



Imaginary Creatures

The Library on Display

Franca Arduini

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imaginary creatures

Mandragora

- Beautifully illustrates a gallery of medieval and renaissance imaginary creatures, chosen from nineteen manuscripts and nine printed books, ranging in date from the end of the 12th to the 18th century, in a handy format with an accessible price
- Offers a glimpse into the Medici's private library, giving us an idea of their literary and decorative tastes
- Illustrates sirens, unicorns, dragons, centaurs, phoenixes, satyrs, minotaurs, decorative borders, woodcuts, illuminations, engravings and colophons
- Published to coincide with the first of a series of exhibitions based around the manuscript and printed book collection of the Laurentian Library in Florence

The first event of the *Library on Display* project, a series of theme-based exhibitions of Laurentian manuscripts and printed books, *Imaginary Creatures* opened in 2007, at the Laurentian Library (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana). Nineteen manuscripts (many commissioned, owned and annotated by prominent humanists) and nine printed books were chosen for the astonishing range of imaginary creatures depicted in them: dating from the end of the 12th to the 18th century and picked out from different collections belonging to the Library, they are in Latin, Greek, the Italian vernacular and Persian, and contain extraordinary images of sirens, satyrs, dragons, centaurs, phoenixes, unicorns, basilisks, winged horses, griffins and minotaurs of all shapes and sizes, added to explain or simply decorate the accompanying texts. Different styles and techniques are represented, from simple one- or two-colour drawings to virtuoso exercises by the master illuminators of the 15th century; the selection also includes woodcuts, engravings and colophons found in precious early printed books. With the a preface by Franca Arduini, Director of the Library, the catalogue is divided into two sections, the first devoted to manuscripts and the second to printed books. All folios on display at the exhibition are reproduced, complemented by details and images of other folios that visitors will not be able to see; the images are accompanied by short catalogue entries.