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INTRODUCTION*

This book collects studies presented at a symposium on multidisciplinary approaches to Animal Studies held in 2016 at the University for Foreigners in Siena,¹ under the auspices of the International Research Network *Zoomathia*, along with two additional contributions by scholars of the same research group.

The IRN *Zoomathia*, based at the Université Côte d'Azur in Nice (France) and funded by the CNRS since 2012, has been created with the aim of connecting scholars interested in the cultural transmission of zoological knowledge from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. The term “zoological knowledge” is here defined widely, encompassing all information and discourse about animals, and including a focus on the human-animal relationships within which all zoological knowledge is inscribed.

Zoomathia brings together scholars of fifty institutions and laboratories from all over Europe. In a decade of activity (including an annual international conference, presentations, round tables, and seminars), the network has promoted the development of tools for analysing and annotating textual corpora, facilitated the interaction between scholars from different fields, and has led to interdisciplinary

* We would like to thank Emily Kneebone for improving the English text of this introduction.

¹ *Towards multidisciplinary research projects on animals in Ancient and Medieval cultures and Societies. Topics and methodological issues*, October 28-29, 2016, Università per Stranieri di Siena.

research in the history of zoology and of human/non-human animal relationships.

The network comes under the umbrella of *Animal Studies*, and is open to philologists, iconologists, historians, zoologists, ethologists, archaeologists, epigraphists, anthropologists, and digital humanists willing to cooperate in a multidisciplinary environment. The “zoomathists”, as we may call its members, aim to pool their varied expertise in order to better understand how in ancient and medieval times people learned about the other animals they interacted with, and how they transmitted that knowledge to successive generations. Last but not least, the project members are interested in illuminating how these other animals resisted human attempts at appropriation, eluding full cultural control thanks to their immense variety and diversity. Naturecultural objects—such as living beings, minerals, and landscapes—are always difficult to investigate, as they are part constructed (in human representations) part “out there”, in their separate existence in the natural world. Animals, however, prove an even more complex case, since they actually exist as *subjects* endowed with agency and pursuing their own interests and goals.²

In the past, people interacted extensively with non-human animals, since these had not been replaced by machines, and were not kept out of sight on industrial farms or exterminated with chemical products. In ancient and medieval communities, living non-human animals pervaded almost every human space and activity: from work places, where they served as a labour force, to markets, from sacred areas to private abodes, in rural regions and in the sea, in the sky and along streets, where they pulled carts and chariots or were burdened with heavy loads; at home as guard animals or pets; not to mention insects and rodents, whose struggle for resources and living spaces often met with fierce opposition from human beings. The presence of animals was so extensive that these societies could be regarded as hybrid communities in which humans and other species restlessly negotiated their control over places and resources.

Observation of these other species was therefore inevitable, and a rich zoology developed from the practical experience of animal caretakers, breeders, hunters, and fishermen, as well as the expertise of learned philosophers and veterinarians, resulting in a wide range of information scattered across texts, inscriptions, artefacts, and images. Within this vast heritage, close direct examination often mingles with

2 Although the *Zoomathia* project’s main goal is not to recover “le point de vue animal” (as Éric Baratay would put it), some of the researchers in the group do share a concern for the “animal side” in the history of human-animal relationships and conceive of their work as a contribution to the building of a more-than-human history of ancient and medieval civilizations. There has been some disagreement among editors as to whether contributors should be discouraged from using terms such as “uomo/homme/man” and “animale/animal” instead of “umano/humain/human” and “non umano/non-humain/non-human”, as suggested by one of the reviewers of the volume. We eventually decided to leave the authors free to choose. In this regard, this jointly written Introduction reflects the preference of the majority of its authors for the standard terminology (“animal” as opposed to “human”).

popular belief and received lore, in a kaleidoscopic mix of empirical findings and biased misrepresentations. In order to collect and assess information gained through such a wide range of experiences and handed down to the present day through such a long and fragmentary chain of transmission, the zoomathist must look at all available evidence—archaeological relics and artefacts, images and texts. This means possessing the methodological expertise necessary to examine diverse repositories and apply informed and up-to-date critical analysis in interpreting each type of data. In order to do so, they can either rely on scholarly literature from different fields or engage in direct collaborative work with experts from different disciplines. Some of the papers in this volume result from the multidisciplinary expertise of a single scholar, others are the outcome of collaborative projects.

It is one of the major achievements of cultural anthropology to realize that, in order to understand cultures, it is necessary to examine all forms of expression, both spiritual and material, and to analyse them *together*. This is even more crucial in the case of ancient and medieval zoological information, since our “informants” are no longer available to be interviewed, and what they knew about this subject is for the most part lost or poorly preserved. The large gaps in our evidence – especially about the original contexts of ritual and practical aspects of these cultures, but also about real-life fauna and their diffusion across ancient and medieval Europe – urge the researcher to take into account different kinds of data and consult the expertise of zoologists and biologists. Comparison with other cultures can offer supplementary evidence. When interpreting animals in ancient texts or images, for instance, one is often hindered by ignorance of the actual circumstances and contexts in which the author and his/her readers would have imagined the scene to occur. Intertextuality is an obvious resource in filling the gaps as, in the absence of background information (live informants, paratexts), the interpreter cannot but resort to other texts. Nevertheless, the extant literature, inscriptions and images do not always provide the information needed, and this is particularly true when it comes to the everyday experiences of low-ranking humans and domestic animals, as in the case of pastoral settings. In these cases, comparison with other traditional societies can offer some guidance, not only because it is always a good exercise in distancing (which helps the researcher not to take their own biases and views for granted) but also because comparative study can provide the kind of background information we lack when we deal with ancient literary sources. The risk of anachronism involved in any comparison between ancient and modern societies is reduced if we consider that, on the one hand, attitudes and practices in rural contexts tend to be *longue durée* phenomena; and, on the other, each species of animal displays a peculiar kind of agency that affects the way people interact with (and conceive of) it, so that some

aspects of a human-animal relationship turn out to be cross-cultural.³

One of the cornerstones of the *Zoomathia* research group is being open to comparisons with other cultures and different ways of structuring knowledge and beliefs about living beings and relationships between humans and non-human animals. An important aspect of this approach consists in taking seriously forms of knowledge about animals that are different from those codified by the Western science of the last three centuries. The ethno-zoological knowledge of temporally distant cultures such as ancient Greece, Rome, and the Middle Ages calls for no less serious consideration and cannot be hastily dismissed as “mistaken”. As a consequence, in our philological practice, any emendation of a text is avoided that does not take into account ancient knowledge on the subject and instead assesses the information from the standpoint of modern scientific competence.⁴

Rather than standing as an impediment to research, the complexity of naturecultural objects like animals and the scarcity of evidence can be turned into a powerful drive for the researcher to widen their area of expertise and/or search for cooperation with scholars of other disciplines. It questions the self-sufficiency of the individual researcher and calls for humility and collaborative work.⁵ Thanks to contemporary ethology and evolutionary theory, we are now aware of the benefits of “collective” intelligence for social animals in finding new strategies and solutions. As human animal scholars interested in the zoosphere we should not hesitate to learn this lesson and behave accordingly.

Moreover, the nature of our evidence, which emerges from cultures in which zoological knowledge was not yet severed from popular beliefs and moral concerns, also invites cooperation between scholars in both science and humanities. That dialogue is not easy: science tends to ignore the complexities created by historical interactions between people and the environment; post-modern philosophy claims that everything we know is based on a construct of our minds and that there is no way to grasp the reality of things. As a research group, we are of the opinion that joint research can be a healthy exercise for both humanities and sciences, and constitutes

3 On the “affordances” that each animal species offers to the human imagination and the consequent possible convergence of animal representations in different cultures see M. Bettini, *Women and Weasels*, University of Chicago Press, 2013 and C. Franco, “Vincoli ecologici all’arbitrarietà del segno. Breve nota di (zoo)antropologia teorica”, in A. Romaldo (a cura di), *A Maurizio Bettini. Pagine stravaganti per un filologo stravagante*, Milano, Mimesis, 2017, pp. 157-160 (with further bibliography).

4 See M. Vespa “Ierocle Stoico, i castori e l’Egitto. L’etnozoologia e la ricerca filologica: un caso di studio”, *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 17.2, 2019, pp. 273-294, on the importance of integrating ethnozoological information into the philological practice of the *constitutio textus*.

5 On the need for multidisciplinary perspectives in the historical study of animals see now É. Baratay, *Aux sources de l’histoire animale*, Paris, Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2019, pp. 7-14 and Id., *Croiser les sciences pour lire les animaux*, Paris, Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2020, pp. 7-17.

a step towards knowledge that aims to become ecological.

Therefore, *Zoomathia* promotes cross-fertilisation and cooperation between disciplines. We hope that the studies presented here showcase what such an experiment can look like. Most of the papers cover a long period of time and focus on the transmission of zoological knowledge. This focus stems not only from an interest in diachrony, but also a conviction that the transmission of mental experiences about other animals – whether drawn from concrete interactions, scientific observations, or artistic imagination – constitutes an essential dimension of these experiences, which call for being shared by people and are meant to bear on many human practical, intellectual and moral activities.

It is not by chance that the volume opens with an essay by a scientist whose competence encompasses art history and the history of literature. **Marco Masseti**'s lifelong work on the history of zoological knowledge and his expertise in the field of zoology and paleoecology form the basis for his general survey of the possibilities and pitfalls of identifying zoological species in ancient literary and artistic depictions. Masseti's paper shows that any taxonomic attribution in classical and medieval sources needs to be set against contemporary zoological knowledge, lest scholars incur blatant errors in interpreting images or translating texts in which an animal appears. Artistic representations are of course much more influenced than are naturalistic photographs by aesthetic traditions, generic conventions, cultural or personal biases, authorial intentions and fantasy, but some of them are also precise enough to convey zoological knowledge. On the one hand, ancient evidence can therefore offer the zoologist a clue as to the taxonomic identity of a particular species: the depiction of a blond capuchin by Andrea del Sarto in the fresco *Tribute to Caesar* (1519-1521), for instance, provides clear information to establish that the primate depicted belongs to the species *Sapajus flavius* (Schreber, 1774). On the other hand, when a representation is not precise, zoological knowledge can enable the correct identification of the animal and shed light on the authorship of the artwork as well as on the meanings of the text/illustration by pointing to the historical and environmental context in which the species was encountered and in which humans interacted with it. For example, the bird of prey in the painting 1890 nr. 2653 of the "Collezione Spannocchi" (Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena) cannot be the gyrfalcon of the emperor, as stated by Scalini (2019), but is most likely a common pern (*Pernis apivorus* L., 1758) or a subadult goshawk, (*Accipiter gentilis* L., 1758). This casts doubts on the attribution of the painting to Pisanello that was based on the "high nobility" of the gyrfalcon and calls for a complete revision of the evidence in order to reassess the authorship. Zoology can thus effectively cooperate with philology, literary studies, and art history towards a critical (re)construction of the animal representations in their original contexts.

The contribution of **Isabelle Draelants**, in collaboration with the entomologist Pierre Klein, focuses on one of the finest and most complex domains of the

faunal culture of the past: arthropods or, to put it better, *wugs* (worm + bug). This polymorphic life form is as consistent and constant in the zoology of the most varied human societies as it is difficult to define in its intention. It is a real catch-all category. Draelants is interested simultaneously in studying the transmission of Aristotelian entomology, via Pliny, to the Western encyclopaedists of the 13th century, and in identifying the main items documented in this part of the bestiaries. French Medievalists indicate this extensive class of animals with the term *vermes*, which includes various arthropods and worms (due, inter alia, to the fact that the larva of many insects looks like a worm). In this matter, whatever the objective of the historical investigation, naturalistic expertise is not complementary, but as crucial as the knowledge of the texts and their linguistic and epistemological contexts. For the historian-philologist is confronted, on the one hand, with multiple, unstable, often ambiguous terminology that varies according to different language registers and translations in the transmission of knowledge across Greek, Latin, and vernacular languages; on the other hand, (s)he deals with chains (or strands of chains) of scientific and literary dissemination, through which the received information undergoes all sorts of material and/or interpretive accidents. In order to establish an identification, the researcher looks for clues in *the zoologic discourse* rather than in *the name* of the animal: in other words, the recognition of a species is based less on etymology and other linguistic aspects of the ancient zoonym than on what the evidence has to say and display about the animal morphology, behaviour and contexts of presence and interactions.

Draelants provides some examples, such as the silk-producing butterfly (*Acherontia Atropos*) which, before the silk of the *Seri* and their *Bombyx mori*, is already documented in Aristotle and Pliny. The expertise of the entomologist makes it possible to find a kernel of truth behind the clashing discourses and divergent strategies of ancient authors in describing this animal. Advocating cooperation between philologists and scientists, the investigation draws attention to the relative incompatibility between ancient and medieval *nomenclature* and modern classification. By excluding vernacular names and traditional lore, Linnaean systematics reinvented natural knowledge from scratch and on the sole basis of contemporary observations and reports. However, in so doing, it cut the link with tradition so that the ancient or vernacular term and the actual species now seem to belong to two different worlds. If the cognitive and experiential validity of Linnaean categories is debatable, Draelants is committed to a more practical yet enlightening enterprise: stitching together, in a collaborative work, the two (pre- and post-Linnaean) severed worlds.

The paper of **Jacqueline Leclercq-Marx** and **Arnaud Zucker** centres on the case of animals with a name derived from another animal—what Zucker himself has labelled “plural zoonym”, to account for a particular onomastic situation, which is

neither a phenomenon of homonymy nor a case of polysemy.⁶ The two authors are interested in the constitution and translation of the *animal sign* through and along three registers (name, image and literary *ekphrasis*), which articulate the perception and representation of an animal. Metonymy does not seem to explain the emergence of this category of zoonyms. Combining literary investigation, historical study and analysis of images, especially medieval depictions, the two authors show the broad framework in which this process takes place, and which insistently manifests an analogy or transposition between terrestrial and marine spaces. They also try to measure in non-mechanical terms the role that each of the three registers plays in the conformation of the two others. The zoonymical designation does not come first in the process. It rather supposes an oriented perception, sometimes shaped by the animal of which it is, in the case of the plural zoonyms, a kind of reminder and index. The image and the literary *ekphrasis* each proposes or imposes an onomastic motivation according to its own modality.

This study insists on the radical heterogeneity of the two modes of expression (iconographic and linguistic), which is due not only to the particular resources of language, which allows fine modalisations (comparisons, allusions, relativisation), but to the intrinsic difference, and regular reciprocal interference, between the two semiotic systems. The image takes charge of the program implicit in the name by transforming certain properties of verbal language into the visual language of pictures. According to the authors, it would be naive to believe that a medieval image aims at representing, in an illustrative way, the external aspect of the animal in question: the sea wolf does not resemble, in its physical appearance, the vignette by which it is represented, because the image expresses *the nature* of the being and not its *appearance*. Such *nature* cannot be determined by considering only one of the registers of the sign, nor it is possible to establish a systematic and oriented scheme for their interrelation (from the name to the *ekphrasis*, or from the image to the name, or from the *ekphrasis* to the image, etc.). The essay highlights, through revealing examples, the complex dynamics of crossed motivations (the effects of motivation or re-motivation of a register on the other) and shows how it is sometimes impossible to establish a precise direction in the construction of the animal sign.

The article by **Jean Trinquier** and **Christophe Vendries** analyses a different case of interaction between onomastics and iconography. It brings together a series of monuments in which a Latin anthroponym (generally a *cognomen*) is transposed or expressed through a zoomorphic image. This process, which is both playful and expressive, has various purposes. It can be seen as an “etymological game”, but also as a “visual game”. The correspondences and cooperation between the two registers

⁶ A. Zucker, “Sur l’extension de certains noms d’animaux en grec: les zoonymes pluriels”, *Métis*, NS 4, 2006: 97-122.

are emphasised, with the iconic sign that either accompanies (and redoubles) the name written in alphabetic symbols or replaces it altogether. Speaking names are thus converted into speaking animals, with the image representing both the visual form of the name's signified and the avatar of the man who bore it. The study thus illustrates how a Latin speaker could play with the surfacing of the literal meaning in personal names and elicit complex responses in the reader of the animal sign. According to the authors, the play on the name activated by the zoomorphic images, beyond their obvious humorous effects, would have served more serious purposes, such as functioning as mnemonic devices.

The two articles by **Alessandro Pace**, **Marco Vespa** and **Christophe Chandezon** both deal with the presence of roosters and chickens in ancient Greek culture, yet from different perspectives. The first contribution, a work of joint authorship of Pace and Vespa, is made up of two sections focusing on different kinds of evidence: archaic Greek ceramic production and Attic literary texts. The analysis of the two types of evidence reveals a remarkable difference in the cultural representation of roosters, whose connotations clearly change in the second half of the 5th century BCE and in the passage from iconography to literary texts. While in Middle Protocorinthian (mid 7th BCE) ceramics the rooster appears in combat scenes and in military contexts (e.g. as a sign on shields or as a symbol of excellence, lineage and military valour on perfume or ointment jars intended for an elite audience), in the Athenian literary production of the Classical period it enters the comic repertoire. Its very name inspires jokes revolving around the ambiguity of its gender (*alektryōn* could refer both to the rooster and the hen), and the animal itself becomes a laughing stock due to its boisterous movements, excessively bold for a bird that cannot even fly. The reproach that the character Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs* addresses to the character Aeschylus (to have cocks on the tragic scene) is based on the connotations imposed on the rooster by comic poets. Such a stark contrast between the two representations of the animal – symbol of aristocratic *aretē* in archaic images and a windbag character in the Attic discourse of the Classical period – emerges for the first time in this study thanks to its multidisciplinary approach, and results in a more articulate and nuanced description of the cultural representation of roosters in Greek culture.

Christophe Chandezon's article adds complexity to the reconstruction by extending the picture in its cultural-historical perspective. In particular, an integrated study of historical documentation, ranging from iconographic testimonies to inscriptions and recent contributions from archaeozoology, reveals the structuring of different anthrozoological communities of roosters, hens and humans in ancient Greece in the transition between the Late Archaic and Classical eras. The introduction of *Gallus gallus* specimens from the East into the Greek world began only in the Archaic period (8th century BCE) and applied for the most part only to male individuals to be employed in fighting games. The dissemination of the species developed over time into the animal's increasingly important presence in the economic life of the ancient

Greek world, with an intensification in the Hellenistic period when hen farms are attested in much of the Hellenised world, including Egypt.

The important modifications of the interspecific relation with cockerels which occurred in several communities in the Greek world may offer a clue for better understanding the discrepancies in the symbolic value of the cock already highlighted by the contribution by Pace and Vespa. The shift in the cultural representation of the rooster in the Classical period from the valiant fighter to the clumsy barnyard fowl, for instance, may be related to the passage from the keeping of sole male *specimina* to the progressive diffusion of hen farms in Greece during the 5th and 4th centuries BCE.

Using the “flock leader” sheep (*ktilos* or *dux gregis*) as a case study, the final essay by **Cristiana Franco** tackles the issue of comparatism in reading animals in ancient sources. The study starts with a fragment from Accius’ *Brutus*, in which the protagonist of the play appears as a ram in a dream that foretells the king’s imminent fall. Given that in ancient Rome sheep were held to be the most stupid of animals, the choice of a ram as the symbol for Junius Brutus (the smart antagonist of Tarquinius and future founder of the Roman *res publica*) is quite disconcerting. Of course, the intended ambiguity of the dream symbolism revolves around Junius’ nickname (*Brutus*) which resonates with the traditional stupidity of the sheep, *brutum* animal par excellence. The audience knew that Junius was so called because he played the fool in order to escape Tarquinius’ jealousy. However, the reason that the same sheep could be described by the interpreters of the dream as a “wise and learned” beast in a manner that distinguishes him from the rest of the flock (*sapientia munitum pectus egregie gerat*) is not obvious.

Since the time of Homer, a military leader could be represented as a “ram” (*ktilos*, *dux gregis*) and one might be content with the proposition that the situation alluded to is that of an alpha-male, who would have won his pre-eminent position by defeating his opponents with repeated headbutts. Franco, however, looks to ethnographic literature in search of a better understanding of the passage in light of pastoral practices. We thus learn that among many pastoral communities the “flock leader”, far from being an alpha-male, is an individual sheep (sometimes a female or a wether) chosen when still a youngling and trained to obey human orders in order to lead the flock according to the shepherd’s will. A brief passage from Aristotle’s *Historia animalium* confirms that the same custom was common in Greece, and there is no reason to believe that things were different among pastoral communities in Italy, where the usage was still widespread until recent times. The paradox of Accius’ symbolism thus receives a consistent explanation: the ram can be a very special individual, moulded by shepherds to become a mediator between human chiefs and the rest of the flock—and thus a “learned” animal among the brutes he guides.

It is perhaps not by chance that a comparison between the Graeco-Roman and modern practice of the “flock leader” had been already proposed in 1932 by D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson, a zoologist-cum-classicist, translator of Aristotle’s *Historia*

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animalium and author of a *Glossary of Greek Birds* and *Glossary of Greek Fishes*. As a scientist, Thompson was probably familiar with comparative methods and prone to considering the ethological and ethnological information needed to better understand the presence of animals in cultural artefacts. Contemporary classicists interested in researching on animals should follow his path more often than they do.