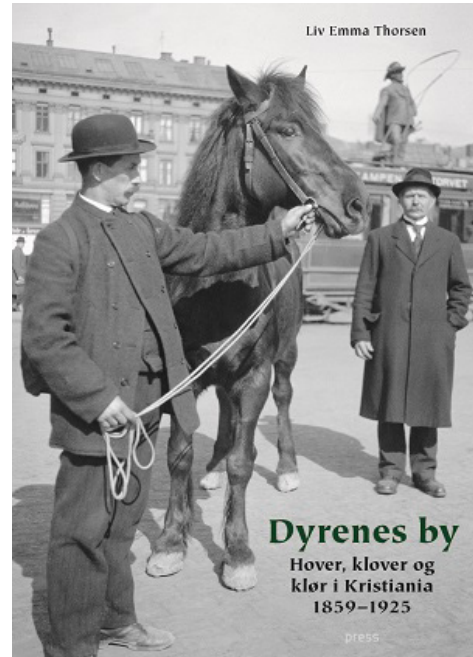


Liv Emma Thorsen: *Dyrenes by. Høver, klover og klør i Kristiania 1859–1925* (The Town of Animals: Hooves, Cloven Hooves, and Claws in Kristiania [Oslo] 1859–1925). Forlaget Press 2020.

Professor Emerita Liv Emma Thorsen's new book delves into a town of animals. In this richly illustrated volume she subtly reveals the central roles played by equine, bovine and avian inhabitants in the daily bustle of the rapidly expanding and modernizing town of Kristiania (Oslo) between 1859 and 1925.

Thorsen is an expert on the history of everyday life and animal history. Indeed, she is a pioneer in human-animal studies, publishing, for instance, an important book on the cultural history of dogs (*Hund! Fornuft og følelser*, Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2001) and the internationally path-breaking study on the individuality, lives and deaths of animals that form part of a taxidermy collection of a museum in Sweden (*Elephants are not Picked from Trees: Animal Biographies in Gothenburg Natural History Museum*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 2014).

The starting point for her current book and its selection of focal animal spe-



cies is based on the declared goals of the first animal protection association in the Nordic countries, founded in Oslo in 1859. The association had three key goals: first, to improve the living condition of horses; second, to lessen the suffering of animals being slaughtered, and thirdly to protect wild birds. In her distinctive history of the city, Thorsen focuses on these divergent groups of animals: horses, cattle and birds.

This proves to be an original and rewarding combination in a historical inquiry. On the one hand, it brings to the fore the involvement of horses in city

transportation and the growth and transformation of slaughterhouses, which have both received international attention. However, Thorsen's study provides an interesting Nordic perspective on a rather small city, whereas much of the existing literature on the subject concentrates on Anglo-American metropolises, or on the largest cities in continental Europe. On the other hand, the inclusion of wild birds in *Dyrenes by* is a refreshingly new approach. It transcends the habitual division between domesticated and wild animals by examining them in one and same historical and cultural context. Furthermore, it brings to the fore birds, who have been very much present in the urban environment, but have hitherto remained in the shadow of mammals in animal history. Many aspects of birds are discussed in this book, but two extremes are particularly noteworthy: on the one hand, they were perceived as small and helpless and in need of human aid, especially during the harsh wintertime; on the other hand, birds were ruthlessly exploited for their feathers which were sought after as a luxury adornment to fashionable hats for women.

The purpose of Thorsen's book is to "write horses, cows and wild bird into the history of the capital city" of Norway. She succeeds splendidly in this task. She insightfully discloses the everyday urban life of animals in Kristiania and discloses how animals and animal bodies formed

an integral part of urban space in the city. She follows living individuals and their animal footprints – hooves, cloven hooves and claws – as well as tracing their bodies and body parts as they are transformed into consumer goods.

In historical research on animals, primary sources pose specific challenges, but, as animal historians have shown, they are not insurmountable. Thorsen positively states how traces of the presence of animals have become impressed in a variety of historical materials. She notes that urban animals can be studied in a manner similar to research on human town dwellers: by asking where they came from, where they lived and how they died. Thorsen has skillfully and painstakingly collected and analysed a variety of sources, such as photographs, memoirs, oral history collections, scholarly publications, statistics and other official forms of documentation. It is apparent that this research is based on extensive knowledge on human-animal studies, yet its dominating feature is its empirical profoundness.

My attention was especially drawn to the numerous eye-catching photographs that are printed and analysed in the study. These photographs disclose the myriad presence of animals in the urban setting of Kristiania. Indeed, even photographs of urban settings that are devoid of animals at the moment the image was captured, actually reveal their

existence and vicinity. Thorsen shows, for example, how watering fountains built along the sides of streets remind us of the need for thirsty horses to replenish themselves in this urban environment. These fountains were an important element in the infrastructure of the town and were not only key places for horses, but also for the humans that worked with them. Watering stations for horses formed a vital part of a complex set of daily spatial and temporal urban practices before the advent of motorised forms of transportation.

*Dyrenes by* is an important book as it discloses, in great detail, the multispecies dynamic of life in Kristiania between the late 1850s and mid-1920s. Thorsen notes that as a part of the modernisation process in Norway, animals began

to be viewed as old-fashioned. Hence, they not only disappeared from the sight of townspeople, but also from historical narratives. Now Thorsen has succeeded in rewriting the history of modernising Oslo by incorporating non-human animals into the narrative of city as agents and participants and, importantly, as co-constructors. Her book is a valuable contribution with a rich stream of empirical evidence. The book reads well and opens the animal perspective to a wider audience, too. Furthermore, in tandem with the book, an exhibition was staged on urban animals in the Oslo Museum (<https://www.oslomuseum.no/urban-animals/>). The book and the exhibition will, hopefully, pave the way for including animals in mainstream history, both in scholarly and popular contexts.

TAINA SYRJÄMAA

*University of Turku*

taisyr@utu.fi