Pioneers of the Printed Paradise: Maarten de Vos, Jan Sadeler I and Emblematic Natural History in the Late Sixteenth Century

Amanda K. Herrin

Introduction

In 1587 Jan Sadeler I (1550–1600) was appointed court engraver to Duke Wilhelm V in Bavaria (1548–1626).\(^1\) Shortly thereafter he must have contacted his long-time collaborator, Maarten de Vos (1532–1603), one of the most sought-after print designers in Antwerp at the time.\(^2\) Together they designed and executed an artistic project that would appeal to the aesthetic tastes and spiritual practices of Sadeler’s new ducal patron. The fruit of their collaboration, a small, richly-detailed graphic series entitled *Imago Bonitatis* (*Image of Goodness*), traces God’s creation of the world across Paradise landscapes diversely animated with living creatures.\(^3\) Emblazoned on the series’ title page is the ducal coat of arms with a dedication to Wilhelm V. The seven engravings in the series correspond to the six days of Creation as described in the Old Testament, with

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1 The arrival of the Sadeler family in Munich in 1587 transformed the Bavarian court into a center of printmaking in Europe. With Jan came his brother Raphael I, and his nephews Aegidius II and Raphael II. See Maxwell S., *The Court Art of Friedrich Sustris: Patronage in Late Renaissance Bavaria* (Farnham: 2011) 200.


3 Ibidem, vols. 44–45, nos. 11–18.
the final day rendered in two separate prints (Genesis 1:1–2:3). Designed to impress, the Imago Bonitatis combines Maarten de Vos’s ingenuity at rendering complex and lively compositions with Sadeler’s own accomplished precision with the engraver’s burin.

Several of the prints in the series accurately depict different species of birds, fishes, reptiles, and animals—an impressive accomplishment given that neither artist specialized in animal representation. In the print The Sixth Day of Creation: The Creation of Adam, Eve and the Animals [Fig. 9.1] familiar indigenous and domesticated species, such as horses, hares, dogs, and mice, appear alongside more recently-discovered exotic animals, such as the rhinoceros, camel, and llama. Within the series animals are grouped more or less according to their natural environments: ungulate quadrupeds graze in a meadow, fishes are displayed swimming in the ocean, and waterfowl stroll the seashore. In The Fifth Day: The Creation of the Birds and Fishes [Fig. 9.2] one can identify