CHASING THE DRAGON'S TALE: EUROPE'S FASCINATION AND REPRESENTATION OF THE DRAGON FROM THE TWELFTH TO THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION
DRAGON PHENOMENON

What is it about monsters, the dragon, in particular, which captures the human imagination? A common experience in childhood is the fear of the dark and monsters. This phenomenon continues into adulthood, but instead of shrieking away from the monsters, there is a need to seek them out. There are some who would disagree that it is human curiosity or our courage that drives our interest in dragons.

This thesis explores myths, religion, and Asian art in an attempt to understand the factors which may account for the prevalence of dragon imagery in Western European art from the twelfth to the seventeenth century. Asian art is briefly mentioned to explain the dual nature of dragon iconography. Our fascination with the dragon has endured, and scholars have classified dragon depictions into two distinct archetypes, one good and one evil. Both dragon archetypes warrant further investigation to demonstrate how they mainly reflect the continuity of a theme, one of power. Many of the artworks are currently in Ohio collections to provide viewing sources for future art history students in the area. These artworks come from a variety of regions in Western Europe from the twelfth to seventeenth century.

While the debate about the origin of the creature remains, the dragon appears in art and literature in both Eastern and Western cultures. These mythical creatures captured the imaginations of the ancient Mesopotamians as far back as the third and early second millennia
BCE. The Mesopotamic Creation Epic *Enûma Elish* is an early example of dragon imagery in a culture. The tale could contain elements that become the basis for both Asian and European dragons. In the *Enûma Elish*, the goddess of the sea, Tiâmat, defended her children by creating monsters to protect them, and among this group was the dragon. Her dragons represented the protective aspects associated with Asian dragons, while the dragon-like or hybrid sea-monster known as Cetus or *ketos* in the later Greco-Roman *Story of Perseus and Andromeda* usually embodied the evil antagonist qualities associated with Western European dragons.

As we will see, this syncretic or blended nature of the myths and legends merge elements and characteristics of these hybrid creatures represented in Western European art from the twelfth to the seventeenth century. Moreover, they point to a complex set of visual sources for our dragons.

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CHAPTER I
MAKING ARCHETYPES

The true origin of the dragon remains a mystery. To understand the development of dragon archetypes used in European artworks, it is useful to explore the meaning of mythmaking. In many cultures, there are stories of vengeful gods, heroes, and monsters that served as a way of understanding natural phenomena that were otherwise out of their control or unexplainable. Art functioned as visual representations of everyday life, creative expressions, histories, myths, and gods.

The Mesopotamians featured the dragon in the Creation Epic, *Enûma Elish* in the third and early second millennia BCE. In the *Enûma Elish*, the goddess of the sea, Tiâmat, defended her children by creating monsters to protect them and among this group was the dragon. Her beastly brood contained a number of snake-dragons and other monsters.2 A possible early example of Tiâmat in dragon form (Fig. 1) on a clay on a Cylinder Seal impression, Neo-Assyrian, 900 BC-750 BC. The goddess was depicted with a reptilian body and a single horn. The *Enûma Elish* text explained that Tiâmat gave birth to snake-dragon creatures:

“Fierce monster-vipers she clothed with terror,
With splendor she decked them, she made them of lofty stature.
Whoever beheld them, terror overcame him,
Their bodies reared up and none could withstand their attack.
She set up vipers and dragons, and the monster Lahamu.”3

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2 Ibid., 24-28.
These various dragons, with the ability to control the natural elements, shared god-like “aspects with the divine beings in ancient Mesopotamia,” and were “immortal but vulnerable.”

These creatures executed the will of the gods in Mesopotamian mythology by fulfilling vengeance or offering an individual protection. Westenholz explains that the mythology of this period portrayed man as having to serve the gods and ancestors or risk their wrath. To earn their protection, man must serve the gods and his ancestors faithfully.

Both good and evil dragon archetypes exist in many cultures. The dragon in literature and art can function as the antagonist or enemy or as the protagonist or hero. For example, in Chinese legend, the Green Dragon of the East is a guardian, representing the spring season and rain, both of which are positive things. As the symbol of the East, the dragon is an auspicious supernatural guardian creature. Two sub-categories of the dragon archetypes found in ancient Asian and Near Eastern cultures are the dragon as a good guardian or protector and the dragon god or evil enemy that threatens. Common physical characteristics of the modern dragon include an enormous serpent or reptilian body and head, wings or not, a tail, claws, legs or not, and the ability to breathe fire or not. The physical description of the Western European from legend notes the dragon body color, not as the typical green seen of today, but including red, yellow, white, and black. A dragon may also have a reptilian head, a lion’s limbs, red eyes, a head crest, and an eagle’s claws, along with scaly or slimy skin. Dragon archetypes should also

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4 Ibid., 14.
5 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
9 Evans, “Dragons,” *Medieval Folklore*, 100.
include the hybrid dragon creatures with the body of a serpent, a dolphin’s tail, or the forelegs of a lion or horse. Early examples of hybrid dragons are Tiamat’s snake-dragon monsters the ušumgalu, bašmu, and mušhuššu in the ancient Near East. These snake-dragons are a composite of “a being with forepaws of a lion, the hind paws of a bird of prey, and a scaly body, neck and head of a snake.”\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} Westenholz, \textit{880-01 Dragons, Monsters}, 25.
CHAPTER II
GRECO-ROMAN DRAGONS

Tales of an individual’s ability to overcome adversity against all odds often feature a noble hero battling a dragon, a giant serpent, a sea-serpent, a ketos, or a wyvern (a winged dragon-like creature). In the end, the hero triumphs over his antagonist and rescues the fair maiden, as we can read in the classical Greco-Roman Story of Perseus and Andromeda.\(^\text{12}\) In this story, Perseus is the son of Zeus and the Princess of Argos, Danaë. At his birth, it was foretold he would kill his grandfather Acrisius the King of Argos. A demigod, Perseus’ life was not without its obstacles. He and his mother were cast out into the sea. The mother and child washed ashore on an island. When Perseus had grown into a young man, the king of the island desired to marry his mother. King Polydectes plotted against Perseus and sent the young man on a deadly quest to bring him the head of the gorgon, Medusa.

The deadly Medusa could turn a mortal to stone with one look. Perseus received gifts from the gods on his journey, including a helmet, a sickle, and the winged sandals of Hermes. After slaying the Gorgon and taking her head, Perseus flew to Ethiopia and came upon the lovely Andromeda awaiting her death. Princess Andromeda was offered as a sacrifice to Poseidon because her mother boasted that her daughter was more beautiful than the Nereids (sea nymphs).

According to the legend, Perseus fell in love with Andromeda the instant the young man laid his eyes upon her. He rescued her from the sea monster, Cetus, on the condition they should

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marry. One could argue that Perseus fell in love at first sight when he saw the nude Andromeda chained to the sea cliff. Using Medusa’s head, Perseus turned Cetus to stone, and the young couple married. Andromeda in the nude serves two functions: the first as a punishment to humiliate the young maiden and her mother for boasting of her great beauty. At the same time, her bare body enhances Andromeda’s vulnerability, beauty, and innocence to the viewers. The position of her body, though bare, does not suggest nakedness or shame, but rather strength.

Andromeda was depicted in the Netherlandish early sixteenth century tapestry now in the collections of the Cleveland Museum of Art. She appears (Fig. 2) as a chained maiden a nude victim offered as a penance for the sins of her family, and as a gilded ornament hung above the scene where Perseus is shown praying.

This large tapestry (Fig. 2) was woven of wool, fine silk, and gold thread to create a sumptuous three panel narrative of this story. Reading from right to left so the viewer can visually follow the storyline that leads the viewer to Andromeda’s rescue, Perseus praying, and the couple’s wedding. Note the lavish tapestry reflects the period of its creation, because the figures wear the fashions of the time. In the center of the first scene, Perseus, wearing a suit of armor, strikes his opponent dead while on horseback. The Cetus or ketos, the sea monster in the classic tale, is depicted here as an impaled dragon dangling (Fig. 2) from the hero’s broken jousting lance. The dangling body of the dragon does not bear any resemblance to a sea creature. Instead, it has some of the common physical attributes associated with the dragon such as the wings, claws, and tail. Rounding out the upper portion of the dragon is an elongated boar-like or dog-like head, with ears and a tongue. Clearly, this early sixteenth century ketos depiction has

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shifted from an actual sea creature to a conventional dragon. As an earlier example of a *ketos*, in *Jonah Cast Up* from the late Roman era (Fig. 3), depicts God’s wrath.\(^\text{14}\) Here, the whale is shown as a *ketos*, a hybrid creature consisting of a boar’s head, wings, lion’s paws, and a fish tail. In the tapestry (Fig. 2), the onlookers are members of the royal family and the court who witness Andromeda’s rescue.

In the story, Poseidon used the dragon/sea monster as a means to exact his vengeance on the country and its ruling family for their arrogance. The defeated beast depicted in the tapestry and in the tale is a symbol of conquest inspiring others confronted with extreme challenges to find their courage. In the tapestry, the severed head of Medusa lays on the ground just below the dragon (Fig. 2) to represent her importance in the story. Medusa’s disembodied head laying below the dragon is also a reminder of Perseus’s triumph over the Gorgon. By overcoming Medusa, Perseus won the skills he would need to save Andromeda. As transportable artworks, tapestries like this one displayed the commissioners’ and owner’s social status and wealth. Tapestry easily transformed the walls of churches, town halls, and wealthy estates into spots of visual splendor. A high-quality tapestry such as this could have hung in a town hall or a public meeting area. Secular and religious themed artworks and tapestries from the Netherlands were in demand.

Bolognese painter and engraver, Lorenzo Lolli (c. 1612-1691) was a student of Guido Reni (c. 1575 - 1642) and Giovanni Andrea Sirani (c.1610 - 1670). Lolli’s version of the classic tale of Perseus and Andromeda set the fair maiden front and center in his Baroque etching *Andromeda* (Fig. 4). As the focal point of the print, Andromeda’s sensual beauty was showcased for the viewer. Modeled after Giovanni Andrea Sirani’s naturalistic style, Lolli’s figure of

Andromeda was shown semi-nude and voluptuous with soft curves chained to the rock.\textsuperscript{15} Her long flowing hair blows in the sea breeze. A victim in this image, Andromeda’s body was angled away from the viewer to portray modesty. With a skyward gaze, she extends an outstretched hand to send a plea to Perseus flying overhead. The print captures the emotion and tension of the rescue.

The open, airy space and rolling clouds established distance in the background. Lolli left the sea calm while the skies are blowing strong. The artist created a disconnection between the wind, the sea, and the maiden. Andromeda wind-blown body is sensuous to the viewer. The gusts of wind and churning sea send waves splashing onto the rocks soaking the central figure from head to toe. Cetus, the sea monster, swims closer to Andromeda. Lolli illustrated the beast not as a dragon, but as a hybrid sea monster composed of a doglike head and with a fish tail. The beast hungrily approached the maiden with its gaping open mouth. Lolli’s print mimics the same physical features used in Reni’s oil painting of \textit{Perseus and Andromeda}, (c.1635-36) (Fig. 5). Clearly, the artist was influenced by his mentors. The subject matter and composition of Reni’s painting resurfaced in Lolli’s print. Reni and Lolli’s artworks share the same disconnection of the sea, the wind, and the chained maiden contrasting the sea and the clouds. The sea monster, a villain, was not the primary focus of the print; instead it is the helplessness of Andromeda that captures our attention.

The Baroque period in Italy produced an abundance of opulent artworks. Music, poetry, and fine art during this period became gilded with ornate tones, mood, sexuality, realism, movement, and tension. Lolli’s print of Andromeda (Fig. 4) and the Netherland tapestry use the same theme; however, each artist took liberty with the beast and with the portrayal of the

maiden. In the Andromeda print (Fig. 4), the maiden does not overcome adversity. Her savior is not far away.
CHAPTER III
FAITH AND THE DRAGON

Art can be used to convey information. In the Middle Ages in Europe, a rich tradition of symbols (often based on Biblical texts, but also borrowed from classical antiquity) was used to instruct and to teach. From the medieval period to the seventeenth century dragon imagery in a religious context symbolized the fallen angel Lucifer (also known as Satan or the Devil). The dragon as a symbol generated a powerful image. The creature appeared in many art forms in public and private places of worship and devotion.

As Christianity spread across Europe from the fourth to twelfth century missionaries, monasteries, regional churches, ecclesiastical governments answering to the papal authority of the Roman Catholic Church became a unifying institution in Western Europe. The expansion of the Church into other cultures and countries helped form a Western European identity “at the expense of minorities.” This expansion of the Church allowed for regional legends, art, and ideas to spread to new audiences. Fascinating stories and artworks shared through trade and cultural exchange led to the Western Church supporting religious artworks depicting heroes, angels, saints, and sometimes dragons to educate and entertain audiences over time. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, an interpreter of dragon lore and images in Medieval French texts, noted that since the creature represented “sin or Satan, it too must be slain in the Christian view.”

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Church taught lessons from the Bible to encourage its parishioners to live a path of righteousness. Lessons included the life of Jesus and a person's responsibilities to humanity as well as God. According to the Delacampagnes, dragon imagery serves as a religious education tool “to elicit fear in the visitor, in order to inspire him to repentance and faith.”

Wealthy patrons commissioned ornate religious objects for the church and personal devotion. Powerful popes, cardinals, and church administrators invested in the cultural arts for themselves or the church. Sacred objects, whether commissioned by the patron or produced for the Church, served a purpose in religious services. Even smaller ceremonial pieces or portable religious objects like icon, crucifix, stands, censor and crosier could be created using precious materials. These objects could serve more than one purpose, functioning in the ceremony as a ritual object while their design or decorations could be symbolic to help educate and inform parishioners. For example, the *Incense Burner and Stand for an Altar Cross* (Fig. 6) of cast bronze, gilded, engraved with chasing, made in Germany, ca. 1150-1175 has identifiable symbolic attributes.

The small bronze incense burner stands about 7 inches tall in the shape of a “small centralized church with gabled roofs, a lantern crowned by a turret, and four semi-circular apses.” This incense burner (one of a pair, the other is in the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin) rests upon four winged-dragon shaped feet. The incense burner may have also served as an altar cross stand. One could also argue the highly decorative object lends itself well to visual interpretation. For example, the small church shaped incense burner (Fig. 6) resting or standing

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20 Ibid.
on the backs of four dragons could imply a moral allegory that exemplifies the Church’s power over sin or Satan. The incense burner (Fig. 6) functions as an incense burner/cross stand and a learning tool. The defeated dragons reinforces the Church’s triumph over evil.

According to medieval scholar, Jonathan Evans, dragons, and saints became a “popular narrative genre in Western European tradition…with over 100 [early] saints credited with critical encounters with diabolical foes manifest in the form of a dragon.”

The author Gustav Mensching (2015) defined a “saint, holy person, believed to have a special relationship to the sacred, as well as moral perfection or exceptional teaching abilities. The phenomenon is widespread in the religions of the world, both ancient and contemporary.”

In earlier centuries, saints were recognized by the communities in which they lived. Many of the earliest saints are associated with dragons. They are depicted defeating the creature or rescuing someone from being slain by the dragon. An early Christian martyr, St. George was known for his faith in God and for inspiring faith in others in the face of great odds. George was a knight from Cappadocia, reputed to have lived sometime between 200 and 300 CE. He is depicted as a gallant knight in shining armor with a red cross on his white shield or flag hanging from a broken lance as he rides a beautiful white steed slaying or trampling a dragon.

Typically the dragon in this tale was shown defeated or struggling against his foe, the hero St. George. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, depictions of dragons in art works showing  St. George and the Dragon did not deviate far from a set of typical attributes. They had a reptilian body with wings or not, an elongated head or dog-like head, and claws or talons.

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However, this is not always the case in sacred imagery and dragon depictions. The dragon as we will learn can evolve into fanciful, imaginative, and violent creatures in sacred works.

St. George’s legend tells us he was a soldier who rescued the daughter of the king from a merciless dragon that plagued the town. Also, that St. George “fought the dragon by the seaside, outside the walls of the city, in order to rescue the king’s daughter who was being offered as a sacrifice.”

Resemblances to the story of Perseus and Andromeda are readily apparent. Slaying the dragon in the context of this legend relates to St. George’s unflattering faith in God and the perseverance of the Christian faith. The legend is set during the rule of the emperors Diocletian and Maximian, both of whom persecuted the Christians. The valiant knight challenged the beast in the name of Christ and made the sign of the cross, and St. George slew the dragon. His faith in God led the townspeople of fifteen thousand men to be baptized and converted to Christianity. The Roman prefect Dacian tortured George to try to convince him to renounce his faith and to worship the ancient gods. George endured agonizing cruelty from Dacian but refused to relinquish his devotion to God. In the end, Dacian had George beheaded.

From this account, we can clearly see that St. George represents good virtues and chivalry and that the dragon is an evil antagonist, an embodiment of paganism. A late fifteenth century French painting of Saint George and the Dragon (Fig. 7) has identifiable traits from the legend such as the white horse, the gallant young hero, the princess, and the dragon. However the setting and the figures in this panel reference contemporary life in the South of France rather than in George’s Cappadocia. This combination of allegorical elements and contemporary local

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24 Ibid.
26 Hall, 136-137.
imagery makes the painting complex.

Fanciful stories such as *St. George and the Dragon* taught faith in God, perseverance, charity, hope, and of our ability to triumph over evil. Evans noted that in the spread of hagiographic accounts, saints and dragon were evidence of the “dragon as a figure of popular belief not only within the culture of ecclesiastical learning but also lay in the population.”

St. George’s famous legend was retold again and again in Western Europe, and even appears in the Middle Eastern legend. Some trace the origin of the story to Libya around 303 A.D. At this time, George was already an iconic figure with admirable qualities of a soldier, gallant, and religious. Jacqueline Simpson (2002) states, “Beginning in the sixth century, he was regarded as a patron of the Byzantine army.” She further adds that St. George’s popularity in Western Europe grew after St. George was claimed to have appeared “in a vision… before the capture of Antioch in the First Crusade.” St. George of Cappadocia’s heroic tale of a maiden’s rescue mirrors that in the story of Perseus and Andromeda. Evans explains this sea-side rescue could have possibly stemmed from a “medieval romance or [from a conflation] with the figure of Perseus.”

What is a legend? Timothy R. Tangherlini defined a legend as “A historical and localized traditional oral prose narrative presented as a true account, often centering on a supernatural or another extraordinary occurrence. Legends express the collective values and

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32 Ibid.
33 Evans, “Christian Dragon Lore,” in *Medieval Folklore*, 101. The brackets are mine.
beliefs of the group to whose tradition they belong.” Don Bacigalupi, author of the *Toledo Museum of Art Masterworks* (2009), explained the castles in the background of *Saint George and the Dragon* (Fig. 7) existed in Provence. He cites the castle on the right as being in “Tarascon in Provence in the south of France”…and that the “castle on the left is Beauclaire, which lies across the Rhone River from Tarascon.” The king’s daughter observing the battle in the middle ground of the panel awaits her release patiently with her hands folded in prayer. In the painting and the legend of the saint, the princess personified the city (Cappadocia). To show the conversion of the townspeople to Christianity the saint was shown on a spotless white (purity/virtue) horse spearing the dreaded evil beast, paganism.

Here, the hybrid dragon was created from a reptilian body, with webbed feet and bat wings. All of these composite features are also found in the artist’s interpretation of what the evil creature should or could look like. In his painting, the artist used the elements of the legend of St. George to communicate the lesson of faith and conversion. However, this artist also used identifiable contemporary references (i.e. landscape, identifiable castles, modern clothing) to promote further a connection with viewers thus making the painting imaginative, and typical to their own lives.

To summarize, allegories and fables were familiar themes for stories and artwork in the Middle Ages, and these artworks often contained moral lessons or a life lesson for the reader or viewer. Dragon slaying represents overcoming evil and sin as in Archangel Michael battling the dragon as recounted in the *Book of Revelations* (12:7), or in the earlier Greco-Roman tale of *Perseus and Andromeda* and in its updated version, the legend of *St. George and the Dragon*.

35 Ibid.
36 Hall, 136-137.
Specific objects in the late fifteenth century French painting are open to interpretation while the main characters retain the markers or the reference points that make them recognizable to the viewer. The primary reference points in this painting (Fig. 7) are St. George’s white horse, the red cross on his shield, his spear, the maiden, and a dragon as the evil adversary. Who else could the young hero be but St. George? These reference points convey the visual storyline and its allegorical meaning to the viewer. The combination of modern elements and distinguishable landscape and identifiable castles revives the old story updating it for a changing world.  

With that said, not every Biblical story has a knight, saint, or hero and sometimes these stories can focus on a life lesson or a struggle of faith. A ketos (or a sea-serpent) appears again in the Biblical story of Jonah and the Whale depicted – as was seen in (Fig. 3). This small late Roman marble sculpture was created in Asia Minor during the third century. The sculpture was created around the time of the legend of St. George of Cappadocia, also set in Asia Minor or Turkey. Like Cetus in the earlier story of Perseus and Andromeda, this sea–monster has elements from both land and sea animals. Cetus is the Latinized version of ketos or whale. In the story of Jonah, we learn that he was swallowed by a whale because he disobeyed God’s “command to proclaim judgment on the city of Nineveh.” Jonah tried to escape from God by getting on a ship. When a storm arose, Jonah was thrown overboard by the sailors.

In Jonah 1: 1-16 and 2: 2-11 all was not lost for the reluctant prophet because God showed him mercy. The whale responded to God’s command and swallowed Jonah to save him from drowning and then returned him safely to shore. Here the whale-like dragon expresses a

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37 Don Bacigalupi, et. al., eds. Toledo Museum of Art: Masterworks (Toledo: Toledo Museum of Art, 2009), 118.
40 Museum label, Jonah Cast Up, Cleveland Museum of Art, access March 13, 2015.
duality in its nature and it can be viewed as a positive or negative agent. The original Hebrew word transcribed as Leviathan referred to a “large sea – monster.” The English translators of the early seventeenth century settled upon “whale” as a suitable translation.

The ketos may better illustrate the fearsome qualities of a large sea-monster. Jonah struggled against God’s command. Jonah did not obey, and God punished him. After three days of praying for forgiveness and enlightenment, he was spat up by the whale close to dry land. The third century sculpture of Jonah Cast Up (Fig. 3) the whale is shown as a composite monster created from several creatures: a dog’s paws, a boar’s head, a fish tail, and bird-like wings. Jonah with his arms raised seems to shoot out the mouth of this beast. This whale, a late antique ketos, and the Near Eastern dragons are examples of creatures that are both terrifying and protective.

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CHAPTER IV

FAITH AND UNREST

The French etcher and engraver Jacques Callot (1592-1634 C.E.) worked for the Medici court at Florence and for King Louis XIII of France. In the early seventeenth century, the Thirty Years War became a European conflict fueled by religious ideals and politics, and by the end of the war France was a major political power. King Louis XIII, a Catholic, had fought several religious battles against the Protestants.\(^{45}\) In 1633, King Louis XIII invaded and occupied the region of Lorraine [, an eastern] in northeastern France close to German speaking territories. Jacques Callot was born in the city of Nancy in Lorraine. The artist came from a Catholic family that had strong “ties with militant Counter-Reformation Catholicism.”\(^{46}\) Throughout this war, Lorraine was in a state of unrest. Daniel relates that the people of Lorraine suffered terribly during this period from the plague, ongoing strife, and the wartime destruction and looting caused by unpaid soldiers.\(^{47}\)

Perhaps the war and plague shaped Callot’s portrayal of his St. Anthony. As a religious subject he depicted the trials of St. Anthony (the Abbot) of Egypt twice, once in the late 1610s and once in the 1630s. The accounts of the life of Anthony of Egypt tell us that as a young man Anthony became a religious hermit. During his solitude in the wilderness, the monk resisted the

\(^{47}\) Ibid. xix-xxi.
Devil’s temptations, which included terrifying visions, and he remained true to his faith. Callot’s first version of *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (Fig. 8), was completed in Florence where he was working for the Medici court. This image is an elaborate scene that features a large grotesque flying dragon hovering above an enormous stage on which we see a procession of fantastic demons and monsters. The flying dragon appears to be watching the parade below him. It is hard to find the small scene of the saint being tormented among all of the vignettes of demons and monsters doing battle with each other. He is located on the right, just before the arch of the bridge.

At this time, Callot also created a number of theatrical and festival prints for the Florentine court. His interest in theatrical and festival prints may have influenced his choice of composition. Esther Averill states that Saint Anthony’s torments, also reference his trials or tribulations or temptations, was a favorite subject for the “serious artists” and the combination of the two themes (torments and temptations) enhanced a theatrical impression of a religious subject. The stage-like composition here allows Callot to show many different forms of torment. Moreover, St. Anthony was also a plague saint, invoked specifically against the disease called St. Anthony’s fire. St. Anthony’s fire was a medical condition known as ergotism caused by eating rye grain infected with a fungus. Ergotism caused hallucinations, convulsions, headaches, and ravaged blackened limbs. Outbreaks of St. Anthony’s fire was historically

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50 Ibid., 47.
shown in images with demons and monsters tormenting the saint and his followers and these images usually accompanied times of war and other political and social upheavals.\textsuperscript{52}

The mood in Callot’s second version of \textit{The Temptation of Saint Anthony} (Fig. 9), made close to 1635, is very different from the first version. By the mid-1630s, Callot had experienced the battles and sieges at Breda (1625-26) and La Rochelle (1629) and was working on his series \textit{Grande Miseres de la Guerre}. In his second version of \textit{The Temptation of St. Anthony}, Callot re-etched parts of the plate and worked out the spatial relationships so we can read the space and actions more easily. Averill noted that this version of the mid-1630s is more terrifying because of the demon-like weapons of war, and their acts of torture are more discernible in the print. They were lost in the earlier version. The large dragon in this image is a menacing antagonist, taking up the major part of the upper plate. He seems to come out into the viewer’s space as he flies above the chaos below. We see his teeth shown and that he grips a demon tightly in his left claws. The spotlighted head of the giant dragon is hard to forget. Averill attributed the change to this image as a reference of Callot’s responses to the Thirty Years War.\textsuperscript{53}

Daniel also cited the war as a reason for the compositional change in the second version. The findings indicate that further research is necessary to explore the various outside factors that may relate to the dragon’s depiction in Callot’s late etching. Nevertheless, Callot’s dragon shows how this symbol of evil together with the theme of the temptation of St. Anthony could both serve in a new context reflecting contemporary events in the early seventeenth century. The hellish stage of Callot’s image may also reference another series of images, those of the \textit{Book of the Apocalypse}.


\textsuperscript{53} Averill, as cited above in fn. 52, 157.
In the final chapter of man’s existence on Earth as recounted in the *Book of Revelations* or *The Apocalypse*, the seven-headed dragon or beast is presented as the harbinger of the end of the world. Artists during the Romanesque and later periods of the Middle Ages translated the account of *The Apocalypse* into artworks with extraordinary presentations of human suffering, spirituality, and religious Christian devotion.

Richard H. Putney writing for the Toledo Museum of Art (2002) noted that during the Middle Ages, “Europe changed dramatically…and developed societies with diverse cultural points of view.”\(^{54}\) He explained, “Religious art of the Middle Ages often represents a separate and symbolic world, one in which eternal truths are conveyed in a lyrical and expressive manner.”\(^{55}\) The Christian faith used objects to “resemble” or symbolize to a deeper meaning that is an “unspoken language” in “his quest after God.”\(^{56}\)

The imagery of the entrance to Hell is depicted in a capital from the arcade of the Monastery of St. Pons-de-Thomières (1200 C.E.), is shocking (Fig. 10). The capital, *The Last Judgment and the Condemned Led to Hell* shows the open jaws of a large dog and hellfire swallowing the figures of the damned. Putney described the open-jawed beast of the capital as a giant dog.\(^{57}\) A dog-headed or boar-headed dragon is one of the variants seen in depictions of monsters in late antiquity, where such a head may grace a fish-like or serpentine body. An example can be seen in the small marble sculpture *Jonah Cast Up* (Fig. 3). As we will see shortly, it may be related to the images of the Egyptian god of the Underworld, the jackal-headed Anubis. The jackal is a wild dog, native to Africa.


\(^{55}\) Ibid., 13.


According to the *New Testament* Douay-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible, the seven-headed dragon (with each head representing one of seven different animals) in *The Apocalypse* or *Book of Revelation* is the harbinger of the end of the world. In the text itself, the beast carries a woman bearing the anti-Christ. In Francis Huxley’s 1979 study of dragons in artworks he explained that the dragon often symbolized the mouth of Hell.58 Two of the three following verses from *The Apocalypse / Revelation* identify the dragon’s or serpent’s mouth as the gate for evil. The first is verse 12:9, where we read:

> And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent who is called the devil and Satan, who seduceth the whole world.

The next is verse 12: 13,

> And the serpent cast out of his mouth after the woman, water as it were a river that he might cause her to be carried away by the river.

And the third verse is 16:13, where we read:

> And I saw from the mouth of the dragon, and from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet three unclean spirits like frogs.

These passages may possibly reflect mistranslation from citation of Greek translation of Hebrew or Aramaic words. In the first century BCE, the “seventy” scholars translated the Old Testament books into Greek at Alexandria. While the second century author of *The Apocalypse*, the final book of the New Testament, was writing in late Hellenistic Greek, he (either John the Evangelist or John the Divine) was referring to a number of earlier Biblical texts. The serpent/dragon/beast confusion seen above is but one example. Alexandria, on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt, was a center of learning and the site of the Great Library. Jonathan Evans argued

that errors occurred in a few translations of the Hebrew to Greek terms:

“By a series of mistranslations, the Hebrew word for sea and land monster[s] hostile to God or the people of God were rendered into various Greek terms by the translators of the Greek Bible and later into Latin by St. Jerome, with the result that medieval readers and hearers of the Bible particularly of the Psalms and the Prophets, interpreted the dragon as a symbol of pride. The fourth term, the Hebrew word for ‘jackal,’ was mistranslated as “dragon” and this error is the origin of the long tradition, culminating in the medieval bestiaries, in which the dragon appears as an allegorical symbol for the sin of pride and thus for the original author of pride, Satan.”

Jackals are desert dwelling scavengers. Because jackals are active at night, rather than during the daylight, they were linked to the underworld by the Ancient Egyptians. St. Michael and the Egyptian god Anubis both play a role in the final judgment of a person’s soul. As the god of the underworld, the jackal-headed Anubis weighs the heart of the deceased against the feather of truth to see if his heart is light enough or free of sin to merit an enjoyable afterlife.

After the turn of the twelfth century, one increasingly sees the “mouth of Hell” depicted in European images as the head of a large dog with its mouth held wide open and its teeth serving as a frame to the entrance to the underworld. The conflation of the dragon with the dog or jackal gave rise to this image. With this understanding, we can now see the Romanesque capital with The Last Judgment and the Condemned Led to Hell (Fig. 10) as a horrific warning to sinners in the Middle Ages.

By the late fifteenth century, according to Peter Parshall (1999), fascination with The

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59 Evans, 101. The brackets are mine.
60 Hall, “Michael,” 208.
Apocalypse resurfaced across Europe. The subject matter “assumed more parable form” and was read as “signs to warn mankind from imminent disaster.” With a new half millennium drawing near people had “religious anxieties” and were uneasy about the future. Parshall cited this resurgence of interest in The Apocalypse was possibly linked to the one of the fifteenth century’s most famous publications, the Nuremberg Chronicle written by Hartmann Schedel and published by Anthony Koberger in 1493. As Parshall explained, the text was a “highly cosmographical account of the history of the world” that forecasted the end of days as relating to the Bible.

However, even before 1490, there was interest in apocalyptic imagery as well as in dragon imagery.

Martin Schongauer, a German painter, printmaker and draftsman active from ca. 1465 to 1491, came from a goldsmith family that had settled in Colmar. He was known for his naturalistic figures, for his religious works, and for his highly detailed imaginative creatures. The artist’s engravings demonstrate his skill with white space and line, pictorial depth and volume, and his personal style derived from that of Rogier van der Weyden. During his lifetime, Schongauer produced one hundred and sixteen engravings, some of which he signed but all of which are without a date. Prints were relatively inexpensive images “sold at fairs and religious festivals” and “acquired by artists and artisans and used in their workshops as resources for motifs and models for compositions.” Moreover, as long as the engraved plates survived, the artist could issue new imprints and profit from his works. Author Alan Shestack (2005) stated,

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65 Max Lehrs, Schongauer the Complete Engravings: A Catalogue Raisonné, (San Francisco: Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, 2005), 11-12.
“Schongauer’s engravings became highly widespread across Europe” and served as an inspiration for many artists including, Albrecht Dürer.66

The Apocalypse or Book of Revelation had an impact on art with its visionary descriptions of dragons, beasts, and doom. The ultimate spiritual battle of good and evil came to a climax when the Archangel Michael engaged in combat with the dragon in the Final Judgment of man in Revelation (Apoc. 12:7-9). In Schongauer’s engraving of ca. 1475 - 80, The Archangel Michael Piercing the Dragon (Fig. 11) the victorious angel stands like a statue, with spear in hand, on top of the evil, still writhing dragon. The Archangel Michael has a natural facial expression, soft curly hair, and his graceful slightly turned body with a spear in hand pins the dragon to the ground. Michael’s tunic and cape billows and drapes under his outstretched wings as the dragon struggles beneath him.

Max Lehrs (2005) identified Schongauer’s depiction of St. Michael’s clothing as non-traditional. Usually the Archangel is shown as a soldier dressed in armor ready for battle. According to Lehrs, Schongauer modeled his Archangel’s attire after the St. Michael in the center panel of Rogier van der Weyden’s Last Judgment Polyptych (c. 1443-1451), this St. Michael wears an alb (Fig. 12) in the Last Judgment This large altarpiece, made for the Hospital de Dieu at Beaune (Fig. 13), was probably executed by 1451.67 Without his traditional battle attire, Schongauer’s Archangel Michael appears vulnerable in his simple white tunic (or alb) and cape. However, this is a spiritual battle, and the Archangel remains a formidable force of faith and good.

As the dragon writhes desperately beneath St. Michael the Archangel, he swings his crab-like claws in the air. Schongauer’s rendition of the beast is highly imaginative and grotesque as

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66 Ibid., 12
67 Lehrs, Schongauer the Complete., 13-14.
well as idiosyncratic. The artist combined the naturalistic detailing of animals in the crab claws and the twisting vine-like appearance of the dragon’s curvy tail in *The Archangel Michael Piercing the Dragon* (Fig. 11). Drawing from nature allowed the artist to merge the imaginary with reality to create a truly frightening dragon.

With his knowledge of Rogier van der Weyden’s Beaune altarpiece, Schongauer brought a Flemish flair to his own personal interpretation of the struggle between *St. Michael and the Dragon*. Albrecht Dürer brought to life the end-of-days with his illustrated *Book of Revelation* or *The Apocalypse*, first issued in 1498. Dürer’s illustrated *Apocalypse* contained a series of fifteen large, impressive woodcuts with the accompanying text in both Latin and German editions. Later editions followed throughout the sixteenth century.68

Albrecht Dürer came from a goldsmith family and was one of the most prolific artists of the Renaissance north of the Alps. His work consisted of religious subjects, allegories, myths, portraits/self-portraits, and images drawn from nature.69 Schongauer’s engravings and drawings remained an inspiration to Dürer, especially when he looked for models of dragons or monsters. However, the two artists never met or had the opportunity to work together because Schongauer died in 1491.70 A few qualities that set Dürer’s artwork apart from his German contemporaries include highly detailed images, foreshortening/perspective, and his use of objects as symbols.71

Dürer’s *The Beast with Seven Heads and the Beast with the Ram’s Horns* (Fig. 14), from his *Apocalypse* woodcuts of 1498, is a literal description of events in two chapters in the *Book of Revelation*.72 In this woodcut, we see God enthroned waiting in heaven with a sickle in his right

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70 Lehrs, *Schongauer the Complete...*, 12.
hand accompanied by his angels hovering above the chaos below. The rolling clouds separating the two realms create movement and tension. Two of the angels carry weapons, a sickle and a sword. The angel with the sword in one hand bears the cross in his other hand. Robert H. Smith (2000) explains the composition: “God awaits the “harvest of judgment day” and the “cross is the secret weapon.”

Below, in the foreground and middle ground, the great crowd of people kneel in worship to the seven-headed beast with ten crowns. This beast is a dragon hybrid created by combining animalistic features such as a cat-face, a dog’s head, a rabbit’s ears, an eagle’s beak, and the body of a lion with bear’s paws, along with the reptilian scaled skin. Approaching the kneeling crowd is a lion with ram’s horns and dog’s paws. A rain of blood showers this lion creature. Dürer’s fantastic imagery was clearly inspired by nature as well as from the text. This woodcut has a similar use of realistic natural elements (not just in the depictions of animal parts, but also in his landscape forms and his depictions of plant life) as we see in Schongauer’s engraving. Dürer’s characteristic use of “object as symbol” here gives us the dragon which represents Satan and evil which illustrates the text from the Book of Revelation.

As we have seen over the centuries, as the fears of the new millennium grew, religious anxiety gave rise to apocalyptic imagery. This along with the continuing popularity of Western myths that featured demonizing dragons being passed down from generation to generation, conditioned the reader of the Bible and the viewer of artworks to associate the dragon-like creature with evil.

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73 Ibid., 67.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

The present study was designed to help explain how dragon iconography functioned in European art from the twelfth to the seventeenth century. It was also intended to help identify various influences such as that relate to dragon depictions and how the creatures functioned as a powerful symbol either as a proactive or antagonistic figure in art. The dragon captured the human imagination and inspired us to adopt some of its physical characteristics from various animal sources to create a hybrid creature. This allows us to manipulate this mythical creature for our specific purposes.

Two important limitations need to be reiterated here. First, the true origin of the dragon or the date of its first appearance has not been discovered. However; we can document that the dragon or very dragon-like creatures appeared in ancient Mesopotamian culture in the third and second millennia BCE. Second, each of the topics and artworks was only mentioned briefly as an introduction to illustrate how dragon imagery functioned. Many of the artworks covered in the thesis are currently located in Ohio public collections and come from a variety of regions in Western Europe from the twelfth to the seventeenth century. Future scholars and researchers can expand the investigation of these artwork which adds to our knowledge and understanding.

Both auspicious and terrifying, the dragon is easily identified as a symbol of power. How the dragon functions as a symbol depends on following factors: the archetype and the individual

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74 Westenholz, 880-01 Dragons, Monsters, 13-16.
artist’s intention of the subject. For example, a painting featuring heroic moral, religious figure slaying the dragon educates the public about the power of faith and devotion. We recognize the dragon as a symbol of duality; one that is a reflection of ourselves. Human beings are not all good or evil nor are we right or wrong. The dragon’s implied duality is one aspect that make this a fascinating creature.
REFERENCES


Figure 1

Cylinder Seal impression, Neo-Assyrian, 900BC-750BC
Clay
British Museum of Art, London, UK.
Figure 2

*Story of Perseus and Andromeda*, early 16\textsuperscript{th} c. (Netherlandish)
Tapestry weave: wool and silk
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH.
Figure 3

*Jonah Cast Up*, c. 280-290 late Roman, Asia Minor, early Christian, Marble

Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH.
Figure 4
Lorenzo Lolli (c. 1612-1691) (Italian)

*Andromeda*

Etching

Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH.
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*Perseus and Andromeda*, (c.1635-36) (Italian)
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Galleria Pallavicini Rospigliosi, Rome, Italy
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*Incense Burner and Stand for an Altar Cross*, (German) (c.1150-1175)

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Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH.
Figure 7
*Saint George and the Dragon*, (French) (c.1480-90)
Painting, oil on panel
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH.

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A version of this thesis with images is available through Kent State University School of Art
Figure 8
Jacques Callot, (French, c. 1592-1635)
The Temptation of Saint Anthony (first version) (c.1617) Etching.
Figure 9
Jacques Callot, (French, c. 1592-1635)
*The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (second version), (c.1634) Etching.
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH.
Figure 10

*The Last Judgment and the Condemned Led to Hell (c. 1200)*
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Martin Schongauer (c. 1450 – 1491)
*The Archangel Michael Piercing the Dragon*, (c. 1475)
Engraving
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH.
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Detail of Rogier van der Weyden’s (Flemish c. 1399/1400–1464) Altarpiece *The Last Judgment Polyptych* oil on panel (c. 1443-1451) Musée de l'Hôtel Dieu, Beaune, France
Rogier van der Weyden’s (Flemish c. 1399/1400–1464)
Altarpiece *The Last Judgment Polyptych* oil on panel (c. 1443-1451)
Musée de l'Hôtel Dieu, Beaune, France
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Albrecht Dürer (c. 1471–1528) (German)
*The Beast with seven Heads and the Beast with the Lamb’s Horn* (c. 1489)
Woodcut from the *Apocalypse series*
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH