

Introduction

by

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From the very beginning of civilization domestic animals constituted an undividable part in the life of human beings. They were present everywhere in daily life: for agricultural work, for transport of goods and men, both in times of war and peace, for ceremonial processions and as pets and faithful companions. They produced a variety of raw material that supplied man with food and goods that ultimately became indispensable for human life. Grazing animals were not only kept in the countryside but also within the city walls. Surprisingly enough, many stables for animals have been identified in the elegant houses which belonged to the urban elite in the Roman town Pompeii. Not only barking dogs, but also braying donkeys and bleating goats, added to the noise of the town, not to speak how they “enriched” the odours of the city. Everyone, not only the country dwellers, lived in proximity to animals. It is therefore remarkable that so little interest has been dedicated to the relationship of man and animal in ancient history and archaeology. One reason for this is the obvious fact that the primary material that animals leave behind in an archaeological context is of little interest to exhibit in museums. What are animal bones compared to a beautiful vase, signed by a master artisan? Furthermore, and probably even more important, is that we lack the personal experience which is vital to formulate relevant questions and to evaluate the information given in the source material. What does a modern urban dweller know about animal husbandry? The sources concerning animal breeding constitute fragmentary and scattered material belonging to a variety of academic disciplines, often strictly divided between science and humanities. In later years, however, several efforts have been made in creating new fields of interdisciplinary research, such as ethno-biology, zooarchaeology, bio-archaeology, only to name a few, that aim at filling the gap between scientific and humanistic disciplines. Progress has been made and it is necessary if we are to understand the interaction between man and nature.

It was therefore considered of great interest to organize a conference at the Swedish Institute in Rome in

September 2002 on the topic man and animal in antiquity. Our aim was to discuss and to explore the relationship between man and animals in the ancient world, from various viewpoints including a variety of academic disciplines and scholarly traditions, methods and theoretical viewpoints. The conference was confined to domestic animals and the participants were invited to explore questions regarding attitudes and mentalities towards them, such as caring and curing, ethics, morals and taboo, communication and artistic inspiration, thus going beyond the purely utilitarian aspects.

The domestication process was a true revolution in the history of mankind. It started ca 15000-10000 years ago when man first tamed wild species to use them or their products, and took the responsibility for their care, food and breeding. Through observation of wild species, man had learnt that only animals with certain characteristics and behavioural patterns could be domesticated. The first animal which was used by man was the tamed wolf, and it gave origin to the hundreds of breeds of dogs which we know today. The collaboration between man and dog has been a determining factor for the survival and development of man. The first livestock animals to be domesticated were probably goats and sheep and this process is closely connected with the agricultural revolution which took place in the “fertile crescent”, an area including the northern part of Mesopotamia, the Palestine area and the slopes of the mountains Tauros and Zagros. Sheep and goats have the social characteristics which make them suitable for breeding, they live peacefully in flocks according to a well-established order, based on a dominant leader. When man discovered that these animals could produce useful commodities, the practise of raising sheep and goats spread among the sedentary farmers, from the Near East westwards to the whole Mediterranean area and northwards to the Balkan countries and Central Europe. “The common domestic mammals of the Old World were all well established as discrete, breeding populations isolated from their wild parents species by the time of the Roman Empire”.

The grazing animals created a pastoral landscape

which still constitutes an important element in our culture, not only as a physical environment but also as a mental framework. The word stem “pa-“ of Indo-European origin, meaning grass, fodder (pasture) travelled westwards together with the domesticated ruminants and their herdsman. In fact, two examples of the many words that stem from it can be found in the Latin word for shepherd, *pastor*, and the name of the Greek pastoral god, Pan.

The Latin word *pecus* had a much broader meaning than any modern correspondent, and it was used as a collective designation for cattle and herd (*pecus, pecoris*) and for single head of the flock (*pecus, pecudis*). The ancient sources divided *pecus* into bigger animals, *majus*, and smaller, *minus*: the larger being oxen, mules and horses and the smaller sheep and goats. With this meaning it has survived in the Italian language in the noun for sheep, *pecora*. Wealth was measured in cattle and the importance of livestock is thus reflected in the word *pecunia*, money, that is derived from the noun *pecus*. The adverb *pecuniary*, which has survived in several modern languages, has the same root. *Pecus* thus stands for much more than animal husbandry - it stands for an entire cultural and economic history. The preconditions are the natural resources which have given the possibilities for man to develop an astonishing interaction with animal, consisting in taming, herding and breeding in order to obtain labor and produce from them. This history also includes how man has responded to this basic economy, in developing particular social and economic institutions which differ from one culture to the other and from one type of landscape to the other.

This conference gave the opportunity for scholars from different parts of the world who are working with similar questions in different cultural contexts and separate academic disciplines to meet. Two veterinarians, Karina Burlin from Umeå and Eva Örtén from Uppsala, both with a keen interest in the cultural history of domestic animals and history of medicine, were also invited to participate in the conference as discussants. With their professional knowledge they contributed largely to the discussions and suggested solutions to various zoo-technical problems. Given this broad approach, PECUS seemed to be an appropriate name for the conference.

Contributions to the conference were presented in sections that were grouped thematically and the present volume will follow that order. In the section *ECONOMY, ADMINISTRATION, TRANSHUMANANCE*, papers on the organisation and administration of pastoral economies in the Mediterranean and Near East were presented. Sheep and goats were well-adapted to the Mediterranean climate, vegetation and landscape and as early as the prehistoric period, these animals were kept in large-scale systems of live-stock breeding for the main purpose of wool production. Such systems required organisation and administrative forces which is documented in the Assyrian archives of Mesopotamia, a corpus covering more than thousands years and in the palatial archives of

the Minoan-Mycenaean culture preserved on clay tablets in Linear B script. From the Roman period we have also important written works on agriculture, the so-called agronomists, which also include animal breeding. In addition to the agricultural treatises there are also inscriptions and law texts. The interdisciplinary approach, which is vital for our understanding of the organisation of these economies, is illustrated by the varied source material used by the authors. To obtain a picture of the ancient pastoral economy, a combination of the study of documentary material from archives and textual sources with archeo-zoological and ethno-archaeological data is essential.

The section *SACRIFICE, LITERATURE, MUSIC AND COMMUNICATION* reflects the eternal human longing for a spiritual dimension in life. The pastoral life-style satisfied not only economic needs but also the need of creativity and artistic inspiration. The contributions in this section explored the role of animals in narrative and sacrificial contexts, in ritual and cult, from sources largely constituted by Greek and Latin authors. In particular, the use of pastoral symbols as metaphors for religious experiences and political ideals was discussed.

A functional system to communicate with animals when the flocks are left grazing over large distances is of utmost importance and pastoral communities all over the world have developed particular calls and songs for this purpose. In Sweden, in contrast to most herding societies, the herding was done by female shepherdesses and in some parts they created a unique type of herding calls, a tradition which now is maintained by folk musicians and studied in conservatories. A performance was given at the conference.

In the section *IDEOLOGY AND STATUS, RITUAL AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION*, a number of papers were given. In antiquity, working animals which relate more closely to man, such as horses and dogs, were conferred with particular prestige and status. These animals have provided man with a wide range of spiritual goods and symbolic dimensions for life and after-life. Several papers discussed the role of horses and mules in different societies and how they were perceived and used as a display of wealth and a status symbol of the elite. Instead, being able to move freely both indoors and outdoors gave the dog special connotations which were frequently associated with the underworld. The contributions dedicated to the creation of myths, ritual behaviour and social organisation show the importance of animals in the ideological world created by man. Questions on sacrifice and ritual practice were also discussed in contexts of ecology, economy and spatial organisation.

Finally, a non-thematic poster session was exhibited at the conference. These contributions are also included as separate articles in this volume.

Questions on the relations between man and animal have strong implications in our modern society. In the urban industrialized part of the world, the use of domes-

tic animals has changed dramatically. For example, Italy, which was once a world-leader in wool production, no longer has an economy based upon wool production and now sheep are kept primarily for meat and milk production. Textile fibres are largely substituted by artificial ones and the wool worked in Italian spinning mills comes mainly from New Zealand and Australia. The sheep are sheared because they have to be shorn, and the wool has little value. Indeed it is often thrown away or even burnt. Breeds selected for their wool production are no longer kept and they have been substituted by breeds which produce larger quantities of milk. Production animals are reduced to the level of “machines” and lack of insight or interest in healthy animal breeding has led to disastrous situations in Europe. Animals are transported all over large distances for several days, only to be slaughtered. Diseases are spread by bad fodder. The pastoral landscape is abandoned and is, in most European regions beyond recall resulting not only in a natural disaster but also a great loss of an important cultural heritage. Finally, it is my hope that this conference publication, by showing models from ancient times with a more balanced pastoral ecosystem than we adopt today, may constitute a voice in the on-going debate concerning the maltreatment of domestic animals and the misuse of the pastoral landscape.

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I also would like to thank the Municipal Council of Blera, Viterbo, for their generosity to organize a performance of cattle-drivers, *butteri*, in the newly opened section of the local museum dedicated to the history of horse and man, and for offering the conference participants a true pastoral dinner in the beautiful surroundings of Civitella Cesi.