



A Session of the RESEARCH GROUP ON MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE

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SESSION 117

Thursday 14 May 2015

3:30–5:00pm

Predicting the Past

Dream Symbology in the Middle Ages

Like medieval bestiaries, dream-books constitute compelling tools to investigate the collective imagination of the Middle Ages. These manuals, such as the widely circulated *Somniale Danielis*, were usually structured so that key terms in the text corresponded to the subject of the dream, while the key-words were arranged alphabetically with a concise interpretation of its symbol. The system established both quick and easy access to terms, symbols, and their meanings, and functioned as a convenient guide to the interpretation of dreams. It serves, too, as an important tool for understanding medieval literary as well as other dreams, and for identifying and describing traditional dream topoi.

Our session analyses the origin and circulation of dream symbology as transmitted in dream-manuals, in both manuscript and early printed sources. It also concentrates on how dream symbols developed and changed, in their transfer across religious texts and imagery, literature, and the visual arts, into settings and contexts (including genres other than the literary and media other than the book) where they reveal new layers of meaning. In such ways, dream-books and their study may function as portals to the medieval past.

Organizer: Valerio Cappozzo (Department of Modern Languages, University of Mississippi)

Presider: Claire Fanger (Department of Religion, Rice University)

Presenters:

Boyda Johnstone (Department of English, Fordham University, New York)

“Possessed by Dreams: Dream Interpretation Manuals in Late Medieval England”

László Sándor Chardonens (Department of English Language and Culture, Radboud University Nijmegen)

“Seeing is Believing: Dream Symbols and Their Perception in Medieval Alphabetical Dream Books”

Valerio Cappozzo (Department of Modern Languages, University of Mississippi,)

“A Dictionary for Dream Interpretation: The Somniale Danielis in Its Manuscript Sources”

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This session resumes a theme explored in the Session on ‘Dream Books’, which the Research Group co-sponsored with the Societas Magica <http://societas.magica/org/> at the 2012 Congress:

<http://www.manuscriptevidence.org/2012-international-congress-on-medieval-studies/>.

At the 2015 Congress, the Research Group sponsors 2 Sessions and co-sponsors 3 Sessions:

<http://www.manuscriptevidence.org/2015-international-congress-on-medieval-studies-events-announced/>.

Pu' sopra se uedere populo
apre trassinare letitia
Albato uedere con fructo vi
anto f.

Albero uedere troua
Albero lecto uedere inghanno
di facto f.

Albero manifestare danno f.
Aceto o alenoio loro molestia
figuelli e chaureti auere osolatio

Angnello pasere odumore uedere
ghuadagno f.

Altare fare danno. f.
Altare uedere honore oforteca f.

Alacrificio andare odore letitia f.
Arco ueder tendere honore
Agghuglia sopra se uedere honore

Alla tauola ueder manchare gh
uadagno f.

Anghulla uedere o trassinare
faticoso tempo. f.

Arme uedere oportare honore f.
Arme uedere opare danno f.

Anelli tore danno f.
Anello pare graue danno f.

Alcielo uolare danno f.
Alino uenire scimento oinfamita f.

Alla bataglia andare tracundia f.
Albero melle uedere spaciamento f.

Ardesi uedere danno f.
Angholiosi uogghi passare tempo
buon f.

Alberghante mehasa sua uede
inuita f.

Amar uederli odio f.
Alla scuola uederli anare danno f.

Alla altre uederli lite f.
Bianchezza abque sua solueri
me f.

Basta uederli graua f.
Bagnio auere oculto e cetera f.
Barbe grande auere morte f.

Barbe grande auere morte f.
Barbe farsi uedere morte f.

Bagnio salbricare o i esso farsi agholscia f.
Braccia picche auere honore f.

Bunfargli luogho nimista f.
Buoi pla china scandere nimino bn f.

Buoi grassli pasere uedere ghuadagno f.
Bunobater ue dire angholscia f.

Bestia plante uedere molestia f.
Bestie domar uedere pace f.

Bataglia ob tur tuti fare lit. f.
Benedusi uede bima gra f.

Biada ueder coghe allegrea f.
Biada nella ma uedere i firmata f.

Batuto essi ue derli danno f.
Corona tre honore f.

Chorona duli aposti honore f.
Corona fare uedere lit. f.

Cielo focho uedere alchuna co
sa rea. f.

Cielo subito e angholscioso uedere
gran tribulation. f.

Ciecho ue derli uelox letura f.
Correre uederli no potere infirmita f.

Corere se uedere ueloxe lite f.
Corere se uedere spaciamento f.

Cera uedere o trattare letitia f.
Cholmato fanellare lite f.

Cholla madre sua iacere danno f.
Cholla moglie sua iacere danno f.

Cholla ferocchia sua iacere danno f.
Cholla moglie altrui iacere danno f.

Cholla uergine fanellare agholscia f.
Chonputona iacere secuita f.

Chomaleino iacere maraniglia f.
Chonokhuna bestia iace morte f.

Abstracts (Alphabetical order by Speaker)

Cappozzo, Valerio (Department of Modern Languages, University of Mississippi)

“A Dictionary for Dream Interpretation: The Somniale Danielis in Its Manuscript Sources”

This paper presents the results of research on the transmission of the *Somniale Danielis* in Latin and Italian manuscript sources. Widely circulated in the late Middle Ages, this dream manual was structured so that key terms in the text corresponded to the subjects of the dreams. The investigation yields an inventory of dream symbols, which functions as a dictionary with a comparative table of medieval dream symbols. Each entry provides the variants associated with one symbol, as recorded in the examined manuscripts, and shows all the existing variations in meaning, with a critical apparatus from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries.

Set in context, this broader view of dream symbols may be seen to correspond to the astonishing and varied genre of medieval bestiaries, in which animals are categorized and analyzed according to their symbols, which often derive from fantasy and superstition. Similarly, in significant measure, dreams and their interpretation may be timeless, so that the *Somniale Danielis* appears to gather into its sphere some traditional beliefs, transmitted orally or in written form, by turns, that may transcend social classes and specific moments in time.

This paper focuses on the importance of the dream dictionary as starting point for commentary on each dream symbol, in order to identify the tradition to which the symbol belongs in each manuscript. How these symbols were represented in contemporary visual arts and literature can significantly guide this investigation in the quest for recognizing their specific meanings. The medieval and humanist dream dictionary can provide portals to exploring many aspects of the medieval imaginary in action; it can also tell us much about local legends and traditions implementing or channeling human fantasy. Such materials can help to advance our knowledge of territorial specificities in the changing landscapes of medieval and early modern creativity in relating to the interlinked worlds of imagination and reality.

Image: Opening page of a Dream Alphabet in vernacular Italian for the *Somniale Danielis*, in a fourteenth-century copy. Florence, The Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Martelli 12, c.33v. Reproduced with permission of MiBACT. Further reproduction by any means is prohibited.

Online facsimile of the manuscript in full: http://www.mirabileweb.it/manuscript-rom/firenze-biblioteca-medicea-laurenziana-martelli-12-manuscript/LIO_109983.

A transcription of its text can be found in: Valerio Cappozzo, *Un volgarizzamento trecentesco del Somniale Danielis nel cod. Laurenziano Martelli 12*, «Medioevo Letterario d'Italia» XI (2014), 77–90.

Chardonnens, László Sándor (Department of English Language and Culture,
Radboud University Nijmegen)

“Seeing is Believing: Dream Symbols and Their Perception in Medieval Alphabetical Dream Books”

This paper discusses trends in the catalogue and sensory perception of dream symbols in medieval alphabetical dream books from the earliest ninth-century attestations to the incunables of the *Somniale Danielis* printed at the end of the fifteenth century. Alphabetical dream books may be regarded as convenient guides to the interpretation of dreams, but the text witnesses surviving in over 250 medieval manuscripts and printed books present a severely fragmented catalogue of dream symbols. There is no dream book among these many text witnesses that completely captures the cultures of medieval societies, and a compilation of all extant sources does not provide a coherent overview either.

There are, in fact, unexplainable omissions that make one query the internal logic of dream books, making it impossible to reconstruct a medieval worldview that is even remotely consistent with daily reality. While many dream books feature at least one dream about dogs, for instance, those that feature cats are in short supply. It would be a mistake to assume that people can only dream of symbols that appear in dream books, but it is striking that the absence of such everyday animals as cats is countered by the presence of such exotic

animals as lions and elephants. To give another example, well-known literary dreams that are thought to build upon the symbology of medieval dream books, as in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, sometimes include interpretations of symbols that were never included in the inventory of dream symbols.

The problem of a haphazard inventory of dream symbols is compounded by a bias towards dream symbols that can be seen. This seems to make sense in view of the primarily visual nature of dreams, yet what about the other four senses? How is it possible to see a musical instrument playing without also hearing it, for instance? This paper follows the trail of dream symbols and their perception in the alphabetical dream books transmitted in the medieval period.

Johnstone, Boyda (Department of English, Fordham University)

"Possessed by Dreams: Dream Interpretation Manuals in Late Medieval England"

In this paper, I evaluate the manuscript contexts for a popular and relatively unknown group of late-medieval dream books, or, as I call them, dream guides: the Middle English *Dreams of Daniel*, translated from Latin in the fourteenth century. These alphabetized lists of dream contents and their significations may strike modern readers, accustomed to psychologized Freudian interpretation, as bizarre and simplistic, but my analysis of the manuscript contexts in which they survive reveals that they were put to use in a multitude of ways, from the devotional to the scientific, and from the serious to the ludic. Contrary to their common associations with lower classes, they were consulted by a diverse set of readers, even reaching to the topmost echelons of medieval culture.

With reference to particular manuscript presentations and contexts, such as London, British Library, Sloane MS 1609 (which situates the *Dreams of Daniel* within astrological contexts) and Cambridge, Trinity College, MS 0.9.37 (which presents the *Dreams of Daniel* alongside medical prognostication texts), I report that, even though they reflect a collective system of shared interpretive meaning, the *Dreams of Daniel* dream guides are designed to empower individual readers, by serving as indices that could, in addition to being used after-the-fact, be consulted in anticipation of future dreams. During a time when sleepers were vulnerable to spirits and unseen forces, these popular, enigmatic, and instructive guides offered readers programs for understanding and seizing partial control over their nocturnal journeys.

The Research Group exists to apply an integrated approach to the study of manuscripts and other forms of the written or inscribed word, in their transmission across time and space.

Information about the activities and publications of the Research Group on Manuscript Evidence appears on its official website: <http://manuscriptevidence.org/>. The Research Group welcomes donations for its nonprofit educational mission, including donations in kind, expertise, advice, and contributions to our work, research, scholarly events, exhibitions, and publications.

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Please join us for our **Business Meeting** on Friday lunchtime and for the celebratory **Reception** co-sponsored with the Societas Magica and the Index of Christian Art of Princeton University
All are welcome to all these events

RESEARCH GROUP BUSINESS MEETING
Friday 15 May, 12:00–1:00pm
1035 Fetzner

CO-SPONSORED RECEPTION
Friday 15 May, 9:00–11:00pm
Bernhard Faculty Lounge