

# PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

## Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

OCTOBER 1915—MAY 1916

WITH

### Communications

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PROCEEDINGS AND COMMUNICATIONS



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VOL. XX.



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## ANIMALS IN MEDIAEVAL SCULPTURE.

By G. C. DRUCE, F.S.A.

Abstract of a Lecture delivered February 28, 1916.

The number of carvings of animals, both in stone and wood, still existing in our churches is very large. Many of them are of a curious character, and would be difficult to account for without reference to the sources from which they were derived. The evidence points to the carvers having worked chiefly from pictures and not from natural models, recomposing the subjects according to their needs. Many of the creatures which they depicted were either fabulous, or so rare that they were not likely to have seen them.

Of the many sources from which the carvers borrowed, an important one was undoubtedly the illustrated bestiaries, which were very popular in the Middle Ages, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They contain many pictures of animals, birds and reptiles. The texts describe their nature and habits, and the religious or moral lessons founded upon them, the latter being supported by numerous quotations from the Bible. The descriptions and much of the symbolism were gathered from the writings of earlier theologians and commentators, such as Gregory, Isidore, and Rabanus, who in their turn had borrowed largely from classical writers on zoology. That these books were used by the carvers is clear from the many correspondences which exist, and in this respect stress was laid on the importance of the twelfth century doorway at Aine in Yorkshire (Plate XIII) which retains part of a series of sculptured animals and birds, to which titles are applied which agree with the titles of similar animals in the Latin bestiaries. The carvings in common with the miniatures show many errors in drawing and anatomy, and this, coupled with conventional treatment, often renders identification difficult, if not impossible. There are however cases in which some striking natural feature, such as the camel's hump or the peacock's tail, enables this to be

done. As regards domestic animals, there is greater approximation to nature as we should expect.

Of the fabulous animals the Unicorn was the first dealt with. It is found in two forms both in the bestiaries and in architecture, one being a large animal "with the body of a horse," passing under its Greek name of *Monoceros* according to the description in Pliny and Solinus, and the other a small animal with the title "*Rinoceros vel Unicornis*," said to be "like a kid." It appears in the well-known Unicorn and Virgin legend. In the mss. these creatures are variously drawn, but in carving both usually approximate to a horse. There are however exceptions, as upon a misericord in Ely Cathedral, where the Unicorn of the legend resembles a calf and is cloven-footed. Of *Monoceros* there are good instances in woodwork at Westwell (Kent) and in Durham Castle Chapel, and of the Unicorn of the legend at Strassburg (in stone), Boston, Chester and elsewhere. The story of its capture by the agency of the girl signified the Incarnation and the capture and death of our Lord at the hands of the Jews.

The Griffin is the most frequently met with of the bestiary animals, as the Siren is of the "birds." It either stands alone, or grasps a man or another animal in its claws, or is fighting with a man or animal. The bestiary says it is hostile to horses and tears men to pieces, episodes of which full advantage was taken by both artists and carvers, but it was pointed out that where its opponent is a knight in armour, the source may have been Alexander's Romance, on account of the great fight with the Griffins therein described, in which so many of Alexander's men were slain. The Griffin is a type of the Devil. Examples were illustrated from the font at Risby (Suffolk) and misericords in Chester and Norwich Cathedrals (Plate XIV, fig. 1), with corresponding scenes from the bestiaries (Plate XVI, fig. 1).

The Hippopotamus or river-horse was a difficult subject for both artists and carvers. As they were not well acquainted with its form they had to compose it as well as they could from the description, which was taken from Pliny and Solinus. Illustrations in bestiaries are few, but the miniatures in the Westminster Bestiary and kindred mss. show it as semi-horse



Fig. 1. Griffin, Norwich Cathedral.

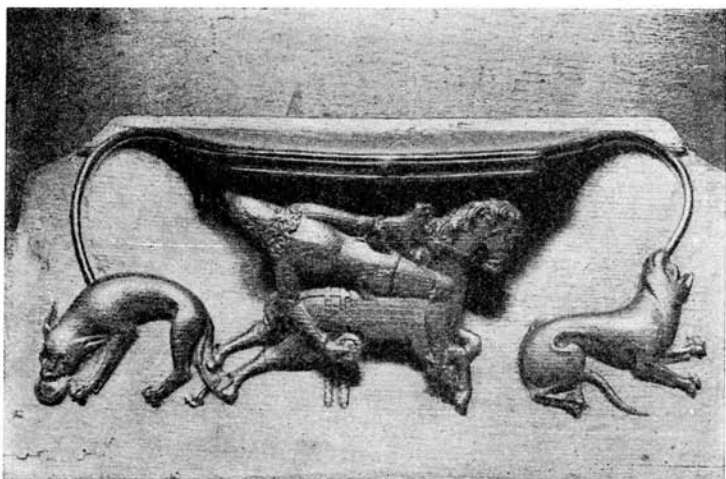



Fig. 2. Tiger and Mirror, Chester Cathedral.





**T**igeris uocata  
 propter uolucere  
 fugam. ita enim  
 nominant p̄se gre  
 ti ⁊ medi sagitta.  
 Est enim bestia uariis  
 distincta mirabilis uirtute  
 ⁊ uelocitate mirabilis. ex  
 cuius nomine suum tigris  
 appellat. qd' ⁊ rapidissi  
 mus sit om̄i suorum. has  
 magis hircama gignit.  
 Tigris ū ubi uacuum rap  
 te sobolis repperit cubile.  
 ilico raptiuis uehigit in  
 Solinus cap. 27.



ficit. Ac ille q̄ritur equo uectus fugat. indens t̄ uelocitate fere se pos  
 se p̄t. nec euadendi ullū subiectū. s̄ posse subleuare. t̄c̄a huiusmodi frau  
 de molitur. Ubi se conuigū uidetur. sp̄a de uirtute p̄t. Ac illa imagine

uent m  
 go de  
 uirt  
 erit des  
 m  
 um tra  
 aralus  
 isa. ad  
 uert op  
 m̄sala  
 uirtute  
 p̄m̄m̄.  
 p̄p̄m̄.  
 Te quod  
 p̄p̄m̄  
 leant de  
 p̄h̄m̄.  
 de r̄m̄

Tiger and Mirror. MS. add. 11283 (B.M.).

semi-dragon. It appears upon a misericord in St George's Chapel with four legs (Plate XVII, fig. 1), but otherwise has the cloven feet, boar's tusks, mane and horse tail of the bestiary. It is perhaps more naturally formed on a poppy head at Eynesbury. No symbolism is attached to it in the bestiaries, but Alexander Neckam makes an attempt to identify it with deceitful persons, on account of its recorded habit of proceeding backwards into the cornfields to feed.

One of the most attractive of the stories illustrated in the bestiaries is that of the Tiger and Mirror, but the scene is curiously scarce in churches, the only example at present forthcoming being upon a misericord in Chester Cathedral. The tigress is so fierce a creature that to obtain its cubs is a most dangerous operation, and can only be successfully carried out by a trick. The hunter waits until the tigress leaves her den, then goes in and takes the cubs, and rides off as fast as he can with them. He is pursued by the tigress, and is being rapidly overtaken when he drops a mirror of glass, which causes her to stop and gaze in it. Thinking that she has found her cub, she proceeds to fondle it, but realizing that she has been deceived, she resumes the pursuit, when the same manœuvre is repeated, and so the hunter gains a place of safety. There are many fine miniatures of this scene in the bestiaries (Plate XV). Sometimes the hunter is on foot and seems to be in no hurry to depart, being apparently overcome by curiosity. The carving at Chester (Plate XIV, fig. 2) shows the hunter in mail on a horse, carrying a cub and in the act of dropping a circular mirror. For the sake of symmetry the tiger is duplicated, one of them holding a mirror in its mouth. The symbolism is given in a French ms. in the Arsenal Library, Paris. The tiger is man, the cub his soul, the hunter is the devil who throws the temptations of the world in man's way and so steals away his soul. The symbolism is omitted in the Latin bestiaries inspected by the lecturer, but it should be noted that Gregory in his *Moralia* makes the tiger with its spots a type of hypocrites "spotted with their vices." It is quite possible that some of the beasts which occur singly in carving are tigers.

The Hyaena appears on the doorway at Alne, but if it were



not for its title it could not be identified. It is biting some object, probably a bone or limb of a corpse. A later and much finer example is to be seen on a misericord at Carlisle, where the hyaena, with long ears and pronounced hog-mane, is biting a corpse. The miniatures in the bestiaries usually show it, similarly hog-maned, dragging a corpse out of an ornamental tomb. A gruesome rendering of the subject appears in one of the MSS. of the British Museum (Plate XVI, fig. 2). At Carlisle the tomb has been omitted. Suppression of detail in this way is common, for it was not possible to include everything that could be drawn with pen and ink. Among the items of information repeated in the bestiaries from classical sources is one that the hyena is male and female in alternate years. This is made use of in the early twelfth century bestiary of Philip de Thaun to indicate "a double-minded man, who is covetous and luxurious, and who imitates the ways of a changeable woman when he should be firm"; but in the Latin versions the hyena is a type of the Jews, who first served God and then gave themselves up to luxury and idolatry.

Camels occur in woodwork and sometimes approximate to the natural animal. They have either one or two humps. Good examples may be seen at Ufford (Suffolk), Swaffham Bulbeck and Boston. The last is so well drawn that it suggests a natural model, but it is accompanied by a quite impossible crocodile, which is clearly by the same hand, and so it was probable that the carver was working from a good picture. A very quaint camel may be seen on a misericord at Faversham.

Camels are regularly illustrated and described in the Latin bestiaries, besides frequently appearing in Old Testament scenes in other MSS. Solinus was the main source of information, and a curious mistake of his as to the number of humps on the Arabian and Bactrian camels has come through to the bestiary. Its well-known habits, its pad-like feet, and its capacity for travelling and carrying loads are all described, and upon the last mentioned the symbolism is founded. As it kneels down to receive its load, it is a type of Christ, who humbled himself to bear the sins of the world.

The Dromedary is also described and illustrated. Its



Fig. 1. Griffin and Man. Westminster Chapter Library, MS. 22.



Fig. 2. Hyena biting Corpse of Woman. MS. Harl. 4751 (B.M.).



principal use is for travelling, and one at least of the miniatures shows the rider tied on with straps fore and aft, "so that his limbs should not be dislocated by the pace." A dromedary with rider appears on a late bench-end at Sefton (Lancs.).

Passing to the minor animals the first slide shown was that of a goat rudely carved in an inverted position on the twelfth century font at Thames Ditton. Rejecting the theory that the stone had been reversed, the lecturer sought to identify it with the Ibex, owing to the attitude of the latter in the bestiaries, where it appears leaping down a precipice and alighting on its horns. The symbolism is based on the strength of its horns, and it is therefore a type of "learned men who by the harmony of the two Testaments are wont to treat whatever opposition may be presented to them by a sound and healthy treatment, and who, propped on these two horns, support the truths which they brought to light by the witness of the Old Testament and the Gospel story." A fine carving of an Ibex is to be seen on a stall arm at St Nicholas Church, King's Lynn, conventionally treated.

The next subject dealt with was the Wild Boar, of which there are excellent examples in the Chapterhouse at York, at Clifton Hampden, and Castor, the two last being in the form of hunting scenes. The incident of the hound being ripped up by the boar is well rendered. The bestiaries show similar features. The wild boar, being an untamed and savage beast, became a type of the cruel princes of this world, *Vespasian* and *Titus* being expressly mentioned on account of their persecution of the Jews. The passage in *Ps. lxxx. 13* is quoted.

Of the numerous Fox scenes only one appears to be identified with the bestiaries, namely, where it pretends to be dead in order to catch birds. It appears thus on the doorway at Alne and on misericords at Chester and Nantwich. The details agree closely with the bestiaries. Many stories of the craftiness and tricks of the fox are recounted in the latter, and it naturally became a type of the Devil exercising his wiles to destroy mankind.

The domestic subject of the Cat and Mouse is found at York, Wells, Winchester, Hodnet, and Beverley Minster. In nearly

all cases the cat is grasping the mouse; but in the Chapter-house at York the treatment is exceptional, for the cat and mouse are set in foliage on a cap, the cat eyeing the mouse. The figures on the thirteenth century font at Hodnet (Plate XVIII, fig. 1) are rude but expressive, while those on a misericord at Winchester Cathedral are naturally rendered. In the bestiaries the cat is usually grasping the mouse. Its cleverness and acute sight are mentioned, but there does not appear to be any symbolic meaning attached to it.

Mice are separately described and illustrated, two or three kinds being named. The old story about mice being generated from damp earth is repeated, and Pliny's account of the growth of their livers in the time of full-moon. Some interesting attempts at popular etymology are also to be noted. From its greed and habit of stealing the mouse is a type of gluttons and thieves. The Dormouse on the other hand, from its habit of sleeping in winter, symbolises the slothful man, who refuses to labour, and the passage in Prov. xx. 4 is conveniently introduced to strengthen the moral.

The Squirrel is a scarce creature in architecture, but some excellent examples may be seen on misericords at Winchester and Norwich Cathedrals (Plate XVII, fig. 2) and at Ulm. The composition is practically constant, the squirrel being seated, sometimes on a branch, cracking a nut. Miniatures are also scarce, but occur in bestiaries at Westminster and the University Library, Cambridge, the latter being noteworthy for the charming account given in the text of the squirrel's method of crossing a river in a ship formed out of a leaf or mushroom hollowed out and laden with nuts, its tail serving as a sail. No symbolism is given.

The Hedgehog again is difficult to find in ecclesiastical carving, although more common in heraldry. A pair of them however appear on a misericord in New College Chapel, Oxford, with grapes sticking on their spines, corresponding in this respect closely with the miniatures in the bestiaries. The story, which is based on Pliny's account, tells of the forethought of the hedgehog, which climbs up the vines and knocks off the bunches of grapes (Pliny and a few MSS. speak of apples), then



Fig. 2. Squirrel. Norwich Cathedral.



Fig. 1. Hippopotamus. St George's Chapel.









Fig. 1. Cat and Mouse. Font at Hodnet, Salop.



Fig. 2. Hedgehog and Dogs. Childrey, Berks.

rolls on them and carries them off on its spines to its young ones. It is also careful to have two airholes to its home, and is thus able, by stopping up one or other, to ward off inconvenient draughts. In the Latin bestiaries the hedgehog with its prickles is a type of the sinner full of the sharp thorns of his vices, and is also a type of thieves; but in the French version of Philip de Thaurin it symbolises the Devil, who steals away the soul of man and deprives him of the joy of the life to come. In Queen Mary's Psalter there is an additional scene; the hedgehog is worried by dogs, but the artist has made no effort to render it naturally, as it is not rolled into a ball. The same irregularity appears on a tomb at Childrey (Berks.) (Plate XVIII, fig. 2).

Instances of carelessness on the part of the carvers in reproducing natural features are numerous, and by way of illustration a frog upon a misericord at Edlesborough (Bucks.) was shown which has all four feet webbed. The only excuse that can be suggested is that the carver copied an incorrect picture. Frogs are fully described in the texts of the bestiaries, but the illustrations are commonplace. The symbolism turns upon their croaking. One version says they are the devils of the Apocalypse, otherwise snarling heretics; another says that "by the name of frog are understood the songs of poets, who in empty and inflated rhythm, reminding us of the singing voice of frogs, have launched upon the world their stories of robbery."

In conclusion the lecturer said that from the religious character of the bestiaries, the carvers were amply justified in borrowing the subjects contained in them for church decoration, but caution was necessary in estimating how far the symbolic meaning was in their minds. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was doubtless a factor, but as time went on the symbolic element was less regarded, and the decorative element evidently became paramount. An interesting point too is how far the carvers had opportunities for seeing rare animals. Although visits to this country of such beasts as the elephant recorded by Matthew Paris and the existence of menageries of sorts may have counted for something, it is difficult to believe that the majority of carvers saw much of wild beasts. They

probably found it much more convenient to work from pictures in books.

The lecturer considered that there was a large field of operations open to investigators in the department of ecclesiastical wood carvings. Photographers were numerous, but there was not enough study of the subjects themselves, many of which required explanation.

The Society is indebted to the Royal Archaeological Institute for the loan of the block of the Head of Doorway at Alne; and to the Kent Archaeological Society for the loan of the blocks of the Tiger and Mirror. The illustration of the carving at Childrey is from a photograph by the Rev. A. H. Collins; the remaining illustrations from photographs by Mr Druce.

#### THE HEARTH TAXES FOR THE TOWN OF CAMBRIDGE, A.D. 1664 AND 1674.

Mr EDGAR POWELL, of Reading (B.A., Trinity College), kindly presented to the Society a copy of the Records relating to the Hearth Taxes for the town of Cambridge in the years 1664 and 1674, which he had transcribed from the Lay Subsidy Rolls at the Public Record Office. At the same time Mr Powell sent a paper in which he reviewed the subject.

The Society's funds do not at present admit of the printing and publication of the Records: but with Mr Powell's permission his paper was read at the meeting on the 8th of May, 1916; and his transcript of the Records is to be kept for reference in the Antiquarian Library at the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology.

At the meeting on May 8th, Mr Powell being unable to attend in person, his paper was read by Archdeacon Cunningham, who added a few forewords; and the Rev. W. Greenwood quoted some references to the tax from the Churchwardens' Accounts of St Benet's. The Rev. Dr Stokes has since written some notes pointing out several matters of topographical interest which are incidentally revealed in the Records. These communications are printed below.

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