

A History of Salamanders

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Mythical Beasts: The Salamander

The real salamander is a very different creature to the one of legend, but its mythical attributes make it a popular emblem on the Coat of Arms for Royalty, nobility, insurers, local authorities and many other organizations.

The skin of the animal, which was known to resist the action of fire, came to be considered proof against that element. This cloth made of the skin/wool of salamanders was incombustible, and very valuable, for wrapping up precious items. These fireproof cloths appeared later to be composed of asbestos, a mineral, which is in fine filaments capable of being woven into a flexible cloth.



The foundation of the above fables is supposed to be the fact that the salamander secretes from the pores of his body a milky juice, which when he is irritated is produced in considerable quantity, and would defend the body from fire.

The salamander represents those who pass through the fires of passion and of this world without stain. Therefore, it stands for chastity, loyalty, impartiality, virginity, courage, Jesus, Mary, and the faithful.

The salamander is also used to symbolize the flames, which it passes through, and so is a symbol of fire, temptation, and burning desire.

The Real Salamander

Salamanders can be found in many parts of the world and there are known to be around five hundred species. They are found in Europe, Asia, some parts of Africa, and North and South America. The largest are found in China and Japan and can grow to five feet long though most are much smaller. Salamanders are not reptiles and although they look like lizards they are not related to them and neither are they related to mammals or birds. They are amphibians and their nearest relatives are frogs and toads.

Fire and the Mythical Salamander

Aristotle, (384 BC – 322 BC), and Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23–79) associate them with fire and it is with fire that most of the fantastic powers are connected. People thought that salamanders were born or created from fire.

Most of the popular myths are believed to originate from the European species, the fire salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*), which hibernates in hollow, decaying logs of wood during the winter months. With wood being the main fuel in ancient times this may explain their sudden appearance amid flames when a fire is lit or replenished with a salamander inside. Woken abruptly from hibernation, or sleep, the natural reaction would be to make a quick escape giving the mistaken appearance that they were born, or generated from fire and flame.

Pliny the Elder believed the salamander to have such a cold body that it could extinguish any fire. There was also a belief that the skin and other parts and extracts of the salamander gave protection against fire.

Early travelers to China claimed they had had been shown clothing reputedly woven from salamander hair that had been deliberately placed in a fire and came out unscathed. Today many people think that they were shown clothing made from asbestos fibers. In fact though its skin is different from reptiles, salamanders are no more fire proof than any other creature.

A salamander unharmed in the fire – Author Numerisation par Koninklijke Bibliotheek – Public Domain Image



The Poisonous Salamander of Myth

The salamander was also reputed to be so toxic that if it entwined itself around a fruit tree then the fruits become poisonous to all who would eat them. The saliva was thought to cause the hair of a person to fall from the body if it made contact with human skin.

If a salamander got into a well then the well water would be poisoned and undrinkable. Many species of salamanders do secrete a toxic substance from their bodies when threatened but the toxicity of the substance was greatly exaggerated.

Works Cited

"Animal Information San Diego Zoo Global Library." Animal Information. Web. 09 Nov. 2015.

"Salamander." Monstrous. Web. 09 Nov. 2015.

Writing Prompt: Imagine you are a marketing executive of a fortune 500 company. It is your job to convince the CEO to use the salamander as the company's new logo. Using the article, "A History of Salamanders" explain why the salamander should become the new symbol. Use specific examples and Standard English grammar to support your response.

	0	1	1	2	2
Student writes legibly	Seriously... I would love to see how smart you are, but I cannot.	Wow, this was tough on the eyes.	Let's work on the handwriting.	A couple things could have been written a bit more clearly.	I can read everything you wrote with no problem. Hallelujah! Thank you.
	0	1	1	3	3
Stays on topic	What was this paragraph about?	I was not quite sure what you were writing about.	Your writing was a bit disorganized.	You stuck to the topic, but may have had one thing that didn't fit.	Way to stay the course.
	2	4	6	8	10
Rewords the question and Answers with a broad response	Does not answer the question, but attempts to restate it.	Does not restate the question, but attempts to answer it.	Does not successfully restate and answer the question clearly.	Restates the question and answers it clearly, but needs some improvement.	Restates the question and answers it clearly.
Cites with evidence to support the answer	Gives a vague example.	Gives one example without a page number.	Gives one concrete example with a page number.	Give two concrete examples, but no page numbers.	Gives two concrete examples from the text with page numbers.
Explains the answer with a conclusion	You had no explanation.	The explanation was weak.	You made your point, but didn't conclude at the end of the essay.	You were close to restating your thesis, but needed to be more specific.	You reiterated your topic and proved your point.
Uses proper conventions of grammar and spelling	You made more than 10 mistakes.	You made between 6-10 mistakes.	You made between 4-6 mistakes.	You made a few mistakes.	You are a grammar superstar.

	0	1	1	2	2
Student writes legibly	Seriously... I would love to see how smart you are, but I cannot.	Wow, this was tough on the eyes.	Let's work on the handwriting.	A couple things could have been written a bit more clearly.	I can read everything you wrote with no problem. Hallelujah! Thank you.
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Peer Reviewed By: _____

Total Score: _____