



Byzantine Animals Between Materiality and Fantasy

International Conference
Katowice, 22.-23.6.2023



Program

(for the **conference venue**
and the **zoom-link**, see p. 13)

Thursday, 22.6.2023

9:00-9:30 Opening, Introduction & Organization
Jan Kucharski, Przemysław Marciniak, Tristan Schmidt

Animality in Byzantium. Theory now and then.

9:30-10:00 Preliminary considerations on the relationship between humans and non-human animals in Byzantium
Stavros Lazaris
(online)

10:00-10:30 From Alexandria to Byzantium: the evolution of zoological handbooks
Arnaud Zucker

10:30-11:00 Break

Social Issues

11:00-11:30 Stuttering Swallows: Disability & Animality in Byzantine Sources
Maroula Perisanidi
(online)

11:30-12:00 Social Roles and Literary Characterization in Late Byzantine Animal Poems
Florin Leonte
(online)

12:00-13:00 Lunchbreak

Hunting and Spectacle

13:00-13:30 From arena sands to ivory carvings: Animal hunts as consular self-representation
Konstanze Schiemann

13:30-14:00 The Advertising and Spread of Hunting Cheetahs in the Medieval Mediterranean and their Relationship with Imitatio Imperii
Evan Schultheis
(online)

14:00-14:15 Break

Animals in Art

14:15-14:45 Good or Evil, Sacred or Mundane, Symbolic or Meaningless? Some Notes on Zoomorphic Representations in Byzantine Sculpture
Roberta Flaminio
(online)

14:45-15:15 The sounds of coexistence and exclusion: Animals in Byzantine ekphrases
Paroma Chatterjee
(online)

15:15-15:30 Break

Epikindyna pteroenta

15:30-16:00 Being Consumed by Insects: Punishment and Horror in Byzantium
Ayşenur Mulla

16:00-16:30 Animals in the Miracles of Thekla
Linda Honey
(online)

16:30-17:00 Break

Keynote lecture

17:00-18:00 Voice's manifold subject formation: Isaac of Antioch's parrot memra
Glenn Peers

19:00 Dinner (Restauracja Tatiana; see below)

Friday, 23.6.2023

Horses

9:00-9:30 The Horse in the Hippodrome: a Fixture, an Athlete or an Agent?
Anastassija Ropa/Alexia Stamouli

9:30-10:00 Weighing the Evidence – Conjectures on the demands made of baggage animals in middle Byzantine era military use
Timothy Dawson

10:00-10:30 Break

Household animals

10:30 – 11:00 Byzantine Pigs
Michael Decker
(online)

11:00-11:30 They steal my food and keep me up all night: racy cats and thieving mice during the Late Byzantine era
Kalliope Mavrommati

11:30-12:00 Break

Between Materiality and Fantasy

12:00 – 13:00 Fantastic beasts and where to find them: Byzantine hybrids
Margaret Mullett

13:00-13:30 Final discussion

14:00 Lunch (Restauracja Alto; see below)

16:00-18:00 Excursion to the Silesian Museum in Katowice incl. guided tour in English

The conference is generously supported by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education grant DNK/SP/463790/2020, the Excellence Initiative of the University of Silesia and the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung

Abstracts

Paroma Chatterjee, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

THE SOUNDS OF COEXISTENCE AND EXCLUSION: ANIMALS IN BYZANTINE EKPHRASES

This paper examines the ekphrastic depictions of non-human animals in two instances of Byzantine literature: the fountain in the 12th-century novel, *Hysmine and Hysminias*, and the Constantinopolitan windvane (anemodoulion) by Constantine of Rhodes and Niketas Choniates. My immediate argument is that the material representations of animals on these objects, such as birds, goats, lambs, sheep, and others, constitute an idyllic ambience in the classical bucolic tradition. In doing so, the animals craft a specific soundscape which intriguingly dominates over and supercedes the sonic powers of the humans interacting with these monuments. My broader argument is that the animals also underline the rigorous exclusions of particular species from the bucolic tradition and the differing materialities of art (techne) and nature (physis), even as they illustrate a seemingly ordered system of coexistence and co-dependence between humans and non-humans.

Timothy Dawson

WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE – CONJECTURES ON THE DEMANDS MADE OF BAGGAGE ANIMALS IN MIDDLE BYZANTINE ERA MILITARY USE

A familiar range of animals were essential to the everyday functioning of Byzantine society. Recovering an understanding of much of that daily reality is impossible, imbedded in vernacular practice that naturally went unrecorded. One microcosm which is amenable to some greater understanding is the indispensable logistics of military transport. The rich technical literature of the tenth century, including Constantine Porphyrogennētos' logistical manual on imperial expeditions, may be productively combined with the techniques of physical reconstruction and testing (the so-called "experimental archaeology") to gain a greater appreciation of how baggage animals were utilised. Comparing the reconstructed data with modern standards of similar animal usage will provide an insight into modes of animal care and employment. It is anticipated that such insights will show that the same rational pragmatism as the military manuals advise as pertaining to humans were also applied to working animals.

Michael Decker, University of South Florida, Tampa

BYZANTINE PIGS

Few domesticated animals are so important to humans today as the pig, *Sus domesticus*. The domestic hog and its wild relatives were important animals in Byzantium. Culturally, the domestic pig looms large, especially as a symbol of uncleanness, while the wild boar embodied ferocity and the destructive animal force of nature. Using textual and material data, in this paper, I will make observations about human-porcine relations in the Byzantine era. In particular, I will touch on the basic relationship of human rearing of domestic hogs for food and its taboo in communities within and around Byzantium. Moreover, I will briefly explore the boar hunt as a marker of the perils of embodied nature and accompanying performative elements of masculinity and the conquest of nature.

Roberta Flaminio

GOOD OR EVIL, SACRED OR MUNDANE, SYMBOLIC OR MEANINGLESS? SOME NOTES ON ZOOMORPHIC REPRESENTATIONS IN BYZANTINE SCULPTURE

Since the Middle Byzantine period there was an increase of zoomorphic representations in the repertoire of the liturgical furnishings and architectural sculpture ornamentation. Their presence could sometimes be related with their place in the architectural space or with the function of the furnishing on which they have been carved. Compared with the contemporary production of Western Medieval sculpture, specifically if considered since the Early Byzantine period, the recurrence of this kind of motifs in Middle and Late Byzantine sculpture represents a different scenery, to which different explanations have been attributed. The aim of this paper is to focus on some aspects of the sculptural production referring both to specific decorative patterns and their correspondence with the function of the furnishing, as well as on their relationship with different iconographic media.

Linda Honey

ANIMALS IN *THE MIRACLES OF THEKLA*

Animals figure largely in early martyrdom accounts of the first-century miracle worker Thekla of Iconium. By the Early Byzantine Period, Hagia Thekla, the religious community Thekla founded in Rough Cilicia (present-day southern Turkey) had developed into a popular pilgrimage center replete with a bird sanctuary.

The Miracles of Thekla, a mid-fifth century Greek text, records Thekla's thaumaturgical activity. My paper examines the role of animals in the forty-two-

miracle corpus: those performed on their behalf and those achieved by their agency with particular attention to two medical miracles attributed to the aggressive intervention of birds in one and insects in the other.

This paper identifies a hierarchical bias within the text in regard to animals, notes a shift over time in regard to animals associated with Thekla, and considers how *The Miracles of Thekla* expands our understanding of the place of animals in the Early Byzantine conceptual universe.

Stavros Lazaris, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND NON-HUMAN ANIMALS IN BYZANTIUM

In recent decades, animals have gained prominence as historical subjects as part of the overall “animal turn” that has developed across multiple academic disciplines. Much of this interest stems from two works. While these were works of philosophy – the first ethics, the second epistemology –, the increased attention they have brought to animals has encouraged several academics within the humanities and social sciences (psychology, sociology, law, literary studies...) to re-evaluate the place of non-human animals within their research, studying them both in their interactions with humans and as worthy objects of enquiry in themselves. This trend has not left history untouched; while some significant work was done by Keith Thomas and Robert Delort in the early 1980s, the last twenty years have been particularly fruitful. In several studies, it was clearly established that the animal has its own story that deserves further attention.

Based on the case study of the deer, I would like to discuss, a broader issue: the relationship of Byzantines with animals. How and why did they use them? How did they consider them? What was the position of Christian thinkers towards nature and animals in particular?

Florin Leonte, Palacký University Olomuc

SOCIAL ROLES AND LITERARY CHARACTERIZATION IN LATE BYZANTINE ANIMAL POEMS

Central to the satirical Byzantine poems on animals composed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was the attribution of zoological features to individuals represented as various animals. This paper will consider how the portrayal of individuals reflected their place in the hierarchy of Byzantine society. In this paper, I will reflect on how the late Byzantine poems on animals introduce and exploit various character tropes like those of “the obedient servant,” “the corrupt servant,” “the

incompetent military," "the trickster," etc. Conversely, this portrayal is deeply influenced by the court rhetoric, which it tried to mirror in reverse form. In addition, I will not only look at the typologies and themes employed by the various animal poems written in Late Byzantium, but also at the stylistic devices that may help us better profile the characters who populated the Byzantine court

Kalliope Mavrommati, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

THEY STEAL MY FOOD AND KEEP ME UP ALL NIGHT: RACY CATS AND THIEVING MICE DURING THE LATE BYZANTINE ERA

Birds and dogs are the most common pets even among the lower socioeconomic strata. Birds were maintained purely for enjoyment, whereas dogs performed helpful services as guards and in the hunt. There are Byzantine texts of the Late period that glorify birds and mostly dogs that lived close to humans. Modern literature has highlighted various aspects of the Byzantines' relationship with these animals.

Cats, however, remain a mystery. Although we are aware that they lived in close proximity to humans, particularly in urban areas, our understanding of cats is primarily limited to the negative connotations they acquired during the Byzantine Middle Ages. Cats were generally unwelcome and disliked for a variety of reasons. However, bone material from harbours across the Empire illustrates their beneficial role to ward off rodents.

As for their eternal rivals, the mice, we have a wealth of references, which can illuminate a certain interest as well as various aspects of daily life especially during the time of the plague epidemic. There are also various texts that satirically portray the rodent problem in houses through humorous episodes inspired by actual incidents. Interestingly, none of these texts mention cats, which could potentially assist with resolving these issues in households. In fact, very few references devoted to the small feline have been preserved. Nevertheless, the cats' crucial and immensely useful role led them inside Byzantine homes, most likely receiving and returning the residents' affection.

We will attempt an overview of the relationship of the Byzantines with cats in the Late period and possible reasons why the scholars of the time were not particularly interested in recording incidents with cats rather than mice in their texts.

Ayşenur Mulla, University of Silesia in Katowice

BEING CONSUMED BY INSECTS: PUNISHMENT AND HORROR IN BYZANTIUM

In this paper, I will argue how sexual crimes and the motive of being consumed by worms and insects are related to Byzantine moral literature. In hagiography and apocalyptic texts, “sinners” were frequently punished for being deceived by the desire of their bodies by being eaten by worms and insects. In this way, the guilty flesh became decomposed. The argument posited in this study is supported by a number of Byzantine apocalyptic texts and hagiographies from the 7th-10th centuries, which offer vivid accounts of sexual sinners suffering the grotesque fate of being consumed by worms and insects or even having these creatures emerge from various parts of their bodies. Curiously, these texts also portray hell as a place where worms and insects are ubiquitous, which is likely connected to Christianity’s defiance of natural decay and promising a bodily afterlife for those proven worthy. According to this promise, it can be deduced that those who commit the most unpleasant sins will be punished by decaying and being eaten by worms and insects.

Margaret Mullett

FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM: BYZANTINE HYBRIDS

Not all Byzantine animals were to be found in imperial zoos or on hunting expeditions. Centaurs and sirens, sphinxes and hippocamps, fauns and chimeras weave their way through the manuscript headpieces, the court poetry and the ivory boxes of the twelfth century. Byzantines wore siren jewellery and griffon silks, rested in tents embroidered with polymorph animals, ate off harpy plates. We should ask the origins of these beasts but also where they are to be found, what they do and what company they keep, whether divine, human or non-hybrid animal. This may give us some clues not only to the place of hybridity in Byzantium but also to attitudes towards animals.

Glenn Peers, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

VOICE’S MANIFOLD SUBJECT FORMATION: ISAAC OF ANTIOCH’S PARROT MEMRA

The prolific churchman Isaac of Antioch wrote an oft-mentioned *memra* around the Trisagion utterance by a parrot during the patriarchate of Peter the Fuller (r. 471-88), when his supplement to the doxology raised serious concerns among some of the city’s Christian inhabitants. The *memra* has attracted attention, but only

intermittently, and our knowledge of Isaac's work is still hampered by a lack of a comprehensive study of this important figure. This *memra* likewise still awaits study and translation, but this paper represents a collaborative effort to introduce this strange and fascinating verse sermon. In particular, this paper presents the terms of the sermon, but it also attempts to situate Isaac in a stronger theoretical position, articulated among modern scholars, but by no means absent from ancient and medieval writers who thought through implications of voice and the non-human, especially the animal. This paper argues for a particular kind of animal-based subject-formation through voice, which is articulated in this poetic theology of parrot, voice and orthodox revelation.

This paper argues for a merging of natures in Isaac's text, of human and of parrot. The sermon is an extended analysis and self-analysis, in the reading argued for here, in how alike human and animal are, and in how profoundly these natures can interchange and subjects can be remade – and how long a history of such interchange there's been between parrots and humans. We don't have the parrot's perspective, since Isaac doesn't try to imagine how they felt after they spoke to Isaac, but we do know the human aftermath, in Isaac's adopting the sacred truth of the parrot's position. He is certainly never the same, and if his text was persuasive (which is easy to believe), neither was his audience.

This paper presents an interpretative summary of the sermon, focusing on the elements of *becoming* described and modelled by Isaac. It also examines transformative possibilities of becoming-other, particularly becoming-animal, which is a position contemporary animal studies and modern philosophy have alerted us to – but have always existed as potential states of being. Isaac finds ways to elevate his parrot to human and angelic status, not without some ambivalence, and in the process folds his own voice and being (and his audience's) into parrot. It is that enfolding of subjects in Isaac's text that makes his text strikingly modern, even as it is deeply, ineluctably of its moment too. Isaac is a writer of remarkable agility and imagination, and this paper presents multiple facets of this sermon in order to reveal the extraordinary voices with which Isaac still addresses us.

Maroula Perisanidi, University of Leeds

STUTTERING SWALLOWS: DISABILITY & ANIMALITY IN BYZANTINE SOURCES

Sunaura Taylor, a scholar and activist for disability and animal rights, asks us to consider whether animals can be crips and whether crips can be animals. In this paper, I will attempt to answer this question, focusing on Byzantine representations of the swallow's stutter. I will begin by discussing in what ways swallows can be said to have been considered disabled as a species. Then, I will explore how the twelfth-

century bishop and classicist Eustathios of Thessalonike understood stuttering swallows through a human prism that gendered and racialised their disability. Finally, I will turn to how the existence of stuttering swallows could become a source of pride for a human with non-standard voice in Byzantium and today.

Anastasija Ropa, Latvian Academy of Sport Education, Riga, and Alexia Foteini Stamouli, University of Patras

THE HORSE IN THE HIPPODROME: A FIXTURE, AN ATHLETE OR AN AGENT?

Hippodrome races were an important cultural event in Byzantium, a place to see and to be seen. However, while the cultural and social significance of the hippodrome has been noted by scholars, the place of the horse remains insufficiently explored. It was definitely a *sine qua non*, but was it viewed as a status object, a co-athlete, or an agent in its own right? Several studies on animal agency and horse agency in particular emphasize the fact that, all too often, we see animal agency only when the animal "chooses" to act against the human expectations, ignoring the act of obedience. In this study, the authors explore literary and artistic sources to argue that, despite the fact that the horse is often rendered invisible by the very stress on the hippodrome race as a spectacle, a secular entertainment and a site of power play, the horse returns again and again as a companion but also an independent agent. Our written sources range from the book of the ceremonial protocol to late historiography and hagiography. For the study of the visual representation of the horse in the hippodrome, we consider the unique visual representation of the hippodrome in St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv (historically Kiev), Ukraine.

Konstanze Schiemann, Johannes-Gutenberg Universität, Mainz

FROM ARENA SANDS TO IVORY CARVINGS: ANIMAL HUNTS AS CONSULAR SELF-REPRESENTATION

In Constantinople during the early 6th century, animal hunts (*venationes*) were presented as part of consular games. Particularly striking here is the iconographic evidence: on consular diptychs, animal hunts are depicted in all their variety – from armed fighters piercing lions with spears to acrobats jumping over bears with long poles. The lively interaction of humans and animals is contrasted with serene depictions of the consuls themselves. The diptychs are evidence that animal hunts were an important part of consular self-representation in the 6th century. This is surprising since by that time, laws had been issued to restrict animal hunts and their popularity was fading: our latest evidence for *venationes* stems from AD 536. In the paper I argue that animal hunts were prominent in consular self-representation

because other entertainment, especially chariot racing, was closely linked to the emperor and thus not available as visual vocabulary.

Evan Schultheis, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC

THE ADVERTISING AND SPREAD OF HUNTING CHEETAHS IN THE MIEVEAL MIEDETRANEAN AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH IMITATIO IMPERII

Beginning in the 9th century, exported silk samites from Constantinople began to depict spotted cats in contexts outside of venatio motifs. Instead of portraying animals being hunted or killed for entertainment on the patterned silk cloth, these cats were associated with imperial authority. By the fifteenth century, cheetahs were prominent throughout medieval European art, usually associated with powerful magnates and other figures of authority. This paper explores the development and spread of the practice of keeping hunting cheetahs in the Middle Ages from its origins in late Roman Arabia through its spread to the Abbasid and Constantinopolitan courts, and from there to medieval Italy and Europe. This paper intends to show that the cheetah initially became a symbol of the authority and influence of the Roman Emperor, but via imitatio imperii, evolved into a symbol of power for medieval European rulers who sought to obtain cheetahs after becoming acquainted with their existence through silk exports and imperial court ceremony.

Arnaud Zucker, Université Côte d'Azur, Nice

FROM ALEXANDRIA TO BYZANTIUM: THE EVOLUTION OF ZOOLOGICAL HANDBOOKS

From Aristotle and his zoological πραγματεία to Byzantium, we can follow through a few witnesses (Aristophanes of Byzantium [3rd c. BC], Timothy of Gaza [6th c. AD], Constantine Porphyrogenitus [10th c. AD]) an evolution of the format of what can be considered zoological "handbooks". Behind this common qualification, which is justified by a certain standardization of templates for shaping and structuring zoological knowledge (anatomy, physiology, ethology, uses...), one can identify different strategies. We will therefore consider the structure and nature of the data listed in three main witnesses of the post-Aristotelian tradition, that share the concern of proposing a synthesis of zoological knowledge according to a monographic approach by animal. We will try to propose a survey of the types of systematic organization of zoological knowledge up to the Byzantine period on two scales: the internal organization of individual portraits of animals, and the global organization of portraits in a general structure.

General Information:

Zoom Link:

<https://uso6web.zoom.us/j/84053228115?pwd=NEExkd2MrUXYxUzdyNGxTV2oyVG1SUT09>

Meeting ID: 840 5322 8115

Passcode: 3nCtnY

Conference venue:

Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach
Wydział Humanistyczny
ul. Uniwersytecka 4
40-007 Katowice
Room B.o.39

Dinner on the 22.6, 19:00 h:

Restauracja Tatiana
Staromiejska 5
40-013 Katowice

Lunch on the 23.6., 14:00h

Restauracja Alto
Plac Wojciecha Kilara 1
40-202 Katowice

Muzeum Śląskie

Dobrowolskiego 1,
40-205 Katowice

Novotel Katowice Centrum

al. Walentego Roździeńskiego 16
40-202 Katowice

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Muzeum Śląskie
Dobrowolskiego 1

Conference Venue:
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Room B.o.39

Restaurant Tatjana:
Staromiejska 5

Novotel Katowice
Centrum

**Katowice Dworzec
(Railway Station)**

