

Actualité scientifique/Scientific news

Recension d'ouvrage/Book review

BAKER K., CARDEN R. & MADGWICK R. (eds) 2014. — *Deer and People*. Windgather Press, Oxford, 286 p.

Whether they occur naturally or were deliberately transported, deer are pretty much everywhere. They have been extirpated, established outside their natural range – sometimes close to where they originated or moved across continents introduced to the unknown (including islands), reintroduced to where they once roamed. Throughout the past up to this very day people have hunted, managed, kept deer – sometimes for meat and raw material or simply just for sport.

However, their significance to human societies cannot solely be reduced to a social and economic role. Deer have also had an important role in the realm of art and symbolism, embodying various meaning or ideals such as the wild, power, fertility, exoticism or tradition – even a connection with the spiritual world. These are expressed through material culture (e.g. ornamentation, craftwork, art), cultural identity (e.g. myth, ritual, linguistic) as well as in the shaping of landscapes. Whether deer can be viewed in similar cultural and symbolic terms across time and space, it is through their multifarious interactions and relationships with humans that the shaping of cultural identities and ideologies can be fully apprehended.

For the better or for the worse, humans have considerably (re)shaped the natural/cultural distribution and history of many deer species – and continue to do so, trying to save those being in threat of extinction and integrating all deer species into the modern world. Understanding the bio-cultural history of deer is now more vital than ever for developing modern conservation and management policies in order to ensure that deer, wherever they are now, remain part of the world.

These themes as varied as “species dispersal, exploitation patterns, symbolic significance, material culture and art, effect on landscape and management” (in preface of the editors), are the core of *Deer and People*. Divided into five thematic parts, this volume is the product of papers given at two international conferences – the 11th International Conference of Archaeozoology held in Paris in 2010, from a session entitled *Cervids and Society: Deer in Time and Space and the Deer and People: Past, Present, and the Future* International Conference held at the University of Lincoln in 2011. If the first conference was

directed toward an audience of zooarchaeologists, the second drew deer specialists from wide-ranging disciplines. In either case, both were clearly emphasising multi-disciplinary research. This is exactly what *Deer and People* is made of: A great number of the contributions are indeed presenting preliminary or more fully achieved studies deriving from interdisciplinary research, covering a relatively long time and large geographic span. Of course the majority of the papers in *Deer and People* are dealing with archaeology/zooarchaeology – as a zooarchaeologist I would certainly not complain. But we can only regret the small contribution on modern deer conservation and management to anchor this book a little more into current concerns about species integration into the modern landscape and threats due to human and/or climatic pressures. However, some of the research presented in this volume definitely offers new insights relevant to modern deer conservation and management. Being a “follower in her path”, it would be unfair not to mention the enormous involvement and work of Naomi Sykes, who voluntarily remained in the backstage of this book, as the editors Karis Baker, Ruth Carden and Richard Madwick rightly refer in their preface. Indeed, she co-organised the session on Cervids in Paris and the Deer Conference at the University of Lincoln – it is worth mentioning the collaboration of the British Deer Society to that conference, and contributed to the production of this volume via her “Dama International” project. *Deer and People* clearly bears her influence in trying to promote interdisciplinary research and the importance of past knowledge with the strong belief that this will “make research more relevant to modern cervid ecology and management” (in preface of the editors).

If all of the papers are not necessarily of interest to everyone, no matter the background, you will certainly find something to whet your appetite and pertinent to your own research, not to mention a strong bibliographic basis to expand your knowledge on specific deer questions. However, if my personal favourites (16. by M. Holmes, 13. by K. Lymer *et al.*, 5. by K. Harris and 4. by C. Gelvin-Reymiller) are gravitating around my own discipline and interests, I found *Femmes Fatale*, by R. Almond, very refreshing. It is not only an interesting account on high-status women's hunting practices, but can also be viewed (to a certain extent at least), as an apology of feminism, restoring the place of these ladies rightfully among

skilled hunters in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance. As I said earlier, you might not find every contribution interesting, but I defy anyone, who is curious about this book, not to find something exciting deerly there!

Far from being completely exhaustive – who could ever boast to cover research on all deer species, disciplines, periods and the whole world! – this book remains a fine example of

what multi-disciplinary research can provide to the understanding of human/deer relationships in the past and present. It shows that each discipline can actually benefit and learn from one another.

If you are a deer specialist... or just a deer lover... then, *Deer and People* will be an excellent addition to your reading list and should be on your bookshelf.

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