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A Paper Menagerie: The Symbolism of Medieval Bestiaries

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A PAPER MENAGERIE

The Symbolism of Medieval Bestiaries



The Physiologus

- "The Naturalist" or "Naturalist Philosopher"
- Written in Alexandria
- 2'd or 3'd Century AD
- By Anonymous Greek Author
- The genre of bestiaries ultimately comes from this book
- Had 47 chapters on mythical beasts
- It aimed to use animals as metaphors for the Christian Doctrine
- To better teach children



...So a lot of its contents weren't exactly true...



There are 5 Different families of Bestiaries

- 1st
 - Mainly copies of the *Physiologus*
 - Elegant and lavishly produced
- Second
 - Mostly English
 - 12th-13th Centuries
 - Additional pages nearly doubled the *Physiologus* in size
 - Still largely religious, but animals were also loosely categorized in a scientific manner
 - Contained some scientific observations as well
- Transitional
- Third
- Fourth

- The *Physiologus* became extremely popular in Medieval Europe
- Many bestiaries in this period started as direct copies
- But scribes often took creative liberties with the content and illustrations
- In 12th and 13th centuries, more species were pulled from...
 - Encyclopedias
 - Sermons
 - Theological treatises
- Until it wasn't really the *Physiologus* anymore

Sources

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