

Foreword

Environmental history and culture of nature. What are the relations between such terms? Between history and nature, environment and culture, it is possible to make out numerous threads woven into human societies, historical time, the cultural production of nature and its representations, but also the natural conditions within which man continually reinvents his trajectory on the planet.

The volume that the reader has in his/her hands gives this field of investigation a privileged position and is invested twice over with special significance. In the first place, it continues the story of another two organized previously. In 2002, *History and Nature* carried stimulating articles, as did *Environmental history (made) in Latin America*, of 2005. *Environmental history and culture of nature* is a new foray into the theme, which stands undeniably at the head of the contemporary historiographical agenda. Taken together, such dossiers amount to a set of twenty texts by twenty-one authors from different institutions in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, the United States, Mexico and Panama. They form a trilogy that should be required reading for researchers devoting themselves to the theme of the environmental history of Latin America.

In the second place, this publication arises out of the activities related to the organization of the IV Symposium of the Latin-American and Caribbean Society of Environmental History (SOLCHA), between 28 and 30 May 2008, in the Federal University of Minas Gerais. From its first meeting in Chile (2003), the systematization of efforts in Cuba (2004), the realization of the foundation of SOLCHA in Carmona (2006) and the fourth meeting of these researchers to be held in Brazil, the *Varia História* has proved itself a fertile channel of debate and dissemination of historical information from an environmental perspective. Alert to the possibilities of dialogue between various disciplines, it assumes a pioneer character in the Brazilian academic milieu, encouraging contact and the exchange of ideas among researchers from various countries who have frequented our pages through their articles. The three dossiers are, indisputably, linked to the primordial trajectory of this international scientific society and to the development of a relatively recent field of historical enquiry.

The role of Law in the material and symbolic change in the Colombian landscape by Germán Palacio, is an analysis located at the interface of the history of law, the study of the land question in Colombia and the historical formation of landscapes. Exploring the process of regulation and codification of private land ownership, the author highlights the symbolic dimensions of the law in environmental transformation.

John Soluri, in *Mass markets, biodiversity and breeding improvements of export bananas, 1920 to 1980*, paints a dynamic picture of the banana market and of the global demand for genetically diversified stocks, in complete contradiction to the growing homogenization of crops. His article brings to the fore the relations between agriculture, science, the market economy, and socio-environmental conditions in the New World.

In *The Berkeley School's cultural-historical Geography: a precursor to Environmental History's emergence* Mathewson and Seemann analyse a tradition of thinking, inaugurated by Carl Sauer, especially tuned to contemporary environmental history. Such a current combats deterministic thinking, focuses on the historical-cultural context of landscapes, reinterprets the characteristics of pre-Columbian societies and postulates the change of attitudes and values in western societies.

Stuart McCook, in *Chronicle of a plague foretold: crop epidemics and the Environmental History of Coffee in the Americas* makes a study in which he provides evidence of the possibilities of a global and transnational approach to environmental problems. Without ignoring the various factors involved in the environmental history of coffee, he asserts that agricultural plague constitutes a privileged portal, as it involves analyses of agriculture, society, science and the global economy.

Portuguese America's economic substantivism and forest history, by Diogo Cabral is a stimulating reflection of a young Brazilian researcher on the ways opened up by dialogue between environmental history, economic history (from the players' perspective and social solidarity networks) and a social history in which nature is not only a geo-bio-physical landscape but also a battlefield.

Dora Shellard questions the wilderness of the frontier landscape, as if no mark existed in them of the cultural intervention of various populations, legitimizing their occupation. From the reports of expeditions, *Landscape descriptions: building wilderness and Indian territories at the Captaincy of São Paulo at the end of the 18th Century* she approaches a contemporary debate on the social justice and environmental balance of protected areas and indigenous land.

Rivers and governments in the state of Paraná: bridges, 'hydraulic force' and the era of the dams (1853-1940), by Gilmar Arruda, focuses on the process of transformations present in the actions of government, as well as on the technological conditions involved in the economic use of rivers. It is

noteworthy as a study of bridge construction and the emergence of the 'dam age', fusing approaches drawn from historical geographical perspectives and the social history of rivers.

Espindola and Wendling build their analysis at the confluence of history and agronomy, discussing the advance of the grassland (*capim-colonião*) on land previously covered by forest in the mid region of the River Doce. Among the socio-economic factors and the biological characteristics of this grass of African origin, *Biological elements in the River Doce's territory configuration* deals with aspects of the interaction between human activities and the natural world.

Finally, *Varia Historia* proudly presents its third dossier devoted to the relations between history and nature. All through the articles, the study of the social-historical diversity that has arisen within the natural environment prompts the questioning of several myths to which our societies have paid heavy tribute. In this way, it is our intention to contribute to awakening/nourishing a positive and pointed disquiet, in which our thinking never rests content with unequivocal replies.

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REGINA HORTA DUARTE

(editor)

Departamento de História/UFMG

reginahd@uai.com.br