

THE MEDIEVAL BESTIARY AS A TOOL FOR INTENSIFYING ANTI-SEMITISM

Sarah Spencer

As one of the superpowers of the Western medieval world, the Roman Catholic Church certainly attempted to impose political and social stances in the temporal world, stances that were supported by the careful use of propaganda. In some cases these instances of church propaganda appeared subtly in the guise of fulfilling another role. For example, the Bible Moralisée of 1220, an illustrated moralized translation of the Bible was perhaps used to further a different church agenda than promoting Christianity. At the beginning of the 13th century the Church passed a law reserving the sacrament of wine to those exclusively in clerical positions. As this church-produced literature and art heavily emphasized the holiness of the remaining sacrament for lay persons – the bread – and ignored the wine it can be said the Church was attempting to appease non-clerics while at the same time supporting their new decree.¹ In the same way bestiaries, another type of medieval church-produced literature, are easily able to be interpreted as heavily propagandized volumes. More specifically, bestiaries were used to perpetuate and strengthen anti-Semitic fears and stereotypes that ran rampant in medieval Europe in order to further encourage a public discrimination leaning towards segregation.

A medieval bestiary was a compilation of known animals, both common and exotic, and their characteristics. However, the emphasis in bestiaries was not on the scientific behavior of these animals, rather emphasis was placed on the mannerisms and what those said about the character of that animal. For instance, in the Aberdeen Bestiary vultures^A were compared to the Virgin Mary – a very un-scientific but heavily Christianized description (not to mention an unexpected one for modern audiences). The primary bestiary that I will be looking at more in depth is the Aberdeen Bestiary, which was written



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¹ James Watts, *Passions and Transgressions Conference: Illuminating Leviticus*, (Syracuse University, 2010).

² *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010).

around the year 1200. Looking past the inaccurate behavioral descriptions of animals, the Aberdeen Bestiary is a rich source for social commentary on medieval Europe's mindset; specifically it is filled with vivid examples promoting anti-Semitic themes.

Apes^B, while not interpreted in the Bestiary as an explicit representation of the distasteful characteristics attributed to medieval Jews, do provide an anti-Semitic commentary. One curious characteristic the bestiary lists as the rule for apes is that when the mother "bears twins, she loves one and despises the other."³ This clear and unequal division of love between the twins seems to reference back to the Bible, the primary authoritative document of medieval Europe, particularly to the founding of religions by the children of Abraham. Galatians states that Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. The



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book then goes on to suggest that the Judaism that formed the basis for Christianity was descended from the son Isaac, born of Abraham's lawful marriage, while the son Ishmael, born of a slave woman, went on to father the religion of Islam.⁴ Some centuries before the Aberdeen Bestiary was compiled, Pope Urban II's referred to those of Ishmael's religion as "enemies of the Lord" in his famous speech at the Council of Clermont.⁵ While the Pope specifically meant Muslims in this denouncement, the term was loosely interpreted and consequently applied to Jews – an interpretation that resulted in a genocide coinciding with the first Crusade.⁶ While the church at first responded to these attacks against Jews negatively, the idea of Jews as enemies of Christ had already taken root and therefore only flourished. As a result, this despised ape twin represents the shunned son and enemy of Abraham and therefore all Christians – namely the Muslims, but closer to home and more dangerous, the Jews.

One of the many symbolic bestiary representations evoking anti-Semitism is found in the animal defined as the leopard. The medieval notion of how a leopard was produced is evident in the animal's name – *leo*, for lion, plus the *pard*, a cat-like beast, combine to create the word "leopard." Because this creature is the result of an "adulterous" coupling, leopards were supposed to be degenerate "such as the mule and the burdon."⁷ In this case the word degenerate is applied to denote that these three mentioned creatures are sterile. While this is not in actuality the case for leopards, it is in fact true for mules. This infertility is the key point in the leopard's status as an anti-Semitic symbol, a point which is made clearer by looking at the role of medieval Jews in society, and, perhaps surprisingly, at the medieval Christian view concerning homosexuals.

³ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 12v.

⁴ *King James Bible*. ([Cambridge, England]: Chadwyck-Healey, 1996. Print), Galatians 4:22-30.

⁵ Chartres, Fulcher of, ed. "Speech at Council of Clermont, 1095." (*Medieval Sourcebook*. Fordham University, 20 Jan. 1996. Web. Apr. 2010).

⁶ Lecture: 3/4/10.

⁷ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 8v-9r.

Looking at examples of medieval art from this period allows better understanding of the medieval mindset regarding homosexuals, and therefore the bestiary's description of the degenerate leopard. In a presentation on the findings concerning an interpretation of Lorenzetti's *Sala dei Nove*, a fresco depicting the consequences of bad versus good government, Dennis Romano, Professor of History at Syracuse University, focused upon a partially concealed image of same-sex seduction that contrast with other depictions of moral society. On one side of Lorenzetti's painting there is depicted a moral city busy raising new buildings and full of markets illustrating the effects of good government. On the other side is shown a city under the management of bad government, rife with economic and moral breakdown.⁸ That homosexuality was depicted on the side of the immoral society enforces the idea of same-sex seduction as a dangerous act. Homosexuality in medieval Europe was then viewed as both a voluntary choice to commit unnatural acts and as leaving God for idolatry – instead worshipping each other's bodies. In addition to these views, social and economic disasters such as famine and disease that caused the loss of families were blamed upon homosexuals. This allocation of blame was due to the fact that they practiced non-procreative sex, which did not add to the population and earned them the title "murderers of the children." Thus, not only were sodomites threatening their own souls, they were considered to be very real threats to civil society.

However, throughout the books of the Bible the banning of Christians from the practice of usury occurs much more frequently than the banning of homosexuality. One of the most vivid stories of this contempt towards usury is the incident of Jesus and the moneylenders from the book of Matthew. After overturning the coin tables in the synagogue, Jesus states to the moneylenders, "My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."⁹ Here Christians are taught to equate handling money with sin as well as being specifically warned against partaking in the practice of usury throughout the rest of the Bible. As a result, that necessary function in the medieval economy fell to the ones not forbidden to practice usury – the Jews. In the same way that homosexuals were considered a threat since they did not contribute to society due to the non-procreative aspect to their sexual practices, the Jews were not considered to contribute to society as they created money out of money by doing nothing, rather than engaging in any real labor. Interpreting the bestiary in this light, the inherent evil and sterile nature of "unnatural" crosses of species is easily seen as a commentary enforcing the idea of the Jews being dangerous to both Christian's souls as well as to society – effectively encouraging Jewish stereotypes and discrimination.

Hyenas^c are also excellent examples of the subtle anti-Semitic themes found throughout medieval bestiaries. First, in the Aberdeen Bestiary hyenas are specifically cited as resembling "the sons of Israel"¹⁰. Secondly, these hyenas are reported as living in tombs and feeding on the dead.¹¹ Since these bodies are buried in tombs, it can be assumed these are deceased Christians that the hyenas are feeding upon. This imagery of Jews gaining sustenance and power from the intake of the substance of Christians brings back to mind the practice of usury again; Jews growing richer from taking the Christian's money – one's means for living.

Considering the actual portrayal of the hyena in the bestiary's image, the animal features horns and a tail along with prominently displayed genitalia. The skeletal horns and tail present on the hyena obviously signify the devil, strengthening the animal's image as an unholy and unclean being. As the hyena is representative of the Jews, it follows that Jews were considered as demons and devil

⁸ Dennis Romano, *Passions and Transgressions Conference: A Depiction of Male Same-Sex Seduction*, (Syracuse University, 2010).

⁹ *King James Bible*. ([Cambridge, England]: Chadwyck-Healey, 1996. Print), Matthew 21:12-13.

¹⁰ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 11v.

¹¹ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 11v.

worshippers. In fact, medieval superstition went as far to perpetuate the widely believed rumor that Jews actually had horns and tails in reality – a myth reflected in the particular depiction of the hyena in the Aberdeen Bestiary.¹² In this same vein, the Jewish community was widely regarded as demons and



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considered to practice all sorts of satanic killings, as demonstrated in the torturous slaughters of children by Jews in the story of St. William of Norwich as well as the popular ballad, *The Jew's Daughter*.¹³

The other feature of the hyena's physical representation in the bestiary image is that of its blatant sexuality in the form of its prominently displayed genitals.¹⁴ In order to grasp the full nature of this use of imagery, the contrasting sexuality of the beaver^D in bestiaries is useful. In medieval Europe the practice of hunting beavers for their testicles, which were believed to be of medicinal value, was a frequent occurrence. In an extreme act of self-preservation, this bestiary beaver will rip off his own testicles when



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being pursued by a hunter.¹⁵ This extreme act of casting off the genitals symbolizes good Christians casting off their vices, with the testicles directly signifying chastity but in essence signifying all human

¹² Hassig, Debra. *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print.), p. 152.

¹³ "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich." *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*. Ed. John M. McCulloh. (New York: Garland, 2000. 515-36. Print); Miyazaki, Mariko. "Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-Semitism." *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*. (New York: Garland, 1999. 23-43. Print.), p. 33.

¹⁴ Hassig, Debra. *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print.), p. 150.

¹⁵ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 11r.

vices.¹⁶ Therefore, since the absence of the genitals in a bestiary image symbolizes purity and Christian virtues, it follows that the presence, but more so the emphasis, on the genitals symbolizes licentiousness and a lack of both Christianity and virtue. In fact, during the time period that this Aberdeen Bestiary was created it was a common stereotype held by Christians that Jews were frequent violators of women – a stereotype only strengthened by this sinister symbolism.¹⁷

Another point of interest that the hyena description shares with that of the leopard – and even the fox – is the emphasis on their deceptive natures. The hyena is described as being able to mimic the voices of humans to lure them to their deaths, and similarly able to mimic the sound of human vomiting to “entice” dogs and then eat them.¹⁸ Both of these images suggest the idea of Jews luring innocent and unsuspecting Christians into their traps by pretending to blend into the accepted Christian society. Furthermore, the sex of the hyena constantly changes denoting un-cleanliness, duplicity, and refers back to the sexual sin of homosexuality that has already been linked symbolically to the Jewish practice of usury.¹⁹

It can be argued that the behavior of the fox^E also symbolizes the luring in of unsuspecting Christians by the Jews. According to the bestiary, foxes roll in the dirt to appear bloody and plays dead until birds “think that it is dead and descend to perch on it. Thus it seizes them and devours them.”²⁰ Here



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the Jew, represented by the fox in this situation, pretends to be “dead” to effectively convince others that he is incapable of harm and therefore not a threat – blending into nature and society. This situation is very similar to the skillful imitation of the hyena of the human voice – both scenarios portray the symbolized Jew as a masked danger. The medieval account, *Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich*, outlines the alleged capture of an innocent Christian boy by the wicked and deceptive Jewish community in order to perform a mock crucifixion. In this account written by Thomas of Monmouth, the young boy William was “deluded with cunning wordy tricks” by a Jew so that “the simple boy was deceived and

¹⁶ Hassig, Debra. “Sex in the Bestiaries.” *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*. (New York: Garland, 1999. 71-93. Print.), p. 77-78.

¹⁷ Hassig, Debra. *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print.), p. 152.

¹⁸ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 11v.

¹⁹ Hassig, Debra. *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print.), p. 146.

²⁰ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 16r.

trusted himself to the man.”²¹ In a greater act of deception, “the boy, like an innocent lamb led to the slaughter, was treated kindly by the Jews. Ignorant of what was being prepared for him...suddenly they seized hold of the boy William...and they ill treated him in various horrible ways.”²² In both of these quotes the Jews hide behind a façade, fooling the soon-to-be saint with a web of false words and actions until it was too late – just as the fox with the birds. All of this would leave a chilling impression of suspicion in the minds of Christian readers, again re-enforcing fear and resulting in discrimination against Jews.

Furthermore in the case of the fox, that animal’s crafty nature is also emphasized, especially in its manner of transportation where it is quoted as “never run[ning] in a straight line but twists and turns.” This crafty and slippery characteristic is again vividly reflected in the account of St. William with the instance of the speaker for the Jewish community talking around William’s mother into allowing the boy to go with them as their “apprentice.” For a good while the mother resists the Jew’s “wordy tricks”²³ as mentioned before, until finally she was “seduced by the glitter of money to the lust of gain...and the boy William was given up to the betrayer.”²⁴ This seduction by the glittering gold is extremely reminiscent of the bestiary transcription pertaining to leopards. The leopard, otherwise known then as the African panther, was said, after digesting a kill, to produce a belch “so sweet that the other beasts come and follow.”²⁵ This method of the leopard’s deceptive enticement is as the Jew with his money, again luring Christians to their doom but in this instance with malicious bribery instead of false manners.

The leopard, the mule, and crocote –offspring of a lioness and a hyena, are all the result of cross species breeding, according to the Aberdeen Bestiary. They are, therefore, considered unnatural and end up being defective in some manner as with the sterility of the mule. And even more than unnatural, some of these cross-breeds are considered monsters. Interestingly, two of these creatures are the result of a lion and some lesser creature – or monster in the case of the hyena. In the bestiaries the lions are quite obviously made out to represent both God and Christ, as demonstrated in the description of the birth of new cubs. When the lioness produces her cubs, they are born dead and she watches over them for three days. At the end of that three day period, the father returns and breathes on the cubs’ faces and brings them back to life – a clear reference to the resurrection of Christ.²⁶ Therefore, when the lion, representing Christianity, mates with that other lesser species, representing Judaism, a defective and unnatural breed results; signifying the ungodliness of that coupling.

This subtle discouragement of inter-religious relationships found in the bestiary is a relatively pale shadow compared to the incredibly un-subtle discouragement of these relationships in medieval European society. In fact, to further decrease the chances of these couplings, Pope Innocent issued a decree at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 towards that effect. As stated in the Pope’s ruling, all Jews were to distinguish themselves as Jews through their clothing so no Christians would accidentally mate with that “lesser race” – preventing Christians from “excusing themselves in the future for the excesses of

²¹ "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich." *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*. Ed. John M. McCulloh. (New York: Garland, 2000. 515-36. Print), p. 521-522.

²² "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich." *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*. Ed. John M. McCulloh. (New York: Garland, 2000. 515-36. Print), p. 523.

²³ "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich." *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*. Ed. John M. McCulloh. (New York: Garland, 2000. 515-36. Print), p. 521-522.

²⁴ "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich." *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*. Ed. John M. McCulloh. (New York: Garland, 2000. 515-36. Print), p. 522.

²⁵ George, Wilma, and William B. Yapp. *The Naming of the Beasts: Natural History in the Medieval Bestiary*. (London: Duckworth, 1991. Print), p. 53.

²⁶ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 7v.

such accursed intercourse.”²⁷ The consistent depiction of this coupling resulting in disgraceful degenerates in the bestiary most certainly reflects the church’s efforts to extinguish intermingling of Christians and Jews and create more defined segregation.

Turning to one of the more obvious Jewish stereotypes still present today, the weasel^F was used in bestiaries to represent cunning and greed among other distasteful



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traits. The most important indicator of how the weasel translates into those characteristics of cunning and greed is in their method of giving birth. The bestiary specifies that weasels “conceive through the mouth and give birth through the ear”.²⁸ This seemingly unnatural and backwards way of producing offspring, while again referencing back to the unnatural cross-breed animals, has more to do with the actual body parts involved in this alleged process. Taking the statement that weasels represent those “who listen willingly enough to the seed of the divine word but...ignore it and take no account of what they have heard”²⁹ into consideration, the conception through the mouth takes on another meaning. Here intake through the mouth represents the Jews receiving the word of God, and the birthing through the ear represents them casting off or ignoring that divine knowledge. This deliberate ignoring of Christian values and teachings was especially clear to the rest of the medieval world in the Jew’s frequent role as usurer – the banned, suspicious handling of money. From the connections of this idea, as well as the bestiary description, comes those stereotypes mentioned before of wicked cleverness and avarice. Therefore, while the casting off the scriptures could represent heretics as well as Jews, the stereotypes of cunning and greed present in the weasel were stereotypes widely perpetuated by the church and attributed to practitioners of Judaism.

The snake^G has almost always been associated with dark powers and unsavory qualities, and this is no exception in the bestiary’s interpretation of these animals. Immediately the description of the snake mentions its method of moving. Similar to the running fox’s path which is never straight, the snake’s body is constantly “folded...and is never straight” in its movements implying an inherent crookedness in its character.³⁰ Again this deceitful and suspicious characteristic suggests the stereotypical Jew in St. William’s story using his “wordy tricks” against the poor, weak, Christian mother.³¹ Furthermore the description of the snake as living “in the shadows” refers back to the other incident previously examined from *Passions of St. William* where the Jews are depicted as circling predators hiding behind masks or “in the shadows” of Christian society.³²

More interesting than the bestiary’s textual description of the snake, however, is the accompanying image of the snake strangling an elephant. In the bestiary, the elephants are described as intelligent creatures that carry on chaste monogamous relationships reminiscent of a good Christian

²⁷ Hassig, Debra. *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print), p. 147-148.

²⁸ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 24r.

²⁹ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 24r.

³⁰ *IBID*, p. 65v.

³¹ "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich." *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*. Ed. John M. McCulloh. (New York: Garland, 2000. 515-36. Print). p. 521-522.

³² *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 65v.



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marriage as defined by the Church. Furthermore, due to the fact that bestiary elephants are unable to bend their knees, once fallen an elephant cannot get up without aid. However, even with the efforts of all grown elephants of the group the fallen elephant cannot be righted. It is not until the lone baby elephant attempts to lift the fallen creature that the elephant is able to get to its feet, signifying the ability of the peaceful Christ to save us all.³³ Additionally, elephants are cited as representing Adam and Eve before they were introduced to sin, not coincidentally, by a serpent.³⁴ Clearly the elephant represents the ideal of Christian humanity, a fact that directly relates to the content of the image accompanying the text on snakes.

In the bestiary the snake is cited as the “arch-enemy” of the elephant; a clear reference back to Urban’s misused declaration of war against the enemies of Christ who is represented by the elephant.³⁵ That the image supporting the text on snakes is a depiction of a snake suffocating an elephant to death becomes an obvious commentary on the Jew’s perceived desire and threat to choke Christianity out of existence. Disregarding the reality of this perception, the fear, suspicion and prejudice in the minds of bestiary readers would only increase as a result of this image.

A creature similar to the snake in physical characteristics as well as textual and ideological representation is the salamander^H. Its most powerful weapon is its deadly poison – the strongest poison of all animals. The potency of its poison is demonstrated in two specific examples. First, if a salamander crawls into a tree “it poisons all the apples and kills those who eat them.”³⁶ The immediate reference this passage brings up is again concerning the banishment of Adam and Eve. The poisoned apples represent the forbidden fruit that when eaten resulted in the banishment and subsequent mortality of Adam and Eve, a consequence represented by the death of those who eat the apples – another underlying warning that Jews were plotting to bring about the death of Christianity.³⁷

³³ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 10r; Hassig, Debra. *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print), p. 130.

³⁴ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 10r; Hassig, Debra. *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print), p. 130-131.

³⁵ Chartres, Fulcher of, ed. "Speech at Council of Clermont, 1095." *Medieval Sourcebook*. (Fordham University, 20 Jan. 1996. Web. Apr. 2010).

³⁶ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 69v.

³⁷ *King James Bible*. ([Cambridge, England]: Chadwyck-Healey, 1996. Print), Genesis 3.

The second example, that of the salamander poisoning the well, is a very interesting one. As this bestiary was created during the 1200's, the infamous Black Plague outbreak of 1348 had yet to occur. However, one common belief that ran rampant as to the origin of the plague was that the Jews had poisoned the wells of Christians. This notion was brought about due to the fact that the Jewish community suffered far fewer numbers of plague deaths than those around them, in reality a likely result of their superior and religiously driven sanitation practices.³⁸ So despite the fact that these theories concerning the Black Death would not come to full fruition for another century, the spreading of disease through Christian



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wells by Jews was obviously not a new concept by that point – and only added to the haze of fear and suspicion surrounding the Jewish community.

A similar train of logic equating Judaism to a plague is evident in the bestiary's textual information concerning the night owl³⁹. The actual name for this owl is *bubo*, which has the other definition of the swelling of the lymph nodes due to disease or plague.³⁹ Although this manifestation is most obviously connected to the later outbreaks of Bubonic or Black Plague, the *bubo* still clearly signifies a serious infection. And this idea of the *bubo* relating to a plague-like infection can be further interpreted to symbolize heresy. A medieval source in reference to heretics of a region states that, "The errors...spread to such an extent that in a short time it had infected more than a thousand towns, and if it had not been

³⁸ *King James Bible*. ([Cambridge, England]: Chadwyck-Healey, 1996. Print), Leviticus

³⁹ *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 50r.



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cut back by the swords of the faithful I think it would have corrupted the whole of Europe.”⁴⁰ This passage clearly speaks of heresy as a real deadly infection that had to be exterminated for the good of Christendom. Again going back to the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, the Pope condemned “all heretics under whatever names they may be known, for while they have different faces they are nevertheless bound to each other by their tails”⁴¹ This reference to heretics living behind masks and being characterized by their demonic figurative “tails” however brings to mind more the Jews rather than general heretics. As Judaism was perhaps the most despised form of heresy, this inference becomes an even smaller mental leap to take. With the references to masks bringing to mind the deceptive qualities of Jews as outlined by the bestiary with animals such as the fox, even more obvious is the reference to tails which clearly goes back to the bestiary commentary for hyenas equating the devil and subsequently the Jews. Therefore, the happenstance that the name for the night owl leads through a train of logic to plague, heresy, and finally to anti-Semitic superstitions seems to be no accident at all.

One of the important characteristics applied to the night owl in bestiaries is that of sloth – another trait that can be interpreted as anti-Semitic commentary.⁴² Sloth is in fact one of the seven deadly sins of the Christian faith and once again refers back to the practice of usury. The jobs of practicing usury or merchants, fields primarily occupied by Jews, were both lines of work considered to not be actual honest Christian work as both practices created nothing but instead simply moved money or goods around. Therefore, the attribute of sloth more closely links that bestiary animal negatively to the Jewish community.

Finally on the night owl, the most obvious aspect of this bestiary animal is the fact that it is the *night* owl and therefore lives its life in the dark and “shuns the daylight.”⁴³ In this scenario the daylight clearly signifies Christ and therefore all Christianity, which is shunned by the Jews. In the book of John in the Bible, the Jews are quoted as rejecting Christ saying “We have no king but Caesar, we know not who this man is.”⁴⁴ From this quote we see not only are these Jews turning away from Christ and Christianity, they are turning away for earthly power which in most cases translate to money – bringing back in the stereotype of Jewish avarice.

⁴⁰ Heisterbach, Caesarius of. "Medieval Heresies." *Medieval Sourcebook*. (Fordham University, 20 Jan. 1996. Web. Apr. 2010).

⁴¹ Schroeder, H. J., trans. "Fourth Lateran Council: Canon 3 on Heresy 1215." *Medieval Sourcebook*. (Fordham University, 20 Jan. 1996. Web. Apr. 2010).

⁴² *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. 1200's. *The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Web. (Apr. 2010), p. 50r; Miyazaki, Mariko. "Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-Semitism." *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*. (New York: Garland, 1999. 23-43. Print), p. 27.

⁴³ Miyazaki, Mariko. "Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-Semitism." *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*. (New York: Garland, 1999. 23-43. Print), p. 27.

⁴⁴ *King James Bible*. ([Cambridge, England]: Chadwyck-Healey, 1996. Print), John 19:15

While the themes and commentaries in medieval bestiaries certainly did not create the anti-Semitism so entrenched in medieval society, they certainly increased and strengthened the anti-Semitic climate already in existence. As demonstrated through an analysis of the Aberdeen Bestiary, bestiary texts and imagery further promoted all the Jewish stereotypes including cunning, greed, dirtiness of both body and soul, and backwardness. Using the bestiary, the church was able to both fortify the anti-Semitic stereotypes as well as reinforce their policies against the Jews through the use of this type of subtle propaganda.