

Summary

THE INFLUENCE OF THE EGYPTIAN CULTURE UPON DESCRIPTION AND TREATMENT OF THE HOOPOE IN THE *PHYSIOLOGUS*

One of the significant differences between an early Christian writing *Physiologus Graecus* (it was written sometimes between the 2nd and 4th century AD in Alexandria, and deals predominantly with animals) and Greek zoology is the former's considerable focus on Egyptian fauna. Bearing this in mind, the authors of first essential monographs on *Physiologus* (e.g. Max Wellmann, Francesco Sbordone) have pointed out that some descriptions of the animals found in this treatise are similar to or even nearly identical with those in the *Hieroglyphica*, written in the 4th century AD by Horapollo. Moreover, a German egyptologist Emma Brunner-Traut in her several papers tried to find specific connections between the treatment of certain animals in the *Physiologus* and the role of these animals in the Old Egyptian mythology, religion and art. Other scholars, however, did not continue to explore the Old Egyptian influence on the *Physiologus*: egyptologists have devoted their papers almost entirely to a description of the animals' roles in the Old Egyptian culture, while studies by classicists and mediaevalists have focused on a tradition stemming from the ancient scientific literature. This paper tries to combine both of these sources of inspiration: taking the hoopoe (*Physiologus Graecus*, rec. I, 8; *Physiologus Latinus*, versio Y, B, Bis, 10) as an example, it tries to describe different views on a behaviour of this bird held by Greek and Roman scientists and by the author of the *Physiologus*, and it tries to specify to what degree the author could have been influenced by his surroundings where he was composing his treatise. A Greek name of the hoopoe, *κουκούφα*, is probably of an Egyptian origin; there existed a sign for the hoopoe in the hieroglyphic script (with a value of a phonogram); and the hoopoe was a plentiful bird in the Egyptian territory, as evidenced by his numerous representations on the mastabas of Egyptian dignitaries, either in his natural environment, or in interaction with people. Whereas the Horapollo's treatment of the hoopoe concords with that in the *Physiologus* (the hoopoe being described as a bird that affectionately takes care of its aged parents), in Greek and Jewish tradition the hoopoe is seen rather negatively as an

unclean bird that dwells on the graves and rummages in excrements which he uses also for construction of its nest and as a food for its younglings. It is quite likely that the author of the *Physiologus* did not draw, in this case, on the scientific literature of ancient Greece, but was influenced by the considerable role the hoopoe played in the Egyptian culture and in everyday life of Egypt's inhabitants.

Keywords: ancient zoology; hoopoe; *Physiologus*; Ancient Egypt; Christian allegory

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