THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE 92: THE LION KINGS

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 92: The Lion Kings. In this episode, we're going to conclude our look our Richard the Lionheart. And we're going to see where he acquired that nickname – "Lionheart." In fact, lions will be a continuing theme in this episode. During this period, lions became symbols of Western European royalty even though lions weren't native to Europe. Most Europeans had never seen an actual lion in the lifetime, and that was true for many other exotic animals from Africa and Asia. The knowledge of those animals in Western Europe was vague and sometimes confused. And in some cases, it wasn't clear if the animals were real or mythological. So we'll also look at the growing fascination with lions and other exotic animals in the Middle Ages.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast at Patreon.com. Just go to historyofenglishpodcast.com and link from there.

So let's pick up where we left off last time – with the end of the Third Crusade and the tenuous reign of Richard I of England. I say "tenuous" because Richard was facing several challenges back home while he was away in the Holy Land. His brother John had an eye on the English throne, and he was encouraging rebellion among the English nobles. Meanwhile, the French king Philip was busy attacking Richard's lands in Normandy. And he had also formed an alliance with John to take down Richard in England. So it became increasingly obvious to Richard that he needed to get back home as soon as possible to deal with the problems there.

Richard was so feared and respected back home that the mere rumor of his return was enough to get some of the more rebellious nobles back in line. Richard had a reputation as a great and powerful warrior, and that reputation is reflected in his nickname – the "Lionheart." He had earned that reputation years earlier as the Duke of Aquitaine where he fought rebellions nobles for years. And he had defeated his powerful father Henry with the help of the French king Philip. During the Third Crusade, he captured Sicily and Cyprus before he even made it to the Holy Land. When he arrived in the Near East, he helped to secure the important port city of Acre. And he nearly took back Jerusalem from Saladin's forces before eventually agreeing to a truce that gave Christians access to the city. So he was considered a great warrior and a model of chivalry, even during his own lifetime.

And that helps to explain why he became known as Richard the Lionheart. During this period, it became common to associate kings and prominent nobles with lions. You might remember from earlier episodes that the King of Scots was known as William the Lion. The Duke of Saxony and Bavaria was named Henry. He was a close ally of Richard's, and he was actually married to Richard's sister. He was known as Henry the Lion. And the son of the French king Philip was named Louis. He later succeeded his father as the King of France, and he is sometimes known as Louis the Lion.

Well back when Richard was the Duke of Aquitaine, and he was fighting again rebellious barons there, he also started to be known as the "Lion." In earlier episodes, I've mentioned the chronicler Gerald of Wales. And it was Gerald who gave us the first written reference to Richard as "the Lion" during that earlier period. But again, that was a common nickname at the time. So how did the Richard "the Lion" became "Richard the Lionheart"?

Well, during the Third Crusade, Richard was accompanied by a Norman poet named Ambroise. It is likely that Ambroise served as a minstrel during the Crusade. And after he returned home to France, he wrote an poetic account of the Crusade in French called "L'Estoire de la Guerre Sainte" – literally the "History of the Holy War."

In his account, he described Richard's arrival as the port city of Acre. He wrote that Richard and his men were heartened. They passed Castle Imbert before seeing the city of Acre for the first time. In that passage, Ambroise wrote in French, ". . . le quor de lion, E trespassa Casel Imbert" – literally "The heart of the lion passed Castle Imbert." And that is the first known reference to Richard as "le quor de lion" – the "heart of the Lion" – or the Lionheart.

So ultimately, this nickname was a just a variation of other regal nicknames at the time that used the word ***Lion***. Even though lions weren't native to Western Europe, most Europeans had some knowledge of the large cats. And in fact, the Latin word for the animal had even passed into Old English during the time of the Anglo-Saxons. That word was ***Leo*** which we still have for the name of the constellation – "Leo." That Latin root also passed into French as ***lion***. And around the current point in our story, that French verison of the word was borrowed into English as ***lion***. So "Leo the lion" is actually redundant. ***Leo*** is the earlier Latin verison of the word found in Old English, and ***lion*** is the later French version that passed into early Middle English.

As I noted, lions weren't native to Europe, but Europeans heard stories about lions from pilgrims, from traders, from minstrels, from the stories of the Bible, and from other sources. And in the popular imagination, they were almost mythological creatures. They were highly regarded for their beauty and power and majesty.

Lions were considered such majestic creatures at the time that the word ***lion*** sometimes found its way into other uses. For example, the beauty and power of the lion is reflected in the name of a common flower which was also borrowed from French during early Middle English. This particular flower had tooth-shaped leaves. And it was thought that the leaves resembled the teeth of a lion. The French word for 'tooth' was ***dent*** – D-E-N-T – from the same root as ***dental*** and ***dentist***. So the flower became known as the 'tooth of the lion' – the 'dent-de-lion.' And after that name entered English, it was Anglicized to ***dandelion***. So a dandelion is literally the 'lion's tooth.'

Also, there was a particular type of lizard that had a head-crest that resembled a lion's mane. So the Greeks called the lizard an 'earth lion' – meaning a lion that crawled along the ground. That term passed through Latin and French into English as ***chameleon***. So a chameleon is literally an 'earth lion.' The skin of a chameleon would change color to help it blend in with its environment. And that tendency of a chameleon to change its appearance led to the other sense of the word today as a person who changes his or her appearance or changes some other personal characteristic.

Chameleon was borrowed into English in the 1300s, and ***dandelion*** came in a couple of centuries of later. So both were borrowed into Middle English.

Now you might have one lion or a group of lions. And today, we call a group of lions a ***pride***. That particular use of the word ***pride*** is based on the notion that lions are powerful and regal and proud creatures. And I mention that connection because there is a more fundamental connection between the word ***pride*** and Medieval ***nobility***. In English, a mounted warrior was called a ***knight***. And in an earlier episode, we saw that the French equivalent was a ***chevalier*** – literally a 'horse man.' But as those horsemen became lesser nobles, they started to acquire a new French name – a ***prudhomme***.

The French word ***prud*** passed into English as ***proud***. And ***homme*** is the French word for 'man.' So a ***prudhomme*** was literally a 'proud man,' but the word ***prud*** had a slightly different sense in Old French. Today, the word ***proud*** refers to someone who is self-assured and pleased with his her accomplishments. But in French, it meant someone who was valiant, and brave and powerful. We have some of that original sense in a variation of the word which entered English around this time, and that's the word ***prouess*** which became ***prowess***. If someone has great ***prowess***, they have great skill and strength and ability. And the word ***prud*** – or ***prowd*** – also once had that sense. So a ***prudhomme*** was a brave and valiant man.

Of course, we can see how the meaning of that word ***proud*** shifted when it came into English. The Norman knights often referred to themselves as ***prudhommes***. And the people of England apparently thought those knights were full of themselves. So in English, the word ***proud*** came to refer to people that had a high opinion of themselves. And over time, ***proud*** and ***prowess*** acquired different and distinct meanings in English, even though they originally had very similar meanings.

By the way, that French word ***prud*** also gave us the Modern English word ***prude*** – as in someone who is uptight and excessively proper. That word was the product of a completely separate development within French. And it actually came from that term ***prudhomme***. As I noted, ***prudhomme*** meant a proud or valiant man. Well, over time, the word was extended to women as well. And that produced the word ***prudefemme***, which literally meant a proud or valiant woman, but it was typically used to mean a noblewoman in the same way that ***prudhomme*** was used to mean a knight or nobleman.

After the Middle Ages, the word ***prudefemme*** came to mean a very proper or demure woman. And it was sometimes shortened to just ***prude***. And that was how English borrowed the word in the 1700s – to refer to someone who is excessively prim and proper, especially as it relates to matters of sex. So that was really the second time that English had borrowed that word – first as ***proud***, and then again in the 1700s as ***prude***.

So that means that ***proud***, ***prowess*** and ***prude*** are all cognate. They all came from a root word that mean 'brave or valiant.' And of course, that same root also produced the word ***pride***. If you are ***proud***, you are full of ***pride***. So it's basically the noun version of ***proud***. And from that original usage, the term was applied to lions. Remember the word ***proud*** originally meant 'brave or valiant,' and it acquired a connection to European nobility. So lions became known as the King of the Beasts. And, just as a group of French nobles were ***prudhommes*** or 'proud men,' a group of lions was

known as a ***pride***. And in fact, several documents from the 1400s make specific reference to a "pride of lions." But as I noted, the sense of the words ***proud*** and ***pride*** started to shift in English. They started to acquire a sense of arrogance, and they lost their original meaning as 'brave or valiant.' And along the way, the term ***pride*** stopped being used to refer to a group of lions. It wasn't until the late 1800s that writers started to revive certain old words for a group of animals. And during the 20th century, it once again became common to refer to a "pride of lions."

So in the development of words like ***proud*** and ***pride***, we can see connections between bravery, knighthood, kings, and lions. And that takes us back to Richard the Lionheart who was ***proud*** in both senses of the word. He was brave and valiant, but he was also kind of full of himself. I alluded to that in the last episode. Even though he was technically a vassal of the French king Philip, he often treated Philip like an underling. He broke an agreement to marry Philip's sister, and he failed to divide money and land with Philip as they had originally agreed.

I also noted in the last episode that Richard and his men made sure that everybody understood that Richard was in charge. When they captured the port city of Acre, they ripped down the banner of one of Richard's allies, Duke Leopold of Austria. Leopold had been involved in the siege of the city for several months before Richard even got there. And it was a major sign of disrespect to rip down another leader's banner, especially if he was an ally. Leopold was so infuriated, that he and his forces soon left for home. He bore a grudge against Richard, and he intended to settle the score. Back home, Leopold complained about Richard to the Holy Roman Emperor. The Emperor had formed a loose alliance with the French king Philip. They all had grievances against Richard. And they planned to teach him a lesson. Their lands stood between the Holy Land and Angevin Empire. So they agreed that if Richard survived the Crusade, he would be seized and arrested on his way back home. That meant that Richard faced a difficult and treacherous journey back to England.

In October of 1192, Richard left Acre and set sail for home. It appears that Richard's plan was to return home and get things back in order, and then return to the Holy Land at a later date to complete the Crusade. But Richard soon found that he had a problem just making his way back home.

His initial stop was the island of Corfu in western Greece. There he heard that his enemies were lying in wait at virtually every port in the western Mediterranean. So Richard decided to change course, and sail up the Adriatic, up the eastern coast of Italy. He eventually became shipwrecked in the northern Adriatic and decided to take a land route home through Central Europe.

I mentioned earlier that Richard's brother-in-law was the Duke of Saxony and Bavaria. His name was Henry, and I noted that he was also known as Henry the Lion. He was one of those nobles with a 'lion' nickname. And he was Richard's ally, so the Lionheart planned to travel overland to the Lion's territory in northern Germany. Richard and his retainers disguised themselves as pilgrims, and they headed out on foot. But three days later, they were spotted about 50 miles from Vienna. Richard was quickly seized and delivered as a prisoner to Duke Leopold. Leopold then sold Richard to the Holy Roman Emperor. The Emperor accused Richard of betraying the Holy Land by agreeing to a treaty to Saladin, and he placed Richard under house arrest.

As you might imagine, the arrest created a political mess. Richard had been on Crusade, and it was considered a violation of Pope's order for a Crusader to be detailed by another leader while he was on Crusade. So the Pope responded by excommunicating Duke Leopold.

Back in England, Richard's brother John tried to take advantage of the situation. He paid homage to the French king Philip for most of the Angevin territory in France. And he agreed to marry Philip's sister Alice. That's the same sister that Richard had refused to marry. So John was fully allied with Philip, and he was trying to position himself as the new leader of the Angevin Empire in Richard's absence. And there is no doubt that he wanted Richard to remain in prison as long as possible.

I should note that this is the period during which many of the tales of Robin Hood are set. In the classic version of the story, 'Prince' John is the evil figure in the background while King Richard is away on Crusade or being held in prison. However, there is no evidence that the Robin Hood legends actually existed during this period. The first reference to songs and stories about Robin Hood occurs in the late 1300s – a couple of centuries later. And in many of the early versions of the legend, the setting varied quite a bit. In fact, fixing the legend during Richard's reign was a relatively modern development.

It is easy to see why later writers would prefer to set the legend in this period. It was a difficult time in England with a great deal of uncertainty. But John was never able to usurp the crown. And he was prevented in part by his mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine. She stood firm in Richard's absence, and she prevented many of the important nobles from siding with John. She also helped to secure Richard's release from house arrest.

The Holy Roman Emperor was demanding a ransom of 150,000 marks for Richard's release. It was an incredible sum of money, but it was the only way to end Richard's captivity. So Eleanor set about raising the money. And keep in mind that massive taxes had been levied a few years earlier to pay for the Crusade. So now, a new round of taxes was imposed.

In almost every church in England, chalices and crucifixes were melted down for their silver. Every freeman was forced to pay a quarter of his earnings to the government to help pay the ransom. It is amazing that so much money was collected in such a short amount of time. And it's a testament to the advanced bureaucracy that had been established in England. And all of those taxes had long-term consequences which we'll cover in upcoming episodes

The amount that had to be paid for Richard's release was literally a King's ransom. And I should note that the word ***ransom*** was borrowed form French around this time. In the end, 100,000 marks were paid for Richard's release, with hostages being given as a guarantee for the remaining 50,000. In February of 1194, after more than a year in captivity, the Lionheart was released from captivity – and he was once agree free to roam the countryside.

With Richard's release, the rebellions in France and England started to fall apart. A contemporary chronicler named Roger of Howden wrote about the reaction of the French king Philip. According

to the account, Philip sent an urgent message to John. The message read, "Look to yourself, the devil is loose."

A short time later, Richard landed in Kent. He had been gone for nearly 4 years. So in order to reassert royal authority, he was crowned for a second time in Westminster. He spent the rest of the Spring consolidating his control, and dealing with the few rebellious nobles that were still sympathetic to John.

I noted earlier that the King of the Scots was also known as 'the Lion' – specifically William the Lion. William had remained an ally of Richard during his arrest, and that loyalty had helped to secure Richard's position in England. William never joined John's rebellion. And now that Richard was back in town, William arrived to request a favor. He asked Richard for possession of the northern English counties that had also been claimed by prior Scottish kings. But Richard refused. The Lionheart was not willing to cede any territory to the Scottish Lion.

After two months in England putting things in order, Richard decided to head across the Channel to deal with the French king Philip. By this point, Philip had taken control of that disputed region between Paris and Normandy called the Vexin. He had also invaded deep into Normandy and even threatened the Norman capital of Rouen. So Philip was really the biggest threat to Richard's reign.

As soon as Richard arrived in Normandy, Richard's brother John came to beg forgiveness. He apologized for his actions and swore that he would never challenge Richard again. Surprisingly, Richard accepted the apology without argument. He said that John was a mere child, and those who had led him astray would be punished. Of course, Richard was referring to Philip who he considered the more important threat. And by forgiving John, Richard was able to bring his brother back to his side, thereby breaking up the alliance with Philip.

Richard spent the next five years waging war against Philip. It was a bitter and brutal affair with siege after siege, and shifting alliances. It soon became clear that Philip was no match for Richard on the battlefield. Richard finally got the upper hand in the winter of 1195 and 1196. Nobles that had sided with Philip when he was ascendant now switched their loyalty to Richard. It was always better to side with the king who was winning. Over time, Richard regained most of the territory that had been lost.

As we know, the conflict between the French kings and the Angevin kings was part of a larger family tradition. The French Dynasty at the time was called the Capetians. And of course, the English ruling family was the Plantagenets. And by now, the Capetians and the Plantagenets were mortal enemies. Each family made alliances with lesser nobles, and those alliances were secured through arranged marriages. So we have to keep in mind that these wars weren't really wars between nation-states in the modern sense of warfare. In many respects, they were wars fought by one family against another family. And this type of warfare explains another important development that took place during this period. That development was the rise of heraldry.

Heraldry refers to the symbols used to represent specific families – especially noble families. It includes the specific designs on banners and flags, and the symbols used on shields and helmets.

These types of symbols and emblems had been around for a while, but around the current point in our story, they started to acquire a larger significance.

As I noted, military standards had been used for centuries. Germanic kings had tended to use symbols like bears, and wolves and boars. But they were mainly used to represent a particular king or specific group of soldiers. But now, the leaders of various families started to adopt their own unique symbols. These were usually very colorful designs, and they often featured exotic animals like lions and leopards.

One theory is that these symbols arose out of the new tournament tradition. As I've noted before, the tournaments featured large groups of knights who tried to knock each other off of their horses – and then collect a ransom for the fallen knights. The knights were usually covered with chain mail, armor and helmets. So in the melee that took place during the tournament, it was difficult for the knights and the spectators to keep track of various participants. You didn't want to knock an ally off of his horse. So it became common for knights to use specific flags and banners and tunics to identify themselves and their allies. The tournament was a type of mock warfare, but the knights started to carry those same symbols into actual battle.

This development may also help to explain the origin of the word ***heraldry***. A ***herald*** was a French word for the chief official who was in charge of a tournament. The word ***herald*** entered English in the 1200s, and in English the word came to mean a royal messenger. That produced the verb ***herald*** meaning 'to proclaim or announce.' So blooming flowers might herald the arrival of Spring. But the herald or messenger usually wore a coat that was decorated with his mater's coat of arms to clearly identify who he represented. And that produced the word ***heraldry*** to refer to things associated with those symbols.

So the first major development of this period was the widespread adoption of crests and symbols and coats or arms by various noble families. The other major development was use of lions in those banners and symbols. According to some sources, William the Conqueror had used a lion on his royal coat of arms. And the tomb of Richard's grandfather Geoffrey of Anjou also contained depictions of lions. These were some of the earliest known uses of lions as royal symbols.

But at the current point in our story, after Richard's return to England and Normandy, he adopted an official coat of arms. He initially used one lion, then he experimented with two lions, but he finally settled on a design with three lions. The three lions were used for the Great Seal of England that was adopted after he returned from the Crusade. And that is still the same basic design used today on the modern Royal Coat of Arms of England.

The lion became so closely associated with royalty that it soon replaced traditional animals like bears and wolves on military standards and family crests. This is all-the-more fascinating when we consider that lions weren't even native to Europe. I should note that lions actually did inhabit parts of Europe many thousands of years ago. But they certainly had not been there since the last ice age. So they were foreign and exotic animals. Very few people in northern Europe had actually seen a lion during their lifetime, and most only knew the animal through depictions on coats of arms or royal banners.

We have to keep in mind that there were no modern zoos where people could just stroll though see animals from other continents. And most people didn't have access to books where they can see drawings and depictions of those animals. So there was almost a mythological component to animals like lions and tigers and elephants and camels.

It does appear that real-life lions occasionally made their way to English soil. The great historian William of Malmesbury lived during the time of Richard's great-grandfather Henry I. And William wrote that Henry received exotic animals as gifts from foreign kings. He reported that those animals included lions, leopards, lynxes and camels. And he said that Henry kept them in a park at his country estate near Oxford called Woodstock. Unfortunately, other than this account, nothing is really known about Henry's collection of animals. And no trace of it exists today. And since it was located at Henry's country estate, it wasn't open to the public. So again, the average person never had an opportunity to see any of these animals in person. And that meant that they only had vague ideas about the appearance and nature of those animals.

Though most Anglo-Saxons never saw any of these animals in person, they did have words for some of them. But those Old English words suggest a fair amount of confusion.

I noted earlier that Old English had the word ***leo*** – an early form of the word ***lion***. Old English also had the word ***tiger***. Both of those words can be traced back to Latin and Greek, but beyond that, the etymology is not really clear.

Another large cat mentioned in Old English was the ***panther***. The word is found in a late Old English document, and it was apparently borrowed from French and Latin. Latin actually had two names for this particular cat: ***panthera*** – which produced the word ***panther***, and ***pardus*** – which produced the word ***pard***. Of course, ***pard*** has fallen out of use, but it was once a common word for a panther in Middle English.

That word ***pard*** is also a clue that people sometimes confused these animals because it is also part of the word ***leopard***. ***Leopard*** is actually a combination of that word ***leo*** for lion and ***pard*** for ***panther***. The construction actually goes back to Greek, but that means that the literal meaning of the word ***leopard*** is 'lion-panther.' And that suggests that Europeans didn't always understand the distinction between lions, panthers and leopards.

In fact, the words ***leopard*** and ***panther*** were often used interchangeably for the same animal throughout much of the Middle English period. A panther was generally considered to be a large leopard. It wasn't until modern scholars clearly distinguished the various species that these terms finally acquired a more specific and consistent use.

The confusion between these cats can also be seen in the way France and England identified the animals depicted on those royal banners and coats of arms. England referred to them as ***lions***, but France once referred to them as ***leopards***. They were referring to the same animal, they just used different names. Today, the animal is generally called a ***lion*** on both sides of the Channel.

So Old English had references to lions, tigers and panthers. And ***leopard*** was borrowed in early Middle English.

Beyond those cats, Old English also had words for a camel and an elephant. But again, the words they used for those animals suggest that the Anglo-Saxons didn't really know what those animals were. And there is one particular word that has been the subject of much debate and speculation. And that word was an Anglo-Saxon word for camels.

Let me begin by noting that Old English actually had the word ***camel***.   The word ***camel*** is actually a Semitic word, ultimately from either Phoenician or Hebrew. And it passed through Greek and Latin and early French before it finally ended up in late Old English.

But it was that other word for a camel that has intrigued scholars. That other word was ***olfend***. Now you're probably saying, "What's the big deal about that word?" Well, it has to do with the possible connection between that word ***olfend*** and the word ***elephant***. Remember that ***olfend*** meant a camel. So are the words ***olfend*** and ***elephant*** related? Well, many scholars think they are.

The word ***elephant*** is derived from the Latin word ***elephantus***, and it passed through French into Middle English as ***olifaunt***.   So the resemblance of ***olfend*** and ***olifaunt*** was even greater in Middle English.

But here's where things get even more interesting. Even though ***elephant*** – or ***olifaunt*** – was borrowed in Middle English, Old English already had a word for an elephant, that was the word ***elpend***. And that word also appears to be related to the other words. So again, the Anglo-Saxons had ***olfend*** for camel and ***elpend*** for elephant. Both of those words are also attested in other Germanic languages, so it appears that they originated within the original Proto-Germanic language. And in fact, based on the development of those words in the other Germanic languages, it appears that ***elpend*** could originally refer to either an elephant or a camel.

So from all of that, we can conclude that the original Proto-Germanic speakers had either one word – or two different related words – to refer to large exotic animals from beyond the Mediterranean. It's possible that the original animal was neither a camel nor an elephant. These words might have referred to a mythological creature. In fact, one theory is that the early Germanic tribes heard stories about large beasts in Africa, and they weren't sure if those beasts were real or not. And if they were real, they weren't sure if the stories were about different animals – or just different descriptions of the same animal. You can imagine how all of this would have been very confusing to people in northern Europe. It would have been like people talking about unicorns and dragons. It might not have been clear if these animals really existed or not.

It is possible that some of these stories about strange beasts came from Greek and Roman traders. And that's because Latin had that word ***elephantus***, which is the direct ancestor of the modern word ***elephant***. And as I noted, most scholars think there is some connection between that Latin word ***elephantus*** and those Germanic words ***oflend*** and ***elpend***. So it is possible that all of those words are derived from a common root word.

Now the early Greek writers Homer and Hesiod used the word ***elephas*** as a word for ivory – which of course comes the tusks of elephants. And it is generally accepted that that early Greek word ***elephas*** is directly related to the Latin word ***elephantus*** for elephant. So it is likely that the Romans picked up their word from the Greeks. And one theory is that that Greek word is the common ancestor of all of these later words.

All of this also raises another interesting question. If one or more of these words came from the Greeks, where did the Greeks get the word from? Did they borrow it from people who lived in the Near East or North Africa?

Well, again, the answer is unclear. But one theory is that the Greek word came from the Phoenicians. And if that theory is true, there is a connection between elephants and the letter A.

So let me explain. Today, we know the letter A as 'A.' But as you may know, the letter was called ***alpha*** by the Greeks. Of course, the Greeks borrowed the alphabet from the Phoenicians – and the original Phoenician letter was called ***aleph***. And ***aleph*** was the word for 'ox' in the Phoenician language.

Since the word ***aleph*** meant an 'ox,' and since that word was used for the first letter of the Phoenician alphabet, the Phoenicians depicted the letter with a simplified drawing of an ox's head. So the original Phoenician version of the letter A – or ***aleph*** – was an ox head. And we can still see the remnants of that original drawing in our modern letter A. Take the uppercase letter A and turn it upside down. You now have a little triangle on the bottom with two lines sticking out of the top. Well, originally, that triangle at the bottom was the ox's head, and the two lines sticking out were the ox's horns.

Well, let's think about that word ***aleph***. Remember that the Old English word for a camel was ***olfend***. So ***aleph*** and ***olfend***. And the word for elephant was ***elpend***. Again, some scholars think that Phoenician word for an ox was the ultimate source of those Old English words via Greek. And if true, that word is also the source of ***elephant*** via Latin and French. So this theory means that the word ***elephant*** is cognate with the words ***alpha*** and ***alphabet***, and it is also related to the letter A itself.

Again, the ultimate connection between these words is still uncertain. And that uncertainty is likely the result of some confusion about these animals among northern Europeans.

Another piece of evidence to support this theory is an early term for a giraffe. The word ***giraffe*** came into English in its current form in the 1500s via French, and ultimately from Arabic. But before that version of the word came in, there was an earlier version that was used in some Middle English documents. In the 1400s, some documents referred to the giraffe as a ***gerfauntz***, which appears to combine the 'ger' part from ***giraffe*** and the 'faunt' part from ***olifaunt*** – the early form of ***elephant***. Again, this suggests some confusion between a giraffe and an elephant.

The confusion is also reflected in another Middle English term for a giraffe. That term was a ***camelopard*** – literally a combination of ***camel*** and ***pard***. Remember that ***pard*** was that word for

panther, and it was also used as a shortened form of ***leopard***. So a giraffe was sometimes called ***camelopard***, implying that it was an exotic African animal like a camel, but it had spots like a leopard – thus ***camelopard***.

The important thing to take from all of this is that the people of England had these words for these exotic animals. So they had some knowledge of those animals. But that knowledge was limited – and it walked a fine line between reality and myth.

That knowledge came from stories and legends. Those stories came from traders and pilgrims. Sometimes they came from minstrels and other story-tellers. They also came from the stories in written documents like the Bible. And it wasn't just the Bible. There was a solid literary tradition by this point, especially in Latin. And descriptions of these animals were also passed along in those written texts.

In fact, texts about exotic animals were very popular in the Middle Ages. Most of them were based on an old Greek text called Physiologus. That document was written in the early Christian period, and it contained descriptions of many animals known to the Greeks. It also mixed in mythological animals like the unicorn and the phoenix alongside actual animals like the lion, the elephant and the panther.

This Greek text was very much a Christian document. It contained a description of each animal, but then it attempted to explain how the animal was a metaphor for some aspect of Christianity. So these stories were popular among scribes who received their education in monasteries and church schools.

That original Greek text was translated into Latin, and there were actually many different Latin translations. Some translations added new animals and dropped some of the original animals. Those Latin texts were then translated into other languages including English. This type of document about animals became known as a bestiary. There was also an Old English version of the bestiary. But around the current point in our story, a Middle English translation was also composed. The author is unknown, but thankfully, the text has survived the centuries.

Of course, the word ***bestiary*** is based on the word ***beast***. And the word ***beast*** entered English around this time in the late 1100s and early 1200s. In its original sense, the word ***beast*** simply meant an animal that lived in the wild. You might remember that the Anglo-Saxons used the word ***deer*** in the same way. But as the word ***beast*** started to be used that general sense, the word ***deer*** became restricted to the animal we know today as a deer. I should also mention that the word ***beast*** was largely replaced by the word ***animal*** when the word ***animal*** came in during the 1300s.

Even though there were many different versions of the Bestiary, the first animal to be described was almost always the lion. After all, the lion was the King of the Beasts. And that was also true in the Middle English Bestiary. It contains descriptions of 13 different animals, beginning with the lion. The text describes several characteristics of the lion.

The passage alludes to the lion's intelligence by stating that the lion covers its tracks when it senses a hunter approaching. It sweeps the ground with its tail to clear the tracks. Here's the passage in Modern English, then in the original Middle English.

All his footsteps he fills after him;
He drags dust with his tail over his steps,
Either dust or dew so that he cannot be found,
And drives down to his den, where he will take refuge.

Alle hise fet steppes After him he filleð;
Drageð dust wið his stert ðer he steppeð,
Oðer dust oðer deu, ðat he ne cunne is finden,
driueð dun to his den ðar he him bergen wille.

The passage then describes another characteristic of the lion. It states that a newborn lion sleeps for three days until his father awakens him with a roar. Here's the passage:

Still lies the lion; he stirs not from sleep,
til the sun is seen thrice about him;
Then he is raised by his father with the cry that he makes.

tille lið ðe leun, ne stireð he nout of slepe,
Til ðe sunne haueð sinen ðries him abuten,
ðanne reiseð his fader him mit te rem ðat he makeð.

The entry for the lion then describes a third characteristic. The passage says:

The lion has a third feature:
when he lies sleeping,
He never closes the lids of his eyes.

Đe ðridde lage haueð ðe leun,
ðanne he lieð to slepen,
Sal he neure luken ðe lides of hise egen.

Now I noted that the Bestiary was a Christian text, and each animal description was a metaphor for some aspect of Christianity. The entry for the lion concludes by explaining the Christian analogies. The lion's ability to hide from the hunter is a metaphor for Christ's ability to elude and frustrate and perplex the devil. And a newborn lion sleeping for three days before being awakened by his father is a metaphor for Christ lying in the tomb for three days before being resurrected. And the lion's ability to sleep with its eyes open is a metaphor for the way that Christ keeps an ever-watchful eye over his flock.

So you can see how the Bestiary was more than just a book about animals. It was used as a teaching guide by churches and monasteries. And in a period when most education had a religious

foundation, students were routinely exposed to these stories. And so, you can see how the Bestiary also contributed to the way people of Western Europe perceived these exotic animals.

By the way, the Middle English version of the Bestiary also discusses elephants, panthers, serpents and eagles, among other animals. I'll look at some of those other passages in the next bonus episode at Patreon. The Bestiary also contains several new words that are used for the first time in an English text. That includes words like ***beak***, ***snout***, ***venom***, ***cave*** and ***clever***. All were brand new words in the English language.

Now the passage I just read about the lion states that he keeps an ever-watchful eye on his surroundings. Well, that was also true of the Lionheart. Richard the Lionheart was a diligent and aggressive warrior. And it was difficult to get anything past him.

Over time, he gradually re-captured the castles and territory that had been lost during his absence in the Holy Land.

Eventually the French king Philip realized that he needed to settle his differences with Richard. In January of 1199, Philip and Richard met to discuss a long-term truce. The negotiations extended into March. But by the end of March, a couple of nobles had started to rebel against Richard in the southern part of the Angevin Empire. Richard left to put down the revolt by seizing a local castle. The castle was poorly defended, and after three days, the castle's defenders were barely hanging on. Richard left his tent to inspect the work of his men who were digging under the castles walls. He had a shield, and he had on a helmet, but he wasn't wearing any armor.

As Richard looked up, he saw someone pop up from behind the castle walls and fire a crossbow in his general direction. The arrow struck Richard in the shoulder. The blow itself was not fatal, but the arrow was lodged deep in Richard's shoulder. A surgeon was called, and he was eventually able to remove the arrow. At first, everything appear to be ok, but surgeries were very risky during this period. The wound soon turned to gangrene. And given the proximity of the wound against Richard's heart, everyone knew that he wouldn't live for very long. As the castle finally fell, a message was sent to Eleanor of Aquitaine that her son was dying. She arrived at the camp just in time to see Richard pass away on April 6, 1199.

Now Richard didn't have any children, so there was initially an issue over the succession. I'll deal with the succession issue in more detail in the next episode, but ultimately, Richard's brother John emerged as the successor. And he soon received the title that he had coveted for years. John became King of England in April of 1199.

Now John had several nicknames. I noted in an earlier episode that he was known as John Lackland – because his father Henry had not left him any land in the initial division of his estate among his children. He also became known as John Softsword because he was seen as a weak negotiator and military leader. He is also known as Bad King John because he is generally considered to be one of the worst kings in English history. And that's also why he is the ONLY English monarch to be named John. No one else wanted to take that name after him .

That may also explain why John never had a nickname associated with lions. But John did have one connection to lions. And it actually ties together two themes that we've explored in this episode – lions and captivity.

One of the most famous prisons in Medieval England was the Tower of London. Many captives were detained there over the centuries. In fact, it was such an infamous prison that the phrase "sent to the tower" became a euphemism for putting someone in prison. And the captives in the Tower of London didn't get the royal treatment that Richard the Lionheart had received as a prisoner in Germany.

Believe it or not, the Tower of London was not only home to captive humans, it was also home to captive animals. And during the reign of King John, it was home to a lion. We know this because written records survive showing payments made to workers at the Tower who are identified as lion-keepers. It also shows that payments were made for an iron gate and chain for the lion. From this, most scholars agree that John was keeping at least one lion in the Tower during his reign. This was the beginning of a small collection of animals at the Tower called the Royal Menagerie.

A few years after John's reign, it is recorded that the Holy Roman Emperor gave three lions to John's son and successor as a wedding gift. They were also kept at the Tower. Other animals were added over time, including ostriches and elephants. It was Queen Elizabeth I who opened the menagerie to the public, and it proved to be a very popular attraction. It was the first time that most Londoners had actually seen these exotic animals in person. In the early 1800s, the menagerie at the Tower was finally closed, and the animals were transferred to a new facility for animals at Regent's Park in London. The new facility was called the "Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park." But that long name was soon shortened. The term ***zoological*** was based on an old Greek word – ***zoion*** – which meant 'animal.' And that term was shortened from ***zoological*** to ***zoo***. The facility itself became known simply as the London Zoo. And in the process, the word ***zoo*** replaced the French word ***menagerie***.

The London Zoo was one of the first modern zoos, and it was a model for many other public zoos that started to spring up around the world. Of course, the London Zoo still exists today. And the lion exhibit at the zoo follows a continuous tradition of lion-keeping in England that goes all the way back to King John and lions of the Tower.

Next time, we'll look at some of John's other contributions, most of which were not very good. He lost Normandy forever, he got into a fight with his barons. And he was forced to sign Magna Carta. All in all, it was one of the worst reigns of any king in English history. That reign was juxtaposed against the legendary reign of King Arthur. And the popularity of the Arthurian legend was exploding during that same period. In fact, first English version of the Arthurian legend appeared around the time that John became king. I didn't have time to get that text in this episode. So next time, we'll look at John's early reign, and we'll dig through that first English version of the legend of Arthur.

Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.