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Michael D. J. Bintley and Thomas J. T. Williams (eds), *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2015), xii and 295 pp., €84.99 (cloth).

This edited book by Michael D. J. Bintley and Thomas J. T. Williams investigates the "inextricably blurred, confused, confounded" boundaries between humans and animals in Anglo-Saxon England and early medieval Scandinavia (1). The contemporary issues of environmental awareness, methodological approaches that foreground nonhuman agency, and human responsibility for both "animal exploitation and management" (12) render the project timely and relevant. The opening chapter, Noël Adams' "Between Myth and Reality: Hunter and Prey in Early Anglo-Saxon Art" examines the animals that ornament Anglo-Saxon metalwork, noting that these tend to be creatures that are hunted rather than domesticated species. Adams examines literature that sheds light on material objects, and reviews perspectives that connect animals to shamanism, Paganism, and Christianity. This is a lengthy chapter, extending from antique models to the eleventh century and is attractively effectively illustrated. The second chapter, Sue Brunning's " '(Swinger of) the Serpent of Wounds': Swords and Snakes in the Viking Mind" is more narrowly focused. Brunning notes kennings like "wound snake" and "battle snake" (56) for swords and imagery likening sword cuts to snake bites, and she considers physical and symbolic reasons for these links.

The third chapter, Victoria Symons' "Wreoþenhilt ond wyrmfah: Confronting Serpents in *Beowulf* and Beyond," investigates the relationship between dragons and runes, which are often connected to treasure. Symons analyses Hrothgar's speech in Beowulf, which characterizes the "lust for gold" (79) negatively, and Sigurd's encounter with Fáfnir, noting that dragons are associated with secrecy whereas runes are tools with which to unlock secrets. The "Rune Poem" from *Hávamál* and the *Nine Herbs Charm* are briefly discussed, as is the depiction of dragons and serpents with runes, with Symons concluding that "wide social anxieties surrounding the distribution of wealth" (93) are encoded in the association. The next contribution, Marijane Osborn's "The Ravens on the Lejre Throne: Avian Identifiers, Odin at Home, Farm Ravens," analyses a tiny 17.5

mm high silver sculpture found in Denmark in 2009. The throne has a seated figure flanked by two birds; the obvious connection to Odin and his ravens seemingly undercut by "apparently feminine garb of the enthroned person" (97). This object is compared to coins, bracteates, the Clonmacnoise plaque, and various other images, with Osborn's research ultimately seeming to support the Odin hypothesis, while admitting to uncertainties with the identification.

Chapter Five, Eric Lacey's "Beowulf's Blithe-Hearted Raven," discusses the raven that celebrates the coming of day roughly in the middle of *Beowulf*. Lacey argues for the description of the raven as bright rather than black (*blaca*), that connects it to the rising sun. This is followed by László Sándor Chardonnens' "Do Anglo-Saxons Dream of Exotic Sheep?," a study of *Revelatio Esdrae*, in which sheep and bees feature prominently, prognosticatory texts, and dream books. The seventh chapter continues the theme of domesticated beasts. "You Sexy Beast: The Pig in a Villa in Vandalic North Africa, and Boar Cults in Old Germanic Heathendom" by the always-entertaining and thought-provoking Richard North ranges widely in literature from various Germanic peoples and languages. North argues Luxorius' *Archilocium*, which contains a reference to a pet pig in a villa, refers to Vandals. It may be that the "boar in residenc… authenticate(s)" a Vandal dominus through allusions to "his race and ancestral cult" (173); equally it may refer to "all the Vandals in Carthage" (173) who were once wild boars but are now tame pigs. After this lively romp Thomas J. T. Williams' " 'For the Sake of Bravado in the Wilderness': Confronting the Bestial in Anglo-Saxon Warfare" is a serious take on the animals associated with battle and death, which are uniformly predatory and undomesticated. A second theme is the location of battles by mounds or barrows, which are also known as "execution sites" (191), and are thus haunted and dangerous. Williams also considers wetlands and forests, and speculates about landscapes that are in some sense "bestial" (199).

The ninth chapter, by Williams' fellow-editor Michael D. J. Bintley, "Where the Wild Things Are in Old English Poetry," examines the difference between wild and tamed natural landscapes, which are also in a certain sense unredeemed or redeemed. The texts *Guthlac* and *Beowulf* are examined in detail, with the link between barrows, heathens, and demons foregrounded. Guthlac's victory over the demons and the redemption of the landscape renders "the grim fenland… beautiful" (211). Bintley observes a similar transformation in Beowulf, though there is no overt conversion of Grendel's lair; "the

mere is no longer a seat of evil, and poses no further threat to the Danes" (215). From this beginning, the poems *Daniel* and *Andreas* are analysed, followed by *The Phoenix*, the *Soliloquies*, and *Durham*. The next offering, "Entomological Etymologies: Creepy-Crawlies in English Place-Names" by John Baker, shifts attention to insects and place-names, two new topics for the volume, and the eleventh and final chapter, Della Hooke's "Beasts, Birds, and Other Creatures in Pre-Conquest Charters and Place-Names in England" continues some of these themes. Hooke covers dragons, game beasts, livestock, birds, and fish.

This is a thought-provoking and generally interesting book, that covers a rich stream of textual and archaeological culture from late antiquity through to the second millennium. The chapters are, as is inevitably the case with edited books, not of equal quality, originality, or interest. But the overall impression is that the editors have thought creatively, harnessed a promising group of colleagues, and have paid sufficient attention to certain fashionable theoretical perspectives while remaining grounded in traditional modes of research in the field. Early medievalists of all stripes will find something to interest them, and those readers whose interests are skewed to the natural world, landscape studies, and animals will find different things. This volume is warmly commended, and deserves a place in all academic libraries, and perhaps in interested scholars' and students' libraries too.

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