

*Healing the Herds: Disease, Livestock Economies and the
Globalization of Veterinary Medicine*

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The Ohio University Press Series in History and Ecology publishes history books that can and should be read by scholars from a number of disciplines. The works are known to be accessible, but with enough specialist information for subject experts. *Healing the Herds: Disease, Livestock Economies and the Globalization of Veterinary Medicine* follows this pattern. Edited by Southern African environmental historians Karen Brown and Daniel Gilfoyle, it contains thirteen chapters that explore the interrelationships between livestock economies, veterinary science, disease and the environment. The book is based on a selection of papers presented at a conference, and the goal is to add to and further develop the historiography of veterinary disease.

One of the challenges of editing such books is to ensure a measure of thematic and stylistic coherence. In terms of the themes there is a very useful and thorough introduction. It clearly traces the themes along which the chapters are roughly organised. First, there is the impact of professionalisation as supported by a better understanding of disease etiologies and more efficient treatments. This is followed by chapters on the consequences of global trade for the spread of pathogens. Similarly, the transport of livestock to alien environments, which exposes them to new sources of infections, is discussed. Finally, the relationship between colonialism and veterinary service is examined. Naturally, these themes tend to overlap in some chapters. Daniel Doeppers (Chapter six), for example, draws on the rinderpest epidemic in the Philippines from 1886-1941 to demonstrate how pathogens moved between the different ports of Southeast Asia. He also links the response to rinderpest with the colonial history of the Philippines. Domesticated bovines were a recently introduced species in the Philippines, and were used for traction rather than a source of meat. By the 1890s, as the number of Spanish and the Mestizo-elite increased, so did the demand for beef.

In several chapters, the book also illustrates that a history of livestock disease is not just about pathogens and vaccines, and that it can also illuminate broader issues. Dominik Hünninger (Chapter four), in one of the very few chapters on pre-19th century, cleverly traces the changes and continuities in legislation during times of cattle plague in early 18th century Germany. In the process, he also writes an innovative narrative of early modern state formation and the political language of legitimisation.

Locations around the world are traversed in the different chapters, from the Far East to Africa via some island states. This can be potentially perplexing because the reader may not be as familiar with the history of say, Trinidad and Tobago (Chapter nine) as Niger (Chapter thirteen), and may thus miss some of the nuances. Occasionally, chapters assume a detailed knowledge of the different districts when tracing the geographical trajectories of the diseases. Chapters one and five contain sketch maps of the countries/and or areas referred to. Similar maps in other chapters would have been helpful.

That being said, it is because of the wide variety of historical and environmental contexts that are covered in the book that it succeeds in tracking how livestock economies, veterinary science, disease and the environment interlink in a *globalised* setting. The physical mobility of livestock, their owners and pathogens are key ideas in all the chapters. Not always present,

but arguably as important, is how the mobility of knowledge and ideas about livestock disease impacted on its history. *How* the state and/or veterinarians sought to transfer knowledge to farmers (or indeed elicit knowledge from farmers) is rarely discussed beyond mentioning policies. In some chapters, however, investigating the transfer of knowledge is a secondary point. Abigail Woods, on British veterinarians and dairy farmers during World War Two (Chapter three), partially attends to factors that made dairy farmers “accept” veterinarians and how the veterinarians came to achieve “expert” status.

The wide array of locations also leads to a verisimilitude of source material. African histories rely especially on non-traditional sources. Lotte Hughes’ perspicacious use of oral histories illustrates that East Coast Fever (ECF) played a central role in the second forced removal of Maasai in British East Africa (Kenya). She puts forward a new and convincing, yet not deterministic, hypothesis. Using the *actor-network theory*, Saveriou Krätli (Chapter thirteen) makes an incisive study of veterinary publications to track the sources of animal-science knowledge on the Bororo zebu – breed. Not all the authors use their sources so creatively. Peter Koolmees (Chapter one), for instance, in his overview of epizootics in the Netherlands relies heavily on recent secondary literature, with a corresponding lack of a nuanced analysis. The thinness is exacerbated by the scope of the chapter - from 1713 to 2002 (!).

One of the most interesting chapters in terms of method is that of Ann Greene (Chapter two) on veterinarians and their professional identity in Gilded Age America. She uses the concept of ecology, specifically its emphasis on place and relationship, as the scaffolding to show how “horse-doctors” in Philadelphia became “veterinarians.” The “internationality” of the book is also reflected in the variety of writing styles. Although it is generally well-edited, there are chapters such as that of Martine Barwegen (Chapter five) in which the (second-language) cadence is slightly jarring. This could distract the reader from the actual content of the chapter.

In its endeavour to enhance the history of veterinary medicine and its relations with society and the economy, *Healing the Herds* mostly succeeds. Its scholarship can serve as a useful introduction to the writing of veterinary and agricultural history. The chapters reveal numerous themes, methods and narratives in the field. Moreover, the editors take great pains to point out the lacunae in the book. In the introduction, mention is made of the vast potential for tracing the epistemology of veterinary science - how scientific knowledge is acquired or constructed.

The conclusion by Brown lists more absences. The most glaring of these is the role of women and the absence of Latin America as well as Russia. Also, little attention is paid to the relationship between animal and human health more broadly. Brown mentions the topic of rabies as an example of which she herself is a scholar. The relationship between livestock and humans more generally can also be explored further. There are exceptions (Hughes for instance mentions the cultural value of cattle for the Maasai), but by far most of the chapters merely refer to livestock in terms of economic livelihood.

There are also some absent species. In the light of the avian flu scare, Brown refers to poultry as a neglected candidate for historical study. The same can be said of swine-flu and pigs, the factory farming of which is often a cause of public protest. To conclude, although *Healing the Herds* is a curator's egg in places, it is a stimulating publication. In a positive way, it shows how much can still be done.