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978-0-521-76737-8 - Social Zooarchaeology: Humans and Animals in Prehistory

Nerissa Russell

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SOCIAL ZOOARCHAEOLOGY

This is the first book to provide a systematic overview of social zooarchaeology, which takes a holistic view of human–animal relations in the past. Until recently, archaeological analysis of faunal evidence has primarily focused on the role of animals in the human diet and subsistence economy. This book, however, argues that animals have always played many more roles in human societies: as wealth, companions, spirit helpers, sacrificial victims, totems, centerpieces of feasts, objects of taboos, and more. These social factors are as significant as taphonomic processes in shaping animal bone assemblages. Nerissa Russell uses evidence derived not only from zooarchaeology but also from ethnography, history, and classical studies to suggest the range of human–animal relationships and to examine their importance in human society. Through exploring the significance of animals to ancient humans, this book provides a richer picture of past societies.

Nerissa Russell is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Archaeology at Cornell University. Her research focuses on the full range of human–animal relations, with particular emphasis on the social and symbolic roles of animals for ancient people. She has published more than forty book chapters and articles in journals, including *Antiquity*, *Paleorient*, and *Journal of Archaeological Science*.

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HUMANS AND ANIMALS IN
PREHISTORY**

NERISSA RUSSELL
Cornell University



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For Marina and Rafael

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Preface

This book has had a long gestation. Its origin lies in a course I taught first as a visiting professor at UCLA some 15 years ago and several times since at Cornell. I had come to feel that zooarchaeology was ignoring many aspects of human–animal relations. In the course I sought to bring ethnography and other disciplines to bear on these issues in a more systematic way than I had begun to do in my research. The first outing of the course convinced me that this material needed to be developed into a book.

At first it seemed like a simple idea to point out the many roles that animals have played in human societies and how they might inform zooarchaeology. Only as I began writing did I realize that this task involved surveying zooarchaeology from around the world and in all periods, as well as the human–animal literature in other disciplines. Therefore, this book has come together slowly, the more so because although when I started there was very little zooarchaeological literature on these topics, as I was writing, what has come to be called social zooarchaeology flowered, eventually to the point where I could not include it all. What began as a cry in the wilderness has become a synthesis of exciting recent work and an attempt to plot a way forward.

Because this book addresses topics and methods, it is not limited in time and space and ranges widely. It is meant to inspire and to lead the reader to the works referenced; I regret that given the breadth of scope I cannot adequately contextualize the archaeological studies in their own localities. I have tried to use dates sparingly and for orientation, so they are generally approximate and given in calibrated years before present (cal BP).

This book has benefited immensely from innumerable conversations through the years. In particular, I would like to thank the students in the various incarnations of the courses “Beyond Protein and Calories” at UCLA and “Humans and Animals” at Cornell. These students came from a wide range of backgrounds and have enriched my perspective. I have also profited from discussions with my colleagues at Cornell, particularly in relation to an early draft of Chapter 4 presented in a department writing group. Kevin McGowan of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology helped me think through evolutionary theory, in addition to being a font of information on everything biological. My many colleagues at Çatalhöyük, notably Louise Martin and Kathy Twiss, have contributed not only to the analysis and interpretation of that assemblage but also to the breadth and depth of my knowledge and thought. I am especially grateful for the most constructive set of comments I received from Jon Driver and two anonymous reviewers. This is a much better book as a result.