

St. John's Bestiary

Ms. 61, 13th century

from St. John's College, Oxford

Notes written by Dr. W.O. Hassall

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ERRATA

Please note that the first frame on this strip is the Index Frame and the Notes begin from the second frame, which is regarded as Frame 1 for the purpose of the Notes.

On P.5 Frame 38 should read Frame 37 (f.37v.) and the following frames should both read Frame 38. (f.38v and f.39)

St. John's College, Oxford

MS. 61, Bestiary

English 13th cent.

Adviser : W. O. Hassall, M.A., D.Phil., F.S.A.

293 x 207 mm. ff. 1-103

From Holy Trinity Priory, York

Belongs to "Second Family of Bestiaries" (see M. R. James, *A Bestiary of the 12th Century*).

Mark of previous ownership appears on top margin of f. 3 in black ink : "Liber Collegii D. Jo. Bapt. Oxon. ex dono Dni Gulielmi Paddei Militis et Coll. olim Convictoris. 1634".

Profusely illustrated through f. 68 in rich colour and incised gold leaf. Small illuminated initials often juxtaposed to picture of beast in question. Occasional single illuminated initials scattered through text. The work of more than one artist apparent. The most bold experienced hand clearly appears in ff. 3v, 5v, 6v, 8v, 9, 13, 13v, 14v, 15, 15v, 16, 18, 21, 23v, 26v (bottom), 29v, 45, 47, 49v, 55 (peacock only), 68. Reddish initials are often visible through pigment, possibly indicating colour to be used, e.g., f. 9, blouse of virgin, body of unicorn. Coloured backgrounds (not gold leaf) are decorated delicately with stars, arabesques, sprays of grass, etc., in fine white lines. This film includes every page in the manuscript. Those without miniatures are not here described.

Please Note : The frame numbers not included throughout these notes contain text only.

Frame 1. f. 1v.

Full page. Creation, four scenes.

Upper left — God creating animals, birds, firmament, earth.

Upper right — God taking rib from Adam to create Eve.

Lower left — Adam holding figleaf, apple-tree, serpent, Eve holding figleaf.

Lower right — Angel with sword driving Adam and Eve from Paradise.

Frame 1. f. 2.

Full page. The creation of birds, fishes, beasts ; squirrel, serpent, fox, hedgehog, rabbit, goat nibbling tree, wild boar, dromedary, wild ass, horse, stag, ram. Pencil outline of birds in margin.

Frame 3. f. 3v.

Full page. Leo, three scenes.

Top — Sick lion curing himself by devouring a monkey.

Middle — Compassionate lion refraining from eating two prostrate men, one, hands upraised in prayer. Three marvelling huntsmen with spears in background.

Bottom — Lion afraid of cock.

Frame 5. f. 5v.

Small illumination at bottom of (cut) page. Hunter on horseback holds tiger cub in cloak. Throws down two glass balls (silver leaf) to confuse pursuing tigress. Silver leaf point of huntsman's spear.

Frame 6. f. 6v.

Two illuminations.

Top — Pard, its eyes rolled up looking at initial P.

Bottom — Panther watched by three animals, emits sweet-smelling breath from its mouth to attract eight other animals.

Frame 8. f. 8v.

Half page. Hunter in chain mail (silver leaf) with shield and spear pierces flank of antelope whose horns are entangled in tree.

Frame 8. f. 9.

Half page. Unicorn in virgin's lap being speared by one hunter (costume), while another raises axe. Tree.

Frame 9. f. 10.

Lynx in circular frame.

Frame 10. f. 10v.

Two illuminations.

Top — Griffin in circular frame. Its fore-part is bird-like with claw grasping pig; its hindquarters a lion.

Bottom — Elephant with crenellated howdah containing six helmeted warriors in chain mail. Elephant is led by man not in armour, with hat and axe over shoulder. Gold leaf flaked off over pink background. (Painting techniques.)

Frame 12. f. 12v.

Castor pursued by two hunters, one with bow and arrow, castrates itself. Blue background, circular gold leaf frame. Delicate colouring.

Frame 12. f. 13.

Ibex falls from mountain peak head first (protected by strength of its horns).

Frame 13. f. 13v.

Hyena, devouring corpse in its coffin.

Frame 14. f. 14v.

Bonnacon standing before tree soiling two pursuing hunters who carry spears and a shield.

Frame 14. f. 15.

Monkey carrying offspring, one in arms, one on back, running from man who stands watching, arms crossed over his chest. Tree.

Frame 15. f. 15v.

Satyr. (Callitriche.) Bearded face and bushy tail, in circular frame. It holds staff with ball on top.

Frame 15. f. 16.

Stag. Page mended by sewing.

Frame 16. f. 17.

Goat.

Frame 17. f. 18.

Wild goats feeding on dittany plant. Asymmetrical treatment of foliage.

Frame 18. f. 18v.

Two illuminations.

Top — Monoceros, its horns projecting beyond frame.

Bottom — Bear, shaping cubs with her tongue.

Frame 19. f. 19v.

Leucrota, springing forward.

Frame 19. f. 20.

Two illuminations.

Top — Parandrus.

Bottom — Fox, feigning death to attract birds. Heads of other foxes watch this successful ruse.

Frame 20. f. 21.

Two illuminations.

Top — Yale, lying down, with fantastically long tusks and horns.

Bottom — Wolf slinks towards six sheep. Five are startled, sixth lies asleep.

Frame 23. f. 23v.

Canis. Three dogs in superimposed profile, before two trees. (Another example of underpainting technique revealed by badly-flaked gold leaf.)

Frame 25. f. 25v.

Sheep, grazing.

Frame 25. f. 26.

Wether, within circular frame, inset in square.

Frame 26. f. 26v.

Two illuminations.

Top — Lamb, in circular frame inset in square.

Bottom — He-goat, lying down; circular frame inset in square.

Frame 26. f. 27.

Camel.

Frame 27. f. 28.

Dromedary.

Frame 28. f. 28v.

Two illuminations.

Top — Ass, charmingly if naively drawn.

Bottom — Wild Ass, drawn with familiarity.

Frame 29. f. 29v.

Horse, drawn with the assurance of familiarity.

Frame 32. f. 32v.

Three illuminations.

Top — Cat with mouse. Tabby markings indicated by wavy blue lines.

Middle — Mouse with egg in mouth.

Bottom — Weasel.

Frame 32. f. 33.

Mole. Thread through upper margin of folio.

Frame 33. f. 33v.

A pair of hedgehogs under symmetrical vine. One hedgehog rolls on back to spear grapes on quills.

Frame 33. f. 34.

Ants in double lines emerge from earth. Circular frame in square inset.

Frame 36. f. 37.

Vultures. A pair, symmetrically traced. Bodies, facing in opposite directions, superimposed, but heads are turned to look at each other.

Frame 38. f. 37v.

Three cranes, one with stone for ballast in its claw. Circular frame inset in square. Delicate colouring.

Frame 39. f. 38v.

Parrot.

Frame 39. f. 39.

Caladrius. Mythical bird standing at foot of patient's bed, looking towards patient who has bandaged head. (Note, drawing of arm, hand and fingers under bedclothes.)

Frame 39. f. 40.

Stork. Frog in mouth. Spirited drawing. Circular frame in square inset.

- Frame 40. f. 40v.**
Swan. Fish in mouth. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 40. f. 41.**
Ibis. Feeds snakes' eggs to young in nest. Grasps snake in its-claws. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 41. f. 41v.**
Two ostriches. One looks at Pleiades. Other deposits the egg held in its bill in a hole in the earth.
- Frame 41. f. 42.**
Coot.
- Frame 42. f. 42v.**
Alcion. (Halcyon.)
- Frame 42. f. 43.**
Phoenix. Collects spice branches for its pyre. (Note : It is white, green and blue ; not, as the text says, "color feniceus"). Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 43. f. 43v.**
Phoenix, perishing in flames. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 43. f. 45.**
Cinomolgus, its nest on top of high, symmetrically drawn cinnamon tree. Two men below, slings with stones in their right hands. Each has his coat tail caught up over left arm to hold cinnamon fruit as it falls.
- Frame 45. f. 45v.**
Two illuminations.
- Top* — Ercinee. Circular frame set in square.
- Bottom* — Hoopoe being preened by its four young, one of which "licks" its eyes. (See T. H. White, *Book of Beasts*.)
Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 45. f. 46.**
Pelicans. Three parents, representing continuous narration. The first is being attacked by its young, the second kills a young bird, the third breathes life back into the dead bird.

- Frame 46. f. 46v.**
Owl. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 46. f. 47.**
Siren. Holds fish in one hand, her fish-like tail in the other.
- Frame 47. f. 47v.**
Partridges. Two birds facing opposite directions, bodies superimposed one in front of the other. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 47. f. 48.**
Female partridge stealing eggs from another female. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 48. f. 49.**
Magpie. Coloured black and white from nature. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 49. f. 49v.**
Hawk. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 49. f. 50.**
Two illuminations.
- Top* — Nightingale on nest full of eggs. Circular frame set in square.
- Bottom* — Bat, coloured grey, from nature.
- Frame 50. f. 50v.**
Raven. Coloured black from nature. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 50. f. 51.**
Crow. Coloured black. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 51. f. 51v.**
Pair of doves in curious medieval dovecot, a stone structure with cupola between two posts. Set in circular frame within a square.
- Frame 52. f. 52v.**
Pair of turtle doves in circular frame set in square.
- Frame 53. f. 53v.**
Swallow. Coloured black and white from nature. Circular frame set in square.

- Frame 54. f. 54v.**
Quail. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 54. f. 55.**
Two illuminations.
- Top* — Peacock.
- Bottom* — Hoopoe. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 55. f. 55v.**
Cock. Spurs. Circular frame set in square.
- Frame 55. f. 56.**
Duck. Drawn from nature.
- Frame 56. f. 57.**
Bees flying towards three skeps.
- Frame 59. f. 59v.**
Perindeus. A tree, said to be in India (text), symmetrically drawn, with doves in its branches eating its fruit, and two dragons below about to eat two doves who have ventured beyond the safety of the shadow of the tree. (See T. H. White, *Book of Beasts*.)
- Frame 60. f. 61.**
Dragon, entwining and breathing fire on a large blue animal with hooked beak, small ears, lion's body, short tail, hoofs. Text calls it an elephant.
- Frame 61. f. 62.**
Basilisk. Mythical spurred cock-like bird.
- Frame 62. f. 62v.**
Viper. Circular frame inset in square.
- Frame 64. f. 64v.**
Asp. It tries to protect itself against a hunter, who is chanting to bring asp from its lair, by stopping up one ear with its tail and pressing the other ear to ground. Hunter's shield.
- Frame 65. f. 65v.**
Scitalis. A mythical snake. Circular frame in square.
- Frame 65. f. 66.**
Two illuminations.
- Top* — Amphisbena. Mythical creature with two heads.

Bottom — Hydrus, a dragon, devouring a crocodile. Circular frame inset in square.

Frame 66. f. 67.

Three illuminations.

Top — Boa, a mythical snake with bird body. Circular frame in square inset.

Middle — Jaculus, a winged serpent.

Bottom — Seps. A mythical worm, deadly to humans.

Frame 67. f. 68.

Full page. A man, having eaten the fruit of a tree poisoned by salamanders which entwine its symmetrically drawn branches, lies dying on the ground below the tree.

Frame 68. f. 68v.

Two illuminations.

Top — Lizard.

Bottom — Newt. (No shiny stars on its back as mentioned in text.)

Frame 69. f. 69v.

Snake shedding its skin by going through crack in "rock". Rock in this case represented by a post. Circular frame set in square.

Frame 103. f. 103v.

Full page. *Lapides Igniferi* in two scenes.

Top — Woman and man, separated by hill, hold out magnets towards each other.

Bottom — The pair embrace as flames burst out.

Below these scenes is an oblong frame within which is written: "Liber Sancte Trinitatis Eborac", much defaced. Two winged serpents entwine these words, the tail of each in the mouth of the other.