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Animaltown: Beasts in Medieval Urban Space. (British Archaeological Reports International Series 2858). Edited by Alice M Choyke & Gerhard Jaritz. 21 x 30 cm. vii + 209 pp, 75 b&w pls and figs, 18 tables. Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4073-1572-0. Price: £41.00 pb.

This volume gathers contributions originally presented at the same-titled conference held in Budapest in 2008. The time-delay in publishing the proceedings is unfortunate, but the editors must be admired for sticking to the task, since this book presents multiple, often illuminating aspects of the human–animal relationship in medieval towns, using examples from across Europe – case studies centre on Austria, Portugal, Russia, Britain, Latvia, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Romania, Italy and Albania, while several other contributions are not geographically-specific but do widen the horizon.

After a clear and thoughtful introduction by one of the editors (Choyke), the 19 papers are grouped into five rather loosely defined sections. The book is distinctively multi-disciplinary – with contributions from archaeology (mainly), history, art history and literature – and the sections try to break down the disciplinary barriers, with mixed success. Quite a few chapters are relatively short and some of them look fairly preliminary. Other contributors have produced authoritative, in-depth reviews, such as Kunst’s excellent paper on medieval urban animal bone assemblages from Austria. Almost all, however, have something interesting to say for future animal studies in the urban context.

The combination of different disciplines dealing with a common subject area is a strength. The effort made by the archaeologists in integrating their evidence with that of other disciplines is, however, only partially matched by other contributors, who largely seem to ignore archaeological evidence; it shows how difficult it is to achieve full interdisciplinarity. There are exceptions, though, such as art historian Nicka’s excellent paper which places the visual representation of peacocks in late medieval towns in its historical and archaeological context. Several authors (eg Beglane, O’Connor, Bejenaru) emphasise the importance of understanding urban human–animal relationships in terms of how the hinterland interacted with the town and the surrounding countryside. This is a subject that has somewhat been neglected in the past. Maltby goes further, by showing how the urban evidence can hardly be properly interpreted without an analysis of the links between town and region. Hence the importance of our investigations of the past regularly operating at different scales of analysis (ie the specific context, the broader site and its region).

Some contributions rather fail to illuminate on the actual theme of the book, namely the urban space, with evidence interpreted almost devoid of context to the point that they could have easily discussed rural evidence using the same words. Also, a few of the zooarchaeology chapters contain terminological oddities or even mistakes, but this is a minor point as the editing is generally good. Many of the figures are helpful and illuminating; I loved the chicken-eating dog in Bartosiewicz’s paper but all images of urban dogs, pigs and peacocks are evocative.

Almost 30 years have passed since the publication of *Diet and Crafts in Towns: The Evidence of Animal Remains from the Roman to the Post-medieval Periods* (D Serjeantson & T Waldron, Oxford, 1989) and the time was ripe for new studies on the use of animals in the urban context. While the earlier volume was exclusively archaeological, this one has the additional merit of bringing in additional disciplinary approaches. Inevitably with any collection of papers, though, the quality of the chapters is variable, with some making very little of the available evidence and others making too much of very limited data. Conversely, other chapters tackle the book topic to the core and contribute substantially to advance our understanding of the medieval urban environment. But, all in all, this is a valuable and important book, which I will recommend to my students. The wealth of information on display is remarkable and, despite, some shortcomings, it represents the culmination of a successful project.

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