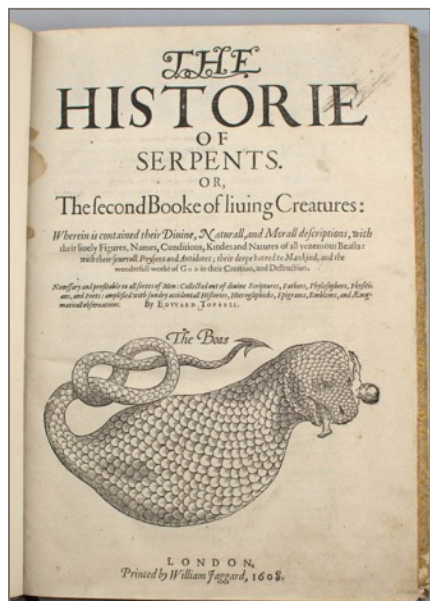
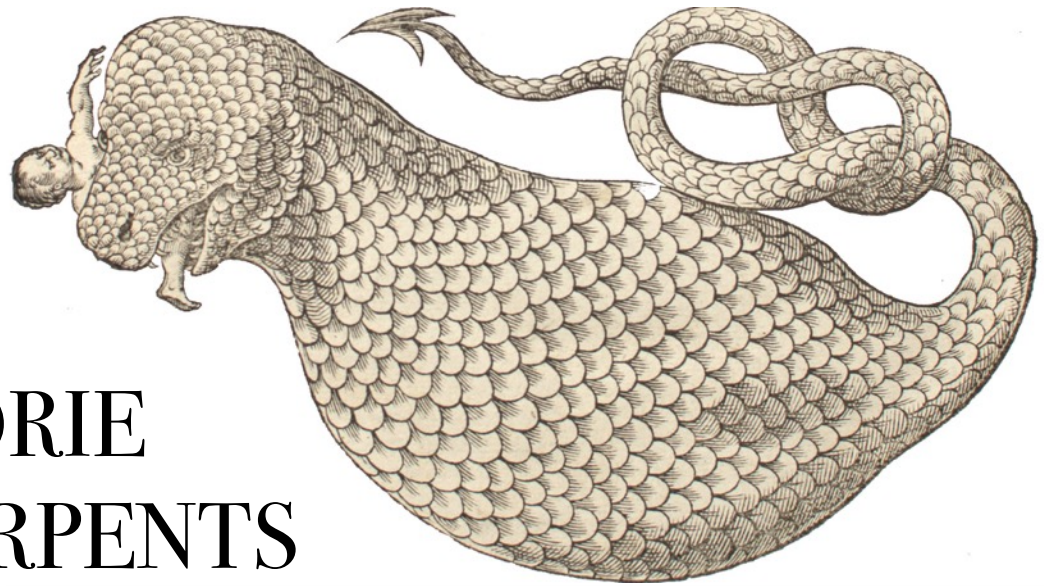


THE HISTORIE OF SERPENTS

Edward Topsell, 1608



Edward Topsell was a British clergyman and author whose two volume bestiary *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts* (1607) and *The Historie of Serpents* (1608) become widely popular for its fantastic illustrations. Both were printed by William Jaggard, who is better known as the printer of Shakespeare's first folio.

Filled with woodcut illustrations of creatures from frogs to dragons, Topsell's work borrowed heavily (and directly) from earlier treatises, most notably Karl Gesner's four-volume *Historiae Animalium*. Bestiaries of the time freely mixed fantastic and real creatures, often using the characteristics of the animals to convey moralistic messages, though more practical (and factual) matters of animal husbandry were also provided.

Held in about 15 other US institutions, the nearest copy is at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. The UW copy is also notable for its unique binding: the gold decorative dragon emblem on the front cover with matches the emblem used on the bookplate suggesting that a previous owner had the binding commissioned specifically to their taste; a common practice among bibliophiles in an earlier time. The binding itself is a well-executed full vellum over rigid boards, with gold-tooled embellishment and green goat label.





Conservation

Physically the UW Libraries copy was in good condition although the front board had become detached leaving the textblock vulnerable to damage and potential loss. By reattaching the front board with Japanese tissue and creating a custom-sized protective box, this important book was promptly made available to an interested faculty member while at the same time ensuring its ongoing accessibility to future scholars. The treatment of *Historie of Serpents* is a great example of how a modest amount of conservation work can make a significant difference in access and longevity.

Sources:

- Lewis, G.. "Topsell, Edward (bap. 1572, d. 1625)." G. Lewis *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Jan. 2008. 5 June 2014 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27557>>.
- Raven, Charles E. *English Naturalists from Neckam to Ray: A Study of the Making of the Modern World*. Cambridge [Eng.: University Press, 1947. Print.

