

## Review

Hilda Kean and Philip Howell ed., *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp.560 – ISBN 978-1-138-19326-0

Erica Fudge

University of Strathclyde

When I was doing my PhD at the University of Sussex in the early 1990s I remember being approached by another postgrad in the School of English and American Studies: ‘Are you the person doing the PhD on bear baiting?’ he asked. When I answered in the affirmative, he noted: ‘It’s nice that people can still do PhDs like that.’ He could only conceive of what I was doing as antiquarian – a gathering and marshalling of facts, nothing more. A few years later, on finishing my PhD I found myself on the job market, getting long-listed for some posts and short-listed for fewer, and failing to find employment. What I need, I recall saying to a friend, is for a job on bear baiting to come up. Something along those lines did actually appear – not quite bear baiting, but a post at Bath Spa University College (as it was called then) on the early modern period with a particular interest in human relationships with the natural world: if I can’t get this job, I remember thinking, I’ll never get a job. I managed to get it, and have – fortunately – been employed ever since. It felt like a one-off back then to see a job with that focus, but things are changing, and have changed quite rapidly. As Hilda Kean and Philip Howell’s new collection shows, not only are there a lot of people working in the field of what they term ‘animal-human history’ (the footnotes and references here offer a substantial and extremely helpful sense of the amount of work in the field), the range of work taking place is varied, in relation to disciplinary direction, focus and theoretical engagement. All of these things are visible here.

The collection is presented by Howell and Kean in their introduction as ‘a guide and resource for current and prospective historians’ (3), and the book is aimed as ‘a survey and a sourcebook’, offering a glimpse of the ‘state of the art’ and available to be ‘consulted for up-to-date discussions of the key themes and arguments of the discipline.’ (7) This self-conscious aim to offer essays that might introduce newcomers to the field makes this collection a crucial and truly contribution in the fast-expanding field. I can imagine undergraduate dissertation students being sent to specific chapters to begin to understand where their own research might start just as I can see established scholars finding new ways of thinking here.

The book contains twenty substantial chapters which are arranged in three sections: ‘Animals and the Practice of History’, ‘Problems and Paradigms’, and ‘Themes and Provocations’. These are topped and tailed by a clear introduction which sets out key ideas in the field and in the collection, and a useful conclusion by Howell that considers the debates about the political and ethical possibilities of animal-human histories and explores possible ways forward. It is completed by an Epilogue by Harriet Ritvo, one of the founders of the field. Overall, the chronological range covered goes from the medieval to the modern, with a few scholars – notably Boria Sax and Karl Steel – exploring earlier classical and Christian debates.

The first section is the most coherent, and includes seven essays that take as their focus the ways in which animals have been taken up in different fields: national history, political history, public history, wildlife conservation, the history of science, veterinary history, and museum studies. As this list shows, the range here includes some obvious areas but also some that are, perhaps, less familiar. All analyse not only what the inclusion of animals might do to established fields, but what the fields might do to animal-human relations. So, Sandra Swart begins her essay on animals and nationalism by recognizing the role of animal emblems – the three lions on the shirts of the England football team, the ‘Springboks’ (the South African rugby team), and so on. But she then raises ecological questions about ‘invading’ species, and considers links between animal territorial wars and human national conflicts. As such, she shows a real range of ways that thinking about animals might impact thinking about nations and nationalism and so establishes the potential complexity of the contribution the study of human relationships with animals might have on history. Her essay is followed by Mieke Roscher’s study of shifts in political history – from a focus on institutions to histories of bodies as part of the field, and shows, using examples from the history of the Third Reich, how animals can and should be included in this subfield. Hilda Kean’s own essay, on the place of animals in public history, discusses some Australian examples of museum and memorial practices to show how public discourse and art can lead in innovative ways to the presencing of animals’ roles in the past, and the essay that follows extends what might be meant by ‘public history’ in unexpected and fascinating ways. Jan-Erik Steinkrüger traces the complex histories of the ‘wild’ as a space that has been perceived to be without any history in relation to the history of national parks (he takes the Serengeti in Tanzania as his example) in which animals and landscapes can themselves be ‘considered a form of cultural memory’ (111). Wildlife conservation, he argues, is part of the project of history, but in it, too often, forgetting is just as important as remembering: ‘To become a wildlife conservation area, the human imprint typically becomes neglected or alternatively sanitised following the seductive by erroneous notion that “wilderness has no history”.’ (113) The disappearance of human agency, reflected in the removal of indigenous peoples from park areas, is perceived as necessary – as if the wild was always unpeopled. As such, his essay not only places conservation practices within the discipline of history, showing that they need to be read historically, it also shows how they are themselves acts of memorialising.

Following Steinkrüger’s piece, which marks the expansion of the focus from nations, to politics, and the public sphere to the land, come three essays that focus in very different ways on practices of knowledge that involve actual animals. The first is Robert G.W. Kirk’s essay on experimental animals and the history of science, in which traces differences between that field and social history, arguing for what he calls a ‘new moral ecology of science’ in which a focus would be on ‘questions of how the embodied emotion alongside affective, moral and other values shape and are shaped by human-animal experimental encounter[s]’ (136). Abigail Woods’ contribution on the role of animals in the history of human and veterinary medicine looks at how ‘animals were not only shaped by human/veterinary medicine, [but] also shaped it.’ (147) She takes three foci – animals as experimental tools, as disease transmitters to humans, and as victims of disease in the history of animal health – and proposes that the contemporary ‘One Health’ movement that studies ‘problems at the interface of humans, animals and their environments’ (159) might offer a way forward for thinking of animals not as objects of study but as subjects, and so produce a less anthropocentric, and more animal-centric approach to both medical and human-animal history. In the final essay in this section, Liv Emma Thorsen traces the meanings and biographies of a range of animal objects on display in museum collections, arguing for their value to historians, and regarding them as objects that can challenge human ordering and categorizing processes, by making human violence against animals apparent, for example, and by refusing the generalising tendencies of history and placing

the individual creature under scrutiny. As a whole, this first section of the collection makes visible the range, potential and innovation of a wide range of animal-human histories, opening up the different areas for research by future animal-human historians. But it is possible that there might be another by-product of this work: this section shows non-historians the range of possibilities contained within the discipline. As such the section is about animal-human relations, but it is also about what historians do.

The second section of the collection – ‘Problems and Paradigms’ – is less clearly focused than the first, taking as it does what the introduction calls ‘key historiographical problems’: here they are about agency, representation, anthropomorphism, exhibition, ‘being with’, and emotions. Like the previous section, it contains a range of materials for study: literary, visual, philosophical, and audible (radio broadcasts) as well as archival documentation. It begins with Howell’s very successful exploration of debates about agency, which includes discussion of the humanist refusal to regard animals as historical actors, the emerging emphasis in ‘Big History’ on the environment as a key (if not the key) determining force, and the idea of agency as distributed, as existing among and between things. This essay should become the introduction to the issue of agency, for historians and others, as it covers a vast amount of ground succinctly and clearly. Jennifer McDonnell’s overview of Victorian ideas – from Darwin to sentimentality – traces ways in which work in animal studies might not only retrieve the hidden creatures of this – as any – period, but might also challenge established assumptions: instead of ‘sentiment’, with all its potentially negative connotations, McDonnell suggests ‘care ethics’. The focus on literary representation in McDonnell’s essay shifts in J. Keri Cronin’s contribution, which offers a useful overview of debates in key works in visual animal studies by Stephen Eisenmann, Steve Baker and Diana Donald, and offers an overview of a variety of ways that animal-human histories might think with visual representation.

Following this piece, Boria Sax traces the histories of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, via two early twentieth-century exhibits - one of a human and the other of a chimpanzee, through millennia of thinking. The essay is more broad-brushstroke than others in the collection, but it raises usefully the anxiety about human difference from animals that is a constant across history, manifested differently in different places and at different times. Helen Cowie’s essay that follows Sax’s also takes exhibitions as a way in, but offers a useful range of perspectives that can be taken in historical analyses of zoos, focusing on questions of empire, power, sentience and agency. It offers a newcomer to the field a sense of the range of possibilities and of the questions that have been and are being asked in the field.

Carl Griffin’s essay also takes animal exhibition as a key piece of evidence (here the exhibition of a celebrity ox in early nineteenth-century England), in his bringing into focus the role that might be played by theoretical materials in historical analysis. Here he takes Donna Haraway’s conception of ‘being with’ as a way of thinking about the close links between violence and affection in the period, looking at sheep maiming and poisoning as well as the affectionate relationships between people and the pigs they were raising to slaughter and consume. As such, Griffin’s essay also brings agricultural animals into focus in this collection. Emotional attachment is also at the core of Ingrid H. Tague’s essay which offers a useful overview of intellectual debates – Christian, Cartesian, Montaignean, sentimental - and thinks about human-pet relations from the perspective of the history of emotions. And finally in this section, Michael Guida places animals within debates about the history of emotions in a different way by tracing the role, meaning and value attached to radio broadcasts of birdsong in England during the period after the First World War and during the Second World War. The essay brings in evidence from the history of the media (here the BBC) and academic and amateur ornithology to make its case for the perception of birds as markers of a constancy that

was being undermined by the conflicts that were uprooting so many 'truths' in the period. The essay advocates from this evidence for the place of birdsong – and so animals more generally – in the history of human emotions, which must itself 'become firmly part of social, cultural and political history.' (382).

The third and final section of the book is 'Themes and Provocations' which the introduction states as signalling an interest in 'larger themes in the history of animal-human relations.' (16) It is interesting that the themes that are included are all illustrating different aspects of human dominion at its most violent – breeding, warfare, hunting and eating. First, historians of science Neil Pemberton, Julie-Marie Strange and Michael Worboys look at the naturalisation of breeds from the early nineteenth century onwards (noting the dearth of historical materials on breeding practices before that time), and show how breeding practices and the ideas that support them are historically situated. Gervase Phillips' chapter 'Animals In and At War' could have been included in the first section as it offers an overview of historiographical debates within military history, but its place in the section on 'Themes and Provocations' might be because of its historical scope (from Homer to the twentieth century) but also because it recognises the range of different materials that can be brought to bear on the same subject: here neo-Darwinian readings of animal agency are read alongside twentieth-century soldiers' letters which present their animals not as Cartesian tools but as comrades. Howell's history of hunting likewise takes a wide view, from the 'hunting hypothesis' about human origins to masculinist and elitist histories of early modern hunting, and argues for a recognition of the complexity of hunting in history – in relation to its challenging of nature/culture boundaries but also its challenging of class separation. He offers too, like Griffin, another way of thinking about collaboration, or what he calls the 'therianthropic interdependence of humans and other animals' (461) which he suggests might be a '*nota bene*' beyond the realms of the history of hunting.

Finally, we have two very different essays on eating practices. Chris Otter traces the history of meat eating through a focus on production technologies and their impact on the animals. His essay looks only secondarily at questions of human taste but, in a discussion of horse meat shows the complex and sometimes contradictory place of equine flesh in modernity. As he states: 'Meat-eating has a multiplicity of dimensions: evolutionary, biological, gustatory, cultural, economic, ecological, ethical, perceptual. The study of meat-eating should, ideally, take all of these aspects into account.' (488) The same, indeed, might be said of animal-human histories more generally. The last essay in this final section is Karl Steel's intriguing reading of the medieval mystic Margery Kempe's autobiography, looking in particular at her refusal to eat meat and what Steel regards as her linked focus on her own fleshiness. This essay stands in fascinating relation to Otter's essay, opening up as it does another history of modernity, this one embedded not only in discourses of dominion – from Augustine and others – but also in the contemporary use of the medieval period as the dark time in human history that we have supposedly moved away from. Reading Kempe through the lens of current conceptions of embodiedness that are so central to posthumanist thinking he challenges a simple notion of the place of the past as lost, gone, moved away from; reading it as present in contemporary culture in a variety of ways.

This leads nicely to Howell's final summing up – which provides an up-to-the-minute overview of animal historiography, but which also refuses the 'triumphalism' of some claims for the field's arrival. This is not only, as Ritvo notes in her epilogue, because there are so many avenues still to follow in writing the history of animals and humans; it is because there are theoretical issues at stake that we need to continue to consider. What is the relationship between history and ethics? Is there one? Should there be one? Is including animals in what has been regarded as a humanist discipline enough to challenge that humanism? There are no simple answers to these questions, but

this collection shows in many fascinating ways just how we are going about attempting to address them.