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Susan Nance, ed. *The Historical Animal.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015. 432 pp. $39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8156-3406-5; $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8156-3428-7.

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The Historical Animal, edited by Susan Nance, assembles sixteen essays on human-animal relationships across time, space, and species into a collection that is at once eclectic and uneven, perplexing and provocative. In the introduction, Nance claims ecumenicism as one of the greatest strengths of the emerging field she calls âAnimal History.â The substantive essays that form the heart of *The Historical Animal* make a compelling case for Nanceâs argument about the virtues of variety. In the process, they raise troubling but fruitful questions: Can a field that examines so many different kinds of creatures in so many times and places using so many methodologies actually be said to constitute a field at all? Or to put it more bluntly: Is thereâand should there beâone animal history, or many?

Featuring original work by scholars based in North America, Europe, and Africa, *The Historical Animal* examines each of these world regions, as well as Latin America. Apart from David Gary Shawâs âHorses and Actor-Networks: Manufacturing Travel in Late Medieval Englandâ and Zeb Tortoriciâs âAnimal Archive Stories: Species Anxieties in the Mexican National Archive,â the collection focuses mostly on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Equines star from the second essay, Abraham H. Gibsonâs âBeasts of Burden: Feral Burros and the American West,â to the last, Courtney E. Whiteâs âTony the Wonder Horse: A Star Study.â Primates, big cats, barnyard animals, cetaceans, and canines also receive extended attention, as do less studied animal subjects, including quaggas, muskoxen, tortoises, salamanders, and even a tiny Appalachian insect called the adelgid.

Though some authors highlight the stories of individual animalsâthe aforementioned Tony the Wonder Horse, a Galapagos tortoise nicknamed Port Royal Tom, a gorilla known as Michael who presented an account of his motherâs slaughter by Cameroonian poachers after learning American Sign Language, and a tubercular dairy cow whose tissue and fur still adhere to an ear punch held by the Ontario Veterinary Collegeâs collection of historical artifactsâmost focus on groups of animals defined by species, habitat, or category of human regard and use. Wildlife, animal performers, and work animals dominate the collection, with meat animals and companion animals playing supporting roles. Not surprisingly, some of the most stimulating essays in *The Historical Animal* examine creatures who transgressed or threatened to transgress such human-imposed categories: muskoxen introduced to Norway from Greenland in the late 1800s and early 1900s, for instance, who began in the 1960s to trouble farmers and hikers in the Dorve region, or the liminal equines produced through a campaign led by German-born South African taxidermist Reinhold Rau to restore the quagga (rendered extinct in the 1880s) by backbreeding plains zebras. To make sense of how various humans have historically related to this menagerie of animals, the authors draw on methods from material culture studies; science and technology studies; zoology; performance studies; and environmental, social, and cultural history. To the credit of the essay authors and Nance alike, the essays remain approachable to general readers even as they demonstrate the growing scholarly significance of animal history.

Ultimately, *The Historical Animal* makes two main

contributions to the historical study of relationships between humans and other animals. The first centers on the thorny epistemological dilemmas that hamper our efforts to âknowâ historical animals, while the second stems from the conceptual and interpretive challenges that inhere in casting nonhuman animals as subjects and agents in historical narratives and arguments.

Several essays follow the call by Etienne Benson and other scholars for historians to seek out sources capable of documenting âanimal traces.â[1] Tortorici, for instance, draws on Sarah Kayâs notion of ââghostly imprintsâ in the archivesâ to cast the repositories of parchment and vellum that document colonial Latin Americaâs past as âa complex biopolitical and necropolitical space that challenges us to be fully conscious of how animal life supports and complicates the archive stories we tellâ (pp. 83, 86). ConcepciÃ³n CortÃ©s Zulueta, meanwhile, posits that ânonhuman animal testimonies,â such as videotape of the gorilla Michael telling the story of his motherâs death, should remind historians that âthere is yet another side to some stories, a nonhuman side that mostly we have not taken into accountâ (p. 129). In the end, though, it is Sandra Swart who most concisely articulates this volumeâs broader call for scholars to look beyond documents and testimony, urging scholars to attend to âthe tactile, the auditory, the aromaticâeven the malodorous. Clearly, what is needed is an incorporation of the history of the senses as a part of the animal-sensitive historianâs analytical armouryâ (p. 70). âLooking at animals,â Swart asserts in a concluding riposte, âis not enough, since they are more than just their skinsâ (p. 71).

The perspectives advanced throughout *The Historical Animal* on the much-discussed issues of nonhuman subjectivity and agency are similarly broad and bold. A couple of essays examine what contributor Andria Pooley-Ebert terms âspecies agency.â While Pooley-Ebert employs âinterdisciplinary explorationâ to reveal the âspecies-specific behaviorsâ of rural and urban horses in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Illinois (p. 149), Nicola Foote and Charles W. Gunnels IV adopt a more explicitly zoological approach. âGalapagos animals,â they emphasize, âwere not always passive. Instead, multiple species demonstrated notable responses in reaction to first contact with humans, such as displaying phenotypic plasticity by quickly learning to recognize and resist human efforts to kill and trap themâ (p. 204). David Gary Shaw, meanwhile, harnesses the actor-network theory (ANT) pioneered by Bruno Latour, John Law, and others to mark out the limits of the agentive roles played by horses (and, by extension, other nonhuman animals). Because of the ââflatnessâ of ANTâs ontology,â Shaw notes, âanimalsâ historical importance is capped, pretty much like the importance of everything elseâ (p. 147).

Nance wraps up her helpful introduction by meditating on the interesting tension between her volumeâs singular titleâ*The Historical Animal*âand the multiplicity of historical animals her contributors trace. After posing the obvious questionâ âshould any one goal unite the field?ââNance contends that âAnimal History is about diversity and inclusion, whether of species or perspectives.â Thus âto require some kind of ethical purity test that might exclude researchers or readers would seem counterproductiveâ (p. 16). Compared to the endless battles over turf, status, and theoretical purity that continue to consume so many scholars, the broad-mindedness Nance expresses seems refreshingly positive. Such pluralism, in fact, may well offer the only sensible solution to a fundamental tension exposed by *The Historical Animal* and so many other efforts at synthesis. Given the fragmentation of history as a discipline, on the one hand, and the insufficiency of âthe animalâ as a category of analysis that simultaneously lumps together all the worldâs creatures while reifying the exceptional status of one speciesâhuman beingsâvis-Ã -vis all others, can âanimal historyâ ever become something more than the sum of its parts? Or is the field destined to posit a unity and coherence that remains underdeveloped even in works as thoughtful and stimulating as this one? Food for further thought, as both Nance and her contributors understand only too well.

Note

[1]. Etienne Benson, âAnimal Writes: Historiography, Disciplinarity, and the Animal Trace,â in *Making Animal Meaning*, ed. Linda Kalof and Georgina Montgomery (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 3-16.

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