Discovered in 1500 by the Portuguese, Brazil was almost immediately christened the ‘land of parrots’, with early travellers claiming that blue skies would darken as if night had fallen when huge, raucous flocks of the birds flew overhead. But the Europeans who spent time in this Portuguese (and, for a short time, Dutch) colony were not satisfied with simply looking at the wondrous, colourful, and odd animals around them; they often brought specimens back with them, including parrots, armadillos, coati, lizards, and even small monkeys. The overseas journey, however, spelled certain death for most of the animals: even if they weren’t eaten by hungry sailors, several months of inadequate care, inappropriate food, and a radical change in climate meant that only the most robust and adaptable animals could survive. Nonetheless, dried animal remains were highly sought after by many collectors of naturalia throughout Europe, and it was well-known that harbour cities such as Amsterdam were excellent places to obtain such materials.

In his overview of cabinets of curiosities assembled by Dutch burghers between 1585 and 1735, Roelof van Gelder describes the obvious enthusiasm for naturalia, the majority of it non-native, demonstrated by the contents of such collections, with most of the specimens coming from areas of VOC and WIC trade and colonization, including the East Indies, South Africa, Brazil, Surinam, and New Netherland. Of

1 Jean de Léry describes his arduous trip back to France from Brazil, during which monkeys and parrots, intended to be exotic pets, were instead consumed as food. See his 1578 History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, trans. J. Watson (Berkeley: 2000) 208–216.


course, the Dutch were not the only collectors interested in flora and fauna from the Americas; as noted by Wilma George in her analysis of printed catalogues of European zoological cabinets from the second half of the seventeenth century, the armadillo—or rather its dried carapace—was the most common animal in such collections, and after Europe, the majority of the specimens came from South America. This does not mean, however, that everyone was satisfied with dried specimens from the New World. Living South American animals were highly desirable because of their unusual appearance, rarity, or beauty and, for obvious reasons related to wealth and position, they frequently ended up in the menageries of European nobility.

Collections of *naturalia* often also included albums of drawings or single images of flora and fauna that served to complement preserved remains, but only the highest ranking members of the European elite were able to commission artists to make images after the living, non-European animals in their own private zoos. Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II’s ‘book of animals’, or *Museum*, from the late sixteenth century, is a well-known example of this type of visual production. That this was not an isolated example is made clear by the images of South American animals belonging to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, including parrots and an agouti, which were created by Italian artist Jacopo Ligozzi in the 1580s, or the oils studies on canvas after the exotic animals in Louis XIV’s menagerie at Versailles by Flemish artist Pieter Boel. Although such images were put to a variety of uses, their contemporary value seems clear: while stylistically divergent, these drawings and paintings preserved the exterior appearance, including the colour and form, of the exotic animal. As such, they functioned as a permanent visual record of both the animal and, with respect to the corpus of images, the menagerie as a whole. They furthermore highlighted the collector’s ability to assemble and possess wondrous and exotic creatures from afar. But how are we to assess the value of images like these if the menagerie, the noble collector, and his artists, were not in Europe, but in the New World as part of a European colonial presence?

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