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EDITORIAL BOARD

Joan Cunningham (Ph.D. Public Health: Epidemiology) is a cancer epidemiologist, recently retired from the Medical University of South Carolina. She holds an MSc (Biology: aquatic eco-embryology) from the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada and Ph.D. (Public Health: epidemiology) from the University of Texas School of Public Health (Houston). Her work focuses on racial disparities in breast cancer, and non-pharmacological mitigation of cancer treatment side effects. She also gives invited lectures on cancer epidemiology to the graduate program at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, Texas.

Amanda Haste (Ph.D. Musicology; Dip.Trans.IoLET) is a British musicologist and academic translator whose research interests include identity construction through music and language. She is a member of the Chartered Institute of Linguists and teaches courses in Translation and in English for Specific Purposes at Aix-Marseille University, France. Her research has been published in leading journals and books by major editors, and she co-authored *Constructing Identity in an Age of Globalization* (Paris: Ex Modio, 2015); and her awards include the Louise Dyer Award for research into British music, and the Elizabeth Eisenstein Essay Prize (2018).

Jordan Lavender (Ph.D. Spanish Linguistics) teaches Spanish and Latin American History at Pomfret School in Pomfret, CT and has conducted research on the use of minority languages on Twitter in Spain, bilingualism in the linguistic landscapes of Azogues, Ecuador, and forms of address in Ecuadorian Spanish, based on ethnographic research in both online and offline contexts.

Annie Rehill (Ph.D. Modern French Studies, MFA) specializes in the literature and history of Francophone Canada, focusing on intercultural expressions and implications. Most recently she has studied Métis literature and art. Previous work in ecocriticism centered on representations of the Canadian *coureur de bois* figure, and on Francophone Caribbean writings. Her publications include "Le Travail dans la nature canadienne: L'Équilibre (et le déséquilibre) humain tel qu'il est représenté par Louis Goulet et Joseph-Charles Taché" (2018); "An Ecocritical Reading of Joseph-Charles Taché's *Forestiers et voyageurs*" (2018); *Backwoodsmen As Ecocritical Motif in French Canadian Literature* (2016); and "Inscriptions of Nature from Guadeloupe, Haiti, and Martinique" (2015).

Shelby Shapiro (Ph.D. American Studies), the General Editor of *The Independent Scholar*, served for many years as the English-language editor of *Tsum punkt/To the Point*, the magazine of Yiddish of Greater Washington, as well as for its predecessor publication, and was Associate Editor of *Records of the State of Connecticut* from 2012 to 2021. His Ph.D. dissertation dealt with acculturation and American Jewish women in the Yiddish press; he is a Yiddish-English translator, and his research interests include Jazz and Blues (having presented jazz radio programs for nine years), the labor movement, the First World War, and immigrant anarchism.



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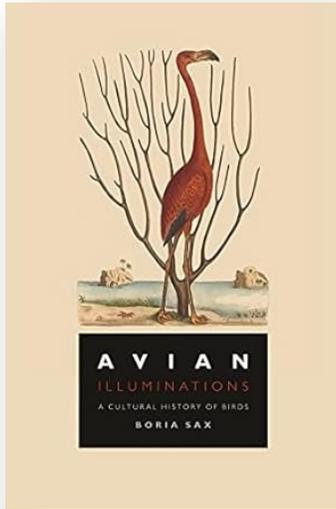
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Avian Illuminations: A Cultural History of Birds

Boria Sax

London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2021

ISBN 978 1-78914-432-1

474pp. + Endnotes, Further Reading, General Index, Index of Birds, Websites about Birds. Illus., b&w, color.

[Avian Illuminations: A Cultural History of Birds: Amazon.co.uk: Boria Sax: 9781789144321: Books](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Boria-Sax-9781789144321-Books/dp/1789144321)

Review by Shelby Shapiro. Review first published online 9 October 2023 and will appear in Volume 10 of *The Independent Scholar*.

Boria Sax continues his efforts to examine the links between and among animals and humans in his latest book, *Avian Illuminations: A Cultural History of Birds*. In the Introduction he writes that his intent in this book is “to show how intimately our bonds with birds are bound up in the matrix of ideas, practices, fear and hopes that make up what we call ‘human civilization.’” (p. 14)

Sax draws upon biology, history, philosophy, folklore, art and religion to achieve this goal, which crosses not only disciplines but territorial borders: this is a worldwide study.

The book is divided into four parts: Birds in Philosophy and Religion; Birds in History; Birds and Art; and Birds and the Future. He writes not so much about birds, but about what birds have meant to their human observers, worshipers and those fearing birds. The illustrations, as in all his books, are exemplary, covering everything from Old Masters to the menu of a Washington, D. C. eatery of the 1940s, the Chicken Hut, to cartoons and cave paintings.

Sax does not limit his examination to what Westerners agree are “real” birds; he includes birds outside the Western canon, for example the deities of Northwestern Native American cultures and Asian civilizations. Throughout he probes what various birds mean, and why, and how these various beliefs fit into comprehensive worldviews.

He writes that

“(h)unting birds such as partridges, grouse and pheasants has long been a highly ritualized sport of the British upper classes, analogous to fox hunting.” (p. 343).

Sax noted that “(w)hen aristocratic hunters faced a lack of game birds, gamekeepers in Britain began stocking the countryside with millions of pheasants.” (p. 346).

In *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant*, historian Jonathan P. Spiro notes how big game hunters belonging to the Boone & Crockett Club ended up becoming the backbone of American conservation movements seeking to replenish what they enjoyed hunting. Hermann Goering followed



the same strategy at his hunting lodge, Carinhall. Sax discusses the 1973 Nobel Prize-winner and Nazi theorist of animal behavior, Konrad Lorenz (pp. 179-180); for more on Lorenz, see Sax's *Animals in the Third Reich: Pets, Scapegoats, and the Holocaust* (2000). In *Avian Illuminations*, it is clear that the white lab coat of Konrad Lorenz merely covered his political brown shirt.

Among myriad topics, Sax discusses cockfighting, "which became popular in Greece long before chickens and eggs became a dietary staple." (p. 207). He writes that

"(t)he bloody spectacle of cockfighting displays a primal, indiscriminate fury that may be a driving force in all civilizations yet which none can fully acknowledge."

Sax goes on to discuss Fred Hawley, a student of cockfighting in the United States, and anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who studied the same phenomenon in Bali. Sax states that

"(i)n other places, however, cockfighting has become a way to sublimate, rather than act out, impulses towards interpersonal violence. Traditional cockfights are well-behaved at matches from Bali to Mexico and the United States. Cockfights in these locales are conducted according to strict rules, and the judgements of the free are seldom questioned." (p. 209)

This observation would be in accord with Norbert Elias's theories of the "civilizing process," especially as it concerns sports, as set forth his introduction to *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), as he traced the development of rules to both level the playing field, decrease personal violence and continue a sport's particular excitement, whether falconry, cockfighting, rugby, soccer or fox-hunting.

Throughout the book are illustrations by the nineteenth-century caricaturist J. J. Grandville, who utilized birds in his anthropomorphic sketches and drawings to make political points; unfortunately, we do not learn more

about this artist of the Romantic Era.

As is usually the case with works by Boria Sax, by the time we finish the book, we no longer take its subject for granted: he opens our eyes to see in new and unexpected ways. This, even though there can sometimes be much that is speculative (as indicated by qualifiers such as "might" and "could"). Yet even in such instances, the reader is prompted to question and reconsider what is taken for granted. As is the case with all of Sax's prior books published by Reaktion Books Ltd., the quality of the text and its many illustrations (whether black and white or color), are stellar, a tribute to his choices and the publisher's production standards. This is another volume to be placed on your "to get" list.

Shelby Shapiro (Ph.D. American Studies) served for many years as the English-language editor of *Tsum punkt/To the Point*, the magazine of Yiddish of Greater Washington, as well as for its predecessor publication, and was Associate Editor of *Records of the State of Connecticut* 2012-2021. His Ph.D. dissertation dealt with acculturation and American Jewish women in the Yiddish press; he is a Yiddish-English translator, and his research interests include Jazz and Blues (having presented jazz radio programs for nine years), the labor movement, the First World War, and immigrant anarchism.