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[Review] James Hevia, *Animal Labor and Colonial Warfare*. Chicago University Press, 2018. 328pp

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Abstract

James Hevia's very accomplished history, *Animal Labor and Colonial Warfare*, actually contains more than one history. A history of the military's reliance on nonhuman animal (animal) labour emerges from a history of the administrative procedures of a British colonial regime. Some years ago, I went searching for this type of animal history to contextualize colonial war re-enactments with circus and menagerie animals. Hevia provides statistical information about the animals involved in colonial military ventures, breaking down the figures by species and compiling total numbers and percentages. He develops an in-depth analysis of the monumental scale of animal deployment – the camels, mules and horses – within nineteenth-century conflicts in northern India and Afghanistan. This is also a history of human failings and animal suffering. Animals were necessary for the transportation of supplies and ammunition, and Hevia contrasts the essential role of the pack animals with that of the military mounts in the campaigns. The measured tone of the book combined with substantial evidence supports a convincing argument that chaotic and fractious practices brought about a scandalous level of neglect for animal welfare. For example, Hevia's research reveals that two thirds of the pack camels in one military campaign could not be accounted for, and nearly half the pack camels in another campaign perished. He demonstrates how a callous view of pack animals led to their rapid demise and meant that they laboured until they dropped, and at times dead animals lined the route in numbers that created an unbearable stench. A lack of specialist knowledge and skilful handlers was compounded by poorly configured chains of command and ineptitude by the military. The accumulated account denotes war-like carnage inflicted on nonhuman others.

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Hevia confirms a staggering scale of animal death in support of nineteenth-century colonial military campaigns over and above the predictable fatalities during battle. The illustrations in *Animal Labor and Colonial Warfare* are taken from London's *Graphic* magazine and these depict animal death which implies some public awareness at the time. One potent image has an elephant with ropes hauling a dead camel; the elephant was also unlikely to survive. Since animals were a recognizable part of nineteenth-century colonial warfare strategies, their importance to the mobility of the military merits this type of extensive investigation. Hevia's carefully researched book is based on archival research and historical secondary sources, and it provides specific histories of the animal species taken by the military for its north Asian campaigns as it locates this material within animal and environmental studies. The analysis provides a wealth of detail about what Hevia describes as animal service without choice.

Scholarship on the Ottoman Empire reveals the tens of thousands of camels, mules and bullocks as well as cavalry horses required for its mobility, and which indicated the numbers that the British in India would need to support military travel. Obtaining suitable animals created innumerable problems for the British and chapter three covers an inadequate breeding scheme with stud donkeys imported into India that was never going to meet demand. Cavalry horses could be purchased from Australia (94 n22), but mules were scarce and purchases almost spanned the world (105). The British veterinarian support was well-intentioned but the military hierarchy ignored advice concerned with animal welfare and there was active prejudice and resistance against following such advice. Chapter four covers the scientific approaches of leading vets in India towards the end of the nineteenth century and the study of animal disease albeit within limited frameworks. While chapter five covers the difficulties with the continued 'impressment' of animals despite proposed alternatives, chapter six describes how reform of the administration finally happened at the turn of the twentieth century. The scale of animal death during the Boer War demonstrates that the lessons of India were not applied elsewhere by the British military (173–4), a point reinforced in the chapter about animal death in World War One.

In his discussion of the plight of the camels, Hevia provides a fascinating case study of 'human-animal-plant ecological relations' in a specific locality. This is also a history of colonial

perspectives imposed on a physical environment and the inability to recognize the effectiveness of local knowledge. The finely calibrated social and natural ecologies that supported camel movements in the semi-arid regions followed seasonal patterns of food and trade exchange with the local inhabitants. The co-dependent balance achieved over time was completely invisible to the military and its destruction caused human and animal suffering. Nor did the military appreciate that camels were bonded to their group. The striking impression of indigenous handlers who sang to camels to keep them happy is juxtaposed with a highly influential commentary published by an Englishman who condemns camels for being lazy and for not being emotionally responsive (78, 125). This expectation of emotional allegiance from the mounted camels was particularly disturbing.

While I have focused this book review on the vivid history of animal labour for the military, the book also analyses aspects of animal labour in agriculture under colonial rule, which irrevocably changed landscapes – such legacies are also a concern in contemporary Australia. Hevia presents the case study of canal creation under colonial reconfiguration of the Punjab region. Chapter seven considers how this historical engineering impacted adversely on humans and nonhuman animals in those localities as the British improved their bureaucratic organization – if not the lives of local inhabitants. Hevia writes: ‘Lastly, with more than a century of human reengineering of the Indus basin, natural drainage patterns have been seriously disrupted’ causing flooding and in 2010 floods killed 1.6 million animals and impacted on 20 million people (276). The focused topics are in chronological order and I found the work informative and engaging throughout. The analysis points to wider discourses such as Foucault’s ‘biopower’ in the specific circumstances of the bureaucratic shift to state management of animals. An invaluable history for those interested in the use of animals in wartime and the colonial history of the disruption of nonhuman and human species in specific environments.