

**Humanities Core: Animal/Culture**  
**Professor Rebecca Davis**

**Guide to The Medieval Bestiary Website**

<http://bestiary.ca>

To explore the Medieval Bestiary website, begin by choosing “Beasts” from the menu on the home page. Next, click on the “Alphabetic” option, which takes you to a list of all the beasts that appear in the bestiaries indexed by this website.

While the Medieval Bestiary is not a fully scholarly source, it offers a unique opportunity to compare the representation of bestiary animals across numerous bestiary manuscripts. It collates various images and medieval authorities’ descriptions of each animal.

Choose an animal that we’ve read about in Barber’s edition of MS Bodley 764. Next, locate that animal in the alphabetic list provided on the Medieval Bestiary website.

Each animal’s page contains a summary of its General Attributes, the Allegory/Moral usually attributed to it (though keep in mind that these can vary), and a list of Sources, that is, the classical and medieval authors from which the compilers of the bestiary drew their information about each animal.

After you’ve familiarized yourself with this basic information, take a few minutes to examine the images for your animal by clicking on the Gallery link. You can enlarge the thumbnails by clicking on them and scroll up or down using the arrow keys next to the images.

Below each thumbnail you’ll see what medievalists refer to as a *shelfmark*, a standard notation that indicates the name and page number of the manuscript in which the image appears as well as the name of the library where that manuscript is now kept. If you refer to an image, include it in a paper, or embed it on your own website, you should always cite or caption it with the shelfmark, just as you would cite bibliographic information, including page or line number, when you quote from a written text.

Examine each of the images of the animal you’re researching and answer the following questions, making sure to cite shelfmarks when you refer to specific images in the gallery.

- How many images does the website include for the animal you chose? What continuities (similarities) do you observe from one image to the next? Is there a particular feature or action frequently depicted?

- In what ways do the images differ? Be specific about your observations, considering the general form of the animal, coloration, the role of any human figures in the scene, the relationship between text and image (if applicable), the quality and style of the drawing (is it realistic/naturalistic? highly stylized/fantastical? ornate/detailed? rudimentary/rough?)
- How do the images of the animal relate to the bestiaries' descriptions and moralization of the animal? In what ways do they reinforce the bestiaries' teachings? In what ways do they contradict or work against them?
- Think about the rhetorical situation. How do these images appeal to their audiences? Do they present the animal sympathetically? As an object of curiosity or wonder? As something to be admired, even emulated? Or do they serve to distance the viewer from the animal, perhaps by suggesting that it ought to be feared, controlled, or shunned? Choose at least one image and give specific examples of how it makes a rhetorical appeal to its audience.
- Compare the images included in the gallery to the image of your animal in Barber's edition of MS Bodley 764. (Note that you will sometimes find MS Bodley 764 included in the Medieval Bestiary's gallery.) How does the Bodley 764 image compare to other medieval bestiaries' depiction of the animal? Make a note if it seems to be closely related to one or more of the other images.
- Finally, choose a favorite image and describe it with reference to the features listed above. Why does this image appeal to you?