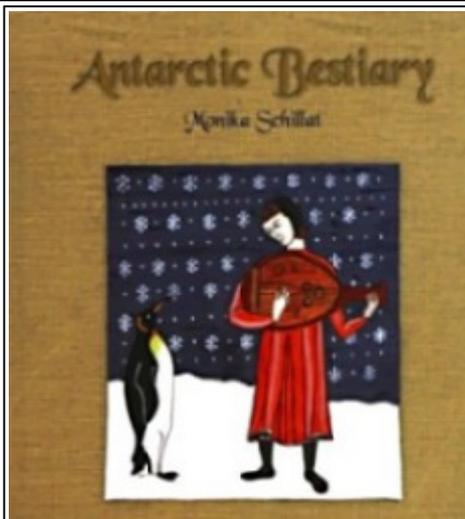


ANTARCTIC BESTIARY

Von Monika Schillat



Prologue



Medieval bestiaries depicted strange and mysterious creatures, allegories from distant new lands filled with wonders. In countless

illuminated manuscripts from the Romanesque and Gothic periods, animals, both real and fantastic, make their appearances.

The bestiarium became one of the most important genres of medieval secular manuscripts. Often the beast depicted would be assigned a characteristic that ...



... accorded with human behavior or personality traits; the bee would be described as the paradigm of the model citizen, the beaver as an industrious villager. Such classifications foreshadowed the popularity of the encyclopedias of the Middle Ages and the more scientific compilations of the Enlightenment.

Books in medieval times bestowed a certain standing upon their owners, and illuminated books, in particular, represented wealth and power. Throughout their history, illuminated books must have been appreciated as works of art, and certainly in the Renaissance they were commissioned and collected as such. Monks in cloisters, bowed over books, pens in hand, were busy illuminating the collections for people to learn about strange beasts and other wonderful things. First of all, the materials – vellum and parchment, ink, coloured pigments, powdered gold and gold leaf – would be prepared and gathered together. The vellum and parchment, from calf or sheep skin, was laboriously prepared: soaked in water and lime, then scraped and stretched. Once dried, the vellum was folded into halves, quarters or eights, depending on the required size of the book. These pages would then be trimmed and stitched together. Ink was made from powdered carbon – soot or lamp-black or iron-gall – which was kept in a cow horn, and materials for the coloured pigments came from a variety of animal, vegetable and mineral sources.

Once the materials had been gathered and prepared, the paper marked, and the illuminator had indicated the spaces needed for the decorated borders, initial letters and miniatures, the scribe could begin work. With a pen in one hand and a curved knife in the other, the latter being used for sharpening the pen and scraping out mistakes.

And there are still scribes and illuminators among us. Even the techniques of illumination used today are very similar to those used in medieval times. Today we would like to present a modern book, full of extraordinary designs for initials and miniatures inspired by different styles, such as Celtic, Romanesque and Gothic. The author - imagining what would have happened if a group of medieval monks and scholars had reached the White Continent - presents us with a wonderful collection of stories about antarctic animals.

Monika Schillat's recent work takes its cue from the ancient compendia of knowledge. Part historian and visual alchemist, she creates in delicate ink and watercolour sketches simulacra of a medieval Antarctic bestiary. Thereby she conjures up inner thoughts, codification of human as well as animal habits and symbols of emotional states. Penguins are addicted to music. They play the harp and listen to the lute. A leopard seal becomes a metaphor of terror. The snowy sheathbill may be understood as an emblem of peace and hope. But fun also plays a key role in this beastly gathering. Sirenes and dragons are part of the animals living in the medieval Antarctic. The result is both beautiful and amusing.

Graciela Ramacciotti





Opposite to the northern or arctic pole lies the **Antarctic.**

And, as the northern hemisphere lies under the constellation of Arktos the Bear, so Aristotle told us the unknown land to the south must be Antarktikos, or the total opposite, the *Polus Antarcticus*.

Mollymawk is the name seafarers gave to a bird of wondrous size

Beyond the torrid zone and the margin of the habitable world, there exists a bird of great size, whose wings together are wider than a well-built man is tall. It is thought to fly further and more continuously than any known bird, needing neither continent nor islands to rest its wings. For food it plucks large fishes from the deep and even with vice-like grip can lift a man from the deck of his vessel. By sailors it is feared as being the harbinger of ill fortune and the cause of mighty tempests.





irene
sicut dicit

phisiologus mortifera animalia sunt.



elphines certum habent
nomen proprie.



In South Georgia and close to the Shag Rocks,
we found huge Mackerel icefish. They can grow to over half
a metre in length and eat the little krill.

