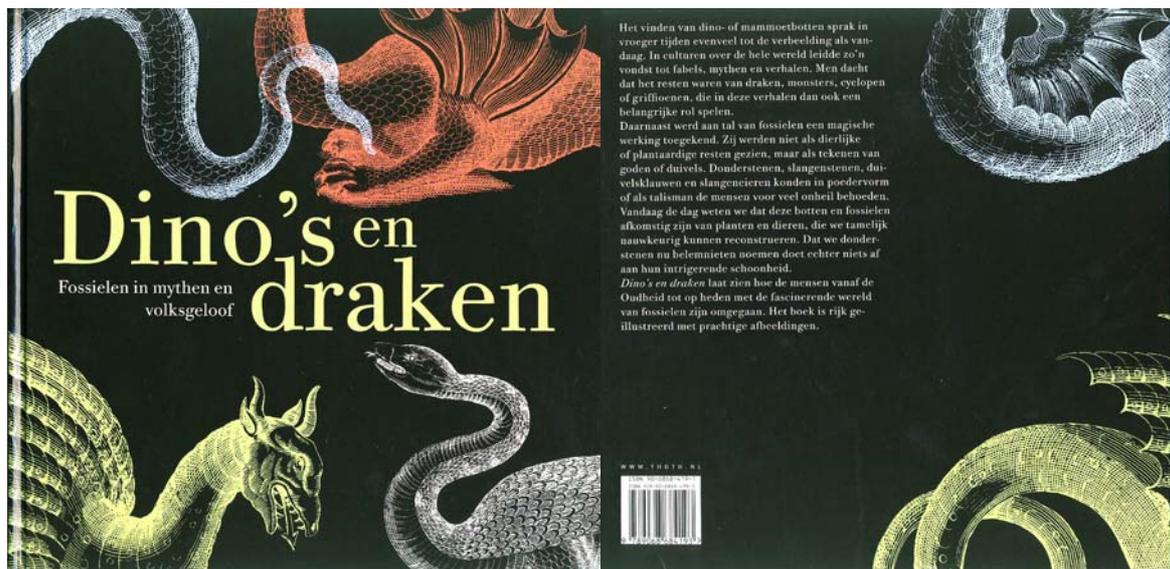


Sliggers, B. Ed. 2006. *Dino's en draken. Fossielen in mythen en volksgeloof*. – Bussum, Uitgeverij Thoth

Book review by A.J. Veldmeijer



The famous Teylers Museum in Haarlem, The Netherlands, has a busy schedule with special exhibitions on various topics, related to their important art, coin, antique instruments, minerals or fossil collections. One of these was the exhibition 'Dino's en draken' ('Dino's and dragons') in 2006 (January 28–May 28). According to the Museum's website ([www.teylersmuseum.nl](http://www.teylersmuseum.nl)) the exhibition wanted to show how people of different cultures and era's explained fossils; to explain the role of fossils in mythology and popular belief/folklore. Giants, dragons, Cyclopes, griffins or basilisks: the find of a petrified bone was in the distant (or not so distant<sup>1</sup>) past reason to believe in monsters, dragons and other legendary creatures or even the evidence of their existence (note that this was in times before 'evolution' and 'extinction' were accepted concepts). The exhibition illustrated the many stories, myths and legends with 'giant' fossils and explained their magical contents and the 'de-mythologising' with the development of palaeontological sciences. Among the fossils on display were remnants ([post]cranial bones, complete skeletons) of the mammoth, the cave bear and woolly rhinoceros as well as a skeleton of *Protoceratops*, the claw of *Therizinosaurus*, the vertebrae of an archaeocete whale and a 21 m long Chinese Dragon.

Published in conjunction with the exhibition was a little book (83 pages) with the title 'Dino's en draken. Fossielen in mythen en volksgeloof' ('Dino's and dragons. Fossils in myths and popular beliefs'). One of the authors of this book is the famous Adrienne Mayor, author of 'The first fossil hunters', in which she, in convincing way, traces the origin of the griffin and Cyclops. Her work initiated the exhibition.

The book is written in Dutch and divided in three parts, headed (translated) 'The folklore of fossils and science' (by Adrienne Mayor). This chapter is subdivided in various small parts with a mixture of topics. Some deal with one of the beasts (for instance the ones with subheading 'The griffin', 'Giants' etc.), and other are on how people dealt with fossils (for instance the part with subheading 'Bonedoctor'). The subdivision of the next chapter, 'Magic and medicine. Fossils in popular belief' (by Charissa van Kooten and Bert Sliggers), is more consistent and headed in all cases with a certain group of fossils ('Belemnites', 'Ammonites' etc.). The last chapter is headed 'From mythology to palaeontology' (by Bert Theunissen) and subdivided into four parts ('Fossils', 'Alternative explanation', 'Stratigraphy' and 'Palaeontology'). The text is, on occasion, interrupted with a bright purple page, offering specific information on various topics (per page), such as 'The monster of Koch' or 'The dragon of Klagenfurt'.

Unfortunately, the text is kind of spasmodic, which rather influences readability. There are some errors, such as the statement on page 8 that the ancient Greek and Roman were prehistoric, *i.e.* illiterate (prehistory means 'before written sources'); the stone eggs on page 10, which, obviously, are fossilised eggs; the eye *on* the forehead of a Cyclops rather than *in* their forehead. Furthermore, the pyramids of Giza are not made of Tura limestone, as stated on p. 59, but only finished with a layer of this very fine and white type of stone. More

<sup>1</sup> People have always explained things, fossils but also strange dents or protrusions in stone for instance, they could not explain rationally as the remnants of monsters, devils, saints and the like. An interesting book in this respect is Bord (2004), reviewed by Veldmeijer in [www.PalArch.nl](http://www.PalArch.nl) in 2005.

troublesome, however, is the fact that from about halfway through the book, Latin names are not in Italics. It seems that this is a mistake of the publisher in formatting the book, as the authors (one of which is responsible for the final editing) clearly show in the beginning that they knew these names had to be written in different font (usually Italic, but occasionally you will find these names underlined in publications).

In general, the information is rather basic, but this is just the intention of the book, as it is meant for the public at large. Nevertheless, I would have liked a list, albeit basic, with 'further reading', as to help out the interested layman who wants to read more on the subject. The illustrations, are, without exception, marvellous: they are numerous, always good in quality and illustrating the text perfectly. There are pictures of bones and skeleton, of course, but also beautiful reconstructions as well as images from very old books.

Summarising, I can say that, despite the flaws, the book is worth buying and makes a good present for the interested layman as well as a marvellous souvenir for people who visited the exhibition.

Sliggers, B. Ed. 2006. Dino's en draken. Fossielen in mythen en volksgeloof. – Bussum, Uitgeverij Thoth. 83 pp. ISBN 90 6868 419 1. Price €17.50 (hardback).

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