

Animals mediating the real and the imaginary in the past

Chaired by Siv Kristoffersen and Kristin Armstrong Oma, both: Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger

Animals were ubiquitous in past societies, as companions, pets, prey, labour, protein-source, producers, symbols, family members. The *anthropocene* is shaped also by human interactions with these myriad animals. The ability to interact cross-species might even have propelled some processes in civilisation. Thus, cross-species intra-agency is vital to understand the formation of the period we call the anthropocene. Life, ontological rationales and ways of being-in-the-world in the past is documented by way of archaeological finds and literary sources. Together, these demonstrate that animals held a looming presence in past life-world, both as themselves, as symbols, and as elements of the imaginary. Previous archaeological research on animals has explored their presence through avenues linked to osteological studies, the artistic expressions of the animal styles, the real and imagined lives of some species and their companionship to humans, and domestic animals as members of the household arena of farming societies. Reverence for, and the sacred nature of, prey animals has also been explored.

The formation of life-worlds in conjunction with animals - either wild or domesticated - led to changes in environments, ecosystems and landscapes. Studies of the sacred geography of past landscape have suggested that the imaginary, an understanding of the landscape closely linked with spiritual beliefs, was a prevalent dimension in the past. Animals lent spiritual significance to the landscape, grounded in their ontological status and their real-life presence.

The session explores the boundaries between the real and the imaginary animals, their various roles in past societies and how this interface created possibilities of mediation of humans, animals and the landscape.