



Kinnaree in Wat Phra Kaeo, Bangkok, Thailand

Dragonlore

The Journal of The College of Dracology

No.117

St Mark's Day 2010



The Arms of Venice drawn by Alex von Volborth
(from "Fabelwesen der Heraldik in Familien- und Stadtwappen" 1996)

Issued 25 April 2010 by Ralph Brocklebank, Orland, Church Avenue, Clent, Stourbridge DY9 9QS
Website:- www.dragonlore.co.uk E-mail:- ralph@dragonlore.co.uk



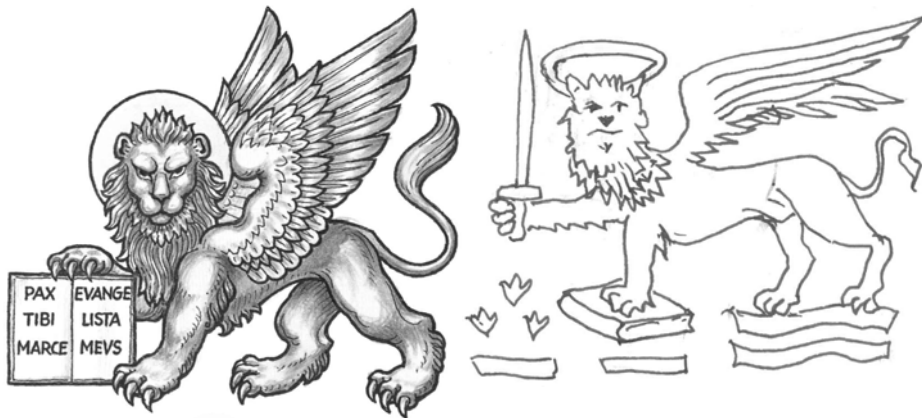
The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts



We welcome new members Ron Douglas Lovell and Derek Vaudrey, and congratulate Clive Cheesman on his promotion from Rouge Dragon Pursuivant to Richmond Herald.

In ten years we have had only four people write to ask that no more issues of Dragonlore be sent. In case there are those who meant to, but never got around to it, in future if we have not heard from anybody for six months, then no more will be sent. Of course, all issues will still be available on the website for those with the necessary facilities. Many of you do send items or e-mails or have a word at meetings, so I do not expect this measure to lead to much of a saving, but some economies must be made. Although I do not write to each of you every time, I always think of you all in turn as I address the envelopes, and I feel that we are indeed a College of colleagues.

Saint Mark the Evangelist wrote the shortest and probably the earliest of the Gospels. He travelled with Paul and Barnabas (his nephew) and worked with Peter. He went to Rome, and may have become the Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, where he was martyred early in the first century. Later, his relics were taken from there to Venice, where the great church of San Marco was built to guard them. His emblem of the winged lion has featured in the arms of Venice ever since (see cover), often shown standing in profile with one paw resting on an open book (left below), but in military use, as on the Ensign and Jack of the Italian Navy (below right), the right paw holds a drawn sword while the left rests on a closed book. St Mark has many feast days, but the one most often celebrated in this country is 25th April.



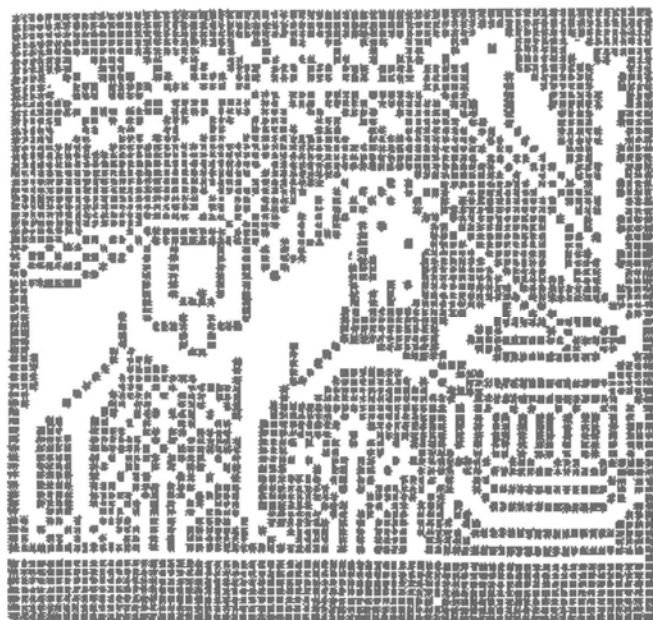
Roland Symons has not yet run out of fabulous beasts on RAF badges. The winged lion for 607 Squadron (left below), dating from November 1936, may have been one of the earliest to be granted. Apart from the big wings coming from the lion's shoulders, note the little ones attached to his feet. The demi-pegasus for 620 Squadron (below right) is red with silver wings and was thought appropriate for aircraft dropping paratroops amongst other duties. Roland has said that he is near the end of his collection of RAF badges with fabulous beasts on them, which were all illustrated in his book 'Knights of the Sky' (reviewed here many years ago!).



David Vaudrey has been to Thailand where he saw a host of Kinnaree statues lining the route from the airport to the city centre, and more elsewhere (see No 106), including the one shown here on the back page at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaeo) in Bangkok. Although said to be "half-woman, half-bird" the lower half looks more leonine than bird-like. Perhaps there are different varieties. David has promised to produce more Thai treasures when he has sorted them out after his travels.

If any of you know more about these oriental monsters, it would be appreciated if you were to let us know. David says that these temples are full of five- and seven-headed serpents, which have a deep religious significance in these parts, possibly derived from an Indian origin. The religious imagery in Thailand does seem to have much in common with Hindu temples.

Philippa Sims sent a pair of figures from Federico Vinciolo's "Patterns for Venetian Lacemaking and Embroidery," dated 1584 (*below*). Vinciolo was pattern designer to Henry I of France – and she has just completed embroidering them (though is not sure about Unicorns having saddles!).



The Tale of a Tail (*for younger readers*)

Young Percy had just been given his first suit of armour, and tried it on without delay. Wasting no time at all, he immediately set out to seek his fortune. After some wandering he came across a large cave and thought he saw a glimmer of something shiny inside. Venturing into the darkness, once his eyes had got used to the gloom, he saw a huge pile of golden objects, but his heart leapt up into his mouth when he noticed that it was covered by an enormous sleeping dragon. His pluck soon returned when he spotted that the tip of the dragon's tail, nearest to him, was pointing upward like a little hatstand. Slipping out of his armour, he draped it over the dragon's tail and then hid behind a rock to see what would happen. When the dragon awoke, it saw what it thought was an intrusive knight standing by his pile of gold, and let out a fierce stream of fiery breath towards it. Unfortunately he only managed to set his own tail on fire, and in great pain he rushed out of the cave to find a handy pond to quench the flames. Meanwhile Percy, seeing the coast was clear, quickly got his armour back and ran out of the cave himself, carrying as much of the gold as he could manage. When he got home, he found that all the golden objects he had saved had been stolen from his neighbours, so he spent the next few days going round the place giving them back. Thus Percy got the reputation of being not only clever and brave, but also completely selfless, an honour which he kept for the rest of his life.

(Based on Dan Piraro's strip cartoon "Bizarro" – but I cannot now recall who sent it in. Whoever you are, please accept my thanks and forgive me for expanding on the brief cartoon adventure.)

BOOK REVIEWS

ON MONSTERS : An Unnatural History of our Worst Fears, by Stephen T. Asma (Oxford, 2009) is a very thoughtful book, and indeed a scholarly one, as 49 pages of footnotes bear witness, in which the author traces the changing fascination with monsters through the ages and relates it to the varying views on the goodness of creation and the emerging psychology of the human race. Quoting extensively from Alexander's letter to Aristotle about his adventures in India, the enormous and multitudinous monsters described are attributed to fear and hallucinations after the long and trying passage over the desert wastes before a sweet-water lake was found. Such exaggerations are well known to psychologists, it seems, but the creative power of the human imagination is not disparaged. Asma attributes to Adrienne Mayor the idea that the Griffin may have first arisen from the discovery of large beak-headed quadruped fossils, and notes that such figures wrought in gold were produced in numbers by the Scythians, people who lived in areas where such fossils were anciently abundant. He even suggests that the monster Tricorn that Alexander says he fought and slew (*featured in No 99*) may have derived from an encounter with just such a fossil skull, later embellished with tales of his valiant but imagined deeds.

Turning to Biblical Monsters, Asma gives his drawing of the Behemoth (*right*) as "Symbolic of God's power" which does not look at all like the hippopotamus that it was generally held to be (*see the A to Z in No 2*). I once went to a lecture on Egyptian art and when we were shown a picture that was said to be the Behemoth, the speaker added that actually it was a very badly drawn pig. I had to tell him afterwards that the Egyptians were very accurate in their depiction of animals, birds and plants, so that each species could still be readily identified, and that his Behemoth was not a badly drawn pig but a very convincing hippopotamus. He looked again, and said, "Well, so it is! I never thought of that." But why he thought it was the Behemoth I never discovered. Asma sees it as representing the more awful aspects of God, and he treats Leviathan in a similar vein (not apparently just a whale!). Biblical Unicorns, of course, have been dismissed as a mistranslation.

Other mediaeval monsters and fabulous fantasies are treated in detail, all tied up with the question as to whether a good God could have created evil creatures. In the Age of Enlightenment, when such beasts had been dismissed as unreal, attention turned to the very real presence of human malformations and what they "meant." Having decided that they are just developmental abnormalities without a moral lesson attached, modern interest in monsters focuses on human behavioural anomalies as seen in serial killers, child torturers and the like. Fascination with monsters remains, but dracologists will probably be most interested in the earlier chapters of this fundamentally truthful book.



SOPWITH AIRCRAFT 1912 – 1920 by H.F.King (London, 1980) is a thorough account of a brief but innovative series of aircraft from this manufacturer, best known for the Camel fighter of the first World War. Having at last managed to acquire a copy, I can now confirm that they did actually produce a model called the Dragon, a single-seater biplane of 1918, though it never went into military service.

JOURNAL SCAN

The Heraldic Gazette (No 115, March 2010) leads with a three-page article by Robin Foster on "The Queen's Beasts – Their Perambulations since the Coronation" which explains how they ended up in Canada, and also has a short piece on "The Dragonlore of French Civic Heraldry" with pictures of the arms of St Servan-s-Mer (with a Unicorn, and identical to the arms of St Lo which we showed on the cover of No 108), Bergerac (with a Wyvern) and Saverne (with another Unicorn). Finally there are a couple of rather feeble Griffins squeezed into the arms of Queen Charlotte – from a coach panel.

Gonfanon (Vol 21, No 1, Spring 2010) has a new contest in which readers are invited to identify a pair of achievements, each with unusually chimerical supporters. The first has a pair of hybrids with golden Chinese Dragon upper halves and green dinosaur lower parts, while the second has a pair of what look like white swan-headed antelopes with golden wings. You may recall that Darren George, the Editor of Gonfanon, is an expert on the Mad Menagerie, and these are certainly mad enough. On later pages there is a golden Wyvern in the arms of Farringtons School in Kent, England, drawn by Allan Ailo, and a couple of stone carvings of strange winged creatures, one of which, from the Ukraine, we have seen before, in No 31 and again in No 41.

CORRESPONDENCE

Leslie Hodgson did send two pictures of the dragon fence in Sleaford that we showed in No 115, but one of them was squeezed out to allow other pictures to spread and we then failed to emend the text. So here is the other picture, with the dragon's head in close-up.

