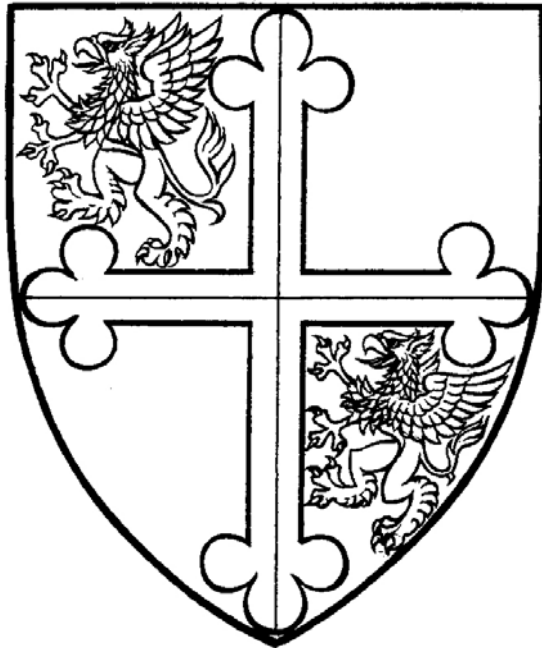


No 16), or in this fine example from Scotland, in which the Griffins of Mistress Valerie Ann Thomas or Casely are holding quoits (Mrs Casely is a PE teacher) – one red on white, the other white on red. In either case, the size of the beasts may be inferred from what they are holding, but often there is no way of telling, and the fierce Griffins squeezed into the corners of the cross on the arms of Cecil Humphery-Smith might be enormous for all we know

(they are gold on blue in a countercoloured design, and look very impressive). But whatever size they may be, Griffins remain grandly gorgeous and are greatly gifted, whether greedily guarding golden gatherings or gracefully granting gratuitous guidance.



Midsummer Day on 24th June is celebrated as the Feast of St John the Baptist.

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Dragonlore

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A Serpent-Dragon attacking an Elephant
from a 12th century Bestiary (from Tisdall 1998)

The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

In 1988, the Rev. Ben Elliott gave a talk on *The Origin and Development of Anti-Christian Dragons*, as noted in No 8, and we are now privileged to have his own precis of this important contribution to our studies. It is not possible to show the wealth of pictures that supported his lecture, but we have found a few relevant examples such as this ambiguous figure from an early Bestiary (fin or wing, two or four legs?) and the Serpent-Dragon attacking an Elephant (*on the cover*) from another. Although no doubt included in the Bestiary for its moral message, there is something about the Dragon on the cover of the way a python would attack a boar (perhaps it is a baby elephant). The chicken-like wings and legs

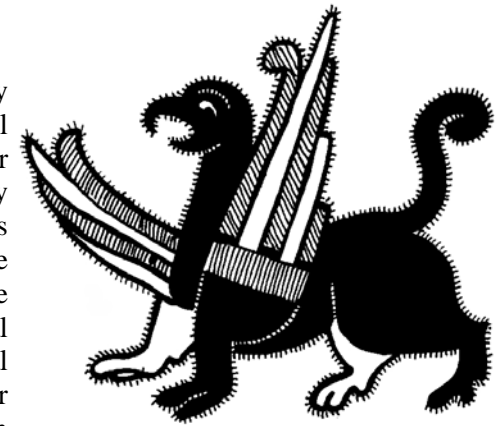


by this time were merely conventional— compare this space filler from the seal of the Earl of Lancaster, and the Wyvern from the margin of the Bayeux Tapestry (*from Huber 1981, see left*). A rare survivor of this form of dragon is seen in this metal garden ornament from Biddulph Grange, a National Trust property in Staffordshire, but note that the wings are now bat-like and not feathered (*below*).



An Alphabet of Queries (10)

Does the Griffin grow gradually greater? In the case of the Vauxhall badge, evidently not, but in other spheres this beast of great antiquity goes from strength to strength and is still a great favourite. One of the many hybrids coming from the ancient Middle East, early classical forms (much used as architectural decorations) generally had four lion's legs, as in this example from the Bayeux Tapestry (Huber 1981), but once the eagle nature had spread from the head and wings to include the fore limbs (which would have been the eagle's rear or pelvic limbs), this earlier pattern was renamed the Opinicus, at least by English heralds. A good example of the mediaeval Griffin is seen in this picture of the Flight of Alexander, amusingly given as the first illustration in *Pioneer Aircraft: Early Aviation before 1914* (Putnam's History of Aircraft, London 2002). Here a pair of Griffins (some versions show four) are chained to a basket in which the King stands and are lured aloft by a haunch of venison which he holds up on a spear. These Griffins seem too small to perform this task, though artists in those days were not too worried by relative sizes. Indeed, in some tales they were said to be large enough to fly



away with an ox in their talons (perhaps being confused with the Roc), and Nigg has described them as “the most majestic of all mythical creatures.” This early 15th century Italian example by Donatello faithfully follows the mediaeval model, and it is still very popular in modern heraldry, for example, the green Griffin gathering golden grain in the Grainger crest (*see*



Fabulous Beasts in the World of the Motor Car

Vauxhall's Griffin badge in its current form has already been noted (No 21), but this earlier version is much more impressive. Rather confusingly, for a few years (1948 to 1957) there was a Vauxhall model called the *Wyvern*. Other fabulous beast names are extremely rare on cars, though TVR got close with *Griffith* and *Cerbera* and hit the target with *Chimera*. Badges and mascots make a better showing with the Lea-Francis badge of a Sea-Unicorn and the Welsh Dragon badge on the Gilbern, a sports car made in Wales in the late sixties. Armstrong-Siddeleys had a Sphinx as a radiator cap and then as a bonnet ornament, while the Humber Pullman of 1933 sported a Demi-Pegasus mascot, but the prize with both the name and the mascot or badge must go to the Phoenix light car which flourished from 1904 to 1922. Any more, anyone?



A COMPETITION

Mary Rose Rogers has written to say that she was asked, "Were there Dragons on the Ark?" Since early dragons were the "largest of the serpents" and Noah was instructed to admit "everything that creepeth upon the earth" then the answer was probably Yes. But as for other monsters, probably not. A recent advertisement for Airport Express shows two unicorned horses watching an Ark sail away, with the caption, "Timing is everything." This theme is not new. There was once a delightful cartoon by Michael ffolkes in *Punch* shewing a Sphinx, a Centaur, a Harpy and a few other fabulous creatures sitting at the water's edge watching the Ark drifting away into the distance. What was the Sphinx saying? If anyone can produce the original



caption, it will be welcomed, but any other appropriate remark will be considered, and the best of the bunch will be announced in a future issue.

ON THE BIBLICAL ORIGINS OF DRAGONS by Ben Elliott

The dragons that appear in combat with the Archangel Michael or with St George, or a number of other saints, gained several of their anatomical features from texts in Scripture, though they owe as much to the Ketos [*also known as Cetus in Latin - Ed*], the sea monster from whom Perseus rescued Andromeda, and whose form personifies the Ocean to this day in the iconography of the Orthodox Church.

By the 16th century in English heraldry, dragons had developed additional characteristics which deny their biblical origins, so that, sadly, the dragon that today is conquered by St George, as it is represented on the insignia of the Order of the Garter, is not a true opponent and ought to have its hind legs amputated, while frequently nowadays one finds the Archangel dealing with dragons with wings that are too large.

Until the late middle ages the dragon is of serpentine or "worm" appearance, so far as its body goes, because it is equated with the serpent of the Fall of Man in Genesis III, 14; it is Satan. "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." Prior to this, the serpent was four-footed though depictions of it in this state are rare. Correctly, therefore, the serpent dragon ought to drag its belly upon the ground, and indeed it always used so to do, even when through merging with the Ketos it developed flippers or forelegs. This came about because the Greek word Ketos was used to translate *sea-monster* in the Book of Jonah, and in early Christian art it was a Ketos, which bears no resemblance to a whale at all, which swallowed and regurgitated the prophet.

Another feature, seemingly derived by inference rather than from a text, is the smallness of the dragons' wings, when they develop, for by no means all dragons have them. The Archangel Michael defeated Satan, "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and they prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." (Revelation XII, 7-9) The size of dragons' wings, when shown in opposition to SS George or Michael,

again until late in the middle ages, made them incapable of re-attaining heaven.

Other texts have also had influence, and again it has been the use of the word "dragon" in translation of the original Hebrew word meaning "sea monster" as well as its use to translate the word "jackal" that has led to some of the iconography in both the Eastern and Western Churches. In the East, the Greek translation (The Septuagint) is used; in the West, the Latin translation by St Jerome (The Vulgate) derived from both the Septuagint and the Hebrew was in use throughout the period. For example, Psalm 91, verse 13: - "You shall tread on the lion and the asp, the lion and the sea serpent you shall tread under foot" became "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder, the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." This has influenced the creatures at the feet both of Christ and of the Archangel, as well as those at the feet of effigies of mediaeval bishops. And that these creatures personified Satan is reinforced by such texts as, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet." (Romans XVI, 20) or, "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." (1 Corinthians XV, 25), and by the iconography of the Conquest of Hell where hell's mouth is depicted as that of a gigantic sea monster.

Most dragons, biblical and later, are to be found in association with water. It is an association of great antiquity. In the Bible, the ancient evil that lurked "in the water under the earth" (Exodus XX, 4, and see Philippians II, 10 for a further correlation with Psalm 91) would seem to have its roots in Babylonian myth, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?" (Isaiah LI, 9) - a passage that refers to the primeval monster overthrown in Babylonian creation myth.

Stories of heroic defeats of dragons are not uncommon in the later middle ages, and it may well be that these also derive from the Greek translation of animals such as jackals by the word "dragon" - an error continued in the Authorized Version. Since in the Bible wild animals were referred to as dragons when fierce, why not a wild boar such as that dealt with by Sir Maurice Berkeley who slew a dragon on the borders of the New Forest? (*This last remark reminded me that Christopher Robin's "dragons" were actually turkeys—Ed.*)

REVIEWS

My younger son Mark took his family to visit my elder son Guy in Washington DC where he is posted, and came back with a super present, the massive volume **Giants, Monsters & Dragons: An Encyclopedia of Folklore, Legend, and Myth** (Norton, New York & London 2000) by Carol Rose, who works at the University of Kent in Canterbury. The research for her earlier book, *Spirits, Fairies, Leprechauns, and Goblins; An Encyclopedia of Little People* (1996), led her to recognise that there was a vaster area of supernatural beings and monsters that were yet not divine, that needed surveying in a comprehensive manner, and this later book contains no fewer than 2,272 entries from the folklore of many countries—yet even then our own little A to Z with barely a tenth as many, has some that she has missed. Her bibliography lists 189 works, and a series of appendices group the names given in the main text into a range of useful categories. The picture on the cover, the only one in colour, shows a detail from the well-known painting by Piero di Cosimo in the Uffizi of a rather dainty little Perseus attacking a vast and grotesque Cetus.

At the other extreme of size, is a delightful little picture book of **Dragons**, edited by Elizabeth Rudd (WH Allen, London 1980) with 25 images from around the world, nearly all in colour and each faced by an appropriate quotation. This miniature celebration of dragonlore in all its variety was sent in by Drusilla Armitage (whose mother's family of Pochin has a Harpy for a crest) and is evidence of the need for a wider understanding of its subject matter.

Joe Nigg, who wrote so well about Gryphons (*see No 7*) has been busy with two new books: **Wonder Beasts: Tales and Lore of the Phoenix, the Griffin, the Unicorn, and the Dragon** (Englewood, Colorado 1995) gives extensive quotations about these creatures from ancient times down to the present day, and has a bibliography with 80 items, while **The Book of FABULOUS BEASTS: A Treasury of Writings from Ancient Times to the Present** by Joseph Nigg (Oxford 1999) is a greatly extended compilation along the same lines, which lists 41 such beasts in a glossary and 151 secondary sources in a bibliography apart from the 116 primary sources quoted in the main text. This is an invaluable collection from the literature of dragonlore.