

## Review of Sabine Obermaier (ed.), 'Tiere und Fabelwesen im Mittelalter'

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DOI:

[10.1515/arbi.2011.005](https://doi.org/10.1515/arbi.2011.005)

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Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Harris, N 2011, 'Review of Sabine Obermaier (ed.), 'Tiere und Fabelwesen im Mittelalter'', *Arbitrium*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 15-18. <https://doi.org/10.1515/arbi.2011.005>

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This review first published in *Arbitrium* Vol.29 issue 1 (2011).

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Sabine Obermaier (Hg.), *Tiere und Fabelwesen im Mittelalter*. de Gruyter, Berlin – New York 2009. IV/342 S., € 99,95.

This multi-disciplinary volume contains 13 essays, assembled for the most part from two rather different sources. Seven are based on lectures originally given in the context of a *Ringvorlesung* held at the University of Mainz in the Wintersemester of 2007/2008; a further four were delivered as papers at the Leeds International Medieval Congress in 2008; and the remaining two were added subsequently. The book's title is the same as that of the original *Ringvorlesung*. Its aim is ambitious: in the words of its editor, "der [...] Band will einen neuen Akzent setzen und legt den Fokus ganz dezidiert auf das Tier als Gegenstand und vor allem als Medium der geistigen Erfassung von Welt und Mensch durch den Menschen" (p. 2). Moreover it seeks to do this whilst appealing both to specialists and non-specialists.

In general, the papers given as part of the Mainz *Ringvorlesung* perform this difficult task successfully – that is to say, they offer a judicious mixture of generalities and detail, of introductory and more specialized material; and they do so in an approachable manner. The first paper (as printed), a discussion of Albertus Magnus's treatment of animals by Henryk Anzulewicz, sets the tone. Anzulewicz begins with a brief survey of natural history before Albert, and continues with an introduction to Albert's zoological works, his use of animal metaphors, and theoretical aspects of his *scientia de animalibus*, before making a more detailed study of his various descriptions of ants. The piece is clearly written, and modern German translations are provided for all Latin quotations. Overall it is carefully calculated to appeal to both sections of its target audience.

The same could be said of most of the other papers from the Mainz *Ringvorlesung*. Jewish perspectives on animals are fascinatingly introduced by Andreas Lehnardt, who traces the understanding of Leviathan and Behemoth from the Old Testament via various rabbinical traditions to the end of the Middle Ages. He focuses especially on ways in which mythical material was re-interpreted and re-deployed to serve a range of rational-theological discourses. The use of animal images in heraldry is dealt with by Heiko Hartmann, in a lucid and lively introduction to the subject in a medieval German context, which features a handy survey of heraldic beasts in *Parzival*, *Wigalois*, *Lanzelet*, *Diu Crône* and *Das Turnier von Nantes*. Anette Pelizaeus, meanwhile, combines a detailed account of the animal sculptures on the east side of Mainz Cathedral with certain insights into the methodology of art-historical analysis: she arrives at her conclusions (notably that the sculptures constitute a cycle depicting Christ's victory over Satan) by considering individual images both in their context at Mainz and in comparison with analogues elsewhere. Moreover her es-

say is neatly complemented by one of those written especially for the volume, Andrea Rapp's analysis of the miniature accompanying the works of Johannes Hadlaub in the *Manessische Liederhandschrift* (with its two prominent depictions of the lady's lapdog). This, too, is nicely pitched: Rapp offers a brief introduction to the manuscript and its pictures, the texts of the relevant poems, and readily intelligible methodological reflections, but also a persuasive new perspective on the Hadlaub miniature: far from biting the lover, the dog is licking and thereby healing him.

The three final contributions to the Mainz lecture series all concern literature. Leonie Franz discusses the functions and meanings of stags in Latin legends describing the foundation of religious houses (such as Fécamp and Böddeken). This essay, too, opens up broader horizons for both specialist and non-specialist through its consistent thematization of the relationship between 'fact' and 'fiction' in medieval textuality. Vernacular literature is represented by Dante, in Bettina Bosold-DasGupta's survey of his presentation of birds and their flight in the *Divina Commedia*. She valuably illuminates themes adumbrated in other essays, considering both heraldic and symbolic birds, and also Dante's relationship to the encyclopaedic tradition. Finally, Marco Lehmann traces the continuing influence of medieval ape symbolism in works by Büchner, Klingemann, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Achim von Arnim, Raabe, and Kafka.

The pieces already discussed have some mildly annoying inconsistencies of presentation (for example with regard to translation – Anzulewicz always translates Latin source material, Franz almost never does, and Lehmann translates even from Middle High German). Overall, however, they make a convincing cycle, and one which certainly goes some way towards fulfilling the editor's stated aims.

The papers from Leeds are, inevitably, a much looser group, though they all explore areas of the huge spectrum of medieval animal studies that the volume would otherwise leave un- or underrepresented. The early Middle Ages, for example, are foregrounded in Kathrin Prielzel's paper on animals in Anglo-Saxon writings, especially those of Ælfric. She covers his treatment of swine, the lion, the wolf, the raven, the eagle, and 'beasts of battle'. Meanwhile Thomas Honegger's discussion of dragons in (mainly) medieval English literature is the book's only monographic study of an individual 'animal' – and a useful one not least in showing that the dragon's role in literature (medieval and contemporary) can be more complex than one might imagine. Finally Clara Wille contributes a philological study of animal names, especially in Latin and Old French (singling out the heron, lamprey, and hedgehog); and An Smets introduces a falconry treatise, the *Fauconnerie* of Artelouche de Alagona, with special reference to its sources.

Valuable though this second group of papers is, they give rise to occasional misgivings. Firstly, some of them at least may prove less than ideally accessible to the non-specialists in Obermaier's intended audience. Smets, for example, for all her piece's exemplary scholarliness,

never really tells us why the treatise she comments on (or the study of falconry more generally) are important; and she includes much untranslated material in Latin and French which, one fears, will defeat some readers. Secondly, one cannot help wishing that the three pieces in English (by Smets, Honegger, and Prietzel) were in German. This is partly because the mix of languages causes the book, as currently arranged, to lose something in coherence and continuity; but more importantly because much of the English used is not entirely convincing. There are a few words or phrases which do not exist at all (e.g. ‘unexperienced’, ‘saffire’, ‘wulf’, ‘leggin’, ‘in how far’), a sprinkling of minor grammatical errors, and numerous stylistic peccadilloes which make one unable to forget that one is reading the work of a non-native-speaker. Perhaps none of this is really important; but it could easily have been prevented by rigorous editing from a native English speaker.

Overall, of course, the principal strength of a volume like this (its stimulating diversity) can also be its weakness (a lack of unity). That Sabine Obermaier, as editor, is well aware of this fact is demonstrated by two steps she has taken to connect the essays together. The first is to divide them into five sections: “Das Wissen vom Tier” (Anzulewicz, Smets, Wille); “Vom Umgang mit Fabelwesen” (Lehnardt, Honegger); “Theriomorphe Zeichensprachen” (Hartmann, Pelizaeus, Rapp); “Literarische Tiere” (Prietzel, Franz, Bosold-DasGupta); and “Ein Ausblick in die Neuzeit” (Lehmann). This division makes perfect sense; but I am not sure that it really works. For example, the essays of the third section go together well; but those of the first all take quite different approaches; and isolating Lehmann’s piece in a discrete section if anything exposes, rather than veiling, its arguable incongruity in this context. Moreover the unifying elements that the essays from the original *Ringvorlesung* arguably share are somewhat obscured by the published arrangement.

Obermaier’s other attempt to pull together the book’s many threads is, however, very successful. In an attempt to provide both a framework and a backcloth for the essays that follow, she begins the volume with an “erster Überblick”, with detailed bibliography, of the various kinds of relationship that existed between medieval humans and animals. Topics covered are farming and hunting, animals and the law, the *Physiologus* and (pseudo-)zoological traditions, beast epic, fables, and the pictorial and plastic arts. One could criticize this chapter for not focusing enough on the specific areas covered by the essays that follow, or for thinness in the coverage of certain other topics (such as travel literature, or the spiritual interpretation of animals); but, of course, Obermaier needed at least 40 pages to perform her task, and only had 20. Certainly her survey is well done, and will be enormously helpful in enabling readers to make sense of what follows.

In sum one can say that this book shares many of the strengths and weaknesses intrinsic to a collective volume of its kind, but is better than most. Certainly its individual essays are all good and worth reading, and that is the main thing.

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