

A Critical Study of The Old High German Physiologus
and Its Influence

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ABSTRACT

Hitherto, criticism of the Old High German Physiologus has been preoccupied with the philological and historical problems which it raises. Important as these are, research must not stop here. The document's lack of discrimination in its presentation of zoological material has led scholars to depreciate its value and to consider it an example of a regressive attitude in the field of natural science. The text throws up additional problems which cannot be understood by the application of scientific standards.

The attempt to understand the real meaning of the Physiologus leads to a consideration of the relationship of symbolism to the processes of the unconscious mind as set forth by C. G. Jung. In this context Jung's studies of religion, alchemy, and myth offer an insight into the text which has so far been obscured. A somewhat veiled but nevertheless remarkable correspondence is discovered between the naturalistic material of the Physiologus and the universal motifs of myth, fairy-tale, and religion. Particularly in the relation of the Physiologus to alchemy, for which Jung has postulated a "psychic" background, can the effectiveness of the document be seen and understood.

Mythical motifs occurring in the Physiologus can only be understood as the product of universal processes of the unconscious mind. Jung has called the part of the mind in which such processes take place the "collective unconscious". His study of the "collective unconscious" shows the importance of understanding and accepting its symbolical manifestation.

This casts new light upon the Physiologus. Whereas critics formerly found it difficult to understand its popularity and effectiveness during the Middle Ages, it is now found that this was due to the dynamic force of unconscious processes which operate in its symbolism. This makes a revaluation of the Physiologus imperative. Rather than a regressive form of natural science it can be understood as a symbolical document with great value for the spiritual life of the Middle Ages.

The symbolical formulation of religious themes in the Physiologus is unique in that it represents not only a mental condition, but also the process of transformation which gave rise to Christian thought. Its symbolical presentation of this transformation is a phenomenon which Jung takes to be beneficial and healing in its effect. Its refining function allows man to "ransom himself from the fear of death" and "reconcile himself to the demands of Hades."

The Physiologus is a document of considerable value as an expression of the archtypal images of the unconscious mind. It is not a mediaeval treatise on natural science, and cannot be understood or interpreted by means of scientific criteria.

PREFACE

The Old High German Physiologus came to my attention by chance as I perused the first volumes of Kürschner's Deutsche National-Literatur. The introductory sentence of der Ältere Physiologus, "Hier begin ih einna reda umbe diu tier uuaz siu gesliho bezehinen," immediately aroused curiosity. With the first reading of the text curiosity turned into peculiar fascination. It seemed imperative to become more closely acquainted with the text and to interpret and explore its nature and meaning.

In dealing with the ways and habits of animals as a zoological treatise, the document could hardly claim scientific distinction of a high order. Nor did it seem to fare better with its theological interpretations of animal characteristics. They appeared to be decidedly incongruous. Such evident shortcomings could not affect adversely the original fascination and the charm which clung to the work remained. In an effort to grasp the astonishing character and meaning of the text recourse was taken to the standard works of literary criticism of the Old High German period and later to more specialized studies. This proved informative to a degree but did not answer the question why the Physiologus should arouse such absorbing interest. Although many historical data were available there was nowhere a sign of awareness that the text might have

significance beyond its theological platitudes. The value judgements on the work tended to be depreciatory. It was taken to be a clear-cut example of the regressive attitude which was prevalent in natural science during the Middle Ages.

This type of criticism failed to do justice to the Physiologus. Some important aspects of this text eluded any scientific or rational approach. The available literature failed to illuminate them and an effort had to be made to broaden the basis from which the document might be approached. A more general study of the nature of symbolism was undertaken and this led to a reading of C. G. Jung's discoveries in this direction. Here lay the key to a wider and deeper understanding of the Physiologus. Not only did Jung's studies of religion and comparative mythology offer an important insight into the text, but his discussion of alchemy revealed a close relationship between this "science" and the Physiologus. The veiled but unquestionable correspondence of the symbols of the Physiologus to the universal motifs of myth, fairy-tale, and religion had never before been noted in the criticism of the texts. Thus it was found that the mythical motif of the "life of the hero", so characteristic of the mediaeval spirit, was represented in numerous sections of the Physiologus and occurred in many variations and guises.

Jung's demonstration of the "seelische Ursprung" of myth and the dynamic force with which mythical motifs operate finally made the effectiveness of the Physiologus comprehensible. It is therefore the purpose of the following study to demonstrate the relationships between the Physiologus, myth, and alchemy, and to explore the basis of these relationships. The parallel symbolism of these three entities can only be fully understood if we see their symbolical form as a product of the unconscious mind. The value, and indeed necessity, of "coming to terms" with symbolism in its various aspects will be discussed and will be taken as justification for a reevaluation of the Physiologus.

The first chapter will provide a summary of Physiologus research. It will try to explain the nature of the problem and the procedure to be followed in the subsequent chapters. The second chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the unconscious formation of symbols and their relation to intellectual processes. Its relevance to the Physiologus will be established. The third chapter will deal with the three surviving texts of the Old High German Physiologus and their Latin prototype. The twenty-seven animals of the texts will be considered individually and the existence of characteristically mythical motifs and their implications will be demonstrated. The fourth chapter will

provide a survey of the repercussions of the Old High German Physiologus on later German culture and a summing up of the findings and conclusions of the preceding chapters.

The Physiologus cannot be properly appreciated by the use of merely scientific criteria and we must look for its contribution and inner meanings in its use of central and dynamic images which spring from both the conscious and unconscious layers of the mind.

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CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHYSIOLOGUS RESEARCH

The Old High German Versions and Editions

The Physiologus is preserved in three Old High German versions. These are known as der #ltere Physiologus,¹ a text of the late Eleventh Century, der j#ngere Physiologus,² dating from the first half of the Twelfth Century, and the Milstat or rhymed Physiologus,³ likewise dating from the early Twelfth Century. All three texts are treatments of a Latin Physiologus abbreviatus known as the Dicta Chrysostomi which was apparently in wide circulation during the Middle Ages. Der #ltere Physiologus is an abbreviation of the Dicta Chrysostomi which, besides treating only the first twelve of the latter's twenty-seven sections, shows a considerable contraction of the material treated. This older text, often referred to as a fragment, is one of the oldest preserved

¹ Codex Vindabonensis 223 p.31r. - 33r., Vienna Hofbibliothek.

² Codex Vindabonensis 2721 p.130r. - 158v., Vienna Hofbibliothek.

³ Formerly belonging to the Kloster Milstat in K#rnten but now in the library of the Verein f#r die Geschichte und Landeskunde K#rntens in Klagenfurt.

vernacular versions of the Physiologus in European literature.
 Only a very short Anglo-Saxon metrical version of three
 chapters (panther, whale and partridge) antedates the Old High
 German "fragment". Der jüngerer Physiologus is a version which
 cleaves very closely to the Dicta Chrysostomi, covering the full
 number of sections and introducing no significant modification
 of the material. This applies likewise to the rhymed Physio-
 logus which is thought to be based directly on der jüngerer
 Physiologus.

Modern interest in the Physiologus was initiated by the
 philological positivists who followed the pioneers of Germanic
 Philology, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. In a series of editions
 beginning in 1824 the Old High German Physiologus was rescued
 from the dust and subjected to a succession of studies which
 led, on the one hand, to a flush of historical research in the
 second half of the century, and on the other hand, to Friedrich
 Wilhelm's⁵ critical edition of the texts in 1914. Wilhelm, in

⁴ Codex Exoniensis, published by Thorpe, Codex Exoniensis
 p.355-67 and Grein, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie I,
 p.233-238.

⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm, Denkmäler deutscher Prosa des
 elften und zwölften Jahrhunderts, Münchener Texte, Heft VIII,
 Munich 1914. Kommentar, 1. und 2. Hälfte, Münchener Texte,
 Heft VIII, 1916 and 1918.

conjunction with his parallel edition of der Ältere and der jüngere Physiologus, also brought out a critical edition of the Dicta Chrysostomi which is of great interest and value. Wilhelm's work represents the sum of linguistic criticism done to date on the Physiologus texts and is by far the most serviceable modern edition. This edition was used as the basis for the present study. The only Physiologus edition to appear since Wilhelm's work is the excellent reproduction of der Ältere Physiologus in Elias Steinmeyer's Die kleineren althochdeutschen Sprachdenkmäler which appeared in 1916. It is interesting to note that this collection of Old High German documents is not listed in the catalogues of the Library of Congress or of the British Museum.

The first edition of der Ältere Physiologus was brought out by Friedrich von der Hagen⁶ in 1824 and followed a transcript of the manuscript made by a certain Schottky.⁷ This transcript was not a reliable foundation for the publication of the text, and the next editor, E. G. Graff,⁸ introduced a number of

⁶ Friedrich von der Hagen, Denkmale des Mittelalters, 1829.

⁷ Cf. A. H. Hoffmann, Verzeichnis der altdeutschen Handschriften der K.K. Hofbibliothek zu Wien, p.363.

⁸ E. G. Graff, Diutiska, vol. III, 1829.

corrections in 1829. Graff edited both der ältere and der jüngere Physiologus. A. H. Hoffman⁹ likewise edited both these texts in 1830 and his reliable editing resulted in an accurate reproduction of the manuscripts. In 1837 H. F. Massmann¹⁰ brought out der jüngere Physiologus but in an edition since considered inferior to Hoffmann's, except with respect to the punctuation which he represented accurately. Müllenhoff and Scherer¹¹ published der ältere Physiologus in 1864 and provided a valuable commentary which contained linguistic criticism and an account of the most significant variations from a text of the Dicta Chrysostomi which had been published a few years earlier. In Kürschner's Deutsche National-Literatur¹² der ältere Physiologus was edited by P. Piper, accompanied by a modern German translation, and der

⁹ A. H. Hoffmann, Fundgruben für Geschichte deutscher Sprache und Literatur, vol. I, 1830.

¹⁰ H. F. Massmann, Deutsche Gedichte des zwölften Jahrhunderts, 2. Teil, 1837.

¹¹ Müllenhoff and Scherer, Denkmäler deutscher Poesie und Prosa aus dem VIII - XII Jahrhundert, 1864.

¹² P. Piper, Die älteste Literatur, 1885.

jüngere Physiologus¹³ was given a four-page discussion by the same writer. A selection comprising seven of the original twelve chapters of der Ältere Physiologus was also included in Braune's Althochdeutsches Lesebuch which first appeared in 1885 and is now enjoying its twelfth edition as a basic reader for students of Old High German literature. Between Massmann's edition in 1837 and Wilhelm's in 1914 der jüngere Physiologus made one more appearance in print. Friedrich Lauchert appended the text to his Geschichte des Physiologus along with a Greek text and a Latin fragment.

If it would be an understatement to say that editors have given due attention to der Ältere and der jüngere Physiologus, it would be as great an overstatement to say this of the third Old High German Physiologus. The single edition of the Milstat or rhymed Physiologus was brought out by Th. G. v. Karajan¹⁴ in 1846. Karajan put great emphasis on strict adherence to the manuscript and overlooked the re-arrangement of the material which is required to do justice to

¹³ F. Piper, Die geistliche Dichtung des Mittelalters, Vol. I, 1888.

¹⁴ Th. G. v. Karajan, Deutsche Sprach-Denkmale des zwölften Jahrhunderts, 1846.

its metrical qualities. The manuscript does not separate the verses but runs them together in long lines. Lauchert¹⁵ has, in fact, used the word Reimprosa to characterize the text. However this may be, the text is still awaiting a critical edition in which due attention is given to word-usage and the employment of rhyme.

Manuscript Problems

Since all three Old High German texts are extant in one manuscript only, textual criticism has never played a conspicuous part in any work done on the texts. The condition of the manuscripts is such that only minor emendations have been required to produce a satisfactory and reliable text. Wilhelm's critical texts of 1914 differ in minor points from the previous editions with respect to emendations but the difference is not sufficient to warrant discussion. Only single words or two-word phrases have been involved and there has usually been little or no variation in meaning. In many cases the emendation has been quite obvious,

¹⁵ Lauchert, Geschichte des Physiologus, 1889, p.119.

such as spor/spror ms., occurring in the first chapter of der #ltere Physiologus. Editors have unanimously agreed on the existence of a number of lacunæ in the texts. The missing passages could easily be reconstructed by reference to the Dicta Chrysostomi but no editor, with the exception of van Karajan, has attempted to do this. It has undoubtedly been felt that artistic merit was not at stake. There are a number of peculiarities to be noted in the texts, especially in that of der #ltere Physiologus. The information in this respect has been furnished largely in the Müllenhoff-Scherer and Wilhelm editions. Attention has been drawn to the fact that chapters 1-8 of der #ltere Physiologus differ considerably from the remaining four chapters. First of all, there is a suggestion that more freedom has been taken with the Latin prototype in the first eight chapters. These chapters are "bald mehr, bald weniger gekürzt und auch geändert",¹⁶ whereas chapters 9-12 appear to adhere more carefully to the Dicta Chrysostomi. As Wilhelm (p.17) has pointed out, the possibility is not precluded that the original already existed in this form. However, the separation of the two parts is made more distinct by linguistic differences,

¹⁶ Müllenhoff and Scherer op. cit., vol. II p.410.

a fact which weighs against the latter view. In chapters 1-8, for example, 't' is predominantly used for both 't' and 'd', while chapters 9-12 reverse this principle, frequently employing 'd' for 't' as well as 'd'. Further linguistic marks peculiar to chapters 1-8 are: 'n' for 'nd' and 'nt' (un for und), 'n' for 'ng' (sprinet for springet), the assimilation of 't' (gesliho for geistliho), 'ī' for 'ie' (fīnc for fienc), 'ū' for 'uo' (fūter for fuoter), and 'ē' for 'ei' (bezēchinen for bezeichinen). On the other hand, chapters 9-12 have the following distinguishing features: 'ū' for 'iu' (gebūdet for gebiutet), 'ui' for 'iu' (entluide for entliuhete), 'ō' for 'uo' (fōren for fuoren), and 'ē' for 'ie' (vērceg for vierzec). In addition to this linguistic evidence, the two parts of the text are distinguished from each other by the fact that the chapter-headings begin with chapter 9. Up to this point room has been left for the headings but not filled in. These facts have received different interpretations. Millenhoff and Scherer believed that they clearly indicated dual authorship of der #ltete Physiologus, while it has been alternatively suggested that different scribes worked on this particular manuscript. Wilhelm says discreetly but rather enigmatically: