

## GUEST EDITORS' NOTE

### Unbalanced reciprocities: the history of relationships between animals

This supplement to *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos* is a special issue about the history of animals, the result of an idea from four Brazilian researchers dedicated to this topic for some time. We the editors (Regina, Natascha, Gabriel, and Nelson) have shared this fascination with the possibilities for research and reflection within the Animal Studies Center (CEA), which opened in December 2019. The CEA is part of the Coleção Brasileira research group based at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. This is one of our first collective initiatives.

But why is this issue special? First, it is groundbreaking in Brazilian historiography. After a survey of the literature, we found that various Brazilian journals in anthropology and other areas of the humanities have already published important dossiers on animal studies, but we were unable to find any initiative of this kind in the most notable history journals. Despite the growing quantity of good work on the history of animals by Brazilian historians, this topic has not yet been approached beyond (laudable) individual initiatives, and until now no publication has served as a touchstone or pioneer in this promising area of interest. Our intent here is to “get this show on the road” of the historiography made in Brazil, to borrow the words of the singer Sérgio Sampaio.

This issue is also special because it presents a provocative definition of the history of animals, starting from the title itself. We wish to explore “relationships between animals,” and here we have deliberately abandoned the human/nonhuman animal dichotomy; this classic separation establishes hierarchies instead of emphasizing connections between species. In just one category (nonhumans), it combines all species of animal life with one exception (humans), but it also favors a certain correspondence (humans  $\leftrightarrow$  nonhumans) instead of allowing the possibility of a spectrum of relationships between all kinds of animals, in a wide variety of vectors and networks. Questioning the radical binary between human and nonhuman animals repositions biological, ethical, and philosophical aspects of the human condition, “holding humanity down” (Walker, 2016, p.59).

Another aspect that has been emphasized starting from the title we chose is found in the unbalanced reciprocities. Considering the history of all animal species in relational terms implies considering interdependence, coexistence, interactions, and reciprocities. They are all agents, each in their own way and in different circumstances, even if most act without conscious intentionality (Maia, 2017). But these reciprocities oscillate in a constant state of unbalance, forged over time in the context of force, power, submission, and/or alliance between animals, including *Homo sapiens*.

With so many intentions, we could not choose any Brazilian publication other than *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos* for this effort. This journal of the area of history has always cultivated transdisciplinarity in pioneering directions and with audacity, and stayed in line with international best practices, demanding readers, and undeniably high-quality editing and content. The editorial team has demonstrated its trust by accepting our proposal, and we hope that this issue also shares these notable qualities.

This special issue abounds with birds, hippos, jaguars, pumas, llamas, and rabbits. Extinct animals, vegetarian humans, conquistadors, and so many others show that history writing must include animal diversity beyond humans. Myriad zoological species that are constantly moving in space and time are not passive vessels but rather actors in processes of transformation, since history is “also” made with animals, which play a key role “in the unfolding of several historical processes” (Nance, 2016, p.5). This is not anthropomorphism, but rather an indication of their participation in the effects and results of very specific actions, without intentionality (Shaw, 2013, p.7).

In organizing this issue we sought to include authors from various institutions, with various themes, methodological approaches, and geographical areas. The contributions are the result of independent research, addressing a variety of topics and expressing distinct analyses. The texts traverse different theoretical and methodological paths, presenting several documentary and bibliographical delineations. Our project is intended to be critical, positive, and (we hope) provisional, since it has already become a reality and we hope it will be surpassed.

Animal bodies, with their stealthy movements and sounds, present themselves as rich documentary sources. Birds that sing as they haven't in ages, taking advantage of the silence resulting from the human covid-19 pandemic, emphasize the importance of sound landscapes. In Andalusia, this clearer birdsong makes it easier to reflect on their relations with humans; the songs are documentary evidence of how birdsong is full of history and modulates in a dialog with anthropic transformations of time and space. In Colombia, dozens of hippopotamuses that move throughout the Middle Magdalena Valley are living memories of the drug trafficker Pablo Escobar's famous zoo. They are uncontrollable and alter landscapes and ecosystems as they interact with native fauna, linking the history of zoos, urbanization, political life, government action, and conservation/destruction of the natural environment. On the border between Argentina and Brazil, large cats like pumas and jaguars demarcate their own territories for hunting and mating, confronting the geographical spaces of political boundaries between nations, national park areas, and the advance of agriculture. As they move, these great cats challenge and spatially overlap human intentions of dividing territories. Stuffed specimens in the extensive collections of natural history museums of Caribbean monk seals, a species first described in 1492 and declared extinct in 2008, are a true document of the museological practices of the modern world and its role in the ruthless persecution of fauna by human beings. They are all that remains of greed in the name of knowledge and controlling nature that were the *coup de grace* for so many species. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the cunning and furtive movements of large felines in Brazil's great central forests often frustrated the photographers from Theodore Roosevelt's expedition as they tried to construct a repertoire of images of

these animals to represent not only human domination of the natural environment, but also the strength of American imperialism.

Interactions between species have a long history and have mobilized human societies over time through the challenges and potential of these encounters. Llamas and rabbits move between domestication, laboratories, and zoonotic diseases, between utility, cultural representations, and threats to humans. In the Andes, llamas shared an interconnected history with human beings since their domestication by pre-Colombian civilizations. Their bodies were transformed in these interactions as they were domesticated, threatened, manipulated in laboratories, and transformed into cultural objects and a variety of representations. Between Australia and Brazil, rabbits appeared as pests and entered into conflict with Australia's endemic species, encouraging scientists to create biological control strategies by manipulating viruses in laboratories, within a dense ethical, political, ecological, and immunological context.

In research on human actions and representations, the wide array of attitudes between anthropocentrism and coexistence assumes complex and paradoxical nuances. In the delirium of human superiority, and humanity's supposed power over other animal species, even vegetarianism in twentieth-century Brazil was unable to abandon the idea that nonhuman animals are inferior. In moralizing discourse that at times used scientific reason as a recourse, the hierarchies and asymmetries between living beings remained unquestionable. Between idealizations and the denial of death and pain, human supremacy was once again reaffirmed in the refusal to eat flesh. But fortunately, human animals also establish contradictions, and these far outperformed the narratives of destruction. Careful analysis of history and transoceanic dynamics since the early sixteenth century casts light on an obscured tradition in which many humans have attempted to construct a wide variety of relationships with other animals, plants, and natural elements.

In the "Historiographic review" section, the assessment of Latin American historiography – as well as a thought-provoking earlier tradition of natural history writings – highlights the many possibilities that currently exist and extends a tempting invitation to Brazilian researchers.

An interview with professor and historian Harriet Ritvo (a pivotal reference in the field of animal history) demonstrates the relevance, density, and consolidation of the history of animals in the international academic debate, while also highlighting the pioneering nature of her important work.

It is time for Brazilian historians to attentively, rigorously, and systematically look to this fascinating area of study, not only in individual initiatives but as a collective effort, in congresses, publications, projects, research groups, extension activities, and knowledge dissemination. In a country inhabited by so many animal species, the survival of so many of them – including our own – depends on our willingness to enter into alliances, relationships of respect, openness to knowledge, a love of diversity, the joy of coexistence, and the active desire to ensure survival for all. This disposition will inevitably be linked to ethics, science, political struggle, and the construction of new founding values for Brazilian society.

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