



# BEOWULF and the Dragon

Originally written in Old English, the epic poem *Beowulf* is named for its hero and tells of his mighty deeds in sixth-century Scandinavia, a time known as the Vendel Era.

The most famous creature in the tale is Grendel, a fierce monster that devoured scores of Danish nobles. Beowulf defeated this creature by ripping its arm from the socket, causing the beast to bleed to death. The hero also defeated Grendel's mother, as well as numerous sea dragons.

Beowulf died from wounds sustained from a vicious fire dragon that terrorized the land after a thief had stolen a golden cup from the beast's hoard. Aided by a brave warrior, Beowulf vanquished the flying dragon and saved the land.

The epic contains accurate historical information as well as fiction. The stories of battling dragons may be legendary, but do they have any basis in reality? Did these men or their ancestors actually fight dinosaurs and pterosaurs? This idea would be consistent with the Bible. But those who believe dinosaurs lived millions of years before man cannot adequately explain why cultures around the world have dragon legends whose creatures often match descriptions of dinosaurs.







# ST. GEORGE

## and the Dragon

St. George (c. AD 275–303) was a devout Christian and Roman military officer. The famous legend of his battle with the dragon is said to have occurred during his journey to join his men in Diocletian’s army.

As he neared the city of Selene in Libya, he saw a young princess outside the city wall. She pleaded with him to leave so that he would not be killed by the dragon to which she was being offered as a sacrifice. George refused to leave and vowed to protect her.

Suddenly, the dragon appeared and attacked the soldier. During his fierce battle against the fire-breathing foe, George found a weak spot under the beast’s left wing and delivered a crippling blow. The legend explains that the princess then led the maimed creature back into the city, where George killed it in the presence of the people.

The king asked George what he wanted as a reward. The dragonslayer replied, “I desire only that ye believe in the God who strengthened my hand to gain this victory.” After baptizing the city into the Christian faith, George resumed his trek to join his troops .





JOHN OF DAMASCUS

# JOHN OF DAMASCUS

Eighth-century scholar John of Damascus wrote *On Dragons and Ghosts*, in which he differentiated between real creatures and fictional creatures. After describing some dragons as extremely large serpents, he stated:

*There is one more kind of [dragon]; those [that] have wide head, goldish eyes and horny protuberances on the back of the head. They also have a beard [protruding] out of the throat ... This dragon is a sort of [beast], like the rest of the animals, for it has a beard, like a goat, and horn at the back of its head. Its eyes are big and goldish. These dragons can be both big and small. All serpent kinds are poisonous, except dragons, for they do not emit poison.*

# MARGO POLO

Famed thirteenth-century explorer Marco Polo described dragons in the Far East:

*In this province [Carajan] are found snakes and great serpents of such vast size as to strike fear into those who see them ... Some of them are ten paces in length ... The bigger ones are about ten palms in girth. They have two forelegs near the head, but for foot nothing but a claw. ... The head is very big, and the eyes are bigger than a great loaf of bread. The mouth is large enough to swallow a man whole, and is garnished with great [pointed] teeth.*

The animals described here are believable, and these men intended to relay information about what they had discovered. Did these men actually see or hear about real dragons—creatures that are today called dinosaurs?

MARGO POLO





# ROMANS and Dragons

■ Ancient Roman historians wrote about dragons and treated them as real creatures.

Cassius Dio (AD 150–235) tells of an encounter said to have taken place in the third century BC involving the Roman general Marcus Atilius Regulus, who served during the First Punic War. It is reported that his army battled a dragon:

*A dragon suddenly crept up and settled behind the wall of the Roman army. The Romans killed it by order of Regulus, skinned it, and sent the hide to the Roman Senate. When the dragon was measured by order of the Senate, it happened to be 120 feet long, and the thickness was fitting to the length.*

Several Roman writers described this encounter near the Bagradas River, including Livy, Valerius Maximus, and Aulus Gellius. Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) described how Regulus and his troops used “ballistae and other engines of war” to slay the mighty serpent, and stated that the skin and jaws were preserved for a time in a Roman temple.

Ammianus Marcellinus (AD fourth century) reported that the revered ibis birds of Egypt often attacked poisonous flying snakes. Could these reptiles be the same as the creature called a “fiery flying serpent” in Isaiah 30:6?





# GOWBOYS and Dragons

On April 26, 1890, the *Tombstone Epitaph* newspaper printed the following incredible report:

## FOUND IN THE DESERT

### A Strange Monster Discovered and Killed on the Huachuca Desert

A winged monster, resembling a huge alligator with an extremely elongated tail and an immense pair of wings, was found on the desert between the Whetsone and Huachuca mountains last Sunday by two ranchers who were returning home ... The two men, who were on horseback and armed with Winchester rifles ... pursue[d] the monster and ... succeeded in getting near enough to open fire with their rifles and wounding it.

The monster had only two feet ... The head, as near as they could judge, was about eight feet long, the jaws being thickly set with strong, sharp teeth. Its eyes were as large as a dinner plate and protruded about half way from the head ... The total length from tip to tip about 160 feet. The wings were composed of a thick and nearly transparent membrane.

Is this just another tall tale, or is it possible that these cowboys encountered the legendary Thunderbird or Piasa of Native American lore, a creature whose descriptions remind one of a pterosaur?