

APHRONITRUM

Rusticus es? Nescis, quid Graeco nomine dicar:
Spuma vocor nitri. Graecus es? Aphronitrum.

[Are you a rude person? You do not know why my name is Greek. My Latin name is "spuma nitri". If you were Greek, my name would be "Aphronitrum"]

But the most important thing is that it was Egbert of Liege the first who definitely increased Martialis' pun in a scholastic form with high circulation, compare his *Fecunda ratis sive Liber de aenigmatibus rusticanis* (written about 1022-1024) 1,1526-1527 ed. Voigt:

Rusticus, ut Coridon, stupet in sermone deserti,
veste incompositus nulloque lepore facetus.

[A rude person, as was Corydon, so shabbily dressed he is and so unwitty in his speeches, is dumbfounded when a great orator is speaking]

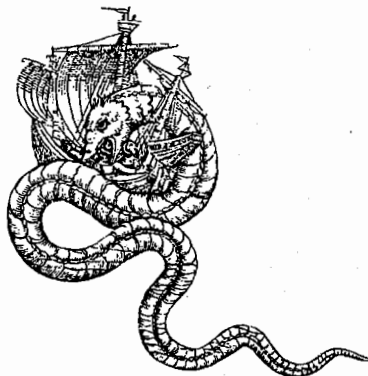
The parody of the Virgilian Corydon treated as a rude man is frequent in Egbert, see *Fecunda ratis* 1,673-674:

Pollinis et fumi sunt plena tuguria stulti,
qualis erat Coridon et plurimus usque fatoclus.

[The stupid man, as was Corydon and all stupid people, live in a dusty and smoky hovel]

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THE "GULO FILFROS" AND NARRATIVE FABLES.

II: IN SEARCH OF THE TRUTH, BUT NOT SOO MUCH

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1. Old Sources in Ulisse Aldrovandi

The description of the strange animal called "Gulo", which lived in the cold lands of Northern Europe, and the legendary tale of its digestive habits were widely circulated through types of historico-geographical and naturalistic publications between 1517 and the end of the 16th century.

These works were essentially based on a feeding custom, as related from the time of Matthias of Miechow but popularized by Olao Magno in his *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*, which was handed down from century to century, ending up - according again to the tradition as narrated by Olao - in L. Oken's *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte für alle Stände*, Stuttgart 1838, p. 1520 (see A. Maranini, *The "Gulo filfros" and Narrative Fables. I: Some of Olao Magno's Imitators*, in «Classiconorroena» 4, 1994, pp. 4-12).

The strong editorial resonance of the work of this bishop from Upsala, who lived for a time in Italy, canonized the tale of the Gulo and acted as the intermediary for a tradition that was integratively preserved in its complexity and rich both in its contradictions and its original - while at the same time outlandishly symbolic - annotations.

One can discover this resonance also in Edward Topsell's *The History of Four-footed Beasts and Serpents* by C. Gesner, published in London in 1658, but with a first edition from 1608 (see also the reissue by W. Ley, New York, 1967), and in the naturalistic manual that popularized the tale, amplifying it with mythological, historical, literary, and cultural data - in the broadest sense of the term - namely, the one written by the Bolognese Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605).

In Chapter XI of the first book of *De quadrupedibus digitatis viviparis* - one of the

volumes he drafted but which was published in Bologna only after his death (1645) in an edition issued by his disciples - he treated *De Gulone* (pp. 178-180) and summarized what was then known about the animal, without limiting himself to the singular, repetitive, and by this time old tale. Nevertheless, he never got beyond Olao but rather linked him with other sources, from antiquity to his own Middle Ages.

Reading through page by page, it seems that indeed nothing of what had until then been written, hypothesized, imagined, and even invented about the «Gulo» had escaped this learned Bolognese's attention. In Aldrovandi's fivefold subdivision of the material (*Synonyma et etymum, Descriptio et natura, Capiendi ratio, Emblemata et Symbola, Usus in variis*), the reader was spared only the concrete representation of the animal's act. As for the rest, not only did he catalogue all of the sources until then mentioned, but he also reserved the major part of his treatment for its symbolical aspect and to whatever the scholars - contemporary or by-gone - had written about it.

Besides the already noted Miechow, Olao and Gesner, there actually also appeared one O. Crollius, who, in the *Tractatus de signaturis internis rerum seu de vera et viva Anatomia maioris et minoris mundo*, included in his *Basilica chymica* (In officina fabriana 1610, p. 83), had recorded a voracious and insatiable animal called «Crocutam» or «Gulonem Boophagon».

Without alluding to his sources, Crollius had referred to its feeding customs, increasing and justifying them in a scientific and medical sense («inter angustias arborum sive rupium sese comprimens, faeces virtute omni et essentia utiliora spoliatas, tam per anteriora quam per posteriora excludit, humore solummodo alimentario in stomachum retento, unde postea absque omni cibo alio, longo tempore vitam miraculose sustentat, viresque corporis integras servat»); and Aldrovandi summarized this opinion, writing that «medicos ab hoc animali vomitorij, et cathartici medicamenti usum didicisse».

Included among the ancient and medieval

sources of the learned Bolognese were Aristotle, Giulio Capitolino, and Alberto Magno, referred to because of Gesner's comparison with the Latin *Hyaena*, to which Aldrovandi almost consented.

The term "iena", written in fact «in graecis literis Porcellam significat; quae cum ita sint, quaedam nomina barbara Hyaenae convenientia Guloni quoque attribui[t] possent, ut Crocuta, Leucrocuta, Akabo, Alzabo, Zabo, Ana, Belbus, apud Iulium Capitolinum Lupus vespertinus, Zilio animal apud Albertum, pariter Lacta, quod animal, eodem teste, in sepulchris habitat, cadaveribusque vescitur». A similar animal used to live in Africa and was called «Dabuh Arabibus, et Selef Africanis».

Leone Africano, a Muslim slave of Pope Leone X - but baptized in 1520 with the name Giovanni Leone - had written about it. Between 1523 and 1526 he drafted *La descrizione dell'Africa* in Italian, which was published in 1550 in Giovan Battista Ramusio's *Navigazioni e viaggi* (edited by Marica Milanese, 1, Torino 1978, p. 447):

Dabuh è un animale grande e come un lupo, e quasi ha forma di lupo, e i suoi piedi somigliano a piedi umani, e similmente le gambe. Gli Arabi così lo chiamano, ma gli Africani *iesef*. Non nuoce alle altre bestie, ma cava i corpi umani delle sepolture e gli mangia. E' vile e semplice animale. I cacciatori, informati della grotta ove egli abita, vanno a quella grotta sonando un tamburino e cantando, e l'animale tanto si diletta di quell'armonia che non s'accorge d'uno che, fra quello spazio, gli annoda ambe le gambe con una salda fune e legato lo strascina fuori, onde gli altri l'uccidono [*Dabuh* is a large animal and like a wolf, and it has almost the shape of a wolf, and its feet are like human feet, and likewise the legs. The Arabs call it so, but the Africans *iesef*. It doesn't harm other beasts, but it removes the bodies of buried humans and eats them. It is a vile and simple animal. The hunters, knowing the whereabouts of the cave that it lives in, go to that cave playing a drum and singing, and the animal is so enchanted by that harmony that it doesn't notice that, by that time, they will knot both its legs with a staunch rope, and tied up drag it outside, whence the others will kill it].

It is likely that Aldrovandi did not overlook the physical connotations presented by the literature that was known to him, which indicated two beasts with diametrically opposed characteristics; and that this African

animal, the Hyena, was not a symbol of greediness but rather of a kind of "viltà e simplicità" [cowardice and simplicity] that could not be compared to the «Gulo» which, according to Olao, used to frighten even a pack of dogs. But the idea of the «Gulo», like the Hyena, feeding on rotting carcasses was so compelling that he regretted not being able to identify it decisively with the latter animal.

He wanted, however, to conclude nevertheless that «nisi Auctor [Leone] huic animali pedes, et cura hominibus similia attribueret, procul dubio hanc Feram cum Gulone coincidere arbitraremur».

In his careful directory of earlier sources, Aldrovandi copied out seven verses that described the appearance and nature of the «Gulo» (*Saturnum ex epulis surgere belluina quam sit, / res vero homini digna famelico triremi. / Incredibili illuvie Rosomacha monstrat. / Est hoc animal Sarmaticis idea Gulonum. / Felis facie ornatis expetita pelle. / Haec bestia nidore procul cadaverum acri, / (Hic vulturem ego quadrupedem vocare suevi)* etc.); then he referred to (and copied out in the original Greek) «versus Moschionis», which he translated immediately into Latin because even the readership that did not know that ancient language would have been able to appreciate them («Id est / Vanum esse umbram hominis mortui affligere, / Vivos punire non defunctos decere»).

Aldrovandi also referred to Joachim Camerarius's *Emblemata* which, with the declared purpose of moralizing on the behavior of humans, had put forward the «Gulo»: «ad detestandum gulae, et heluionis vitium figurat Gulonem in angustiam duarum arborum se intrudentem», wrote Aldrovandi, «ut violenter ingesta violentius egerat, cum hac inscriptione. NESCIT GULA MODUM. Hoc exhibet, ut homines insigne hoc ingluviei exemplum edocti, vitium gulae evitent. Quocirca subscripsit hoc distichon. / Qui plenas, lautasque, dapes sectatur, et ambit. / Hunc similem brutis, vel superare reor».

The same Camerarius just a bit before «hanc Feram, vel huic congenerem effigiat

devorantem cadaver [...] cum tali inscriptione IAM PARCE SEPULTO. Voluit Auctor hac similitudine taxare homines maledicos, et famae defunctorum insidiantes».

In the 1596 edition of the *Emblemata* the «Gulo» had still not made an appearance and the author - yet another reader of Olao - in the *embl. LIII* wished instead that the «libri de Avibus et aliis rebus» by the learned Bolognese would soon come to light.

Aldrovandi (or whoever edited his posthumous works) had therefore used another one of the *Emblemata* editions; in the second one, which was published by the Voegelianis in 1605, the «Gulo» appeared in *embl. LIV*, but differently than in the one by Olao, and one much closer to the truth, a small bear squeezed between two trees, in front of the remains of bones and against a rural background of trees and houses. The *embl. LIII* portrayed the «Hyaena» with a bone in its mouth, having a curly coat and a thick tail, standing in front of a grave with bones in sight, against a similarly rural background of trees and houses.

Aldrovandi was struck by the obvious physical resemblance presented by the animal etched in *embl. LIII* (the Hyena) and that which was provided by the other narratives that he knew about; he noted the habit, common to both animals, of feeding off of rotting carcasses, and he created a parallelism. The symbolic hypothesis that linked the animal to the vice of greed was so strong in him that in recalling the image of the woman with the long neck and the full belly - symbol of greediness - in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, he wrote «si Fera, de qua in praesenti agitur, huic Auctori [Ripa] fuisset manifesta, proculdubio hanc, tanquam legitimum gastrimargiae symbolum pinxisset».

In this way he reintroduced Gesner's old hypothesis, which was based on ancient sources (Plinio and Aristole); and with the expression «hanc Feram, vel huic congenerem», he linked *de facto* «Gulo» and «Hyaena», turning it into just one animal.

Naturally he did so in a tentative way, but the uncertainties that remained in his writing do not eliminate the suspicion that he really

believed in the possibility of this identification and that the etchings he saw in Camerarius - sources, among other things, for the majority of his literary citations, from the inscriptions on the sepulcher of Sardanapalo to the reference to Giulio Capitolino, from the odes of Horatio to the satire of Juvenal, from the *carmina vulgaria* to the admonishment of St. Luke, XXI *cavete ne corda vestra graventur crapula, et ebrietate* - had provided him with decisive proof.

2. Among Readers and Legends, Symbolisms and Truth

Sources, names, and symbols built, as we have seen, a tradition around the animal «Gulo» that fascinated its readership for more than three centuries. The tradition remained bound to Olao's history, to the summary by Menabeni, to the naturalistic manuals - Gesner exemplified how one could already be less tied to exclusively literary sources, and Aldrovandi how one could be an encyclopedic collector of traditions - to Negri's history, and to the tales of those who, in searching for the truth, criticized the maestro Olao without being able to free themselves from him.

The apparition of the fabulous element in the narrations, which certainly wished to display a scientific intention, was a piece of data that was *de facto* insuppressible, and those same people who began to feel that weight, Gesner and Negri among them, did not avoid falling into the same trap: the literature used such an element even when it wanted to assume a more markedly scientific character; that is, at least until the very end of the 18th century.

In a 17th-century naturalistic manual by J. Jonston (Amstelodami 1657, p. 91), which followed Aldrovandi's *Historiae naturalis de quadrupedibus libri*, one can read again about the tradition of the names of the «Gulo», a quick description taken from Miechow, and its emptying out, so classic by this time that it was no longer necessary to cite the sources. In plate LVII, the «Gulo Vielfraes» was drawn in a different pose

than the one handed down from the etchings of Olao's *Historia*, of such representative stillness between the two trees that it clashes with the vulgarity of the depicted action. To whomever thinks that it appeared, at last, out of place - at least in the iconic formulation - one can retort that the pages of Jonston were integrally reproduced, without any historical or illustrative mutations in the successive, large *Theatrum universale omnium animalium*, edited by H. Ruysch and published in Amsterdam in 1718 (2, p. 917)

Perhaps many readers of these manuals had entirely no sense of humour; perhaps the action of the «Gulo» continued to respond to the taste for the marvellous and the fantastic more than our modern sensibility allows us to appreciate; perhaps that action had so penetrated the collective imagination of the readership as to seem - also in the mutations of Olao's iconography - an appendix that no one paid attention to anymore, but that no one could yet neglect - in the name of the truth, which was considered science to all intents and purposes, but which was rather knowledge in the broad sense of the word, and allowed for ample forays in all fields of knowledge.

Aldrovandi demonstrated that every cultural parallelism was possible and that identifications, even in the scientific field, still occurred solely on literary grounds; it was no wonder, given the cultural context of such genres, to discover in his naturalistic tract verses taken from Virgil, Lucretius, Propertius, Manilius - for the latter, in particular, the citation of vv. 5,631-636 and 5,642-644 - or that the remaining proof of the «Gulo» and its voraciousness was above all concerned with the symbolic tradition (that belonged to generic medieval indications relating to many animals, but that was later found in Miechow); nor ultimately, that all of those who had left written proof about the «Gulo» had not done nothing but draw on the one from another. Penetrating their works is like opening up a "Russian doll." Until the 18th century, not one of the old narrations refrained from making suggestions, mediations, and symbolic interpretations of the literary and mythical memoirs

and of the scholarly Latin and Greek citations; rather, one could say that their own substance consisted in this outlandish rewriting and that it became the contact point between the literary and scientific traditions.

Every narrated history during the 16th and 17th centuries, the ones that began to live on - in order then to survive for a long time - in that enchanting baroque air, nevertheless tried to connect themselves with the past. And they traced the proper origins: classical, when they existed - for the main entry *gulones* they might have been Apul. *ap.* 32,16 and Macrob. *sat.* 7,12; for the identification of the Hyena, above all Aristotle and Plinius - or medieval, like animal symbolism or the legends handed down from Olao, among which that of the seven sleepers, criticized and refuted by Negri, which the Upsalan bishop Olao Magno had taken, without claiming so, from Paulus Diaconus or from Gregorius of Tours.

3. Linguistic Notations

From the publishing success of all of these books, travel tales, summaries, and naturalistic manuals, it seems even more clear that most readers did not disapprove of the fabulous element of the narrations in the least.

Menabeni was not as fortunate as Olao or the numerous books on zoology or Negri's tales, but he also enjoyed several re-editions, like the one in Vienna, edited by L. Nassinger in 1581 (see the copy C.Misc.47/2 from B.C. Berio of Genoa, having belonged to D. Canevari).

Olao's work had the richest tradition, however, and it continued to be bought and read well into the following centuries: for example, by G.M. Viotti (see the Roman edition, 1555, in Genoa, B.C. Berio C.C. 428, having also belonged to D. Canevari), by C.J.V. Berio (see the Venetian edition, 1565, in Genoa, B.C. Berio, *m.r.A.III.5/10*), by G.F. Arparell and A. Mai (see the Roman edition, 1555, in the Vatican Library, *Mai XI.I.VII.20*), and by A. Patrignani and G. Ferraioli (see the Venetian edition, 1561, in

the Vatican Library, *Ferraioli V.503 e Ferraioli VI.800*).

The work truly attracted the most fascination, and even the critic Giovanni Scheffer (1621-1679), who in his *Lapponia, seu gentis regionisque Lapponicae descriptio accurata* declared, against Olao, that the hide of the «Gulo» used to be traded, used Olao's words for the «Gulo's» hide (brilliant «comme les Satins de damas à fleurs»), and wrote for the hunt: «le chasseur prend le tems que Jaerf ou Goulu passe avec effort entre deux arbres pur se décharger le ventre, et alors on le perce à coups de fleches et on le tuë» (see the French trans. *Histoire de la Laponie*, Paris 1678, pp. 314 and 208).

As for its name, he wrote that «on l'appelle en langage Sclavon Rosomacha, les Suedonis le nomment Ierff, et les Alemans Vilefrass ou VVildefrass; ce mot neanmoins ne signifie pas une bête qui devore beaucoup, comme veut Scaliger, mais plutôt une bête des forêts et sauvage» because the word «VVild» according to the Germans meant wild and fierce.

The epithet VVildefrass, therefore, did not correspond to a "bestia vorace" [voracious beast] but rather a "bestia selvatica, che viveva nelle foreste" [wild beast that used to live in the forests]; unless, he added on second thought, «le copiste ou l'imprimeur n'ait pas fidèlement suivi son original» (p. 314).

The source he cited, actually, namely Giulio Cesare Scaligero (1484-1558), who had also been mentioned by Gesner and Aldrovandi, had not only *not* ventured into glottological lucubrations concerning its name, which did not bother him in this particular instance, but had limited itself to citing denominations, by now the usual ones, which linked it with one of the etymons proposed by the tradition: that is, «uuild-» (=wild [beast]), and not «uil-» or «uiel-» (=very [heavy eater]). In addition, he indicated that he depended entirely on Olao's «quemadmodum aviculae viso vulture»:

nomen hoc [Rosomacha] Sclavum est. Suecij Jerff dicunt, Germani Vuildefrass. Nos ioco [loco nella citazione di Gesner 1551 ma ioco in Gesner 1560], Vulturem qudrupedem consuevimus appellare

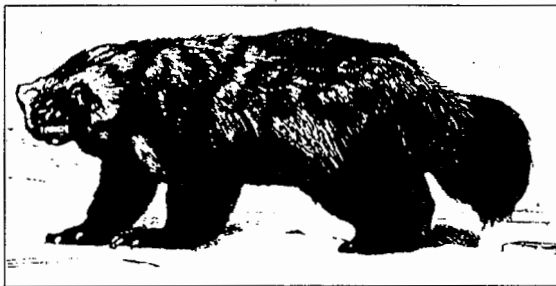
The edition of Scaligero's work that I consulted (*Exotericarum exercitationum liber quintus decimus de subtilitate* ad H. Cardanum, Lutetiae 1557, p. 272v) renders «Vuildfrafs» both in the text and in the title of the relative chapter (*Exercitatio cciii*) and, if one is to exclude a typographical error, it indicates that Scaligero was uninterested in the origin of the name and in its connection with the traditional etymon keeping with the "vorace" [voracious] characteristic of the beast, but instead connected simply to one of the current German names.

More interested in harming the loathsome Cardano as savagely as possible, Scaligero intended to denigrate him in the eyes of his readers. And he did this by proving the inherent incongruity between the animal and the symbolic aspects attributed to its voracity; that is, acting upon what was still its most highly regarded worth.

With his ferocious irony, Scaligero wrote on p. 272: «optimo iudicio usus es, cum dicebas: Animalia, hominum indigenarum similia, in singulis nasci regionibus. Idque exemplo Rosomachae ... at incolae, Cardane, ventrem non distinguunt. Praeterea haud multo voraces Angli, apud quos animal tale nullum. Vulpes in Italia paucae. Esse tamen Italos cautos, omnium consensus nationum persuadet».

4. Totemistic Mythology

Today we know all about the «Gulo», or rather the carnivorous mammal popularly known as «Ghiottone» [Wolverene], which belongs to the subfamily of Weasels; in a photograph from the *Enciclopedia italiana* (16, 1950, p. 917) it is visibly shown in an aggressive posture, along with its extremely dense fur and sharp teeth, and its fat tail:



C.D. Sherborn's old inventory, *Index animalium sive index nominum quae ab A.D. MDCCLVIII generibus et speciebus animalium imposita sunt, sectio secunda a Kalendis Ianuariis MDCCCI usque ad finem decembris MDCCCL, Additions*, London 1932, p. 528, had already revealed it in all of its other epithets. They are, besides the by now classical «gulo» and «voracissimus»: «arcticus, barbara, barbatus, borealis, canescens, capensis, castaneus, diaphorus, ferrugineus, ... lanatus, larvatus, leira, luscus, mapurito, mellivora, nipalensis, orientalis, quintessis, quitensis, ratel, spelaeus, suffocans, urva, vittatus, ... vulgaris, wolverene, yzquiepatl», listed such that one can deduce that other traditions stand between us and the history of this animal, because each of the epithets corresponds, in a plausible way, to other previous sources. Aldrovandi had proposed a *summa* of the acquaintances still alive at the time and had connected his naturalistic account to a diligent pursuit of the sources that, while privileging Camerarius, seemed not to have neglected any part of the cultural apparatus that could have been connected to the name of the animal; but each of the epithets on Sherborn's list represents a new link to the past of the Wolverine, and it would deserve a deep investigation, aimed at searching for new motivations and a connection to the beliefs and the most ancient art of the Finno-Ugric world, as already pointed out by several critics.

Recent research has in fact linked this animal to the so-called legend of the «ghiottone alato» [winged wolverine] of Noin Ula (Mongolia); that is, to the representation on a carpet discovered in a Hunnish subterranean tomb, that pictured an animal endowed with wings attack an elk and pointed to a totemic origin of its myth. Zoltán Kádár (*Gli animali negli oggetti ornamentali dei popoli della steppa: Unni, Avari e Magiari, in L'uomo di fronte al mondo animale nell'Alto Medioevo*, Spoleto 1985 ["Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo" 31], pp. 1378ss.) recalled how A. Alföldi, in order to explain this scene, had spoken of the myth of the «ugri ad Ob»,

according to which two hunters, named «Pascher», chased a deer: the winged hunter killed the beast but left the dead body alone; the other, the foot soldier, searched for it and found it very far away, and remained over there, because that land was overflowing with fish and beasts. (A. Alföldi, *Die theriomorphe Weltbetrachtung in den hochasiatischen Kulturen*, in «Archäologischer Anzeiger», 1-2, 1931, pp. 393-418; see also *Die geistigen Grundlagen der hochasiatischen Tierstiles*, in «Funde und Forschungen», 1931, pp. 278-280).

The name «pascher» means "glutton", and according to Alföldi, this representation of Noin Ula could portray the original myth of the search for a new homeland. According to G. Györffy (*Du clan Hongrois au comitat, de la tribu au pays*, in «Sza'zadok», 92, 1958, p. 951), it is possible to identify the name «pascher» not only with the animal «Gulo» (Wolverine), but also with the name of a people that live along the Cama, Urals, and the Volga, namely «baschkir» (Bashkirs). According to the original myth, this nation was brought by an animal to a new homeland (A. Alföldi, *Die theriomorphe Weltbetrachtung, cit.*, p. 406: «Paster bzw. Pasker bedeutet ugrisch "Vielfrass" [...], der also der Tierahne des Pastergeschlechtes ist»). The «ghiottone alato» [winged wolverine] nevertheless, noted Kádár once again, resembles a grifon more than a wolverine; but others have also recalled and associated this figure with a relief from Tell-Halaf, in which one sees a small beast with a long tail ferociously attack a huge deer.

The symbolic representations of totemistic origins in a civilization of Eurasian peoples are so diverse that it would seem impossible today to say more about it; according to Györffy, for example, the legend of the deer hunt is not originally totemistic.

It is not difficult to find motivations for the symbolic characterizations that the successive ages connected to the feeding rites of the animal; but it is more difficult to find the crossover point, if it should exist, connecting the beginning of the great fascination to the ample literature offered for the ridiculous digestive habits, at least starting with the

first source, in chronological order, that then handed them down. One could hypothesize that they were born out of popular accounts and handed down orally, whereupon they found themselves in the literature, true to form, from Miechow (1517) up to Cardano (1550), Gesner (1551), Olao (1555), Menabeni (1581), Aldrovandi (1645) and others.

5. Yesterday and Today

Aside from the actual, confirmed greedinesses and voraciousnesses, contained in the current name and in that scientific one *gulo gulo*, which refer faithfully to the most ancient tradition, and by name of *Filfras*, which was transported intact, from the oldest centuries to the modern Swedish zoologic terminology, there is nothing whatsoever of the ancient magic of the Wolverine that survives today. In fact, from F. Schulthness on - *Fransk-Svensk Ordbok. Skolupplaga*, Stockholm 1898, p. 315 - one finds under the main entry *glouton* two Swedish nouns: 1. «storätare» (from «stor» = grand, it. grande, engl. big); 2. «zool. järf, filfras», and the same main entries *filfras*, -en, -ar, and *järf*, -ven, -var correspond to fr. *glouton* even in the most recent one: F. Schulthness, *Svensk-Fransk Ordbok. Skolupplaga*, 1 and 2, Stockholm 1901, pp. 111 and 251 (and see also K. Ahlenius, *Olaus Magnus och hans Framställning af Nordens Geografi. Studier i geografiens Historia*, Upsala 1895, pp. 235s. «järf-ven»). In O. Hoppe, *Svensk-Tysk Ordbok. Skolupplaga*, Stockholm 1901, p. 162 the main entry *järf* is said to correspond to the modern German *Vielfrass*.

The glottological tradition, therefore, has remained intact, according to the line Miechow-Olao-Menabeni-Negri-Aldrovandi (Vielfrass), in spite of the spelling variations: Viel/vil (see in L. De Westenrieder, *Glossarium Germanico-latinum vocum obsoletarum prime et Medii Aevi, in primis Bavaricarum*, 1, Monachi 1816 p. 630 under main entry «VIL vaste, fast viel, sehr viel»), and in spite of other pointed out glottological solutions, linked not to voraciousness but rather to wildness.

Whoever would like to revive the entire succession connected to the different names, including the citations of Miechow and Olao, including variations and treatments of each genre (such as «Viel'frass» or «fjeldfross "bergkater"») and various explanations (the origin of «fressen» the animals' food, not to be confused with «essen» people's food, and of «viel» much, not from «wild» [wild] nor from «Vieh», beast) need but read the dense lines dedicated to the main entry «Vielfrasz» in J. and W. Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch Zwölfter Band II. Abteilung Vesche-Vulkanisch*, bearb. v. R. Meiszener, Leipzig 1951, coll. 228-231.

Here one could also find another historical identification with the Hyena («vielfrasz, lurco insatiabilis, it. hyoena, belbus, animal in Africa magnitudine lupi, cadaveribus mortuorum vivens Stieler 899», col. 228), which ideally connects Olao's «Gulo» to Negri, through Gesner, Aldrovandi, and Leone, and again: «er wendet sich gegen die bis dahin geltende ansicht ... dasz vielfrasz als bezeichnung des in den nordischen gegenden heimischen tieres eine umdeutung von norw. *fjeldfross* sei (-fross ist de norw. form, -fress ist schwedisch). Böhlingk weist nach, dasz dieser name viel früher in Deutschland als im nordischen verkomme» (col. 228); and then «Peder Claussön Friis (1599) erff als den norwegischen fellefraadtzer als den deutschen namen bezeugt der name Jerv ist dagegen seit alter zeit belegt ... Böhlingk kommt zu dem schlusz dasz norw. *fjeldfross* "bergkater" eine volks etymologische umdeutung von *viel frass* ist» (col. 228); «filfras ist ebenfalls dem deutschen nachgebildet, deutlicher noch *fjeldfross* heimisch ...» (col. 229). And again «in Schweden und in der Litawe werden thier, Vilfrasz mit namen funden Heyden Plinius (1565) 130, Harsdörffer Gesprächspiele 8,523» (col. 231). The tools that modern science - naturalistic as well as literary - put at our disposal, allow us to examine extensively the authors of European literature dating from the 16th-18th centuries and to know absolutely everything. The description offered by B.

Grzimek's modern collection presents several differences from that of the cited volume of the *Enciclopedia italiana*, according to which the Wolverine is «delle dimensioni di un cane di buona taglia, di forme tarchiate, con collo e coda corti, arti robustissimi, pentadattili, muniti di artigli forti e aguzzi, con pelame abbondantissimo e lungo. D'indole vivacissima, intraprendente, distruttiva e scontrosa, dai movimenti repentini e energici ... ama le solitudini iperboree d'Europa, Asia e America, cacciando tutto quello che riesce ad uccidere col suo coraggio talvolta temerario, anche nei rigori dell'inverno, durante il quale non va in letargo») [of the dimensions of a medium-sized dog, thickly-set, with throat and short tail, very robust skills, pentadactyl, armed with strong and sharp claws, with an abundant and long coat. A very vivacious, enterprising, destructive, and clashing temperament, makes sudden and energetic movements ... loves the hyperborean solitudes of Europe, Asia, and America, hunting everything that it succeeds in killing with its extraordinary rash courage, even in the severity of winter, during which it does not hibernate].

Actually, according to B. Grzimek (*Vita degli animali*, in the transl. ed. by C. Cavallazzi, Milano 1972-73; under the heading, see also the *Enzyklopädie, Säugetiere*, 3, München 1988) the Wolverine has a massive body «come quella degli Orsi» [like that of a Bear] and has «le zampe bene sviluppate con piedi grandi, larghi e muniti di membrana interdigitale, e il mantello lungo e folto» [well-developed paws with big and wide feet, fortified with an interdigital membrane, and its coat is long and thick]. See facsimile:



Camerius's iconography seems therefore to adhere more closely to the truth that of Olao, but other elements of the modern description carry over from the Upsalan bishop, such that F.S. Bodenheimer (*Towards the History of Zoology and Botany in the XVIth Century*, in *La science au seizième siècle, Colloque international Royaumont 1-4 juillet 1957*, Paris 1960, p. 295) could write that Olao's *Historia* narrates «the full description of .. the Gulo.. partly in somewhat legendary form, but essentially correct».

The *Historia* comes back into mind when one reads of its inedible meat and its fur that today yields no market value, of the voraciousness and the use of rotting carcasses to feed itself (limited nevertheless to holidays because the Wolverine, moving more agilely on the snow, manifests its aggressivity at the height of winter), of the fright that it really causes, not only to the pack of dogs described by Olao, but to the Wolf (if not in its own pack), to the Bear, and to the Puma, because it frightens them off by spraying from as far as three meters away a bad-smelling secretion (perhaps one of the characteristics that contributed to creating the feeding habit in the old imagination, together with the habit of marking established points of its territory with secretion and excrement).

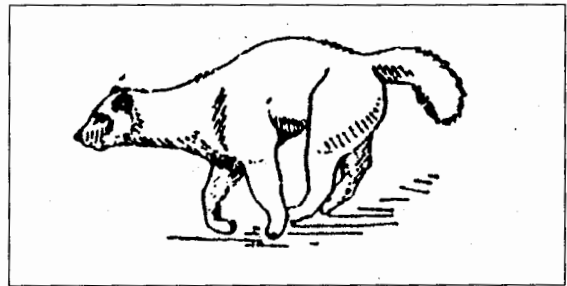
Something of the old magic returns when Grzimek explains that, as if centuries had not passed, many peoples still consider this animal a voracious and dreaded carnivore - if bred in captivity, however, it seems to become a tame overgrown "pup" - and that Eskimos and Laplanders considered it «impuro» [foul], as if it were the devil's incarnation (p. 75).

Someone, therefore, continues to spread rumors of old legends in the folkloric traditions of modern nations, such that desires are planted to actually go to the Northern countries and meet in person this animal that has aroused such curiosity through time, to see its habits with one's own eyes.

But would we behave then like truly impartial naturalists, or would we not as well collect old beliefs and traditional rumors? Thus, how would we have behaved several

centuries ago? We too would most likely have mixed our interest with the myths, the legends, and the fabulous accounts of the unknown worlds, and in this we would have been companions of great poets, happy to be able to renounce, with them, having to confront ourselves continuously with reality.

Among the Italians, for instance, there was Torquato Tasso, who was a passionate reader and imitator of Olao. He certainly drew from the etching of the reindeer that pulled along the snow an imaginary wheeled-carriage, included in the *Historia* (see facsimile), when he wrote «veggio che fra le nevi e l'alto ghiaccio / il rangifero, occulto al nostro mondo, / porta correndo le veloci ruote» (*Le sette giornate del mondo creato* 6,113).



In conclusion, but prudently, to give credit to our fame recalled by Scaligero, we could ask on whose part we would have sided had we been readers living in the tempered cultures of the 16th-18th centuries, when the real and imaginary did not live together only in the minds of the artists and magic mingled with reality and seeped into the supernatural. Would we not perhaps have favored Olao and have wanted to read even more of such amazing accounts?



STEMMI DI PAESI NORDICI IN UN MANOSCRITTO DELLA BIBLIOTECA AUGUSTA DI PERUGIA

di Rita Staccini, Università di Perugia

Nel ms. 89 (B33) della Biblioteca Comunale Augusta di Perugia, una *Miscellanea di*