



9-2  
 'Desidia' (Indolence),  
 by Breughel. Detail from  
 drawing in the series  
 'Seven Deadly Sins'. Vienna  
 (Albertina), 1558.

Pieter Breughel the Elder produced two series of drawings, the 'Seven Deadly Sins' and the 'Seven Virtues', in 1558, not for wide circulation, but intended for a small circle of scholars who would understand the humour and satire portrayed and directed against the folly of the world. In the 'Desidia' (Indolence) scene [9-2], the sleeping woman reclining on the back of a recumbent donkey – the barnyard animal symbolising the sin of sloth – is a personalised Desidia. A number of symbols representing sloth surround her. For example, snails were believed to be born from mud and to feed on it. As they therefore made no effort to search for food they were perceived as being lazy, and the image of a snail came to represent such a sinner. An owl symbolises death, stillness and passivity, so the presence of the owl in this scene seems appropriate. The scorpion is a symbol of evil. Such a creature is carrying off two figures. Evil takes over when man slumbers.

The French artist Jacques Callot engraved personalised images of each of the deadly sins with their barnyard animal counterpart. For the depiction of sloth, Pigritia, Indolence, is shown sleeping by the side of her donkey [9-3]. The punishment of sloth was illustrated in 1496 in *Le grant kalendrier des Bergiers*, published by Nicolas le Rouge in Troyes, France: those indulging in it were thrown into a snake pit for eternity [9-4]. Although no one in



9-3  
 Jacques Callot's depiction of  
 sloth, Pigritia, Indolence.