

Historical Animal Geographies

Edited by Sharon Wilcox & Stephanie Rutherford. London, Routledge. 2018. 214pp. £105.00 hardback, £31.49 e-book ISBN: 9781138701175 or ISBN: 9781315204208.

'It is easy to forget that animals have a history' (p.47), writes Camilla Royle in her contribution to this stimulating volume. Edited by Sharon Wilcox and Stephanie Rutherford, and bringing together a range of scholars, conceptual framings and empirical case-studies, this edited collection seeks to counter this tendency towards forgetting by affirming the importance of historical analysis to the subfield of animal geographies. Their 'historical animal geography' project, defined as 'the exploration of how spatially-situated human-animal relations have changed over time' (p.3), necessarily demands the cross-pollination of historical work on animals with the geographical concepts of scale, place, space and landscape. As they argue, the relational ontologies of contemporary more-than-human scholarship should be deployed to pay increased attention to the agency of animals across time as well as space.

The book is organised into four themes - 'The home – shared spaces of cohabitation'; 'The city – historical animals in and out of sight'; 'The nation – historical animal bodies and human identities'; and 'The global – imperial networks and the movements of animals' – expressing the shared geographical and conceptual focus of constituent chapters. Each author, however, individually explores the relations between particular humans and animals in a specific context. Creatures as diverse as monkeys, earthworms and elephants appear amidst slave plantations, retirement homes, and museums.

Across its breadth, the collection therefore highlights the potentially productive tensions that exist within the subfield of animal geographies, between its more cultural, empirical, theoretical and critical wings. Philo and MacLachlan's examination of animal slaughter, alongside Nast's discussion of the companionship between nineteenth-century miners and their fighting dogs, demonstrates a desire to uncover the socio-economic structures of violence affecting both animals and humans. Other chapters, such as that by Urbanik, by contrast focus more on telling detailed *empirical* accounts than addressing wider political or ethical questions. Moreover, particularly loaded terms are used with varying degrees of critical and contextual discussion. For example, Howell historicises the meaning of 'the pet' and its status as an animal. By contrast, Lloro-Bidart's discussion of the 'middle landscape' of the veteran's retirement home refers to 'nature' and 'more-than-human species' with little pause for clarification, her conceptual emphasis directed elsewhere. Finally, the editors also incorporate re-printed works by Wolch and Ritvo, each influential when considering the scholarly genealogy of the present volume. Perhaps a little context – the specific reasoning behind selecting *these* pieces for inclusion, for example – would have been welcome. Ultimately, then, how such tension – or reciprocity – between different sub-disciplinary agendas might be resolved (or productively engaged) remains open.

The collection also includes some insightful responses to the methodological challenges raised by historical animal scholarship. Royle's dialogue with evolutionary biology enables her to animate earthworm existence with a tangible historicity and environmental agency. Elsewhere, Lambert demonstrates the value of reading documents 'against the grain', recovering an animal presence alongside subaltern voices to propose a less 'speciesist' history of slavery. A key methodological issue spanning the chapters concerns 'agency', with several authors (e.g. Webb's discussion of urban pig-keeping) adopting a framework akin to actor-network theory. Whilst recognising animals' abilities to shape historical change – as vital constituents of more-than-human assemblages – the *liveliness* of other creatures is somewhat evacuated, flattened, and rendered 'shadowy'¹ by this approach. Creatures 'with capacities to affect and be affected' (p.2) feel oddly absent. In historical work we must avoid essentialising animals by appealing to homogenised *collectives* (be they 'pigs',

'elephants' or otherwise), reinforcing as this does the kind of 'species thinking' subject to much recent criticism.²

In summary, across the volume one can question the kind of historical project being undertaken. Is this a historical geography *of/with* animals; a *historical animal geography*; or an *animal historical geography*? Perhaps such labels articulate less distinct projects than they name some of the possible responses to the challenge laid down here by Wilcox and Rutherford. Moreover, whilst the work in this collection remains both engaging and urgent – particularly so given the environmental challenges faced today – there remains scope for articulating *how* the different kinds of histories offered here might translate into the inclusive ethics and politics advocated in collection's epilogue.

Notes

[1] Philo, C., 2005. Spacing lives and lively spaces: partial remarks on Sarah Whatmore's Hybrid Geographies. *Antipode*, **37**(4), pp.824-833.

[2] See for example van Dooren, T., 2014. *Flight ways: Life and loss at the edge of extinction*. New York: Columbia University Press.

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