

ANIMALS AND POPULAR SCIENCE IN CLASSICAL LITERATURE

This dissertation project explores how animals in ancient Greek and Roman literature reflect an intersection of poetic and technical traditions. The field of animal studies, the examination of the relationship between animals and humans throughout history, has recently enjoyed a flourish of interest by scholars from many different fields. Among scholars of ancient Greece and Rome, a significant body of work has emerged examining how representations of animals in antiquity embody cultural thought regarding religion, gender, empathy, and human reasoning. Such works illustrate dimensions of the ancient world like animal sacrifice, the symbolic relation between women and dogs in Greek literature or contrasting theories of animal intelligence. Alongside literary studies, attention has also been directed to zoological theory and the role of animals in ancient medical and philosophical literature. Expanding upon developments at either end of this spectrum, my dissertation project examines how animals in ancient Greek and Roman literature evoke literary models alongside popular schools of intellectual thought. I propose that animals become effective and popular tools for ancient (and modern) writers to engage with multiple, seemingly unrelated, traditions. Through the ways animals are presented, authors can echo, combine and innovate upon different literary or scientific models as well as construct the particular worldview of a given work.

Whether the deadly serpents of the Libya or a pet parrot whose imitations entertain elite Romans, animals work especially well to explore the coevolution of literature and science in antiquity. This occurs not only because of their ubiquity - all but the most narrowly focused works feature or incorporate animals - but also the diversity of usages in which they can appear. Since its infancy, Greek and Latin poetry often employed creatures to characterize or express particular qualities and experiences (e.g. 125 out of 226 similes in the *Iliad* involve animals). Even in the earliest writing, however, metaphorical language relied not only on common tropes and perceptions, such as lions being fierce, but also a shared knowledge about the natural world. For example, in a simile describing the Trojan hero Hector, Homer compares him to a *drakōn bebrōkōs kaka pharmaka* “a snake fed on foul poisons,” reflecting the belief that snakes acquired their venom from poisonous herbs. Biological concepts like this in turn become access points for intertextual engagement. Centuries later, the Roman poet Vergil employs almost the exact same simile for Hector’s villainous Greek opponent, Pyrrhus, *coluber mala gramina pastus* “a

serpent which grazed on bad herbs,” simultaneously evoking not only Homer’s poetic style but also its (by-then debunked) zoological foundation.

In contrast with previous work on the cultural and literary significance of specific species or contexts, my project explores the nexus of science and poetics in the broader context of Classical literature, especially in literature from the Hellenistic and Imperial Periods (ca. 4th c. BCE - 3rd c. CE). In this pursuit, I have divided my project into five core chapters corresponding to specific types of animals and the realm of scientific or technical knowledge to which they most closely correspond: 1) snakes and toxicology, 2) wild mammals and ecology, 3) domesticated animals and agriculture, 4) birds and language, and 5) fish and taxonomy. These categories are not mutually exclusive - in fact, there is much overlap of the effects different species can have on a particular work. Rather, I impose them to organize my discussion into tightly focused case studies which illustrate different ways in which animals and ideas about them can appear in literature.

Although the dissertation will work with evidence from range of Greek and Latin authors, of particular interest and relevance are Herodotus’ *Histories*, Nicander’s *Theriaca*, Lucan’s *De Bello Civili*, Vergil’s *Georgics*, Oppian’s *Cynegetica* and *Halieutica*, and Aristophanes’ *Birds*. Each of these works explore, to various extents and in various ways, specific zoological topics such as venomous bites, hunting, husbandry, fishing and animal behavior. Despite covering such a wide range of sources, these chapters do not seek to provide an exhaustive account of ancient animals. Rather, they aim to illustrate the versatility and ubiquity of animals in ancient literature and the diverse modes of thought they inform through distinct, but interrelated case studies. Through this project, I aim to broaden not just our understanding the reception of animals in ancient thought, but how literature engages with scientific topics and folds them into narrative and poetic aims.