Sea Monsters on Medieval and Renaissance Maps

By Chet Van Duzer

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The sea monsters on medieval and Renaissance maps, whether swimming vigorously, gamboling amid the waves, attacking ships, or simply displaying themselves for our appreciation, are one of the most visually engaging elements on these maps, and yet they have never been carefully studied. The subject is important not only in the history of cartography, art, and zoological illustration, but also in the history of the geography of the "marvelous" and of western conceptions of the ocean. Moreover, the sea monsters depicted on maps can supply important insights into the sources, influences, and methods of the cartographers who drew or painted them. In this highly-illustrated book the author analyzes the most important examples of sea monsters on medieval and Renaissance maps produced in Europe, beginning with the earliest mappaemundi on which they appear in the 10th century and continuing to the end of the 16th century.

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Editorial Review

Review

"[B]eautifully illustrated. . . . People interested in maps, cryptozoology, folklore, and arcane zoology and zoological history will want to check it out."
(*Scientific American*)

"The book features striking images of maritime monsters taken from maps of the ocean made between the 10th and 16th centuries."
(*Boston Globe Brainiac Blog*)

"Full of charming stories and cartographic detail, Chet Van Duzer's book is an entertaining and rewarding book for general readers and a well-researched reference for scholars."
(Alessandro Scafi *Times Literary Supplement*)

"In the large-format, hardcover that this thing is, it's basically as near to the ultimate nerd-level coffee table book that you could ever want, and I love it for that."
(Aidan Flax-Clark *Lapham's Quarterly*)

"[An] authoritative, wide-ranging study. . . . Sumptuously produced. . . . The author is an encyclopedic scholar of historical cartography, with a magisterial command of comparative knowledge and scrupulous attentiveness to detail."
(Marina Warner *New York Review of Books*)

"Medieval and Renaissance map scholar, Chet Van Duzer, backed by the British Library as publisher, have teamed up to produce a spectacular new book, *Sea Monsters on Medieval and Renaissance Maps*, a topic, oddly enough, for which there is little by way of real precedent. This book will become the sea monster authority by default. Although this beautiful book is a product of academic quality, it is very readable and accessible and requires no prior knowledge."
(*BibliOdyssey*)

"A truly charming book, and one that will turbocharge the imagination of anyone staring over the side of a boat at a bunch of waves that could hide just about anything."
(Sam Llewellyn *Marine Quarterly*)

"Lavish. . . . The sea monsters depicted throughout Van Duzer's beautifully illustrated British Library volume strike absolute wonder in the reader today, and the author provides valuable insight into what medieval and Renaissance viewers must have made of these sinewy, silly, horned, fanged, and fearsome creatures. . . . Van Duzer reminds scholars that it sometimes helps to let the eye wander to the margins, to get a different historical perspective of medieval perspectives of their surrounding seas. This critical analysis of a hitherto ignored cartographic trope adds much-needed depth to our understanding of medieval and later perceptions of the sea and its mysterious creatures."
(Vicki Ellen Szabo, Western Carolina University *Nautical Research Journal*)

"An in-depth dissection of ancient maps and sea beasts from days past."

(Andrew Belonsky *Out*)

"Duzer offers a sublime examination of the genealogy of individual sea monsters and the artistic techniques of placing them on maps. . . . The author and the British Library both deserve great praise for creating such a visually stunning work."
(*Historical Geography*)

About the Author

Chet Van Duzer is a Kislak Fellow at the Library of Congress. He is the author of *Johann Schoner's Globe of 1515: Transcription and Study* and co-author with John Hessler of *Seeing the World Anew: The Radical Vision of Martin Waldseemuller's 1507 & 1516 World Maps*.

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