

Chapter 4

NATURE AND SALVATION

EARLY MEDIEVAL MISCELLANIES brought the natural world firmly within the province of Christian philosophical learning and co-opted it for the much larger purposes of consolidating the authority of the Church. This took a great deal of continuous recopying and re-collocation of texts, an effort that was justified by the practical utility of the material to the makers of the miscellanies. These makers—anonymous local priests tasked by their bishops with improving the faith of their flocks—recognized the utility of the natural world in accessing their audiences’ imaginations as a gateway to faith.

This access was based on the fourfold way of seeing known in the later Middle Ages as the *quadriga*, first expressed by Origen and expounded by John Cassian in the fourth century (see Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion).¹ The *quadriga* taught that the Bible has four levels of meaning: the historical, allegorical, tropological or moral, and anagogical or spiritual. The progression from the first to the second levels was the most discussed, and the full four levels were rarely expounded, but they were known to biblical exegesis from the patristic period onwards. Alcuin, for example, recognized three ways of seeing—corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual—in a letter of 798 to his pupil Fredegisus.² The essential point of this method was that one subject could represent several different things depending on how it was interpreted. Jerusalem could be, at the same time, the earthly city, the Church of Christ, the heavenly city, and the human soul.

The allegorical sense was of particular interest because it provided a means of linking the words of Scripture with the things of nature.³ In other words, the allegorical hermeneutic method revealed the link between the visible physical world and the invisible world of God. It was easy to understand and easy to demonstrate. And from the allegorical sense, one could proceed to the moral and spiritual, correcting not only belief but also oneself and so coming closer to spiritual salvation. One of the stated aims of Charlemagne’s reforms was, after all, the moral improvement of the empire.⁴

This chapter considers the evidence of five miscellanies containing the *Physiologus* for the application of allegorical readings both within and across texts about the natural world. The first half of the chapter investigates the different ways that these readings could be shaped and deployed. The second half is a close study of the famous *Physiologus* illustrations in Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 318. While these drawings have been extensively studied by art historians, they have never been considered within a whole-codex context, and their allegorical significance both for the *Physio-*

1 Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*; Lubac, *Histoire et esprit*. See also Robertson, *Lectio Divina*.

2 “Tria sunt genera visionum: unum corporale, aliud spiritale, tertium intellectuale.” MGH Epp., 203–4. See Collins, *The Carolingian Debate*, 17.

3 Harrison, “Hermeneutics and Natural Knowledge,” 345.

4 Keefe, *Water and the Word*, 5.

logus and for early medieval nature within the compilatory culture discussed in this and the previous chapter, has gone largely unnoticed. They reveal the true extent to which early medieval manuscript makers innovated when working with inherited material about the natural world.

Allegorical Interpretation

The practice of allegorical interpretation in miscellany manuscripts is especially evident in two *Physiologus* codices: Montecassino, Archivio dell'Abbazia, MS 316 and MS 323. These two manuscripts, separate volumes produced as a pair, are of Italian origin and date from the second quarter of the ninth century, according to Bischoff. If his dating is correct, the manuscripts were made not long after the composition of the letter by Jesse of Amiens on baptism in 811 or 812 and the composition of Hrabanus' *De rerum naturis* between 842 and 847, both texts that were copied into these codices. These are therefore miscellanies that were newly compiled in the mid-ninth century from available source material, rather than duplicated from available exemplars, and so can be taken to reflect a specific, contemporary set of intellectual practices and requirements.

The common factor behind the majority of texts in Montecassino, Archivio dell'Abbazia, 316 and 323 is their focus on allegorical interpretation. The Latin glossary (12), for example, prefers symbolic *interpretamenta* to literal ones: "cornum," horn or javelin, is "fortitudo uel regnum," fortitude or royal power/kingdom (p. 23, l. 19); both "dexter," "right," and "draco," dragon, are translated as the devil, "diabolus" (p. 23, lines 27 and 29); "candelabrum" is "ecclesia," the Church (p. 23, l. 12). Not only the glossary, but Eucherius' *Instructiones*, the *Physiologus*, the explanations of winds, the sun and thunder, and the texts on the mass and baptism provide allegorical explanations of their subjects. The guiding principle behind this compilation of texts is not only to assist with reading the Bible and understanding the example of biblical characters: it is also to interpret and understand the wider world as an extension of God. The sun is explained as the light of Christ, thunder is used as a way to introduce four biblical characters who rose to the sky, and the seven winds are listed so that the reader might learn, at the end, that the Saviour resides beyond the stars. These texts reveal that a knowledge of God in the world was to be gained through the study of language and of observable phenomena.

The figure at the heart of this desire for knowledge is that of the human being. Humanity was made in God's image, it was for humanity that Christ suffered on the Cross, and human history was the history of salvation. Seeking God in the natural world and in language was done so that humanity might be saved. These texts therefore reflected the human desire to come closer to God. This is evident in the anonymous explanation of the Mass on pp. 56–57. It makes use of the four-part exposition from Augustine's epistle 149, as well as the seven-part outline from Isidore of Seville's *De ecclesiasticis officiis* I.15.⁵ These sources make the anonymous text a logical, author-

5 Geiselmann, *Die Abendmahlslehre*, 104–5.

itative break-down of the Mass and its spiritual purpose. Most interesting, however, is that the explanation also contains extracts from Hrabanus Maurus' *De rerum naturis*, with their interpretations of the figure of the human being—*homo*—in Gospel parables. The vivid first interpretation is of the person with the shrivelled hand from Matthew 12:10 and Mark 3:1, "*homo manu habens aridam*," which is interpreted as "*animam misericordiae*," the soul's mercy (p. 56). The second is from Matthew 12:43, on the impure spirit leaving a person's body, "*homo de quo in mundus spiritus exiens rursum*," interpreted as penitence (p. 57). The third is from Matthew 13:3, on the man who sowed his field with mustard-seed, "*homo qui seminavit in agro suo sinapis*," interpreted as Christ (p. 57). There are two further interpretations of *homo* in Isidore of Seville's *Allegoriae quaedam sacrae scripturae* (item 3), on the man with a hundred sheep and the man who planted a vineyard (Matthew 18:11 and 21:33/Luke 15:4 and Mark 12:1, pp. 52–53). The Bible is the story of humanity, which is a subject of allegorical study in these Montecassino manuscripts. It is no accident that explanations of the sacraments of communion and of baptism, both of which are doors to salvation, were included in these books.

Allegory for Salvation

Two other *Physiologus* miscellanies also focus very closely on human redemption and salvation. The first of these is Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud. Misc. 129. It was compiled in the early ninth century in the Main river valley—that is, in the region of influence of the great Insular foundation that was Fulda, as well as many smaller monastic foundations dating back to the circle around St. Boniface. Its adherence to the same Insular traditions is evident from the calligraphic Insular minuscule used throughout, and from the regularly titled and carefully copied Insular-influenced contents. The texts are presented one after the other, without codicological breaks, in a few confident hands that at times tend to cursivity, indicating a swift and straightforward production process.

As a whole, this collection deals with penitence, but was evidently intended to be deeply spiritual, inspiring, and in places even joyful in tone. Referring to Paradise, one of the anonymous expositions describes it as a place "where there is unfailing light, everlasting joy and life eternal, where evil will not be seen and good will never fail" (23v, lines 1–3).⁶ The author of these lines drew on contemporary Insular descriptions of heaven, without copying them verbatim.⁷ The focus of the compilation is firmly on salvation rather than on penance, although sin, vice, and fear of God are addressed in a number of texts (e.g. item 13). In item 26, a typical example of the tone set by many of the homilies, Augustine's sermon 326, "On the birthday of the twenty martyrs," sets up the martyrs as an exalted, emotionally charged example to follow: "And indeed on earth they had nothing, but in heaven they possessed everlasting felicity. They were

⁶ "Ubi lumen indeficiens, ubi gaudium sempiternum et uita perennis, ubi non uidebitur malum et non deficiet bonum."

⁷ Pelle, "Source Studies," 69–70, esp. note 141.

hurrying off, fully committed, toward heaven, and running along the road of life without a worry in the world; and while still a long way off they were stretching out their hands for the palm. Run, saints; so run that you may obtain it (1 Cor. 9:24)."⁸

Allegorical interpretation is at the heart of these joyful eschatological texts. On fol. 97v, for example, the 12 apostles are interpreted as the 12 stones laid in the foundation of the heavenly city.⁹ Natural imagery is used throughout the compilation to make these allegorical interpretations comprehensible. Thus, the tree in the Garden of Eden is used to explain the spiritual implications of evil in item 11; item 12 is a meditation on the sheep, wolves, serpents, and doves in Matt. 10:16, and what they represent; item 26 discusses the branches and flowers emerging from the rod of Jesse; and item 37 (the *Physiologus*) gives allegorical interpretations for each animal, plant, or stone. Other texts focus on other subjects but incorporate natural elements. This is the case with the final item, the extract from Jerome's commentary on the Song of Songs, which is concerned chiefly with the heavenly Jerusalem and with the dove; and with the brief exposition on the meaning of stars in the extract on fol. 43r. This collection therefore uses allegory of the natural world to focus closely on spiritual redemption and the hope that it offers.

The now destroyed manuscript Chartres, Médiathèque L'Apostrophe, MS 63 (125) offers a parallel compilation. It is not possible to say a great deal about it here, since all that is now available is a list of contents, together with opening lines and a few closing lines. Nevertheless, these contents do indicate that the manuscript's compilers had a similar interest in salvation history. The codex contains Ambrose's commentary on the first six days of Creation, and a text by him on the virtues and vices (2), as well as a commentary on Genesis (4) which makes use of three levels of seeing. Additional allegorical texts that would have been useful to exegetes include the commentaries on Genesis and the six days of Creation, as well as the *Physiologus* and excerpts from book 13 of the *Etymologiae* on the world and its parts. The second half of the manuscript demonstrates a significant linguistic and lexical interest. It contains the first book of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* and a portion of his *Differentiae*—sets of distinctions between words which have similar meanings—as well as Jerome's epistle 29 to Marcella explaining some Hebrew words, and a work on the names of God. It seems that this miscellany was made along the lines of those compilations discussed in Chapter 3, with a focus on language as a means for understanding Scripture. Although here, too, there is a significant interest in salvation, it is approached through lexical and etymological learning: something which is entirely absent in the Oxford manuscript. This may be attributable to the difference between Insular and continental traditions.

Both these miscellanies exemplify the increased allegorical use of the natural world for stimulating thinking about moral living and salvation during the early Middle Ages. They demonstrate that those in charge of compiling books for communities were engaged in the same dialogue across different centres of production. This alle-

⁸ Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, trans. Hill and Rotelle, 170.

⁹ "Nunc xii lapides paradiso in fundamento ciuitatis ponuntur."

gorical hermeneutic method, with its emphasis on both language and nature, represents perhaps the highest peak of innovation for early medieval miscellanies.

Compilation and Christian Time

As we have already seen, miscellany compilers created new contexts and meanings for texts. This was the case for Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 318, an apparently random compilation which, like the other *Physiologus* miscellanies, was nevertheless put together with the greatest of care. Similarly to the Montecassino, Oxford, and Chartres manuscripts, the contents of this ninth-century codex were selected based on an interest in Christian time. Here, however, the focal point was human history.

The contents are as follows:

1. Antonius, *Life of St. Simeon the Stylite*
2. Isidore of Seville, *De ortu et obitu patrum*
3. *Physiologus*
4. Fredegar, *Chronicle*
5. List of Egyptian days
6. Unknown homily on Matt. 17.1–9
7. Homily attributed to St. Ephrem
8. *Probationes pennae*, two lines of verse on the difficulty of writing, and two medical recipes for palsy and headache
9. On the seven miracles of the world

The historical work in question is a copy of Fredegar's *Chronicle*, which is also the longest text in the manuscript: it takes up 100 out of the 131 folios. The text has an uncertain authorship, problematic transmission, and extensive, frequently unique contribution to Frankish history alongside the *Annales regni francorum*.¹⁰ It is now generally accepted that it was composed around 659 by a single author with links to Burgundy and later Austrasia, possibly Metz, who may have belonged to the Columbanian monastic milieu.¹¹ The *Chronicle* consists of six parts: histories by Isidore, Jerome, Hydatius, and Gregory of Tours, the *Liber generationis* (attributed to Hippolytus of Rome) and an original addition. These six parts were divided into four books, of which I to III extend from the beginning of the world to 584 CE. Book IV continues through to 642 or 658, depending on the copy.¹² The Continuations, which it seems were commissioned

10 The most recent edition of the *Chronicle* is in Wolfram, Kusternig, and Haupt, eds., *Die vier Bücher der Chroniken*; it builds on Fredegar, *Fredegarii chronicorum*. Roger Collins has compiled a detailed list of the extant manuscripts with a discussion of the text's transmission history in his *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*. The question of date and authorship is addressed in the seminal studies by Goffart, "The Fredegar Problem," and Erikson, "The Problem of Authorship." Further studies include Scheibelreiter, "Gegenwart und Vergangenheit," and Wood, "Fredegar's Fables."

11 Wood, "Fredegar's Fables," 360.

12 Goffart, "The Fredegar problem," 206.

by members of the Carolingian royal family, extend the chronicle to 768.¹³ The Bern manuscript does not contain the full text of the *Chronicle*—in particular, that section of it taken from Hydatius is not present—but this is not unusual among extant copies.

The collocation of a historical text with an allegorizing text on animals, plants, and stones is unusual in the early Middle Ages. The most obvious shared feature between the *Chronicle*, the commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel, the *Life of St. Simeon the Stylite, Senior* and Isidore's *De ortu et obitu patrum* is the use of material from Isidore. The *Chronicle* gives the Augustinian six ages of the world from Isidore's history, which are divided into genealogical lists of figures from the Old Testament beginning with Adam, and lists of Egyptian and Roman rulers down to Heraclius. The *Physiologus* borrows some of its animal descriptions from the *Etymologiae*. *De ortu et obitu patrum* is itself by Isidore and in its full form contains eighty-six brief biographies of figures from the Old and New Testaments, including several prophets' lives.¹⁴ The Bern copy begins with Adam and ends with David.

Although thematically these texts appear to be quite different, they do show by this very difference the importance of Isidore as an authority in a range of subjects. Already, perhaps, Isidore's popularity from the late seventh century onwards provides a reason for combining these texts within the same miscellany. Yet all the texts also show evidence of a certain interest in the lives—and deaths—of figures significant to Christianity. This is clear from the Isidorean genealogies in the *Chronicle* and indeed from other elements of it, such as the list of popes; from *De ortu et obitu patrum* and from the *Life of St. Simeon the Stylite*. St. Simeon is held up as an example for emulation by Gregory of Tours in the *Historia* (VIII.15), through the imitation of his lifestyle by St. Vulfoiaic. The life may therefore have been selected to complement Gregory's text in Fredegar.

The early medieval focus on using the created world as part of Christian allegorical interpretation provides an even stronger reason for the collocation of these texts, however. The focus of these works is on time: not simply the historical time of the *Chronicle* but also Christian time. Indeed, history and the history of salvation are indivisible. The purpose of a list of fathers and sons, from Adam to David as in *De ortu et obitu patrum*, is to show that history is a single whole. There is an unbroken connection between the present and the biblical past. History is furthermore measurable by the lifespans of human beings: the *Chronicle* gives the age of each male biblical figure at the time he produced his heir, making it possible to calculate with relative precision the length of each historical age. The lives of human beings thus have a place in history that is commensurate with the strength of their faith.

For exegetes writing in the early Middle Ages, the biblical story of salvation was paralleled by the histories of their own peoples, and there is an echo of this in the *Chronicle*.¹⁵ Fredegar was the first to use the fifth-century *De excidio troiae*, a history of

¹³ Fredegar, *Fredegarii chronicorum*, xxv–xxviii.

¹⁴ PL 83.130–156. See also Vaccari, “Una fonte.”

¹⁵ Mayeski, “Early Medieval Exegesis,” 87.

the Trojan War attributed to Dares Phrygius, to stress the Trojan origin of the Franks. Fredegar of course had a political purpose: his patron was Dagobert I.¹⁶ The claim of descent from the Trojan kings justified and asserted the right of the Franks to occupy the former territory of the Holy Roman Empire. In the early Middle Ages, this claim would furthermore have been supported by Isidore's identification of Dares Phrygius as the first secular historian (with Moses as the first ecclesiastical historian).¹⁷

The Bern *Physiologus* Illustrations

The innovations of the decorative program in this manuscript have been noted by various scholars, but their astonishing significance as a whole has been entirely overlooked.¹⁸ They are a significant supplement to this manuscript's focus on the history of salvation. The drawings are executed in an illusionistic style inherited from antique Greco-Roman pictorial traditions, like those in the fourth-century Vatican Virgil, to which the Bern *Physiologus* has been compared.¹⁹ The effect is one of three-dimensional, vivid, realistic, and skilfully executed figures. In the early Middle Ages, this was not unique to the *Physiologus* in Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 318: the so-called Rheims School produced several manuscripts illustrated in this style in the ninth century, including the Ebo Gospels, the Troyes and Utrecht Psalters, and the Gospels of Saint-Thierry (or the Hincmar Gospels).²⁰ Evidently, highly skilled artists able to work in this prestigious antique style were trained in the early medieval Frankish world. But the technical skill of these drawings is just a small part of their complexity, which is enshrined in their manuscript context and interaction with the *Physiologus* tales.

The art historian Koert van der Horst believed that the Bern *Physiologus* was a more faithful replication of late antique original illustrations than the Bibles, Gospel books, and Psalters produced at this time, as it did not undergo modifications as part of "a carefully planned reform programme."²¹ However, this is not the case. The text underwent changes each time it was reproduced and at Rheims two additional illustrated chapters were added to it. The first of these is *Galli cantus*, the crowing cockerel, the text for which is taken word-for-word from sections 5, 24, and 88 of the *Hexaemeron* of Ambrose.

16 Young, *Troy and Her Legend*, 57. See also Yavuz, "Transmission and Adaptation."

17 *Etymologiae* 1.42.

18 Mutherich, "Carolingian Manuscript Illumination" and *Studies in Carolingian Manuscript Illumination*; Koehler and Mutherich, *Die Karolingischen Miniaturen*; Hicks, *Animals in Early Medieval Art*, among others.

19 Nees, "The Illustrated Manuscript" and *Frankish Manuscripts*. The Vatican Vergil is digitized at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.3225. It is only 160 × 160 mm compared to the 255 × 180 mm of the Bern manuscript, but this does not exclude the possibility that the exemplar for the *Physiologus* was larger.

20 For a detailed discussion of these manuscripts, see Horst, Noel and Wüstefeld, eds., *The Utrecht Psalter*, 24–84 (on the Utrecht Psalter), as well as 104–19 and 168–255 (on the other manuscripts).

21 Horst, "The Utrecht Psalter," 77.



Figure 4.1. *Galli cantus*, the singing cockerel, beneath the illustration for the Indian stone.
 Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 318, fol. 21r. Used with permission.



Figure 4.2. *Caballus*, the horse, with its rider. Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 318, fol. 22r. Used with permission.

The second is *Caballus*, the horse, taken from Isidore's *Etymologiae* XII.1.42–8.²² The *Galli cantus* image shows three birds, two of which may be singing, perched on a beam, with three archways in the background (Figure 4.1). *Caballus* depicts a man on a galloping horse (Figure 4.2). It is possible that they represent an original ninth-century addition to this manuscript.

The text of *Galli cantus* may have been added to the *Physiologus* at some stage long before Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 318 was copied, particularly since it is also found in Brussels, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, MS lat. 10066–77, which is not related pictorially to Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 318. The two manuscripts may therefore depend on an exemplar or set of exemplars that already contained *Galli cantus* and dated to before the ninth century. However, the text of *Caballus* is not found in any other Greek or Latin *Physiologus* and relies on Isidore's seventh-century encyclopedia. It cannot therefore have been present in a Greek exemplar, nor in the fourth-century Latin translation which served as, or lay behind, the exemplar for the Bern manuscript. The art historical evidence suggests that the exemplar from which the *Physiologus* in Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 318 was copied may have been made no earlier than the seventh century.²³ The existence of a *Physiologus* with a new chapter as early as the seventh century indicates an early medieval interest in and desire to expand the text. Similarly, the presence of the additional drawings in the Bern *Physiologus* reveals both the text's significance, and the willingness of early medieval compilers to expand and innovate. This is especially clear from the example of *Galli cantus*, as we shall see below.

²² Henkel, *Studien zum Physiologus*, 26.

²³ Tselos, "A Greco-Italian School," 5–13.



Figure 4.3. The bathing devil in Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 318, fol. 17v. Used with permission.

The Bern *Physiologus* also contains one other drawing that distinguishes it from other manuscripts and may not have been copied from a pre-existing model: the illustration that seems to accompany the chapter on the salamander on fol. 17v. This chapter is entitled *De natura animalis qui dicitur salamandra* and lists the characteristics of the animal: if it enters a furnace it extinguishes the flame; if it enters a warm bath, the entire bathroom grows cold. The *Physiologus* compares this behaviour with the biblical parable of the three boys who were thrown into a furnace, where the power of Christ protected them and induced the flames to attack their enemies instead. Just before the chapter's *incipit* is the small painting in question, without an enclosing frame, depicting a small, hairy, man-like figure with slightly curving horns, sitting in a round wooden bathtub surrounded by grass and plants (Figure 4.3). His prominent lower lip gives him a comically mournful air.

This drawing floats ambiguously between the chapter on the salamander and the preceding chapter on the stag.²⁴ The stag is said to spew water at its enemy, the dragon, which it then swallows, and this action is interpreted in the text as the drowning of the devil's works in the bath of rebirth or baptism. The figure in the bath has all the features of a devil rather than a salamander, but it could be sitting either in a cold bath, or in a bath of baptism. The ambiguity of its interpretation was almost certainly a deliberate choice made by the Frankish artist (and we have no reason to suppose that the illustrator of this devil was not also the manuscript's main illustrator).²⁵

²⁴ Woodruff, "The *Physiologus* of Bern," 250, believed it was part of the salamander chapter.

²⁵ Nees, "The Illustrated Manuscript," studied this illustration. Some similar motifs, of both baptisms and demons, are present in other early medieval art. A few examples include Musée de Picardie, Amiens, M.P.1875.61: an ivory book plaque from Rheims, dated to the last quarter of the ninth century with three scenes from the life of St. Remigius, whose central scene shows the miraculous baptism of a dying man; British Museum, OA.3065: an ivory from the Tournai

The carefully curated placement of the bathing devil illustration is only one of a series within this manuscript. Like the added drawings, the positioning of the entire series of paired illustrations is also meticulously thought-out. On fol. 8v, the miniatures for the story of the lizard and the charadrius bird appear next to each other. Each of these stories describe the loss of eyesight and the importance of looking at the right object in the right way or at the right time. The person responsible for the organization of the manuscript made an effort to link these related stories together visually through the illustrations—consciously intending them to be discussed as part of the subject of vision—even though this meant that the following page was a plain block of text. In general, the illustrator avoided leaving pages unadorned: only four of the thirty-two folia containing the *Physiologus* are plain.

The same paired layout is repeated on fol. 21r, with the miniatures for the stories of the Indian stone at the top and *Galli cantus* at the bottom. The link between these stories is less obvious, since *Galli cantus* is not a canonical *Physiologus* story, but the text is essentially a long list of the virtues of the cockerel's song, which—like the Indian stone—possesses miraculous restorative properties. The Indian stone heals sick people by pulling foul water from their bodies into itself and releasing it again after three hours in the sun. The miniatures are linked through the image of three drops of water falling from the stone and the image of three cockerels under three arches. By adding the *Galli cantus* miniature to the miniature of the Indian stone, the illustrator created a mirrored set of relevant symbolic materials for meditating on the miracle of the Resurrection. The discovery of Christ's empty tomb at dawn after three days—one of the best-known Christian stories—is symbolised by the number three, the sun (whose rise is heralded by the cockerel's song), the cockerel himself, and the salvific power of water.

Finally, the placement of the illustration for the story of the elephant was also a highly creative and deliberate choice. This was first observed by Bent Gebert. In this part of its story, the elephant, which cannot lie down and must sleep leaning against a tree, falls over when a hunter cuts down the tree. Other adult elephants come to help it stand, but fail (until a young elephant, which is not depicted here, succeeds). The miniature is presented vertically, at 90 degrees to the reader (Figure 4.4). The art historian Otto Homburger thought this was because the illustrator didn't have enough horizontal space to represent the full range of figures from left to right, but as Gebert noted, a variety of solutions was available to resolve this potential issue in other miniatures (such as the one on fol. 7r, where the figures are arranged vertically in varying

School showing a reed basket baptism of Christ in the top scene, dated ca. 900; Walters Museum, 71.305: a similar tenth-century baptism ivory; Hannover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS I 189, fol. 5r (http://digitale-sammlungen.gwlb.de/index.php?id=6&tx_dlf%5Bid%5D=9889&tx_dlf%5Bpage%5D=1): a tenth-century manuscript from Fulda containing the *vita* of St. Kilian which shows Kilian baptizing man in a wooden bath made of planks with two horizontal metal stripes; St. Peter fends off a devil: from the New Minster *Liber Vitae*, England (Winchester), ca. 1031, London, British Library, MS Stowe 944, fol. 7r (www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Stowe_MS_944).

19^r
 femina & concipiat. Cum ergo tempus uene-
 rit ut generet & introat in stagnum aquae & sic
 aqua ad mamillas eius & dimittit natum. ut re-
 uigando super aquas proximum habeat natem ma-
 tris suae. Serpens autem inimicus est aeliscanti quia
 pedibus suis interficit eum.



Figure 4.4. The falling elephant in Bern, Burgerbibliothek,
 MS 318, fol. 19v. Used with permission.

sizes).²⁶ The decision to turn the illustration 90 degrees and thus compel the reader to turn the book is a physical reminder of the elephant's fall. It creates haptic involvement in the story, providing an opportunity for active reading.

For all its simplicity, this is an astonishingly imaginative technique, still used today in printed books for creative audiences (such as storytellers and children). At the same time, there is a great deal of spatial ambiguity within the image: the tree is the central pictorial axis, where the fallen elephant is clearly struggling to rise with the help of a second, standing elephant. This was perhaps intended as a moralizing reminder of the tree in Paradise, which was often the central axis of pictorial depictions of the Fall. Yet, looking from the bottom of the page upwards, there is empty space behind the fallen elephant's elongated body, suggesting the movement of the fall into the bent—not yet broken—tree. This is also the direction from which the third elephant approaches. It is on higher ground and its head is hidden: it has not yet arrived, or it is mid-movement.²⁷ These details mean that the painting as a whole does not satisfy even as it is flipped. It demands not only movement in space to make sense, but also explanation of its movement in time. This elevates it from a clever device in an educational book to an exegetical tool, wielded by an artist aware of the moral value of Christian time.

The ease with which the *Physiologus* could be used to move from literal to allegorical to moral interpretations, so clear in this and the other images, must have been one of the principal reasons for its popularity, since it enabled teachers of all kinds to make that crucial connection between the visible, immediate world, and the insubstantial spiritual realm. The Bern *Physiologus* is a masterpiece that enables even modern eyes to see these associations. But glorious illustrations, while surely always welcome, would not have been essential in the early Middle Ages. All that was needed was a moderately competent guide to the material. Part of the genius of the *Physiologus* was that it was adaptable to any level, of both teacher and student: the story of Christ's baptism and its associated symbolism, for example, could be told simply, or it could be made rich and complex. The *Physiologus* provided the necessary material for both ends of the scale. Its different textual families almost certainly played a role in this, as well: each new copy and arrangement of the text provided new opportunities for juxtaposing the stories and creating new contextual links between them. Textual variance is not a unique feature of *Physiologus* manuscripts, of course, but it might, in this case, have contributed to the adaptability and therefore to the spread of the *Physiologus* as a work in miscellanies.

The arrangement of the miniatures in the Bern *Physiologus* wasn't simply a matter of having the intelligence to spot the iconography: it involved, firstly, reading the text at the planning stage to decide where both the old and the new drawings would be placed; and secondly, arranging the spacing of the text-blocks against the space the miniatures would take up, to ensure that the execution would match the planning. Both these matters required significant experience both of writing Caroline minuscule

²⁶ Gebert, "Der Satyr im Bad," 29.

²⁷ I am very grateful to Tina Bawden for her many insights into this illustration, which are reflected in this paragraph.



Figure 4.5. Haecpertus completes the text by writing around the miniature.
Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 318, fol. 8v. Used with permission.

and of painting framed miniatures. (It is clear from occasional overlaps that the drawings were added after the pages were ruled but before the text. One such overlap is evident in the last line on fol. 8v, where the loop of the g in “intellegibilis” extends into the red border of a miniature.) Moreover, the creator of the Bern *Physiologus* needed to be a master manuscript-maker, not only skilled in the arts of brush and pen, but also trained in the kind of project management ability demanded by the complex *mise-en-page* evident here. The manuscript is principally the work of a single scribe, probably the Haecpertus named in the colophon on fol. 130r.²⁸ I suggest that Haecpertus must have been not only the scribe but also the principal artist and master-maker of the *Physiologus*.

Haecpertus’ skills would have been far from unusual among early medieval manuscript-makers across Europe. Eadfrith both copied and painted the seventh- or eighth-century Lindisfarne Gospels, and innovated in the depiction of the Evangelists, deviating from his exemplar.²⁹ The Irish monk Macregol left a colophon in the eighth- or ninth-century Gospels on which he worked, in which he described himself as a scribe who had painted (“dipinxit”) the manuscript.³⁰ The scribe of the eighth-century Trier Gospels from Echternach, Thomas, signed his name on the pages containing miniatures, which suggests that he was also the artist.³¹ Similarly, Eadwig Basan is known

²⁸ “Haecpertus me fecit” (“Haecpertus made me”).

²⁹ Netzer, “The Design and Decoration of Insular Gospel-Books,” 235.

³⁰ “Macregol dipinxit hoc Evangelium. Quicumque legerit vel intellegit istam narrationem orat pro macreguil scriptori” (“Macregol painted this Gospel. Whoever should read or hear these words, pray for Macregol the scribe”); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D.2.19 (Rushworth Gospels or Macregol Gospels), fol. 169v: <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/p/4aee97d4-0845-44fa-8dd7-8c4902090db2>.

³¹ Trier, Domschatz, MS 61, fols. 5v, 11r, 125v. See Netzer, *Cultural Interplay*.

to have contributed to multiple manuscripts as a scribe and artist at Christ Church Canterbury.³² Haecpertus' execution was not flawless—he ran out of space at the top of fol. 8v and had to finish writing around the right-hand side of the miniature, for example—but his overall achievement is nevertheless impressive (Figure 4.5).

Conclusion

In the Middle Ages, memory was a sense-image inseparable from learning.³³ It was through the things one learned and memorized that one shaped one's inner self. This idea was reflected in monastic reading or *lectio divina*, which prescribed hours of silent meditation on texts. It also applied to lay people, who were no less in need of correction and assistance than those in the service of the Church in finding the path to salvation. The *Physiologus* was a means by which images of God's work could be imprinted in the memory—whether through silent reading or through hearing the text read aloud. This may be one reason for the many images in the copies of the *Physiologus* across the different linguistic traditions of this text. But even without illustrations, allegorical interpretations of the tales deepened their colours, imbued every object with significance and lent the actions of their characters special interest. In the *Physiologus*, allegory made the Created world of God part of the story of human salvation.

The manuscripts explored in this chapter highlight that the *Physiologus* was an extremely malleable text which could be adapted here to a very specific context. Through the miscellanies in which it was included, with their narrow focus on virtue and salvation, and allegory as a method for exploring and achieving these, the *Physiologus* itself became an eschatological work. By refining on the kind of textual collocation discussed in Chapter 3, these compilations had become not only even more focused, but able to move smoothly between an exploration of language, human history, and the wider world as an extension of God. It is in these and similar manuscripts that we see the peak of Carolingian innovation as regards both miscellanies and the natural world.

32 As a scribe, he worked on Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Plut. XVII 20 (a Gospel lectionary) and three British Library manuscripts: Add. 34890 (the Grimbald Gospels, www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_34890); Cotton Vespasian A.I (www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_Vespasian_A_I); and Harley 603 (www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_603). As an artist, he is believed to have worked on Hannover, Museum August Kestner, MS W. M. XXIa 36; London, British Library, MS Arundel 155 (www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Arundel_MS_155), which contains his portrait (fol. 133); and York, Minster Library, MS Add. 1. See Gameson, "The Colophon" and *The Scribe Speaks?*, and Karkov, "Writing and Having Written." My grateful thanks to Tina Bawden for drawing my attention to these scribes and references.

33 Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 19.

