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Elizabeth Morrison and Larisa Grollemond, eds., *Book of Beasts: The Bestiary in the Medieval World*. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2019. xiv + 339 pp. Notes, appendices, references, illustration credits, index, and *errata* insert. \$85 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978160606590.

Review by Jenny Davis Barnett, The University of Queensland.

Recent trends in critical animal studies, or the animal “turn,” have inspired increased interest in the medieval book of beasts. Bestiaries from the Middle Ages provide insight into human understanding of the relationship between mankind and the natural world. At the origin of medieval bestiaries are the second-century CE *Physiologus* (a Christian didactic text written in Greek containing allegories of beasts, stones, and trees) and textual recensions through the centuries, most notably by Isidore of Seville. [1] Illuminated manuscripts offer a glimpse into the quotidian lives of women and men as they understood medieval Christendom. The beasts that fill these pages act as “memory hooks” as viewers and auditors learn the nature and significance of each animal as an allegorical lesson of orthodox Christian conduct. [2] Just as a dog tongue cures a wound by licking it, so does the priest cure the wounds of sinners through confession and penance. [3] The ubiquity of equine creatures with a long, spiralling horn in contemporary popular culture is just one sign of the enduring legacy of medieval beliefs about the unicorn.

This catalogue, produced to accompany the exhibition *Book of Beasts: The Bestiary in the Medieval World*, on view at the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center, Los Angeles, from May 14 to August 18, 2019, reproduces bestiary manuscripts of the high medieval period and investigates their many roles and enduring legacy from the Middle Ages to the modern day. For the 2019 exhibition, dozens of institutions from across Europe and North America lent to the Getty creating the greatest number of bestiaries ever brought together—one third of all known manuscripts in the world. The title “Book of Beasts” references T. H. White’s seminal 1954 book, the first English translation of a medieval bestiary. [4] The exhibition and catalogue are the first in-depth exploration of bestiary imagery and its inspired works in other media (objects related to the bestiary in concept or iconography). Both emphasise the visual and are object oriented. The catalogue conveys a history and knowledge of the exhibited items to the public. As the editor explains, the catalogue “seeks to explore the multiplicity of roles of the bestiary in medieval culture” (p. 8) and “largely follows the order of the exhibition” (p. 11).

Editor Elizabeth Morrison is Senior Curator of Manuscripts at the J. Paul Getty Museum and a specialist in secular manuscript illumination. Morrison has curated a variety of manuscript exhibitions for the Getty Center: *Imagining the Past in France, 1250–1500*, [Medieval Beasts](#), [The Medieval Bookshelf: From Romance to Astronomy](#), and [Images of Violence in the Medieval World](#). She

is co-editor of the book *Imagining the Past in France: History in Manuscript Painting, 1250–1500* and author of *Beasts: Factual and Fantastic*.^[5] Larisa Grollemond is Assistant Curator in the Manuscripts Department at the Getty Museum. She completed a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania on late-fifteenth-century manuscript culture at the courts of France. Her research interests include the interaction of manuscript and print in the late Middle Ages, hybrid books, late-medieval and Renaissance court culture, and royal patronage of the arts.^[6]

The outward construction of the catalogue mimics an important focus in the exhibition—the objects inspired by bestiaries. Glossy images of lions (often the first animal in bestiaries) adorn the front cover while cloth binding depicting a tapestry (a form inspired by bestiaries) encloses the remaining front, spine, and majority of the back cover. Catalogue contents are presented in four sections, plus appendices, bookended by front and back matter plus an *errata* insert (bibliography and endnotes erroneously omitted from pp. 148-149). The catalogue organises bestiaries by their image programs and vivid colour images are reproduced throughout. In Part One, Morrison provides a succinct and helpful introduction to the medieval bestiary tradition and contemporary successors: “the purpose of this catalogue is no less to celebrate the visual contributions of the medieval bestiary to the history of art than to explore its lasting legacy” (p. 11). A selection of fifteen bestiary animals and associated scripture excerpted from Willene B. Clark’s 2006 text follows.^[7] Part Two, “Exploring the Bestiary,” is divided into two sections. In the first section, on the form and function of bestiaries, Sarah Kay discusses the bestiary of the Latin West in its Latin and vernacular forms that display dependence on the Greek *Physiologus*. Xenia Muratova explains that the bestiary form developed as a textual and visual palimpsest over the centuries and Morrison considers text and image presentation on the page. To research the purpose of bestiaries, Ilya Dines investigates a group of medieval miscellanies. Susan Crane presents a case study of Bodleian Ms. 764 to illustrate the expanding meanings of the bestiary and Georgi Parpulov comments on zoological illustration. In the second section, *Bestiary Reimagined*, Emma Campbell explores bestiaries translated from Latin and Grollemond focuses on the integral role of animal images as bestiary texts evolve for a wider audience. Part Three looks beyond the bestiary; in the first section, *Church and Court*, Meredith Cohen discusses bestiary animal iconography in sacred and secular visual culture beyond the illuminations on items such as historiated capitals, tapestries, and tableware. Christine Sciacca considers the allegory of the lion in the case of a feline aquamanilia. Elizabeth Eisenberg and Melanie Holcomb analyse the roles of the bird Ziz, the ox Behemoth, and the sea creature Leviathan in symbolising the origin and fate of the universe in the Jewish tradition. The second section considers natural history; Emily Steiner writes on the intersection of bestiaries and encyclopaedia in the Middle Ages and Rebecca Hill details the role of beast lore in text-and-image books in Arabic script languages. The influence of bestiaries on medieval *mappae mundi*, world maps often painted on vellum animal skins, is illuminated by Debra Higgs Strickland while Chet Van Duzer traces the reciprocal migration of Monstrous Races in maps and manuscripts. For the Epilogue, Grollemond introduces the ‘modern bestiary’ in a broader sense as any collection of animals (in text, imagery, or both) often detached from allegory or Christian orientation from the early twentieth century to the current day. This is followed by images of drawings in pencil or ink, woodcut prints, watercolour and gouache, linocuts, and sculpture referencing animals real and fantastic inspired by the book of beasts tradition.

As an academic work, the greatest strength is the copious amount of criticism collected from established scholars and world-renowned experts in the field. As noted in the introduction, the critical essays are secondary to the visual objects in both the exhibition and the catalogue. So,

some of the essays are presented in small script which some readers may find difficult to see. Given the reference to a printed bestiary from 1527 (p. 163), future scholarship could extend analysis of objects related to bestiaries into sixteenth- and seventeenth-century emblems and emblem books glossed in the Epilogue (p. 284).

Like bestiaries, this catalogue has many functions. As an *objet d'art*, it is a memento of the Getty exhibition and the international collaborative efforts a decade in the making. For students it is an illustrated course combining high-quality reproductions and excellence in critical scholarship. For teachers it is a source book to create coursework in art, medieval history, media studies, and visual culture. As museum director Timothy Potts astutely remarks, “endowing animals with human concerns, emotions, and actions...appears to be a universal practice that often says more about how humans interpret their world than it does about their attitudes towards animals” (p. vii). Even as I am viewing the catalogue, my beagle companion curiously sniffs the pages filled with unicorns and griffins. This book is for anyone with an interest in human animals and our relationship with the world in which we live.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Timothy Potts, “Foreword”

Elizabeth Morrison, “The Medieval Bestiary: Text and Illumination”

Sarah Kay, “The Textual Kaleidoscope of the Medieval Bestiary”

Xenia Muratova, “Patrons and Artists: Tradition and Invention in Medieval Illuminated Bestiaries”

Elizabeth Morrison, “Accommodating Antlers, Making Room for Hedgehogs, and Other Problems of Page Design in the Medieval Bestiary”

Ilya Dines, “The Function of Bestiaries in Medieval Miscellanies”

Susan Crane, “Expanding the Bestiary’s Meaning: The Case of Bodleian Ms. 764”

Georgi Parpulov, “Painted Animal Images and the Greek *Physiologus*”

Emma Campbell, “The Bestiary in Translation”

Larisa Grollemond, “Beasts at Court: Reading the Bestiary in the Late Thirteenth Century”

Meredith Cohen, “The Bestiary beyond the Book”

Christine Sciacca, “King of Beasts: Feline Aquamanilia”

Elizabeth Eisenberg and Melanie Holcomb, “Cosmic Creatures: Animals in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts”

Emily Steiner, “Encyclopedic Beasts”

Rebecca Hill, “Beast Lore in the Islamic Tradition”

Debra Higgs Strickland, “The Bestiary on Medieval World Maps”

Chet Van Duzer, “Monsters, Animals, Maps, and Sources”

Larisa Grollemond, “The Bestiary in the Modern Age”

NOTES

[1] See Michael J. Curley, ed. and trans., *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[2] See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[3] T. H. White, ed., *The Book of Beasts: Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century* (New York: Dover, 1984), p. 67.

[4] T. H. White, *The Book of Beasts*.

[5] Cited from the Getty Iris Blog post by Elizabeth Morrison, 20 January 2021, <https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/author/emorrison/>

[6] Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-Family Bestiary: Commentary, Art, Text and Translation* (Woodbridge, United Kingdom: Boydell, 2006).

[7] Cited from the Getty Iris Blog post by Larisa Grollemond, 20 January 2021, <https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/author/lgrollemond/>

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