Dog-Headed: Outcast to All

Wesley Mills
Utah State University, wesley.mills@aggiemail.usu.edu

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Cynocephali almost always represent foreigners.

INTRO
Cynocephali is a Greek word, meaning dog-headed. Despite such creatures appearing throughout various mythologies, in a wide range of time periods, they are consistently used to represent a quality of “otherness”.

METHODS
A variety of sources were consulted for information on the meaning behind the cynocephali of various cultures. The main subjects examined belong to the ancient Christian, Eskimo, and Egyptian worlds. Despite vast separation in location and time period, a common theme did emerge.

RESULTS
Fig. 1 – Saint Christopher, who is often represented with the head of a dog. A hagiography states that this bizarre appearance lead those he interacted with to accept all people as capable of redemption.

Fig. 2 – An Eskimo depiction of Irqidlit, a word meaning “short, ugly people with dog faces,” used to describe the Ainu people of Siberia.

Fig. 3 – Anubis, Egyptian god of the afterlife. One of his titles was “Foremost of Westerners” where Westerners refers to the dead.

DISCUSSION
From the religion of the middle-age Christians, to the ancient Egyptians and the legends of the Eskimos, it seems that many different cultures use dog-headed people, cynocephali, to portray outsiders, whether that be people from distant lands or whether it be the dead.

Bibliography

wesley.mills@aggiemail.usu.edu