

Twitter Thread by Erik Wade



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Modern viewers may be horrified by medieval images of people hunting unicorns, but--to judge by medieval images of unicorns--medieval people may have seen unicorns as a little....murderous.

(BL, MS Sloane 3544, f. 4) #MedievalTwitter



When not being hunted, medieval unicorns mostly seem to be attacking other creatures, like this poor elephant.

(BL, MS Royal 2 B VII, f. 100v)



Or these bears.

(BL, MS Royal 10 E IV, f. 157)



Or this lion.

(BL, MS Royal 2 B VII, f. 190v)



Here's a whole troop of them fighting Alexander the Great.

(BL, MS Royal 15 E VI, f. 21)



Fighting this man.

(Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 828, f. 7v)



Here's a common allegorical image, where the tree represents a person's life and the unicorn represents.....death.

(Morgan, MS M.729, f. 354v)



Here's another version of the same image.

(BL, MS Additional 37049, f. 19v)

Behold here as you may se
 A man standing in a tree
 And me vnycome fast fast pkyt hy
 I caused hy ipe tre to rym
 And be netye hy was a dragon fell
 Gapyng hy redy for to gylt
 And delyte molise t a blak y tre gnallyt
 Besly hy doone for to bryng
 And hese vndyr pe rote of yre tre
 fforne spent lokte onte sakes ho
 ye tre stode opou a sodde al dyene
 And a dghadde myre a bolste it seene
 itt for al po pels he y he stand m
 A gony drop he hasted hy for to dym
 And lytel hede of al m pels dos he take
 ffor dym drop he purpos meny to make
 yis man betokene both man t dyse
 And ye tre betokene of pame y lyse
 ye vnycome y hasty ma for to kyt
 Betokene deth pat fla hy d ptt
~~ye dghadde is to be vndyr stand~~
 ye dghadde myre is to be vndyr stande
 yis dghadde pat vi is fyle t flakad
 ye tyme y opou dghylt grolde y tre
 ffor ye fforne soupett as zemay se
 Betokene man's body i yis dghadde here
 t is made of foure elymet sere
 ye dghylt t ye dghadde molise is y ungett y day
 yis man's lyse fast dghadde a dghadde
 And ye gapyng dragon as y zode telle
 Is vndyr stand y mounte of helle
 En man's saule besh to dym
 yat her dos dye in delyt hy
 And ye hony drop vndyr stand may be
 ye dghadde dghadde t vanyte
 for y dghadde men labos both day t nyght
 And for to gyt it dghadde alle yam myght
 And y yam selfe yam for gylt
 And al ye pels yat yam an t lott
 yis yis dghadde man
 yis dghadde lyfyn
 yis dghadde
 yis dghadde



"You've got to come down sometime, dude!"

(Morgan, MS M.763, f. 251r)



Here's St Anthony being tormented by demons, including one in the shape of a very threatening unicorn.

(BnF, MS Français 313, f. 298)



"I've got you cornered, buddy."

(Morgan, MS M.1093, f. 154r)



They even attack marginal decorations!

(Morgan, MS W.82, f. 205v)



More marginal carnage.

(BL, MS Additional 42130 f. 15)



A unicorn gleefully menaces a terrified lion.

(Bodleian Library, MS Douce 48, f. 221v)



In conclusion, medieval unicorns woke up every day and chose violence.

