

# Introducing the Medieval Ass

Kathryn L. Smithies

Series: Medieval Animals

September 2020

£11.99 • PB • 9781786836229 • 198 x 129mm • 128pp

7 b&w images



Market:

*Introducing the Medieval Ass* is written as an introduction – as such its remit is to reach both the scholar and the interested lay reader. This book will appeal to a variety of readerships by presenting a fascinating topic in an accessible and lucid manner which educates, entertains, and enthrals – exactly as medieval asses did through their presence in encyclopaedias, religious and philosophical texts, and humorous and satirical tales.

Blurb:

*Introducing the Medieval Ass* presents a lucid, accessible, and comprehensive picture of the ass's enormous socio-economic and cultural significance in the Middle Ages and beyond. In the Middle Ages, the ass became synonymous with human idiocy, a comic figure representing foolish peasants, students too dull to learn, and their asinine teachers. This trope of foolishness was so prevalent that by the eighteenth century the word 'ass' had been replaced by 'donkey'. Economically, the medieval ass was a vital, utilitarian beast of burden, rather like today's ubiquitous white van; culturally, however, the medieval ass enjoyed a rich, paradoxical reputation. Its hard work was praised, but its obstinacy condemned. It exemplified the good Christian, humbly bearing Christ to Jerusalem, but also represented Sloth, a mortal sin. Its potent sexual reputation – one literary ass had sex with a woman – was simultaneously linked to sterility and, to this day, 'ass' and 'arse' remain culturally-connected homophones.

Key Selling Points:

- This is the first book dedicated to the medieval ass
- It appeals to a multi-Audience: interested lay readership; accessible, introductory and undergraduate level book; scholar
- This book explains how the medieval ass was an arse, an idiot, a violent hot-tempered sexed-up brute that ate the balls of its own male offspring. Conversely, the ass was also a humble, patient, loyal, hard-working Christian animal (marked with a cross) that Christ rode into Jerusalem. These paradoxical qualities are explored in this book and open up a wealth of information on how people in the Middle Ages viewed the ass, not just as a simple beast of burden, but also as a figure to warn and to educate, to expose human failings and praise the divine.
- *Introducing the Medieval Ass* reveals medieval attitudes to animals, to people, and to the divine, making it an excellent way to approach medieval cultural and animal studies.

Author Details:

**Kathryn Smithies** is a medieval historian and research and teaching associate in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne.

Contents:

List of Illustrations

List of Abbreviations

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Natural World of the Ass

Chapter 2: The Religious Ass

Chapter 3: The Scholastic Ass

Chapter 4: The Ass in Literature

Post-script: The Medieval Ass in the Post-Medieval Era.

Conclusion

Bibliography

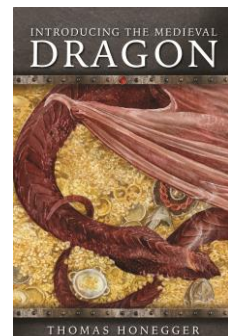
Other Related Titles:

**Introducing the Medieval Dragon**

Thomas Honegger

September 2019

£11.99 • PB • 9781786834683 • 198x129 mm • 144pp



UK Distribution (ex Wales):

NBN International| [orders@nbninternational.com](mailto:orders@nbninternational.com) | Tel: 01752 202301 | Fax: 01752 202333

Wales Distribution:

Books Council of Wales| [distribution.centre@books.wales](mailto:distribution.centre@books.wales) | Tel: 01970 624455 | Fax: 01970 625506

University of Wales Press, University Registry  
King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff, CF10 3NS  
Tel: (0)29 2037 6999  
[www.uwp.co.uk](http://www.uwp.co.uk)



**GWASG PRIFYSGOL CYMRU**  
**UNIVERSITY OF WALES PRESS**