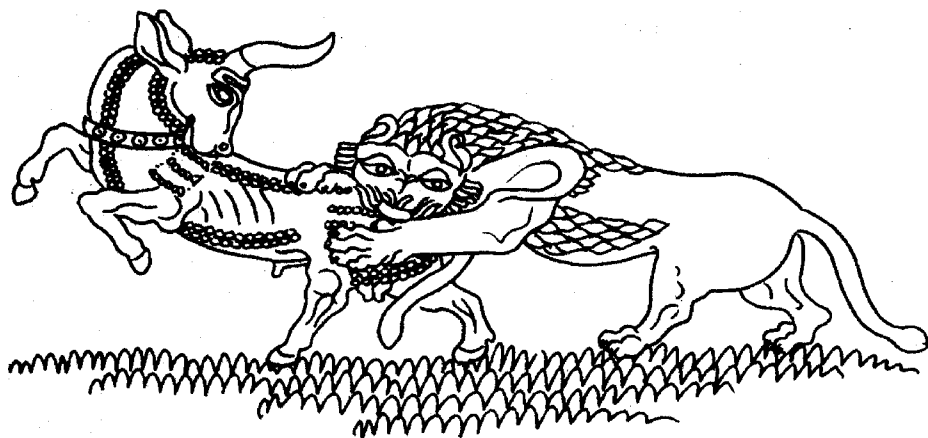


and in revenge Tiamat brought forth numerous fierce and venomous serpents and dragons to torment Ea and his son, but Marduk managed to overcome her, split her in half, and used the two halves of her body to create the solid earth and the sky. The monsters then submitted to their new rulers, and the Sirtush was tamed and then trained to act as a guardian at the gates.

Much later, King Nebuchadnezzar I (1126-1105 BC), having seized power in Babylon, promoted Marduk from being a hero-figure not unlike Hercules, who served the gods and undertook certain difficult tasks, and made him the supreme god with the Sirtush as his main emblem, and it was still later, when Babylon had become a great power under King Nebuchadnezzar II in the 6th century BC, that we have the glazed-tile relief figures that still survive from the Ishtar Gate at Babylon, alternating with bulls and lions. Although lions and bulls, some winged, feature largely in the statuary and symbolism of the ancient Middle East, and thence in the Near East and later in the heraldry of Western Europe, the serpentine Sirtush seems to have disappeared, unless it somehow metamorphosed into the heraldic dragon. A search for the “missing link” might prove fruitful. There might also be a connection between Marduk fighting a monster and the Archangel Michael fighting a dragon or a devil, since the Hebrews spent some time in Babylon, and Abraham came from Ur in Mesopotamia in the first place.

Useful references have been *Dragons* by Sheila R.Canby in **Mythical Beasts** (Ed. John Cherry, London, 1995), **The Babylonians** by H.F.W.Saggs (London, 1999) and **Mesopotamia: The Invention of the City** by Gwendolyn Leick (London, 2001). All three favour the name Musshussu.



Relief from Persepolis, 5th century B.C.

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Dragonlore

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St Leonard's Day 2003



St Leonard slaying a dragon, drawn by Eric Fraser

The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

We welcome new member John Shannon of New York, our first in the United States of America. He is the Almoner of the Society of St George of New York (and thus interested in dragons) and also President of The College of Arms Foundation Incorporated with a particular interest in British heraldic art (and so familiar with heraldic monsters of all kinds).

The picture on the cover is taken from *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain* (London, 1973) and illustrates a legend from Sussex, not far from Hasting's twin town of St Leonards. The story is worth quoting in full:-

"About half-way between Horsham and Pease Pottage in Sussex are the Lily Beds, an area of St Leonard's Forest where lilies-of-the-valley grow wild. By tradition, the flowers have grown there ever since St Leonard slew a fearsome dragon that was terrorising the neighbourhood in the 6th century. The hermit-saint was wounded during the fight, and wherever his blood fell lilies-of-the-valley sprang up.

"As a reward for the brave saint's courage, God also decreed that adders in the forest would never sting again, and that nightingales, which had disturbed the saint's prayers, would never sing there again.

"But apparently, St Leonard did not free the forest of dragons, for three local villagers claimed to have come across a 'strange and monstrous serpent' in 1614, and rumours of hideous creatures lurking among the trees lingered on until well into the 19th century.

"According to the villagers who said they had seen it, the dragon of 1614 was just over 9 ft long, thick in the middle and thin at the ends, with red scales on its belly, black ones on its back and a ring of white markings around its neck. It had large feet, could run as fast as a man, and had on its flanks 'two great bunches so big as a large football, which (as some thinke) will in time grow to wings.' Wherever it went, it left a track of 'glutinous and slimie matter which is very corrupt and offensive to the smell.'

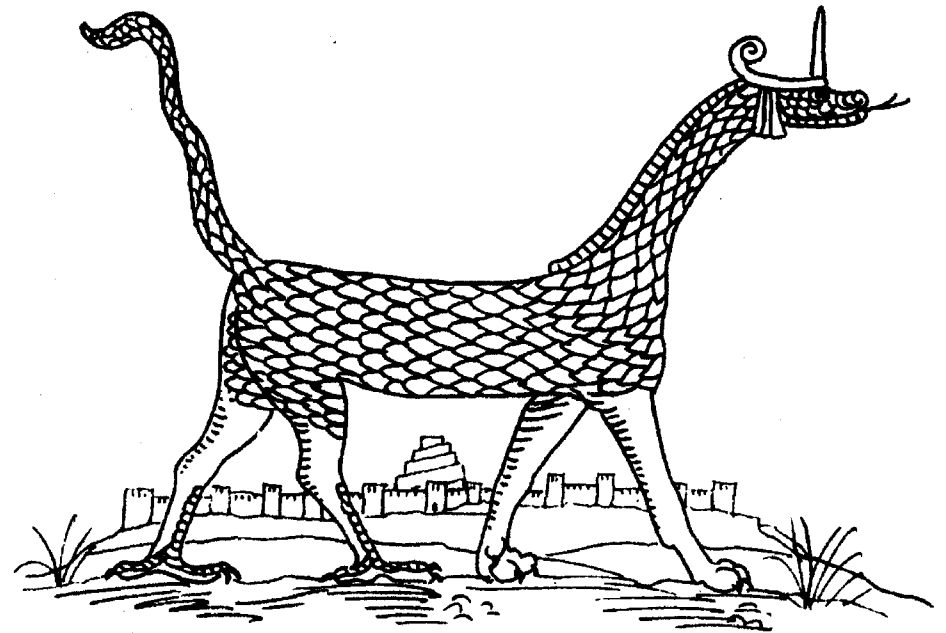
"The dragon was reputedly able to spit its deadly venom over a great distance and it was held responsible for the deaths of two people. 'As by woeful experience it was proved on the bodies of a man and a woman coming that way, who afterwards were found dead, being poysoned and very much swelled, but not prayed upon.' It killed two dogs in the same way, but did not eat them either. Apparently, it lived mainly on a diet of rabbits.

"Neither history nor legend relate what eventually happened to the creature."

Perhaps this is not the same St Leonard whose feast day falls upon 6th November. Several books about saints refer to a St Leonard who was a Frenchman serving King Clovis in the 6th century, who successfully helped

An Alphabet of Queries (22)

What is known about the SIRRUSH? This strange creature, which some believe to be the earliest known representation of a dragon-like monster, and is also known as a Musshussu (although this may be nothing more than the result of uncertainty in transliterating the ancient inscriptions), appears in relief on the Ishtar Gate at Babylon. Because its front legs are like those of a lion and its back legs like an eagle's, it is sometimes referred to as an anti-griffin, but this ignores its long scaly serpent-like neck, back and tail, and its unique head, which, apart from its prominent horns, is also rather snake-like. Evidently a composite animal, it has parallels in some early biblical examples, in Eden before the expulsion, when the serpent still had legs (*see No 29*) and also in an Egyptian picture which shows a long snake with two pairs of human legs, a bearded man's head at one end and a jackal's head at the other (*see Cherry, 1995, p 18*). The SIRRUSH is said to be sacred to the god Marduk. In the ancient Mesopotamian legend of the creation, Marduk was the son of Ea, himself the offspring of Apsu, god of the waters beneath the earth, and Tiamat, goddess of the sea. Ea slew his father to gain control of the world,

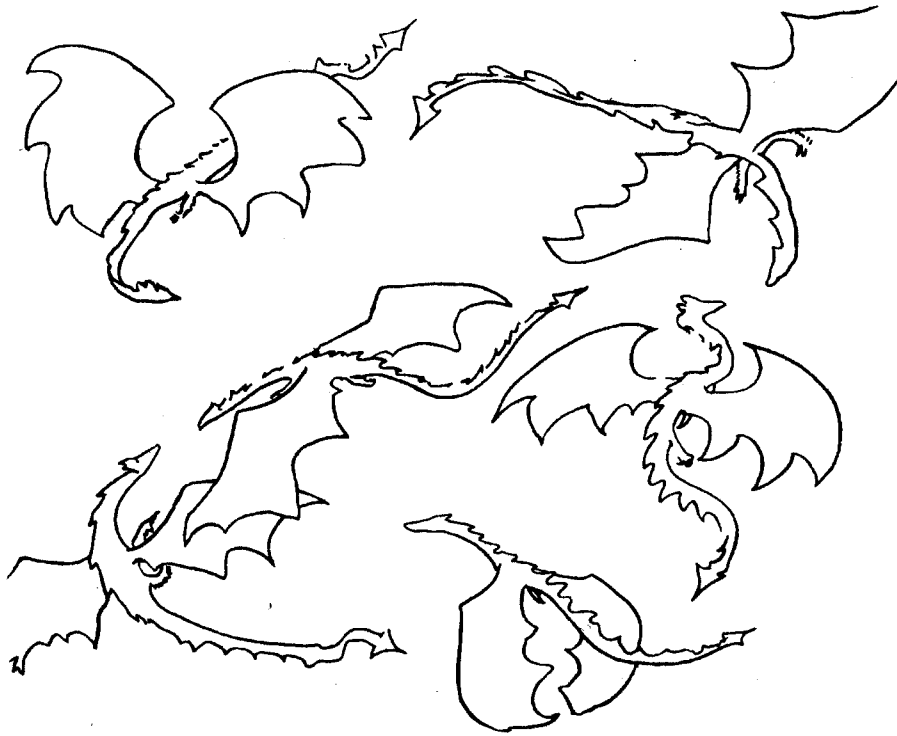


SIRRUSH drawn by Anne Marie Jauss (from Lum, 1952)

BOOK REVIEW - VERMINOLOGY

Dragons: The Modern Infestation by Pamela Wharton Blanpied (Woodbridge 1980, reissued 1996) was kindly sent in by Drusilla Armitage, who writes, “It seems a bit far-fetched to me...”

This curious book appears to be an elaborate parody of the sort of academic study that floods our university libraries and earns brownie points for aspiring scholars on the fringes of hard science – sociologists, ethologists, environmentologists and the like – hence the coining of the word “verminology” to cover their endeavours. All the characteristics are there: smudgy, slightly-out-of-focus photographs taken on field trips, rough sketches of preliminary observations (see below), distribution maps, analysis charts, excerpts from the papers of field workers and even a three-page bibliography of “works cited” that, apart from two titles, seems to be entirely invented. It must have been fun to produce, but the wonder is that it was ever thought to be worth reprinting.



“Field sketches of young dragons playing at sunset”

FEEDBACK

With regard to the task of finding a new name for the misleading “Male Griffin” (see No 36), Kevin Greaves, who is a doctor, believes that the proposed name Orogriff would be mistaken, suggesting that it was derived from the mouth, as in words such as oral or orifice, and thinks that a better choice would be **Ormogriff**. This certainly strengthens the connection with the Earls of Ormond, from whose heraldry the beast apparently derives. The Irish name Ormond, according to Adrian Room (in his *Dictionary of Names*, London 1992), “represents an English spelling of *O Ruaidh*, ‘descendant of *Ruaidh*,’ with the latter a personal name meaning ‘red.’” Probably the ending -mond is an assimilation to names such as Richmond and Desmond, but the inclusion of part of it in the new name for our contentious beast is quite harmonious. Any advance on Ormogriff?

ADDITION TO THE A TO Z



BEAKER, the name of a sprightly cartoon character that appeared with members of his family in a comic strip that was drawn week by week during the war years and posted off to a father who was serving at sea. Beaker’s adventures covered a wide field of activities, and it was hoped that they might be collected together and put into a book, but in the end they were all lost.

MIDDLE EARTH

Fans of the Hobbit and the Lord of the Rings (the film of which has now reached its third and final episode) should take note of **Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle Earth** by John Garth (London, 2003), which “focuses on a crucial area of Tolkien’s life curiously skated over by previous biographers: the searing time the creator of the hobbits spent in a hole - the trenches of World War I - and its lifelong influence on his epochal work,” in the words of reviewer Nigel Jones. The final part of the film trilogy, *The Return of the King*, contains at least one new monster, Shelob, a giant spider-like creature that lives underground and has to be overcome before the prize can be reached.

SERENDIPITY

When discussing the Enfield in No 34, the example was given of a camel as being a creature very hard to draw from a verbal description, by one who had never seen such an animal. When watching a documentary about the life of Lawrence of Arabia, there was a scene in which a line of camels was silhouetted against the skyline, being ridden purposefully into the distance, and it was evident that the most striking feature of the beast, its hump, was not visible. The saddle and saddle-cloth with the rider perched on top looked rather like the howdah on an elephant and completely hid from view the hump underneath. It was seen to be **on** the back, but not **part** of the animal. If asked to draw the camel from such a brief glimpse the obvious features would be the long serpentine neck with a small head on the end and the long legs with knobby knees and odd two-toed feet, all attached to a body not unlike that of a horse. And then the light dawned. The odd Florentine monsters drawing Bacchus in his carriage illustrated in No 36 are camels - humpless, it is true, and with serpent’s heads rather than giraffe’s (but then we did not get a good look at the heads), but the necks and the legs and feet are surely those of a camel. If a distinctive name is wanted, how about Bacchamel?

his queen through a difficult childbirth by means of prayer, and as a reward was given land at Noblac near Limoges, where he founded an abbey. This legend is not known until the 11th century, but Leonard became one of the most popular mediaeval saints. Some stories add that he was instrumental in miraculously freeing a number of prisoners, though one authority suggests that this was a mistaken belief based on a false derivation of his name from an old French word *lien* meaning a fetter. In any case, an emblem of *four chains conjoined in saltire each ending in a broken fetter* is used by the Parish Church of St Leonard in Clent, and also appears in the arms of Clent Parish Council. There are no stories of dragons in Clent, nor are any mentioned in the tales about the saint of Noblac, who is venerated widely in Europe and celebrated on 6th November. Legends of local heroes fighting dragons are found throughout Britain and France, so perhaps there was a Sussex lad called Leonard who became confused with the saint from Noblac. Who knows? Books consulted include *A Calendar of Saints* by James Bentley (London, 1986), *Saints* by Tessa Clark, Elizabeth Hallam and Cecilia Walters (London, 1994) and *Encyclopedia of Saints* by Clemens Joeckle (London, 1997).

DRAGONS FROM VENICE

Gilly Greenhill sent two postcards from Venice showing some scenes from the life of St George as painted by Vittore Carpaccio (c 1465-1525/6). One shows him praying over a young dragon and the other has him subduing an older beast, possibly the young one grown up. If so, it gives an interesting light on the development of the species, with the youngster holding itself up off the ground in a sprightly manner and with its ears cocked up, while the bulk of the old one keeps it sprawled on the floor with even its ears sagging (though this might be the result of St George’s attack on it).

