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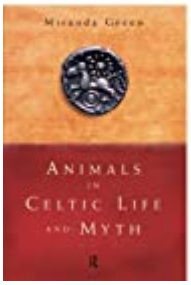
Miranda J. Aldhouse-Green. *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth.* London: Routledge, 1992. $140.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-05030-2; $44.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-415-18588-2.



Reviewed by Cathy Mosely (H-Nilas)

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While the belief that the Celts worshiped the natural world is not new, Miranda Green helps to bring their relationship with animals, both domesticated and wild, into focus; she not only looks at how the animals are represented in artwork and myth, but what the archaeological evidence offers in terms of the everyday usages. In her preface she states that this work roughly covers the period between 600 BC and AD 400, and that geographically it covers Ireland in the extreme west to Czechoslovakia in the east. What she states both in the preface and her introduction is that she sees the Celts venerating animals– no matter what the activity, be it food, hunting, war, or religion.

There is some overlap in the material, since the author usually breaks down her chapters in order to cover the main animals in Celtic life: pigs, cattle, horses, dogs, cats, sheep, birds, and wild animals (boars, deer, fox, ravens, cranes). However, the overlap does not become repetitive since she builds on the information she provided earlier. Her chapters include: "The Natural World of the Celts," "Food and Farming: Animals in the Celtic Economy," "Prey and Predator: The Celtic Hunter," "Animals at War, Sacrifice and Ritual," "The Artist's Menagerie," "Animals in the Earliest Celtic Stories," "God and Beast," and "Changing Attitudes to the Animal World."

The chapter, "Food and Farming: Animals in the Celtic Economy," starts the book off on a solid foot. The author gives a concise description of what is known, or speculated on, in regards to Celtic farming and stock management, covering a variety topics ranging from byproducts of living animals (wool, milk, manure, and manual labor), slaughter, and the distribution of herds amongst various communities. The author makes the point that the current archaeological evidence indicates that wild animals made up a very small percentage of the Celts' food source.

"Prey and Predator: The Celtic Hunter" brings an interesting light to the reasons for hunting. The authors points out that archaeological evidence invalidates the idea that hunting was a primarily for food, though it does seem to indicate that hares were hunted as a food source. Her emphasis is on the idea that hunting was the activity of the elite (possibly due to the fact that horses would have been expensive to maintain), possibly as training for warfare, and that the kills were used either in ritual or for their skins. However, the Celtic Hunter gods (discussed in more detail in "God and Beasts") offer another dimension to the activity of hunting; the images of the various Hunter deities give the impression that the gods not only were worshiped in order to protect the hunters, but to protect the wild animals. The evidence seems to indicate that hunting was not an activity that was lightly

done, and was surrounded with many rituals and taboos, among them the shedding of blood that opened the doors between the realm of mortals and the realm of spirit, and was an act to be carried out with reverence.

The chapter "Animals at War" mainly focuses on horses and dogs, with an emphasis on the Celtic cavalry and on the uses of chariots. The Roman use of the Celtic cavalry is also discussed. Other topics include the depiction of horsemen in art, along with the symbolic use of animal images (particularly the boar and the raven/crow) on war gear.

"Sacrifice and Ritual" discusses the distribution of sacrifices across the Celtic world, a discussion that covers type of animals, places of sacrifice (pit, grave, sanctuary), mode of killing, body parts left, and ritual feasting. The author also offers commentary on whether or not the animals sacrificed were an actual loss to the community, or part of a surplus; she also goes into some detail on ritual feasting, and whether or not the offerings left for the gods were the choicest, or the least edible (this seems to be vary with the type of site).

"The Artist's Menagerie" touches on a variety of artifacts, and offers an nice introduction to the topic of Celtic art. The chapter covers war gear, household goods, personal jewelry, coins, and cult artwork. Again, this offers a clear breakdown by animal and what the various creatures and usages might symbolize.

The chapter "Animals in the Earliest Celtic Stories" offers a good lead-in to the chapter "God and Beasts." In "God and Beasts," Green not only discusses the symbology for various animals, but discusses the various sacred sites and what type of spiritual (or medical) help that the pilgrims may have been seeking at these sanctuaries. She also touches on the influence of the Romans on how deities were perceived, but argues that for the Celts the animal "helper" was often interchangeable with the image of the deity, and that often times the deity was represented as half-human and half-animal.

The last chapter, "Changing Attitudes to the Animal World," is an interesting wrap-up to the book. Here the author briefly discusses how the Greeks, Romans, and the Christian world have all held the idea that animals were subordinate to human will, and goes on to comment on the growth of pet ownership. She contrasts all of this with what is believed to be the Celts' view of animals, which seemed to view all animals as belonging to the gods–as she puts it, "occupants of the landscape in their own right." However, Miranda Green does not look at the culture through rose colored glasses and points out that this respect did not prevent animals (and humans) from being killed in some very grisly ways.

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