

CfP Crossing Boundaries. Human-Animal Relations from Post-Petrine Russia to the Soviet State (1725-1991)

Discussion published by Helena Holzberger on Tuesday, January 31, 2023

The study of human-animal relations is one of the most promising fields in historiography. During the past three decades, it has evolved from animal activism to a highly theorized endeavor that tries to re-situate nonhuman species in societal contexts. Ranging from the large mammals of the seas down to small birds and insects, it discusses phenomena of coevolution, culturalization and commodification. Although pathbreaking works have been published on whaling, hunting, and the animal gaze, the study of human-animal relations remains peripheral in the context of imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. This is all the more surprising, considering that scholars have convincingly argued that exploring human-animal relations can provide us with important new insights and perspectives. Here, the still neglected cultural relationships of local ethnicities with certain species and the role animals play in imperial expansion are only two of the many aspects that deserve to be studied in more detail. While traditionally a strong focus has been set on the economic use of animals, a more thorough treatment of their everyday role in local communities still remains to be desired, as it has recently been shown not least in the example of the Bering Strait. This view would also expand the boundaries of environmental history which has rather been interested in the at times catastrophic consequences of resource extraction and processing instead of interspecies exchanges.

In order to address these desiderata, we suggest taking a *longue durée*-perspective on the interplay of human and nonhuman actors that ranges from post-Petrine Russia to the fall of the Soviet Union. We are looking for contributions with a spatial scope from western Russia to the Pacific Ocean, and from the steppes of Central Asia to the ice shelves of the Arctic Circle. With regards to the theoretical and methodological tools of the thriving field of human-animal studies, this forces us to re-evaluate established narratives of internal colonization (as in the example of the fur trade), culturalization (e.g., in pet-keeping and the emergence of livestock farming), and conflicting agency (as in the rather macabre tales of polar bears and Arctic explorers). What is more, in light of the lasting inaccessibility of Russian archives, it presents us with alternative avenues and opportunities in finding and interpreting historical sources. Thus, our workshop aims at bringing together scholars from such varying backgrounds like environmental, social and cultural history with the goal of producing a peer-reviewed special journal issue that delivers new approaches to an old relationship.

Possible contributions may include, but are not limited to, the following topics:

1. Human-animal encounters in contexts of imperial expansion
2. Trans-species agency and processes of culturalization
3. Commodification of animals from proto-capitalist to socialist economies
4. Food cultures in transition and the industrialization of animals
5. Human and nonhuman animals in gendered relations of power

Please submit an abstract of 250 words as well as a short bio by March 10, 2023. You will be notified by early April regarding acceptance.

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