

BOOK REVIEW

Animals and the Shaping of Modern Medicine: One Health and its Histories *by Abigail Woods, Michael Bresalier, Angela Cassidy & Rachel Mason Dentinger*

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Animals have been important to human health since well before recorded history, and medical science has long used animals to explore anatomy and physiology, produce biological products, test the safety and efficacy of drugs, and create models of disease. Our use of animals for such purposes is well recorded in the history of medicine.

Animals and the Shaping of Modern Medicine argues that the role of animals in aspects of medicine that intersect veterinary and biological fields of study has been unduly neglected. The book seeks to address this by presenting four historical case studies. The first describes the role that 19th century zoological gardens played in attracting doctors to study animals with diseases such as rickets that were relevant to human health. The remaining cases concern other species – Scottish sheep, cows in the developing world and the tapeworm – that have also been overlooked. A fifth chapter covers the emergence of the ‘One Health’ movement, which seeks to integrate the study of problems that involve human health, animal health and the environment, such as emerging zoonotic diseases.

While principally a collection of stand-alone scholarly studies, the introductory and concluding chapters to the book provide a rich and stimulating context by reviewing how animals have featured in history and by presenting the philosophical underpinnings. The key thesis is that while animals do not understand human knowledge, politics or culture, they have influenced medical investigators, institutions and knowledge-practices. Since animals do not write history, to find the evidence for their influence we must study the traces they leave in the records we have created. Taking such an animal-centric viewpoint helps us to understand how animals ‘shaped’ modern medicine.

That the privileged human narrative is not the whole story is a valuable take-home message with the potential to change how we view certain areas of medical history. An especially useful feature of the book is the inclusion of a detailed, annotated bibliography of work on the animals involved in various aspects of the history of medicine, which makes a great starting point for those new to the field.

This book is written for an academic audience rather than the general reader and some may find it hard going in parts. Occasional jargon-laden sentences are not enough, however, to detract from the overall quality of the writing. It is most likely to be of relevance to specialist historians interested in disciplines of medicine in which animals played a vital role.

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