

Summary

THE SHREW OR THE ERMINE? NEW MEANING OF ARISTOTLE'S TERM *MYGALE* IN THE MIDDLE AGES

In the Czech Medieval sources we can find different Latin variants of originally Greek noun *μυγαλή*, denoting some smaller representative of the family *Soricidae* from the order *Insectivora*. Czech glosses attached to the Latin variants *migale*, *micale*, *mitale*, *merhale*, *iugale* and others testify, however, that the Czech lexicographers and authors of various scientific treatises did not connect this word with the shrew but with some significantly bigger animal – probably with the ermine (family *Mustelidae*, order *Carnivora*). This paper tries to illuminate how and when did this change happen: whether it was caused by a mistake, originating sometimes during the two thousand years when the Greek word *μυγαλή* found its way from the ancient treatises into the Czech Medieval works, or whether it was motivated by a mistaken interpretation of the Czech authors.

The word *μυγαλή* spread into the Middle Ages from two very different texts: from Aristotle's treatise *Historia animalium*, and from the Bible (*Lev* 11,29–31) where the shrew belongs – together with the mouse, weasel and other beasts – to the ritually impure animals that are forbidden to eat. As it seems, the Medieval encyclopedists, who combined the scientific knowledge of Aristotle with the colourful narrative of biblical exegesis in their descriptions, found the meaning of this word not clear enough and so they likened this animal to the chameleon, or often considered it unidentifiable. The Medieval illuminators, in their turn, depicted this animal as a smaller beast of prey resembling the weasel. However, the animal called *gali* was depicted in a similar way. This word comes from Aristotle's *Historia animalium* where it denotes indeed the weasel or other weasel-like beast of prey, and it occurs for the first time in the Middle Ages in the 13th century, in the Latin translation of Aristotle's zoological treatise translated from Arabic by Michael Scotus. The word *gali* itself remained obscure for the Medieval encyclopedists and they were unable to identify the respective animal – this is best exemplified by the suggestion of Albert the Great who considered the *gali* to be the fox. It comes as no surprise, then, that Bartholomaeus Anglicus put the description of both animals together into a single pas-

sage. The names *gali* and *mygale* thus multiply the many nouns available in the Middle Ages for the weasel-like beasts of prey (*mustela*, *putorius*, *furunculus*, *ermidium* and others), and the word *mygale* is almost exclusively used to denote the ermine in the 14th and 15th centuries.

Keywords: medieval latin lexicography; ancient and medieval zoology; latin names of quadrupeds; Shrew; Weasel; Ermine; Aristotle; *Glossa ordinaria*; Thomas of Cantimpré; Bartholomaeus Anglicus

HANA ŠEDINOVÁ, Kabinet pro klasická studia FLÚ AV ČR, v. v. i., Na Florenci 3, 110 00 Praha 1, sedinova@ics.cas.cz.