

MENAGERIES

◆ AS PRINCELY NECESSITIES AND ◆ MIRRORS OF THEIR TIMES

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THE FIRST GREAT WOMAN RECORDED IN HISTORY WAS QUEEN Hatshepsut of Egypt. Dressing like a king and wearing a false beard, she ruled her country for twenty years in the fifteenth century B.C., making it prosper and expanding its trade relations with other states. Most famously, she sent an expedition down the Red Sea to Punt, a land in East Africa that was rich in gold, ivory, resins, and wild animals. She wanted the exotic creatures in particular to enhance her royal image, for little can compare with the impact of a retinue of unusual and marvelous beasts. Gratifying Hatshepsut's desire, her agents returned home with monkeys, leopards, curious birds, wild "cattle," and a giraffe for the royal menagerie (fig. 1).¹ It was a great coup for the queen to demonstrate her power and influence over faraway regions through a collection of live trophies.

Hatshepsut was one of many rulers in the course of history to be captivated by strange animals. Halfway across the globe, around 1150 B.C., the Chinese emperor Wen Wang built a nine-hundred-acre "Park of Knowledge" in the province of Henan, between Beijing and Nanjing, where he kept various deer, "white birds with dazzling plumes," and a great variety of fish.² Mesopotamian kings and their Persian successors set up large, walled parks, called *paradeisoi* by the Greeks, where they maintained numerous beasts for contemplation, hunting, and court ceremonies—hence our word *paradise*.

Collecting rare, exotic, and wild beasts seems to be a universal human desire.³ People have been indulging it for millennia, on different continents, and in various cultural settings. Because keeping animals purely for entertainment is expensive, only rulers and aristocrats had the wherewithal to gather unusual animals at their palaces and pleasure parks. Rulers pursued rare fauna for diverse reasons, and these have been evolving over the course of the centuries. In the Hellenistic world, in ancient Rome, and in the Aztec empire, war often provided the incentive and the means for procuring rare beasts. In the Renaissance, animals came to be employed as effective tools of international diplomacy. From the sixteenth century onward, foreign beasts

were acquired for more scientific purposes. Of course, at all times exotic creatures also enabled rulers to demonstrate their political power and its reach. By looking at the changing history of man's relations with animals—through a series of revealing examples—we can see how menageries reflected the values, concerns, and ambitions of the age in which they were formed.

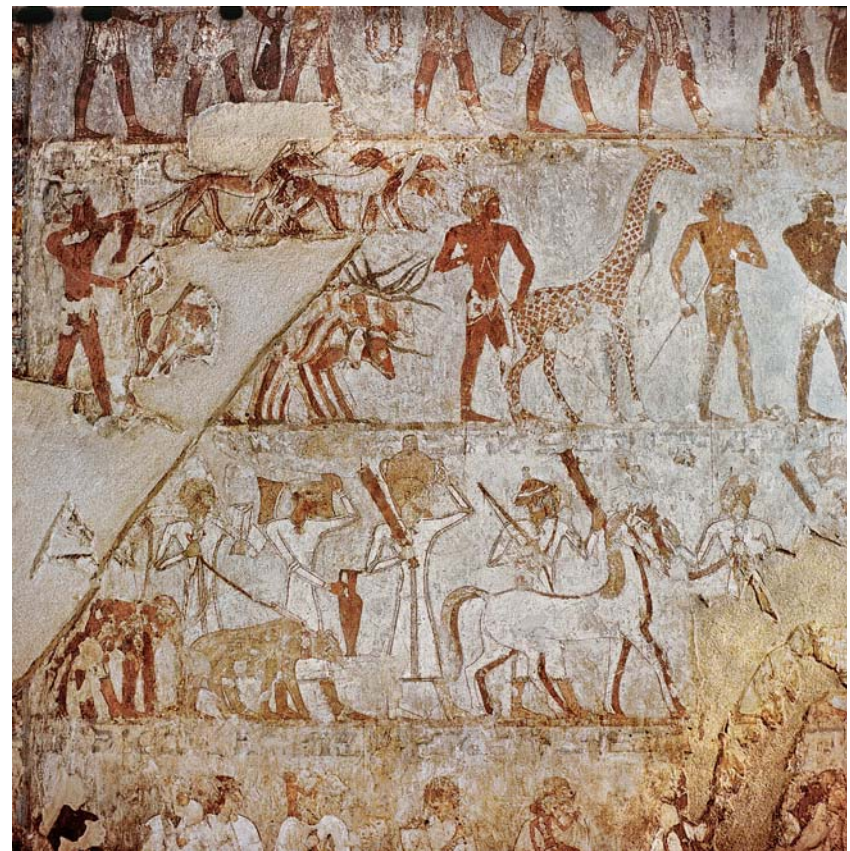


FIGURE 1
Detail of a wall painting from the tomb-chapel of the vizier Rekhmire, showing the arrival of exotic animals similar to those brought to Queen Hatshepsut, Egyptian, Eighteenth Dynasty. Tomb of Rekhmire, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tombs of the Nobles, Thebes, Egypt. Photo: © Werner Forman/Art Resource, New York.

Figure 9, detail.

◆ ANIMALS AND ANCIENTS

As Alexander the Great waged an assault on the Persian Empire, he encountered an astounding military technology.⁴ At the battle of Gaugamela (in present-day Iraq) in 331 B.C., Darius, the king of Persia, met his Macedonian enemy with a phalanx of fifteen elephants (fig. 2). Flapping their ears, trumpeting, stomping the ground with treelike feet, the giant beasts terrified the uninitiated. They threw soldiers and horses into panic, trampled them underfoot, and wreaked havoc on the battlefield. Being a superb strategist, Alexander managed to outmaneuver these living tanks and win the battle, but he grasped the tactical usefulness of elephant warriors and decided to assemble his own animal troops.

Too busy with his eastern conquests, Alexander never did create his own elephant army. But his successors, having inherited his beasts, deployed them against each other as they vied for Alexander's legacy and for supremacy over one another. In fact, possession of war elephants became a kind of ancient arms race.

All elephants up to that point, however, were imported from India, the routes to which lay under the control of Alexander's general Seleucus, and after his death, that of the general's son Antiochus I. So other successors had to find alternate sources for their animal warriors. This problem was particularly pressing for Ptolemy Philadelphus, who came to rule Egypt in 282 B.C. Philadelphus contested with Antiochus the possession of Coele-Syria (southern Syria)—the endpoint of the great trade routes stretching from the East. He had inherited from his father, Ptolemy I, another of Alexander's generals, a handful of elephants, but with time and military confrontations their number dwindled. Philadelphus desperately needed to replenish his stock to preserve and consolidate his kingdom in the face of constant threats from other successors. For him elephants were not a luxury but a necessity for strengthening his kingdom in its formative stage.

Having read Herodotus and Aristotle, who had reported that elephants lived in the African hinterland, areas now encompassed by eastern Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, Philadelphus sent his explorers to investigate.⁵ They were to travel along the Nile valley and the western coast of the Red Sea, describe the regions they traversed, survey their natural resources, and bring back interesting specimens. Of course, the king was most keen



FIGURE 2
Phalera depicting a war elephant, Hellenistic Period, chased and gilded silver, diam: 24.7 cm (9¾ in.). St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum. © State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

to obtain the elephants. But he was also eager to best Alexander the Great, who had gathered much scientific information during his eastern campaign, enabling his teacher Aristotle to compose an encyclopedic *History of Animals*. Philadelphus, who through his patronage of literature and science made the library of Alexandria the preeminent study center in the Mediterranean world, commanded his explorers to bring back other unusual beasts as well.⁶

His quest and ambition paid off. Within a few years, in the winter of 275/74 B.C., when Philadelphus staged a procession in honor of his father and the god Dionysus, he was able to parade before his astonished subjects and foreign guests a spectacular collection of exotic creatures.⁷ Marching first were ninety-six elephants pulling military chariots. After them followed saiga antelopes (hump-nosed ruminants from the Urals), oryxes with bright white bodies and horns rising like tall spears, hartebeests (hump-shouldered fawns with long, narrow faces), ostriches, camels, a large white bear (either a Thracian variety or an albino from Syria), leopards, cheetahs, caracals, a giraffe (unknown even to Aristotle), a two-horned white Ethiopian rhinoceros, and other African, Ethiopian, Arabian, Syrian, and Persian beasts



FIGURE 3
The Magerius Mosaic (hunting scenes in celebration of Venationes offered by Magerius), 3rd century A.D., from the amphitheater in Smirat, Tunisia. Tunisia, Sousse Museum. Photo: © Vanni/Art Resource, New York.

and birds. A by-product of a war effort, this animal array was like nothing ever seen in any Greek city. As a result, Philadelphus gained a lasting renown—less for his battlefield triumphs, which were not spectacular, than for creating a splendid court, sponsoring learning of all kinds, and ushering in a golden age of Alexandria.⁸ Philadelphus was typical of Hellenistic kings in combining active warfare with nurturing of knowledge, but he stood out among them for the lasting effects of his cultural and scientific endeavors.

War also enabled the Romans to gather great quantities of exotic animals. But unlike Philadelphus, who sent his beasts to reside peacefully in the royal zoo after his Grand Procession, except for the elephants, of course, the Romans slaughtered foreign fauna in staged combats. (This practice would subsequently be emulated, though on a much smaller scale, by various European rulers, from the Medici in fifteenth-century Florence to the Saxon electors in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dresden). Wild beast hunts in the arena were, along with gladiatorial fights, a favorite entertainment of the

Romans (fig. 3).⁹ Presented only a few times a year, these spectacles were always special events, anticipated with great eagerness and much talked about afterward.

Rome was a violent place. In the city itself, it was dangerous to walk down the street because of roving bands of thugs. Outside its walls, war veterans often turned into bandits and prowled the countryside. Beyond the frontiers of the empire, the Roman army conquered foreign peoples with highly organized and merciless onslaughts. Violence in the arena was an extension of the violence of the whole state.

Roman society was also highly stratified. Those who appeared in the arena were perceived as lesser beings than the spectators and thus deserving their fate. Gladiators, who fought against men, as well as the *bestiarii* and *venatores*, who sparred with exotic animals, were either slaves sold to gladiatorial schools or free men who voluntarily gave up the rights and privileges of citizens in order to escape debt or to obtain a guaranteed subsistence. Wild beasts were also seen as justly receiving harsh treatment. They were inferior creatures, violent and aggressive by their very nature, so it was deemed appropriate for humans to vent their own aggression on animals. Aristotle had argued that animals lacked rationality, and so they could be treated without the justice or humanity due to men. Of course, he warned, wanton cruelty toward animals was inadvisable as it might accustom humans to brutal conduct toward each other. But for the Romans the sight of fighting and dying beasts was, by and large, not seen as wanton. It demonstrated their state's triumph over foreign lands and control over nature.

The killing of a multitude of beasts during the show also exhibited its sponsor's largesse—his ability to dispose of the huge sums of money that went into procuring and transporting the animals to Rome—just for the pleasure of the populace. The sponsors were usually ambitious politicians or emperors. Thus Augustus boasted in the first century A.D. that among the great achievements of his reign, “in my own name, or that of my sons or grandsons, on twenty-six occasions I gave to the people, in the circus, in the forum, or in the amphitheater, hunts of African wild beasts, in which about three thousand five hundred beasts were slain.”¹⁰ This number would grow higher and higher with each successive emperor. Trajan had eleven thousand animals killed in the games celebrating his Dacian triumph in A.D. 106.¹¹

Bringing the games together was an enormously complex undertaking. To begin with, the sponsor had to call on his contacts in the regions where desirable beasts dwelled. Since Romans built their political careers on military campaigns in distant lands, they asked the rulers and governors of the territories they had subjugated to provide them with a variety of exotic creatures. Transporting wild animals from faraway provinces was also an involved business. The Roman fleet was used in this process, either merchant galleys, which served as both cargo vessels and men-of-war, depending on circumstances, or ships for ferrying army horses, which had a large hull in the back and a flat bottom. Ferocious beasts, such as lions, were brought on board and kept in cages for the duration of the journey. Larger animals, such as elephants or rhinoceroses, were secured on the deck by ropes or chains attached to their feet. Needless to say, handling wild creatures, traumatized by arduous journeys, was a fraught task. Pliny the Elder, however, reports a charming anecdote about disembarking elephants at the south-Italian port of Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli): Frightened by the length of the gangway stretching from the boat to the shore, the animals, of their own accord, turned around and crossed it backward to cheat themselves in their estimation of the distance.¹²

Even if they arrived in good time and decent shape, exotic beasts required attentive care and proper feeding to perform in the games. Symmachus, a consul who staged opulent animal hunts in A.D. 391, had imported a number of crocodiles for his show, but they refused to eat for fifty days. When the time for the games arrived, the crocodiles had little pluck left in them. Emaciated, they had to be dispatched in a hurry, before they expired on their own from hunger and the stress of being dragged into the arena and attacked by armed men.¹³

The lot of exotic animals—forcefully removed from their natural habitats, carted along uneven roads, loaded on and off wagons and ships, and then subjected to human whims—had always been quite miserable. Even when they were not killed by the hundreds or thousands to entertain the masses, wild beasts had to endure confinement, the wrong food, different climate, and other hardships that often caused their premature death.

◆ EXOTIC BEASTS AND RENAISSANCE RULERS

After a hiatus of several centuries following the fall of the Roman Empire, Renaissance Europeans began to sail more often to distant lands in search of valuable and lucrative commodities, be they African gold, Egyptian carpets, Turkish alum (used for fixing dye to cloth), or Eastern spices. Increasingly they brought back not only those prized wares but also unusual birds and beasts. Because they were still rare and always marvelous, exotic animals became potent diplomatic gifts and political tools.

In 1516 the king of Portugal, Manuel I, presented a remarkable assemblage of animals to Pope Leo X.¹⁴ Manuel had several motivations for his offering: He wanted to express his obedience to the recently elected pontiff, to show Portuguese achievements abroad, to request relief from church tithes so that Portugal could use this money for further expansion in Africa and the Indies (couched as conversion of the natives to the Catholic faith), and to obtain a guarantee that the Spice Islands would be Portugal's domain, rather than that of Spain, which was also trying to claim this critical commercial region. To dazzle and win over the pope, Manuel sent him Chinese and Mexican manuscripts to appeal to Leo's learning, vestments and altar fittings adorned with gems to suit his opulent tastes, and to tantalize the pope's interest in nature—a cheetah, two leopards, various parrots and Indian birds, a fine Persian horse, and, most spectacular of all, a young white elephant from India trained to dance to the music of pipes and to respond to commands in Indian and Portuguese. As the convoy of human and animal ambassadors made its way from Lisbon to Rome, crowds of onlookers came out to gawk at the rare creatures. Once the cortege reached the Vatican, it became the object of international attention. The beasts, especially the elephant Hanno, were a great success (fig. 4). They brought glory to Manuel for being able to procure such stunning gifts thanks to the Portuguese expansion overseas, and to Leo for commanding such wondrous offerings from powerful European rulers.

Some two decades later, in 1533, Leo X's cousin, Pope Clement VII, married his kinswoman Catherine de Medici to Henry II, son of the French king Francis I. In the course of the nuptial festivities the two parties exchanged splendid gifts. These events were later immortalized in verse by the writer and courtier Nicolas Houel and illustrated in commemorative drawings by Antoine Caron (ca. 1521–1599). As Houel wrote:



FIGURE 4
Majolica platter showing the elephant Hanno in procession with Pope Leo X, surrounded by cardinals, courtiers, and the Swiss Guard, Montelupo, Italy, ca. 1516. London, Victoria and Albert Museum. Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Art Resource, New York.

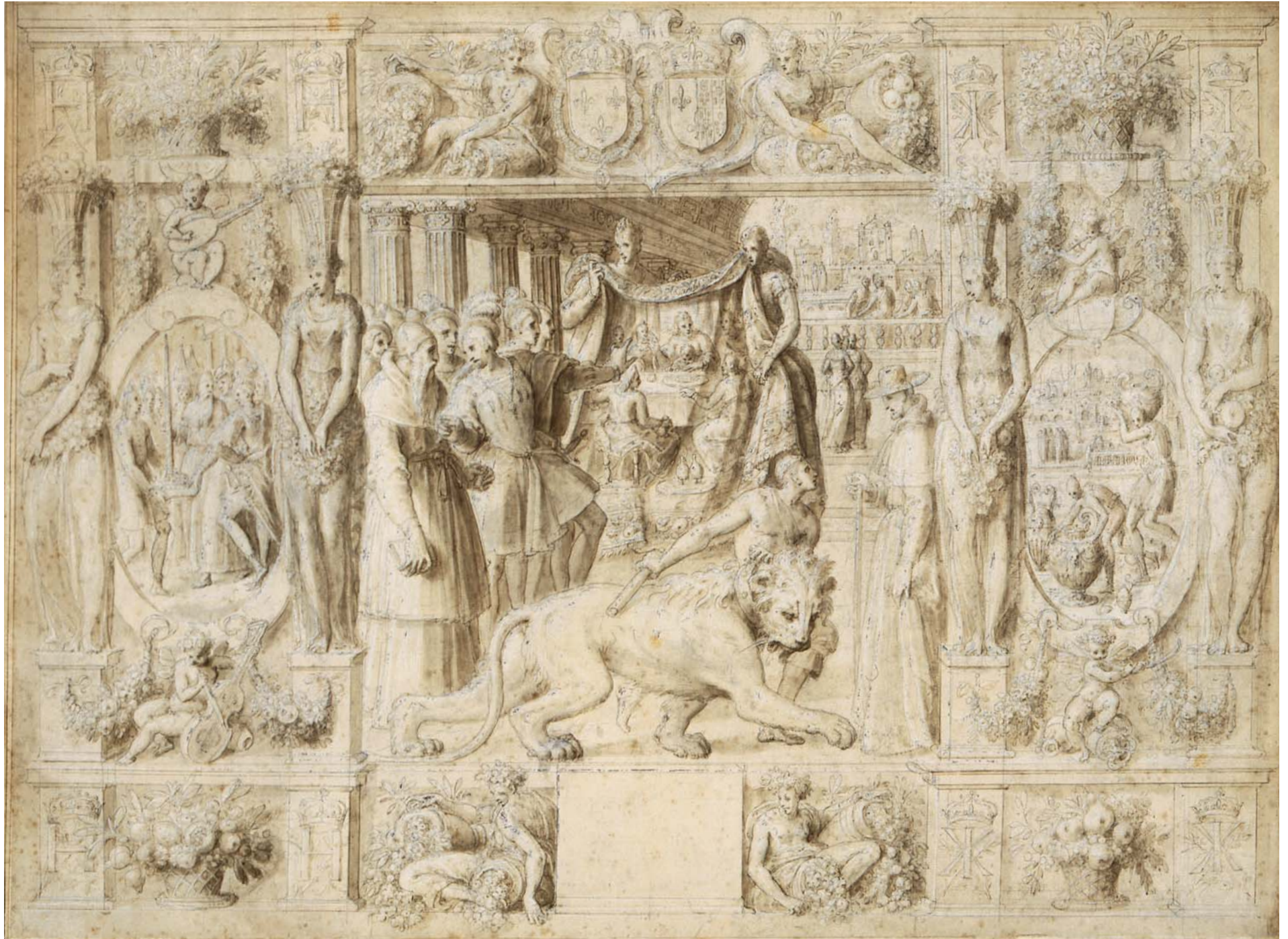


FIGURE 5

Antoine Caron (French, ca. 1521–1599), *The Gifts Exchanged between Pope Clement VII and King Francis I*, ca. 1560–74. Brown ink and brown wash, 40.6 × 55.4 cm (16 × 21¾ in.). Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des arts graphiques, inv. RF 29752-12. The drawing accompanied Nicolas Houel's *Histoire française de nostre temps*. Photo: © J. G. Berizzi/Réunion des musées nationaux/Art Resource, New York.

*The tournament having ended, the Holy Father
made a gift to the King of a unicorn's horn,
likewise the King gives him a beautiful tapestry,
Showing him thus his great generosity.
And to gratify in kind the other side
To Ippolito, the nephew of the triple crown,
Likewise a lion he offers him,
Full of grandeur and courage . . .*¹⁵

The accompanying drawing (fig. 5) shows the servants bearing massive metal vases in the right medallion, the unicorn horn being presented in the left one, the proffering of the tapestry in the background of the central panel (the tapestry depicted *The Last Supper* by Leonardo Da Vinci [1452–1519], with the French royal arms prominent over the head of Christ). The most important position, however, is given to the lion in the front center. Previously shipped to Francis I from Algiers, this beast was, of course, a princely creature par excellence, but it was also one of the emblems of Florence. The Medici had kept lions for generations and, as true heirs of the ancient Romans, staged animal combats to entertain visiting dignitaries. In April 1459, for example, Cosimo de' Medici decided to treat Pope Pius II and Galeazzo Maria Sforza to a spectacle of lions attacking and ripping apart horses, bulls, buffalos, boars, goats, and cows. Unfortunately, the lions were so well cared-for that they showed no interest in hunting, embarrassing Cosimo and displeasing his guests.¹⁶ Still, the gift of a lion to the papal nephew was astute.

On occasion, animal presents could prove overwhelming to rulers. The Chinese emperor Xian Zong Zhu Jianshen, for example, received so many lions from foreign ambassadors that when a delegation from Sultan Ahmad, the Timurid ruler of Samarkand, arrived at his court in the 1480s with two more felines, the emperor protested. Quite contrary to the Confucian tradition of graciously accepting gifts from vassals, he declared that lions were useless animals, too expensive to keep, and not even fit to harness in front of his carriage. He had had enough of them.¹⁷

Yet most rulers felt that exotic fauna was very effective in symbolizing their political might and its extent. When Hernán Cortés arrived in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán in 1519, he was astonished by the enormous size and scope of the emperor Montezuma's collection of birds, beasts, and unusual humans, and devoted more time to the description of this menagerie than to any other aspect of the city.¹⁸ Cortés marveled at pavilions full of birds of prey and at separate pools for sea and river fowl. He gaped at majestic jaguars, pumas, and ocelots in their stout cages and at reptiles kept in clay jars. He was also amazed by the assembly of dwarfs, hunchbacks, albinos and other such men and women kept in the royal zoo. Hundreds of attendants took care of Montezuma's creatures, taking pains to feed them appropriate diets and keep them in good health. The vastness and variety of this menagerie left no doubt that Montezuma controlled a great empire. And to his subjects it also signaled that the emperor was like a god, ruling over all creation. Cortés took to heart the message of Montezuma's animal collection. Seeing it as a direct reflection of the Aztec ruler's power, he took pains to destroy it when sacking Tenochtitlán in 1521.

Then, a few years later, when his own authority and reputation needed shoring up, Cortés sailed back to Spain, taking along jaguars, ocelots, pelicans, brightly plumed parrots, an armadillo and an opossum (two animals entirely new to Europe), and, most remarkable of all, human specimens: male and female dwarfs and hunchbacks, a band of men and women "whiter than Germans" (i.e., albinos), Aztec jugglers and ball-players, and Mexican noblemen, used by Cortés as if they were rare and diverting pets (fig. 6).¹⁹ This fabulous train paid off handsomely. Impressed by the marvels Cortés had captured in the Aztec kingdom, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V showered him with honors and privileges, conferring on him the title of marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca and a grant of twenty-two pueblos. Charles also confirmed Cortés as captain-general of New Spain and "governor of the islands and territories he might discover in the South Sea," and gave him the right to retain the twelfth part of what he should conquer in perpetuity for himself and his descendants. These titles and concessions assured Cortés first rank among the conquistadors and colonists of New Spain. He gained them in no small part thanks to his animal cortege, which made him appear, according to a contemporary, "as a great lord."



Indianische Vorführung mit einem Holzklotz (2. Phase)
Indian performance with a wooden block (2nd phase) Producción india con un tajo de madera (2-a fase)



Indianische Vorführung mit einem Holzklotz (3. Phase)
Indian performance with a wooden block (3rd phase) Producción india con un tajo de madera (3-a fase)

FIGURE 6

Christoph Weiditz (German, 1500–1559), *Aztec Juggler*, 1529. Drawing from *Das Trachtenbuch des Christoph Weiditz von seinen Reisen nach Spanien (1529) und den Niederlanden (1531/32)*. Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Handschrift 22474. Reproduced from a facsimile of this manuscript published by Theodor Hampe (Berlin and Leipzig, 1927). Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 83–B11083.

◆ RARE FAUNA FOR ENLIGHTENED MONARCHS

The Age of Exploration, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, introduced new incentives for collecting exotic creatures. The steady stream of beasts from the New World, Africa, and Asia brought back by conquistadors, merchants, and adventurers spurred not only the eagerness of European rulers to acquire them but also the desire of naturalists to comprehend the bounty of nature in new, more scientific ways. Exposed to novel species, scientists began to rethink their understanding of the animal world. Thus far it had been studied largely through the prism of ancient writers on the subject, such as Aristotle and Pliny the Elder. Now naturalists began to base their descriptions and analysis of fauna on direct observation of both exotic species and familiar ones.²⁰ Influenced by this new trend, rulers, in their turn, started to amass menageries of both live beasts and preserved specimens, turning their collections into scientific laboratories. One of the most passionate exponents of this new approach was Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, who ruled from his capital of Prague (1576–1612).

Rudolf hunted for exotic fauna from every possible source (fig. 7).²¹ He enlisted the help of merchants with their far-flung contacts, urged his diplo-

mats to acquire beasts from distant lands, kept an eye on rare creatures procured by other rulers, and tried to cajole them to cede them to him. Thus he acquired New World parrots, lovebirds from Madagascar, a purple-naped lory and salmon-crested cockatoo from the Moluccas, two ostriches, and several dromedaries—very rare in Central Europe at this time and procured via Turkish intermediaries despite the ongoing war with the Ottomans. Rudolf also owned a skunk, a coatimundi, and a llama from the New World, as well as lions, tigers, cheetahs, and many other animals besides.

Rudolf spared no effort to bring rare creatures to his court. He spent thirty years pursuing a rhinoceros that had been imported from India by the king of Portugal, eventually getting only a few bones.²² He was more successful in wresting from another ruler the first live cassowary ever to come to Europe—a bird observed by Jean-Baptiste Oudry two centuries later in the French royal menagerie and painted for the king.

The cassowary is a large, flightless bird that dwells in the tropical forests of Australia and New Guinea. It has glossy black plumage that looks like thick hair, a bright blue neck with a patch of brilliant red skin on the nape,

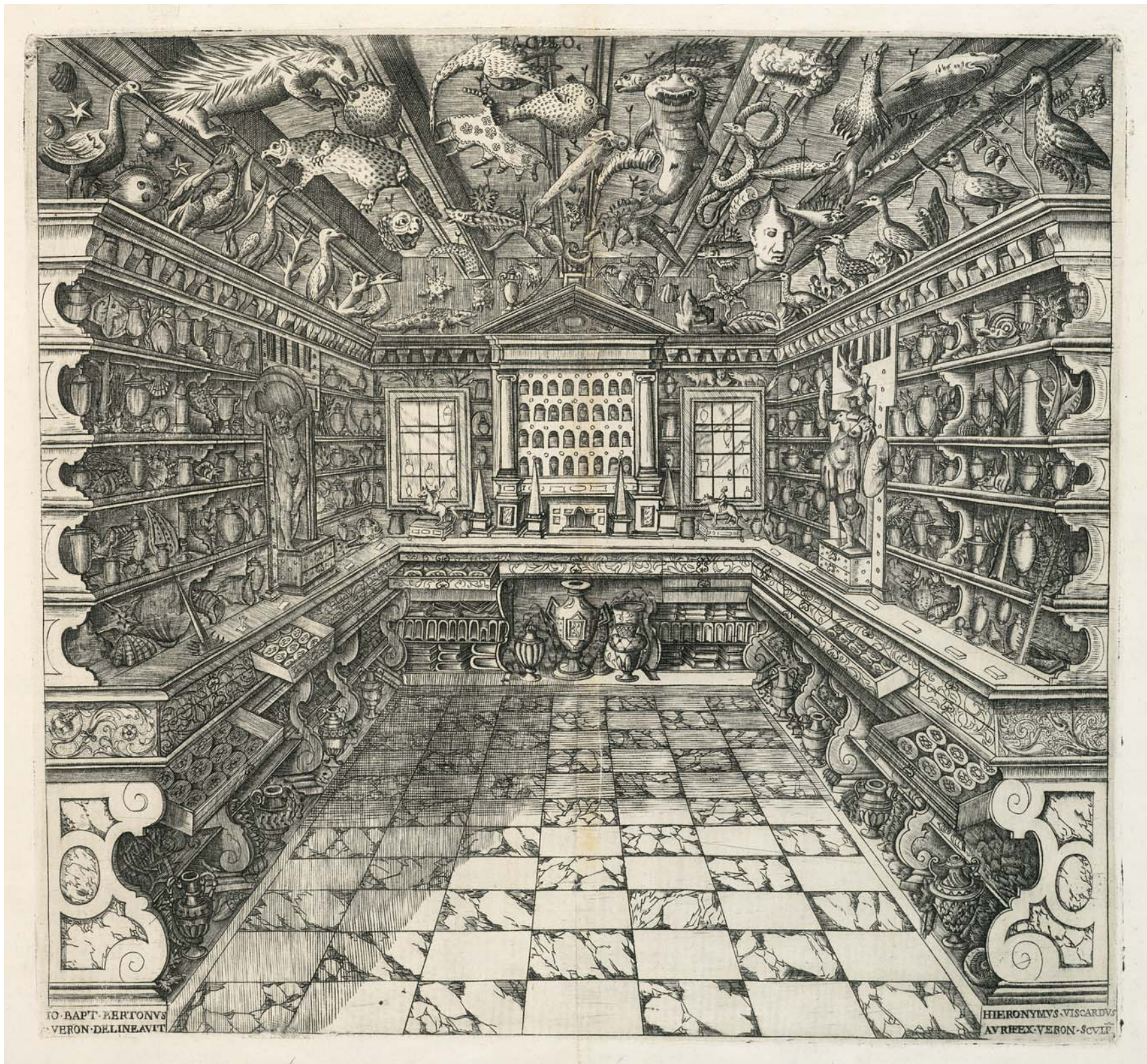


FIGURE 7
Frontispiece from Benedetto Ceruti and Andrea Chiocco, *Musaeum Francisci Calceolari junioris Veronensis*
(Verona, 1622), illustrating a natural history collection contemporary with that of Rudolf II. Research Library,
The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 85–B1 661.

and two long red wattles dangling in front. A domed horny helmet rises atop its head, over the eyes and the beak, giving it its name, which derives from a Papuan word meaning “horned head.” The bird uses this helmet to push aside the vegetation as it runs through the rain forest with its head bent down. The cassowary’s stout, powerful legs end in long, three-toed feet. The inner toe has a deadly twelve-centimeter-long spiky claw which the bird uses for defense.

Rudolf’s cassowary had had quite an adventurous life, not altogether atypical of the journeys endured by other exotic beasts that ended up at European courts in that era.²³ It made its first recorded appearance on December 4, 1596, as a gift from the king of Java to a Dutch ship captain sailing in search of spices. The bird, however, was “as much a stranger to the inhabitants of Java as it is new for us,” remarked the French scientist Carolus Clusius, who conducted research under Rudolf’s patronage. The king of Java had probably himself received the cassowary as a diplomatic gift, although it is not recorded from whom. Given the rarity and the spectacular appearance of the creature, he must have felt that it would make an excellent goodwill offering to the Dutch traders who were known for their fierce conduct in the East Indies. The Dutch gladly accepted the bird and managed to preserve it alive and in good health on the long journey back home. The cassowary disembarked in Amsterdam in July 1597. For several months it was put on show, and locals and foreigners passing through the bustling port gawked at it—for a fee. After its novelty had cooled off a bit, it was sold to Count Georg Eberhard von Solms, who collected animals at his park at Le Haye.

When news of the remarkable bird reached Rudolf, he at once undertook to secure the fascinating stranger for his menagerie (he enlisted the aid of a local duke to help convince the count to cede the bird to the emperor). Rudolf may well have expected a truly fantastic creature, for rumors said that the Indian bird ate embers and red fire. Four months later, when the cassowary finally arrived in Prague, it did not peck at coals, but it was still a striking specimen, with its long cobalt blue and raspberry red neck and its rounded helmet giving it regal hauteur. Rudolf was thrilled with his acquisition and generously rewarded the courtiers who delivered it to him. He was now the only man in Europe to possess such an extraordinary pet. To honor and safeguard his distinguished animal, Rudolf erected in the garden of his castle an imposing aviary especially “for the Indian [*sic*] bird,” and engaged the

painter Bartholomaus Beranek to decorate the cassowary’s home with pretty pictures—perhaps evocations of its natural habitat. While the emperor was clearly elated, it is harder to know how happy the cassowary was in its new abode or how long the tropical creature lasted in the wintry Prague climate. By 1607 it was listed as a stuffed specimen in Rudolf’s *Kunstkammer*.

Rudolf was also delighted to secure a dodo—very likely the first live example to reach Europe.²⁴ This gawky and defenseless bird was discovered by Dutch sailors on Mauritius in September 1598, when five Dutch ships had come upon this uninhabited island in the Indian Ocean while heading for the East Indies. Apparently they managed to bring a live dodo to Europe on their return journey, and it was acquired by Rudolf. The emperor commissioned one of his court artists to paint the uncanny creature for his compendium of fauna illustrations.

Depictions of animals became in this era a crucial component of natural history studies because they supplied valuable visual data. As Conrad Gesner wrote, the readers of his *Historia animalium* (*History of Animals*, a five-volume encyclopedia published between 1551 and 1558) could look at the woodcut images of the animals he discussed where and whenever they pleased, whereas the ancient Romans could only see exotic beasts for the duration of the games. Images also served to supplement collections of live and preserved creatures and to make them known to the outside world. Carolus Clusius, for example, turned the portrait of the emperor’s dodo into a print and included it in his *Exoticorum libri decem* (*Ten Books of Exotica*), an up-to-date and extremely influential presentation of new animals and plants published in 1605 and based in part on Rudolf’s menagerie. Oudry’s portraits of animals from Versailles were also intended to be translated into prints for a suite of natural history illustrations.

Of course, sixteenth-century natural history was not yet “pure science.” Nature was still viewed as a manifestation of divine creativity and approached with a sense of wonder. Man’s purpose in studying it was to marvel at God’s ingenuity.²⁵ As the humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola wrote in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1496), after creating the world and populating it with animal life, the Divine Architect “longed for a creature which might comprehend the meaning of so vast an achievement, which might be moved with love at its beauty and smitten with awe at its grandeur.” The French naturalist Pierre Belon, in his *Natural History of Birds*

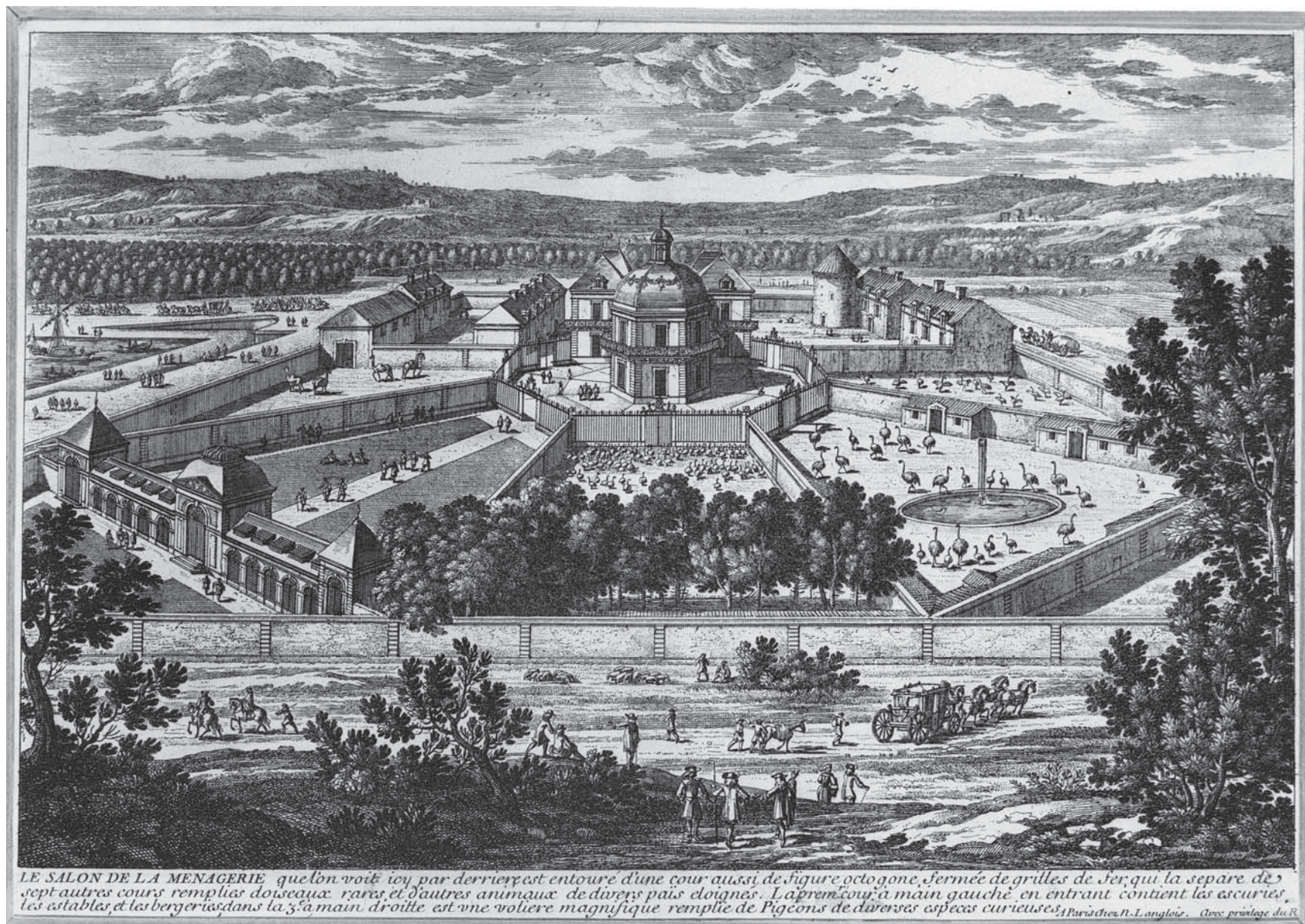


FIGURE 8

Nicolas Langlois (French, active ca. 1640), *View of the Versailles Menagerie*. Engraving. Château de Versailles and Château du Trianon, inv. GRAV. 465. Photo: © Réunion des musées nationaux/Art Resource, New York.

(1555), contended that it was particularly one of the chief duties of a well-bred man to scrutinize and admire God's creations and thereby improve his understanding of the universe. And the English clergyman cum naturalist Edward Topsell promoted the investigation of nature as a guide to salvation. In his *Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes and Serpents* (1607), he argued that God saved the animals from the Flood in order to allow humans access to divine knowledge: "Surely, it was for that a man might gaine out of them much knowledge, such as is imprinted in them by nature, as a spark of that great wisdom whereby they were created." Such religious underpinnings of

natural history persisted into the eighteenth century. Carolus Linnaeus, the "father of taxonomy" (a system of naming, ranking, and classifying organisms that is still in use today) believed that the naturalist's task was to reveal the divine order of creation.

This kind of spiritual quest, combined with scientific investigations and the imperatives of royal majesty, continued to underlie the creation of zoos in the seventeenth century, the most famous of them being the menagerie at Versailles, established by Louis XIV (fig. 8).²⁶ The king's primary purpose in building his menagerie was undoubtedly royal pomp: He wanted to impress

his guests and subjects with his collection, without unduly taxing himself or them. Therefore he first focused on acquiring peaceful animals that could be admired grazing and pecking picturesquely in their enclosures. When he was not himself at Versailles, Louis allowed paying visitors to see his creatures. The playwrights and poets Molière, Jean de La Fontaine, Jean Racine, and Nicolas Boileau who came to satisfy their curiosity were especially impressed by the demoiselle cranes and the pelicans, marveling at nature's creativity in producing such birds. The establishment of the Academy of Science shortly after the founding of the Versailles menagerie expanded the king's thinking about his animals, and he began to encourage scientists to use his collection to advance zoological knowledge.

Louis XIV initiated the menagerie project in 1662, when he was a spirited man of twenty-four. It was his first undertaking at Versailles, which had been built as a countryside retreat by his father thirty-eight years previously. The king commissioned architect Louis Le Vau (1612–1670) to devise an original plan for his zoo. Up to that point rulers tended to spread wild animals in different parts of their estates, putting cages of ferocious beasts here, aviaries there, gaming animals in a third place. Louis XIV wished all his animals to be united in one location and placed amidst trees, plants, and flowers in a true zoological garden. He also decided that the animal enclosures should be seeded with grass and provided with basins and water jets that would come to life when he went walking around the menagerie. Finally, the king wanted the whole complex to be easily visible at a glance, so Le Vau designed a series of wedge-shaped pens, radiating like an open fan out of a central point at which he placed a little chateau where the king and his company could partake of light meals and rest from their walks. Adjacent to the chateau was an octagonal pavilion from the balconies of which one could look at the animals below. As a preview to admiring live birds and beasts, the walls of the gallery leading from the chateau to the pavilion and those of the pavilion itself were hung with animal paintings by Nicasiaus Bernaerts (1620–1678). (The king had ordered him to depict all new creatures arriving at the menagerie.)

Initially, Louis XIV concentrated on deer, gazelles, and other ruminants, which nibbled demurely at the green lawns of the enclosures, as well as on vividly colored birds from all over the world, which fluttered cheerfully in the aviaries — except for ostriches, Egyptian herons, and large egrets, which

inhabited a pen where the ground was covered by sand and stones to recall the African desert. With time this peaceful assembly came to be augmented by fiercer and showier creatures. Some of them were diplomatic gifts from foreign rulers. The king of Portugal, Pedro II, for example, sent Louis XIV an elephant, while the king of Siam offered him three crocodiles. Governors of French colonies abroad were also instructed to obtain rare beasts for the crown. The marquis de Chouppes was ordered to procure birds on Belle-Isle, while M. Lopis de Mondevergue, governor of Madagascar and Bourbon, sent a cassowary, which he had bought from merchants sailing back from the Indies. The vessels of the East India Company were likewise asked to bring Louis XIV exotic species from their voyages to Asia, Africa, and America, and Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the king's minister of finance, personally delegated the animal purveyor Mosnier Gassion to undertake annual trips to the Levant, Egypt, and Tunis to capture rare animals for Versailles. (Colbert was interested in acclimatizing foreign species on French soil.) The long voyages by seas, rivers, and bad roads were punishing for the poor beasts and many of them perished en route, necessitating further hunting expeditions. Between 1671 and 1694, Gassion made forty-one trips, and between 1687 and 1694 alone, he imported 536 sultan hens, 103 ostriches, 84 Egyptian ducks, 81 Numidian demoiselle cranes, and scores of other birds, not to mention beasts.²⁷

One of the favorite animals at Versailles was the elephant presented to Louis XIV by the king of Portugal.²⁸ There had not been an elephant in France since the reign of Henry IV, and the giant, yet gentle beast attracted numerous visitors, scientists, and artists. The animal was very sweet, softly accepting offerings, even from small children. But it was also clever and adventurous. It learned to unfasten the leather straps by which its feet were bound, and one night broke open the door of its enclosure so skillfully that its keeper, who was sleeping nearby, did not even wake up. The elephant then went to visit the other animals, scaring them by its massive bulk and sending them for cover to all corners of the menagerie. Yet it was itself a timid creature, especially afraid of pigs. The elephant survived at Versailles for thirteen years. When it died in 1681, its dissection was a major scientific event. It was only then that it was discovered that the creature was not a male, as the keepers had supposed all along, but a female.

Since the king made his collection accessible to members of the Academy of Science, so that they could conduct zoological studies based on his extraordinary array of beasts, the scientists reveled in being able to examine the 55 different species of mammals, including monkeys, panthers, cheetahs, servals, lynxes, walruses, sea lions, porcupines, beavers, antelopes, gazelles, buffalo, stags, deer, reindeer, the elephant, and others besides. There were also 16 species of birds of prey, 20 of parrots, some 150 species of other types of birds, plus crocodiles, turtles, lizards, and snakes.²⁹ When the animals died, scientist dissected them and learned valuable lessons in comparative anatomy. They also drew and made prints of these specimens—both whole beasts and anatomical parts—and preserved the carcasses so that they could be displayed in the chateau at Versailles and in the Jardin du roi in Paris.

Alas, Louis XIV's great-grandson and successor, Louis XV, did not share his predecessor's enthusiasm for animals, and during his reign the menagerie went into decline. As one observer reported, the poor animals were living in mire up to their knees. Yet the international fame of the Versailles zoo endured, and exotic beasts continued to be sent to France as diplomatic gifts. At the same time, rulers in other countries sought to emulate this famous establishment.

Eugene, prince of Savoy, great-nephew of Louis XIV's prime minister, Cardinal Mazarin, and descendant of both the ducal house of Savoy and the French royal house of Bourbon, created his outstanding menagerie on the model of Versailles—even replicating the fan-shaped enclosures—despite the fact that he hated Louis XIV.³⁰ Eugene's family had intended him for the church, but he longed for military glory. After Louis XIV turned down his application for a commission, Eugene fled the French court and went on to make a brilliant military career in the service of Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I.

But Eugene was interested in more than war. He was an eager collector of books, scientific specimens, and artworks, and an avid builder, constructing several palaces, including a winter palace in Himmelspfortgasse in Vienna and his summer residence, the Bevedere Palace, on the outskirts of the city. It was at Bevedere that he set up a great menagerie in which he gathered 43 species of mammals and 67 species of birds. Like other rulers, Eugene obtained his animals through merchants and dealers, as well as from foreign potentates. The envoy from Tunis, for example, brought him a tiger.

Eugene was especially fond of a pair of bison presented to him by Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia, the reindeer sent by the king of Sweden, and a tame lion that was allowed to walk around the palace.

The place of exotic beasts in Eugene's mind and heart is evident from an album of prints produced in his honor by Salomon Kleiner in the 1730s. The volume is devoted to the Belvedere: its buildings, beautiful apartments, and elegant gardens. A pair of prints shows the general layout of the menagerie and its embellishments. The animals themselves appear in a separate cycle of illustrations, where they are posed in the garden together with Eugene's exotic plants and prized statues, including two marble figures of women recently unearthed at Herculaneum, buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79 (fig. 9).³¹ By putting together statuary and rare beasts, the prints celebrated Eugene as a student of both science and art, of natural and man-made wonders. It was a concise exposition of the interests incumbent on a progressive ruler. The inclusion of exotic animals alongside artworks in princely palaces reflected the preeminent role of natural history in this era of scientific curiosity and advancement of knowledge.

Holy Roman Emperor Franz I looked to both the Versailles and Belvedere menageries when he created and presented a beautifully renovated Schönbrunn zoo (at the Hapsburg summer palace outside Vienna) to his wife, Maria Teresa, in 1752.³² This menagerie had thirteen enclosures for the animals, as well as pathways, pools with fountains, a pond, and several ornate pavilions, including one in which the queen could breakfast while watching camels, elephants, and zebras outside. Franz procured animals through dealers in Holland and England as well as through expeditions he sponsored to America. Altogether he imported some 600 to 700 birds and animals to the Schönbrunn aviaries and grassy enclosures, although some animals also came from Belvedere after Eugene's death. Franz I's successor, Joseph II, opened the menagerie to the public, and it continues to function as the city's zoo to this day, having, of course, been brought up to modern standards.

The dukes of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, in contrast to the rulers mentioned above, were rather poor, governing merely a small German principality, and they were apparently not in a position to establish their own menagerie.³³ So they did the next best thing: They bought portraits of animals kept in the celebrated Versailles menagerie. These pictures, moreover, had originally been commissioned as a gift to Louis XV and painted by a cel-



FIGURE 9

Salomon Kleiner (German, 1700–1761), Exotic animals of Prince Eugene of Savoy, plate 103 from volume 2 of *Das Belvedere in Wien* (1731–40; facsimile: Graz, 1969). Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 88–B2638.

ebredated animal painter who worked for the French king and was well known in Germany—Jean-Baptiste Oudry.

Oudry had a long-standing relationship with the dukes of Schwerin, selling them over twenty-six of his own paintings (they would acquire eighteen more after his death) and playing middleman in their transactions with other Parisian artists.³⁴ So when he offered Duke Christian Ludwig a series of animal portraits based on the birds and beasts of Versailles, Oudry was building on a history of ducal interest in his works. Christian Ludwig was also an avid huntsman, so Oudry's pictures appealed to his interest in animals, and he was a keen collector of paintings, especially favoring seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish masters who specialized in convincing depictions of nature. The bond between Oudry and the ruling family of Schwerin was reinforced in 1738 when the duke's son, Friedrich, visited Paris after spending a year at the riding academy in Angers. Oudry toured the young prince around the city, took him to artists' ateliers and the Gobelins tapestry manufactory, and painted his official portrait. Christian Ludwig initially wanted his son to be depicted by the most prestigious painter in Paris, Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743). But the royal portraitist charged too dearly for his creations. Oudry was happy to oblige for less.³⁵

It seems likely that a similar combination of shortage of funds (to maintain live beasts) and the already established relationship with Oudry, who was able to provide the dukes of Schwerin with satisfactory and cheaper surrogates, convinced Christian Ludwig and Friedrich to buy Oudry's animal series. The fact that this cycle had been initially intended for the French king made it all the more appealing. By buying the pictures the dukes of Schwerin satisfied several needs and desires at once. They likened themselves to the French court by patronizing the same painter and by exhibiting the same exotic beasts; they augmented their gallery of paintings; and they created an impression of princely glory at a fraction of the cost that attended the ownership of rare fauna. Of course, painted animals were not as wondrous, exciting, and impressive as live ones, but Oudry's canvasses brought them to life. His animal portraits allowed the dukes of Schwerin to take their place in a long history of princely collecting of marvelous beasts as symbols of power, sophistication, and mastery over the natural and political realms. ♦

Notes

- Livingston 1974, p. 16; Fisher 1966, p. 26; and Loisel 1912, vol. 1, p. 26.
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- See Belozerskaya 2006.
- H. H. Scullard, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World* (London, 1974), pp. 64–65.
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- Le Bestiaire de Rudolf II* (note 21 above), pp. 110–13.
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