arms, Armour and Regalia*, ed. Rupert L. S. Bruce-Mitford (London, 1978), pp. 378–82; Hicks, *Animals in Early Medieval Art*, pp. 26–9. See also discussion of the bowl found at Lullingstone, Kent, p. 42 below.

and a brooch from Fairford, Gloucestershire.⁵ There are no obvious mice or rats (another Roman favourite), and we can detect no lizards or amphibians. On the other hand, marine creatures with coiled tails appear sporadically, fish can be traced throughout the period, and serpents put in a dramatic appearance in the sixth century. With one exception (a butterfly or moth in cloisonné on the triangular buckle from Sutton Hoo Mound 17),⁶ there are no winged insects or bees – Isidore’s ‘tiny flying animals’, or *minutis volatibus* (*Etymologiae* XII. viii).

Anglo-Saxon animal representations were therefore confined to a very limited repertoire. We know from Isidore of Seville and other sources that the names and characteristics of different species were not lost to the educated clergy in the West, and they were certainly never forgotten by the common man who dealt with them.⁷ Nor were they absent in Church literature, although Christian enquiry into the nature of animals was often tinged by judgements regarding their inherent good or evil in the eyes of God.⁸ For the most part, this outlook was also characteristic of animal representations produced in the early medieval period in Scandinavia and the Continent by craftsmen acquainted at some level with Classical art. Contemporary societies living across Britain (termed variously Romano-British, Celtic and Pictish) retained only a slightly wider animal repertoire.⁹

The representation of the full spectrum and variety of animal life, therefore, was simply not ‘part of the program’ in the early medieval period. At the most basic level, as Salisbury has demonstrated, the defining factor in the relationship between humans and animals was the provision of food.¹⁰ Yet rather than domestic food animals, the animals depicted were those obtained in the noble pursuit of the hunt. Much animal imagery was, of course, decorative and presumably symbolic in ways that remain difficult for us to fully understand. It is clear, however, that the specific range of animals on metalwork was

⁵ Arthur MacGregor and Ellen Bollick, *A Summary Catalogue of the Anglo-Saxon Collections (Non-ferrous Metals)*, BAR British Series 230 (Oxford, 1993), p. 154, no. 22.1.

⁶ Martin O. H. Carver, *Sutton Hoo: A Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground and its Context*, Society of Antiquaries of London and British Museum Press (London, 2005), p. 244, fig. 103.

⁷ The runes spelling out roe deer (*railhan*), engraved on a gaming piece made from a deer’s astragal, is perhaps the earliest surviving English word: Alfred Bammesberger, *Old English Runes and their Continental Background* (Heidelberg, 1991), p. 403.

⁸ For example St Eucherius, Bishop of Leon (c. AD 380–449), *Formularum spiritualis intelligentiae ad Uranium*, V, *De animantibus* (PL 50, 749–54), where animals are divided up into those which are holy (*sanctus*), those which are devilish (*diabolus*), and those whose nature is mixed (such as ravens and dogs).

⁹ See Hicks, *Animals in Early Medieval Art*, pp. 39–55, fig. 1.9, for examples of Pictish stones carved with linear representations identifiable as bulls, geese and stags, in addition to the canines, eagles, snakes, fish and horses noted above.

¹⁰ Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1994), pp. 32–9.

selected because it was considered appropriate for certain types of object, many of which were worn by people of high or relatively high status. Our task, therefore, is to describe them objectively and attempt to interpret them.

Literature

No insular texts contemporary with the early Anglo-Saxon period survive to illuminate how people at the time regarded the creatures they depicted. The desire to find meaning in animal imagery, however, has given rise to an extensive scholarly literature on the broader subject of Germanic animal art. A survey of the research history on this topic has recently been published by Høilund Nielsen,¹¹ and I would like to draw attention to only a few trends here.

First, the study of Anglo-Saxon animal imagery has been intertwined with Scandinavian material for over half a century.¹² This is not unjustified, as key art styles such as Style I¹³ and Style II¹⁴ were imported from the Continent and Scandinavia to England. The discovery of some of the finest surviving Style II metalworking in Sutton Hoo Mound 1 further embedded discussion of insular styles into the Scandinavian orbit, particularly as key objects such as the shield and helmet from the grave find their best parallels in Vendel Sweden.¹⁵

Hand in hand with this orientation is the reliance upon the mythology of Viking and post-Viking period poems and sagas to

¹¹ Karen Høilund Nielsen, 'Germanic Animal Art and Symbolism', in *Altertumskunde – Altertumswissenschaft – Kulturwissenschaft: Erträge und Perspektiven nach 40 Jahren: Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich and Heiko Steuer, *Erganzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 77 (Berlin, 2012), pp. 595–611.

¹² E.g. George Speake, *Anglo-Saxon Animal Art and its Germanic Background* (Oxford, 1980), p. 85; Høilund Nielsen's title 'Germanic Animal Art' embraces Anglo-Saxon England as part of the larger Germanic and particularly Scandinavian world.

¹³ See, *inter alia*, E. Bakka, *On the Beginning of Salin's Style I in England*, Universitet i Bergen Årbok Historisk-Antikvarisk Rekke 3 (Bergen, 1958); Sonia Chadwick Hawkes, 'The Jutish Style A', *Archaeologia*, 98 (1962), 29–74. Leeds initially believed Style I to have come from the Continent (E. T. Leeds, *Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology, being the Rhind Lectures Delivered in Edinburgh, 1935* (Oxford, 1936), pp. 41–78); but post-Sutton Hoo (and the work of Chadwick-Hawkes), inclined more towards southern Scandinavian influence – see E. T. Leeds, 'Notes on Jutish Art in Kent', *MedArch* 1 (1957), 5–26.

¹⁴ On Style II, see the references in nn. 30–1 below.

¹⁵ On the helmet, see Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, vol. 2, pp. 205–220; Sonja Marzinzik, *The Sutton Hoo Helmet* (London, 2007), pp. 33–5. The shield boss is a Scandinavian type with no other parallels in Anglo-Saxon England: see *Anglo-Saxon Graves and Grave Goods of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries AD: A Chronological Framework*, ed. John Hines and Alex Bayliss, *Society for Medieval Archaeology* (Leeds, 2013), p. 161.

interpret animal imagery.¹⁶ At the beginning of the twentieth century, Salin (the Swedish academic who first defined Style I and Style II) and others suggested that animals such as ravens and wolves might be identified with those named as companions of the Norse god Odin.¹⁷ In the second half of the twentieth century Hauck used Old Norse religion as the basis for complex interpretation of the images on Scandinavian gold bracteates as iconographic renderings of mythological passages.¹⁸ In many works he argued for the complete transformation of Classical imagery and myth into those of a Germanic realm dominated by the high god Odin. Bracteates remain a special object type, represented in England by only one class (D-bracteates) whose ornament may have influenced the development of Style II in Kent.¹⁹ To a large extent, however, the range of animals on bracteates is not dissimilar to that found on metalwork of the Anglo-Saxon period.

The Skaldic and Eddic poems were written down under Christian influence in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, but are generally considered to preserve older oral traditions.²⁰ Although these myths and heroic tales can never be dismissed as expressions of northern thought, neither can the grave methodological problems presented by these late sources be overcome.²¹ A widespread belief in the Germanic high god Woden/Odin, identified in early sources with the Roman god Mercury, and later in the tenth century with Mars, cannot, of course, be doubted,²² but whether all animal art must be embedded in this mythology remains to be proven. In England Woden (together with Caesar) heads up the genealogical lists of some Anglo-Saxon royal houses, and is mentioned in a few other ninth- to tenth-century sources,²³ but does not appear in *Beowulf*. Furthermore, there was never any corresponding development of the individual tales and

¹⁶ *Inter alia*: Speake, *Anglo-Saxon Animal Art*, pp. 77–92; Tania M. Dickinson, 'Symbols of Protection: The Significance of Animal-Ornamented Shields in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *MedArch* 49 (2005), 109–63 (pp. 154–60); Leslie Webster, *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New History* (Ithaca, NY, 2012), p. 17.

¹⁷ Bernhard Salin, *Die altgermanische Tierornamentik* (Stockholm, 1904). Salin was director of the Statens Historiska Museum in Stockholm in the late nineteenth century.

¹⁸ The primary source is Karl Hauck *et al.*, *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1985–9), but he published over sixty further articles and books on the subject.

¹⁹ Speake, *Anglo-Saxon Animal Art*, pp. 66–72.

²⁰ A good introductory survey in Theodore M. Andersson, 'Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', in *Early Germanic Literature and Culture*, ed. Brian Murdoch and Malcolm Read, Camden House History of German Literature I (Rochester, NY, 2004), pp. 171–204.

²¹ See the comments in Dickinson, 'Symbols of Protection', pp. 111–12.

²² Most recently see Wilhelm Heizmann, 'Die Bilderwelt der Goldbrakteaten', in *Altertumskunde – Altertumswissenschaft – Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. Beck *et al.*, pp. 689–736 (p. 710).

²³ Rudolf Simek, 'Germanic Religion and the Conversion to Christianity', in *Early Germanic Literature and Culture*, ed. Murdoch and Read, pp. 73–101 (pp. 82–3).

mythic structure around these Germanic gods in Christian England comparable to that in pagan Viking and post-Viking societies.

Another modern research strand applies anthropological theory to the interpretation of the execution and the conceptual ideology behind animal art. Kristoffersen, for example, presented an interpretation of Style I based on the principles of Lévi-Strauss.²⁴ Parallel with other forms of 'primitive', 'native' art, he argued that split representations of animals into masks in Style I ensured a 'transformation of meaning from the ritual to the social sphere'; he envisioned Germanic societies at this time as alienated from the Classical world and its means of expression. Pluskowski, following literary speculation by Glosecki, saw animals as 'mediators between the natural and supernatural worlds' in an animistic and pagan society.²⁵ Deities like Odin/Woden were shamanistic shape-shifters, therefore, in this world of magic, where 'the conceptual boundaries between human and animals were mutable and certain species facilitated connections with the otherworld.'²⁶ Wild animals, notably the wolf, boar and raptor (although rarely represented in archaeological finds), represented an inner beast to be channelled or controlled. From this perspective, for example, all canines can be identified as wolves, as the elite themselves identified with wild, fiercely aggressive predators.²⁷

Moving from the anthropological to the political, Hedeager proposed that cultic practices such as shamanism were deeply embedded in the political structures in Scandinavia.²⁸ She rightly questioned whether 'myth' can ever be embedded in objects. As some of the later epic poetry refers to earlier historical periods, however, she supports the idea that 'mythic structures encode history' and thus explain the appearance and disappearance of art styles such as Style I and Style II. From this perspective Style I corresponded to the political structures of the Migration period, while Style II represented the state of affairs following the Langobardic invasion of Italy in AD 565.

²⁴ Siv Kristoffersen, 'Transformation in Migration Period Animal Art', *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 28:1 (1995), 3–17.

²⁵ Stephen O. Glosecki, *Shamanism and Old English Poetry* (New York, 1989); Stephen O. Glosecki, 'Movable Beasts: The Manifold Implications of Early Germanic Animal Imagery', in *Animals in the Middle Ages*, ed. N. C. Flores (New York, 2000), pp. 3–23; Aleks Pluskowski, 'The Beast Within? Breaching Human-Animal Boundaries in Anglo-Saxon Paganism', *Saxon* 45 (2007), 1–4; Aleks Pluskowski, 'Animal Magic', in *Signals of Belief in Early England: Anglo-Saxon Paganism Revisited*, ed. Martin O. H. Carver, Alexandra Sanmark and Sarah Semple (Oxford, 2010), pp. 103–27.

²⁶ Pluskowski, 'The Beast Within', p. 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2 (the common animals within Style II); Aleks Pluskowski *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 26–7, 134–7, 142–4, 155–8.

²⁸ Lotte Hedeager, 'Myth and Art: A Passport to Political Authority in Scandinavia during the Migration Period', *ASSAH* 18 (1999), 151–6; Lotte Hedeager, 'Migration Period Europe: The Formation of a Political Mentality', in *Rituals of Power from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Frans Theuvs and Janet L. Nelson (Leiden, 2000), pp. 15–57.