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THE HIPPOPOTAMUS IN FLORENTINE ZOOLOGICAL
MUSEUM "LA SPECOLA"
A DISCUSSION OF STUFFED ANIMALS AS SOURCES
OF CULTURAL HISTORY

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ABSTRACT. - In the modern museum world we find a division between cultural-historical museums and natural-history museums. The division between nature and culture manifests itself in organizational, physical and cognitive ways. The article discusses the cultural-historical dimension in natural-history collections. The hippopotamus in the Florentine Zoological Museum "La Specola's" collection is an illustrative example that stuffed animals are also portals to the history of knowledge and mentality. Stuffed animals in natural-history museums are cultural products that have been produced to exemplify and depict nature. They can thus be defined as both nature and culture, and it is precisely this hybridity that gives them status as sources in the interdisciplinary field that we call cultural history. The hippopotamus in "La Specola" has a biography that reveals it has changed its meaning content from being a curious individual in a princely specimen cabinet to representing the species *Hippopotamus amphibius* in a modern museum of natural history. In this transformation, the specimen's historical, social and cultural contextualisation disappears. A closer study of the hippopotamus brings us to the baroque royal-court culture of Cosimo 3rd, to the Enlightenment's museum ideal and to the cultural history of wild animals in Europe. Here it is obvious that the hippopotamus has been an extremely rare animal, something which makes the hippopotamus in "La Specola" an especially interesting and valuable object for both natural history and cultural history.

Key words: Hippopotamus, stuffed animals, Zoological Museum "La Specola".

RIASSUNTO. - *L'ippopotamo del Museo Zoologico fiorentino "La Specola". Gli animali impagliati come documenti di storia culturale.*

Nel settore dei musei esiste oggi una separazione fra musei di carattere storico-culturale e musei naturalistici. Questa separazione fra natura e cultura si rende evidente nei vari aspetti organizzativi, fisici e cognitivi. Il presente articolo discute l'importanza storico-culturale delle collezioni naturalistiche. L'ippopotamo conservato nel Museo di Zoologia "La Specola" di Firenze è un esempio indicativo di come gli animali impagliati possano costituire utili elementi per un approccio alla storia della conoscenza e dell'intelligenza. Gli animali impagliati nei musei di Storia Naturale sono prodotti culturali che sono stati realizzati per esemplificare ed illustrare la natura. Essi possono quindi essere definiti natura e cultura, ed è proprio questo aspetto ibrido che dà loro il significato di documenti in quel settore interdisciplinare che chiamiamo storia culturale. La storia dell'ippopotamo della "Specola" ci indica che questo reperto ha cambiato il suo significato nel tempo, trasformandosi da individuo stimolatore di curiosità in un gabinetto di un principe ad esemplare rappresentativo della specie *Hippopotamus amphibius* in un moderno museo naturalistico.

Parole chiave: Ippopotamo, animali impagliati, Museo Zoologico "La Specola".

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I became interested in stuffed animals and how they might be interpreted in a cultural-history context while writing a book on the cultural history of dogs (Thorsen 2001a). Because dogs have also been stuffed and stored, this interest led me to natural history museums and to “La Specola” in Florence to see the three mounted dogs in the museum’s collection. And so it was that I chanced upon the glass display case showing the *Suidae* species, and discovered another interesting specimen, the hippopotamus. This article presents some fragments which may serve in a reconstruction of the cultural history of hippopotamuses in Europe and some reflections upon stuffed animals as museum objects. My starting point is that stuffed animals have an origin history that connects them not only to natural history collections but also to culture and society. By focusing on stuffed animals as sources to more than natural history and museology, my intention is to point out the cultural and historical dimension in natural-history collections. Stuffed animals are cultural products made to exemplify and allude to nature. They may therefore be defined as representing nature and culture. This hybridity gives them status as sources of the interdisciplinary field of cultural history.

The natural sciences have always been influenced by contemporary social and cultural conventions – and vice versa.¹ This has had an impact on the kind of natural items that have been collected and how the items have been exhibited, which then involves principles of taxonomy and categorization. In other words, the placement of the item or the specimen in the museum will have impact on the questions you might ask about it and thus delimit the field of knowledge the item may impart.

When we examine the collections of natural history museums and look for the specimens’ provenance, we discover that some animals originally came from natural history cabinets. Others have been bought from zoos, from hunters, from professional firms trading in wild animals; they may be trophy collections given as gifts to the museum or they have been collected by the museum.² Stuffed animals have, in other words, biographies that connect them to culture and society. A closer study of the hippopotamus in Florentine “La Specola” exemplifies the links between natural history and cultural history.

¹ The anthology edited by Jardine N., Secord J., A., Spary E., C. 1996: *Cultures of Natural History* presents a thorough introduction in the cultural aspects of natural history. See also Stephen Asma 2001.

² Agnelli et al. 1990; Star 1992; *The History of the Collections Contained in the Natural History Departments of the British Museum*, Vol. 1, 1904. The trade in exotic animals has gone on since the renaissance. On animal trade as big business in the 19th and early 20th centuries see Rothfels 2002.

AN OLD ANIMAL IN A NEW MUSEUM

When Florence's new natural history museum with the official name *L'Imperiale e Regio Museo di Fisica e Storia Naturale* opened its doors to the public on the 21st of February 1775, the visitors were introduced to an institution that realized the Age of Enlightenment's new museum ideal.³ The museum was open to one and all, and its activities were organized according to new scientific principles. Before the foundation of the museum, medical doctor and natural scholar Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti was commissioned by the Grand Duke of Tuscany to put together a catalogue over a period of two years, from 1763 to 1764, of what he designated the "natural products" – *i prodotti naturali* – in the princely collections. Most came from the Medicis' curiosity cabinets in the Uffizi galleries and Palazzo Pitti.

In the preface to the catalogue Targioni Tozzetti recommends that the general public should have access to these unique natural objects. Seven years later young Peter Leopold of Habsburg-Lorraine decided to put all the natural science objects in a separate museum. The construction of an astronomy observatory also brought astrology and meteorology into the museum's sphere. Completed in 1789, the observatory gave the museum the popular name "La Specola". In the same year, some of the adjoining Giardino di Boboli was made into a botanical garden and associated with the museum. Thus the museum covered all the branches of natural history.

During the second half of the 1800s this entity was split into a botanical and a mineralogical museum so that only the zoological collections remain at "La Specola". Today, La Specola's greatest claim to fame is the unique exhibition of around 1400 anatomical wax artefacts that portray human internal organs. These were prepared in the museum's own workshop from 1771 to 1893, most dating from the end of the 1700s and the early 1800s (Azzaroli Puccetti 1997, Poggesi 2001). The museum also holds other large and important collections. "La Specola" is, like the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen, to mention another important museum where parts of the collections stem from royal collections, a museum of great historical depth (Dam-Mikkelsen and Lundbaek 1980, Mordhorst 2001). Among thousands of objects we find the hippopotamus in Hall X, catalogue number 40 in Targioni Tozzetti's catalogue, now number 766.

There are three interesting and interconnected ways of embarking on a search through the history of the hippopotamus. The first is by

³ My presentation of the history of "La Specola" is based on Azzaroli Puccetti 1972; Berzi et al. 1980; Poggesi 2001.

way of the animal itself as we see it in the glass display case, the second is by way of the anecdote or history of its origin, and the third is through Targioni Tozzetti's catalogue entry. All of them state something about the hippopotamus, but from three perspectives: The first places the hippopotamus on centre stage as a natural history specimen; while the history of its origin leads to the history of exotic animals in Europe in general and to the history of Florentine Renaissance and Baroque culture in particular. Thirdly, Targioni Tozzetti's catalogue entry may be read as a historical narrative that invites reflections upon the cultural history of the hippopotamus in Western culture.

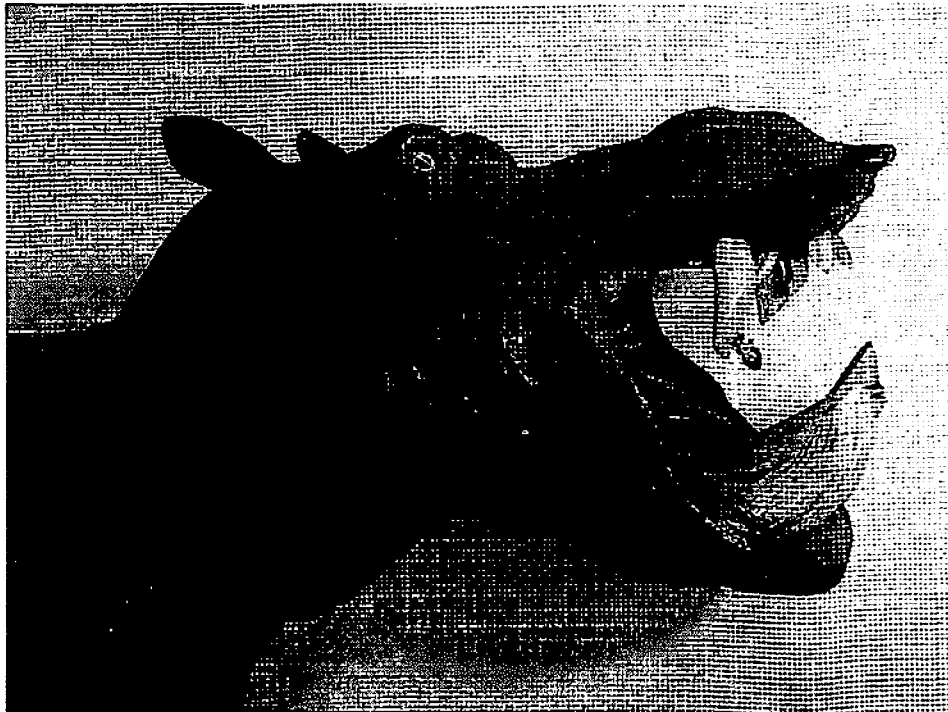
THE HIPPOPOTAMUS

We are here looking at a specimen whose exact age is unknown, but it must be approximately 300 years old if the history of its origin is correct. The age is revealed immediately through the clumsy execution of the stuffing and mounting, and through the animal's expression. The hippopotamus faces its public with its large mouth gaping wide open and painted red, with large eye teeth and powerful front teeth. The sagging legs and the skin that is cracking in several places testify to the ravages of time have taken on the specimen. The decrepit state of the hippopotamus and the fact that it is filled with plaster and hence excessively heavy warns us that it should not be moved. A mark around the neck suggests that the hippopotamus at one time was kept captive.

This mark around the neck is the connecting line to the origin history as reproduced by the museum staff and as found in the literature (Batini 1972: 25-30). According to the anecdote, the hippopotamus was an animal in the Medici family's menagerie in Giardino di Boboli, where it is claimed to have lived in one of the fountains, perhaps the one in the front of the Pitti Palace. When the hippopotamus died, it was stuffed (*ibid.*: 26). The mark around its neck from a chain or strong rope tells us that the hippopotamus probably spent the final part of its life as a captive in the Giardino di Boboli. This menagerie may be traced back to 1677 and the reign of Cosimo III (1670-1723).

Cosimo III was a prince who spent time and money on collecting live animals. Cages containing exotic animals were placed in the Giardino di Boboli for the enjoyment of the Florentine court and hidden from the eyes of the general public. An older menagerie in the city with a history dating back to the end of the 1200s had been at Piazza San Marco since 1550. Here there was also an arena for animal fights. Grand Duke Peter Leopold closed the San Marco menagerie in 1776 and the menagerie in the Giardino di Boboli in 1785 (Simari 1985; Agnelli et al. 1990: 286-287).

In her article "Serragli a Firenze al tempo dei Medici", Maria Matilde Simari points out that there are few sources to tell us anything about the menagerie in the Giardino di Boboli. I am relying here on her information. The menagerie was designed to house various types of animal – parrots, monkeys, pheasants and poultry are mentioned in the sources – but also rarer animals, even if we are not sure which ones (Simari 1985: 28). Perhaps we can turn to Targioni Tozzetti for more specific details. The first entry in Targioni Tozzetti's catalogue describes the skin of a young elephant mounted on a wooden skeleton, and he writes that "the elephant died in Florence near the end of the



Head of the hippopotamus in "La Specola" Museum (Photo S. Bambi).

previous century", i.e. near the end of the 1600s (Targioni Tozzetti 1763: 27). It is fairly safe to assume that the elephant may have belonged to Cosimo III's menagerie, and a complete examination of Targioni Tozzetti's catalogue might be of assistance in identifying other Medicean animals in "La Specola"'s collections.⁴

Simari refers to a brief description from 1757 of the menagerie, where it is stated that it had a separate section with stuffed animals

⁴ The Medici had a giraffe in 1459. Information given by Richard Reynolds, 23 October 2002.

which appeared “as if they were alive”. Eight large display windows were used for viewing the animals, the live ones as well as the stuffed ones. The building’s decorations reflected the exotic animals inside.⁵ The description of Cosimo III’s menagerie echoes the lay out of the Baroque menageries as a scenography confusing reality and artifice (Baratay and Hardouin-Fugier 1998: 54).

The menagerie in the Giardino di Boboli has been interpreted as an expression of Cosimo III’s deep fascination with live curiosities. It is also known that he had them mounted, an act that shows how rare and expensive the noble collectors of this time considered these animals to be. This further reinforces the theory that the hippopotamus has belonged to Cosimo III’s collection of exotic animals. When we include plants and trees in the category “live curiosities”, we must not forget this prince’s splendid orchards that contained a huge range – or collection – of fruit varieties, many of which were portrayed by Bartolomeo Bimbi around 1700. The paintings must have served as a visual catalogue (Chiarini et al. 1998).

On the death of a rare animal, the natural scientists of the 1600s faced the choice of either learning more about the animal by dissecting it, or stuffing and displaying it. In the words of American historian Paula Findlen: “Anatomizing nature produced knowledge but did not preserve nature. For this reason, many collectors often hesitated to dissect the rarest specimen they acquired.” She therefore concludes that many collectors hesitated to anatomize their rarest specimens because it would be a greater satisfaction to display an entire crocodile, or, in this case, a hippopotamus, than to dismember it (Findlen 1996 [1994]: 221).

Targioni Tozzetti’s catalogue entry from 1763 makes it probable that the hippopotamus he describes there is the same as the one on exhibit in “La Specola”. Regrettably Targioni Tozzetti does not offer any information that might lead us to connect this hippopotamus to Cosimo III’s menagerie. Being a naturalist, his interest was focused on the nature of the hippopotamus, its natural habitat and way of living, and not on this specific specimen’s provenance and biography. With its seven pages the catalogue entry *Ippopotamo (Cavallo marino)* is one of the most comprehensive of this volume.

Targioni Tozzetti writes the following about the specimen: “The reproduction is complete, that is a dried and filled skin, showing how the live animal appeared, with a whole head and open mouth, where the teeth may be seen in their natural position” (Targioni Tozzetti 1763,

⁵ Cambiagi, Gaetano 1757: *Descrizione dell’Imperiale Giardino di Boboli*. Firenze; quoted in Simari 1985: 28.

I: 51).⁶ The teeth of the hippopotamus receive much attention – admittedly they also are highly conspicuous. The less visible wear mark around the neck is not mentioned, even though Targioni Tozzetti remarks on other injuries to the skin. He also reflects on the extraordinary thickness of the skin, considering it well suited as raw material for the soles of shoes worn by the hermits on Mount Sinai (*ibid.*: 56).⁷ Targioni Tozzetti's remarks on the animal's teeth are of special interest because they help us understand just how rare a hippopotamus must have been in his time. He writes about the condition of the teeth, that "their colour and substance resemble ivory quite a lot, but are old and yellowed" (*ibid.*: 53).⁸ He also notes the distance between the teeth, and what they resemble (*ibid.*). The teeth of the hippopotamus resemble those of the boar, writes Targioni Tozzetti, but they are flat and very worn on the top. Following these statements, he concludes that the hippopotamus must be a carnivore: "It needs a great deal of food, and based on the structure of the teeth it appears to be a carnivore" (*ibid.*: 57).⁹

After explaining the condition of the teeth, Targioni Tozzetti discusses the ability and opportunity of the hippopotamus to forage. Perhaps it does not live in the region of the Nile that lies in Egypt, he reasons, but rather in Ethiopia where there are large areas of marshland, and in other African rivers where it will be easier to catch prey. The crocodiles of the Nile are not easy prey for the hippopotamus, "primarily because they are so much quicker than him, not being created to swim quickly to the shore." Other predators are also difficult to catch. The hippopotamus would not be able to catch a fleeing sheep, being so "clumsy and inept" for the purpose as he is (*ibid.*: 57-58).¹⁰

BETWEEN CLASSIFICATION

Keywords in the zoology of the late 1700s were nomenclature and

⁶ "La stampa d'uno intiero, cioè il cuojo seccato, e ripieno, che rappresenta la figura dell'animale vivo, col capo intiero e colla bocca aperta, in cui si vedono i denti nella loro situazione naturale".

⁷ "Il cuio è di colore di terra tutto grinze e scabiosità irregolari, durissimo, /.../ e s'intende come al rifere del Bellonis e dell'Alpino possa essere ottimo per suola da scarpe dei Romiti del Monte Sinai".

⁸ "...nel colore e sostanza sono molto simili all'avorio, ma vecchio e giallastro" The ivory of the hippo has the quality that does not yellow so that it has been used to make false teeth (Blunt 1967: 117, note 2).

⁹ "Egli ha bisogno di molto alimento, e dalla struttura dei denti sembra essere carnivoro".

¹⁰ "...ed i coccodrilli non sono animali da lasciarsi mangiare dall'ippopotamo così facilmente, massimo perché sono tanto più agili di lui, che non fare fatto per nuotare velocemente all'asciutto poi, cioè fuori dell'acqua, egli non dovrebbe fare grandi prede, perché è di una corporatura così goffa ed disadatta, che non gli darei a raggiungere una pecora la quale fugissi".

classification. Using Linné's taxonomy, precise names could now be given to all new animals that were discovered in an increasingly bigger world. When we study the catalogue entry describing the hippopotamus, however, it seems that this animal had not yet been finally inserted in the linnean order. This may explain how a learned person such as Targioni Tozzetti, calling himself the Dean of Florence's medical college, Professor of Botany and Prefect of Biblioteca Pubblica Magliabechiana, was so ignorant of how the hippopotamus lived.

Targioni Tozzetti's problem was that he lacked a basis for comparison. The catalogue entry was written around 40 years after the rule of Cosimo III, and we may deduce that Targioni Tozzetti had never seen a live hippopotamus. One might imagine that there was an oral tradition regarding this strange animal that had lived in the Giardino di Boboli, but if this were the case it either never reached Targioni Tozzetti's ears, or rather, being a scholar of the 18th century, he preferred not to mix scientific facts with popular anecdotes. The latter would have been the typical approach of natural historians of the Renaissance who compiled whatever they had seen, read and heard about the animal in their catalogue entries.¹¹ In comparison to this, Targioni Tozzetti seemed to have based his conclusions on what he could observe, i.e. the stuffed hippo, and what he could learn from contemporary naturalists like Duke de Buffon (1707-1788) and Carl von Linné (1707-1778).

Apparently he found little help in the library: As he points out, the way of life of the hippopotamus was sparingly described in zoological literature. In his description of the hippopotamus he refers to such luminaries as Linné and Buffon, but neither Linné nor Buffon have much to tell us about hippos. In Linné's "Systema Naturae" (1748, p. 11) the hippopotamus is described in the fifth order of quadrupeds, i.e. "Thiere mit Pferdgebiss", together with the elephants, the rhinoceros, the horses and the swine. The teeth are the classification criterion. In "Histoire Naturelle" (1761, vol. 9, p. 57) Buffon mentions the hippo in one sentence claiming that the animals live along the big rivers in India and Africa.

Did Targioni Tozzetti do a good job? Later in the catalogue we find an entry describing a hippopotamus' cranium, and he mentions that the collection has a number of hippopotamus teeth, some used to decorate weapons. Could the cranium registered in Targioni Tozzetti's catalogue have belonged to the stuffed hippopotamus? We may wonder whether he compared the cranium and these teeth with the specimen or not, but the entries are not connected in the catalogue. Today we know that the hippopotamus in "La Specola" has false teeth that probably were made

¹¹ See for instance Whitaker 1996: 78 about wonders and the importance of the anecdote.

from painted wood, while the cranium itself is built of wood and plaster. The size shows that the hippopotamus did not survive its captivity for very long, but that it died while still only halfway to adulthood. It is impossible to determine the gender of the animal.¹²

Like Linné, Targioni Tozzetti uses the teeth as a classification criterion, and when we look at the specimen, it becomes even more evident why Targioni Tozzetti was so focused on the teeth of the hippopotamus. Whoever in his time stuffed the hippopotamus made it a repulsive and frightening wild animal, standing there with its gaping mouth, apparently ready to devour its prey. Moreover, it is precisely the huge mouth that is characteristic of the hippopotamus.¹³ The mouth makes it awe-inspiring and might mislead a human spectator into believing that hippopotamuses are carnivores. The hippo had been represented as a carnivore earlier, too.

Around 1615-1616, the Dutch painter Peter Paul Rubens painted a hunting scene where horsemen with dogs attack a crocodile and a hippopotamus. The raging hippopotamus is in the centre of the picture, its jaws gaping wide and revealing razor-sharp fangs. In the interpretation of Rubens, the hippopotamus appears as the most dangerous and blood-thirsty of these two wild animals (Baratay and Hardoin-Fugier 2002 (1998: 62-63).

While other exotic live animals such as lions and elephants have been brought to Europe since antiquity to serve as gifts and live trophies (ibid.: 17-19; Rothfels 2002: 14-16), live hippopotamuses in European captivity must be a relatively late and modern phenomenon. To understand what a rarity live hippopotamuses were in Europe, I can mention how on the arrival of the baby hippopotamus at the London Zoo in 1850, it was claimed to be the first live hippopotamus seen in Europe since the Roman period (Blunt 1976: 106, Ritvo 1987: 228). The number of visitors to the zoo doubled that year (Ritvo 1987: 217). The hippopotamus was called Obaysch. It died in 1878, twenty-nine years old, which is actually not an advanced age for a hippopotamus (Blunt 1976: 121). Information in Richard Altick's book "The Shows of London" states that there was a hippopotamus in the three storied (!) Exeter Change Royal Menagerie in London as early as 1813. Altick quotes Lord Byron who, after a visit to the menagerie, wrote in his journal on 14 November 1813: "Two nights ago I saw the tigers up at Exeter Change. /.../ There was a "hippopotamus" like Lord L[iverpool] in the face" (Altick 1978: 309).

¹² Information given by curator Paolo Agnelli, 02 October 2002.

¹³ Today, in the USA it would cost approximately \$23 500 to stuff an adult hippo, an open-mouth pose would require an additional \$110 (Asma 2001: 14).

One important reason why hippopotamuses were extremely rare in older menageries, and why they also were sensational newcomers in the new, public zoological gardens of the 1800s, was that capturing a calf and keeping it alive during transport was very difficult.¹⁴ In the animal trade of the last decades of the 19th century, the hippopotamus was one of the most valuable animals on the market (Rothfels 2002: 59). The general public in the US did not see a live hippopotamus until 1860, while the first elephant was brought to the continent in 1796, the first rhinoceros in 1830 and the first giraffes in 1837 or 1838. Still being rare at the end of the 19th century, the hippo in the Giardino di Boboli must have been an extraordinary natural rarity and a marvel in its time!

In retrospect, it may be considered a symbolic act when a few years after the opening of L'Imperiale Regio Museo di Fisica e Storia Naturale, Peter Leopold closed Cosimo III's menagerie. The hippopotamus, if we have now become convinced that it actually was part of the Grand Duke's collection of exotic animals, first as a live then later as a dead curiosity, had at this time been included in the order of the new natural history museum. When the menagerie was closed, "the predilection for collecting and documenting zoological specimens in a spirit that united natural-science interest with the passion for collecting things that had been typical of the last grand dukes of Medici disappeared," Maria Matilde Simari concludes (Simari 1986: 25). The founding of "La Specola" and the closing down of the menagerie in the Giardino di Boboli may also be considered an expression of the understanding of and attitude to natural history that was prevalent during the Age of Enlightenment, knowledge that was made accessible to everyone through the public museum.

We do not know what the floor plan was for the first exhibition in "La Specola". Today the hippopotamus is standing "in its proper place" together with specimens of the *Suidae* family, which like the *Hippopotamidae* belongs to the order *Arctiodactyla*. The closest neighbour is a wild boar. There the hippopotamus stands as if he was just another hippopotamus, and not as one that probably lived out his life in a fountain in the Giardino di Boboli. Here the animal was part of a tradition that stemmed from the need of Renaissance princes to demonstrate their power by means of the unique and the marvellous – a realm that these animals were also a part of.

WHY LOOK AT STUFFED ANIMALS?

The purpose of this article is to look at stuffed animals as sources of

¹⁴ See for instance Rothfels 2002, Chap. 2: Catching Animals.

cultural history. The biography of the hippopotamus shows that it has changed its meaning content as an object from being a curiosity in the Medici menagerie to becoming a species representative in "La Specola". In this transformation the specimen's historical, social and cultural contextualization has disappeared.

Having used the hippopotamus as a guide, first into the baroque royal culture and then the Enlightenment's museum ideal, I shall now conclude with some remarks on what characterizes stuffed animals as objects. The history of the hippopotamus shows that two aspects are important. First, the purpose of stuffing the animal, and second the context in which the specimen is presented.

Strictly speaking, two overarching motives may be distinguished for stuffing animals. One is to preserve the animal as an individual the other is to preserve it as a representative of the species. Trophies emphasize animals as individuals, as the selected animals or parts thereof are transformed into souvenirs of hunting expeditions. This also applies to stuffed pets, where the intention is to preserve an animal with great emotional importance to the owner as a physical memorial (Thorsen 2001b).

Animals used for zoological exhibitions represent their species and are in principle replaceable. The animal that was once alive is de-individualized and anonymous. When visitors come to exhibitions in the zoological museum it is to see animals as animals, i.e. as representatives of their species, detached from time and historical space. Whatever social and cultural contexts the animal was once part of are not only forgotten, they are without interest. As Stephen T. Asma points out: "[Specimens] have intriguing and elaborate histories that largely go untold, because, unlike fine art objects, their individuality must be subjugated to the needs of scientific pedagogy" (Asma 2001: 3). With very few exceptions natural history museums only exhibit wild animals. Perhaps they are not inserted in history and culture simply because they are categorized as wild.¹⁵ The exception would be representatives of extinct species, which usually are exhibited with information about when and where the last representatives of the species were killed.

Visitors rarely reflect upon the process the dead animal has undergone during the stuffing procedure itself. Under the skilled hands of the taxidermist the dead animal undergoes a transformation from nat-

¹⁵ So far I have found one famous animal which is exhibited in a natural history museum with information about the animal's biography. This is the Indian rhinoceros whose skeleton is on display at Les Galeries d'Anatomie comparée et de Paleontologie and the stuffed skin in the Grande Galerie de l'Evolution in Paris. The animal came to La Ménagerie Royale in Versailles in 1770, and is described by Buffon in his *Histoire Naturelle*. It was cut by a saber in 1792, and died later in the Jardin des Plantes.

ure to culture. Animals that have been prepared for research are, according to Anne Larsen in referring to 19th century natural history, a specimen; "objects of natural origin that had been prepared in ways that allowed them to be examined, compared to similar objects and described in a concise, informative manner" (Larsen 1996: 358). Her crucial point is that the prepared animal is an artificial object "designed and constructed by naturalists to answer various scientific needs" (ibid.). When we pursue this argument in the exhibit, once in place on display, the animal is naturalized again.

The hippo was a live curiosity in Cosimo III's menagerie, and when it died, it was stuffed because it was a marvellous and wonderful animal. In that sense the hippopotamus may be considered a trophy in the Prince's collection of natural specimens, a trophy that made the collection superb in the eyes of others. Only when the hippopotamus specimen was introduced into the collections of "La Specola" did it receive the status of a representative of a species. The cultural history biography of the hippopotamus is presented on the museum's website, but not in the exhibition. Thus, I think, an essential quality is lost, i.e. the meaning of the animal when it belonged to the Medici, whether live or stuffed, and the fascination of seeing something that lived in an earlier period of time. In the same way as other stuffed animals, the hippopotamus as an object holds a duality, being both a product of human activity and a remnant of something that once lived. This duality makes stuffed animals into something more than the linking stage between the people of the past and the present, as they present themselves as lived lives.

Stuffed animals bring together the culturalized and the naturalized animal. Considering these objects both as animals and as representations in a cultural context enables us to see some of the linking lines between the natural sciences and the humanities, between the hard and the soft sciences.

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