

# SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To be read in conjunction with

## THE CAROLINGIAN CUP FROM THE VALE OF YORK VIKING HOARD (Ager)

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### A PROPOSITIONAL NOTE ON THE ANIMAL AND VEGETAL SYMBOLISM OF THE VALE OF YORK CUP, WITH REGARD TO THE *PHYSIOLOGUS* AND ICONOCLASTIC INFLUENCES

As noted in the printed article (n 18), it seems likely that the choice of all the animals portrayed on the Vale of York cup was influenced by pertinent chapters in the *Physiologus*, the earliest and most widespread of the animal books of Late Antiquity in the Mediterranean region and the Christian Middle Ages. The book is of unknown authorship, although it drew on a variety of sources. It is sometimes attributed erroneously to Epiphanius of Salamis (c 310/20–403). With reference to the Bible, its chapters on existing and mythological animals, plants, stones, etc, present them as moralistic allegories, as types of Christ, the Devil, the Church, or believers and it was translated into Latin from Greek by the fifth century AD, or earlier. It occupied a place of special importance in the symbolism of the early Christian world connecting man and beast and in time it became an established source of medieval sacred iconography and didactic poetry.<sup>1</sup>

The legend of the lion as the king of all beasts and possessing three "natures" alluding to Christ and the Resurrection is presented in the *Physiologus*, chapter 1, and lions are illustrated in the illuminated copy in Berne.<sup>2</sup> But, the symbolism of the lion was complex and often conflicting in Christian iconography: on one hand, Judah is a lion's whelp<sup>3</sup> and the lion is a symbol of Christ, the spiritual lion of the Tribe of Judah, of eternal life and Christ's

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<sup>1</sup> Woodruff 1930; Curley 2009; Kirschbaum 1968–72, *sub* Physiologus.

<sup>2</sup> Woodruff 1930, figs 2, 16, 24, 29; Curley 2009, 3–4.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 49: 9.

resurrection,<sup>4</sup> while it is also the symbol of St. Mark. But, on the other hand, the lion was regarded as the Antichrist by Isidore of Seville. Its alternative, demonic side is further shown in Early Medieval art in which lions attack both man and beasts, eg the lion menacing the figure of Christ on the Cross depicted in the Stuttgart Psalter of c 820-30.<sup>5</sup>

The panther is the subject of *Physiologus*, chapter 30, and is described as a mild creature, the friend of all animals (although an enemy of the dragon) and a symbol of Christ, since it slept for three days after eating, then awoke to new life, just as Christ was resurrected after three days.<sup>6</sup> When illustrated in a miniature in the illuminated copy of the *Physiologus* in Berne, it is shown with spotted fur attracting other animals to it, including a stag, by the fabled sweetness of its breath.<sup>7</sup> The true panther was also the symbol of Christ in the medieval bestiaries descended from the earlier sources.<sup>8</sup>

The stag forms the subject of *Physiologus*, chapter 45, and occurs commonly in Early Christian art such as the sculptures and wall paintings in the catacombs of Rome and elsewhere. It came to typify purity, also representing Christ, the Apostles, and the Christian soul of the faithful in search of the Eucharist by analogy with Psalm 42: 1; like Christ it used the heavenly waters of wisdom to kill the dragon and symbolised the victory of good over evil in Christian authors.<sup>9</sup> In the illuminated Berne *Physiologus* it is shown in the latter pose attacking a serpent on the ground with its antlers, but, although trees are shown, they form part of the landscape to the rear of the stag's hindquarters and are not depicted directly behind its body, as on the cup.<sup>10</sup> A miraculous stag motif appears in a number of saints' lives and a stag spoke to St Eustace, while he was still a Roman soldier, as Christ reproaching him for his persecution.<sup>11</sup>

The dual nature of the onager is the subject of *Physiologus*, chapters 11 and 26, where it is said to have been possible to tell the hour of the day or night during the equinox from the number of times it brayed; but it could also represent the Devil.<sup>12</sup> Onagers are often mentioned in the Bible, although without any particularly overt connotations.

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<sup>4</sup> Revelation 5:5; Rock 1870, 156; von Blankenburg 1943, 201; Curley 2009, 3–4.

<sup>5</sup> Von Blankenburg 1943, 200; Ferguson 1961, 21–2; Kirschbaum 1968–72, *sub* Löwe; Wamers 1991, Abb 6; 2011, fig 7.3).

<sup>6</sup> Curley 2009, 42–5.

<sup>7</sup> Woodruff 1930, fig 26.

<sup>8</sup> White 1954, 14–7.

<sup>9</sup> Ferguson 1961, 25; Kirschbaum 1968–72, *sub* Hirsch; Hulme 1976, 169; Domagalski 1990, 151–160; Curley 2009, 58–60.

<sup>10</sup> Woodruff 1930, fig 38.

<sup>11</sup> Alcock 1993, 233.

<sup>12</sup> White 1954, 82–4; Kirschbaum 1968–72, *sub* Esel, Wildesel; Curley 2009, 15, 38–9.

The deer may represent the Christian soul in search of the Eucharist by analogy with Psalm 42: 1, or possibly Christ as a victim persecuted by devils, or, on the other hand, as the Christian soul similarly persecuted, or tempted by sins. The hunt scene itself may represent the Passion, although the devils are more usually portrayed in the form of huntsmen and hounds in this type of iconography.<sup>13</sup>

The antelope is the subject of *Physiologus*, chapter 2, and is illustrated with its horns extending into the branches of a tree behind its body in the Berne illuminated copy.<sup>14</sup> Its two horns symbolised the two biblical Testaments.<sup>15</sup>

The unicorn (or *monoceros*) was an ancient mythical beast of Indian/Asiatic origin and symbolic of immense power in the Old Testament.<sup>16</sup> The unicorn is also the subject of *Physiologus*, chapter 36, in which its horn was said to be able to purify water. It was adopted as a Christian symbol, even representing Christ himself in the fourth century, or earlier, and, in the Middle Ages, it was seen as a symbol of the death and sacrifice of Christ, while its single horn represented the unity of Christ and the Father by analogy with John, 10: 30.<sup>17</sup> A drawing of a unicorn was made by the Greek traveller, Cosmas Indicopleustes, c AD 550, of which only later copies survive.<sup>18</sup> Pope Gregory the Great made use of the *Physiologus* and referred to the *monoceros*/rhinoceros and the unicorn, linking the latter with Mary and the crib in his *Moralia in Job*, while Isidore of Seville also mentioned the unicorn and rhinoceros.<sup>19</sup> Unicorns appear in art contemporary with the Vale of York cup and were a widely familiar motif at this time, eg one is illustrated approaching the Virgin Mary in the Berne *Physiologus* and another is apparently illustrated by the bull-like, but single-horned, beast on the Halton Moor cup, whilst similar creatures menacing David and the figure of Christ on the Cross are portrayed somewhat ambivalently in the early ninth-century Stuttgart Psalter, depicting Psalm 22, as a type of the Crucifixion.<sup>20</sup> A unicorn featured on the head of Boniface's crosier and, in the ninth century, Abbot Ratgar of Fulda was dubbed the "Raging Unicorn" by his monks, while in manuscripts of the period c 800–1000 the unicorn is associated with a woman or virgin and Christ and his disciples, as in the ninth-century Berne

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<sup>13</sup> Alcock 1993, 233.

<sup>14</sup> Woodruff 1930, fig 41.

<sup>15</sup> Curley 2009, 4–5.

<sup>16</sup> Numbers 24: 22; Deuteronomy 33: 17; Job 39: 9–10; Psalms 22: 21 and 92: 10; Isaiah 34: 7.

<sup>17</sup> Kirschbaum 1968–72, *sub* Einhorn; Cherry 1995, 44–71; Gotfredsen 1999, 32–3; Curley 2009, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Gotfredsen 1999, 45, fig on p 23.

<sup>19</sup> Gotfredsen 1999, 34–5.

<sup>20</sup> Woodruff 1930, fig 20; Wamers 1991, 104–8, Abb 5–6; 2011, fig 7.1–3; Gotfredsen 1999, 28–30, fig on p 29.

and Brussels *Physiologi*.<sup>21</sup> Unicorns occur, too, in other continental manuscripts of the 820s and in Irish and Italian sculpture of the eighth/ninth century,<sup>22</sup> but were often shown with clawed feet rather than hoofs. They thus appear to have been recognised as Christian symbols at the time. Also, as the opposed placement of the stag and onager on the Vale of York cup shows, the symmetrical depiction of pairs of animals, including male and female in the case of the lion and probable lioness, was not an overriding factor in the choice of the artist. The other animals portrayed on the cup are, however, of natural, not mythical, species and single-horned deer do sometimes occur in nature as the result of a genetic flaw, whilst classical writers say the horn of a unicorn could be around two to four feet long, so one might expect its horn to be shown rather longer on the cup, if that is what the creature is. The possibility that a unicorn may have been intended is therefore of interest, but difficult to prove.

The stories of the *Physiologus* could be seen as providing evidence of the eternal truth, which God wished to express in each of his creations, at the same time serving as symbols of the essence of Christian revelation and making statements about divine omnipotence, dogma and doctrine.<sup>23</sup> It seems quite likely, therefore, that the work may have played some part in the selection of the animals illustrated on the Vale of York cup: they may not be simply individual pictures, especially since art historians agree it is probable that the work afforded the inspiration for the animal motifs depicted on the tops of canon tables of manuscripts associated with the Reims group of illuminators.<sup>24</sup> It is further notable that lions, hinds, onagers, and a unicorn are counted as evidence of God's wisdom amongst a whole menagerie of birds and beasts in Job, 38–9. Collections of animals as symbols of heavenly peace and the harmony of all living things were an ancient idea and early medieval animal friezes may be read as symbolic manifestations of Christian doctrine, illustrating themes such as the eternal cycle of life and death, of the victory of good over evil and the battles between God, death and the Devil for the eternal life of souls and, by extension, between Christianity and paganism with the ever advancing triumph of Christian ideas.<sup>25</sup>

The uncertainty about the identification of the animal in roundel L1 is, therefore, regrettable for the further elucidation of the significance of the overall symbolism of the decoration of the cup. The *Physiologus*, however, says that the stag hated all poisonous things and further

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<sup>21</sup> Gotfredsen 1999, 38, 45–50 with figs.

<sup>22</sup> Harbison 1992, 318.

<sup>23</sup> Von Blankenburg 1943, 30, 63.

<sup>24</sup> Woodruff 1930, 230–34.

<sup>25</sup> Von Blankenburg 1943, 279–281.

claimed that both the deer and the unicorn could neutralise the poison of snakes, while the lion and pard were powerful creatures: so possibly the animal depictions on the cup had a protective function in respect of what it may have been made to contain. There may have been male and female counterparts in the design, too, eg the lion and probable lioness, or the stag and deer. The unicorn, if that is what it is, may represent *spiritus* and a female deer the soul, or *anima*. Taken singly, the lion, stag, panther(?) and unicorn(?) may all be identified as early medieval symbols of Christ, although the element of the chase would seem to provide a counter-argument. If the cup forms part of a set, of which further members may hopefully yet come to light, interpretation of the designs would no doubt be significantly assisted.

It might be suggested in addition that the six roundels of the Vale of York cup symbolise the number of Creation, since God completed his works on the sixth day. Number theories were popular in eighth-century Irish art, for example, although one should be wary of the dangers of hyper-interpretation.<sup>26</sup> Influenced by Genesis 1: 31, six may be further significant as the first perfect number and also as a circular number.<sup>27</sup>

The vine scrolls round the cup may, if not purely decorative, have a Christian significance, since the vine was a popular image in Christian art of the early Middle Ages and is often interpreted as the emblem of Christ, based on the notion of Christ as the True Vine.<sup>28</sup>

### ICONOCLASTIC INFLUENCES?

Whilst Imperial textiles, which reached to the West, may have exerted influences on Carolingian artistic development, it is probable that Byzantine silks with Christian themes ceased to be woven during the two periods of the Iconoclasm from 726–87 and 815–83, and uncontroversial charioteer and hunter subjects were encouraged as substitutes for sacred ones, such as the eighth-century Quadriga silk from the tomb of Charlemagne.<sup>29</sup>

Although there was a Carolingian controversy about visual art, too, its ties to the Byzantine phenomenon are tenuous and complex and the power of images in teaching the uninitiated or illiterate was recognised in the West, while there was no objection to figural art *per se*.<sup>30</sup> The iconoclastic movement was supported by the western emperors, while the popes denounced it

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<sup>26</sup> Richardson 1984, 29.

<sup>27</sup> Hopper 1938, 36, 102; Richardson 1984, 29–30.

<sup>28</sup> John 15; Ferguson 1961, 39–40; Williams and Ager 2015, 16).

<sup>29</sup> Volbach 1969, 114; Noble 2009, 69; Harris 2010, 76.

on numerous occasions. But, on the other hand, it does not seem to have radically affected the choice of subject matter for the lavish illustration of contemporary manuscripts, or ivories.<sup>31</sup> How far the Iconoclasm influenced the portrayal of animal motifs on metalwork, if at all, is thus uncertain, although it may have reduced the quantity of models available, leading artists to look to Hellenistic models and the Orient for inspiration until some years after 843: 'deriving their inspiration from oriental sentiment, they [the iconoclasts] wished to restore to Christian art the characteristics which had marked it at its birth'.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the absence of human figures on either the Vale of York or Halton Moor cups, or indeed on others of the main group, is notable.<sup>33</sup> Animals and vegetal decoration, however, may have been more acceptable if regarded as symbols, or merely as matter, and certainly rich foliate ornament was introduced around this time.<sup>34</sup> Along with the vine-scroll, the orientalising beasts and trees of the Vale of York cup would have been suitably uncontroversial, as they were in mosaics and frescoes of the period, but still recognisable as potent Christian symbols.

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<sup>30</sup> Noble 2009, 2, 112, 149–157, 216–225.

<sup>31</sup> Noble 2009, 6, 226–9, 313–370; see below.

<sup>32</sup> Dalton 1911, 13–16, 647.

<sup>33</sup> The portrayal of human figures on the Włocławek cup, on the other hand, could be a further indication of a late date for that vessel.

<sup>34</sup> Dalton 1911, 13–16.

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