

An Alphabet of Queries (30)

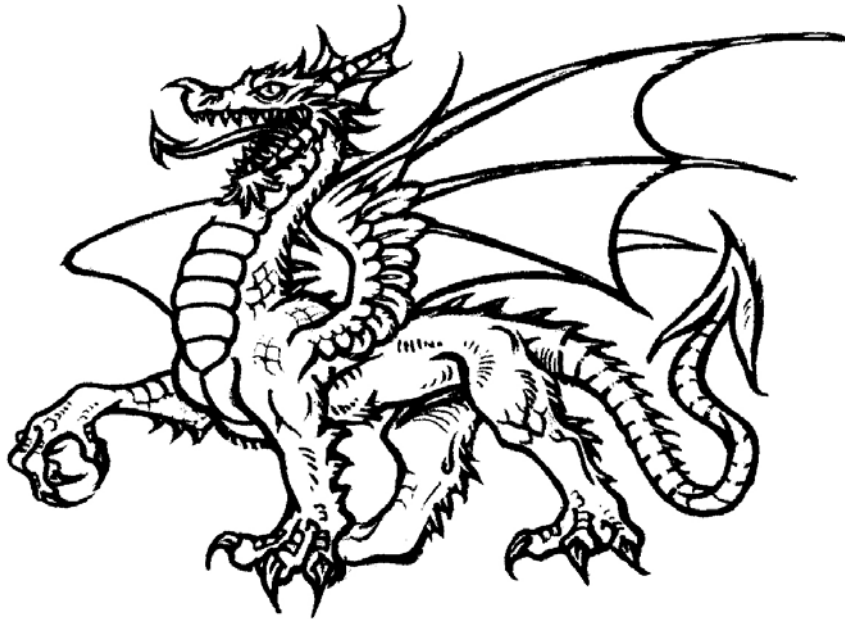
And finally, is not the Zimbabwe bird associated with the Mashona? Indeed it is, and in more than one sense. The ancient ruins known as Zimbabwe, where the soapstone carving of the bird was found, lie in the heart of the territory now occupied by the Mashona tribe, though it is not thought that they are the same people who founded the ancient civilization. And the bird also featured on the badge of HMS Mashona (*see right*), a “Tribal” class destroyer of 1937 that was sunk in an air attack in 1941.

(This concludes the series, “An Alphabet of Queries.” Further queries will be welcomed, but need not come in alphabetical order.)



Another new dragon

When Kevin Arkinstall heard that his dragon had gone missing, he kindly drew a replacement. See if you can spot the difference:-



The arms of Salisbury in the tail-piece of No 45 were taken from C.W.Scott-Giles (1933)

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Dragonlore

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A Griffin from a Salzburg mural relief



The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

Welcome to new members Ron Fiske, Shirley Howard-Alpe, Jim Marriage, Ken Mourin and Mary Pierson.

Dunstan was born in 909 into a noble Wessex family, at Baltonsborough near Glastonbury, and was educated at the Abbey there. He joined the court of King Athelstan, but after an intrigue he was expelled and became a hermit in holy orders and learned all manner of crafts, including metalwork, illumination and needlework, at all of which he excelled. In 939, Athelstan was succeeded by his half-brother Edmund, who recalled Dunstan to the Wessex court and then made him Abbot of Glastonbury. The monastic life in England had fallen into some degree of laxity, and Dunstan took steps to revive it and restore the Benedictine rule, teaching the monks to practise useful crafts. Later, under King Edgar, he became Bishop of Worcester in 957, of London in 959, and then Archbishop of Canterbury in 960. His programme of reform was spread to cover the whole country, and many new monasteries were founded. King Edgar died in 975, but Dunstan survived the anti-monastic backlash and gradually withdrew from court life to concentrate on music and his other artistic skills - he was an accomplished harpist and wrote several fine hymns - and to encourage the development of the school for the monks at Canterbury. Dunstan died in 988 and is now the Patron Saint of Goldsmiths. His feast day falls on 19th May, and one could say that all his achievements were carried out under the banner of the Wyvern of Wessex.

The Griffin on the cover is taken from a photograph of a mural design in Salzburg in Austria, snapped by Roger Seabury, to whom our thanks are due.

FEEDBACK

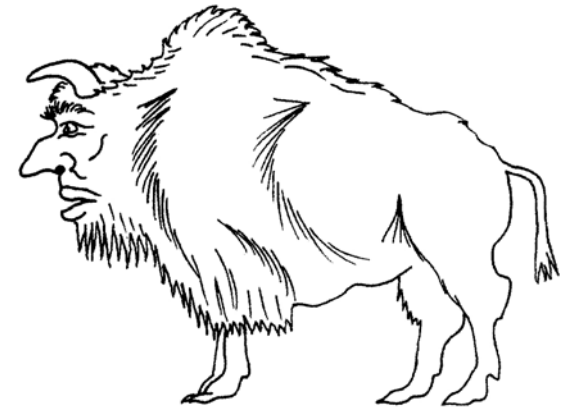
Apropos “The Sea-Dog that never was” in No 42, Darren George has written to point out that Garter Cole, in his 1976 review of the book by Rodney Dennys (*The Coat of Arms*, No 98), had already noted this error of interpretation and illustrated both the supposed monster and its evident origin. (It was in this same piece that Cole proposed that the proper name for the so-called “Male Griffin” should be **Keythong**.) In fact, Tony Jones did not

Another way of combining Man and Bull is seen in the Bucentaur. This has the upper part of a man, from the waist up, replacing the head and neck of a bull, giving a six-limbed creature, like the regular Centaur but with a bovine rather than equine body (*see right*). Not unknown in the ancient Middle East, it seems to have been used as a gate-guardian, as a kind of wingless Lamussu, but apparently did not travel to Greece. Unlike the Griffin, neither the Minotaur nor the Bucentaur have been taken up into heraldry, perhaps because the Griffin was seen to represent all that was noble, which implied that its complementary creature stood for just the opposite qualities. Or perhaps they just did not travel well. In any case, now that superstition no longer rules as it did, and originality is everywhere being sought, we may hope to see these beasts taking their place alongside the more usual heraldic monsters.



There is one modern monster that comes close to these ancient creatures. Darren George, who has written on the Mad Menagerie and has often been quoted in these pages, was instrumental in founding the Prairie Branch of the Royal Heraldry Society of Canada, and started a Critter Contest in the pages of their Branch Journal, “The Prairie Tressure,” to which he has contributed some critters of his own invention - or discovery. The Manicon, drawn here by Graham Scott (*right*), has a man's face on

the body of a bison, and since the bison is a close relative of the bull, it thus compares well with Rubens' Minotaur. Darren claims that this beast actually appeared in the 1905 grant of arms to the Province of Manitoba. Although the blazon is *Vert on a rock a bison statant proper, on a chief Argent a cross Gules*, examination of the accompanying picture clearly shows a man's face on the front of the animal. I can confirm that this is the case, and had always



supposed that the artist at the College of Arms who illustrated the grant had never seen a bison and just used his imagination, but Darren suggests that he may well have known about the Manicon and thought it would be an appropriate opportunity to let him see the light. Further examples of these prairie critters will appear in due course.

such creatures survived to coexist with humans, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that early human beings discovered some of these giant fossils and tried to reconstruct the kind of animals they had been, using known creatures as models - hence the hybrid of eagle and lion. Once imagined, griffins could have passed into folklore and mythology, and thence assumed symbolic importance.

Now it seems that in the ancient Mesopotamian zodiac, the constellation that we know as Scorpio was known as the Eagle, which, with the Lion, stood at two of the cardinal points of the heavens. Thus the symbol of the Griffin covered half the cycle of the year, embracing the warm months of summer and autumn. The cardinal points in the other half, covering the cold months of winter and spring, were represented by the other two beings known as the Waterman and the Bull. These four figures played a significant part in the mythology of the ancient Middle East, reappear in the Revelation of St John, and are today best known as the emblems of the four Evangelists. If Lion and Eagle combine in the Griffin, then Man and Bull come together in the Minotaur.

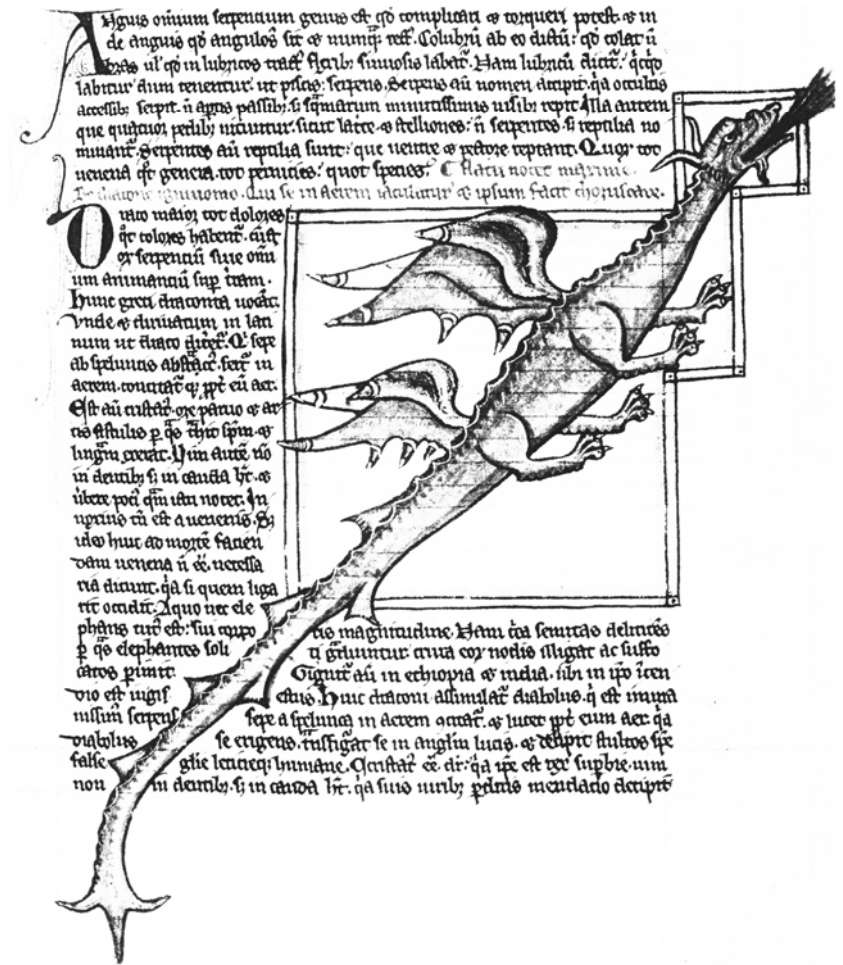
Although Man and Bull may be combined in various ways (see, for instance, the Lamussu in No 43) the type best known to us is shown as a man's body with a bull's head, as used by the Greeks to illustrate the story of Theseus (*seen here on an Athenian jar of c 480 BC*). This example has a bull's tail, and other versions give him the rear legs of a bull, or sometimes just his cloven hooves, but there is a completely different interpretation of the beast, as seen in Rubens' little painting of



“Daedalus and the Minotaur” which was stolen from a Spanish art gallery, along with its companion piece of “Aurora,” and later, following some meticulous police work in Europe and America, was recovered and restored to its proper home. This Minotaur, as painted by Rubens, has the body and head of a small bull, but with a man's face. It made a good story on the television, but we have not been able to get a copy of the picture.

claim that his re-identification was original, and if our wording was ambiguous and implied that he had done, then apologies are due. (See *Heraldry in Glamorgan: Mid and West Glamorgan No 1, The Abbey Church of St Mary, Margam, and Margam Castle* by Anthony L Jones, Cowbridge 1993, pp 55-56.)

A Most Peculiar Dragon



This curious creature was sent in by Tony Jones, who found it in a bestiary. Evidently the artist felt that its very long serpentine body could not be kept aloft by the usual pair of wings, so he gave it a supplementary set.

Some More Scots Monsters

In the bookplate department, we have already seen the handwork of Mark Dennis (No 29), but here is his own bookplate, drawn for him by Gordon Macpherson. The delightful beast that forms the crest is an Opinicus, and is described as “Gules feathered and semee of ermine spots Or, armed and langued Azure.” We know that the Opinicus is in fact an early form of Griffin, and was the usual form in classical Roman times, but when in the Middle Ages the eagle nature of the front end of the Griffin spread downwards to encompass the fore limbs, the English heralds then decided that this older form with all four legs in the lion mode should be renamed, though the origin of the new name remains something of an etymological mystery.



To return to Mark's own artistry, this kind of mini-griffin (*on the left*) is his own invention, which he has named the **Robilyon**. He presented it to Robin Blair, the Lord Lyon King of Arms, who has a robin redbreast as his personal crest and a lion as his crest of office, so this new hybrid neatly combines his two roles. We are told that it is “a creature of the heraldic hedgerows.”

Mark has also sent in a fine picture of “St George and the Dragon” from a 15th century French Book of Hours in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, which is full of the most marvellous details. It shows the same scene as the picture by Raphael in No 32, page 4, with the

mounted Saint preparing to take a swipe with his sword while his broken lance lies on the ground, having pierced the dragon's neck. Naturally, the dragon is somewhat cowed and the maiden not in the least perturbed while her parents watch from the castle walls, and all set in an intriguing landscape. We cannot reproduce the whole picture, but here at least is the dragon (*see below*).



The Griffin and the Minotaur - A Complementary Pair

The Griffin first appears in the ancient Middle East, and there is a theory that it arose from early attempts to make sense of some partially recovered skeletal parts of dinosaurs such as the well-known *Triceratops*, or perhaps its close relative, the *Protoceratops* whose fossils were found in Central Asia where stories of griffins were first reported. These had a beaked nose and a neck-frill and horns whose broken remains might have suggested ears or wings (or both), as well as four legs like a lion though much larger (*see the Triceratops skull, right*). Of course there were no humans around at the time dinosaurs roamed the earth alive, and it is impossible to believe that any

