

Book Review by Ellen Hambleton:

The Oxford Handbook of Zooarchaeology. Edited by Umberto Albarella, with Mauro Rizzetto, Hannah Russ, Kim Vickers and Sarah Viner-Daniels. Oxford University Press. 2017.

The preface to 'The Oxford Handbook of Zooarchaeology' sums up the daunting yet irresistible challenge faced by Albarella and collaborators in compiling this volume of 47 chapters from over 70 different contributors. How to create a single, coherent volume for a discipline that embraces such a variety of themes, methods and approaches? Albarella tackles this by organising content into geographic regions, creating what he describes as "*a showcase of 'world zooarchaeology'*". One of the attractions of this book is the opportunity to easily tap into research from parts of the world the reader may be unfamiliar with. Equally as fascinating as 'exotic' locations, species and cultures, is the chance to see how zooarchaeology is applied to address some of the major archaeological themes that run through these geographically and chronologically diverse studies.

Part 1, a reflective review of zooarchaeology in 21st century (Chapter 1, Albarella), wrestles over how to define zooarchaeology, recognising the overlapping and mutable boundaries shared with related disciplines such as environmental archaeology, palaeoecology, and anthrozoology. This volume avoids taking exclusively social, economic or environmental approaches, preferring, as the inside cover blurb states, '*to provide a holistic view of the roles played by animals in past human cultures*'. Parts 2-7 each cover a different continent: Europe (14 chapters); Asia (8 chapters); Africa (8 chapters); North America (8 chapters); South America (4 chapters); Oceania (4 chapters). Within each part, chapters are organised loosely by chronology. The authors appear to have been given a very free rein in how they have approached their contributions, and each chapter has its own agenda and unique style. The result is a rather eclectic, but enjoyable, anthology of papers.

Some contributors have interpreted their remit as providing a narrative of animal exploitation of a region over time (e.g. Chapter 17: Palaeolithic to Byzantine periods in western Turkey; chapter 20: Neolithic-Iron age in central Asia), or an overview of a particular period (e.g. Chapter 4: Mesolithic eastern Baltic; Chapter 13: Medieval Ireland; Chapter 15: Medieval northwest Russia; Chapter 19 Neolithic China). Others review the history of zooarchaeological contributions and how they have taken forward the archaeological understanding of an area and period (e.g. Chapter 32: pre-contact Northwest coast of North America). Some explore particular themes of cultural perception and treatment of animals (e.g. Chapter 14: animals in urban life; Chapter 29: animals in ancient Egyptian religion), while others address more familiar archaeological questions (e.g. domestication and emergence of animal husbandry: chapters 16, 19, 21, 25, 33; exploitation of particular environments: chapters 11, 28, 36, 43, 47).

There are no constraints placed on what constitutes zooarchaeological evidence; authors make use of genetics and stable isotope studies, ethnography, iconography and the study of historic texts alongside more 'traditional' zooarchaeological analyses involving the identification, quantification, measurement and other macroscopic observations of archaeological bones. Chapter 21, Hitomi Hongo's contribution on the 'Introduction of domestic animals to the Japanese archipelago' is a fine example of this holistic approach, combining narrative review with thematic exploration, while drawing on zooarchaeological evidence of all types. Other less satisfactory contributions have more navel-gazing focus on methodological issues (e.g. Chapter 24, Plug), although this still serves to highlight that zooarchaeological data are not always straightforward to obtain, let alone interpret.

The structure of the book says much about the ideological intent of the editors; the geographical groupings celebrate the internationality of zooarchaeology and its contribution to world archaeology. Linked to this is a belief and desire that at its heart zooarchaeology is an inclusive, accessible and egalitarian discipline, and efforts have been made to include contributors of many different nationalities. Albarella (Chapter 1) and other authors (e.g. Monks, Chapter 32) remain self-critical about the extent to which indigenous peoples and local citizens are actively participating in or leading zooarchaeological research in their parent nations, and identify this as a key issue to be addressed by the zooarchaeological community. In a similarly inclusive vein, senior and established scholars who are world leaders in zooarchaeology share the pages with high calibre early career researchers. Through the lens of gender equality, this book also looks respectable. It achieves a far better balance of male (56%) and female (44%) contributors than its companion publication, *The Oxford Handbook of Archaeology* (Cunliffe et al 2009) (72% male 28% female).

An interesting benefit of organising content by geography is that it will age well. New state-of-the-art scientific techniques come and go, or become established, and the hot-topics of archaeological enquiry change (or at least are subject to periodic rebranding!). Arguably the geographical groupings offer longevity, enabling chapters to stand on their own merit irrespective of academic fashions. Inevitably the contents will date; the chapters include on-going research and debates, and even during the course of preparation of this book things have moved on. For instance, there are now newer perspectives to chicken domestication in China (Eda et al 2016, Peters et al 2016). Nevertheless, many of the insights and much of the data presented in these chapters have potential to inform and enlighten for many years to come, and this book has been thoughtfully compiled in a way which will ensure their long-term accessibility.

The core evidence used to advance understanding in all chapters is zooarchaeological, making this book highly relevant for specialists and students in this field. Yet this is not a conventional 'text book' of zooarchaeology. It does not offer a comprehensive guide to zooarchaeological methods and principles or thematic concerns (although, the glossary of zooarchaeological methods is a worthwhile addition that expands the usefulness of this book, particularly for a student audience, and Peter Bogucki's foreword helpfully flags the recurrent major archaeological themes). Rather, this book serves the interests of a wider audience. The themes and research questions at the heart of all these chapters are about people in the past, understanding the development of human culture, and gaining insight into the daily lives of our predecessors in all walks of life across the globe throughout human history and prehistory. This would be a valuable addition to the library of any institution or individual concerned with such essential questions.

The Oxford Handbook of Zooarchaeology elegantly demonstrates by example that well-integrated zooarchaeological investigations can be highly effective in addressing fundamental questions about our human past.

References:

Cunliffe B, Gosden C, and Joyce R A. 2009. *The Oxford Handbook of Archaeology*. Oxford University Press.

Eda M, Lu P, Kikuchi H, Li Z, Li F, and Yuan J. 2016. Reevaluation of early Holocene chicken domestication in northern China. *Journal of Archaeological Science* 67:25-31.

Peters J, Lebrasseur O, Best J, Miller H, Fothergill T, Dobney K, Thomas RM, Maltby M, Sykes N, Hanotte O et al. 2015. Questioning new answers regarding Holocene chicken domestication in China. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112(19):E2415.