

Monday, 24.01.2022, 16:15 - 18:00 CET

Andrew Wells TU Dresden (Germany)

## **Slavery Beyond the Human: Animals and Chattel Slavery in the British Atlantic World, 1600-1840**

### Abstract:

Animals played a central role in the history of transatlantic slavery that has only recently attracted scholarly interest. Of vital importance to plantation agriculture, animals were also key to other aspects of slavery and the process of enslavement. Horses played a crucial part in the African warfare that supplied slaves and sharks were a useful instrument of terror for the captains of slavers to overawe their crew and human cargo. A small but significant trade in exotic animals, especially birds, was conducted by slave traders in parallel with their main business, and pets were important companions in Britain's slaveholding colonies for both black and white. Dogs were a source of pleasure as well as workers in their own right: notoriously bred and used to hunt runaway slaves, they also served to combat vermin infestation on cane fields and offered protection from intruders and thieves. This lecture will explore these and other themes that arise from the application of the recent 'animal turn' to transatlantic slavery. It focuses on two in particular. The question of 'agency' has provoked much debate among historians of slavery and of animals, yet these two debates have not so far been considered together. The lecture traces the course of these discussions to argue that a deeper exploration of the role of animals in slavery is necessary for the place of agency – both of animals and slaves – to be properly established. In addition, the lecture will examine the place of real animals in the discourse on slavery and abolition after 1760, in which animal symbolism played a powerful role. Many scholars have recognised the simultaneity and mutual influence of the accelerating campaigns against slavery and animal cruelty in the first third of the nineteenth century, but the role of actual – as opposed to symbolic – animals in pro- and antislavery argument has largely escaped notice.

### Bio:

Andrew Wells is a cultural and intellectual historian of the early modern British Atlantic World. He completed a doctorate on the interrelationship of ideas of racial and sexual difference at the University of Oxford and has worked at the universities of Edinburgh, Göttingen, and Dresden. He was Junior Fellow in 2018-19 at the Alfred Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg at the University of Greifswald and has published numerous articles and book chapters on the history of animals, race, urban history, and the Titanic disaster. He is co-editor, with Sarah Cockram, of *Interspecies Interactions: Animals and Humans between the Middle Ages and Modernity* (Routledge, 2018). He has recently completed an extensive revision of his doctoral dissertation into a monograph entitled *Generating Difference: Race and Reproduction in the British Empire, 1660-1840* and is currently working on a Habilitation dealing with urban concepts of freedom in the British Atlantic World.