

Westenholz, G. & R.S. Bianchi. 2004. Dragons, monsters and fabulous beasts. – Jerusalem, Bible Lands Museum

Book review by M. Overbeeke



The exhibition in Teylers Museum, Haarlem (The Netherlands) from 28th of January to 28th of May 2006, called 'Dino's en draken' (Dutch for 'Dinosaurs and dragons'; see Mayor *et al.*, 2006), gives a nice extension for this book called 'Dragons, monsters and fabulous beasts'. Westenholz & Bianchi are the authors of the book, which is published in combination with an exhibition at the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem in 2004. It should be regarded as a catalogue with background information for items that were on display at that exhibition. Given the fact that multiple exhibitions of somewhat the same nature are currently closely following each other in various museums around the world, the subject of this book is very much alive at the moment and can rely on much interest.

The suggestion by Mayor (2000) that the feared griffin was based on the docile, herbivorous dinosaur *Protoceratops* might have sparked the current peak in interest. Possibly because of this, more people became interested in the relationship between mythical and prehistoric animals, and more relationships were found, e.g. the Titan and mastodon.

This book presents, by means of historical evidence such as wall paintings and jugs, mythical beasts. The objects originate from the ancient Near East to the Roman Empire. The thoughts and ideas of the people in this period of time are explained with some specific examples. Every civilisation had their own names for beasts that are principally the same and these names are laid down for their specific civilisation and divided into creatures of the sea, the land and the sky.

The main text is not accompanied by pictures and the page margins are small, so a lot of text is presented on one page. This makes it harder to read and it makes reader dwindle away from the text on occasions, which is a pity. The section that presents the individual creatures changes format into three columns of text with few simple drawings of only a selection of the described creatures. The book could do with more clear (and colour) pictures of all creatures, which would have made it a more attractive read. The margins of these pages remain as small as the others but the letters are smaller relative to the main text. The text itself, however, is pleasant to read and gives a complete picture of the mythical beasts that are described.

The book is published in a format slightly smaller than A4. The main text, including preface and foreword, is 12 pages, followed by 23 pages of mythical creatures exhibited in the Bible Lands Museum and a rather extensive reference list. The 162 items in the exhibition are beautifully depicted and explained in the appendix.

The book is written in English, from front to back, and Hebrew, from back to front. The appendix is therefore in the middle of the book and is written in English with the Hebrew next to it. The soft cover is nicely illustrated and edited in an eye-catching, red colour. So, for the people that are interested in, or want to know more on, mythical beasts, this book gives a nice overview of what is, or better said, was imagined to be out there in historical times.

Westenholz, G. & Bianchi, R.S. 2004. Dragons, monsters and fabulous beasts. – Jerusalem, Bible Lands Museum. 224 pp. ISBN 965-7027-08-X. Price £ 31.99 (paperback).

Cited literature

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