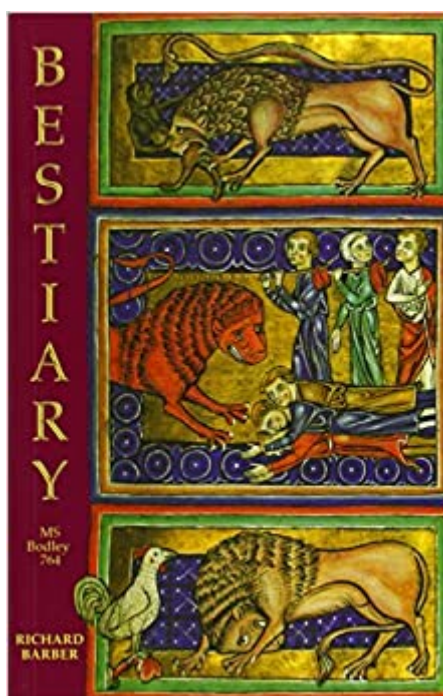


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Bestiary: Being An English Version Of The Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Bodley 764



Synopsis

Bestiaries are a particularly characteristic product of medieval England, and give a unique insight into the medieval mind. Richly illuminated and lavishly produced, they were luxury objects for noble families. Their three-fold purpose was to provide a natural history of birds, beasts and fishes, to draw moral examples from animal behaviour (the industrious bee, the stubborn ass), and to reveal a mystical meaning - the phoenix, for instance, as a symbol of Christ's resurrection. This Bestiary, MS. Bodley 764, was produced around the middle of the thirteenth century and is of singular beauty and interest. The lively illustrations have the freedom and naturalistic quality of the later Gothic style, and make dazzling use of colour. This book reproduces the 136 illuminations to the same size and in the same place as the original manuscript, fitting the text around them. Richard Barber's translation from the original Latin is a delight to read, capturing both the serious intent of the manuscript and its charm.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The translation is pellucid, and the colourful late-gothic illustrations really delightful. Epic begets epic: stupendous and thought-provoking. --Fortean Times
An invaluable resource for readers and writers who aspire to understand how mediaeval men and women viewed the natural world, both actual and fantastical. --Historical Novels Review
Excellent translation from the Latin original makes for fascinating reading about beasts, real and imaginary, of the medieval world. The most delightful picture-book about animals you'll ever see. --Evening Standard

Bestiaries are a particularly characteristic product of medieval England, and give a unique insight into the medieval mind. Richly illuminated and lavishly produced, they were luxury objects for noble families. Their three-fold purpose was to provide a natural history of birds, beasts and fishes, to draw moral examples from animal behaviour (the industrious bee, the stubborn ass), and to reveal a mystical meaning -- the phoenix, for instance, as a symbol of Christ's resurrection. This Bestiary, MS. Bodley 764, was produced around the middle of the thirteenth century and is of singular beauty and interest. The lively illustrations have the freedom and naturalistic quality of the later Gothic style, and make dazzling use of colour. The 136 illuminations are reproduced to the same size and in the same place as in the original manuscript, and the text fitted around them. Richard Barber's translation from the original Latin is a delight to read, capturing both the serious intent of the manuscript and its charm.

Look, I am just a mom. I am not some specialist in Medieval art or a religious commentator. I am just a mom. I have a six year old son who thinks the sun rises and set on this book. And with a little parental editing I read (most of) it aloud to him. The pictures are fantastic and detailed. It was just what I was looking for when my son requested a book on mythical beast. These animals appear in fairy tails and fantasy games and he wanted more detail on what they were exactly. A lot of discussion about what is real, what was misunderstood and what was just plain made up. A great spring board for critical thinking for a kid. It has been absconded by older brother who is 27 years old. My sons and I have enjoyed this book thoroughly.

If you are not familiar with the concept of a "bestiary," the best way to describe it is the attempt of the medieval mind to categorize and describe the animal kingdom. Bestiaries were the work of the educated class, because it was they alone who had the skills to write, and also to illustrate, a written tome. Bestiaries can be hugely enjoyable, for they allow us to see both the insights and the shortcomings of the medieval conception of "animal." And, in the case of this text, they could be lavishly illustrated. This bestiary, which is a translated facsimile of the 13th century MS. Bodley 764, is simply a delight. At a slightly larger form factor than a standard trade paperback, the text is printed on the highest quality heavyweight, high gloss paper and is reproduced in full color (every illustration). The attempt is to reproduce the manuscript as it appears in the MS. Bodley 764, but with the Latin translated into English. The result is a gorgeous (and physically manageable) text which really does a good job of transmitting the original intention of the text. Although an index is provided at the front so you can jump to an animal of choice, the text is really best read from

beginning to end. It is as I say a "delightful romp," and you'll find yourself entranced at the simultaneously simplistic and deep content the words convey. By the way, you might think this will have animals such as "ox," "lion," "seal," and so on. You're right. But it also has a wealth of animals, real and imaginary, that you wouldn't necessarily expect, unless you are an avid medievalist. Try "Parander," "Bonnacon," "Monoceros," "Hoope," and "Wether," and then you'll realize there's a whole lot to explore here. There are about 120 animals in all. A real treat for both bedtime reading and for more serious study, this book can also make a wonderful gift for the person for whom you can't think of anything to give.

Gorgeous. Simply gorgeous.

I bought it because I have always been intrigued by the illustrations, but it is interesting to see how animals were viewed in medieval times.

This is an interesting book. I only wish the illustrations were bigger. Overall, I would recommend this book to others.

Good printed, great illustrations

A gorgeous book, splendidly conceived, executed, and masterfully bound by The Folio Society.

THANKS

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