

## **PETERBOROUGH PSALTER and BESTIARY (facsimile)**

The manuscript of which this is a copy is an unusual combination of two separate books. Psalters were strictly pious volumes for prayer, while bestiaries took a more colorful and at times humorous approach, explaining Christian values and beliefs by using animals, both real and fantastic, as metaphors. The Peterborough Bestiary includes more than one hundred moralizing descriptions and images of animals and is one of the most comprehensive books of its kind.

The facsimile is open to the first page of the Bestiary, which features beavers, an ibex, a hyena, a “bonnacon”, monkeys, a satyr, and deer. Although most animals were anthropomorphized and behaved like humans, others were just plain funny. The “bonnacon”, for example, is a made-up creature that looks like a bull and has a built-in weapon that worked like a flamethrower. When hunters pursued it, the “bonnacon” expelled its dung over a distance of two acres, burning everything along the trajectory. Today we find these creatures and their stories merely amusing; in the medieval mind, however, they addressed the spiritual and the material simultaneously.

Bestiaries were popular with both clerics and secular individuals, particularly in England and Northern France. The extensive, exuberant decoration as well as the unusual combination of the two books in the Peterborough manuscript suggest that this luxury volume was intended for private rather than for monastic use.