



BRILL

Notes on a Renaissance Bestiary by Ulisse Aldrovandi

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Abstract

A unique codex in the University of Bologna, crafted as a single monographic volume, transmits an extremely interesting treatise by the naturalist and antiquary Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605). Entitled *Discorso sopra alcuni animali quadrupedi per i quali si possono esprimere i 7 peccati capitali*, literally 'discourse about those animals through which it is possible to [symbolically] express the seven mortal sins,' it was completed, according to an earlier copy (BUB Aldrov. 91, cc. 472^r–482^v), on 12 August 1578. The work was dedicated to Alessandro degli Orsi, a nobleman of the city and infantry commander in Hungary, who was honored in 1585 with the *gran croce*. This article suggests a reconstruction of lost decorations in one of the Orsi family mansions, either the Palazzo Orsi or the Villa Orsi. It also considers the moral implications of virtues versus vice represented by four-legged animals.

Keywords

bestiary – symbolism – emblematic – Ulisse Aldrovandi – virtues and vices – four-legged animals

During the Counter-Reformation, the city of Bologna took on a fundamental role in rethinking and developing visual art in society.¹ It was home, in fact, to prominent scholars and artists who were able to revolutionize the concept and representation of nature, paving the way for a renewed understanding of the

¹ Pigozzi, *Il Concilio di Trento e le arti 1563–2013*.

function of art, both from a sacred and profane angle.² Above all the figures taking part in this cultural movement, worthy of mention are the great cardinal Gabriele Paleotti (1522–1597) and the painters Annibale, Agostino, and Ludovico Carracci. If the former embodied the apex in terms of theoretical meditations on this aspect of Renaissance intellectual life, as demonstrated by his influential *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* (1582), the latter demonstrate the highest practical result of his theories, especially with the systematic application of the so-called ‘historical and realistic naturalism.’³

Within this vivid context, which witnessed a constant interplay between erudition and art, a significant case study is represented by MS 596-EE4, housed within the rare-book collections of the University Library in Bologna (BUB). This codex, crafted as a single monographic volume, transmits an extremely interesting treatise by the naturalist and antiquary Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605).⁴ Entitled *Discorso sopra alcuni animali quadrupedi per i quali si possono esprimere i 7 peccati capitali*, literally ‘discourse about those animals through which it is possible to [symbolically] express the seven mortal sins,’ it was completed, according to an earlier copy (BUB Aldrov. 91, cc. 472^r–482^v), on 12 August 1578.⁵ The work was dedicated to Alessandro degli Orsi, a nobleman of the city and infantry commander in Hungary, who was honored in 1585 with the *gran croce*.⁶

This discourse occurs in epistolary form. It probably followed Orsi’s request to learn which four-legged animals could appropriately symbolize the seven mortal sins and their seven opposite virtues. This question was very likely related to the development of the now-lost decorations of one of his mansions, either the Palazzo Orsi Marconi in Bologna or the Villa Orsi, located about fifteen miles from the city. Both constructions were renovated in or around the 1570s, and they very likely needed ideas for an ornamental apparatus.⁷

2 Prodi, *Arte e pietà nella Chiesa Tridentina*.

3 Prodi, *Il cardinale Gabriele Paleotti*, 527–536.

4 It consists of 36 folios (recto and verso), transcribed by a copyist. The handwriting is clear and well organized on the page. The version appears to be advanced and ready to be sent to its addressee.

5 Lugli, ‘Il laboratorio di Ulisse Aldrovandi,’ 160–175, esp. 172, n. 37.

6 Bonazzi di Sannicandro, *Elenco dei cavalieri*, 230 and n. 3.

7 An analogous example could be found in the Castello di San Martino in Soverzano, of the Manzoli family. The iconographic program of this building was accomplished by the scholar Giovanni Battista Bombelli. Manuscripts of these works are housed at University Library in Bologna: the first (BUB MS 312) consists of a short discourse, dated 1577; the second (BUB

Although Aldrovandi devoted most of his efforts to the natural sciences, he was not new to artistic concerns. He wrote several considerations on art and art theory, together with three ekphrases describing the decorations of his city palace and his countryside villa.⁸ Furthermore, his constant dialogues with Cardinal Paleotti around the composition of his *Discorsi* put him at the forefront of the iconological scholarship of Bologna.⁹ In addition, he was also keen in pursuing symbolic and emblematic culture in general, given his acquaintanceship with Achille Bocchi's Accademia Hermathena.¹⁰ So it is not by chance that Aldrovandi was approached to define an iconographic program within his city, not only with a specific zoological focus but also with an emblematic slant.¹¹

In line with Counter-Reformation sensitivities, the symbolic images Aldrovandi proposed were freed from a mythological and legendary legacy and were inserted within the boundaries of sixteenth-century natural science—which, at the time, did not dismiss literary imaginations, including medieval bestiaries. Aldrovandi provided an extensive, and often unconventional, number of options that could be used to this purpose. The matter is organized according to a *methodus*—a flow-chart that schematically governs the relationship among the seven sins/virtues and the animal associated thereto. The order of the matter is as follows: Pride vs. Humility (ff. 1^v–4^r); Greed vs. Generosity (ff. 4^r–9^r); Lust vs. Chastity (ff. 9^r–12^r); Rage vs. Patience (12^r–15^r); Gluttony vs. Fast (15^r–17^v); Envy vs. Charity (17^v–21^v); Sloth vs. Industriousness (21^v–27^r). The last section¹² of the booklet (ff. 28^r–36^v) is an addition to the previous discussions, especially on Pride (ff. 28^r–32^v), Greed (29^v–32^v), and Lust (32^v–36^v), where three animals are discussed specifically according to Dante's *Inferno* (1.31–60).

Nevertheless, Aldrovandi was not the first scholar who attempted this transition from a fantastic and irrational imagery to a realistic and rational one.

MS 2059) consists of a dialogue, dated 1585. The latter reviews the former account, also in consideration of the publication of Paleotti's treatise, which may have forced a reformation of the imagery previously depicted. See Ceccarelli and Aksamija, *Architettura, arte e mitologia familiare*.

8 Corrain, 'Il manoscritto 99 di Ulisse Aldrovandi,' 35–79.

9 Acciarino, *Lettere sulle grottesche*.

10 Angelini, *Simboli e questioni*.

11 Emblematics and natural science had a very deep conceptual exchange; see Enekel and Smith, *Emblems and the Natural World*.

12 This appendix may have been added subsequently to the first version of the text transmitted by the earlier copy BUB Aldrov. 91, cc. 472^r–482^v.

A long-lasting tradition, starting with Aldrovandi's forerunner, Conrad Gesner (1516–1565), built and reinforced the relationship between nature and this visual/literary genre. This trajectory culminated with the German protestant theologian Joachim Camerarius (1500–1574), who accomplished a collection of emblems, exclusively based on figurations deriving from the botanical and zoological fields.¹³ Several emblems included in his four-volume collection overlap some of Aldrovandi's iconographic proposals—even if their publication happens almost twenty years later than Aldrovandi's discourse. If this precludes Camerarius being a source of Aldrovandi's work, it still could show a methodological convergence between the two: in the attempt to apply their scientific approach to visual representation, both Aldrovandi and Camerarius reached similar results.

Aldrovandi's letter could provide the only testimony of a hypothetical portion of today's missing decorations. Thus, the present article aims to illustrate in detail the imagery arranged by Aldrovandi in his manuscripts, by associating the literary description given in the text with potential figurations that could contribute to the understanding of the development of its supposed final output. To do so, when possible, the manuscript will be compared to other works by Aldrovandi, printed editions and manuscripts, including the drawings and the paintings of his collection,¹⁴ to create a link with his previous and following works. If this cross-referencing phase does not provide results, other works will help identify the sources of the letter, such as natural-historical dissertations, symbolic collections, and books of emblems. Simultaneously, several ancient sources will be referenced, in order to reconnect the Renaissance reception of Antiquity with its archetypical form.

This article represents the very first stage of a more complex work that will involve further investigations of the text and its iconological reference and will ultimately lead to the publication of the critical edition of the manuscripts transmitting this iconographic program.

1 Pride vs. Humility

The first combination established by Aldrovandi is Pride ('Superbia') vs. Humility ('Humiltà').

13 Enekel, 'Camerarius's Quadrupeds'; Smith, 'Joachim Camerarius's Emblem Book on Birds'; Hendikx, 'Ichthyology and Emblematics.'

14 Alessandrini and Caragato, *Natura Picta. Ulisse Aldrovandi*.

The first animal mentioned in this regard is the goat. Even if it possesses an ignorant and dishonest nature, the goat always seeks to reach high places in spite of limits and difficulties.¹⁵ Thus, just like goats climb rocky cliffs aiming for the peak, proud and arrogant people struggle to ascend society through unscrupulous and ruthless endeavors. To prove this attitude, Aldrovandi mentioned two passages from the Psalms related to pride (74:5: 'dixi iniquis nolite inique facere et delinquentibus nolite exaltare cornu' [I said to the wicked: Do not act wickedly: and to the sinners: Lift not up the horn] and 82:4: 'super populum tuum malignaverunt consilium et cogitaverunt adversus sanctos tuos' [They have taken a malicious counsel against thy people and have consulted against thy saints]). The former, for example, evoked a physical attribute ascribable to the goat, i.e., the horns ('nolite exaltare cornu'), which was assigned to Pride via the Church Fathers.¹⁶ This reading, however, lacks a visual counterpart, in that the imagery of the goat reaching the highest heights is usually charged positively, like in Camerarius's emblems (Fig. 1).¹⁷ Probably for this reason, in Aldrovandi's posthumous zoological work *De quadrupedibus bisulcis libri*, published in 1621, this reference was replaced by a broader formulation that considered the goat as a generic symbol of sin,¹⁸ including, among others, also pride—and this mostly because of the Gospel of Matthew 25:32–33: 'Et congregabuntur ante eum omnes gentes et separabit eos ab invicem sicut pastor segregat oves ab hedis: et statuet oves quidem a dextris suis hedos autem a sinistris' [And all nations shall be gathered together before him: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left].¹⁹

15 The term chosen by Aldrovandi to express this negative inclination of the goat is 'fetido' (fol. 1^r). Its meaning can be deduced by the first edition of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, where it is stated (p. 343) that one of its semantic nuances derived from the Latin words 'turpis' and 'obscenus,' which bear a moral connotation, rather than from 'foetidus' (stinky), which sticks exclusively to the sensorial domain. However, many authors acknowledge the bad smell of the goat as a symbol of sin, among others Saint Eustaches (PL 50.748–754), Rhabanus Maurus (PL 112.914B, 952C), and Cornelius à Lapide; see Levi D'Ancona, *Lo zoo del Rinascimento*, 77–79.

16 Hieron. *Comment. in Job* 39 (PL 0770D), or Auctor Incertus [Rhabanus Maurus], *Allegoriae in universam sacram scripturam* (PL 112.0903C).

17 Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 74–76. More generally, see Ferro, *Teatro d'impresse*, 156–157 and 175–176.

18 Aldrovandi, *Quadrupedum omnium bisulcorum historia*, 671–672.

19 See also Augustine, *In Psalmum XXXIX enarratio*, 19 (PL 106. 1453C)

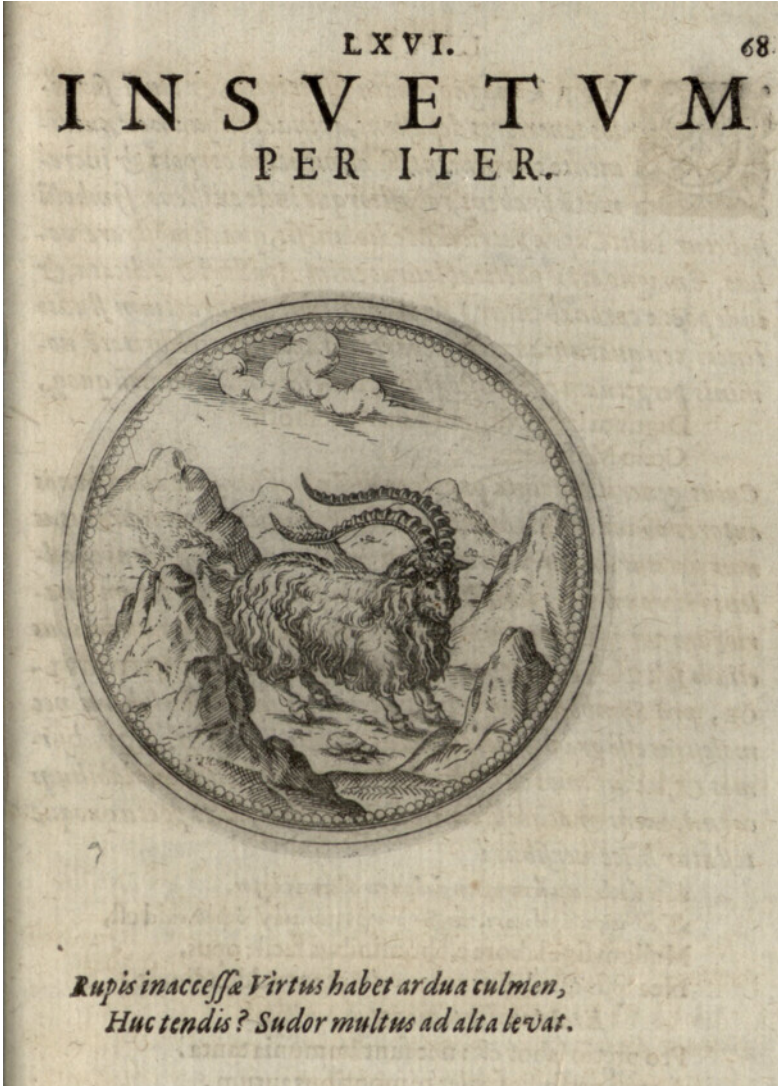


FIGURE 1 Ibex, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 1595, p. 68

The hyena is the second animal considered as a symbol of Pride. It is associated with this sin for a physical defect, i.e., the inflexibility of the neck (Fig. 2a): just like hyenas never bend their neck, the proud and arrogant never consider the possibility of ceding their ambitions despite a righteous cause. A biblical passage is hither recalled (Daniel 4:37: 'et viae eius iudicia et gradientes in superbia potest humiliare' [and his ways judgments, and them that walk in



FIGURE 2A
Hyena, engraving, Ulisse Aldrovandi,
De quadrupedibus digitatis, 1637,
p. 342

pride he is able to abase]), which demonstrates the originality of Aldrovandi's reading.²⁰ However, even in this case, matching figurations are not found, for hyenas were usually associated with instability, sexuality, sometimes with courage, or with the world of the dead,²¹ and hence were represented accordingly (Fig. 2b).²²

To contrast the symbols of Pride, Aldrovandi suggested several images that could represent its contrary, i.e., Humility. The first and most appropriate quadruped in this regard was considered to be the lamb, not only because it was often considered the embodiment of humbleness in ancient literature²³ but also because ancient hieroglyphic culture associated it with humility (Fig. 3).²⁴ Aldrovandi himself conceived the lamb as a symbol of Mercy ('*miseriordiae typus*') and Compassion ('*benevolentiae typus*'),²⁵ the latter also according to a clypeus described by Pighius.²⁶ And the fact Jesus Christ himself was addressed as the Lamb of God in the Gospel of John 1:29 ('*ecce agnus Dei qui tollit peccatum mundi*') [Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who taketh away the sin of the world]) established an inescapable link with this tradition, which in Aldrovandi's times appeared to have a strict convergence with archaeological finds emerging from the digs conducted in early Christian sites (Fig. 4).²⁷

20 See Druthmarus, *Expositio in Matthaicum*, LVI (PL 106. 1453C).

21 Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 81–83; see also Levi D'Ancona, *Lo zoo del Rinascimento*, 144–145.

22 Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 55.

23 Aldrovandi mentions Hor. *carm.* 2.17.32: '*nos humilem feriemus agnam*' [Your bard a humbler lamb will slay].

24 Among the various interpretations given by Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 74b–77a, which include folly, virtue, innocence, wealth, happiness, etc., the one that can correspond to Aldrovandi's humility is *Mansuetudo* (75b).

25 Aldrovandi, *Quadrupedum omnium bisulcorum historia*, 464, where the lamb is defined as a symbol of mercy and good will ('*agnus misericordiae*' and '*benevolentiae typus*'); see also Levi D'Ancona, *Lo zoo del Rinascimento*, 41–44.

26 Pighius, *Hercules prodicius*, 437: '*HIC MVRVS AHENEVS ESTO | BENIVOLENTIA BVONIS-SIMA GVARDIA.*'

27 Bosio, *Roma sotterranea*, 627.

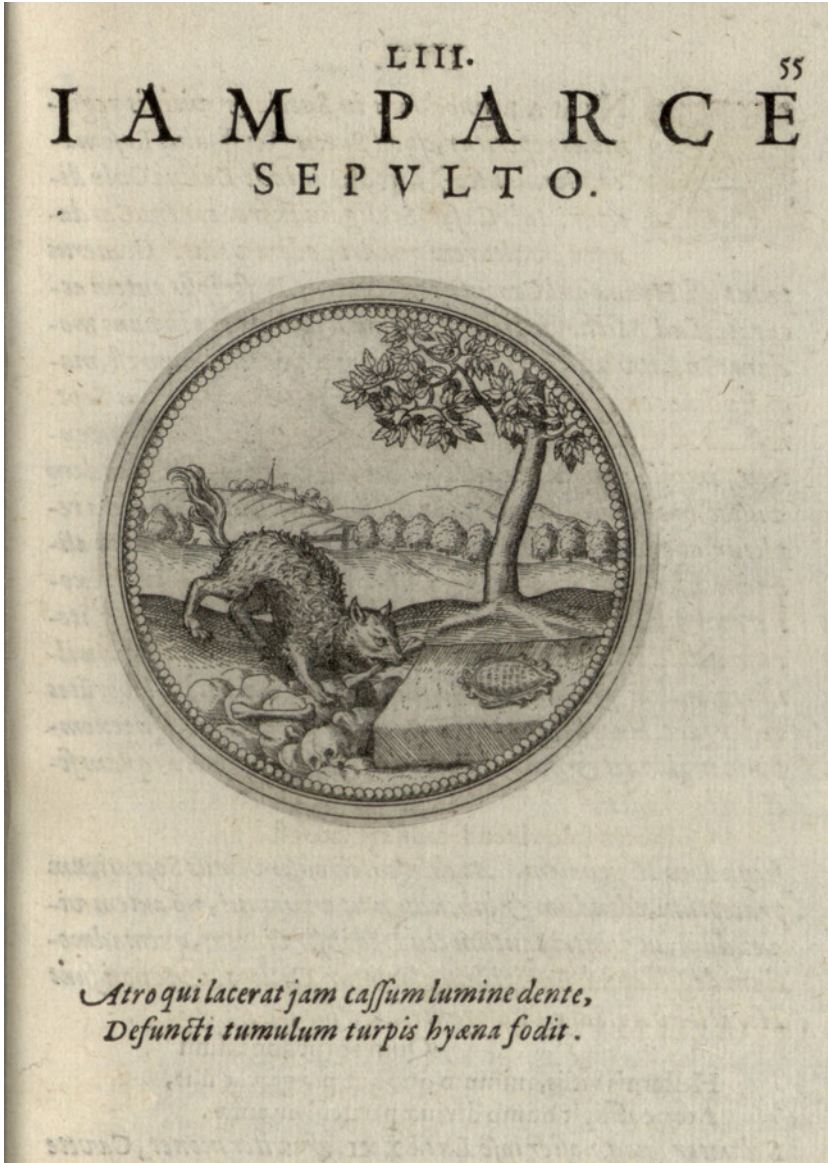


FIGURE 2B Hyena, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 1595, p. 55

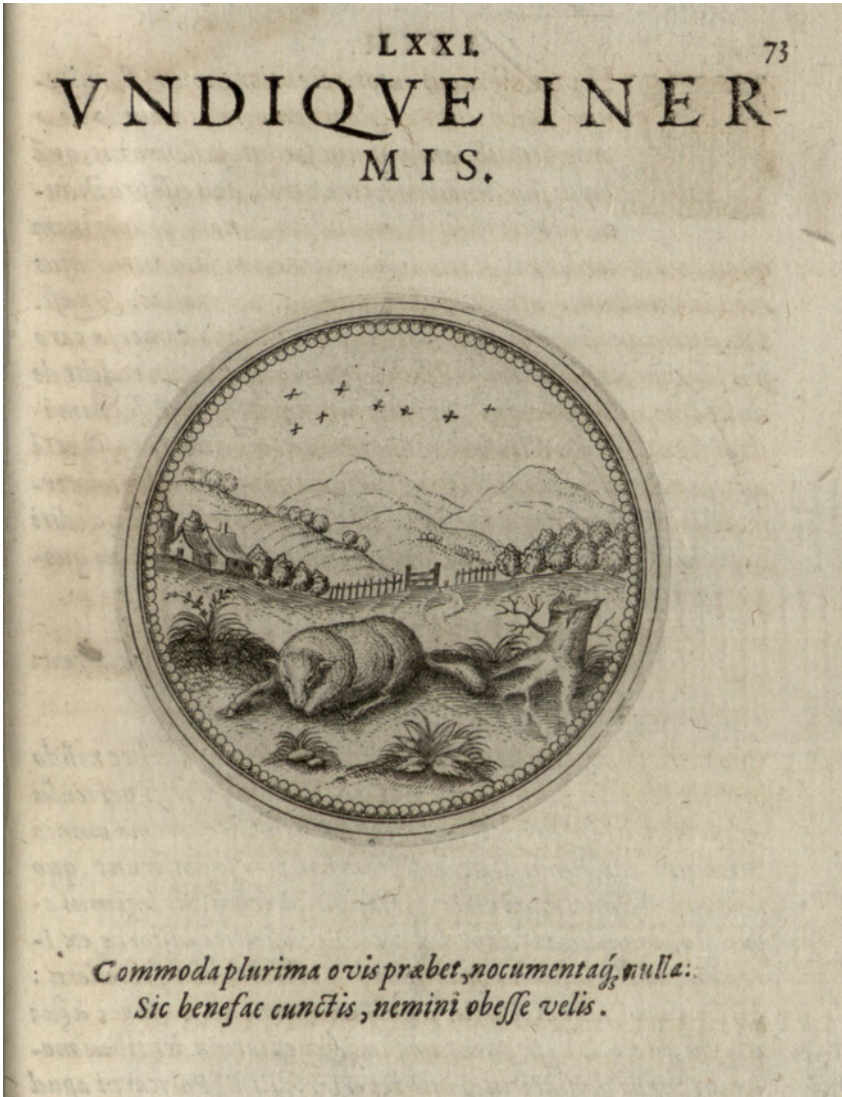


FIGURE 3 Lamb, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 1595, p. 73

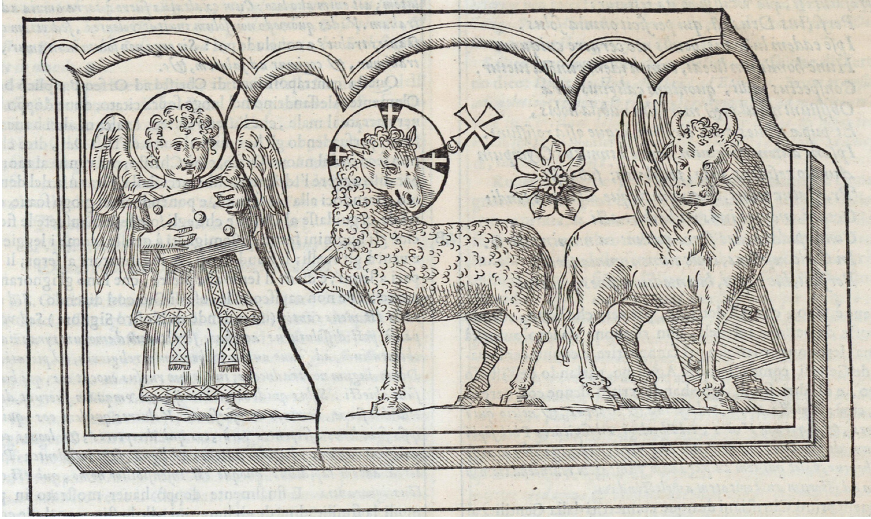


FIGURE 4 Lamb with tetramorph (Matthew and John). Antonio Bosio, *Roma sotterranea*, 1632, p. 627

Humility could also be represented by the wild goat called *damula* (Fig. 5). Even if this option could apparently overlap with the goat formerly deemed to be a symbol of pride, it ended up overturning the previous meaning, in that this animal was considered extremely shy and fearful. According to Isidore of Seville,²⁸ its etymology inferred that it could escape from someone's hands, even if no further evidence corroborates this reading.²⁹ Aldrovandi affirmed that the wild goat loved the mountains and the woods and that it used to feed on aromatic herbs and shrub leaves, which were usually vomited. It also fed on the so-called tarragon ('dragonetto') or on dittany, according to Aristotle and others,³⁰ when it needed to heal from the wounds inflicted by hunters (Fig. 6).

Lastly, bezoar, a particular type of wild goat (Fig. 7), was thought to hunt serpents, kill them with its breath, and eat them—at least according to Pliny (*Nat. Hist.*, 8.118) and subsequently to the *Physiologus*.³¹ All these features could indeed convey meanings related to Humility. In fact, the nature of the hum-

28 Isidore, *Etymologies*, 12.1.42 (PL 82.0427B). See also Gessner, *Historiae animalium lib. 1*, 335.

29 Ernout and Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologie de la langue latine*, 163.

30 Aristotle, *Historia de Animalibus*, 612a.

31 Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, pp. 72b–73a. Aldrovandi *Quadrupedum omnium bisulcorum historia*, p. 758.



FIGURE 5
Wild goat, engraving. Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Quadrupedum omnium bisulcorum historia*, 1621, p. 729

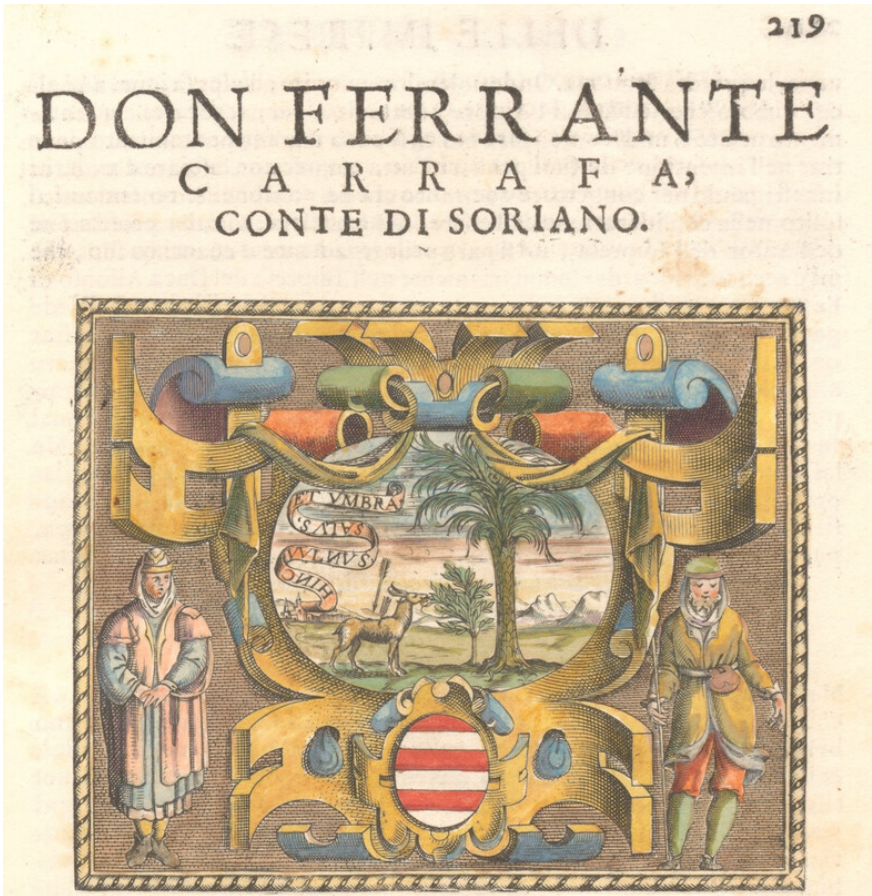


FIGURE 6 Wild goat, engraving of impresa. Girolamo Ruscelli, *Imprese illustri*, 1566, p. 219

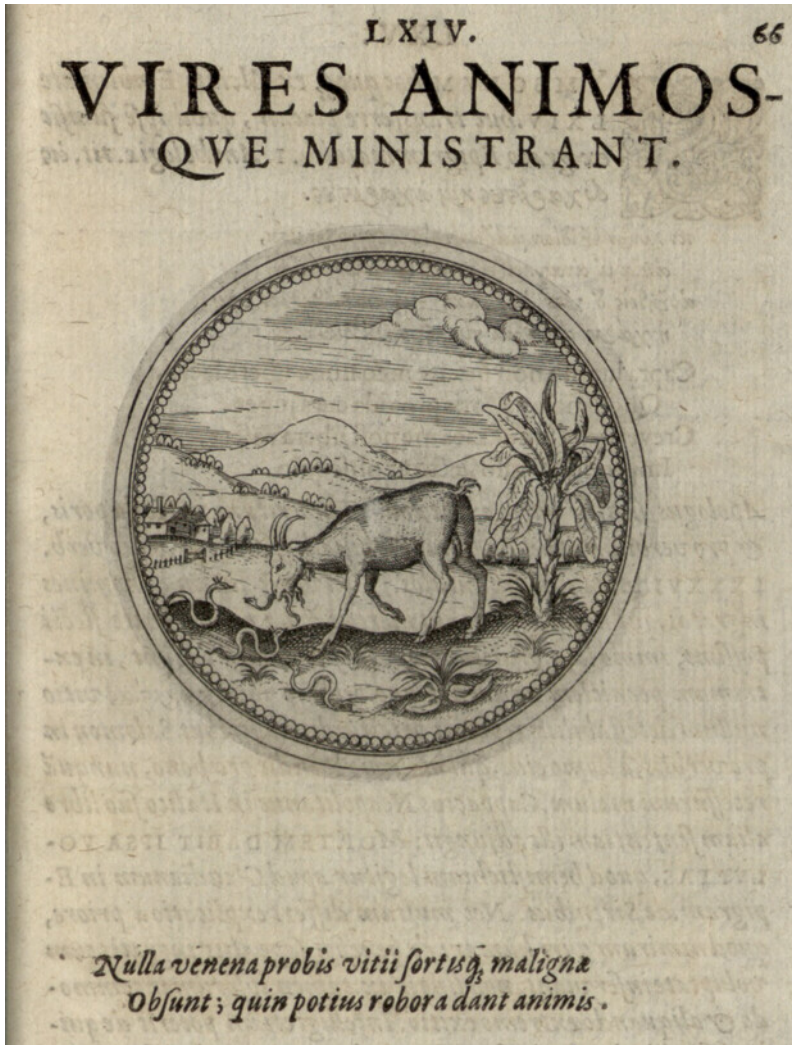


FIGURE 7 Wild goat or bezoar, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 1595, p. 66

ble is to avoid offending God and conflicting with neighbors, escaping pride and evil temptations. Aldrovandi said that Humility enjoyed contemplation (mountains) and solitude (woods). The humble feeds on the teachings of the wise (just like the goat fed on aromatic herbs and shrubs) and uses these teachings when facing the wounds of sin (just like the goat fed on tarragon—which is symbol of penance, because it is a medicinal herb). The devil hates the humble, because they are not subject to its influence, according to the Ecclesiastes

13:24 ('abominatio est superbo humilitas' [And as humility is an abomination to the proud: so also the rich man abhorreth the poor]).

2 Greed vs. Generosity

The second mortal sin considered is Greed ('Avaritia'), together with its opposite, Generosity ('Liberalità').

Aldrovandi affirmed that the bear could embody Greed. This is an unusual attribute for bears, given that they typically represented different vices, such as lust, according to commentaries on John's Apocalypse,³² or rage, according to Valeriano.³³ Nevertheless, it had a lively tradition. In fact, bears were sometimes included in the broader spectrum of Greed symbolizing violence, for example when in the *Hortus Deliciarum* they surrounded the chariot of Avarice ('Violentia est Ursus').³⁴ This was validated by Gregory the Great, who stated that violence was a consequence of Greed.³⁵ Stefano Federici's impresa included in Luca Contile's collection³⁶ offers an interesting visual counterpart of the concept (Fig. 8), which makes clear its imagery was drawn from Solinus.³⁷ In this light, Aldrovandi could say that as soon as bears see food, they become extremely aggressive and voracious, just like money transforms the greedy into aggressive and selfish animals incapable of considering the good of others. Aldrovandi explained this statement in one of his posthumous zoological treatises: just like bears are blindly attracted by food, to the point that they cannot focus on anything else, similarly a greedy person is attracted by material goods, to the point of being blinded to any other good.³⁸

Another animal that could represent greed is a donkey (or ass) carrying food or wine, eating grass, and drinking water. This is drawn by Alciato's emblem number 84 [IN AVAROS]: just like the greedy, the donkey kept on its back valuable goods, preventing others from accessing them, and it fed itself on unvaluable things (Fig. 9).³⁹

32 Cornelius à Lapide, *Commentaria in Apocalypsin*, 215.

33 Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 85a–b.

34 Herrad of Landsberg, *Hortus deliciarum*, 195.

35 Gregory the Great, *Moralia* II, 31.45 (PL 0621 C).

36 Contile, *Ragionamento*, 74b–75a.

37 Solinus, *Collectanea Rerum Mirabilium*, 26.7; Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 31a–b.

38 Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis*, 131–132.

39 Alciato, *Emblematum liber*, 47.



FIGURE 8
Bear, engraving of impresa. Luca Contile, *Ragionamento sopra la proprietà delle imprese*, 1574, p. 74b



FIGURE 9
Donkey, engraving of impresa. Andrea Alciato, *Emblematum liber*, 1531, n. 47

The third animal mentioned in this group is Pliny the Elder's catoblepas (Fig. 10).⁴⁰ This legendary bovine—today associated with the wildebeest—lived at the springs of the Nile; it was considered to be poisonous and willing to kill whoever crossed its path. Its head was so heavy that it was always looking downwards—at least, according to the etymology of the name (Κατωβλεψ/Katôbleps → καταβλέπω/katablépō ‘to look downwards’). These features were compatible with the characteristics of the greedy, in that they privilege the ‘river’ of worldly goods over the heavenly, and they are poisoned by their own possessions and by the desire to always acquire more things.

A fourth animal that could express Greed is the dog. While resting close to a pile of hay, the dog growls and pushes away everyone who wants to approach

⁴⁰ See Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 8.77; Pomponius Mela, 3.98; Timotheus of Gaza *animal.*, 53; Ael. *animal.*, 7.6; Ath., 5.221B and 9.409C.

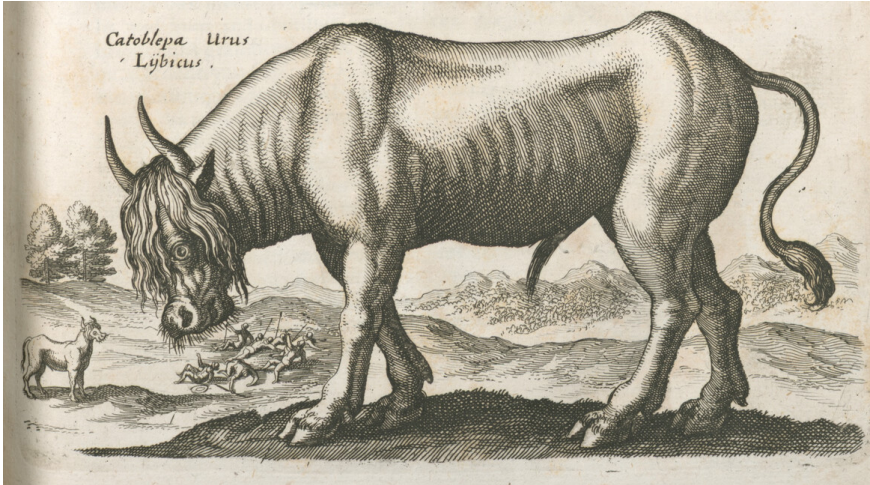


FIGURE 10 Catoblepas, engraving. Jan Jonston, *Historiae naturalis de quadrupedibus*, 1657, tab. 19

the stack, even if it is not at all interested in feeding on it. This concept was wonderfully expressed by the Latin proverb ‘tamquam canis in presepi’ [Like the dog in the manger, (He will neither do nor let do)], also discussed in Erasmus’s *Adagia*⁴¹ and expressed in poetry by Thomas More.⁴² At the moment, no image related to this description could be found.

Analogously, historians report that in India, huge horned ants collect gold and fiercely fight humans to defend it, even if they did not make any use of it. This animal featured also in Mercator’s 1569 world’s map (Fig. 11).⁴³ Elsewhere, Aldrovandi attributes this information to several sources, including Herodotus, Pliny, and Solinus.⁴⁴ This behavior bore a resemblance to people affected by greed, who accumulate material goods and avoid sharing them with others, including those who may be in the need. Ecclesiastes 6:1–2 described very well this dynamic:

est et aliud malum quod vidi sub sole et quidem frequens apud homines:
vir cui dedit Deus divitias et substantiam et honorem et nihil deest ani-

41 Erasmus, *Epitome chiliadum adagiorum*, 325 [Cent. I, lib. X. Prov. XIII].

42 More, *Epigrammata clarissimi disertissimique*, 57. See also Ricciardi, *Commentaria symbolica*, 1:133v.

43 Mercator, *Nova et Aucta Orbis Terrae Descriptio*: ‘Formicae hic aurum effodientes homines sunt.’

44 Aldrovandi, *De animalibus insectis libri septem*, 513; see Herodotus, 3.102–105; Solinus, *Collectanea*, 30, 23; and Isidore, *Etymologies*, 12.3.9; from these sources, information on



FIGURE 11 Gold digging ants in Asia, detail, engraving, Peter Mercator, *Nova et Aucta Orbis Terrae Descriptio*, 1569

mae eius ex omnibus quae desiderat nec tribuit ei potestatem Deus ut comedat ex eo sed homo extraneus vorabit illud hoc vanitas et magna miseria est.

There is also another evil, which I have seen under the sun, and that is frequent among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, and substance, and honour, and his soul wanteth nothing of all that he desireth: yet God doth not give him power to eat thereof, but a stranger shall eat it up. This is vanity and a great misery.

these ants reached the *Physiologus* 11 [*de tertia natura*] and medieval bestiaries in general.



FIGURE 12
Gold digging ants, detail, engraving. Jacob Abbot, *History of Darius the Great*, 1854, p. 121

LXXVIII LIB. SECVND.
FORMICAE ARATRA, NON SIBI FERVNT BOVES,
SYMB. XXXVIII



FIGURE 13
Ants, engraving of emblem. Achille Bocchi, *Symbolicarum quaestionum libri*, 1555, p. 78

A corresponding image for this animal is missing, at least in early modern times—depictions can be found in later editions of Herodotus (Fig. 12).⁴⁵ Yet Aldrovandi himself, talking about ants in his entomological treatise, indicated an emblem by Achille Bocchi (Fig. 13) related to this animal, which relied, however, on different sources.⁴⁶

Even if does not belong to the category of the four-legged animals, the leech (Figs. 14a–b) is mentioned among the symbols of greed. Aldrovandi established this comparison thanks to empirical observation. He noted that leeches' mouths are shaped in a triangular fashion.⁴⁷ They use this organ as a tool to suck

45 Abbot, *History of Darius the Great*, 121.

46 Bocchi, *Symbolicarum quaestionum de universo genere*, 78.

47 This detail is accounted also in Aldrovandi, *De animalibus insectis libri septem*, 722, where it is clearly drawn from direct observation. The source mentioned in this passage is Alber-



FIGURE 14A
Leech, engraving. Thomas Mouffet, *Insectorum sive minimorum animalium theatrum*, 1643, p. 323

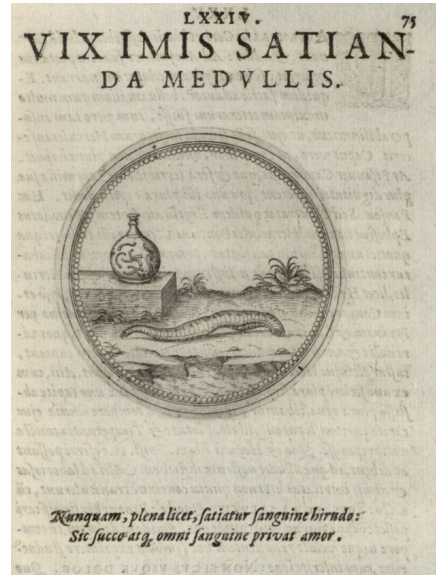


FIGURE 14B
Leech, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum & emblematum ex aquatilibus et reptilibus desumptorum*, 1604, p. 75

blood from their prey. The blood is then vomited to allow them to suck more. Similarly, greed leads to the acquisition of material goods thanks to three major actions: theft, extortion, and exploitation against the poor. The profits acquired are then re-invested to perpetrate more thefts, extortions, and exploitations. The connection between leeches and the greedy was already established in one of Solomon's Proverbs (30:15): 'sanguisugae duae sunt filiae dicentes adfer adfer tria sunt insaturabilia et quartum quod numquam dicit sufficit' [The horseleech hath two daughters that say: Bring, bring. There are three things that never are satisfied, and the fourth never saith: It is enough].

After these examples, Aldrovandi attempted to arrange a list of those animals that could symbolize Generosity. However, he immediately noted the difficulties in accomplishing this task, in that generosity is mainly a human inclination, not suitable to animals in general. For this reason, Aldrovandi stretched the definition of generosity by considering two different ramifications of the

tus Magnus, who omits the form of their mouth (*De animalibus*, bk. 36. par. 38). The detail is not indicated in other Renaissance natural philosophers, as those listed in Mouffet, *Insectorum sive minimorum animalium theatrum*, 323–325.



FIGURE 15
Allegory of Generosity, engraving. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, 1603, p. 25



FIGURE 16
Allegory of Generosity, engraving. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, 1603, p. 291

concept: generosity pursued with one's personal belongings; and generosity pursued with the belongings of others. Only the latter could apply to animals and hence develop a zoological symbolism. For example, lions⁴⁸ and eagles,⁴⁹ after having killed their prey and eaten their share, usually leave the leftover carcasses for other animals to eat. Even if this behavior could be technically deemed as generous, it did not represent the real generosity, which was a specific human feature. A Renaissance iconographic tradition depicting these animals as symbols of generosity is evidenced, for example, in Cesare Ripa (Figs. 15, 16), who combines their features.⁵⁰

3 Lust vs. Chastity

The third mortal sin considered is Lust ('Lussuria'), together with its opposite, Chastity ('Castità').

48 Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri*, 35: 'Leo liberalitas et generositas est antesignanus.' Lion as symbol of generosity is mentioned in Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 1a, and in Ripa, *Iconologia*, 25.

49 Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 40. *Liberalitas* and the eagle is a typical combination of ancient numismatic specimens that circulated abundantly during the Renaissance.

50 Ripa, *Iconologia*, 291.



FIGURE 17
 Ram and Venus, engraving. Giovanni Pierio Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 1556, p. 72a

The first animal that could indicate Lust was the ram. Usually driven by an unstoppable sexual prowess,⁵¹ the ram was considered filthy and malodorous, just like the lustful manifested themselves. The classical source evoked by Aldrovandi is Horace.⁵² An iconographic description is offered by Valeriano (Fig. 17) and Ripa⁵³ and is confirmed by Aldrovandi himself elsewhere.⁵⁴

The second animal listed as a symbol of lust was the hog,⁵⁵ because of its natural filthiness and inclination to roll in the mud and get dirty—just like the lustful thrive in dirty carnal pleasures. Valeriano, according to Alessandro Alessandri,⁵⁶ mentions an Egyptian monument portraying a hog and symbolizing all kinds of excess (Fig. 18). According to Pliny,⁵⁷ if a hog lost its eyes, it would immediately die; similarly, if the eyes of the lustful are freed from the object of their desire, the lust itself will vanish.

The toad was considered a symbol of lust by the medieval tradition.⁵⁸ Its physical characteristics⁵⁹—like the eyes filled with flames, the fact that it hates

51 Aldrovandi, *Quadrupedum omnium bisulcorum historia*, 641.

52 Horace, *Ep.*, 10.15: 'libidinosus immolabitur caper' [the lustful ram is sacrificed].

53 Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 72a–b, and 77b; Ripa, *Iconologia*, 294.

54 Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri*, 663.

55 Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 66b, and 68a; see also Aldrovandi, *Quadrupedum omnium bisulcorum historia*, 982 and 1004–1006.

56 Alessandri, *Genialium dierum libri sex*, 139b; the commentary on this work, Tiraqueau, *Semestria in genialium dierum Alexandri*, 341, credits the account of the episode to the first book of Diodorus Siculus, who, however, did not provide more details.

57 Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 8.206.

58 This symbol is expressed in Thomas Cistercensis, *Commentaria in Cantica canticorum*, VII (PL 206. 0474C).

59 Described also in Bartholomaeus Anglicus (*De proprietate rerum*), 18.16, and reported also by Cecco d'Ascoli (*Acerba*, 3.36).



FIGURE 18
Hog on pyramid, engraving, Giovanni Pierio
Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 1556, p. 66b

sunlight and eats fragrant weeds, and its propensity to live in muddy places—were all attributes compatible with the lustful. The red eyes represented adultery, according to one of Peter’s letters (2 Peter 2:14: ‘oculos habentes plenos adulterio’ [Having eyes full of adultery]), and the constant search for dark environments represented the constant attempt to achieve carnal pleasure, which was symbolized by the weeds and the mud. On a visual side (Fig. 19), the frog used to express positive meanings;⁶⁰ yet, it was also a well-established symbol of sin: it could embody greed, rage, and evil in general,⁶¹ but also gluttony, and women’s lust—the last two aspects noted also by Valeriano.⁶² Frog as a symbol of Lust populated many medieval allegorical sculptures and Renaissance figurations, for example, Grünewald’s or Bosch’s paintings.⁶³

In contrast, Aldrovandi indicated the ox (portrayed as a castrated bull) as the best animal that could represent chastity: when a bull is castrated, it loses its sexual energy but becomes stronger and more domesticated.⁶⁴ This could be

60 It expressed truth, poetry, silence, etc.; see Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri*, 598–599. See also Ricciardi, *Commentaria symbolica*, 2:164.

61 Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri*, 618–619. See also Ricciardi, *Commentaria symbolica*, 2:164.

62 Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 211a.

63 *Les amants trépassés*, maybe from Grünewald, Musée des beaux arts, Strasbourg; Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1500–1505, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

64 Aldrovandi, *Quadrupedum omnium bisulcorum historia*, 141.

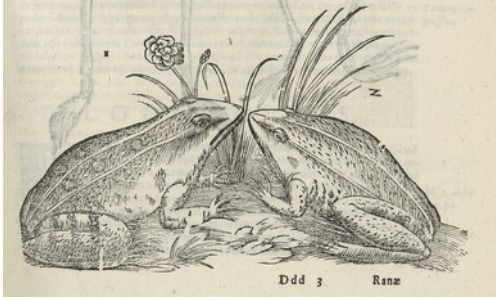


FIGURE 19
Frogs, engraving. Ulisse Aldrovandi,
De quadrupedibus digitatis, 1637,
p. 598

applied to the chaste, based on the Gospel of Matthew 19:12: ‘et sunt eunuchi qui se ipsos castraverunt propter regnum caelorum qui potest capere capiat’ [and there are eunuchs, who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. He that can take, let him take it].

The beaver was considered a symbol of chastity itself,⁶⁵ in that it performed self-castration in order to keep away the hunters who stalked it for its testicles—even if, Aldrovandi notes, this behavior is not proven by observation.⁶⁶ This information is widely accepted from Pliny onwards, across the Middle Ages, up to the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ Renaissance images of beavers severing their testicles appeared often in emblem books, such as those by Alciato,⁶⁸ Giovio,⁶⁹ and Camerarius (Fig. 20). Beavers, according to Camerarius, also symbolized perseverance.⁷⁰

The dove was indicated as a perfect symbol of chastity (Fig. 21), according to Valeriano and Ripa.⁷¹ Aldrovandi⁷² supported this reading by recalling the Song of Songs 2:12: ‘fiores apparuerunt in terra tempus putationis advenit vox turturis audita est in terra nostra’ [The flowers have appeared in our land; the time of pruning is come: the voice of the turtle is heard in our land]. A visual counterpart with its symbolic explanation is offered by Camerarius.⁷³

65 See also Levi D’Ancona, *Lo zoo del Rinascimento*, 81.

66 See Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viviparis libri*, 276–292. However, it was also considered a symbol of adultery; see Ricciardi, *Commentaria symbolica*, 1:232.

67 Pliny *Nat. Hist.*, 8.47.109; Isidore, *Etymologies*, 12.2.21; *Physiologus*, 17.

68 Alciato, *Emblematum liber*, n. 153.

69 Giovio, *Dialogo*, 45.

70 Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 98a–b.

71 Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 161a–b; Ripa, *Iconologia*, 87.

72 Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae tomus*, 518.

73 Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex volatilibus et insectis*, 63a–b.

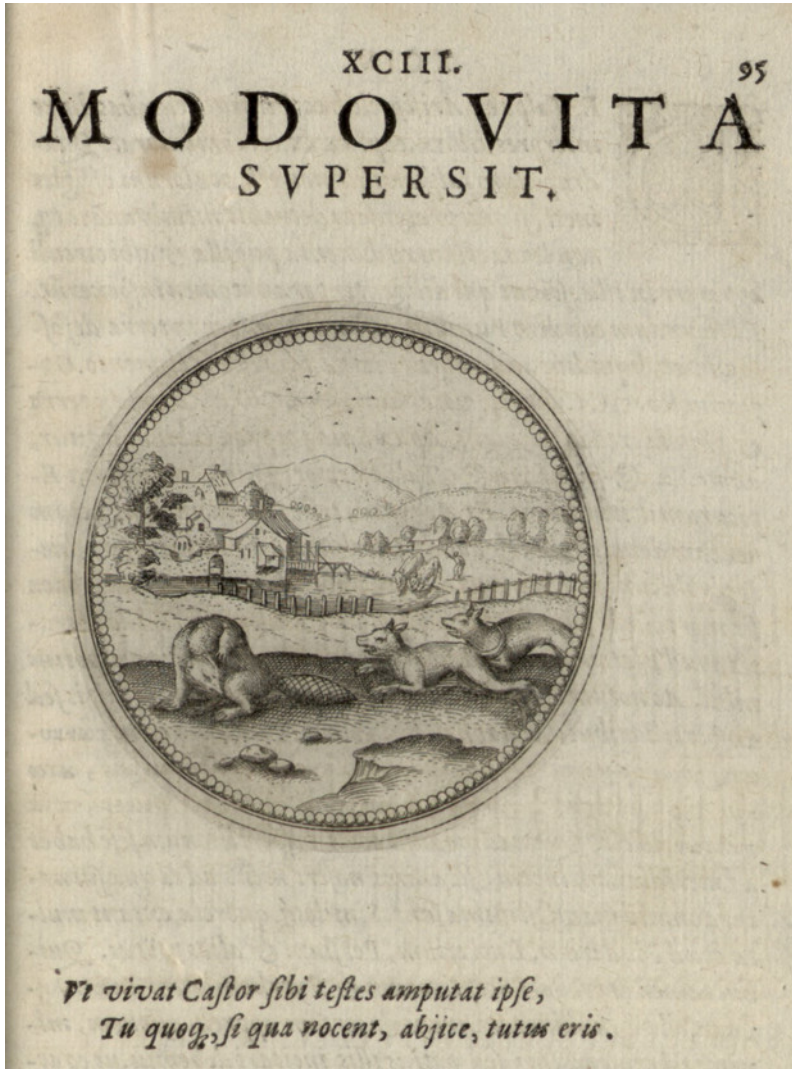


FIGURE 20 Beaver, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 1595, p. 95

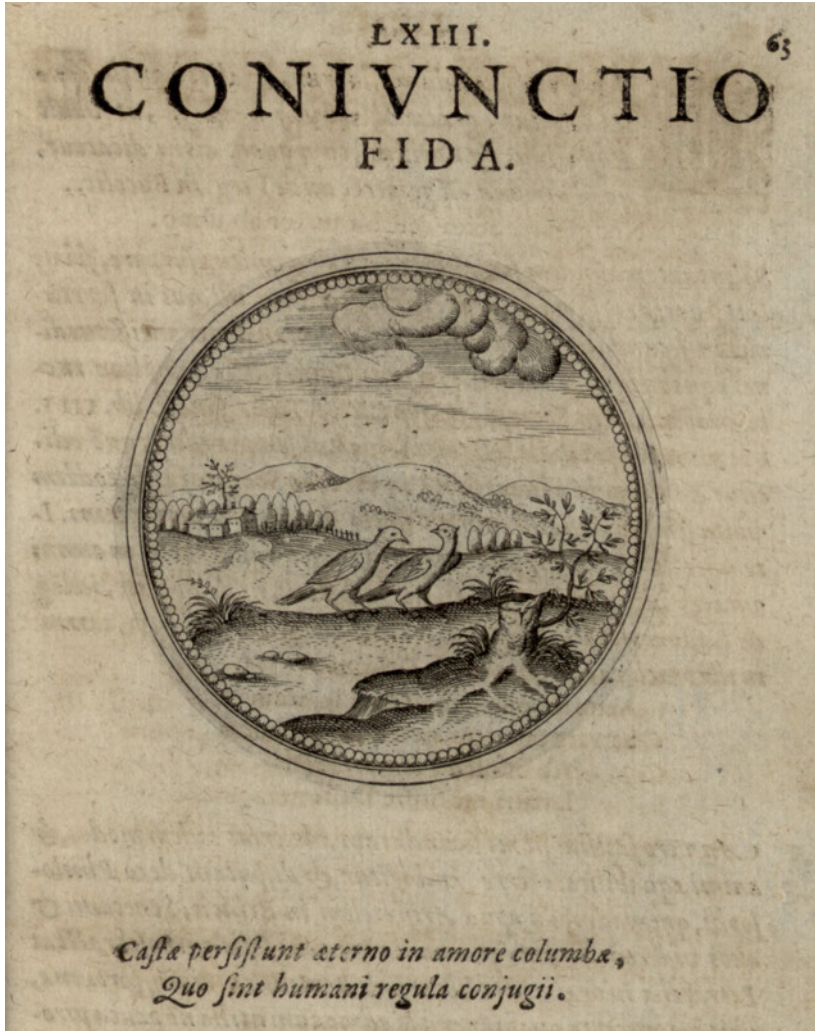


FIGURE 21 Doves, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex volatilibus et insectis*, 1596, p. 63

4 Rage vs. Patience

The fourth mortal sin considered is Rage ('Ira'), together with its opposite, Patience ('Patientia').

The first animal that could vividly communicate the mortal sin of rage is the wild boar. According to Pliny and Avicenna, boars are so fierce that they disregard danger and death, fighting the hunters with fury even when they



FIGURE 22 Rabid dog, engraving. Ulisse Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis*, 1637, p. 537

are severely wounded.⁷⁴ Quick-tempered people act in the same way: driven by rage and anger, they attack their opposers even when their chances of success are minimum. This attitude was corroborated by the evocation of a verse from the Book of Job (5:2: 'vere stultum interficit iracundia et parvulum occidit Invidia' [Anger indeed killeth the foolish, and envy slayeth the little one]) and in Book of Maccabees (2.4.25: 'fere bellua iram gerens' [the rage of a savage beast]).

The dog affected by rabies was another possible representation of rage and anger (Fig. 22).⁷⁵ This animal is usually a loner, pictured with red eyes, dangling its tongue, and drooling. The enraged person has an analogous attitude: they avoid companionship and vomit any insult or offense that comes to their mind—this is very well expressed by the opened mouth of the dog with its saliva pouring out.

The last animal evoked in this section is the hedgehog (Fig. 23).⁷⁶ According to ancient sources and medieval bestiaries, it was thought to steal fruit from orchards and carry it to its den on its quills.⁷⁷ However, if on the way it lost even just a negligible part of the prey, it threw everything away and started the whole robbery over from the beginning. An emblematic depiction of this animal is

74 The aggressive temper of boars is described in detail in Aldrovandi, *Quadrupedum omnium bisulcorum historia*, 1025–1030, and also in Gessner, *Historiae animalium lib. 1*, 1042.

75 Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri*, 536–540. See also Ricciardi, *Commentaria symbolica*, 1:133v.

76 See also Levi D'Ancona, *Lo zoo del Rinascimento*, 185–186.

77 Aelianus, *animal.*, 3.10; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 8.37.133; *Physiologus*, 13.

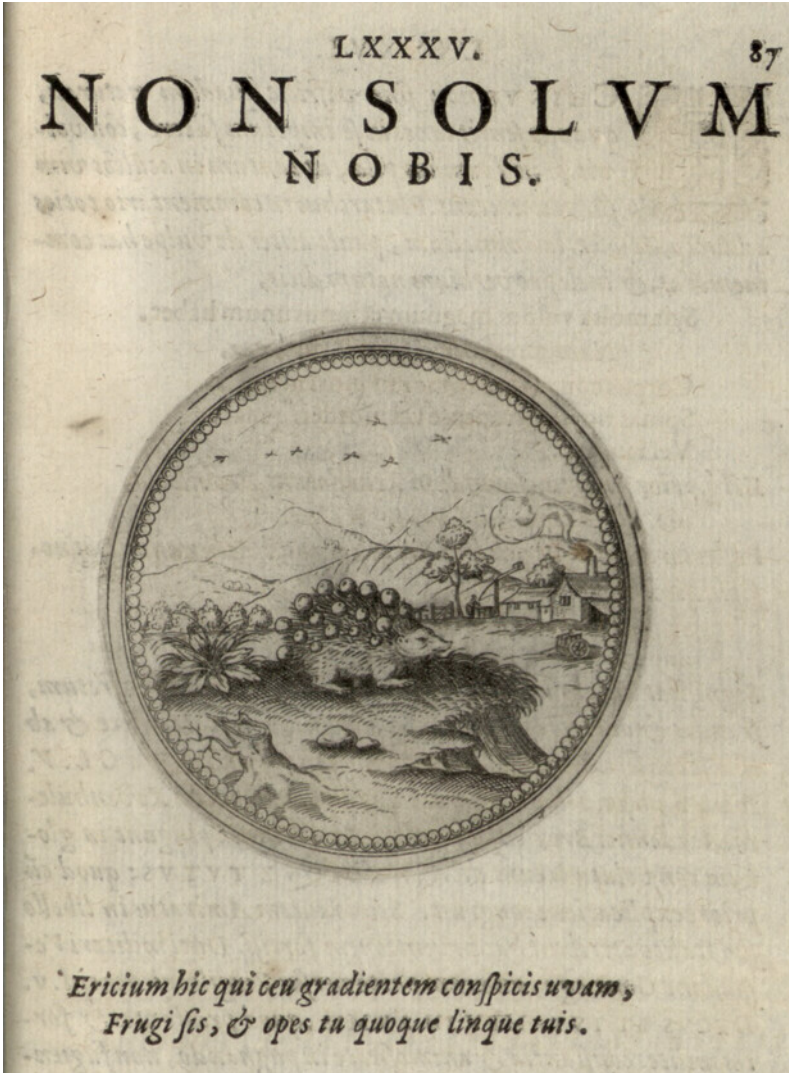


FIGURE 23 Hedgehog, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 1595, p. 87



FIGURE 24
Allegory of Patience, engraving of
emblem. Georgette de Montenay,
Emblèmes ou devises chrestiennes, 1571,
p. 83

given by Camerarius;⁷⁸ Aldrovandi himself, who included it among his naturalistic drawings,⁷⁹ mentioned several emblems depicting this animal, even if not with the meaning of rage—such as those of Claude Paradin and Antonio Bragaglia.⁸⁰

To depict Patience, instead, Aldrovandi proposed to represent the celestial Sagittarius. The archer was an image usually associated with Patience, if one considers the emblematic depiction of Georgette de Montenay (Fig. 24).⁸¹ However, Aldrovandi considered the combination with an astronomic meaning. When the Sun is conjunct with this zodiac sign, the weather is usually stormy, with heavy rains and snow blizzards. These conditions symbolized the difficulties that must be overcome thanks to the virtue of patience.

As an alternative, Aldrovandi suggests adopting the donkey,⁸² in that this animal tolerates hunger, exhaustion, and blows, which makes it the perfect embodiment of patience.

78 Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 93a–b.

79 Alessandrini and Ceregato, *Natura Picta*, 547.

80 Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri*, 465–466; Bargagli, *La prima parte dell'impresa di Scipion Bargagli doue*, 42–43; Paradin, *Devises heroïques*, 140.

81 De Montenay, *Emblèmes ou devises chrestiennes*, 83. This reading is also found in a later symbolic work from Du Bois, *Eruditionis*, 3.1.6.3.

82 Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 91a–b, ascribes to the donkey the meaning of hard working.

5 Gluttony vs. Fast

The fifth mortal sin considered is Gluttony ('Gola'), together with its opposite, Fast ('Astinentia').

Aldrovandi, relying on Valeriano,⁸³ characterized the crocodile with an open jaw as a symbol of gluttony. This animal was thought to voraciously eat weeds and herbs. According to Pliny,⁸⁴ one of its mortal enemies, a rainbow mud snake (*enhydria*), hid in those leaves. The unsuspecting crocodile gobbled the serpent, which killed it.

The same could be told about the gluttons who, uncontrolled, devour their food and end up being killed by their own defect.⁸⁵ Despite the many emblematic representations of the crocodile,⁸⁶ actual visual counterparts of this symbolic meaning are missing—only Camerarius provides a similar image (Fig. 25), which, however, is charged with a different meaning.⁸⁷

The bear could also express the same meaning. According to Aristotle, the bear is omnivorous:⁸⁸ to reach the juiciest fruits, it climbed trees; in order to get honey, it broke the beehives; it fed also on ants and crabs, but as a medicine. Gluttons shared this same attitude: sometimes driven by pleasure, sometimes under the pretext of necessity, gluttons aimed to satiate their palate with sophisticated foods. In this light, the passage of Ecclesiastes 36:20 ('Omnem escam manducabit venter, et est cibus cibo melior' [The belly will devour all meat, yet one is better than another]) explained the image. Elsewhere,⁸⁹ Aldrovandi evoked an emblem included in Camerarius's collection to represent this symbol (Fig. 26).

In contrast, according to Valeriano,⁹⁰ Fast could be properly signified by representing a camel,⁹¹ especially because of its resistance to thirst (Fig. 27), as attested also in a verse of Persius's *Satires*.⁹²

83 Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 207b–208a. The animal had the same meaning also during the Middle Ages, as attested in Bartholaeus Anglicus's *De proprietate rerum*, 18.32.

84 Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 30.8.

85 Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri*, 686.

86 Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri*, 687–688.

87 Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 99a–b.

88 Aristotle, *Historia de Animalibus*, 594c.

89 Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri*, 179.

90 Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 93b and 94b.

91 Aldrovandi, *Quadrupedum omnium bisulcorum historia*, 923.

92 Persius, *Satires*, 5.136: 'Tolle recens primus piper et sitiente camelo' [Be the first to unload fresh peppercorns from some thirsty camel].

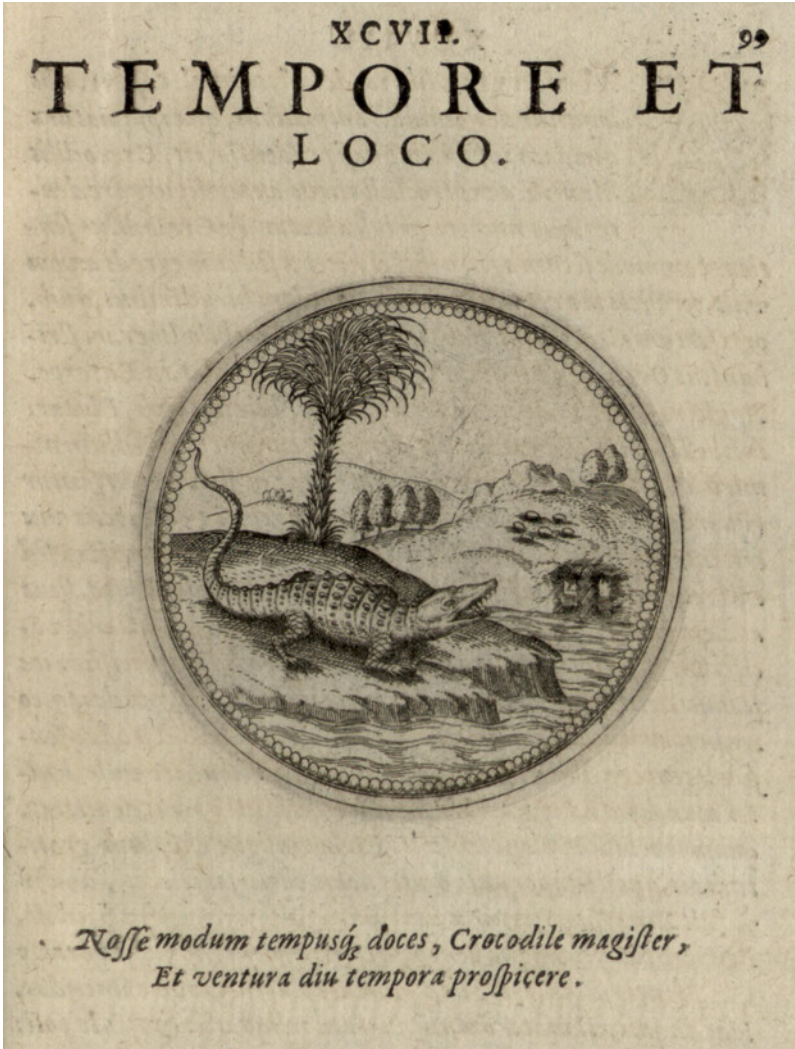


FIGURE 25 Crocodile, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 1595, p. 99

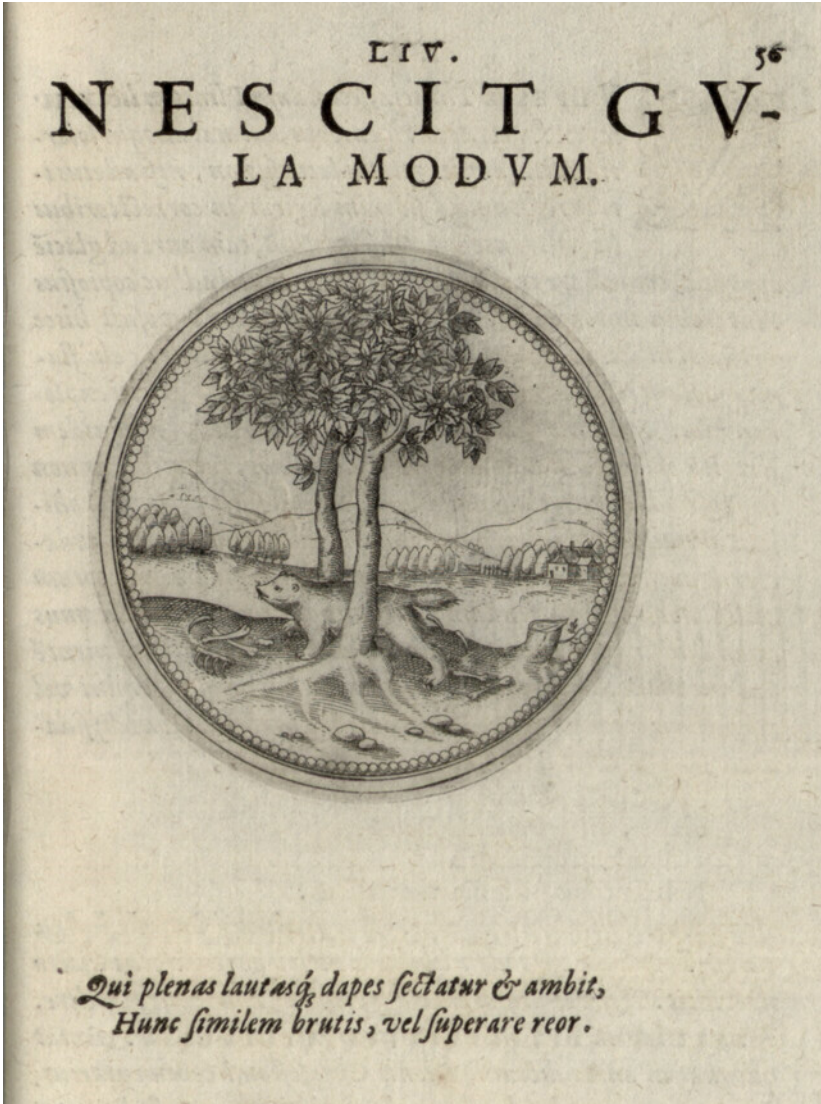


FIGURE 26 Wolverine, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 1595, p. 56



FIGURE 27
Camel, engraving. Giovanni Pierio
Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 1556, p. 93b

6 Envy vs. Charity

The sixth mortal sin considered is Envy ('Invidia'), together with its opposite, Charity ('Amore per il prossimo').

According to Aldrovandi, the best four-legged animal to express the mortal sin of envy is the stag. After losing their antlers, stags usually hid them, in order to prevent humans from finding them and using them in medical preparations.⁹³ Even if the deer in general is often charged with a plethora of symbolic meanings, this specific reading is not attested anywhere else, and hence no visualization could be found.

The salamander could convey the same symbolism.⁹⁴ This reptile usually came out of its den during heavy rains. Such behavior resembled the conduct of envious people, who usually show up when the righteous face difficult moments, vexing and harassing them. The biblical passage of 1 Samuel 18:5–30 very well explains the dynamic. Considering that the salamander is a cold-blooded animal, and it was thought to put out fires, Aldrovandi conceded that

93 So far, I could not find the source of this passage.

94 Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri*, 640–644. Aldrovandi is the sole author who links the salamander with the mortal sin of Envy. This animal could convey both positive and negative meanings; see Ricciardi, *Commentaria symbolica*, 2:179v; and Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 119b.

the salamander could symbolize how envy precludes charity—in this case symbolized by fire. Furthermore, its white saliva is considered to have a toxic effect on the human body. Similarly, envious people vomit their poisonous words to defame and belittle their acquaintances—this could be explained by Psalms 13:3 ('venenum aspidum sub labiis eorum' [the poison of asps is under their lips]). No parallel iconography of the behaviors described by Aldrovandi could be found, demonstrating once again the originality of the imagery. In general, according to the medieval tradition, salamanders were depicted in the act of walking undamaged through the flames, as shown in many emblem books (Fig. 28).

A third animal that could symbolize envy is the lynx—also known as 'lupo cerviero,' because of its characteristic howling.⁹⁵ According to Theophrastus, Pliny, and later Vincent of Beauvais,⁹⁶ a lynx's urine could turn into mythical gemstones called *lyngurium*.⁹⁷ For this reason, the lynx tends to hide its urine, in an attempt to prevent humans from finding their precious fluid. Usually the lynx is linked to greed, which is somehow related to envy. For this reason, it may be appropriate to mention Camerarius's emblem⁹⁸ portraying a lynx in the act of killing its prey (Fig. 29).

Even if not giving an actual explanation, Aldrovandi puts together also a short list of other creatures who could serve the same purpose, even if not quadrupeds, such as sirens, Indian serpents, dragons, adders, butterflies.⁹⁹

Charity opposes envy. The first animal that could nicely embody this virtue is the mare suckling her foal, because she often adopts and nurtures orphans. This at least according to the *Chiliades* by John Tzetzes.¹⁰⁰ An interesting visual example of this iconography could be found in a drawing (1642–1645) by Stefano della Bella that circulated through print (Fig. 30).

95 Technically, the 'lupo cerviero' is the ocelot.

96 Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 8.55.137.

97 Theophrastus, *In Lapidibus*, 28; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 8.55.137; Vincent de Beauvais, *Speculum maius*, 8.80. On the *lyngurium* in general, see Walton, 'Theophrastus on Lyngurium.'

98 Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 35a–b.

99 Butterflies are not usually considered a symbol of envy. However, according to Guérout Guillaume (*La propriété et nature des oyseaux*, 60), the butterfly expressed some kind of desire of past time ('desiderant tousiours le temps beau' [always desiring good weather]). It is reasonable to assume that envy could derive from this type of desire; see also Enekel and Smith, *Emblems and the Natural World*, 21.

100 Tzetzes, *Chiliades*, 4.124.111–112: 'Αἱ ἴπποι κατοικτεῖρουσαι τοὺς ὀρφανοὺς τῶν πῶλων / θηλάζουσι καὶ τρέφουσι τούτους σὺν τοῖς ἰδίοις' [Mares, having mercy for the orphans among the foals, Suckle and feed them with their own].

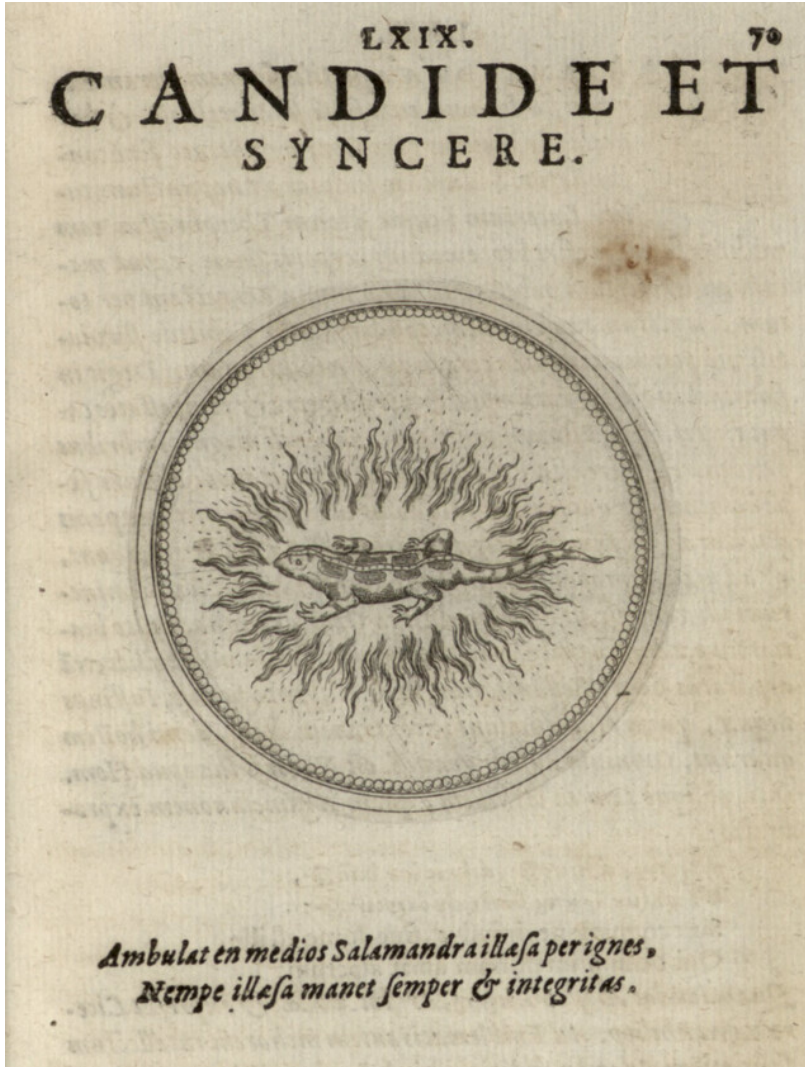


FIGURE 28 Salamander, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum & emblematum ex aquatilibus et reptilibus desumptorum*, 1604, p. 70

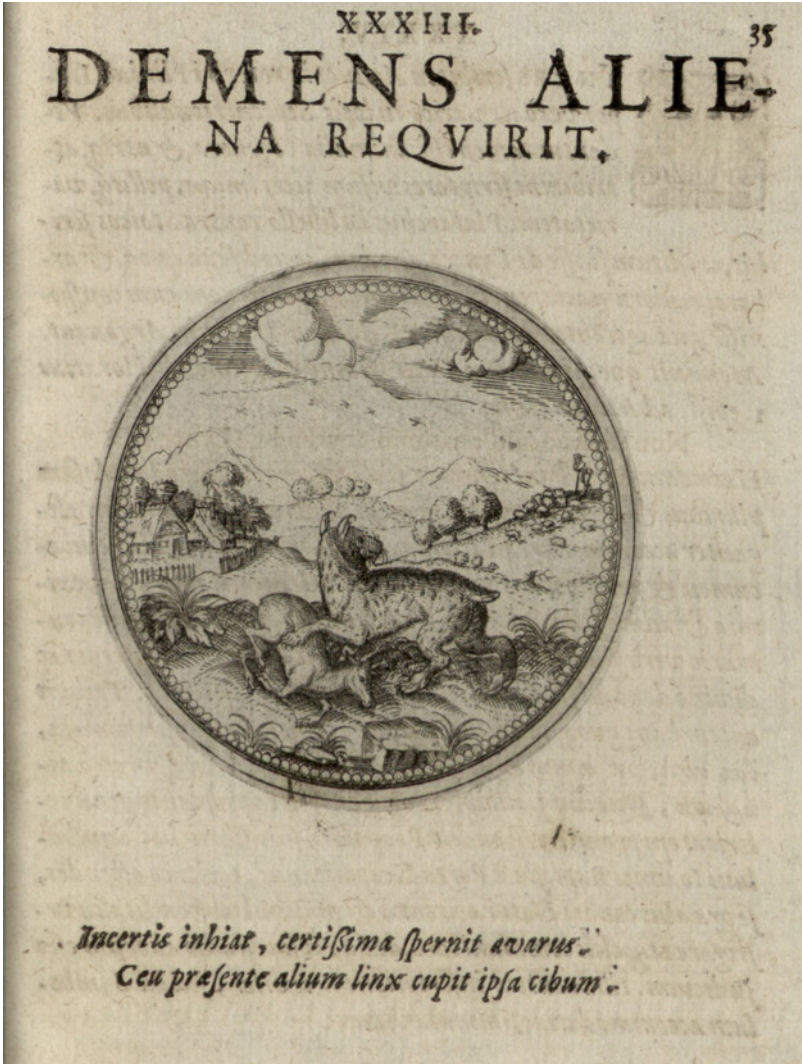


FIGURE 29 Lynx, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 1595, p. 35



FIGURE 30
Mare suckling her foal,
engraving. Stefano
della Bella, 1642–1645,
Metropolitan Museum of
Arts [n. 2012.136.435.17]

Among water animals, the seal is considered one of the more fitting animals to symbolize charity (Fig. 31) in that, just like dolphins, they were thought to teach other water-creatures to swim. Aristotle includes it among the quadrupeds, regardless of its fins.¹⁰¹

Other animals that could symbolize charity according to Tzetzes include lion cubs, eagles, wild goats, cranes, and pelicans, in that they all took care of their parents during their old age,¹⁰² elephants, swifts, sparrows, bees,¹⁰³ ants, bears,

101 Aristotle, *De Partibus Animalum*, 697b: 'Αἱ τε γὰρ φώκαι ὡς μὲν ἔνυδροι πόδας ἔχουσιν, ὡς δὲ πεζαὶ πτέρυγας' [For seals, if looked on as water-animals, are yet found to have feet; and if looked on as land-animals, are yet found to have fins].

102 Tzetzes, *Chiliades*, 4.7.123. The animals are mentioned almost in the same order: 'When they are old, lions, eagles, dolphins, / Wild herds, the kind of storks, / And pelicans, are fed by their own offspring, / Which also help them both in walking and in flying, / And in swimming, with regard to the fish-like, as, for instance, the dolphin and seal.'

103 Tzetzes, *Chiliades*, 4.9.125, v. 132: 'Τισὶ τοῦ σμήνους ἔργον δε καὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς ἐκφέρειν' [For some, it is even the job to carry the dead out of the hive].



FIGURE 31 Seal, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum & emblematum ex aquatilibus et reptilibus desumptorum*, 1604, p. 69

and mice,¹⁰⁴ in that they all take care of and bury their dead. However, the visual application of this source is extremely difficult to detect. One can assume that it is due to the originality of the iconographic choice.

7 Sloth vs. Industriousness

The seventh and last mortal sin considered is Sloth ('Accidia'), together with its opposite, Industriousness ('Diligentia').

Aldrovandi identified the armadillo as the perfect embodiment of the mortal sin of sloth.¹⁰⁵ This animal was considered extremely lazy¹⁰⁶ but also sly and cunning, given the technique it developed for extracting ants from their hills: sticking their snout into the ground and grabbing the insects with their tongue (Fig. 32).¹⁰⁷ Indolent people had a similar attitude, that is, the inclination to draw things from easily accessible sources, relying also on deceitful expedients to obtain benefits.

The pond heron could serve the same purpose (Fig. 33), because Aristotle defined this bird as lazy (ἀστερίας ὄκνος).¹⁰⁸

To symbolize the virtue of spiritual industriousness, Aldrovandi suggested depicting the wild donkey, known as onager. This animal possessed an instinct to escape dangerous situations. The onager persevered so relentlessly in avoiding danger that it could withstand the attacks of all its predators. Similarly, saints and truly devout people escape sin and withstand the difficulties of pursuing virtue. In this regard, the words of Psalm 54:8 ('ecce elongavi fugiens et mansi in solitudine diapsalma' [have gone far off flying away / and I abide in the wilderness]) help in understanding the image.

To better express the concept of spiritual industriousness, Aldrovandi mentioned passages from Cassiodorus¹⁰⁹ and Bernard of Clairvaux,¹¹⁰ who stated

104 Tzetzes, *Chiliades*, 4.10.127. The animals are mentioned almost in the same order: 'The dolphin, the elephant, the swallow, bees, and the ant, together, / Bury corpses when it pertains to the dead of the same genus as them. / Bears and mice with them, and with these even flies, / And the hawk throws dust even on an unburied person.'

105 Aldrovandi declares he had an armadillo in his museum.

106 Alessandrini and Ceregato, *Natura Picta*, 535.

107 Fondo Ulisse Aldrovandi, Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, Tavole vol. 005-1 Animali.

108 Aristotle, *Historia de Animalibus*, 617a 5. See also Gessner, *Historiae animalium liber III*, 209: 'Ardea stellaris piger (ocnus) cognominata, in fabula est, ut olim e servo in avem transierit, atque (ut cognomen sonat) iners otiosaque est.'

109 Cassiodorus, *Expositio psalmorum*, 98 (PL 0900).

110 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Epistolae* 139.2 (PL 182. 0284A).



FIGURE 32 Armadillo, oil on paper. Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, Fondo Ulisse Aldrovandi, Tavole vol. 005-1 Animali

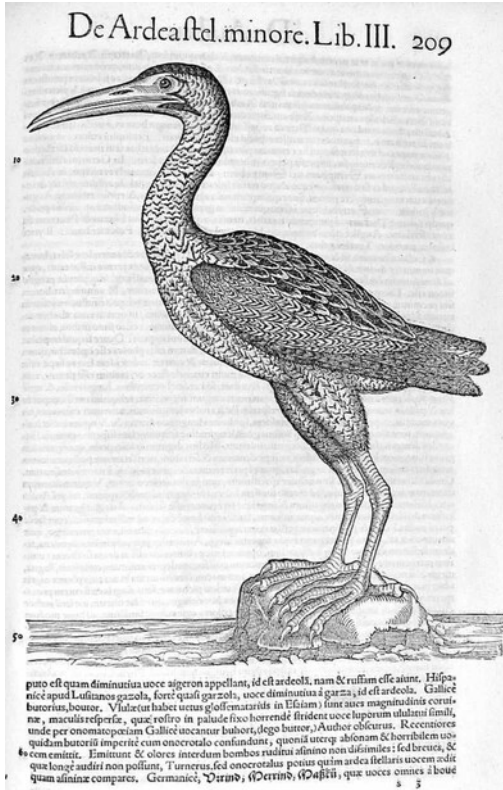


FIGURE 33
 Ardea (heron), engraving, Conrad
 Gesner, *Historiae animalium liber*
III, 1551, p. 209

that perseverance always prevails. Both authors showed that diligence and persistence are the only way to emerge victorious from the challenges of life. Building on the idea of these passages, the naturalist could designate another animal to function as a symbol for the virtue discussed, namely, the greyhound or, according to Aristotle, the *canis laconicus*.¹¹¹ This dog chased its prey with ruthless ferocity until it caught it. This behavior evoked the attitude that must be held in pursuing God, as demonstrated also by Paul's letters (1 Cor. 9:24: 'sic currite ut comprehendatis' [So run that you may obtain]). An image with an analogous meaning is found in Camerarius's emblem book (Fig. 34).¹¹²

111 Aristotle, *Historia de Animalibus*, 574b.

112 Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 60b–61a.

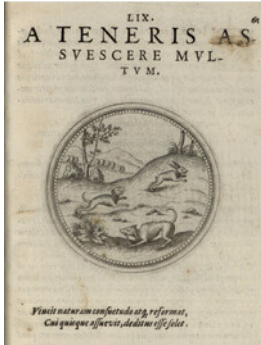


FIGURE 34
 Greyhound, engraving of emblem. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex animalibus quadrupedibus*, 1595, p. 61

A bird that could symbolize this virtue is the sparrow, also according to the words of Matthew in the Gospel (2:10: 'nolite ergo timere multis passeribus meliores estis vos' [Fear not therefore: better are you than many sparrows]). The sparrow was considered a bird with great internal warmth, capable of digesting even extremely toxic plants, such as the *hyoscyamus*—known as the henbanes.¹¹³ Similarly, those who pursue spiritual industriousness possess an internal warmth given by God that could help them overcome even the most difficult situations. And even more, considering the words of Paul's letters (Rom. 8:28: 'diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum' [And we know that to them that love God all things work together unto good]), this inspired diligence transformed any inconvenience in something positive.

8 Conclusions

From this survey, it is possible to draw a number of brief conclusions, on which future arguments could be formulated.

First of all, it is clear that Aldrovandi creates, or aims to create, an extremely innovative iconographic program, even if apparently founded in non-original tradition. The animals he chooses are all part of an imagery that peacefully passed from Antiquity, through the Middle Ages, up to the Renaissance, with no apparent modifications. However, each zoological symbol proposed is presented with slight shifts on its conventional perception, sometimes based on empirical observation, that made it basically unique. This means that he made the effort to offer his patron a plethora of figures charged with new meanings to be utilized in decorating his buildings. And this is accounted also by the

¹¹³ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae tomus alter*, 541.

comparison with his naturalistic treatises, where his inventions are not always accepted or acknowledged in the sections concerning the iconological descriptions of the animals involved, showing how Aldrovandi himself perceived the character or their innovation.

This leads to the second main aspect of Aldrovandi's work: the strong emblematic fascination of the imagery. In fact, the process of attributing new meanings to a well-established symbolic pattern could happen only in a context that allowed a constant re-semanticization of the symbolical elements involved, the purpose of which was to create an alphabet capable of expressing, and hence explaining, the various nuances of the divine touch in the material world. It is not by chance that Aldrovandi associates to each visual core a biblical reference, coming both from the Old and from the New Testament. This combination not only intends to concentrate the symbols around a scriptural theme, actually driving them into a moral dimension, but offers also a potential significance of the symbols themselves through a motto directly drawn from the Holy Writ.

The third and last aspect tells something about the vitality of the emblematic culture in the Bolognese environment at the end of the sixteenth century. Thanks to Aldrovandi's letter, it is possible to understand that emblems were not utilized only as means to convey meanings from the natural world for artistic purposes. Rather, through emblemization, the natural world transitioned from a material dimension to a moral one, acquiring the capability to read the world beyond its exterior aspect, right into the reasons that governed the interplay between the creation and its creator.

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