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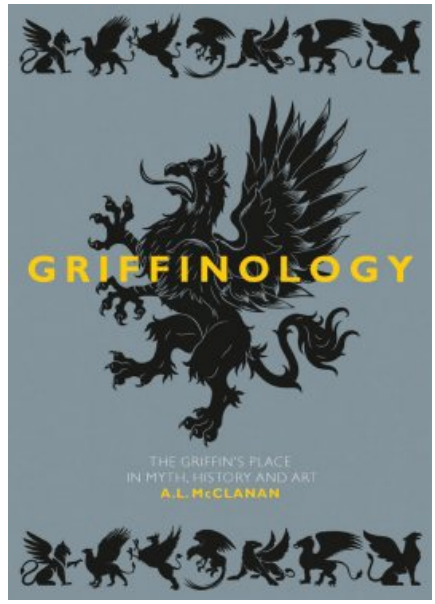
(roughly 100) is not too onerous to search through.

Naturally, all of these possible shortcomings pale in comparison to the ability to own a volume which contains full-size, full-colour facsimiles of these historic American heraldic manuscripts, along with the detailed research and bibliographical notes by Dr. Harold Bowditch on the arms and the individuals contained therein. If you have any interest at all in American (or really British, since Massachusetts was a British colony at the time) heraldry as it was used in the early and mid-eighteenth century, then this volume should be on your "must have" list to own.

David B. Appleton



A.L. McClanan, *Griffinology: the griffin's place in myth, history and art*.
London: Reaktion Books, 2024. 224 pages, 109 illustrations.
Hardcover ISBN 978-1-78914-846-6. £30. Ebook ISBN 978-1-78914-886-2. £25.

The griffin is a familiar fabulous beast, not least through its presence in heraldry, with an ancient and complex history and iconography. This attractively produced and lavishly illustrated volume is a thorough exploration of the origins and evolution of the griffin, up to its present-day appearance in commercial branding, gaming, and modern fantasy literature.

Depictions of griffins first appear in the applied arts of the Bronze Age cities of Iran/Mesopotamia and spread throughout ancient west Asia. They are common on cylinder seals and take various forms: a lion's body with the head of an eagle; a 'griffin demon' (a standing anthropomorphic figure with the wings and head of an eagle); and the Anzû Bird (a lion-headed eagle). Professor McClanan's approach here is inclusive – if a beast has been called a griffin, then it is likely to be present in this book.

'Orientalising' griffins spread from the Middle East to Classical Greece where

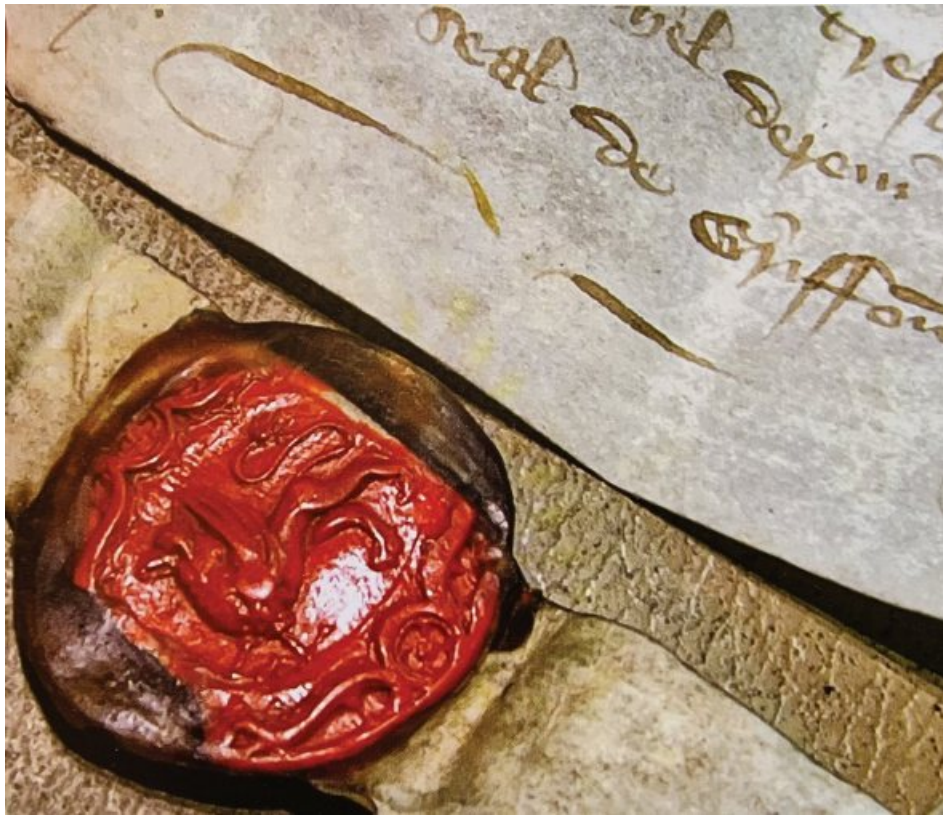


Figure 1: receipt issued by King Edward III in 1344 with his griffin signet appended, Griffinology fig. 88, p.137; *TNA* E213/128.

they provide a striking presence as *protomes* (three dimensional heads) on ceremonial cauldrons. The heads are identifiable as griffins being open-beaked and with erect sharply pointed ears. These vessel parts are likely to have ended up as votive offerings, and more than six hundred examples of the *c*. 3000-year-old bronze sculpted griffin heads survive. Unsurprisingly, the Greeks considered griffins to be dangerous – fast and fierce, with exotically coloured feathers 'Beware the sharp-beaked hounds of Zeus that do not bark' (Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound,* ll. 802–3) – and liminal, inhabiting the borders of the known world to 'dwell about the flood of Pluto's stream that flows with gold' (ibid*,* ll. 805–6). Herodotus too tells of fierce griffins guarding gold from the one-eyed Arimaspi (mythic inhabitants of Scythia) in a story of c. 430 B.C. It is this association with gold that prompted Adrienne Mayor to link possible Greek discoveries of beaked Protoceratops skulls in areas of central Asia where gold is also present, to the origins of the griffin myth, ignoring more ancient iconographic antecedents.[1]

The griffin is perhaps the first creature to appear in the motif of symmetrically

1 Adrienne Mayor, *The First Fossil Hunters: Dinosaurs, Mammoths, and Myth in Greek and Roman Times* (Princeton, 2000), chapter 1.

placed 'heraldic' beasts, where pairs of confronted or addorsed creatures flank the Tree of Life. Such motifs were long-lived and travelled both east and west along the Silk Roads, absorbed into and absorbing elements of central Asian Animal Style art, via textiles, and eventually appearing in Byzantine and Romanesque art and proto-armorial sculpture. This array of motifs had a considerable influence on the genesis and evolution of heraldry in the twelfth century.

The book discusses associations with the divine, including the appearance of griffins in Dionysian revels from *c*. 400 B.C., and the long tradition of their depiction on drinking horns. It illustrates an ivory example with a horned griffin terminal of c. 100 B.C., one of fifty *rhytons* excavated from the Parthian Persian fortification of Old Nisa in Central Asia. Medieval and early modern sources describe 'griffin claw' drinking horns, a surviving example of which (a bison horn) was recorded in the cathedral treasury of Saint-Denis in c. 1125–50.[2] Two griffins' claws and three griffins' eggs (ostrich eggs) are documented in Durham Cathedral in an inventory of 1383. One of these claws (an ibex horn) with its identifying inscription (translated here from the Latin) 'the claw of a griffin sacred to the blessed Cuthbert of Durham' survives in the collections of the British Museum. In Pisa, an Islamic bronze automaton of a griffin belonging to the eleventh to mid-twelfth century, captured in a military campaign, was set on high at the east end of the cathedral and emitted eerie sounds when the strong coastal winds blew through its bellows.

Although there is much of relevance to the origins and development of heraldry throughout this volume, there is one chapter where the use of griffins in an armorial context provides the focus. Amongst subjects discussed is the griffin's achievement of status as an English Royal Beast in 1335 when William Montague, Earl of Salisbury, gave Edward III the right to use his family badge. Edward made use of his new device, notably on his privy (or private) seal, known as the griffin signet (**Figure 1**). Small medieval lead badges in the form of griffins have been found along the Thames foreshore and in other riverine locations, and these may refer to Edward III, Salisbury, or be apotropaic, or a combination of these attributions. A clue to the rise in popularity of the griffin is present in *Tractatus de Armis* of c. 1440–50, where the combined martial qualities of the lion and the eagle were said to be doubled in this composite beast, and used to signify a great warrior.

Like other fabulous creatures the griffin was subjected to attempts at retrospective heraldic classification, where wingless griffins are categorised as 'male.' The oddest variant example of a male griffin is present as a supporter on the grant of arms to Anne Boleyn, where it is shown with multiple elongated spikes projecting from its body. The proliferation of griffins in English heraldry by the early seventeenth century is demonstrated in *Vincent's Ordinary*, with its sixty-two griffins segreant, twenty-four griffins statant, and seventy-three griffin heads (not including badges and crests).

There is far more of fascination in this thoroughly engaging account than can possibly be referred to in a short review – from the winged griffins who carried Alexander the Great aloft in his flying chariot, to the Jewish mythological figure of Ziz, whose griffin form appears in the *Bird's Head Haggadah* of *c*. 1300, via frozen Pazyryk burials with griffin tattoos, excavated from Central Asian kurgans (burial mounds). For anyone with an interest in the origins of heraldry, mythical creatures, medieval bestiaries, nomadic iconography, and much more I highly recommend this book.

Steven Ashley

2 Intriguingly the medieval French name *Denis* is linked to that of the god Dionysos.