

Plants, Humans and Animal Interactions: Global Perspectives from Pleistocene to the Holocene

Keywords: Plants, Human, Animals, Domestication, Evolution, Agriculture

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Abstract:

Plants, humans, and animals have been intimately interconnected throughout the Pleistocene and Holocene, shaping human evolution, subsistence, and cultural development. Plants provided food, fuel, medicine, intoxicants, and essential resources for technological and cultural innovation, including fiber, thread, textile materials, architectural components, tools, and other craft purposes. They also supplied fodder for animals that later became part of human subsistence systems. Despite their importance, plant remains are often poorly preserved in archaeological contexts, and methodological challenges complicate the identification of wild versus cultivated species.

Environmental factors such as climate, topography, and biodiversity strongly influenced plant availability, while ecological changes shaped vegetation patterns, making environmental shifts a key driver of plant exploitation. In coastal and marine settings, resources such as mangroves, seagrasses, and coastal tubers contributed to human adaptation, providing stable food sources, raw materials, and shelter that supported settlement, mobility, and technological innovation. Over time, human intervention led to the domestication of plants, transforming wild species into crops and enabling the transition from hunter-gatherer to food-producing societies. These processes influenced human physiology, settlement patterns, and the subsistence of other animals.

While cereals and well-preserved crops have dominated research, many economically and culturally significant plants particularly vegetatively propagated field and tree crops remain poorly documented. Conceptual and methodological limitations continue to constrain our understanding of human plant animal interactions.

This session invites contributions that investigate the roles of diverse plant species and their relationships with humans and animals in shaping subsistence, technology, and adaptation. Multidisciplinary approaches including archaeobotany, paleoecology, ethnobotany, and archaeology are encouraged to reconstruct global patterns of plant use and human-animal-plant interactions across the Pleistocene and Holocene.