

Review Article

HEAVENLY CREATURES?

LEWIS MAYO
University of Melbourne

Roel Sterckx *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2003, 398 pp. ISBN: 0-791-45270-0 (pbk).

Richard E. Strassberg, trans. & ed., *A Chinese Bestiary: Strange Creatures from the Guideways through Mountains and Seas*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, 360 pp. ISBN: 0-520-21844-2 (hbk).

Animals seem to be moving into the centre of scholarly discourse about Chinese cultural history – the appearance of two fine volumes devoted to animals, whose broad historical frame is early China (roughly the period from the Zhou dynasty through to the first empires of the Qin and Han) – gives ample testimony to a rising academic interest in animal themes, or more precisely in the relationship between animals and cultural order. Indeed, we could see these books as trying to argue that the relegation of animals to a position of marginality in mainstream scholarly analysis of Chinese culture is a product of modern preoccupations and habits of thought: old Chinese writings are full of animals, attesting to their discursive and cultural pre-eminence in the imperial and pre-imperial eras, but the anthropocentric concerns of the major scholarly fields that have dealt with early China in the past century – cultural and political history, philosophy and religion, literary study and the history of science and technology – have caused animal questions to be overlooked. That classical Chinese discourse relating to animals was not ‘zoological’ in the sense of being a specific articulated field of knowledge and writing which had animals as its primary object of inquiry and which sought to construct animals as beings which inhabited their own distinctive realm, requiring analysis in terms different from those which might be deployed for topics such as morality or statecraft, might be thought of as a reason for why scholars have been slow to focus on animal issues. But the sense that scholars of early China have suddenly ‘discovered’ animals is also somewhat misplaced: much of the output of ‘sinology’ – in the sense of an intensive study of old Chinese texts – had animals as an object of enquiry. A quick perusal of the bibliographies of

both of these books brings to light a very large number of modern scholarly works devoted to animals in European and East Asian languages. This does not include the large amount of animal-related writing in Chinese between the Han and the Qing dynasty, much of it concerned with animal references in classical texts – all who work in this field are indebted to Qing encyclopedia compilers for their thematic collation of early writings on these matters. What has perhaps shifted in the past decade or so is the capacity to construct an intellectually compelling set of arguments that address the *problematic* of animals in early Chinese cultural systems: older scholarship did not feel the need to articulate such arguments, taking animals as a legitimate topic that either did not require justification, or was a vehicle for the demonstration of erudition or literary skill. The two books under review here thus simultaneously constitute a continuation of a venerable tradition and a challenge to established scholarly paradigms.

What reasons might be given for the concern with the non-human cultural history of Chinese-speaking societies that animates (sic) these books? One way into this question is to look at the common features of the two works under consideration to see if we can identify any kind of common intellectual agenda, or, at least some preoccupations that they both share.

The point of intersection between these books is the theme of the miraculous animal and its central place in the cultural landscapes of early China. In addressing this theme, the two authors mirror a fascination found in the texts that survive from the late Zhou to the Qin and Han periods for the fabulous beast which is clearly a major focus of socio-intellectual energy and interest. Indeed, the works of Sterckx and Strassberg can be said to share with the Chinese texts they study a desire to understand where the extraordinary animals that populated the world of ancient China come from and what their existence signifies. What sorts of forces do such creatures represent? For both the modern commentators and the writers of ancient Chinese texts, these miraculous beings are emanations of a charged world, and products of a landscape (physical and mental, for the two constitute each other) filled with productive power, whose logic our minds struggle to comprehend, but which makes perfect sense to those equipped with the right set of categories and judgments. Unusual animals are a matter for sages, who alone know and are unfazed by them. Books which describe these beings, like those of Sterckx and Strassberg and also the classical Chinese works on which they draw, unfold the order of this extra-ordinary world, and provide a recipe for us to engage with these beasts without them causing us anxiety. With careful study we can grasp something of the patterns and energies that give rise to such creatures.

For audiences in early China, the relevant energies and patterns are those found in the landscape and in the state, for us they are those of a socio-cultural system which gave rise to these representations. In laying out the names and characteristics of strange animals, scholarly knowledge both modern and ancient seeks to overcome the threatening effects of an assemblage of peculiar beasts. If creatures of surpassing strangeness can be

encountered on the pages of books whose function is to give guidance and security, then there is little in the world which can scare us. The production of a comprehensive account of unusual, spiritually-charged beasts allows for a world in which nothing seems to escape sagely powers, confirming the extraordinary capacities of the sagely person. Rather than an 'other', which challenges the rule of the norm by seeming to be outside it, the strange animals examined in these books are comprehended by an all-encompassing system of knowledge which can explain the interconnections and interrelationships between beings.

The challenge posed by miraculous animals to dominant knowledge systems in the modern world is their lack of a flesh and blood existence: the forces that generate them do not fall within the domain of biological reproduction as this is conventionally defined, but are rather those of symbolic energies and systems, what we would call cultural production. Not very long ago, in what is sometimes referred to as the age of high or 'classical' modernity, fabulous animals were often treated as either products of societies with a limited understanding of natural processes or perhaps more favourably viewed as marks of a more enchanted and spirit-infused world which had not yet been battered by the hardness of fact and disciplined observation and scientific experiment. For the authors whose work is surveyed here, however, miraculous animals constitute part of an autonomous cultural vision, different from our own, and are to be examined as part of a wider system of meaning through which a society constituted a meaningful universe. What is interesting about animals is their signifying capacities, and their affiliation to systems of knowledge and practice such as shamanic ritual, which have receded to the margins of the contemporary world. Attempts to view accounts of miraculous animals from early China through the frameworks of biological science are doomed to failure and incomprehension, since they are founded on a study of animals-as-things-in-themselves, completely divorced from systems of human signification which are the domain in which fabulous beasts exist. However, if animals are studied as part of human systems of signs and knowledge, then a mythical animal and a 'real' animal can be examined as part of a continuum. The idea of the fabulous creature as a product of folly or whimsy to be contrasted with the flesh-and-blood animal is broken down by studying the processes for the production of meaning that are unfolded upon and through animals as objects of human sense-making.

The two books studied here adopt this position explicitly or implicitly: assuming that the divide between systems of knowledge which understand animals biologically and those that do not is essentially unbridgeable, they structure their accounts as histories of cultural perception: biological animality is invoked, but only to distinguish biological enquiry from the kind of cultural analysis which they undertake. Rather than dispense with the idea of the biological animal altogether, or attempt to see it as a product of a particular socio-cultural ordering (and not as a kind of ground of the real), the biological animal is put aside, so that the focus can be given to human representations and deployments of animals. For Roel Sterckx this seems to be a considered

philosophical position – the biological autonomy of animal lives makes them a particular and specific ground of challenge to human projects of cultural ordering. He suggests that the attempt of early Chinese thinkers and institutions to negotiate this fundamental otherness grounded in the biological differences between animals and humans and the insusceptibility of animals to the forms of symbolic suasion to which humans can be subjected, articulates an implicit sense of the boundary between nature and culture, even though this boundary was drawn with much less sharpness than in ‘western’ cultural traditions. If all cultural systems for representing nature are ‘socio-centric’, as Sterckx seems to argue, those within which animal life was encoded in early China were distinguished by a much higher degree of interpenetration between the natural and the cultural – which means both a higher level of socio-centrism and a stronger sense of the engagement of the natural with moral and political life – than those of Greek thought and its inheritors, which sought to construct a very clear divide between an animal or natural world and a human or cultural world, with discourses and sciences specific to each, distinguishing clearly between bio-logics and anthro-p-logics. In this regard, Sterckx (and perhaps also Strassberg) hold that ‘nature’ – which comprises animals, landscapes and non-human things more generally – is culturally constructed, and that each culture constructs it differently. Indeed, Sterckx gives a very sophisticated and well-argued account of this basic position, which is one of the most effective ways to resist the hegemony of biological or scientific knowledge as the universal standard for examining all discourse about non-human life. But rather than trying to position cultural systems on a scale according to how far they regard animal realities as separated from human realities and how far these realities are seen as interpenetrating (with the boundary between animal and human or nature and culture seen as one of the foundational concerns of any system of social and political order), it seems more helpful to treat the ordering of animal lives by symbolic and material means as an intrinsic part of all socio-political systems: the cultural discourses and categories that create what we think of as nature (such as nature documentaries, organized groups of professionals like scientists who act on or in the name of an entity called ‘nature’ and so on, helping to ‘realize’ nature as a coherent domain for us, a matter for common sense) constitute one of the historical ways in which human systems of power have organized people, animals, plants and spaces. In this way, the historical processes which have produced the order of life that surrounds us and those obtaining in early China can be understood as simultaneously linked and different from each other. This essay acknowledges the epistemological integrity of the positions these two books have adopted on the cultural ordering of non-human life in early China, but seeks ways of approaching it which do not hold it in explicit or implicit contrast to our own.

Roel Sterckx’s book deserves the highest praise – it is an outstanding piece of scholarship. His use of his foundational sources cannot be faulted – he quotes from a great range of original writings most of which are linguistically demanding and deals with each of these in depth, offering many powerful

observations. He respects the integrity of the writings he deals with as texts – that is, as discrete intellectual and semantic wholes – but the reader retains a powerful sense of engaging with a world, a world of which these texts are an emanation. Equally commendable is the capacity to understand and articulate the specificity of particular intellectual traditions (the ‘schools’ of thought in early China), while still arguing for commonalities in the representations of animals found in different sources. This proffers a very rich picture of an historical epoch. The integration between the exercise of producing a past for the present with the exercise of engaging with scholarly debates and arguments, both those specific to early China and those dealing with animal-human relationships in other contexts, is similarly impressive. Thorough reading in a full range of modern secondary work in European and East Asian languages grounds his study in a deep understanding of what has already been done, but his frameworks and analytical approaches are very much his own. The categories which he deploys for organizing his analysis are clearly the product of trying to think past established ways of classifying and analysing cultural phenomena. Thus the linkage between the articulation of a bureaucracy charged with the governance of animal lives and ideas of the powers of sage kings to apprehend the processes of transformation and metamorphosis that sees one category of being shift into the form of another is something that a less intellectually coherent analysis might have had trouble setting out, but in Sterckx’s hands it is presented with subtlety and coherence. This book is without doubt the most important single monograph on animals in Chinese culture to appear to date, and makes a major contribution both to knowledge and to conceptualisation of this field.

Richard Strassberg’s book is also excellent. Most enjoyable is its format, which like many of the creatures which it described, is a numinous hybrid. The bulk of his text is a translation of the materials on miraculous beasts in the most famous of early Chinese compendia on exceptional creatures, the *Shanhai jing* 山海經, usually translated as the Classic of Mountains and Seas, but here formulated as *Guideways*. Rather than translate the whole text (which has been done by others), the strange beasts that appear through its pages and landscapes are collected together, and while still being kept in their original textual habitats, are assembled as a group, allowing their commonalities and differences to be brought forth. But the hybridity here is also that of combining the act of putting on display these beasts with text and illustrations interlinked, and the process of analysing the world of these beasts in the introductory essay. We thus have a happy blend of research with a substantial amount of translated primary writing, without one component overwhelming the other. This encourages two different kinds of complementary reading in which a confusing text is not simply presented without explanation, and the world of strange textual beasts retains its own autonomy without being subordinated to the sovereign powers of the writer’s analysis and explication. This seems in line with the sagely response to eccentric animals which reduces their threatening qualities and their unconventional appearance, without robbing them of their position as beings

that defy ordinary categories. The final book is very agreeably put together and assembles in elegant form a picture of an early Chinese world not populated with forms of life familiar to us, which helps to alter visions of the cultural landscape of Chinese-speaking societies on the cusp of imperial unification under the Qin and Han. It shows this cultural landscape as filled with unusual beings which, even if they moved towards cultural extinction not long after the text was produced, nonetheless persisted as shadowy reminders of an alternative geography that continued to exist next to more hegemonic models of animals and territory.

The production of cultural and political order in any socio-historical context involves the production of coherent systems for the governance of non-human life. There are two major factors involved in this: one is that claims to authority rest at some level on the idea of institutions having some relation to a stably reproduced order in the universe, which they do not, in their daily or normal operations, seek to transgress. Systems of agricultural production, public gardens, and authoritative classifications of living beings all contribute to the overall order which frames the legitimate exercise of public and private power. The other factor is closely related: challenges to dominant power are very often framed in terms of signs of cosmic or systemic disorder, manifested in corrupted or irregular food supplies, wild dogs or micro-organisms running rampant while authorities are shown as powerless to inhibit them, or, more recently, the spectre of a collapse of the overall structure of life itself, presaged in the daily disappearance of threatened species. A sufficiently compelling compilation of these signs and a powerful narrative of what they mean will cause governments to fall, experts to lose their credibility and, in the most radical of contexts, movements to arise which call for a radical re-ordering of human society, with the greed and waste of power-holders being held accountable for systemic or cosmic imbalance. In the present, such claims are lodged by conservationists in the name of nature, with the non-human other world serving as a source of mute censure and ultimate vengeance on an erring humanity.

As it is for us, the sovereignty of the state in early China was not simply a human issue. Governing power exerts itself on non-human beings of various kinds and those who challenge ruling power will muster together marks of failures of responsibility that appear through irregularities in the non-human sphere. A central part of the discourse on exceptional animals was the recognition of what their presence said about the state of the political realm: a compelling and comprehensive body of knowledge about animal prodigies had to be assembled if such challenges were to be met and refuted. The imperial state was the product of what Strassberg identifies as a long process of military consolidation by feudal states, which brought together an ever more heterogeneous range of flora, fauna, landscapes and cultural traditions which were associated with and specific to those landscapes. This multiplied the number of possibilities for potentially threatening animal prodigies to appear: if the power and legitimacy of new rulers was marked by the sudden appearance of exceptional animal signs, then both those in established positions and those

seeking to challenge them had to compete to identify unusual creatures and to offer convincing accounts of their habits and significance, to support their own claim to power.

Thus on top of the general tendency of all systems of socio-political authority to generate stable systems of taxonomic classification which sustain and in many cases mirror the classifications of human beings which make up the social order, the doctrine of animal presages serving as a ratification of or censure to dominant political forces made comprehensive naming and description not simply a matter of outlining 'normal species'. It also made specifying every possible type of hybrid or eccentric being a matter of political urgency. If power-holders could account for any anomaly which they might encounter, assign it to a taxonomical pigeonhole and describe its powers and capacities, all animal presages could be adequately dealt with. This was itself a confirmation of political and moral superiority, as their rivals could not do this. What marked sages apart from their fellow humans was their capacity to be unmoved by freakish animals, and to deploy an understanding of existing taxonomical categories to classify and thus control these unusual beasts. Where others are perturbed or frightened by animal presages, the sage ruler exhibits a studied indifference: he knows which signs to read and what modification to make to his conduct to ensure proper ritual conformity between cosmic patterns and his own life practices in diet, comportment, musical enjoyment, residence and excursions, so when seemingly troubling signs appear, he knows they are not what they seem. As an adviser to the court, the sagely official can use knowledge of the doings of wild animals to enjoin caution and restraint on the part of the ruler. Just as comprehension of the moral energies of a sacred text makes the sage especially privileged in his understanding of questions of ethics, so does comprehension of the 'book' of animal signs provide a source of insight into the moral energies in the universe, whose lessons the sage can proffer to his superiors and inferiors.

The hierarchies of animals which distinguished the exceptional and rarely manifesting beast who synthesized categories by combining features of different types of creatures into powerful hybrids (and not necessarily frightful aberrations) from ordinary everyday animals, had as their obvious point of reference the hierarchy of humans and the division between everyday, common-or-garden skills and spectacular and prodigious talent. These systems were mutually referential and mutually reinforcing: the idea of a society built out of a combination of sages and common folk structured the animal world by a similar set of principles, just as the principles of division in the animal world helped to confirm the sense of a world in which humans were differentiated by their degree of moral insight. Theories of *qi* 氣 supplied some of the underlying rationale. Each place had its own distinctive *qi*-scape, and this condensed itself into the beings which resided in that place, both human and animal, giving them and their culture its distinctive temper. Human morality, customs and music had as their correlate and one of the objects of their influence the animals, common and distinguished, which surrounded them. Failure to apprehend the *qi*-structures and moral orders of

the locality in the correct way resulted in disorder and in disturbing and disturbed patterns of animal conduct.

Roel Sterckx offers a convincing explanation of the cosmology and institutional logic that underpins this notion. The authority of the ruler was a moral force whose transforming effects could be felt by all animate beings: all creatures with blood and *qi*, as one early conceptualisation of animate life put it, possessed emotions and exhibited affection and fear, and were thus susceptible to the transforming moral influence of the ruler. This moral influence is understood as having a geographical structure, and the governance of territory is an exercise of moral force to control potentially threatening spiritual forces, including animals. As Strassberg's introduction to the *Shanhai jing* bestiary makes out, ritual dance, moral authority, geographical knowledge, the capacity to master routes for travel and to propitiate the harmful beings which one would encounter along those routes, an understanding of animals and gods, understanding of medicine and even such domains as mastery of genealogy formed a tightly interconnected system, of which the text he translates is an emanation and a corollary.

Bureaucratic control of animal life was another constituent of this overall picture, and Sterckx's identification and analysis of this theme is one of his book's central contributions. The authority of bureaucrats from the Zhou and Warring States period onwards involved a simultaneous performance of ritual and 'practical' functions, and just as animal taming was not a simple technical exercise in subduing a body, but was understood as a process of subjecting the beast to moral influence, so too did officials combine a moral and religious role with their 'normal' duties. Thus the management of the royal stables or the tending of oxen (which had ritual dimensions) were linked to officials whose responsibility was the expulsion of inauspicious birds and specialists in avian and animal auguries. This extended the ideological reach of the bureaucratic system and its symbolic command much further, making the bureaucracy seem ritually necessary for the proper functioning of the universe. At the same time, the designation of specialist personnel with responsibility for animal-related duties contributed to the differentiation of animals and the construction of bodies of expert knowledge around each beast. Sterckx ends his book by invoking the famous figure of Bo Le 伯樂, the horse physiognomist, whose understanding of horses combined an intuitive flair with a highly sought after professionalism. Such features fuse the qualities of bureaucratic specialization which had produced concentrated expertise in specific animal related areas such as the training of horses for chariot racing or the proper understanding of avian auspices, with a more 'mystical' and holistic claim to comprehend cosmic patterns that were manifested in animal behaviour and required for their correct management, even in domestic context

A similarly compelling idea which sought to extend human authority over the natural world by moral and cultural force was the notion that animals could be rendered compliant by ritually correct and properly performed music. The spectacle of animals responding to this music, which was itself attuned to

the seasonally co-ordinated structures of *qi*/breaths and responsive to the energies of the earth, provided a particularly compelling example of authority which seemed to rely solely on symbolic and moral pressure and did not need coercion. As with the system of authoritative nomenclature which enabled animals to be controlled through a thorough grasp of their name and taxonomic position, this notion is attached to the idea of a system of thoroughly articulated categories which create order through nothing other than the purity and balance of their arrangement, an arrangement which is in the full sense rectified and harmonious. This is a classic instance of the effects of symbolic violence in which the foundational historical acts of force and annexation are obscured in a system of 'pure' signs and sounds which seem to have no history and no politics behind them and exert their influence by their apparent conformity with the order of the universe itself. (One might observe that the unacknowledged relationship between the enjoyment of the spectacle of 'nature' in the present, the capacity of engagement with nature to reduce and alleviate structural tensions and thus alleviate sources of challenge to dominant forces, follows an identical logic, even though the expansion of chains of legitimacy now means that no overt link is made between acceptance of the dictates of the state or the economic system and the comfort and pleasure taken in watching or sharing space with animals or consuming animal-related cultural products. This is so much so that any attempt to point to the political dimensions of this act appears a crude Marxist reductionism. Given the powerful link between the consolidation of the domestic realm and ornamental pleasure in animals, one might observe that this resistance to any consideration of the politics of contemporary engagements with animals is also a resistance to the breaking of the charmed circle of domestic life, much as the excessive politicisation of Mao's China eradicated the autonomy of the domestic sphere and also condemned household pets other than birds, pushing the issue in the other direction.)

As it is in all contexts, including our own, the animal world of early China was integrated with a powerful and comprehensive cosmology or series of cosmologies. Through the consolidation of the five phases theory which coincided more or less with the growth of the Qin and Han empires, all animals could be positioned in broad categories defined by their outer coverings – scaly, feathered, naked, hairy and armoured – which correlated with the five directions, five seasons, five elements and five colours. The self-referentiality of this system meant that each season and each direction had its characteristic animal, and each animal could be understood in relation to a balance of yin and yang forces. It is a cosmology of succession and of opposition: scaly animals like fish are opposed to hairy animals like wolves, as east is opposed to west, morning to evening, spring to autumn, and so on. What is central is the capacity to establish a series of correspondences and interrelations: a cycle in which the scaly was replaced by the feathered which was replaced by the naked which was replaced by the hairy which was replaced by the armoured, which was replaced by the scaly. Even more to the point, this comprehensive empire-wide cosmology was able to subsume and

neutralize local religious geographies and cosmologies which were often focused on local animal forms (whether ‘real’ or ‘mythical’), and which remained a source of local emotions and local commitments. What we see in the animals of the *Guideways Through Mountains and Seas*, is a geography and cosmology articulated prior to this process or at its early stages, when the heterogeneity of hybrid forms of animals stands as an analogue to the hybridised cultures of feudal states. These cultures were formed, in Strassberg’s eyes, by a process of aggregation following annexation, rather than by systematic description founded on the elimination of aberrant forms which reminded representatives of centralized culture of the substratum of cultural and political commitments, and indeed of local organizations and imaginations of fauna which preceded the formation of the imperial state. A much less heterodox and diversified imperial religious zoo would replace it, leaving far more deified bureaucrats and far fewer peculiar animals which seemed to incarnate spirits of place. The slow retreat of the local in favour of the imperial was underway in the Han and continued in subsequent dynasties.

Sterckx’s book stresses the central place of ideas of transformation in the discourse about animals and their generation in Early China. He points to the difference from the dominant zoological tradition in Greek and post-Greek thought in the west, where the fixing of species boundaries is a fundamental concern. In part we may see this tendency in Greek thought as helping to create and following on from a struggle between a zoological system founded on the careful articulation of categories and a mythological system stressing metamorphosis. We find it hard to think without this particular opposition between mythological and scientific. It leads us to a political reading: the strong linkage between the power of the modern state and science and its definitive categories, leads those anxious to challenge the dominant system of power and thought by invoking mythic and poetic ideas of shape-shifting, vulnerability and mutability, which are seen as the antithesis of a system of institutional authority grounded on the establishment of norms and the exclusion of those who cannot fit them (the insane, transgender people, all those who might be grouped under the heading of ‘queer’, homeless beggars and so on).

The discussions of transformation and animals in Sterckx’s book suggest another and indeed opposing way in which a cosmology of transformation might be linked to dominant power. The power of the sage ruler is to have all possible shifts and alterations comfortably within his grasp: the correlative cosmology of the five phases theory takes the regularity of seasonal transitions as its pre-eminent model of order. The ruler moves from taking up the fecund energies of scaly water dwellers in spring, to adopting the fiery, flighty powers of birds in summer, to the grounded mature, and centred power of naked animals in late summer, to the warming energies of beings with thickened hairy coats in autumn, the season of harvest and slaughter, while in the hard, dark, frozen time of winter it is the armoured world of tortoises with their slow permanence with which he is associated. These shifts constitute an inexorable transformative logic over which the sage ruler

presides. But through his sovereignty over taxonomies and nomenclatures and his command of the moral energies in music and ceremonies another kind of control is afforded, one in which processes of hybridisation and change are rendered not dissonant but predictable to the discerning mind, incapable of discomforting those who have already mastered all of the underlying principles and thus see a world in which political action, morality, non-human life and topography are fused as a linked structure.

In the world of texts, such a magnificent synthesis can be fabricated and a state of cosmic harmony joining ruler and compliant beasts can be imagined. But this order is almost always seen as a long-lost beginning. Those coping with the fissions and fusions of bureaucratic offices, with the failures of animal breeding programmes to produce the dreamed-of faultless pedigree bloodlines, and myriad others were endlessly frustrated in their quests to construct this state of equipoise. It is much as the solace afforded by the image of a natural world which is a peaceful companion other to its human twin constantly eludes those who dream of it, troubled by the fear of collapsing ecosystems, species becoming extinct and a sense of ever-more cramped and intrusive human relationships. If the idea of the biological animal has at its heart this dream image of a stable, companionate autonomous being which will be an object of reverent devotion for its own sake, it is like all visions of pure love, hopelessly compromised by the omnipresence of unresolved and unresolvable political and institutional struggles. Rather than seeing the politicised animals of early China as representatives of a cultural system with which we have no way of engaging fully, it seems helpful to read the texts this past offers carefully for the insights they may provide for a history of power, thought and animals which is in a full sense, our own.