

Abstract

For medieval people, farm animals represented close companions in many ways – they provided meat and other food products, helped with work and very often, shared the same living space with their human owners. Moreover, they became a significant cultural symbol over time. The presented master thesis aims precisely at the reconstruction of these symbolic meanings in bohemical written sources of the 14th and 15th centuries, using three chosen animals as examples: cattle, goats, and swine.

The thesis is composed of two main sections. The first and more empirical part follows the issue of domestication as well as the form of animal husbandry in the Bohemian lands during the 14th and 15th centuries. However, the core of the thesis itself lies in the fourth chapter, which deals with the symbolism and allegorical viewings of the animals in the individual sources, with emphasis on how and in what contexts farm animals were referred to. Medieval encyclopaedias, exempla, the political allegory *The New Council* of Smil Flaška of Pardubice, and Bohemical chronicles that were written during the specified period are used as sources for investigating this issue. Their analysis indicates that the symbolism of domestic animals was highly ambiguous, and one animal could carry both positive and negative connotations at once while being in the same culture. Some of the typical attributes are found in only one type of source. However, to a large extent, the characteristics from the different sources commonly overlap, which hints at certain widespread symbolic notions of each animal. This thesis attempts to contribute to the understanding of the perception of farm animals in the Middle Ages and to broaden the awareness of this topic, especially considering that some of the medieval beliefs still strongly survive to the present day.

Key words: livestock, cattle, swine, goat, domestication, animal husbandry, symbolism, the Middle Ages