The Book of Gryphons

Condensation

From the beginning of civilization, human imagination gave birth to creatures never actually seen upon the earth or in the air. Of all these mythical beings, one of them is so richly symbolic that for the past five thousand years, artists have shaped and reshaped it in materials from stone to lace. This majestic beast has pulled the chariots of gods, g...
mythical beings, one of them is so richly symbolic that for the past five thousand years, artists have shaped and reshaped it in materials from stone to lace. This majestic beast has pulled the chariots of gods, guarded ancient treasures, cured human illness with its magic claws, and pursued sinners. It has been the subject of travelers’ tales and scientists’ doubts and regarded as an animal of whimsy. Part lion, part eagle. . . .

***Master of Two Worlds***

[Fabulous] creatures are often composed of the most impressive parts of various animals -- parts such as beaks, horns, claws, wings, and tails. The imagination constructs these animals into new beings with recognizable parts of real animals. But in the most elemental figures, such as the Gryphon, the qualities and powers of those creatures are symbolically fused into a single being.****

"And so, . . . the Gryphon is born -- a combination of lion, king of beasts, and eagle, monarch of the air." ****

"Because it has lived so long and in so many places, the Gryphon has appeared with many variations, its personality and shape changing from culture to culture, reflecting the values and beliefs of a given society. What is in its eyes is a short history of the world."****

"Sacred to the Sun"

Along with a host of other fabulous creatures, the Gryphon was born in the human imagination around 3,000 B.C. in the ancient Near East. . . .

"Currently regarded as the earliest known representation of a Gryphon, dating back to the third millennium, is a seal-impression from Susa, the capital of ancient Elam, in what is now Iran. The seal-impression has the basic Gryphon form: lion hindparts, wings, and the head and forefeet of a bird of prey.****

"Virtually everyone who writes about the Gryphon mentions its warfare with the Arimaspians, for it is a highlight of the Gryphon’s history, dramatizing the beast’s vigilance and ferocity. As the story is repeated, it becomes more elaborate in detail. Combining the work of many early writers, we find that Scythia was the richest ancient source of gold and that Gryphons, whose instinct led them to treasure, roamed the Caucasus Mountains in search of gold and precious stones. The Gryphons would dig up these riches with their powerful claws, roll about in them with delight, and then sit and watch their treasure for hours, fascinated by the gold and gems shining in sunlight and moonlight. They built their nests of gold and laid in them not eggs, but agates. In that same country lived the one-eyed Arimaspians, who tried to steal the Gryphon gold for the adornment of their hair. They attacked the Gryphons on horses, which led to the hostility between the Gryphon and the horse, but the ferocious Gryphons, so strong they could carry off a horse and rider together, either tore the Arimaspians to pieces or carried them back to the Gryphon nests and fed them to their young."

"By this time in history, the major aspects of the Gryphon's dual nature had been established. On the one hand, the Gryphon was the guardian and consort of kings and gods -- guarding tombs and thrones, pulling chariots; on the other hand, the Gryphon crushed enemies and pursued and destroyed wrongdoers. It was both gracious and malevolent."

"Having passed through many youthful transformations, the Gryphon arrived in Rome, where its shape was formalized and fixed. From that point on -- with minor variations -- the Gryphon has appeared as we know it today."

***Saints, Demons, and Knights***

"The Gryphon was portrayed as both demonic and divine in the art and literature of the Middle Ages. At a time when Christianity used pagan customs and images in its own way and separated an imperfect earth from an ideal heaven, the
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The dual-natured Gryphon became a symbol for both the Devil and Christ. As a combination of the rapacious eagle and the ferocious lion, the medieval Gryphon represented the Devil and his legions to some. To others, the earthly strength of the lion and the ascendant splendor of the eagle symbolized the earthly and divine natures of Christ. "***Fabulous and Regal"As man shifted his attention from God and eternal life in heaven to the wonder of man himself and his earthly home, the Gryphon returned to the world."The monstrous and marvelous, as well as the scientific, fascinated the people of the Renaissance. Christopher Columbus, on one of his voyages to the New World, writes in his log that he saw three sirens leaping about in the sea. The Gryphon became an important figure in heraldry as well as a focal figure in a debate over the existence of fabulous animals." ***"In his Pseudodoxia Epidemica (Vulgar Errors), published in 1646, the English physician Sir Thomas Browne attempts to disprove the existence and prove the fabulous nature of many traditional animals, among them, the Gryphon. . . .The truth, Browne declares, is that the Gryphon is a symbol, not an actual animal."***"In 1662, . . . England established the Royal Society to foster the scientific spirit of direct observation and experimentation. The new scientific knowledge gradually discredited the old beliefs."***"In a Modern Time"The discredited Gryphon has moved to places more remote. In its modern exile, the beast lives quietly on the edge of imagination." ***"Just as the hybrid Gryphon form has survived through the ages and around the world, so has it survived the transformations of character and personality. The Gryphon is still with us – and not only in the stories and artifacts of the past. With the recent revival of interest in fantasy, the Gryphon has joined other mythical beings as a character in heroic fantasy novels, a figure in fantasy games, and a subject for craftsmen."The Gryphon might well be used as a symbol on spacecraft, so that ages from now, on a distant star, a space traveler might look into the Gryphon's eyes and see the long, rich life of one shape of the human imagination."Copyright © 2013 Joseph Nigg

About Author :

Since the early 1980s, Joseph (Joe) Nigg has explored the rich cultural lives of mythical creatures in a variety of styles and formats for readers of all ages. His books have garnered multiple awards, and his current international bestseller, "How to Raise and Keep a Dragon," has been translated into more than twenty languages."Griffins, the Phoenix, dragons, unicorns, and other traditional animals of the imagination are all around us in words and images," Nigg writes. "But when you delve into the histories of these creatures, you'll find an incredible wealth of cross-cultural lore intertwined with history, myth, religion, art, literature, science, and specialized areas such as alchemy and heraldry. While looking beyond the popular presence of mythical beasts, you'll discover as much about the history and dreams of the human race as about our animal creations."Nigg has been writing about fabulous beasts ever since he became intrigued by a fantastic animal figure.
on an antique lamp in his study. The winged lion with a fish tail eventually led him to the local art museum, where he was allowed to hold an ancient Persian silver cup embossed with griffins. That experience resulted in his first book, "The Book of Gryphons" (Apple-wood Books, 1982), a lavishly illustrated history of the eagle-lion beast. Since then, his scope has broadened to the entire host of fantastic animals worldwide. After twelve years of research and writing, Nigg recently completed THE PHOENIX: A CULTURAL HISTORY. The most comprehensive Phoenix study to date, the book traces the transmission and transformations of the mythical bird from ancient Egypt to the present. He was born in Davenport, Iowa, and grew up throughout the Midwest. Holding an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and a Ph.D. in Creative Writing from the University of Denver, he taught at several colleges and served as the executive editor of a global network before writing full time.
The griffin, griffon, or gryphon is a legendary creature with the body, tail, and back legs of a lion; the head and wings of an eagle; and sometimes an eagle’s talons as its front feet. Because the lion was traditionally considered the king of the beasts and the eagle the king of birds by the Middle Ages the griffin was thought to be an especially powerful and majestic creature. Since classical antiquity, Griffins were known for guarding treasure and priceless possessions. Since I'm announcing it everywhere else, I guess I'll post it here, too: My latest Amazon Kindle book, The Eyrie: A Book of Gryphons will be available starting August 15. As I explain in the introduction, I spent a lot of time in my formative years looking for gryphon stories, articles, folktales and essays and found little beyond Alice in Wonderland. Thus I had to write my own: www.amazon.com/Eyrie-Book-Grypâ€¦ I'm also giving out free quotes from the book, so here's a quote for DeviantArt: "Nineteenth-century naturalist Valentine Ball provided an even less likely origi