POLEMIUS SILVIUS’ “VOCES VARIE ANIMANCIUM” 
AND RELATED CATALOGUES OF 
ANIMAL SOUNDS

BY

D. THOMAS BENEDIKTSON

The English term ‘catalogue of animal sounds’ was used first, I believe, by Finch in his study of two Vatican MSS containing animals and the sounds they make, similar to the passages in Reifferscheid’s Suetonius fragment 161, De Naturis Animantium. These passages appear in MSS from the eighth to the eighteenth century. They sometimes are incorporated into texts on other topics, as is the case with Polemius Silvius’ calendar or Aldhelm’s treatise on metrics. One catalogue is incorporated into the Liber Glossarum or Glossariorum Anseleubi. The passages vary in style: some give animals in nominative singular and verbs in the third-person singular indicative; others give animals in the nominative plural and verbs in the third-person plural, or animals in the accusative plural and verbs in the infinitive, treating the list as indirect statement; a few use the genitive or even the dative. Some catalogues are alphabetical, and some include humans and inanimate objects. Some separate by phylum. But they are a unique genre and cannot be neglected.\(^1\)

The older of the two full-length studies of these catalogues, Wackernagel’s Voces Variae Animantium, examines not only Latin and Greek but also German sounds, but Wackernagel did not have available much of the material needed for full study. The more recent dissertation of Klenner provides a useful contextual study of what he calls “Tierstimmenkataloge”, especially of Greek, poetic Latin, and later catalogues in Latin and in the Romance languages, but does not establish the basic Latin texts. In fact the section on prose Latin catalogues, divided into “The Catalogue of Suetonius” (by which

---

he means Hugutio of Pisa) and “The Catalogue of Aldhelm”, focuses largely upon the later, derivative catalogues of Papias, Hugutio, etc., not on the extant passages from which they are derived. Reifferscheid’s edition exhibits as the main text Hugutio, a fact which Reifferscheid points out elsewhere in the edition but which has escaped some scholars, and prints as well a number of catalogues without much help in evaluation or classification. His apparatus is so confusing that Finch misread the abbreviations and believed that the texts in question came from Isidore of Seville’s *De Natura Rerum*, as was pointed out by Marcovich. Marcovich has in fact greatly illuminated the issues surrounding these texts by classification and organization. The passages are divided by him into “Class I” catalogues such as the one attributed to Phocas in the *Liber Glossarum* (VO 167 Lindsay), poetic catalogues (*De Philomela*, etc., “Class II”), those dependent on Aldhelm (“Class III”) and a few catalogues similar to Polemius Silvius’ (“Class IV”).

The approximately fifty MS catalogues cannot be edited here. Rather I would like to consider nine passages associated with Polemius Silvius’ *Laterculus*, six of which have been published independently and four of which are in the Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden. Polemius lived in the fifth century, apparently in southern France. The *Laterculus*, which we possess in a twelfth-century MS (*Pol, below*), is a calendar, with miscellaneous discussions including a catalogue of animal sounds, entitled *Voces Varie Animancium*. The work is dated by mention of the consuls of 448. There are two defining characteristics of the Polemius catalogues. First, the animals appear in nominative singular with their sounds in third-person singular present indicative. Second, the order of animals is quadripeds first, followed by birds, then the frog, then humans, then natural forces, and finally man-made objects. It is impossible to determine whether