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## **The Biblical World of Animals**

In the Holy Scripture one can come across a number of texts referring to animals and mentioning them. Because of that, while reading the Bible, we are often tempted to confront descriptions included in it with contemporary natural sciences. We often wonder whether the animals mentioned in different Books of the Sacred Scripture should be perceived in a realistic way, or rather as a kind of allegory to present a particular situation or to teach us a lesson about something.

How should biblical descriptions including references to the animal world be interpreted? Firstly, one must remember that the principal aim of the Bible is to deliver the Revelation of God. It is the Book written and read with the theological aim in mind, therefore, it would be unreasonable to expect the references to animals that one can find in it to have a merely zoological character. That is why it is crucial to analyse the biblical mentions of animals in the context of literature and theology, far beyond the initial zoological interpretation.

It is noteworthy that the Bible, presenting the story of God's interventions with the human fate, laterally provides us with one of the first written records of animal species and descriptions of their behaviour and appearance. Common references to the animal world show that the authors of the Bible were careful nature observers, able to use their knowledge of fauna to picture and present numerous lessons and useful advice. On the other hand, the zoological analysis of the fragments of the Bible in which references to animals appear lets us determine the variety of species in the biblical areas in the times when both the Old and the New Testament were being written.

## 1. The Origins of the Abundance of the Biblical Fauna

Analysing the wide variety of animal species mentioned in the Bible and the reasons why the inspired authors chose these particular representatives of the animal world, one must consider a number of factors that influenced this process. Their character is both geographical and historically-cultural. The first aspect one must take into consideration is the fact that the biblical stage of the history of salvation was not only the land of Israel, but also other areas and countries, since during some periods Israelites resided in Egypt (cf. Gen 45:9–10) and the Tigris-Euphrates basin (cf. Ps 137:1), where they had a chance to become familiar with the animals living there. What is more, even in the ancient times exotic animals were bred and traded,<sup>1</sup> an example of which we can find in the description of king Solomon's fleet: "[the] king had a fleet of Tarshish ships at sea with Hiram's fleet. Once every three years the fleet of Tarshish ships would come with a cargo of gold, silver, ivory, apes, and monkeys" (1 Kings 10:22).

Using the contemporary geographical names, we can place the events described in the Bible on the territory spreading from Iran in the east to Libya in the west, from Armenia in the north to Sudan in the south. Analysing the different species of the biblical fauna we must look at the eastern part of the Mediterranean Basin, which is often referred to as the Fertile Crescent<sup>2</sup> or the Cultural Semicircle.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Słownik tła Biblii*, red. nauk. wyd. oryg. J. I. Packer, M. C. Tenney, red. nauk. wyd. pol. W. Chrostowski, Warszawa 2007, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> The name "Fertile Crescent" was introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by J. H. Breasted as referring to the ancient Near East. It is used with reference to the region containing the moist and fertile land stretching from the Persian Gulf (Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Syria, south-east Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel) to Egypt in the west – cf. S. Jankowski, *Geografia biblijna*, Warszawa 2007, p. 16, 22; *Atlas biblijny*, Warszawa 1990, p. 13–14; W. Chrostowski, „Ziemia miodem i mlekiem płynąca.” *Medytacja nad geografią historyczną Palestyny*, „Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny” 44 (1991) no. 4–6, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> A much newer expression used to describe the area of Levant, Asia Minor, Cyprus, Greece. The name comes from the supposition that we owe the invention of the alphabet and money to this region – cf. S. Jankowski, *Geografia biblijna*, op. cit., p. 16, 28.

However, the majority of biblical events take place in the territory between Africa and Asia, between the Mediterranean coast and the Arabian Desert. The popular name of this area is the Holy Land.<sup>4</sup> It is a part of the western side of the Fertile Crescent, the southern part of the Levant, to be more exact, it is therefore a part of today's Syria, Lebanon and Israel.

Natural borders of the Holy Land can easily be determined – from the west it is the Mediterranean coast, and in the north the Mountains of Lebanon along the Nahr el-Litani stream (Leontes), Beqaa Valley (el-Bika) and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains with Mount Hermon. In the east the natural border is formed by the River Jordan flowing from the slope of Mount Hermon to the Sea of Galilee, in the end reaching the Dead Sea. On the extension of the River Jordan and the Dead Sea the border of the Holy land is formed by the Gulf of Aqaba, separating the Sinai Peninsula from the Arabian Peninsula. From the south-west the Holy land is enclosed by the Negev Desert, which then changes into the Sinai Desert. The geographical border between Negev and Sinai is formed by the line between the Gulf of Aqaba and the mouth of the el-Arisz stream, flowing into the Mediterranean. The area of the Holy Land determined in this way covers about 25 thousand km<sup>2</sup>, and the territory of the contemporary Israel is inscribed in it.<sup>5</sup>

Due to its location, the Holy Land is the area where the paths of people and animals from three continents – Europe, Asia and Africa – cross. Because of that, over the last few thousand of years, a unique animal world was formed, specific for areas of varied influences, where the diversification of species is big. That is why it is necessary to reach for the zoological knowledge while trying to determine and recreate the natural background of a number of biblical pericopes, as mutually conditioning co-existence of different plant and animal species is characteristic for all living creatures.

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<sup>4</sup> The land of Israel seen from the religious perspective is the Holy Land for Judaism and Christianity – cf. W. Chrostowski, *Ziemia Izraela w ekonomii zbawienia i świadomości żydowskiej*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 114 (1990) z. 1, p. 63–76.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. Jankowski, *Geografia biblijna*, op. cit., p. 44–46; W. Chrostowski, „*Ziemia miodem i mlekiem płynąca*,” op. cit., p. 131–132.

The research on the biblical fauna is facilitated by the determination of the so-called zoological zones. In the territory of Israel four such zones can be determined: the Mediterranean zone, the Irano-Turanian zone, Saharo-Arabian zone and the tropical enclaves in the Dead Sea and the Arabah Valley areas. The Mediterranean zone comprises the Hermon Mountain, the Golan Heights, Galilee, the Akko Plain, Mount Carmel, the Jezreel Valley, western and mid Samaria, the Sharon Plain and Shfela, the Judean Mountains and the northern and middle part of the Judean Lowland. The Irano-Turanian zone forms a narrow strip of land stretching from the south of the Golan Heights, through eastern Samaria, to the central part of the Judean Desert, where it widens towards the west, encompassing northern extremities of the Judean Mountains and Shfela and a large part of the Northern Negev, where it narrows down and stretches to the south through the hills of the central part of Negev.<sup>6</sup> Asian influences are characteristic for this biogeographical zone, since it constitutes a kind of extension of the steppe strip of the Central Asia plateau, which is why it is inhabited by wolves (*Canis lupus*), foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and European hares (*Lepus europaeus*).<sup>7</sup> The Saharo-Arabian zone comprises the Jordan Valley, the eastern part of the Judean Desert, the Dead Sea coast, Arabah, the Paran Plateau and the Eilat Mountains, Negev and the south-western part of the Shfela lowlands.<sup>8</sup> Wadis, being deep dry riverbeds with steep banks formed by water, are common in this area. As far as fauna and flora are concerned, they are the near-Eastern counterparts of the north-African oueds. Among the animals living in this area we can encounter the Nubian ibex (*Capra ibex nubiana*) and the rock hyrax (*Procapra capensis*).<sup>9</sup> By the River Jordan and the Dead Sea there are oases of the tropical Sudan zone, the subtropical character of which confirms the presence of the African flora and fauna. The plant world is

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. W. W. Ferguson, *The Mammals of Israel*, Jerusalem-New York 2002, p. 22–23.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. B. David, A. Fossi, S. Nick, A. Issar, P. J. Dubois, *Przyroda*, [in:] *Ziemia Święta*, red. wyd. pol. J. Hess, Bielsko-Biała 1996, p. 20–21.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. W. W. Ferguson, *The Mammals of Israel*, op. cit., p. 22–23.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. A. B. David, A. Fossi, S. Nick, A. Issar, P. J. Dubois, *Przyroda*, op. cit., p. 17–19, 22–23.

most importantly represented by acacias (especially *Acacia nilotica* and *Acacia seyal*), and from the animal world we can come across: the mountain gazelle (*Gazella gazella cora*), the striped hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*), the wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) and the lesser Egyptian jerboa (*Jaculus orientalis*). The occurrence of the aforementioned zoographical zones in Israel conditions a unique specific combination of animals, especially mammals and birds, which is different from every other place in the world. The specific diversity characteristic for this area is thought to be caused by the fact that it is positioned in between three continents and has a great climatic and environmental variety.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Characteristics of the Biblical Fauna

The term “animals,” commonly used to refer to all living creatures except for plants, does not always have its equivalent in the Bible. Most often it is associated with the Hebrew word חַיָּה *hajjā(h)* meaning ‘a living creature’ (cf. Lev 11:2) and בְּהֵמָה *bēhēmā(h)*, which in the Old Testament is used to refer to all four-legged animals (cf. Gen 6:7), especially domestic ones (Ex 22:9–10). In Septuagint (LXX) and the New Testament a Greek word θηρίον *thērion* is used, four-legged animals, however, are referred to with the word τετράπους *tetrapous* (cf. Acts 10:12; 11:6).<sup>11</sup>

The Old Testament perceives animals mostly as the creatures of God. They belong to Him, and, just like humans, are being taken care of by Him (cf. Ps 36:7). Unlike other religions of the ancient Near East, the Old Testament warns against deifying animals, and even forbids that.<sup>12</sup> Animals were created to praise the Lord (Ps 148:7, 10; Dan 3:79–81). At the same time, God is the only Lord of all animals (Ps 49:10–11), and

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Y. Eshbol, U. Paz, *Birds in the Land of the Bible*, Herzlia [n.d.], p. 3–7; W. W. Ferguson, *The Mammals of Israel*, op. cit., p. 22–23.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. H. I. Avalos, *Zwierzęta*, [in:] *Słownik wiedzy biblijnej*, red. nauk. B. M. Metzger, M. D. Coogan, Warszawa 1999, p. 828.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. M. Lurker, *Słownik obrazów i symboli biblijnych*, tłum. K. Romaniuk, Poznań 1989, p. 280–282.

the man (Adam) was chosen from among all creatures and was allowed to name them (Gen 2:19). The Old Testament contains many instructions concerning the behaviour of people towards animals. They teach that lost animals cannot be left by themselves, and that working animals should not be overburdened (Deut 22:1–4). The obligation to rest on the seventh day applies to animals as well (Ex 23:12). This is the law referred to by Christ, who, explaining the right way of understanding the Shabbat, reminds about the need of taking care of animals that help men, especially the ox and the ass (cf. Lk 13:15; 14:5). In the Bible we can also find descriptions showing the admiration of contemporary men for the animal world. This contemplation of nature not only shows the delight and appreciation of beauty, but, most importantly, brings to mind God the Creator. An example of such way of reality presentation can be found in the Book of Job, in which the title character understands the power of the Creator when he notices the perfection of animals (Job 38–39). Specific animal personalisation is also characteristic for the Bible. As we can read in the Book of Exodus 21:28–32 and a similar fragment of the Book of Leviticus 20:15–16, those animals that committed a crime are subject to punishment.<sup>13</sup>

Some of the animals in the Bible are presented as God's tools of administering justice. Plagues of Egypt can serve as examples, especially mass appearance of frogs (Ex 8:1–5), gnats (Ex 8:16), flies (Ex 8:21) and locusts (Ex 10:4–6). During the walk of Israelites through the desert, saraph serpents were the tool of God's justice (Num 21:6). The she-bears tearing to pieces those jeering at Elisha play the same role in 2 Kings 2:24, as well as boars (Ps 79:14) and foxes that damage the vineyards (Song 2:15).

In the New Testament we can also come across descriptions in which Christ refers to animal lives in order to illustrate his teachings. The following words of Jesus can serve as an example: "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head" (Mt 8:20).

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. S Kobieliński, *Bestiariusz chrześcijański. Zwierzęta w symbolice i interpretacji. Starożytność i średniowiecze*, Warszawa 2002, p. 14–15.

### 3. Animal Classification Systems in the Sacred Scripture

Classification systems of the animal world in the Bible are not based on scientific data, but are the result of shrewd observations of the environment, and a way of presenting the significance of animals for people and their lives. Because of that, one of the first and well defined ways of fauna classification that we find in the Bible is based on a cult criterion, according to which animals can be divided into two groups – clean and unclean (Lev 11:1–31; Deut 14:3–21).<sup>14</sup>

Clean terrestrial animals are the ones which are cloven-footed and chew the cud, so, using the contemporary zoological terminology, the even-toed ungulates and ruminantia belong to this group. Of the various creatures that live in water one can eat only those that have both fins and scales. Among birds only some seed-eating ones, especially pigeons, are considered to be clean. According to this classification system the group of unclean animals includes: reptiles, rodents, carnivorous birds, scavengers, as well as some domesticated animals, such as pigs, asses, camels and almost all insects.<sup>15</sup>

The lists of animals that we can find in the Book of Leviticus and the Book of Deuteronomy mostly include wild animals, represented by the species indigenous for the biblical land. Some animals bred in Israel at that time are also listed there. This long and detailed list of unclean animals is not any longer than the Egyptian list of taboo animals. The difference between the Jewish and Egyptian lists, however, is visible in the way in which animals were perceived. By the River Nile their status was that of sacred creatures, whilst by the River Jordan their uncleanness was emphasised, and they were separated from what was considered to be sacred. What is more, in Israel the taboo element concerning animals

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. A. Wajda, *Zwierzęta czyste i nieczyste*, [in:] *Wokół Biblii. Biblia w kulturze świata*, pr. zb. pod red. T. Jelonka, Kraków 2008, p. 128–149; E. Barnavi, *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People. From the Time of the Patriarchs to the Present*, New York 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. H. I. Avalos, *Zwierzęta*, [in:] *Słownik wiedzy biblijnej*, op. cit., p. 828.

was connected with both the problem of their consumption and their impurity, as perceived by Judaism.<sup>16</sup>

Determining the category of sacrificial animals in the Bible is strongly connected with this system of classification. In the Old Testament animal sacrifice was offered with rams, she-goats, bulls, turtle-doves, pigeons, heifers (cf. Gen 15:9–11). In Israel killing and offering an animal made fulfilling the most important obligation of man towards God possible – that being the expression of adoration, gratitude and propitiation. In the religion of Israel only ritually clean animals could be used as offerings, which did not belittle the value of other creatures. An example of that can be the ass, which is an unclean animal, however, its first-born can be redeemed with a sheep. If it is not redeemed, one should break its neck (Ex 13:13; 34:20). It is noteworthy that the tradition of blood animal sacrifice in Israel stopped after the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., and, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb 10), they were no longer necessary when Jesus Christ Himself became the perfect offering. The function of Christ – the Sacrifice, which became real on the cross, is pointed to by John the Baptist, who presented Jesus as the Lamb of God twice (Jn 1:29.35). Christ is referred to as the Paschal Lamb (cf. Ex 12:1–14) and as the Servant of Yahweh (Isa 53:7). It is important to remember that even the Old Testament prophets emphasised the fact that animal sacrifice cannot be the core element of the worship (cf. Isa 1:11–17; Mic 6:6–8). A similar reference can also be found in the New Testament (cf. Heb 10:1–18).<sup>17</sup>

As far as men are concerned, the Bible divides animals into two groups: the ones that are dangerous and pose a threat to men, and the ones which

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. T. Margul, *Zwierzę w kulcie i micie*, Lublin 1996, p. 194. The Jewish law classification differentiates between kosher animals (meaning fit for consumption) and unclean animals (the consumption of which is prohibited). What is more, the commandment to slaughter animals for consumption according to a process known as 'shechita' – quickly and in the least painful way possible – cf. A. Unterman, *Encyklopedia tradycji i legend żydowskich*, przeł. O. Zienkiewicz, Warszawa 2000, p. 303.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. M. Wolniewicz, *Ojczyzna Jezusa. Kraj, ludzie i dzień powszedni*, Katowice 1989, p. 97–99.



are friendly and useful in everyday life.<sup>18</sup> Domestic animals fall into the second category, especially sheep, goats, cattle, camels, horses, mules and asses. They provided the people breeding them with fresh meat and milk, skin and bones that were materials for producing different objects; they served as means of transport and draught power. In the Bible the number of animals owned was a measure of wealth and social position (cf. Job 1 : 3) and played a crucial role in building and keeping the military force in the Near East – as was the case with breeding and trading horses (cf. 1 Kings 5 : 6; 10 : 28–29).<sup>19</sup>

Among the animals that the Bible considers to be most harmful, we must mention the locust. Its sudden appearance in large numbers, especially in the fields, orchards and vineyards, caused the most fear, since, devouring all green parts of plants they came across, they destroyed the crops completely, posing a real threat of famine (cf. Joel 1 : 4). The saraph serpents were also considered to be extremely dangerous (cf. Num 21 : 1–6).<sup>20</sup>

In the Bible the classification into birds and terrestrial and water animals is clearly distinguishable (cf. Gen 1 : 20–26; Ps 104 : 10–26). The inspired authors used the habitat of particular animal species as the criterion for classification. Wherever animal action is involved, animals in the Bible can be classified as domesticated (bred by humans) and wild, therefore living in their natural habitat (free). According to the scientific terminology, the animals which appear in the Bible can be grouped as belonging to the kingdom of insects, fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals.

## 4. Domesticated Animals in the Bible

The process of domesticating animals has its origins in the Neolithic Era. The sheep and the goat were the earliest domesticated animal species, the process most probably took place about six thousand years before Christ on the Iranian plateau. The traces of breeding cows in the Near East are

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. S. Jankowski, *Geografia biblijna*, op. cit., p. 213.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. H. I. Avalos, *Zwierzęta*, [in:] *Słownik wiedzy biblijnej*, op. cit., p. 828.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 828–829.

dated back to about four thousand years before Christ. Three thousand years B.C. the ass, most probably from the eastern part of Africa (Somalia), was domesticated. It was used for riding and as a draught animal (cf. Gen 22:3; 42:26–27; 1 Sam 25:18) long before the camel was domesticated.<sup>21</sup>

The ass was an indispensable element of life in Israel. It was commonly bred and almost every family kept one. When someone did not own an ass, it could be hired for the price of three denarii a month. In the times of Jesus, and even nowadays, big and strong Muscat donkeys, with light grey or white fur, able to cover a distance of up to 40 kilometres, were and are popular in this area.<sup>22</sup>

The popularity of breeding asses was caused by their basic dietary requirements and resistance to difficult weather conditions. She-asses were used as draught animals, but they were also milked. Even wealthy people travelled with asses as means of transport, and the indication of their wealth and position was owning asses with white hair (Judg 5:10). She-asses were ridden on, as they were more obedient than male asses, although even they were sometimes difficult to control (cf. Num 22:21–30). Rich people, especially merchants, travelled on asses in special saddles, under which patterned saddle-clothes were put. Up till now in the Near East white (grey) asses are more expensive than ordinary ones.<sup>23</sup>

The ass in the Bible is the symbol of humility and persistent service, which was depicted in Zechariah's prophecy 9:9: "See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, Meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass."<sup>24</sup> The description emphasised peaceful intentions of the king to come, as rulers setting off to war rode on horseback.<sup>25</sup> It is worth

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. S. Jankowski, *Geografia biblijna*, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. H. Daniel-Rops, *Życie w Palestynie w czasach Chrystusa*, tłum. J. Lasocka, Warszawa 2001, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Komentarz*, [in:] *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu w przekładzie z języków oryginalnych z wstępami i komentarzami*, opracował zespół pod redakcją M. Petera (Stary Testament) i M. Wolniewicza (Nowy Testament), t. 1, Poznań 2003, p. 377.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Słownik tła Biblii*, op. cit., p. 173–174.

<sup>25</sup> All evangelists refer to this prophecy describing Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which is supposed to present the right dimension of His mission as a Messiah. He does not

mentioning that in early monarchy period kings often rode on mules (cf. 2 Sam 18:9 and 1 Kings 1:33). At that time they were twice, or even three times more expensive than horses. They had to be imported from other countries, as Israelites did not know how to breed them.<sup>26</sup> What is more, the law forbade breeding mules: “Keep my statutes: do not breed any of your domestic animals with others of a different species; do not sow a field of yours with two different kinds of seed; and do not put on a garment woven with two different kinds of thread” (Lev 19:9), although it did not mention using them.<sup>27</sup>

In Palestine the ass was always the most popular animal. It was ridden on by both men and women (cf. 2 Kings 4:24). When a family was travelling, however, it was a woman and her children that were riding, and a servant or a father who walked next to them (cf. Ex 4:20).<sup>28</sup> This way of travelling was popularised in Christian iconography, in which different painters liked to use this eastern habit of presenting the Holy Family during their flight to Egypt (Mt 2:13–15),<sup>29</sup> although an ass is not mentioned in the Gospel.

Despite the fact that the ass was an extremely useful animal for every Israeli family, after death it was despised and was not even buried. It was

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arrive in Jerusalem as a combative ruler, but as the Prince of Peace mounted on a colt. What is more, this is the only moment in the life of Jesus in which he is described as riding an ass (cf. Mk 11:1–7; Mt 21:2–7; Lk 19:30; Jn 12:14–15) – cf. *Katolicki komentarz biblijny*, red. nauk. wyd. oryg. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, R. E. Murphy, red. wyd. pol. W. Chrostowski, Warszawa 2001; *Międzynarodowy Komentarz do Pisma Świętego. Komentarz katolicki i ekumeniczny na XXI wiek*, red. nauk. wyd. oryg. W. R. Farmer, współred. S. McEvenue, A. J. Levoratti, D. L. Dungan, red. nauk. wyd. pol. W. Chrostowski, współred. T. Mieszkowski, P. Pachciarek, Warszawa 2000, p. 1070; R. C. Fuller, L. Johnston, C. Kearns, *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, Nashville-New York 1975, p. 731.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. J. H. Walton, V. H. Marrhews, M. W. Chavalas, *Komentarz historyczno-kulturowy do Biblii hebrajskiej*, op. cit., p. 394, 927.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. F. H. Wight, *Obyczaje krajów biblijnych*, op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 231–232.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. L. Impelluso, *Natura i jej symbole. Rośliny i zwierzęta. Leksykon, historia, sztuka, ikonografia*, tłum. H. Cieśla, Warszawa 2006, p. 261.

thrown away or left in the desert for wild animals to tear into pieces.<sup>30</sup> It explains the circumstances in which Samson found a fresh jawbone of an ass,<sup>31</sup> which in his hands became a dangerous weapon. The Biblical description claims that he killed a thousand men with it (Judg 15:15).

The horse was probably domesticated 2 thousand years before Christ, on the steppe of Elam, or by the Scythians in what is now the contemporary European Russia. It was brought to Palestine and Egypt by the Hyksos (17<sup>th</sup> century B.C.).<sup>32</sup> In biblical times horses were usually used for drawing chariots, since, similarly to Egyptian beliefs,<sup>33</sup> riding in a saddle was considered inappropriate. Owning horses was a symbol of monarch's high social status, which can be seen in Solomon's attempts to maximise the amount of horses and chariots that he owned (cf 1 Kings 10:26, 29). With time, horses became steeds, used for example in courier services (cf. Esth 8:10).<sup>34</sup>

The presence of the camel in direct proximity of men, even four thousand years before Christ, can be confirmed by the archaeological discoveries from Sumer and Egypt. Popularisation of camels in the Near East took place at the end of the second millennium before Christ (in Egypt it happened in the Persian times – 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.).<sup>35</sup> There is no mention of camels (dromedaries) in Old Babylonian documents of sales and purchase from 1950 to 1530 B.C., which leads to the conclusion that camels appeared in the area of the Fertile Crescent in the second half of the second millennium before Christ and that they came from Arabia. During the same period the Bactrian camel (two-humped) was popu-

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. D. Forstner, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej*, op. cit., p. 285.

<sup>31</sup> A jawbone of an ass is not much of a weapon. About 25 cm long, with the weight of no more than 0.5 kg. One might assume that the teeth still attached to it and its slightly bent shape made it a bit more effective – cf. J. H. Walton, V. H. Marrhews, M. W Chavalas, *Komentarz historyczno-kulturowy do Biblii Hebrajskiej*, op. cit., p. 291.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. A. Lasota-Moskalewska, *Zwierzęta udomowione w dziejach ludzkości*, Warszawa 2005, p. 171–177.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. H. Owusu, *Symbol Egiptu*, tłum. M. Dziedzic, Katowice 2002, p. 283.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. J. I. Packer, M. C. Tenney, *Słownik tła Biblii*, op. cit., p. 176.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. S. Jankowski, *Geografia biblijna*, op. cit., p. 88.

larised in Central Asia. So in the times of Abraham (18<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) the camel might have been bred and it might have been considered as a kind of luxury, but it seems improbable that it was used as a mount. As far as the camel is concerned, there are some discrepancies in the Bible. According to some exegists, information on camels in Gen 24:31 and 37:25 is anachronistic. On the other hand, the events described in Judg 6:5 and 7:12 can be treated as proof that the camel was domesticated before the period of kings.<sup>36</sup>

The use of camels as mounts in the Holy Land was popularised about 1.5–1 thousand years before Christ. Before that time, tents and other belongings were transported with the use of mules and asses. The camel, much stronger and with more stamina, made it possible to cover longer distances. The mule or the ass had to drink at least every other day. The camel, however, could survive without water for 17 days. Owning camels, nomads did not have to fear the desert and even remote cities and settlements could sustain regular exchange of goods. With the passage of time and as people learnt to use horses, the mobility of nomads was even greater, as effective defence against the attacks of neighbours was possible and it was possible to fight regular wars.<sup>37</sup>

Cattle, scientifically referred to and most commonly classified collectively as *Bos primigenius*, comprises of the following: the male called a bull, an ox, being a castrated adult male, the female called a cow, and their offspring called a calf.<sup>38</sup> They are bred for their meat, milk, fat, skins, and, until recently, they were also commonly used as working animals. Cattle is a domesticated form of the aurochs, but there is no agreement as to when it happened. The most common theory is that it took place in Asia about 6–7 thousand years ago.<sup>39</sup> The theory is confirmed by the archaeological discoveries from the land of Mesopotamia, where the oldest traces of animal domestication from about 8 thousand years ago were found. It is noteworthy that initially cattle was used for ritual purposes,

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. A. Chouraqui, *Życie codzienne ludzi Biblii*, Warszawa 1995, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. D. Frostner, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej*, op. cit., p. 251.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. B. Szczepanowicz, A. Mrozek, *Atlas zwierząt biblijnych*, Kraków 2007, p. 69.

then – as working animals. It was much later that people began breeding them for their meat and milk.<sup>40</sup>

In the Bible we also come across cattle classification according to its function. The Hebrew word עֵגֶל *'ēgel* is usually translated as 'calf', and can also more specifically mean young, one-year-old bulls. In Psalm 29:6 a calf like this (עֵגֶל *'ēgēl*) is jumping, in the Book of Jeremiah (50:11) it frisks, and in the Books of Leviticus (9:3) and Micah (6:6) a one-year-old calf – a yearling – is mentioned. The female form עֵגְלָה *'ēglā(h)* in the Bible can refer to a three-year-old heifer (Gen 15:9), a trained heifer (Oz 10, 11), or a ploughing heifer (Judg 14:18).<sup>41</sup>

Although the Law forbade Israelites to castrate bulls (cf. Lev 22:24), the Bible mentions those animals. Oxes, being calmer than bulls, were used for different kinds of field work, which is mentioned both in the Old and the New Testament. St. Paul quotes a fragment from the Book of Deuteronomy 25:4: "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out grain," talking about the right of Gospel proclaimers to expect material support from the faithful (1 Cor 9:9).<sup>42</sup>

It is worth mentioning that oxes are very strong, work effectively and are resistant to bad conditions. They were most often used for hard field works. Oxes are mentioned in biblical descriptions of ploughing animals (cf. 1 Kings 19:19) and animals drawing carriages (cf. 1 Sam 6:2; 1 Chr 13:9).<sup>43</sup>

In the Bible cattle is often presented as a symbol of wealth (Gen 13:2; Ezek 38:12; 1 Chr 5:9). In dreams and in poems fat cows serve as metaphors, bringing to mind an image of wealthy people and nations (Am 4:1; Jer 46:20), whereas thin cows symbolise years of wind-blasted ears (Gen 41:26).<sup>44</sup> In the Bible we can also find a detailed regulation concerning the red heifer offering (Num 19:1–9), at the basis of which, according to Ephraim,<sup>45</sup> there is a concept that a mother has to atone for her child,

<sup>40</sup> Cf. A. Rajski, *Zoologia. Część systematyczna*, t. 2, Warszawa 1988<sup>2</sup>, p. 582.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. W. H. Propp, *Złoty cielec*, [in:] *Słownik wiedzy biblijnej*, op. cit., p. 829.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. D. Frostner, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej*, op. cit., p. 252–254.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. B. Szczepanowicz, A. Mrozek, *Atlas zwierząt biblijnych*, op. cit., p. 69–70.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. L. Ryken, J. C. Wilhoit, T. Longman III, *Słownik symboliki biblijnej*, op. cit., p. 1192.

<sup>45</sup> Brat Efraim, *Jezus Żyd praktykujący*, przeł. J. Fenrychowa, Kraków 1994, p. 92–93.

which is the golden calf – the sin of idolatry (cf. Ex 32). Since only blood can defeat death, threads of crimson wool were thrown into the fire in which the heifer was burnt.

Biblical authors very often reach for images borrowed from observing the behaviour and the pasturage of sheep. These animals were commonly bred in the ancient times in the Near East. They were kept for wool (2 Kings 3:4), which was the essential element of the economy of Israel. Owning large herds of sheep was a sign of wealth (Ezek 27:18) and made paying a tribute possible (2 Chr 17:11). Apart from wool, milk and meat, people also used rams' horns. They were used to build ceremonial instruments (Josh 6:4) or oil containers (1 Sam 16:1).<sup>46</sup> What is more, in ancient Israel sheep were animals most often killed as offerings.<sup>47</sup> Even the story of Abraham and Isaak clearly states that the ram caught by its thorns in the thicket and offered up as a holocaust (Gen 22:13) was the sacrifice made in place of Abraham's son.<sup>48</sup> In the temple two yearling lambs were offered on the altar as the sacrifice established for each day (cf. Ex 29:38–42). An unblemished female lamb could also be presented as sin offering (Lev 4:32). No Paschal feast could take place if a year-old lamb was not slaughtered and eaten (Ex 12). The Bible presents the lamb as a symbol of gentleness, obedience and the need to be taken care of (Isa 40:11; 53:7; 2 Sam 12:1–6).<sup>49</sup>

In the Book of Isaiah (53:7) the lamb is used to depict the humbleness and obedience of the Servant of Iahweh, who dies to atone for the sins of His people: "Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth; Like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth." This text is the announcement of Christ's sacrifice, what is then confirmed in the Acts of the Apostles (8:31–35). It is also referred to by the Evangelists, when

<sup>46</sup> Cf. L. Ryken, J. C. Wilhoit, T. Longman III, *Słownik symboliki biblijnej*, op. cit., p. 1192.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. N. de Lange, *Wielkie kultury świata. Świat żydowski*, Warszawa 1996, p. 8.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Księga Rodzaju. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz*, oprac. S. Łach, Poznań 1962, p. 395.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. E. Trocmé, *Baranek Boży*, [in:] *Słownik wiedzy biblijnej*, op. cit., p. 53.

they describe Jesus' silence when faced with the Sanhedrin (Mt 26:23) and Pontius Pilate (Jn 19:9).<sup>50</sup>

The image of sheep was also used to present the messianic times (Isa 11:6–7) and the people of Israel (Ps 44:11; 79:13; 80:1). In the New Testament Jesus was called the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29), and He Himself warned his disciples against the wolves in sheep's clothing (Mt 7:15).<sup>51</sup>

In ancient Israel the most popular types of sheep were the ones with fatty tails which weighed between 4 and 8 kilograms. The fatty tail of these animals constitutes the energy reserve for the sheep and is considered to be a valuable piece of meat, which is shown by the following biblical fragment: "Now, from this ram you shall take its fat: its fatty tail, the fat that covers its inner organs" (Ex 29:22; cf. Lev 3:9).<sup>52</sup>

In biblical countries breeding goats is extremely popular. Unlike most white Palestinian and Syrian sheep, the goat has black fur. Their way of life is also completely different. Goats like mountain slopes; sheep, however, prefer plateaus and mountain valleys. Goats' favourite food are tree leaves, sheep prefer grass. Despite hot summer weather, goats can graze in the field all day long, sheep need to hide away from the scorching sun under a tree, in the shade of a rock or in a hut built for them by their shepherd. Goats are also braver, more eager to play, and at the same time more stubborn, therefore, more difficult to control than sheep.<sup>53</sup>

When keeping livestock, especially while grazing large herds, dogs were commonly used in biblical times: "But now they hold me in derision who are younger in years than I; Whose fathers I should have disdained to rank with the dogs of my flock (Job 30:1)." Dogs were used to guide the herds. The shepherd walked first and his dogs drove the animals dragging behind. They barked angrily at every intruder they saw, warning the shepherd of the upcoming dangers.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, red. naczelny X. Léon-Dufour, tłum. i oprac. K. Romaniuk, Poznań 1994, p. 63.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. H. I. Avalos, *Zwierzęta*, [in:] *Słownik wiedzy biblijnej*, op. cit., p. 829.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. F. H. Wight, *Obyczaje krajów biblijnych*, op. cit., p. 129.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. ibidem, p. 145.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. F. H. Wight, *Obyczaje krajów biblijnych*, op. cit., p. 137.



In the Bible there are also numerous mentions of different birds. Pigeons were considered to be clean birds, that is why they could be eaten and given as offerings to the Lord. Pigeons are mentioned in the description of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple (cf. Lk 2:24). They were the sacrifice most often offered by the poor. The offering of the poor usually consisted of two pigeons, one of which was given for the holocaust, and the other one as sin offering to the Lord (Lev 23:8). One of the best known Old Testament pericopes in which this bird appears is the description of the Deluge in which Noah, sending out a raven and then a dove, is checking if the waters had lessened on earth (cf. Gen 8:6–11). In the Song of Songs the beauty of the beloved is compared to the beauty of a dove (1:15).

God creates birds together with fish on the fifth day with the following words: “Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky” (Gen 1:20). Among them there are clean and unclean species. The list of unclean birds can be found in the Book of Leviticus (11:13–19): “Of the birds, these you shall loathe and, as loathsome, they shall not be eaten: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the kite, the various species of falcons, the various species of crows, the ostrich, the nightjar, the gull, the various species of hawks, the owl, the cormorant, the screech owl, the barn owl, the desert owl, the buzzard, the stork, the various species of herons, the hoopoe, and the bat.” Most birds mentioned here are carnivores and scavengers, which are currently not eaten either. It can be assumed that the reasons for classifying these birds as unclean are mostly sanitary, although we should not forget the religious element, as the majority of them were considered sacred by Israel’s neighbouring countries (especially in Egypt and Mesopotamia).<sup>55</sup>

Another example of a well known pericope in which we can find a reference to a particular kind of bird – quails – is the description of the stay of Israelites in the desert, after they fled from Egypt. Their appearance is interpreted as a gift of God (cf. Ex 16:12–13). It is noteworthy that in the Near East the meat of these birds was thought to be a real delicacy.

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. A. Wajda, *Zwierzęta czyste i nieczyste*, [in:] *Wokół Biblii. Biblia w kulturze świata*, op. cit., p. 139–142.

Jesus also reached for bird images in his teachings: “Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them” (Mt 6:26); “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up” (Mk 4:4); “Then he said, «What is the kingdom of God like? To what can I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that a person took and planted in the garden. When it was fully grown, it became a large bush and ‘the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches’»” (Lk 13:18–19). These examples clearly show that those who listened to Jesus had to be familiar with those animals, especially with the way they fed and built their nests.

## 5. Theological Significance of Biblical Animals

The fact that animals are mentioned in the Bible can be analysed in two dimensions. On the one hand, biblical descriptions provide the reader with details concerning lives and behaviours of different animals, especially the domesticated ones. On the other hand, animal references made by the inspired authors must be seen as literary tools, used to illustrate the spiritual reality of individuals, as well as whole nations; showing the specific relationships between people, and also between God and men and God and Israel. That is why those references cannot be taken at face value and understood as mere zoological facts; we should look for allegories, metaphors and symbols concealed in them. The presence of numerous animal names in the Bible, often accompanied by descriptions of their characteristics, is caused by the fact that the inspired authors often used the language of imagery to present the revealed truths to their contemporary listeners. Biblical authors, although they had no education in natural science, had a gift of observation. For example, Habakkuk, watching the hind moving swiftly on the rocks of Judea, wrote: “GOD, my Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet swift as those of hinds and enables me to go upon the heights” (Hab 3:19).

Animal references appear from the very first pages of the Bible to the last book of the New Testament, the Revelation. The first mention of animals can be found in the Book of Genesis in the description of the

process of creation: “God made all kinds of wild animals, all kinds of cattle, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. God saw how good it was” (Gen 1 : 25). For ancient Israelites, living near their pagan neighbours who often turned towards zoomorphic gods, it meant that animals could not be deified. Admiring their strength, agility, appearance, way of life or independence, Israelites tried to see the greatness of God in them, unlike the Egyptians who worshipped them.<sup>56</sup> It cannot have been easy, and that is probably why we come across many warnings against deifying animals and worshipping them in the Old Testament (e.g. Wis 15 : 18–19).<sup>57</sup>

In the New Testament it is Saint Paul who refers to these dangers and temptations in the Epistle to the Romans, in which he emphasises that there is no excuse for those who misunderstand the world ‘talking’ to them about God: “Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. As a result, they have no excuse;” (Rom 1 : 20). Failing to recognise the presence and power of God, “while claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of an image of mortal man or of birds or of four-legged animals or of snakes” (Rom 1 : 22–23). As a result God’s creation in a way is turned against Him: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and revered and worshipped the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Rom 1 : 25).<sup>58</sup>

The animal world in the Bible is abounding, especially in the context of its significance for man. Even the Book of Genesis (1 : 24) talking about land animals first mentions cattle, being domesticated creatures and the closest to man, then “creeping things,” which means the ones that have

<sup>56</sup> More information on the subject can be found in the article by A. Wajda, *Postacie zwierzęce w panteonie egipskim*, [in:] *Teologia – rośliny i zwierzęta. Biblia w kulturze świata*, pr. zb. pod red. T. Jelonka, Kraków 2008, p. 181–207.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, op. cit., p. 1148.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. W. Chrostowski, *Dobroć wobec zwierząt w świetle Biblii*, [in:] „*Pieśniami dla mnie Twoje przykazania.*” *Księga pamiątkowa dla Księdza Profesora Janusza Frankowskiego w 50. rocznicę święceń kapłańskich i 75. rocznicę urodzin*, red. W. Chrostowski, Warszawa 2003, p. 97.

no legs or very short legs, and, lastly, “wild animals of all kinds,” the least known to man, since they could not be tamed. Adam was given the power to rule and subdue the animal kingdom seen in this way (cf. Gen 2: 19; 9: 1–8), however, he was also made responsible for taking care of it. At the same time it was made clear that the power that men have over animals cannot be lawless, as there are many regulations that need to be followed with regard to them, e.g. the one putting a ban on eating meat with blood (Gen 9: 4), which is the “abode” of life. In this way the Bible emphasises that all life is a gift of God. If anyone enters the delicate dimension of the created world and decides to kill animals, they must be aware of the fact that they are reaching out for something that belongs to God.<sup>59</sup>

Mammals of prey, such as lions, bears, buffaloes, hyaenas and jackals, since they pose a real threat to people’s lives and well-being, were used by the biblical authors as symbols of evil and all the things that should be avoided. Birds of prey, amphibians, insects, rodents, flies, mosquitoes, wasps and locusts were perceived in a similar way, some of them due to their size and strength, others due to their number or behaviour. All of them could become a plague or a tool of God’s punishment (Ex 7: 14–10, 29; Wis 16–19). Small predators and nocturnal birds living in the ruins or in the bushes represented destruction and punishment for idolatry to the Gentiles and the unfaithful Israel (Isa 34: 11; 27: 10–11).

Some relationships between men and animals presented in the Bible show how crucial they are for men to survive. The Bible reminds that we owe food and help to them. They serve people carrying objects, making travelling and field work easier. That is why the Bible points out that animals deserve time to rest (Ex 20: 10; Deut 5: 14–15) and must be rewarded for their work (Deut 25: 4). People should take animal physical condition into consideration, so one should not plough with an ox, which is strong, and an ass, which is obviously weaker, harnessed together (Deut 22: 10); when an animal is overburdened, even if it belongs to your enemy, you should help it out (Ex 23: 4–5; Deut 22: 4), and animals going astray need to be returned to their owners (Ex 23: 4; Deut 22: 1–2). It is noteworthy that the Law allowed to rescue animals even during Shabbat (Mt 12: 11n;

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 100–104.

Lk 13:15; 14:5), and these are just a few examples from the long list of humanitarian behaviours towards animals described in the Bible.<sup>60</sup>

The Old Testament mentions offering animal sacrifices to the Lord and using them for meat. Different kinds of animal offerings are mentioned in the Book of Leviticus. The blood worship of the Old Testament proves that the lives of animals can be used as substitute offerings for human lives. The first piece of information concerning animal sacrifice appears in the pericope about Cain and Abel, in which the younger brother is presented as the one who brings to the Lord an offering of “the best firstlings of his flock” (Gen 4:4). Jewish tradition paid much attention to the way in which animals were slaughtered, especially if they served as offerings,<sup>61</sup> as blood sacrifice was associated with freeing man from his sins, purification of weaknesses and negligence.<sup>62</sup>

Many biblical descriptions refer to little creatures, for example insects. Some of them, like bees and ants, are especially appreciated in the Bible. The bee was described in the Sacred Scripture with the following words: “Least is the bee among winged things, but she reaps the choicest of all harvests” (Sir 11:3). The biblical description of ants stresses their diligence: “Go to the ant, O sluggard, study her ways and learn wisdom; for though she has no chief, no commander or ruler, she procures her food in the summer, stores up her provisions in the harvest” (Prov 6:6–8).

Early did men in the Near East consider owning numerous herds to be the proof of divine favour. It brought authority and respect among neighbours in the past, and it is still considered to be a sign of wealth and authority. It is similar in the Bible. Abraham enjoyed having such position

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. S. Jankowski, *Geografia biblijna*, op. cit., p. 214–215; W. Empel, *Biblia a zwierzęta*, „Życie Weterynaryjne” 3 (1995), p. 70–71.

<sup>61</sup> *Shechita*, the special, ritual way of slaughtering mammals and birds, gives the instructions that come from Moses and are derived from the oral records of Torah. They indicate who can become a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer), and even what kind of blade (*chalef*) must be used in the process of killing – cf. A. Unterman, *Encyklopedia tradycji i legend żydowskich*, op. cit., p. 266–267.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. W. Chrostowski, *Dobroć wobec zwierząt w świetle Biblii*, [in:] *Pieśniami dla mnie Twoje przykazania*, op. cit., p. 110–111.

(Gen 13:2), as well as Jacob (Gen 30:43), the Israelites leaving Egypt (Ex 12:38; Josh 22:8), and Job (Job 1:3; 42:12). Monarchs tithed the herds owned by people (1 Sam 8:17). Thanks to his wealth in livestock Jacob could support two wives (Gen 30:28–43) and reconcile with his brother (Gen 32:14–16). Herds of sheep, goats or bigger cattle were the tribute paid by vassals to their sovereigns (like Mesha, the king of Moab, who delivered to the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs, and the wool of one hundred thousand rams in 2 Kings 3:4). During King Solomon's reign the country was a huge cattle trading market between Egypt and Cilicia (1 Kings 10:28f.; Ezek 27:14).<sup>63</sup>

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## Summary

### The Biblical Word of Animals

Numerous references to animals in the Bible show that biblical authors had a broad knowledge of nature. According to the current classification of living organisms and method of research used by modern zoology, it is stated that these observations do not have the characteristics of scientific research. In spite of this, they are the evidence of the clear-sighted observation of animals, which is reflected not only in the knowledge of the appearance of individual species, but also of specific behaviours related to their way of life. It concerns not only domestic animals, raised for the purpose of gaining meat, fur, hide and labour, but also wild representatives of the fauna. Bible references concerning the latter apply to the species perceived as highly dangerous to man and domestic animals, i.e.: lions, wolves, bears, leopards or snakes. Amongst the Bible animals one can distinguish these which aroused admiration because of their appearance, such as gazelle, deer, ibex or dove. At the same time, it is essential to emphasise the fact that this rich animal world is just a vivid background of the biblical story of Salvation and a tool used to translate God's address into human language. For this reason, the knowledge of animal symbolism in the Sacred Scripture makes more accurate understanding of the pericopes possible.

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. S. Jankowski, *Geografia biblijna*, op. cit., p. 90.

## Keywords

Animals, Bible, classification, significance, symbolism

## Streszczenie

### Biblijny świat zwierząt

Liczne wzmianki o zwierzętach na kartach Biblii są potwierdzeniem dobrej znajomości świata przyrody przez autorów natchnionych. W odniesieniu do obowiązującej obecnie klasyfikacji organizmów żywych i metod badawczych, jakimi posługuje się współczesna zoologia, nie mają one charakteru dociekań naukowych. Świadczą natomiast o umiejętności wnikliwej obserwacji zwierząt, czego wyrazem jest nie tylko znajomość wyglądu przedstawicieli poszczególnych gatunków, ale także specyficznych zachowań związanych ze sposobem ich życia. Dotyczy to nie tylko zwierząt udomowionych i hodowanych przez człowieka w celu pozyskania mięsa, mleka, skór oraz siły roboczej, ale i dzikich reprezentantów świata fauny. Biblijne wzmianki o tych ostatnich odnoszą się do gatunków postrzeganych jako szczególnie niebezpieczne dla człowieka i zwierząt domowych, do których zaliczyć należy lwy, wilki, niedźwiedzie, lamparty czy węże. Wśród biblijnych dzikich zwierząt są również takie, które swym wyglądem i zręcznością budziły podziw, czego przykładem są odniesienia do gazeli, jeleni, koziorożców, a nawet gołębi. Równocześnie należy podkreślić, że ten bogaty świat zwierzęcy jest jedynie barwnym tłem dla biblijnej historii zbawienia oraz narzędziem pomocnym w przekładaniu orędzia Boga na język ludzki. Dlatego poznanie znaczenia i symboliki zwierząt pojawiających się na kartach Pisma Świętego pozwala współczesnemu człowiekowi lepiej zrozumieć perykopy biblijne, w których są one przywoływane.

## Słowa kluczowe

Zwierzęta, Biblia, klasyfikacja, znaczenie, symbolika

