

# The Fables of Ulrich Bonerius (ca. 1350)



# The Fables of Ulrich Bonerius (ca. 1350):

*Masterwork of Late Medieval  
Didactic Literature*

Translated by

Albrecht Classen

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
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Masterwork of Late Medieval Didactic Literature

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## INTRODUCTION

Medieval and early modern German fable literature was deeply influenced by Ulrich Bonerius's *Der Edelstein* (*The Gemstone*), representing a major stepping stone between late antiquity and the Enlightenment (eighteenth century).<sup>1</sup> His highly popular collection of fables, which continues to be enjoyable and instructive to read even today, provides valuable insights into late medieval culture, mentality, ethics, and morality, and it sheds important light on the genre of didactic literature. What he has to say about people's stupidity, ignorance, failures, and evil character still applies to us, sad to say, very much until today, but his advice how to correct and improve oneself also carries considerable weight for the modern world.

There are some interesting parallels with the fables written by Marie de France (ca. 1190),<sup>2</sup> but Bonerius approached his task from a more learned perspective, and he was also fully trained as a translator/writer, intending his works as material for preachers, although (or just because) he employed a fairly simple style and addressed his concerns in a direct, yet very convincing fashion. His fables contain much pragmatic advice for many of life's ordinary situations high and low, warning us about vices and lauding virtues.

We clearly hear a preacher's voice, but Bonerius was obviously fully aware of people's countless shortcomings, failures, and foibles, and addressed them through his hundred narratives, many of which closely follow the ancient models of animal stories (Aesop), while some of them also talk about people's interactions, regularly leading to problems and conflicts.

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<sup>1</sup> In German-language research, he is normally identified as 'Ulrich Boner,' but both in the prologue and the epilogue to *The Gemstone* he relies on the Latinized version, which I prefer, especially because the word 'boner' has a pornographic connotation in modern English. The name goes probably back to the profession of one of his forefathers, meaning, the butcher. For a solid introduction to Bonerius, see Klaus Grubmüller, "Boner," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, 2nd, completely revised ed. by Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. I (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1978), cols. 947–52.

<sup>2</sup> Marie de France, *Fables*, ed. and trans. Harriet Spiegel. Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

To be fair, however, there are significant similarities between the Anglo-Norman fables written by Marie de France and the Middle High German fables composed by Bonerius. Both draw mostly from the same sources, and both embrace very similar values and ideals. They differ in their interpretations of the morals or lessons to some extent, but not drastically. They provide different prologues reflecting their own personal situations, but they use many of the same animals and narrative contexts. Both begin with the same fable (no. 1) about the rooster who cannot make any use of the gemstone hidden in the dung pile, but the rest of the fables follows separate paths in each collection. Marie's fable about the wolf and the lamb (no. 2) is no. 5 in Bonerius's work, Marie's fable about the mouse and the frog (no. 3) appears as no. 6 in the German collection, Marie's no. 4 is Bonerius's no. 7, Marie's no. 5 is Bonerius's no. 9, etc. Subsequently, the differences grow progressively, so that we can only identify some thematic overlaps in both of their works. In the case of the Middle High German narratives, the Swiss poet at times improved the context considerably. For instance, whereas Marie talks about a greedy dog carrying a piece of cheese in its mouth, Bonerius has the dog holding a piece of meat, a more realistic variation. Both poets also include their own individual fables, so we would have to read these two works in tandem, but not in any direct relationship. While both adopted classical sources, they also pursued their own ideas and offered interesting interpretations, which make both collections into creative and innovative contributions to this tradition. It is highly unlikely that Bonerius might have been familiar with the efforts by Marie, but both can be identified as outstanding literary representatives of their times. Comparing Marie's *Fables* with Bonerius's *Edelstein*, we discover two great contributors to the genre of fables, especially because both preserved their independence and included not only the well-established narratives handed down by Aesop (6th c. B.C.E.), Phaedrus (1st c. C.E.), Babrius (2<sup>nd</sup> c. C.E.), Aphthonius of Antioch (315), Avianus (early 5th c.), and Romulus (10th c.; also known as Anonymus Neveleti, or Anglicus), but each also created his/her own fables and hence deserves credit for being a poet on his own.<sup>3</sup> Bonerius's fables also prove to be a

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<sup>3</sup> See the useful introduction by Harriet Spiegel, ed. and trans., Marie de France, *Fables* (see note 2), 6–7. For a solidly researched study especially of the Latin fable tradition, which includes, however, also comments on Bonerius, see Aaron E. Wright, 'Hie lert uns der meister'. *Latin Commentary and the German Fable 1350–1500*. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 218 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 107–31. See also the older studies providing valuable comparisons between Bonerius's versions and the Latin sources: Anton E. Schönbach, "Zur Kritik Boners," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*

combination of translations and literary innovations because the poet offers numerous examples illustrating the value of freedom, addressing personal stupidity, the value of fair and objective judges, and also the responsibility of teachers. In short, this Dominican priest explicitly reflected his urban background and his personal concerns as a friar monk preaching to a city audience.

## **The Genre of the Fable and Its History**

As in many other cases, it is not easily possible to define the genre of the fable in concrete terms, although most commonly animals appear and act out certain ways, characters, intentions, and types of behavior as illustrations of human (mis)behavior. The discussion about the nature and characteristics of fables goes back to the eighteenth century, such as when Gotthold Ephraim Lessing presented both an extensive treatise on this genre and a larger collection in 1759. This famous playwright and critic engaged, above all, with the fables composed or edited/cast into verse by Antoine Houdar de la Motte (1672–1731), Henri Richer (1685–171748), and Johann Jakob Breitinger (1701–1776), among others (curiously, not by Jean de La Fontaine), examining many different perspectives. He reached, however, only the conclusion that all short narratives with a moral lesson would fall under this category.<sup>4</sup> But fables can also be predicated on objects, birds, and

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6 (1875): 251–90; Reinhold Gottschick, “Ueber die Quellen zu Boners Edelstein,“ *Königliches Gymnasium zu Charlottenburg, Jahresbericht* 6 (1876): 1–3; id., “Über die Benutzung Avians durch Boner,“ *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 7 (1876): 237–43.

<sup>4</sup> *Lessings Werke*, ed. Georg Witkowski. Meyers Klassiker-Ausgaben. Vol. 3 (Leipzig and Vienna: Bibliographisches Institut, n.y. [1911]), 419–20. I translate directly: “When we trace back a general moral statement to a particular case, then grant this case the status of reality, and then make a story out of it, in which you can recognize the general observation again, then this poem is called a fable.” Later, Lessing offered an extensive review of Bodmer’s and Breitinger’s edition in 1781, Lessing, *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Karl Lachmann. 3rd, newly rev. and expanded ed. by Franz Muncker. Vol. XI (Stuttgart: Göschen, 1898), 322–51 [wrong pagination in Stange’s bibliography]. Lessing already demonstrated a high degree of philological acumen, an understanding of the value of comparing the various manuscripts and incunabula with each other – he was aware of six manuscripts and the first incunabulum – in order to gain a good understanding of what the original might have looked like. He points out that the two Swiss editors were not the first ones at all to have discovered medieval manuscripts with Bonerius’s fables; instead, a Herr von Heineke and Johann Saubertus had already come across the Bamberg incunabulum from 1461. Lessing offered some valuable criticism of the edition

people, as long as there is then a moral lesson at the end.<sup>5</sup> Most commonly, the animals or plants mentioned in a fable are anthropomorphized in order to reflect on human conditions, problems, concerns, conflicts, shortcomings, failures, vices, and also crimes.

A modern definition, concise and yet comprehensive, would be: “A brief verse or prose narrative of description, whose characters may be animals . . . or inanimate objects . . . acting like humans; or, less frequently, personified abstractions . . . or human types, whether literal . . . or metaphorical . . . . The narrative or description may be preceded, followed, or interrupted by a separate, relatively abstract statement of the f.’s theme or thesis.”<sup>6</sup> Fables have been composed in all of world literature and have constituted a major genre because they contain a significant didactic message which is regularly contained in an entertaining narrative about misfortune, success, failures, misery, happiness, ignorance and stupidity, and intelligence and wit.<sup>7</sup>

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prepared by the two Swiss philologists and, more importantly, published some of the fables missing in Bodmer’s and Breitinger’s publication. For the digital copy of Lessing’s works from 1898, see online at:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015050680787&view=1up&seq=16> (last accessed on July 20, 2020). For the intense discourse on the fable in the eighteenth century, see Thomas Noel, *Theories of the Fable in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> There are many scholarly efforts to come to terms with the fable, but most have remained a bit unsatisfactory because every fable author has operated somewhat freely and made it difficult for modern scholars to come up with strict, uniform, and clear definitions. See, for instance, Klaus Grubmüller, “Zur Pragmatik der Fabel: Der Situationsbezug als Gattungsmerkmal,” *Textsorten und literarische Gattungen: Dokumentation des Germanistentages in Hamburg vom 1. bis 4. April 1979*, ed. Vorstand der Vereinigung der Deutschen Hochschulgermanisten (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1983), 473–88.

<sup>6</sup> David Lee Rubin and A. L. Sells, “Fable,” *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 400–01; here 400. See also the detailed and precise article “Fabel” in Gero von Wilpert, *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur*. 8th, improved and expanded ed. (1955; Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2011), 254–55, which comes along with an extensive bibliography.

<sup>7</sup> Harold J. Blackham, *The Fable as Literature* (London and Dover, NH: Athlone Press 1965); Gerd Dicke and Klaus Grubmüller, *Die Fabeln des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit: ein Katalog der deutschen Versionen und ihrer lateinischen Entsprechungen*. Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, 60 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1987); see now also Mishael Caspi and John T. Greene, *Parables and Fables as Distinctive Jewish Literary Genres: The Origins and Structure of Indirect Speech about God* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011). For a collection of Chinese

Some of the most influential and popular fables ever written, apart from those by Aesop, originated in India, compiled in the collection known as *Kalila and Dimna*, or the *Bidpai Fables*, from around the third century B.C.E. In the mid-sixth century C.E., the physician Burzoë, at the request of Chosroë I Anoshirvan, ruler of Persia from 531 to 579, translated those tales into Middle Persian. This collection, in turn, was translated into Old Syriac not long afterwards, and in the middle of the eighth century, the Persian Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ translated it into Arabic; this became the source for many other translations, such as into Greek by Simeon, son of Seth, in ca. 1050, then into Old Slavonic, and Medieval Italian. A Hebrew translation by Rabbi Joel appeared at the end of the twelfth or early thirteenth century, which Giovanni da Capua translated into Latin by the end of the thirteenth century. This, in turn, became the source of the German translation by Antonius von Pforr in 1480 (printed). A Spanish translation of Ibn al-Muqaffa appeared in 1251 (anonymous), and many other translations into different languages followed.<sup>8</sup> There are some shared motifs in the eastern and the western tradition, and the ethical ideals appear to be surprisingly similar. We find many other fable collections also in Arabic, such as *Marzubannama* by Marzuban (ca. 1220) or *Fakihat al-Khulafa’ wa Mufakihat al-Zurafa’* by Ahmad ibn Arabshah (1389–1450), and we could easily widen our perspective by including fables also from other cultures and languages throughout the world. But let us return to *The Gemstone*, which offers overwhelming proof for this intensive but heretofore little-studied phenomenon of a nearly global transmission of texts throughout the Middle Ages by way of copying and translating.<sup>9</sup>

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fables, see, for instance, Mary Hayes Davis and Chow-Leung, *Chinese Fables and Folk Stories* (New York, Cincinnati, OH, and Chicago: American Book Company, 1908); for a short selection of African fables, see [https://www.worldoftales.com/African\\_folktales.html#gsc.tab=0](https://www.worldoftales.com/African_folktales.html#gsc.tab=0) (last accessed on July 20, 2020). For Arabic fables, see *Marzubannama* by Marzuban (ca. 1220) or *Fakihat al-Khulafa’ wa Mufakihat al-Zurafa’* by Ahmad ibn Arabshah (1389–1450).

<sup>8</sup> Nasrullah Munshi, *Kalila and Dimna*, trans. from the Persian by Wheeler Thackston (Indianapolis, IN, and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2019), ix–xiii; cf. Albrecht Classen, “India, Persia, and Arabia in the Mind of a Late Fifteenth-Century German Author: Transcultural Experiences through the Literary Discourse. Antonius von Pforr and his *Buch der Beispiele der Alten Weisen*,” *Philological Quarterly* 99.2 (2020): 119–45.

<sup>9</sup> See the contributions to *Text, Transmission, and Transformation in the European Middle Ages, 1000–1500*, ed. Carrie Griffin and Emer Purcell. *Cursor Mundi*, 34 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018). The contributors mostly deal with Irish, English, and Italian literature. Only Matthew Wranovix engages with textual transmission in late

## Why This Translation

Medievalists and scholars working on fable literature will profit deeply from this late medieval Swiss-German collection, now also available in an English translation, especially because Bonerius rendered famous Latin sources into his fourteenth-century Swiss German.<sup>10</sup> Scholars working on eighteenth-century literature will profit from this as well because his fables began to receive great attention once again at the end of that century. *The Gemstone* could be profitably used in an academic classroom today because the animal stories are easy to understand, generally entertaining and pleasing, and the subsequent moral lessons are quite direct and to the point, obviously mirroring general concerns, worries, ideals, and values, and thus can be regarded as valuable sources for the study of the history of mentality, history of everyday life, medieval politics, and philosophy. Moreover, anyone searching for moral and ethical teachings in a slightly different context will greatly enjoy the insights proffered by Bonerius. His fables shed considerable light on the social, political, religious, and economic conditions at his time, but his lessons also ring deeply true until today.

## The History of Reception of Bonerius's Fables

These fables were recently edited once again in an impressive fashion and are now available in a bi-lingual volume prepared by Manfred Stange (*Ulrich Boner: Der Edelstein*, 2016),<sup>11</sup> with the original Middle High

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medieval Germany, but limits himself to the efforts by bishops to organize centrally the distribution of liturgical texts or pastoral handbooks. Vernacular literature is hardly discussed, and the real impact of eastern, especially Arabic literature on the European scene, not to talk of classical literature, is not even considered. See the valuable review by Shari Boodts in *The Medieval Review* 20.18.13 (online).

<sup>10</sup> As to the genre of the European fable, see Reinhard Dithmar, *Die Fabel: Geschichte, Struktur, Didaktik*. 8th rev. ed. Rpt. of the completely rev. ed. from 1988. Uni-Taschenbücher, 73 (1988; Paderborn and Munich: Schöningh, 1997); Hans Georg Coenen, *Die Gattung Fabel: Infrastrukturen einer Kommunikationsform*. Uni-Taschenbücher, 2159 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000). But, to reemphasize this important point, fables were written all over the world; see, for instance, Harleen Singh, *The Rani of Jhansi: Gender, History, and Fable in India* (Delhi, India: Cambridge University Press, 2014). We are still far away from the full understanding of the global literary network connecting many of those fable collections with each other.

<sup>11</sup> Ulrich Boner, *Der Edelstein: Eine mittelalterliche Fabelsammlung*. Zweisprachige Ausgabe Mittelhochdeutsch – Neuhochdeutsch. Herausgegeben, übersetzt, mit Anmerkungen, farbigen Abbildungen, einem Nachwort, Literaturverzeichnis, Register

German text on the left page and the modern German translation on the right. But they remain mostly unknown outside of the German-speaking world of medievalists. The English translation of Bonerius's fables will put them on par with, if not above, those by Marie de France (fl. ca. 1160–1200) and will make them accessible for a much wider audience. Even only a superficial comparison between the Anglo-Norman and the Swiss-German texts quickly demonstrates that Bonerius offered much more lively, detailed, and interpretive fables, obviously fully aware of his more complex, probably late medieval urban audience, whereas Marie addressed only a limited courtly group of listeners/readers.

From early on, German philological research had recognized the high value of this fable collection. They were first fully discussed and edited by Johann Jacob Bodmer and Johann Jacob Breitingen in 1757 (94 fables, based on the Zürich manuscript Z1, lost since 1776),<sup>12</sup> then by Johann Joachim Eschenburg

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und Fabel-Verzeichnis versehen von Manfred Stange (Überstadt-Weiher, Heidelberg, and Neustadt a. d. W., and Basel: verlag regionalkultur, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Johann Jacob Bodmer and Johann Jacob Breitingen, *Fabeln aus den Zeiten der Minnesinger* (Zürich: Orell, 1757). Ulrich Boner, *Der Edelstein (Öffentliche Bibliothek der Universität Basel, Handschrift A N III 17)*. Farbmikrofiche- Edition. Mit einer Einführung in das Werk von Klaus Grubmüller. Kodikologische und kunsthistorische Beschreibung von Ulrike Bodemann. *Codices illuminati medii aevi*, 4 (Munich: Edition Helga Lengenfelder, 1987); online at: <https://www.omifacsimiles.com/brochures/cima04.pdf>. They point out that Johann Georg Scherz already had edited fifty-one of Bonerius's fables from the Strassburg manuscript in his *Philosophiae moralis germanorum medii aevi specimen ..., ex MSC nunc primum in lucem publicam productum*, 1704–1710, followed by comments by Gottsched in 1746 and Lessing in 1773 and 1781. Christian F. Gellert printed some of Bonerius's fables in 1744 and 1746, and this inspired Johann Jakob Bodmer and Johann Jakob Breitingen to do the same in 1752. In the following decades, various major German philologists turned their attention to Bonerius's fables to experiment how to prepare a historical critical edition, exploring thus the basic principles of modern philology, such as Johann Joachim Eschenburg (1810), Karl Lachmann (1817), Georg Friedrich Benecke (1816), Franz Pfeiffer (1844), and Anton E. Schönbach (1875). For Lessing's engagement with medieval literature, and hence also with Bonerius, see Albrecht Classen, "Lessing als Philologe: Seine Kenntnis und Wertung mittelalterlicher Dichtungen und Texte," *The Lessing Yearbook* 19 (1987): 127–63. The most significant study of Bonerius's fables to date is the monograph by Klaus Grubmüller, *Meister Esopus: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Funktion der Fabel im Mittelalter*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 56 (Zürich and Munich: Artemis, 1977), here pp. 297–374.

in 1810,<sup>13</sup> George Friedrich Benecke in 1816,<sup>14</sup> and then, truly magisterially, by Franz Pfeiffer in 1844.<sup>15</sup>

Bonerius's fable collection was a great success in the Middle Ages, as documented by the impressive number of manuscripts containing his narratives. Below is a list of all known manuscripts containing either the full collection of the *Edelstein* – he himself put together one hundred fables, framed by a prologue and an epilogue – or a shorter selection. I have added also as much information about the manuscripts in their composition (often combining a variety of similar or other texts) and the illustrations, and the dialect used by the scribe, as I could assemble:

1. Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek, cod. Oettingen-Wallerstein I,3.fol.3, fol. 1r–98v, 1449, paper, I + 275 leaves, 2°, Swabian, completely illustrated (100 ill.). The manuscript also contains *Des Teufels Netz* and the *Sibyllen Buch* (*Sibyllenweissagung*), both didactic texts reflecting on society at large and the various estates.
2. Basel, Öffentliche Bibliothek, cod. A.N.III.17, fol. 1ra–58vb (ca. 1410 or ca. 1420), parchment, 59. fol., 2°, Alemannic, completely illustrated (71 colored ill.).
3. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. germ. 2° 579, fol. 1r–105v (15th c.), paper, Alemannic, not illustrated.
4. Bern, Burgerbibliothek., Ms. hist. helv. X.49, pp. 1–206 (ca. 1466–1473), paper, 210 pp., 2°, Alemannic, completely illustrated (71 ill.).
5. Colmar, Bibliothèque de la Ville, Ms. 78, fol. 122ra–vb (= fable no. 1), 1397, paper, 128 leaves, 2°, Alemannic, not illustrated. Most of the manuscript is reserved for the didactic narrative, *Schachzabelbuch* (Chess Book), by Konrad von Ammenhausen.
6. Donaueschingen, Fürstlich Fürstenbergische Hofbibliothek, cod. A.III.53, fol. 1ra–vb. (15<sup>th</sup> c.), paper, 1 leaf (fragment), Bavarian,

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<sup>13</sup> Johann Joachim Eschenburg, *Boners Edelstein in hundert Fabeln: Mit Varianten und Worterklärungen* (Berlin: Unger, 1810).

<sup>14</sup> George Friedrich Benecke, *Der Edel Stein getichtet von Bonerius. Auch Handschriften berichtet und mit einem Wörterbuche versehen* (Berlin: Realschul-Buchhandlung, 1816); now online at: <https://books.google.com/books?id=3CsHAAAAQAAJ&hl=en>.

<sup>15</sup> Ulrich Boner, *Der Edelstein*, ed. Franz Pfeiffer. *Dichtungen des deutschen Mittelalters*, 4 (Leipzig: G. J. Göschen, 1844); now online at: <https://books.google.com/books?id=U9xJAAAAMAAJ>; or at: [https://books.google.com/books?id=CIMGAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA3&source=gbs\\_toc\\_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=CIMGAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA3&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false).

- with illustration. This manuscript is today in Karlsruhe, Landesbibliothek, same signature.
7. Dresden, Landesbibliothek, M 67b, fol. 103ra–45rb (ca. 1450–1470), paper, 225 leaves, 2°, North-Bavarian-East Franconian (Nuremberg?), completely illustrated. It also contains Thomasin von Zerklære's *Der Welsche Gast* (*D*), excerpts from Hugo von Trimberg's *Der Renner*, and a variety of short verse narratives.
  8. Frankfurt a. M., Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. germ. qu. 6, fol. 199r–228v (1446–1449), paper, illustration + 242 + illustration leaves, 4°, Swabian, completely illustrated (120 ill.). The manuscript also contains Hugo von Trimberg's *Der Renner*; the didactic narratives *Von der Jugend und dem Alter* (On Youth and Old Age), *Greisenklage* (Lament of the Old Man), and the *Spruch auf den schwäbischen Städtekrieg* (Verse Narrative on the War between the Swabian Cities and the Bavarian Duke Frederick the Wise, 1387–1388).
  9. Frauenfeld, Kantonsbibliothek, cod. Y 22, fol. 3r–107v (2nd half of the 15th c.), paper, 120 leaves, 4°, Swabian, illustrations had been planned but were not realized. There are some additional religious poems included.
  10. Fulda, Landesbibliothek, cod. Aa 110 4°, fol. 304ra (= fable no. 32), 2nd half of the 15th c., paper, 413 leaves, 2°, Rhine-Franconian.
  11. Genf-Cologne (also: Cologne-Genf), Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, cod. Bodmer 42, fol. 8r–120v (ca. 1455), paper, 106 leaves, 2°, Alemannic, illustrations planned, but were not realized. For a digital copy of the manuscript, see <http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/fmb/cb-0042>.
  12. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 86, fol. 1r–120v, 1461, paper, V + 120 + IV leaves, 2°, Bavarian, illustrations had been planned, but only the first ten were pre-sketched. For a digital copy, see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg86>.
  13. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 314, fol. 1ra–50rb (1443–1447), paper, 197 leaves, 2°, Swabian (Augsburg); the *Edelstein* completely illustrated (90 ill.). The manuscript contains numerous other verse narratives or stanzas, such as by Freidank, but then also the heroic epic poems *Dietrichs Flucht* and *Rabenschlacht*. For a digital copy, see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg314>.

14. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 400, fol. 1r–111r, 1432, paper, V + 111 + V leaves, 4°, Alemannic, not illustrated. For a digital copy, see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg400>.
15. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 794, fol. 1r–80v (ca. 1410–1420, maybe specifically 1415), paper, I + 80 + I leaves, 2°, Bavarian, completely illustrated. For a digital copy, see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg794>.
16. Karlsruhe, Landesbibliothek, cod. Ettenheimmünster 30, fol. 1r–108v (2nd half of the 15th c.), paper, 126 leaves, 2°, Alemannic-Swabian, illustrations planned, but were not realized. The manuscript also contains some didactic stanzas by Freidank. For a digital copy, see <https://digital.blb-karlsruhe.de/urn/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-107601>.
17. Karlsruhe, Landesbibliothek, cod. Ettenheimmünster 37, fol. 84r–237v, 1482, paper, I + 238 leaves, 4°, Alemannic-Swabian (Constance?), illustrations planned, but were not realized. The manuscript also contains a calendar in verse; for a digital copy, see <https://digital.blb-karlsruhe.de/urn/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-103141>.
18. Munich, Staatsbibliothek, cgm 576, fol. 1r–90v (2nd half of the 15th c.), paper, 90 leaves, 2°, Alemannic, only the first 19 illustrations realized (up to fol. 17r).
19. Munich, Staatsbibliothek, cgm 714, fol. 222r–225r (= fables nos. 72 and 82), (1455–1458), paper, 495 leaves, 4°, Northern Bavarian (Nuremberg), not illustrated. The manuscript contains many different texts, including Konrad von Würzburg's *Trojanerkrieg* and Hans Rosenplüt's Shrovetide Plays. For a digital copy, see <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn/resolver.pl?urn=urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00024106-2>.
20. Munich, Staatsbibliothek, cgm 3974, fol. 124r–213r (1446–1466), paper, 321 leaves, 2°, Bavarian (Regensburg), Latin/German manuscript, *Edelstein* as the German complement to the Latin commentated *Anonymus Neveleti*, completely illustrated. The manuscript also contains the entertaining precourtly verse narrative *Salomon und Markolf* and a *Biblia pauperum*. For a digital copy, see <https://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/0008/bsb00088606/images/index.html?fip=193.174.98.30&id=00088606&seite=1>.
21. Munich, Staatsbibliothek, clm 4409, fol. 87r–132r (12th–15th c.; Boner's fables, 15<sup>th</sup> c.), parchment/paper, 229 leaves, 4°, Bavarian with some Swabian influence, partly Latin, partly German

- manuscript, *Edelstein* until fol. 122v, as the German companion to the Latin commentated *Anonymus Neveleti*, only partially illustrated. The manuscript also contains a variety of other Latin-German poems. For a digital copy, see <https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/bsb00006778/images/index.html>.
22. St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, cod. 643, S. 1a–89a (3rd quarter of the 15th c.), paper, 260 5., 2°, High Alemannic, *Edelstein* completely illustrated. The manuscript also contains many verse narratives and the *Zürcher Stadtchronik*. For a digital copy, see <http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/de/list/one/csg/0643>.
  23. St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, cod. 969, p. 116–129 (15th c.), paper, 222 p., 4°. Alemannic, not illustrated. The manuscript also contains various ascetic-mystical treatises from the women's convent of Wonnenstein. For a digital copy, see <http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/csg/0969>.
  24. Strassburg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, Ms. 2935 (previously cod. L germ. 727. 2°), fol. 164r–182v (15th c.), paper, 185 leaves, 2°, Alemannic, not illustrated. The manuscript also contains Jakob Twinger von Königshofen's *Chronik*. For a digital copy, see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10224652f>.
  25. formerly, Strassburg, Stadtbibliothek, Joh. Bibl. Ms. A 87, fol. 5r–122v (15th c.), paper, 122 leaves, 2°, Alemannic, not illustrated, burnt in the fire of 1870.
  26. formerly, Straßburg, Stadtbibliothek, Joh. Bibl. Ms. B 94, 1411, paper, 201 (?) leaves, 2°, Alemannic (Freiburg i. Br.), not illustrated, burnt in the fire of 1870. The manuscript also contained a version of Egenolf von Staufenberg's *Peter von Staufenberg* (verse narrative about a knight's relationship with a fairy).
  27. formerly, Strassburg, Stadtbibliothek, no call number (14th/15th c.), paper, 4°, Alemannic, illustrated (uncertain), burnt in the fire of 1870.
  28. Stuttgart, Landesbibliothek, cod. HB X 23, fol. 79r–148r (ca. 1446–1449), paper, 149 leaves, 2°, East Middle German, not illustrated. The manuscript also contains texts such as Johann von Tepl's *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* (The Plowman from Bohemia; a dialogue prose text pitting the Plowman [= Everyman] against Death), the didactic *Cato*, and Jacobus de Theramo's *Belial*.

29. formerly, Wernigerode, Stolberg, Bibliothek, cod. Zb 4m, fol. 135v–137v (= fables no. 57 and 82) (end of 15th/early 16th c., disappeared since 1931. The manuscript also contained a number of medical treatises. Numerous illustrations.
30. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. 2933, fol. 1r–102v (ca. 1470–1480), paper, 106 (originally 122) leaves, 4°, Rhenish-Franconian, completely illustrated.
31. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, cod. 2.4.Aug.2°, fol. 15ra–52rb (ca. 1490–1492), paper, with 7 parchment leaves, 169 paper leaves, 2°, North Bavarian/East Franconian (Nuremberg?), completely illustrated (104 ill.). The manuscript contains numerous other didactic texts, such as by Hermann von Linz, Freidank, and the Monk of Salzburg.
32. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, cod. 3.2.Aug.4°, fol. 26r–58v (15th c.), paper, 58 leaves, 4°, Bavarian with some Alemannic, illustrations had been planned, but were not realized. The manuscript also contains a German translation of Jacobus de Cessolis's chess treatise (*Schachzabelbuch*).
33. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, cod. 69.12.Aug.2°, fol. 1r–96v, 1492, paper, 96 leaves, 2°, North Bavarian, completely illustrated, but the colored pen drawings were often cut out.
34. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, cod. 76.3.Aug.2°, fol. 1r–95v, 1458, paper, 199 leaves, 2°, Swabian (Augsburg?), completely illustrated. The manuscript also contains several Shrovetide plays by Hans Rosenplüt and KÜchlin's *Reimchronik vom Herkommen der Stadt Augsburg*.
35. formerly, Zürich, Z 1, fol. 1ra–80vb (end of the 14th c.), parchment, 80 leaves, 8°(?), Alemannic (Bern?), not illustrated. Since Breitingen's death in 1776, the manuscript has been lost.
36. Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, cod. C 117, fol. 2r–119v, 1424, paper, 119 leaves, 4°, Alemannic, not illustrated.<sup>16</sup>

Bonerius's fables were also some of the earliest texts ever printed in the West:

1. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, 16.1.Eth.2°, fol. 1r–88v. Bamberg: Albrecht Pfister, 14. Februar 1461 (= GW 4839), 88 leaves, 4°, East Franconian, with 101 woodcuts.

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<sup>16</sup> See also the detailed descriptions of each individual manuscript online at: <http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/1763> (last accessed on July 20, 2020).

2. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 8° Inc. 332 Zirn., fol. 2r–78v (Bamberg: Albrecht Pfister, ca. 1463/64 = GW 4840), 78 leaves, 4°, East Franconian, with 103 woodcuts.<sup>17</sup>

Only when Heinrich Steinhöwel published his own collection of fables, which were printed in Ulm in 1476, did Bonerius face a serious competitor on the early modern book market, whereupon his fame slowly faded away.

Before the appearance of Bonerius's fable collection in 1350, German poets such as Herger, Reinmar von Zweter, Bruder Wernher, der Marner, or Frauenlob had created only a few examples; by contrast, *Der Edelstein* is the first comprehensive, fully developed anthology of fables, mostly drawn from the classical and early medieval tradition. Only the poet Der Stricker (ca. 1220–1240) had created a larger body of fables before Bonerius.<sup>18</sup>

Once this Bernese Dominican priest had created this large corpus of fables, other poets interested in this genre followed suit, such as Gerhard von Minden with his *Wolfenbütteler Äsop* (1370), the so-called *Magdeburger Äsop* from the early fifteenth century, Ulrich von Pottenstein's translation of the so-called *Cyrrillische Fabeln* (between 1408 and 1416), and the *Nürnbergger Prosa-Äsop* (ca. 1412). In fact, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed a true explosion in fable literature, both in Latin (Laurentius Valla, Remicius, Abstemius, Accursiana, Sebastian Brant) and in the various vernaculars. In the German-language area, we can identify such major writers as Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg, Johannes Pauli, Philipp Melanchthon, Martin Luther, Hans Sachs, Ulrich Zwingli, Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof, Erasmus Alberus, Burkhard Waldis (fifteenth and

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<sup>17</sup> Wolfgang Milde, "Zu den beiden Bonerdrucken Albrecht Pfisters <GW 4930 imd 4940>," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (1976): 109–16. See also Doris Fouquet, *Ulrich Boner: Der Edelstein. Faksimile der ersten Druckausgabe Bamberg 1461, 16.1 Eth. 2o der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel* (Stuttgart: Müller u. Schindler, 1972).

<sup>18</sup> Der Stricker, *Erzählungen, Fabeln, Reden: Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch*, ed., trans., and commentary by Otfried Ehrismann (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1992). His fables remained relatively popular until the early sixteenth century (manuscript C), and they are mostly very different from those composed by Bonerius. For the long list of manuscripts containing The Stricker's short verse narratives, including his fables, see online at <http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/367> (last accessed on July 20, 2020). Cf. also Bruno Boesch, *Lehrhafte Literatur: Lehre in der Dichtung und Lehrdichtung im deutschen Mittelalter*. Grundlagen der Germanistik, 21 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1977). Oddly, he does not even mention Bonerius by name, and touches on the genre of fables only in passing, despite acknowledging its significant role in didactic literature (226).

sixteenth centuries), and many others. Fables were very attractive also all over Europe and were produced in many different languages, not to mention the other continents (see above). In light of the enormous popularity of the fable throughout the early modern age, we recognize Bonerius's central role in this reception process, and after a hiatus in the seventeenth century, his impact continued in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> Some of his fables were also picked up by the famous collectors of fairy tales, first the Brothers Grimm (1812), then Ludwig Bechstein (1847), and others, which indicates the extent to which the generic term 'fable' could be used in a variety of contexts and was not at all limited in the strict sense to the type of narratives as originally developed by Aesop.<sup>20</sup>

### Bonerius the Author

We do not know much about Bonerius in biographical terms, but we can be certain that he was a Dominican priest in Bern, where he is documented several times between 1324 and 1350.<sup>21</sup> For the first part of his collection (fables 1–62), he mostly relied on the collection by Gualterus Anglicus (ca. 1175), formerly known as the so-called *Anonymus Neveleti*, identified as such since Isaac Nicholas Nevelet had published the Latin fables in distichs in Frankfurt a. M. in 1610. They are now recognized as the fables by the so-called Romulus (twelfth century).<sup>22</sup> This version has survived in more than a hundred manuscripts.

For the second part (fables 63–91), Bonerius drew from the Latin fable collection by Avianus (early fifth century). Some additional narratives, not necessarily fables but pursuing the same didactic intent and using a parallel structure, Bonerius borrowed, at least indirectly, from a variety of sources, such as Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina clericalis* (12th century), the *Alphabetum narrationum*, and the works of other famous authors such as

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<sup>19</sup> Adalbert Elschenbroich, *Die deutsche und lateinische Fabel in der Frühen Neuzeit*. 2 vols. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1990). Vol. 1 contains the selected texts, vol. 2 offers commentary and literary-historical information. For Bonerius, see vol. 2, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> See *Kinder- und Hausmärchen gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm* (Zurich: Manesse Verlag, 2002), Vol. II, 172–74.

<sup>21</sup> Despite numerous entries in various reference works and lexica, until today our knowledge about Bonerius's personal life and works has not gained much at all in detail. See, for instance, Walter Mitzka, "Boner, Ulrich," *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, ed. Otto zu Stolberg-Wernigerode vol. 2 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1955), 443; online at:

<https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118661418.html#ndbcontent>.

<sup>22</sup> Klaus Grubmüller, *Meister Esopus* (1977), 58–85.

Jerome, Jacques de Vitry (ca. 1160–ca. 1240), Valerius Maximus (fl. 14–37), Aulus Gellius (ca. 125–after 180), Macrobius (fl. ca. 400), and Odo of Cheriton, not to forget the highly popular *Gesta Romanorum*. However, he also invented his own fables, so he was not simply a collector and translator. As much as he ‘translated’ especially from Avianus and Romulus (*Anonymous Neveleti*), there are numerous smaller and larger differences in the plot development, imagery, and moral and ethical commentaries. All this makes the *Gemstone* a fairly independent piece of late medieval (Swiss) German literature of high literary quality which exerted a tremendous influence well into the sixteenth century.

### **Bonerius’s Ethical, Moral, and Philosophical Messages**

The earliest manuscripts containing Bonerius’s fables date from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, certainly a further confirmation for the significant growth of literary interests at that time, especially because most of those manuscripts originated from private, secular collections in the hand of wealthy aristocrats and urban intellectuals/merchants and were probably also used for teaching in schools. The poet was deeply convinced of the moral, ethical, and religious value of his fables for men and women, old and young, poor and rich (his own formulation often repeated throughout his collection), commonly bringing to his general audience’s attention situations in the countryside and the city. He also argued strongly throughout his collection that a rational, intelligent, but also pragmatic approach in life would be the only advisable path for people.

Many times, he also insists on the great value of individual freedom, which resonated clearly in fourteenth-century Bern and other parts of future Switzerland. We could also argue that the poet echoed an ever-growing sentiment advocating personal freedom and the freedom of the urban community, which also explains the extensive distribution of his collection of thirty-six manuscripts mostly from southern Germany and modern-day Switzerland.<sup>23</sup>

There is a clear indication that Bonerius conceived of his fables as a systematically developed literary project, framed by the prologue and the epilogue, but many of the manuscripts do not reflect this holistic concept quite the same way, obviously as a result of the various scribes’ different

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<sup>23</sup> Johannes Janota, *Orientierung durch volkssprachige Schriftlichkeit (1280/90–1380/90)*. Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Neuzeit, III: *Vom späten Mittelalter zum Beginn der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2004), 300–03.

interests or concerns.<sup>24</sup> As he says in his epilogue, his intention had been to create 100 fables (v. 9), although most of the surviving manuscripts do not contain all of them. The number 100 was always regarded as highly symbolic, indicating completion, perfection, and harmony, such as in the case of Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia* (completed in ca. 1320, so just 30 years before *Der Edelstein*), which consists of three *cantiche* (*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso*), each with 33 cantos (symbolizing the age of Christ at His death), which amounts to 99 altogether, plus the prologue, which precedes the *Inferno*.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, we have to remember that Bonerius published his *Edelstein* exactly at the same time as when the Florentine poet Boccaccio (1313–1375) published his *Decameron* (ca. 1350), which also consists of hundred stories, ten of them told every day over ten days altogether. It would be impossible at this point to say whether those two poets knew of each other, but it is absolutely striking that both employed exactly the same structural pattern. In each text, there is a prologue and an epilogue, and then there are the hundred tales/fables. While Bonerius adds his personal comments to each fable in his epimythium, Boccaccio has his story-tellers exchange ideas about the meaning of each tale presented to them. However, while Bonerius composed mostly fables in the traditional sense of the word, Boccaccio created secular, often erotic, and always entertaining prose narratives. Significantly, both poets were extremely successful with their works, Bonerius in his Swiss-German, Boccaccio in his Florentine-Italian, both regularly exposing people's shortcomings, failures, and weaknesses, and both presenting also model cases of a virtuous lifestyle. Both the *Edelstein* and the *Decameron* mostly addressed an urban audience and

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<sup>24</sup> Klaus Grubmüller, "Boners 'Edelstein' und seine Überlieferung," Ulrich Boner, *Der Edelstein*, Farbmikrofiche (see note 11), 7–16. See also the catalog accompanying an exhibition, *Fabula docet: illustrierte Fabelbücher aus 6 Jahrhunderten*, ed. Ulrike Bodemann. Ausstellungskataloge der Herzog-August-Bibliothek, 41 (Wolfenbüttel: Herzog-August-Bibliothek, 1983); Ulrike Bodemann and Gerd Dicke, "Grundzüge einer Überlieferungs- und Textgeschichte von Boners Edelstein," *Deutsche Handschriften 1100–1400: Oxforder Kolloquium 1985*, ed. Volker Honemann and Nigel F. Palmer (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1988), 424–68.

<sup>25</sup> For the symbolism of 100 as expressed numerous times in the Bible, see <https://www.biblestudy.org/bibleref/meaning-of-numbers-in-bible/100.html> (last accessed on July 20, 2020); for number symbolism in general, see Heinz Meyer, *Die Zahlenallegorese im Mittelalter: Methode und Gebrauch* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1975); Heinz Meyer and Rudolf Suntrup, *Lexikon der mittelalterlichen Zahlenbedeutungen* (1987; Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1999).

obviously exerted a mass appeal.<sup>26</sup> While Boccaccio has ten individual story-tellers, Bonerius operates by himself and offers his own interpretations for the instruction of his audience.

In contrast to Dante, Bonerius does not engage much with such spiritual questions concerning the structural and mathematically conceived composition of his work, though he has clearly a spiritual perspective in mind when he expressed his opinions about the meaning of his fables, which he always offers at the end of his narratives. Hence, the comparison with Boccaccio offers many more productive insights into shared literary interests during the fourteenth century.

## The Middle High Swiss-German Text in Modern Editions

We know that Bonerius hailed from Bern and was a Dominican priest, who obviously intended his fables as narrative illustrations for public sermons. He had a patron there, Johann von Ringgenberg, whom he addresses in the prologue (v. 44) and in the epilogue (v. 39). This Johann (the First, documented between 1291 and 1350) played a significant role in imperial and Swiss politics, and he accompanied Emperor Louis IV the Bavarian on his journey to Rome in 1327/28, where he excelled through his bravery. Johann was also an accomplished poet whose stanzas, strongly influenced by those composed by Walther von der Vogelweide, are included in the famous *Manesse Codex* created in Zürich on behalf of the Manesse family (today, Heidelberg, ms. C, fol. 190v–192r).<sup>27</sup> There is also a fictive author portrait

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<sup>26</sup> I have recently discovered a number of late medieval German verse narratives, *mæren*, which could have served as Boccaccio's sources, if not both Boccaccio and his German predecessors drew from the same Old French *fabliaux*. Albrecht Classen, "Boccaccio's Literary Sources Beyond the Expected: The Decameron in Light of Some German Verse Narratives: "Gänslein," Ruprecht von Würzburg, and Jans Enikel," *Global Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 1.1 (2019), online at: <https://www.pubtext.com/pdf/?boccaccios-literary-sources-beyond-the-expected-the-decameron-in-light-of-some-german-verse-narratives-gnslein-ruprecht-von-wrzbur>; id., "German-Italian Literary Connections in the Late Middle Ages: Boccaccio's *The Decameron* in Light of Some Late Medieval German Narrative Precedents," to appear in *Arcadia* (considerably expanded and revised version). I do not suggest now that Boccaccio and Bonerius were in personal contact, but both obviously composed their works in the same intellectual and literary milieu.

<sup>27</sup> For a biography, see Gustav Roehle, "Rinkenber, Johann I. von," *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 29 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1889), 57; now online at: [https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/ADB:Rinkenber,\\_Johann\\_I.\\_von](https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/ADB:Rinkenber,_Johann_I._von). For the digitized version of this famous manuscript, see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/epg848> (both last accessed on July 20, 2020). See also my comments in note 1 of

of Johann, but none, of course, of Bonerius, who used a completely different genre and wrote long after that codex focused on courtly love poetry had been completed.

Until today, we rely primarily on the edition of Bonerius's fables as published by Franz Pfeiffer in 1844. He used mostly the manuscript A, today called Z 1 (Zürich, end of the fourteenth century). Bodmer and Breitingner had published these fables contained in that manuscript already in their anthology *Fabeln aus den Zeiten der Minnesinger* (1757), but it disappeared with Breitingner's death in 1776.<sup>28</sup> The fables are arranged in a very different order, beginning with no. 2, 6, 7, 9, 12, and then 4, etc. Pfeiffer complemented the text in Z 1 with texts contained in the other Zürich manuscript, C 117, from 1424, and the Heidelberg manuscript cpg 400 from 1432, offering the full range of hundred fables in the right sequence, as originally intended by Bonerius, as far as we can tell today based on the surviving manuscript evidence.

## The Translation

In this translation, the first of its kind for Anglophone readers, I have relied on the edition prepared by Manfred Stange, who in turn used Pfeiffer's text version and modified it only slightly. In the late nineteenth century, Max Oberbreyer (1881) and Karl Pannier (1894) had already published their respective German translations in verse of a selection of Bonerius's fables.<sup>29</sup> This English translation is independent of those previous efforts and of the new one by Stange, though I have regularly consulted his suggestions. However, numerous times I had to divert from Stange's reading and offered my own version based on a careful study of the various dictionaries, which is then reflected in the footnotes.

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the translation. See *Codex Manesse: Die Miniaturen der Großen Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*, ed. and commentary by Ingo F. Walther, together with Gisela Siebert (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1989), 127 and the color reproduction of the page depicting the poet in an idealized style, fig. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Bodmer and Breitingner did not identify themselves on the title page, but in the introduction, they use the first-person plural for themselves. For a digitized version, see <https://archive.org/details/fabelnausdenzei00unkngoog/page/n23/mode/1up> (last accessed on July 20, 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Max Oberbreyer, *Der Edelstein von Ulrich Boner*. Ausgewählt und sprachlich erneuert mit Einleitung und Erläuterung. Sammlung altdeutscher Werke in neuen Bearbeitungen, 10–11 (Staßfurt and Leipzig: Foerster, 1881); Karl Pannier, *Der Edelstein, von Ulrich Boner*. Ausgewählt und sprachlich erneuert (Leipzig: Reclam, 1894).

At any rate, rendering Bonerius's fables into English represents a very different task than to translate them into modern German, especially because many idiomatic phrases and technical terms cannot be simply translated into English. I have tried hard to follow more closely the original than Stange, which might diminish some of the literary elegance Stange aimed for but it serves the purpose to be more authentic and to provide a clear sense of how Bonerius spoke, what images or metaphors he used, and how he actually expressed himself. Of course, I had to adapt many of his phrases or sentences as well in order to render them into proper modern English, but the reader can still follow closely, comparing every line in the original with the text in the translation.

The consequence is that Stange's translation sometimes reads more fluent and more natural, but then it also tends to move a bit too far away from the original narrative as well. I prefer to stay as close as possible to Bonerius's own text, even if this means at times that the syntax might ring a bit stilted in modern English. I observe as much as possible the verse structure, but I do not imitate the poet's rhyming scheme or meter. He himself explained in the prologue and also in the epilogue that he did not have great poetic ambitions and tried to express himself in a simple, straightforward manner so as to help his audience understand his didactic messages clearly and without delay.

Occasionally, I have added an alternative word or phrase in square brackets right in the translation when this seemed to help understanding the meaning of Boner's statement better, such as replacing a pronoun with the concrete noun or name for clarity's sake. Otherwise, numerous notes offer additional explanations.

## **Bonerius's Messages For His Contemporaries and For Us Today**

True, Bonerius composed his fables by now ca. 670 years ago, but his observations and comments about human behavior, failures, shortcomings, or vices have not lost anything in their validity or relevance for people all over the world. Indeed, with respect to fable literature, which extends back to antiquity, we face the stunning observation that human attitudes, values, desires, vices, etc. have not changed much despite radical, even revolutionary transformations in material, technical, scientific, and political terms throughout time.

The need to educate young people about proper behavior – whether students in monastic schools during the Middle Ages or in modern schools and universities – to appeal to adults to remedy their wrong actions and

words, and the absolute necessity to hold up these literary narratives as mirrors for all people has not changed at all. Thus, Bonerius, like Avianus, Romulus, Marie de France, Der Stricker, and many others, deserves close attention once again because he conveys universal and global lessons of great significance, and we all can certainly learn from this wise, experienced, dedicated, and passionate author of fables.

This Dominican priest obviously knew very well what he was talking about, being deeply aware of human frailties, vile inclinations, and people's often rather evil nature at large. After all, ethics are not part of the human DNA; they must be taught over and over again, as these fables illustrate quite dramatically, and this in tandem with fables composed in many other parts of the world, such as those contained in the extremely popular *Kalila and Dimna*.

In a way, throughout his *Edelstein*, Bonerius exemplified, without stating it explicitly, the Seven Deadly Sins, also known as the Capital Vices, or Cardinal Sins: pride, greed, wrath (anger), envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth. Especially the early medieval Desert Fathers, among them, above all, Evagrius Ponticus and his disciple John Cassian (*De institutis coenobiorum* [Institutes of the Coenobia], ca. 420 C.E.), had created this list of vices, mostly out of a concern for the spiritual well-being of the desert hermits and coenobitic (solitary) monks. These Vices stand in strong contrast to the Seven Heavenly Virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, courage (or fortitude), faith, hope, and charity. Both groups of ethical concepts were already addressed in many different ways by the ancient philosophers, but here we are dealing with theological notions, above all, fundamental for the establishment of the Christian Church in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

Subsequently, every medieval and early modern ecclesiastic was deeply aware of these vices and virtues and preached about them regularly in their masses. In essence, as we could probably all agree, their truth has not been diminished until today, and most of the evils in our postmodern world could be identified through this list of seven deadly sins as well.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Bonerius's fables address all of them and reflect upon them from many different perspectives, but nicely packaged, so to speak, in entertaining,

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<sup>30</sup> Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature*. Studies in Language and Literature (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State College Press, 1952); *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. Richard G. Newhauser and Susan Janet Ridyard (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2012); *The Virtues and Vices in the Arts: A Sourcebook*, ed. Shawn Tucker (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2015).

didactic tales. In their core, however, those fables sharply target human sinfulness and alert us about the dire consequences of criminal, evil, and vicious acts and foolish, naïve, arrogant, and prideful behavior. The great popularity of his fables far into the late fifteenth century, and then again during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, confirms that here we face one of the great medieval authors who has much to say even for us today.

If there ever might be a question – and that is, unfortunately, a stark truism – why we ought to turn our attention to the past, to the Middle Ages, or pre-modern literature at large, then these fables provide the answer in a striking fashion. Experiences acquired through lived lives over thousands of years make it possible for us today and tomorrow to develop further as individuals, to establish ethical standards for ourselves, and to contribute to the growth of our society. We do not need to reinvent the wheel all the time and should really learn from those model cases (negative and positive) provided by the fables in order to move forward as a human race, and this not only in technical, material terms but, much more importantly, in ethical, moral, spiritual terms.<sup>31</sup> I am sorry to say, but much, if not all of the political malaise we are facing today can easily be examined and explained by using the lens provided by Bonerius’s verse narratives. He obviously knew very well what he was talking about concerning people of all ages and gender – and today: races, sexual orientation, religions, and languages – and he would probably have been horrified and disgusted about our modern world, which seems (2020) to face more of a decline than progress. The wolves continue to devour the innocent sheep, and injustice and violence seem to grow every day.

Nevertheless, there are those medieval (and early modern) fables, and they speak an open and direct language. We thus face a fantastic opportunity to understand, to learn, and to change our behavior once again, and the more we study those verse narratives, the more we are invited to reflect on fundamental human behavior and hence to draw lessons from the many different cases presented. Bonerius’s fables, like all other previous

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<sup>31</sup> Albrecht Classen, “The Amazon Rainforest of Pre-Modern Literature: Ethics, Values, and Ideals from the Past for our Future. With a Focus on Aristotle and Heinrich Kaufringer,” *Humanities Open Access* 9(1). 4 (2020), published on Dec. 24, 2019, online at: <file:///C:/Users/aclassen/Downloads/humanities-09-00004.pdf>; id., “The Past as the Key for the Future: Reflections on an Ancient Question. What Does (Medieval) Literature Mean Today in the Twenty-First Century?,” *Athens Journal of Philology* 6.3 (2019): 147-70; online at: <https://www.athensjournals.gr/philology/2019-6-3-1-Classen.pdf>; id., “What is *Humanities Open Access* all about? Innovative Perspectives and Inclusivity as the Platform for Novel Approaches in Humanities Research,” *Humanities Open Access*, June 30 (2020), at: <file:///C:/Users/aclassen/Downloads/humanities-09-00055.pdf>.

literary efforts in that regard, represent extreme situations, but in that way they are excellent fictional models which provide hope for us as parents, teachers, and scholars insofar as the negative examples strongly urge us not to follow the many different types of bad behavior and evil actions and to improve, both on a private and a public level, ourselves and all others, and thus human society at large.