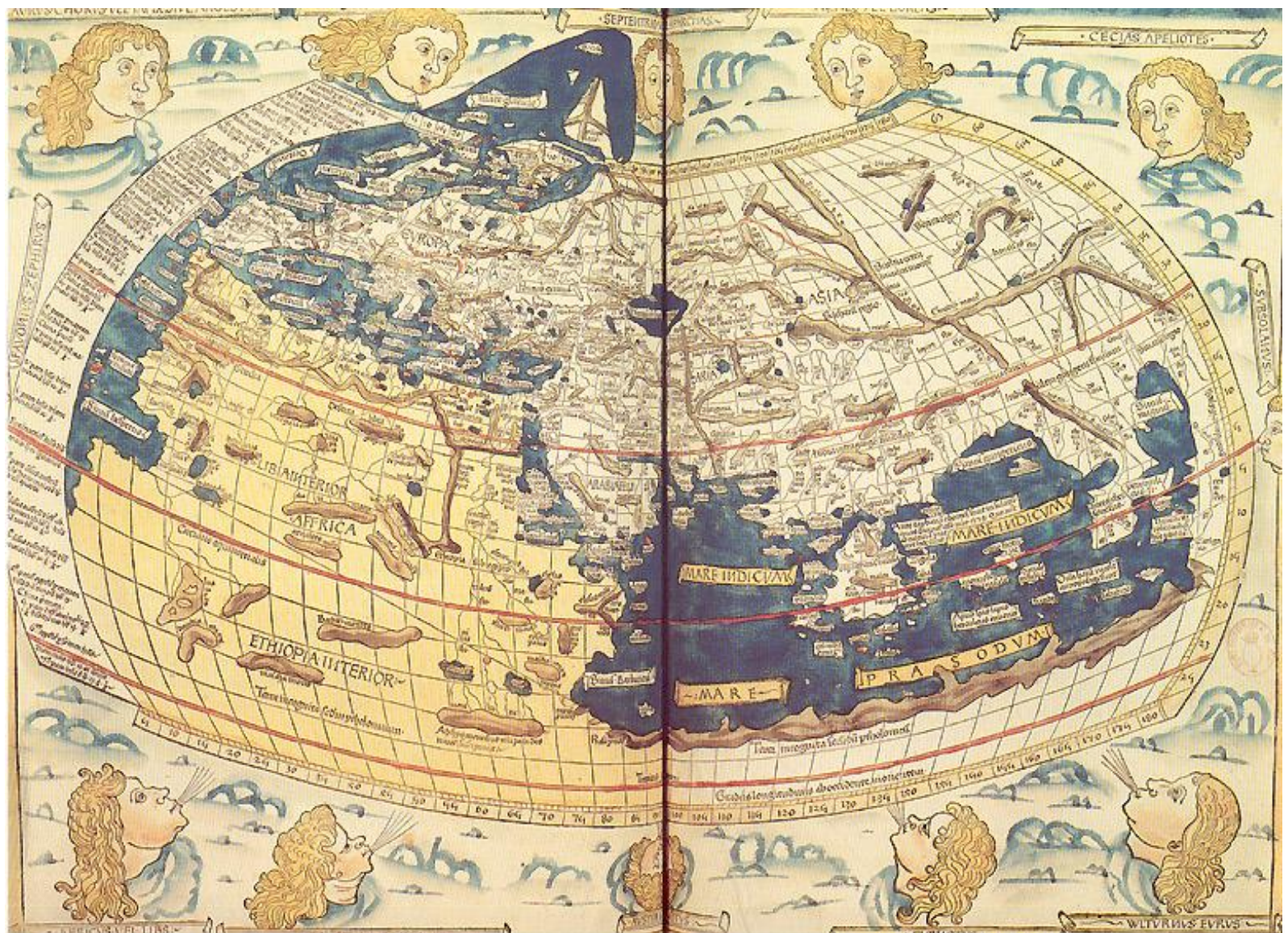


**PARTRIDGES, QUAILS AND DOMESTIC COCKS: THE CASE OF  
HOMOSEXUAL "WIDOWERS" FROM ARISTOTLE TO GESSNER –  
AND A GEOGRAPHIC MYSTERY**

**By: Dr. Aafke van Oppenraay. Pictures: with our thanks to Elio Corti.  
English translation by A. Runia.**



With his extensive oeuvre the great Greek philosopher and teacher Aristotle, who lived from 384 to 322 B.C., can be said to have laid the foundation of almost all modern science. Through the centuries his works were read, used, quoted, commented on and criticized. To this very day his texts are a source of lively debate, certainly among scholars.

Thus in a recently published article in the *Atti della Accademia Pontaniana* (Naples)<sup>1</sup> the scholars Dr Elio Corti and Dr Roberto Ricciardi describe the account of special behaviour

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<sup>1</sup>Elio Corti, Aafke van Oppenraay, Roberto Ricciardi, "Conrad Gessner, l'atteggiamento dei galli *sine gallinis*, Alberto Magno e la regione di *Leylychynie*," in *Atti Accademia Pontaniana, Nova Serie Vol. LVII 2008* (Napoli: Giannini Editore, 2009), 59-68.

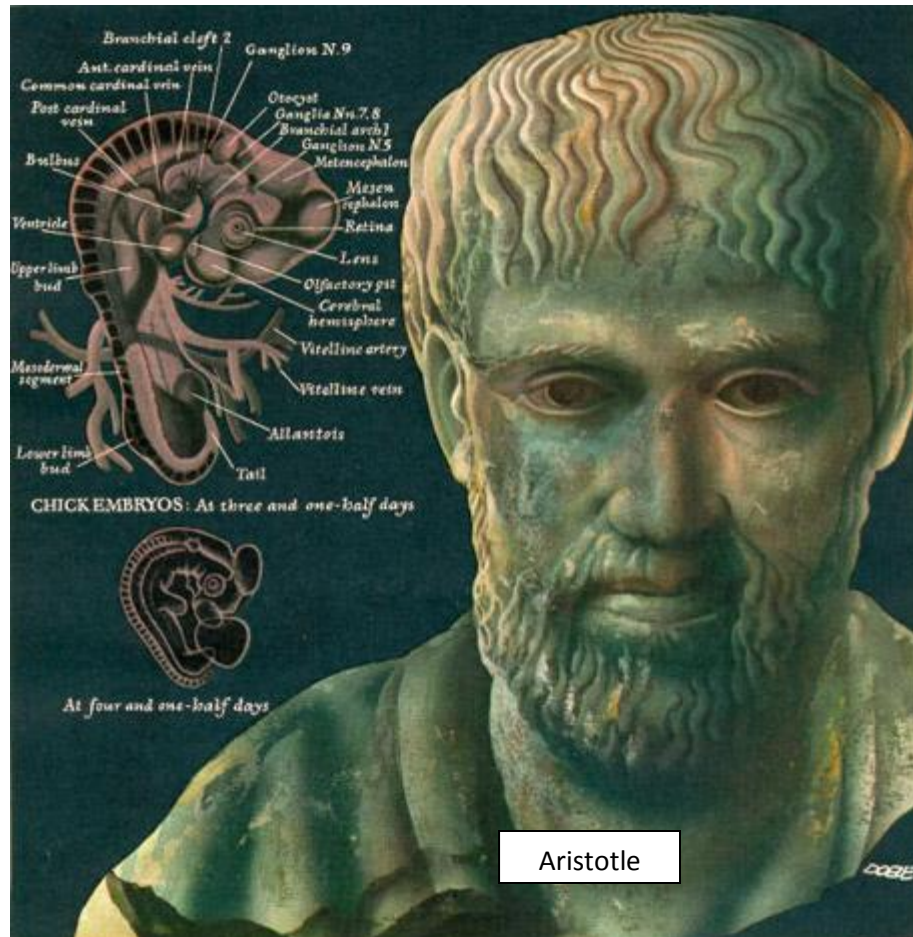
sometimes displayed by partridges (Greek: πέρδικες, Latin: *perdices*), quails (Greek: ὄρνυγες, Latin: *coturnices*) and domestic cocks (Greek: ἀλεκτρούνες, Latin: *galli, gallinacei*). They found this account in the third book of a work on zoology by a sixteenth-century Swiss scholar, Conrad Gessner.<sup>2</sup> In this third book Gessner writes in the section dealing with ornithology:<sup>3</sup>

“Cocks also do something similar (*i.e. to what was described in the foregoing regarding the sexual behaviour of partridges and quails*): for in the temples where they stay as holy sacrifices, without hens, they all automatically tread the last one to have joined as a votive offering, (*thus*) Aristotle.” (...) “In the region called *Leylychynie* all young, not yet mature cocks fight with each other and the victor treads the loser, in the absence of hens, (*thus*) Albertus (translation AvO).”

The context portrays the sexual behaviour which the male animals of these gallinaceous bird species sometimes tend to display when for some reason the female partners are absent – for instance because they are brooding their eggs, or because human intervention keeps them away from the males. We are dealing here with the group behaviour of males called “widowers”, who have joined to form a group with other companions in misfortune, or whom people have placed in a separate group for a certain reason.

The special behaviour that these animals may start to display has two forms. First, fights, after which the victor sexually mounts (“treads on”) the loser. Second, the almost ritual, habitual sexual mounting of the male to have arrived last by all other members of the group.<sup>4</sup>

In the last sentence of the quotation Gessner claims to have derived the content of the report from a certain “Albertus”. This means that he consulted the great Latin commentary that



Aristotle

<sup>2</sup>Conrad Gessner (1516-1565), *Historiae animalium* 5 vols. 1551-1558. *Historiae animalium* book 3 (ornithology), 384. Gessner drew the material for his discussions from no fewer than five sources, which he explicitly mentions: Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), Pliny the Elder (23-79 A.D.), Claudius Aelianus (175-235 A.D.), Athenaeus (c. 200 A.D.) and Albertus Magnus (c. 1200-1280 A.D.); also, indirectly, from Pompeius Trogus (1st century B.C.).

<sup>3</sup>Gallinacei etiam idem (...) faciunt, in templis enim ubi sine foeminis munerarii dicatique versantur, non temere eum qui nuper dicatus accesserit, omnes subigunt. Aristot. (...) In regione quae vocatur Leylychynie omnes galli iuniores, nec dum provecti aetate, inter se pugnant et victor cum victo coit, quum gallinae defuerint, Albertus.

<sup>4</sup>For the interesting and complicated history of this fragment’s transmission I refer to the article in question.

Albertus Magnus<sup>5</sup> (Albert the Great) wrote on Aristotle’s zoological books in the Middle Ages. Corti and Ricciardi checked this passage in Albertus, and encountered what they believed was a geographical mystery: for what was the “region called *Leylychynie*” (“regio quae vocatur *Leylychynie*”) – thus in Gessner; Albertus’ text has the form *Leyhychynie* – and where should this mysterious region be located?

After trying in vain to discover the name everywhere, they decided to write to me, because they knew that I am preparing the critical edition of Michael Scot’s medieval Arabic-Latin edition of Aristotle’s zoological books, which he made around 1215-1220 A.D. in a translation centre in Spanish Toledo.<sup>6</sup> It was this translation that Albertus Magnus used when, a few decades later, he produced his own great commentary on the text. For the edition of Scot’s translation I am investigating the various phases of textual transmission; and precisely this investigation enabled me to solve the riddle.

This required a comparison of the textual fragment in all its known phases of transmission. In chronological order, these are: (1) Aristotle’s original Greek text, (2) the Greek-Arabic translation by Pseudo-Ibn al-Bitriq, (3) Michael Scot’s Arabic-Latin translation, and the two commentaries, by (4) Albertus Magnus and (5) Conrad Gessner.



Albertus Magnus

<sup>5</sup>Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 1.8 t.2 c.3 n.60 p.595 v.19-22, ed. Hermann Stadler (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1916). For the quotation of Albertus’ text and its translation, see below under the general quotations on p. 3 and under note 7 (“Galli etiam faciunt hoc ... quando sunt sine gallinis”).

<sup>6</sup>Aristotle, *De animalibus*. Michael Scot’s Arabic-Latin Translation. Part two, books XI-XIV: *Parts of Animals*. Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus 5.2, ed. A.M.I. van Oppenraay (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 1998).

Aristotle, *De animalibus*. Michael Scot’s Arabic-Latin Translation. Part three, books XV-XIX: *Generation of Animals*. With a Greek Index to *De Generatione animalium* by H.J. Drossaart Lulofs. Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus 5.3, ed. A.M.I. van Oppenraay (Leiden-New York-Köln: Brill, 1992). Part one (books I-X: *History of Animals* is being edited).

For the sake of clarity I will provide the passages from the principal texts in an English translation:<sup>7</sup>



Aristotle (4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), *Historia animalium* book 8, 614a7-8:

“Sometimes this happens also with the domestic cocks; for in the temples, where they are set apart as offerings without females, they all as a matter of course tread the newly presented one” (translations from d’Arcy W. Thompson (1910ff) and Balme/Gotthelf (1991).

Arabic translation (Pseudo-Ibn al-Biṭrīq, 9th century A.D.):

“And sometimes this happens with domestic cocks that, when they are free (of hens) in a *certain* place and a strange cock enters their midst, they all tread this cock” (tr. AvO).

Arabic-Latin translation (Michael Scot, c. 1215 A.D.):

“And domestic cocks do exactly the same. For the cocks that are in the places called *kihinie*, where they approach each other (sexually) if no hens are present (...)” (tr. AvO).

Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus* (c. 1260 A.D.):

“Domestic cocks do this too, it is said, in the places located in the region called *Leyhychynie*. For in these places all young, not yet mature cocks come together to fight, and the victor tries to mount the loser, if there are no hens” (tr. AvO).  
 Conrad Gessner, *Historiae animalium* book 3 (1555 A.D.):

“Cocks also do something similar: for in the temples where they stay as holy sacrifices, without hens, they all automatically tread the last

<sup>7</sup>Aristotle (4th century B.C.), *Historia animalium* book 8, 614a7-8:

ἐνίοτε δὲ συμβαίνει τοῦτο καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀλεκτρούων· ἐν μὲν γὰρ τοῖς ἱεροῖς, ὅπου ἄνευ θηλειῶν ἀνάκεινται, τὸν ἀνατιθέμενον πάντες εὐλόγως ὀχεύουσιν.

Arabic translation (Pseudo-Ibn al-Biṭrīq, 9th century A.D.):

وربما عرض للديوك فإن الديوك اذا (...؟) برينا في موضع ثم دخل بينها ديك غريب يسفده جميع تلك الديكة.

Arabic-Latin translation *De animalibus* (Michael Scot, c. 1215 A.D.):

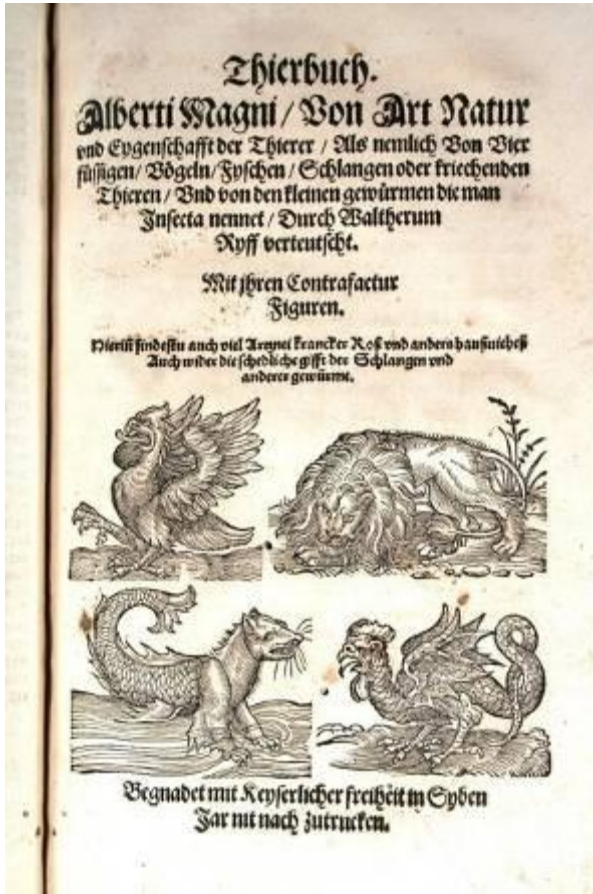
Et secundum hunc modum faciunt galli, quoniam ipsi galli in locis qui dicuntur kihinie, in quibus appropinquant se sine feminis (...).

Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus* (c. 1260 A.D.):

Galli etiam faciunt hoc, ut dicitur, in locis qui sunt in regione quae vocatur Leyhychynie. In locis enim illis omnes galli iuvenes non vetusti apopinquant sibi et pugnant, et victor nititur coire cum victo, quando sunt sine gallinis.

Conrad Gessner, *Historiae animalium* book 3 (1555 A.D.):

Gallinaei etiam idem (...) faciunt, in templis enim ubi sine foeminis munerarii dicatique versantur, non temere eum qui nuper dicatus accesserit, omnes subigunt. Aristot. (...) In regione quae vocatur Leylychynie omnes galli iuniores, nec dum provecti aetate, inter se pugnant et victor cum victo coit, quum gallinae defuerint, Albertus.



one to have joined as a votive offering, (*thus*) Aristotle.” (...) “In the region called *Leylychynie* all young, not yet mature cocks fight with each other and the victor treads the loser, in the absence of hens, (*thus*) Albertus” (tr. AvO).

The Greek-Arabic translation, which has been passed down to us in only one, rather poor manuscript,<sup>8</sup> is unfortunately lacunose in this place: the lacunae include an exact equivalent for the Greek expression *en tois hierois* (“in the temples” or “in the holy places”): the manuscript merely has *fī maudī* (“in a *certain* place”). But the Arabic-Latin translation has “in locis qui dicuntur kihinie” (“in the places called *kihinie*”), in which *kihinie* must be a transcription (rendering in Latin alphabet) of an Arabic word that Scot found in the Arabic manuscript which he used for his translation, as an equivalent for “*en tois hierois*”. My assumption now is that the word most probably used by the Arabic translator (and which we therefore no longer have in the only surviving Arabic manuscript) is *kahīnī*, which means “holy” or “priestly, sacerdotal”. The medieval translator Scot turned this into *kihinie*, probably therefore in the plural form (Arabic *mawādi* *kahīnīyya*). He rendered the word in

transcription instead of in translation, apparently because he did not know its meaning.

However, Albertus did not understand that the strange word represented an adjective, and thought that it must refer to a geographical name. He did not find the word originally used by Scot, *kihinie*, in his Latin manuscript because this manuscript came from a branch of the Latin manuscript tradition in which copyists had corrupted the word to *leihinie* or *lehinie*.<sup>9</sup> He therefore adapted the sentence, because he wanted to make its content more comprehensible to his readers: instead of “in locis qui dicuntur *leyhychynie*” (“in the places called *leyhychynie*”), as he apparently read in his manuscript, he wrote “in locis qui sunt in regione quae vocatur *Leyhychynie*” (“in the places located in the region called *Leyhychynie*”). By means of these additions he wanted to make it clear that *Leyhychynie* had to be the name of a region: he therefore wrote its name with a capital.

So the scholars Corti and Ricciardi need no longer search for this mysterious region *Leyhychynie* in Albertus, the name of which ultimately became *Leylychynie* in Conrad Gessner: it never existed, but its fictitious name turns out to be a Latin transcription passed down in corrupted form – of an Arabic adjective unfortunately not passed down to us – from Michael Scot’s Arabic-Latin translation: *kihinie*, the Arabic equivalent of *tois ierois* (‘the *holy* places’) from Aristotle’s original, Greek text.

<sup>8</sup>Tehran (Majles 1143).

<sup>9</sup>We find such readings in for instance manuscripts from Cambridge (Gonville and Caius 109/178), Berlin (Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz 194) and Vienna (Nationalbibliothek 97). Scot’s translation has been preserved in c. 62 manuscripts.

One sees that it is often necessary to possess reliable text editions of the complete history of a text's transmission, in order to be able to give a sound, scientifically underpinned explanation for what is sometimes only a detail. The present case even involved a crucial detail, which would still be baffling researchers if my work on the text edition of Scot's translation had not provided the solution.



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