I will tell you how the pearl is born. There is a stone in the sea called the oyster. It comes out of the sea early in the morning ahead of the light, and, opening its shell (that is, its mouth), it swallows the heavenly dew and the rays of the sun and moon and the light from the stars above. And thus is born the pearl from the most high celestial bodies. Here, as in the case of the agate, John himself shows us that the intelligible pearl is Jesus Christ our Lord, saying, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, behold, he who takes away the sins of the world’ [John 1:29]. The sea is the world and the divers who bring up the pearl are the chorus of holy doctors. Because of ill will, however, sinners carry the pearl back down, so greatly does it oppose them. Physiologus, therefore, spoke wisely of the pearl.

*Physiologus* XXIV¹

The *Physiologus* is now an obscure text, yet it was once one of the world’s most popular works of Christian nature allegory. Compiled anonymously in Greek between c. 150 and 200 AD in Alexandria, its tales derive from works by authors such as Herodotus, Ctesias, Aristotle and Plutarch, brought to Egypt from India and the Middle East by merchants and other travellers as part of an oral tradition.² From the fourth century the text was translated into Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Latin and Syriac, as well as various Eastern European languages. In the early and central Middle Ages it was translated into Icelandic, Old English and the principal Romance and Germanic dialects. One scholar has claimed that perhaps ‘no book except the Bible has ever been so widely diffused among so many people and for so many centuries as the *Physiologus*.’³ Certainly it was, historically, one of the world’s most widespread and popular texts. Scholarship has traced its emergence, textual development and sources, examined its illustrations, and produced translations in several languages. Yet we still know next to nothing about why the *Physiologus* was read, by whom, or in what ways, once it had reached Europe in the early middle ages. The reasons for this are largely historiographical: interest in the Latin text was driven by its roots in classical culture, as well as by its influence on later medieval bestiaries in both Latin and

the vernacular, and had largely waned by the second half of the twentieth century. By then, it seemed that the possibilities of the *Physiologus* had been exhausted. However, this is not the case for the Latin tradition in the early middle ages, which has so far remained relatively unexplored. It is not hard to see why: the simplicity of the *Physiologus* stories, the absence of any significant glosses to show how the text was used, and particularly the heterogeneity of the miscellany manuscripts into which the text was copied, have made study of the early medieval tradition both difficult and unattractive. Yet my examination of the extant manuscripts as a group has shown that the use and readership of the *Physiologus* was determined precisely by such miscellanies, which are, in turn, part of a complex early medieval intellectual and social process. Both these new findings have significant implications for our understanding of the *Physiologus* and of miscellanies as a category of manuscript. This paper examines the ways in which the *Physiologus* corpus challenges conventional perceptions of coherence and disparity in medieval manuscripts, and provides a new set of criteria for reading and classifying miscellanies.4

To date, the way in which scholars have approached the reception history of the *Physiologus* has depended on two factors. The first is the form of the text. To the modern reader, the stories of the *Physiologus* bring to mind Kipling’s *Just So* stories, or their inspiration, the fables of Aesop; ‘stories with a moral’ that are often read to children. At first sight, such stories seem to fall within the province of folklorists and anthropologists, as products of popular tradition, with didactic but otherwise no real intellectual value and little historical significance or influence. The editor of the facsimile of the *Physiologus* in Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS lat. 318, for instance, was sure of the text’s ‘kunstlose Naivität’ and ‘Volksbuchcharakter’.5 However, such an assessment imposes a modern understanding of the fable genre on the *Physiologus*. The Greeks had used fables as useful material for the practice of rhetoric: that is, as elements of speech or thought. The majority of these stories took on a variety of forms, none of which is found in the *Physiologus*.6

4 The doctoral research that enabled this paper to be written was generously funded by the Arts and Humanities Council UK (AHRC), the London Bibliographical Society and the University of Cambridge Lightfoot Fund. I am very grateful to these bodies for their support.


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Writers such as Babrius, Aelian and Phaedrus, active between the third century B. C. and the third century A. D., who took up and helped transmit Aesop’s material, aimed to entertain and interest as well as to teach. The Physiologus was something novel, a work that made use of the flexibility and interest of its natural material, but combined this with the moral and spiritual dimension of a relatively new religion – Christianity. This context suggests that the Physiologus had a different function to fables from the outset.

The history of the Latin Physiologus from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries has also dominated scholarship on its reception. During this period, the Latin Physiologus underwent several transformations. Firstly, it became one of the texts used in the newly established cathedral schools. A Physiologus appears on an eleventh-century book list from the school of the Cathedral of Le Puy in Haute-Loire. Two new versions – the Physiologus Theobaldi, a poem in twelve chapters attributed to the eleventh-century Abbot Theobaldus of Montecassino; and the Dicta Chrysostomi, the recension upon which the German vernacular families of the Physiologus came to depend – were also used in continental classrooms. Secondly, the Physiologus gradually developed into the bestiary, primarily through expansion from Isidore of Seville’s Etymologiae (the size of the text rising from around 20 or 40 chapters to around 150). In these new forms, the Physiologus came to be used for moral instruction and courtly entertainment.

The central and late-medieval history of the Latin Physiologus as a didactic work, and as the precursor of the bestiary, has shaped historians’ ideas about the early medieval reception of this text. However, the evidence for these uses of the Physiologus in the early middle ages – before the text began to be significantly adapted – has not been properly investigated. For the
historiography of the Latin recension of the text at least, what the *Physiologus* became has been more important than what it was at any particular moment. This is perhaps most clearly expressed in Willene Clark’s outline of the principal differences between the bestiary and the *Physiologus*:

[The] new bestiary had much greater breadth than *Physiologus*, a far more rational organization, a lack of monastic ideas and language, and forward looking art… the moral/ethical didacticism and the ancient authority of the text’s sources was unquestionably old fashioned.¹¹

To view the bestiary as more rational, and as having greater breadth, than the *Physiologus*, is to do them both a disservice, as ‘rational organisation’ and ‘breadth of subject’ are relative concepts that depend entirely on cultural context. The bestiary had more content, and was arranged by category – but it does not then follow that the *Physiologus* was a poorer, less well-structured version of this text. This essential distinction of emphasis between cultural context and evolution (which implies movement towards a better goal) is a rather straightforward one that nevertheless makes all the difference when it comes to both the *Physiologus* and, as will be demonstrated, to miscellanies.

The lack of scholarship on the early medieval reception of the *Physiologus* may also be due partly to the groundwork laid by those who wrote during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an era of definitive scholarship on the Greek and Latin texts.¹² Such textual studies remain authoritative, but their judgement of the *Physiologus* it is not entirely free of that bias against the fourth to tenth centuries (the period which saw the appearance and widespread use of the Latin *Physiologus*) which viewed them as part of an intellectual ‘Dark Age’. This label is never explicitly used, but its judgement is expressed nonetheless. In 1851, writing about the *Physiologus* in Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS lat. 318, Charles Cahier remarked that the scribe was ‘a patient and attentive copyist, but of limited intelligence; a kind of manual labourer, devoted to


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his task with a truly blind obedience.'\textsuperscript{13} This statement reflects a tendency in the scholarship of a hundred and seventy years ago to regard the Carolingians essentially as preservers and copyists, whose work lacked originality and was therefore of limited interest, though instrumental in the transmission of antique learning. More recent scholarship has overturned this assumption, but it has persisted among those who study the \textit{Physiologus}: one twentieth-century scholar thought its contents ‘trivial’ and another judged that ‘its style is impoverished and the mode of thought extremely simple.’\textsuperscript{14}

Yet the Latin \textit{Physiologus} was indisputably successful from the beginning. It is extant in eleven manuscripts and is mentioned thirteen times in book-lists from before 1000. These numbers, unusually high for a purportedly trivial early medieval text, indicate that the \textit{Physiologus} was a popular work. Its value is especially borne out by its collocation with interesting and important texts: it appears together with passages from works by Church Fathers such as Isidore of Seville, Jerome and Augustine, and important Christian writings such as the \textit{Psychomachia} of Prudentius; with fragments and extracts from pagan authors, including Cicero and Boethius; with histories and geographies such as Fredegar’s \textit{Chronicle} and Solinus’ \textit{Collectanea rerum memorabilium}; and with grammatical tractates, glossaries, riddles and the \textit{Liber monstrorum}, among many other texts. Twenty-two entries in the great early medieval glossary compilation, the \textit{Liber glossarum}, are taken from the \textit{Physiologus}; and it was demonstrably used by Ambrose, Gregory of Tours, Isidore of Seville and Jerome in passages about the meaning of animals and constellations.\textsuperscript{15} It was listed as apocryphal and even heretical by the sixth-century \textit{Decretum Gelasianum}, a work considered by the Carolingians as authoritative, yet this did not impede its widespread copying; indeed, one of the early medieval manuscripts of the \textit{Physiologus} also contains the \textit{Decretum}.\textsuperscript{16}

The \textit{Physiologus} certainly had applications outside monastic schools, as demonstrated by the will of the important lay magnate Eberhard, count of Friuli, and his wife Gisela, made in 863 or 864, which lists a \textit{Liber bestiarum} among the private chapel books that were bequeathed to their eldest

\textsuperscript{13} ‘Un copiste patient et attentif, mais de courte intelligence; une espèce d’homme de peine dévoué à sa tâche avec une obéissance véritablement aveugle.’ C. Cahier and A. Martin, \textit{Mélanges d’archéologie}, vol. 2, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{15} Ambrose, \textit{Hexaemeron} 6.3.13; Gregory of Tours, \textit{De cursu stellarum ratio} 12; Isidore of Seville, \textit{Etymologiae} 11.3.36; Jerome, \textit{In Hieremiam prophetam} 17:11.
\textsuperscript{16} St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 230, pp. 539–43; the \textit{Physiologus} is listed on p. 542, line 18: ‘Liber pisioletus qui ab hereticis conscriptus est et beati ambrosi nomine presignatus apogryphus.’ To judge from the spelling of the word ‘physiologus’, which the scribe clearly did not know and so was unable to transcribe correctly, and from the neutral title given to the text in this manuscript – ‘incipit interpretatio spiritalis de libro bestiarum’, p. 510 – the scribe simply may not have recognised the \textit{Physiologus} for what it was. The question of why the Carolingians generally disregarded the \textit{Decretum} when it came to the \textit{Physiologus} requires further study, however.
son Unruoch. Such a bequest suggests that if the material of the *Physiologus* was used to teach young monks, it was also of some interest to the educated laity in the Carolingian period. Together these links draw the *Physiologus* into an early medieval intellectual tradition that had its roots in the inherited, encyclopaedic knowledge of the late antique and early medieval Christian spheres. The manuscript context of the *Physiologus* is therefore an important source of information about the text’s uses and audiences in the early middle ages, and it demands that we re-assess the implications of the Latin *Physiologus* corpus in this period.

These implications are discussed in what follows, together with the method and results of a contextual study of the early medieval Latin *Physiologus*, carried out between 2011 and 2016 on the basis of a close examination of the eleven extant manuscripts from before 1000 AD – that is, their codicological composition and textual collocations, their production circumstances, their textual alterations and additions, and their scripts and layouts. These manuscripts have never before been examined as a group. They are:

1. Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS lat. 225 + Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS lat. 233 + Orléans, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 313
2. Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS lat. 318
3. Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS lat. 611 + Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 10756
4. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS lat. 10066–77
5. Montecassino, Archivio dell’Abbazia, MS 316 and MS 323
6. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 14388

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19 Some decorative elements of the Orléans unit have been digitised at <bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/consult/consult.php?COMPOSITION_ID=3079&corpus=decor>.

20 Digitised at <www.e-codices.unifr.ch/de/list/one/bbb/0318>.

21 The Bern unit has been digitised at <www.e-codices.unifr.ch/fr/list/one/bbb/0611>; the Paris unit at <gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9065920c>.

22 Digitised at <belgica.kbr.be/fr/coll/ms/ms10066_77_fr.html>.

23 Digitised at <daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0002/bsb00022465/images>.
The compilation of a handlist of these manuscripts and their contents revealed that some of them were not described in any detail in published catalogues. This meant that many of the texts contained within these books were unidentified, beyond a Latin description or incipit. Occasionally cataloguers would label a set of pages simply as theologica varia or ‘excerpts from patristic authors’; one Physiologus manuscript had such a catalogue entry for pages 269 to 441: that is, the contents of 172 of this manuscript’s pages had not been satisfactorily classified. This is, or until recently was, standard catalogue practice for sets of short excerpts (as opposed to complete texts) in manuscript catalogues, made necessary by the demands of space. However, since the Physiologus study was contextual, it was necessary to identify every excerpt. In addition, many Physiologus manuscripts are composed of more than one codicological whole – that is, in Gumbert’s definition, of more than one ‘discrete number of quires, worked in a single operation, containing a complete text or set of texts’. This made it necessary to be able to visualise the spread of texts between quires, and the relationship of each codicological unit to the others, in order to identify the early medieval contents of each miscellany. Existing visualisation methods proved to be wholly unsatisfactory for miscellanies, and required a new diagrammatic method for representing them to be developed.

But in the end, the identification and layout visualisation of the small excerpts in the Physiologus manuscripts did not help to clarify the text’s audience or use. If anything, it emphasised the

24 Digitised at <daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00036883/image_1>.
25 Digitised at <www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/csg/0230>.
26 Digitised at <digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/bav_pal_lat_1074?ui_lang=ger>.
27 Digitised at <diglib.hab.de/?db=mss&list=ms&id=148-gud-lat>.
29 J.P. Gumbert, ‘Codicological units: towards a terminology for the stratigraphy of the non-homogeneous codex’, *Segno e testo* 2 (2004), p. 25. The definition of the word ‘miscellany’ as used in this article is based on Gumbert’s definition of codicological wholes, and not on his definition of composites: see *ibid.*, pp. 17–18.
30 A. Dorofeeva, ‘Understanding miscellanies: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS lat. 611 and a new method of visualising manuscript collation’ (submitted to the *Gazette du livre médiéval*).
diversity of these books. Since the textual transmission history of the *Physiologus* was already well-established, this diversity posed a problem. The function of the *Physiologus* in the early middle ages was best determined through its manuscript context; but this context was proving to be so heterogeneous that it seemed only to demonstrate that the *Physiologus* was a miscellaneous text, generally copied out alongside fragments, lists of various kinds and minor or commonplace works. In other words, the *Physiologus* seemed to be one unimportant text alongside many unimportant texts, hardly worth studying except for the structure and appearance of its manuscripts.

That the *Physiologus* did not always appear in more or less the same context in the early middle ages was, in fact, to be expected. Few texts did. A modern reader might imagine it grouped with Aesop, Isidore, Pliny, Phaedrus, Solinus, and other authors – perhaps Aelian or Lucretius – writing about the natural world. Aesop, Isidore, Pliny and Solinus do appear among the texts in the *Physiologus* manuscripts, but not in any grouping according to theme. This is because texts were not generally organised in this way, unless for some practical purpose (lectionaries are one example); or rather, as we shall see, thematic grouping was only one of the principles according to which texts could be copied out together. The lack of thematic grouping in a manuscript did not mean that there was not some other principle of selection or organisation at work, nor that the book itself was an inconsequential compilation of excerpts. A particular copy of a text in a specific manuscript – however fragmentary or rare – had been useful enough to someone to have been copied out when the book was made. Modern standards of coherence could not be applied here. It was necessary to find evidence of the ways in which the *Physiologus* manuscripts selected and organised their texts.

Since it is impossible to consider the evidence of all eleven *Physiologus* manuscripts here, we shall focus on a single codicological whole represented by Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 225 + Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 233 + Orléans, Médiathèque, MS 313, made at the beginning of the ninth century in the Loire region, possibly at the monastery of Saint-Mesmin at Micy near Fleury. The composition of the original codex can be reconstructed from its quire signatures:

1. Orléans 313: quires 1–14

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Together with seven other manuscripts, this large and well-decorated codicological whole witnesses a Carolingian corpus of texts that may have existed in upwards of fifty codices, according to the study by Michael Gorman.32 Judging from its two principal manuscripts, this collection, which for clarity we shall call Gorman’s corpus, comprised a large set of extracts (see the Appendix for a list of contents). As Gorman points out, the corpus could not have been put together in this form before 798, assuming this to be the correct date of the letter by Alcuin which it contains; and not long after the year 800, as the oldest manuscripts of the corpus date from the beginning of the ninth century.33 However, the major works of the corpus may have been compiled well before 800, ‘since collation reveals that the various texts seem to be distant from their archetypes and they are all rather ‘old-fashioned’ for the year 800’.34 Gorman’s corpus may represent, therefore, an older collection expanded at the turn of the century.

Both the ninth-century Bern-Orléans codicological unit and two other corpus manuscripts contain these texts and a large number of additions. Isidore’s Prooemia to the Old and New Testaments and De ortu et obitu patrum (on the lives and deeds of the Fathers) are added at the beginning. Further texts are inserted at the end, starting with the quires in Bern 225 and continuing with the remainder of Orléans 313 (see the list of contents in the Appendix, where the additions are emphasised in bold font).

These texts are not simply appended, but are mixed in with some of the original collection: namely, the excerpts of the interrogationes that derive from the Etymologiae, the Dicta Leonis and De divinis scripturis. This suggests that the range of texts in the Bern-Orléans unit underwent a considered process of selection. Gorman concluded that the corpus was intended for educating priests and thereafter as a reference work, containing as it does ‘elementary exegetical material… an introduction to the significance of names… some texts on the priesthood… a simple text on

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33 Gorman notes that the astronomical reference to Mars in the invocation to Charlemagne accompanying Alcuin’s letter was recorded in the Annales regni francorum for the year 798.

doctrinal matters… [and] a basic credal statement.\textsuperscript{35} Such a basic function as a teaching and reference work does not quite explain its popularity, however: eight extant manuscripts is a large number for a miscellaneous collection, and this one may once have existed in over fifty codices.\textsuperscript{36} Nor does it explain why the collection was sometimes expanded, as in the Bern-Orléans unit. Gorman suggests that the corpus may have been put together by someone close to Charlemagne, which, together with its utility, guaranteed re-copying for some time after the emperor’s death.\textsuperscript{37} Yet there is no reason why anyone in Charlemagne’s circle would have required such an ‘elementary’ and ‘old-fashioned’ set of texts.

That is not to say, of course, that the contents of the corpus did not fit with Charlemagne’s reform ideas. In the \textit{Admonitio generalis}, arguably his most important capitulary, Charlemagne required clerics to learn the Roman chant thoroughly; to know and teach the Lord’s Prayer and the clauses of the Creed; to celebrate baptisms and masses; to sing the psalms, doxologies and \textit{Sanctus}; to keep the church, altar and vessels in a proper manner; preach against sin, especially hatred and avarice, and especially about the virtues and the resurrection of the dead; and read only correct and canonical books. Clergy also needed to understand these subjects in order to instruct parishioners and conduct services. In summary, Charlemagne was concerned that priests should understand the forms and structures of the Church, be competent in liturgy and pastoral duties, and identify orthodox sources.

This programme is reflected to a large extent in the Bern-Orléans collection. It contains exegesis of common biblical passages, creeds and the Lord’s Prayer; reference summaries and lists: of Creation events, biblical tithes and characters, clerical vestments and grades, councils, popes and Church Fathers; and moral, pastoral and spiritual texts. Form, liturgy and orthodoxy are represented. The dangers of avarice – a concern in the \textit{Admonitio} – are discussed in the text on fol. 232, an extract from the \textit{Dicta Leonis episcopi} that was part of the original corpus, and in the following exposition on the Vulgate Matthew 6:24 on fol. 233–4, which was a new addition. The \textit{Dicta Leonis} ends with ‘explicit dicta sancti gregori de mamon a iniquitatis’ and the exposition of the Matthew passage begins with ‘mamona diuitio interpretantur’. Here we find a very specific extract of the \textit{Dicta} which was understood by the scribe or compiler to discuss the


evils of greed for material wealth. The brief biblical exposition that has been newly added on the same subject serves to complete what can be described as a lesson: an outline of the concept, followed by a biblical reference and an example interpretation. This style is ideal for sermons and homilies, as well as for a teaching text.

Generally, then, the Bern-Orléans collection appears to fit in with the teaching programme outlined by central authority. Yet the manner in which its texts were selected suggests that this was not the only, or indeed the primary purpose of the collection. Evidence of textual selection strategies is often scant, but it is available for the Bern-Orléans unit. It was one of three manuscripts in Gorman’s corpus to receive additional texts, and it is related textually to one of the others – Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, lat. 10612, which originated at the large Benedictine abbey of St Julien in Tours, also in the ninth century.\(^{38}\) These manuscripts are evidence of regional links between the abbey of St Julien and the close-lying monastery near Fleury that produced the Bern–Orléans unit. Yet, despite the relationship between these centres, and the exchange of books likely conducted between them, the additions to Gorman’s corpus contained in the Paris manuscript and in the Bern-Orléans unit are quite different. This indicates that, though copied from the same exemplars, the two books were needed for different purposes. In other words, the differences between their contents were not determined principally by differences in available source material, but rather by conscious editorial decisions.

While Gorman’s corpus was certainly suited for teaching, then, the additional texts the Bern-Orléans unit received, and the variety of its contents, meant that it was intended as a multi-purpose book from the outset. The majority of the added texts appear to be lists, with some exegetical material as well. Such texts could be used for reference purposes, whether to consult the life of a particular pope or bishop’s name, or to check the correct interpretation of a common topic, perhaps while composing a sermon. Other functions are possible. What is certain is that this was an easily adaptable set of texts, just as Gorman’s corpus itself was easily adapted to new contexts through the re-arrangement and addition of material. And adaptability, in turn, meant that these miscellanies could not be used by a single group of people. For instance, monastic education was important to the makers of this miscellany, as evident from the chapters from the Benedictine Rule and the question-answer version of books 7–9.3.17 of Isidore’s *Etymologiae*, where the chapter *De monachis* is the only one to be emphasised by the inclusion of a rubric.\(^{39}\) However, the monks in training at St Mesmin, the probable place of origin of the Bern-Orléans

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unit, would also have had recourse to bibles, homiliaries, sacramentaries, patristic texts, grammatical and other works from which to learn. The availability of training is evident from the fact that manuscripts were exchanged for copying between the monastery near Fleury and the monastery near Tours, from their proximity to important and wealthy monastic centres associated with those cities, and from the breadth and high quality of the Bern-Orléans collection. Neither do the contents of the miscellany suggest that it was used principally by priests, by novices, by bishops, by lay brothers or by any other single person or group active in an early medieval monastery. This collection was valuable for its diversity and flexibility. As such, it answered the intellectual needs of an entire community on an everyday level. The small lesson on avarice was little suited for the composition of challenging scholarly tractates, but provided easily understandable source material for letters, sermons, discussion or exegetical exposition: daily occurrences at any large monastic house.

The Bern-Orléans unit is just one example of the planning that went into miscellanies. It also demonstrates that thematic collocation of texts – such the two extracts on avarice – was perfectly possible, but was not the guiding principle it might be in a modern or early modern miscellany. It certainly wasn’t uncommon: other *Physiologus* manuscripts also contain thematically arranged extracts. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. T.2.23 contains the *Sermo de symbolo* (part of a sermon addressed to catechumens seeking baptism at Easter, here presenting the evidence of the coming of the Messiah) by the fifth-century bishop of Carthage Quodvultdeus on fols. 82r–88v. The sermon includes an acrostic Sybilline prophecy, and is followed by two further Sybilline prophecies on fols. 88v–93r: prose poems extolling God and foretelling of the events of the Second Coming and Last Judgement.40 This group of texts acts as an exposé of a particular theme – the Second Coming. An animal theme is discernible in Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Palat. lat. 1074, which contains the *Physiologus* (fols. 1r–21r) with appended excerpts from Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* XVI.10.1 (fols. 21v–22r, on the pearl and the parrot), and an anonymous commentary on the Book of Daniel (fols. 22r–23r). Commencing without a title or other notice of its contents immediately after the *explicit* to the *Physiologus*, the commentary explains the meaning of a short verse (Dn. 10.4–5) concerning a man girded with a gold belt from Uphaz, and of Daniel’s dream of four beasts (Dn. 7): a winged lion, a bear, a four-headed winged leopard and a huge beast with ten horns. The author purposefully links Daniel with Jacob’s son

Dan in Genesis 49:17, in which Dan is called a serpent who shall bite the horse’s heels so that the rider shall fall backwards (fol. 23r, l. 14: ‘et fiat inquid dán serpens in uia…’). The passage on the beasts is significantly longer than that on the man, and is covered in much greater depth in the commentary. The appearance and behaviour of the four beasts are explained and linked with the Second Coming: ‘post hec adueniet dominus… post hec erit celum nouum et erra noua’ (fol. 23v, lines 16 and 21–2). This set of texts on the natural world – particularly animals – and on its eschatological Christian interpretation is presented here as a single thematic unit, despite the very different origins of the individual texts. But thematic collocation was only one possible option in such miscellanies. The form of some texts, rather than their contents, serves as the guiding principle for their collocation in St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 230: pages 361 through 408 contain five unrelated sermons, while pages 408 through 419 contain unrelated commentaries on the Lord’s Prayer.

Additional early medieval strategies for the selection and collocation of texts remain to be discovered in this and other miscellanies. For now, perhaps the most important lesson of the Bern-Orléans unit, and the other manuscripts mentioned above, is that miscellanies were not static; they were not simply blind and irrelevant copies of older books. Inherited material was expanded upon and arranged in new ways in the early middle ages to create new meanings.

In this context, the importance of the relationship of a manuscript to its original needs to be re-examined. One scholar of the early middle ages recently declared in discussion that Carolingian scribal culture was part of an Abschreibekultur that aimed to canonise the past, and that it was not innovative in any significant way. The perceived importance of the past for early medieval intellectual culture is undeniable, but scholarship over at least the last twenty years has also firmly overturned the idea that either early medieval copying or textual composition were unoriginal. The notion of originality or creativity was in any case not explicitly associated with the act of writing until the eighteenth century, as Gerald Bruns pointed out as early as 1980.41 In the case of miscellanies, if not all other early medieval books, the issue of original production versus imitative reproduction is one that needs to be set aside entirely. The reason for this is, as Thomas Bredehoft recently noted, that ‘[o]ur entire theoretical perspective on which aspects of a medieval text are ‘substantive’ and which are ‘accidentals’ is built upon an understanding of scribal activity as inherently reproductive’; yet early medieval readers did not universally assume

a ‘hierarchical relationship of value between original and copy’. The individual texts in a miscellany were not more or less important depending on their derivation from an authoritative text, or their length. Miscellanies were, instead, valuable as whole collections of knowledge.

Each miscellany was a response to an increasing need for information. Monasteries required practical and informative works to answer their particular requirements. This is evident from Gorman’s corpus and the additions to it in the Bern-Orléans unit. The editing and collating work that went into this codicological whole is proof that miscellany manuscripts of this kind were increasingly essential reference tools for linguistic, factual and practical knowledge that was normally scattered across dozens of texts. For such miscellanies, the lack of glosses and marginal notes – features normally associated with manuscripts that were read intensively – is not an indication that they were not read at all; instead, they were new collections that were being read in new ways. Each complete miscellany therefore deserves our attention as a witness to the resources, methods and interests of early medieval readers at a particular place and time.

It is possible to detect both a number of complications associated with miscellanies, and some of their essential features. The complications need to reviewed first, and they arise from our general definition of the word ‘miscellany’ as ‘a mixture, medley, or assortment; (a collection of) miscellaneous objects or items.’ The basic problem with applying the term defined in this way to early medieval books is that it implies an arbitrary collection, or one of no particular consequence, both by its meaning and by its modern usage. Text extracts do not seem to carry the same weight as the works from which they have been taken.

An arbitrary collection need not mean an unimportant one, of course, and scholars have paid attention to early medieval miscellanies for their preservation of parts of rare or otherwise lost works, or interesting variants of texts, or certain kinds of texts, such as glossaries, that form their own tradition. But only a very few studies have acknowledged the implications of miscellaneous texts within their complete codicological context for early medieval book and intellectual history, and their value as evidence of whole classroom, church or political programmes. The eleven

43 ‘miscellany, n.’ OED Online.
44 Among the most insightful of these studies are M. Garrison, ‘The Collectanea and medieval florilegia’, in M. Bayless and M. Lapidge (eds.), Collectanea Pseudo-Beda, Scriptorum Latini Hiberniae 14 (Dublin, 1998), pp. 42–83; S. A. Keefe, Water and the Word: Baptism and the Education of the Clergy in the Carolingian Empire, 2 vols, Publications in Medieval Studies (Notre Dame, IN, 2002); and S.G. Nichols and S. Wenzel (eds.), The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany, Recentiores: Later Latin Texts and Contexts (Ann Arbor, 1996). Several very good recent collected studies of miscellanies in a later medieval context also examine some of the problems discussed in this article; these studies include M. Connolly and R.L. Radulescu (eds.), Insular Books:
early medieval *Physiologus* manuscripts constitute a representative cross-section of this evidence. However, even a cursory examination of their contents raises the twin problem of definition and genre in miscellaneous collections. ‘Miscellany’ is not a useful taxonomic principle.\(^{45}\) Its generality means it can be applied to books which have a miscellaneous character, but whose appellation describes their unity of purpose. Among such books are florilegia, or collections of sentences and short paragraphs from authorities on various subjects; *catenae* or verse-by-verse biblical commentaries composed of excerpts from older commentators; and liturgical books such as breviaries and homiliaries. Can any such collected volume be classed as a ‘true’ miscellany? This question very much depends on our definition of the term, and this is in turn tied to the problem of purpose. If the purpose or purposes of a collection were in fact defined, it seems incorrect to call it a miscellany, as this implies a set of unrelated stand-alone texts.

Attempting to discern the intent behind a miscellaneous collection is difficult and fraught with potential pitfalls. Many manuscript scholars class the texts in a miscellany by genre, such as epistolary, geographical, hagiographical, historical, liturgical, medical, philosophical and so on; or sometimes by sub-genre, such as anatomical or annalistic. As it is not uncommon for miscellanies to number a hundred folios or more, it is easy to discern ‘genre groups’ in the many texts scattered throughout a manuscript. By describing a miscellany as liturgical, theological or musical, the scholar gives an approximate and useful indication of its primary purpose and content, and often, though not always, of the sphere in which it was used.

Such a thematic description is also technically correct, and easy to prove, but in the case of books with more than one kind of genre it ignores the miscellaneous nature of the book in question. The importance of these collections lies precisely in the diversity of their contents. They are compilations made to suit the particular needs and tastes of a certain place in a certain period of time, and their uses are as many as the kinds of texts they contain. It should not be forgotten that books, even plain and hastily written, simply cost too much in both time and resources to contain unimportant or non-useful material. ‘Genre’ is not a medieval concept, and it seldom served as an organising principle in those miscellanies that contained several genres of text. Rather, a miscellany’s contents were selected according to the information they imparted. It is this information we must evaluate to understand the purpose and value of a collection: the focus

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\(^{45}\) S.G. Nichols and S. Wenzel (eds.), *The Whole Book*, p. 3.
ought to be on contents, rather than on form or genre. Breaking the individual texts down into carriers of information has a unifying effect, for the variety of extracts within a manuscript begins to matter less than the manuscript as a single cultural and intellectual repository.

This is all the more important because these texts were rarely, if ever, selected at random, or in accordance with their importance to a single person only. The exception is if the book in question was a personal vademecum such as that of Walahfrid Strabo.\textsuperscript{46} His book was copied largely by Walahfrid himself over several decades; as Bernhard Bischoff noted, his hand displays at least four stages of development. The contents of Walahfrid’s manuscript reflect his own interests and requirements. One would expect personal books such as this to be written largely by their owner. There were very probably other books written by a variety of scribes for the sole use of a single person, such as a bishop or other high official; however, these books did not reflect their personal interests, but rather their high status and the duties of their professional lives. We must, therefore, differentiate between collections written for and by a single person; and collections – miscellanies – written by one or more scribes to supply the needs of a community, whether to be used by a single person or by a group of people. For the identification of such books, the context of production is all-important, though, as Mary Garrison points out, it is not always easy to identify from the surviving codicological evidence.\textsuperscript{47}

To return to the problem of taxonomy, neutral terms such as ‘handbook’, ‘reader’ or ‘sourcebook’ may reflect the nature of such collections better than ‘miscellany’. The German word \textit{Sammelhandschrift}, too, carries fewer connotations. A challenge to the assumptions of terminology is to be welcomed not only by the most pedantic kind of book historian: casual use of post-medieval terminology risks obscuring the real applications and significance of medieval books, even when these books are then thoroughly analysed. Walahfrid Strabo’s vademecum has been described as his ‘commonplace-book’, a term that derives from early modern scrapbooks or note-journals, newly fashionable in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{48} Walahfrid’s manuscript remained with him for over twenty-five years and was used to help him write, teach, travel and fulfil his other life capacities. From the outset, its purpose and uses differed from that of commonplace-


\textsuperscript{47} M. Garrison, ‘The Collectanea’, p. 46.

books, and deserve explanation rather than encapsulation within a concept that is anachronistic and so likely to be misunderstood. Some scholars have re-defined their terms in response to this sort of problem. Rosamond McKitterick has coined the term ‘glossary chrestomathy’ to describe those books that contain collections of glossaries: a useful distinction that avoids the problem of ‘genre’.\(^{49}\) Susan Keefe, in describing the different kinds of credal texts, has labelled them ‘EF’ for ‘explanations of the faith’, ‘PF’ for ‘professions of the faith’ and ‘DF’ for ‘defense of the faith’.\(^{50}\) This, too, prioritises the content of the credal text rather than its form, whether a sermon, exhortation to catechumens, major treatise, letter, dialogue, list and so on.

The inclusion of a short text such as the *Physiologus* along with others in a single codex need not require any perceived coherence of content; nevertheless, it is possible to discern a certain kind of unity from the manuscripts that survive. It seems clear that such miscellanies comprise a book type of their own, alongside but apart from other compilation volumes such as florilegia and homiliaries. Like these books, miscellanies were purposefully compiled, but they differ in that they lack coherence: whether of form, as with florilegia; of association, for example with a ritual or series of rituals, as with many liturgical collections; or of theme, as with grammatical or musical compilations. It is this diversity of content and purpose that ensured the widespread creation and use of miscellanies, as well as their continued resistance to categorisation by modern book scholars.

In a more general sense, early medieval miscellanies participate in the trend towards encyclopaedism. That is not to say that they are in the tradition of Pliny, Solinus, Cassiodorus and Isidore; few, if any, miscellanies aspire to the high degree of organisation and breadth of subject found in the encyclopaedias of these authors (and it is only in comparison with their work that the reductive term ‘miscellany’ becomes appropriate). Rather, as we have already noted, early medieval miscellanies are a response to an increasing need for information. Monasteries required practical and informative works to answer their particular requirements: teaching manuals, formulas, books to aid with the composition of letters, sermons and official documents, lists of dates, words, and numbers, hagiographies, translations, basic Christian texts such as creeds, and so on. Many miscellanies contain some or many of these texts. As receptacles of practical knowledge, and above all as books used in day-to-day life, miscellanies were


microcosmic encyclopedias. The word ‘encyclopedia’ derives from the Greek ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία, or circle of knowledge; and in this sense, miscellanies represented a system of knowledge, complete in that they arose out of and answered a whole set of local needs, though they were not comprehensive in subject.

A crucial feature of miscellanies as ‘local encyclopedias’ is the fragmentary nature of their texts. Many are incomplete, abridged, rearranged or paraphrased; others are short extracts only or simple notes from various sources, apparently mixed together willy-nilly. This fragmentary form is the only one possible for a collection that supplements and acts as an extension of inherited, learned knowledge. It has been shown that ‘in a literate society writing serves as an adjunct to memory.’⁵¹ As the manuscripts of the Physiologus demonstrate, miscellanies contain information that was thought valuable or useful, served as a reminder or reference, and had gained new importance following directives passed down from above. In other words, miscellanies were living witnesses to the state of knowledge in their place of production, and their fragmentary contents were supplements to memorised learning. From the ways in which compilers selected, arranged and transcribed these incomplete texts we can discern what they wanted to know, and trace the outline of what they did know. This is far less feasible with complete copies of texts.

The study of groups of miscellanies opens new possibilities for future research on early medieval intellectual culture, therefore. Examination of the group of Physiologus manuscripts suggests that miscellany corpora have been overlooked as important repositories of inherited knowledge, and as evidence of the ways in which learning was implemented at a local level across the Frankish territories in the early middle ages. It is only by examining miscellanies, moreover, that we are able to understand how and why complete texts that were never copied into other kinds of books – such as the Physiologus – were used. The principles towards a theoretical model of miscellanies described above suggest a much-needed new way of looking at these complex and interesting medieval books.

Appendix

List of contents of Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS lat. 225 + Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS lat. 233 + Orléans, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 313, with those additions that are new to this manuscript in bold font:

Orléans 313

1. 1–24: Isidore of Seville, *Prooemia in libros ueteris ac noui testamenti.*
   Inc. ‘Incipit liber praemiorum de libris noui et ueteri testamenti. Plenitudo noui et ueteris...’

2. 24–59: Isidore of Seville, *De ortu et obitu patrum.*
   Inc. ‘Incipit uita uel obitus sanctorum qui in Domino praecesserunt. Item praefatio. Quorumdam sanctorum...’

   Inc. ‘Domno sancto ac reuerentissimo fratri Orosio Esidorus. Quaedam notissima...’

   Inc. ‘In christi nomine incipit expositio sancti euangelii edita gregorio papa urbis romae...’

5. 180–8: Alcuin of York, *Epistula 136 De gladio.* Missing prologue but with invocation on p. 188.52
   Inc. ‘Item de gladio secundum lucam. Est enim locus euangelii...’

6. 188–90: Anonymous commentary on Isaiah 11:1. ‘De septiformis spiritu sancti.’53
   Inc. ‘Egredietur uirga de radice iesse...’

   Inc. ‘Primo enim scendi est quod omnes similitudines euangelicç...’

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8. 195–204: Isidore of Seville, *Sententiae*, with a condensed question-answer version of books 7–9.3.17 of Isidore’s *Etymologiae*.

   *Inc.* ‘Summum bonum deus est. Quid est deus. Deus igitur spiritus est…’

9. 204–6: First set of questions on ‘letters’ from a northeastern Italian set of *interrogationes et responsiones* written in or before the eighth century.\(^55\)

   *Inc.* ‘Incipiunt quaestiones de litteris uel singulis causis. Quia uideo te…’

10. 206–7: Second set, based on Isidore’s *Prooemia* with details from the *Etymologiae*.

   *Inc.* ‘Incipiamus de sanctam scripturam. Et a [sic] sacrorum numero…’

11. 207–12: Third set, on the books of the New Testament.\(^56\)

   *Inc.* ‘Item noui testamenti libri isti sunt. Primum euangeliorum…’

12. 212–13: Fourth set, initial section of the questions on Genesis.

   *Inc.* ‘Incipit questio de libro genesis. Ubi primum in sacris…’


   *Inc.* ‘Hyeronimus ait. De principio caeli…’


   *Inc.* ‘Item de exodo. Quare moyses non alium signum…’

15. 222: Ordinal of Christ in the Hibernian Chronological version.\(^57\)

   *Inc.* ‘Hii sunt grados septem in quibus christus aduenit…’

16. 222–3: *Chronica sancti Hieronymi*, conclusion. Based on Isidore’s *Differentiae*, followed by definitions of *liber*, *mundus* and four kinds of *dilectio*. Remainder of page blank.

   *Inc.* ‘Dicamus de sacerdote. Sacerdos christus est…’

Bern 225

17. 88⁷–97⁷: First third of the *Liber pontificalis*, with the letters of Jerome and Damasus followed by the lives of 35 popes (Linus to Liberius).\(^58\)

   *Inc.* ‘Beatissimo pape damaso hieronimus gloria…’

18. 97⁷–103⁷: Jerome, *De uiris illustribus*.

   *Inc.* ‘Hortaris dexter ut tranquillum sequens…’

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\(^56\) Not listed by Gorman as one of the texts in his corpus of exegetical miscellanies. However, it appears in Cologne 85, which is one of the manuscripts in Gorman’s corpus, and it has the appropriate erotematic form.


\(^58\) According to the Felician epitome, but omitting Pope Eusebius. The letters are known to be forgeries made by one or more of the sixth-century compilers of the *Liber*. For an initial bibliography on the subject, and a commentary on the authorship and dating of the letters, see R. Davis (trans.), *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715*, Translated Texts for Historians 6 (Liverpool, 2000).
204: Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* chapters 80–1, 84.

*Inc.* ‘Poenitentiam abolere peccata indubitanter credimus…’

20. 224: Anonymous text on clerical vestments.

*Inc.* ‘De uestimenta sacerdotale. Quod nostris temporibus dalmatica dicitur…’


*Inc.* ‘Dilectissimi fratre, sanctissimi consacerdotes…’

22. 229–30: Isidore, *Etymologiae* VI.16. Preceded by a list of the four ecumenical councils and followed by a list of a further six councils.

*Inc.* ‘De canonibus conciliorum ex libro ethymologiarum esidori…’


*Inc.* ‘De decimis offerendis in genesi. Et dedit ei decimas…’


*Inc.* ‘Dicta leonis episcopi. Credo in deum…’


*Inc.* ‘Nemo potest duobus dominis seruire…’


*Inc.* ‘De canonibus conciliorum…’

27. 236: List of church council canons, giving the number of bishops and priests named and the number of chapters in each.

*Inc.* ‘Sub constantino augusto imperator canon nicenis…’

28. 236–7: List of the emperors and popes in office during each council, and the number of Roman bishops who were present, followed by a list of those condemned in each council.59

*Inc.* ‘Primum concilium nicenum…’ With rubricated title in an irregular substitution cipher (‘ef npnkoicxs dpndipsvm’), which may be read as ‘de nominibus conciorum’.

29. 237–8: Extract from a Roman *ordo* on Septuagesima Sunday.60

*Inc.* ‘Item de septuagesimo die…’


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59 The Bern-Orléans unit shares this addition with Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 10612; the addition does not otherwise appear in Gorman’s corpus.

60 The text is similar to that printed in P. Batiffol, *History of the Roman Breviary*, trans. Baylay (London, 1898), pp. 359–60, and somewhat similar to E. Martène and U. Durand (eds.), *Thesaurus novus anecdotorum*, 5 (Paris, 1717), col. 107. This Roman *ordo* is found in full in Montpellier, Bibliothèque de l’École de Médecine, MS 412 (s. ix).
31. **239: Anonymous summary of the creation of the world.**

   *Inc. ‘Dogmatum caelesticorum. Ante exordium creaturarum fundauit…’*

32. **240–1: Extract from Venantius Fortunatus, *Commentum in symbool Athanasianum.***

   *Inc. ‘Qui si sol aut ignis aliquid inmundum tetigerit…’*

33. **242–3: An exposition of the Lord’s Prayer.**

   *Inc. ‘Oratio dominica proprie dicitur... ’*

34. **243–55: Gennadius of Marseille, *De ecclesiasticis dogmatibus.***

   *Inc. ‘Incipit doctrina dogma ecclesiasticorum secundum nicaeum concilium...’*

   Bern 233

35. **137: *Physiologus in 37 chapters.***

   *Inc. ‘Incipit liber fisioloto exposito de natura animalium uel auium seu bestiarum...’*

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