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The Transformation of Landscapes, Humans, and Animals: A Systems Approach

Have humans domesticated animals, or have they domesticated us? Are there “pristine” landscapes, or are they all man-made, or have landscapes shaped the human societies growing up around them? Game (wild animals) has become rare everywhere, but wasn’t there a time that human actions, in contrast, attracted game? And how impenetrable is the wall between livestock and game? And how recent is the tendency of biodiversity to decrease and landscapes to become more monotonous? This study, the first of its kind, offers a sweeping, panoramic view of global environmental history of landscape transformation across five millennia.

Environmental historians have so far mainly focused on paired contrasts and causal links, such as:

- 1) The creation of landscapes by humans;
- 2) The dependence of game on particular landscapes;
- 3) The keeping of livestock and other commensal animals by humans;
- 4) Hunting by humans.

However, landscapes, in turn, “created” particular human features. The presence of commensal animals deeply influenced human civilization, while they were also responsible for the creation of certain landscapes. The presence of livestock and their diseases had a noticeable, but badly documented, influence on the health and therefore numbers of wild animals living in the areas adjacent to their pasture lands. Humans, of course, trapped and hunted game—little is known about the trapping, while the hunting of certain species is better documented—but they also attracted game by the creation of certain landscapes. Changing numbers of game, in turn, made for societal transformations.

Therefore, what needs to be investigated is the interdependence of landscapes, humans, livestock, and game in one “system.”