

Two Chinese Dragons in Confrontation

This cartoon from the Toronto *Globe & Mail* of 25 October 2004 (courtesy of John Wilkes, our host at that time) depicts the threat by the People's Republic of China to swallow up the island of Taiwan and prevent it from becoming independent. Oddly enough, the little island, which has become very prosperous, sees itself as the true heir to a united China, but does not wish to submit to what they see as the oppressive regime holding the mainland. Since the true nature of Chinese dragons is traditionally to be docile and helpful to mankind, it is to be hoped that this threatening posture is mere show, and that peace and calm will bring about an acceptable solution to the conflict.



A Standpoint

The true nature of Dragons is spiritual; that is to say, they exist in the mind or in the imagination, and were never zoological specimens. So why does the press use the term for every newly discovered fossil creature? *The Daily Telegraph* for Friday, 24 September 2004 had the headline "The dragon that was a sucker for seafood diet" to cover an article about *Dinocephalosaurus orientalis*, which it called a Chinese sea dragon that lived more than 230 million years ago, though in the picture, drawn by Carin L. Cain, it looked more like the Loch Ness monster. Then again, in the issue for Thursday, 14 October 2004 a headline said "Chinese dragon caught napping after 130m years" with a photograph of the curled up *Mei long* fossil and a drawing by Mick Ellison of a reconstruction of 'the sleeping dragon.' We suspect that Roger Highfield, the Telegraph's Science Editor, has a soft spot for dragons, but he is not the only transgressor. "Dragon" is certainly a better headline-grabber than "Terrible-headed lizard from the East," so perhaps we shall have to get used to it.

And it's not only fossils...



This largest of all living lizards, from Komodo in the East Indies, is not a dragon. (More about this in a later issue.)

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Dragonlore

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A Unicorn for Scotland and a Dragon for Wales:

Two coin patterns designed for the Royal Mint by Timothy Noad.



The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

We welcome new members Lesley Holt and John Uncles.

St Cecilia was a Roman virgin who converted to Christianity and was martyred, still singing. She is now the patron saint of musicians, and Purcell's Ode to her is one of his loveliest pieces of music. Purcell wrote many odes, operas and masques, *Dido and Aeneas* and *King Arthur* among them. Had he written one for *St George*, he would undoubtedly have done some dramatic music for the Dragon.

The Scottish Unicorn and Welsh Dragon on the cover are from a set of four designs, the other two being a Hart's head for Northern Ireland and a crowned Lion's face for England, that Timothy Noad submitted for a new series of pound coins. They were not selected (we are getting bridges instead) but have been produced as a set of silver pattern coins for the benefit of collectors, and may be acquired from the Royal Mint Coin Club, FREEPOST SWC4207, PO Box 500, Pontyclun CF72 8WP.

There have recently been a few citations of *Dragonlore* in other journals. Our pieces on the Basilisk and Cockatrice from Nos 19 & 20 have been reprinted in *The Heraldic Craftsman* No 49, for September 2004, whilst *Heraldry in Canada* for Autumn 2004 (Vol 38, No 3) has an article by Eric Saumure which quotes from No 48 about HMCS Griffin and then goes on to expand on the theme, with a picture of the badge of the current HMCS Griffin (see right) on the cover (in colour, blazoned *Argent a griffin Azure seme de lis Or armed and beaked Gules*).



Eric then writes about ships' badges in general, but gives one more example of interest to us, involving a new hybrid creature. The badge of the minesweeper HMCS Comox, which was named after a bay on Vancouver Island and served from 1954 to 1957, was a rebus on the name, and showed a black ox's head sporting a red coxcomb (see left). Following the principal of the transference of names, this beast could properly be called after the ship, itself called after the bay, giving rise to the next item. The bay itself is said to derive its name from an Indian word meaning "plenty" or "abundance."



Two contrasting Griffins

This splendid drawing (*on the right*) is the crest of The Hon William Charles Wentworth MP, kindly sent in by David Krause.



In contrast, this odd creature (*below, left*), with its small wings and lack of ears, is the Royal Beast of King Edward III, anachronistically holding a shield bearing the badge of the House of Windsor. The artist, TW or WT, is not known to us, but it is a fine balanced composition all the same. The postcard, published by English Life, Derby, was sent in immemorably.

Two Curious Creatures



A Chinese phoenix from a porcelain tea-set. Unlike the Egyptian phoenix, the Chinese variety has some features in common with the peacock, a native of India, with its relatively long neck, short wings and very long tail feathers, as well as the strange little crest feathers on its head, also seen on the heraldic phoenix. Note that in heraldry a peacock is almost always shown with its tail erect, a feature not recorded for a phoenix.

A Manticor from a tile found in Ludlow Castle and now in the town museum. Some ancient lions were drawn with very human faces, but still with manes, but this one has a human head, not just a face, so must be the hybrid creature. Thanks to Roger Seabury for drawing this to our attention.



ADDITION to the A to Z

Comox – a hybrid of Cock and Ox, this bovine creature sported a red cock's comb, and as far as is known was found only in Canada. The last known specimen departed in the direction of Turkey, but lost its identity on the way.

More fabulous beasts from Canada

While visiting the city of Hamilton in Ontario, a trip was made to see the preserved Tribal class destroyer HMCS Haida, which has been carefully restored to the condition it was in at the close of the Korean War, in which it served with distinction. Named after a West Coast Indian tribe (or First Nation, as they say nowadays), its badge shows a two-headed Thunderbird from their native art-work (*see right*). This totem raises the question as to whether these artists thought that they were portraying a double-headed monster, or whether there were other reasons for the choice. The same query would apply to Byzantine double-headed eagles. Perhaps it was a device to represent rapid movement, as in the two-headed figures drawn in those old advertisements with the slogan, "That's Shell, that was!" Or more likely, it was an artistic convention to show both sides of the head on a single figure, thus also preserving symmetry, which may have been important. We too have conventions which those brought up in a different culture may find difficult to appreciate. It is said that when the Chinese first saw European portraits, they asked whether our people actually had one side of the face darker than the other, and when given the explanation, could not understand why an ephemeral effect of the light should be recorded permanently in a portrait. Double-headed birds, then, may not have been intended originally as monsters, but it is fair to say that over the years they have become so, and we are justified in including them in our fabulous bestiaries.



(As an aside, it was mentioned in the last issue that a two-headed eagle was used in a new regimental cap-badge as an emblem of Mercia, even though there is no evidence that the ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdom used such a device. There is another possible reason for its use. Territorial Army regiments are usually affiliated to a Regular Army unit, and often show such a connection in their badge. One or more of these Midland Yeomanry regiments may have been linked to 1st King's Dragoon Guards, whose badge was in fact the arms of their one-time Colonel-in-Chief, the Emperor Francis Joseph II of Austria, displayed on a double-headed eagle (see right). It is therefore possible that this monstrous bird is not an Anglo-Saxon totem but the Imperial Eagle of Austria, derived ultimately from the Byzantine Empire. More historical research is needed.)



Now back to Canada...

Taken from the Canadian Book of Remembrance, 1914-1918, kept in Ottawa, this picture of St George and the Dragon has the Saint on a white charger attacking a dark blue beast with golden breast-plates and claws and a red tongue, in the original painting by Allan Beddoe (*below*).



Finally, from Vernon, B.C., *The Morning Star* for 25 July 2004 reports “**Ogopogo sightings on the rise**. The north end of Okanagan Lake is becoming a hotbed of activity for Ogopogo watchers. There have been three reports of something mysterious in the Newport Beach-Fintry area since mid-May—the first sightings on the entire lake in more than a year.” Several local people, some hopeful and some sceptical, are quoted, including a young lady and her twelve-year-old daughter, who said, “We saw the head of something. It was kind of between a cow and a dinosaur. It was slimy, fish-like. It was gliding across the water, kind of shy.” Later, they heard some violent splashing coming from the lake. “We saw three humps just out of the water,” they said. “At first I thought it was my imagination but it was something. I won’t say it was Ogopogo but it wasn’t normal. There’s definitely something out there.” Afterwards, she said, “I’ve got my camera ready but I haven’t seen anything since.”

Another sighting was from a couple in a boat, who would not reveal their names. They recounted how their depth finder went crazy, then looking out, they saw a black object about eight feet long and five feet wide that broke the water and began to rock the boat, freaking them out. A local researcher said, “You can’t help but believe them because they are so sincere,” but she admitted that she still meets people who are sceptical. “If they disbelieve and chose to do so, that’s fine, but if you ever experience it, you never forget,” she said.

(Our thanks to Darren George for sending this clipping.)

LAMUSSU ON A BOOKPLATE

(Brian North Lee, the bookplate expert, has kindly sent in the following example of the art, together with its accompanying note.)



A number of ex-libris depict fabulous beasts, but few are as well designed as the one which Phiroze Randeria (1924-2001) used. It was engraved on copper by Henry Wilkinson. Phiroze was a doctor, Persian by birth but long resident in London, and he described the composition thus: “The motif is ancient Persian, combining features from the palace of Cyrus the Great at Persepolis. Between the two columns is the ‘Farohar’ signifying the holy spirit, below which are two sphinxes. On either side of the columns are figures of the guardians of the gate, upper half human, lower half of a bull. The motto in the ancient Pehlavi language is HUMATA (good thoughts), HUKHTA (good words) HUVERESHTA (good deeds).” Not being an expert in such matters, I suspect that all four beasts are basically lamussu, the outer ones half-bull, the inner ones half-lion, as commented on in *Dragonlore* No 43. At any rate, they display nobility, panache, and the capacity to evoke an ancient civilization by motifs intrinsic to it. It also inspires thoughts of such as Ozymandias and long extinct kingdoms.

Brian North Lee

(The engraving is certainly rather fine. One might also note the push-me-pull-you lions on the tops of the columns. Many thanks for this.)