

England is rather limited. The two best known examples are St Catherine's lighthouse on the Isle of Wight and St Mary's bridge chapel in Derby (both of which are mentioned). The connection between two other hermitage sites (both of which are discussed) and local infrastructure was omitted. Firstly, at Redstone in Worcestershire a community of hermits apparently ran a ferry across the River Severn (Clay 1914, 57; Jones 2019, 204–5). Secondly, in 1336 the hermit at Knaresborough in North Yorkshire was recorded as the keeper of the adjoining bridge (*Calendar Patent Rolls 1334–38*, 318).

The next chapter discusses institutional or monastic hermits and anchorites. The latter were individuals who were voluntarily immured inside tiny dwellings, often attached to churches. The following chapter considers English hermits after the Reformation and contemporary hermits in the UK, who can be Buddhist as well as Christian. Roffey concludes that 'the search for solitude was the pre-eminent model and universal paradigm for the perfected spiritual life. The hermitage resided at the heart of an authentic religious life and experience'.

Despite occasional omissions, this book has many strengths: each chapter is a concise and informative overview of a particular topic, based on original research. There are a lot of black and white photographs of hermitages (both internal and external views) almost entirely taken by the author, but few very few plans, which is a shame.

Clay, R M 1914. *The Hermits and Anchorites of England*, Methuen, London

Davis, V 1985. 'The rule of St Paul, the first hermit, in late Medieval England', in W J Sheils (ed), *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition*, 203–14, Studies in Church History 22, Oxford Eccl Hist Soc, Oxford

Jones, E A 2019. *Hermits and Anchorites in England, 1200–1550: selected sources translated and annotated*, Manchester University Press, Manchester

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doi:[10.1017/S0003581524000271](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003581524000271)

Griffinology: the griffin's place in myth, history and art. By A L McCLANAN. 240mm. Pp 223, 109 ills. Reaktion Books, London, 2024. ISBN 9781789148466. £30 (hbk).

Professor McClanan has gathered together examples of the usage of griffins from different cultures and different continents going back 5,000 years to ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia. These are considered from an art historical perspective, presented in a very approximate chronological sequence over fifteen well illustrated chapters. Chapter 1 naturally addresses the question of definitions, and here a difficulty arises because rather a broad range of creatures is included, such as 'griffin demons' (Assyrian human figures with three head and wings of birds), winged lions, 'donkey griffins', de facto dragons (with reference to a bronze dragon of the city of London found at Temple Bar) and the modern hippogriff (horse-eagle). This provides a rather broader base for discussion than might otherwise have been the case. A variety overlooked in this assemblage of non-canonical griffins is the Dacian wolf-griffin, which makes an appearance on the spectacular hexagonal bronze mould from Sarmizegetusa Regia.

The Egyptian usage was minor, and served largely as an alter ego of the pharaoh, likely in his capacity as a solar deity. The evidence of Herodotus, who described the griffin as a guardian of gold from the eastern regions, suggests that it came to the Greek world from western Asia. As flying creatures, griffins were well suited to providing air transportation for the gods, in particular for the sun god Apollo whose chariot they pulled (providing the same service for Dionysus/Bacchus), while as animals of singular viciousness who would readily tear a man to shreds, they were appropriated as companions for the goddess Nemesis. The griffin is noted to have a strong association with death, with frequent usage on Roman sarcophagi.

Moving into the Christian era, the powerful strength possessed by the griffin enabled it to travel to the heavens, and this made it a suitable emblem for the Byzantine imperial household, with various examples given, including a depiction of the Emperor Alexios V Doukas, who was deposed by the western knights of the Fourth Crusade in AD 1204. He wears silks charged with the griffin. Griffin textiles, both Byzantine and Islamic, are known from at least the beginning of the ninth century, from which western European samples have survived because they were used to wrap the bones of saints. Griffins are among the many animals that border the Bayeux tapestry, where one of them heralds the death of Edward the Confessor.

A recurring theme is a rising popularity of the griffin in western Europe from the twelfth century onwards in the aftermath of the First Crusade of

AD 1099, and the author considers that the crusading movement played an important role in this dissemination. Examples cited include the use of griffins as guardians outside the doors of Italian and Aquitanian churches, and the late incorporation of the monster into the Latin version of the *Physiologus* (from which derived the medieval bestiaries) in twelfth-century England. The griffin had long been present in the eastern Greek language *Physiologus*. The griffin was strongly associated in the western European mind with the Holy Land, it being given to inhabit the landscape of that region in the history of the Crusades written by Fulcher of Chartres (d after AD 1127) who resided in Jerusalem. Moreover, a life of St Imerius of Switzerland, which was copied c AD 1200, described how this saint had overcome a ferocious griffin in the Holy Land and taken its claw as a trophy. Such claws featured in a medieval inventory of Durham cathedral.

Heraldic aspects are covered briefly in Chapter 13, which notes a number of interesting instances. These include the strange wingless 'male griffin', which was granted as a supporter to Queen Anne Boleyn, from whose torso menacing spikes project; the griffin privy seal of Edward III taken from the livery badge of the king's friend William Montagu, Earl of Salisbury; and medieval English lead griffin badges, which might have been granted as livery by either Edward III or Salisbury, or might simply have had some apotropaic function.

The book is brought up to date with no less than eight pages devoted to Harry Potter, the second lengthiest and most detailed part of the book after an earlier chapter on the griffin in the tattoos of nomadic central Asia. The Potter section was presumably included to enhance marketability. Most readers with an interest in griffins will find something to interest them in one or more of the short chapters, but the reviewer was compelled to return to John Cherry's account of the griffin in his book *Mythical Beasts* (1995) to find a clear and succinct historical overview with which to usefully compare McClanan's book. This earlier source mentions an important piece of information surprisingly absent here, which is that griffins are mentioned in the Bible, notably in the Book of Deuteronomy in which Moses forbids the tribes of Israel from eating griffins.

Despite a lack of clarity and a somewhat chaotic style of presentation, McClanan covers the subject with a considerable breadth that serves to whet the appetite for further enquiry.

Cherry, J 1995. *Mythical Beasts*, British Museum Press, London

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doi:10.1017/S0003581524000283

St Helena: an island biography. By ARTHUR MACGREGOR. 240mm. Pp xiv + 229, 35 figs, 30 b&w pls. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2024. ISBN 9781837650880. £85 (hbk).

It is one of the most remote inhabited islands in the world, more than 1,200 miles off the coast of Africa. It is one of the earliest British colonies, recognised and formally chartered to the East India Company in the brief administration of Oliver Cromwell's son. It boasts more unique endemic species than any other patch of land on the planet. And it is, famously, a place of exile and imprisonment, the island prison for the final six years of an ex-emperor's life. St Helena is forever associated with Napoleon.

It is also, oddly enough, associated with many other famous people: the Duke of Wellington, who ironically on an earlier stay had slept in the very same house in which Napoleon was billeted on the night that he disembarked; Charles Darwin, who passed through in 1876 and presciently noticed the extraordinary wind turbulence on the very clifftop where the expensive new airport was unfortunately sited some 140 years later; Edmund Halley, the astronomer royal whose pioneering visit in 1676 and construction of an observatory led to his recording the transit of Mercury and other important astronomical discoveries; Captain Cook on several of his many voyages; and the notorious Captain Bligh, who arrived in 1792 with yet another cargo of breadfruit in transit from Tahiti to the West Indies – the very plants that three years earlier had triggered the famous mutiny on the *Bounty*.

Any biography of the island must also look at the extraordinary role that it played, during the long rule of the East India Company, in Britain's trade with the East, when St Helena became a vital staging post for ships sailing round the Cape of Good Hope on their return journey from India. Hundreds of ships used to call in every year, but, with the opening of the Suez canal, hardly any merchant vessels needed to stop over, and St Helena began a long decline into penury and obscurity.