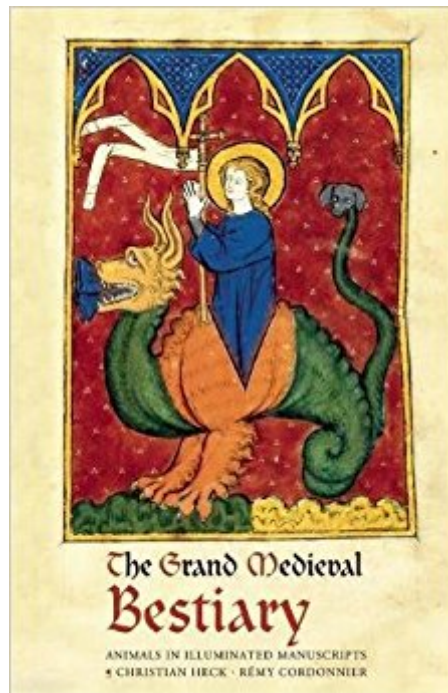




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# The Grand Medieval Bestiary: Animals In Illuminated Manuscripts



## Synopsis

As the 587 colorful images in this magnificent volume reveal, animals were a constant presence and delightful presence in illuminated manuscripts throughout the Middle Ages. Many proto-zoological illustrations, of great charm but variable accuracy, are found in the bestiaries, or compendiums of animal lore, that were exceedingly popular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But animals are depicted in every other sort of illuminated manuscript as well, from the eighth-century Echternach Gospels, with its geometrically schematized symbols of the Evangelists, to the early fifteenth-century TrÃfÃ's Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, with its famously naturalistic scenes of peasant and aristocratic life. In his insightful opening chapters, the noted art historian Christian Heck explains that the prevalence of animals in illuminated manuscripts reflects their importance in medieval thought, an importance due in part to the agricultural society of that age, in which a variety of species—and not just docile pets—were the daily companions of man. Animals also had a greater symbolic significance than they do today: in popular fables, such as those of Reynard the Fox, they held up a mirror to the follies of mankind, and on the religious plane, they were understood as an integral part of God's creation, whose attributes and behaviors could be taken as clues to His plan of salvation. The main part of the book explores the complex and fascinating iconography of the individual creatures most frequently depicted by medieval miniaturists. It is arranged in the manner of a proper bestiary, with essays on one hundred animals alphabetized by their Latin names, from the *alauda*, or lark, whose morning song was thought to be a hymn to Creation, to the vultur, which enjoyed a certain respect due to its impressive appearance, but whose taste for carrion also made it a symbol of the sinner who indulges in worldly pleasures. The selection includes a number of creatures that would now be considered fantastic, including the griffin, the manticore, and of course the fabled unicorn, tamable only by a gentle maiden. Not merely a study of art history, *The Grand Medieval Bestiary* uses a theme of timeless interest to present a panorama of medieval life and thought that will captivate even the most sophisticated modern reader.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This is a huge and beautiful book that feels almost like a trip to the Cloisters between two covers."

**New York Daily News** "Rarely have earnest scholarship and sheer wonder come together as comfortably as they have here. And as magical as the original artworks surely are, this unique volume is literally better than the real thing, since it allows us to ogle them closely." **Fine Art Connoisseur** "Every year I try to reserve the adjective "stunning" for one book. This is it." **The Seattle Times holiday gift guide**

Christian Heck, a senior member of the Institut Universitaire de France and former curator-in-chief of the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar, is an authority on illuminated manuscripts. **Rafael Cordonnier**, a researcher at the University of Lille, specializes in medieval iconography.

I first saw this book in its French language edition on [France's French website](#) in 2011 at a price of just under Euro 385 (discounted from Euro 405!!). At this price the book was way beyond my means, so I was pleasantly surprised when an English language edition appeared on the [UK](#) and [US websites](#) at a much more affordable GBP 90. I conjectured that the English language edition must be a 'cut down' version of the French 'Belle reliure', but what the heck I figured, what lover of the art of medieval manuscripts could resist even a cut-down edition displaying some of the world's finest medieval imagery and a text by two specialists from premier French universities? I therefore ordered the book from [US](#) and was amazed when a huge package weighing 16.5lb arrived on my doorstep. This is no cut-down version. With exactly the same number of pages (620) as the French original the book itself is 15.25" tall, 10.75" wide and just under 2.5" thick. Printed on high quality glossy paper in full colour, the book boasts around 600 full colour reproductions of illuminations taken not just from bestiaries, but from a wide range of illuminated manuscripts ranging from the early 8th century up to the early 16th. The book comes protected in a heavy slipcase that adds about 0.5" to

the overall dimensions. Accompanying the images are four essay chapters covering general topics, such as the role of animals in medieval life and Christian philosophy that fill the first 105 pages of the book. The following 491 pages provide examples of 100 individual animals that were described in medieval bestiaries together with an essay by Professor Cordonnier outlining the symbolism and myths attached to each in the medieval Christian world view. I am not qualified to comment on whether or not the essays by the two authors stand up to the highest standards of art historical scholarship, but to a general reader like myself the text adds another dimension to the splendid reproductions of the medieval imagery. To anyone with a love of medieval art and imagery, or the relationship between man and the animals with which we share our world, this book with its high quality reproductions will be a delight. You will need a strong bookshelf to support its weight however. Perhaps a lectern with a chain to secure it would be best!

Huge & spectacular...this elephantine book is alive & vivid. It requires 3 people to open it...(just kidding)...but, it is an enormous book of enormous consequence for the scholar who loves animalia...Happy Birthday to me.

Comprehensive review to follow...Amazing book on illuminated manuscripts & bestiaries. It's a huge book, so it's best to read on a table-- not on your lap.

All the reviews were absolutely spot on. For any medievalist this Bestiary provides a concise history of the medieval world of beasts and animals. What imaginations the artists had to provide such colorful and amazing illustrations.

Wow is all I can say. I was a little hesitant at paying so much for a book especially before seeing it but wow what a timeless masterpiece. Talk about beautiful historically preserved pictures.

Huge book, therefore hard to handle, but just beautiful!

Fast shipment, book is beautiful, in great condition, and a bargain to boot! If you have any interest in animals or Medieval art--buy this book!

Well beyond expectations. History of methodology behind animal representations, full page images. Would highly recommend to anyone interested in bestiary.

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