Chapter Eleven

Life in Earth: Animal Relations with Earth in the Physiologus, Bestiaries and Early Medieval Riddles

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In *Thinking with Soils,* Céline Granjou et al speak of the simultaneous elementality and indivisibility of soil:

> Forty-five percent mineral, 5% organic matter, between 20 and 30% water, with air making up the rest. Clay, sand, and silt; humus, earthworms, and insect corpses; hydrogen and oxygen; nitrogen and phosphorous. […] A geochemical accomplishment, an entanglement of interactive, irritable, and irritating things which forms the basis of 'life' but which, we seem to forget, is not always available for relation—at least as defined when the 'human' is foregrounded. [1]

The collection to which this chapter contributes explores the many ways in which medieval cultures reckoned with the polysemy of earth: as element, territory, *oukimene*, and creative foundation. Granjou et al suggest the ways in which soils, at any moment and at any scale, are uniquely 'complex articulation[s]' made by multiple things, beings and behaviours; cultures in and of themselves, sympoietic with human social forces.[2] As a contribution to the questions of this collection, this chapter looks at animal-earth interaction in the early

[1] Tironi M. – Kearnes M.B. – Krzywoszynska A. – Granjou C. – Salazar J.F., "Soil Theories: Relational, Decolonial, Inhuman", in Salazar J.F. – Granjou C. – Kearnes M. – Krzywoszynska A. – Tironi M. (eds.), *Thinking with Soils: Material Politics and Social Theory* (London: 2020) 15-38, 27.
[2] Granjou et al, "Soil Theories" 25; Haraway D.J., "Sympoiesis", in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham – London: 2016) 58.

medieval Physiologus and bestiary, asking what these often highly specialised relationships with earth also reveal about contemporary understandings of the element. In the bestiary tradition alone, myriad animal behaviours with earth are described, from spontaneous generation to burrowing, from trickery to nesting, earth-eating, hoarding, mining and grave-robbing. Whilst in a number of the cases described here, the animal behaviour that relates to the use of earth enters the bestiary tradition from sources other than the Physiologus,[3] I also include in this chapter discussion of animal earth use in the early medieval riddles tradition alongside the Old English Physiologus. In Aldhelm's (c. 639-709) *Enigmata* and to a lesser extent the Old English riddles of Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501, or the Exeter Book (tenth-century), the influence of the naturalists that also underpin the bestiary tradition is palpable, most particularly in the quasi-encyclopaedic *De Creatura* 'Of Creation' (enigma C) and the related *Exeter Book* riddles 40 and 66.[4] Corinne Dale detects in Aldhelm's enigmata, 'the careful attention to nature of a naturalist'.[5] Rather than an exhaustive survey, which is beyond the limitations of this chapter, this discussion will bring together salient modes of animal use of earth amongst the naturalist texts in two sections. The first looks at birth and

[3] For dating of the Physiologus, see Scott A., "The Date of the *Physiologus*", *Vigiliae Christianae* 52.4 (1998) 430–441, especially 438-441; and Curley M., *Physiologus* (Chicago IL: 2009) ix-xxxviii. Commentators have argued for both the second and fourth century, and most now take a middle ground on that dating.

[4] See Lapidge M., *Anglo-Latin Literature 600-899* (London: 1996) 9-10. For an introduction to and translation of Alhelm's *Enigmata,* see Lapidge M. – Rosier J. (eds.), *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works* (Cambridge: 1985) 59-94. For the text of the *Aenigmata,* see Glorie F. (ed.), *Variae Collectiones Aenigmatum Merovingicae Aetatis* (Turnhout: 1968) 359-540. For Exeter Book dating, see Muir B.J., *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501* (Exeter: 2nd rev. ed. 2000) 1; Conner P.W., *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Woodbridge: 1993) 48-94. For the dating of the Old English Physiologus, see Sisam K., *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: 1962) 97-108. For discussion of the dating of the Riddles, see Williamson C., *Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill, NC: 2010) 23. I follow the *ASPR* (KD) numbering for the riddles.

[5] Dale C., *The Natural World in the Exeter Book Riddles,* Nature and Environment in the Middle Ages (Cambridge: 2017) 5. Dale rightly identifies the distinctively different discourse of natural observation in the Exeter Book riddles, which in contrast to Aldhelm's (and other) sources is often interested in pursuing the 'natural origins' of crafted objects. On Aldhelm and naturalism, see also Cameron M.L., "Aldhelm as Naturalist: A Re-Examination of Some of His Enigmata", *Peritia* 4 (1985) 117–133; Howe N., "Aldhelm's Enigmata and Isidorian Etymology", *Anglo-Saxon England* 14 (1985) 37–59. For works by Isidore and Pliny contained in Anglo-Saxon libraries, see Lapidge M., *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: 2008) 309-316 and 325.

death in the earth, through spontaneous generation and grave-robbing. The second takes a lengthier look at examples of life between these two finitudes: the ways in which bestiary animals make a living space in the earth through digging. Though these texts approach the natural world through a lens of educated anthropocentrism, attention to the life-cycles of non-human others gives a glimpse of an underground world of animal collaboration and zoo-esoteric knowledge of the earth: ultimately, perhaps, an important symbiosis, through which the earth needs the animals, just as animals need the earth.[6] This chapter implicitly asserts that medieval matters of earth include matters of animals, and attempts to track the nonhuman relationalities that sustain the imagined medieval earth.

The texts that I explore in this chapter are written in Old English, Middle English, and Latin, with some Old French, reading across a long chronological range. This discussion will hold the second-family bestiary tradition at its centre.[7] The use and interpretation of texts about animals, especially in the bestiaries, of course undergoes transformation in this long period.[8] Sarah Kay, for example, argues that a 'benign view of human-animal relations in Physiologus' is superseded by 'interspecies violence depicted in Second-family manuscripts, and in French bestiaries […] designed to appeal to aristocratic appetites'.[9] Whilst, in contradistinction to this claim, 'The Whale' of the Old English Physiologus is significantly more malicious than whales of later bestiaries,[10] Kay's point here is important: that animal-

[6] In this volume, James Davis explores the agricultural implications of fertile earth and animal fertiliser. See Chapter Ten Davis J., "Maintaining the Earth: Soil Management and Sustainability in Medieval Agricultural Manuals" 441-450.
[7] See Kay S., *Animal Skins and the Reading Self in Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chicago: 2017) 8-10; Baxter R., *Bestiaries and Their Users in the Middle Ages* (Stroud: 1998) 1-17.
[8] See discussion of the discourse on bestiary families in Clark W.B., *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-Family Bestiary: Commentary, Art, Text and Translation* (Woodbridge: 2006) 7-50 and Clark W.B. – McMunn M.T. (eds.), *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia: Reprint 2016); see also Dines I., "The Problem of the Transitional Family of Bestiaries", *Reinardus* 24 (2012) 29–52.

[9] Kay, *Animal Skins* 87.
[10] Cavell M., "A Community of Exiles: Whale and Human Domains in Old English Poetry", in McHugh S. – McKay R. – Miller J. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature* (Cham: 2021) 97–110, 106; Paddock A., *Beastly Spaces: Geomorphism in the Literary Depiction of Animals* (Ph.D dissertation, University of Oxford: 2017) 86.

human relations in bestiary tradition are necessarily historical, despite the central tenet of the bestiarists – that 'the world is all an inscription'.[11]

Of all the texts in the Exeter Book, those that are most explicitly interested in animals are the three-text Physiologus, *The Phoenix*, and the riddles. Amongst the nearly one hundred riddles, twenty are usually solved as an animal or plant of some kind.[12] Nonetheless, unlike the majority of the Anglo-Latin riddle tradition, the Exeter book riddles do not travel with their solutions.[13] So whilst the Physiologus and later the bestiaries tell the reader very explicitly which creatures they make reference to, a function of the Exeter book riddles is that they do not.[14] Insofar as we might see the act of speaking a solution as an act of classification, the number of riddles that we might say refer to animals (or earth) is always, necessarily then, negotiable.

Despite the contingencies of any riddle solution, the relationship between riddle and taxonomy is not incompatible and often, as discussed, overlap in their source material.[15] Whilst Susan Crane argues that a taxonomical approach to the second-family bestiaries resolves the apparent dichotomy between each animal and its interpretations, I will also suggest that this approach can be a compatible framing for the riddles. Crane takes a middle

[11] Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies* (Westminster, MD: 1957) III, 27-28; see also Clark, *Medieval Book of Beasts* 1.

[12] Following, for ease of collection, solutions as listed in Williamson, *Old English Riddles*; see also Dale, *Natural World* 5.

[13] For discussion of the circulation of Aldhelm's solutions, see Orchard A., "Enigma Variations: The Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Tradition", in O'Brien O'Keeffe K. – Orchard A. (eds.), *Latin Learning and English Lore (Volumes I & II)*, Toronto Old English Studies (Toronto: 2005) 284–304, 285; Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* 334, also lists four extant copies of Symphosius's *Aenigmata* present in Anglo-Saxon England. See also Pavlovskis Z., "The Riddler's Microcosm: From Symphosius to St Boniface", *Classica et Mediaevalia* 39 (1998) 219–251.

[14] On the riddles' challenge to the reader, see Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called*; On the flexibility of this formula, see Mize B., *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality* (Toronto: 2013) 89-109; Tyler, *Old English Poetics* 101-122.

[15] See Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature* 1-11 for discussion of Aldhelm's knowledge of Pliny and Isidore; see also Howe, "Aldhelm's Enigmata and Isidorian Etymology"; and Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm* 126-224.

way through critical attempts to classify bestiaries as works of morality on the one hand or natural history on the other, by positing that *any* taxonomy of nature is necessarily 'embedded human history'. She resolves this tension by reading bestiaries as 'plac[ing] each creature in relation to the others […] physical, moral and spiritual contents all contribute to a single discourse "on the natures of animals"'.[16] The riddle too speaks from the rhetorical position that creatures of the world, first of all, have a nature that *can* be described and, second, that the nature of things can be made to seem similar to the nature of other things: that the natural world can be understood through a process of metaphor. The interrelations of things in the riddles are reliant on similitudes and analogy – that the order of the world is balanced by each thing in relation to another, can be inferred from the premise of the riddle form: an understanding of the nature of a thing using the guises and/or voices of other things.[17] Shu-Han Luo, writing on childhood in the Exeter Book riddles, suggests that 'the language of families arise from the riddle-poets' categorising impulse, which understands formal similarities as kin and transformation as a kind of life'.[18] Augustine writes on the use of analogy to understand life in other beings, 'For we also recognise, from a likeness to us, the motions of bodies by which we perceive that others besides us live […] we perceive something present in that mass such as is present in us to move our mass in a similar way; it is life and soul [anima]'. Analogy is not a factor of human reason for Augustine, but a working of Nature, suggesting that animals use analogy to the same conclusion by a 'natural agreement' (*quadam conspiratione naturali*).[19] On the one hand, the metaphorical nature of riddles affirms taxonomical approaches to the world, and at the same time, they insist on

[16] Crane, *Animal Encounters* 72-73.

[17] See Paz J., *Nonhuman Voices in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Material Culture* (Manchester: 2017) 59-60.

[18] Luo S.H., "Tender Beginnings in the Exeter Book Riddles", in Irvine S. – Rudolf W. (eds.), *Childhood & Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (Toronto: 2018) 71–94, 74.

[19] Augustine, *De trinitate*, ed. and trans. W.J. Mountain – F. Glorie, Library of Latin Texts Series A. (Turnhout: 2010) VIII.VI.9.

metaphorical relations between those taxonomies: it is in this way that they speak harmoniously with the bestiaries.[20] My approach to bestiaries in this chapter, building on Crane's suggestion, reads relationships between long taxonomies, comparing particular properties across manuscripts and texts, not for what each entry can tell us about the complete picture of natures of any particular beast, bird, jewel or tree, but rather for what particular isolated natures that make use of earth can tell us about animal relation, figurative and perhaps even otherwise, with that element.

Unearthing

Aldhelm's Enigma I presents Earth as a parental body, which literally gestates and then nurses its offspring.[21] In a passage reproduced in second-family bestiaries Isidore says of 'nature' that it means 'causing to be born', 'for it has the power of engendering and creating'.[22] In the bestiaries, the place of Nature or Earth in the engendering of matter is also explicitly referenced in some instances of spontaneous generation. The second-family bestiaries include Gerald of Wales on the Barnacle Goose, which grows on driftwood like a barnacle, of which he writes: 'the first man was born of clay […] Look at the example of nature, which daily creates and brings forth new creatures without male or female help to instruct us and confirm us in the faith. The first generation came from clay, the latest from

[20] On metaphor, see Cavell M., *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies: The Poetics of Human Experience in Old English Literature* (Toronto: 2017) 5-10; Murphy P.J., *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (University Park, PA: 2011) 27-37.
[21] Enigma 1, lines 2-4. See also discussion of earth as mother, which is invoked in the field-ceremony in MS Cotton Caligula A vii, fol. l71a (twelfth century): Jolly K., "Father God and Mother Earth: Nature-Mysticism in the Anglo-Saxon World", in Salisbury J. (ed.), *The Medieval World of Nature: A Book of Essays* (New York – London: 1993) 221-252, 221-222; see Heffernan C.F., *The Phoenix at the Fountain: Images of Woman and Eternity in Lactantius's Carmen De Ave Phoenice and the Old English Phoenix* (Newark, NJ – London: 1988) 92-93, for discussion of the Galenic tradition of earth as womb, and vice-versa. In this volume, the maternal form of earth has been explored in several chapters. See Chapter Seven Joyner D., "*Terra*, the Arts and Spiritual Ecologies" 265, 270-274 and Chapter Twelve Anlezark D., "Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Creation, Wisdom and Healing" 519.
[22] *Etymologies* XI.i.1.

wood'.[23] Isidore explains of mice that, 'The mouse (*mus*) is a small animal; some say it is born from earth (*humus*)', which the second-family bestiary turns into a figure for greed after earthly things.[24] The bestiary entries for the worm typically follow Isidore's reading, frequently quoting him at length.[25] The worm does not feature in the Physiologus. Isidore of Seville describes 'Vermin' in *Etymologies*, defining worms as 'animals that are generated for the most part from flesh or wood or some earth substance, without any sexual congress'.[26] Though noting exceptions to his rule, as vermin of the earth, Isidore explicitly lists the 'beetle' (*cantharis*); 'multipede' (*multipes*); 'snail' (*limax*). These later examples of animals generated spontaneously posit a causative relation between the earth and some animals, chiming with Aristotelian hylomorphism ('what desires the form is matter'), and are constituents of a wider doctrine of spontaneous generation that, whilst endlessly revised, were still debated in the nineteenth century.[27] For Aldhelm's *de creatura*, as well as explicit subterranean references (for example to hell, l.9), the animals that have dealings with earth are putrid: beetles springing from dung (l.14) and worms infiltrating the body, apparently in the grave (lines 65-66). These themes are taken up in Exeter Riddle 40: *gores sunu* (l.72) 'the offspring of dung'; *se hondworm* (l.96) 'the flesh-worm' (literally 'handworm'). The association of the worm and the decomposing of the body in the grave is further laid down by Aldhelm in enigma C, in which the speaking voice of creation describes: 'I am bigger than

[23] See Barber, *Bestiary* 121. The barnacle goose features in two Latin second-family bestiaries (Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 764 and Harley MS 4751, thirteenth century, produced in England) and one French Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, fr. 3516 (Bestiare of Pierre de Beauvais, thirteenth century). It is also featured in the fifteenth-century 'Diedis of Armorie' in British Library, Harley MS 6149.

[24] *Etymologies* XII, iii.1.

[25] The worm is an entry in Aberdeen University Library, Univ. Lib. MS 24 (Aberdeen Bestiary); Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 11207; Bodleian Library, MS. Douce 308 (Bestiare D'Amour, French recension); and Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KB, KA 16 (Der Naturen Bloeme); and Bodley 764 (following the horned serpent or cerastes, with no illumination).

[26] *Etymologies* XII.v.1-18.

[27] Aristotle, *Physics*, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton: 1991) I.ix; see also Strick J.E., *Sparks of Life: Darwinism and the Victorian Debate over Spontaneous Generation* (Cambridge, MA – London: 2000). See also the Ovidian tradition of life-generating muds discussed by Catherine Clarke in this volume. See Chapter Eight Clarke C., "Thinking with Mud: Dirt, Imagination and Early Medieval English Culture" 372-374

the black whale in the grey waves / and smaller than the poor worm that burrows into bodies'.[28] The worms then, navigate earth as a medium of both birth and death, a matter in which composition and decomposition of bodies cooccurs.

For the Old English *Phoenix*, which is fundamentally concerned with age, death and rebirth, the birth-sequence also describes a pale worm of some kind, which in this case grows from an apple-like mass of ashes (lines 230-236, referencing *Carmen de Ave Phoenice* lines 99-108).[29] This climactic moment of the poem, the emergence of the Phoenix's new form from the ashes of a flaming and perfumed nest atop high branches, does not explicitly reference earth. In the full poem, however, the element of earth appears frequently with many different meanings.[30] Of these, the referents *eorð/eorþ* (l.42; l.131; l.136; l.154; l.207; l.243; l.249; l.331; l.349; l.460; l.487; l.506; l.629; l.638); and *folde* (l.3; l.8; l.60; l.64; l.74; l.155; l.174; l.197; l.257; l.352; l.396; and l.490) are by far the most frequent. *Middangeard* and *molde* (the latter always in accusative or dative form) are also used several times, whereas *grund* (2), *tyrf* (2: both pleonasms with other earthen terms), *lam* (1), and *greot* (1) are reserved for rare or singular use.[31] Whilst references to earth in the Phoenix are consistently numerous: several are part of statements of exceptionality or fame (and earth in these cases referring to the *oikumene*, for example, lines 3b-5a; l.8; l.157), accounting for many of the instances of *folde* 'earth' and *middangeard* 'middle-place' or 'world'. Many other instances of earth refer to the wondrous fertility of the Phoenix's territory contributing to a sense of the

[28] *Grandior in glaucis ballena fluctibus atra, et minor exiguo, select qui corpora, verme aut modico* (Aldhelm enigma C, lines 65-66).
[29] Muir, *Exeter Book* 164-187. See discussion in Heffernan, *Phoenix at the Fountain* 87-91.
[30] In this volume, Catherine Clarke explores the resonances and textures of old English earthen terms, including greot. See Chapter Eight Clarke C., "Thinking with Mud: Dirt, Imagination and Early Medieval English Culture" 367-370. Daniel Anlezark also explores the Old English words for earth, and their ambiguities, in this volume. See Chapter Twelve Anlezark D., "Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Creation, Wisdom and Healing" 511-512
[31] These include *eorð* (14 instances), *folde* (12), *middangeard* (5), *molde (*4), *tyrf* (2), *grund* (2), *greot* (2), *lam* (1). Searches performed using *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, compiled by Antonette di Paolo Healey with John Price Wilkin and Xin Xiang (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project 2009).

bird's environment, which in its quasi-prelapsarian state seems to require no work on the part of its inhabitant. Earth is clearly important in this poem, but not always in its animal relationality: in many cases earth is supernaturally fertile and unmarked by the harsh weather that mark mortal existence, *or* it is used in contrast to mark out the distinctiveness of the Phoenix. The Phoenix does not so much use the earth as inhabit it gracefully, engaging more strenuously with the air in flight, and the lofty fragrant oils of its nest, and only whilst on its migration away from its island to regenerate. In this way, the earthliness of the land that the Phoenix visits to nest and to burn is often defined in contradistinction to its home, emphasised in the pleonasm, *eorþan tyrf*: *of þisse eorþan tyrf eþel seceð* (l.349) '[away] from this earthen turf [the Phoenix (*anhoga* 'lone-dweller' (l.346)] seeks [its] home'. By occupying stave positions, the semantic overlap between *eorþan* and *eþel* for humans and yet the simultaneous distinction between these terms for the Phoenix, is further emphasised. The surrounding lines further spell out that no other bird, the devoted followers of the Phoenix, can follow it to its home (lines 346-349). The island home of the Phoenix, which as Appleton notes is an elaboration not present in the poem's source,[32] makes the implicit suggestion of exceptional earth, defined in distinction from the waters that surround it: *Ænlic is þæt iglond, æþele se wyrhta, / modig, meahtum spedig, se þa moldan gesette* (lines 9-10) 'Unique is that island, noble its maker / brave, powerful of might, who that earth established'.

Still other examples of earth in this poem make close reference to burial, which is expressed through variation, and represents several different words for earth and configurations of its relation to the body: *lame bitolden* (l.555b) 'overwhelmed with clay'; *greotes fæðm* (l. 557) 'the bosom of dust'; *eorþan fæðm* (l. 486) 'the bosom of earth'; *foldan biþeahte* (l.490) 'covered over with earth'. The Phoenix commends its own bodily remains, bringing its ashes and bones for burial to the island: *Þonne eal geador bebyrgeð*

[32]Appleton H., "The Insular Landscape of the Old English Poem *The Phoenix*", *Neophilologus* 101 (2017) 585–602, 585.

beaducræftig ban ond yslan on þam ealonde (lines 285-287). 'Then, war-crafty, buries all together bones and embers on the island'. *Bebyrgeð*, unique in the poem, is underpinned by the striking inclusion of *beaducræftig*: this linkage of burial and victory emphasises the parallel between the Phoenix and Christ, and in doing so suggests the double meaning of *byrgian* as 'to taste' as well as 'to bury'.[33] Earth, implied in this burial, is not mentioned, in stark contrast to all other burials in the poem. The terms used in earth-specific references include the less-used words in this poem, *lam*, which has a sense of moistness, as 'clay' or 'mud', and *greot*, which is drier and sandier.[34] For example, with reference to Job in the allegorical concluding section of the poem, the grave is described through the encompassing burial: *lame bitolden,/geomor gudæda,   in greotes fæðm*, (lines 555b-557) 'Covered in clay, / sad of past deeds, in the bosom of dirt'. Whilst *lame bitolden* is a common description of burial in both Old English poetry and the Exeter Book (see also *Guthlac B*, l.1194a), for this poem, it is unusually descriptive of the material textures of the earth it describes. The cloying wetness of mud evoked contrasts with the following reference to *greot*, which is distinctively dry, shaly and sandy, and is used in this way on the Franks Casket with reference to whale-beaching.[35] The patterning of earth-animal relationality in this poem is like the apophatic evocation of grim weather in the blissfully seasonless landscape of the Phoenix's home: the Phoenix has little need of detailed experience of the earth's material makeup: but gritty and moist embrace of the grave, on the other hand, necessarily awaits the reader. Degrees of textural specificity about earth in this poem decrease the closer the Phoenix comes to its home: at its own unique burial, there are only ashes and bone, but when speaking of human death, the material savour of the earth is brought to the fore.

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[33] See also *The Dream of the Rood* l.101, for the same use of paronomasia with this term.

[34] 'Greot', n., sense 1. *DOE*; Bosworth, Joseph. 'lám', n., sense 1. In *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*. For a discussion of 'mud' in Old English Literature, See Clark's chapter, "Thinking with Mud: Dirt, Imagination and Early Medieval English Culture" 00.

[35] 'The Franks Casket', in Page R.I., *An Introduction to English Runes* (Woodbridge: 2nd ed. 2006) 178-179.

The Panther, like the Phoenix, lives (or rather walks) uniquely, as *anstapa* (1.15a), and his den, like the nest of the Phoenix, is an important place of regeneration that has powerful resonances of the miraculous grave of Christ: *æfter þam gereordum ræste seceð / dygle stowe under dunscrafum* (lines 36-37) 'after the feasting he seeks rest / in a hidden place under a mountain cave'.[36] The correspondence between this sleep in the *scræf* and the cave in which Christ undergoes the trials of death is made later explicit (lines 59-63). The Panther's high den is counterpart to the hellish watery deep of the following Physiologus text, 'The Whale', in which the Whale's use of earth is an ironic reversal of the hapless sailors' desire to land. Whilst the sailors' search for earth amidst the sea leads them to the danger of the false island, the whale's malicious drowning act echoes and mocks their quest when he dives to the ocean floor: *grund geseceð* (l.29b) 'seeking the ground'. The only clear evocation of earth in this poem is therefore deeply and dangerously ironic.

The nature of the Panther's den is unclear, and it is often translated as a mountain cave. The semantic range of *scræf* is broad, as indicated by the ambiguous *eorþscræf* occupied by the narrator of the *Wife's Lament*, variously interpreted as cave, grave, barrow or possibly sunken house,[37] and the possible interpretation of earthen aspects of this den is also offered by *dygle* (l.37) 'secret, hidden',[38] which also appears in *Guthlac A* (also in the Exeter Book fols. 33-45):[39] *þa he ana gesæt / dygle stowe* (lines 158b-159a) 'when he sat alone in that secret place', here referring to a godless and perilous *beorg* (a barrow, or hill) where

[36] Muir, *Exeter Book* 266-269. On *an*- compounds and unique creatures see Carla Cucina, who notes that the Panther's friendly *natura* is at odds with a translation of this term as 'lonely wanderer', arguing instead for the Panther's exceptionality. Cucina C., "Unique Creatures in Old English Poetry, with a note on *ānstapa* (*The Panther* 15a)", *Studi medievali* ser.3 56.2 (2015) 681-704.
[37] For discussion see Battles P., "Of Graves, Caves, and Subterranean Dwellings: Eorðscræf and Eorðsele in the Wife's Lament", *Philological Quarterly* 73 (1994) 267-286, who argues for the interpretation of the dwelling as a *souterrain* or sunken house. This poem is also discussed by Catherine Clarke in this volume. See Chapter Eight Clarke C., "Thinking with Mud: Dirt, Imagination and Early Medieval English Culture" 367

[38] 'dýgle', sense 1, DOE.

[39] Muir, *Exeter Book* 108-136. For more on sweet breath, and 'stenc' in these poems see Weiskott E., "OE *Panther* 74b: 'Þæt is æþele stenc'", *Notes and Queries* 59.1 (2012) 5-6.

demons rest from their work of torment (lines 203-217).[40] The Panther and Phoenix appear to use the earth not to spontaneously generate, nor to die, but for both purposes: regeneration beyond the grave. In these cases, however, the worm-filled metabolic power of the earth, so important for the transition from mortal body to immortal soul for a human, appears not to touch these unique and Christlike animals: they both remain in saintly ignorance of the gritty dirty aspects of the grave, suspended from relation with earth.

In the bestiary tradition, the grave's more worldly functions can be maliciously disrupted, especially by the hyena.[41] Debra Strickland describes this as 'one of the most straightforward allegories' in the bestiary – an anti-Jewish figure, in which both of the hyena natures –arenotelicon (changing gender, usually from male to female), and raiding graveyards for corpses – are part of its purported monstrosity. In the *Physiologus*, *on the Hyena or the brute*, the double gender (read as duplicity) and the unclean qualities (referencing Leviticus 11:27) are emphasised, but not the hyena's digging or mimicry of human voices and vomiting. In Guillaume Le Clerc's bestiary (thirteenth century) he moralises the hyena's shift from male to female as a spiritual denigration, brought about by a turning away from Christ (a common theme amongst other anti-Jewish figures in the bestiary, such as the hoopoe).[42]

Though the two properties are linked, for the purposes of this chapter the grave-robbing is of greatest interest. Whilst the hyena is not usually depicted in illuminations as

[40] On the importance of the barrow and hill debate in Guthlac studies see for example, Clark S., "Guthlac and the Temptation of the Barrow", *Studia Neophilologica* 87.1 (2015) 48-72.

[41] The Hyena features in the Latin Physiologus, and in forty manuscripts, in the first, transitional and second-families, of which more than twenty-eight are highly illustrated English bestiary manuscripts. For extensive discussion of hyena illuminations see Strickland, *Medieval Bestiaries* 145-155.

[42] See Strickland, *The Mark of the Beast*, and much more extensively Strickland D.H., *Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: 2003). For a reading of the hyena's body through the lenses of intersex and trans-animality, see Campbell E., "Visualizing the Trans-animal Body: The Hyena in Medieval Bestiaries", in LaFleur G. – Raskolnikov M. – Kłosowska A. (eds.), *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality Before the Modern* (Ithaca, NY: 2021) 313-352, especially 348-350, in which Campbell explores Phillipe de Thaon's *Bestiare*, which unusually moralises the vulnerabilities of Christian masculine virtue through the figure of the hyena's changeable genitalia.

raiding earthen graves, but rather dragging corpses from sepulchres, this may be a visual figure, like the frequent nudity of the corpse, for the fact that the subject depicted is dead (it was not uncommon for some peasant corpses to be interred without coffin, or even perhaps a shroud).[43] The grave site here, symbolic of Christian salvation for individual souls, is, like the bodies that house those souls in life, assailable and permeable by outside threats. This threat is of course also literal – many animals, hyenas included, scavenge graves.[44]

Strickland has also argued for the sexual nature of grave-robbing in one hyena illumination, likely made in Salisbury 1230-1240, that unusually features a female corpse (British Library, Harley MS 4751, fol.10r), reading the act of grave-robbing as a figure for sexual corruption and, through this, the spiritual threat of conversion. She links the female corpse not only to the general anti-Jewish sentiment of the entry but specifically to a contemporary prohibition of sexual intercourse between Jews and Christians issued by Pope Innocent III during the fourth Lateran council.[45] Whilst the hyena's charged predation focuses attention on the vulnerable (implicitly Christian) body, in doing so it upends the carefully

[43] An exception to nudity in these depictions is the shrouded (genderless) corpse in British Library MS Royal 12.F.XIII and Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 6838B, fol. 6r, and the entry in British Library Add. MS 11283 in which all that is left of the corpse is a leg, or, poignantly, just a head in Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 1444b, fol. 247v; and Kongelige Bibliotek, Gl. kgl. S. 1633 4º, fol. 9r in which only a leg is visible, draped over the edge of the tomb. On the irregularity *and* regularity of disinterment in medieval England see Daniell C., *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066-1550* (London: 1996), especially 80-101; for grave disruption see Miles M.R., *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: 1989) 81; Aries P., *Images of Man and Death* (Cambridge; MA: 1985) 19-23; the hyena is referred to as digging up graves specifically in Pliny, *Natural History* VIII. 30; (compared with hypocrites) in St Antony of Padua, *Sermons*, in Neale J.M., *Mediæval Preachers and Mediæval Preaching, Extracts, Translated with Notes and an Introduction by J.M. Neale* (London: 1856) 242-244, and Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, ed. B. van den Abeele, De diversis artibus; t. 78-79 (Turnhout: 2007) 18.

[44] In early medieval Britain, for example, some deviant burials, especially for children, may represent measures against grave-scavenging foxes carrying away human remains rather than any ritualistic measure in relation to the deceased. Crawford S., "Children, Death and the Afterlife in Anglo-Saxon England", in Karkov C.E. (ed.), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: 1999) 83–91. Christopher Daniell also writes that 'Many statutes [of the medieval English church] were anxious to prevent "brute animals" or swine entering a cemetery. When they entered, they not only ate the grass, but trampled on dead bodies and even dug or snuffled them up (Powicke and Cheney 1964: 379, 1005)'. Daniell, *Death and Burial* 101. The reference to 'brute' animals here recalls the hyena (though foxes, dogs, and swine were in reality the most likely disruptive agents).

[45] Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries* 152.

ordered shelter and peace of the grave site. The symbolic relationship between hyena and earth posited in these entries is one of plunder: the destructive *un*earthing of that which has been peacefully ordered. Martin Carver has argued for the reading of early-medieval burial assemblages as poetry: a deliberate and richly interpretable bricolage of meaning, the value of which may forbid any grave-robbing for those able to read them.[46] Thea Tomaini extends this idea in *Corpse as Text* to infer that the laying of the corpse itself is a necessarily textual act.[47] The hyena's plunder, can be read as the misinterpretation of a sacred (de)composition, and so a seductive perversion of textual meaning. The anti-Jewish sentiments that may coalesce in this charge are clear: Campbell notes the common medieval anti-Semitic association with the 'dead' letter of Scripture.[48] In a genre so centrally concerned with reading, the hyena also warns of the dangers of misinterpretation.[49] The hyena's dealings with earth are corruptive, of the hyena, of those the hyena drags from the grave, and of the grave itself. Bringing the hyena entries into conversation with the worms, beetles, and barnacle goose, is uneasy: on the one hand, the earth of the grave is a closed sanctuary before its disturbance by the violatory hyena, yet on the other it is in essence a churning, generative cradle of change. And for the Phoenix, and Panther, both such possibilities exist simultaneously. Ultimately, these entries may suggest, as is to be expected in a set of texts as encyclopaedic and multistranded as the bestiary, that conflicting properties of earth can coexist; earth is emphasised differently in each entry as a result of a particular animal's nature.

[46] Carver M., "Burial as Poetry: The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves", in Tyler E.M. (ed.), *Treasure in the Medieval West* (York: 2000) 25-48, especially 40.

[47] Tomaini T., *The Corpse as Text: Disinterment and Antiquarian Enquiry, 1700-1900* (Suffolk: 2017) 1-22, especially 2-4.

[48] Campbell, "Visualizing the Trans-Animal Body" 250.

[49] The hyena in this way may find itself in the company of other bad animal readers, like the *moþþe* ('moth') of Exeter Book Riddle 47, who falsely eats the words of men laid down carefully in a strong foundation (a book). Muir, *Exeter Anthology* I 320.

A Place of Refuge and Fortification

To have to work the earth in order to find sustenance for living is the specific punishment for Adam's Fall in Genesis 3:17, *maledicta terra in opere tuo* ('Cursed is the ground for thy sake').[50] Rather than Adam's body, postlapsarian earth and the very fabric of Creation is fundamentally transformed by Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit.[51] The earth itself is changed by Adam's transgression, and the rest of creation is bound up in his failure. Animal digging in the medieval bestiary, which usually begins with the addition of Adam's naming of the beasts,[52] takes place in the hardened earth of the fallen world. The animals discussed here are specifically those that work for their own living. Here the horse, and the ox and plough, are discounted, despite their presence in many bestiaries (and, in the latter case, several riddle collections, including Eusebius (*Collectanea* 194) and the Exeter riddles 12, 38 and 72), because of the need to include medieval agricultural and equestrian knowledge in this discussion, and crucially the complicating factor of human intention. The ox, for example, destined for the plough because of its strength, works more as a hybrid machine of agricultural labour: indeed, Exeter Riddle 12 seem to align its work with slavery.[53] Some animals in the bestiary, on the other hand, dig for themselves, and it is those that I will discuss now.

Life close to the earth can form a familiar metaphor for baseness and filth. Augustine on 'The Enmity between Eve and the Serpent', writes 'For one who eats the earth penetrates

[50] Literally, 'for thy work'. See Camille M., "'When Adam Delved': Laboring on the Land in English Medieval Art", in Sweeney D. (ed.), *Agriculture in the Middle Ages: Technology, Practice, and Representation* (Philadelphia: 1995) 247–276, 249. By contrast the snake loses its legs and is condemned to eat the earth, and Eve is cursed to a life of subservience and the dangers and pain of childbirth.

[51] For discussion of Adam's digging and the specificity of tools, see Camille, "When Adam Delved".

[52] See also Clark, *Book of Beasts* 239, on this scene in the Ashmole bestiary; and Kay's discussion of Adam naming in the Northumberland and Sloane Bestiaries in *Animal Skins* 36-40.

[53] See Cavell, *Weaving Words* 159-172.

things deep and dark, but nonetheless temporal and earthly'.[54] The digging animals of the bestiary are often described as dirty, in more than one way, though not all the unclean animals dig. In short, in the bestiary it matters how these animals are dirty – it is insufficient to read proximity to earth as necessarily damning. This section looks at digging in the bestiaries and Physiologus: animals living and building in the earth in nests and burrows.

Ground nesting is sufficiently common in the bestiaries as to be described in several different birds (and it is worth noting that ground nesting is equally a relatively common strategy in the avian world.) The hoopoe (confused in many cases with the screech-owl), which, like the hyena, is largely moralised as an anti-Jewish figure, is described as living amongst dung and graves.[55] The use of earth for camouflage in ground nesting, on the other hand, is a nature of the Partridge, that derives from Pliny.[56] Partridges protect their nests with thorns and twigs, and the eggs are moved by the partridge and covered with soft dust to hide them. Bodley 764 adds that the chicks hold up clods of earth in their claws to hide themselves, sidestepping the usual suggestion that the young will leave to find their true mother. The accompanying illumination for this entry, without explanation, features a white canine creature, in striking contrast to the brown partridges and the brown earth they stand on (Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 764, fol. 75r). Nonetheless, the dog is crouching, even perhaps snarling with limbs contracted and ready to spring. The implication, perhaps, is that whilst the partridge is camouflaged for now, it cannot hope to maintain its strategy for long. The hoopoe, screech-owl and partridge, however, are implicitly lowered by their life at

[54] Augustine, *Against the Mannichees*, ed. and trans. R.J. Teske, Fathers of the Church 84 (Washington, DC: 2001) II.xviii.
[55] The hoopoe is in 43 extant bestiaries. The hoopoe also possesses access to secret knowledges which it may impart to the wise. See its appearance in the Islamic tradition of the prophet-king Solomon, discussed by Patrick Naeve in the final chapter of this volume. See Chapter Fourteen Naeve P., "The Anthropomorphic Earth and the Speaking Universe of Islamic Culture" 595.
[56] *Natural History* X. li. The Partridge is in 51 miscellanies, bestiaries, Physiologuses and aviaries. The Latin Physiologus text, Xxxii On the Partridge, I will not quote here in full, draws on Jeremiah 17:11, explaining how the partridge raises the eggs of other birds that will then return to their true mother, a story that Isidore repeats in *Etymologies* XII.vii.63.

ground level and amongst the earth, as birds, perhaps, they might be condemned, for not aiming higher.

There are, however, more admired uses of the ground as a living space amongst the creatures of the bestiary. The exemplary labour of the ant is one such example. The Middle English Physiologus records of the ant: ‘and she rests seldomly and fetches her food where she can find it, gathering each seed of both wood and weed […] hauls to her hole that soon will help her’.[57] The instinct to hide away stores however, is also a potential exploitable characteristic. The gold-digging ants, in a legend which draws ultimately from Herodotus (fifth century BCE), can be tricked into hiding their gold into the empty packs of mares or camels through the subterfuge of humans: ‘It is said that in Ethiopia there are ants shaped like dogs which dig up grains of gold with their feet; they guard this gold so no one can steal it’.[58] This is widely circulated beyond the bestiary, and features in both Mandeville’s travels and *Wonders of the East*, as well as, as Marilina Cesario has identified, as an enigmatic fragment in early English sunshine prognostication literature.[59]

The illuminations of the ant accord with this deep-delving use of the earth, often giving greater detail to the earthworks of the ant hill than to the ants themselves (which are usually small dots). For example, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 3630, fol. 85r, a second-family bestiary, produced in England in the 3rd quarter of the thirteenth-century, shows an anthill with ants in various arcing tunnels inside; the early thirteenth-century,

[57] ‘*and* resteð hire seldum · *and* fecheð hire fode ðer ge it mai finden · gaddreð ilkines sed · boðen of wude *and* of wed […] · haleð to hire hole · ðat siðen hire helpeð’. The Middle English Physiologus is extant only in London, British Library Arundel MS 292, produced in England in the thirteenth century. Symphosius too, praises the ant’s hard work in similar terms (*de formica*, enigma XXII).

[58] Isidore, *Etymologies* XII, ‘formica’. The same passage is quoted in Philippe de Thaon’s bestiare for ‘formica’; Aldhelm’s enigma XVIII depicts the antlion, referencing its double name (but not an association with the gold-mining ants).

[59] Cesario M., “Ant-Lore in Anglo-Saxon England”, *Anglo-Saxon England* 40 (2011) 273–291, 280. Cesario identifies Pliny and Isidore as the likely sources for this particular instance of the gold-digging ant.

Ashmole Bestiary (Bodleian Library, MS. Ashmole 1511, fol. 36v), shows ants travelling to and from their nest in ordered lines, with ants labouring inside. Unlike the shallow hiding strategies of the partridge, which eludes hunting only temporarily (and possesses its stolen eggs only until the young return to their birth mothers), the ant appears to have deeper strategies with the earth. The ant hill makes of the earth a high storehouse against winter, to be filled and emptied.

[Fig. 11.1] Full Page[60]

In this illuminated miniature, from Bodleian Library, Oxford M.S. Bodley 764. fol. 50v, one badger (*taxus)*—clutching a chestful of earth and with a stick in its mouth—is dragged backwards away from a tunnel by two other badgers, whilst a final pair, overlaying the frame with effort, undertake the task of enlarging the sett through digging. The text is taken from Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica*, composed 1186-1188, and in this manuscript reads:

> There is [an animal] called the badger and [also] the melot. This animal bites and is unclean, often inhabiting hilly regions and rocky places. [It makes] trenches underground as places of refuge and fortification by scraping and digging with its feet. Certain of them are commanded by their nature to be ready to serve others. They lie on their backs and on their stomachs the others pile earth from the trench [and they] embrace [the soil] with their four feet. They position a piece of wood across the edge of

[60] With kind permission of Bodleian Library (image via Digital Bodleian).

their mouths. With their teeth the others then grab on [to the wood] and drag them backwards. [This behaviour is] not observed without drawing wonder.[61]

This image, a narrative of the digging strategies of the badger, shows a deeper interest in the badger beyond the idea of it as dirty beast that bites.[62] The miniature, which is modelled on this manuscript's pair, Harley 4751, gives a striking arrangement of badgers, shown from above, below, and both sides. Harley 4751 is likely produced at Salisbury, and itself develops much of the iconography from the line drawings of the twelfth-century manuscript, Cambridge University Library MS Ii. 4. 26.[63] There is no instance of the badger in Cambridge MS Ii 4 26, however, suggesting that this image is an invention of the artist responsible for Harley 4751. It is possible that the Harley artist may have been inspired by a nearby digging entry; the mole, which receives a damning comparison for its nature, blindly digging at roots in the darkness underground,[64] whilst often depicted above ground, is in Bodley 764, fol. 51v, depicted as seen from above as is the case in the line drawing in Cambridge University Library MS Ii. 4. 26, alongside an additional mole as seen from the

[61] *est taxus qui et melota dicitur. hoc animal mordax et immundum montana frequentans et saxosa. scrobes subteraneos tanquam refugii loca, munimenta que pedibus scalpens et effodiens sibi ipsi con format. Quidam uero ex hiis nature imperio seruire parati: 'terram ab aliis fossam uentri que supino impositam quatuor pedibus complectentes. Ligno que in ore transuerso locato: dentibus ab aliis hinc inde coh[a]erentibus retrograde que trahentibus': non absque intuena [c]um admiratione trahuntur.* Transcription normalised for readability. This text quite faithfully preserves the content and phrasing, if not the precise order, of *Topographia Hibernica* on badgers (see, for example, Bodleian Library Royal MS 13 B VIII, fol. 10v).

[62] Where I translate 'bites', the bestiarist follows Gerald of Wales in using *mordax*: literally 'biting' which has a number of figurative senses, such as stinging, caustic or aggressive. *Dictionary of Medieval Latin, mordax,* sense 3.

[63] Harley MS 4751(or, the Harley Bestiary) was produced in England in s. xiii med., and like Bodley 764 includes excerpts from Gerald of Wales on birds of Ireland. Harley 4751 is 'illustrated with 106 miniatures in round or square frames. No gold has been used and the colors are sometimes sombre'. See Payne, *Beasts* 14.

[64] Mole is in 23 bestiaries, both French and Latin second-families of the twelfth and thirteenth century.

side, surrounded by curling sods of earth.[65] It is tempting to wonder whether the Harley 4751 badger illumination, which is much grander and corresponds unusually well to its textual counterpart, was inspired by its poorer earthly relation, the mole.

The superior tunnelling behaviour of the badger dominates its entry. The natural servitude of one badger to the other is emphasised, but so, furthermore is collaboration (if unequally distributed work) and the question of *how* badgers develop their setts. The depiction is at odds with the rocky places in which the badger is supposed to dwell, and luscious curls of brown earth are shown, with no rocks to be seen in either manuscript.[66] The badger, we are to understand from both the text and the illumination, is skilled in its work with earth.

Jacques de Vitry (c. 1160/70-1240) used an exemplum which develops this suggestion of the badger's skill further.[67] He writes of a fox tricking the badger into leaving its home:

> The badger is a very cleanly animal which constructs with its teeth and claws an abode in the rock, and cannot endure any foul odour. The crafty fox befouls the dwelling of the badger, which straight[a]way abandons it and the fox takes possession

[65] See full facsimile and description in James, *The Bestiary*; see also Baxter, *Bestiaries* p.s. 11, 113, 193-194.
[66] As well as these two bestiaries, the Badger is also recorded in Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1462 (*De medicina ex animalibus*: a herbal); Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 254; and Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KB, KA 16. On Bodley 764 see, Baxter R., "A Baronial Bestiary: Heraldic Evidence for the Patronage of MS Bodley 764", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987) 196–200.

[67] Jacques de Vitry 'had been a canon regular at Oignies and part of the circle of the Parisian theologian and moralist Peter the Chanter, composed his *ad status* collection while he was cardinal-bishop of Tusculum (1229–40)'. Davis A.J., "Preaching in Thirteenth-Century Hospitals", *Journal of Medieval History* 36.1 (2010) 72–89, 74-75. On the life of the prolific Jacques de Vitry, see Baldwin J.W., *Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter & His Circle* (Princeton, NJ: 1970) 1, 36-39.

> of an abode which he did not build, and for which he did not labour. So it is with God and the devil in the human heart.[68]

The first line of description here parallels elements of the badger entry (*Topographia Hibernica* interpolation) in the second-family bestiary: life in mountainous regions, digging a home with its feet and the use of teeth. There is an especially crucial difference — the badger is referenced as a *clean* animal that hates filth.[69] It is likely that Gerald's badger, who finds full expression in the Harley and Bodley 764 bestiaries, its story embroidered by the remarkable illumination, is *immundus* in the sense of being unclean to eat.[70] So these passages are not quite the contradiction they appear to be: the badger may indeed be a clean and dirty animal, and it is implied that its dirtiness does *not* come from its association with the soil, unlike many of the other animals explored in this chapter. The badger, in his cleanly earth-working, is identified with God. The emphasis is on the reverent labour of the badger's dwelling, made with teeth and claws: it is self-evident that the badger has made a good abode, a home that is envied by the fox. The Bodley 764 and Harley bestiarists tell us that the badger's trenches are built as *loca refugii* ('places of refuge') and *monumenta* ('of fortification'), terms which elevate the sett above a pit to a considered stronghold.[71]

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[68] CCXCII. [fol. 24, 151[ro]], translation in Crane, *The Exempla of Jacques de Vitry* 262, with reference to London, British Library MS Harley 463, fol. 24. Similar references to the badger, though no outright sources, are identified by Crane as Alexander Neckham (1157-1217) (*De Naturis Rerum,* ed. Wright 207, cap. Cxxvii, 'de taxo et vulpe'); and Bartholomaeus Anglicus (written 1240-1250), (Bartholomaeus A., Abeele, B. van den, *De proprietatibus rerum* lib. cap. 101).

[69] Which may have some basis in truth: badgers typically have organised latrine systems and will bury their dead by walling them in to their chambers, though as a mustelid, it is the case that badgers have strong scent-producing glands in their rears, which are finely individualised for family-identification.

[70] *immundus*, sense 2, in *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, citing Geraldus Cambrensis 'taxus…animal mordax et [immund]~um'.

[71] Michael Bintley has argued that early medieval 'ideas about settlements and strongholds could prove just as powerful and enduring as their physical forms': Bintley M.D.J., *Settlements and Strongholds in Early Medieval England: Texts, Landscapes, and Material Culture* (Turnhout: 2020) 23.

This digging of the Badger, contrary to some of the images explored in this chapter, is neither apparently damning, nor violatory. Though, like the hyena, it is a 'dirty' beast in the bestiary; the coordinated work of the badgers invites admiration. In human-made earthworks, immense working, and organisational, power is necessary. Paolo Squatriti, for example, has suggested that grand earthworks demonstrated a ruler's ability to marshall the social power necessary for their construction.[72] Digging, in such a context, matters less than the careful management of the diggers. The text of the badger entry may suggest a parallel interest in what the badger's earth work can tell us about it as a social animal: setts of great complexity point to corresponding levels of social organisation.

I will interweave one further text alongside this exploration of the badger to further illuminate this point about admirable animal homes in the earth. Exeter Riddle 15, most often solved as the fox or the porcupine (or hedgehog), is an animal mother defending her burrow, indicated by the feminine form of the adjective *onhæle* ('hidden') in line 7a and the reference *to bearnum* (9a), *geoguðcnosle* (10a) and *eaforan mine* (12b).[73] Badger, as a solution, is somewhat out of favour.[74] Bitterli's objection is that the riddle mentions nothing of the

[72] Squatriti P., "Digging Ditches in Early Medieval Europe", *Past & Present* 176.1 (2002) 11–65. Whilst John Blair warns against taking this argument 'too far', he too notes that 'such projects displayed rulers' newly confident control over construction works' (Blair J., *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (Princeton: 2018) 99).

[73] See Williamson, *The Old English Riddles* 176. Megan Cavell notes that any distinction between porcupine and hedgehog is likely immaterial. Cavell M., "The Igil and Exeter Book Riddle 15", *Notes and Queries* 64.2 (2017) 206–210, 209. The 'porcupine' solution was first proposed in Walz J.A., "Notes on the Anglo-Saxon Riddles", *Harvard Studies and Notes* 5 (1896) 261–268, 261-263. Supporting the 'ox' or 'vixen', see Meaney A., "The Hunted and the Hunters: British Mammals in Old English Poetry", *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 6 (2000) 95–105 and Osborn M., "Vixen as Hero: Solving Exeter Book Riddle 15", in Waugh R. – Weldon J. (eds.), *The Hero Recovered: Essays on Medieval Heroism in Honor of George Clark* (Kalamazoo, MI: 2010) 173–187; Williamson, *Old English Riddles* 173–178; and Muir, *Exeter Anthology* II, 657.

[74] 'Badger' was Dietrich's solution, also accepted by Tupper, Wyatt, Mackie, Nelson and Baumm. See Nelson M., "Old English Riddle No. 15: The 'Badger': An Early Example of Mock Heroic", *Neophilologus* 59.3 (1975) 447–450, 449. This solution has been questioned especially in Bitterli D., "Exeter Book Riddle 15: Some Points for the Porcupine", *Anglia* 120.4 (2003) 461–874, 74–75. Bitterli also questions the solution of 'weasel' on the grounds that lore on the aural conception of the weasel is absent, comparing Aldhelm's *Enigma 82, Mustela* ('Weasel').

characteristic white blazes that give the badger its striped face (and likely its name).[75] In addition, it has been noted, badgers are of limited interest to medieval and classical natural philosophers.[76] The latter point is undoubtedly true, as indeed my exploration of the badger in the bestiary further serves to demonstrate. To the first objection, however, one might offer the following counter-evidence: the riddle may not mention striped faces, but neither do bestiary entries for the badger, despite some thin pale facial markings in the illumination above.

Carole Hough notes that 'the Oxford English Dictionary records an obsolete term *grey* used of a badger from 1413-22 to 1686', though she urges caution in using this term for animal identification in early medieval placenames (suggesting the term in such cases often refers to 'wolf').[77] Old English term for 'badger', *brocc*, may derive from older words meaning 'grey'.[78] In the illumination of the badger in Royal MS 13 B VIII, fol. 10.v, which includes the text of *Topographia Hibernica*, the creature is also a blue-grey animal.

As discussed, I see it as counterproductive to my particular purpose here to establish firmly the identity of the animal (though I favour vixen, or even badger). The features that commentators bring to the centre of their reading are ear position, claws, swiftness of foot, fallow colouring, and something described as *hildepilum* (28b) ('battle darts'), and, crucially, defence of the burrow.[79] In reading animal burrow use in zooarchaeology, strict designation of particular species-ownership of a space may mask the real use, and understanding, of these burrows. The opportunistic use of badger setts by foxes, for example, is a typical behaviour.[80] Pairing place-name analysis with evidence from bones at various early medieval English sites

[75] *OED, badger n. 2.* Suggests that the etymology is 'probably < badge n. + -ard suffix, so called with reference to the white mark borne like a badge on its forehead'.

[76] Bitterli, "Exeter Book *Riddle 15*" 473.

[77] Hough C., "OE *graeg in Place-Names", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 96.4 (1995) 361–365, 362.

[78] 'brock, n.1". OED Online. 'Old English *broc*, < Celtic: in Old Irish *brocc*, Irish and Gaelic *broc*, Welsh and Cornish *broch*, Breton *broc'h* < Old Celtic **broccos*, probably cognate with Greek *φορκός* grey, white; compare the English name *gray*, *grey'*.

[79] See *Dictionary of Old English*, hilde-pīl, noun, m., cl. 1; and 'pile, n.1'. sense 1. OED Online.

(400-1100 CE), suggests that the presence of foxes in a place name might indicate the underlying partner presence of badgers in that location.[81] Like successive peoples, some animals will re-use worked sites of previous inhabitants; largely because of the complexity and thoroughness of badger setts, they are ideal for opportunistic settling by other species. Whilst Cavell notes that Riddle 15 makes use of the prevalent 'exile motif [in Old English] depicting a prey animal (either a fox or porcupine/hedgehog) chased from domestic harmony by a predator intent on murdering her young', there is a real possibility, especially if this animal *is* a vixen, that the domestic harmony she occupies is second-hand.[82]

The mother animal of riddle 15 uses her burrow defences against her assailant skilfully, forcing her pursuer through narrow tunnels that he must crawl through (l. 15a), keeping him on a *nearwe stige* ('narrow path') whilst secretly and skilfully creating another way out, *degolne weg dune þyrel* ('on a secret way through a hill hole'); *ac ic sceal fromlice feþemundum þurh steapne beorg stræte wyrcan* ('but I must boldly with walking-hands fashion a path through a high hill') (lines 18, 21).[83] Her war-darts, if she is still pursued, are a final defence: her knowledge and careful planning of the burrow is the key constituent of her escape plan. And this is a plan: riddle 15 uses conditionals to show the cognitive mapping and manipulation of the mother's knowledge of her sett: *gif mec onhæle / an onfindeð* (7) ('if one finds me hidden') […] *forþon* (12) ('therefore') […] *ac* (21) ('but'): *gif* occurs again in lines 14a, 20a and 24a. This situation is hypothetical, and what the riddle speaks of is an animal's careful strategy against a *laðgewinnum* ('long-hated') enemy, knowing that her anticipated threat is likely. When, in the final half-line, the speaker describes this enemy as

[80] Tattoni C., "Nomen Omen. Toponyms Predict Recolonization and Extinction Patterns for Large Carnivores (Report)", *Nature Conservation* 37.4 (2019) 1–16.

[81] Poole K., "Foxes and Badgers in Anglo-Saxon Life and Landscape", *Archaeological Journal* 172 (2015) 1–34.

[82] Cavell, "A Community of Exiles" 100.

[83] *feþemundum* literally means 'hands for walking', or paws. This compound is a hapax legomenon, see *Dictionary of Old English*, *fēþe-mund*, Noun (f., cl. 2).

one *þam þe ic longe fleah* ('whom long I have fled') (29), this might be read as not just referring to the chase in which the assailant, perhaps a dog, infiltrates the burrow, but referring too to the careful planning of that chase which we are witnessing in this riddle. Underground knowledge, and careful deployment of it, therefore, is perhaps a far greater defence for this mother than the war-darts. Whether this riddle is taken to reveal a badger, vixen, hedgehog, (or weasel), the complex burrow, and the animal skill with which that burrow is managed, functions simultaneously as a place of refuge and fortification when properly excavated *and* navigated by a digging animal. As a possible portrait of a vixen's inheritance of a badger sett, whether or not this home was acquired through devilish trickery, the portrayal is an embodied and claustrophobic glimpse of the underground world of the skilled earthly animal.

Conclusion

The argument of this chapter is that depictions of relationality between earth and nonhuman agents importantly express the properties of this element in early medieval culture. The animals of the bestiary appear to access a private knowledge of the earth itself: quite literally, a deeper engagement than is available to people. The animals discussed here powerfully evoke the ambivalent status of the earth, both base and vital, and furthermore demonstrate the necessity of animal skill in earth-working that differs utterly from that of the human. The badger's collaborative labour and the ant's indefatigable store-housing, and the mother's knowledge of her burrow, all point to a learned skill in the matters of earth, and an admirable use of it to do things well: in the case of the badger making a well-functioning home in the earth. The idea that these texts, though centred on human wisdom, may in fact be suggesting that animals might have a superior knowledge of earth, however, is not necessarily explicitly

disruptive to the anthropocentric framing of the bestiaries. Returning again to Augustine's words on the serpent, for example, to 'eat the earth' *is* to 'penetrate' deep mysteries, but mysteries of the 'temporal', and the base and 'earthly' only: the domain of the body, not the spirit, to which the bestiary insists the human should aspire. What I have been unable to do in the restrictions of this chapter is to bring the earth-working animals into dialogue with those of water, air, and fire. What the Phoenix, emblematic in its use of fire for cyclical rebirth as a figure of Christ, might teach the partridge about transcending an earthly nest, for example, illuminates the ways in which these animals fit into not only a platonic ordering of the elements, but into connection with each other.[84] The bestiaries and riddles, drawing on the work of the classical and medieval naturalists, are showing us an indivisible system of interactive and proliferate nonhuman agents, and an interest in the order of the earth as profoundly interconnected.

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