

Book Review by Harfiyah Haleem

ANIMAL WELFARE IN ISLAM by Al-Hafiz Basheer Ahmad al Masri, The Islamic Foundation, 2007, p/b ISBN 978 0 86037 595 1, 180 pp, price £9.95

The first edition of this book by Al-Hafiz al-Masri (1914-1992) was published as *Animals in Islam* by the Athene Trust (now Compassion in World Farming) in 1988. I came across a shorter version not many years later called *Islamic Concern for Animals* which consists of only the first chapter. Since then the book has been out of print and unavailable. This welcome new edition has four chapters, the first of which has the same name, the second is 'Vegetarianism and Meatism', then 'Animal Sacrifice (in various religions) and finally 'Halal meat: the bone of contention'.

The last chapter is mainly of interest to Muslims living in non-Muslim countries, as it goes in some detail into the confusing controversies about whether or not to eat the food of the Christians, the generally-agreed *fiqh* conclusion being 'If in doubt, recite "*Bismillah, Allahu Akbar*" over the meal before eating it.

The chapter on 'Animal Sacrifice' shows how human beings (as in the story of Abraham and Isma'il) moved from human sacrifice to animal sacrifice, and how Islam changed animal sacrifice from a way to support and enrich priests into a charitable act, benefiting pilgrims and poor people. The chapter ends with an Appendix containing a 1986 letter from the Hajj authorities detailing recent progress in making use of the vast quantities of animal sacrifices made on the Hajj.

In the chapter on vegetarianism Al-Masry admits to being an inveterate 'meatarian' by upbringing, 'otherwise, at heart, he is a vegetarian by conviction'. He then proceeds to demolish every logical argument for eating meat, saying, amongst other things, that all the necessary vitamins and minerals, even Vitamin B12, can be found in vegetarian diets if carefully balanced.

The most interesting chapter is the first one, showing the enlightened provisions for good treatment of animals embodied in the Qur'an and Sunnah, which is no doubt why this was published separately. I know this book is highly respected and has been long awaited by animal welfare activists. At the moment it is particularly topical, since the Police have recently targeted the more extreme animal rights campaigners in a major operation in UK and Belgium. It is not confined to Islam, but mentions too the good things said in other religions about treating animals with care and respect. Al-Masry's scholarship is broad and well founded, and the book deserves to be read by all Muslims, and all who want to know what Islam says about animals.