

Tierlexikon – Probeartikel »Einhorn« (Entwurf!)

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Bisher bearbeitet:

C. Lateinische Literatur

IV. Tiere in nicht tierbestimmter Literatur – 1. Narrative Texte (Hagiographie)

Bitte beachten: Die Literaturangaben zu den einzelnen Abschnitten sind noch nicht vollständig.

Einhorn, unicorn, licorne

DNP 3, 916; EM 3, 1246-1256; LCI 1, 590-593; LexMA 3, 1741-1742; LThK 3, 758b; ODB, -; PW 5/2, 2114f.; RAC 4, 840-862; TRE 26, 599f. [Physiologus]; 33, 141f. [Teufel], 545f. [Tiersymbolik]. – MIQUEL –; SCHENDA –; SCHMIDTKE, 269-272; ZERLING, 72-76.

C. Lateinische Literatur

IV. Tiere in nicht-tierbestimmter Literatur

1. Narrative Texte

Hagiographie: The unicorn is a figure of diverse and rich symbolism across western European medieval culture, and yet is an infrequent beast in hagiography. Early theologians' identification of the unicorn with Christ seems not to have been an influence, at least in early hagiography. Here it is most often a demonic creature that one might expect to find in the wilderness where the desert hermits suffered metaphysical confrontations. Thus, an early appearance is in one of the accounts of Saint Macarius in a list of horrifying beasts such as dragons, basilisks and snakes [*Vita Sancti Macarii Romani*, PL 73, col. 417]. Another possibly eleventh-century legendary *Vita* refers to the great fury of the unicorn from which men flee [*Vita Sanctorum Barlaam eremitae et Josaphat Indiae Regis*, PL 73, col. 493; this originally Greek *Vita* circulated in Latin from about 1048, but the core story appears to have been based on the Siddhartha Buddha legend]. In this respect hagiography largely follows some of the most ancient images of the unicorn, where it can be a wild, or even demonic force [see Gotfredson, pp. 15-24]. Following this vein, a horrific horse-beast that appears in an Irish saint's *Life* may be a version of or related to the unicorn. This beast had been appointed by God to keep an island free from inhabitants until it is to cede to Saint Senán and his community: 'A horse's mane had it; an eye gleaming flaming in its head, and it keen, savage, forward, angry, edged, crimson, bloody, cruel, bounding.' [Stokes, pp. 213-14]. Other references to the unicorn also associate it with danger, moral or physical, as in the *Vita* of Altmann, Bishop of Passau (d. 1091) in which the hagiographer, quoting psalm 21:21, asks for salvation from the mouths of lions and the horns of unicorns [This is from the later *Vita*, the earlier having been written within 50 years of the Bishop's death; *Vita Altera B. Altmanni ep. Pataviensi*, AASS 8th August, p. 285]. Similarly the *Vita* of William Gnoffi (d. c.1317) associates the unicorn with spiritual danger, in this case of a sexual kind, rhetorically linked with the demonic [AASS 16th April, p. 468]. However a few positive images of the unicorn do appear. The fifteenth-century *Vita* of the early Dominican, John of Salerno (d. 1242) quotes Psalm 92:10, 'my horn shall thou exalt like the horn of a unicorn', in referring to the Dominican brothers being perfected towards the mercy of God as they grow old [AASS 10th September, p. 629]. The eleventh-century *Vita* of Saint Nilus of Rossano (d. 1004) contains another apparently positive image of the unicorn; the saint living austere in the wilderness is described as a free-living unicorn [AASS 26th September, p. 321]. Thus here the unicorn appears not as the opponent of sanctity as in the *Vita* of Saint Macarius but is identified with eremitical virtue, pointing towards later medieval associations of the unicorn with spiritual purity.

Ausg.: *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore*, ed. and trans. W. Stokes, 1899.

Lit.: L. Gotfredson: *The Unicorn*, 1999.

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