

Humanities Core: Animal/Culture
Professor Rebecca Davis

Guide to Viewing The “Bodley Bestiary”

Oxford, Bodleian Library, [MS Bodley 764](#)

One of the primary texts that we’ll be reading during the first three weeks is a medieval bestiary, or “book of beasts,” that is preserved in a manuscript housed in Oxford, England, inside the Bodleian Library. The librarians call this precious book MS (an abbreviation for “manuscript”) Bodley 764.

Lucky for us, because the manuscript has recently been digitized, we don’t have to fly to Oxford to see the manuscript up close.

To prepare for Professor Davis’s lectures during Week 2, spend some time getting familiar with MS Bodley 764.

The link above takes you to an image of the outside of the manuscript book (or *codex*). Study the Metadata on the right side of the page. Notice that it gives you some important information about the manuscript including its date of production, place of origin, and the language of its text.

When you click on the image, several navigation tools appear at the top left. Use these to zoom in and out and get a closer look.

Are you ready to look inside? In the green space just above the image you’ll see a horizontal scroll tool and an arrow key that allow you to open the cover and advance the pages of the book.

Initially, you’ll encounter a number of blank pages. Keep advancing, or drag the scroll to the right, until the number count reads 17/298. This is the first page of text in the manuscript. Use the tools to zoom in. What kinds of things do you notice about the text? Is it readable? Do any words look familiar to you?

Keep advancing the pages until you come to the first image, or, what we call a manuscript illumination. What’s depicted here? Are these scenes familiar? How would you describe the style of illustration?

Professor Davis will discuss a number of the manuscript’s images along with its text during lecture. For further study, you might attempt to locate the manuscript pages for one or two of the beasts you’re reading about in your modern English translation of the bestiary. Unlike the Aberdeen Bestiary website, the Bodley Bestiary site does not provide a transcription or a commentary so we’ve got to rely on our own observations here. What kind of information can you get from exploring the digitized manuscript that your modern edition can’t provide? How does looking at the digitization change your experience of the bestiary?