

**NON-HUMAN PRIMATES AND OTHER TERRESTRIAL WEST AFRICAN  
MAMMALS IN THE PORTUGUESE LITERARY SOURCES OF THE 15<sup>TH</sup>  
AND 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES: PERCEPTION, DESCRIPTION AND  
COMMERCIAL USE**

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**Resumo/Abstract**

In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries Portuguese exploration around the coast of Africa brought new first-hand information about the newly discovered lands to the attention of the Old World. Encounters with new and wild animals, but also their interactions with local communities, their abundance, their commercial value and trade were frequently reported by navigators and explorers. Today these reports can provide us with precious information about historical population levels and distribution of these animals as well as offer unique first-hand accounts of folkloric and ethnographic data from pre-colonial Africa. Although with regards to some species (e.g. African elephants, *Loxodonta* spp. and the Monk seal, *Monachus monachus*) researches on their distribution and abundance in the past already exist, other animals such as non-human primates were little considered and therefore the study of these sources is still of great value. Europeans' perception was obviously influenced by the cultural and religious background of that time, but it is possible to find very interesting and accurate descriptions of non-human primates' and other mammals' morphology and behavior. For instance reports about West Africa chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes verus*) from this period can be considered the product of precise and meticulous observations constituting the first nucleus of the natural history of this specie. In this paper we will discuss how western African terrestrial mammals were perceived by early explorers in an attempt to provide some insights into the early modern European perception of "exotic" animals. We will also present what these studies can reveal to us about the distribution and population levels of these animals as well as their use in trade by Europeans and Africans at that time. The study also aims to make a comparison between the contemporary and the pre-colonial perceptions (and use) of animals by local human populations, taking into account the recent ethnological studies conducted in Guinea Bissau.

**CV**

Dr. **Cecilia Veracini** is a graduate in Biological Science from the University of Pisa (Italy); she obtained a MSc in Anthropology from the University of Florence and University of Barcelona in primates vocal communication. She received a Ph.D. degree in Anthropological Science from the Florence University (Italy) with a work on ecology of two species of Brazilian Amazonian primates. He served some years as Assistant Professor at the Florence and Pisa Universities. She worked as collaborator at: a) the NIH (US); b) Museum of Natural History of Florence (Italy); c) Museum of Natural History of Barcelona (Spain). In 2011 she received her second Doctorate degree in History of Science (University of Pisa/Florence/Siena) with a Ph.D. thesis

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