



Book Reviews

ANIMALS AS DOMESTICATES. A WORLD VIEW THROUGH HISTORY
BY J CLUTTON-BROCK East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012. 189pp,
49 B/W plates, 9 illus, ISBN 978-1-61186-028-3, hb, \$44.95

Few people have contributed more than Juliet Clutton-Brock to our understanding of the past relationship between people and animals. As a zooarchaeologist she has produced many important high quality articles on animal remains from archaeological sites, but she is better known for a string of wonderful books that focus on various aspects of the natural history of domesticated animals. This book contributes to such a valuable collection and can be recommended to professionals as well as students and enthusiasts. What pleases me most of all about Clutton-Brock's books is that they are written in a style that is accessible but at the same time rigorous, clear proof that science can be popularised without any need of dumbing down. As an academic and fellow zooarchaeologist I have found much in it that I knew already – and which I did not mind at all to be reminded of – but also plenty of additional information and new ideas. I trust that most of my colleagues will feel the same and that those less conversant with the book's main subject will be well served with a mine of new knowledge that is clearly written and soundly explained.

Animals as Domesticates has a predecessor in Clutton-Brock's *Domesticated Animals from Early Times* (subsequently re-edited as *A Natural History of Domesticated Mammals*), which has been for many years a classic source for archaeologists and natural historians alike. This book does not, however, merely represent an update of this earlier volume, as its very different structure focuses much more on a world view perspective (see subtitle). In addition, the amount of evidence that has been accumulated in the last couple of decades is so substantial that this has created the opportunity for a very different story to be told.

After a nicely written Foreword by James Serpell the author introduces us to some of the key themes in the book, and in particular exposes her theory that an important trigger to the domestication of animals was represented by the nurturing instinct of the human species. This is continuously explored throughout the text in a series of chapters which highlight the key elements in domesticates' development in the main regions and cultures of the world. We begin with the domestication of animals in Eurasia, move on to its spread into Europe, and then parallel pathways affecting the main civilizations of the Old World. South and South-East Asia, Oceania, Africa south of the Sahara and the Americas all have specific chapters dedicated to them. There is also a chapter on domesticates in the Classical World. The book does not deal with the Middle Ages but this was probably a sensible choice, despite the great importance that this period has for the development of domestic livestock. It was clearly important to keep the discussion compact and also close in time to the phenomena directly stemming from the original domestication process.

There is a good coverage of all species that were originally domesticated and the book, unlike its predecessor, also touches on birds and fishes. A slight oversight is perhaps the lack of a discussion about the domestication of the goose and duck; important farmyard birds in Eurasia. This is made more apparent by the fact that the Muscovy duck is awarded a full section in the chapter on the Americas. The main sources Clutton-Brock has drawn upon in reconstructing the history of the domesticates are archaeology, iconography, history and molecular biology. For

societies where written sources are available the archaeology takes a back seat, which is a little unfortunate, but justifiable with the notion that the archaeological evidence is probably more difficult to synthesise, partly because of its abundance (e.g. the enormous amount of animal bones deriving from Roman sites) but also because the evidence is so widely dispersed in many different reports, some difficult to access. This problem may also explain why, in drawing general patterns on the spread of domestication, the genetic evidence is often given more prominence than the macroscopic evidence which derive from the archaeological remains of past animals. The nature of the evidence deriving from DNA research is such that it tends to be particularly useful in providing information on large scale trends, which suits well broad reviews such as that provided by this book. This, however, emphasises the need for such evidence to be strictly rigorously collected and carefully evaluated by those who use its results. The only substantial reservation that I have about this book is that the genetic evidence is not always used critically, even when it seems apparent that it is very much in need of further verification or, where it has stretched interpretation beyond what is reasonable to assume and in isolation from other sources of evidence.

In addition to the important evolutionary trends, the book also provides a mine of important details, maintaining a very high standard of accuracy and thoroughness. One small oddity is represented by the suggestion that the babirusa, as well as a score of other South-East Asian wild pig species, had all been “indigenously domesticated” (p.91). This idea may be based on the view that some of these species were moved by humans between islands, but I do not think that this can be equated to a domestication process, as, in history, wild animals have often been shipped to various locations – as the author herself has showed us in the past.

The book is also beautifully illustrated, and if some images appear not to be reproduced in top quality, it is because some old photographs have been used, presumably, and reasonably, because of their historical value. There is also a valuable appendix on the nomenclature of the domesticated species and a very useful index. The conclusions do not attempt to summarise the book’s content but rather include some personal thoughts on the present and future relationships between people and domestic animals. I particularly liked the criticism of factory farming and their consequent cruel treatment of animals. Research into the historical processes of the domestication of animals contributes a unique insight into the cultural and emotional impoverishment that extreme industrialization has caused in our relationship with animals. Juliet Clutton-Brock is not just a top-class scholar but also a sensitive author, alert to social and political issues and respectful of the subject of her investigation. Fittingly, the book is dedicated to her first pet, which belonged to a now endangered breed.

This book is highly recommended to anybody who has an interest for the past and the natural world and the author must be congratulated for writing such an illuminating account.

Umberto Albarella
University of Sheffield

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