

## A Medieval Monster Mash: Fantastical Creatures in New College Library's Manuscripts from the Twelfth to Fourteenth Centuries

Fantastical creatures and mythical monsters abound in medieval manuscripts. Drawn from a variety of classical and medieval teratological traditions, they cavort in margins, lurk between lines, and inhabit initials, often gnawing on letters, themselves, and each other.<sup>1</sup> New College Library's spectacular collection of manuscripts plays host to a wide variety of weird and wonderful beings. This short article will focus on select examples from the collection to explore something of the range of different forms and functions mythical monsters could take and perform within medieval manuscript art. Drawing on the field of 'monster studies', it will demonstrate that these fantastical creatures can reveal much about the people who made and used the volumes in which they are found.<sup>2</sup>

Mythical monsters in medieval manuscripts functioned as signs and symbols of other things, as embodied metaphors for people, events, or concepts.<sup>3</sup> This is reflected in the etymology of the word monster which is widely believed to derive from either the Latin verb *monstrare* meaning 'to show, display or reveal' or the verb *monere* meaning 'to warn'.<sup>4</sup> Crossing boundaries and challenging assumptions, these monstrous depictions often functioned on multiple symbolic levels, serving diverse purposes and conveying different meanings simultaneously. Though these creatures may seem disconnected and out of place to modern eyes, their symbolic meanings and graphic functions were integral to the manuscripts they inhabit.<sup>5</sup>

Mythical monsters are, for example, regularly found in the margins of biblical manuscripts. Randall suggests that the inclusion in liturgical and devotional volumes of 'profane marginal themes', including monsters, could reflect a 'medieval propensity for [the] juxtaposition of contrasting elements'.<sup>6</sup> One such manuscript is the library's beautiful thirteenth-century de Brailes Psalter, MS 322. This deluxe copy of the Old Testament Psalms was produced by the renowned, and apparently particularly prolific, workshop of William de Brailes, based in Oxford c. 1230–60.<sup>7</sup> It is lavishly illuminated, with abundant use of gold leaf and lapis lazuli, a striking blue pigment imported from modern-day Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Made for display for a manifestly wealthy, but unfortunately unknown, patron, it contains ten major historiated initials depicting scenes from the Old and New Testaments in stunning detail. These include the fight between David and Goliath (at the beginning of Psalm 51 on f. 54r) and the Annunciation to the shepherds (at the beginning of Psalm 97 on f. 97r). Wyverns, winged two-legged dragons, form the outline of many of initials in the de Brailes Psalter, or else emerge from them, some breathing fire.

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<sup>1</sup> Alixe Bovey, *Monsters and Grotesques in Medieval Manuscripts* (London: British Library, 2002), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent overview of this area of scholarship, see Asa Simon Mittman, 'Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman with Peter J. Dendle (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 1–14.

<sup>3</sup> Wes Williams, *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture: Mighty Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 6–7, 10–11.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6; Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), XI.iii.3 (*Monstra vero a monitu dicta, quod aliquid significando demonstrant, sive quod statim monstrant quid appareat*).

<sup>5</sup> Albrecht Classen, 'Imagination, Fantasy, Otherness, and Monstrosity in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern World', in *Imagination and Fantasy in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Time: Projections, Dreams, Monsters, and Illusions*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 1–229, at pp. 57–62.

<sup>6</sup> Lilian M. C. Randall, *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Graham, 'Brailes, William de (fl. c. 1230–1260)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23 September 2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/38130>> (Accessed: 12 December 2024); Stella Panayotova and Anna Mazzinghi, 'William de Brailes (doc. c.1230–1260)', in *The Art & Science of Illuminated Manuscripts: A Handbook*, ed. Stella Panayotova (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2020), pp. 252–9.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Gameson et al., *The Pigments of British Medieval Illuminators: A Scientific and Cultural Study* (London: Archetype Press, 2023), pp. 168–9, 206.



A wyvern from the de Brailes Psalter, New College Library, Oxford, MS 322, f. 27r  
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Dragons are a common feature in the decorative schemes of medieval manuscripts. Alongside the de Brailes Psalter, many of the manuscripts housed in New College Library contain depictions of draconic creatures. Among these are two late-twelfth-century copies of Peter Lombard's *Great Gloss on the Psalms* (MS 32 and MS 34). These manuscripts were decorated in very different styles, MS 32 in northern France and MS 34 in England, but both contain wyverns and other dragon-like creatures which adorn their initials.<sup>9</sup> It is particularly unusual that, in MS 32, a wyvern giving birth to three worm-like babies forms the tail of the illuminated initial 'Q' which begins commentary on Psalm 51 on f. 77r. As Urbanski notes, draconic creatures in the medieval Christian iconographic tradition were often understood to be the devil or demons in disguise, or were else more generally symbolic of temptation or sin.<sup>10</sup>



Initial 'Q' at the beginning of Psalm 51 features a wyvern giving birth  
 New College Library, Oxford, MS 34, f. 77r

<sup>9</sup> Henry O. Coxe, *Catalogus codicum MSS. qui in collegiis aulisque Oxoniensibus hodie adservantur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1852), pp. 8–9; J. J. G. Alexander and Elzbieta Temple, *Illuminated Manuscripts in Oxford College Libraries, the University Archives and the Taylor Institution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 12 (no. 83) and 15 (no. 117).

<sup>10</sup> Charity Urbanski, *Medieval Monstrosity: Imagining the Monstrous in Medieval Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2024), p. 244.

Painted in a palette of red, pink, and blue, however, the wyverns of the de Brailes Psalter do not seem to have malicious intent. Rather, they appear to be supporting and perhaps even protecting the sacred text of the Psalms which they decorate. It has been suggested that some mythical monsters in the margins of medieval manuscripts may have had an apotropaic function.<sup>11</sup> Fantastical creatures may have been stationed in the margins to shield the Word of God from perceived forces of evil, perhaps like the gargoyles carved into medieval churches and cathedrals.<sup>12</sup> Wyverns do not roam the pages of the de Brailes Psalter alone, but are accompanied by a host of other creatures, some real and others fantastical. These include a variety of bird species (e.g., ff. 29v, 64v, 92v, 100v, etc.), a squirrel (f. 93v), a fox (f. 96v), and a badger (f. 98r), alongside many different hybrid creatures, most of them part-human and part-animal (e.g., ff. 16v, 35v, 45v, 81v, 110v, etc.). The diversity on display was perhaps intended to reflect the vastness and variety of God's creation.



A later, printed depiction of some of the so-called 'monstrous races' from the *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493) including a blemmy and a cynocephalus on the right of the image, New College Library, Oxford, BT1.15.4

Throughout medieval Europe, many people believed that creatures we now know to be fantastical (i.e., 'not real'), such as blemmyae (headless beings with faces on their torsos) and cynocephali (canine-headed humans), did exist, albeit on the edges of the known world.<sup>13</sup> These beliefs arguably represented an act of psychological othering, a rejection of groups of people based on perceived or attributed differences. This othering of non-European peoples and cultures through the language of the monstrous was both a product of and means for discrimination, which was often grounded in racism, and was used to justify and establish the superiority of white Europeans over other societies located in Africa and Asia.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, these so-called 'monstrous races' were sometimes described as contrary to nature. However, the Church Fathers Augustine

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>12</sup> John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), see especially pp. 5–25, 131–65; Classen, 'Imagination, Fantasy, Otherness, and Monstrosity', p. 173.

<sup>13</sup> Damien Kempf and Maria L. Gilbert, *Medieval Monsters* (London: The British Library, 2015), p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3–25, at pp. 7–12; Classen, 'Imagination, Fantasy, Otherness, and Monstrosity', pp. 15–18.

and Isidore disagreed. They argued that it was not possible for monstrous beings to be unnatural because this would make them contrary to the will of God, who was the omnipotent and omniscient creator of everything.<sup>15</sup> Isidore maintained that these creatures could only be contrary to what was known or believed about nature, which was necessarily limited by the human condition; God's purposes, Isidore explained, are enigmatic and his monsters are signs of the unintelligible world and its mysteries.<sup>16</sup>

Hybrid monsters, especially animal-human hybrids, were a particularly popular subject for medieval manuscript artists. Drawing inspiration from the fantastical beasts of classical myth, such as the centaur (a part-horse, part-man) and the harpy (part-bird, part-woman), artists created a wide variety of different hybrid creatures. New College's manuscripts are full of such beasts. Hybrid monsters of comparable appearance, for example, inhabit two fourteenth-century English manuscripts within the collection. A strange creature looks disdainfully down at the text of Boethius's *De consolatio philosophiae* in New College Library's MS 264 (f. 9r), and in the library's MS 183 (f. 65v), which contains the *Constitutiones Clementiae*, a similar being looks up expectantly at a gloss on the text.



Hybrid creature from New College Library, Oxford, MS 264, f. 9r (left)  
and creature in New College Library, Oxford, MS 183, f. 65r (right)

In his pioneering work, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', Cohen argues that their 'ontological liminality', their rejection of order and structure, allows hybrid creatures like this to disrupt binary categories.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Camille maintains that hybrid creatures 'seem to celebrate the flux of "becoming" rather than "being"', and suggests that they embodied both an appreciation ambiguity and a challenge to established social boundaries.<sup>18</sup> Camille contends that hybrid monsters can 'gloss, parody, modernize and problematize the text's authority while never totally undermining it'.<sup>19</sup> As Randall highlights, manuscript artists may have also employed monstrous

<sup>15</sup> David D. Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), pp. 52–3; Augustinus Hipponensis, *De Civitate Dei*, Library of Latin Texts online (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), XVI.8: <<https://clt.brepols.net/llta/pages/Toc.aspx?ctx=714017>> (Accessed: 12 December 2024); Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XI.iii.1–2.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, 'Monster Culture', p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), pp. 9, 29.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

forms to make allusions to current events, local uses, and prejudices.<sup>20</sup> In this way, they could have been variously used to teach, through constructive criticism, to divert the reader, and to elevate the text.<sup>21</sup> As Randall observes, ‘although today it is difficult to discern the precise meaning in each case, the full implication was doubtless readily intelligible at the time’.<sup>22</sup>



Initial from Gudio Faba's *Rota nova* that features a bird-human hybrid  
New College Library, Oxford, MS 255, f. 2v

Hybrid monsters may have also held deeper, more spiritual meanings in the medieval period, even serving as a vehicle for understanding the Divine. Williams argues that the monstrous offered ‘a complementary, sometimes alternative, vehicle for philosophical and spiritual inquiry’.<sup>23</sup> According to the philosophy of Christian Neoplatonism, derived from the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, a Greek theologian of late antiquity, God transcends human knowledge so He can only be known through what he is not.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it is those things which are the furthest removed from God, such as monstrous and deformed bodies that can offer a truer picture of him. Williams demonstrates that these beliefs helped to shape the development of a symbolic language of the monster and grotesque in the Middle Ages, which provided alternative ways for readers to understand and engage with texts.<sup>25</sup>

The fantastical creatures in medieval manuscripts were sometimes juxtaposed with figures and scenes which are truer to life. For example, in New College Library's thirteenth-century Spanish copy of the *Rota nova* (or ‘New Wheel’), which was authored by the thirteenth-century Bolognese rhetorician Guido Faba (MS 255), a rather severe part-man, part-bird hybrid vomits forth the initial ‘P’ on f. 2v.<sup>26</sup> Within the bow of the letter, two human students drink from chalices at the well of rhetoric, observed and encouraged by Guido Faba, their teacher.

<sup>20</sup> Randall, *Images in the Margins*, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 5–6, 25–8, ff.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Beryl Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages* (New York: Scribner, 1975), p. 18; for this manuscript, and its text, see *Magistri Guidonis Fabe Rota Nova ex codice manuscripto oxoniensi New College 255 nunc primum prodit*, ed. A. P. Campbell and Virgilio Pini (Bologna: Istituto per la storia dell'Università di Bologna, 2000) and *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300–1475*, ed. Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 699–705.



A merperson appears to provide musical accompaniment to a lesson led by Thomas Aquinas depicted in the initial at the beginning of this copy of his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* New College Library, Oxford, MS 116, f. iiii

A hybrid monster also observes a scene of learning in MS 116, a fourteenth-century copy of Thomas Aquinas's Commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*. Set on a background of pounced gold, the historiated initial which begins the text depicts Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican friar incorrectly dressed as a Benedictine monk, teaching two secular novices. Observing the lesson from atop a decorative border, is a fantastical creature with a human upper-body and bestial lower-body. The shape and colour of its lower half suggests that it is a merperson, a human-fish hybrid. In tales told from ancient times to the present day, mermaids and sirens—their winged counterparts—are usually violent and highly sexualised characters.<sup>27</sup> Wearing a tunic and a headdress and playing a rebec (a medieval stringed instrument), the creature depicted in MS 116 is very different. It seems to offer a whimsical, perhaps even satirical, counter to the seriousness of Aquinas's theology. Its particular aquatic hybrid form may more specifically reflect or comment on the text. The page on which it appears contains Aquinas's commentary on the prologue to the *Sententiae*, which begins with a quote from the Old Testament:

I, wisdom, have poured out rivers. I, like a brook out of a river of a mighty water; I, like a channel of a river. and like an aqueduct, came out of paradise. I said: I will water my garden of plants, and I will water abundantly the fruits of my meadow.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> H. David Brumble, *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: A Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 421; Martha Moffitt Peacock, 'The Mermaid of Edam and the Emergence of Dutch National Identity', in *Imagination and Fantasy*, ed. Classen, pp. 683–710, at pp. 683–4.

<sup>28</sup> Book of Ecclesiasticus/Sirach 24:40–42; *Ego sapientia effudi flumina: ego quasi trames aquae immensae defluo: ego quasi fluvius Dorix, et sicut aquaeductus exivi de paradiso. Dixi: rigabo hortum plantationum, et inebriabo partus mei fructum.*

Was the artist perhaps inspired by the text's mention of water and rivers to draw an aquatic hybrid creature? Is this being perhaps a pictorial comment on Aquinas's exploration of the divine wisdom of God as a river?



Hybrid monster added to a copy of Thomas Buckingham's *Quaestiones theologicae*  
New College Library, Oxford, MS 134, f. 324r

Another fantastical hybrid can be found in MS 134. It sits atop the initial which opens the text on f. 324r, the beginning of Thomas Buckingham's *Quaestiones theologicae*. The creature has a human-like face, deathly white, but brown, dog-like ears which hang down beneath its red headscarf. Its body, though clothed in a brown tunic, is distinctly bestial, with lion-like haunches, taloned feet, and a curled tail. From its open mouth sprouts a large vine which fills the upper margin of the page. Willoughby demonstrates that this creature must have been added to the manuscript some time after its text was finished because marginal notations in the upper margin have been overpainted.<sup>29</sup> He believes that these annotations were most probably added to the manuscript by its first owner, William Reed (*d.* 1385), sometime fellow of Merton College and later bishop of Chichester.<sup>30</sup> Willoughby suggests that the fantastical hybrid creature may have been added to the manuscript on the occasion of its presentation to New College. MS 134 is the only surviving volume which contains both Buckingham's *Quaestiones theologicae* and the work to which it was written in response, and strong opposition—*De causa Dei contra Pelagium*, authored by Buckingham's former teacher, Thomas Bradwardine.<sup>31</sup> Was the hybrid monster added at the beginning of Buckingham's treatise intended as a derogatory comment regarding its relative merits, and perhaps as a warning to the manuscript's future readers at New College?

<sup>29</sup> James Willoughby, from the forthcoming catalogue of manuscripts in New College Library, Oxford.

<sup>30</sup> *The University and College Libraries of Oxford, Volume 2: Magdalen College to University College*, ed. Rodney M. Thomson with James G. Clark, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 16 (London: British Library, 2015), p. 1116.

<sup>31</sup> For the debate between Buckingham and Bradwardine, see Edit Anna Lukács, 'Bradwardine and Buckingham on the Extramundane Void', *Bochumer philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 17 (2014), 123–49.



Hybrid monsters

New College Library, Oxford, MS 174, ff. 23r (top left), 36v (bottom left), and 7r (right)

Several of New College's other medieval manuscripts play host not to one hybrid monster, but to entire casts of these mythical creatures. A variety of fantastical fusions drawn in pen decorate the twelfth-century copy of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* produced in an English Cistercian house (MS 308).<sup>32</sup> Many mythical hybrids can also be found in MS 174, a late-thirteenth-century Italian glossed copy of Roman law compendia authored in the early-sixth century by the Byzantine Emperor, Justinian I.<sup>33</sup> This manuscript teems with life from its first page, its initials inhabited by a varied cast of tiny beings, including many fantastical, hybrid creatures.<sup>34</sup> Alongside animal and human forms, including both men and women, rulers and musicians, soldiers and monks, strange creatures writhe and stare, cavort and gesticulate. Many have human heads and small bestial bodies with stumpy legs, some have tails or wings; others seem to be part-person and part-serpent, with

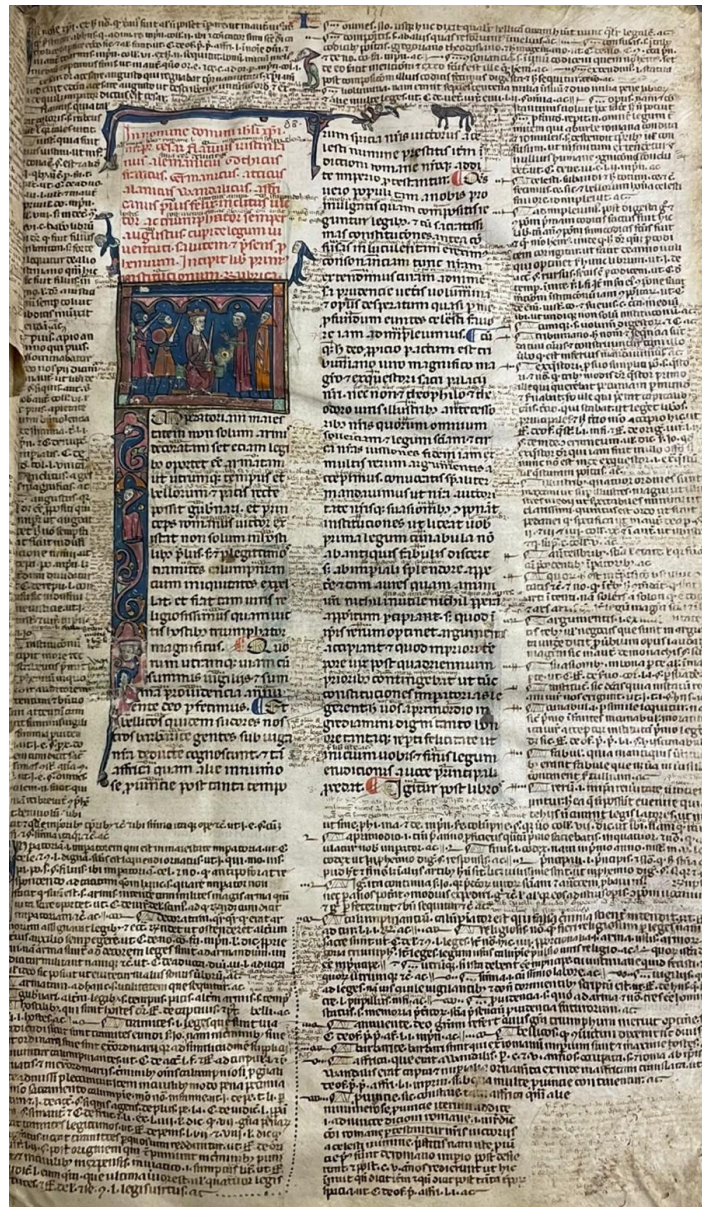
<sup>32</sup> Coxe, *Catalogus codicum*, p. 112; Alexander and Temple, *Illuminated Manuscripts*, p. 14 (no. 106); for more on this manuscript, its origins, and decoration see Antje G. Frotscher's article in this issue of *New College Notes*.

<sup>33</sup> MS 174 was presented to New College in the fifteenth century by Thomas Burton, college fellow (1398–1414) and canon of Salisbury Cathedral (1416–c. 1427). Burton's ex libris is on f. 1v; a note on f. 2v records that, prior to his gifting of the manuscript to New College, Burton lent it to Thomas Clyffe, fellow 1435–47 (Thomson (ed.), *University and College Libraries of Oxford, Volume 2*, pp. 1177, 1273).

<sup>34</sup> The original Italian manuscript constitutes ff. 1r–72v, 78r–209v, and 236v–299v; the other folios contain added glosses (ff. 73r–77v, 235r–v).



long, sinuous forms. The occasional centaur, merperson, and winged lion can also be found in the margins of this manuscript. Their myriad facial expressions, some happy, others cross or pensive, lend them a compelling and dynamic quality. This cast of the weird and wonderful certainly adds visual interest and introduces an element of whimsical humour to this manuscript. Indeed, these fantastical creatures may have been designed to poke fun at and, thereby, to some extent subvert or undermine the serious legal text with which they share the page. These monsters in the margins, through their physical forms which transcend boundaries, seem to disrupt the orders and hierarchies, rules and strictures detailed in this volume.



New College Library, Oxford, MS 174, f. 3r

On f. 3r, for example, the text opens with a miniature which depicts Emperor Justinian, armed and enthroned in the centre, dispensing justice; two soldiers, their swords raised, stand behind him (on the left of the image) as he takes an audience with two of his subjects (on the right of the image). Various fantastical creatures, including several hybrid monsters, surround the text and image. A border which extends below the miniature is populated by three such beings, including a snake-like creature with a seemingly mammalian head, and two beings with compact

animal bodies and human, apparently female heads. Two hybrid monsters adorn the upper corners of the miniature's border, like finials; the figure on the left, which has a human torso, bestial legs, and a tail, fires an arrow directly upward at the head of a creature growing from a border which curves around the top of the main text. On the right of this border, another creature armed with a bow sprouts from the end of a vine; they vaguely resemble a centaur, but are bipedal, and have wings growing out of their haunches. They are depicted in action, shooting arrows at an apparently leonine creature. Above this scene, nestled between two sections of the *Great Gloss* of Acurssius another part-human hybrid monster lurks. This collection of fantastical creatures, in their strangeness and chaos, act as a counter to the orderliness and practicality of the text and its content; they perhaps serve as a reminder to the reader of the volatility and violence of human nature, which forever bubbles under the surface of polite society.



New College Library, Oxford, MS 174, f. 3r [detail]

In addition to variously commenting on, illuminating (both in the sense of decoration and meaning), and perhaps even protecting the text with which they share the page, fantastical monsters may also have served more practical purposes in medieval manuscripts. In several surviving volumes, these creatures form part of a graphic vocabulary designed to aid readers in navigating the text. In two of the thirteenth-century Latin Vulgate Bibles gifted to New College by its founder, William of Wykeham, monstrous beings inhabit initials at the beginning of prologues, whilst historiated initials showing scenes from the Bible begin the books of the sacred text proper (MS 1 and MS 7). This simple hierarchy would have helped readers quickly differentiate the Word of God from the associated biblical apparatus. In other manuscripts, fantastical creatures function as *aide memoires*—small, but memorable images designed to help readers navigate back to a particular page.<sup>35</sup> In the huge four-volume Bible (MSS 3–6) bequeathed to New College by Thomas Beckington (*d.* 1465), fellow 1408 till 1420, and bishop of Bath and Wells from 1443 until his death, a cast of weird and wonderful creatures populate the pages. Though positioned in the margins, they are invariably physically connected to the text itself, often extending out of minor initials. In the first volume (MS 3), animal and human figures, including women holding a book, a key, and a spade, share the pages with many fantastical forms, from a horned dog-like creature (f. 31v), to fish with a human head (f. 37r). Beckington specified that these volumes, copied by the French Humanist scribe, Philip of Troyes, should be kept safely chained in the New College library for the use of all those wishing to study them.<sup>36</sup> It is easy to envision generations of New College students engaging with these mythical monsters and using them to navigate the biblical text.



Some of the fantastical monsters found in New College Library, Oxford, MS 3, ff. 31v (left) and 37r (right)

Thus, as this short exploration has shown, fantastical creatures fill the pages of New College's medieval manuscripts. These weird and wonderful beings can serve many purposes, often simultaneously, which are as varied as the physical forms they take. From practical aids for the reader, to guardians of sacred text, from satirical graphic commentaries, to vehicles for better understanding God and his divine will, monsters were a central and integral element in medieval art. Monsters in manuscripts offered a way for both their artists and readers/viewers to think about themselves and the world around them and, thus, can provide insights into their beliefs and fears, their thoughts and preoccupations.

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<sup>35</sup> Similar creatures perform this function in other New College manuscripts, including a second, multi-volume Bible (MSS 8–13).

<sup>36</sup> Thomson (ed.), *University and College Libraries of Oxford, Volume 2*, pp. 1103, 1258–9.