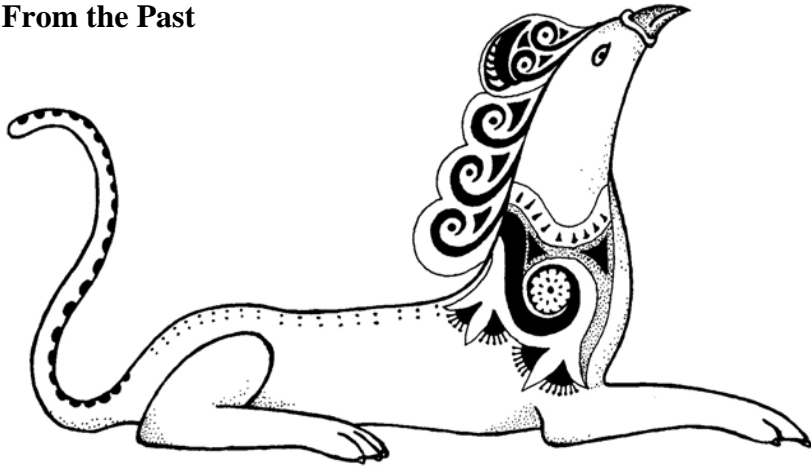


“Enter the Dragon”



This fearsome creature, *Varanus komodoensis* to zoologists and ‘ora’ to native people in its homeland, has been in the news lately because a specimen recently imported to the London Zoo died in amorous circumstances, trying to climb a wall to reach its mate. An excellent article in *Night & Day* (24 December 2004) by Rose Shepherd, under the heading “Enter the dragon,” made it clear that this fierce-looking animal is “not a mythical fire-breathing monster” but a rare zoological species that deserves careful scientific study, and described its nature, background and prospects. Some other press features gave details of its horrible habits on Komodo and a few neighbouring islands in the East Indies, but despite its misappropriated name, this largest of all the living lizards is **NOT A DRAGON**.

From the Past



Note that this Griffin from Minoan Crete has no wings.

Issued 26 December 2004 by Ralph Brocklebank, Orland, Church Avenue, Clent, Stourbridge, DY9 9QS
STOP PRESS - This is the day of the great Indian Ocean flood disasters.

Dragonlore

The Journal of The College of Dracology

Number 55

St Stephen's Day 2004



An illustration from *The Gruffalo's Child* by Axel Scheffler



The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

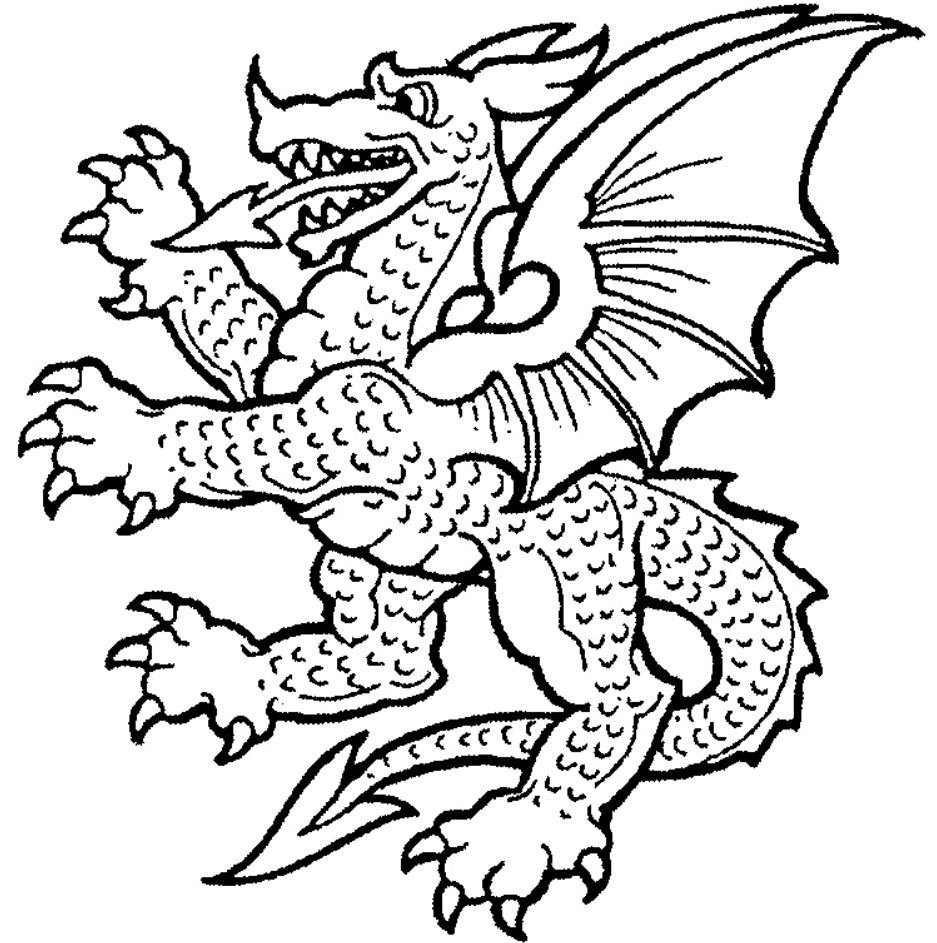
St Stephen was the first Christian Martyr and his Feast, on the Day after Christmas, is best remembered as the time that Good King Wenceslaus looked out. The peasant seen gathering winter fuel, who lived hard against the forest fence, my well have been in some danger, as it was well known that the forests of Bohemia were full of fierce wild creatures, including werewolves and wyverns.

The picture on the cover is taken from the long-awaited sequel to one of the most popular children's picture books ever published, *The Gruffalo*, by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler (London, 1999) very much after the style of Maurice Sendak (see No 24). This is the story, told in simple rhyming couplets and embellished with enchanting pictures using bold outlines and clear subtle colours, of a mischievous mouse alone in a great forest who keeps meeting animals who want to eat him – a fox, an owl and a snake. He has to use every trick and deceit he can think of to outwit them, and invents a huge monster to scare them off. He is then surprised to find that this monster actually exists, exactly as he had imagined it, and described it to his would-be predators, with “terrible tusks and terrible claws, and terrible teeth in his terrible jaws. He has knobbly knees, and turned-out toes, and a poisonous wart at the end of his nose. His eyes are orange, his tongue is black, he has purple prickles all over his back.” The Gruffalo then too begins to threaten him until he finds a way of deceiving it so that he can make his escape. Children love the story, and want to have it read to them over and over again until they know it by heart. The new book, *The Gruffalo's Child* (London, 2004) seems likely to become another classic. No mere ephemeral fantasy, the Gruffalo deserves to be added to our store of Fabulous Beasts.

Another intriguing book of stories for children is *The Salamander Tales*, written and illustrated by Fred Gettings (Floris Books, Edinburgh, 1981). There are only two kinds of story, it starts, those told to pass the time and those told to hide a meaning. Gnomes are only interested in the latter kind, and these stories are written as if by gnomes for gnomes. Much hangs on the four types of elemental beings, gnomes, undines, sylphs and salamanders (see *Dragonlore No 25, p 7*) and the salamanders turn into rather engaging little dragons (see right) which feature in several of the stories. The



A Sad Tale by Alexander Troblov



*He dreamt of conducting a symphony,
To perform on the grand piano!
He wanted to dive into poetry,
And study one day at Milano.
He felt, to be sure, an artistic call,
But then came St George and ruined it all.*

(The identity of the artist/author is clear to one who once was Haplar Knabelkcorb.)



Perhaps a couple of Unicorns did get on to the Ark after all, and then lost the plot...

This reminds me of my mother's favourite joke (she was a mathematician):

Noah was walking around some time after they landed, and seeing two snakes sobbing bitterly, asked them what was wrong. "You see," said the snakes, "God told us to go forth and multiply, and we can't, because we're adders!" Noah comforted them, and told them to seek shelter in the woodpile. After a while, passing that way again, he saw the snakes with a lot of little ones, and said, "I see you managed to multiply, then!" "Oh, yes!" said the adder, "It's easy with logs!"

(The young, with their calculators but no tables of logarithms, just don't get it!)

An Air Force Dragon

We have had rather a lot of ships' badges lately, so here is another of Roland Symons' precisely drawn RAF badges, this one for 63 Group Headquarters, known as Western and Wales Group (hence the sunset and the Dragon – what else?). Formed in 1946, its badge was granted in 1952. (Had not St Edward's crown been adopted by then?)



From the Classical Art World



This small *Study of a Dragon Pierced by a Lance* by Il Guercino (properly Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, 1591-1666, an Italian painter of the Bolognese School, nicknamed "The Squinter") has recently been on display in London (*Country Life*, 1st July 2004) and was probably intended to form part of a scene featuring St George. Note that the wings seem to be feathered bird's wings rather than the bat-like variety.

hidden meanings cover such profound matters as the origin of the world and the creatures in it, but in such an imaginative way that children are entranced. Gettings is probably better known for his many books on symbolism, occult art and so forth, but this little collection is a real gem of apparently amusing innocence.

BOOK REVIEW

A Christmas present from Una Lewers, the book **Dr Ernest Drake's WORKING WITH DRAGONS. A Course in Dragonology**, edited by Dugald A. Steer BA (Dorking, 2004), is a follow-up to the magnificent volume reviewed in No 40. The new work is again illustrated by Wayne Anderson, with his marvellously convoluted and highly imaginative dragons, and with help too from Douglas Carrel and Helen Ward, and the many creatures depicted, not only dragons, but an original take on the Basilisk and the Cockatrice, show great ingenuity and attention to detail. Here is one example:-



In No 52 we asked what an African dragon would look like. Dr Drake reports that the only dragons to be found in Africa and Arabia are giant Wyverns, which are larger than any other dragons (up to 50ft long and 20ft high) and are not found anywhere else. No mention is made of the modest little Wyverns of Wessex, nor that similar creatures were found throughout Northern Europe before the four-legged varieties started to appear around the beginning of the fifteenth century. Likewise, the winged but legless Amphitere is said to be the dragon form exclusive to the Americas,

perhaps suggested by Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent of the Aztecs, overlooking the Natiaka, Piasa, Kitchi-atuisis, Weewilmekq and the more recently described Chucacabras (*see No 45*) which are all somewhat dragon-like, as well as ignoring the fact that Amphiteres were reported from Mediterranean regions in classical times. But perhaps Dr Drake would have asserted that he only reports what he sees, and does not give much credence to unreliable mediaeval accounts!

One rather unusual picture is this drawing (*right*) said to be of an amulet carved by Vikings on meteoric iron called “skystone,” and used to bring down a magic hail of stones on their unfortunate victims. There is a wealth of advice on the use of magic, lucky charms, spells, talismans and runic writings, with the warning that most scientific dragonologists find magic dubious and downright dangerous. Other advice covers the technique of hatching dragon’s eggs, first aid for poorly dragons, how to draw dragons, inventing secret dragon scripts and forming your own Dragonological Society. This last we may already have done, and secret scripts were among our schoolday pleasures (*see samples below*), while many of our members are already adept at drawing dragons. Yet Dr Drake and his Editor, Dugald Steer, even though they may not always be quite correct historically, deserve commendation for their great enthusiasm and, above all, for their concern for the welfare of dragons.



W W E T A V E I N O W W E S S T E X A N D E

W W E A R E N O W E R Y B I G

Wyvern’s cuneiform script

F T H U U C Z M W L W K O V H O W Z C X U

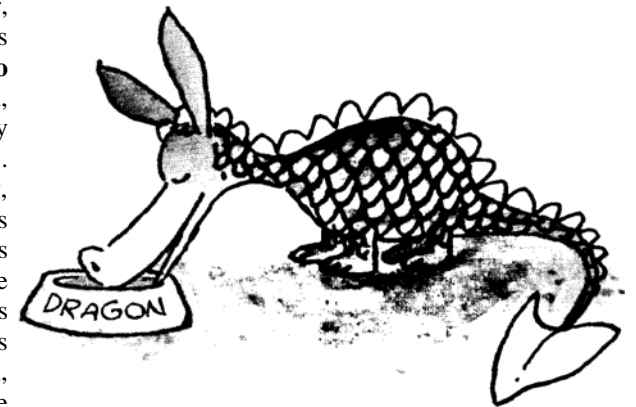
Hippogriff’s bilateral hieratic script

Dugald Steer has also produced a fantastically fascinating book on **EGYPTOLOGY** (Dorking, 2004) which must have provided quite a few fun-filled Christmas presents. It purports to be the long-lost diary of Miss Emily Sands, who set off in 1926 to find

the legendary lost tomb of Osiris, but in passing gives an excellent introduction to ancient Egyptian history, monuments and mythology. Those strange human-bodied but animal-headed figures that represented their gods are well featured - the jackal-headed Anubis, ibis-headed Thoth, hawk-headed Horus – but it is generally agreed that these should not be reckoned as fabulous beasts. Perhaps the crocodile-headed hippopotamus Ammat, the devourer of wicked souls, might be counted. The only animal-headed human that is accepted as a fabulous beast is the bull-headed Minotaur, from Greek mythology, which was defeated by the cunning Athenian prince Theseus, maybe in a metaphor for the replacement of the old god-centred culture of the Bronze Age with the new Iron Age civilization based on the intellect. But for those devoted to ancient Egypt, Dugald Steer’s new book is an entertaining treasure-house, full of fanciful but fact-based information.

Wayne Anderson had also written and illustrated a book of his own, **DRAGON** (London, 1992), which tells the story of a strange young creature hatched from an egg that was accidentally dropped into the sea, who sets out to seek his mother and find his true identity. After a series of encounters in which he discovers that he is not a fish, nor an insect, nor a bird, nor a snake, and not even a crocodile, he meets a young boy who has a book on dragonlore, and guides him to the land where his mother dwells. She recognizes him and names him, “Dragon!” Unfortunately, the superb pictures are too delicately ethereal for us to reproduce with the means at our disposal, but the story is a delight, just what children love.

Yet another, still older, children’s book that has come our way is **There’s No Such Thing as a Dragon**, with story and pictures by Jack Kent (London, 1984). It tells of a friendly, mischievous but wingless dragon (*right*) which turns up unexpectedly in a little boy’s house. Because his mother tells him that there is no such thing as a dragon, he feels that he has to ignore it. In response, the dragon grows larger and larger until he is running round the town with the house on his back, the boy and his mother still inside. Only when father comes home, and they recognize the dragon for what he is, does he shrink back to a manageable kitten-sized pet. “I don’t mind dragons *this* size,” said Mother, “Why did it have to grow so *big*?”



“I’m not sure,” said the boy, “but I think it just wanted to be noticed.” From this final sentence, it is clear that this is a story with a hidden meaning, a moral, but it is good fun all the same.