

not dead bodies but spirits, though the two themes were soon combined. It was in the field of literature, starting with *Vampyre* by John Polidori (a friend of Byron's) in 1819, followed by *Varney, the Vampyre* in 1847 and then Bram Stoker's *Dracula* of 1897, that we see the handsome fanged gentleman seducing a virgin in order to sink his teeth into her neck for his life-prolonging draught of her blood. I have seen a corpse in which the upper lip had shrunk a bit to reveal the tips of the two incisor teeth, giving just a hint of fangs, and where the lips had bled slightly, perhaps suggesting that blood-sucking had occurred. And of course love-bites between lovers are not unknown. But these fabulous ghoulish gentlemen, though their habits were undoubtedly beastly, were not exactly beasts.

Next we come to the discovery that certain small South American bats have evolved the habit of feeding on blood taken from a sleeping animal. Their sharp teeth pierce the skin in a tender spot, and when the blood flows, they lick it up until they have had enough, usually not disturbing or waking their host, or even harming it very much. These tiny beasts are real enough and not at all fabulous, though naturally they were called Vampire Bats.



Vampire bat

Now we return to the realm of fiction, with the confluence of ghouls and bats. Not so much in literature as in film-making, do we find the gentleman vampire, having had his fill, leap out of the window with his flapping cloak turning into bats' wings as he makes his getaway. At last we have a fabulous beast, but it is no ancient legend, just a twentieth-century invention. As a final indignity, the tiny snub-nosed vampire bat of America has been replaced in these films by the large flying fox, the greatest of the bats with its fierce-looking muzzle, though it is in fact a fruit-eating vegetarian.

In closing, we note that the arms of certain Spanish towns such as Valencia are adorned with a bat in place of a crest. One author thinks that this was originally a dragon that was incorrectly copied, while another believes that it was derived from the helm and mantling of early arms. If the latter is correct, it forms a precedent for a flapping cloak becoming bats' wings.

(For much of the above we are indebted to Daniel Cohen's 1982 book on *Monsters*)

Dragonlore

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Griffins in the Arms of the Earl of Aylesford, drawn by Anthony Wood

The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

We are proud to welcome two new members, Dugald Steer, whose splendid work on *Dragonology* was reviewed in No 40, and Peter Spurrier, whose work will be known to our regulars. And sadly we report the death of Tricia Rutherford, who taught me about word-processing and computer use long ago.

The picture on the cover, with Griffins on the shield, in the crest and as a supporter to the Arms of the Earl of Aylesford, is taken from Anthony Wood's book *Heraldic Art & Design* (1996), reviewed in No 15. The Earl, who is now ninety years old and lives at Packington Hall, Meriden, just outside Birmingham, is the Lord Lieutenant of the County of the West Midlands. This was one of the so-called "Metropolitan Counties" formed in 1974, and though their County Councils have since all been abolished, they retain a shadowy form of existence as "ceremonial counties." This means that they still have a Lord Lieutenant but no longer a corporate body to use their coat of arms. While it still existed, the West Midlands County Council had a very attractive coat of arms with Phoenixes as supporters and a Griffin holding an arrow for the crest.



Arms of the Metropolitan County Council of the West Midlands, drawn by John D Mackie, from his book "Twenty Four Years of Civic Heraldry in England and Wales 1974 - 1998" (privately circulated). Note that the shield - "Or between two bars gemel as many barrulets dancetty of three points interlaced Sable" - carries the letters W M, lightly disguised.

It was not only the Metropolitan Counties that suffered in this way, with their various duties devolved on to their constituent District Councils, now given Unitary Status. The Royal County of Berkshire was treated similarly, so that its handsome coat of arms with its two Norman lions no longer has a

Most of the superb illustrations are unusually fresh, but there are some old favourites among them. Perhaps just one sample will serve to demonstrate the quality of the pictures. Here is a large sphinx with a little griffin, in gold on a blue ground, from Assyria:



Surprisingly, in the last chapter little is said and nothing shown from the world that we know as fantasy fiction (*see No 28*), but nevertheless this book makes an important contribution to our field of studies - logical, comprehensive, pedantic in a scholarly way, very French, in fact - and the authors are to be congratulated.

An Alphabet of Queries (25)

Is the Vampire really a fabulous beast? Originally, as early as the twelfth century, vampires were legendary ghouls from central Europe, dead bodies that rose from their graves to find a feast of blood that would prolong their existence, and when they had had enough, would return to sleep in their coffins. Since their bodies were putrefying, they would spread plague and pestilence during their night-time wanderings, and responsible citizens would feel bound to trap them, slay them and burn their bodies. Not all animated corpses were blood suckers, and there were legendary bloodsuckers that were

being done by the staff of the unit, repairing damaged aircraft and returning them to duty. Granted in 1945, the blazon reads *On a mount a dragon vert armed and langued gules supporting a tower its dexter leg resting on a mill-rind Or*. No mention of the tower being cracked. The mill-rind is standing in for one of the grindstones used in the workshops. Good or bad, dragons make handy symbols!

FEEDBACK

Darren George writes that the jokey explanation of the origin of the Harpygriff given in No 31 cannot possibly be true, because the so-called “male griffin” was virtually unknown outside England and had certainly not penetrated as far as the Ukraine. He adds that big-breasted creatures of all kinds were very popular in eastern Europe, so that the Harpygriff would not have attracted undue attention. Perhaps we should see more of them in the western world!



BOOK REVIEW

Paul Thorning has alerted me to a sumptuous new book that is an important addition to our library of reference works. **HERE BE DRAGONS: A Fantastic Bestiary**, by Ariane and Christian Delacampagne (Princeton and Oxford, 2003) was originally published as *Animaux étranges et fabuleux: Un bestiaire fantastique dans l'art* (Paris, 2003) and translated by the first author. The bibliography of 92 entries shows its academic status, while its 188 illustrations, nearly all in colour, provide a feast for the eyes. The emphasis throughout is on works of art, ranging from the earliest known artefacts from the Middle East right up to the cartoon story-book of Tintin and the Yeti. To start off, their definition of “fantastic animals” is very similar to our usage for “fabulous beasts” as it excludes humans, angels and demons, and gods even if they have animal heads, as many did in ancient Egypt and India. Also excluded are genuine animals about which fantastic tales are told. The contents are divided into six chapters as follows:

ONE: Symbols, Dreams, Religions

TWO: Inventing a Bestiary

THREE: Unicorns and Human Hybrids

FOUR: Flying Quadrupeds and Dragons

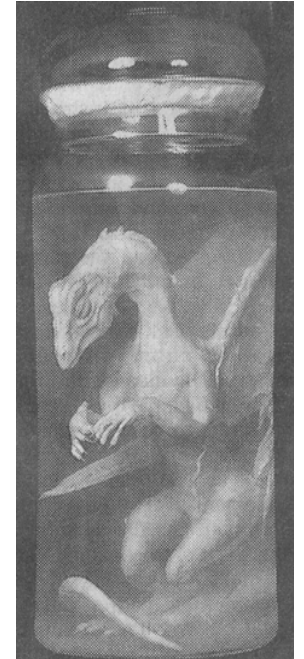
FIVE: Influences or Coincidences?

SIX: The Fantastic Today

corporate body to make use of it, and most of the newly-devised Welsh counties - Dyfed, Gwent, Clwyd and so on - have gone the same way. At least in Wales there are still plenty of heraldic dragons about, as well as a Sea-dragon and a Sea-horse, in their civic heraldry.

A Dragon in the News

The Daily Telegraph for Saturday 24 January 2004 carried a report by Roger Highfield, their Science Editor, about a pickled “dragon” that was found in a garage in Oxfordshire, together with some paperwork written in old-fashioned German dating from the 1890s. The documents suggest that the specimen was sent to the Natural History Museum, from where it was sent to be destroyed but was in fact rescued by a porter, who was the grandfather of the man who has now found it. It has a reptilian head on a long arched neck, four legs, a pair of diaphanous wings, a smoothly pointed tail and even an umbilical cord. Speculating as to whether it is made of wax or india-rubber, it is suggested that it may have been sent from Germany as a joke, or a hoax, or as an example of their model-making skills, since there was strong rivalry between German and British scientists at that time. The Natural History Museum is said to be interested in following up this find.



Roger Highfield continues, “The scientific journal *Nature* once carried a tongue-in-cheek article on the ecology of dragons written by Lord May, who became the science adviser to the Prime Minister and is now the president of the Royal Society. From the reported sightings, Lord May concluded that dragons are “both omnivorous and voracious,” with great variations in diet: one made do with two sheep every day while another, kept by Pope St Sylvester, consumed 6,000 people daily. Their lifespan seems to range between 1,000 and 10,000 years. Some scientists believe that dragons, though the product of imagination, were inspired by the extraordinary creatures that once roamed the Earth. As J K Rowling’s alter ego Hermione Granger once suggested, legends have a basis in fact.”

Thanks to Drusilla Armitage and to Una Lewers for sending me copies of this news item. Roland Symons also sent a similar item from *The Times*. Any further developments that come this way will be reported in due course.

Fabulous Beasts in World Mythology

A recent arrival is the massive (2,220gm) volume **Mythology: The Illustrated Anthology of World Myth and Storytelling**. Edited by C.Scott Littleton (Duncan Baird, London, 2002), with 688 pages and over 700 pictures in colour, it gives both a broad overview of the subject and a wide selection of individual examples under five main headings: **Cradles of Civilization** (Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome), **The Celtic, Viking and Germanic Worlds** (Northern Europe), **The Eastern World** (India, China, Japan), **The New World** (North America, Middle America, South America), and **The Southern World** (Africa, Australasia). Although birds and beasts, serpents, fishes and insects abound, fabulous creatures are disappointingly scarce. Those included are the Sphinx and Phoenix and various animal-headed and human-bodied gods from Egypt, more man/beast hybrids and winged demons, and the Sarrush, from Mesopotamia, the Centaur, Satyr, Mermen, Pegasus, Gorgon and Minotaur (mentioned but not depicted) from Greece, the Fenris Wolf from the Norse sagas, Nagas and Ganesha (the elephant-headed god) from India, plenty of dragons from China as well as the *Feng huang* (Phoenix) and *JiaYu* (a tiger-dragon hybrid), the Thunderbird and Plumed Serpent from the Americas, and the mythical serpent Taipan from Australia. A strange omission, following an ancient taboo, is the sequence of early Bible stories. Robert Graves has shown that

the events centred on Adam and Eve, Noah, Jonah and so on, form an integral part of the mythology of the ancient Middle East, but without them we get no Behemoth, Leviathen, or (possibly mis-translated) Unicorn, nor, of course, the strange monsters from the Revelation of St John. Nevertheless, this is a beautifully produced compilation, from which we have taken one delightful Chinese story:-

The Foolish Dragon

One day a dragon living in the ocean saw that his wife was unwell. Hoping to restore her health, he asked if there was any particular food that she would like to eat. At first she refused to answer, but when pressed confided that she had a craving for a monkey's heart.

The husband was at a loss to know how to satisfy her whim. Still, not wanting to see her suffer, he made his way to the shore, where he spied a monkey in the tree-tops. To tempt it



down, he asked if it was not tired of its own forest, offering instead to carry it across the ocean to a land where fruit grew on every branch.

Easily persuaded, the monkey climbed on to the dragon's back. It soon had an unpleasant surprise, however, when the dragon dived down into the ocean depths. Panic-stricken, it asked where they were going, at which point the dragon explained apologetically that he needed a monkey's heart for his sick wife.

"Then you'll have to go back to land!" shouted the monkey desperately. "I left my heart in the tree-tops."

Obediently, the foolish dragon did as he was told, swimming back to the shore and letting his prey scamper back to the trees. Scrambling rapidly to the safety of the topmost branches, the monkey thought to itself as it watched its former captor waiting in vain below: "What simpletons dragons must be to fall for a story like that!"

More Dragons from RAF Badges



Roland Symons has sent a couple more of his exquisite drawings, following on from the selection shown in No 11. The Central Bomber Establishment has a dragon's head erased in pale pierced by a sword point downwards, based on the arms of Kings Lynn. It was granted in 1948, and the dragon here being struck down represents the evil enemy. On the other hand, the dragon of the Home Aircraft Depot at Henlow represents the good work