The Unnatural History of Dragons

"There be some Dragons which have wings and no feete, some again have both feete and wings, and some neither feete nor wings, but are only distinguished from the common sort of Serpents by the combe growing upon their heads, and the beard under their cheeks."[1] This seventeenth-century description in *The Historie of Serpents* by Edward Topsell, reminds us that dragons have not always resembled the familiar scaly creatures with wings, horns, and whirling eyes that we know today. In fact, before the eighteenth century most people believed that the dragon was a type of serpent appearing in several varieties, similar to the division of dogs into breeds such as terriers, poodles, and spaniels. Even when endowed with any number of feet and wings, ancient dragons were considered, like crocodiles, as large, exotic snakes. Along with the optional wings and feet, other features could be added in various combinations, so that many, but not all, dragons had sharp fangs, three-clawed feet, horns on the forehead or nose, or hairy ears. Dragons varied not only in shape, but also in size and color. The compiler Topsell listed gold, red, and blue along with the more common green and brown ones. They ranged from small Macedonian dragons the size of Saint Bernard dogs to enormous monsters 150 feet long said to have been found in India.[2]

For most ancient thinkers, the dragon had one more extremely important characteristic: it was dangerous to man. Some believed that the creature's snaky tail could strangle elephants and crush humans; others thought dragons could poison the air with their flaming breath, or that they could poison water. Some, but by no means all, dragons ate their victims, indicating that their depredations were motivated by higher considerations than simple hunger. Mere mortals who encountered dragons died instantly; only gods, angels, saints, and heroes were likely to survive violent combats with the great snakes. Such battles usually occurred when a dragon threatened an established human community, or when the community wished to expand into dragon-infested wildernesses. The majority of the dragons in the Museum and Johnson collections can be understood in terms of this archetypal myth of combat between the polluting dragon and the purifying hero.[3]

Of the three sources from which medieval knowledge of dragons was derived—the Bible and church teaching, bestiaries, and travelers' descriptions—the church was by far the most important authority. Dragons are mentioned frequently in Latin and vernacular Bibles, thanks to mistranslations of one Hebrew term signifying water monsters and another referring to a desert mammal now believed to be a jackal.[4] Both creatures were rolled into one Latin term, *Draco*, which caused confusion and gave the dragon some contradictory characteristics. Consider, for example, the problems of the artist called upon to illuminate Psalm 148. Its seventh line reads "Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons and all deeps. . . ." where the dragon was originally meant to be some kind of fish or whale from the "deeps." Yet, there were several other passages that clearly proved the dragon lived in deserted regions of the earth. In the Book of Job, the afflicted Job, shunned by his neighbors, laments, "I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls," or, in other words, a filthy outcast in the wilderness. Jeremiah associates dragons with ruin, disorder, and wilderness: "And I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant."[5] The fifteenth-century illuminator of Psalm 148 in the Pembroke Hours resolved the conflict by painting his dragon on dry land, but set apart from conventional beasts (fig. 2).[6]

The official attitudes of the church were supported by the bestiaries and travelers' tales. The bestiary as known to medieval Christians was derived from *The Physiologus*, a pagan compendium of facts about animals by an unknown author written some time around the third or fourth century A.D. *The Physiologus* was then adopted by Christian moralists, who tagged didactic messages onto the pagan tales and used the result to teach natural history and Christian morality to schoolboys.[7] In the manuscript versions of the text that have survived, the dragon, "the biggest of all serpents," is compared to the devil, "who is the most enormous of all reptiles. . . ."[8] Devils and dragons resembled each other in having combs, in flying, and in use of their snaky tails for the capture of the unwary. Both polluted pure Christian societies. The bestiaries reinforced the biblical image of the dragon as a godforsaken creature, while concurrently presenting him as a danger to human life and salvation.

Given the weight of tradition and authority that these texts bore, it is not surprising that medieval travelers to desert or pagan lands were inclined to

1. *Saint Michael and the Dragon*
Graduated Missal, fol. 239r
French, c. 1350
Illuminated manuscript, image 1½ x 1⅛" (3.8 x 2.86 cm)
Philip S. Collins Collection
45-65-7



Although one mythical beast, the griffin, is the symbol for the Philadelphia Museum of Art, it is another, the dragon, that appears more frequently in our collections. Louise W. Lippincott, assistant curator of the Johnson Collection, concentrates on the dragon in Western art in this Bulletin, *published in conjunction with an exhibition—of paintings, illuminated manuscripts, objects, and small sculptures—that traces European dragon iconography from late medieval times to the nineteenth century. Miss Lippincott received her doctorate in history at Princeton University this past summer.*

Jean Sutherland Boggs
The George D. Widener Director

discover dragons. Lands that were both desert and pagan seem to have had the most dragons. In the late thirteenth century, Marco Polo, for example, ran into some exceptionally fearsome "serpents" in his travels in China: "They are loathsome creatures to behold. Let me tell you just how big they are. You may take it for a fact that there are some of them ten paces in length that are as thick as a stout cask: for their girth runs to about ten palms. These are the biggest. They have two squat legs in front near the head, which have no feet but simply three claws . . . like the claws of a falcon or a lion. They have enormous heads and eyes so bulging that they are bigger than loaves, their mouth is big enough to swallow a man at one gulp. . . ."[9]

Modern scholars suspect that Polo had actually seen a crocodile; some medieval artists, having seen neither creature, applied the verbal description to the more familiar dragon. Dragons were also reported by Sir John Mandeville in the mid-fourteenth century. Describing the wasteland around the ruins of the Tower of Babel in Arabia he wrote, "It is alle deserte and full of Dragounes and grete serpentes and fulle of dyverse venymouse bestes alle abouten."[10] In this manner, reliable eyewitness accounts confirmed the equation between deserts, dragons, and godlessness made in the Bible, and the biblical boundaries between godly (Christian) territories and ungodly (dragon-infested) outer deserts could be seen in the concrete terms of the earth's political geography.

As one might expect from the parallelism of heavenly and earthly geographies, great medieval battles with dragons were fought in both locations. Dragons and angels fought over the boundaries of heaven and hell, while human saints contested the limits of the church's jurisdiction over spiritual and temporal matters on earth. The high stakes involved caused many of these battles to be fought to the death. Conquest of a dragon was an important step on the thorny path toward individual sainthood and the creation of a universal Christian society.

One of the earliest images of dragons in the Museum collections occurs on the pages of a French graduated missal dating from the middle of the fourteenth century.[11] The dragon appears as part of the ornamentation of a capital letter *B* in one of the choral sections; he is losing the battle against Saint Michael the Archangel (fig. 1). Michael, dressed in flowing lavender and scarlet robes, bearing wings and a halo, stabs the recumbent dragon in the mouth with a long, white staff tipped with a cross. Even though he is less than an inch long, one can recognize the dragon fully equipped with wings, nose horn, ears, and snakelike tail. His fangs are depicted with minute dots of white paint. The choice of this image to ornament the phrase "May the Lord bless all the angels who do His word by their might and power . . ." is explained by the meaning of the Michael story and its relationship to the medieval concept of the Christian knight.

The battle of Saint Michael and the apocalyptic dragon is recorded in chapter 12 of Revelation: "And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns. . . . And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world, and his angels were cast out with him."[12]

In Revelation, Michael's conquest of the dragon ended the reign of Satan and cleared the way for the Resurrection and creation of paradise on earth. To medieval interpreters of the Bible, Michael became the ideal type of the Christian soldier or crusader seeking to fulfill God's orders through military conquest. The dragon represented not only the devil but also the infidel, the devil's earthly equivalent. Michael threw the dragon out of heaven just as crusaders wished to drive the infidel out of Jerusalem. The archetypal struggle between saint and dragon banished the beast to the outskirts of the Christian world; medieval military and religious life consisted of a constant struggle to keep him there.

In these never-ending battles, Michael was invoked as the protector of Christian society, almost literally as "the angel who made heaven safe for Christians."[13] The multiple nature of the dragon of Revelation—serpent, devil, and Satan—offered the medieval artist depicting the combat a variety of options. Consequently we see Saint Michael vanquishing dragons ranging from the two-legged, winged wyvern to a very human-looking demon.

2. Illustration to Psalm 148
Book of Hours (Pembroke Hours), fol. 204r
Flemish, c. 1460
Illuminated manuscript, image 2 9/16 x 2 1/4" (6.5 x 5.7 cm)
Philip S. Collins Collection
45-65-2





3. *Saint Michael and the Dragon*
Book of Hours, p. 121
French, c. 1480
Illuminated manuscript, image 1⅝ x 1⅝" (4.13 x 4.13 cm)
Philip S. Collins Collection
45-65-15

Other artists emphasized the satanic characteristics of Saint Michael's dragon using the parallels between devils and dragons drawn in the bestiaries. The illuminator of a French book of hours, working around 1480, drew the creature in human form covered with scales (fig. 3). Like a dragon, he has bat wings and three claws on each arm and leg. Furthermore, the demon sprawls on the ground beneath the saint, turning his head up and around to confront his enemy. In other words, his pose is very similar to that of the tiny dragon from the fourteenth-century French missal; and, in fact, is more typical of dragons than demons. The most demonic of the Museum's dragons appears in a mid fifteenth-century Flemish or French book of hours (fig. 4). He has a human body and head, and he stands upright, clutching a weapon in his talons, but a few dragonlike features persist: the demon has three claws on his arms and legs, and he breathes fire at his opponent. Saint Michael's tactics against this antagonist also seem more suited to human than draconian foes. He kicks the creature in the groin with his left foot and raises the sword in his right hand for the coup de grace.

The propensity of Saint Michael's dragon to exhibit demonic qualities and behavior is consistent with the angelic status of the saint and the location of the battle on the outskirts of heaven. Michael's opponent is clearly a supernatural as well as an evil creature—an important distinction for an age that held that dragons existed naturally on earth. The demonic associations, along with Saint Michael's wings and fantastic armor, situate them in the visionary world of Revelation. These specifications of protagonist and place help to differentiate the heavenly battle from its earthly equivalent, Saint George's conquest of a dragon in Libya in the third century A.D. While the images of Saint Michael tended toward the unreal and fantastic, depictions of Saint George emphasized the earthly nature of their encounter.

The themes of military triumph and the founding of a Christian community familiar from the Michael story also run through the most popular legends of struggle between saint and dragon, that of Saint George. While many of us recognize the image of the knight on his white steed rescuing a handsomely dressed maiden from a dragon, few now realize that the story



4. *Saint Michael and the Dragon*
Book of Hours, fol. 351r
Flemish or French, c. 1450
Illuminated manuscript, image 3¼ x 2⅝" (8.26 x 6.67 cm)
Philip S. Collins Collection
45-65-5



5. *Saint George and the Dragon*
Book of Hours, p. 126
French, c. 1480
Illuminated manuscript, image 1½ x 1 15/16" (3.8 x 4.92 cm)
Philip S. Collins Collection
45-65-15

represented more than a model of chivalrous behavior to damsels in distress. According to Jacobus de Voragine, the thirteenth-century author of the colorful, but not always accurate, *Golden Legend*, George was a Christian officer in the Roman army stationed in Libya—a pagan, desert area. "A chance journey took [George] one day into the neighborhood of Silena. . . . In this town, in a deep lake as large as an ocean, there dwelt a horrible dragon, who many times had put to flight the men who came armed against him, and who was wont to prowl about the city wall; poisoning all who came within reach of his breath. In order to appease the fury of this monster, and to keep him from destroying the whole town, the burgesses had been offering him two sheep every day."[14] When the town began to run out of sheep, they offered the dragon human sacrifices; George arrived just as the daughter of the king was preparing to do her civic duty. Ignoring the maiden's suggestion that he seek a safer distance, George stunned the creature with a blow from his lance, then ordered the princess to bind it with her girdle. Together they led the dragon into town, where George threatened to unleash it on the inhabitants if they would not convert to the Christian faith. Their conversion and the death of the dragon followed, and George had rescued a community from the joint dangers of dragons and paganism. George followed up this feat with several other miraculous escapades, and died a martyr's death in A.D. 287.

Like his prototype Saint Michael, George came to be viewed as a protector of medieval Christians. In the Flemish Pembroke Hours of around 1460, mention of George's conquest of the "pestiferum draconem" and rescue of the princess is followed by a request for protection from visible and invisible enemies—the joint evils of physical and spiritual danger combined within the dragon.[15]

In most illuminated manuscripts, George appears as a well-equipped medieval knight, who spears his dragon in the mouth. Within this iconographical framework, however, artists have enjoyed a great deal of latitude. A version of the scene from the late fifteenth century presents George with an antagonist that the twentieth-century viewer recognizes instantly —not a dragon, but a crocodile (fig. 5). As we know from bestiaries and Marco Polo's accounts, crocodiles were thought to be large and dangerous oriental serpents who lived in deep



7. Attributed to Agnolo Gaddi
(Florentine, 1351(?)–1396)
Legend of Saint Sylvester
Panel, 11½ x 15" (29.2 x 38.1 cm)
John G. Johnson Collection
Cat. no. 9

water, ate people, and were killed when hunters rammed razor-tipped lances down their throats. Since George's dragons and the crocodile, both serpents, shared these significant physical and behavioral characteristics, the medieval illuminator's substitution of one for the other is understandable. The dragon's squat legs, absence of wings, and long tail are crocodilian. Furthermore, the scaly back, on which both horse and saint trample, suggests the hardened skin of the reptile, which medieval naturalists believed was too hard to pierce with any weapon.[16]

A version of Saint George and the Dragon from a French book of hours of around 1480 is nearly as bizarre as the preceding two (fig. 6). George, wearing the familiar white coat with red cross over his armor, kills his enemy with a spear thrust in the mouth. His animal opponent, however, resembles nothing so much as an aardvark. Aardvarks were, of course, unknown to the medieval world (at least as recorded in bestiaries), so this dragon must actually be a composite creature, invented to conform to a verbal description from a text. The narrow throat, long jaw, flaming breath, comb on the back of his head, and twisted tail match written descriptions of the dragon exactly. In fact, the artist's quest for verisimilitude led him to draw the dragon's tail wrapped around George's leg, in reference to a famous piece of dragon lore recorded in bestiaries, which may also have suggested the visual image: "It has a crest, a small mouth and a narrow gullet through which it draws breath or puts out its tongue. Moreover, its strength is not in its teeth but in its tail, and it inflicts injuries by blows rather than by stinging. . . . Even the Elephant is not protected from it by the size of its body; for the dragon, lying in wait near the paths along which the elephants usually saunter, lassoes their legs in a knot with its tail and destroys them by suffocation."[17] The George of the Pembroke Hours faced death by poison or engulfment, while his French counterpart would have suffocated had he lost the battle.



6. *Saint George and Saint Lawrence*
Book of Hours, fol. 363r
Flemish or French, c. 1450
Illuminated manuscript, image 3⅛ x 2⅝" (7.94 x 6.67 cm)
Philip S. Collins Collection
45-65-5

The peculiar iconography of Saint George and the Dragon represents one artistic solution to problems inherent in the portrayal of sacred history. The saint's life and adventures are accepted and depicted as historical facts, and the protagonists are drawn with the greatest possible naturalism. George is dressed as a contemporary knight, while the dragon's image is taken from the best eyewitness accounts and most reputable texts. Every effort is made to lend liveliness and verisimilitude to the image in a manner analogous to Jacobus de Voragine's use of dialogue and circumstantial detail to enliven his *Golden Legend.*

The theme of the saint combating a dragon in order to protect the boundaries of Christian civilization and initiate a new era of the godly beyond its outposts is repeated in the legend of Saint Sylvester, told in its most elaborate form by Voragine. The high points of the story are depicted in a small predella panel attributed to the Florentine painter Agnolo Gaddi (fig. 7). In the center of a barren landscape relieved by a cave or cleft in the rocks, sparse buildings, and a freestanding antique column, Sylvester, dressed as a pope, binds the mouth of a chastened dragon with his signet ring and a piece of cord. Two pagan magicians lie paralyzed between the saint and his captive; subsequently revived by the saint, they also pray in the background. On the left, the saint's two Christian companions observe with becoming gravity, while the emperor Constantine, newly converted to the religion, gestures in astonishment on the right.



Saint Sylvester was pope from A.D. 314 to 335, but very little else is known about him beyond the fact that his reign coincided with the conversion to Christianity of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great, with a concomitant improvement in the political situation of the Christian church and the end of official persecution of Christians. By the seventh century, these important events had been decked with the trappings of legend and embroidered with dialogue by Jacobus de Voragine in the *Golden Legend*. The priests of the idols came to Constantine and said: "Holy Emperor, there is a dragon in a cave, and since thou didst receive the faith of Christ, this dragon daily slays more than three hundred men with his breath!" The emperor applied to Sylvester, and Sylvester to God, for advice on confronting the pestilential menace. Acting on instructions from heaven, "Sylvester, with two priests, went down into the pit, by one hundred and fifty steps, carrying two lanterns. He addressed the dragon with the words of the Holy Spirit, then bound his jaws, which hissed with rage, and sealed them as he had been told to do. And coming out of the pit, he found two magicians, who had followed to see if he dared to confront the dragon. These two lay almost lifeless on the ground, overcome by the pestilent breath of the monster." Sylvester revived them, they and "a great multitude" converted, and "thus were the Romans delivered from a twofold death, namely from their pagan belief and from the poison of the dragon."[18] The fate of the dragon is undisclosed.

Jacobus de Voragine chose to interpret the dragon as a scourge of the pagans, but the legend suggests that the beast also threatened all but the most exceptional Christians. One must speculate about a possible connection between the dragon of the legend and the dragon-topped standards carried by the cohorts of Constantine's pagan armies, which actively persecuted Christians before the emperor's conversion.[19] Might Sylvester's binding of the dragon's jaws actually symbolize his neutralization of military persecution, thanks to the intervention of a newly converted Constantine? With this reading of the dragon's meaning, Sylvester has effected a military triumph as well as a spiritual one.

Perhaps the most curious variations of the combat myth occur when the dragon's opponent is a woman. Women encountered dragons only half as often as men did—not surprising when the restricted life of most medieval women is taken into consideration. They rarely went crusading, nor did they travel as merchants, seamen, or explorers. Since they shunned dragon-inhabited territories, their battles generally occurred in intimate surroundings, and were fought on nonmilitary terms.

Of the female saints troubled by dragons, Saint Margaret was the most popular and the most frequently portrayed. Her story, as told in the *Golden Legend*, is a complex one. Born the daughter of a pagan priest in Antioch, Margaret was converted to Christianity by her nurse, then expelled from the household when her father discovered her change in faith. She made an adequate living as a shepherdess until her beauty attracted the notice of a pagan government official, who abducted her. Margaret refused to be either seduced or converted back to paganism, and as a result her frustrated admirer had her tortured and thrown into prison. There, Margaret prayed that God would show her the true nature of her tormentor; suddenly a dragon appeared in her cell. The legends differ on just how Margaret survived. According to the teaching of the church, she made the sign of the cross, and the dragon disappeared. In the alternate version—much more popular although condemned as apocryphal by the authorities—the dragon swallowed Margaret head-first, then "burst asunder" when she called on the Lord for assistance. The narrative resumes when the demon reappears disguised as a handsome young man. Ignoring his pleas for sympathy, Margaret lays him out on the ground, then tramples him underfoot in the manner of Saint George and Saint Michael.[20]

The echoes of the George and Michael stories in the Margaret combat are apparent. The dual nature of the dragon-demon is reminiscent of Michael's adversary, "that old serpent called the Devil."[21] Also like Michael, Margaret casts the dragon on the ground in order to vanquish him, then puts her foot on him as if she were a victorious warrior. Furthermore, like George and Sylvester, Margaret achieves the mass conversion of five thousand onlookers at her martyrdom; sadly her victory is a short one, for her persecutor executes all five thousand immediately before beheading Margaret herself. The Margaret story follows the established pattern of conflict on the borders of Christian civilization, followed by conversions and—very, very briefly—a new Christian era.

8. *Saint Margaret and the Dragon*
Pembroke Hours, fol. 47r
Flemish, c. 1460
Illuminated manuscript, image 1⅞ x 2⅜" (4.76 x 6cm)
Philip S. Collins Collection
45-65-2



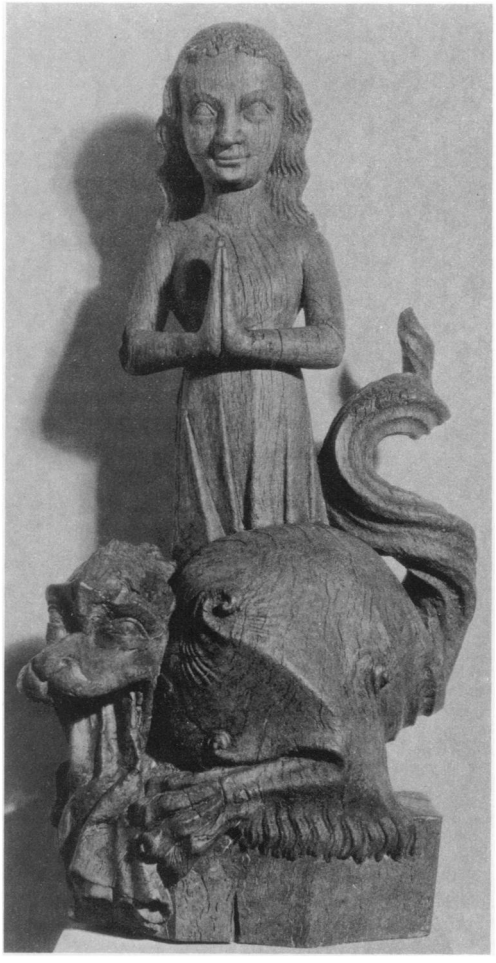
9. *Saint Margaret and the Dragon*
Book of Hours, p. 132
French, c. 1480
Illuminated manuscript, image 1⅝ x1¾" (4.13 x 4.45cm)
Philip S. Collins Collection
45-65-15



Margaret's battle is fought in terms of seduction rather than military prowess. On the earthly level, she is tempted by offers of marriage and wealth by the official. Her spiritual opponent is the demon in his draconian and youthlike forms, who struggles for control of her body, which seems to be linked to her spiritual status. Will Margaret remain a pure Christian virgin or become a pagan's polluted concubine? She triumphs by a combination of passive resistance and timely intervention from the Lord, who delivers this female Jonah from the infinitely more powerful dragon. Margaret also effects the mass conversion passively, by force of her example, rather than with threats to turn the dragon on her persecutors. These characteristics of Margaret's struggle—seduction, passivity, resistance—seem to have been derived from the archetypal encounter between woman and serpent, Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden. Significantly, medieval illuminators often drew Eve's tempter with the legs and wings of the dragon.[22] Offered the gift of knowledge by the serpent/devil, Eve fell; by resisting similar deadly gifts, Margaret helps undo the enormity of the orginal sin and becomes a saint. Evidently the church had relatively low expectations for female dragonslayers, if resistance to, rather than obliteration of, the corrupting agents could constitute grounds for sainthood. Images of Saint Margaret nearly always show her popping unharmed from the belly of the dragon. Her chaste and passive nature is indicated by her hands clasped in prayer and her modestly averted eyes, while her rapid progress through the gastrointestinal tract can be deduced from the train of her robe, which the dragon has not yet swallowed.

Saint Margaret's dragon from the Pemroke Hours is reminiscent of a rather hairy dog, with floppy ears, mournful expression, short tail, and paws (fig. 8). However, his batlike wings and knobby back label him as a dragon. Strange as this dragon is, it does not prepare us for a lugubrious beast from late in the fifteenth century (fig. 9). This pudgy crocodile has the serpent's knotted tail and the twisted posture typical of the dragon; otherwise one might be forgiven for supposing it to be an invention of James Thurber. Equally bizarre, a wooden dragon has a tail carved into a corkscrew spiral rather than a knot, perhaps to conform to the limits of the original block of wood. His rotund shape was determined by a burl or growth

10. *Saint Margaret and the Dragon*
French, 15th century
Oak, height 29" (73.66 cm)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Roland L. Taylor
29-66-4



within the oak, and the irregular texture suggests a hairy coat (fig. 10).

While Saint Margaret's four-legged, hairy, often wingless dragons present new variations on standard dragon images, the artists seem to have selected them to emphasize the spiritual meaning of the Margaret legend. Most of the dragons depicted with Saint Margaret are colored yellow or gilded, in contrast to the green or red animals found with Saints Michael, George, and Sylvester. The gold color may relate these dragons to the crocodile, their serpent cousin from the bestiaries, according to customary verbal descriptions: "Crocodile is so called from its saffron or crocus colour. It is born in the River Nile, an amphibious animal with four legs. . . ."[23] Why should a medieval illuminator allude to the crocodile when illustrating the Margaret legend? The answer is to be found in the life history of another Nile creature, the Hydrus. A natural enemy of the crocodile, the Hydrus liked to roll in the mud until slippery, then dash down the gaping jaws of sleeping reptiles. "The crocodile then, suddenly waking up, gulps it down, and the Hydrus, splitting all the crocodile's guts into two parts, not only remains alive but comes out safely at the other end."[24] The crocodile and Hydrus reenacted Margaret's historical encounter with the dragon in the natural world; it was only logical for the illuminator to make the parallel explicit.

Other details support the assumption that the artists deliberately combined the visual dragon with the verbal crocodile. The bestiaries often depicted the crucial moment as the Hydrus slipped into the crocodile's mouth, with his hind end protruding like the train of Margaret's dress. Many of these crocodiles resemble Margaret's dragons—hairy, snaky tail, and canine face.

The writer of the bestiary saw the story of the crocodile and Hydrus as an allegory of the Resurrection. "Thus is the crocodile symbolical of Death and Hell, whose Hydrus-enemy is our Lord Jesus Christ. For it was he who, assuming human flesh, descended into Hell and, breaking asunder all its internal arrangements, led out those people who were unjustly imprisoned in it."[25] In the books of hours, the same interpretation was placed upon the legend of Saint Margaret. The prayers associated with her day and image allude to her rescue from the "impio olybrio" ("impious horror") by the word of God,

and her ascent into heaven following her martyrdom. Margaret is implored to intercede with the Lord so that others may also be rescued from unjust damnation.[26] As we might expect, medieval illuminators drew the visual connection between her dragon, the crocodile, and the jaws of hell. The mournful doglike face of most Margaret dragons is also characteristic of the standard representation of the jaws of hell in scenes of the Last Judgment.

It is almost with disappointment that one turns from the bizarre creatures of the medieval North to the Renaissance dragon conditioned by Italian tradition. A quick glance at an assemblage of sixteenth-century dragons reveals a distressing similarity; these dragons are stamped out of the same mold and instantly recognizable to us as dragons. Whence came this standard image, and what does it portend for the dragon's allegorical life?

When the pre-Christian dragon myths are read without their medieval superstructure of interpretations and moral commentaries, as began to occur in the Renaissance, the old pagan view of the dragon reemerges. The dragon enemies of Apollo (Python), Jason, Hercules (Hydra), and Perseus represented primeval chaos or one of the forces of nature, rather than paganism, devils, or damnation.[27] They were not less dangerous for this; the classical hero had to be every bit as exceptional as the Christian saint in order to triumph. But, if classical dragons were powerful, unpredictable, and dangerous, they could also be beneficent when properly restrained. For example, the dragons harnessed by Ceres, the goddess of plenty, signified fruitful grain fields, according to one Renaissance commentator. Pierre Dinet found that the winged dragon's curving flight referred to shafts of grain, which did not grow straight up but trembled in the breeze or trailed on the ground. Likewise, the creature's snaky tail symbolized the winding furrows and trails made by the ox-drawn plow.[28] In the same vein, a dragon accompanying the goddess Pallas Athena could allude to her wisdom, while serving simultaneously as a "custodiendas Virgines," a protector of maidens.[29] Ancient dragons protected from or punished pollution, rather than caused it.

Pierre Dinet, Andrea Alciati, and other Renaissance students of pagan mythology also adopted the ancient idea of the dragon as guardian of sacred sites and treasure.[30] Renaissance scholars probably argued that the dragon guarding the golden fleece was only doing its duty, just as the serpents sent to slay Laöcoon were defending the reputation of the goddess. This role of the dragon had, of course, been interpreted in a dark light by traditional Christians, who found it most appropriate "that the ancient Temples of the Heathen-Idolators were annoyed with dragons, that as the devill was there worshipped, so there might be appearance of his person in the uglie forme and nature of a dragon."[31] Alciati, among others, chose to interpret the phenomenon in a more flattering light, stating that the gods employed dragons as temple guards because of their vigilance, sharp eyesight, and nose for trickery.[32] These guardian dragons presented a threat only to those who overreached the limits of prudent behavior and piety.

This interpretation of the dragon as a vigilant protector of virtue helped enlarge its appeal, and by the sixteenth century, dragons became common on coats of arms. (At present, dragons appear on the arms of about five hundred English and European families.) Since the objective of a design of a blazon was to be instantly recognizable, standardization of the dragon image soon followed. In England during the sixteenth century, the image of the dragon as winged and four-legged was finally set, while his two-legged cousin, the wyvern, was granted a separate identity. On the Continent, wyverns and four-legged dragons continued to be confused, but all had wings.[33]

Noblemen, knights, and heralds may have fixed on the winged and legged image of the dragon for their blazons because of its resemblance to the dragons topping the standards carried by the Roman legions. The soldiers of ancient Rome had probably adopted this image as the symbol for each cohort in the course of their campaigns in the Orient. As they marched throughout Europe, they carried the wyvern image with them, introducing dragons to Wales and other relatively obscure places.[34] In Wales they survived as emblems of the Pendragon family, whose heroic efforts to blend Roman civilization and Christian ideals are preserved in Arthurian legend. In early Christian Rome, however, the same dragon standards called to mind the persecutions carried out by pagan troops, and—as demonstrated in the legend of Saint Sylvester—a pagan symbol of

11. Cassone (marriage chest) with Return of Proserpina
Italian (Tuscany), late fifteenth century
Wood with painted and gilded gesso, length 79" (201 cm)
Purchased: Joseph E. Temple Fund
44-15-7



12. Sarcophagus with Rape of Proserpina
Rome, c. 2nd. century A.D.
Pentelic marble, length 82 9/16" (210 cm)
Florence, Uffizi Gallery



virtue was perceived as an embodiment of evil. During the Renaissance, the old meaning was reasserted, and the virtuous Roman wyvern prevailed over the medieval *Draco crocodillus*.

The fantastic wyvern image could become the conventionally accepted *Draco* in the Renaissance because fewer eyewitness reports from travelers suggested alternative images to the artist and herald. While increasing numbers of Europeans were traveling in Africa and the Orient, sightings of dragons declined. Some of the most reliable observers noted—with disappointment, perhaps—that the great African serpents lacked the feet and wings they had been led to expect. Large snakes remained simply snakes, and crocodiles, drawn from their images on Roman coins or from observation, became crocodiles.[35] By the end of the sixteenth century, doubts about the natural existence of winged dragons had risen to the point where Topsell was obliged to defend his discussion of them with lengthy quotes and citations, "least it [the dragon] should seeme incredible, as the foolish world is apt to beleeve no more than they see."[36] Topsell cited not only a swarm of winged and footed dragons that plagued the inhabitants of a German town in 1543, but a French example as well: "There was a Dragon or Winged-serpent brought unto *Frauncis* the French-King when he lay at *Saneton* by a certain Country-man, who had slaine the same Serpent himselfe with a spade, when it sette upon him in the fields to kill him. —This witnessed by learned men, who believed the serpent had been blown into France by the wind."[37]

In spite of these and a few other reports, advanced Renaissance opinion held that winged and footed dragons did not exist in the natural world. The great Italian thinker and artist Leonardo da Vinci was of this school, writing: "You know that you can not make any animal without it having its limbs such that each bears some resemblance to that of some one of the other animals. If therefore you wish to make one of your imaginary animals to appear natural—let us suppose it to be a dragon—take for its head that of a mastif or setter, for its eyes those of a cat, for its ears those of a porcupine, for its nose that of a grey hound, with the eyebrows of a lion, the temples of an old cock and the neck of a water-tortoise."[38] Leonardo himself rarely drew dragons, but he is known to have attached painted scales, a horn, and beard to a common lizard, which he tamed and displayed to his friends.[39] Topsell, a conservative clergyman, would surely have condemned such a masquerade as cynical and irreligious.

Renaissance artists made explicit the association of the fantastic, heraldic wyvern image and the *Draco* of classical and biblical texts. The association became so close that artists would alter the appearance of ancient dragons to conform more closely to their conception. For example, a Tuscan cassone relief of the late fifteenth century showing a scene from the Rape of Proserpina includes Ceres racing to her daughter's rescue in a chariot pulled by wyverns (fig. 11). However, the Roman sarcophagus relief on which the cassone design is based depicts two enormous, bearded snakes in the harness (fig. 12).[40] According to the bestiaries, such reptiles are perfectly acceptable dragons, but the heraldic wyvern prevailed in the Renaissance imitation nevertheless.

This is also the case in a Christian context, Defendente Ferrari's altarpiece, the *Virgin and Child with Four Saints: John the Divine, Catherine, Anthony Abbot, and an Unidentified Saint* (fig. 13). This type of composition was traditional, and the basic treatment of the subjects had long been formalized. On the left of the composition Saint John the Divine gestures a blessing with his right hand, while holding a chalice in his left. From the chalice leaps a tiny black wyvern, complete with bat wings, tail, two legs, claws, and glowing eyes. According to legend, a pagan priest slipped poison into Saint John's chalice, then challenged him to drink it. As John was about to do so, the poison flew out of the cup in the form of a dragon, and John was able to drink safely. Conversions followed.[41] In the hands of a Northern medieval illuminator, one would expect the dragon to display characteristics of the poisonous serpents, such as the asp or the viper, but here, the Italian Ferrari selected the conventional wyvern, a type of dragon not usually considered to be venomous and that had long been cast as a more appropriate opponent of the militant saints. Perhaps the artist associated the evaporated poison with the dragon's poisonous breath; if so, he has contradicted the very point of the story. Once in the air the poison is harmless, whereas at the same point, dragon's breath is at its most dangerous. Ferrari seems to have ignored the naturalistic allegorical devices favored by the medieval illuminators, preferring to suggest his

13. Defendente Ferrari (Italian [Vercelli] active 1510–35)
Virgin and Child with Four Saints: John the Divine, Catherine, Anthony Abbot, and an Unidentified Saint
Oil on panel, transposed to canvas, 53¾ x 45¼" (136.53 x 114.9cm)
John G. Johnson Collection
Cat. no. 276





14. Inkstand
Italian (Padua), early 16th century
Bronze, height 5 1/16" (13 cm)
Purchased: Joseph E. Temple Fund
30-1-33a



creature's evil nature by altering its color to black and exaggerating its fantastic shape.

In spite of its new image and new association, the dragon retained many of its medieval Christian meanings, and some of the richest Renaissance dragon imagery borrows heavily from both new and traditional sources. This is the case with a bronze inkstand made in Padua during the sixteenth century (fig. 14). A small bronze dragon crouches upon a plinth, which he clutches with his talons. His gaping jaws were intended to carry the ink. His body, much smaller than his head, is curled underneath him, and unlike typical wyverns, he has feathered wings that might have been borrowed from a cherub. Propped up against his tail one finds a coat of arms, presumably that of the patron who commissioned the object. These arms include a heraldic wyvern, suggesting one reason for the choice for the ink container. However, a reference to the dragon from Deuteronomy probably acted as an equally important factor in the choice. The text, a list of plagues and evils punishing the enemies of Israel, reads: "For their vine is the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are the grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps."[42] In this age of the felt-tip pen and electronic word processor, the relevance of such a curse to inkwells is not immediately obvious. However, any educated Renaissance person would instantly connect this passage with a common recipe for writing ink, made from a brew of iron or oak gall and spirits of wine.[43] In the context of Deuteronomy, ink *is* "the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps." One wonders if the original owner of the inkstand wrote satires with his poisonous pen.

The dragon inkstand is a relatively simple example of the Renaissance imagination at work. Far more complex is the meaning of the wyvern of Paris Bordone's painting *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness* (fig. 15). Its iconography has bewildered scholars for years, since dragons have no overt connection with the saint or his history. The painting shows Jerome in the right foreground. He is draped in a red and blue cloak and turns away from his book, cross, and skull (his standard attributes). On the river bank behind him, his faithful lion has fallen asleep with his head on one paw. In the background, and apparently the object of Jerome's bemused gaze, a dragon leaps out of the river to attack a foppishly dressed young man. The terrified victim has lost his plumed hat as he rushes to avoid the creature's flaming breath.

No reference to a dragon appears in the story of the life of Saint Jerome.[44] The son of a Christian nobleman in Dalmatia, Jerome studied Greek, Latin, and Hebrew as a youth in Rome, devoting himself at first to Christian texts. However, he soon found his attention wandering to the pagan authors, whom he read avidly before falling ill of a fever that nearly killed him. During his illness, Jerome experienced a vision in which his judge ruled that he was no longer a Christian but a "Ciceronian;" Jerome was miraculously cured of his fever when he promised to renounce pagan authors forever. This he did, rising up in the ranks of the Roman clergy until ordained as a cardinal at the age of thirty-nine.

Jerome endured several years of ecclesiastical politics, but finally, disgusted with the lecheries and corruption of his fellow prelates, he went to live a life of penance in the desert outside of Constantinople, later recounting the miseries of desert life: "My twisted members shuddered in their sackcloth, my squalid skin was as black as an Ethiop's. Daily I wept, daily I groaned; and when sleep finally beat me down, my bare bones



15. Paris Bordone
(Venetian, 1500–1571)
Saint Jerome in the Wilderness
Oil on canvas, 27⅝ x 34⅜"
(70.2 x 87.3 cm)
John G. Johnson Collection
Cat. no. 206

were bruised on the hard ground. . . . Yet, while I lived thus, the companion of scorpions and wild beasts, ofttimes I imagined that I was surrounded by dancing girls, and in my frozen body and moribund flesh the fires of concupiscence were lighted. For this I wept unceasingly, and subjugated the rebellious flesh with week-long fasts."[45] The painting illustrates this episode in the life of Saint Jerome, and although historians have been unable to explain the presence of the dragon,[46] its meaning is essential in the reconciliation of the many differences between the composition and the text.

Close examination of the painting and Renaissance dragon lore reveals that the creature has several meanings here. The painting shows that it inhabits a bend in a river between a waterfall upstream and a submerged dam or ford downstream. On the left bank of the river a rustic gate has been erected at the dam, perhaps to prevent animals from crossing. According to Greek legend, dragons inhabited springs and occasionally rivers, which they guarded ferociously. [47] This legend reached Europe in Roman times in a letter from Fermes, an (alleged) traveler in the East to the emperor Hadrian in Rome, and was absorbed in a variety of Roman and medieval treatises on natural history and the marvels of the East. Fermes described a territory east of the Nile and Brixontes rivers, inhabited by dragons 150 feet long and thick as columns. These dragons, Fermes said, were so terrifying that no one dared to cross the rivers where they lived.[48] Paris Bordone's painted dragon is clearly one of these oriental guardians, scaring off a traveler desirous of crossing the river at the fording place. In this exceedingly circuitous manner, the artist has identified his lush landscape, complete with river, grass, trees, and walled town, as a site in a remote Middle Eastern desert. The text's description of Jerome's wilderness in the vicinity of Constantinople is reconciled with Bordone's landscape and the river dragon.

The dragon not only helps locate the wilderness, but also refers to Jerome's trials in general, and his struggles with the dancing girls in particular. Because of his flaming breath, the dragon was categorized as a "hot" creature, a denizen of the hotter parts of the earth. Because they were so hot, dragons liked to cool off in cold springs.[49] The flaming dragon, therefore, suggests the heat of the desert sun which turned Jerome's skin "black as an Ethiop's." The dragon and dancing girls relate to the youthful victim's fashionable clothes. These phenomena are linked by what the moralized bestiaries called "the third nature of the serpent." That is: "When he [the serpent] sees a naked man he fears him, but when he sees a man clothed he attacks him. Spiritually we, too, ought to understand that when the first man our father Adam, was naked in paradise, the serpent did not succeed in attacking him, but when he dressed in a tunic (that is, the mortality of a sinful fleshly body), then the serpent assaulted him. . . . If you deprive yourself, however, of the clothing of princes and powers of this world, of the rulers and spirits of wickedness in heavenly places as the Apostle said, then the serpent will not be able to attack you."[50]

Jerome, who has abandoned the life and, incidentally, the clothes of the debauched princes of the church, is immune from attacks by dragons, whereas the young man in tights and tunic is in a perilous situation. The reference to Adam's sinful body and the fall of man—combined with what we know of the behavior of Jerome's colleagues in Rome—suggests that wearing clothing should be associated with sexual shame and, perhaps, "voluptuous" behavior. Such was the interpretation Pierre Dinet placed on serpents depicted with a man and a woman: "The serpent painted with a man and a woman signifies sentiment betrayed by voluptuousness, and reason deceived by sentiment, as witnessed by Saint Athanasius and Saint Augustine concerning Psalm 48. Having an open mouth, and a man crushed within it, it represents remedies against temptation, and this because if a young person is crushed in the mouth of a serpent he dies, and his body is instantly demolished: so says Saint Ambrose discussing the merits of abstinence."[51]

In the background beyond the fleeing young man, traces of a female figure, also in flight from the dragon, can barely be seen. Recent cleaning of the painting indicates that she was once part of the composition and may have been covered over by the artist at a later date.

Paris Bordone employed the image of the dragon to suggest Jerome's virtue in the face of voluptuous temptations. Consequently, one wonders whether the artist also intended to contrast Jerome's virtuous behavior in the wilderness with his less than perfect life before his illness, vision, and reform. Jerome himself admitted, "I hold virginity as high as Heaven,

16. Peter Paul Rubens
(Flemish, 1577–1644)
A Franciscan Allegory in Honor of the Immaculate Conception, c. 1631–32
Oil on panel, 21⅛ x 30¾"
(53.7 x 78.1 cm)
John G. Johnson Collection
Cat. no. 677



albeit I do not possess it."[52] His narrow escape from death by a fever (heat, again) may be suggested by the young man's flight from the dragon's flaming breath. That the entire scene may refer to Jerome's past is indicated by the odd posture of the saint himself. He turns away from his sacred books and writings (his future as a Christian scholar) and looks *back* over his shoulder at a symbolic reenactment of the turning point in his life.

If this interpretation of the iconography is correct, Paris Bordone's *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness* updates the ancient and medieval versions of the combat myth. As a scholar rather than a knight, Jerome confronts the dragon but does not slay it. His encounter leads to a conversion, his own, and a new life of Christian scholarship and asceticism. Memories of his horrific escape from death (the dragon) help him maintain a high spiritual level of existence in the face of enormous temptations. Thus, the dragon actually plays two parts in the Jerome combat story. From the Christian standpoint it represents the polluting evils of antique paganism and sexual vice from which he escaped; like Saint Margaret, Jerome would have been engulfed and damned if he had succumbed to it entirely. However, after his conversion, the dragon's rôle in the saint's life changes. Its image reminds him of his brush with sin and death and protects him from further temptation. It becomes a symbol of his hard-earned virtue and wisdom in the classicizing tradition of Alciati. But even these dual interpretations of the dragon can be reconciled, if the meaning of the painting concerns the value of a classical education and worldly experience as preparation for a life of Christian scholarship.

During modern times—from the seventeenth century to the present—the evil nature of the dragon has reasserted itself. Educated people no longer believe that winged and footed dragons exist in nature, although the creatures have been granted perpetual life in the world of allegory, symbol, and imagination. In art and literature they appear frequently as embodiments of death and damnation, and their appearance is calculated to terrify.

The return of the dragon-demon was engineered by the Counter-Reformation Catholic church, which found it a convenient symbol for heresy. In

17. Jacques Callot
(French, 1592–1635)
Temptation of Saint Anthony
Etching, image 12 3/16 x 18 3/16" (30.96 x 46.2 cm)
The Charles M. Lea Collection
28-42-791

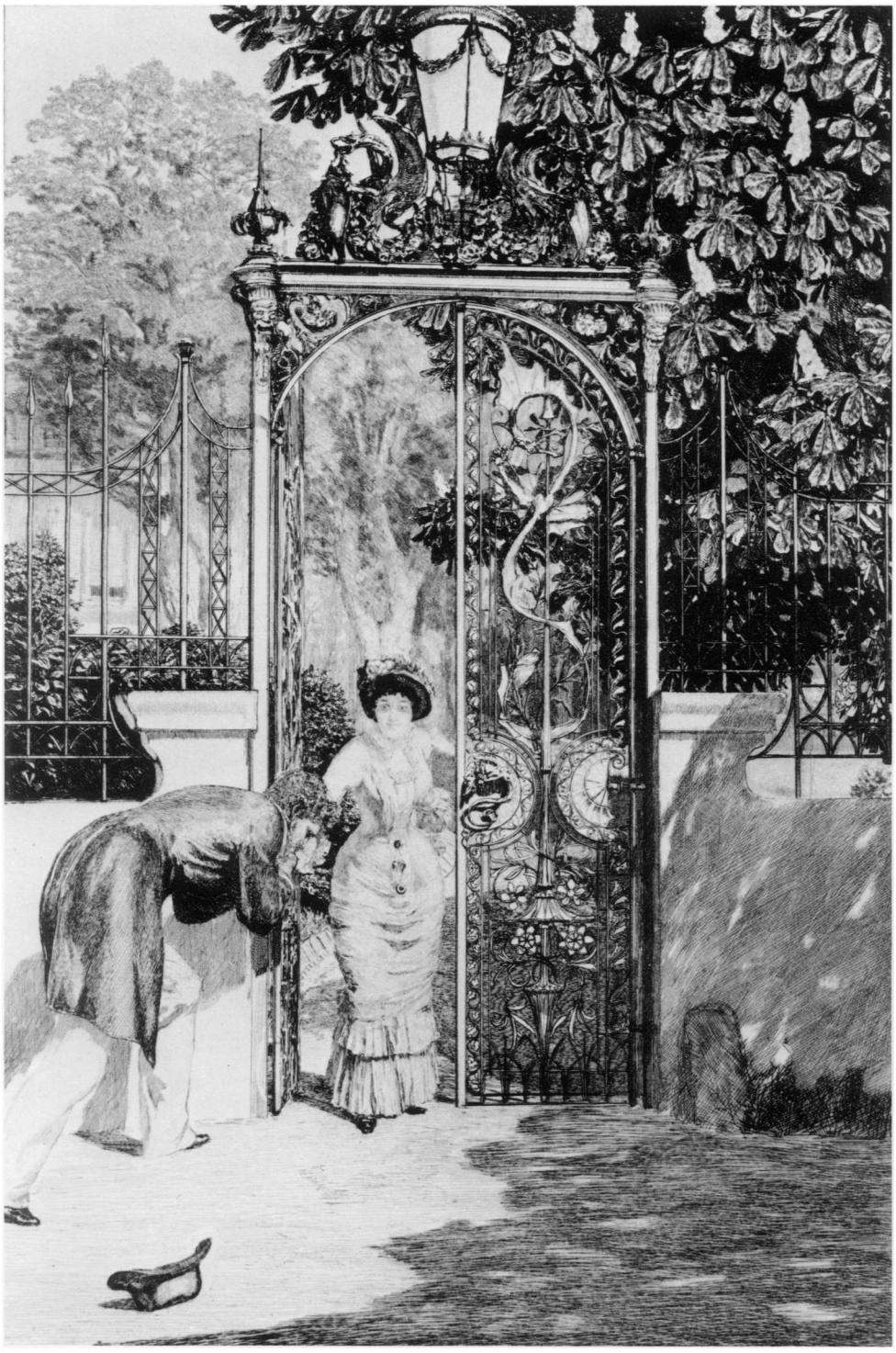


Rubens's *A Franciscan Allegory in Honor of the Immaculate Conception* (fig. 16), a dragon's head functions as the jaws of hell into which Franciscan monks shovel demons. In Jacques Callot's *Temptation of Saint Anthony* (fig. 17), the demons themselves are depicted as dragons, reminiscent of the medieval opponents of Saint Michael. The seventeeth-century Catholic church's revival of medieval dragon imagery should be seen in relation to its militant struggle against the rising tide of heresy, atheism, and Protestantism. Saint and dragon combats within this context represent the victory of true (Catholic) Christianity over false religions, be they Protestant or pagan.

The religious conflicts of the seventeeth century were followed by an eighteenth century wary of religious extremism and sometimes wary of religion itself. This attitude, combined with significant advances in natural history and world exploration, nearly obliterated the traditional Western dragon. Samuel Goldsmith, in his *Natural History* wrote, "The Dragon, a most terrible animal, but most probably not of Nature's formation," while Samuel Johnson went one step further by applying the term to "a fierce violent person; especially a fiercely or aggressively watchful woman; a duenna."[53] Johnson's chaperone is a deliberately comical interpretation of the classical concept of the dragon as guardian of virtue; a once fearsome creature has become an object for ridicule. The eighteenth century replaced the creaking medieval creature with the beneficent and decorative Chinese dragon. These fascinating beasts may have originated in the ancient Middle East, as Western dragons did. However, when adopted by the Chinese, they retained their old significance as powerful forces of nature.[54] To eighteenth-century Western viewers, unversed in the intricacies of Chinese thought, they were charming monsters lacking the unpleasant associations of their Western, Christianized counterparts. Chinese dragons, with their distinctive faces, scaly bodies, and lack of wings, further modified Western notions of the appearance of the dragon.

Such modifications are apparent in the dragon ornamenting a teapot manufactured in Ireland in 1872 (*see* cover). Although called "Chinese" by the manufacturer, the dragon is actually a hybrid combining Eastern and Western features.

18. Max Klinger
(German, 1857–1920)
A Love: At the Gate, 1887
Etching and engraving,
image 16 x 10 7/16" (40.6 x
26.5 cm)
Gift of the Print Club
1981-54-5



Crouching below the teapot, it owes more to medieval dragon-crocodiles than to its oriental relative. The crocodilian body, twisted tail, ears, and nose horn, are characteristic of the Western medieval prototype, as are the batwings supporting the teapot. The sculptor has added a novel feature of his own—webbed feet. From the oriental dragon, he has borrowed the scales and blue and lavender coloration. This composite beast is in the crouched and twisted posture reminiscent of the dragons of Saints George and Michael, but its flaming breath would warm the teapot rather than an adversary.

Not all nineteenth-century uses of dragon imagery were so trivial or so delightful. At the other end of the symbolic spectrum lurks the dragon as envisioned by the German painter and graphic artist Max Klinger. This creature exists as a highly abstract gate ornament in a print entitled *A Love: At the Gate* (fig. 18), one of a series. In the context of a young woman inviting her admirer into a lush garden, it connotes Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden and the onset of original sin. But, since it is wrapped around a lance in the gate design, it also recalls Saint George's heroic rescue of a doomed city and his chaste refusal of marriage to the king's daughter. The troubling ambiguity of the dragon's moral significance adds to the tension of the moment depicted; is it an agent of corruption or a guardian of virtue? Will temptation or virtue triumph? The issue is clarified by the remainder of the series, of which this is the second image. Seduction is followed by shame, death, and remorse. Although a far cry from the clear-cut definitions of medieval times, the ambiguous dragon is nevertheless appropriate to the uncertain moral and psychological climate of the late nineteeth century.

The mixture of form and metaphor evidenced in the nineteeth-century dragons indicates the shifting and broadening of form and meaning that have occurred since belief in dragons—and serious dragon studies—has declined. The weird creatures that grace the covers of science fiction novels or haunt the dungeons of fantasy adventure games today are even more remote from their medieval and Renaissance forerunners.[55] Yet even if they inhabit distant planets or join the ranks of fantastic monsters whose slaughter can win experience and treasure for a game-playing adventurer, they remain creatures of the outer limits and the inner life of the mind. Every century has its dragons.

Notes

1. Edward Topsell, *The historie of serpents. Or, the second booke of living creatures . . .* (London, 1608), p. 158.
2. Ibid., pp. 156–57.
3. Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley, 1980). Fontenrose traces the evolution of the dragon combat myth from pre-Classical to early Christian times.
4. *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. dragon.
5. Job 30:29; Jeremiah 9:11.
6. For complete catalogue information on this and other illuminated manuscripts from the collection, *see* Carl Zigrosser, "The Philip S. Collins Collection of Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts," Philadelphia Museum of Art *Bulletin,* vol. 58, no. 275 (1962).
7. Michael J. Curley, trans., *Physiologus* (Austin, 1979), pp. ix–xxxiii.
8. T. H. White, ed. and trans., *The Bestiary: A Book of Beasts* (New York, 1960), pp. 165–67; for the original Latin text, *see* M. R. James, *The Bestiary* (Oxford, 1928).
9. Ronald Latham, trans., *The Travels of Marco Polo* (London, 1958), pp. 178–79.
10. M. C. Seymour, ed., *Mandeville's Travels* (Oxford, 1967), p. 29.
11. *See* Zigrosser, "The Philip S. Collins Collection," pp. 7–9, for a discussion of the forms of illuminated manuscript service books.
12. Revelation 12:3, 7–9.
13. Book of Hours (French, late fifteenth century), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philip S. Collins Collection (45–65–9), fol. 26.
14. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* trans. and adapted Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (1941, reprint, New York, 1969), pp. 233–35.
15. Book of Hours (The Pembroke Hours), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philip S. Collins Collection (45–65–2), fol. 42.
16. White, *The Bestiary,* p. 202.
17. Ibid., pp. 166–67.
18. Voragine, *Golden Legend,* pp. 81–82.
19. Topsell, *Historie of serpents,* p. 154.
20. Voragine, *Golden Legend,* pp. 613–14.
21. Revelation 12:9.
22. Joan Barclay Lloyd, *African Animals in Renaissance Literature and Art* (Oxford, 1971), p. 14.
23. White, *The Bestiary,* p. 202.
24. Ibid., pp. 178–80.
25. Ibid., p. 180.
26. Pembroke Hours, fol. 47.
27. Fontenrose, *Python,* pp. 217–19.

28. Pierre Dinet, *Cinq Livres des Hieroglyphiques ou sont contenus les plus rare secrets . . .* (1614, reprint, New York, 1979), p. 624.
29. Andrea Alciati, *Emblemata cum Commentariis* (1621, reprint, New York, 1976), pp. 122f.
30. Fontenrose, *Python*, pp. 545–54.
31. Topsell, *Historie of serpents*, p. 155.
32. Alciati, *Emblemata*, p. 122.
33. Rodney Dennys, *The Heraldic Imagination* (New York, 1975), pp. 186–87. In Italy, where classical culture persisted throughout medieval times, the wyvern was never completely supplanted.
34. Ibid., pp. 189–91.
35. Lloyd, *African Animals*, p. 26.
36. Topsell, *Historie of serpents*, p. 161.
37. Ibid., p. 161.
38. Jean Paul Richter, ed., *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, (1883, reprint, New York, 1970), vol. 1, pp. 292–93.
39. Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, ed. William Gaunt (London, 1963), vol. 2, p. 166.
40. I am grateful to Eda Diskant for pointing out the dragon on the cassone and supplying the photograph of its Roman prototype located in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
41. Voragine, *Golden Legend*, pp. 61–62.
42. Deuteronomy 32:32–33.
43. James Watrous, *The Craft of Old-Master Drawings* (Madison, 1957), pp. 70–74. I am grateful to Denise Thomas for supplying the information about Renaissance inks.
44. Voragine, *Golden Legend*, pp. 587–88.
45. Ibid., pp. 588–89.
46. *See* Herbert Friedmann, *A Bestiary for Saint Jerome: Animal Symbolism in European Religious Art* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 209. Friedmann's hypothesis that the background scene is unrelated to the theme of the penitential saint is incorrect. However, he has been more courageous than other cataloguers, who limit their comments to the beauty of the landscape. *See also*, F. Harck, "Notizien uber italienische Bilder in Petersbourger Sammlungen," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 19 (1896), p. 430; Bernard Berenson, *Catalogue of a Collection of Painting and Some Art Objects. Italian Paintings*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1913), p. 128; Giordana Canova, *Paris Bordon* (Venice, n.d.), p. 98; and various communications in the Johnson Collection painting files to Barbara Sweeny, former curator of the Johnson Collection, which make apparent the confusion over the presence of the dragon.
47. Fontenrose, *Python*, pp. 545–50
48. M. R. James, *Marvels of the East* (Oxford, 1929), pp. 9, 55; *see also* Rudolph Wittkower, "Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 5 (1943), pp. 159–97.
49. Topsell, *Historie of serpents*, p. 160.
50. *Physiologus*, p. 19.
51. Dinet, *Cinq Livres*, p. 325 (author's translation).
52. Voragine, *Golden Legend*, p. 589.
53. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. dragon.
54. Ernest Ingersoll, *Dragons and Dragon Lore* (New York, 1928), pp. 74–92.
55. Bob Schwabach, "Leaping Lizards! Who Let the Dragon Out?" *Today* magazine, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 26, 1981, pp. 10–14, 22–23.

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