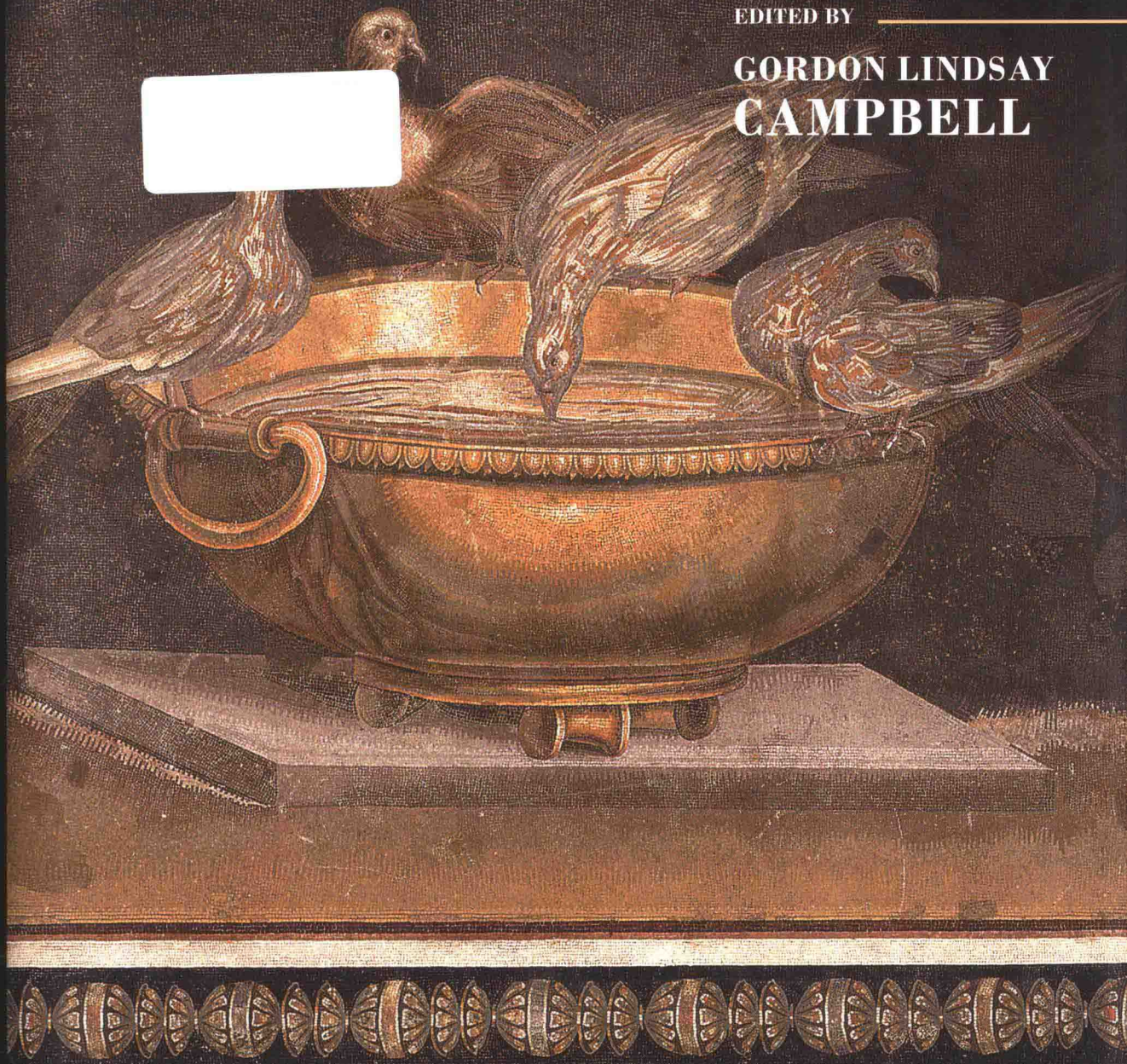


EDITED BY

GORDON LINDSAY
CAMPBELL



≡ The Oxford Handbook of
ANIMALS IN CLASSICAL
THOUGHT AND LIFE

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

ANIMALS IN
CLASSICAL
THOUGHT AND
LIFE

GORDON LINDEY CAMPBELL



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INTRODUCTION

GORDON LINDSAY CAMPBELL

THERE has been quite a surge in recent years in interest in animals in antiquity, and this volume is intended to present a broad survey of attitudes to animals in the classical world by some of the leading contemporary scholars. Each chapter can stand alone as a starting point for investigation into each topic, and each has a useful section on suggested reading for further investigation, but the book may also be read as a whole as a coherent commentary on the whole field of scholarship. The main pre-existing volumes, the Berg *Cultural History of Animals* (Kalof, 2007), and *Pecus: Man and Animal in Antiquity* (Santillo Frizell, 2004) are also very well worth consulting, and may offer in some cases a more theoretical approach than I offer here.

Before I started editing this volume my main interest was in literary and philosophical animals in the ancient world, but, encouraged by the anonymous readers for OUP and my editors, I have broadened out the book to include the realities of animals in the ancient world, and this I hope has provided a much broader and more balanced spread of chapter topics.

Animals are ‘good to think with’, and ancient treatments of animals, whether in art, literature, or philosophy, often generate more questions than answers. For example, the question ‘are *we* animals?’ can be answered in many ways. Most ancient writers who try to answer this definitively say that we are indeed animals, but animals with special attributes that enabled us to separate ourselves from animalkind and develop the language, culture, and technology that make us human. Other writers may agree that we are animals, but warn that we are in danger of backsliding into a bestial state if we fail to continue to practise the culture that originally made us human. The Arcadians in particular are always in danger of turning into wolves if they will insist on carrying on eating people (Hartog, 2001: 133–50). In art and mythology, Centaurs ask a similar question about humans and animals; a Centaur is part human and part horse, a hybrid animal that forms a unity, but the line between horse and human is clearly to be seen. A Centaur is a walking illustration of the impossibility of a human–animal hybrid and at the same time a dire warning of what could happen if we were to transgress the boundaries of

human and divine law, as did Ixion when he tried to rape Hera but only succeeded in raping a cloud, Nephele, who then gave birth to Centaurus, the first Centaur. Seemingly driven by their transgressive origins, the main job of Centaurs in myth is to undermine marriage, the bedrock of Greek society, to attend weddings, get horribly drunk, and try to carry off the bride. Heroes, such as Heracles and Theseus, then have to step in, fight the Centaurs, and restore the sanctity of human marriage (see especially Dubois, 1982).

If the Centaurs display the extremes of inhuman bestiality, there is also a strong tradition in the ancient world of the superiority of animals to humans. Democritus says that we are foolish to imagine that we are superior to animals since they have been our teachers in many arts: the spider in weaving, the swallow in house-building, and the swan in singing (DK68 B154). Similarly Lucretius says that we should not think this world was made for us; if it was made for anyone it was for the animals since they are so much better adapted to it than we are (*On the Nature of the Universe* 5.195–234). This volume starts with some of the earliest examples of the exploration of these questions, Aesop's fables. According to Aesop, once upon a time animals could speak and held assemblies in the woods. They had language and political society, two things that are regularly thought to be specifically human attributes according to many ancient sources. We are intended to learn moral lessons from Aesop's animal fables: to learn from the animals.

Also crucially important in understanding ancient ideas about animals is their treatment in art. Therefore one of the longest chapters in the book is devoted to this subject. This is an extraordinarily rich field of enquiry and worthy of many volumes of its own, but as with all the chapters in this handbook it is intended as an introduction to the subject and supplies valuable advice to aid the reader in further study. Comic, epic, and tragic animals follow, giving strong insights into literary treatments of questions of human, animal, and divine identities and interactions. Often attitudes to and uses of animals in literature cast a powerful light on ancient society. In comedy humans often take on animal characteristics, and sometimes, as in the *Birds*, animals feature as characters in their own right rather than just in animal choruses. In epic, animals may have a moral function, or serve to illustrate the natures of the various heroes and other characters: Achilles is associated with the lion, Odysseus with the eagle, and so on. In tragedy, animal imagery is often used to illustrate deep human emotion, and to explore the 'middle ground' between human and animal.

The realities of human–animal interaction are also well covered in this volume. Animal husbandry, farming, animals and the market, insects, domestication, the fauna of the ancient Mediterranean, fish and fishing, among other topics, are studied in impressive depth and detail. I have learned a very great deal from these chapters and hope to follow the leads suggested by the authors and improve my knowledge of these aspects of animals in the ancient world. On animal domestication, I have been fascinated to learn that humans and animals 'symbiotically domesticated each other in separate regions, on three different continents (Africa, Asia, Europe)', people reaching Cyprus with their herds from the Levant about 9000 BC and the Aegean about 7000 BC. In animal husbandry, 'the technical sophistication and productivity of Graeco-Roman animal husbandry has become increasingly clear', and the quality of ancient livestock would

not be matched until Holland's Golden Age or the agricultural revolution in England. In the chapter on animals and the market, we learn that ancient ideas of wealth and worth were dominated at least from Homer onwards by 'value economics'. That is, that wealth properly should consist of land and animals, and all other forms of wealth and wealth production, especially mercantilism, tended to be regarded as 'improper' and 'grasping'. I am personally very attracted by these ideas. The fauna of the ancient Mediterranean world is also well surveyed here, and I am sure that the reader will be surprised by the presence of some (now) exotic animals in ancient Greece and Italy, including porcupines in Sicily and lions in northern Greece.

More abstract topics such as animal communication, the origin of species, gastronomy and meat eating, and pets are also studied in breadth and detail. The question of whether animals have language, or whether humans exclusively possessed language as our defining characteristic in antiquity is closely examined.

Meat eating in antiquity could be somewhat tricky since most meats were the product of 'luxurious pastures', and usually had to be properly sacrificed before being eaten. Tricky also, unlike other farm products, were cows to barter or take down to the shops expecting change. In late antiquity we hear that special dispensation could be given to the sick for eating unsacrificed meat, given the paucity of sacrificed meat under Christian persecution of ancient religious practices.

Defining what constituted pets can also be difficult. As the author of the chapter on pets in this volume says, the range of possible pets is very broad: 'Sheep dogs, hunting dogs, guard dogs; draught horses, cavalry horses, circus horses; mice-catching weasels, cats, and snakes; even some domestic livestock, including cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and chickens, among others, may have been named or arguably cared for as "pets", in addition to their roles as "working" or "productive" animals.'

I hope my own chapter on the origin of life and of species will be of use to those concerned not only with the ancient world but also with modern theories and the later reception of ancient ideas. The chapter on animals in warfare may well be an eye-opener for many readers, with the use of scorpions and burning pigs as offensive weapons, among other abuses of animals as weapons. It may be satisfying to read that Lucretius was correct in claiming that such 'weapons' frequently rebounded upon those who sent them, as will the chapters on animals and magic, and animals and divination. These aspects of the use of animals are crucial to our understanding of the ancient world. We are not separate from the animal world, and the will of the gods or simply of nature can be determined through the behaviour and health of animals. Otherwise, this close link can be exploited to our advantage or to the disadvantage of others by other humans whom we can curse using animal magic.

Animal sacrifice was crucially important in antiquity and is granted one of the longest chapters in this book. Important questions are of whether we can say we can have a proper society if we do not have shared animal sacrifice, and of whether we can possibly consider ourselves humane if we do sacrifice animals. Animals in late antiquity and Christianity, and part-animal gods, carry on the theme of animals in religion. The author of the chapter on part-animal gods argues that 'The animal god, as an idea, is

dead; but its carcass continues to block the flow of scholarship on the subject of theriomorphism in Greek religion. It has to be moved gently aside, and the best way of doing this is by studying the remarkably prevalent ancient practice of depicting gods in hybrid form, as partly theriomorphic, partly anthropomorphic.¹ This puts me firmly in my place, at least, and I hope it will do the same to the reader as well.

Metamorphosis is another crucially important topic, closely related to questions about the origins of species and ideas of what makes us and keeps us human, and this topic is also granted one of the longest chapters in the book. Clearly, in the ancient world there was often a fear hovering about the possibility of losing human status. But would that really be a bad thing? Perhaps we could be rescued from the evils of human life by becoming animals once more. Gryllus preferred being a pig, after all. Wondrous animals inhabit a similar conceptual landscape to metamorphic creatures, although they tend to wander the outer regions of the world, especially to the East. Wonder grows as ancient writers survey the East, and the norms of nature start to break down as we meet dog-headed people and gold-mining ants. Egyptian animals are closely related to the wondrous animals of the East, but perhaps more real. Everything is distorted and back to front there, and the interface between the mundane and sacred worlds could well be moderated more between animals and the divine than the human and divine.

Moving more into reality for a few chapters, we survey public exhibitions of animals in triumphs, wild beast shows, and horse and chariot racing. It is difficult for us to understand the cruelty of wild beast shows, and how they could be enjoyable to watch; perhaps this form of entertainment provides the widest cultural gulf between us and antiquity. Horse racing, on the other hand, is still extremely popular, and before we get too pious about our moral superiority over the ancients, we have recently learned what happens to racehorses that don't make the grade.

Then we come to philosophical animals and the arguments and opinions of the ancient schools of philosophy on the place of animals in the world. This is a very valuable survey, as is the following chapter on vegetarianism and animal entitlements. This has been the focus of considerable attention in recent years, and readers may well find these studies illuminating.

The final three chapters return to perhaps more technical territory, with the topics of ancient zoological knowledge, ancient fossil discoveries and interpretations, and veterinary medicine. Readers may well be intrigued by the chapter on fossils and their interpretation in the ancient world. If the author is correct, then we may well have to reconsider how we approach ancient ideas of mythical beasts. I have begun to see ancient fossil evidence everywhere in ancient sources, anyway.

After five years of work, I am very glad that the volume is finally completed. I hope it is a significant addition to the scholarship on animals in the ancient world, and that readers will find it a useful tool and a guide for further investigation. *Nunc est bibendum*.

Gordon Lindsay Campbell
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Maynooth, 2014

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