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From Aristotle to Linnaeus: The Books that Transformed Whales into Mammals

The recognition of cetaceans (whales and dolphins) as mammals by the scientific community took a long time. It was not until the 10th edition of Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae* that they were recognized as a natural group and totally separate from fishes. This is puzzling given that for about 2,000 years before Linnaeus’s work many naturalists had identified a number of characteristics of these animals that clearly placed them closer to land mammals (or “ viviparous quadrupeds”) than to fish. In this presentation I survey pre-Linnean literature with descriptions and classifications of cetaceans and explore several explanations for this case of intellectual inertia. Since Linnaeus was not an evolutionist we cannot support the idea that lack of evolutionary thinking prevented the understanding of the proper place of cetaceans in animal classification. I believe that a combination of environmental classification and scholasticism led to their misclassification for centuries. Linnaeus great contribution (although heavily influenced in this case by others) was to clearly differentiate between analogy and homology.