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L. A. J. R. Houwen

A Scots Translation of a Middle French Bestiary

The late fifteenth-century Scots heraldic treatise which I have called *The Deidis of Armorie* is found in British Library, Harley MS 6149.¹ It is one of those collections of texts to which few, save perhaps the editors of the *DOST*, have paid much attention. The manuscript was copied in the late fifteenth century by Adam Loutfut, the Kintyre Pursuivant at the time, for Sir William Cumming, then the Marchmont Herald, but soon to be the Lord Lyon.² Three later copies are extant.³ The *Deidis* itself is a reasonably competent, if somewhat mechanical, translation of a French treatise of which

¹This paper is based on sections of my Ph.D. thesis (University of Sheffield), which will, in a different form, be published by the Scottish Text Society.

²About Adam Loutfut we know very little. Sir William Cumming of Inverallochy (Aberdeenshire) was knighted in 1507 and, on the death of Lord Lyon Henry Thomson in October 1512, became the next Lyon King of Arms. Apart from holding this office, Cumming was also a distinguished lawyer with an extensive practice, who counted some important magnates among his clientele, such as the Earl of Eroll, Burnett of Leys, Rose of Kilravock. He died in August 1519. See Sir T. Innes, "Sir William Cumming of Inverallochy, Lord Lyon King of Arms, 1512-1519," *The Juridical Review*, 55 (1943), 24-38.

³(1) Oxford Queen's College MS 161, from c. 1500; (2) the so-called Scrimgeour MS (NLS, Adv. Lib. 31.5.2), copied in the first half of the sixteenth century by John Scrimgeour of Myres (Fife); (3) the Lindsay MS (NLS, Adv. Lib. 31.3.20), owned by Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, who was Lord Lyon from 1591 to 1620.

the only surviving copy is the College of Arms MS M. 19 in which, together with some other texts also reproduced and translated in Harley 6149, it forms one continuous work.

As an examination of the contents reveals Harley 6149 is no ordinary heraldic manuscript. It appears to be a carefully chosen collection of some of the better-known heraldic and chivalric material, with works on the history of the office of arms, treatises on single combat, battles and tournaments, as well as ceremonials. Most of these are renderings in Scots but a few texts are in Latin. Among the texts we find such heraldic and chivalric classics as the *Boke of St Albans*, Nicholas Upton's *De Officio Militari*, Bartolus' *Tractatus*, Vegetius' *De re militari*, and a lightly Scotticized version of Caxton's *The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry*. So not only do the texts cover virtually all those tasks a herald or pursuivant could possibly have been expected to perform, they are also very up to date and include nearly all the medieval classics.⁴ The only text conspicuous through its absence is de Bado Aureo's *Tractatus de armis* but, as we shall see later, even this treatise was used for some of the animal descriptions in the *Deidis of Armorie*.

The illustrations, which accompany three of the texts, point to the practical nature of the manuscript. A work on the coronation of emperors and one on the seven deeds of honor is illustrated with crowns.⁵ The *Deidis of Armorie* itself is adorned with painted shields of charges and animals. Illustrations of the charges are, for sound didactic purposes, often considerably simplified so as to show only the charge under discussion. The animal illustrations appear to reflect the painter's own experience. The result is a curious mixture of illustrations based on heraldry, bestiaries, real life, and the illustrator's own fantasy (or lack of it). Thus we find animals depicted true to bestiary or heraldic conventions. Good examples of the latter are the lion (painted magnificently rampant), the leopard, dragon and the gryphon. An example of the former is the tiger gazing into a mirror; other such illustrations are the pelican in her piety upon a nest;⁶ the siren

⁴It also compares favorably with NLS, Advocates Library, 31.6.5, which belonged to John Meldrum, Cumming's successor to the office of Marchmont Herald when the latter became Lord Lyon, in that the latter manuscript only contains copies of Bartolus' *De insigniis et armis* and Upton's *Studio militari*.

⁵This latter work will be published as "The Seven Deeds of Honour and their Crowns: A Late Fifteenth-Century Chivalric Treatise" in a forthcoming volume of *Studies in Scottish Literature*.

⁶This was quite a common subject in church architecture and bestiaries. See G. Bellew, "Heraldic Birds," *The Coat of Arms*, 2 (1952-3), 252; G. C. Druce, "The Pelican in the Black Prince's Chantry," *Canterbury Cathedral Chronicle*, 19 (1934), 10-14; E. P.

bearing a mirror in the right hand and a comb in the left; the elephant with a tower on its back; and the phoenix about to be consumed by fire. However, many illustrations show only the animal in question without any reference to the stories associated with them. Of these a fair number appear to be closely modelled on nature. Compare for instance those of the wild boar, hound, bull, horse, hart, as well as many of the birds and some of the fishes. Such realism is unusual in ordinary bestiaries.⁷ Animals which he did not know at first hand or had not seen depicted elsewhere suffer consequently: the hippopotamus, the basilisk, the asp, and quite a few of the fishes, the whale and dolphin among them, are not executed very well at all nor are they often very distinct from each other. One may conclude that the illustrator was well aware of the various iconographic traditions with respect to animals (if not charges) but is often at a loss when new and often exotic animals are introduced in the text with which he has no first hand experience, just as he is at a loss when some obscure charges are introduced.

Unlike its French source, the Harley MS represents the *Deidis of Armorie* as a single work. On closer analysis, however, it would appear that the *Deidis* is made up of what must, at one time, have been at least four, possibly five, distinct treatises, the largest of which is what I have called the heraldic bestiary. The term bestiary is not strictly speaking correct since after the beasts, birds, and fishes, the author also touches upon the inanimate charges. But even this is paralleled in some of the more traditional bestiaries which sometimes include a chapter on stones or trees. In some 1816 (out of 2,555) lines the *Deidis* deals with some seventy-seven beasts, birds, fishes and reptiles. It is a veritable store-house of medieval animal legend and lore and this is by far the most charming section. It vividly illustrates the point made by Curley in his translation of the *Physiologus*, namely that the popularity of the stories "was assured by their ready adaptability to a variety

Evans, *Animal Symbolism in Ecclesiastical Architecture* (London, 1896), pp. 128-31. It also made its way into arms, witness the first and third quarter of the arms of Corpus Christi College, Oxford (founded by Bishop Foxe in 1515-16, the self same man who may have been instrumental in the completion and publication of Wynkyn de Worde's edition of the *Contemplacioun of Synnaris* in 1499, for which see A. A. MacDonald, "Catholic Devotion into Protestant Lyric: The Case of the *Contemplacioun of Synnaris*," *The Innes Review*, 35 (1984), 74-9.

⁷ McCulloch noted: "One would never study the illustrations in French bestiaries, any more than in the Latin versions, for evidence of the artist's awareness of the world of nature about him; a close visual interpretation of the text as he understood it or as his model had presented it was the object of the illustrator." F. McCulloch, *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries*, rev. edn. (Chapel Hill, 1962), p. 77.

of cultural contexts, religious as well as secular."⁸ The bestiary is introduced with the explanation that people first began to bear arms "in auld tymis" in order to recognize each other and to be able to tell the character of the bearer. Following a reference to Joshua who, it is claimed, was the first of the Nine Worthies to take arms, the author claims that because living things are "more worthi" than non-living things (save for the cross and the fleur-de-lis) he will start with the animals.

As is to be expected the first of these is the king of beasts. In fact, it is with the lion that every Latin and Old French bestiary began.⁹ In the "standard" bestiaries the lion is described as having three natures. First, it loves to dwell on the tops of mountains. Should it then be pursued by hunters, the smell of the hunters will reach up to him, and it can cover up its tracks with its tail, just as Christ as a man covered the traces of his divinity. The second feature is that when it sleeps, it does so with open eyes; in the same way, even though Christ's body might sleep, his divinity is ever awake.¹⁰ Finally, the third aspect of its nature is that when the lioness gives birth, the cubs are born dead until they are brought to life on the third day, just as Christ was revived on the third day.¹¹ Apart from the three natures of the lion, many more details were usually added so that it became one of the longest chapters in the bestiary. Rather than seeing the lion as the Lion of Judah, our author is concerned with the chivalric world and he clearly made a selection from the available material choosing that which would be most appropriate to a knight. Consequently, he chose those details emphasizing the lion's bravery and courage. Thus, he quotes Isidore and tells the story that the lion, when pursued by hunters neither flees nor hides himself, but awaits them in the field. Also, we are informed, it is the lion's nature that when it is hurt by anyone, it will chase him until it gets even with that person, even if it should cost the lion its life. Aristotle is subsequently quoted as saying that the lion's bones are so hard that when struck together they spark. Its courtesy is illustrated by the fact that when the lion has caught its prey it will share it

⁸*Physiologus*, trans. M. J. Curley (Austin, 1979), p. ix.

⁹That is, until Richard de Fournival's *Bestiaire d'Amour*, see McCulloch, p. 137.

¹⁰This is reinforced in *The Book of Beasts*, trans. and ed. T. H. White (New York, 1954, p. 8), with quotations from *The Song of Songs*, "I am asleep and my heart is awake" (5:2, misquoted), and one of the Psalms, "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (121:4).

¹¹A similar story is told in *Deidis* and the bestiaries about the phoenix and the young of the pelican.

with others, and also because it will not hurt anyone who is friendly towards him.¹² The chivalric 'morality,' which follows every subsequent description in the narrative, then explains that the man who bears the lion in arms is brave and valiant but also sweet and gracious toward his companions. In the case of the lion this 'moral' is quite straightforward, thanks both to the fact that the lion's characteristics are eminently suitable for a knight, but also because there is a lot of material to choose from. Once the author gets to less documented animals, his entries not only decrease substantially but the morals can become quite forced. Compare for instance the entry for the bees, which runs to some sixty-four lines, with that of say the mole which only runs to six.

Quite appropriately, the leopard follows on the lion.¹³ It is "generyt be adultery" which is why the prophet Merlin, who was after all "born of faerie in adultrie," bore it in arms. Aristotle is quoted as stating that the hart has no gall and Isidore notes the uncleanness of the wild boar whose ferocity is so great that it will rush against the hogspear of the hunter without any regard for its own life. A greyhound or dog borne in arms signifies loyalty and the gryphon guards an Asian mountain which abounds with gold and precious stones. The subtlety of Reynard, illustrated in many a medieval manuscript and carved on many a misericord, is mentioned as symbolizing the cunning man who manages to hold his own among lords and princes and succeeds in staying out of danger.¹⁴ It would also seem that the author never misses an opportunity to spin some yarn about the animals under discussion. We are told the story of how hares split their lips laughing about some fleeing frogs and we learn that the so-called *somnus leporinus* or catnap (literally, of course, hare-nap) is due to the fact that hares sleep with their eyes open. As mentioned before, the obligatory chivalric moralities are occasionally quite forced and one often wonders why anyone would want to

¹²This may be inspired by Pliny who said that the lion spared any creature that prostrated itself to him, although ultimately the story goes back to Aesop. *Parcere prostratis scit nobilis ira leonis* was a motto associated with the royal arms of Scotland and is referred to by Ireland (*The Asloan Manuscript*, ed. W. A. Craigie. STS, 2nd Series, 14 [1923], 57, ll. 4-5), Dunbar, "The Thrissill and Rois" (*The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. James Kinsley [Oxford, 1979], l. 119), and Henryson (*Fabillis, The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Denton Fox [Oxford, 1981], ll. 929-30).

¹³The two were often confused in early heraldry and it has long been a controversial point whether the three animals passant guardant in the Royal Arms are lions or leopards; see for example H. S. London, "Lion or Leopard?" *The Coat of Arms*, 2 (1952-3), 291-2.

¹⁴For the fox in medieval English art, see K. Varty, *Reynard the Fox* (Leicester, 1967).

put up with bearing some of the animals discussed here in their arms. A case in point is the bonassus or wild cow. According to Aristotle and Avicenna it defends itself against its pursuers by casting "his filth" upon them, burning his followers in the process. According to some other bestiary, the contents of his large intestine covers three acres and sets any tree that it reaches on fire.¹⁵ It is perhaps not surprising that only one other book of heraldry has ever mentioned the bonassus as being borne in a shield.¹⁶

The author next deals with birds, those being less close to human nature than beasts. He starts with the royal eagle, continues with the sparrow-hawk which, surprisingly, is followed by the unicorn! For this the author excuses himself claiming he had overlooked it when working on the beasts, which is why he has to include it here.¹⁷ Among those birds to which he pays a lot of attention is the stork to which he devotes some sixty-five lines. After explaining what devoted parents these birds are he spends most of these lines illustrating the fact that both beasts and birds possess the ability to recognize (the *sprete of cognoissance* or *esperit d'aucune connoissance* as the French source has it); this he does by means of three stories. The first takes place in the diocese of Milan, where a man had replaced a stork's egg with that of a raven, but as soon as the little corbie started to show its feathers, a male stork who noticed it got together a whole group of males and tore the female to pieces (the story does not say what happened to the raven). The second event supposedly took place in Lorraine where a female stork once knew carnally the male of a neighboring nest, after which she wanted to bathe herself in a nearby spring, presumably to wash away the sin. The spring, however, had been interfered with by a peasant and she did not dare approach it, but she also saw her rightful spouse approach her nest. She joined him but as soon as he smelled her he became very angry, assembled a troop of storks who discussed the matter and attacked the poor female in battle formation, and tore her to pieces. So much for the fruits of sin! Finally, he tells the story of a stork that was rescued by a monk from gourmands who would have eaten her. When the migration period approached the monk told her she was free to go but asked her to come and visit him should she ever return to these parts. And so she did; on returning to the monastery she called out

¹⁵White, p. 33.

¹⁶According to London it was that of Randle Holme in 1688. See H. S. London, "Minor Monsters," *The Coat of Arms*, 4 (1956-7), 33.

¹⁷Or as he puts it: "Throw mysluking has bene forzet to put hir befor among Pe othir bestis" (f. 21).

for him. When the monk appeared he was rewarded for his past hospitality with a precious stone which the stork cast into his lap. Obviously, the monks were astonished at this and thought it a miracle so they immediately placed this "rycht worthi and precious" stone among their relics. Somehow I cannot but think that originally these three stories were intended to illustrate quite different points.

However this may be, many other birds, among which he classifies the bees, the butterfly, the flying-stag, and the bat, are discussed. Most of these are described quite conventionally. Accordingly, when he discusses the pelican, we get the familiar story of the father or the mother killing the little ones because they annoy them with their wings. Three days later the mother pierces her breast and pours her blood over her children, which revives them. Despite the fact that a heraldic 'moral' is attached to the story, the Christian one is given as well. The phoenix which rises from its own ashes is not omitted either, and neither is the raven, of which it is said that it refuses to feed its own young until it recognizes in them the appearance of the black color in the wings.

Fishes follow the birds, starting with the whale, followed by the crocodile, and such odd creatures as the mermaid, the "cheualier de mer" (a legendary creature resembling an armed knight), and the monk-fish. Reptiles are classified among the fishes and even such a curious phenomenon as the barnacle-geese makes an appearance here, even though it could be argued that its proper place is among the birds. This creature was first introduced in the bestiaries after Gerald of Wales had described it in his *Topographia Hiberniae*, where the animal is used to criticize the ungodly Irish clergy. It is claimed these geese are like marsh geese but smaller. At first they grow, enclosed in shells like mussels, on fir-logs floating in the water, from which they take their nourishment. Once they have grown wings they fly away. Gerald explains that "In some parts of Ireland bishops and religious men eat them without sin . . . regarding them as not being flesh, since they were not born of flesh."¹⁸ The crocodile, we are told, has four feet, is yellow, lives on earth during the day and spends his nights in the water. And, of course, when he devours a human being he sheds crocodile tears. Quite in line with the way the ancients felt about the loyalty of dolphins our author relates three stories to prove his case. The first tells how a "barn" from Champagne had for some time been feeding a dolphin with bread. They became such good friends that the dolphin allowed the boy to ride on its back. However, when the boy died, the dolphin also died from grief. He next tells of another dolphin in Babylon who loved a boy so dearly that

¹⁸J. J. O'Meara, trans., *Gerald of Wales. The History and Topography of Ireland* (Harmondsworth, 1982), pp. 41-2.

when, after having played together, the boy ran away, the dolphin tried to follow him on the beach, was stranded, caught and killed. A curious detail related about dolphins is the fact that they are supposed to enter the Black Sea, where they breed, on the left and to leave it on the right side because their eyesight in their left eye is poor but that in their right excellent.¹⁹ Stories like these seem to suggest to me that the author really enjoyed himself when writing the bestiary since such stories, and many like them, are really uncalled for in the heraldic context. They can hardly be regarded as character descriptions of bearers of arms. However, both the readers of the Scots and the French text were less amused; the section on animals is one of the least annotated ones in the entire manuscript.

Inanimate charges, starting with the cross and the other ordinaries, follow the bestiary section. The treatise concludes with an apology for its briefness and the advice that if the interested reader wants to know more, the old and experienced heralds ought to be consulted.

In view of the manuscript's heraldic and chivalric contents and the type of man for whom it was intended it will come as no surprise that I concur with Byles's description of it as being compiled "with a view to utility rather than ornament."²⁰ This is not surprising considering Cumming's position as Marchmont Herald at the time of the compilation of the MS and it would, in my view, seem highly likely that he actually had the MS made with his subsequent career in mind. This would explain the emphasis on texts dealing with the history of heraldry and the tracts on armorial bearings in particular, since that subject had become rather technical, if not thorny, by this time. The bestiary text itself may then be looked upon as intended background reading, possibly so as to make it easier for heralds to choose and explain the symbolism of particular animals when called upon to assign arms to people.

¹⁹ Aelian IX.42 has the same observation about the tunny: "And that they see with one eye and not with the other is admitted by Aeschylus when he says, 'Casting his left eye askance like a tunny.' And they pass into the Euxine, keeping the land on their right, on which side in fact they look out. Contrariwise when issuing from the Euxine they swim along the opposite shore and hug the land, taking the utmost precaution to safeguard their life by means of the eye which sees." A. F. Scholfield, trans., *Aelian on the Characteristics of Animals*, 3 vols. (London, 1958-9), II, 263.

²⁰ A. T. P. Byles, ed., *The Book of the Ordre of Chyualyr. Translated and Printed by William Caxton from a French Version of Ramón Lull's "Le Libre del Ordre de Cauayleria" Together With Adam Loutfut's Scottish Transcript (Harleian MS 6149)*, EETS, OS, 168 (London, 1926), xxviii.

Although the bestiary section of this treatise does not bear any direct relationship to any other known heraldic treatise it does not stand alone.²¹ The first such treatise we know of is the Anglo-Norman *De Heraudie*, also known as the "Dean Tract,"²² which may be dated to between 1280 and 1300.²³ It is a very short work running to some 144 lines; nevertheless, it already exhibits the order reflected by many later treatises including our own: colors, ordinaries and subordinaries, animals and inanimate charges. However, the only animals referred to are the lion, leopard, gryphon, martlet, popinjay, crow, swan and heron; fish are entirely absent. The animals are followed by leaves and flowers and inanimate charges. As is to be expected later treatises expanded on this. Thus one of the most famous and influential ones, de Bado Aureo's *Tractatus de Armis*, probably composed at the end of the fourteenth century, discusses some eighteen birds and animals and includes both the pike and crab.²⁴ This is still a far cry from the seventy-seven animals found in our text, but, contrary to the "Dean Tract" and like our own, the *Tractatus* does include moralizations; thus a man who bears a leopard in arms signifies someone who was born out of wedlock, and he who bears a dog in his arms is a benevolent and loyal man who would never desert his master. One feature of some of the later, fifteenth-century treaties—among which we may include ours—is the dramatic increase in the number of animals. "Mowbray's French Treatise," for example, enumerates some eighteen beasts, six serpents, five fishes and twenty-three birds, and, just for good measure, also lists some twenty-two precious and semi-precious stones.²⁵ Unlike our heraldic tract, however, the animals referred to are not accompanied by a chivalric moral. From the above it will be clear that the insertion of a bestiary into a heraldic text is by no means unusual and as far as that is concerned our author operated firmly within the bounds of a tradition going back to at least the thirteenth century.

²¹For a discussion of heraldic treatises see H. S. London, "Some Medieval Treatises on English Heraldry," *The Antiquaries Journal*, 33 (1953), 169-83; C. R. Humphery-Smith, "Heraldry in School Manuals of the Middle Ages," *The Coat of Arms*, 6 (1960-61), 115-23, 163-70; and R. Dennys, *The Heraldic Imagination* (London, 1975), pp. 59-86, 212-17.

²²"An Early Treatise on Heraldry in Anglo-Norman," ed. R. J. Dean, in *Romance Studies in Memory of Edward Billings Ham*, ed. U. T. Holmes (Hayward, CA, 1967), pp. 59-62.

²³Dennys, p. 61.

²⁴E. J. Jones, ed., *Medieval Heraldry* (Cardiff, 1943), pp. 95-143.

²⁵Dennys, pp. 72-3.

When we consider the sources on which our author drew for his animal descriptions, two in particular stand out. The first is Brunetto Latini's *Li livres dou tresor* which he used for some of his accounts of birds and fishes in particular. Latini's descriptions are often copied word for word, and sometimes even his order is reflected.²⁶ However, even in those sections in which the author reproduces passages from the *Tresor* almost verbatim, we often find him adding new information. This may vary from the addition of source-references—which do not occur in the published versions of Latini's bestiary (as edited by either Chabaille or Carmody)—to extensive anecdotes, as in the case of the stork, where the stories of the "cigogne" from Lorraine and the one that was sheltered by a monk are absent from Latini. All this seems to suggest the author drew upon a later expanded version which may have included some of the animals discussed by our author but not found in the edited *Tresor*. The other source on which the author must have drawn is some edition of de Bado Aureo's fourteenth-century *Tractatus de armis*.²⁷ In a sense, this is more of a source than Latini because the *Tractatus* includes chivalric moralizations. Undoubtedly, the author drew upon other sources as well, but since bestiary material can be very similar it is not always easy to determine which. He certainly refers to the encyclopedists Isidore, Bartholomeus Anglicus, and Vincent of Beauvais, as well as to such a variety of authorities as Aesop, Aristotle, Avicenna, St. Basil, Dioscorides, Plato, Pliny, and Solinus. Unfortunately, these references do not establish that the author actually made use of these authors directly; such references to authorities are, after all, a regular feature in the encyclopedias of the time.

²⁶Cf. for instance the description of the hippopotamus (ff. 32-32^v) with Latini, who has: "Ipotame est uns poissons ki est apelés cheval fluel, pour çou k'il naist el fleuves de Nil. Et son dos et ses crins et sa vois est comme de cheval, ses ongles sont fendues comme de buef, et dens comme sengler, et la coue retorte, et manguë blés de champ, ou il vet a reculons, por les agais des hommes; 2. et quant il manguë trop et il aperchoit k'il est enfondu par sormangier, il s'en vet par sus les canons nouvellement tailliés, tant que li sans s'en ist par ses piés a grant fuison, et par tel maniere garist il de sa maladie"; F. J. Carmody, *Brunetto Latini li Livres dou Tresor* (Berkeley, 1948), p. 131, ll. 1-8. Compare also the descriptions of the unicorn, falcons, cranes, phoenix, stork, pelican, bees, partridge, parrot, peacock, antelope, crocodile, lizards, basilisk, asp, and dolphin. Latini's order is reflected (without any omissions), in the following groups: (a) wild cow, lamb (b) partridge, parrot, peacock and turtle-dove.

²⁷For some close parallels in the *Tractatus* see the descriptions of the lion (21-25), the stag (27-28), the boar (29), the dragon (33-35), the dog (33), the bear (31-33), the eagle (35-37), the owl (39), the dove (41), the cock (45) and martlets (45-47). The references are to the English translation of the Welsh text as edited by E. J. Jones.

In view of the foregoing I hope to have shown that Harley 6149 in general and the *Deidis of Armorie* in particular deserve more attention than they have hitherto received. Not only is the *Deidis* quite interesting from a linguistic point of view, but a study of such texts as the *Deidis* could also shed more light upon the use of (animal) symbolism by (Scots) literary authors. As any editor of medieval texts knows from experience when hunting for the sources of particular passages, those which he traces to the standard reference works rarely yield all the information he is looking for. In such cases we should be prepared to examine such utilitarian texts as found in Harley 6149. It may well be that some of the imagery used by the poets can be traced back with greater success to texts such as those discussed here.

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